

Meeting Notes

Charlottesville Historic Resources Committee
Friday, January 14, 2022; 11:00 a.m. – 12:50 p.m.
Remote meeting via Zoom

HRC Members present

Phil Varner, chair
Sally Duncan, vice-chair
Dede Smith
Genevieve Keller
Margaret O'Bryant
Jalane Schmidt
Kay Slaughter
Richard Wilson
Tom Chapman

HRC Members not present

Jessica Livingston

Staff present

Jeff Werner

1. Call to order:

HRC chair Phil Varner calls meeting to order and calls committee attendance.

2. Approval of the agenda:

Genevieve Keller asks to add an item to the agenda: consideration of a new ex-officio HRC member, Tom Chapman of the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society.

Dede Smith asks to add an item welcoming new HRC member Richard Wilson.

Genevieve Keller moves to approve the amended agenda. Dede Smith seconds motion. Motion passes unanimously.

3. Public Comment:

The HRC receives no public comment.

Jeff Werner asks to welcome two University of Virginia students interning at Neighborhood Development Services who have joined call.

4. Approval of meeting notes:

a. December 2021 HRC Meeting Notes:

Margaret O'Bryant requests correcting a mistake in the notes regarding the Ann Bailey lecture.

Smith moves to accept the amended meeting notes. O'Bryant seconds motion. With Keller abstaining, motion passes unanimously.

5. Introductions

Varner welcomes Richard Wilson to HRC and Wilson offers introduction.

Zoe Larive and Paige Werman, two university students, offer introductions.

6. Engagement of the Descendant Community for Court Square/Slave Auction Block site:
[11:25, 45 minutes]
Committee discusses progress report for project to City Council. No action taken.
Committee plans to have report ready by February City Council meeting. Varner has started work on report and will offer draft by next meeting. Three major points in report:
- a. Descendant engagement in order to build trust and community support around project
 - i. Challenges, as well as opportunity provided by virtual engagement
 - b. Summary of the primary comments received by descendants so far
 - i. The fact that there needs to be an educational component
 - ii. The preference for something substantial
 - c. Request for a budget, timeframe, and hard commitment to do something significant from Council

Jalane Schmidt has been coordinating with James Madison Regional Library staff to coordinate a spring talk with Dr. Ann Bailey, historian with expertise on slave auctions.

Schmidt shares that more is being learned about the sale and auctions of enslaved people at Court Square through university graduate student researchers.

Kay Slaughter asks that Varner might include results from graduate research in Council progress report and presentation.

Committee members consider possibility of erecting Virginia Department of Historic Resources state highway marker to recognize sale of enslaved people at Court Square.

7. Downtown Walking Tour Map Work Session
Walking Tour Map subcommittee members, Smith and Slaughter, offer update on progress drafting text for walking tour map. No action taken.

Subcommittee used spreadsheet to identify potential sites in major geographical areas for map: Court Square, Downtown, Water Street, Market Street and Vinegar Hill. Designer used these sites to create a prototype, presented at last meeting.

Smith and Slaughter working on drafting text for map entries.

Wilson asks that map entries contain dates and architects, when available.

Committee discusses how to interpret Downtown Mall history on map.

8. Committee Membership Discussion
Keller acknowledges that Tom Chapman, Executive Director of Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society, is regular attendee of HRC members and asks that he be added as ex-officio member.

Keller moves to ask Tom Chapman join the HRC as an ex-officio member.

Slaughter seconds motion. Motion passes unanimously.

Schmidt agrees to ask Andrea Douglas at the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center if she's interested in joining as an ex-officio member.

9. Staff Updates:

Staff has no updates to offer.

10. Coordinate Agenda for February HRC Meeting:

Committee decides that only one meeting is necessary in February.

11. Announcements: [12:45, 5 minutes]

Kay announced an upcoming virtual community event for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Meeting Notes
Charlottesville Historic Resources Committee^[1]_[SEP]
Friday, February 11, 2022; 11:00 a.m. – 12:50 p.m.
Remote meeting via Zoom

HRC Members present

Phil Varner, Chair
Sally Duncan, Vice-chair
Margaret O'Bryant
Dede Smith
Genevieve Keller
Jalane Schmidt
Kay Slaughter
Tom Chapman
Jessica Livingston
Richard Wilson

HRC Members not present

Staff present

Jeff Werner
Robert Watkins

1. Call to order:

Meeting guests introduce themselves. Sterling Howell is the Program and Volunteer Coordinator with the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society. MaDeja Leverett and Jake Calhuon are University of Virginia graduate students conducting research on the sale of enslaved people at the Albemarle County Courthouse.

2. Approval of the agenda:

Dede Smith moves to approve the agenda. Margaret O'Bryant seconds motion. Motion passes unanimously.

3. Public Comment:

The HRC receives no public comment.

4. Engagement of the Descendant Community for Court Square/Slave Auction Block site:

Calhoun, shares one-page research report via email.

Graduate researchers have so far conducted research between 1831-1842 so far, mainly in chancery records.

Leverett shares a list of names they've identified in their research so far.

Smith and Jeff Werner express importance of coordinating with other research projects so redundant work isn't done.

Jalane Schmidt thanks graduate researchers for their work so far, and for Phil Varner's work on the report to City Council.

Committee members offer feedback on report to City Council.

Members discuss the need to credit all who have made contributions in report.

The report needs to identify the committee's staff support.

Committee discusses the best language to include in the report. It is important to be precise but also use language that a broad audience can understand since it is a public document. HRC discusses using terms like trafficking, antebellum, auctions, and sales.

Schmidt updates committee on planning a lecture for April with Dr. Anne Bailey.

5. Downtown Walking Tour Map Work Session:

Smith offers update on walking tour map. Map subcommittee is still figuring out how to write an engaging walking tour in so few words. Subcommittee members reached back out to map designer and Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society (ACHS) staff for feedback. Subcommittee has moved away from Vinegar Hill inset map to allow for more text.

Committee discusses having a walking tour meeting with ACHS to determine best routes and sites for map.

6. Staff Updates:

Staff announces that the Board of Architectural Review will review plans for a new Albemarle County District Courthouse at the February meeting.

7. Coordinate Agenda for March HRC Meeting:

HRC will retain similar agenda for March meeting.

8. Announcements:

Tom Chapman and Jeff Werner and others gave a presentation on Pen Park through the library.

Chapman announces that he's been working with Sally Duncan and Renaissance School students to put together an exhibit at ACHS.

Report on Research in Court Square
Jake Calhoun and MaDeja Leverett

For the past four months, we (MaDeja Leverett and Jake Calhoun) have researched the antebellum history of Court Square and the Albemarle County Courthouse in an effort to uncover the site's significance as a place of enslavement and the commodification of human beings. In doing so, we have thus far engaged primarily with Chancery Order Books, records detailing disputes over wills, estates, and debts due to the Court. Enslaved women, men, and children featured prominently in many of these cases as they regularly factored into the "estate" of many Virginians. These enslaved Americans posed a unique problem for the Court as evenly dividing a human into equal "shares" posed a challenge. At times, enslaved persons might be granted to the deceased's next of kin as happened in May of 1835 when the Albemarle County Court decreed that Ann Eliza and Emily, two women enslaved by Christopher Hudson, were to be bequeathed to Hudson's grandchildren after his passing. All too often, however, in order to distribute the "shares" of the deceased in a manner that the Court deemed appropriate, the Court would appoint one or more commissioners to sell the enslaved persons, essentially liquidating them in order to distribute their monetary value evenly among the claimants.

The Albemarle County Court directly advertised the sale of enslaved individuals and families on the Courthouse door and in local newspapers, as it did with an enslaved woman by the name of Phebe in 1837. In May of that year, Phebe's sale, along with that of her "increase" (her children), was advertised on the front door of the Courthouse and circulated in local Charlottesville newspapers. In certain cases, the Court might also elect to order an auction or sale to take place on the following court day, ordering the date of said sale to be advertised in a similar manner. An enslaved woman named Dolly endured this process in October of 1838 when she was auctioned off in front of the Courthouse in order to pay off the debts of her enslaver John Gilmore. After combing through these Chancery Order Books dating from 1831 to 1842, dozens of names of enslaved people sold by commissioners of the Albemarle County Court have emerged, all of whom had their sale either take place or advertised at Court Square. Beyond these individuals, hundreds of more names of enslaved people, all of whom had their fate determined by the Court, fill these records.

So far, our research has only taken us through 1842 though this advertisement and trade of enslaved human beings by commissioners of the Court continued well beyond that date, lasting up until the Civil War. We have yet to explore the Chancery Records of these later years, nor have we had the opportunity to review the Albemarle County Court Minutes from these decades, which, after 1850, should detail the fate of any fugitive slaves that might have come before the Court after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Fugitive slaves across the South, if captured, would often be sold at auction by County courts if their enslaver could not be located. Unlike the Chancery Order Books, these sources have been known to list place of sale, often specifying the precise location of the auction of a fugitive slave, whether it be the steps of a courthouse, a nearby plantation, or an auction block. Though we have few explicit references to the geographic place of sale within the confines and context of Court Square, as in whether such sales took place on the Courthouse steps or at Number Nothing, the names and stories of the enslaved people sold at Court Square speak not only to the Square's significance as a site of enslavement but also to Albemarle County Court's undeniable historical function as a tool of dehumanizing Black people.

Report on Research in Court Square
Jake Calhoun and MaDeja Leverett

List of Names of Enslaved People Confirmed Sold at Court Square and Year of Sale
(Drawn from Chancery Orders 1 Albemarle County, 1831-1842)

Warwick, 1834
Phebe and her children, 1837
Lucinda and her children, 1837
Alice, 1837
Hannah (child of Alice), 1837
Clara, 1837
Margaret, 1837
Mary, 1837
Harriet, 1837
Jim, 1837
Edy, 1837
Nancy, 1837
Dolly, 1837
Eve, 1837
Dolly, 1838
Milly and her children, 1839