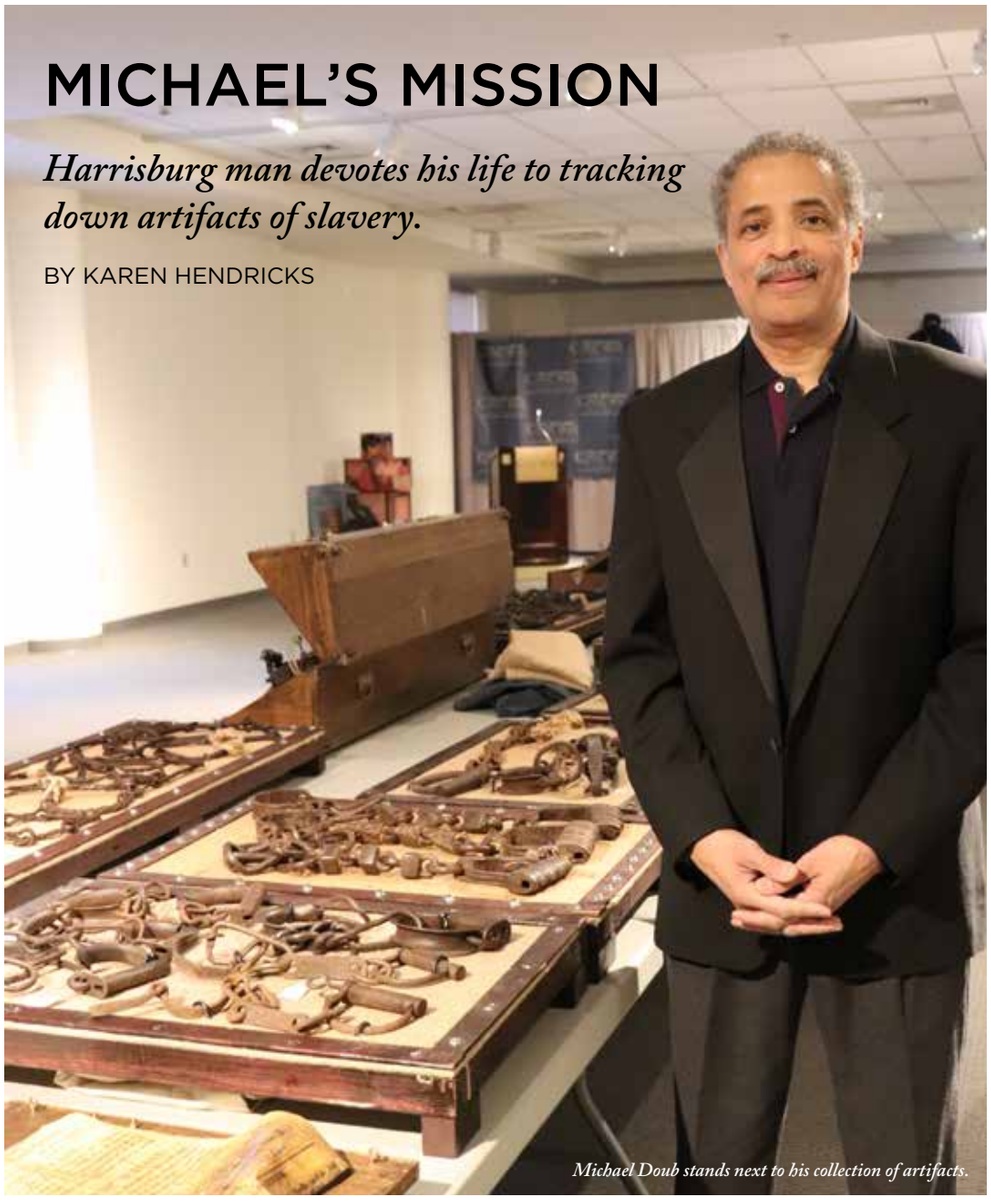
MICHAEL'S MISSION

Harrisburg man devotes his life to tracking down artifacts of slavery.

BY KAREN HENDRICKS



Michael Doub stands next to his collection of artifacts.

Michael Doub describes it as a hunger.

He has a need to know more. He wants to know the truth about a single, vital subject—the history of slavery in the United States.

Over 30 years, he has sought, discovered and amassed a collection of historical artifacts that is believed to be one of the largest privately held collections of its kind in the country.

"I've always had a love of history," said Doub, who lives in Harrisburg.

It was during his travels for the U.S. Navy that he began exploring museums. He was drawn to exhibits that focused on African Americans and slavery, but he realized that something was missing from the exhibits. While there were words and stories to read, there were few artifacts.

"It became a hunger for more information, and the more I got into it, the more I found myself questioning things," he said. "It increases, because when you learn about slavery, you learn about the Civil War."

So began his quest. He pointed to a brown case.

"That was my first item—my first set of shackles," he said. "They are child's shackles I bought at an antiques store in Mechanicsville, Virginia."

He pointed to another set of shackles in the same case.

"If you look closely, you can see damage—someone tried to escape from these," he said.

Doub thinks they're about 200 years old. In all, he has about a dozen pairs of shackles. They're similar to handcuffs, heavy, made of iron with D-shaped pieces that fit around wrists, connected by thick, chained links. There's a progression in size, from the child's shackles to those used on women and men.

HIS PASSION

Michael and Ruby Doub have been married for 30 year and describe a "tight-knit family" of children and grandchildren. His career with the U.S. Department of Defense has stretched 41 years, focused on information technology for the Navy's Trident nuclear submarines.

Ruby Doub is employed by Dauphin County and serves as the assistant to commission Chairman Jeff Haste. She's also a former board member of the National Civil War Museum and Gamut Theatre, and, in fact, the couple enjoys attending Harrisburg's arts, theater and history-focused events.

"I wasn't supportive at first," Ruby said, of her husband's avocation. "I didn't understand why he was spending money on these things, and he wasn't always upfront with me."

One time, Doub dropped his wife and daughter off at a soccer tournament in New Jersey. Rather than parking right away, he retraced their route to a roadside yard sale where an artifact had caught his eye. He purchased it and returned to his daughter's soccer game.

"As I grew into my love for history throughout the years, I've become more and more proud of the collection and his passion for history," Ruby said.

The collection is comprised of more than 100 artifacts—all of them mounted in plain brown cases. Each one required a search on Doub's part.

He tracked them down through magazine and newspaper ads for "relics," at estate and yard sales, antique stores and barns. He traveled by car, train and airplane, purchasing tickets and gas, covering many miles through the Carolinas, Maryland, Georgia—primarily the southern states—but one local item hailed from Lancaster County.

He pictured one journey, in North Carolina. It's where he purchased shackles, mixed with tractor parts, found in an old barn. He described the driveway, where red clay got stuck in his tires.

Some sellers acknowledge the artifacts' uses, while others were oblivious, he said. Some were reluctant to say much at all.

Primarily constructed of metal, the artifacts look cold and heavy—physically, as well as in subject matter. Each artifact stands as a visual reminder of slavery. Although varied, each one was used to exert control.

Rattlers were attached around a slave's legs or neck. They made noise if a slave tried to run; some cut into a slave's legs with movement. Some items prevented slaves from eating—they were primarily used on women preparing food in a master's kitchen. There are slave collars. Many of the items have bells, locks, or prongs. One bears the mark of the British crown.

REAL, RAW

Some of the artifacts have been publicly displayed—at the State Museum of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg University, Messiah College, Penn State Harrisburg as well as Penn State University's main campus and the National Civil War Museum. Doub often includes a talk titled, "The Danger of Forgetting."

"There is a limitation to what people really want to know about slavery," he said.

That's why he believes that many museums don't display artifacts like his; they're too "real" and "raw." But to him, they're also "priceless."

One question he cannot answer is whether his own ancestors were slaves. But he has wondered. A genealogy deep dive may be his next quest.

Has Wayne Motts, National Civil War Museum CEO, ever seen anything like Michael's collection before?

"Never. Not in any museum," Motts said. "Finding slavery-related items is rare. I don't think it has to do with museums not wanting to display them—I think it's finding them [that's difficult]."

Motts was quick to point out that, when the museum was built in 2001, it was the first of its kind to put the issue of slavery "up front" as the cause of the Civil War.

"Slavery is a painful story, but that pain needs to be discussed," he said. "The significance of Michael's collection cannot be understated. They are historical materials, educational materials, artifacts to be preserved, interpreted, to tell the stories of slavery."

All museums and historical collections begin with an individual—someone who sees the value in preserving the past. Someone who has a hunger for the truth. Someone like Michael Doub.

"Anyone who says one person can't make a difference, can look at this," Motts said.

Indeed, Doub said that his artifacts often have a profound impact on those who see them.

"People have multiple reactions—tears, questions, religious responses and some people just stare," Doub said. "They say, 'We knew about slavery, but we didn't know about this.'" Ⓑ

To contact Michael and Ruby Doub about exhibiting their artifacts or presenting "The Danger of Forgetting," you may email them at rtdoub@hotmail.com. For more information on the National Civil War Museum, One Lincoln Circle, Reservoir Park, Harrisburg, visit www.nationalcivilwarmuseum.org.

SEW MUCH TALENT

Stitch by stitch, Dyanna Crosson patterns her future.

BY YAASMEEN PIPER

One night, as her hair lay wild across her pillow, Dyanna Crosson had an idea. Instead of going to the closest beauty supply store for a bonnet or headscarf, she would make her own.

This was the beginning of Dyanna's Designs and Novelties. Over a year later, the 15-year-old SciTech High student has created and sold numerous bonnets, scrunchies and phone holders with bold patterns and colors. The patterns range widely from elephants and polka dots to bold African prints and Disney characters.

"The way I pick it is, whatever I'm feeling at the time," Crosson said. "If I want to create something that's really colorful and bold, I go with a bold color. If I know you and I know how you act and how you feel, then I will feel like 'Oh, this is you. This is the type that you like.'"

Sewing seems to be in Crosson's blood. Her grandmother sewed, as did her mother. It was inevitable that Crosson would fall into it, too.

When Crosson was 8 or 9, her grandmother gave her one of her old sewing machines and taught her how to use it. She started fiddling with it in her free time until she finally got the groove. She started creating things like pillows, purses and clothing for her dolls.

She created her first bonnet a year ago with the help of a YouTube tutorial. She watched the video three times before she finally had a finished product. The Minions Christmas-themed bonnet turned out to be a little too large, but that didn't stop her. She kept going until she got it right.

"After I made it a couple of times, I was like 'Oh, yeah. I like this,'" she said. "I started making some for my family members, and they were like, 'Ohhh, I like this.' That really boosted me up.'"

She started giving her creations away as birthday and holiday gifts. Her first sale came from her sister, which motivated her to start her own mini-business.

"I felt kind of cool because I said, 'I can go with this,'" she said. "I can make money from this and have fun with this."

Of her three primary products, she most likes to create bonnets. They come in small, medium and large sizes, selling for $12 to $25. The large bonnets fit box braid and dread hairstyles, the medium sizes are good for those who like their cap close to their heads but not too tight, and the small sizes are for people with short hair or children.

"When I make [a bonnet], I want to keep it for myself, but I know I can't," she said. "Each one, I'm just like, 'I would wear this. I would totally wear this.' I just really love making them, it's so fun."

Crosson mostly sells her creations through word of mouth, or on Instagram. However, she did have her own table at the Kwanzaa festival last December in the Harrisburg Mall. She crafted African print bonnets that mixed cool and bright colors

Even though she was the youngest seller at the festival, she said that she was not intimidated and that everyone was welcoming.

"When customers came in, I was the first face they saw, and everyone seemed to surprised by how young I was," she said.

Starting up a business so young can be difficult. Besides creating her products, she attends school, does homework, goes to volleyball practice and finds time to socialize with her friends.

"It's very hard balancing everything," she said. "It's stressful and time-consuming."

Crosson said that her goals and her support system keep her going. Her greatest supporters, she added, are her family. Her grandmother often helps her collect fabrics or the materials she needs to create her own patterns, her mother sells Crosson's items at her job, and her father helps her on the business side.

"It's lovely because everyone supports me, and no one is negative towards me," she said. "They're all very supportive. I love it."

She is currently in the process of creating a website and even securing her own section in a local beauty supply store.

Over the next few years, Crosson sees herself in college, either in Arizona or Florida, while still running Dyanna's Designs and Novelties.

"I see myself doing really well, making a whole bunch, getting my fan base together, getting my Instagram booming," she said. "It'll make me really happy to see that. I see myself in college. If I'm in college, and I see someone with my stuff on, I think I might melt." B

For more information on Dyanna's Designs and Novelties, check out her Instagram @dyanna_design_novelty.

IN THE WINGS

Sidelined for now, two emerging theater companies dedicated to diversity plan 2021 comebacks.

BY BARBARA TRAININ BLANK

"Akeelah and the Bee"

"Voices of the Eighth"

Sharia Benn

It's been a tough year for performing-arts organizations—between the pandemic, the extra safety precautions required to reopen and the economic repercussions.

But two relatively new theaters in the Harrisburg area may have extra challenges.

"Because of the pandemic, we had to stop performing in the middle of the 2020 season," said Frank L. Henley, artistic director of the Narcisse Theatre Co.

A community-based, nonprofit, Narcisse is dedicated to uniting the local arts community and developing artists "from outside the mainstream."

"We probably won't resume production till the summer of 2021, though it's too far off to speak about specific plans," Henley said.

The theater is committed to showcasing thought-provoking revivals, such as "Waiting for Godot" and "The Enemy of the People"—the latter done collaboratively with Gamut Theatre Group—but half of its productions are original plays by local playwrights. One example is "Lizophrenia," an interactive one-woman show by Liz P. Curtis.

"Though I am African American, as is the majority of our board and past cast members, we are a multicultural organization dedicated to all communities within Harrisburg," Henley said.

Narcisse is not an African American theater company in the same sense as another relatively new theater, Henley said.

That organization is Sankofa African American Theatre Co. Sankofa's mission is to engage audiences around the African American experience through telling stories that amplify that experience, "which is often excluded or actually flawed when included," said Sharia Benn, co-founder, president and executive artistic director.

Sankofa's productions and programming are directed by African Americans, written by African Americans, centered on African American voices, and give access and support to African American talent.

"Yet, Sankofa is not an exclusive organization, but rather one that invites inclusivity to promote understanding, racial equity and community healing," Benn said.

Because of its newness, Sankofa didn't have the financial reserves or donor base of other arts organizations, nor did it qualify for pandemic relief like them. Sankofa was not eligible for grant funding because of eligibility requirements around staff size or operating budget, though its base of supporters and board members contributed, "some of them making a sacrifice… as they had lost jobs or had reductions in income."

But Sankofa's artistic director also attributed the financial woes, at least in part, to systemic racism.

"There are sustained conscious and unconscious racially based public policies and institutional practices that have resulted in inequities in access to funding and resources for education for theaters, artists and communities of color," she said. "These institutional inequalities have existed for generations…and are clear when private philanthropic and public/government funding of black theater companies are examined."

STILL HERE

Until performing arts groups can safely open, the two theaters are taking advantage of the involuntary break to remain visible and enhance their offerings.

Narcisse, for example, is reading plays for possible production and doing professional development. Henley is working on beefing up the theater's educational program, which will include classes in acting, stagecraft and playwriting.

Sankofa is in the planning stages for some safe, socially distant programming during 2021, and Sankofa and Gamut Theatre Group—one of its collaborators—are doing more short-term planning by quarter, as opposed to an entire season. Sankofa also works with Open Stage.

"Reopening will definitely be different, and virtual technology will be a part of that and the future of theater," Benn said. "We are also updating our strategic plan and implementing processes to make our organization more effective administratively…"

Like Sankofa, Narcisse doesn't get a great deal of funding because it uses small casts and a lot of local actors. Narcisse also has no permanent home. Generally, its productions take place at the Harrisburg Midtown Arts Center (HMAC), but the theater company would like to find its own space.

"But we're starting small," he said.

One space he'd like to occupy is the former Danzante building on Allison Hill. It is beautiful but also would fill a gap, Henley said—the area east of Cameron Street currently has no art gallery or theater.

Frank L. Henley

Involving the community is another goal of Sankofa's. "Voices of the Eighth" (V.O.T.E.) was an original, collaborative production performed in February, which included creative work from Sci-Tech, Central Dauphin East High School and Bishop McDevitt. It was attended by close to 800 students and more than 400 others in a public performance.

The play told the story of Black people who had lived in the Old 8th Ward in Harrisburg, a community razed to expand the Capitol Complex. It also highlighted the importance of the African American community being counted in the census—with the 2020 census team invited to be part of the performance talkbacks.

Sankofa and Narcisse also collaborate. "Voices of F.E.W." was an original play by Benn that Henley directed. It is about the life and challenges of Frances Ellen Watkins-Harper, a 19th-century abolitionist, groundbreaking literary and oratorical figure and advocate for social change.

The two theaters also share hope for the future.

"We're looking forward to getting back to our audiences of Harrisburg, completing our mission to the people of Harrisburg," Henley said.

"We're still here," Benn said. "It's important to say that Sankofa does not act in response to what's happening, such as COVID and anti-black actions. We're not a result but a recognition." B

For more information about Narcisse Theatre Co., visit www.narcissetheatre.org or call 717-777-1374. For more information about Sankofa African American Theatre Co., visit sankofatheatrehbg.com or call 717-214-3251.

LOVE & BUSINESS

It's a family affair at L&L Beauty.

BY YAASMEEN PIPER

Lynette Holmes, Leroy & Lynnae Armstrong

Hair is one of the most prominent staples of black culture. Our hair can tell the story of who we are, where we've been, our family lineage, etc. Because our hair is so important to us, beauty supply stores are like a second home.

In my 22 years going in and out of beauty supply shops, I've only seen a handful that were black-owned. That's why it was so refreshing stepping into L&L Beauty Supply store.

Lynnae Armstrong, co-owner of L&L, greeted me with a smile as soon as I walked in.

The walls of the store were lined with colorful hair, from grey and red to ombre pink and lavender. There are shelves stacked with natural hair products, makeup, nail polish, accessories and more. The store, which officially opened on Nov. 23, has numerous national black-haircare brands such as SheaMoisture and Dark and Lovely, but also locally produced products. It was like walking into a candy store; I didn't know where to start.

"In America, black people spend approximately $7.5 billion annually on hair supplies, beauty products, makeup, skin products," said Lynette Holmes, co-owner of L&L and Armstrong's mother. "We are the top consumer in that particular area, and with us spending so much money, why would we not want a stake in it?"

It didn't take much contemplation before Holmes, Lynnae and her husband Leroy Armstrong decided to go into business together. They all read various reports about the lack of black-owned beauty supply stores and had a discussion about it. The conversation took place over a few sessions until one night they really dove into their mode of attack and decided to open L&L. The next day, they went out and registered their business name.

According to Holmes, she makes up one of the "L's" while Leroy and Lynnae make up the other. The two have been inseparable since the beginning stages of their love story. Though they went to the same school and Leroy was even in her house once, the two didn't start talking until they met on a dating website.

After talking for a few days, they met up at his church then started to go on more and more dates outside the church. Within days, they were in a whirlwind romance. The first week, they introduced their parents to one another. By the second week, they had their names tattooed on each other.

"Thank God we ended up married," Lynnae said between a fit of laughter.

The couple, who have been together for five years and married for one, also own a general contracting business and buy and sell houses together, so working together at L&L was nothing new.

"We're together all day every day," Leroy said. "We're accustomed to each other."

Though there are some ups and downs, all three love working together. They are open and blunt with one another, which they say benefits their business more than harms it. There's no such thing as beating around the bush when you're working with your family.

"We're a family running a business," Holmes said. "We laugh, we love, we fight. We're family."

L&L is still in the process of growing its business and adding more local entrepreneurs and artists into the store. Currently, some of the local vendors they have are Wow Damn Foxy Hair, a line of haircare products, These Lips are Da' Balm homemade lip balms and Lyniques Accessories, which was created by Holmes herself.

The products in the store are all handpicked from places across the East Coast, from New York all the way to Florida. According to Holmes and Leroy, they select their products based on recent trends, customer feedback and their own hair care experiences.

"We just use the basic knowledge of being an African American," Leroy said. "We know what we want to put in our hair and what other people want from us growing up."

In five years, the three see L&L becoming a franchise and inspiring other African Americans to open their own stores. Lynnae hopes that the store brings in enough business that they can one day donate to up-and-coming local businesses and promote black entrepreneurship.

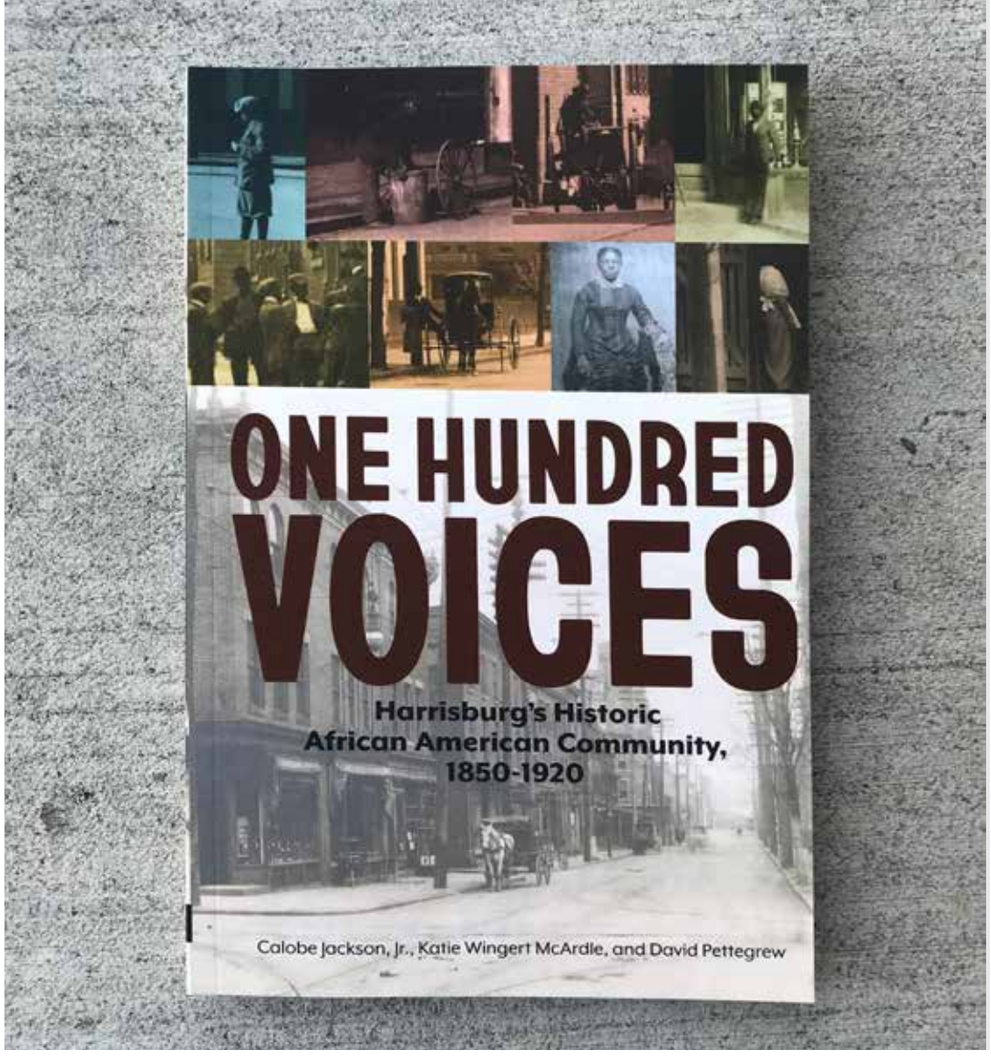
"We don't want [L&L] to just be a beauty supply store," she said. "We want it to be a place where you can just buy black. Period."

L&L Beauty Supply Store is located at 310 Reily St., Harrisburg. For more information, visit their Facebook Page @LLBeautySupplyStore.

VOICES OF THE PAST

New book tells the stories of Harrisburg's historic African American community.

BY MADDIE CONLEY



In August, a new monument celebrating African American history was erected on the Pennsylvania state Capitol grounds.

The Commonwealth Monument Project came out of a desire to pay tribute to Harrisburg's Old 8th Ward, a historic African American and immigrant neighborhood that was demolished to expand the Capitol grounds.

The best way that Lenwood Sloan, executive director of the project, could think to honor the memory was by introducing people to the families that once lived in the neighborhood.

On the monument, 100 names were inscribed. But that wasn't enough. He wanted people to know their stories.

Now, each bronze-inscribed name comes to life in a new book entitled "One Hundred Voices: Harrisburg's Historic African American Community 1850-1920."

"We came to the revelation that we couldn't just write their names," Sloan said. "They are not merely names in a census, but stories that were lost to us. We need to tell the story about these people."

BROUGHT TO LIGHT

"Through my research in Harrisburg, I know quite a few people that were prominent in the community," said Calobe Jackson Jr., a local historian and co-editor of the book.

Jackson has a well-earned reputation around the city as the history guy. If you need information on an old building, a historic figure or a memorable event, he's your man. Lenwood Sloan knew this when he reached out to Jackson for a favor.

He needed a list of 100 names of African American figures from the 1850s to 1920s for the monument's pedestal, names that would later become stories for the book. Jackson put together a file including freedom seekers, abolitionists, activists, police officers, doctors, preachers, janitors and many more. All had ties to Harrisburg and most had ties to the 8th Ward, Jackson said.

"A lot of people didn't know about or forgot about these people," Jackson said. "A lot of these people were Harrisburg High School graduates and teachers in the district. I'm proud that we can show students now what these past students did."

Sloan remembers someone asking him why he was making such a big deal out of the names, especially with many of them being widely unknown.

But these jobs that seem unimportant in modern days, such as street sweeper or housekeeper, were important back then, Sloan said.

"We need to lift them up out of obscurity," he said.

Through a grant from the Council of Independent Colleges, Messiah University was able to help with the Commonwealth Monument Project and the "One Hundred Voices" book.

Thirty Messiah students researched the historic figures and wrote excerpts on their stories for the book.

"The process of researching these individuals was pretty challenging," said David Pettegrew, a history professor at Messiah and an editor of the book.

With some of the 100 people being less prominent, Pettegrew said they had to really look deep into archival material—a process he believes was worth the result.

"We need to do more local African American history," he said. "This book contributes to a broader story about this resilient community who lived through change at the local level. This is Black Lives Matter historically. This is Black Lives Matter locally."

BEGINNING OF DISCOVERY

Finding the stories behind the names on the list was only the start of something much bigger. Messiah students sent out graphics on social media looking for descendants of the 100 names they had learned so much about.

"Believe it or not, descendants began to contact us," Pettegrew said.

Around 100 people with ties to the 100 names reached out to the university. Some even assisted in writing the chapters for the book.

"Getting to connect with the descendants has been the most rewarding thing," Pettegrew said.

Even for those who may not be direct descendants of people in the "One Hundred Voices" book, Sloan believes there is a way for everyone to connect to it.

"The book helps you map your personal narrative in relation to the 100 names," he said.

Not only is the book about individual education, but Pettegrew hopes that it will engage people in Harrisburg's history—one that isn't always told.

"We are hoping this is just the beginning of discovery," he said. "We want it to inspire people to think about Harrisburg in a new way and the rich African American history." B

"One Hundred Voices: Harrisburg's Historic African American Community 1850-1920" is free to download on the Digital Harrisburg website. Physical copies are available for purchase at the Midtown Scholar Bookstore or on Amazon. For more information, visit www.digitalharrisburg.com.

The Commonwealth Monument is located at 4th and Walnut streets.