

For the HOUSTON GIVES recognition this year, the Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum, Inc., nominates the First Unitarian Universalist' Team for its restorations of historic museum houses in Freedmen's Town.

This team accelerated its effort in 2019- 2022 to preserve and restore Yates Museum's historic homes located in Historic Freedmen's Town- Fourth Ward, adjacent to downtown Houston. Why? Because their project is an important part of First UU Church's dedication to racial justice which includes building racial bridges in Houston and beyond.

The Board of Directors and Catherine Roberts, Co-founder for Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum, report that this First UU Team has been critical to the success of the Museum to honor its Mission and Vision – the creation of an African Heritage, International Research and Educational Tourism Destination for Texas.

Freedmen's Town is the only remaining post-Civil War, urban, National Register Historic District, of its kind, in the United States. It was founded & built by previously enslaved families and their descendants, immediately after Emancipation in 1865. The six Yates Museum houses, on eleven archaeology sites, are Texas State Historic Landmarks and National Register Historic Structures. Two houses are "Sites of Memory Associated to the UNESCO -Slave Route" with applications pending approvals on the other RBH Yates Houses and other related sites.

The First UU team has taken a holistic approach by providing a wide range of services including preservation of museum houses and archaeological sites, project management, consultation, fundraising, mentoring student interns, marketing and public relations, as well as, roles on the Board of Directors and Advisory Council, office staffing, and fundraising. The First UU Team includes Project Leaders and volunteers from diverse corporations and cultures.

During the design phase, First UU Team assisted the museum in the selection of designers and engineers and then coordinated their work through the federal and city approval process. In some cases First UU measured original details and prepared drawings for preservation/city approvals and construction. The team performed a wide range of carpentry work from basic framing to finish mill work. This included the installation of exterior siding and interior floors, walls and ceilings. When materials were missing or damaged beyond repair, the team sourced historical materials for readapted use. The exterior of the houses were completely cleaned, primed and painted. Where specialty construction trades were required, First UU volunteers, qualified, obtained bids and managed their work. This included such trades as foundation repair, major structural framing, roofing installation and electrical & HVAC trades. First UU Teams Leaders conducted Preservation Volunteer Days for corporate employees, church and school groups, fraternal and other organizations such as I-CERV, YMCA, etc.

Three structures, in particular the UNESCO- Workman's Cottage, the Jacob (Nixon) Nicholson, and the J. Vance Lewis Houses, have garnered most of the 6000 hours of volunteer services per year. The First UU preservation efforts for those houses have

included comprehensive structural re-enforcements, interior repairs, new foundations and roofs, total house rewiring and installation of a central air conditioning and heating systems. Preservation of the Lewis House has included restoring its original wrap around porch, ceilings, floors, and preserving interior finishes such as its hand-painted wall papers, etc.

The First UU teams of 10-15 carpenters and painters have worked on these historic structures during COVID, in extreme weather, and almost weekly to prepare them as museum houses dedicated to the professions of the freedmen heroes who built Houston. The restoration process has been slow and careful in order to comply with the strict USDI Guidelines for Historic Preservation, to reuse original materials, or when rotted, to repair them with the same methods and species of 100+ year old wood.

To help fund the enormous scope of work First UU Church has donated several shared offerings, and individual members also donated several thousand dollars toward stabilizing and restoring these Museum houses. Additional donations to Rutherford B. H. Yates Museum, Inc. are needed to accelerate restoration efforts toward completion through its Building Racial Bridges Capital Campaign 2021-2024

A few pictures are attached to illustrate the contributions the First UU Team has made toward restoration of the RBH Yates Museum's historic houses in Freedmen's Town.

