From: David Forbes
To: Drew Reisinger
Subject: [Probable SPAM] Re: Press Release: Exhibit Spotlights Hidden African-American History
Date: Thursday, March 14, 2013 5:09:14 PM

Drew,

Indeed: Jake Frankel is on the case and we'll have a post featuring it this weekend.

-David

On Mar 14, 2013, at 11:23 AM, Drew Reisinger wrote:

> David,
> Thank you for retweeting the slave deed video that went live yesterday. If it is newsworthy enough for the Xpress website would you consider posting it there as well?
> http://buncombecounty.org/slavedeeds
> Thanks for your consideration David,
> Drew
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> --
> Drew Reisinger
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Exhibit Spotlights Hidden African-American History

The genealogical history of African-Americans remains tucked away on the bookshelves of courthouses throughout the nation.

Only in Buncombe County, North Carolina, have those original records been opened, scanned, and published online for review by descendants, historians, and educators around the world.

Those slave deeds are central to the poignant exhibit *Forever Free*, which honors the history of enslaved people and commemorates the 150-year anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Forever Free was 13 years in the making and opened this month. It includes a moving documentary and handwritten deeds that archive the trading of people as property, such as:

"Know all men by these presents that J. Abner Jervis of the State and County aforsaid have this day bargained and sold unto Andrew Hemphill of the County of Burke, a certain Negro woman slave,

named Sarah aged about 20 years old, for the consideration of two hundred and fifty dollars…"

A simple request sparked collaboration between an elected official and a university, and has resulted in the posting of slave deeds online, an exhibit honoring President Lincoln, the *Forever Free* exhibit, and a challenge that government can do more to acknowledge our history of slavery.

"It was the government that allowed slavery to exist from the very beginning. So it is important for a government agency to begin to be in the forefront of acknowledging the past," said Dr. Darin Waters, a scholar featured in the documentary. "I think that it says to those who are descendants from the people who were slaves, 'we are finally recognizing the humanity of your ancestors and the important role that they played in helping to create the society that we now live in.'"

In 2012, the Center for Diversity Education at UNC Asheville asked Drew Reisinger, the Register of Deeds of Buncombe County, for one of the original slave records to use in the exhibit *Lincoln: the Constitution and the Civil War.*

Reisinger was initially "floored that these records existed," and, recognizing their value to families and academics, took steps to make them readily available to the public. In North Carolina, county Register of Deeds offices cataloged the transactions of slavery. In Buncombe County, those handwritten files date from the early 1800s.

At Reisinger's request, the Center for Diversity Education gave the county their compilation of the county's slave records which a group of students had painstakingly pulled together 13 years ago. Reisinger's staff set out to upload all of the images of Buncombe County's slave records and put them online. The images are now available on the county's website.

Cataldo Perrone of the county's public relations department helped bring the project alive by producing the *Forever Free*documentary. The documentary features historians and descendants of slaves speaking on the significance of these records and the importance of

acknowledging our past.

Perrone also produced the audio history of the Sarah Gudger story and the reproductions of the slave deeds, all of which are on display as part of the exhibit.

A few counties have compiled slave deeds and made hard copies available within their county offices for public review. A few more counties have put an index of their slave records online. "All these efforts are steps in the right direction," Reisinger said. "I am thrilled to be able to add the ability for people to view the actual record without having to drive to the physical office to see them. Historians, educators, and descendants of those who were enslaved have greatly appreciated easier access to the documents."

Forever Free is on display through April in the southeast corner of the lobby of 35 Woodfin Street in Downtown Asheville.

To research Buncombe County's slave deeds, go to http://buncombecounty.org/slavedeeds

To view the *Forever Free* documentary on YouTube, go to http://bit.ly/YaGyNs

Contact information:

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