

Meeting of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission January 26, 2021 Director's Report

2020 "Year in Review" Highlights

- **Personnel Shifts**

- Adrienne M. Nirdé joined the NC African American Heritage Commission as Associate Director in May of 2020. In this role, Mrs. Nirdé leads the AAHC communications strategy, supports organizational programs and initiatives, and serves as a member of the organizational leadership team.
- Amber Pelham, a recent 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 will begin her role at the end of January 2021.

- **Commissioner Re-Appointments**

1. Reverend Dr. Pierre Crawford (Gaston County)
2. Tamara Holmes-Brothers, PhD (Cumberland County)
3. Deloris Rhodes (New Hanover County)
4. E. Charles Robinson (Durham County)

- **COVID-19 Pandemic Response**

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
- **“Green Books’ ‘Oasis Spaces’: African American Travel in NC, 1936-1966” (\$148,570 Awarded July 2017)**

The performance period for this project (colloquially known as the NC Green Book Project) concluded in August of 2020. Under the leadership of grant-funded research historian Lisa R. Withers, and with the support of a robust advisory board, African American student interns, and a team of intra-departmental colleagues, the project was executed and completed with great success, and a significant amount of community acclaim. Project accomplishments include:

 - A special UNC-TV [“Black Issues Forum”](#) centered on the Green Book was filmed at the NC Museum of History and hosted by Deborah Holt-Noel.
 - Successful documentation of each the 326 North Carolina Green Book sites.
 - Confirmed, tracked, and updated the 63 extant (still standing) sites. At project start, 66 sites were extant.
 - Obtained or took modern-day photographs of 104 sites.
 - Collected 59 oral histories.
 - Developed two identical traveling exhibitions, as well as one digital exhibition, entitled “Navigating Jim Crow: The Green Book and Oasis Spaces in North Carolina,” which launched in March. While COVID-19 interrupted the traveling exhibition schedule, the exhibit resumed traveling in December of 2020. It will travel throughout the state indefinitely.
 - Developed a project [web portal](#).
 - Created educational webinars, digital educational resources for 4th and 8th graders, and traveling trunks for museum educators and schoolteachers.
 - Raised awareness around Green Book sites across the state, which activated many local communities to work collaboratively to preserve extant Green Book sites, including in Kinston, Greensboro, Charlotte, and Raleigh.
 - Over 500 constituents were engaged through the Green Book Project at various events across the state, including HBCU homecomings, African American cultural festivals, grassroots community informational sessions and library and university programs.

Organizational Priorities for 2021

Fiscal

1. **Activate Commissioners to secure funds to meet the growing capacity and operational needs of the NC African American Heritage Commission.** Needs (please note):
 - a. Recurring operational funding for the NC African American Heritage Commission.
 - b. Recurring funding to program and steward the North Carolina Freedom Park.
 - c. Staff positions:
 - i. Education & Outreach Coordinator: will develop educational resources and family, youth, and community programs. Will also lead the development of curriculum and lesson plans, educational workshops, digital educational content, educational presentations, and other resources for K-12 educators, museum educators, and private and home-school educators; and will help field and respond to constituent technical assistance requests.
 - ii. Program Coordinator: will organize, implement, and manage programs, special events, workshops, trainings, professional development opportunities, symposia and convenings, board meetings, heritage trail systems, and exhibitions.
(These are priority positions; Director foresees a need for NCFP staff positions, as well)
(Director will connect with Commissioners in Q1 to discuss further)
2. Collaborate with Commissioners to **explore other pathways towards support.**

Programmatic

1. **Expand Arts Engagement work**, under the leadership of Kyma Lassiter, NCAAHC Arts & Outreach Coordinator. After identifying this gap, Kyma has led the charge to help the Commission connect more deeply and effectively to North Carolina's creative community. You will hear more about what we have accomplished, and what is forthcoming, later in the meeting.
2. Continue to **shape our state's African American heritage tourism infrastructure**, with an eye towards heritage trails. We are thinking expansively as a team, and in close relationship with partners like Visit NC and NCGrowth, about how to do this work in a way that is dynamic, and that has the potential to boost local economies. We are excited about what the NC Civil Rights Trail will yield, particularly by connecting digital maps, physical markers, and driving tours and itineraries. As the trail grows, we will continue to work with Visit NC and local tourism bureaus to determine how the trail is shaping local tourism, and therefore local economies.

We are also thinking critically about the future of Freedom Roads and the NC Green Book Project as opportunities for more active trail development work. We have seen success in activating the trail through digital tools, through local programs (especially in Halifax and Guilford Counties), and through educational resources. Thus, we aim to explore how to connect these successful components more deeply to a physical trail system, which has yet to be fully conceptualized. We hope to advance this work in 2021.

Finally, the next phase of the NC Green Book Project will likely include a trail element. Currently, AAHC staff and external partners (including the SC African American Heritage Commission, the National Trust for Historic

Preservation, and the William G. Pomeroy Foundation) are considering possibilities for statewide and multi-state driving tours, travel itineraries, and physical markers.

3. **Build awareness of the NC African American Heritage Commission across the state**, inclusive of its initiatives, programs, and resources. Adrienne Nirdé will play a critical role in leading this work and will share more during her report.

Constituent-Centered

1. **Connect constituents to more professional development opportunities**, building upon the success of CARES webinars.
2. **Streamline technical assistance across DNCR**, particularly by assigning AAHC staff to liaise with specific DNCR divisions.
3. **Increase and streamline support grassroots African American heritage practitioners**. Strategies shall include:
 - a. Streamlining technical assistance requests by building strategy that will include assigning AAHC staff to liaise with constituents around specific subjects and deputizing AAHC Commissioners to help respond to region- and subject-specific requests, among other measures.
 - b. Developing resources for constituents, including technical leaflets.
 - c. Building a heritage practitioner database to understand who our grassroots practitioners are, where they are, what they are doing, and determine where they need support.
4. **Grow relationships with critical partners**, especially the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, the seven other state African American Heritage Commissions, and state African American Heritage Commissions.

Health & Safety

1. **Prioritize the mental and physical health, and physical safety, of AAHC staff.**

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

1. **Continue to expand young Black peoples' access to the cultural heritage field**. A 2020 award from the UNCG Community-Engaged Pathways and Partnerships (P2): Collective Scholarship Fellows Program will advance this work beginning next month, through 2024, through "Crafting a Community-Engaged Approach: Creating Pathways for African Americans in Public History."