

## Uncovering the impact of Latino ancestry in **Washington**

Published 10:00 am Wednesday, April 12, 2023

By The **Daily News**

1 of 2

By Clark Curtis, for the **Washington Daily News**

The **Washington** Waterfront Underground Railroad Museum, under the guidance of the **Washington** Harbor District Alliance, has been awarded a three year \$150,000 grant from the Building Integrated Communities (BIC) project at UNC Chapel Hill. BIC, which is supported by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, is a community planning and leadership initiative that partners with North Carolina local governments to create inclusive practices and policies for residents born in other countries. "I was approached by BIC to find out about and document the Caribbean, Hispanic, Mexican, and Latino ancestry in **Washington**, prior to 1950," said Leesa Jones, director of the **Washington** Waterfront Underground Railroad Museum. "There is a long rooted history of those who came here from places such as Peru, the West Indies, the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, South America, and elsewhere, as a result of the shipping industry. Our part at the museum is to document the stories of those who came here to live, work and learn about their lives."

"The Latin American and Caribbean Public History Initiative, which is part of BIC, aims to expand public understanding of **Washington** and Beaufort Countys' history," said Hannah Gill, director of the Latino Migration Project. "The initiative will generate educational materials for the **Washington** Underground Railroad Museum, the **Washington** Harbor District Alliance, the City of **Washington**, and the Brown Library. The initiative engages with community members to build relationships and celebrate local histories."

As part of the initial kickoff of the project, the Underground Railroad museum will be hosting a community storytelling event on Sunday, April 16th from 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm, at the Mother of Mercy Catholic Church meeting room, located at 112 W. 9th Street in **Washington**. There will be food, personal stories told in English and Spanish, the reading of childrens' books in Spanish and English, hands on art, games, and an opportunity for attendees to share their recorded stories. "With this project we want to serve as a welcoming committee to others," said Jones. "These events give us an opportunity go into their communities to learn about their histories and their stories, and to show them how valuable their ancestry has been in the history of **Washington**."

Cristina Estrada-Underwood works with Jones as a bilingual oral historian. She serves as a liaison between the funding source and the project, and as translator for the oral histories. "Beyond that, I bring about an understanding and perspective from both cultures, having lived the first 20 years of my life in Mexico," said Underwood. "We have the opportunity to give voice to those who don't have a voice of their own and have been forgotten, stories that don't appear in textbooks but are so meaningful to the local history. Through projects such as this, I truly believe we can make a differences as we promote understanding, awareness, and inclusion in all communities."

Added Jones, " We want members of the Latino community to understand that their stories are valued and important, and that our local history is representative of all of the great people who have lived here. **Washington** can be a community where every child can find its' place in it and every resident can take ownership of what this town represents."

All members of the community are invited to attend the community storytelling event.