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**GRANT PROJECT WILL DOCUMENT HISTORY OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
COMMUNITY IN PROVIDENCE’S COLLEGE HILL NEIGHBORHOOD**

The Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission (RIHPHC) has received a \$25,000 grant from the National Park Service to research and document the history of African Americans in the College Hill Historic District in Providence. Rhode Island is one of thirteen states to receive a grant from the Historic Preservation Fund to assist in efforts to broaden the inclusion of underrepresented communities in statewide inventories of historic properties and the National Register of Historic Places and National Historic Landmarks. The Commission and the R.I. Black Heritage Society (RIBHS) are the lead partners in the project.

College Hill is significant as the site of the original settlement of Providence in 1636 and as the center of political, government, scholarly, and artistic life in Providence and Rhode Island for more than 300 years. The College Hill Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1970, and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1971. Expanded in 1976, the National Register District is roughly bounded on the north by Olney Street, east by Hope Street, south by George M. Cohan Boulevard, and west by the Mosshassuck and Providence rivers, and encompasses over 1700 buildings and structures.

Although the role of African Americans in the development of the neighborhood has often been overlooked, recent scholarship makes it possible to retell the history of College Hill. For instance, RIBHS has found a cluster of neighborhood properties owned by internationally renowned opera singer Sissieretta Jones (1869-1933) and has conducted numerous interviews about the impact of local urban renewal and redevelopment projects on the African-American community in the 1950s and 1960s. The 2006 report published by Brown University’s Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice explored the university’s connections to slavery and revealed how the slave trade influenced the development of College Hill. Further research of census and

directory records, archival material, and secondary sources will uncover additional information to present a more robust and inclusive history.

The project will be carried out over the course of two years, beginning with outreach to scholars, members of the local African-American community, and other organizations to identify key research sources. The next phase will focus on gathering and analyzing information about how sites in the district relate to African-American history. The National Register nomination will be amended and recommendations made for public outreach. And finally, the amended nomination will be submitted to the National Park Service for approval.

In making the announcement, RIHPHC Executive Director Edward F. Sanderson stated: “Former Rhode Island Historic Preservation Officer Fred Williamson always insisted that America’s heritage is enriched when its full and inclusive story is told. This important project will expand our understanding of Providence’s history and serve as a model for future historic preservation projects.” Sanderson noted that Frederick C. Williamson (1915-2010) was the longest serving state historic preservation officer in the country and a co-founder of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society in 1975.

Joyce Stevos, President of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society said that she “is excited to be involved in a formal project that will update African American information related to the College Hill Historic District.” She said, “It is seldom that a community gets an opportunity to amend formal documents for the sole purpose of including African-American history. This rare undertaking by skilled scholars is deeply appreciated and will put all the residents of College Hill on an equal footing when people learn about one of America’s most historic communities.”

The R.I. Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission is the state office for historic preservation and heritage programs. Rhode Island’s statewide historic preservation program identifies and protects historic buildings, districts, and archaeological sites. The Commission conducts statewide surveys of historic sites and buildings; nominates significant properties to the National Register of Historic Places and the State Register; administers programs of financial aid including grants, loans, and tax credits; reviews federal, state, and local projects to protect cultural resources; regulates archaeology on state land and under state territorial waters; and assists the preservation efforts of local governments, preservation societies and property owners. The Commission also is responsible for developing and carrying out programs to document, support and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Rhode Island's people.

The R.I. Black Heritage Society was constituted for the purposes of procuring, collecting, and preserving books, pamphlets, letters, manuscripts, prints, photographs, paintings, and historical materials relating to the history of African Americans in Rhode Island. The Society assembled a collection that documents local African Americans’ accomplishments in the fields of military service, business, politics, the arts, and education. The Society also encourages and promotes the study of African-American history through lectures and making information available to the general public.