

CONNECTING THE
Heart & Soul
OF AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

EDITION NO. 5 | JULY 2020

The American Tapestry: Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in National Heritage Areas



In the Niagara Falls NHA, murals celebrate the cultural contributions of African Americans like jazz artist Spider Martin in this mural by Edreys Wajed

We celebrate
our nation's diverse heritage.

We create
experiences that stimulate cultural equity.

We empower
inclusive communities to tell their stories.

The Alliance of National Heritage Areas is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our membership organization of Congressionally-designated National Heritage Areas and partner-affiliated organizations works collectively to protect and promote diverse people and places that tell America's stories equitably and inclusively.

We define diversity as meaningful representation of different groups in cultural heritage development, included but not limited to race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability, ethnicity, geography, and perspective.

We define equity as policies and practices that help communities gain access to opportunity, networks, and resources toward reaching their full cultural heritage development potential.

We define inclusion as authentic engagement of diverse groups in cultural heritage development, providing all community members with a genuine sense of belonging.

***We are the Heart & Soul of America.
We are the Alliance of National
Heritage Areas.***



Sara Capen | Chair, Alliance of National Heritage Areas

National Heritage Areas are places that tell a rich and diverse American story.

As venues that hold this particular distinction, we serve as keepers of America’s stories. We are the entities where people, place and history converge. For too long, “distinctly American” meant only one side of the story—a conventional but flawed textbook version of history.

History is not simple and cannot be represented in a single picture or a paragraph. Behind monuments and portraits is a legacy that is much more complex. We Americans have a difficult history—a history that cannot and should not simply be ignored because it is hard or uncomfortable.

Through our work, National Heritage Areas empower people to tell their stories in their words within the framework of their American experience.

Now, more than ever, our role is vital to the people and places we serve. Through our collective efforts, we remind our neighbors and visitors that history is never “long ago and far away” but an arc to today where the impact of history still lives on in communities.

National Heritage Areas preserve, protect and share difficult stories that every American should be required to know like the story of Emmett Till, the Mother Emanuel AME Church, the Japanese Internment Camp at Topaz, and so many more.

It is through our grassroots work and partnerships that we spark conversations across generations and among disparate groups about our collective American history, a complex history ranging from the brutality of the Trail of Tears to the triumphs of the United Farm Workers. It is in doing so that we hope to foster not only a stewardship of place but a stewardship of history where every American can find their own story woven into the tapestry of America. Whether it is voices of resistance or resilience, innovation or upheaval, National Heritage Areas will continue to work to uncover the invisible and untold stories to ensure that “distinctly American” means the stories of all Americans.



Lowell Perry, Jr. | Chair, Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

I am the son of the former Chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under

President Gerald Ford, a Yale graduate, Executive Director of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area, and Chair of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee for the Alliance of National Heritage Areas (ANHA). Our network of 55 Heritage Areas from all across the country is bringing the importance of conservation and historic preservation to the success of the so-called American Experiment to the forefront. Our long-time stewardship of the historic contributions of black, brown, Asian and indigenous people, make us uniquely qualified to help bridge the conversation gap in finding solutions for

the racial injustice which still infects this country. Historically accurate and complete storytelling from the perspective of the protagonists themselves, and not through just the lens of their colonizers—which has typically been the case—will better ensure a rich dialogue on difficult subjects.

Like you, I grapple with what the appropriate action to take individually, and collectively, in support of the justifiable national unrest, should be. Our country is dealing with two viruses. COVID-19 and Racism-20. We will get through the former by following the safety protocols outlined by public health professionals. The latter virus is a much tougher and more complex dragon to slay. Yet slay it together we must. The telling of our respective stories will ensure each citizen understands more about who the real forgotten people in this

country have been, and add value to the narrative.

It is our duty as National Heritage Areas to tell accurate and inclusive stories. In order for us to be honest brokers in a national conversation, we must first hold the mirror up to ourselves and ensure we are walking the talk. This special edition of Heart & Soul is an introduction to ANHA as an organization, as well as our intention to be more actively involved in actual solutions to eradicate the insidious virus called racism that continues to choke the life out of its host – America. We are in it for the long haul to be positive influences and tireless advocates for what is right, and for the noble ideal of equal justice under law for all.



SPOTLIGHT:

NATIVE
AMERICAN
HERITAGE

Commemorating Chief Cornplanter

The story of the Native American experience in the United States is a difficult and painful one. The Oil Region National Heritage Area is working with the Seneca Nation to heal historic wounds. Part of that healing process took place when Oil City's Mayor proclaimed October 14, 2017, as "Chief Cornplanter Day" throughout this northwestern Pennsylvania community, unveiling permanent commemorations about this 18th – 19th century diplomat from the Seneca Nation.

The plaque reads: "Cornplanter (1738 – 1836), a defender of Seneca land and culture, allied the Iroquois Confederacy with the fledgling United States after fighting for the British during the American Revolution. He arbitrated conflicts between Native Americans and settlers, though he later became disillusioned when the Nations were not treated equally and fairly. In 1796, Cornplanter and his heirs were granted three tracts of land by the state, one at present-day Oil City."

Representatives of today's Seneca Nation were guest speakers and musicians/dancers at free public events introducing a new two-story outdoor mural as well as a blue/gold outdoor Commonwealth of Pennsylvania historical marker. Both the marker text and artwork for the mural were approved in advance by SNI leadership.

The historical marker is strategically placed along the Allegheny River and the Erie to Pittsburgh Multi-Use Trail, which draws tens of thousands of avid bicyclists every year.

Oil Region National Heritage Area
Pennsylvania | OilHeritage.org



The Oil Region National Heritage Area and our partners have worked recently with the Seneca Nation to honor their history within northwestern Pennsylvania. In 2017, a State Historical marker and building mural were dedicated in remembrance of Chief Cornplanter's impact on the region. This year, the Venango Museum's seasonal exhibit will focus on Native American history to better tell the legacy of the first peoples who inhabited the area, an important story which needs to be told more often.

Sacred Way Sanctuary

Across the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area, Sacred Way Sanctuary and other organizations including the Florence Indian Mound Museum, the Alabama Trail of Tears Association, Wild South, Oka Kapassa, and the Oakville Indian Mounds Museum and Education Center educate residents and visitors alike about indigenous people's history and experience. They also provide places for contemporary connection among people of different cultures. Valuing indigenous voices allows us to tell a more complete story of the MSNHA's past and is essential to healing the wounds left by colonization and the forced removal of indigenous people from our region.

On October 21, 2017, over four hundred people gathered at Sacred Way Sanctuary to celebrate the opening of their new museum and education center in Florence, Alabama. Years of work by Dr. Yvette Running Horse Collin and Sean Collin led up to this exciting event. The museum focuses on the relationship between native peoples of the Americas and the horse.

Over one hundred horses associated with many tribes from across the United States and Canada make up Sacred Way Sanctuary's foundation herd. These horses were gathered from across the country. At the Sanctuary they live in natural family herds consisting of a stallion and a group of mares. The horses help to tell a story that challenges the dominant narrative of conquest, which claims that all of the horses throughout the Americas died out during the last Ice-Age period and horses were reintroduced by the Spanish to the Americas. The oral histories brought forward by Dr. Collin under the guidance of elders from tribes across the country present a compelling counter narrative, which argues that the horse has always been in the Americas. The museum and sanctuary are part of the Native American Horse Trail, which includes sites in Oklahoma, the Dakotas, and Canada. Foals are available for adoption in breeding pairs or small herds.

The work of Sacred Way Sanctuary reminds us that listening to diverse perspectives is of the utmost importance – you never know what you might learn. It also demonstrates that history is not just found on the pages of books or in archives. The horses of Sacred Way have a history of their own.

Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area
Alabama | msnha.una.edu



Bridging a Historic Gap in Arizona

The mission of the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area is to restore the riverfront of the Lower Colorado River at Yuma, Arizona. So how is it that restoring an historic bridge could help make restoration happen?

There had been a historic divide between the Yuma community and the Quechan Indian Tribe—ever since the U.S. military took control of the Yuma Crossing away from the Quechan in the 1850's. Distrust and suspicion weighed heavily on the relationship.

Restoration was only going to happen through cooperation between the City and the Tribe, as more than 2/3 of the Yuma East Wetlands was tribal land. The East Wetlands project was also technically challenging, with soil salinity, restricted river flow, and a jungle of dense non-native vegetation covering the waterfront.

“It was going to be difficult to undertake a complex 400-acre restoration effort without close cooperation, and we had not yet earned the trust of the Quechan Tribe,” says Charles Flynn, Heritage Area Director.

Fortunately, Flynn was able to focus on another project that both City and Tribe very much wanted: the restoration and re-opening of the historic “Ocean to Ocean Highway Bridge”. Built in 1915, the bridge connected tribal land to downtown Yuma, but was closed in 1989 for structural deficiencies.

The Heritage Area moved ahead with design and secured \$1 million in grants but needed \$400,000 in local match. The City agreed to provide \$200,000 of the match but wanted the Tribe to enter into a complex Intergovernmental Agreement to assure the Tribe's share of the match. Flynn worried that an overly legalistic approach would hinder the growing trust among the parties. His worries were put to rest when the Tribe voluntarily provided a check of \$200,000, payable to the City of Yuma! “This was the moment when I knew we were building trust,” Flynn said.

Eighteen months later, tribal and city residents met on the bridge to celebrate the re-opening of the bridge which both literally and figuratively reconnected the communities. The partnership has grown ever stronger over the years.

Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area
Arizona | YumaHeritage.com



What is a partner? According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it is one associated with another especially in an action. Although I did not witness the events described here, I personally attest to the strength of the relationship that developed after the Tribe and the City took a chance at associating with one another, despite long-held differences. These reluctant partners took action, bringing about physical improvements to the benefit of a larger community encompassing both sides of a river. This story assures me that so long as we remain willing to occasionally put aside the mechanics of transactions and focus on meeting one another's needs, this relationship built by a bridge will endure.

—Brian Golding, Sr. (2020)

Director of Economic Development,
Quechan Indian Tribe | Chairman,
Board of Directors, Yuma Crossing
National Heritage Area

Indigenous Lens, Indigenous Narrative

On July 6, 2019, Northern Plains National Heritage Area (NPNHA) sponsored a Native Voices panel at Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park, where General Custer’s reconstructed home is located.

To reflect on this difficult chapter in U.S. History, NPNHA coordinated with United Tribes Technical College to invite Native historians and traditional knowledge keepers to partake in public dialog. Gerard Baker, an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation (MHA Nation), was the panel moderator. Additional panelists included Dakota Goodhouse (Standing Rock Sioux Nation), Donovan Sprague (Cheyenne River Sioux Nation), Loren Yellow Bird, Sr. (MHA Nation), Tamara St. John (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate/Nation), and Calvin Grinnell (MHA Nation).

During the Native Voices panel, tribal participants shared their perspectives on Native history. Loren Yellow Bird, Sr., said, “We do have a culture that’s still vibrant and that people need to know about.” Yellow Bird, also a military veteran, served as a cultural advisor to the 2015 film *The Revenant*, a story about fur trader Hugh Glass.

Baker drove Yellow Bird’s point home. “When George Custer came through here and later on when he took his trip to Little Bighorn, that was difficult times. One thing we have to do as an audience... is we need to learn how to listen...to the stories on both sides.” He asked the audience to “Listen to that wind. Listen to that river. Listen to the voices of the past that were up here. If we do that, we’ll have a lot better future.”

Northern Plains National Heritage Area
North Dakota | NorthernPlainsHeritage.org

The Northern Plains National Heritage Area regularly partners with Thunder Revolution Studios to document projects that involve indigenous heritage through an indigenous lens on the Missouri River in central North Dakota. Owner and enrolled tribal citizen Justin Deegan, whose self-described ancestry is Arikara and Oglala/Hunkpapa, said Thunder Revolution has opportunities to change tropes and stereotypes such as “poverty porn” that have become normalized from centuries of colonization. Deegan said there “is definitely a paradigm shift happening” in indigenous filmmaking and that “it’s important to support them and encourage their work.”

Below, Left: Native Voices panel discussion that took place at Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park on July 6, 2019 in the NPNHA.

Below: Justin Deegan on film location during an archaeological investigation at “Sakakawea Village,” Knife River Indian Village National Historic Site.





Preserving Our Stories, Respecting Our Past

At a curve along Alaska's Kenai River, known for silver salmon fishing and named for its color, Turquoise Bend was discovered to be an 800-year-old, semi-permanent winter village site of the Dena'ina Athabaskans. To the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, this site is not only a cultural landmark and direct link to their ancestral heritage, but also represents a deep spiritual connection to a place that represents a holistic way of life which has persisted for generations.

So what does one do, today, when such a sacred place is located on private property?

The Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area coordinated with many partners to address the challenges of preserving cultural heritage sites in a way that respects indigenous peoples while educating and assisting private land owners in protecting these places.

As a result of the initiative, elders, youth, landowners, and archaeologists teamed up to excavate the Dena'ina settlement site at Turquoise Bend. Teams used non-invasive Ground Penetrating Radar and discovered a semi-subterranean log home built to house multiple families. Their work also included surveying cultural plants, examining the condition of the river bank, and performing site restoration activities.

"There were some cultural differences that [landowners] were very willing to hear about, learn about, and work with. I feel like we could have a good conversation that was respectful of the land," said Joel Isaak, Cultural Coordinator of the Kenaitze Indian Tribe.

This project illustrates how members of various cultural communities can collaborate, listen, and be heard as the stories of our nation unfold.

The Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area's staff and board are committed to embracing diversity and will continue to find ways to tell the story of all people and events that have lived, worked, and made the mountains and valleys of our corridor home. Through our work we continue to strive to find ways to listen and learn from one another. By taking the time to engage in the discovery of different cultures and experiences, we are able to recognize injustices and thereby work towards solutions that make the world a better place and, in turn, make us better people.

**The Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm
National Heritage Area**

Alaska | KMTACorridor.org



Sharing Cultures for a Better Community

For more than a decade, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area (BRNHA) has provided seed monies to develop heritage and recreation assets for Hayesville, a town of 300 residents. This town was once known as Quanassee and was an important stop along Cherokee trading routes for hundreds of years.

The Clay County Communities Revitalization Association has created a Cherokee Homestead exhibit with replicas of winter and summer homes that the Cherokee lived in for thousands of years in this region. This exhibit is part of the Quanassee Path, an urban walking trail that showcases five separate Cherokee historic sites: the Cherokee Cultural Center in the library, the outdoor Cherokee Homestead Exhibit, Cherokee Botanical Sanctuary, Old Jail Museum, and the archaeological site at Spikebuck Mound.

The Cherokee Homestead exhibit has hosted more than 14,000 students connecting with fourth and sixth grade North Carolina curriculum. Students from all over the U.S. and from around the world have also learned about Cherokee heritage in Hayesville. Each fall, the exhibit is home to the annual Cherokee Heritage Festival, where visitors and locals alike learn about Cherokee culture through demonstrations, music, dance, food, and crafts. This cultural exchange culminates in a Friendship Dance with both Cherokee and festival goers participating.

“The work undertaken by the small town of Hayesville is quite profound,” said Angie Chandler, director of the Blue Ridge National Heritage. “Working in collaboration with the Eastern Band of Cherokee, Hayesville is

embracing and taking pride in its heritage and sharing it in a meaningful way with the rest of the world. What a great model for all of us to follow.”

Rob Tiger, a local merchant and community leader, has played a key role in the town’s revitalization efforts. He noted a key shift in how youngsters are taking pride in their heritage. “I was in a local school classroom recently and when I asked, around 30 percent of students raised their hands to claim Cherokee heritage. This is not something that would have happened when we started working on this project.”

Most recently, Hayesville’s 1888 courthouse was renovated and dedicated as the Beal Center to serve as an event space, craft market and small business center. The town square boasts a new Music Heritage sculpture, which marks Hayesville’s renovated Peacock Playhouse as a must-see stop on the regional Blue Ridge Music Trails, a Blue Ridge National Heritage Area initiative that aims to preserve and promote Western North Carolina’s traditional music. “The BRNHA has helped us to host a community theater, the quality of which rivals Atlanta, but where you feel like you know the artists and are listening to the stories of old friends,” says Mayor Harry Baughn.

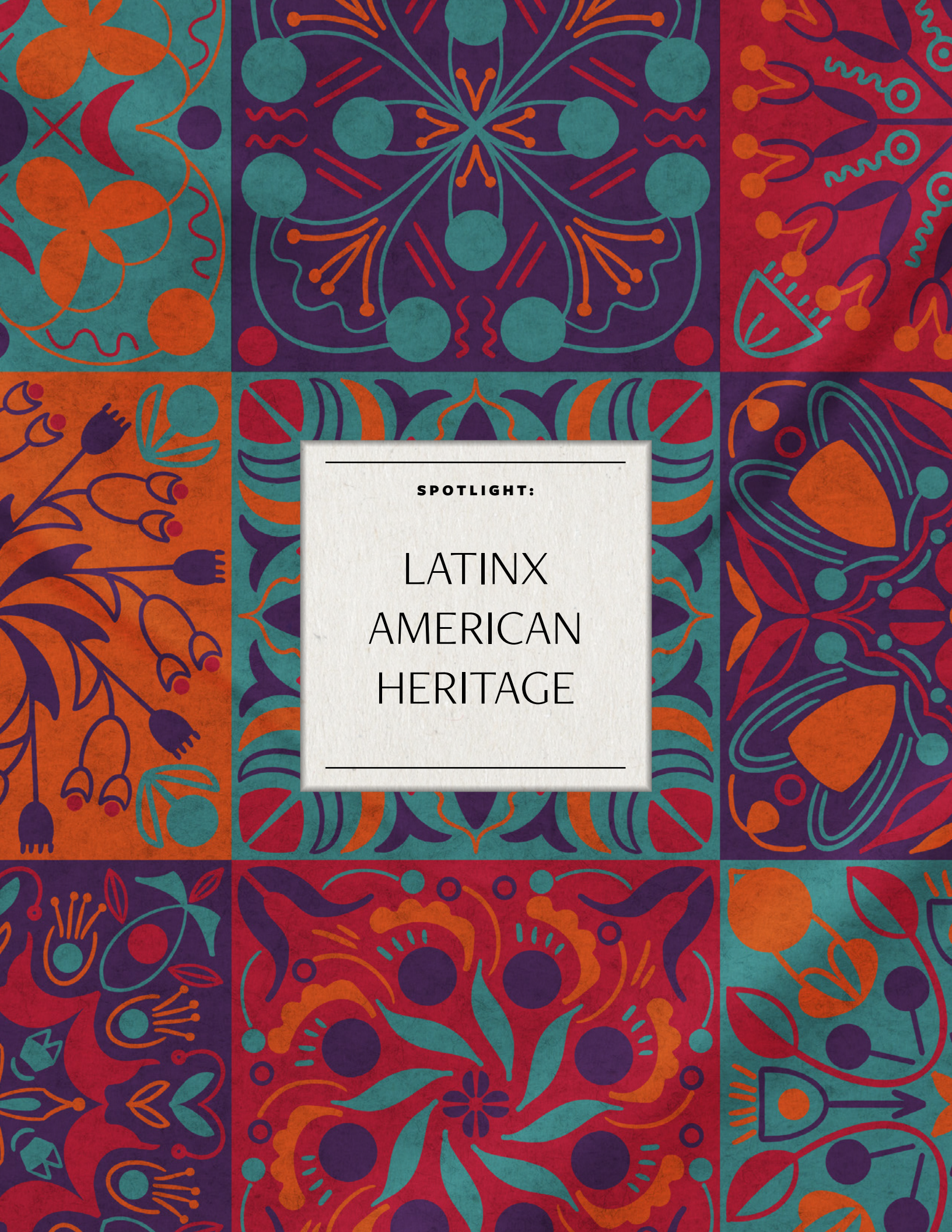
“Western North Carolina’s traditional music is a blend of Cherokee, European and African influences,” said Chandler. “Through the music we work to build bridges and goodwill to everyone.”

Blue Ridge National Heritage Area
North Carolina | BlueRidgeHeritage.com



“When you know who you are;
when your mission is clear,
and you burn with the inner fire
of unbreakable will; no cold
can touch your heart; no deluge
can dampen your purpose.
You know that you are alive.”

—**Chief Seattle, Duwamish**



SPOTLIGHT:

LATINX
AMERICAN
HERITAGE



Querencia Interrupted

The vast span of northern New Mexico that encompasses the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area has been a cradle of settlement and trade route for thousands of years, a mosaic of cultures, including the Jicarilla Apache, eight Tewa and Tiwa Native Pueblos, and communities established by the descendants of Spanish colonists who settled in the area 400 years ago.

The history, cultures and traditions still expressed in language and unique flavor of its foods, feasts, celebrations and demonstrations of tradition across mountainous, desert and valley communities; replete with artisans, craftsmen, quarters and tables as welcoming as the people that host them.

“Through history those men are heroes whose deeds have been given proper recognition by the historian’s pen. Others, whose lives are unrecorded, so far as posterity is concerned, did nothing, for of these our annals are silent and we know them not.”

—Gaspar Perez de Villagr , *Historia de la Nueva M xico*, 1610.

At the heart of community interaction is the recognition of story... the acknowledgement of participation... the honoring of contribution. Some events are minor; others can change the course of history.

During World War II, the U.S. government established the Manhattan Project (1942 to 1946). At its center were the project itself and the community of scientists and support teams that came together in a created village on an isolated mesa to create a weapon that would bring an end to the war. Many can recite the story of the bomb and the likes of Robert Oppenheimer and Enrico Fermi. The stories less told are those of the common local populace who helped create and maintain the project at the ground level.

After the explosion of the bomb at Trinity Site, one scientist asked, “What have we done?” The answer to that question would be worldwide change in global politics, the United States’ role in the world, and the beginning of a new atomic age.

At a local level, the project contributed to a significant change to the local culture. The established dependence on subsistence farming and occupations gave way to paid employment, daily travel outside of the community for work, and a new dependence on fixed wages. The growth of “the Lab” and the economic engine of Los Alamos also gave rise to new possibilities for education and technology, and for those who could not seek them, a deeper divide in income and social standing.

In October, 2017, the Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area joined with the Northern NM College to present the Historias de Nuevo Mexico conference. The conference theme was, “Querencia Interrupted: Hispano and Native American Experiences of the Manhattan Project.” Its purposes were to create a new dialogue —recognizing contributions of locals, allowing participants to share their own stories, opening the discussion of continuing issues, and honoring the surviving participants with a specially commissioned Story Protectors medal. The conference is propelling intercommunity discussion and the inclusion of local oral history profiles in documentation of the project.

Northern Rio Grande National Heritage Area
New Mexico | RioGrandeNHA.org



Supporting a Historic Mutual Aid Society

The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area and the History Colorado State Historic Fund will provide funding for the interior and exterior restoration and rehabilitation of the original La Sociedad Protección Mutua de Trabajadores Unidos (SPMDTU) headquarters in Conejos County, Colorado. The SPMDTU is the oldest Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States. It was founded in Antonito, a small town located in the southern part of the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, by Celedonio Mondragón and six others on November 26, 1900. In the mid-1900s, it had 65 concilios locales

(local councils), in small towns throughout southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, including three in Utah. After World War II, it had a total of 3,000 members. The SPMDTU began as a mutual aid organization that sought, through non-violent actions, to combat the exploitation of Hispanic workers by land barons, mine owners, and the railroads. This original SPMDTU meeting hall is listed in the “State Register of Historic Properties” and the “National Register of Historic Places” in the areas of Ethnic Heritage and Social History. Today, the organization is still active. Its concilios locales conduct monthly meetings and

functions, in order to further the organization’s vision. The SPMDTU is comprised of a diverse group of men and women committed to enriching Hispanic communities and families, with fund-raising efforts aimed at providing and enhancing community services. The Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area is home to Colorado’s oldest Hispano, agricultural and railroad communities. With over 11,000 years of documented human inhabitation, this is where Colorado began.

**Sangre de Cristo
National Heritage Area**
Colorado | SangreHeritage.org



“ We are confident.
We have ourselves.
We know how to sacrifice.
We know how to work.
We know how to combat
the forces that oppose us.
But even more than that,
we are true believers in
the whole idea of justice.
Justice is so much on our
side, that that is going to
see us through. ”

— Cesar Chavez





SPOTLIGHT:

AFRICAN
AMERICAN
HERITAGE





Damage to a store following the 1968 riots.

Rebuilding Baltimore:

A marriage of rich history, and an inspired future.

Tutwiler Quilters helps African American women use their skills of quilt-making to help support themselves and their families, as well as to preserve a quilting style that is indigenous to the African American people in the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (see page 20).

The Baltimore Heritage Area is steeped both in the history and future of race relations. Many civil rights figures got their start here: Congressman Elijah Cummings, Justice Thurgood Marshall, Juanita Jackson Mitchell, and Lillie Mae Carroll. Historical homes and institutions still stand today where you can gain an understanding of diverse experiences like the Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Park and the Lloyd Street Synagogue.

The 1968 race riots negatively impacted the business and entertainment community in Baltimore along Pennsylvania Avenue. Then again in 2015 another wave of destruction around race relations occurred in the same area after the death of Freddie Gray. The city was once again challenged with rebuilding

and archiving a difficult time in our history. The Heritage Area includes these neighborhoods and we are working with our partners to restore and breathe new life into these historical/cultural gems so that their legacy is not forgotten.

Today, Baltimore is actively marrying its civil rights lessons of the past with a look to what it wants its diversity plan to be in the future. The Heritage Area is working with heritage organizations, cultural institutions, neighborhoods and most importantly citizens to archive the story of race in the city, but also improving race relations through lectures, programs, grants and initiatives that look to heal the racial divide in the city as well.

Baltimore National Heritage Area
Maryland | ExploreBaltimore.org



Race Project KC

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area has undertaken a challenging task: interpreting our region’s divisive history of segregation and its legacy.

Helping us interpret that story is Race Project KC. It consists of a series of opportunities for high school students to learn Johnson County, Wyandotte County, and Jackson County’s history of racial segregation and how it continues to impact us today. The project has paired students from wealthier suburban schools and majority-minority schools in economically depressed areas.

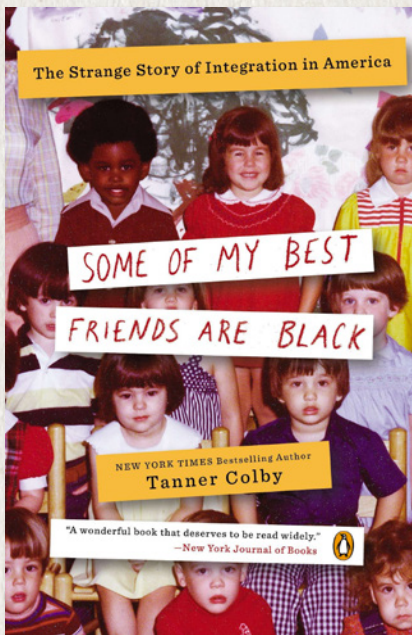
Students encounter experts on the topic, learn vocabulary for talking about race, and build relationships with peers they might not otherwise meet. The project gives students a chance to share their own unique stories, break down barriers between diverse groups of students, and use their diversity to understand collective strengths.

The catalyst for the project was the book *Some of My Best Friends are Black: The Strange Story of Integration in America* by Tanner Colby (2012). The book provides a history of Kansas City’s racial divide.

“It is our generation that will be the ones to do something about the division of economic status in the KC area. We will create steps to stop the economic and educational division,” said one Race Project student.

Even with the challenges of COVID-19, the Race Project KC connects teachers and students with tools to continue their exploration. Through a VoiceMap app tour called “Dividing Lines: A History of Segregation in Kansas City,” students guide users through the region’s uncomfortable history.

Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area
Kansas and Missouri | FreedomsFrontier.org



Declaring Independence: Then & Now

The winner of a prestigious Leadership in History Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History in 2019, “Declaring Independence: Then & Now” provides a forum for civic engagement within the 45 communities of the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area. Each performance, tailored to the community in which it is held, presents the Declaration of Independence within the unique historical context of its creation while offering insights into the document’s enduring meanings, challenges and relevancy for contemporary society.

What does the Declaration of Independence mean today, and what did it mean to citizens throughout the Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area when it was first conceived and debated during their lifetime? These are the questions considered in the public program “Declaring Independence: Then & Now.”

The program tells the story of people living within the 45 communities of the heritage area during the spring and summer of 1776 and portrays how they debated and celebrated the declaring of independence from Great Britain. Offered in partnership with community organizations, each presentation includes

a narrated reading of the Declaration of Independence, interspersed with the words spoken by local individuals as researched by citizen historians.

As the 18th century words and ideas are performed, the narrator explores their meaning to challenge the audience to consider the promises made in that foundational document through the lens of both the past and the present. Presentations are held in historic venues, often the same one in which the original discussions occurred.

“Declaring Independence: Then & Now” continues to evolve as each community explores its part in the story of American Independence and in our expanding aspirations for freedom and equality. Audiences are inspired and challenged by hearing the Declaration of Independence anew. Civic engagement and interest in our country’s founding principles are high, and Declaring Independence provides an interactive forum in which to explore both.

Freedom’s Way National Heritage Area

Massachusetts And New Hampshire | Freedomsway.org



Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership



The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MDNHA) collaborated with The Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University to create the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership. In 2015 and 2016, the partnership organized 16 community gatherings interpreting and celebrating the lives of African American church mothers from the Mississippi Delta featured in Alysia Burton Steele's book *Delta Jewels: In Search of My Grandmother's Wisdom*. The community gatherings engaged over 1,000 Mississippi Delta residents, visitors, and supporters in honoring the Delta Jewels church mothers and their unheard stories of surviving sharecropping, the Jim Crow Era, and the Civil Rights Movement through family, education, activism, and faith.

All 54 Delta Jewels church mothers featured in the book received certificates of appreciation from U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson, the longest serving African American elected official in the state of Mississippi's history and host of the Congressional Black Caucus Political Education and Leadership Institute held

annually in the Mississippi Delta. In addition, the MDNHA and The Delta Center received 2016 National Park Service Centennial Awards for engaging underrepresented populations including youth, the elderly, and African Americans.

MDNHA Executive Director Rolando Herts was clearly inspired by Alysia Burton Steele's book, *Delta Jewels: In Search of My Grandmother's Wisdom*, a collection of oral histories and portraits of African American church mothers from the Mississippi Delta. Church mothers are revered in their communities. Appointed by their church pastors based on years of dedication, study of the Bible, worship, and prayer, church mothers counsel families and youth and model good spiritual practices. The Delta Jewels church mothers, in particular, did this in the face of racial discrimination during the Jim Crow Era and social upheavals of the Civil Rights Movement.

The MDNHA created venues to share these stories throughout the Delta—the very communities where the Delta Jewels church mothers have lived for decades.

Collaborating with The Delta Center at Delta State University, the MDNHA arranged a series of community gatherings featuring the author and the Delta Jewels church mothers in Clarksdale, Charleston, Indianola, Yazoo City, Ruleville, and Mound Bayou. "This remarkable group of strong women inspired me with their wisdom and humor," commented Dr. Myrtis Tabb, Chair of the MDNHA Board of Directors.

These initial community gatherings fostered even more presentations throughout the Heritage Area, the state of Mississippi, and the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, DC, engaging over 1,000 participants. The significance of this project is best noted engaging the Mississippi Delta's diverse communities in the process of finding, saving, telling, experiencing their own stories, as well as promoting increased awareness of and pride in Mississippi Delta cultural heritage regionally and nationally

**Mississippi Delta
National Heritage Area**

Mississippi | MSDeltaHeritage.com

Saving the Mother Trinity Church

Glowing in the torchlight, the faces of 125 enslaved people shone with piety and excitement. As they made their way through the darkened streets of Augusta, Georgia that night in 1840, no one in the procession could have known they were lighting the way to the birth of a major religious denomination.

Augusta's historic Mother Trinity Church, the birthplace of the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, has many stories to tell. Yet, after 158 years of worship at its original location near the banks of the Augusta Canal, the Trinity congregation abandoned their historic sanctuary. The reason: contamination from a defunct manufactured gas plant had poisoned the ground beneath the church. In 1997 Atlanta Gas Light Company bought the church property, the congregation rebuilt and relocated, and Mother Trinity stood empty for almost twenty years. It became clear the utility planned to demolish the old building.

The Augusta Canal National Heritage Area (ACNHA) stepped in, spearheading the "Save Mother Trinity" initiative. With guidance from Partners for Sacred Places (a national non-profit that specializes in repurposing of historic worship spaces) ACNHA convened more than fifty community stakeholders to look at how the church could be reused for a meaningful, sustainable purpose. "But first and foremost, we needed to save and stabilize the structure," explained ACNHA Executive Director Dayton Sherrouse.

The clock was ticking. The gas company was under orders to clean up the property by 2019. As an alternative to demolition, ACNHA sought permission to move the structure onto an adjacent parcel, but the gas company resisted. Finally, a formal mediation between the company and Augusta's Historic Preservation Commission yielded an agreement; the gas company would deed both the church and nearby land to the Augusta Canal Authority (ACNHA's management organization) and contribute \$300,000 toward the cost of relocation—provided the move was completed by mid-June 2018.

After disproving the naysayer's attitude that it couldn't be moved, the Augusta Canal NHA successfully moved to a new location the Historic Trinity Church in 2018. The church, built in 1848, represented the birthplace of the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, referred to as the Mother Church of the denomination. The denomination was started in 1840 where slaves



and free blacks originally worshiped in the St. John United Methodist Church. The move of the historic church was required to save it from demolition to enable the Gas Company to remediate contaminated soil underneath the church. Since the move, the NHA has employed an architect to complete a Historic Structure Report including recommendations for the ultimate renovation. We unsuccessfully attempted to obtain a grant under the National Trust's African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund. We continue to raise funds for the renovation of the church.

**Augusta Canal
National Heritage Area**
Georgia | AugustaCanal.com

SLAVERY, RESISTANCE & COMMUNITY:

The 2018 Slave Dwelling Conference

In 2018, the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (TCWNHA) and the Slave Dwelling Project co-hosted the 5th Annual Slave Dwelling Conference. The conference's theme, "Slavery, Resistance, and Community," remains as relevant today as it was during the Civil War and Reconstruction, as the events of 2020 reflect how much work remains for our nation.

The TCWNHA's commitment to building inclusive relationships with diverse communities remains the bedrock of our mission to tell the "whole story" of the Civil War and Reconstruction, partnering together to help those communities preserve and share their stories of slavery, emancipation, and resistance that continued long after the fighting ended.



The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (TCWNHA) has expanded beyond conventional battlefield history to tell the "whole story" of the Civil War. To that end, we partnered with the Slave Dwelling Project (SDP), which delves into the stories of slavery, emancipation, and resistance that continued long after the fighting ended. Partnering with Joseph McGill and his SDP team, we presented the 5th Annual Slave Dwelling Conference, hosted at Middle Tennessee State University.

The SDP's mission is to identify and preserve extant slave dwellings. By combining the TCWNHA's initiatives to document and preserve Tennessee's diverse Civil War experiences with the SDP's vision, this multi-day conference became a national venue filled with speakers, discussions, and opportunities to connect.

Sessions blended scholarly research with grass-roots projects. Highlights included an art exhibit and a heart-stirring concert by the internationally renowned Fisk Jubilee Singers. We also brought in Pulitzer Prize-winning author Colson Whitehead, author of *The Underground Railroad*. Free and open to the public, Whitehead's keynote address captivated the audience, by turns hilarious, painfully honest, and thought-provoking.

Two full days of sessions culminated at Bradley Academy, an African American historic school and long-term TCWNHA partner, for an overnight experience that forms the foundation of the SDP. Wrapping up with tours at Clover Bottom (a historic home with slave dwellings that houses Tennessee's SHPO), Fort Negley (a Union fort in Nashville built primarily by contraband labor), and the Hermitage (Andrew Jackson's plantation in Nashville), attendees from across the nation experienced the diversity of the TCWNHA's and the SDP's missions firsthand.

Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area

Tennessee | TnCivilWar.org

Savoring Gullah Geechee Culture

A group of chefs and their guests recently came together on a Johns Island, South Carolina farm owned by third-generation Gullah Geechee farmer, Joseph Fields. Chef B.J. Dennis served traditional Gullah Geechee dishes like okra soup and Charleston red rice. A pit barbecue held a whole lamb and pig sourced from neighboring Wadmalaw Island. Many at the dinner were familiar with the dishes but likely knew less about the deep relationship between their Gullah Geechee hosts and their land.



The Gullah Geechee are direct descendants of people who came from sophisticated agricultural societies along Africa's west coast. Trafficked across the Atlantic into Charleston and Savannah, the enslaved brought their knowledge of tidal rice cultivation, enabling the region to grow wealthy.

Tidal rice cultivation flourished once West African technology was introduced. Intricate systems of canals, dikes, sluices, and trunks redirected fresh water as it was pushed upstream by rising tides. While slaves worked in mosquito-filled swamps where malaria and yellow fever flourished, absentee European planters spent their time in the pine lands and cities. This led to highly "Africanized" plantations, where the enslaved managed the rice production under the direction of a white overseer.

The Gullah Geechee are best understood through their relationship to the land. After slavery ended, family farms were often the primary source of income. Gullah Geechee land owners were able to develop a self-sustaining economy based on the small-scale production of cotton, subsistence agriculture, and truck farming supplemented with harvesting shrimp and oysters. As a result, many were able to avoid the hazards of tenant farming and sharecropping.

For centuries, the Gullah Geechee have resided along the coasts of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. Their ancestors, though all West African, were culturally, linguistically, and spiritually diverse. Over time, a new creole culture and language—now known as Gullah Geechee—emerged on these isolated island and coastal plantations and is one of the great, foundational cultures of the United States. Here you will find hand-crafted sweetgrass baskets that reflect ancient weaving traditions; century-old praise houses hosting "ring shouts" (the oldest surviving African-American performance tradition); and dishes that connect today's Gullah Geechee chefs to the cook pots of their ancestors. And here you will find acres of rice fields—silent and verdant memorials to the unfathomable sacrifices and inspiring perseverance of the Gullah Geechee people.



There is an old Gullah Geechee saying, "mus tek cyare de root fuh heal de tree." We must take care of the roots to heal the tree. Running through all of our contemporary challenges around race, policing, and the killing of African-American people is the common thread of our American experience with slavery, Reconstruction and segregation. It is a history that has burdened African Americans differently and one not always collectively well-understood. The killings of Ahmaud Arbery and at Mother Emanuel AME Church happened in our heritage area, instantly turning Brunswick, Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina into focal points for our enduring conversations around inequality and racial injustice. Deeply rooted in our Lowcountry landscape are stories of centuries of a Gullah Geechee quest for freedom, equality and justice — a battle that continues.

Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor
South Carolina | GullahGeecheeCorridor.org

A Promise Fulfilled

After over a decade of preservation efforts, landmarks of African-American history within the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area have been saved for future generations. The Lyon Farmhouse (the oldest homestead in DeKalb County and the place where members of the historic Flat Rock community were enslaved prior to the Civil War) has been stabilized after months of renovations. Up the road, the ground where the enslaved and their ancestors are buried has also been protected: an easement has been placed on the land surrounding the Flat Rock slave cemetery and the historic processional path leading to their resting place.

A well-worn, hand-written land deed from 1925 sits in an archive. It shows the transfer of 45 acres for \$600 in DeKalb County, Georgia. This slip of paper seems unremarkable, but it reflects a promise that continues to be fulfilled today through the partnership of the Flat Rock Archives and the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance.

It wasn't the purchase that was remarkable, but the purchaser—T. A. Bryant, Sr. His acquisition of 45 acres of red Georgia clay freed him from the bounds of sharecropping. It was the beginning of a promise to sustain, nourish, and preserve Flat Rock, one of the oldest African American communities in Georgia. Over 40 years, Mr. Bryant sold nearly 30 parcels of land to community members so they could have a stake in the South while many fled to northern cities during the Great Migration.

The Archives and the Alliance ensure that Bryant's promise endures, and is celebrated.

Lyon Farmhouse Stabilization The oldest and only remaining intact homestead in DeKalb County, the Lyon Farm was built by a Revolutionary War veteran after the Creek secession in 1821. The vernacular house reflects the westward expansion of a new nation and nearly two centuries of white settlement; slavery and emancipation; reconstruction and Civil Rights. More than a decade of advocacy has resulted in over \$500,000 in funds to preserve the historic farmhouse. Through a cadre of local and national partners, the Alliance led the stabilization efforts and continues to support Archive-led tours of the grounds, farmhouse and slave quarters. The Flat Rock community, still thriving today, has attracted people from across the country, as well as tourists from Europe, Canada and New Zealand.



Flat Rock Slave Cemetery Preservation

Obscured by trees on a high ridge, sits a parcel of land marked by simple fieldstones. This is Flat Rock Historic Slave Cemetery. Generations walked a worn quarter-mile dirt path to bury their dead. For years due to incomplete property records, the heavily sloped tract was threatened by insensitive development. While the racism and inequality that plague African Americans in life are perpetuated in death, cemeteries remain power places of rich history and earthed potential. The Alliance and the Archives worked closely with local government to secure the land and permanently deed it to the Archives, where this story will be shared with future generations.

Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area
Georgia | ArabiaAlliance.org



“There is no singular story that tells the entirety of the Underground Railroad history. In fact, there are tens of thousands of stories. The stories we share are of those hundreds of the heretofore unknown men and women who formed the foundational support for those who had successfully traversed the long distances from slavery to Niagara Falls with one more river to cross to freedom, the mighty Niagara. The Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center encourages visitors to share their personal experiences with freedom, oppression, and injustice, by prompting people to think critically about how we as a society should address these issues today.”

Bill Bradberry, Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission (2020)

A Boundary Between Slavery & Freedom

For centuries, Niagara Falls has captured people’s hearts and imaginations. It has been long recognized as a natural phenomenon that is considered awe-inspiring and majestic. However, the sheer power of Niagara Falls goes far beyond the Falls themselves. For those escaping slavery in the American South, the Niagara River, presented a final boundary before entering Canada.

The United States was founded on the ideal that “all men are created equal.” Yet four million people lived in slavery in the United States in 1860. Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, thousands of people fled enslavement to find new

lives of freedom, often crossing the Niagara River into Canada at several access points within the City of Niagara Falls.

African American hotel waiters formed the core of Underground Railroad activism in Niagara Falls providing a network of assistance for freedom seekers who arrived seeking a safe passage across the border. Within the flourishing hotel and tourism industry, African American waiters lived double lives, openly serving hotel guests and secretly helping freedom seekers cross into Canada.

Their effort made Niagara Falls one of the most important locations of the powerful struggle between slavery and freedom.

In May 2018, the much-anticipated Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Center opened. The Heritage Center reveals authentic stories of Underground Railroad freedom seekers and abolitionists in Niagara Falls and inspires visitors to recognize modern injustices that stem from slavery and take action toward an equitable society.

The Heritage Center is a project of the Niagara Falls Underground Railroad Heritage Commission, in partnership with the Niagara Falls National Heritage Area.

**Niagara Falls
National Heritage Area**

New York | [Discoverniagara.org](https://www.discoverniagara.org)



SPOTLIGHT:

ASIAN
AMERICAN
HERITAGE

National Heritage Areas Need Your Support

In 1984, a new concept that married heritage preservation and tourism with economic revitalization through public-private partnerships was born. Today, 55 National Heritage Areas across the country enable

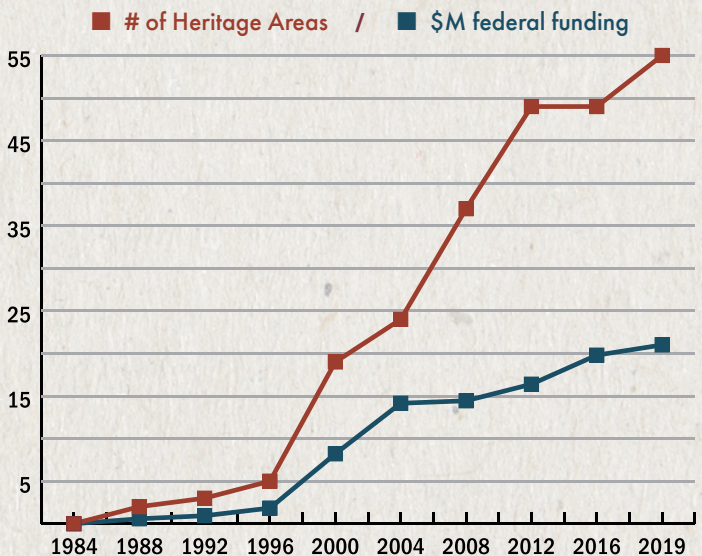
locally-driven projects and programs to preserve heritage and create jobs without any increase in federal land ownership. Nationwide, NHAs leverage a modest federal investment (\$21 million in 2019) to generate over \$12 billion in economic activity annually.

But we have a challenge: 30 National Heritage Areas require reauthorization in 2021. In response, the Alliance of National Heritage has worked with Congressman Paul Tonko (D-NY) and Congressman Dave McKinley (R-WV) on programmatic legislation that establishes standardized criteria, ensures accountability, and promotes long-term sustainability for NHAs. With more than 200 House co-sponsors, H.R. 1049 was approved unanimously in 2019 by the House Committee on Natural Resources. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Pat Roberts (R-KS) have introduced companion legislation in the Senate (S. 3217).

Time is of essence to preserve this cost-effective program which matches more than \$5 in non-federal funds for every

federal dollar invested. The economic fallout of COVID-19 makes the work of NHAs in rural and economically disadvantaged communities more important than ever.

In addition, federal funding has not kept pace with the needs of this growing program. As demonstrated by the chart below, between 2004 and 2019, the number of National Heritage Areas increased by 129%, while federal funding has increased by only 39%.



To learn more about National Heritage Areas, visit our website at NationalHeritageAreas.us or email us at AllianceOfNHAs@gmail.com

To join the Congressional caucus on National Heritage Areas, please contact:

Emily Dubovny Silverberg
Legislative Assistant, Rep. Paul Tonko
Emily.Silverberg@mail.house.gov | 202-225-5076

Kaitlin Brown
Legislative Assistant, Rep. David McKinley
Kaitlin.Brown@mail.house.gov | 202-225-4172