



NEWS FROM
ULSTER COUNTY
County Executive Jen Metzger

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Ulster County Provides Update on Work of Truth and Reconciliation Commission

NEW WEBSITE AND NARRATIVE WALKING TOUR PLANNED FOR LATER THIS YEAR

KINGSTON, NY - The Offices of the Ulster County Executive and County Clerk announce the progress made by the Ulster County Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and plans to share its findings with the public this year.

The Ulster County Truth and Reconciliation Commission, comprised of professors, local historians, and educators, was created three years ago with the support of then-County Executive Pat Ryan and Radio Kingston to conduct primary historical research into slavery in Ulster County and chronicle the lives of individuals of African descent, with the goal of providing an honest and expansive understanding of the legacy of slavery in Ulster County, and to create an accessible resource for educators, students, and the community.

The Commission is completing a website, which will go live in June, with a searchable database of all primary documents, an interactive map containing the locations of historic houses in Ulster County known to have been involved in enslavement, an overview of historic Black burial grounds, and an extensive collection of stories chronicling the lives of historic personages of African descent.

Later this year, the Commission will unveil a narrative walking tour through history, produced by Sound and Story, and presented in the voice of Cezar Smith, a 19th-century Black resident of Kingston who was laid to rest in the Pine Street Burial Ground.

The Commission's efforts are bolstered by its dedicated members:

- **Albert Cook (Co-Chair)** has been a member of the Social Studies Department at New Paltz High School for 25 years, where he currently teaches World History, AP American History, and Black History. He also has been an instructor in the Urban Education Initiative at Vassar College, where he co-taught classes on the Legacy of Dr. King, the History of Black Voter Disenfranchisement, and the History and Legacy of Mass Incarceration. He has lectured throughout the region on issues surrounding the history of African Cultures and the development of Race and Racism in North America.
- **Susan Stessin-Cohn (Co-Chair)**, co-author of *In Defiance, Runaways from Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley, 1735–1831*, and former professor of social studies education at SUNY New Paltz, is currently the Historian for the Town of New Paltz. She is a recipient of the Bruce Dearstyne Award for excellence in the educational use of local government records; the New York State Archives Award for the best use of primary local documents in a curriculum in NYS; and the Pride of Ulster County Award for research on the Ulster County Poorhouse. She has appeared on both CSPAN and PBS.
- **Ashley Hurlburt-Biagini** is a research historian and web developer in the Hudson Valley. She is the former Manager of Collections and Archives at Historic Huguenot Street, where she co-curated various exhibits. Ashley has appeared on WYNT Channel 13, is on the research committee for the Sacred Place of My Ancestors, and is the co-author of *In Defiance: Runaways from Slavery in New York's Hudson River Valley, 1735–1831*.
- **Philip White** is a recent graduate of SUNY New Paltz and has been involved since the Fall of 2022 in researching the history of slavery in the Hudson Valley. The son of a historian, he grew up in Poughkeepsie, where he first became acquainted with the long legacy of anti-slavery movements in the area.

In addition, the Commission benefits from the expertise and guidance of County Historian Geoffrey Miller and the County Archivist Jonathan Palmer, and the Commission's Advisory Board, which includes Erica Brown, Taylor Bruck, Debra Bruno, Jimmy Buff, Wendy E. Harris, Donna Jeffress, Esi Lewis, Esq., Jonathan Palmer, Kitt Vanderzee Potter, and Philip Timbrouck.

“The establishment of the Ulster County Truth and Reconciliation Commission signifies our commitment to confronting the legacy of slavery and chronicling the lives of individuals of African descent whose stories have not been told,” **said County Executive Metzger**. “By acknowledging this history and expanding our perspectives on it, we take a significant step toward healing and understanding. I commend the dedicated members of the commission and advisory board for their work in bringing this important initiative to fruition.”

"It has been very exciting to see the amazing historic records in our care scrutinized and utilized so extensively," **said Ulster County Clerk Nina Postupack.** "As the keeper of these documents, I have been honored to work in partnership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to ensure our records contributed towards the formation of an authentic truth, no matter how difficult that truth may be, concerning the legacy of slavery in a community I've had the pleasure to serve."

"The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a unique opportunity for the Ulster County Government to show our commitment to eradicating racism by allocating resources and sharing primary documents under the care of the County Clerk to provide a more complete and accurate history of slavery in Ulster County for the healing and uniting of our collective community," **said Ulster County Chief Diversity Officer Esi Lewis.** "We are grateful to the Commission and the advisors for the time and energy they continue to invest into this project and our community."

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