FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

City of New Haven Unveils William Lanson Statue

NEW HAVEN, Conn. – Today the City of New Haven, artist Dana King, Al Marder and the Amistad Committee, State and local elected officials formally unveiled the statue of William Lanson. William Lanson was an historical figure, an 18th century runaway slave, who was a major property owner in New Haven, provided opportunity for many other people of color in the community, and a master engineer who worked on an array of monumental infrastructure projects that shaped the City into what it is today. The event was live streamed on the City’s FaceBook Page.

New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker said, “Not much is known about Mr. Lanson’s early life, but one thing is abundantly clear: he has made an incredible mark on New Haven. His perseverance and ingenuity has had a lasting impact on our community that we still see today,” he concluded.

During his remarks, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker highlighted some of the great feats from William Lanson that would transform the New Haven community. At the reception just two days prior to the statue dedication, Elicker reminded attendees that Lanson extended Long Wharf in a project that lasted two years (1810-1812), making New Haven’s Long Wharf the longest wharf at that time, which would greatly improve and link the economic hubs in the community. The site of the statue dedication, the Farmington Canal Trail, also holds serious significance, as Lanson was contracted to build the wall of the harbor basin where the canal would empty.

Artist Dana King released the following statement:
I am honored to have taken a prominent role in memorializing William Lanson, who was such an important figure in the New Haven community. William Lanson built an integrated community in what is now Wooster Square, advocated for voting rights for free Black people, building vital infrastructure that increased wealth for New Haveners, yet never received the credit he deserves. He gave everything he had to create a better New Haven and died after having his property taken from him and his reputation deliberately tarnished. Now more than ever, we must honor Black lives, by rectifying mistakes of the past and present. William Lanson represents so much to African descendants: our history, our struggles, and our triumphs. Thank you to the Amistad Committee for giving me this extraordinary opportunity.

Others in attendance at the event included Director of Arts and Cultural Affairs at the City Adriane Jefferson, former Mayor Toni Harp, Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, President Al Marder and members of the Amistad Committee, members of the State Delegation and Board of Alders, and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro.

For information on William Lanson, read below or visit this link.

William Lanson, a runaway slave: a leader in the struggle for the right of free Blacks to vote; one of the founders of the Temple Street Church (now Dixwell United Church of Christ); harbored runaway slaves; owned Wooster Square. Lanson succeeded at most everything he aspired to accomplish by pushing open and bravely walking through doors that were closed to him and other formerly enslaved and freemen/women in 19th century America. He did it by turning empty, mostly undesirable land into vibrant neighborhoods filled with housing for marginalized, invisible people. He did it employing Black people in the construction of New Haven’s early infrastructure. And he also spoke out on behalf of those whose voices were ignored. Later in life, the white power structure determined that William Lanson’s time was up. He had become way too powerful for a Black man. When that happened, the system felled him like the deeply rooted tree that he had become.

For more information on artist and sculptor Dana King, read below or visit this link.

Dana King is a classical figurative sculptor who creates public monuments of Black Bodies in Bronze. She studies the strength and resilience of African descendants and create pieces made of clay with her hands that are then cast in bronze. King prefers sculptures because they inhabit space and space is power. She believes sculpture provides an opportunity to shape culturally significant memories that determine how African descendants are publicly held and remembered. Research is fundamental to her work. When digging for threads to weave together stories of the past, there are historically generalized and racist ideologies that demand a wholesale upheaval of the normative misrepresentation of Black peoples’ emotional and physical sacrifices. African descendants deserve public monuments of truth that radiate their powerful and undying resilience created from a Black aesthetic point of view. King’s sculptures link generations by revealing common threads: shared values, experiences, and aspirations. She knows they help those alive today compare and contrast their world with that of social pioneers, both enslaved and free, whose courage and commitment to excellence helped create modern society. Dana King creates memories, hoping you see yourself and those you love in her work.

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