

## INTRODUCTION

### A Long Time Coming

On a lovely summer day in 2008, I had the pleasure of hosting Robert and Barbara Lewis at the Joseph Lloyd Manor site in Lloyd Harbor, New York, where I was leading an archaeological excavation. Lloyd Manor is the home of the well-known African American poet and author Jupiter Hammon, as well as a number of other enslaved men and women who were owned and overseen by the prominent Lloyd family in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Our excavations focused on exposing the architectural remains and cultural layers associated with an outbuilding depicted on an early hand-drawn illustration of the property. We were looking to see if any of the evidence from the excavation would show the building was a residence for enslaved persons, perhaps even the home of Jupiter Hammon. An educated and literate person of African descent, Hammon must have stood out to the owners who had known him since birth. It would have made sense for him to have a separate home on the site, where space was not in short supply. That said, the manor house was large enough and conspicuously segregated internally to suggest that at least some enslaved people lived there. Unfortunately, while the archaeological deposits clearly indicate that the small outbuilding was used for domestic purposes, since it contained mostly kitchen-related artifacts, there was not enough evidence to confirm it was occupied by people of color. Therefore, this question remains unanswered.

Nevertheless, the site proved to be a fascinating object for people across Long Island and beyond. Too few people know about the important works of Jupiter Hammon, whose writings were a major contribution to the first generation of African American authors (alongside those of Phyllis Wheatley and Lucy Terry Prince). The fact that an archaeological project researching the possible site of Hammon's home was open to view inspired hundreds of first-time visitors to Lloyd Manor, the bulk of them people of color. Though we offered site tours

and coordinated special events with speakers on African American history and archaeology, we heard most often that the main attraction was the chance to visit an ancestral African heritage site and to commune with this history.

This heritage was one reason the Lewises came to the site, and they were among the many that told us how impressed they were with the memories that seem to come from the ground. Yet they came that day also because they were interested in learning more about the possibilities of archaeology. I had first met Robert Lewis a couple weeks before at a historic preservation award ceremony for a mutual friend, Charla Bolton. Charla and Robert worked together in 2005 to establish the Bethel–Christian Avenue–Laurel Hill Historic District (BCALH) in Robert’s hometown of Setauket. This was one of the earliest and still one of the very few historic districts representing Long Island’s many historic communities of color. At the reception that followed, Charla eagerly introduced Robert and me, since she saw in each of us a shared interest in not only history but also social justice. She was right, and Robert and I became friends and have worked together since.

Robert rightly asked that day how archaeology and civil rights fit together. It seemed to him an odd combination of a scholarly study of the past and activist focus on the present and future. I figured the best thing to do was to show rather than tell him my answer, so I invited him to come see the excavations at Lloyd Manor. During his visit he saw the field school crew exposing house foundations and collecting small household artifacts from the sifters. He and Barbara also pitched in and helped wash artifacts, giving them a direct experience with both the archaeology and the materiality of history artifacts provide. We discussed more fully how this work could support a social justice agenda. This book provides the full version of the answer to this question, but in short my answer focused on two things.

The first is that archaeology, especially the historical archaeology of common people and marginal communities, provides a counter-narrative to most of what we know about the past. At places like Lloyd Manor, for example, there is a rich documentary record that gives us insight on the home owners and their families, business interests, and additional worldly and otherworldly concerns. The Lloyds’ home faces a waterway that connected the estate to a vast and developing colonial and commercial network. There is much less written about those who did the everyday work that sustained the position, wealth, and authority of the heads of these households. At Lloyd Manor, these everyday workers included enslaved African-descended laborers whose worldview was quite different yet whose presence and labor were essential to the site’s history. Focused on collecting the mate-

rial remains of everyday spaces and activities, archaeology is positioned to recover information that can address these missing pieces of the past, pieces which of course connect us to actual people who, despite the lack of other records, lived, worked, loved, and sometimes died where we dig. The idea that people lost to history can be found with archaeology was compelling to the Lewises.

The second aspect of archaeology that impressed them was that it was something they could do themselves. Helping us out by washing artifacts was a big deal, since it allowed common folks like them to handle artifacts and make a real contribution to the recovery of lost places and people. Unlike historical documents, which tend to be housed in carefully managed and guarded archives (though much more is now available online!), archaeological artifacts seemed more accessible. While excavations need to be supervised by professionals and require proper permits, they remain a hands-on, participatory means to make history that do not require advanced degrees, years of experience, and the right connections to be able to contribute. It only takes interest, time, and some ability, and, with typically limited funding, research archaeologists are usually quite happy for the help! This is even more the case when those helping out come from the very communities being studied.

For Robert and Barbara, finding a direct and different route to the past and relatively open access to the tools to discover it was powerful. Later, Robert used these attributes to describe archaeology as an “unconventional” way to do history. Conventional history for him came in the form of stories whose content and meaning were already fixed and whose sources were out of reach. Histories like this seemed a lot like many other forms of exclusion and oppression he was familiar with from both his personal experience and his political activism as a person of color.<sup>1</sup> As an elder, he was also aware of the impact of conventional thinking among the members of his community who were too often forced to accommodate the shortcomings of their poverty and the need to work instead of learning about and fighting the persistent racism that underlay their struggles. For Robert, people of color require unconventional methods of living and understanding if they are not only to pay their bills but also understand and develop an authentic and successful culture of their own. This unconventional spirit was alive during the civil rights era, but the passion for civil rights has since tempered as other pressing issues emerged. This decline is in part due to a backlash against civil rights that came with the rise of conservatism in the 1980s and after but also because, at the local level, the realities of the changing economy began to undercut the ability of many people of color to earn enough and thereby maintain their capacity to sustain autonomous and unconventional

lives. In an unexpected way, the unconventionality of archaeology seemed to offer the chance to reignite that spark. This book tells the story of what we have done to bring this perspective to light.

## A Long Time Coming

In a conversation with Judith Burgess, a cultural anthropologist and oral historian who rounded out our research team in 2010, Robert Lewis told us that Sam Cooke's 1964 civil rights-era anthem "A Change Is Gonna Come" was a beloved song among members of Setauket's mixed-heritage Native and African American community. Cooke wrote this moving tribute to the African American freedom struggle after being turned away from a hotel in Shreveport, Louisiana, because he and his wife were black. Cooke's song has sustained civil rights resistance ever since. We all knew this song and realized that the lyric "a long time coming" captured the essence of the work we were trying to do together, and we adopted "A Long Time Coming" as the title for our collaboration (figure I.1).

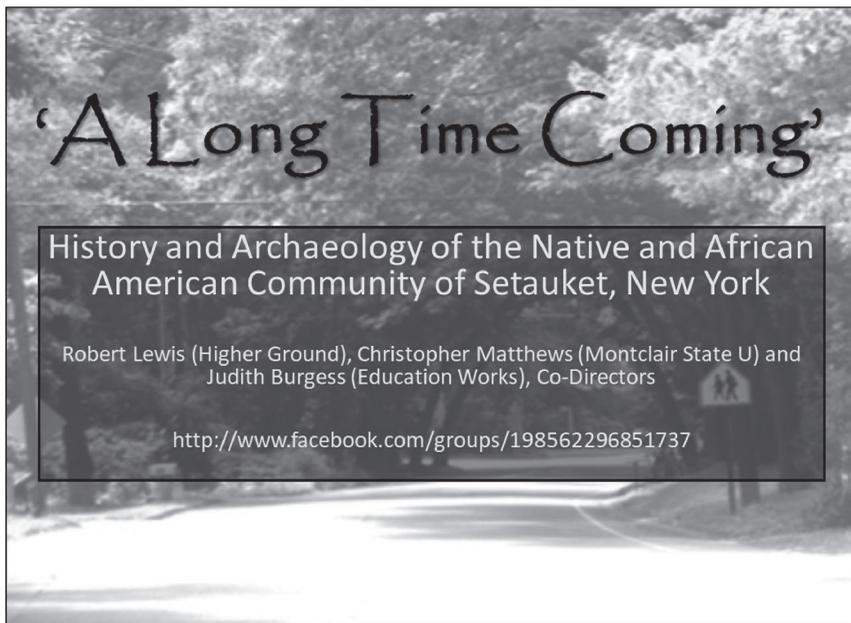


Figure I.1. Opening slide of the A Long Time Coming PowerPoint presentation. The background shows Christian Avenue in Setauket as it leads into the Bethel-Christian Avenue-Laurel Hill Historic District.