

Gardens of stone historic resting place for community's African- - wistv.com - Columbia,

FORT MOTTE, SC (WIS) -- They were mothers, grandfathers, children, aunts, blacksmiths, teachers, preachers, healers, farmers, midwives, slaves, and for some, nothing marks their presence on earth except a shallow dent in the earth or a moss-covered rock.

But they all have a story. And thanks to **Jackie Whitmore**, their memories live to this day.

"Our effort now is to say 'this place is real. There are real people buried here. They've got real stories and have real lives,'" he said.

Whitmore led an effort to install historic markers at two African-American cemeteries in Fort Motte. The burial ground at Lang Syne plantation on Lang Syne Road is the final resting place of several hundred-people connected with the community.

"It's the ancestral burial ground of our people of the plantation community of Lang Syne," he said. "Generations of our people from slavery time are buried here."

Lang Syne once belonged to the McCord family, including Louisa McCord, who served as a nurse at the Civil War hospital at the University of South Carolina, among her many accomplishments. One of her family's homes, built by slaves, still stands across the street from the Horseshoe in Columbia.

"My mother's buried here," Whitmore said. "My grandmother's buried here. My great-great grandparents are buried here."

Among them is Mary Weeks Bryant, whose life inspired a later occupant of Lang Syne, Julia Peterkin, in her book *Scarlet Sister Mary*. Several other people buried there were used as characters for Peterkin's books.

The connection between the white plantation owners and the people buried in the cemetery will be noted on the historic markers. The stories of the people buried there tell the story of the Fort Motte community.

"The historical marker will chronicle the collaborative community concept in that it will not just tell the story of African-Americans," Whitmore said. "It will tell the story of a lot of people as it relates to this community."

Some graves have headstones made of marble or granite. Some have headstones made of cement, by Whitmore's own hands. Some stones lack dates of birth. Some have nothing to mark their existence at all.

Whitmore, his family, and volunteers have tried to maintain the cemeteries and keep the graves clear, fighting ecological progression and ignorance.

"After a period of time these things will be lost and they will be gone if we don't do that," he said. "We have a lot of issues and concerns in communities wherein that cemeteries are long neglected and then after a while, somebody's building and destroying them."

"This is important. Not only for the people that are buried, but as a community and as a state that we hallmark the great history of this community of the people that are buried here."

True Blue cemetery on True Blue Road is the site of the second historical marker. Spanning seven wooded acres, it was the original slave cemetery for the True Blue indigo plantation, owned by the Singleton family. As many as 1,000 people are buried there, and as the church cemetery for Mount Salem, Mount Zion and Jerusalem Baptist Churches, internment continues.

"The vastness of the property is so significant that you would have people in a community buried in seven acres, just of land," Whitmore said. "That's a lot of people."

Because of the size of the cemeteries, Whitmore said he could use help to keep them clear so they don't become engulfed by the woods as so many other cemeteries have.

"The cemetery needs to be maintained," he said. "It doesn't require a lot once you get it under control."

Whitmore hopes the descendants of the people buried there will help tend the properties. Or civic groups, churches, school groups, scouts, fraternities, sororities or community groups would help out as a service learning project.

"This is a great place for learning . . . a great story of people who were determined, who became, in their own right, prominent people," he said.

Whitmore also is working on getting historic markers at two other cemeteries in the area: the five-acre Oakland Plantation cemetery off New Bethany Road and the Good Samaritan Lodge Hall cemetery on Fort Motte Road near the Mt. Pisgah AME Church.

He is grateful for the support of donations and volunteer time from members of the community.

"A lot of people across the races, across cultures, ethnicities, I mean, it's amazing how the community of Fort Motte has pulled together to help this."

And upon visiting or volunteering, maybe strangers will feel the same connection to the people Whitmore has.

"When I'm visiting here I feel at ease," he said. "I feel at peace. When I was a kid I came here a lot with my grandmother so it's kind of like going down memory lane. I have a great calm and a great peace when I come here. It's like talking to my people. It's like talking to my ancestors."

The historic markers will be unveiled with a reunion event Saturday, August 6 at Jerusalem Baptist Church on Fort Motte Road.

"This is home. This is home to my family and my people and I'm proud to be a descendant of this community."

When asked what he thought the souls of the people buried there thought of the initiative, he Whitmore responded, "I think they are very proud and pleased that somebody remembered them."

Contact Whitmore by clicking [here](#) to get involved or to donate. You can call him at 803-260-1663.

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