



Request for Proposals: **Creating a Black and Native American Heritage Trail in the Hudson Highlands** *June 2021*

Summary

The Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Inc. (HHLT) is laying the groundwork for a heritage trail that will amplify important stories about the Black and Native American people who have shaped the landscape and history of the Hudson Highlands.

HHLT seeks to hire a qualified consultant/researcher to uncover and research these important stories, with a focus on eastern Putnam County, NY, in this initial phase. The consultant/researcher will then use these research findings to create content for the heritage trail. The consultant will be expected to complete research and content development for the heritage trail by December 2021.

HHLT is committed to the values of equity, including diversity and inclusion, and seeks researchers who have experience conducting research through that lens. Proposals in response to this RFP are due by **July 16, 2021**.

About HHLT

Founded in 1989, HHLT protects and preserves natural resources and scenic beauty in the heart of the New York Highlands, where the Appalachian Mountains cross the Hudson River. A place of dramatic scenic beauty, the Highlands is rich in unique ecosystems and biodiversity, providing critical habitat for at-risk wildlife and plant species. The New York Highlands are part of the federally designated Highlands Region, as defined in the U.S. Highlands Conservation Act (HCA), which recognizes the national significance of this region.

Located less than 50 miles north of New York City, our region attracts millions of visitors each year, and development pressures are on the rise. We accomplish our mission to protect and preserve the Highlands with a four-pronged strategy:

(1) Land Conservation and Stewardship: HHLT has permanently conserved thousands of acres of critical habitat, natural landscapes, and scenic resources. We work with private landowners on conservation agreements that limit future development, the outright purchase of land, and the facilitation of land acquisitions by other conservation organizations along with federal, state and local agencies. We also own and manage the 400-acre Granite Mountain Preserve in Putnam County.

(2) Public Policy and Municipal Planning: We partner with local municipalities on creating natural resource and open space inventories, to guide a thoughtful balance between development and conservation.

(3) Conservation Outreach, Education, and Environmental Justice: We build public support for natural resource protection through outreach and education. Recognizing the need to amplify the stories of



Communities of Color in the NY Highlands, we are committed to promoting more projects that are relevant to all people, especially those who were historically excluded.

4) New York Highlands Network: HHLT convenes and coordinates this coalition of 16 conservation organizations and government agencies working to increase the pace and inclusivity of conservation across the New York Highlands.

Project Background

Across the U.S., the conservation community is taking responsibility for making land conservation more inclusive. Like many land trusts, HHLT was formed in the 1980s with a mission to protect natural resources, scenic beauty and rural character in our region. As we evolve as an organization, we acknowledge the inequities in past conservation work, and we are dedicated to promoting more projects with relevance to people of all backgrounds, especially those who have been historically excluded.

On June 5, 2020, HHLT issued a statement about racial inequity and highlighted the need to amplify the stories of Communities of Color in the Hudson Highlands. We made a commitment to use our platforms to share and amplify stories of and from People of Color who have shaped the landscape and history of the Hudson Highlands. In the fall of 2020, HHLT launched the *Relearning Highlands History* blog series (hhl.org/relearning-highlands-history) to deliver on that promise.

Now a year after *Relearning Highlands History* was first envisioned, HHLT would like to take the series one step further and bring some of these important stories “to life” by creating a digital heritage trail that will highlight sites relevant to the history of Black and Native Americans in the Hudson Highlands.

This digital heritage trail, as envisioned, will take visitors on an educational journey that winds temporally through original human history on this landscape to the present, and geographically from Peekskill to Beacon. When completed, this heritage trail east of the Hudson River will complement the existing African American Heritage Trail of Westchester County to the south, and the Dutchess County Equality Trail to the north. (The latter trail is currently under development through a partnership between the Mid-Hudson Antislavery Project and Dutchess County Historical Society.) Like these other regional heritage trails, the Hudson Highlands trail will provide opportunities for historical and environmental education, as well as inspiration for conservation action.

We have identified several potential focal points or “stops” along the trail:

- **Frederick Philipse Estate and Beverley Robinson House:** The homes of Frederick Philipse, and Col. Beverley Robinson and Susanna Philipse, were located along current Route 9D in Garrison. The Philipses were major enslavers and slave traders in colonial New York.
- **Villages of the Nochpeem:** One of the chieftaincies of the Wappinger Tribe, the homes of these Native American people were located north of Anthony’s Nose in Garrison.
- **Nimham Mountain:** A 1,054-acre Multiple Use Area located in Kent and named after Chief Daniel Nimham, who challenged to the Philipse Patent, covering what is now Putnam County.



- **Larksbury/Lawson Cemetery:** Black journalist, political activist and community leader Sumner Lark created Larksbury, an African American community and cemetery, on 200 acres in Putnam Valley in the 1920s. When Mr. Lark died in 1931, control passed to Bishop Robert Lawson, a Harlem religious leader who spoke at the first March on Washington along with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. At least 300 people were buried at this cemetery, including Mr. Lark and Bishop Lawson.
- **Snowdale Farm:** This Patterson resort, run by the Moran family, was part of a flourishing recreational tourism industry for African Americans in the 1920-30s.
- **Tone's Pond:** Tonetta Lake in Southeast was home to a fisherman's resort, run by Tone Seeley, an enslaved man manumitted (or released from slavery) after his service in the American Revolutionary War.

HHLT is seeking to hire a qualified consultant/researcher to uncover and fully research these important stories about people and the land, and use those research findings to create content for the heritage trail.

The consultant will research historic sites in and near Putnam County, initially focusing on the above stories and other potential properties along the Hudson River from Peekskill to Beacon. They will work closely with HHLT, researchers, historians, local museums/archives and Communities of Color to identify key historical figures, locations, land issues, and stories to share through the trail. The digital heritage trail will also draw from the stories told through the *Relearning Highlands History* series.

Research and content development for the heritage trail will be completed in 2021, with the implementation of the trail anticipated in 2022-2023.

Once established, the digital heritage trail will make important stories and historic sites accessible forever, providing educational content on the Black and Native American history of the area for generations to come. Our hope is that the trail will inspire visitors not only from local communities, but also from across the country and around the world, to learn, or *relearn*, Hudson Highlands history.

Scope of Services

The consultant/researcher for the heritage trail project will:

- Work closely with Ashley Rauch, HHLT's Community Engagement Manager and Project Manager for the heritage trail project, to define a detailed workplan and timeline for the project, with specific deliverables and outcomes, based on the tasks and deliverables outlined below.
- Attend monthly planning/progress meetings with the Project Manager via Zoom.
- Conduct extensive research, both online and through local museums, archives and other credible sources, to identify key historical figures, locations, land issues, and stories for potential inclusion along the heritage trail.



Initial research should focus on the locations listed above under “Project Background,” and then expand as new potential stops are identified in collaboration with the Project Manager, with a goal of identifying and researching/documenting up to 15 stops for inclusion along the trail.

Local museums/archives at which research may be conducted include, but are not limited to: Putnam History Museum, Putnam County Historian’s Office, Beacon Historical Society, and Peekskill Museum. Online sources that should be explored include the New York Slavery Records Index at John Jay College and Columbia University’s Slavery Archives.

- Review the *Relearning Highlands History Series* to glean information that can be used for the heritage trail.
- Throughout the research process, collect historic images/photographs, audio/video files, graphics, and any other media that can enhance the descriptions for each stop along the digital heritage trail.
- Identify and interview sources involved in or familiar with the stories/stops to supplement information gathered through the research phase.
- Visit historic sites, when feasible, to assess if they should be included along the heritage trail, and document each site with photographs.
- In collaboration with the Project Manager, with potential input from members of HHLT’s Equity Committee, prioritize stops and then determine the ideal “route” and format (webpage, mobile app, PDFs, GIS StoryMap etc.) for the digital heritage trail.
- In collaboration with both the Project Manager and HHLT’s Land Team, which has significant GIS expertise, create a map of the Hudson Highlands depicting the digital heritage trail’s route and locations using ArcGIS.
- Using research findings and information gleaned through interviews, draft text to describe each stop along the heritage trail route. This text should be written to appeal to a broad audience with varying levels of expertise.
- Help secure rights for any images and audio/video files that will be used for the digital heritage trail that are not in the public domain.

Deliverables

The consultant/researcher will submit the following deliverables as part of completing this project, within the suggested time table (specific deadlines will be determined at the start of the project):

- Google Drive or DropBox folder containing all research findings and image/audio/video files, organized by story/stop, due on or before September 30, 2021. This should include recordings and/or notes from any interviews conducted.



- Prioritized list of stops for the heritage trail, determined in collaboration with the Project Manager, on or before October 15, 2021.
- Draft of text descriptors for each stop, paired with compelling image/audio/video files, due on or before November 15, 2021.
- GIS map of heritage trail route and locations, due on or before November 30, 2021.
- Final descriptors for each stop, incorporating HHLT feedback, on or before December 15, 2021.

Minimum Qualifications

The consultant/researcher should have the following qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree
- Previous experience conducting historical research, ideally in Black and/or Native American history
- Familiarity with and interest in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice issues
- Familiarity with communities within the Hudson Highlands, and urban areas to the north and south (Peekskill, Beacon, Newburgh)
- Strong writing skills and interpersonal abilities

Please note that HHLT is committed to the values of equity, including diversity and inclusion, and we seek consultants/researchers who have experience conducting research through that lens.

Submitting a Proposal

Anyone interested in applying for this research project should submit a formal written proposal that includes the following elements, which should be combined into a single PDF file for submission:

- **Contact Information**
- **Project Narrative:** Please briefly describe the research process/approach you would use for this project and a suggested schedule for completion.
- **Qualifications:** Please include your relevant experience and comparable past projects. This can be submitted in the form of a resume or curriculum vitae.
- **References:** Please include contact information for at least two professional references.
- **Cost of Services:** Please indicate the anticipated cost of completing the project, including costs for labor, travel, research supplies, and printing. Note that HHLT has budgeted between \$8,000 - \$12,000 for this project, so consultant expenses should fall within this range.

Proposals should be short and simple, providing a straightforward and concise description of the consultant's qualifications and capabilities to satisfy the requirements of this RFP. Proposals will be evaluated for selection based on the project narrative and the experience and qualifications of the applicant.



All proposals must be received via email no later than **Friday, July 16, 2021**.

Please submit electronic proposals to:

Ashley Rauch
Community Engagement Manager
Hudson Highlands Land Trust
ashley.rauch@hhlt.org

Questions

Applicants are invited to submit any questions they may have on the project or RFP ahead of the proposal deadline to Ashley Rauch as *ashley.rauch@hhlt.org*.