

## Report for Meeting of the North Carolina Historical Commission, Summer 2021

Prepared by Angela M. Thorpe, Director, NC African American Heritage Commission

### ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

- Former Assistant Secretary Tracey Burns was appointed to the role of Deputy Secretary for Diversity, Equity, Accessibility and Inclusion. The AAHC now falls under her purview.
- Kimberly “Kyma” Lassiter was formally promoted to the role of Program Coordinator within the AAHC. We look forward to the work that she will do to grow arts engagement and community outreach for the division.

### COMMISSIONER RE-APPOINTMENTS

1. Tamara Holmes-Brothers, PhD (Cumberland County)
2. Deloris Rhodes (New Hanover County)

### FISCAL & LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

Governor Roy Cooper’s recommended budget (2021-2023) includes two recommendations affect the AAHC directly:

1. Funding for two positions, an Education & Outreach Coordinator and a Program Coordinator, and \$270,000 in recurring operational support for the African American Heritage Commission.
2. \$2.5 million to design and construct a new monument commemorating African American contributions to North Carolina on the State Capitol Grounds.

Additionally, [HB 754 was filed](#) and introduced this legislative session. This bipartisan bill would direct the AAHC to study civil rights monument needs in the state and appropriate \$500K to support ongoing work on the NC Civil Rights Trail. We are absolutely thrilled about this opportunity, and grateful that the value of our work is being recognized. Many kudos are due to AAHC Associate Director, Adrienne Nirdé, who has led the development and growth of the NC Civil Rights Trail since 2020.

### GRANT UPDATES

#### WILLIAM G. POMEROY FOUNDATION—NC CIVIL RIGHTS TRAIL

In the spring of 2020, the AAHC received funding from the William G. Pomeroy Foundation to develop and launch the NC Civil Rights Trail in partnership with Visit NC and the NC Office of Archives & History. The project will identify and mark (digitally and physically) North Carolina sites key to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, or critical to advancing civil rights in the state. This project has created one interactive, evergreen digital map of North Carolina civil rights sites, and will ultimately yield fifty physical, community-based markers by January of 2023.

In February of 2021, the first three NC Civil Rights Trail markers were awarded:

1. New Ahoskie Baptist Church (New Ahoskie Baptist Church and Chowan Discovery Group)
2. 1951 Adkin High School Walkouts (Adkin High School Alumni and Friends, Inc.)
3. Shelby Sit-Ins (City of Shelby)

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Marker applications are now being accepted until October. For more details about the project, please visit: <https://aahc.nc.gov/programs/civil-rights-trail>.

#### **NORTH CAROLINA HUMANITIES COUNCIL CARES RELIEF FUNDING**

The NC African American Heritage Commission (AAHC) received an NC CARES: Humanities Relief Grant (\$10,600) from the North Carolina Humanities Council. Grant funds first enabled the AAHC to secure necessary digital resources, software, and technology to communicate and share resources more effectively with African American heritage leaders across the state as they navigated the pandemic crisis. Funding also enabled the AAHC to execute a webinar series titled: “Sustaining North Carolina’s African American Heritage Institutions During COVID-19.” In the series, we explored how the state’s black heritage institutions might think innovatively about navigating the pandemic, with the insights of heritage practitioners and culture workers from across the country. Series topics and presenters included:

- Fundraising in the Age of COVID-19: Anna Barber, President and Principal Consultant for Barber & Associates
- Documenting the Pandemic + Black Lives Matter in Your Community: Chaitra Powell, African American Collections and Outreach Archivist, Southern Historical Collection (Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC); George Barrett, Executive Director, Marian Cheek Jackson Center
- Relevance & Sustainability During Times of Crisis: Brent Leggs, Executive Director, African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund (National Trust for Historic Preservation); Vedet Coleman-Robinson, Executive Director, Association of African American Museums; Juanita Moore (President & CEO [ret.], Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, NC African American Heritage Commissioner)
- Digital Engagement 101 for Small Museums: Kaytee Smith, Karen Ipock, and Rebecca Hyman (of the NC Department of Natural & Cultural Resources)
- Digital Innovation in the Age of COVID-19: Bryan Carter, PhD, Director of the Center for Digital Humanities, The University of Arizona; Tiffany Tolbert, Senior Field Officer, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Afeni Grace, Program Coordinator, Harvey B. Gantt Center for African American Arts + Culture
- Heritage Practitioner Roundtable: Frachele Scott, Managing Director, Pauli Murray Center for History & Social Justice; Lacey Wilson, Site Manager, Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum; Angela Lee, Executive Director, Hayti Heritage Center; Bill Myers, Executive Director, Oliver Nestus Freeman Roundhouse Museum

#### **NATIONAL PARK SERVICE NETWORK TO FREEDOM GRANT**

This funding enabled digital educational resources centered on freedom seeking in North Carolina to be developed in partnership with Edenton State Historic Site and Carolina K-12, a program of Carolina Public Humanities (UNC). Thirty educators from across the state also received training on how to apply these resources to the classroom.

## INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM & LIBRARY SERVICES GRANTS

### **“A Tale of Two Ships: Developing a Research & Interpretation Plan for Revealing Hidden Histories of One Ship with Two Identities” (Awarded July 2018; Concluded March 2021)**

In the fall of 2020, project work shifted towards completing the grant, particularly through crafting a comprehensive research and interpretation plan. Angela Thorpe and Adrienne Nirde led focus groups with several departmental staff to gain more insight into future interpretive and research possibilities related to LaC/QAR. These conversations were helpful to shaping meaningful portions of the project research and interpretation plan.

On February 25-26, 2021, AAHC and QAR Lab staff hosted a virtual, two-day convening entitled “Shaping an Inclusive Interpretive Vision for LaC/QAR, Pt. II.” This gathering served as a call-back and an accountability tool to the inaugural February 2019 convening and workshop that was hosted by the TOTS team. The convening welcomed back participants who participated in the 2019 event, and welcomed stakeholders who engaged with TOTS at various levels from 2018-2021 to participate. On each day, 33 participants, from North Carolina to Barbados, were engaged.

Finally, “A Tale of Two Ships: A Collections Research and Interpretation Plan for Revealing Hidden Histories of One Ship with Two Names” was completed by project PI Angela Thorpe. The Plan underwent editing by Kimberly Kenyon, Senior Conservator & Co-Principal Investigator, Queen Anne’s Revenge Conservation Lab, and multiple levels of review from colleagues and legal counsel. The AAHC is delighted that several action items in the plan have begun to take shape.

### **“Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey” (Awarded July 2020)**

Following a thorough national search, Amber Pelham, a graduate of the Public History graduate program at New York University and a Hampton University alum, was selected as the two-year Research Fellow for the AAHC’s “Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey” project. Amber began her role at the end of January 2021.

Amber performed additional research on the slave trade in the colony of North Carolina and is currently working to develop one introductory exhibit centering on the relationship between the Transatlantic Slave Trade and North Carolina.

Slightly variable versions of this exhibit will be installed at Bath State Historic Site, Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson State Historic Site, Edenton State Historic Site, Somerset Place State Historic Site, Tryon Palace, Roanoke Island Festival Park, and the NC Maritime Museum at Beaufort in 2022.

The project will also fund the development of an “Africa to Carolina” web portal. This website will be designed to showcase information and resources that we know and have currently, with the intention of building upon it after the conclusion of the project in alignment with the larger goals of the Africa to Carolina initiative. A seasoned web contractor, Phil Bicking, has been identified to build the web portal (Phil built the NC Green Book Project Web Portal). His work will begin in July 2021.



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### **“A Tale of Two Ships: Part Deux” (Awarded June 2021)**

The AAHC recently received word that its “A Tale of Two Ships” work will grow due to another Museum Grants for African American History & Culture award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. \$100,386 is being awarded to the African American Heritage Commission to continue doing archival research on *La Concorde* overseas in France, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. This work will yield academic scholarship, digital content, and expansive interpretation in DNCR institutions.

### **STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT**

The AAHC continues to expand the ways that it supports its broad body of stakeholders across North Carolina.

Under the leadership of Adrienne Nirde, the AAHC has expanded its messaging and digital engagement work, growing awareness about the AAHC and creating new communications channels for the division. Mrs. Nirde has led this work with a talented cohort of undergraduate student interns and emerging professional contractors.

Under the leadership of Kyma Lassiter, the AAHC has expanded its arts engagement work. Ms. Lassiter has worked diligently to develop a useful suite of resources for North Carolina artists, including professional development trainings, a digital newsletter, and physical supplies. She has also worked to provide more intentional technical assistance to Black arts institutions across North Carolina. Finally, Ms. Lassiter serves as a liaison to the NC Arts Council and the NC Museum of Art.

Angela Thorpe has worked to drive a more effective and streamlined heritage-based technical assistance strategy, with great support from Adrienne Nirde. This work has included developing streamlined communications channels for constituents, heritage-based webinar trainings, and the development of a grassroots practitioner database. This work will continue to evolve, with an eye toward developing more professional development opportunities and a resource library for constituents and performing a needs assessment across grassroots practitioners.

Finally, the AAHC has worked strategically to create pathways for African Americans to enter into, and thrive within, the cultural heritage field in North Carolina for several years. In recent years, the AAHC has received funding to advance this work with its primary partners—the graduate program in Museum Studies at UNC-Greensboro (UNCG) and the graduate program in Public History at North Carolina Central University (NCCU). A 2020 award from the UNCG Community-Engaged Pathways and Partnerships (P2): Collective Scholarship Fellows Program advances this work even further through “Crafting a Community-Engaged Approach: Creating Pathways for African Americans in Public History.” From 2021-2024, this project will institutionalize efforts to help African American students and emerging professionals access and grow in North Carolina’s cultural heritage field.

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## **PARTNERSHIPS & CONNECTIONS**

The AAHC continues to maintain and grow partnerships and fruitful connections with the following groups and institutions:

### National

Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture and-

-Smithsonian Transcription Center, NC Government & Heritage Library, State Archives of North Carolina:

[Freedmen's Bureau Transcription Project-North Carolina Records](#)

-Center for the Study of Global Slavery: A Tale of Two Ships and Africa to Carolina

Society of Black Archaeologists: A Tale of Two Ships and Africa to Carolina

National Trust for Historic Preservation: Nina Simone Childhood Home

Equal Justice Initiative: Supporting constituent-based commemoration of racial terror violence

### Regional

State-based African American heritage commissions and networks, including:

-Virginia African American Heritage Taskforce

-South Carolina African American Heritage Commission

-Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture

-Georgia African American Historic Preservation Network

### State

NC Growth/SmartUp

Local African American Heritage Commissions

Intra-departmental partners