

Descendants of Jefferson's Enslaved People Are Watching

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Stand facing the southwest corner of 7th and Market Streets and look up at the windows to see the blinking eyes. Those eyes represent the Descendants of Monticello, some of the 600 enslaved people working for Thomas Jefferson during his lifetime at his home in Charlottesville, VA.

Many of the images are of eyes belonging to descendants of Jefferson's 14-year-old enslaved valet, Robert Hemmings, brother of Sally Hemings*, with whom historians believe Jefferson fathered six children. Accompanied by his valet Hemmings, Jefferson lived in the Graff House, home of Jacob and Maria Graff, for about 100 days in 1776, while drafting the Declaration of Independence. The house was reconstructed as Declaration House.

"Descendants of Monticello," a public artwork by Sonya Clark, is presented by Monument Lab. On view until Saturday, September 8.

*Both [spellings](#) — Hemmings and Hemings — have been found in historical records.



"Descendants of Monticello," a public artwork at Declaration House, 7th and Market.

Out & About

The Schuylkill River Dog Park Revisited

By Margie Wiener

In the Summer 2023 issue of the *Center City Quarterly*, I published a photo essay titled "A New Take on the Dog Days of Summer." I still go to the Schuylkill River Dog Park to visit my favorite dogs. This past Spring, I came across an article in the *Fitler Focus* in which I learned that the dog park needs our help.

Whether you have a dog or don't, you've likely spent time enjoying the dog park at Schuylkill River Park. Its elevated viewing path and large, lively play area offer fun for dogs, their owners, and those simply passing by.

With no city funding or administrative support, a dedicated group of volunteers manages repairs and maintenance, and plans for the future.

Sandy Abdelmalek, who lives in Fitler Square with her two-year-old Portuguese Water Dog, Charlie, is the main liaison between the neighborhood group Friends of Schuylkill River Park (FSRP) and FSRP's dog park sub-board. Taryn Bartolotta and Robbie Fletcher also volunteer as co-leaders of the dog park sub-board. Together they raise funds, coordinate maintenance, perform community outreach, and plan for the future of the city's largest and most highly regarded dog park.

Currently, the group is focused on a few near-term infrastructure projects, the first of which, repairing the mangled turf, was completed in February. Dogs would chew and tear up the turf, creating a safety hazard for dogs and humans alike.

The turf repair cost \$10,000. About \$3,500 came from word-of-mouth donations, and FSRP pitched in the remainder, according to Abdelmalek. But this "patch and repair is only going to last us, at most, a year," she says. "This really was a band-aid for us."

The more lasting solution is a full replacement of the turf. But with quotes coming in at \$160,000 to \$200,000, that long-term fix must rely on strong community financial support.

Another issue is dogs leaping over the west retaining wall, where owners often sit to watch their pets play. The area behind this low wall has heavy vegetation and can't be easily cleaned or maintained, so it accumulates dog waste and mud. When dogs run through it, they can become dirty or injured. The board hopes to install fencing behind the retaining wall to keep dogs safely out of this area.

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