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NEWS RELEASE

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Oregon Historical Society Shares Update on Afro-American Heritage Bicentennial Commemorative Quilt Conservation Efforts

Portland, OR — November 24, 2020 — The Oregon Historical Society has sent the [Afro-American Heritage Bicentennial Commemorative Quilt](#) for conservation [following the vandalism](#) to the Oregon Historical Society's (OHS) downtown facility on the evening of Sunday, October 11, 2020. During that evening, the quilt was taken from its temporary display in the OHS pavilion, where it [was on exhibit](#) as part of a collaboration with Portland Textile Month in order to offer free public access for community members to view the quilt during the month of October. Thankfully, local police recovered the quilt early the next morning, returning it to the care of OHS collections staff.

Each square of the quilt, crafted from 1974 to 1976 in honor of the American Bicentennial, honors a Black individual or moment in history. Fifteen Black women from Portland sewed the quilt, who later donated it to OHS and entrusted it to the Society's care. Upon its return, museum collections staff quickly moved to stabilize the quilt, carefully but quickly drying it to prevent mold and microbial growth. Once dry, staff members carefully cleaned the quilt with a variable-speed, HEPA filter vacuum through a screen to prevent force or damage to the textile. Fortunately, the quilt did not sustain notable structural damage, but it did suffer from red pigment staining throughout. The quilt was condition reported and documented as is, and staff sent this information to several potential textile conservators.

Last week, OHS sent the quilt to the [Textile Conservation Workshop](#) (TCW), a non-profit organization focused on the preservation of textiles. Located in South Salem, New York, TCW is a highly respected leader in textile conservation with a focus on quilts. The founder and director, Patsy Orlofsky, is also the author of *Quilts in America*, which provides history and technical information about quilting.

"I am confident that Patsy and her team will do the very best to address the conservation issues with the Afro-American Heritage Bicentennial Commemorative Quilt," said OHS Deputy Museum Director Nicole Yasuhara. "Speaking to Patsy, I have been impressed

with her knowledge, realistic approach, and thoughtful recommendations. We will continue to communicate throughout the process, and hope to have the quilt back in our care in a few months.”

After consulting with Dr. Sylvia Gates Carlisle, the last living quilter from the original group, OHS has decided to attempt to restore the front of the quilt as much as possible, but will remove and replace the quilt backing, which is severely stained. The original backing will remain in the OHS collection as its own museum object, with the history of the vandalism captured and added to its story.

You can learn more about this important piece of local African American history through a recent blog post at ohs.org/blog and view a recorded virtual panel discussion on the quilt’s history on our website at ohs.org/events, which featured Dr. Sylvia Gates Carlisle, Dr. Carmen P. Thompson, Sheridan Collins, and Mary Bywater Cross.

About the Oregon Historical Society

For more than a century, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state’s collective memory, preserving a vast collection of artifacts, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms & website (www.ohs.org), educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon’s history open and accessible to all. We exist because history is powerful, and because a history as deep and rich as Oregon’s cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.