



Message from County Executive Robert P. Astorino:

Westchester County in the Hudson Valley is rich in African American history and offers a variety of ways for families of all cultural backgrounds to experience the contributions men and women of African descent have made to the American experience.

Among the ways we recognize the African American journey here in Westchester are through historical landmarks that date back to the 17th century, galleries exhibiting authentic African art, and annual celebrations with dance, music and more. These recollections of sacrifice, struggle, and perseverance African Americans endured are reminders of their significant contributions to our society.

To help you explore and discover the contributions of African Americans in Westchester, we have put together this guide, which will point you to many places and events of interest.

To learn more about African American historical sites and get travel information go to visitwestchesterny.com and the county's African American Advisory Board website at westchestergov.com/aaab.

meet
me in
**Westchester
County**



FOREVER QUILTED IN OUR AMERICAN IDENTITY

Westchester has a long history as a home to African American culture. Learn about and explore historical sites, annual events, arts and culture and more.

Events

February is Black History Month, a time when people of all cultural backgrounds recognize the contributions African Americans have made to the United States through art, education, civil rights, and more. Westchester County joins in that recognition by hosting various lunches, school programs and other events to commemorate this important month.

An African American celebration of spring, Pinkster was historically held in the Hudson Valley as early as the 17th century. To the Dutch, Pinkster was a religious holiday. For their African slaves, Pinkster was a time free from work and a chance to gather with family and friends. Filled with music, dance, food, and revelry, the cross-cultural festival is recreated each May with a rousing colonial-style celebration at Philipsburg Manor in Sleepy Hollow. Festivities include lively

presentations of drumming and traditional dance, African folktales, and demonstrations of traditional African instruments and utilitarian wares.

Also known as “Freedom Day” or “Emancipation Day,” Juneteenth is a U.S. holiday that commemorates the announcement of the abolition of slavery in Texas in 1865. Eventson June 19, celebrations are held throughout the country; in Westchester County, parades and festivals take place in Peekskill and in White Plains.

And every year, Kensico Dam in Valhalla hosts cultural heritage festivals for many various heritage organizations in the county. Among those events in the summer months is the African American Festival, where vendors come to sell authentic African wares and other cultural items. Food, live music and dance performances are also part of the festivities.

Arts & Culture

African American culture is also celebrated through art. The Enslaved Africans’ Rain Garden is a public art project at Philipse Manor Hall in Yonkers that commemorates the lives of enslaved Africans who lived along African American Heritage Trail Site, six of whom were the first to be manumitted by law in the United States in 1787 – 76 years before the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Jack Peterson Memorial, located in Croton, is another African cultural site that acknowledges the brave stand taken by militia men during the American Revolutionary War to thwart the British forces on the Hudson River.

Also, there are several organizations in Westchester County that celebrate African American traditions including Youth Theatre Interactions in Yonkers, an after-school program that teaches young adults and

children many different types of performing arts, including African dance and drumming.

Networking

Several organizations in the county help to promote and assist African American professionals. The Westchester Black Women’s Political Caucus, which was founded in 1976, sets out to expose and fulfill pivotal roles for black women in Westchester County politics. The African American Men of Westchester, founded in 1987, was formed to capitalize on the vast talent of the African American community. The African American Chamber of Commerce/Westchester and Rockland Counties, Inc. is a voluntary organization that promotes better understanding of the private enterprise system and coordinates the effort of commerce, industry and professionals in promoting economic and community well-being of African American businesses.



HUDSON VALLEY REGION

WESTCHESTER COUNTY GUIDE TO AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY & HERITAGE



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148 Martine Ave., Suite 104
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A FEW NOTABLE NEIGHBORS FROM WESTCHESTER

Cab Calloway

A former Greenburgh resident and world-famous American jazz singer and bandleader.

Ruby Dee & Ossie Davis

Renowned actors and civil rights activists, as well as long time residents of New Rochelle. Dee was inducted into the Westchester County Women’s Hall of Fame in 2007.

Branford Marsalis

A former New Rochelle resident and a gifted saxophonist who is a leader of the Branford Marsalis Quartet.

Willie Mays

A one-time resident of New Rochelle who played most of his career with the New York and San Francisco Giants and then the New York Mets.

Gordon Parks

A former Greenburgh resident best known for his photo essays for *Life* magazine and as the director of the 1971 film *Shaft*.

Phylicia Rashad

A Mount Vernon resident and Tony Award-winning actress, best known for her role as Claire Huxtable in the television series *The Cosby Show*.

Betty Shabazz

A resident of Mount Vernon and Yonkers. She was the wife of Malcolm X and headed the Office of Institutional Advancement and Public Relations at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn (part of the City University of New York).

Denzel Washington

A Mount Vernon native, Washington is a celebrated American film star having won two Academy Awards for acting. He continues to support local charities including the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Vanessa L. Williams

A Chappaqua resident who became the first African American to be crowned Miss America. She is a successful film, stage, and television actress, as well as singer.

HOW TO GET AROUND:

Transportation Information

Westchester County is easily accessible by major interstate highways and thoroughfares including I-87 (New York State Thruway), I-95 (New England Thruway), I-287 (Cross-Westchester Expressway) and I-684.

Westchester County Airport (HPN) is conveniently located in the center of the county.

Public transportation is a good travel choice. It helps our environment by reducing air pollution and traffic congestion. It can also be cost-effective.

PUBLIC TRANSIT OPTIONS PROVIDE EASY ACCESS AND INCLUDE:

RAIL TRANSIT: For information, schedules and fares call 800-METRO-INFO or go to www.mta.info.

BUS TRANSIT: The County’s Bee-Line bus system is one of the nation’s best, safest and most reliable transit systems. Our shuttles, BxM4C Westchester-Manhattan Express and frequent local buses provide many options.

Call (914) 813-7777 for route and schedule information. www.beelinebus.com

Additional bus service is available from surrounding counties into Westchester: Tappan Zee Express - Rockland County (845) 364-3333. Putnam Area Rapid Transit - Putnam County (845) 878-RIDE. I-Bus - CT Transit (203) 327-7433.

Westchester County Parks Department

450 Saw Mill River Rd., Ardsley, New York 10502
(914) 864-PARK parks.westchestergov.com

Westchester County Tourism & Film

Let the Tourism Office assist you with your visit by offering other guides and information to aid you in planning your trip.

148 Martine Ave., White Plains, New York 10601
(914) 995-8500 or (800) 833-9282
info@visitwestchesterny.com
www.visitwestchesterny.com

Westchester County Tourism & Film is the official destination tourism marketing organization for the county.

Hotels & Accommodations

Whether you seek the charms of a historic castle or the chic ambiance of an ultra-modern hotel, Westchester can accommodate you. Bed and breakfasts, luxury lodging and budget hotels provide just the right place to stay and play.

For complete hotels/accommodations information visit www.visitwestchesterny.com

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1. Monument to First Rhode Island Regiment

First Presbyterian Church (Burial Grounds) 2880 Crompond Road, Yorktown Heights (914) 245-2186

Erected in 1982 as a result of the pioneering research and activism of Mr. John H. Harmon, this monument is dedicated to the valiant and courageous soldiers of the First Rhode Island Regiment, which was composed predominately of enslaved African American soldiers who had enlisted in the American Continental Army to earn their freedom. During the American Revolution, these men fought courageously to defend American liberty against the aggressions of British tyranny.

2. John Jay Homestead State Historic Site

400 Jay Street/Route 22, Katonah (914) 232-8119 or (914) 232-5651 www.johnjayhomestead.org

April – October Sat.-Wed., 10am-3pm. Grounds open year round, 8am-6pm. Other times by appointment. Admission free

After growing up in the Westchester community of Rye, Founding Father John Jay established a homestead for himself and his family in the northern Westchester community of Bedford. Enslaved and free Africans lived and worked at Jay properties in Bedford, New York City, Albany, Fishkill and Rye throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries.

John Jay Homestead is a National Historic Landmark and is operated by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. In 2013, the site opened a brand new Education and Visitor Center that includes a main exhibit gallery with a welcome desk and gift shop, a map-model of the property, computer kiosks with exhibit content, and period news magazines featuring articles relevant to John Jay's life. A 2011 addition to the building features a video viewing area, and an activity center with a replica governess's cart, similar to one the Jay children rode in, and discovery boxes full of interesting things to explore. Around the corner in the horse stalls, visitors can see realistic models of horses and experience a sound and light show emphasizing the importance of horses to the Jay family and Bedford Farm.

3. The Friends Meeting House

420 Quaker Road, Chappaqua (914) 238-3170 www.chappaquafriends.org

Open Sunday 10:30am – 11:30am or by appointment.

The Chappaqua Friends Meeting House, circa 1753, is the oldest Quaker meeting house standing in Westchester County. In the early 1750s, members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, began to challenge the morality of slavery in colonial New York.

In 1767, the Purchase community of Friends decreed that it was forbidden for its members to own slaves, stating that “[it] is not consistent with Christianity to buy or sell our fellow men for slaves.” The Society of Friends resolved that all of its members should release their slaves and seek to provide them with the means to support themselves and their families. The Quaker opposition to slavery served as a primary catalyst in its abolition in post-revolutionary New York.

4. Philipsburg Manor

Route 9, Sleepy Hollow (914) 631-3992 hudsonvalley.org

May 4 – November 11 Wed.-Sun. Timed tours only 10:30am-3pm.

Philipsburg Manor, a property of Historic Hudson Valley, is a nationally significant late 17th and early 18th century milling and trading complex that was part of a vast 52,000-acre estate owned by the Anglo-Dutch Philipse family. Enslaved individuals of African descent operated the commercial center of the estate in what is now the village of Sleepy Hollow.

Today, costumed interpreters demonstrate and talk about various aspects of colonial life that affected the culture and economy of those who lived and labored at Philipsburg Manor. The interpreters offer regular performances of vignettes dramatizing important aspects of African slavery. In addition, the site offers popular school programs and a lively calendar of special events. Visitors experience hands-on tours of the water-powered gristmill, manor house, barn, activity center, and slave garden. The visitor center includes a shop and cafe.

5. Foster Memorial AME Zion Church

90 Wildey Street, Tarrytown nps.gov/nr/travel/underground/ny5.htm

Open to the public. Call (914) 631-2002 for additional information.

Amanda and Henry Foster, Rev. Jacob Thomas, and Hiram Jimerson founded Foster Memorial African Methodist EpiscopalAME Zion Church in Tarrytown in 1860. Amanda Foster, born in Albany in 1807, is considered the “Mother of the Church.” She was the driving force in the formation of the congregation, whose first meetings were held in her Tarrytown confectionery. In possession of her “free papers,” documents that permitted African Americans prior to the abolishment of slavery to freely travel, Amanda obtained employment as a nurse to the children of the governor of Arkansas. While in Arkansas, she contributed to the Underground Railroad movement by using her “free papers” to help a young fugitive slave girl escape.

Like most AME Zion churches, Foster AME Zion was and still is a religious and social crossroads for the African American community, providing a meeting place for worship and a place for public interaction and service. In 1982, the Church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It was recognized as a Westchester County Tricentennial Historic Site in 1983.

6. Stony Hill Cemetery

Buckout Road, Harrison Open to the public.

Post-Revolutionary War emancipated (freed) slaves settled in the rough and stony hills where Harrison, North Castle and White Plains meet near Silver Lake. Their community, also known as “The Hills,” was evidence of an emerging free African

by continued residential development. Mt. Hope AME. Zion Church in White Plains and the Stony Hill Cemetery Committee serve as the stewards of this historic site and represent the voice for one of the first free black communities in this country.

The committee honors fallen heroes through beautification efforts and ongoing research of the site's history.

7. Villa Lewaro

Route 9, Irvington Private residence

Madam C.J. Walker, born Sarah Breedlove, was the daughter of enslaved parents. She invented, patented, and brilliantly marketed hair and cosmetic products for women of color. Walker's success made her one of America's first black millionaires. In 1916,

8. The Neuberger Museum of Art, the African Art Collection

735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase (914) 251-6100 neuberger.org

Tues.-Sun. 12pm-5pm Free first Saturday of every month for all visitors. Admission: adults \$5, students \$3, seniors \$3, free for children under 12.

African art has been an integral part of the Neuberger Museum of Art since it opened in 1974. In 1999, the collection almost doubled in size with the major gift of 153 works from the collection of the late Lawrence Gussman, a notable collector and a resident of Scarsdale, New York. Lawrence Gussman's interest in Africa began in 1957 when he met

9. African Cemetery

Accessed through Greenwood Union Cemetery, North St., Rye Open to the public.

The African Cemetery was established in Rye when its site was deeded to the town on June 27, 1860, by Underhill and Elizabeth Halsted, “(to) be forever after kept and used for the purposes of a cemetery or burial place for the colored inhabitants of the said Town of Rye and its vicinity free and clear of any charge therefore.” In the latter part of his life, Underhill Halsted became a fervent follower of the Methodist movement, which was profoundly opposed to slavery. However, being anti-slavery did not mean one was not prejudiced.

unit in the U.S. Army with a full complement of African American officers from colonel to lieutenant. This unit was called the “Black Devils” by the Germans because of their courage and the “Partridges” by the French because of their proud bearing.

In 1983 the African Cemetery was listed as a Westchester County Tricentennial Historic Site, and in 2003 the cemetery was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

10. Jay Heritage Center

210 Boston Post Road, Rye (914) 698-9275 www.jaycenter.org

Jay Mansion May 19 – September 1 Sun. 2-5pm Admission free Other times by appointment.

Carriage House Visitor Center: Tues.-Fri. 10am-5pm. Free Admission

The Jay Heritage Center occupies the site of the childhood home of Founding Father John Jay. It was also the home of several generations of people, both free and enslaved, who worked for the Jays.

John Jay was a founder and past president of the Manumission Society of New York, which advocated abolition and established schools to educate free African Americans. As governor of New York, Jay signed the Gradual Emancipation Act into law in 1799. The Rye farm remained a place of refuge for Jay throughout his public career.

His son, Peter Augustus Jay, was profoundly anti-slavery and also served as president of the Manumission Society. As a delegate to the New York Constitutional Convention of 1821, he called for the extension of suffrage to African Americans in one of the most eloquent speeches of the convention.

In 1838 Peter Augustus Jay built a magnificent Greek Revival mansion on the site of his father's boyhood home.

11. Philipse Manor Hall, State Historic Site

29 Warburton Avenue at Dock Street, Yonkers (914) 965-4027 www.nysparks.com

April – October Thurs.-Sat. 10am-4pm November – March Thurs.-Sat. 10am-3pm Except holidays. Groups year round, call for appointment. (914) 232-5651

Philipse Manor Hall, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, was a major component of the original Philipsburg Manor and served as its Lower Mill complex. As masters of Philipsburg

Manor, Frederick Philipse and his wife Margaret Hardenbrock were Westchester's premier examples of 17th-century large-scale New York slaveholders. They were deeply involved in both slave trading and slaveholding.

Until the Revolutionary War, several generations of the Philipse family were leading merchants in New York's commercial life. The records of their business and lives indicate that enslaved Africans were vital to their success and the development of Westchester.

The Philipses' global commercial activities placed Westchester at the center of the “Golden Circuit,” better known as the TransAtlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade to the West Indies, America and Europe.

12. Ella Fitzgerald Statue

Yonkers Metro North Railroad Station Plaza, Yonkers Open to the public.

Dubbed “The First Lady of Song,” Ella Fitzgerald was the most popular female jazz singer in the United States for more than half a century. As an African American woman, she experienced not only the adulation of this country, but also some of its most hideous and persistent moral defects.

Raised in Yonkers, Ella lived and worked at a time when, for her, entrances to most white-owned clubs were through the back door. She literally conquered the bigoted, the insensitive, and the racist with love through song while serving as an ambassador for both music and our country.

African American artist Vinnie Bagwell created this bronze statue entitled “The First Lady of Jazz Ella Fitzgerald” in her honor in 1996. It stands next to the Metro North station in Yonkers.

13. St. Paul's Church National Historic Site

897 South Columbus Avenue, Mount Vernon (914) 667-4116 www.nps.gov/sapa

Regular hours for tours and programs are: Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm Call for information about special weekend hours.

St. Paul's Church, completed in 1787, was located in Eastchester, later considered part of Mount Vernon. Built along the old Boston Post Road, it rested in the midst of farmhouses and taverns.

The earliest reference to African Americans in Eastchester appears in the town records dated April 23, 1672. The entry records the sale of a “Negro woman” to Samuel Adams of Fairfield, Connecticut by Moses Hoitte.

The church and taverns were the center of community life. Many of the 9,000 interred in the cemetery are persons of African descent. Most of them were buried there in the 19th and 20th centuries. The church records at St. Paul's include the sexton's book and burial records denoting the race of those entered into the historic graveyard.

