

A Call to Action

A Strategic Plan for the
African American Heritage House



Summer 2023-2026

Chautauqua Institution has been called “The most American thing in America” by President Teddy Roosevelt. It would follow then that, like our great nation, Chautauqua is still a work in progress, embodying noble ideals that have yet to be completely fulfilled.

Few areas reflect this dynamic more clearly than the relative lack of diversity within the Chautauqua community. While great African American speakers such as Thurgood Marshall and Booker T. Washington have spoken from the dais over the past 100 years, Chautauqua’s racial composition has remained relatively constant and is not reflective of our broader society.

Against this backdrop, and under the assumption that those who work to understand others will be more open and welcoming, **The African American Heritage House** is dedicated to preserving and accurately portraying the history and culture of African Americans as well as providing educational and cultural experiences that will enrich the lives of all who visit Chautauqua Institution.

Our strategic plan for the coming years will focus on three key areas:

- 1. Expanding our educational and cultural programming.** We will offer a variety of new educational and cultural programs throughout the Chautauqua season.
- 2. Strengthening our community partnerships.** We will work to build stronger relationships with community organizations, residents and visitors of Chautauqua Institution to promote our mission, to increase public awareness of our programs, and to make Chautauqua Institution a more welcoming place for all.
- 3. Transforming our home at 40 Scott into a welcoming center for all with particular focus on African Americans.** Our plans include a new grand Chautauqua porch, accommodations for the staff, visiting scholars,

speakers and guests, and an enlarged space for public functions, including display areas for the history of African Americans with Chautauqua connections.

We are confident that this strategic plan will help us to achieve our mission of preserving and sharing the history and culture of African Americans in our community and beyond. Together we can strive to achieve Chautauqua’s ideals to honor the dignity and contributions of all people and promote dialogue to achieve enhanced understanding that leads to positive action. We are grateful for your support and look forward to working with you to make this vision a reality.

Sincerely,

Strategic Planning Committee members:

Rebecca Pickens (Chair)

Erroll B. Davis, Jr.

Helene Gayle

Ted First

M. Timothy Renjilian

The African American Heritage House is a testament to the power of shared vision, anti-racism work, and an inclusive commitment to positive change. Our story is interwoven with that of the Chautauqua Institution, a place of sabbatical and learning founded in 1874 by two Methodist visionaries, Bishop John Heyl Vincent and inventor Lewis Miller. Their stated intention was one of hope: to create an engaged community that welcomed all, and a space for religious study that was connected to the wider world of science, history, literature, and biblical scholarship.

From the beginning, African Americans were present within Chautauqua's community. In the first twenty five years, they came as guests, employees, speakers, ministers, students, and artists. African Americans were members of the first Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle class and became a significant part of Chautauqua's national reach, setting up local chapters in places like Tennessee and Kentucky, and increasing the breadth and numbers of individuals participating in the CLSC, one of this country's oldest “book club” correspondence courses. The African American presence, however, diminished rather than grew as Chautauqua approached the turn of the century.

By the dawn of the 20th century, the US saw segregation - through post-reconstruction regulations and behavioral norms, become the lived reality. Before the end of the first decade, a Phillis Wheatley house appeared on the grounds to accommodate people of color. The source of the idea to have, situate, build, or fund such a house is yet unknown, even after three years of archival research. Over the decades, Chautauqua's significance declined in the new culture of automobiles, radio, and mass entertainment. African Americans, while continuing to be invited to the stage and pulpit, remained few in number of season participants. The Phillis Wheatley house ceased just prior to the signing of the 1965 Civil Rights Act.

By mid-century a few African American families owned or rented properties on the grounds, and by the 1990s, Chautauqua's Department of Religion had embraced its role in building religious, social and ethnic diversity and inclusion on the grounds. Nationally recognized African American pastors and Muslim imams were actively recruited, joining rabbis and renowned Jewish scholars.

The Department of Religion's early efforts to build an African American on-the-grounds constituency appeared unsuccessful, but had planted seeds which were followed by a broader commitment to ensuring diversity and inclusion, with a particular emphasis on those historically underrepresented or absent. This commitment led — in 2013 — to the creation of the African American Heritage House Board, and a collaboration among the Board and its volunteers, the Institutional leadership, and community partners to support an AAHH mission fostering a diverse community that transforms the Chautauqua experience. And in 2022, the Board purchased a home on the Chautauqua grounds and the African American Heritage House became a reality.

Moving forward, inch by inch and row by row, we are creating a community that welcomes and embraces all. The AAHH is proud to be a part of this work through its focus on the African American experience. We look forward to continued bridge-building across lines of difference and to honoring the contributions of all who have made Chautauqua a place of inclusive learning, growth, and inspiration.

This plan is our commitment to that calling.

Vision and Mission

Imagining a more vibrant, diverse, and welcoming Chautauqua community.

The African American Heritage House fosters a diverse community to collaboratively transform the Chautauqua experience.

We Are Called:

To Advocate for Historical and Intellectual Integrity

To fully welcome people of diverse backgrounds and encourage their participation in our community, we seek to understand them and their unique histories. Thus, we strive to be accurate and complete in our understanding of the past and rigorous in our analysis of the present.

To Foster Openness and Honesty

Building trust and respect are essential to address complex challenges of race, and to develop genuine, lasting relationships across diverse groups. Openness and honesty are the foundation for this building process.

To Live in Community with Humility and Grace

By understanding others and empathizing with them, we will create an environment where dialogue and action can help us achieve our objectives.

To Be Welcoming and Hospitable

Welcoming newcomers and strangers – letting them know that they are valued and have a home in our midst – is the first step toward being in a relationship with them, and those relationships are the key to building community.

To Play a More Active Role in the Community

It is imperative for AAHH to collaborate with other organizations within and beyond the grounds. Consistent with Chautauqua Institution's strategic goal, all people will have the opportunity to connect with and be a part of our shared community.

Strategic
Focus Areas

Engagement

Community

Sustainability

Engagement

We strive to present to the entire Chautauqua audience an engaging and educationally accurate history of the marginalized in American society with a primary focus on the African American experience. This includes a programmed interpretation of the weekly Chautauqua theme; archival research; robust discussions, both scheduled and unscheduled; and other forms of educational and cultural programming.

Engagement Goals

1. Maximize the impact of our speaker program

Research a “desired speakers” list and develop a process in which the entire Board nominates potential speakers that emphasize the distinctive role of the marginalized.

Develop a speaker scheduling process and timeline so that speakers are scheduled in a timely manner that facilitates early advertising.

Create an advertising strategy for program offerings related to speakers (including the Chautauqua Daily).

2. Maximize the value of our archival research program

Create an online presence around storyboards, e.g., a digital storyboard wall on the AAHH web site.

Develop a strategy around archival research, including goals, potential future focus areas, research questions, and dissemination.

Create curated physical space on the Chautauqua grounds for continuing work on storyboards and other archival research artifacts and products.

Expand archival research products, e.g. including weekly articles in Chautauqua Daily that could also be featured within an AAHH online forum.

3. Develop new and creative forms of programming

Develop a strategy around porch chats to support upcoming programming, including the identification of weekly themes based on speakers’ lectures for incorporation into porch chat discussions.

Contribute to the larger Chautauqua cultural and artistic program, e.g., by starting a Music Night at the house.

Expand use of the house beyond the Chautauqua season, and expand programming beyond the season and grounds.

Create opportunities for extended presence and engagement of scholars and artists.

Develop a brochure for use on Chautauqua grounds to promote AAHH programs and house, e.g., for use at the Sunday Activity Fair and availability at the house.

Community

We strive to expand and strengthen the community at Chautauqua to be more welcoming and engaging for all, leveraging the African American experience. This includes attracting and welcoming new Chautauquans; encouraging inquiry, conversation and understanding within the community; fostering relationships and collaboration; and empowering community members to carry their insights back into the wider-world.

Community Goals

1. **Attract a diverse population to the Chautauqua community**

Form relationships with local social justice organizations, inviting them to visit and participate in activities and programs related to the AAHH.

Create partnerships with higher education institutions and organizations, with particular focus on Black/African American and other people of color campus groups and HBCU institutions, e.g., developing book clubs.

Work with Institution leadership to encourage and support efforts to increase diversity.

Partner with external organizations to attract more African American visitors to Chautauqua.

Leverage our personal networks to recruit a more diverse group of Chautauquans.

2. **Welcome all who enter the Chautauqua community**

Create activities that are specifically to welcome those who are involved with the AAHH, including sponsoring CI partners and students, artists, and staff of color.

Recruit and train volunteers, e.g. to participate as “docents.”

Create and publicize opportunities for new African American visitors to Chautauqua

Invite community members to participate in welcoming activities, such as taking speakers to dinner.

3. **Encourage and empower the Chautauqua community toward collaborative action**

Create activities such as “friendship circles” for people of color and Chautauquans.

Collaborate with Chautauqua Institution’s Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) group on events for the season.

Develop new programmatic and spontaneous activities to discuss difficult issues of race, marginalization, and hope.

Create student-focused events around the AAHH mission to shape the experiences and memories of visiting students on the grounds.

Sustainability

We strive to maintain an environment in which the AAHH lives and thrives for years to come. This includes optimizing organizational structures; developing financial and fundraising models; and creating a welcoming physical space, home, and cultural center for the African American community at Chautauqua.

2. Develop a staffing framework that supports the mission of the AAHH

Create an operational committee to focus on the oversight of the day-to-day activities of the organization.

Build a plan for paid positions to help perform and augment our key activities.

Determine how to best utilize and develop the existing database for fundraising, volunteer recruitment, off-season engagement, and other applications.

3. Formalize governance structures

Expand the board, clarify responsibilities for members, and define formal governance and committee structures to enhance the engagement and oversight capacity the board has over the work of the AAHH.

Develop succession plans for board members to create a pipeline of future leaders in the organization.

4. Create the necessary infrastructure for a sustainable physical plant

Create an architectural plan and budget for expansion and improvements to the house in order to better utilize the space to serve the mission of the organization.

Sustainability Goals

1. Build a robust financial strategy that is flexible, adaptable, and sustainable

Create a financial committee to focus on long-term financial sustainability.

Develop 2-3-year expense budgets and analyze our recent fundraising history to be able to more aptly set fundraising targets going forward.

Create an endowment and planned giving strategy to address our current debt and future plans.

SOUTH ELEVATION

1/16" = 1'-0"

WEST ELEVATION

1/16" = 1'-0"

DESIGNER: JOE FLIKKEMA
SNOWY MOUNTAIN DESIGN
1000 W. 10TH STREET
CHAUTAUQUA, WI 54829

ENGINEER: PETER RADKA
ROCK HILL ENGINEERING, LLC
4100 WISCONSIN STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60644
(773) 477-6000

ELEVATIONS
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE HOUSE
1000 WISCONSIN AVENUE
CHAUTAUQUA, WI 54829

DRAWN: JEFF FLIKKEMA
DATE: 08/20/2023
SHEET # A1
2 OF 2

The AAHH Storyboard Project

Phase 1: The First 25 Years of Chautauqua

“What would an audience of twenty years ago have said to the presentation to them, of a Southerner, a woman, and a negro as lecturers. Strange, but the sympathy that was astir among the people was ample proof of the thankfulness in their hearts that such a thing was possible and they were seeing it.”

—Chautauquan Assembly Herald, 1885



Booker T. Washington

THE NEGRO PROBLEM IN THE BLACK BELT OF THE SOUTH.

An Address Delivered in the Amphitheater, August 1, 1896, by Rev. Booker T. Washington, Principal of the Normal and Tuskegee Industrial School, Tuskegee, Ala.

A guiding principle of the African American Heritage House (AAHH) at Chautauqua Institution is that history must be told correctly: It is only through attention to an accurate history that we can gain a genuine understanding of people and form meaningful relationships.



Tennessee Singers, Mt Hermon, Chautauqua, NY, 1884. Chautauqua Institution Archives.

With the support of key donors, the AAHH has commissioned archival research to understand the experience of African Americans at Chautauqua over the years. Our first block of research featured the work of our archivist Emálee Sanfilippo and focused on the years 1874-1899, resulting in storyboards showcasing the lives of African Americans on the grounds.

We are excited to continue our multi-year effort with storyboards for each tranche of research. Our initial set was on display in the AAHH during the summer of 2022 and was met with great interest. A second phase covering the period 1900-1914 is on display at the House beginning in the 2023 season.

The storyboards can also be found at the AAHH website, at <https://www.aaheritagehouse.org/>.

Strategic Planning Committee

Summer 2023

Rebecca Pickens
Chair

Erroll B. Davis, Jr.

Ted First

Dr. Helene Gayle

M. Timothy Renjilian

Strategic Planning Partners

Teibel Education Consulting

Howard Teibel

Thomas Fikes

Sam Gilden

AAHH Board of Directors

Summer 2023

Erroll B. Davis, Jr.
President

Rev. Dr. Joan Brown
Campbell

Rev. Dr. Robert Michael
Franklin, Jr.

George L. Follansbee, Jr.
Treasurer

Dr. Helene Gayle
Vice President

Rev. Dr. Cynthia L. Hale

Edward M. Jones

Rebecca Pickens

Rev. Dr. Otis Moss III

M. Timothy Renjilian

Ted First

Brenda T. Thompson

Rev. Dr. Sterling Freeman

