Memorial’s first phase COMPLETE

Interment, art installations, to occur in spring

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PORTSMOUTH — The reburial at the African Burying Ground memorial is still planned for the spring, and a date for the grand opening ceremony is expected early in the new year, according to a city official.

Construction of a memorial at the site where 13 bodies were discovered during a construction project in 2003 is completed for the calendar year, and area residents are welcome to walk around and explore the foundation. The park on Chestnut Street will memorialize as many as 200 people of African descent who were buried in that part of the city during the 18th century.

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century, many of them slaves. "It's safe to say that the most complicated work in the project has been completed," said David Moore, Portsmouth's community development director. "The public is welcome to visit the site and see the work that is completed and read the inscriptions that are there."

Several aesthetic components of the burial ground still need to be completed, including the installation of the decorative railing at the Court Street end of the memorial, the planting of shrubbery and installation of decorative pavement. After that is complete, the main sculptures and burial vault lid will be installed. During the spring ceremony, the remains that were exhumed in 2003 will be reinterred.

"Since 2003, the committee's whole purpose has been to find the best way to honor those buried under Chestnut Street," Moore said.

The city's African Burying Ground Committee will also finish raising the final $75,000 of the $1.2 million project as the year turns to 2015.

"We have much to reflect on and be grateful for in 2014," said Vernis Jackson, chair of the committee, in a prepared statement. "The entire city has come together to make sure this project moved forward. We have reached an exciting juncture in the project, the stage is set for the remaining work to be completed next year and culminate with the artwork installation and reburial of remains in the spring."

The construction phase that was recently completed was complex and sensitive, Moore said, noting it required constant monitoring to keep within the guidelines of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources.

"It was a construction project that went well," Moore said.