

# Portsmouth African Burying Ground

## Portsmouth, New Hampshire

### Rediscovery to Memorial

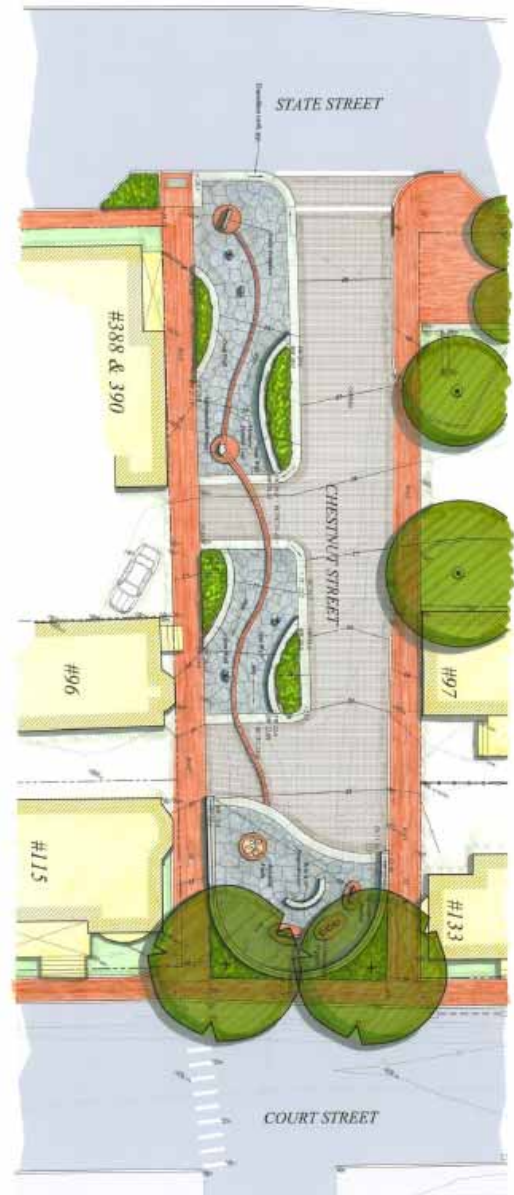
#### Coffins Under the Street

In October 2003, contractors carrying out infrastructure upgrades near the intersection of Court and Chestnut Streets unearthed a series of coffins. Under the direction of the State Archaeologist, a total of thirteen coffins were found at the site and eight were temporarily removed. Archaeological, historical and scientific protocols were followed throughout this process and a team of researchers has now analyzed the historic records, artifacts and skeletal remains, as well as DNA samples. The findings of the combined research support the interpretation that this location was the “Negro Burying Ground” shown on a 1705 City Map.

Documentary evidence indicates that this segregated burying area for colonial-era African-Americans may have been in use as early as 1705 in what was then the outskirts of town. As Portsmouth expanded during the prosperous 1790s, the burying ground was subsumed into the urban landscape as part of Chestnut Street. The Portsmouth African Burying Ground probably extended the entire length of the block between State and Court Streets, and as many as 200 graves may still lie beneath the west lane of Chestnut Street. The rediscovery of the burying ground has tremendous distinction as the only known African-American cemetery of its age that has been investigated through archaeology in all of New England.

#### Creating a Memorial

Currently, the memorial to this important piece of Portsmouth’s history is in the final design stage and the community is pursuing fundraising to fully implement the selected design, which includes the work of artist and sculptor Jerome Meadows of Savannah, Georgia and a local Landscape Architecture firm, Woodburn & Company. The memorial will be located on a City street, which will be closed to through traffic and presents an enormous opportunity for public art and education.



We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten  
By Artist and Sculptor Jerome Meadows

*I stand for the Ancestors Here and Beyond  
I stand for those who feel anger  
I stand for those who were treated unjustly  
I stand for those who were taken from their loved ones  
I stand for those who suffered the middle passage  
I stand for those who survived upon these shores  
I stand for those who pay homage to this ground  
I stand for those who find dignity in these bones*



The burying ground and memorial lie in the heart of Portsmouth’s downtown and will complement nearby, vibrant African American cultural entities -- the Seacoast African American Cultural Center and the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail. The burying ground lies on the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail and the memorial will be an opportunity to enhance understanding of Portsmouth’s history.

*The African Burying Ground Committee is committed to raising monies from the community to support this project. If you would like to help support the creation of the memorial to those buried at Chestnut Street, please contact the African Burying Ground Committee and the City of Portsmouth by calling (603) 610-7226.*