

# Historian fights for Bronx slave burial ground to become official historical site

Posted: Jan 09, 2020 6:50 AM EST  
Updated: Jan 09, 2020 6:50 AM EST

A local historian says slaves were buried in the Bronx and haven't been properly memorialized.

Philip Panaritis says Drake Park is a slave burial site confirmed by archaeologists and historians.

"We believe there were hundreds of bodies that were lost, scraped away in 1915," says Panaritis. "They didn't get all of them and ground penetrating radar found skeletons down there."

Panaritis says the slave owners were buried near Drake Park, with a plaque marking the historic site near the corner of Drake Park South and Hunts Point Avenue.

"This was all lost to history. The folks, people didn't even know there had been slaves here in the Bronx, here at all it in Hunts Point, at what really was plantations," says Panaritis.

Volunteers are working to get the historic site designated as such by the state and federal government. Organizers say they've been struggling to get a memorial built since \$180,000 was allocated for the project by former state Sen. Jeffrey Klein.

A member of his successor Alessandra Biaggi's team tells **News 12** the money has since been reallocated, but can still be used if the Parks Department wants access to the funds.

"We just heard the money didn't come through and wasn't designated. They're still looking for it. It's disturbing, it's disturbing the memory of those folks was erased from history," says Panaritis

In a statement, the parks department tells us News 12, "We are committed to honoring the history of our parkland. After the students and staff of P.S. 48

rediscovered the slave burial ground in Drake Park, we installed an updated historical interpretive sign to memorialize the site's history.

We look forward to continuing our discussions with state Sen. Biaggi regarding the future of Drake Park."

They add a census dated back to the 1800s said 40 slaves lived in Hunts Point. The burial ground was unearthed in 2013 thanks to a class project at P.S. 48.

Local historians say it's important to preserve this history and are encouraging the state to step up and honor the slaves who were buried in the Bronx.

"Without this project and without the memorials, we're afraid the people that live here and people in New York will forget about it again," says Panaritis.

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