



Pokanoket Sachem Tracey “Dancing Star” Brown (right), joined by Bristol Town Councilman Tim Sweeney and Victoria Johnson (from the Newport Middle Passage Project) were all smiles as the temporary marker was unveiled.

RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

By Christy Nadalin 3/4/2023

Dozens gathered on a brisk and breezy Saturday morning to celebrate the latest development in the multi-year effort to site a marker to the Transatlantic slave trade on the Bristol waterfront.

“We’re so happy to be here today with everybody to celebrate the beginning of a milestone,” said Stephan Brigidi, Bristol Middle Passage Port Marker Project co-chair, before inviting Pokanoket Sachem Tracey “Dancing Star” Brown to acknowledge the sacredness of the site to her people. “I welcome you to the ancestral homeland of the Pokanoket tribe,” Brown said. “The Creator put our people here to live on this land and to take care of it and everything on it to live in peace and harmony. I would like to honor my ancestors who did just that — they lived in peace and harmony with this land and everything on it. I would also like to acknowledge the Pokanoket people who still today are trying to restore balance to this land.”

Brigidi also acknowledged Charles Roberts, founder of the Rhode Island Slave History Medallion project, and an advisor to the Port Marker Project, and credited him with the idea for siting the marker

in Independence Park, near the boardwalk. Then he introduced Professor Bernard Freamon, Bristol Middle Passage Port Marker Project co-chair and Director of the Race and the Foundations of American Law course at Roger Williams University.

“We are here in the spirit of remembrance, acknowledgment, healing, and reconciliation to mark the future site of a memorial to the African and Indigenous persons who were subjected to a human trade in which the town of Bristol played a key role,” said Freamon. “The commercial engine for the trade; the building of ships, the financing of voyages to Africa occurred right here in Bristol in Newport....Not only were there significant numbers of Africans who were brought here to the Northeast, the colonists also enslaved a large number of indigenous people.”

According to the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society, at least 600 enslaved people lived in Bristol between the town's founding in 1680 and 1808, when the trade was outlawed under federal law.

Freamon concluded by saying that through this monument, the community will learn about this chapter of our history, not only to not forget it but to also acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of all to our community.

Councilman Tim Sweeney spoke, representing the Town Council. “The installation of this marker connects Bristol to its involvement in slavery and allows us to heal, and learn from our past,” he said. “This past weekend. I toured this Smithsonian African American Museum in DC, and I saw a quote from President Barack Obama that I feel is fitting for today's ceremony: ‘Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change we seek.’

“A big, big, thank you to the Middle Passage project group for their hard work and getting us here today. On behalf of the town, thank you.”The group then unveiled a placeholder marking the site on the monument, the design of which remains to be finalized.

“We hope that in 12 months, maybe, give or take a few, we'll be back to you with the real thing,” said Brigidi.



Bernard Freamon, Bristol Middle Passage Port Marker Project co-chair and Director of the Race and the Foundations of American Law course at Roger Williams University, provides remarks.
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Pokanoket Sachem Tracey "Dancing Star" Brown and Pokanoket Sagamore William "Winds of Thunder" Guy look over a scroll prepared by the Bristol Historical Society that chronicles the lives of known enslaved peoples throughout Bristol's history, dating back to 1680.
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