

# Media Release



**bluffton**  
HEART OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

July 18, 2017

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Award-Winning Research Serves as Foundation of Garvin House Tours

Bluffton resident Melanie Marks received a statewide Preservation Service award for her extensive research regarding the Cyrus Garvin-Garvey family genealogy. The Garvin-Garvey House, built around 1870 and located in what is now known as Oyster Factory Park in Bluffton, is the only house still standing on the May River which was previously owned by freed slaves. The Town of Bluffton has recently rehabilitated the house and it is considered an asset of the National Register Historic District. Marks' research will serve as the foundation for future, docent-led tours which will be presented by staff members of the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society.

"Melanie is a history investigator and her two years of research sifting through documents, visiting cemeteries and interviewing community members has brought to life the story of Cyrus Garvin and his family during their life chapter as freed men and women," Mayor Lisa Sulka said. "We are forever grateful to Melanie teaching us about who Cyrus Garvin was.

"As the house is a crucial component to the Bluffton Historic District, the story about how Cyrus and his family members established themselves as true Blufftonians when they settled on the May River is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit as they traveled through the Reconstruction Era."

Marks received a 2017 South Carolina Historic Preservation Award June 16 from Governor Henry McMaster. Sponsored by the Office of Governor, the South Carolina Archives and History Foundation, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and the Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation, this award recognizes exceptional accomplishments in preservation, rehabilitation and interpretation of the architectural and cultural heritage of South Carolina. Marks founded a historical research consulting firm, CT House Histories, LLC, based in Fairfield, Connecticut and donated her Garvin-Garvey House research to the Town of Bluffton.

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Erin Schumacher, the Town's historic preservation principal planner, submitted the application for this award after Marks presented several binders of research to the Town of Bluffton which detail the journey of Cyrus Garvin and his life as a freedman. That research was compiled in an historical report, "The Garvin House: The Journey of a Freedman's Family, Bluffton, South Carolina." This report was co-authored by Marks' colleague, Patricia Hines.

"Melanie's research has the potential to be the cornerstone of interpreting this historical period through the life of Cyrus Garvin," Schumacher said. "It is extremely rare to have a house still standing which was built nearly 150 years ago by a freedman. The house has the opportunity to tell the story of Reconstruction, the Great Migration, Gullah-Geechee culture and African American history all at one site."

Town Manager Marc Orlando said Marks' research will be used as the content of future tours of the Garvin House through a partnership with the Bluffton Historical Preservation Society.

"The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society is the Town's official welcome center and it is fitting that this organization use Marks' research to keep the story of the Garvin-Garvey family alive in our community." Orlando said. "We are honored to have this house as a part of the Historic District's portfolio."

The Bluffton Historical Preservation Society (BHPS) will be offering docent-led tours of the Garvin-Garvey house, starting around September 1. Reservations are requested. For more information or further details of the tours, please call BHPS at 843.757.6293.