



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Senator Shelley Mayer join for a virtual tour of Westchester African American Heritage Trail sites

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS February 15, 2022

| ISSUE: **CARL KRUGER**

Westchester County, NY – Throughout Black History Month on Facebook, **State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** and **State Senator Shelley Mayer** are exploring nine historic sites in their Senate districts that are part of the Westchester African American Heritage Trail. Facebook users can follow along using the hashtag [#WestchesterAAHT](#) or visit the pages of [Senator Stewart-Cousins](#) or [Senator Mayer](#).

“Westchester is steeped in African American History and the county’s Heritage Trail is home to several important sites that tell many of those stories. Together, they create a roadmap to help people discover the rich African American culture in our communities,” said **State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins**.

“I’m proud to highlight locations on the African American Heritage Trail with **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** during Black History Month. I hope it will inspire residents of the 35th and 37th Senate Districts to explore the rich history of African Americans in Westchester County,” said **State Senator Shelley B. Mayer**.

Below is the content of the Black History Month social media posts and the dates that they appeared or will appear on Facebook.

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February 3:

Philipse Manor Hall State Historic Site in Yonkers is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It was a major component of the vast 52,000-acre Philipsburg Manor and served as the estate's Lower Mill complex. The business records of Frederick Philipse, along with his wife, Margaret Hardenbroeck, were deeply involved in both the trading and holding of enslaved people. In 1868, the building became Yonkers' municipal center (as Village Hall, and later as City Hall) and remained such until 1908.

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February 7:

The African American Cemetery in Rye was deeded to the town by Underhill and Elizabeth Halsted on June 27, 1860. Although many do not have headstones or formal markers, an estimated 300 people are buried at the cemetery, including African American veterans from the Civil War through World War II.

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February 10:

Villa Lewaro is the estate built in 1918 for Madam C.J. Walker, an African American hair care entrepreneur, philanthropist, and activist who was the first female self-made millionaire in the U.S. Walker died just one year after moving into the Irvington estate, but her legacy lived on for decades. Her daughter, A'Lelia would live there for years, and the home was often a meeting place for the artists and intellectuals who fueled the Harlem Renaissance. Designed by Vertner Tandy, the first black architect registered in New York, Villa Lewaro was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976.

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February 14:

The Jay Heritage Center in Rye was home of Founding Father John Jay and several generations of free and enslaved people. Jay was a founder and president of the Manumission Society of New York, which advocated for the abolition of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. He also helped establish the first African Free Schools to educate children of emancipated men and women.

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February 15:

John Jay established a homestead for himself and his family in Katonah, where both free and enslaved Africans worked. In 1799, as Governor of New York, he signed the Gradual Emancipation Act into law.

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February 17:

The Foster Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church is the oldest black church in Westchester County. Congregants first met in a room above a Tarrytown confectionery until the church's brick building on nearby Wildey Street opened in 1865. Organized by Amanda and Henry Foster, Foster AME Zion was the center of black social life in the Tarrytown area and a stop on the Underground Railroad. Escaped slaves attempting to reach Canada or deciding to settle locally were provided with food, shelter and support by members of the congregation.

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February 22:

African American art has been an important feature of the Neuberger Museum at Purchase College. Opened in 1974, the museum's collection nearly doubled in 1999 when 153 works were gifted from the collection of Lawrence Gussman.

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February 24:

"The First Lady of Jazz, Ella Fitzgerald" sculpture stands with its arms open as if performing to the passersby at the Yonkers Metro North Railroad Station. Sculpted in bronze by African American artist Vinnie Bagwell in 1996, it commemorates Yonkers native Ella Fitzgerald's contributions to American music during a time when the entrance for even the most well-known African-American performers at white-owned clubs was through the back door.

February 28:

After the Revolutionary War, emancipated people settled in the stony hills where Harrison, North Castle and White Plains meet. “The Hills” was evidence of an emerging free African American class in early Westchester County with their presence documented through various documents. Stony Hill Cemetery in Harrison is the last identifiable element of the community.