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New site for Kunta Kinte plaque to be dedicated

Ceremony will complete first phase of project for 'Roots' author statue

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Published on Monday, September 29, 1997
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Annapolis dedicates a new spot at City Dock today for a plaque marking the arrival 230 years ago of author Alex Haley's ancestor Kunta Kinte aboard a slave ship.

The ceremony, which starts at 11: 45 a.m., completes the first phase of a project to place a bronze, life-sized statue of the ``Roots" author sitting on a bench and telling a story to three children at the City Dock.

The event marks 10 years of annual commemorations in the city sponsored by Kunta Kinte Celebrations Inc., which also holds an annual Kunta Kinte Heritage Festival there. Members of Haley's family and historian Phoebe *Jacobsen*, who helped the author trace his ancestral links to Annapolis, are expected to attend today's ceremony.

``The historical date, Sept. 29, will forever remain an important date to be shared by not only both organizations, but more importantly to be shared with pride by all Annapolitans," said Leonard Blackshear, president of the Kunta Kinte-Alex Haley Foundation, which is co-sponsoring this year's event.

Haley spent 12 years researching his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, ``Roots," which told the story of his African ancestor being led ashore in chains from the Lord Ligioner slave ship on Sept. 29, 1767. Haley, who co-authored ``The Autobiography of Malcolm X," died at age 70 in 1992.

A plaque was installed at the City Dock in 1981 in honor of Haley's ancestor, but event organizers said visitors often miss it. The new location will have the plaque resting on a pedestal. It also will be accessible to wheelchair users.

Over the next 15 months, nationally recognized artist Ed Dwight will complete and install the bronze sculpture at the head of the dock. The memorial also will include a time capsule of artifacts to be sealed for 100 years, organizers said, and ``it will emphasize the message that maintaining family connections and pride in one's heritage is the foundation for a strong human spirit able to overcome all adversity."

For more information or to offer support to the foundation, call 410-841-6920. To offer support to Kunta Kinte Celebrations, call 410-349-0338.

Pub Date: 9/29/97

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