



## **HSF RECEIVES HISTORIC TRUST GRANT TO CREATE A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE ENGAGING YOUTH IN THE LIVES OF ENSLAVED HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS AT DAVENPORT HOUSE MUSEUM**

**SAVANNAH, GA – FEBRUARY 8, 2021** – Recently Historic Savannah Foundation received a \$5,000 matching grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to create, for the Davenport House Museum (DHM), a youth guide engaging middle-school aged students in the lives of those enslaved in the Davenport household in the 1820s.

“The exciting thing about this project is once done, young people all over the world – as well as in our community – will be able to access virtually our uniquely Savannah story in ways customized for their age group,” said HSF CEO and President Sue Adler. HSF is partnering with the Nobis Project, a nonprofit educational resource organization specializing in community engagement experiences, particularly regarding authentic narratives of African American history and Gullah Geechee culture, to create a dynamic tool to bring the past to life.

The Davenport House, HSF’s only historic house museum, tells the story of early 19<sup>th</sup> century daily life in the port city of Savannah to thousands of visitors annually. Over the years, through scholarly research, the Museum has broadened the story it tells to include all 23 members of the Davenport household, including the thirteen enslaved workers owned by Davenport. “We tell our story with humanity and inclusion, but we are limited by physical space. We want to open our narrative to the world to provide understanding about what happened here. This virtual youth guide is a tool for doing this. We are pleased to expose virtual visitors to our stories,” continues Adler.

HSF called on experts with Nobis Project, Dr. Christen Higgins Clougherty, Founder and Executive Director, and Heather DuCloux, Program Coordinator, to lead the initiative. They came up with the idea of creating “journeys” where students venture through the lives of household members as they explore the house virtually. Each “journeys” will be developed using the groundbreaking research undertaken by scholar Kelly Westfield, who did extensive reverse deed work on the lives of enslaved members of the household.

Westfield used information known to the Davenport House Museum, such as ads for the sale of enslaved workers, as the basis for delving deeper into the records to trace their lives back through their chain of sale. In doing this, she found a wealth of information, including names of parents and siblings, mobility through sale, and in a couple of cases final resting places. Having Nobis specialists' pair down the research and put it into a form that will intrigue students is a goal of the project.

The intention of the DHM's youth guide program is to provide younger guests and the community with a more accurate depiction of the Davenport family household, as well as the lives of enslaved people in a 19<sup>th</sup> century Southern port city. The legacy of the enslaved people – not only in the Davenport House, but also throughout Savannah – is critically important to the history of the city. It is because of enslaved people that much of the city exists as it does, from buildings and trades to traditions and experiences. It is also important to acknowledge that much of what is enjoyed today by visitors and residents alike was built on the backs of this enslaved population, which is often excluded from or vaguely mentioned in the story.

Historic Savannah Foundation, a leading nonprofit preservation and cultural institution, believes the creation of an age-appropriate guided program to properly tell the story will strengthen connections with both the local youth community and visitors, as well as promote healing in what has become an exacerbated society. "We admire Historic Savannah Foundation's intention to be a part of a healing process, illustrating that the contributions and legacy of enslaved Africans is important for all to better understand and taking an active role to promote the authentic – yet difficult – story of enslavement in the United States," Clougherty said.

The components created by the Nobis Project for children ages 8-15 will be interactive for both visitors to the Museum as well as online. The work will dovetail with HSF's facilities expansion at the Davenport House and will culminate with the opening of an Urban Enslaved Exhibit, currently under construction. Visitors' "journeys" will focus on the new exhibition.

"We are honored and grateful to receive this matching grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to pursue such an innovative, worthwhile initiative. The Nobis Project is inspirational, and we cannot wait to see the final program they complete. It is such a relevant undertaking and will work perfectly with the new Urban Enslaved Exhibit we are creating as part of the Kennedy Pharmacy expansion. This really gives it another essential element and will make the experience so multi-faceted," concludes Adler.

Historic Savannah Foundation, a leading nonprofit preservation and cultural institution, saves buildings, places, and stories that define Savannah's past, present, and future. Following its formation in 1955,

the organization started a Revolving Fund to save endangered historic properties, now totaling nearly 410 buildings throughout several of Savannah's historic districts. HSF continues to build capacity within its operations, secure new financial resources, improve its image and visibility, and increase public policy efforts to protect Savannah's historic districts.

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