



## **Black Lives Matter – Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow**

In 2020, America once again faced the reality of systemic racism and violence against Black Americans in the wake of George Floyd's horrible murder by a police officer in Minneapolis. The passionate protests and calls for change flowing from this tragedy roiled people and places across the nation and the world. This was right and proper, and it wasn't new. Many protested the hate and hostility inflicted on people of color in our country long before Mr. Floyd's death, including here at home. Such activism has been necessary because our region shares the same history and pervasiveness of racism as the rest of America, and has done so for a very, very long time.

When the Dritt Mansion, now SNHA's Zimmerman Center for Heritage, was constructed along the Susquehanna River in York County about 1750, slavery was legal in Pennsylvania, with over 6000 Black Americans in bondage. Slavery was not abolished here until 1780, and then only phased out, with many still enslaved well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For over thirty years after our area and people played a key role in securing freedom and independence during the Revolutionary War, Black Americans were still enslaved here, including at the Dritt Mansion itself.

We should be proud of those who strived for racial justice in the two centuries that followed. Black businessmen like William Goodridge, William Whipper, and Stephen Smith, Quakers like the Wrights and Mifflins, and many lesser known Underground Railroad supporters who assisted those escaping slavery. We should be proud of the Christiana Resistance of 1851, when Black and non-Black Lancaster Countians clashed with a Maryland enslaver to ensure freedom for his fugitive former captives. We should be proud of those who fought to end slavery in the Civil War and abolitionists like Thaddeus Stevens who helped advance equality for Black Americans. We should be proud of local citizens who strove for justice in the civil rights era, desegregating Lancaster pools and facing racial strife in York in the 1960s. And we should be proud of the racial justice movement today.

The very need for such heroes and actions throughout our history demonstrates one thing we should not and cannot be proud of – the persistent and still-prevalent racism and injustice experienced by people of color in our community. Since our founding in 2001, SNHA has sponsored projects highlighting the importance of Black Americans in our region's history and hosted programs that bring young people of color to the river for fun and learning. But we have not done nearly enough. As we embrace, learn from, and take part in America's historic racial justice movement, we must, and will, stand against racism and for racial equity, diversity, and inclusion – in our storytelling, our community projects, our partnerships, and our workplace.

Since 2020, SNHA has engaged our staff and Board to assess and update our policies and practices to ensure justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in our programs, projects, and leadership. SNHA staff have participated in excellent forums on these issues through the National Park Service, Alliance of National Heritage Areas, and other partners. We will apply this learning and other resources and guidance to make our organization better.

In 2022, SNHA completed our National Heritage Area Management Plan to guide our work over the next decade. As we implement the plan, we'll ensure that the advisory groups, partners, consultants, and communities we work with are diverse and inclusive and that contributions from people of color are heard and addressed. Our current inclusive storytelling project focused on key people, places, and events important to Black lives and Black history in our National Heritage Area will provide an essential framework for this work in the years ahead.

We look forward to working with our community and partners to ensure that our organization promotes racial justice and celebrates cultural diversity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark N. Platts".

**Mark N. Platts, President**

*Originally posted June 2020 / Updated August 2023*