

Spartanburg County Public Libraries Receives Preservation Grant from Watson Brown Foundation to Support Presentation of Emancipation Parade Flag

The Spartanburg County Public Libraries recently received a preservation grant in the amount of \$24,000 from the Watson Brown Foundation to support the presentation of the Emancipation Parade Flag. This flag is of enormous significance to all of Spartanburg, but particularly to the county's Black communities. The Emancipation Parade Flag left Spartanburg in 1865 and had been completely lost from local memory until 2015, when University of South Carolina Upstate professor Dr. Andrew Myers learned of it while researching the journals of U. S. Army Captain Norris Crossman. Crossman was the commanding officer of an army detachment charged with seizing Confederate government assets and enforcing the Emancipation Proclamation in Spartanburg and Union Counties during the summer of 1865. That September, a committee of newly emancipated freedmen and freedwomen organized a celebratory luncheon to thank the federal soldiers for their role in protecting and enforcing their new freedom. While dissatisfied ex-Confederates looked on, the soldiers marched arm-in-arm with freedmen in a parade that led from Spartanburg's downtown public square to a nearby natural spring where the jubilee would be held. Several separate accounts bear out details of the event.

Strong circumstantial evidence suggests that Joseph and Priscilla Young, Black community leaders who would have a lasting impact for generations to come, were the preacher and wife mentioned in Crossman's accounts as the leaders of this event and the creators of this flag, which was presented to Captain Crossman as a memento of appreciation and kept by his family for generations. With little else left from Spartanburg's Black communities during this era, this artifact holds an



1865 Emancipation Parade Flag after conservation efforts.



Joseph and Priscilla Young in the Center surrounded by their children.

entirely unique place in our local history and speaks to emancipation jubilees held in communities across the South at the end of the Civil War.

The 1865 Emancipation Parade Flag project began for SCPL after the purchase of the flag in 2015. Previous efforts to preserve the flag included the creation of a custom case after initial purchase, the assessment of the flag by a conservator, and the current preservation efforts based on the original assessment of the flag. An assessment and conservation treatment by renowned textile conservator Claudia Walpole, who has experience with early flags was conducted in 2019 and recommendations were made for the care and conservation of the flag. During the past year, the flag was treated in her studio, and in early 2021, the flag returned to Spartanburg, repaired, cleaned, and mounted to protect it for the years to come. This grant from the Watson Brown Foundation will help SCPL to purchase a museum-grade display case so that the flag can be safely and easily viewed. For now, the flag can be viewed by appointment by contacting the Kennedy Room.

The mission of the Watson-Brown Foundation is as follows: “The Watson-Brown Foundation, through creativity, diligence and financial support, labors to improve education in the American South by funding its schools and students, preserving its history, encouraging responsible scholarship, and promoting the memory and values of our spiritual founders.”

The mission of the Spartanburg County Public Libraries is to inspire people to pursue lifelong learning for a thriving Spartanburg County.