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Memories, Stories Sought at DeReef Park History Harvest

Charleston, S.C.—The City of Charleston, Gullah Society and National Park Service are hosting a public History Harvest for DeReef Park and the surrounding neighborhood Thursday, Jan. 19, 6 to 8 p.m. at 75 Calhoun Street, in the third floor conference room. Parking is available in the Gaillard Center parking garage at 32 Alexander Street.

Community members are invited to attend and share their stories, objects and documents—photographs, letters, family bibles and genealogies, certificates, obituaries, newspaper articles—to help create a shared history of DeReef park and the adjacent neighborhood, bordered by Cannon Street to the north, Morris Street to the south, Smith Street to the West and Felix Street to the east.

During the free event, oral histories will be recorded and digital copies of documents and objects will be made on-site, so that participants are able to keep their materials. The stories captured will be used to create interpretive signs and will be made into a report that will be available to the public for general educational use and study.

Joanna Gilmore with the Gullah Society remarked, “The purpose of the history harvest is to ensure that memories and stories are preserved and that they contribute to the understanding of the diverse history of the DeReef Park neighborhood and Charleston as a whole.”

“The National Park Service welcomes the opportunity to participate in this worthwhile endeavor,” Michael Allen, community partnership specialist with the National Park Service added. “We encourage the community to come, participate and share in this public engagement gathering. The success of the Dereef Park project depends on your continued support and trust in the process.”

DeReef Park, located on Morris Street, between Felix and Smith Streets, is named after two brothers, Joseph (1802-1876) and Richard Edward DeReef (1798-1876), who purchased the land in 1854. From this time until the 1960s, the neighborhood was home to a vibrant African-American community.

To ensure compliance with the Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and as part of the conversion of a portion of DeReef Park, the city agreed to research and conduct an architectural field survey of DeReef Park and the neighborhood. The city will host the History Harvest, which is the first of two public meetings being hosted, to acquire oral histories and photographs, letters and other documents to help preserve the history of the area. The second event will be scheduled to take place in early spring.

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