

14 | '21 Statement for Syllabus of course: 'Archaeology of African American Farms & Gardens'  
by Dr. Christophe Lindner, as professor, for the dozen students in Anthropology 290

In the five years since Bard College's 2016 acquisition of Montgomery Place in Annandale NY, a series of nine courses and a senior thesis culminated in Gilsonfest. This most recent effort, with a student-researched exhibit and a booklet by Professor Myra Young Armstead [2019], commemorated the career of Alexander Gilson, a former Montgomery Place gardener. It inspired the current course, 'Archaeology of African American Farms and Gardens' in the context of community collaboration supported by the College's Center for Civic Engagement [CCE].

The Bard Archaeology website's section 'Internet Exhibits / Bard Exhibits' now expands with this statement for the new course's syllabus. Simultaneously I will include on the website an introduction and link to the video that students in the 2020 course 'Ancient Peoples before the Bard Lands' created as a presentation to the Stockbridge Munsee Community of the Mohican nation, recorded and edited by Bard's CCE fellow Rose Battista '23 with my assistance.

These exhibits join a set of 14 'Internet Exhibits / Germantown Exhibits' -- 12 years in the making -- produced in collaboration with a community nine miles north of Bard, at a Town property adjacent to lands owned by the College. The project at this historic parcel in Germantown, the Maple Avenue Parsonage [inhabited 1746-1990], is becoming a model in community archaeology, focusing on early German-American and African-American material culture. A video of my symposium presentation of February 7, 2020, at the Bard Graduate Center in New York City, is available via a link on the website, and will receive publication as a book chapter published by the BGC in 2022. It evolved from a presentation at a conference of the Society for Historical Archaeology during January 2020 in Boston. Another book chapter, on community archaeology in Germantown, also for an international audience, is under review. Due out soon is an archaeology journal article as a photographic tour of the Parsonage.

In a precursor to this project, with a former Bard student, Trevor Johnson '07, I summarized the results of my previous long-term project on an early African American farm in Hyde Park, done on behalf of the Black History Project Committee of Dutchess County. That book chapter appeared in a groundbreaking volume entitled *The Archaeology of Race in the Northeast*, edited by Christopher N. Matthews and Alison Manfra McGovern, and published by the Society for Historical Archaeology.

The academic work for the new course in Winter/Spring 2021 involves three books for discussion in seminar and a variety of student presentations that will serve as background on Montgomery Place. The first book is Leland Ferguson's [1992] landmark study of tidewater South Carolina, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800* [Smithsonian]. It historicizes the field in which we newly engage and exemplifies the use of theory and evidence. The second text is *Jefferson's Poplar Forest: Unearthing a Virginia Plantation*, edited by Barbara Heath and Jack Gary [2012, University Press of Florida]. The retired President's retreat home [1810-23] and its landscape are presented from his perspective and the vantage points of the people in bondage there. It serves as a model for our research on Montgomery Place. The third book, *The Archaeology of Garden and Field*, edited by Naomi Miller and Kathryn Gleason [1994, University of Pennsylvania] provides methodological surveys and case studies, pertinent to our scientific pursuits in Annandale.

We will also read book chapters, technical reports, and articles including a 2019 update by Ferguson and one of his young colleagues, Kelly Goldberg, and we'll view a BBC documentary *Digging for Slaves* that includes segments on the work in South Carolina and Virginia. For comparisons in the Northeast, we'll look at writing and videography by Bardians at the home farms of leaders of two free African American communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: near the Germantown parsonage [since 2009] and at Guineatown in Hyde Park [2002-2015] on the original Bard estate, inhabited for a half century, a generation before the College's 1860 establishment in Annandale.

Several differences in economic base contrast the orchard focus of Montgomery Place's farm with that of Poplar Forest, which provided tobacco to the international market through Lynchburg, and the rice plantations along the Cooper River above Charleston. A key research question will be the way that landscape transformations were a manifestation of the relationship at Montgomery Place between the estate's owners and the laborers who were responsible for the physical enactment of such changes. What also remains in question is whether free African Americans formed a community adjacent to Annandale or in its nearby village of Red Hook, as they did in Hyde Park and Germantown.

We aim to begin a partnership with African-American educational programs this year, similar to the CCE-supported collaborative relationship established last semester through the Stockbridge Munsee / Mohican nation's Office of Cultural Affairs. For that effort, Bard students created a video presentation for the internet about their research and learning process at an ancient Indigenous site on the Annandale campus. The Engaged Liberal Arts and Sciences [ELAS] class this semester has the goal of more diverse presentations, accessible via the Bard Archaeology website and shared via Zoom.

This orientation reflects the complementarity of science and the humanities in the ELAS course. The groundwork for scientific explorations will be started through strategic sampling by test excavations with humanistic questions for guidance. The Livingston estate at Annandale drew the two pre-eminent architects of country houses and landscapes in America, Alexander J. Davis and Andrew J. Downing, respectively. Women from elite families implemented these beautification efforts, with a workforce under the apparent leadership of an African American man, Alexander Gilson. He was credited with the innovation of two varieties of ornamental plants and became an independent nurseryman with a home in the nearby village, where he lived with his sister and their aged mother.

Although the most conspicuous linkage between the partially obscured, former African American presence at Montgomery Place, with its buried vestiges of material culture, would be the Conservatory designed by architect-artist Frederick Catherwood in the late 1830s [removed several decades later], we also have hints of different landscapes during former times: an earlier kitchen garden and the prior location of the farm. Over 30 years ago, archaeology found evidence of ancient Indigenous occupation near the river, likely dating back 6,000 years, at a site called 'The Pumpkin Patch.' We aim for continuation of the engagement with the Munsee / Mohican nation in our discovery process on Montgomery Place, at other locales on the Bard campus, and in neighbor communities. And to parallel that, I am aiming for collaboration with African Americans who are active in agricultural and horticultural education, to foster their involvement in research on the Bard campus and its other lands.