

**CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA  
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA**



Agenda Date: September 3, 2024

Action Required: None

Presenter: Jalane Schmidt

Staff Contacts: Jeffrey Werner, Historic Preservation and Design Planner

**Title: UVa Student Research: The Memory Project**

### **Background**

Report on UVA Democracy Initiative's *Memory Project*.

"Research on the Traffick of Enslaved People in Albemarle County Court Square."

<https://memoryproject.virginia.edu/>

Presentation by Jalane Schmidt, Director of the UVA Democracy Initiative, and Associate Professor of Religious Studies.

### **Discussion**

Between 2021 and 2024, a team of researchers working on behalf of the University of Virginia's Memory Project researched the antebellum history of Court Square and the Albemarle County Courthouse in an effort to uncover the site's significance as a place of enslavement and the commodification of human beings. The Memory Project research team's efforts involved reading through all Chancery Orders of the Albemarle County Court between the years 1830 and 1865, documenting every mention of enslaved people. Researchers compiled each mention, alongside the relevant contextual information, into an index. Over the course of this research, the documents revealed that the Court directly involved itself in the auctioning and sale of hundreds of enslaved people, especially in relation to the arbitration of estate disputes. These enslaved people were sold in Court Square, very likely on an auction block, though Chancery records rarely mention a specific place of sale. Nonetheless, these sales were ordered, advertised, and administered directly by court commissioners and on the grounds of Court Square.

This research has deep implications for further research. We anticipate that genealogists and historians can use the hundreds of names recovered in these documents to make connections and enhance their research into the history of slavery in Central Virginia. This research also holds implications for ongoing interpretation of public spaces like Court Square as it illustrates the culpability of the County of Albemarle in perpetuating and buttressing the institution of slavery throughout the antebellum period.

### **Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan**

N/A

**Community Engagement**

N/A

**Budgetary Impact**

N/A

**Recommendation**

N/A

**Alternatives**

N/A

**Attachments**

1. Memory Project (UVa) Research Summary May 2024