

Tubman Statue Brings Beacon of Hope to Cambridge

This column in *Attraction*, by Amelia Blades Steward, visits the faces of those who have benefited from the generous and tireless work of the nonprofits on the Mid Shore or are one of the organizations giving back in unique ways to better our world. She has been a freelance writer in our community for over 20 years and offers a glimpse into the lives of residents on the Mid Shore whom she has met along the way.



When the Harriet Tubman sculpture, “Journey to Freedom,” was commis-

sioned in 2018 by a Dallas businessman for a new building, the nationwide interest in Harriet Tubman was in its infant stages. After the Emmy and Academy Award-winning sculptor, Wesley Wofford of Wofford Sculpture Studio in North Carolina, put the final images of the sculpture online after it had been installed, the social media response was overwhelming.

“It was palpable the public’s thirst for this sort of conversation and this sort of monument. And so, for us, it was a way that we could participate in this wave of social justice that was washing over the nation,” Wesley recalls.

While having lunch with another client, after receiving the response he received, they were talking and agreed there was a need to get the sculpture out to the public and the world. The client agreed to underwrite the new project as a loan and Wesley started casting an Artist Print in October 2019 that was ready to travel in January 2020 as *The Traveling Exhibition: Harriet Tubman – “The Journey to Freedom.”*

Since February 2020, the exhibit has traveled to 12 places. The first stop was at the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, and the second stop was The Harriet Tubman Museum in Cape May, New Jersey. The third stop was Cambridge, in Dorchester County, the birthplace of Harriet Tubman.

Wesley explains that the project has been a foray into how through these public spaces and monuments we can own the uncomfortable histories that we have.

“This collaboration with Cambridge has been so important, unique, enriching, educational, and experimental on how public statues honoring our collective heroes are created – this sort of bridge building needs to happen nationwide. We’re very fractured on lots of levels, but with public statuary specifically, there’s a big divide. Everyone’s testing the waters as to how to deal with

these public spaces of existing objects or untold stories,” Wesley comments.

Adrian Holmes, founder of Alpha Genesis Community Development Corporation (AGCDC) in Cambridge, and Jermaine Anderson, Executive Director of AGCDC, tell the story of how the sculpture got to Cambridge and the impact it had on the community, leading to a community-wide effort for Cambridge to have its own sculpture of Tubman, to be installed on the Dorchester County Courthouse lawn on the fourth Day of Resilience on September 10, 2022, in time for the bicentennial of Harriet Tubman’s birth.

A week after the first AGCDC Day of Resilience in 2019, Jermaine got a phone call from Odyssey Wofford asking about bringing the Harriet Tubman “Journey to Freedom” statue to Cambridge. A local Cambridge resident, Tashina Fowler, had seen the statue online and had reached out to Odyssey to request the statue come to Cambridge because it was in Dorchester County, the birthplace of Harriet Tubman. The pair didn’t know how they would pay for the \$2,700 to bring the original sculpture to Cambridge for a month.

Amy Craig, Clerk of Court, Circuit Court for Dorchester County, who was involved in approving the traveling statue’s location, recalls, “When we got word of the traveling Harriet statue and I was brought into a meeting to decide where she would be placed for 30 days, it only took me a second for me to realize there was only one public place in Dorchester County that she should be and I made a commitment that it would be placed there at the courthouse.”

“Our administrative judge at the time was Brett W. Wilson and he backed me on it. But it was not just the courthouse staff, it was also the County Council from day one, as they supported the use of the courthouse lawn as county property.”

Through a Heart of the Chesapeake Heritage Area Authority mini-grant, Alpha Genesis found the money to bring the statue to Cambridge and on September 11, 2020, the statue was installed for the second Resilience Day in Cambridge. Adrian remembers, “When the sculpture arrived on a flatbed truck, cars stopped in the middle of the street and people left their cars. I didn’t expect that at all. People wanted to give us money. There was a group of us who were positioning the statue and installing it and we kind of knew that this was bigger than what we thought it would be. Then, it was how do we have a statue of our own and there was never a question of



Sculptor Wesley Wofford and Adrian Holmes display the model of the “The Beacon of Hope” sculpture. The 13-foot bronze sculpture of Harriet Tubman will be installed and dedicated on the Day of Resilience in Cambridge on September 10 at noon.

who else do we get to do it? Because we had experienced such positive energy behind Wesley’s work, we deserved our own permanent sculpture in this sacred space.”

The process then began for the citizens of Dorchester County to engage Wesley in commissioning their own sculpture of Harriet Tubman. Adrian believes that the process has been divinely inspired from the beginning.

“We started community conversations while the “Journey to Freedom” was here, asking people what is it they wanted to see in our own Harriet Tubman sculpture – what do we want to say about this woman, this place, and about our community? And then about us as black people?” Adrian states.

“We had an opportunity to tell our story from a place of victory and that’s what we wanted to do. We didn’t want to keep this slave narrative going. It is a far-reaching thing that we must show ourselves in a more positive light. We can’t dismiss the hardships that have happened. I think Cambridge is ground zero for healing. The atrocities that took place here have to be reconciled. This really isn’t about who did what, but a movement for healing our community and our nation. It’s pretty powerful,” she adds.

Amy states, “The entire community has endorsed this project. Judge Wilson said about the project, ‘This is a brick-and-mortar structure that represents justice. And we owe justice and honor to Harriet Tubman.’”

Wesley came to Cambridge and did

a couple of public forums at the courthouse where he talked to people about what they liked about the “Journey to Freedom” and what they would want to see in their statue to reflect the keywords that were identified. The community wanted their statue of Harriet to look amazing, determined, and heroic, but not “pretty.”

The sculpture’s title, “Beacon of Hope,” was meant to be a symbol of inspiration rising out of the uncomfortable. According to Adrian, that’s why when you see the sculpture, the base is messy and includes shackles, which is not comfortable. She states, “We thought it was important to have shackles to say that this place is where people were shackled and auctioned. We can’t “not tell” that story. We can’t “not feel” that pain, in order to heal it. We all look at our own lives and the trauma that we experienced early in life, but everything that happened to Harriet blossomed in such a positive way that she changed the trajectory of this country.”

“It was also the input of the community who wanted to see Harriet looking younger. This was her childhood home and where she experienced the trauma. So, adding the child Harriet Tubman in our sculpture makes this piece very specific to Dorchester County.”

Adrian shares that the people of Dorchester County also wanted the statue to tell their story. She adds, “We took every effort to make sure black people gave direction to Wesley and he was 100% on board. I always remember Oprah Winfrey saying, ‘Love is in the

Tubman Statue Brings Beacon of Hope, continued

details.' Wesley embodies this. He deposited some of his soul into that clay. He was the best person for the job. It was important to Wesley, that we felt included in this process and we did."

The energy that Wesley brought to Cambridge with "Journey to Freedom" is being continued with this new sculpture, exemplary of his sculptural style.

"My surface treatments and surface textures are distinct – it's my sort of artistic style or flavor emphasizing that it is made by human hands. Surface treatment has very much to do in building a bridge of emotionally connecting with this object," Wesley comments.

"What I love about this piece is that as you move around the sculpture, the look of determination on Harriet's face evolves into a smile at the viewer. It's incredibly regal. I think that this illustrates the stories that need to be told."

The 13-foot bronze sculpture includes a younger Harriet at the feet of an older Harriet who is reaching toward the North Star, becoming a beacon for others. One of the adult models for Harriet was Lisa Green of Harriet Tubman Tours and the child model for Araminta was Otelia Burrell, a 7th generation great niece of Harriet Tubman.

Hair became a focal point in the sculpture and an important element in telling the story of Harriet. "We started talking about celebrating African American hair and creating a narrative of love with the hair. We had a weekend where everyone converged - models, hairdressers, and descendants, and we all worked together and talked about how we can capture it," Wesley recalls.

"We had two fantastic local Cambridge hairdressers, Latoya Baltimore and Danielle Johnson who designed the hair for the sculpture, and I translated

their designs into clay. Hopefully, children will be able to look at the statue and see themselves in it."

"I would say that that 'Journey to Freedom' changed my perspective about what types of projects I want to work on as a sculptor and this Cambridge project amplifies the importance of the stories that I want to help tell. I think that it has been life-changing for everyone involved – but specifically, how does the studio want to spend our time and what do we want our output to be contributing towards? So, it's very timely to be alive as a sculptor right now," Wesley reflects.

"Adrian and Jermaine are the perfect examples of how these types of projects should go and we've referred a lot of other grassroots organizations to them who want to facilitate similar projects for their communities.

"The sculpture's impact on this public space in Cambridge reflects community inclusion – that we are very dedicated to allowing justice for all. This statue will be placed in a location in the community – not just a place to come to go before a judge for circumstances, but it's a place to come and feel that you are included in this property. It's a property of the people, not just a courthouse," Amy states.

"Let us not forget that Harriet not only freed enslaved people, but she also fought to give women the right to vote. She nursed soldiers that were injured in this country. She was a servant to the people of this country."

Funders for the project have included the Maryland Heritage Authority, Maryland General Assembly Legislative Bond, Dorchester County Tourism, Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area, George B. Todd Fund, Media

One, the Waddell Foundation, Crescent City Charities, The Green Field Foundation, the Nathan Foundation, and the Maryland Humanities Council. The group also partnered with Cambridge Multi-Sport, the City of Cambridge, Dorchester Center for the Arts, Dorchester County Government, Habitat for Humanity Choptank, and the Harriet Tubman Organization. The City of Cambridge purchased the granite foundation on which the statue will be placed, and the Dorchester County Government is paying for the site preparation.

"And I am so thankful and honored for all of our elected officials, including Senator Addie Eckardt who helped us get a Maryland General Assembly legislative bond, and for all of the big and small foundations who helped us," states Adrian.

In reflecting on the fundraising process, she said, "We got our energy for the fundraising from the students at Mace's Lane Middle School. John Kahl, a Mace's Lane Middle School social studies teacher, asked his students if they wanted to play a role in the fundraising effort for the statue, which was going to cost \$250,000. They had every intention of raising all the money themselves, which really ignited us."

A collaboration was born between Adrian and the students. The students wrote and illustrated the book, *Discovering Harriet*, written from their perspective - how they learned about the statue and their plans to bring a permanent sculpture to the grounds of the Dorchester County Courthouse. The book was sold to benefit the purchase of the sculpture.

"I think we all realize where we are with the tenor of race relations in our country. We have to be leaders, and this is where the healing starts. Cambridge is Ground Zero for this healing," Adrian states.

Everything pertaining to the base and the production of the statue has been funded, but funds are still being raised for unexpected expenses, like the logistics to move all the pieces and install them. Phase two of the bricks fundraiser is also underway and bricks can be purchased for \$200 to \$1,500.

To purchase a brick, visit www.bricksrus.com/donorsite/harrietsjourneyhome. Donations for Harriet's Journey Home can also be made through <https://alphagenesiscdc-bloom.kindful.com>. For further information about the events, visit alphagenesiscdc.org or call 410-989-3909.

Day of Resilience Program

September 10 • 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

206 High Street, Cambridge

A new 13-foot bronze sculpture of Harriet Tubman, created by Wesley Wofford Sculpture Studio, will be permanently installed and dedicated at the Dorchester County Courthouse. It is Stop #3 along the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, and a former site of slave auctions and a daring escape to freedom engineered by Harriet in the 1800s. The dedication of the 3,000-pound bronze sculpture, "The Beacon of Hope," will take place at noon.

More events are planned for the weekend, Friday through Sunday, including commemorations, reflections, round-table discussions on current events and issues, entertainment, presentations from renowned guest speakers and historians, Underground Railroad Byway tours, a time capsule to mark the occasion, as well as special guests, including Harriet's descendants. Speakers to date include Edward Prince, 5th Generation Grandson of Harriet Tubman's niece who was rescued; Samuel Still, a descendant of William Still who met Harriet Tubman in Philadelphia; Ambassadors of Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of the Congo; Wesley Wofford, Sculptor of "The Beacon of Hope" statue; and Judge William H. Jones. For further information, visit <https://alphagenesiscdc.org/harriets-journey-home>.

Underground Railroad Bike Event

October 15

26 Mile Ride • 8 a.m. - Noon

46 Mile Ride • 8 a.m. - Noon

This unique bike ride will follow the part of the Underground Railroad through scenic marsh and farmlands, with rest stops at historic sites. Cyclists will experience Harriet Tubman's journeys, while helping to raise funds for the statue. This ride is one of the many community efforts, coordinated by Alpha Genesis CDC, to raise money and awareness of the county's rich heritage. Bikers will leave from Cambridge South-Dorchester High School and travel along the same routes that Harriet would have traveled. Visit www.bikesignup.com/Race/MD/Cambridge/BikeTheUGRR to register.

Thomas's
FINE JEWELRY



Unique Jewelry & Gifts • Engagement Rings
Expert Jewelry Repair by Appointment



THOMASSFINEJEWELRY.COM

525 POPLAR STREET | CAMBRIDGE | 410-228-0321

OPEN WEDNESDAY - SATURDAY

