



**Dr. Helen Chavis Othow presents Professor Kathy Gore of the NCSU School of Forestry with a copy of Lewis Bowling's book celebrating Oxford's Bicentennial at last week's meeting of the John Chavis Historical Society.**

## Burial plot of Oxford native John Chavis to be restored by NCSU

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At a meeting of the John Chavis Historical Society held at the Thornton Library last week, North Carolina State University Professor Kathy Gore of the School of Forestry presented a program about the final resting place of Granville County native John Chavis, which is believed to be located on the former Willie P. Mangum Estate in Rougemont. The school oversees the estate, which is now called Hill Forest.

John Chavis (1763 - 1838) was a free black man and the first African-American to graduate from a college or university in the United States. In 1778, while still a teenager, Chavis entered the Virginia Fifth Regiment and fought in the Revolutionary War. He later operated a classical school where he taught the sons and daughters of white people, as well as free blacks, before the Civil War.

Willie Mangum, a United States Senator in the early 1860's, was a student of John Chavis in the early 19th century. Research conducted by

the Historical Society which bears Chavis' name led to the discovery of the burial site in the Mangum family cemetery on the grounds of the estate. Chavis is thought to be buried there with Senator Mangum, Mangum's parents and other family members, as well as the slaves of the Mangum Plantation.

Gore, who has been associated with NCSU for the past 23 years, noted that she was exposed to Chavis and his role in history by being referred to the book by Dr. Helen Chavis Othow, 'John Chavis: African American Patriot, Preacher, Teacher, and Mentor.'

"It was amazing to me that Chavis served in the American Revolution, as a free black man, and I didn't know about it," she said in her presentation.

Gore has assigned a group of students in her class to focus on Hill Forest (the Mangum estate) and John Chavis' connection to the family, hoping to generate interest in a future project where Hill Forest can become a tourist destination.

The assignment, she added, is a natural tie-in

with parks and recreation, cultural heritage and tourism. The research will be split into several phases and across several curriculums, including the parks and recreation classes, marketing, finance, history and web design - and will hopefully continue for the next several semesters as an ongoing project. Right now, her students are creating 'story maps' with information they have gathered.

"I don't know what the end product will be," she said to the Historical Society members, "but I look forward to seeing what the students are able to uncover and the ideas they will suggest for the preservation and utilization of this site."

Members of the John Chavis Historical Society will be an integral part of this project, and will be asked for input along the way.

"This is just the beginning," Gore said. "We look forward to finding more pieces to this puzzle."

For more information about the John Chavis Historical Society, contact Helen Chavis Othow at [hdothow@embarq-mail.com](mailto:hdothow@embarq-mail.com) or visit the Historical Society's website at [www.jchsinc.org](http://www.jchsinc.org).