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Finding healing power by sharing 'whole truth'

Descendant of man who sold enslaved people leads effort to install historical marker



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF

The Rev. Anthony Thompson blesses the new Charleston historical marker that notes the history of the former slave auction house on the site owned by William Payne on Thursday. Charleston native Margaret Seidler, along with the College of Charleston's Center for the Study of Slavery, worked to have the plaque placed.

Hospital directors receive vaccine

Roper St. Francis board, volunteers in priority group

BY MARY KATHERINE WILDEMAN
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As South Carolina remains in the first phase of vaccination against COVID-19 and seniors await appointments for weeks, one surefire way to get a vaccine appears to be by volunteering for a hospital.

Hospitals have relied, in part, on volunteers to help as the large-scale vaccination effort gets underway. Because they are interacting with the public in a health care setting, those volunteers are often considered eligible for the vaccine.

But at Roper St. Francis Healthcare, a nonprofit health system that operates four hospitals in the Charleston area, members of the board of directors were among those volunteers vaccinated.

The board has been meeting virtually, a spokesman for the hospital confirmed.

"They're integral to our health care system's operations and so we included them in the 1A group," he said, referring to the first subset of people eligible for the vaccine in South Carolina, which includes those 70 and older and health care staff.

Several of the hospital system's board members are physicians, qualifying them for the first phase of vaccinations regardless. Other volunteers at Roper

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Margaret Seidler, who discovered in 2018 that William Payne was her great-great-great grandfather, reads historic copies of slave auction advertisements from Payne's auction house on Thursday.

BY EMILY WILLIAMS
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Ned. Amelia. Hagar. Flora. Anthony. Nancy. Margaret Seidler read the names, loud enough that people standing around could hear over the traffic passing by on Broad Street.

She stood in front of a large white building with big columns that used to be two smaller buildings without columns — something that anyone walking by can see now, thanks to a photo printed on a new bronze marker.

If someone stops and reads the text, that person will learn, maybe for the first time, that the street they are walking that is now lined

with law offices, galleries and bars and restaurants, a street featured in glossy magazine spreads touting Charleston's beauty, was, for decades, a booming location of the domestic slave trade.

Enslaved people were sold at public street auctions and inside the buildings at private sales.

And, at that specific site, Seidler's fourth great-grandfather, William Payne, had brokered the sale of enslaved people.

The number known of just how many people keeps growing. Seidler found seven more this week. The likely total is well over 10,000, she said.

Massy. Daniel. Lowry. Phelde.

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Columbia lawyers to lead fight for Trump

Harris, Gasser join team of ex-president for impeachment case

BY ANDY SHAIN
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COLUMBIA — Former President Donald Trump's impeachment is in the hands of four Columbia lawyers who work within 10 blocks of each other in a city that is 475 miles away from Capitol Hill.

Former federal prosecutors Johnny Gasser and Greg Harris have joined former Justice Department attorney Butch Bowers and former federal prosecutor Deborah Barbier as the core of the legal team that hopes to win Trump a second impeachment acquittal in the Senate. Trump could be barred from holding public office if

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Inspired by principal, Walmart chips in \$50K

Retailer boosts mission of educator who stocks shelves at night to help low-income students

BY JENNA SCHIFERL
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Walmart has donated \$50,000 to North Charleston High School to help low-income students.

The funds will further the efforts of school principal Henry Darby, who took on a third job at the retail store stocking shelves overnight in order

to help the students' families pay the bills.

Three nights a week, Darby heads to the Walmart Supercenter off Centre Pointe Drive near the Tanger Outlets to work from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.

He finishes his shift with just enough time to make it back to the high school

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A North Charleston principal and longtime county councilman who took on a third job to help low-income students pay their bills was surprised Friday morning with a \$50,000 donation from his part-time employer.

ANDY PRUITT/PROVIDED

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GRACE BEAHM ALFORD/STAFF

Dr. Bernard Powers, director of the College of Charleston's Center for the Study of Slavery, gathered Thursday with the Rev. Anthony Thompson, Margaret Seidler and Doreen Larimer to place a marker that notes the history of the former slave auction house site on Broad Street. The College of Charleston's Center for the Study of Slavery sponsored the bronze plaque.

Finding healing power by sharing 'whole truth'

MARKER, from A1

Simon. Judy.

That fact came as a shock to Seidler when she traced her family lineage in 2018. A native Charlestonian, she was always told the same thing growing up, that her ancestors were poor German immigrants on the city's East Side.

She didn't question it.

But a DNA test led her down a winding, research-filled, emotional path ending in the reality that she was descended from people who profited from the sale of human beings. There was John Torrains, a wealthy Charleston merchant in the transatlantic slave trade. She'd uncovered his story first. Torrains' daughter, she discovered, married Payne.

She didn't claim responsibility for her ancestor's actions. The response she often got from telling people about the connection was that she had nothing to do with her ancestors' sins. But she felt a responsibility to the knowledge of it — that she had to do something to advance efforts to make the truth of Charleston's history more visible.

The fact that Charleston was, after years of talking about it, making progress to build an International African American Museum, helped bring her to the idea of placing a historical marker.

The museum is memorializing a place that has gone unmarked,

Gadsden's Wharf, a site of the transatlantic slave trade. And a goal of the museum is to promote a truer telling of history beyond its walls, one that does not erase African Americans or turn a blind eye to the actions of people who profited from the sale of human beings.

Seidler could do something to advance that.

"I believe that when you share the whole truth, there is potential for healing," Seidler said. A historical marker seemed to be "the most effective way to illuminate" that truth, she said.

Seidler dug deeper into the research. Now with the goal of placing a marker, she had to build a case for why it should be there.

She studied the newspaper ads that Payne placed, and the numbers of the sales grew from hundreds to thousands.

She tracked them in spreadsheets, recording names when they were included.

Alick. Nelly. Paul. Isaac. Clarinda. Patty with two children.

The task of simply pinpointing where the auction house was located turned out to be a journey of its own. Frustrated by the confusing task of digging through old property records, she turned to a list of professional deeds researchers provided by the county deeds office. She reached out to one of them, Doreen Larimer, who was listed as a historic deeds researcher.

To do this kind of real estate

research requires genealogy research, said Larimer. They go hand in hand.

Relying on numbered addresses doesn't work: The streets of the peninsula have been renumbered several times over that past three centuries. So, while records may include a numbered address for a historic property, it likely won't match up with the modern street address.

Larimer's work involved "putting the links of a chain of title together," or finding the links from the present owner to the owner before that and the owner before that and so on, a process that, in Charleston, can go back a few hundred years.

Charleston is incredibly rich in resources when it comes to historic documents, Larimer said. The most difficult part for many people is just reading the writing. Most people aren't accustomed to the script that fills the many pages of historic property records documenting land ownership on the peninsula.

The historic deed itself creates a kind of puzzle. The legal description defines the site by the parcels around it — this person's land is on the property's east side, this other's on the west side — meaning the task also involves tracing the ownership of those surrounding parcels, too, to prove that the site in question is the one you're looking for, in this case, Payne's auction house.

To hear more



Charlestonian Margaret Seidler told the story behind this Broad Street property on Understand SC, The Post and Courier's news podcast, in November. To listen to the episode, go to bit.ly/2YqeGNp. You can also listen on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever else you listen to podcasts.

Local historian and author Peg Eastman added another piece: a photo to show what the building, which used to have an address of 32 Broad before it was combined with the structure next to it, looked like at the time Payne operated his business.

To write the language on the marker, Seidler leaned on the expertise of other local historians, like Nic Butler of the Charleston County Public Library and Bernard Powers, director of the College of Charleston's Center for the Study of Slavery, which became the sponsor for the project.

Standing in front of the just-placed marker Thursday, Powers said he hopes this will have a ripple effect, that other people will research their family history, face it head-on and use the knowledge proactively.

"You know, many people, when they discover this aspect of their family — and we've seen examples — they would run away from it. They would hide it. They would bury it."

That didn't happen this time,

he said.

"Silence can be deadly, because it can miseducate," Powers said. "It can also make people far more comfortable than they ought to be with the status quo."

The wording on the marker is intentionally matter-of-fact, Powers said, to show "just how routine it really was."

As the marker says, "many buildings on Broad Street between Church and East Bay Streets" — not only Payne's — were "private venues for the sale of human property."

Payne's, though, was likely the busiest between 1803 and 1834. At his biggest sale in February 1819, Payne sold 367 enslaved human beings, a fact that is included on the new marker, along with the estimated dollar-value of that sale, about \$6.5 million in 2021 dollars.

Several years ago, a marker was placed at the Old Exchange Building, down the street from the place where the new plaque has been installed. It explained that Charleston was "one of the largest slave-trading cities in

the U.S." and that auctions occurred there, usually just north of the Exchange.

It also notes that merchants sold enslaved people "at nearby stores on Broad, Chalmers, State and East Bay streets."

The new marker on Broad is unique in that it points out one such place, not on a building that's been preserved for its history but one that's part of the day-to-day modern function of the street. A bank's offices are there now — the owners of the building, a firm called Wessex Capital Investments, gave their permission for the marker placement — and a popular bar sits to one side, a stylish seafood restaurant on the other.

That area "has been associated almost solely with whiteness," Powers said. But the history of Black Charlestonians is there. The National Freedman's Savings Bank, a bank established for African Americans after the Civil War, was on Broad Street. Also on Broad Street, Jehu Jones Sr., who was born enslaved, opened a business once described as "the finest hotel in Charleston."

The list goes on, and there is work to do, Powers said, in making more of these stories physically visible on the streets of Charleston.

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Hospital directors receive vaccine

VOLUNTEERS, from A1

St. Francis also qualify for vaccination because they are interacting with the public; among those volunteers are family of the board members. Roper St. Francis is not seeking more volunteers at this point.

A spokeswoman for the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control said hospital board members should only be vaccinated if they fall into the guidelines in the first phase. All others should wait.

"All providers are expected to adhere to the state's vaccination guidelines that were developed to ensure the uniform and fair distribution of vaccines across South Carolina," the agency said in a statement. "Any provider who vaccinates individuals outside of the current guidelines creates frustration and confusion, and they are forcing those identified to be at highest

risk for dying from COVID-19 and who are waiting patiently to receive their shots to be further delayed in getting what could be life-saving vaccine."

The Medical University of South Carolina did not put a policy in place to vaccinate its board of trustees, members of which are elected by the General Assembly. Many of the members qualify anyway because they are health care providers or because of their age, a spokeswoman for the hospital said. She could not comment on the vaccination status of the individual board members.

At MUSC, anyone volunteering in the mass-vaccination effort qualifies for a vaccine, too.

Tidelands Health, a nonprofit health system in the Grand Strand, only inoculated meet the guidelines of the first phase. Its volunteers and short-term hires supporting the vaccination cam-

paign are also eligible for shots.

Meanwhile, hospitals are under pressure to use all of the vaccines they receive. Gov. Henry McMaster said last week hospitals need to administer as many of the shots as they can manage or face an executive order halting elective procedures, which are key to hospitals' bottom line.

Most hospitals across the state say they are lacking supply, however, as recent weekly shipments from the federal government fell short of expectations.

Roper St. Francis has administered more than 19,000 doses of the vaccine, according to DHEC numbers.

The Charleston health system is not alone in the state in its policy of vaccinating board members, according to the S.C. Hospital Association, and other kinds of volunteers easily meet the guidelines. Volunteers, just like many hospital staff, are also subject to indirect exposure,



ANDREW J. WHITAKER/STAFF

Vehicles line up at a Roper St. Francis Healthcare COVID-19 vaccine drive-thru at the North Charleston Coliseum parking lot. Hospitals in South Carolina are stepping up their efforts to vaccinate those eligible in the first phase.

said Schipp Ames, a spokesman for the association.

"The state's hospitals and health systems have been working around the clock to clear the shelves of vaccine and get shots in the arms of more

South Carolinians as directed by DHEC and Governor McMaster," Ames said. "Hospital board members are integral to the decision-making process of each facility and many meet the guidelines for Phase 1A criteria

as seniors and members of the health care community."

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