

Historic Germantown

Black Lives Matter Action & Inclusion Plan

Introduction

Historic Germantown affirms #BlackLivesMatter and commemorates lives lost on this 1-year anniversary of George Floyd's killing. The rapid changes in our country over the past year have heightened our social awareness, shifted our perspectives and reified our commitment to being a good neighbor. We realize that social justice is at the heart of all, and affirming Black Lives Matter needs the words, deeds and actions combined to make a difference. As a consortium of 18 historic sites located in Northwest Philadelphia, Historic Germantown is an active cohort of socially responsive museums. As a core part of our commitment and culmination of our outreach, on May 25th, 2021 the 1-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder, we are transparently presenting our BLM statement, process and actions happening at our historic sites, to the community. Answering the calls for greater equity, institutional accountability and more pathways to participation for community members.

Tuomi Forrest Executive Director of Historic Germantown states

“As our nation embarks on a journey of repair, one year since the murder of George Floyd, Historic Germantown, with and in support of our 18 affiliated cultural sites, affirms Black Lives Matter. We have a vision for inclusion in Northwest Philadelphia: we want all visitors to feel deeply cared about, called in, respected and protected, as we clearly face all aspects of our history -- of our organizations, of this community, and of our country. In this majority African American community, we gather with neighbors through our consortium to help dismantle racist structures and systems as our collective responsibility”

Keep in touch with your feedback, suggestions and encouragement for the journey ahead.

info@freedombackyard.com

HG Action Plan & Inclusion

HG aims to extend a spirit of Welcoming + Belonging where equity is rooted in our core via expanding interpretation to tell a fuller picture of history, explore hidden histories of enslavement, self-emancipation, abolition, literature, labor, leisure, trading, military history and more. We engage diverse communities and create inclusive spaces throughout our 18 affiliated historic sites. To this we will actively remove barriers, physical and perceived, and encourage more diverse participation from our own community to listen to and amplify their voices.

Here are some actions you can look forward to across our Historic Germantown consortium

1. Enjoy greenspaces at our sites for respite and reflection,
2. Experience our and site programs to dive deeper into local Black History
3. Explore our interpretation and historic origins to understand this time of racial reckoning.
4. Contribute to the creation of our Black Lives in Germantown tour, to herald important black history past to present in the community.
5. Volunteer to beautify sites and provide your input through community engagement.
6. Request to use our space for a community convening, activist meeting, organized gathering or other event for the community benefit

We understand that to be a truly inclusive museum we must recognize and tackle institutional inequalities in our community and make our history and programs accessible. We rededicate ourselves to the need for strategic action fostering agency and gathering community input to lead our sites forward in the best interests for all

Get involved by emailing info@freedombackyard.com

HG Uplifts Black Lives : Site Actions & Sentiments

Awbury Arboretum

Actions:

- Deepening community engagement and outreach to a task force of near neighbors planning around greenspaces and site expansion
- Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the greenspaces, adventure woods, walking trails and nature for recreation, respite and reflection.

"Awbury Arboretum is committed to equity, transparency, and building trust with our community. We stand in solidarity with the BLM movement and are committed to stewardship and programming of our free and open green space that reflects these values."

Heather Zimmerman, Executive Director, Awbury Arboretum

Historic Fairhill

Actions:

- Deepening community engagement and outreach to local school children and families for community gardening, free veggies and nature learning
- Working with local public schools in the Fairhill neighborhood to revive their libraries and distributing free children's books to every child and family
- Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the greenspaces for recreation, respite and reflection in nature.
- Offering history tours showcasing murals and cemetery of famous Quaker abolitionists.

“Historic Fairhill is a 5-acre, 300-year-old Quaker burial ground where leaders of the 19th century movements for Abolition and Women’s Rights are buried. Today, still so far from their vision of justice and equality, we affirm that Black Lives Matter. We work to uplift black and latinx lives in neighborhood school libraries, community gardens, and community events.”

Jean Warrington, Executive Director, Historic Fairhill

Johnson House Historic Site

Actions:

- Continuing outreach to a wide section of neighbors, daycares and senior citizen facilities planning to launch programs for the Center for Social Advocacy to increase social justice awareness, intergenerational exposure, learning and community care
- Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the greenspaces and nature for recreation, respite and reflection. Inviting visitors to decide the best uses and programs for the outdoor space
- Continuing to host Juneteenth festival and establish the importance of this holiday and the freedom seeking it represents.
- Sharpening focus on early childhood education, expanded interpretation and programs to spark interest neighborhood stakeholders

“The struggle for freedom and social justice should be practiced every day! The Historic Germantown Consortium represents a sensible vehicle to affirm that Black Lives Matter – serving as an example of a catalyst for the change that we need today. Our history of social and racial justice serves as an example of a unique partnership—between enslaved Africans seeking freedom and the abolitionist Johnson family - it is a catalyst to inspire, uplift and empower current and future generations to do the work to uplift black lives. Johnson House Historic Site, established its Center for Social Advocacy to represent what everyday people have done and can do to make a difference in their community and beyond every day.”

Cornelia Swinson, Executive Director, Johnson House Historic Site

Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust

Actions:

- Deepening outreach to locals by giving away veggies in the garden
- Sharing the iconic history of the 1st Protest against Slavery and how that intersects to modern movements in defense of black lives

“Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust has always acknowledged that Black Lives Matter as evidenced by the Mennonites initiating the first protest against slavery in 1688. We also converted our empty lot into a community garden that serves the local community. In addition, we have planted a part of the garden with a variety of vegetables and I have notified the community that if anyone is hungry, they may come and take whatever amount is needed. We have also provided temporary housing for an African American person that was in need this past winter”

Dave Hersh Board Chair, Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust

Lest We Forget Slavery Museum

Actions:

- Deepen public programs around unpack racial tension with white audiences.
- Empower visitors on improving race relations and becoming anti-racist.
- Continue to show the artifacts and harmful legacies of American chattel slavery
- Expand public programs to include teach ins, summits, scholar talks and panel discussions about how the denigration of slavery continues to haunt the black community through traumatic interactions with police, broken homes, community disinvestment, politicians who make laws to disenfranchise black communities.

“It’s important that our shared communities with diverse neighborhoods know that we affirm Black Lives Matter, so our neighbors know we share many of their same concerns. Lest We Forget Slavery Museum utilizes our rare artifacts and informative presentations to shed light on a dark and tragic period of American history that reveal how different coming to America was for millions of enslaved Africans so that their Black descendants know their ancestor’s sacrificed contributions will never be forgotten. Lest We Forget Slavery Museum provides a direct correlation between historic events and current ones that exemplify our commitment to social justice issues today.”

Gwen Ragsdale, Executive Director, Lest We Forget Slavery Museum & Traveling Exhibit

Cliveden of the National Trust

Actions:

- Continuing outreach to a task force of near neighbors planning around Revolutionary Battle of Germantown
- Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the greenspaces and nature for recreation, respite and reflection. Inviting visitors to decide the best uses and programs for the outdoor space
- Interpreting stories of enslavement and persons involved and impacted at the site
- Deepening community engagement to create agency among neighborhood stakeholders

“At the center of Cliveden’s core ideals is the celebration, explication, and unearthing of the stories of Black lives associated with the property. A site of enslavement, Cliveden has a responsibility, and the desire, to confront its history. We look forward to working with our community and neighbors in continuing this essential work.”

Nancy VanDolsen, Executive Director, Cliveden of the National Trust

Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion

Actions:

- Deepening community engagement and outreach to near neighbors and African American Communities
- Public Programs: July Literary Parlor - we are discussing *Clotel* or *The President's Daughter: A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* by William Wells Brown (1853) <https://ebenezermaxwellmansion.org/literary-parlor/>
- Virtual talk by Judith Giesberg, Ph.D. about the diaries of Emilie Davis. <https://ebenezermaxwellmansion.org/interactiveqa/> African American Emile Davis was 22 years old in 1861. In 1863, she penned the words with which we were introduced to her, 'Today has been a memorable day,' opening a small window into a black community in war. In three slim pocket-sized diaries, Emilie wrote daily entries, recounting events big and small. A seamstress by trade, Emilie recorded her sewing work in the pages of her diary.
- Presenting 'Deep Rivers' Tours and talks about - How African Americans Waded through the Waters of Oppression to Achieve Greatness. Showcasing Deep Rivers Victorian Black Historical Icons: Abby Fisher - 2nd Black Cookbook Author and Pickle Manufacturer / John Trower - most important 19th-century caterer in Philadelphia / Henry Ossawa Tanner - Artist / Julian Abele - Architect / Octavius Catto - Activist

<https://ebenezermaxwellmansion.org/deep-rivers/>

<https://chestnuthilllocal.com/stories/prominent-historic-blacks-live-again-in-deep-rivers-at-maxwell-mansion,13797>

"Over 70% of Germantown residents are African American. Museums in Historic Germantown (and everywhere) need to present an inclusive historic narrative. For too long Black history was ignored or given diminished attention. Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion highlights the lives of 19th-century African American heroes as a beacon to young and old alike emphasizing that Black Lives Matter."

Diane Richardson - Executive Director, Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion

Stenton

Actions:

- Continuing outreach to a cohort of near neighbors planning around a Museum Park Community Partnership group, and its governance and activities
- Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the greenspaces and nature for recreation, respite and reflection. Inviting visitors to decide the best uses and programs for the outdoor space
- Interpreting stories of enslavement and persons involved and impacted at the stie
- Deepening community engagement to create agency among neighborhood stakeholders

Historic Rittenhouse Town

Actions:

- Continuing outreach to neighborhood associations inviting partnerships and program activities
 - Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the greenspaces and nature for recreation, respite and reflection. Inviting visitors to decide the best uses and programs for the outdoor space through park surveys.
 - Sharpening focus on education, creativity and wellness to spark interest neighborhood stakeholders
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Germantown Historical Society

- Amplify awareness access to and Increased usage of GHS scholar resources including black history content information regarding: John Trower project, Bright April, Self-guided walking tour, digitized copies of the Souvenir of Germantown Notable Sites + Negro Achievement Week
 - Share regular updates on how community members can access the archive
 - Co create a Black Lives in Germantown Tour that stitches together interpretation across all HG consortium sites
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The Concord School House and Upper Burying Ground

Actions:

- Deepening community engagement and outreach to local schools, children and families for their back to school bookbag giveaways.
- Develop open festive programs for Juneteenth + the Civic Season - a time celebrated by museums across the country from Juneteenth to Independence Day July 4th.
- Expanding interpretation around questions of race and memory, while revealing more about the histories of extraordinary everyday people growing community through schools, cemeteries and civic spaces.

“Historic Germantown must have an active voice in advocating antiracism practice and a commitment to engaging with our community to do the work of antiracism. Our site strives to welcome broad and diverse audiences. We seek to develop innovative community-based programming that explores the multiple, difficult racial histories of our city, our region, and our nation.

The Concord School House and Upper Burying Ground was established by and for the community. It reaffirms its commitment to serving all of its neighbors and to promoting equality, justice, and antiracism.”

John Pollack, Board Chair, The Concord School House and Upper Burying Ground

Black Writers Museum

Actions:

- Continues to tell the stories of Why black lives matter and deserve dignity, amplifying social justice in African American communities historic and contemporary via spoken and written word.
 - Stay tuned for the new exhibit Movement Music opening summer 2021
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Wyck

Actions:

- Promote and display ‘Our Germantown’ oral history and exhibit. Call for more stories.
- Offer community and local groups a space to meet and gather
- Welcoming visitors and families to enjoy the rose garden and greenspaces, history tours and nature onsite for recreation, respite and reflection.
- Inviting community members to participate in community farming, to practice skills with an expert farmer and receive a share of the produce grown.

Wyck offers its solidarity with communities of color and the Black Lives Matter movement. As a historic site long rooted in Quaker tradition, Wyck is committed to work toward progress and equality. Right now, we acknowledge that the human rights of black Americans continue to be systemically denied throughout the United States and in our own community. Wyck stands with the Black Lives Matter movement and communities of color as we participate in the work required to achieve and assure justice.

Part of Wyck’s mission is to strengthen its neighboring community. In order to live our mission, Wyck commits to listening to the public it serves, being honest and transparent in its history, and redoubles its commitment to equality.

The name of this site, “Wyck,” means restful place, or respite. As we gradually re-open our site in the coming weeks, we hope that Wyck’s sense of peace can help foster healing in our community.

HG BLM Committee - Goals of our Process

On a mission of discovery from Summer of 2020 until now, we realized the need to explore the racial reckoning in society and forge a path for our institution to play a greater role in building good will. We are guided by this excerpt of our Historic Germantown BLM values Statement in this process.

“We believe black lives matter and honor the black and brown community members in Germantown, Philadelphia, and beyond. honoring the tremendous impact and presence of black and brown residents, activists, leaders and communities in Northwest, Philadelphia.”

Over a year of committee convenings with site directors, community members, elected officials and other stakeholders from summer 2020 - 2021 we refined the process and gathered input to crystalize these goals of our Black Lives Matter work.

- ❑ Learn from examples of BLM Statements/ DEI Statements nationwide
- ❑ Review equity + inclusion tactics to support member sites on strategy.
- ❑ Create consensus on a common set of priorities/actions in response to identified challenges in Germantown and NW Philly.
- ❑ Articulate steps to co creating value statements for this work and becoming accountability partners during the journey.
- ❑ Understand how racism intersects with a myriad of systems of oppression, learning How to become anti-racist and interrupt bias.
- ❑ How to leverage privilege as a historic site, aiming to center black voices, black history, black heritage inclusive storytelling and scholarship.
- ❑ Recognize what the issues are to find the solutions for the communities we serve.

Community Feedback

Historic Germantown in responding to the challenges of our modern moment, is using history, nature and education to give people an outlet for advocacy, respite, connection and dialogue. Community members of color and concerned citizens have expressed righteous rage and fierce urgency to address what needs to happen during this time of racial reckoning; and we at HG are here to listen. These are some concerns that surfaced through our community engagement over the past year:

- We need healing and momentum, Action and Advocacy to fight for black lives.
 - Uplift an ecosystem of growth, and a neighborhood of people who see themselves and their stories elevated through local museums.
 - Support communities in building power and celebrate social justice movements with energy and resources.
 - Expanding our capacity for caring, empathy and compassion.
 - Find spaces to speak out, stand on the frontlines and take action to help end institutional racism, inequality, and the dehumanization of all people of color and other marginalized people.
 - Celebrate black heritage and heroes with inclusive storytelling, authenticity and integrity; End the Myth of white supremacy in monuments, in history books and in expanding the narrative and the cannon.
 - Consequences of radical demands for systemic reinvention, restructuring, and rights to dignity and freedom from violence in the wake of the covid-19 crisis and the Black Lives Matter movement.
 - Contextualize black disenfranchisement, denigration, discrimination through the historic lens of American racism, mob mentality, white supremacy, slavery, racialized violence and oppression.
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