

Looking Forward through the Past

The ALTC project aims to understand why this mixed cultural community of Native and African Americans is still here in Setauket, and what has enabled this population to survive in this place for more than 200 years. After just a few community meetings, we learned a great deal of very important information about this historically significant community. We learned that the historical families who formed the core of this community are truly fascinating people. Some of those who have come to stand out include: the Jacob and Hannah Hart family including Lucy Keyes, Minnie Sanford, and Ernest Hart, the Selah Hart family, the William Smith Sells family, Levi Philips, Abraham Tobias, Rachel Holland Hart, the Harry Hart family, Frank Scott, the Edward Calvin family, and Ethel Lewis. We also learned about the role of philanthropist Ward Melville in the preservation of this community.

In the process of learning about the families, we also gained an understanding of meaningful, but forgotten, places that were the basis of survival for the non-white population in the Three Villages. Some of these places have been lost, like the Chicken Hill area in East Setauket and areas where some families lived in Old Field. Others are distant memories like the "colored" beach by Strong's Neck Bridge, the site of the Old Bethel AME Church and Grove Place Cemetery, and Harry Hart's Hall on Rt. 25a. Others, like Bethel AME Church, Irving Hart American Legion Hall, Laurel Hill Cemetery, and of course the homes of the families still living on Christian Avenue, remain part of the living community.

Considering the challenges that made their path difficult in the past, and continue to do so in the present, it is a wonder that this culturally significant community still exists. These families pay attention to what is important for their survival, and they are aware of the impact of their history in Setauket though it deserves much greater attention and research. Thank you to everyone who participated over the past year. We hope you will all join us in celebrating our achievements thus far, and in making new ones in the upcoming stages of the project.

Summer 2011

Summer 2011 will be an exciting time for *A Long Time Coming*. On June 18th we will host a speaker, from the well-known Weeksville Heritage Center in Brooklyn, who will talk about the successful development of that historic African American site into a nationally significant place and how this helps to create a more stable economic base for its preservation. We also look forward to the arrival of Hofstra's Center for Public Archaeology field program. The Hofstra team will be excavating at the former house and home of Jacob and Hannah Hart on the corner of Lake and Main Streets. Everyone is invited to visit and to join the archaeologists to see what turns up. We will be running an open house during the afternoon of June 18th, which will include tours of the Hart site excavation and the Bethel-Christian Avenue Laurel Hill historic district. **Join Us!**

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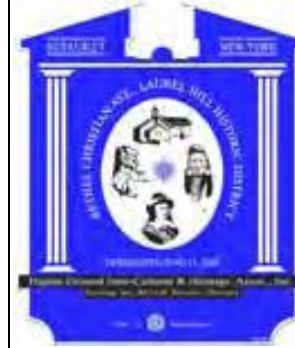
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Ceramic cat-shaped salt shaker found in the Ernest Hart Cabin
(Photo by Jamie Atkinson)



A Long Time Coming

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Why This Project?

Always historically precious, but often economically threatened, African American settlements were once common up and down the East Coast, with several communities throughout Long Island, NY. Today, only a few of these historically rich communities retain an active, living population of descendant families and individuals dating back to late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Even fewer have managed to preserve their cultural traditions, their historical inventory, and their "sense of place" locally and in the national tapestry of American history.

The most common cause for the loss of these historical communities has been commercial development, often disguised as gentrification, which has dismantled and forever changed even the very richest residential African American historical places such as Boston's Beacon Hill; Harlem, NY; the Gullah communities of the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands; and Afro-American historical treasures in Florida such as Eatonville and American Beach.

Resolutely facing, what appears to be an irreversible tragedy for African American and Native American cultural sites and communities, the Higher Ground Inter-cultural & Heritage Association and the Hofstra University Center for Public Archaeology have mounted an impressive cultural, historical and archaeological project on East Christian Avenue, Setauket within the historic North Shore of Long Island, NY.

Called *A Long Time Coming* [ALTC], the Hofstra/Higher Ground project is based on the principles of community self-knowledge and unconventional methods of study and research. As a community-driven project, ALTC will excavate sites, document significant places, conduct oral history, genealogical and archaeological workshops, and interpret in fine detail the community's early settlement life and family history. The project's enthusiastic reception by the community is tied to a perception that the project will increase awareness of their historic legacy, and provide members access to opportunities for economic stability. We hope that with successful results the project will become a model for the study of other historic Native and African American communities.



Dr. Judith Burgess explains aspects of the local community history research to the community at the Sept. 25th workshop. (Photo by Kara Gaskins)

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Who Are We?

A Long Time Coming is a community-based participatory research project. Project participants consist of descendant members of the Native and African American Community of the Three Village area.

The project is a collaborative venture between Dr. Chris Matthews, Hofstra University Center for Public Archaeology, Dr. Judith A. Burgess, Education Works Co., and Robert E. Lewis, President, Higher Ground Intercultural and Heritage Association, Inc.

Project Goals

1. Create a broader and deeper awareness of the historical and cultural significance of this community.
2. Develop cultural and economic resources to sustain the enthusiasm for this project in the future.
3. Foster new stewards of this history from among the descendants of this historic community.



September 25th Workshop

Introductions, Objective and Dirty Hands

A Long Time Coming hosted its first workshop on September 23rd at the Bethel AME Church. The group focused on an introduction to the project, the purpose of public archaeology, the importance of tracing family heritages and finally, learned firsthand how archaeologists preliminary view sites by digging shovel test pits.

Twenty-five participants listened to presentations from project co-directors Robert Lewis, Chris Matthews, and Judith Burgess. Participants then introduced themselves, their relationship to the community and discussed the goals they would like to see the project accomplish. They also discussed what brought them together as a community. Workshop participants then broke into groups to explore more about their interests and ideas for the project and enjoyed refreshments.

Finally, the group journeyed to the Lucy Hart Keyes site at 37 Christian Avenue to see preliminary archaeological survey in action. Participants, including several children, helped dig four shovel test pits (holes dug to render a picture of what a site has potential to yield) and sifted through the soil to collect artifacts from each pit.

The entire group enjoyed working with the artifacts and gained a better understanding of the archaeological process.

[Photos (L to R) by Robert Lewis, Jamie Atkinson, Scan of Ida Glass' photo album, Jamie Atkinson]

October 23rd Workshop

Artifacts and Interviewing

On October 23rd, participants met at the Irving Hart Memorial Legion Hall on Christian Avenue to talk about historic artifacts and discuss how to approach these unique resources. Prior to the meeting, Chris Matthews and project intern Jamie Atkinson collected artifacts from the Ernest Hart Cabin behind the Lucy Hart Keyes house. They collected dozens of objects, which were laid out in the hall for observation and discussion. Participants discussed the obvious, mysterious and possible uses for each of the objects. After discussing in groups, Prof. Matthews led a discussion on how oral history and artifacts can work together to reveal a community's history.

Dr. Burgess then led a hands-on session on oral history. Workshop members studied oral history transcripts of former community residents to see how an oral history interview is conducted. A lively discussion ensued on who should be interviewed, what kinds of questions to ask, how to allow the narrator full opportunity to talk while guiding the interview, and finally, the ways to secure permission to record the interview. This discussion was followed by hands-on use of recording devices and microphones as small groups conducted practice interviews with neighbors and family members.



November 13th Workshop

History from Home and Interviews

Workshop participants were asked to come with photographs, documents, artifacts and other historical records about their family as well as community and local history. ALTC staff set up a scanning station where community items were recorded and documented.

Participants brought in photo albums, family heirlooms, DVDs, and historical documents connected to their family's past. These items triggered stories which we listened to and documented. One community member, Ida Glass, shared several photograph albums. Another, Jim Edwards, brought in artifacts, digital images of his family and documents. Michael Calvin shared a mortgage statement that shed light on the sale and ownership of his family's home on Christian Avenue.

Workshop participants then split into multiple groups to continue working on oral history interviewing techniques. Each group selected a member to be interviewed, as a way to explore that person's memories of the community. At this workshop, Michael Calvin, Ida Glass, Pearl Hart, Julius Stith, Robert Lewis and Nellie Edwards were interviewed.

Want to get involved?

To stay informed of the *A Long Time Coming* project activities and news, please fill out this form and mail it back to us.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Cell Phone _____

Email _____

I'd like to participate in (check all applicable):

Archaeology

Oral History

Archival Research

I have materials (photographs, documents, artifacts) that would be of interest to the project

I can volunteer to help promote and compile results of the project

Place
Stamp
Here

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