

Historic Hudson Valley

People as Property: Stories of Northern Colonial Enslavement

A. Nature of the Request

Historic Hudson Valley (HHV) requests \$400,000 to support the production of a website titled *People as Property: Stories of Northern Colonial Enslavement*. The site will shed light on the often overlooked history of slavery in the colonial North with a special focus on individual stories as a means to personalize the past. With a Discovery grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, HHV engaged in a rigorous inquiry period during which four humanities themes were established to guide the project; and with a Prototyping grant, HHV identified and researched content for the site and created a robust proof-of-concept prototype. Now, with the solid foundation of our humanities content and an engaging digital format, HHV is ready to move into the final production of this important resource.

This project is an outgrowth of the NEH-funded reinterpretation of Philipsburg Manor, HHV's National Historic Landmark in Sleepy Hollow, NY. Since the reinterpretation in 2002, HHV has presented the history of northern colonial slavery at Philipsburg Manor for hundreds of thousands of onsite visitors. The website will advance HHV's strategic goals, transform the way we engage the public through digital and experiential learning, and bring this history online for a public audience.

Rather than an examination of the institution of slavery, *People as Property: Stories of Northern Colonial Enslavement* presents a collection of individual stories and experiences of enslaved people. Adolph Philipse's 1750 probate inventory, as well as runaway slave ads, legal and court documents, slave narratives, and other primary sources related to northern slaveholdings serve as entry points for exploring the human dimensions of slavery. Philipsburg Manor stands as the primary case study augmented by content from several noteworthy historic sites, libraries, academic institutions, and historical societies in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. During Discovery, HHV articulated the following **humanities themes** for the project:

1. Colonial economic development depended upon the enslaved.
2. The inhumanity of enslavement stems not from the labor or living conditions, but from the classification of captive Africans as property.
3. Resistance (in many forms) by slaves was a means of reasserting personal volition.
4. Manumission was gradual, not uniformly adopted by the northern states, and did not denote equality.

People as Property will function as an online interactive documentary. The homepage of the site offers users four units: **1) Protecting Profits, 2) Being Enslaved, 3) Taking Action, and 4) Erasing Slavery**. These units are non-linear, allowing users to choose their own journey through the site. When a user selects one of the units, she is presented with three sub-categories. Within Protecting Profits, for example, one finds Labor Systems, Custom to Law, Economy & Profitability—and is then offered a variety of content pieces such as video, primary documents, audio clips, maps, or illustrations with which to interact. Each piece of content is dynamic and supports a humanities theme.

For example, following the path: Being Enslaved > Cradle to Grave > Caesar, the user is introduced to the humanities theme of people being defined as property via short text, and can then learn Caesar's story via video, learn how a gristmill works via infographic, or calculate Caesar's economic contribution to the Manor's profitability by executing a math equation. In the Legal Property subsection of the Being Enslaved unit, the user can scroll through Philipse's 1750 probate inventory and see the names of enslaved people there; when the user clicks on the name Sam, she will experience the story of an enslaved father who watches his son sold away at auction.

The **"time map"** feature (a term coined for this project by a designer at our partner firm) allows users to interact simultaneously with a timeline and a geographic map of the Atlantic world to discover trade routes, historical coincidences, and events significant to northern colonial slavery.

Users always have the option of clicking back to the main menu in the top right hand corner. And users can click on the plus sign in the bottom right corner to expand the footer and gain access to a host of resources including assets, bibliography, glossary, educational materials, and information about HHV and other northern slavery historical sites.

HHV has found a strong and fitting partner for this project in the design firm **C&G Partners**, which created both the Design Document and Prototype, and will continue to work with the company to produce the final site. HHV and C&G worked diligently to develop the optimal look and feel for *People as Property*. The site had to confer authority and present a tone appropriate to the subject matter, balanced by an attractiveness that makes the site interesting and engaging enough to spend time exploring. The look and feel that has resulted captures both objectives. Using the rich natural colors and textures of historic sites and objects combined with a sleek and minimal layout, *People as Property* offers an appealing visual experience while at the same time presenting a wealth of humanities content and content types in an easy-to-navigate format. The resulting user experience is one that offers variety and an opportunity to explore and discover at one's own pace while being immersed in a vivid historical world.

HHV will use the Production grant to: 1) Create digital video and photography of all content; 2) Test and evaluate user experience and learning objectives; 3) Finalize the site's technical specifications for public launch, including responsiveness across all digital platforms; and 4) Implement a content management system (CMS) that allows for updates to the site after launch. The total budget for this two-year phase is \$588,730.

B. Humanities Content

Introduction

HHV's digital project is **deeply grounded in humanities scholarship and will inform a topic of national historical significance—enslavement in the colonial North**. HHV tells this story onsite at Philipsburg Manor through the lives of the 23 enslaved individuals who operated the provisioning plantation in the 18th century. Other historic sites and places of interest have begun to tell this story as well. Taken together, the website will allow users to learn about enslavement in the colonial North, and will also raise awareness of like-minded sites and organizations that have made a commitment to telling this difficult and complex story. What we know about the identities of the individuals highlighted in the website—their names, skilled trades, family relationships, languages, cultural and religious practices—will distinguish *People as Property* in the context of historic presentation. **Importantly, the website allows us to individualize the often anonymous institution of slavery.**

Before the NEH invested in Philipsburg Manor's reinterpretation, this history was a story untold. Not only was the educational focus at the site narrowly trained on the lives of the prominent Philipse family, but our national understanding of slavery was largely relegated to a textbook study of the antebellum South. Today, thanks to the NEH's catalytic support, Philipsburg Manor presents the history of northern colonial slavery and its effects on the commercial, economic, and cultural development of New York. HHV's 12-member African American Advisory Board established two goals for the interpretation:

1. *As a living history museum*, Philipsburg Manor will set the standard for interpreting enslavement in the northern colonies. With a thought-provoking and hands-on approach, the site and its collections will enable visitors to better understand the varied individual relationships among slave, owner, and tenant, and the inseparable institutional relationships among enslavement, commerce, and culture.
2. *As a resource*, Historic Hudson Valley will provide research materials necessary to academics, educators, and students of history for public discourse on the history and legacy of enslavement. Through educational and community outreach, programs, and special events, HHV will spark interest in public history, provide an open environment for scholarly debate, and encourage new interpretive methods for presenting these and related issues to our visitors.

HHV takes seriously its role as interpreter of this history. Because Philipsburg Manor is well researched, HHV has been able to dig beneath the surface and explore the identities, skills, family connections, and cultural retention practices among the enslaved population at the site. However, even with this breadth of material, we still only get a partial view of history and must therefore use interpretation to evoke the human experience of slavery. With staff trained in the content and in the presentation skills necessary for this complex and sensitive story, HHV has realized the first goal of the reinterpretation with great success. To broaden this story and become a resource for a wider public, HHV is augmenting its online reach. **As with the onsite experience, HHV's online project uses stories and interactivity as a means to convey this history to a general audience.**

The website represents a significant digital outgrowth of HHV's NEH-funded Philipsburg Manor reinterpretation. While digital means have been used extensively to promote onsite visitation to Philipsburg, a limited amount of historical content has been made available online. Since the reinterpretation, HHV has introduced a variety of educational programs at Philipsburg and within New York City and Westchester County public schools that focus on slavery in the North. Offerings have included school-time workshops for K-12 students, after-school programs for underserved youth, an arts-integrated curriculum for use in the classroom, a summer day camp, apprenticeships in wooden boatbuilding and historic agriculture, and public festivals including Pinkster, a Dutch celebration of spring adapted by African Americans in the 18th century. An orientation exhibition installed in 2011 in the visitor's center focuses on issues of resistance. *People as Property* will enable HHV to further its educational mission by making our instructional materials available to the public in the Teacher Resources section of the site.

Research and Scholarship

It was not until the late 1960s that historians began to shift from slavery as an economic institution to in-depth studies of enslaved life. John Blassingame, David Brion Davis, and Herbert Gutman examined the cultural practices that sustained enslaved Africans in America: belief systems, kinship networks, naming practices, music, and folk tales. Following the publication of these works, the issues that they introduced received a great deal of scholarly attention including Ira Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*; Gary B. Nash's *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*; Shane White's *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*; and William D. Pierson's *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England*. Other scholars have focused on slavery in rural settings including Graham Russell Hodges (*Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665-1865*) and A. J. Williams-Myers (*Long Hammering: Essays on the Forging of an African American Presence in the Hudson River Valley to the Early Twentieth Century*). Archeological discoveries such as the African Burial Ground in lower Manhattan and the Sylvester Manor provisioning plantation on Shelter Island represent additional sources of information about slavery at specific northern sites.

HHV has contributed to this body of work by commissioning such studies as "The Physical Experience of Northern Slavery: Housing, Food, Health and Medical Care" by Susan Klepp (1995); "The Slaves of Philipsburg Manor Upper Mills" by Jacquetta Haley (1988); "Slaves and Slave Holding in New York's Philipse Family, 1660-1750" by Dennis J. Maika (1997); and "The Slaves' Garden at Philipsburg Manor" by Margaret Vetare (2003). These and related research reports continue to inform the onsite experience at Philipsburg and helped to build the intellectual foundation of *People as Property*. Beginning in Discovery and continuing through the Prototype phase, HHV reviewed new scholarship that has surfaced since the reinterpretation. Beyond Philipsburg, we have researched and identified resources and individual stories pertaining to other northern historic sites where slavery existed, including the Bush-Holley House (Cos-Cob, CT), African American Meeting House (Nantucket, MA), Cliveden (Germantown, PA), and Marlpit Hall (Middletown, NJ).

Philipsburg's interpretation was an early example of a push toward using regional studies to illustrate larger themes. Recent publications such as *For Adam's Sake*, *Ten Hills Farm*, *The Manor*, and *New York Burning* examine the role of slavery in local settings of New London, CT, Medford, MA, Shelter Island, NY, and

Manhattan. Consulting scholar Leslie M. Harris's *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (University of Chicago Press, 2003) examines issues of race and class through two centuries of slavery, and has enriched HHV's interpretation of northern colonial enslavement. Harvard historian Jill Lepore consulted HHV's library collections while writing *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth Century Manhattan* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), which focuses on the 1741 "Great Negro Plot" to burn New York City and murder those who came to put out the flames. And consulting scholar Craig S. Wilder researched primary source documents at HHV's library for his book *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

Historical research has added to the knowledge base of HHV's staff and, ultimately, the public. Two works stand out for their contributions to public history: *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums*, by Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small (Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002) and *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* edited by James O. Horton and Lois Horton (University of North Carolina Press, 2008). The February 2014 publication of *The Public Historian* revisits the interpretation of enslavement in the years following Horton's book. Of note in this issue of the *Historian* is an interview with HHV's Discovery-phase advisor Azie M. Dungey, creator of the *Ask A Slave* web series, in which she discusses the difficulties encountered when presenting slave life as a first-person interpreter at Mount Vernon. Also, the book *Best Practices for Interpreting Slavery at Historic Sites and Museums* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) indicates that there are successful, nationally recognized models to follow—including Philipsburg Manor, which serves as a case study in one chapter of this book—as well as sites where good models are needed to inspire change. These publications critique the various interpretations of slavery and race at historic sites and have informed HHV's strategies for the website.

Convening of Humanities Advisors

During both the Discovery and Prototype phases of this project, HHV convened a distinguished group of humanities scholars, museum professionals, education consultants, and transmedia experts to examine the humanities content, learning objectives, and narrative treatment of this project. The Discovery group consisted of: Ana Lucia Araujo, Ph.D. (Howard University), Laura Chmielewski, Ph.D. (Purchase College, State University of New York), Leslie M. Harris, Ph.D. (Emory University), Jeffrey W. McClurken, Ph.D. (University of Mary Washington), Jacqueline A. Simmons, Ed.D. (Columbia University), Azie M. Dungey (*Ask a Slave* web series), and Kate Livingston (Evaluator, ExposeYourMuseum). On April 23-24, 2015, these scholars and professionals met with members of HHV's African American Advisory Board, as well as staff from HHV's Digital Programs, Library, Curatorial, and Education Departments. The group pored over the humanities themes and tackled difficult questions for the website such as: Where does the story begin and end?; What is the narrative arc?; Who is the intended audience?; What types of content are needed to advance the site's learning goals?; How do we organize this content for web-based engagement?; and How do we appropriately and respectfully tell stories with little or no evidence?

Through two days of discussion (including a tour of Philipsburg Manor) and later consultation with HHV, this interdisciplinary team reinforced the intellectual foundation of the project. Group consensus was reached on three major points: 1) HHV's scholarship from the reinterpretation, augmented by external scholarship and research for the Prototyping phase, is sound and relevant; 2) HHV should embrace fictional narrative as a teaching tool in instances where historical evidence is limited or non-existent; and 3) To foster effective learning, engagement, and empathy, the website content will be driven by the following **four humanities themes**:

1. Colonial economic development depended upon the enslaved.

Throughout the northern colonies, both the labor of the enslaved and the establishment of the transatlantic slave trade proved to be vital to the region's developing economy. From the fertile valley of the Hudson River to the shorelines of Long Island, provisioning plantations used enslaved labor to produce staples such as flour and butter for export to the sugar islands of Barbados and Curacao. New England merchants in Boston, Newport, Salem, and New London established profitable trade routes delivering human cargo from Africa to the West Indies in exchange for molasses, distilled into rum in refineries along the New England coast, and

shipped back to West Africa in exchange for captive Africans. As early as 1644, merchants in Salem were sending locally built ships on the “triangle trade” route among Africa, the West Indies, and New England. By the middle of the 18th century, nearly two-thirds of Rhode Island’s fleet was engaged in the slave trade, and New York City was second only to Charleston, SC, among urban centers of slavery. Legal codes that bound slaves were the same throughout the English colonies in their attempt to control and dehumanize enslaved workers. The nature of northern agriculture combined with the growth of commercial enterprises such as Philipsburg Manor gave rise to a work force that included a high proportion of African American artisans skilled in different trades—such as Caesar, the enslaved miller, and Dimond, the enslaved riverboat pilot, both of whom were vital to Philipsburg’s operation. The labor of these and the thousands of other enslaved Africans was instrumental in the early success of the colonies.

In the **Protecting Profits** unit of the website, users will learn that Philipsburg Manor is a case study of a larger American story. At its zenith, the estate was a rural, proto-industrial complex with strong ties to Manhattan and the Atlantic world. Merchant ships sailed up the Hudson and docked at the Philipsburg wharf on the Pocantico River. There they were loaded with provisions like wheat flour ground by Caesar in the site’s gristmill and butter churned by Massy, a dairymaid. By focusing on these enslaved individuals whose labor helped to fuel the Philipse’s commercial empire, HHV is able to localize this history and connect it to our broader humanities themes. Similarly, **this project aims to recognize the vast number of enslaved people throughout the colonial North who played a crucial role in building America’s economy.**

2. The inhumanity of enslavement stems not from the labor or living conditions, but from the classification of captive Africans as property rather than person.

In late January 1750, an “Inventory of all and Singular the goods, Rights Chattels & Credits of the Estate of Mr. Adolph Philipse Deceased” was undertaken. Included in the four pages of “movable property” at the Upper Mills, alongside the cattle, horses, and silverware, were the names of 23 enslaved men, women, and children. The “negro property” included the skilled laborers required to run a milling operation, several farmers on the site, a small domestic staff, eight young children, and several “men not fitt for work.”¹ One of the young children listed on the inventory was an eight-year-old boy named Sam. On April 19, 1750, Sam was sold for £62 to Abraham DePeyster at public vendue. Sampson, the man we infer was his father, was also enslaved at Philipsburg Manor and had been sold a few weeks before to Lawrence Cortwright for £75. When onsite visitors learn that Sam and Sampson were separated during the spring of 1750, they begin to understand the human tragedy of enslavement—that slaves were treated as property rather than person. From students to retirees, visitors often express anger at the system of enslavement and suggest that they would have resisted through various acts of rebellion, violence, or by running away. The story of Sam and Sampson is now told in the **Being Enslaved** unit. By establishing an immediate, empathetic connection to people of the past, **it is HHV’s intent that uses of this online documentary will be moved to ask: How would I have reacted in this situation?**

3. Resistance (in its many forms) by slaves was a means of reasserting personal volition.

Similar to the onsite experience, visitors to *People as Property* will discover that individuals coped with enslavement through a complex range of responses as they attempted to improve their circumstances. The retention of African cultural practices and the struggle to build and maintain families also countered the dehumanizing aspects of bondage. Such cultural retention is evident in the survival of African names, language, music, and rituals such as Pinkster. Enslaved Africans also developed survival skills such as collectively setting a sustainable pace of work for group tasks, feigning illness or ignorance, or even sabotaging equipment as a means of resisting the physical exhaustion of slave labor. More overt methods for fighting the system included running away (or “stealing oneself” as abolitionist Frederick Douglass termed it) and open rebellion such as the slave uprisings of 1712 and 1741.

Although every type and individual feat of resistance has its own story, there is much to be learned from the act of “stealing oneself.” The hundreds of runaway ads printed in colonial newspapers provide us with a

¹ MssCol 2412, Adolph Philipse estate records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

wealth of knowledge about enslaved individuals and their community. The ads show evidence of ongoing, active resistance by individuals against the institution of slavery and give us a glimpse into the physical appearance, skills, education, personalities, and the perceived behavior of those who chose to run. Running away often meant more than finding freedom; individuals frequently ran to find or maintain family. For example, a notice from March of 1763 describes a woman named Lucretia who chose to run away while pregnant. Another speaks of a 10-year-old enslaved girl, Dinah, who, in April of 1778, was “stolen by her mother,” a woman named Cash.

Unlike traditional textbook treatments, these primary documents shed light on the individuals who were enslaved. Their relevance was recently reaffirmed by an NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up grant awarded to Cornell University to develop a database of runaway slave ads from pre-1865 U.S. newspapers. The database, which draws from several historical collections and experiments with crowdsourcing, is an exciting development. It also attests to the interpretive expertise of history museums such as HHV to add appropriate context. HHV’s *People as Property* website will feature these ads in the **Taking Action** unit, and will help users “read between the lines” to understand the choices made by real people. Indeed, **the defiant act of running away represented a powerful assertion of one’s humanity at a time when slaves were defined as property**. In this vein, the Teachers Resources section of the website will include educational materials for HHV’s *Runaway Art: Interpreting Colonial Slave Ads* classroom program. Fueled by a multi-year grant from The New York Community Trust, *Runaway Art* uses local 18th-century runaway slave ads as a springboard for thousands of New York City students to create an original artwork and essay. The program is a successful example of how HHV is working to foster empathy and engagement with history among schoolchildren.

4. Manumission was gradual, not uniformly adopted by the northern states, and did not denote equality.

Through legislative acts, judicial cases, and constitutional decree, manumission took many forms in the northern states; it was also lengthy, contested, and often ignored. Most northern states adopted a gradual manumission that ensured slave owners a period of 18-28 years to determine how to divest themselves of their human property. Pennsylvania’s 1780 legislative “Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery” set the standard for most northern states. Any person born in Pennsylvania after March 1, 1780 was born free. Those enslaved in Pennsylvania before the 1780 law went into effect, however, remained enslaved for life. It wasn’t until 1847 that another act of the legislature declared all Pennsylvanians free. Over the next four years, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire all passed similar bills for gradual abolition. The process of complete abolition, however, took decades. Although Connecticut’s gradual abolition began in 1784, the state did not end slavery until 1848. In New Hampshire, slaves were noted on the 1790 and 1800 censuses, and the state did not officially end slavery until 1857.

New York and New Jersey, with larger enslaved populations than the New England states, began their gradual emancipations in 1799 and 1804, respectively. Any persons born after those dates were considered free, although they were required to serve their former owners for a period of 25-28 years. New York eventually abolished slavery for all in 1827. New Jersey never fully abolished slavery until it ratified the 13th amendment in December of 1865. Massachusetts was the only state to end enslavement by a ruling of the state’s Supreme Court. In the *Commonwealth v. Jennison* case, an enslaved man named Quock Walker sued his owner for his freedom. The court ruled that he was free and subsequently used the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, which states that “all men are born free and equal,” as the basis for abolishing slavery under the Massachusetts Constitution. Four years later, in 1787, the first cotton manufactory in the U.S. was established in Beverly, MA. Perversely, the abolition of northern slavery coincided with the establishment of textile mills in New England where profits were made through the use of southern cotton cultivated by enslaved labor. By examining this history in the **Erasing Slavery** unit and depicting it through an interactive timeline, HHV’s project provides insight into the legacy of race-based slavery and its impact on issues of discrimination and inequality.

Here are **select examples of website content** in each unit and the **humanities theme** to which they align:

Unit	Example	Content type	Humanities Theme
Protecting Profits	27 March 1727 <i>Boston Gazette</i> ad for sale of two slaves	Period document	People as Property
	Van Bergen Overmantle, 1730-1745	Period image	Economic Development
Being Enslaved	Portrait of John Potter & Family (includes enslaved child)	Period image	People as Property
	Narrative of Venture Smith	Period narrative read by voice actor	Resistance
Taking Action	1741 sentence for Cuffee & Quack	Period document read by voice actor	People as Property and Resistance
	Discussion of covert acts of resistance	Video clip of contemporary scholar	Resistance
Erasing Slavery	An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in Pennsylvania (1780)	Period document	Economic Development and Gradual Emancipation
	Slave quarters installation at Bush-Holley House	Contemporary photo	Manumission did not mean equality

Contemporary Relevance

At a time when many American historical institutions struggle to retain or redefine their importance to the public, *People as Property* reinforces the lesson that the story of enslavement and resistance in the colonial North remains relevant and timely. The 2008 election of President Barack Obama, followed by key appointments of African American cabinet members including Eric Holder and Loretta Lynch, led many Americans to conclude that the nation had entered a “post-racial” phase. Supreme Court rulings on the Voting Rights Act of 2012 and Affirmative Action initiatives have sparked debate on the usefulness of legal protections for minorities, which some justices see as outdated. Yet, racial bias persists on many fronts, from widening socioeconomic gaps to the tragic deaths of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Freddie Gray to the nationwide Black Lives Matter movement. **The website offers users information about the history of enslavement in the colonial North and helps audiences better understand the origins of contemporary issues of race, racism, and civil rights.**

As the Smithsonian prepares to open the National Museum of African American History and Culture this September, our interest as a nation in the diverse aspects of American enslavement continues to grow—along with our knowledge of the institution. Students as well as the general public often express amazement that slavery extended beyond the cotton plantations of the antebellum South. In the past decade, this level of interest has made inroads in our cultural landscape. With the recent announcement that Harriet Tubman will replace Andrew Jackson on the twenty dollar bill, and the Broadway smash-hit *Hamilton* receiving a record-breaking 16 Tony Award nominations this year, Americans are witnessing a dramatic change in who we value as national treasures. The film *12 Years a Slave*, adapted from Solomon Northrup’s 1853 narrative, won the Academy Award in 2013. Prominent examples of African American history-themed television programs include a remake of Alex Haley’s *Roots*, while the new series *Underground* explores the role African Americans played in the underground railroad. These recent examples, along with the popular PBS series *The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross* (2013) and *Finding Your Roots*, hosted and produced by Harvard scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr., illustrate an interest in American enslavement and freedom that has grown in popular culture. Americans are becoming more comfortable with humanizing the institution as a means to understanding it more fully. **By illuminating this history, the *People as Property* website will provoke thought and advance the national conversation.**

C. Project Format

This project aligns with HHV’s mission, expertise, and strategic goal to deploy technology to convey the interpretive themes of our historic sites to a national audience. For more than 15 years, interpreters at

Philipsburg Manor have been sharing with visitors the story of slavery and resistance in the colonial North, focusing on the enslaved individuals who lived and worked on this 18th-century provisioning plantation. However, the physical location limits audience reach, and time constrains the onsite experience. ***People as Property: Stories of Northern Colonial Enslavement will employ innovative web design to share knowledge, offer context, and engage users in meaningful interactive experiences.*** In so doing, the site addresses the ongoing challenge of broad audience engagement. As HHV has found through years of experience conducting public tours, school programs, and special events, multiple factors have shifted the way museums and historic sites across the nation view audience engagement, including: 1) increased challenges in attracting onsite audiences; 2) growing public preference for interactive and self-guided experiences; and 3) the prevalent use of digital, mobile, and transmedia strategies to engage, connect, and share. For the past decade, HHV has been addressing these challenges through the presentation of popular events and the development of digital programs. As such, HHV has been able to thrive and build a far-reaching constituency—300,000 annual onsite visitors² and 1 million annual web visitors. Strengthened by our reach and decades of experience, HHV is positioned to launch an interactive website that engages the public with a vital piece of American history.

The **website’s objectives** are to:

- Provide an understanding of slavery in the colonial North
 - Explore the human dimensions of slavery, as opposed to the institution, as a means to encourage empathy for the individual
 - Help give recognition to the enslaved, for whom little physical evidence remains
- Use specific entry points (e.g. probate inventories, runaway slave ads, slave narratives, shipping records, legal documents) into key humanities themes
- Bring together content from disparate locations, providing an experience beyond a traditional site visit
 - Present Philipsburg Manor as the primary case study
 - Apply historical interpretive techniques to create individual stories and experiences of enslaved communities from various northern sites using the limited information available in extant sources
 - Be a valuable resource for teachers and students
- Encourage visits and promote public programs at Philipsburg and other historic sites

Cross-navigation is a vital usability function of the website. In addition to preventing dead ends, it allows users to follow their interests, thereby maximizing online engagement time. The website will be optimized for all digital devices to ensure a quality user experience whether on a computer screen, tablet, or phone. The site architecture includes a content management system to allow HHV to add content after launch. To ensure an optimal user experience, the website employs the following **engagement techniques**:

- Interactive books, videos, time map, and pop-up modules to maximize user engagement and experiential learning
- Primary documents, historical vignettes, audio recordings, infographics, and artwork offer multiple points of entry for the user
- The homepage serves as a non-linear menu where the user can choose any path regardless of chronology
- Four large thematic units are broken into sub-sections to motivate long-term engagement and user “stickiness”
- Primary layers of content are augmented by in-depth explorations
- Links to relevant, referenced outside websites are embedded so users can visit other sources for more information
- All pieces of content are tied to a story of an enslaved individual, ensuring user engagement with the personal story and driving home an emphasis on the human experience of slavery

Users will explore content through four main units that correspond to the project’s humanities themes: **1) Protecting Profits, 2) Being Enslaved, 3) Taking Action, and 4) Erasing Slavery.** The names of these units

² Of HHV’s total annual visitorship of 300,000 at our five historic sites, Philipsburg Manor accounts for 60,000 annual visitors.

are deliberately simple and accessible, so as to incite curiosity and action (clicking through) among a general audience. The website is designed to accommodate varying degrees of user knowledge, interest, and attention. Within each of the four units are three sub-units where users are introduced to the top-level content through content types such as: text overviews, short videos, audio clips, interactive books, and image slide shows. For longer, self-guided journeys, users can go deeper on subtopics and more complex content types such as longer narratives, videos in chapters, responsive modules, a timeline map, images of historical artifacts, and interactive primary documents. For example, if a user clicks on Being Enslaved and then Middle Passage, she will be able to watch a narrated video that evokes the journey and its inhumanity. If a user clicks Taking Action and Overt Acts, she can scroll through 18th century runaway slave ads and hear the story of Nell based on one of those ads with a script written by HHV's Director of Content Development and voiced by a professional actor.

While *People as Property* is intended for a general public audience, HHV anticipates it will be used as a classroom resource by educators. By clicking the plus sign in the bottom right corner of the site a menu bar opens with a catalog of resources including **Teacher Resources** which will house lesson plans, classroom exercises, learning activities, and curricula, including the 125-page Common Core-aligned curriculum for HHV's in-class program *Runaway Art*, created by Columbia Teachers College professor Jacqueline A. Simmons, Ed.D.

HHV came to work with C&G Partners after discovering an interactive website the firm created for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum called [*Some Were Neighbors*](#). The provocative website integrates linked first-person narrative, historical images with tagged metadata, video to complement a museum exhibition, resources for educators, an image gallery, and opportunities for users to reflect upon and share content. HHV admired the site's ability to be visually appealing and engaging while dealing with painful history, as well as its focus on first-person stories in order to illuminate the past. HHV's inclination that C&G might be a good partner for the *People as Property* project has resulted in a highly successful collaboration on a number of fronts. C&G's level of engagement with the humanities content, their understanding of the immersive user experience, and their ability to create a site that can appeal to a wide audience has all made C&G the ideal fit for this project.

D. Audience and Distribution

During the Discovery phase, in order to ensure effective engagement and optimal user experiences, HHV worked with C&G Partners to define four personas for the website user. Personas are fictional, generalized characters that embody the diverse needs, goals, and behaviors of our existing and potential visitors. The targeted personas HHV has kept in mind while creating the site are: **1) Culture Seeker; 2) Popular Culture Visitor; 3) Teacher; and 4) 7-8th Grade Student**. The attached [Design Document](#) provides a detailed profile for each persona including learning behaviors and expectations, level of interest in history, attention span, device and sharing preferences, and frequency of museum and historic site visits. Each persona also comes with a specific set of challenges and intended outcomes when visiting *People as Property*.

Because HHV's initiatives dovetail with partner institutions including Colonial Williamsburg, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, New York Public Library, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, HHV will work with these communications teams to promote *People as Property* resources on their webpages and social media channels. To reach educators and students, HHV will offer a link to the website on portals such as the [National Council on the Humanities](#), and [National Council for the Social Studies](#). In addition, HHV will pitch the project to the editors of American history-themed podcasts such as Nate Di Meo's *The Memory Palace*, *Stuff You Missed in History Class*, *American Experience* (PBS), and *Footnoting History*. As part of our overall strategy, HHV will employ targeted SEO techniques to capture relevant traffic related to the many-layered content available on *People as Property*. HHV will also target audiences via Google AdWords, Twitter, and Facebook sponsored stories and promoted posts.

People as Property will be a focal point of HHV's communication efforts locally, regionally, and nationally. HHV staff members regularly present at professional conferences, such as those organized by the Museum

Association of New York and the American Alliance of Museums, and HHV will make the project a centerpiece of upcoming speaking engagements. *People as Property* will be a prominent link on HHV's organizational website and will be marketed via social media. HHV's in-house Communications Department regularly uses social media to connect with and grow our audience. HHV has more than 100,000 Facebook fans and 7,000 Twitter followers, and more than 5,000 downloads of our free smartphone app to Union Church of Pocantico Hills. Additionally, HHV has an email list of 100,000 from ticket buyers, members, and newsletter subscribers. The website will reach a wide audience in diverse segments including HHV's onsite visitors, our online audience (1 million annual visitors), online and onsite visitors to our partnering sites, users interested in diving deeper into the history of northern colonial enslavement, and students and teachers. HHV conducts ongoing formal audience research and analyzes visitation statistics to best meet the needs of our onsite constituents. Our typical visitor group consists of parents ages 35-50 with children under 10. HHV's audience is web and social media savvy, with 81% of survey respondents in 2015 identifying as Facebook users, 62% identifying as YouTube viewers, and 32% identifying as Pinterest users.

As launch of the site approaches, HHV will contract with a New York-based public relations firm in order to extend our hand beyond the museum-education-cultural institution audience and tap into the popular culture conversation. The agency will position the site to reach a wide general audience, raise awareness of the site and keep its visibility high, and engage key influencers with a strong, serious social media following.

E. Product Evaluation and Testing

Kate Livingston (Founder and Principal, **ExposeYourMuseum, LLC**) has been a formidable collaborator with HHV through the Discovery and Prototype phases. The formative user-testing evaluation conducted during Prototyping was enormously beneficial and educational for HHV in the development of this project. A number of significant changes were incorporated as a result of user testing, C&G's input, and an evolution in HHV's thinking about the project. One major change that occurred during the Prototyping phase was the decision to move from seven introductory units on the home menu to four in order to streamline the user interface and more closely align our homepage points of entry with the four humanities themes driving the content. Crystallizing these four homepage units enabled HHV to better organize the site and go broader and deeper in each category to create a richer user experience.

User-testing revealed some interesting considerations: 1) Users wanted the site to establish authority and intention early and often; they were wary of any kind of political agenda. In response, Rather than relying primarily on the footer to convey authorship and authority, we added references to both HHV and the NEH in the prologue video and made a design change so "Historic Hudson Valley" appears in the lower corner of all pages. To address intention, we wrote more first-person perspectives from external scholars into the content-sourcing plan, prioritized the "how we know what we know" utility within the footer, added a "cast and credits" utility to supplement "about" and "acknowledgments," and made an additional design change that will allow users to easily identify the source of text in individual sections of the site. 2) Some users were put off by images of contemporary actors portraying enslaved people; it broke the immersive narrative for them. To address this, HHV commissioned artists to create hand-drawn sketches to serve as images of the enslaved; in some instances these drawings will morph into color photographs. 3) Some general users felt like they were on a site targeted to students. In response, HHV removed the occasional didactic icons targeted at students that clicked-through to quizzes or activities, reformatted interrogative section titles, adjusted the tone of narrative text throughout the site, and created a section accessible through the site footer that contains educational resources for students and teachers.

In addition, HHV learned that users enjoy and engage with the site's interactive elements. For example, actively clicking and scrolling through the Philipse inventory helped users understand that the personal stories on the site were about real people rather than composite characters. Users also liked the time map feature, the ability to view videos, and the ability to click around within the site regardless of historical chronology or a linear format.

In the Production phase, Ms. Livingston will begin the evaluation cycle with a logic model workshop with the project team, ensuring audience and user learning and experiential outcomes are well defined, with specific measurable indicators. Ms. Livingston will conduct user tests with the Beta version of *People as Property*, focusing on the four targeted personas (Culture Seeker, Popular Culture Visitor, Teacher, and Student) in order to evaluate how these most-likely types of users interact with the site. During the Prototype phase, users were presented with a static PDF of the site to evaluate. During Production, all testers will interact with a live version of the website during a one-on-one session with the evaluator; they will be observed and questioned as they engage with content and navigate the site in a self-directed manner. Livingston will also assess how well the four humanities themes are conveyed by the site. Testers will be questioned prior to their interaction with the site to establish a baseline for their knowledge of slavery in the colonial North, then again during their experience, and after engaging with the site in order to evaluate how effectively the themes are delivered. It is critical to the Production phase that this testing occurs well before the end of the project, so any useful feedback from testers can be implemented. The sample size is 24, made up of two testers representing each of the four personas in three different communities (Hudson Valley, NY; New York City; and Austin, TX). Following testing, Ms. Livingston will analyze and report results and devise a list of actionable recommendations for the final product.

F. Rights, Permissions, and Licensing

HHV's research library contains invaluable resources for *People as Property*. The library collection contains the **Philipse Family Papers** and the **Van Cortlandt Family Papers**, which include receipts, letters, bonds, leases, legal papers, rent rolls, maps, deeds, and wills. A number of these documents contain vital clues to understanding enslavement in the Hudson River Valley, as well as references to acts of resistance and the conditions that motivated such actions. These documents, as well as extensive materials in the **Corporate Records**—including research reports, memoranda, and letters dating to early American and European research surveys for the Philipse and Van Cortlandt families, augmented by research reports conducted for the northern colonial slavery-focused reinterpretation of Philipsburg Manor—provide the foundational material for this project. **Documents and historic images** have been gathered from other repositories listed in our bibliography, including the American Museum in Britain, the Medford Historical Society & Museum, Pennsylvania State Archives, and Princeton University Rare Books and Special Collections, with appropriate permissions obtained. Microfilm versions of the colonial-era **runaway newspaper ads**, vital primary sources for this project, are found in the collections of various libraries. Although the text of these advertisements is in the public domain, permissions will be obtained for images of original source material.

G. Humanities Advisors (résumés and letters of commitment attached)

During the Production phase, HHV will continue to draw on its relationships with the humanities and digital scholars who participated in Discovery and Prototyping. Scholars will review iterations of the website during the Production phase to vet the humanities content and assess the site's usability, navigation, interactivity, and content presentation.

Laura M. Chmielewski, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History at Purchase College, State University of New York. Dr. Chmielewski brings more than 20 years of academic experience specializing in Early American and Atlantic history. She coauthored the leading text in the field for university students, *The Atlantic Experience: People, Places, Ideas* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). She has deep knowledge of the history of Philipsburg Manor, developed through site visits with her students and having worked on consulting projects for HHV. A former historic site director, Dr. Chmielewski writes and lectures on Early American history topics including colonial slavery and transatlantic trade.

Kevin Clark, Ph.D., Professor in the Division of Learning Technologies, and Founding Director of the Center for Digital Media Innovation and Diversity in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Dr. Clark has extensive experience as a designer and consultant in the areas of educational game design, online and interactive media, and issues of diversity and inclusion in digital media. His recent publications include *Culture Learning and Technology: Research and Practice* (Routledge Publishing, 2014),

and *Emotions and Technology: Communication of Feelings for, with, and through Digital Media*. (Elsevier Publishing, 2014).

Leslie M. Harris, Ph.D., Associate Professor of History and African American Studies, Emory University. Dr. Harris's research focuses on the history of pre-Civil War African Americans in the U.S. She is the author of *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), which challenged the prevailing view of slavery as a phenomenon of the South with little impact in the North. She advised the New-York Historical Society's *Slavery in New York* exhibit and co-edited the accompanying book. She co-founded and directed Emory's Transforming Community Project, which encourages reflective, fact-driven engagement with the University's history and experiences of race, gender, and sexuality.

Jeffrey W. McClurken, Ph.D., Professor of History and American Studies, Special Assistant to the Provost for Teaching, Technology, and Innovation, University of Mary Washington. Dr. McClurken's expertise exists at the intersection of American history (including the history of slavery), teaching, and technology. He has authored numerous chapters and articles in publications including *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections between Archives and Our Users* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011) and *Learning through Digital Media: Experiments in Technology and Pedagogy* (New York: The New School and the MacArthur Foundation, 2011).

Jacqueline A. Simmons, Ed.D., Lecturer, Department of Curriculum and Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Simmons teaches graduate courses on curriculum theory and history, teaching and learning, and curriculum design. She advises a range of institutions and leads a creative team for Project Innovation, a web-based toolkit commissioned by The Rockefeller Foundation to teach the research, creative facilitation, and collaboration skills needed to effect social change. In addition to developing the curriculum for HHV's *Runaway Art* project, Dr. Simmons skillfully moderated the convening of scholars in Discovery. In Production, she will serve as education specialist, advising HHV on how to best serve the project's learning objectives.

Craig S. Wilder, Ph.D., Professor of History, Head of History Faculty, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Dr. Wilder specializes in American urban, intellectual, and cultural history. He has authored the books *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities* (Bloomsbury, 2013) and *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York University Press, 2004), among others. He has advised historical documentaries as well as exhibits at regional and national museums including the New-York Historical Society, Chicago History Museum, and Weeksville Heritage Center.

H. Production Team

Working in tandem with C&G Partners, HHV's African American Advisory Board, our humanities advisors, and evaluator, the individuals below are responsible for co-curating the website, prioritizing content, guiding our interactive and digital storytelling strategy, and driving the project to successful completion.

Historic Hudson Valley Staff (résumés attached)

Ross W. Higgins (Project Director), Vice President, Program: BA, French, Skidmore College. Ms. Higgins directs the design and implementation of all digital programs for HHV. She also oversees the library, curatorial, and education functions, especially as they relate to presenting digital experiences. A member of HHV's senior management team for 20 years, Ms. Higgins played a key role in the Philipsburg reinterpretation and is instrumental in the planning of public programs. She directed the Discovery and Prototype phases of this project.

Michael A. Lord, Associate Director of Content Development: BA, History and Black Studies, Amherst College. Mr. Lord came to HHV in 1998 to help lead the reinterpretation of Philipsburg, creating and implementing a new interpretive plan for the site. Until 2015, he served as HHV's Associate Director of Education. Prior to HHV, Mr. Lord worked in the African American Programs department of Colonial

Williamsburg, where he interpreted the “Slave Quarters” at Carter’s Grove, chaired the “Enslaved Virginia” project, managed and acted in museum theater programs, and trained interpreters.

Jessa J. Krick, Collections Manager: MA, Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture; BA, English, Willamette University. Ms. Krick is the senior staff member responsible for HHV’s collection of 8,000 objects and serves on the Digital Programs team. Ms. Krick also served as the lead for HHV’s implementation of Gallery System’s eMuseum software.

Karen Walton Morse, C.A., Manager of Library and Archival Services: MSI, Archives and Records Management, University of Michigan; BA, Comparative Literature, University of Chicago. Ms. Morse brings to the project a facility for using archival and manuscript material as the basis for online exhibitions and digital humanities projects. As part of HHV’s Digital Programs team, Ms. Morse is also overseeing an IMLS-funded library automation and retrospective conversion project.

Margaret W. Hughes, Associate Director of Education: MAT in Museum Education, George Washington University; BA, American Studies, University of the South. Ms. Hughes oversees public and school visits to HHV properties and coordinates staff training and teacher workshops that share current scholarship with these audiences.

African American Advisory Board

This project builds on HHV’s foundation of institutional knowledge and deep ties to the community. Our 12-member **African American Advisory Board** (AAAB), which guided the Philipsburg reinterpretation, oversees all programming at the site. Under the AAAB’s guidance, HHV has developed a number of innovative youth programs including *Runaway Art* and a museum theater workshop in which students work from scripted vignettes to portray moments in the lives of enslaved individuals at Philipsburg. The AAAB meets quarterly and will continue to play a key advisory role in this project.

Vendors (proposals, résumés, and letters of commitment attached)

C&G Partners, an award-winning, multi-specialty design studio that has deep expertise in diverse interrelated design fields: branding, exhibitions, infographics, interactives, motion, and web design. From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to The King Center, C&G has extensive experience interpreting sensitive issues from the past and making history meaningful to a variety of audiences. C&G developed the Design Document and the Prototype for this project.

Kate Livingston, Founder and Principal, **ExposeYourMuseum, LLC**, a boutique consultancy delivering the tools and data needed to better understand current and potential visitors, teams, communities, and audiences. Ms. Livingston’s user-testing provided invaluable insights during the Prototyping phase and HHV has contracted with her company again to conduct user testing during final production of the website and to measure HHV’s intended learning objectives for the site.

The Tracing Center (Boston, MA), an organization dedicated to fostering awareness of the nation’s complicity in slavery and inspiring dialogue and active responses to this history and its legacy. The Tracing Center’s *Best Practices in Slavery Interpretation* is a ground-breaking project to research, evaluate, and disseminate, via writing and training, best practices for interpreting the history of slavery at museums and historic sites.

I. State of the Project

Following a dynamic and productive Prototype phase, HHV is in a strong position to move into Production. HHV has researched and identified stories of enslaved persons in order to create video, audio, and images for the site’s content. HHV has established relationships with other historical repositories (full list in the bibliography), from which to draw primary source material, including: 1) The Historical Society in Little Compton, RI, where Executive Director Marjory Gomez O’Toole has recently pored through colonial deeds, wills, and town records to uncover the fascinating personal story of enslaved people in Rhode Island’s coastal

towns (letter of commitment attached); 2) The Medford (Massachusetts) Historical Society and Museum, housing a collection of slave trade letters dating 1759-63; and 3) Cliveden, the National Trust historic site in Philadelphia, where the papers of the prominent Chew family offer fascinating insight into the lives of the enslaved people who lived there and what they did to find freedom.

On May 15-16, 2016, HHV convened a group of humanities and digital media scholars, museum educators, and media creators to examine the humanities content, learning objectives, and the Prototype of this project. C&G Partners, members of the AAAB, and the HHV project team were joined by Laura Chmielewski, Ph.D., Kevin Clark, Ph.D., Leslie M. Harris, Ph.D., Adeline Koh, Ph.D., and Craig S. Wilder, Ph.D. in a rigorous and insightful colloquium. HHV's Associate Director of Content Development, Michael A. Lord, moderated the discussion and prompted the advisors to think critically about how the stories of northern colonial enslavement, resistance, and the human experience of slavery can and should be told online. C&G Partners presented an early version of the Prototype to the group for their feedback. Kate Livingston presented via video some of her findings from user testing and HHV explained how these concerns were addressed in the Prototype.

The scholars examined the humanities content and made suggestions for the narrative and language. The group discussed the importance of conveying to the website user the inherent contradiction of the enslaved existing as person *and* property at once; and the importance of conveying the financial contributions of the enslaved in building the wealth of colonial America. The scholars also confirmed that the prototype is a visually appealing, effective, and engaging way to convey the humanities content.

Finally, the group debated how HHV might gesture towards the idea that the history of slavery presented on the website can provide context for the current state of race relations in America today. The Finding Connections sub-section in the Erasing Slavery unit examines how the story of enslavement in the colonial North remains relevant. HHV's position is that of historians, and, as such, it is our job to present the past and make connections to the present. Onsite and online, HHV strives to provoke thought and generate further inquiry. In this digital project, we have an opportunity to connect to the present in a way that we cannot and do not at Philipsburg Manor. However, our point of view maintains that we remain apolitical and not interpret nor expand on the legacy of slavery. In order to determine how best to represent this section, HHV will hold a *charrette* led by Jacqueline A. Simmons, Ed.D. Dr. Simmons is committed to, and especially adept at, fostering an atmosphere of inquiry where participants are encouraged to share and explore questions that may arise when confronting what can be difficult or uncomfortable feelings about slavery, race, and identity in America today. She is particularly engaged in thinking about how to teach difficult knowledge, and how to consider context when teaching about the past. She will guide HHV in making the bridge between the historical content presented on the website and contemporary relevance. The *charrette* will also include James DeWolf Perry, co-founder and Executive Director of the Tracing Center, who will facilitate HHV in making relevant connections between enslavement and social, economic, and political issues today.

J. Work Plan

January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2018

Months	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Ongoing collaboration with C+G Partners																								
Content review																								
Content prioritization, updated content matrix																								
Continuing content research as needed																								
Relationship building with scholars and historic sites																								
Preparation of UX and new visual design templates																								
Acquisition of Permissions and/or Licenses																								
Development of test script for evaluation																								

People as Property: Stories of Northern Colonial Enslavement

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Sources of archival material to be used in this project: Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, African American Burying Ground Park (Portsmouth, NH), The African American Museum (Philadelphia, PA), African Burial Ground National Monument, The American Museum in Britain, Ancient Burial Ground (Weathersfield, CT), Bard College Special Collections, Boston Trowtrow Gravesite (Norwich, CT), Brooklyn Historical Society, Camden County (NJ) Historical Society (NJ), The Cathedral of St. John the Divine (Providence, RI), Colonial African Burial Ground aka "God's Little Acre" (Newport, RI), Connecticut State Library, Fenimore Art Museum, Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Greenwich (CT) Historical Society, Historic Hudson Valley, Library of Congress, Little Compton (RI) Historical Society, Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts State Archives, The Medford (MA) Historical Society & Museum, Monmouth County (NJ) Historical Society, Morris County (NJ) Historical Society, National Archives (UK), New Jersey Historical Society, New-York Historical Society, New York Public Library, Pennsylvania State Archives, Princeton Univ. Rare Books and Special Collections, Rhode Island State Archives, Rucker Agee Map Collection Birmingham Public Library, Stamford (CT) Probate Court Records, Venture Smith Gravesite (East Haddam, CT), West Hartford (CT) Historical Soc.