

Roots you can touch

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nion," she said.

"Nothing in our past takes away from wanting to know who our ancestors were and what their accomplishments were. That's the most natural human instinct."

The humid air hung heavy and quiet during a June visit to Somerset Place, which was home to 300 slaves when the Civil War broke out. But during the Homecoming, the site will overflow with Littlejohns, Honeyblues, Collinses, Blounts and other descendants from as far away as California, Connecticut and Germany.

They'll listen to African drummers, sing spirituals, dance to a blues band "and ... EAT!" as Mrs. Redford says in a newsletter to about 500 core descendants. Friends, local whites and other interested people are invited as well.

Making The Connection

"It's almost like a healing event," she said. "It's saying that in some instances, we were left feeling disconnected and incomplete.

"Now we can feel whole and complete, know who our ancestors were, know what they did, where they lived, which cabin they lived in, what family they were facing, who lived closest to the manor house, and who worked in the fields."

She said a feeling of alienation has led many American blacks to try to connect with their African origins, but that "America is where our truer vested interest lies."

Inspired by Alex Haley's "Roots," Mrs. Redford began her research in 1976, spending seven years going through plantation bills of sale and deeds of trust and talking to descendants, many of

whom still live near the former 5,870-acre plantation and own some of its land. For the past three years, she has been bolstering that information with records from the state Department of Archives.

Her research includes about 1,600 names and 20 family lines, most of which have intertwined.

Somerset Place is a state historic site, and the history of its owners is documented even more accurately. The plantation around Lake Phelps, about 50 miles from the Atlantic, was first developed in 1785 by Josiah Collins. A year later he imported 80 African slaves who joined about 100 U.S.-born slaves already at Somerset.

Slaves spent two years digging the six-mile canal from Lake Phelps to the Scuppernon River. Other slaves operated the flatboats that carried crops and supplies along the canal.

'Investment Protection'

Collins, his son Josiah II and grandson Josiah III continued buying slaves, including a large purchase from the Littlejohn family in Edenton that brought Mrs. Redford's great-great-grandparents - Peter and Ely Littlejohn - to Somerset.

By 1860, Josiah Collins III was the third-largest slaveholder in North Carolina, with 328 slaves. But in 1862, his family fled Union soldiers and took about 170 slaves inland with them to Orange and Franklin counties "to protect their investment," said Mrs. Redford.

Ely Littlejohn and four of her 13 children remained at

Somerset. One of them, Fred - an ancestor of Mrs. Redford's - helped Union soldiers bridle horses on July 27, 1862, when the soldiers arrived to confiscate horses, according to a letter from the plantation minister.

That was the year slave Lovey Cabarrus was raped in the kitchen by a Union soldier. Mrs. Redford has a letter from the slave overseer to Collins describing the incident.

Revealing New Facts

She said her book on the slave families is a "good history, but it reads like fiction." The book is coming out as a 300-page limited edition primarily for the families involved in the homecoming.

Mrs. Redford's research revealed some facts that counter popular beliefs about slavery. While some television accounts show slaves living in neat, comfortable cabins, she found that 15 people often lived in one 18-foot-square cabin. While the law forbade literacy for slaves, the Collinses provided Somerset slaves with a school and a minister. Records show that some slaves earned money and that others had considerable freedom of movement.

"Collins' method of management, his method of control, was to keep families together," Mrs. Redford said. "If he bought a male slave, he bought the family. If a female slave had a husband, he bought the husband, assuming a monogamous relationship would eliminate discipline problems. There was a great deal of emphasis on keeping families together, which was to our advantage in doing the genealogical study."

School bus drivers

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bus driver compensation and benefits.

"The (Budget and Finance) Committee met on July 18," member Gerald N. Hewitt told the board. "We had a rather lengthy discussion about what happened. Most of us were disappointed more money did not come from the commissioners."

Superintendent Zane E. Eargle said the benefits represent a promising start. "I feel we have at least begun to address the needs of bus drivers," he said. "We would like to do more."

Beaufort O. Bailey, the lone black school board member, said he is glad that the board was able to give the bus drivers some of the benefits they wanted.

"I'm concerned that we go back to the county commissioners and request the balance so we can offer the bus drivers full benefits," he said Tuesday.

The beginning salary for bus drivers last year was \$4.55 per hour. With a 5-percent increase granted by the state this year, the salary increases to \$4.78.

Bus drivers in the system also will receive \$4.60 a day as a travel supplement.

But the board felt that was not enough, approving 26 cents more to increase the beginning salary to \$5.04, at a cost to the system of \$96,250.

Previously, bus drivers had no benefits, no matter how long they had worked. The system wants to attract more adult bus drivers by changing this.

Adult drivers who have driven in the system for three or more years will be provided nine paid holidays each year at a total cost of \$47,720.

Drivers who have been with the system for 10 or more years will be offered free health coverage at a total cost of \$32,400.

The budget adjustments were approved without much discussion Monday night. But at the earlier Budget and Finance Committee meeting several board members said they regretted that they couldn't offer bus drivers more.

"It's an area that we have overlooked for years," board member Thomas C. Voss said at that meeting. "It's time we took action locally. We can't wait for the state."

Before the board had approved the budget adjustments Monday night, several bus drivers voiced their concerns and urged the board members to approve the bus driver package.

Mabel Johnson told the board that she has been driving a school bus for 15 years without any benefits.

"There are other part-time personnel with this school system who work only four hours per day and receive part-time benefits," she said. "Does this seem fair to you?"

Another bus driver, Kim Saleeby, told the board that bus drivers are in the same situation with low pay and no benefits that they were in 20 years ago.

"As I'm sure you are aware, there is a desperate need for drivers for the upcoming year," she said. "For the pay that we receive, and the absence of benefits, it's amazing that there are any reliable drivers at all."

The school board hopes that the package approved Monday night will help the system ease its shortage of bus drivers.

Earlier this month, the school system launched a campaign to attract about 100 new drivers.

The shortage of bus drivers is being blamed partly on a June 6 school bus accident involving a

16-year-old driver. The bus overturned, injuring 35 children.

Susan Carson, the system's school-community relations coordinator, said that some parents are apprehensive now about letting their children drive buses.

Another reason for the shortage may be the rise in the graduation requirements for students from 19 to 20 credits, Ms. Carson said.

Driving a school bus takes up two periods a day and students receive only one credit for it, she said.

The school system is trying to increase the public's awareness of the driver shortage through media publicity, Ms. Carson said, as well as word of mouth.

Ms. Carson said that two groups seen as having the best potential to fill the system's needs now are housewives who are mothers of older students and college and technical school students. Driving a bus is a good way for the mothers to supplement their family income, she said.

In an effort to stir interest, the superintendent has sent letters to mothers of its high school students telling them about the opportunity.

In a related matter, the June 6 school bus accident was brought up again Monday night by David L. Farrell, who had three children injured in the accident.

Farrell said he is concerned that, during the accident, most of the seat bottoms came free and were thrown around the bus. Something should be done to secure the seats, he said.

Morris Hastings, director of transportation for the school system, later told the board that the seats did come loose when the bus overturned.

Hastings said it is very difficult to keep the safety latches on the seats locked because students often

unlatch them.

In other business at Monday's meeting, the board requested that the superintendent direct his staff to study of benefits and compensation for school bus drivers offered by other school systems.

The board also approved a motion by board member John S. Holleman Jr. that the board approach the county commissioners and further explain the need for many of the items that had to be deleted from the budget due to cuts.

"I would like for us to approach the county commissioners and request that all the original improvement items for bus drivers be funded and all improvement items for elementary schools be funded," he said.

In other business, the board considered but did not act on a policy concerning the length of the students' school day.

Under the new policy, students would arrive to school up to 30 minutes before the start of the instructional day and leave within 15 minutes of the end of the instructional day unless they are participating in a school-sponsored activity.

School personnel would not be required to supervise students that arrive before the 30-minute period at the beginning of the day or remain longer than 15 minutes after school.

"This primarily is an elementary-school problem," Eargle told the board. "We've had the problem for years. Some parents through necessity or otherwise have used the schools to care for their children. We have children in some cases being delivered to school an hour before school starts. This places an additional burden on the teachers."

Eargle said that the policy would provide valuable planning time for teachers.

Plans for apartments

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"We are not going to let them create anymore slums," Hairston said.

The plans call for the construction of 48 one-and two-bedroom units at a cost of \$40,000 each. Each apartment would include an outlet for an air conditioner, a washer connection, a stove and a refrigerator. Missing from the plans are carpeting and a connection for a clothes dryer, although basketball and tennis courts, sidewalks, parking lots and mailboxes are included.

Another concern among aldermen is that the city may not be getting its money's worth. East Ward Alderman Virginia K. Newell and South Ward Alderman Frank Frye said that the \$40,000 price tag for each apartment is too high.

"I am not sure we are getting what we pay for," said Frye, who owns a realty company.

Womble said central air conditioning and carpeting should be included because of the high price of the apartments. "As it is now, the price is too high," he said.

"We want it to be something that we will be proud of," said Northeast Ward Alderman Vivian H. Burke. "We also want something that the residents will be proud of."

Womble said he wants the design of the apartments to show some creativity. "We want something that shows some imagination and is not the run of the mill," he said.

The appearance of the apart-

ments is crucial because University Parkway is a heavily traveled thoroughfare, Womble said.

Womble said he prefers the

construction of single-family homes or duplexes. "This is the city's first venture into something like this," he said. "We want a

first-class job."

David L. Thompkins, director of the Winston-Salem Housing Authority, said he also favors

duplexes. He agency would manage the complex.

Townhouses would make the complex resemble public housing

built during the 1950s, Thompkins said.

West Ward Alderman Robert

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