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South Carolina*

OFFICE OF
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Anson Burial Memorial Plans Announced

Charleston, S.C. — Charleston Mayor John Tecklenburg, Denny's Chairman Brenda Lauderback, former General Director of Spoleto Festival USA Nigel Redden, sculptor Stephen Hayes and President of the Wells Fargo Foundation and head of Philanthropy and Community Impact Otis Rolley announced a plan to build the Anson Burial Memorial at a press conference Tuesday.

The Anson Burial Memorial will be built near the corners of George and Anson streets. The memorial is to remember the 36 Africans/ African Americans and Native American whose bodies were disinterred during the renovation of the Charleston Gaillard Center in 2013.

HISTORY OF THE MEMORIAL

At the end of August 2021, Mayor Tecklenburg invited 24 people – representing specific organizations and other civic leaders – to discuss how to memorialize the Ancestors. The organizations that attended that discussion included:

- City of Charleston
- College of Charleston
- International African American Museum
- Anson Street African Burial Ground Project
- Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor Commission
- Spoleto Festival USA
- Gibbes Museum of Art
- Charleston Gaillard Center
- Association for the Study of African American Life and History
- Preservation Society of Charleston
- St. John's Reformed Episcopal Church.

These groups held further meetings in 2021 and early 2022, during which sculptor Stephen Hayes was invited to develop a design for a memorial. His design was enthusiastically accepted.

Since the development of the design, organizations and individuals have stepped forward to expand the potential impact of the memorial. The setting of the fountain, designed by Steve Dudash of the Navy Yard Charleston, has been enlarged to provide an appropriate place for reflection.

The Gaillard Center has committed to using the Memorial, housed on its campus, to add another dimension to its extensive arts and curriculum-based educational programs.

The Gibbes Museum of Art – where Stephen Hayes was awarded the 1858 Prize for Contemporary Southern Art in 2020 – will participate in Stephen Hayes’ process of casting the hands. Le’Sheia Oubre and Joanna Gilmore, original members of the Gullah, will select the individuals who will have their hands cast for the project. Genealogical information studied by Dr. Raquel Fleskes and Dr. Theodore Schurr of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Pennsylvania, through a grant from the National Geographic Society, serves as essential background for the story of the Ancestors.

In addition to the support of the Wells Fargo Foundation, generous contributions have been made by the Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust, the Spaulding Paolozzi Foundation, Denny’s, and Wolverine Worldwide Foundation. Nelson Mullins provided pro-bono legal counsel. Thomas & Hutton have worked pro-bono on engineering the fountain, and the beautiful renderings have been contributed by Outdoor Spatial Design.

To learn more, to make a donation or to volunteer to have your hands cast, go to:
www.asabgproject.com.

ABOUT THE MEMORIAL

Sculptor Stephen Hayes has designed a fountain with a basin that will be earth-formed from the land in which the Ancestors were buried, as well as earth from other previously unacknowledged grave sites of enslaved people in Charleston. Each of the 36 Ancestors will be memorialized with a pair of hands extending from the basin, those hands will be cast from living individuals whose age, gender, and ethnicity match those of the deceased. Behind each hand will be an individual jet of water, some of which will fall on the hands. Some hands will hold the scant possessions buried with the individuals, such as beads, ceramics and two coins, among other items.

Mr. Hayes is an Assistant Professor of the Practice of Art, Art History and Visual Studies at Duke University. A multi-media sculptor who calls himself a “creator” rather than artist, Mr. Hayes is a Durham, North Carolina, native who works in wood, metal, fabric, paper and sound. He is known for making life-size sculptures that address the United States’ conflicted history of slavery. His work has been shown over a decade at galleries and museums, as well as at the Contemporary Art Museum in Raleigh, North Carolina and the Cameron Art Museum in Wilmington, North Carolina. His work has been reviewed in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. He created “Boundless,” to commemorate the Black Union soldiers who fought in the American Civil War and used castings from those soldiers’ descendants.

ABOUT THE GAILLARD CENTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

As part of the Gaillard’s Education and Community Program three-year arts literacy initiative that fuses visual and performing arts with literature to engage students and enrich their classroom learning, students will partake in a local history classroom lesson and interactive art projects. The Anson Street Burial Grounds Project staff will teach students about the process of reinternment and the purpose of the memorial before engaging them through the book *Anson Street African Burial Ground: What happens when we recognize our shared humanity?* *Lessons from our ancestors.* Once students are familiar with the project, they will work with a guest sculptor in art classes for two months to create sculpted pieces that will subsequently be displayed in a student installation at the Gaillard Center. Memorial sculptor Stephen Hayes

will also interact with the students as they complete these meaningful works that will be shared with the greater Charleston community.

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

Charleston Mayor John Tecklenburg: “A promise was made when the 36 Ancestors were reinterred in 2019 that a fitting memorial would be built to mark their graves and now, we are going to fulfill that promise.”

Brenda Lauderback, Denny's Chairman: “It is especially important to remember the enslaved people whose hard, uncompensated work built the wealth that made Charleston such a beautiful city. There are many unmarked grave sites of enslaved people in Charleston and this memorial will honor not only the 36 Ancestors but will remind visitors and Charlestonians alike to recall the thousands of people whose names and lives have all too often been forgotten. I am sorry that Dr. Ade Ofunniyin is no longer with us. The Gullah Society which he founded called our attention to so many unmarked graves sites but particularly to this one.”

Former General Director of Spoleto USA Nigel Redden: “Charleston is a city of monuments, and this memorial is a beautiful work of art that will provoke viewers to think about its meaning and about the lives it honors. The site on George Street is not only adjacent to where the Ancestors were buried in the second half of the 18th century but is now just a very short walk from Emanuel AME Church, St. John’s Reformed Episcopal Church, the home of the Grimke sisters, and, very soon, the International African American Museum.”

Sculptor Stephen Hayes: “I feel honored to work on a project that acknowledges these individuals who were once natives to this property/land. The memorial will be a vessel that connects the past and the present to the rich history of this state. Although evidence of their physical bodies has naturally become a part of the soil, I hope that the fountain of cast hands and the water speak to the continuous cycle/flow of birth. Life and death.”

Otis Rolley, President of the Wells Fargo Foundation and head of Philanthropy and Community Impact: “Wells Fargo is honored to support the Anson Burial Memorial as a way to preserve the untold stories and heritage of the African American community. For society to truly move forward, we must learn from our past. This memorial offers an avenue to reflect and promote dialogue about the American experience as a way to help advance racial equity.”

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