DREAMING OF TIMBUCTOO

DREAMING OF TIMBUCTOO

No property, no vote.

No ballot, no empowerment.

Gerrit Smith's solution? Free land.

TIMBUCTOO (Tim-buk-tu)

Also: TOMBUCTOO;

TOUMBOUCTOU

and TIMBUCTO...

1. Ancient Saharan city on the Niger River in present-day Mali; intellectual and commercial capital of West Africa in 15th and 16th centuries; in Europe, regarded as the most mysterious and inaccessible of cities, unseen by white explorers until 1828 ...

2. Short-lived Adirondack farm settlement for African-American New Yorkers founded in 1846, known chiefly for having attracted the abolitionist John Brown to North Elba, where his family remained in residence for fourteen years ...

3. "A scheme of justice and benevolence", devised by abolitionist Gerrit Smith, to parcel out 120,000 acres of mostly Adirondack wilderness to 3,000 black New Yorkers, thus enabling them to gain access to the vote and to pursue agricultural self-sufficiency and independence ...

4. A crossroads, long neglected, marking the convergence of Adirondack and African-American history; a missing link, a lost chapter, a key.

THE ROOTS OF TIMBUCTOO

... The ever-present, ever-crushing Negro-Hate ...

The vision of an Adirondack farm settlement for African-American New Yorkers was a response to the nightmarish facts of daily life for black people in metropolitan New York in the 1830s and 1840s. Waves of white immigrants were displacing black laborers and artisans from long-held jobs. A housing shortage forced impoverished black families into epidemic-ridden slums. Bounty hunters on the trail of fugitive slaves prowled black neighborhoods. Most insultingly, a discriminatory $250 property requirement for free black men disenfranchised nearly all black New Yorkers from 1821 until 1873.

When, in 1846, New York voters resoundingly defeated an equal suffrage referendum, black civil rights activists despaired. For many, the promise of a fresh start in Northern New York, far from city vices and the curse of "Negro-Hate", struck a powerfully deep chord.

What shall I do with my children? is the uppermost thought. If a porter shop is to be the highest station in life to which my son can aspire; the gentleman's kitchen the only place my daughter can find employment, then what is the use of educating them.

Barbara Ann Steward, teacher and lecturer. Frederick Douglass' Paper, June 1, 1855

Dancing for Eels. Lithograph. James Brown. NY, 1848. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

A Kidnapping by Blackbirders. Woodcut. Courtesy of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Look out for kidnappers! Colored people should be on their guard. Let no white man into your house unless you know who he is...

The Emancipator, March 2, 1837

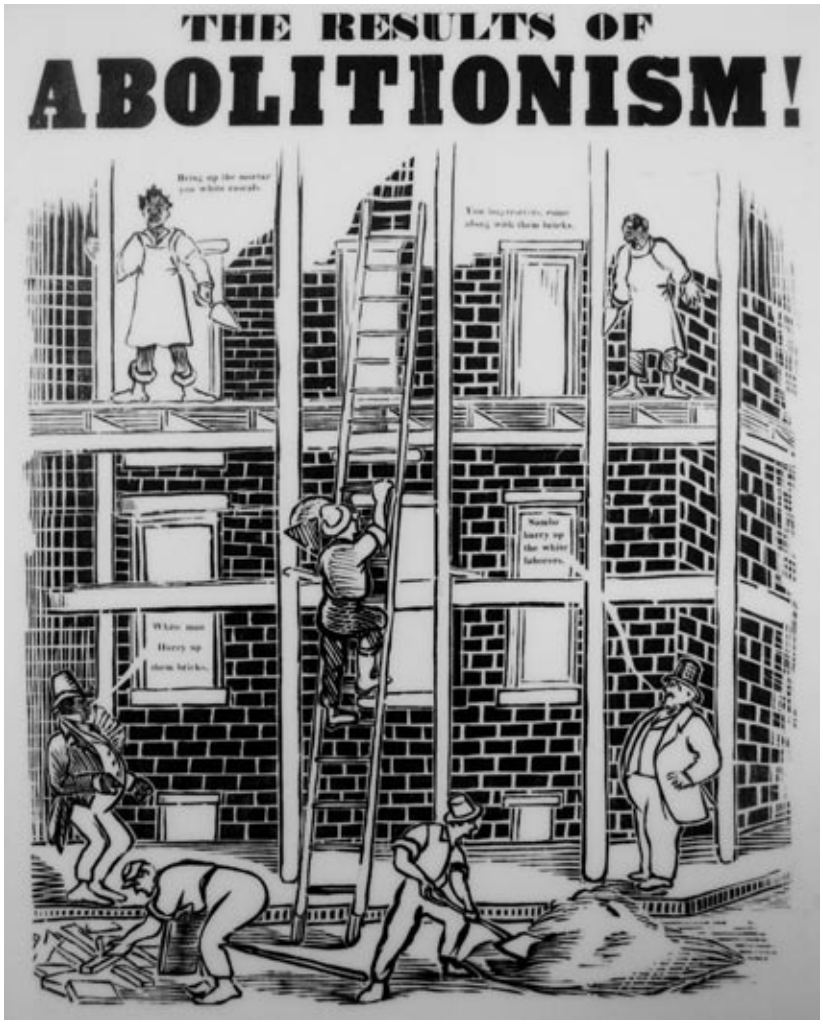
Colored School Broken Up in the Free States. Engraving. *Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1839*.
Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

If I sought a trade, white apprentices would leave if I were admitted.

Samuel Ringgold Ward. *The Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*. 1855.

Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly-arrived emigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favor.

Frederick Douglass. *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass; Written by Himself.* 1853.



The Results of Abolitionism. Broadside. Woodcut with letterpress, ca. 1835. Political cartoon. Courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

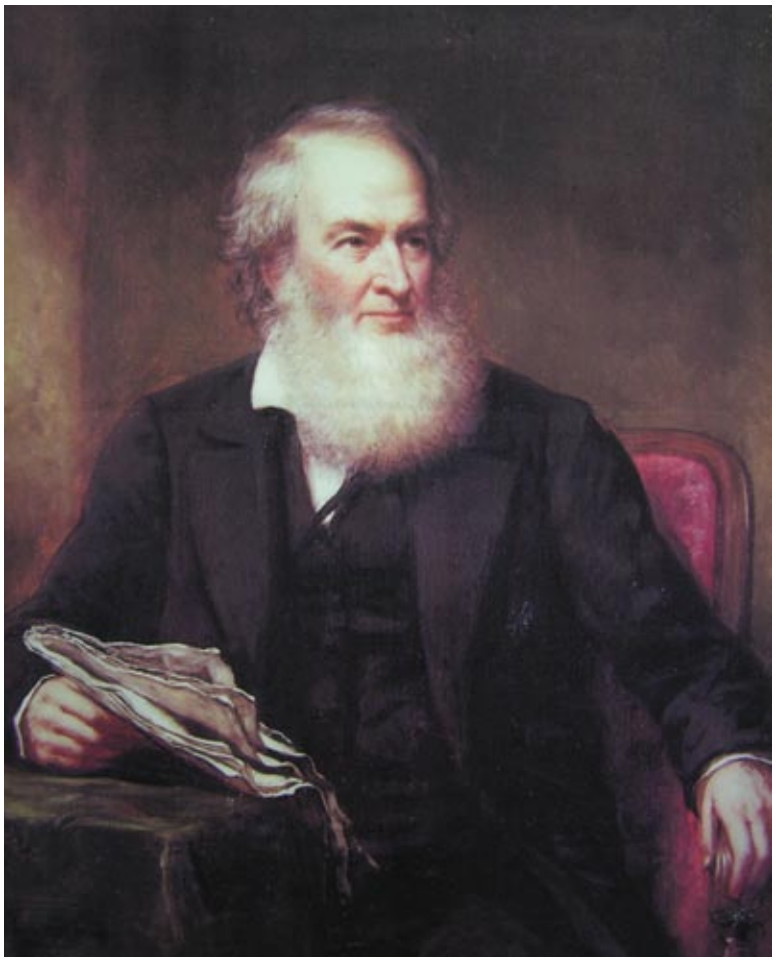
Added to poverty in the case of a black lad in [New York] City, is the ever-present, ever-crushing Negro-Hate, which hedges up the path, discourages his efforts, damps his ardor, blasts his hopes, and embitters his spirits...

Samuel Ringgold Ward. *The Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*. 1855.

GERRIT SMITH - ABOLITIONIST

He was not great, as Clay and Webster and Calhoun were great - he was not even so profound a champion of his cause as Charles Sumner, but he united the aristocratic bearing of the gentleman with the simplicity of the servant of the bondman, giving to him as a brother, in such equal proportions that he earned for himself a title better than that of a gentleman, better than that of a philanthropist - that of a man.

New York Herald. Dec. 29, 1874.



Vote they will,
cost what it will...

Gerrit Smith's attempt to establish a black farming settlement in the Adirondacks was one of his many initiatives in social, political and land reform. The son of the largest landholder in New York State and a savvy land speculator in his own right, Smith not only gave away land grants to black New Yorkers, he resolved to give one thousand poor white New Yorkers land in 1849.

Gerrit Smith. Painting. Courtesy of Madison County Historical Society, Oneida, NY.

I am still so greatly entangled by my various liabilities... that I am sometimes half resolved not to purchase the liability of any more slaves... [but] I have this evening read the Albany Patriot of this date. Poor Luke Carter! Poor Sarah Carter! Their poor children and grandchildren! How my heart bleeds for them!... If you have not the money, draw on me for it. You can now assure poor Sarah that she will at all hazards be free.

Gerrit Smith to William Chaplin. Letter. Jan. 7, 1846. Gerrit Smith Papers, Courtesy of Syracuse University Library, Special Collections.

With Gerrit Smith's decision to give away 120,000, mostly Adirondack, acres to 3,000 black New Yorkers between 1846 and 1853, this upstate philanthropist from little Peterboro promoted two cherished ideals: agrarianism and African-American equal rights.

Smith's vision of self-sufficient black homesteaders in Northern New York expressed a Jeffersonian faith - shared by many urban black reformers - in the redemptive power and civic virtue of land ownership and farming. Smith was also keenly mindful of how his land disbursements might be used to gain the vote for black New Yorkers. If a typical 40-acre "Smith grant" was worth much less than the $250 required of New York's black electorate, it could be improved - through lumbering or farming - to achieve that value.

Thus the quest for equal suffrage advanced the agrarian ideal at the same time that the American dream of a farmer's freehold showed a way to the ballot box and political empowerment.

Since the State has again determined that although white men because they are white may vote, nonetheless black men because they are black shall be obliged to buy the right to vote - since they [must] become landowners that they be entitled to vote, they will become landowners. Vote they will, cost what it will ...

Gerrit Smith to leading black abolitionists Dr. James McCune Smith, Elder Charles B. Ray and Rev. T. Wright, after the defeat of an equal suffrage referendum in Nov., 1846. Letter. Nov. 14, 1846.

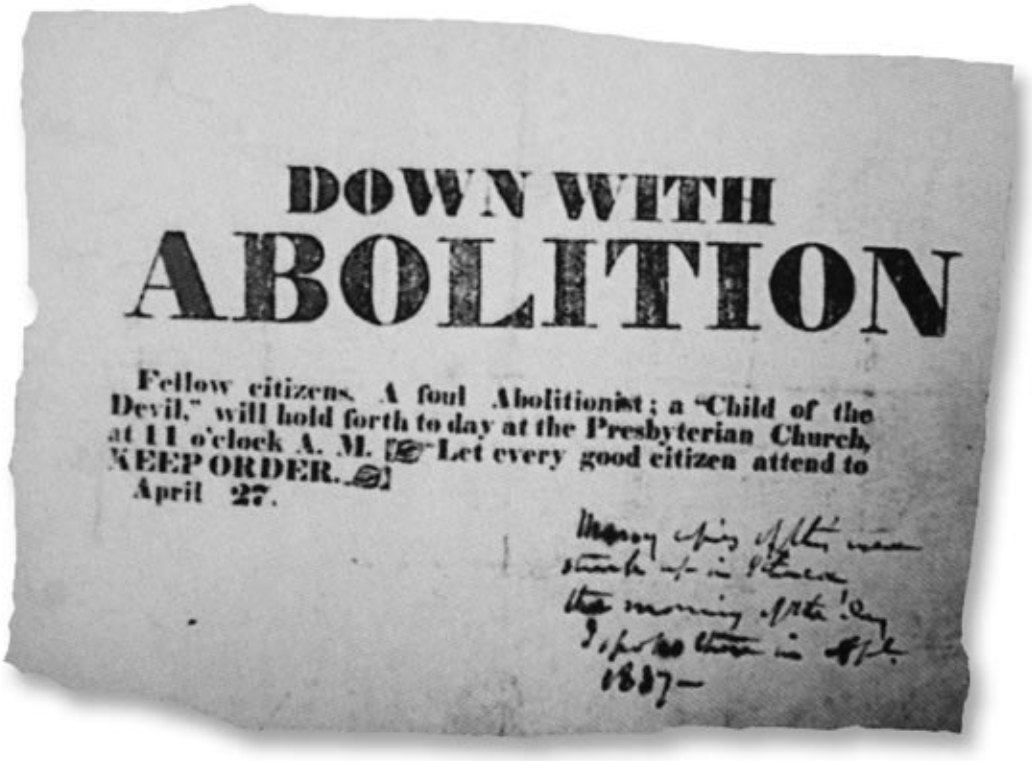
Am I Not A Man and a Brother?
Woodcut. 1837.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

On Abolition, Gerrit Smith was an absolutist, earning the hatred of the pro-slavery lobby, and an unparalleled affection and respect among black reformers of his time.

At Peterboro. I found ... it was all Abolition - Abolition in doors and out - Abolition in the churches and Abolition in the Stores - Abolition in the Field and Abolition by the wayside.

Rev. C.W. Dennison, *Christian Reflector.* 1841.

Gerrit Smith. Courtesy of Peterboro Historical Society, Peterboro, NY.



DOWN WITH
ABOLITION

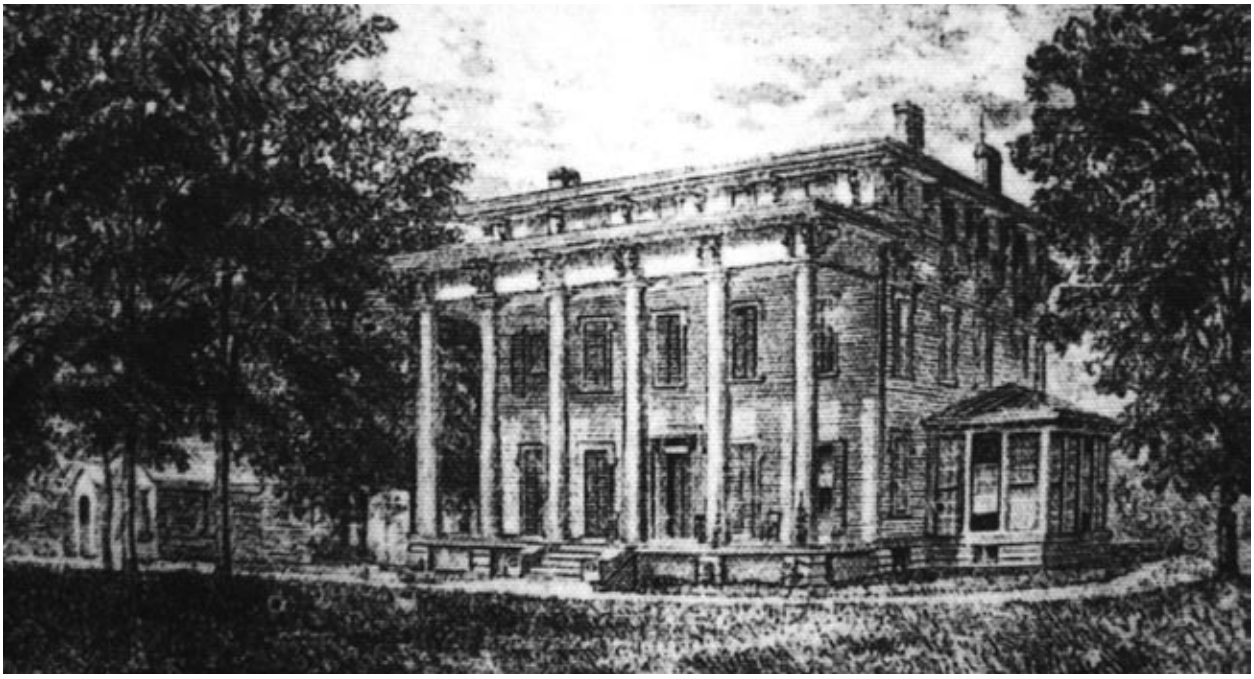
Fellow citizens, A foul Abolitionist; a "Child of the Devil," will hold forth to day at the Presbyterian Church, at 11 o'clock A. M. ☞Let every good citizen attend to KEEP ORDER.☜
April 27.

1837—

Down With Abolition. Anti-abolition poster, April 27,1837. Ithaca, NY.

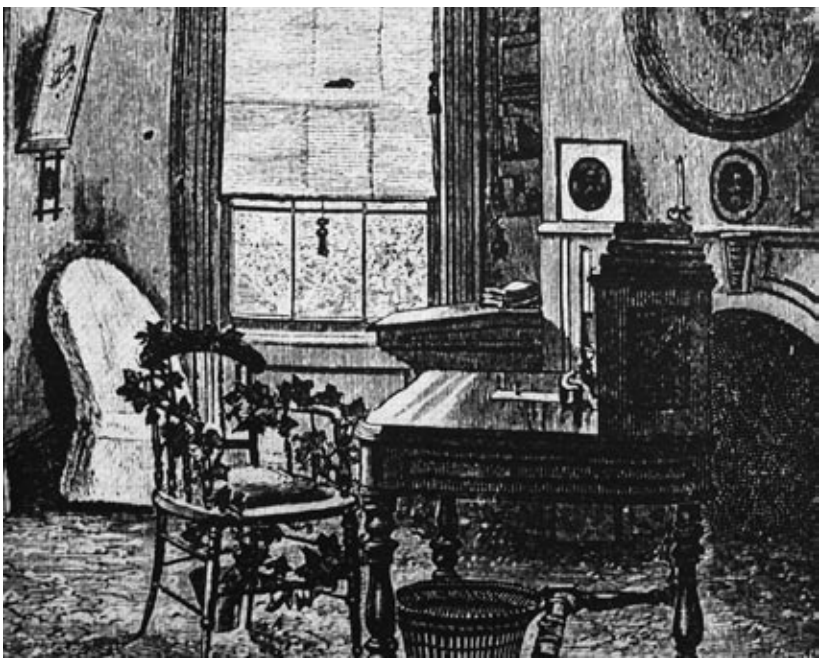
... There is no doubt of one fact, that no man in the State, will draw to an audience so many approving listeners, and then get so few of their votes, as you.

M. McGowan, Albany, to Gerrit Smith. Letter. Oct. 1, 1859.



Gerrit Smith's house at Peterboro, NY. Engraving. Book illustration. *Gerrit Smith, A Biography*. Stephen Frothingham. 1878

From his study in the family manse in Peterboro, Madison County, Smith tirelessly promoted the anti-slavery Liberty party, which ran national and state candidates from 1839 to 1848. Smith subsidized an African-American trade school, sponsored several black-owned newspapers, and bought the freedom of scores of slaves. He championed women's rights and the temperance movement, served in Congress, and founded an independent church based on the principles of abolition he held so dear.



The Study. Engraving. Book Illustration. *Gerrit Smith, A Biography*. Stephen Frothigham. 1878.

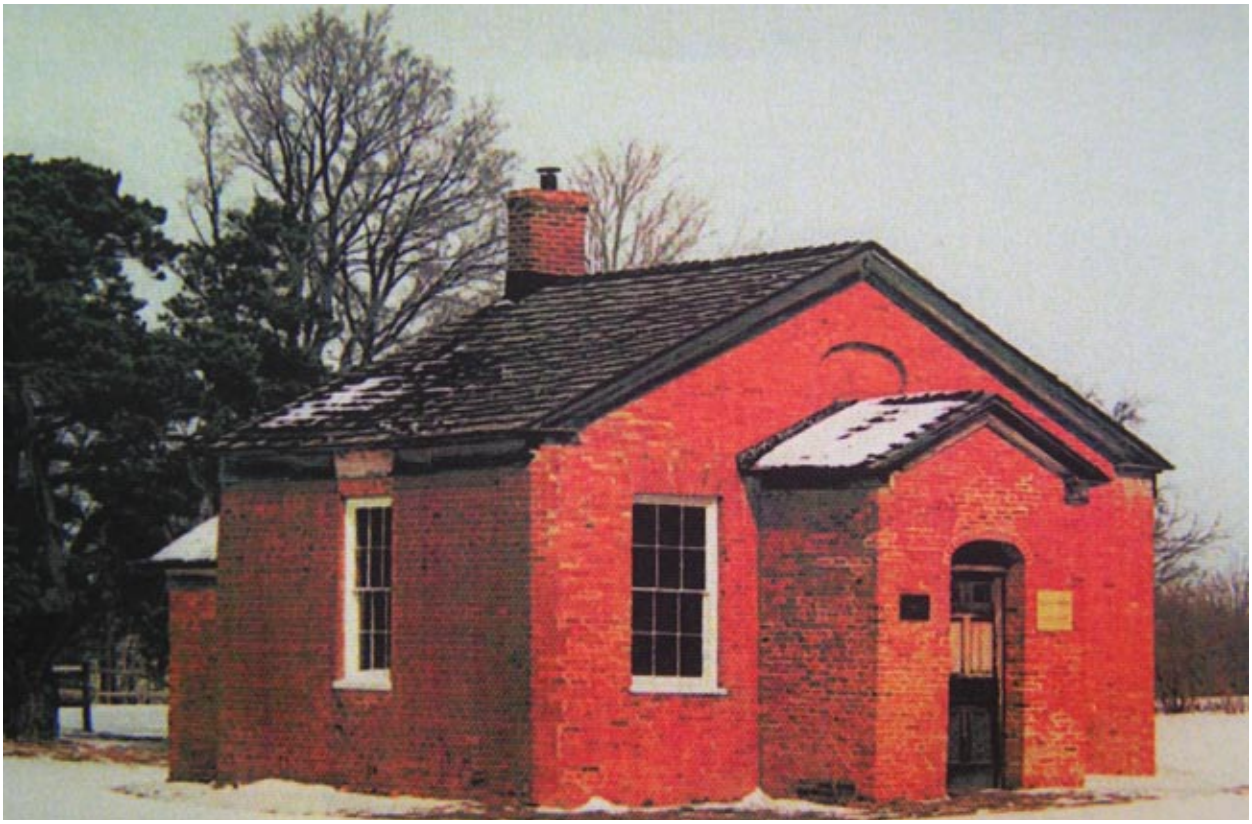
Just as the dream of Timbuctoo drew John Brown to North Elba, so has his farmstead and burial place, a New York State historic site since 1896, attracted pilgrims to the Adirondacks for commemorative events honoring one Yankee farmer's sacrifice for freedom and human rights.

The possession of great tracts of land makes common men conservative and monopolists. It made of Gerrit Smith one of the most radical and generous of men.

New York Daily Tribune, Dec. 28, 1874.

It is true I own three-quarters of a million acres, and yet, paradoxical as it may seem to you, I am an agrarian and think it wrong for a man to own more than one farm. I am rich as the world says, and yet... I think it a sin to be rich, and would rather live and die poor...

Gerrit Smith to Marius Robinson, Marlboro, OH. Letter. April 3, 1846.



Gerrit Smith's land office in Peterboro, NY. Photograph. Clifford Oliver.

THE AGENTS

I have got for you a fine set of men ...

It is unlikely that any Adirondack "land Baron" ever assembled as distinguished a team of land agents as the reformer Gerrit Smith. The thirteen activists Smith asked to help him find 3,000 African-American grantees for his Adirondack land comprised a formidable political elite, renowned for work in suffrage reform, education, temperance, publishing and the ministry. These men undertook to "sell" a new life in Northern New York not for compensation (there was none) nor for love of their friend Gerrit Smith, but from their own agrarian beliefs, their weariness with urban life and their conviction that the black vote was more effectively pursued in the country than the city.

Henry Highland Garnet

Portrait: courtesy of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, Troy, NY

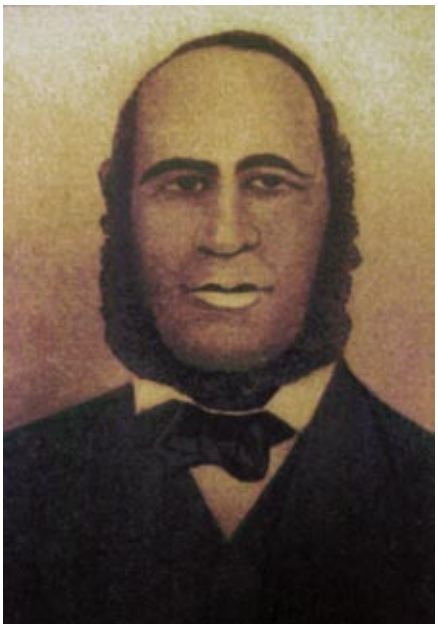
No agent mobilized more grantees actually to move to the Adirondack region than the Slave-born activist minister Henry Highland Garnet of Troy.

Prejudice is so strong in the cities... that it is impossible for us to emerge from the most laborious and the least profitable of occupations... In the towns of Syracuse and Geneva, among a colored population of some eight hundred, there are more voters according to the odious $250 qualification than there are in New York City, which has eighteen or twenty thousand colored inhabitants.

The Promotion of the Enfranchisement of Our People. Speech. H.H. Garnet, Schenectady, NY. 1844.

Initially, Gerrit Smith sought "grantees" from Metropolitan New York, asking simply that they be able-bodied men between 21 and 60, non-drinkers, of good character and not "in easy circumstances as to property". When his agents could not find candidates enough to meet this quota (a failure that reveals how seriously they took Smith's requirements). Smith widened his search to include the rest of New York State. By 1853 Smith was satisfied - 3,000 grants had been dispersed.

Charles B. Ray



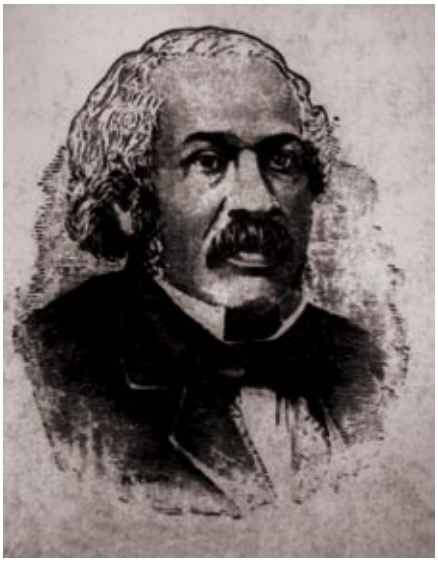
Elder Charles Bennett Ray. Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingam Center, Howard University.

The Manhattan minister, reformer, and avowed agrarian Charles B. Ray was urging readers of *The Colored American* to move to the country ten years before Gerrit Smith enlisted Ray as one of his New York City-based agents.

There is no life like that of the farmer, for overcoming the mere prejudice against color. The owners of adjacent farms are neighbors... There must be mutual assistance, mutual and equal dependence, mutual sympathy - and labour, 'the common destiny of the American people,' under such circumstances, yields equally to all, and makes all equal.

Charles B. Ray, Theodore Wright, and James McCune Smith, responding to Gerrit Smith's gift of land in 1846. Gerrit Smith Papers, Courtesy of Syracuse University Library, Special Collections.

Dr. James McCune



Dr. James McCune Smith. Engraving. Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NYPL.

Scotland-trained Dr. James McCune Smith (American medical schools refused him admission) was the first degree-holding black physician in New York City. The warmth and candor of his long friendship with Gerrit Smith is revealed in a letter he wrote Smith after the Peterboro philanthropist announced his plan to give away 3,000 grants:

Have you carefully surveyed the long chasm which intervenes between your present and your contemplated position in Society? You have borne the taunt of Fanaticism, you must prepare to be branded as a foolish man. You are accustomed to the scorn and hate of white men. Can you bear the cold ingratitude of colored men?

Dr. McCune's cautionary words proved prophetic: the "Smith Lands" project inspired generations of regional historians to dismiss Gerrit Smith as "a foolish man", and its failure to make settlers out of most of the grantees was, for Smith, a great disappointment.

Rev. James Wesley Loguen

Photograph: courtesy of Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, NY.

A fugitive slave from Tennessee, the Syracuse minister and volunteer land agent Jermain Wesley Loguen not only scoured central New York for grantees, he toured fledging black settlements in Essex and Franklin Counties, preached in Adirondack churches, and published an account of his seven-week tour in Frederick Douglass' The North Star.

What a man you have sent me!
I asked him to pray and he preached so feelingly
for his mother and sisters in slavery that we
were all in tears.

Gerrit Smith to Frederick Douglass on meeting Jermain W. Loguen. From The Rev. Jermain Wesley Loguen as a Slave and as a Freeman: A Narrative of Real Life. 1859.

There is more, in this matter of granting land, than meets the eye: there are in it, breadths and depths which the first glance does not readily fathom. It is a great experiment in behalf of long suffering, long crushed, down-trodden, and bleeding humanity. It is a experiment for the RACE! Not of Africa, nor of Cush, but for the race of mankind! The cause of our common race is ... entrusted to our hands.

Theodore S. Wright, Charles B. Ray, and James McCune Smith. From *An Address to the Three Thousand Colored Citizens of New York Who Are the Owners of 120,000 Acres of Land ... Given to Them by Gerrit Smith Esq ... 1846.*

NEWSPAPERS AND CONVENTIONS

That farming is the ... best occupation for colored Americans, we have always thought, and always SAID.

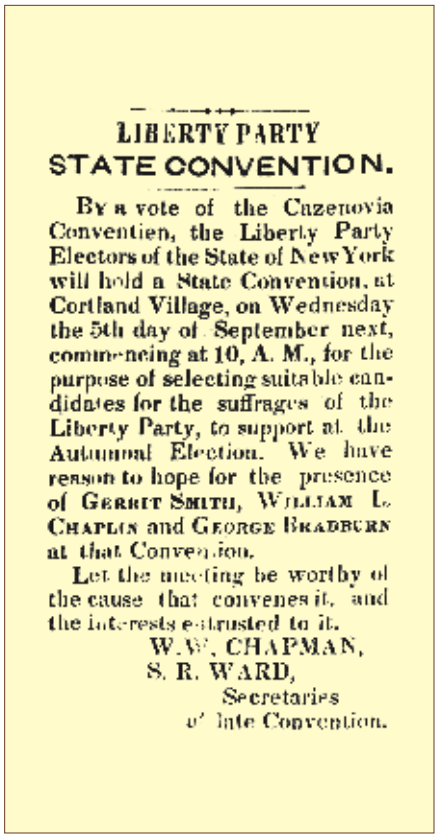
The Colored American. Feb. 17, 1838.

Gerrit Smith did not originate the idea of African-American agricultural self-sufficiency. Long before he conceived his "scheme of justice and benevolence", African-American leaders espoused the farmer's life in black-owned newspapers and at state and national black political conventions.

Smith's project supplied black reformers with the means to realize a long-held dream, and when Smith published his plan to give away land, a black national convention in Troy in 1847 honored him with a strongly-worded resolution:

[Forsake] the cities and towns and their employments of dependency therein, and emigrate to those parts of the country where land is cheap, and become cultivators of the soil, as the surest road to respectability and influence.

Willis A. Hodges and Charles B. Ray, Agriculture Committee, National Convention of Colored People. Troy, NY. 1847.



LIBERTY PARTY
STATE CONVENTION.

By a vote of the Cazenovia Convention, the Liberty Party Electors of the State of New York will hold a State Convention, at Cortland Village, on Wednesday the 5th day of September next, commencing at 10, A. M., for the purpose of selecting suitable candidates for the suffrages of the Liberty Party, to support at the Autumnal Election. We have reason to hope for the presence of GERRIT SMITH, WILLIAM L. CHAPLIN and GEORGE BRADBURN at that Convention.

Let the meeting be worthy of the cause that convenes it, and the interests entrusted to it.

W. W. CHAPMAN,
S. R. WARD,
Secretaries
of late Convention.

STATE
OF
STEUBEN,
And So Forth.
A Two Days'
MASS MEETING

Will be holden at PRATTSBURG, on *Tuesday & Wednesday*, 29th & 30th inst., commencing at 10, A. M., on the 29th.

Another at BATH, on *Friday & Saturday*, June 1st & 2nd, and at CORNING, on *Monday & Tuesday*, 3d and 4th of June.

And at ELMIRA, *Wednesday & Thursday*, 5th & 6th of June.

H. H. GARNET, S. R. WARD, and others will attend.

Liberty Party State Convention, Cortland village.

State of Steuben, A Two Days Mass Meeting.

Handbills for anti-slavery meeting published in *The Impartial Citizen.* July 25, 1849. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

Charles B. Ray, the editor and publisher of *The Colored American,* envisioned the farmer's freehold as a testing ground where African-Americans would disprove the myth of black inferiority. From 1837 to 1842, The Colored American published more than fifty articles trumpeting the farmer's life. A few years later, when Gerrit Smith undertook the distribution of his Adirondack lands, black newspapers like *The Rams Horn* (Brooklyn), *The Albany Patriot* (Albany), and *The Impartial Citizen* (Syracuse) all promoted a migration to the north with editorials and settler's firsthand accounts. Frederick Douglass gladly championed the "Smith Lands" in his Rochester newspaper, *The North Star,* even while the famous civil rights activist never claimed title to the lot Gerrit Smith had given him, or toured the settlements himself.

Frederick Douglass. Front piece for *My Bondage and My Freedom.* Engraving. Courtesy of American Antiquarian Society.

Advantage should at once be taken of this generous and magnificent donation ... The Sharp Axe of the sable-armed pioneer should at once be uplifted over the soil of Franklin and Essex Counties and the noise of falling trees proclaim the glorious dawn of civilization within their borders!

Come, Brethren, let it not be said that a people under the lash could level the forests of ... the whole Southern states that their oppressors might reap the reward, lack the energy and manly ambition to clear land for themselves!

Frederick Douglass. *The North Star.* Feb. 18, 1848

Black convention-goers around 1840. Engraving. Courtesy of William Loren Katz Collection.

THE GERRIT SMITH GRANTEES

... the farmers had not enough money at the outset ...

Dr. James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith.

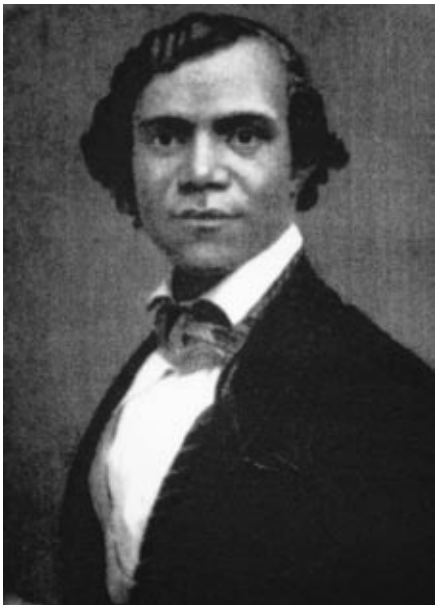
City-based grantees were also disinclined to abandon their communities. Giving up a familiar neighborhood was no light sacrifice: in hard times, a sense of home was a source of comfort and support. Manhattan grantee Patrick Reason, an engraver who belonged to a loose-knit fraternity of activists that mingled at the same black schools, temperance and suffrage conventions, would have missed this level of engagement in the Adirondack wilds.

Grantees may have felt as well that their ongoing work was more urgent and morally compelling than the pursuit of an agrarian ideal. The Baptist sexton John Jones, an escaped slave from Virginia who settled in Chemung County in 1844, was Underground Railroad station master for Elmira, helping as many as 800 fugitives flee north. For activists like Jones, a flight to the remote Adirondacks was hard to justify while fugitives were in desperate need.

Could we get about 200 grantees in North Elba, and then cut off all communication with the city (burn the galleys), things could be made to prosper.

Dr. James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith. Letter. Feb. 6, 1850.

Both the artist, Patrick Reason, and subject of this engraving, lecturer and author Henry Bibb, received Adirondack land grants from Gerrit Smith. Neither grantee moved onto his lot.



Henry Bibb. Engraving by Patrick Reason. Frontispiece for *The Narrative of the Life & Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave.* 1849. Courtesy of The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NYPL.

John Jones. Photograph. Courtesy of Chemung Historical Society, Elmira, NY.

In Gerrit Smith's list of 3,000 grantees were barbers, hotel cooks, engravers, house painters, farmers, laborers and lecturers, representing almost every county in New York. Whether free-born, emancipated, or fugitives from slavery, all were New York residents when they were given the gift of land.

Why did hardly any of them settle on their Adirondack lots - or even, in many cases, claim legal title to Smith's gift of land? Many felt the Adirondack wilderness was not worth moving to. Queens County grantee Jonathan Mingo explored his lot, found it wanting, and moved his family west to Michigan.

Other grantees could not afford to move. The physician Dr. James McCune Smith enjoyed his visit to the Adirondacks in 1849, but would not move his family there: he could not justify the economic risk. Free or bought, land still took capital to improve. This Gerrit Smith did not offer, and the "Smith grantees" could not provide.

Jonathan Mingo we know to be a sterling man, and an excellent farmer.

I felt myself a "lord indeed" beneath the lofty spruce and maple and birch, and by the trawling brook, which your deed made mine, and would gladly exchange this bustling anxious life for the repose of that majestic country, could I see my way clear to a livelihood for myself and family.

Dr. James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith. Letter. Feb. 2, 1850.

THE SETTLERS

I used to be compelled to clear up ten acres of land in a year in the South, and do other work, and get thumped in the bargain. But when I reach my little farm, with my liberty axe I expect to clear up fifteen acres annually. I have received so much abuse from white men that once I thought all were my enemies. I was mistaken. God bless Mr. Gerrit Smith, and all the Smiths (long and continued cheering)

From an "eloquent and common sense speech" by "fugitive, William Jones", at a "Meeting of the Colored People of Troy" Oct. 28, 1846. The Albany Patriot

Black farmers at North Elba. Photograph. Courtesy of The Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, NY.

We held a fine meeting on Wednesday night and delivered 60 deeds to a fine set of men. You certainly deprive yourself of a most interesting site, in declining to see a gathering of the Grantees. Tall, stalwart, hard-fisted, they embody a Hope of the Race. We hold another meeting tonight at Brooklyn and on Monday in Westchester.

James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith. Letter. New York City. Dec. 17, 1846.

"African-American farmer with team of oxen in upstate New York." Photograph. Courtesy of DeWitt Historical Society of Tompkins County, Ithaca, NY.

When I reach my little farm ...

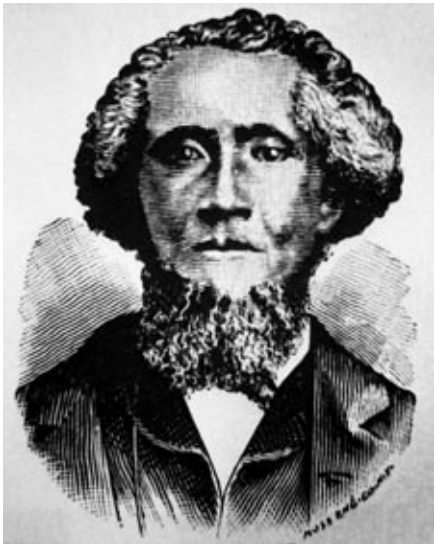
Lyman Eppes, Sr.

Photograph: courtesy of
Edwin Cotter, Lake Placid, NY.

The most successful and abiding of the black farmers in North Elba, Lyman Eppes left Troy for the Adirondacks in 1849. Eppes raised sheep and cultivated a range of crops, taught music and may have been the first Adirondack guide to cut a trail through Indian Pass.

The Eppes family took an active role in the development of their frontier hamlet. An Inspector of Elections and Overseer of Roads, Lyman Eppes also helped found a Sabbath School, a town library and a church. His rendition of John Brown's favorite hymn, "Blow Ye The Trumpets, Blow!" at Brown's funeral won Eppes a warm place in local history. But a letter to *Frederick Douglass' Paper* reveals a less sentimental side of this pioneer: a frustrated defender of the settlement cause, a shrewd appraiser of rising land values; and a tough critic of Gerrit Smith's agents whose enthusiasm for the settlement project was evidently on the wane by 1854.

Willis A Hodges



Engraving: Frontispiece. *A Free Man of Colour.*

In 1847, after urging city-dwellers to move to the country at a black national convention, Virginia-born Willis A Hodges of Brooklyn (then Williamsburgh), a newspaper editor and grocer, decided to practice what he preached: leave the city, and farm. In his few years of Adirondack homesteading, Hodges built a log home and ice house near Franklin County's Loon Lake, wrote his autobiography, founded a short-lived settlement called Blackville, and, according to his son, ran a station for fugitive slaves from his home at "Hodge Hill".

The farmer and abolitionist John Brown was greatly impressed with Willis Hodges' Brooklyn-based antislavery newspaper, The Ram's Horn. The two men corresponded, and when Hodges moved to Franklin County he anticipated John Brown's role as "welcome and useful neighbor". Late-arriving Brown was "useful" mainly in absentia, sending the Blackville and "Timbuctoo" settlers cash advances and stores of pork and flour, along with the following advice:

Within a year or so past, large tracts of these lands ... have been sold for taxes; and if not redeemed within two years from the day of sale, those who bid them in will realize from what they term "Nigger Lands", handsome fortunes. It appears to me, Mr. Editor, that were the grantees appraised of the fact that these lands are very valuable, and still increasing in value, they would certainly redeem them.

Lyman E. Eppes, North Elba . Letter. Frederick Douglass' Paper. July 12, 1854.

... Do not let anyone forget the vast importance of sustaining the very best character for honesty, truth, industry and faithfulness. I hope every one will determine to not merely conduct as well as the whites; but to set an example in all things. I am much pleased that your nephew has concluded to hang on like a man. With my best wishes for every one I remain yours in truth ...

John Brown to Willis A Hodges. Letter. Jan. 22, 1849. Courtesy of the Gilder Lehrman Collection, The Morgan Library.

James Henderson

Before James Henderson moved to Timbuctoo in 1849, he owned a shop in Manhattan, ran a night school and worked for suffrage reform at black political conventions in Schenectady and Troy. When Henderson could not farm his lot, he and other grantees found better land in North Elba. This farmer-cobbler, at one time North Elba's Inspector of Elections, did freeze to death in 1852, but bore no resemblance to the caricature of Stoddard's anecdote. After Henderson's untimely death, his family moved to Manhattan.

... To return to Township 12: Mr. Henderson, a shoemaker from Troy, had his sign hanging out (the first and only in the township) and appeared to [run] a good business.

Dr. James McCune Smith to Gerrit Smith. Letter. Feb. 6, 1850.

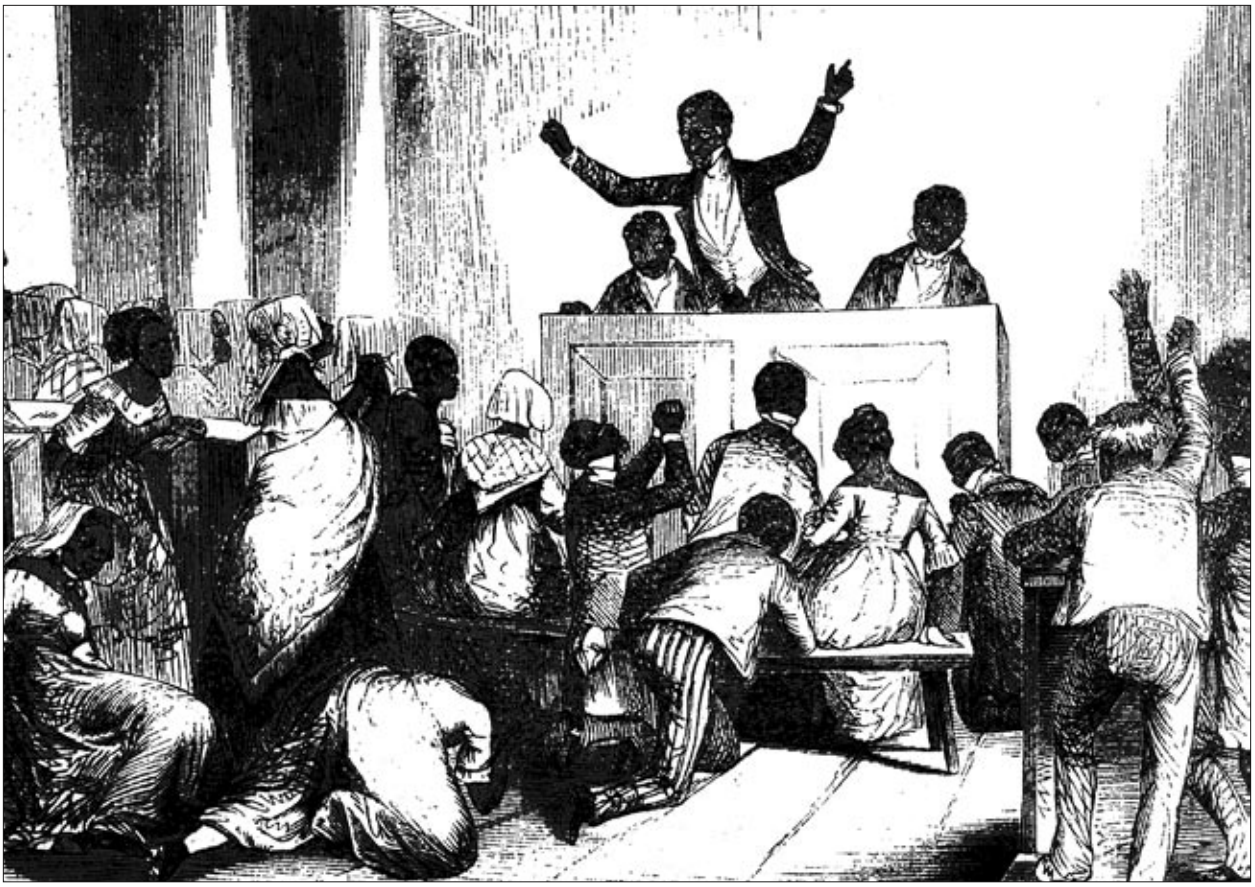
You say they are all gone; what has become of them? Don't know; they couldn't make a living heah; too cold for 'em. Wa'nt much used to work, I guess, an' couldn't stan' the kind they got heah. Most of 'em was barbers and sich, who thought they wouldn't have nothing to do when they come heah. And after the old man [John Brown] died they couldn't get alog, so they dug out, some of 'em and some of 'em died, and one old niggah froze to death.

From The Adirondacks Illustrated. 1888. Seneca Ray Stoddard.
A conversation between Adirondack photographer Seneca Ray Stoddard and his African-American driver on a visit to John Brown's farm.

There is no better land for grain. We get from 25 to 50 bushels of oats to an acre … The farmers here get 46 cents per bushel, cash in hand, for their oats.

James Henderson to Frederick Douglass. Letter. The North Star. Jan. 29, 1849.

At church pulpits in Troy, Utica, Manhattan, Syracuse and Brooklyn, Gerrit Smith's agents preached the gospel of the "Smith Lands". They advertised the grants in handbills and promoted them at temperance meetings and in black newspapers.



Black minister preaching in church. Engraving.
Courtesy of the Schomberg Center for Black Culture. NYPL.

THE CIVIL WAR

During the civil War, black Adirondackers took up arms for the Union cause. Farmers Josiah Hasbrook Jr. and William Carasaw from North Elba joined the 26th United States Colored Troops, along with Charles Hazzard from St. Armand. William Appo Jr. son of John Brown's good friend William Appo, enlisted early and perished at Bull Run.

Adirondack guide Warren Morehouse served almost three years with the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. From the Town of Franklin, father and son James and Samuel Brady fought with the 188th Regiment. After transferring to the 26th Colored, Samuel Brady was killed.

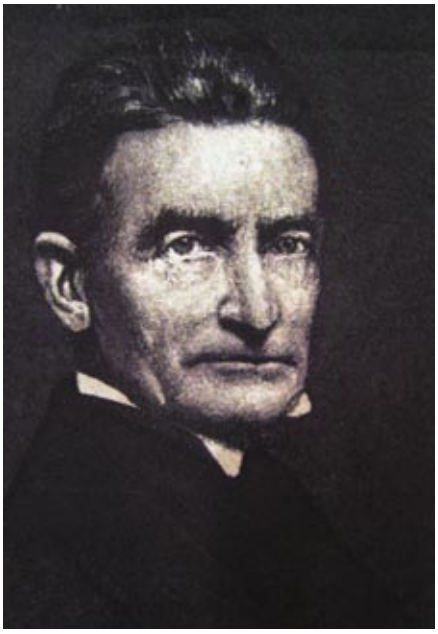
No officer in this regiment now doubts that the key to the successful prosecution of this war lies in the unlimited employment of black troops ... Instead of leaving a home and family to fight they are fighting for their homes and families, and they show the resolution and the sagacity which a personal purpose gives.

Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higgenson. Army Life in a Black Regiment. 1869.

Black troops man Union guns. Photograph. Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, IL.

JOHN BROWN AND HIS FAMILY

Fellow Travelers



John Brown. Engraving. Courtesy of the William Loren Katz Collection

The Black settlers did not follow the abolitionist John Brown to North Elba. Brown followed them. But his notoriety fixed him retroactively - and wrongly - at the center of the saga of Timbuctoo. In 1859, Brown seized the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, with a small band of black and white volunteers. His capture, trial and execution polarized the nation and set into motion, has written a biographer, "a spiral of accusation and counter-accusation between North and South that bore the country irreversibly toward the Civil War".

In 1848, Brown bought Adirondack land from Gerrit Smith hoping to show the black settlers "how to manage". An able farmer, he might have fulfilled this role had he stayed in North Elba long enough to assume it. His concern for the welfare of the "colored brethren" was sincere. He sent them money and food, helped them survey their land and register their deeds - when he was home. But business dealings and the anti-slavery campaign kept him away from his North Elba farm for long years at a time.

There are a number of good colored families on the ground; most of whom I visited. I can think of no place where I think I would sooner go, all things considered than to live with these poor despised Africans who to try, & encourage them; & show them a little so far as I am capable how to manage.

John Brown, to his father Owen Brown. Letter. Jan. 10, 1849.

How did the black settlers fare from one season to the next? Clues abide in the letters of the Browns. The staunchly abolitionist Browns befriended many grantees. John Brown hired settlers from Timbuctoo to clear his land. Lyman Eppes taught his children music. The Browns themselves tutored the children of grantees and opened their "meal bin" to the hard-pressed settlers when they ran out of food. Sabbath School was integrated. So was John Brown's dinner table.

Family letters also underscore the Brown's chronic financial difficulties. Decades rich in farming experience and reputed to manage one of the best farms around, the Browns were nonetheless extremely poor, yet comparably well-off next to their neighbors, the ill-equipped, new-to-farming grantees.

For nearly a whole winter, Mrs. Brown said, they had no money with which to pay postage, except a tiny treasury which the younger girls had earned for that express object, during the previous summer, by picking berries for a neighbor three miles off.

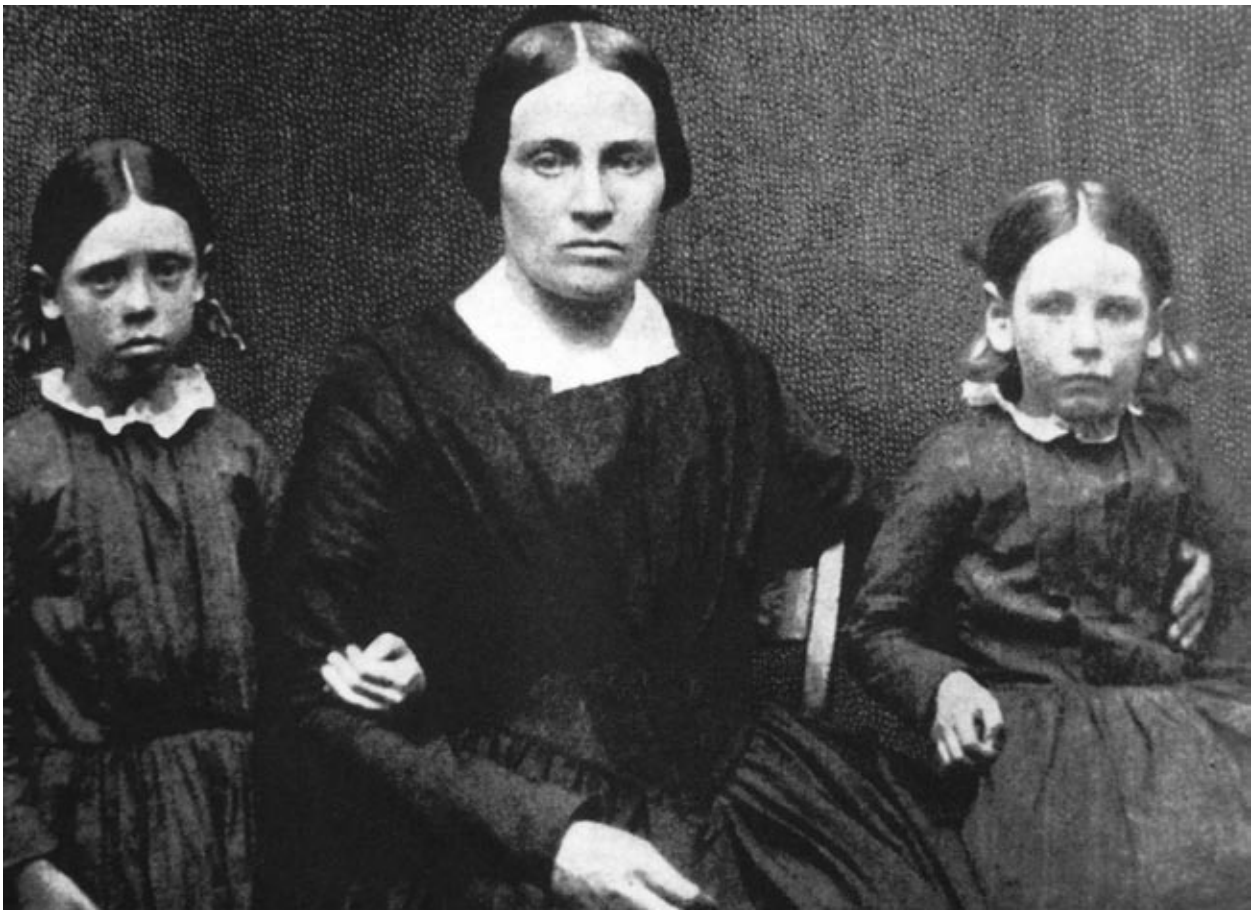
NYS Report of the Commissioners of Fisheries, Games and Forests, 1892.

What we have now received will pay up all our debts & some over to get leather for shoes. The girls & I have not had any since we came here & I have made all Ellen has this winter out of cloth ...

Mary Ann Brown to John Brown. Letter. May 20, 1856.

Mary, I hope you will always live in Essex County ...

John Brown to Mary Ann Brown. Letter. Dec. 1, 1856.



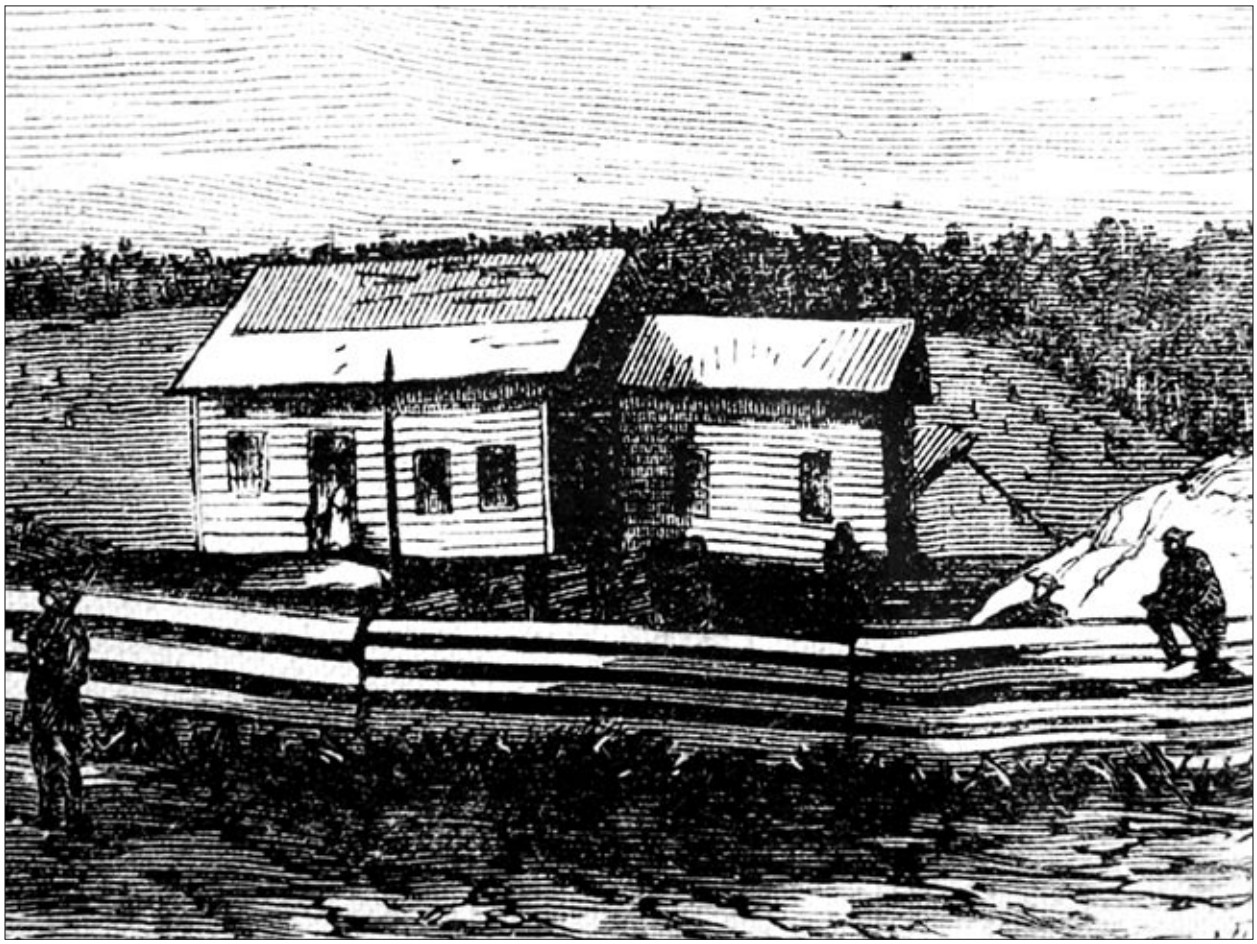
Mary Ann Brown with Annie (left) and Sarah (right), about 1851. Photograph. Courtesy of West Virginia State Archives, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

I very much regret that I ever spent a cent on that farm in North Elba but I did not know what I know now. I am in hopes of selling it sometime so as to get back part of what I spent there.

Mary Ann Brown. Letter. California-bound, in 1863.

You ride a mile or two, then take down a pair of bars; beyond the bars faith takes you across a half-cleared field, through the most difficult of wood-paths, and after half a mile you come out upon a clearing. There is a little frame house, unpainted, set in a girdle of black stumps, and with all heaven about it for a wider girdle; on a high hillside, forests on the north and west, - the glorious line of the Adirondacks on the east, and on the south one slender road leading off to Westport, a road so straight you could sight a United States marshal for five miles.

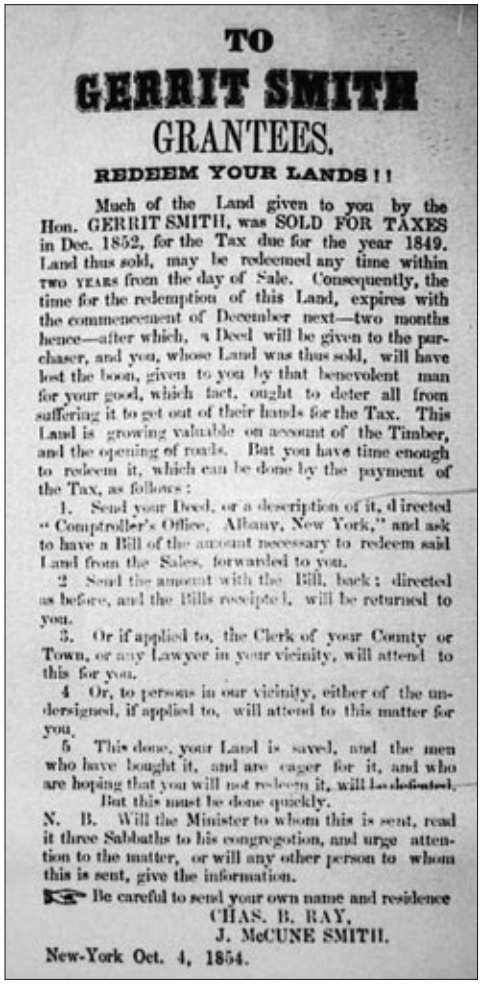
Massachusetts abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson on visiting John Brown's farm in 1859 when Brown awaited trial for treason. *The Public Life of John Brown*, James Redpath. 1860.



The John Brown Farmstead. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Boyd B. Stutler Collection.

THE VANISHING OF TIMBUCTOO

Gerrit Smith Grantees - Redeem Your Lands!



TO

GERRIT SMITH

GRANTEES.

REDEEM YOUR LANDS!!

Much of the Land given to you by the Hon. GERRIT SMITH, was SOLD FOR TAXES in Dec. 1852, for the Tax due for the year 1849. Land thus sold, may be redeemed any time within TWO YEARS from the day of Sale. Consequently, the time for the redemption of this Land, expires with the commencement of December next—two months hence—after which, a Deed will be given to the purchaser, and you, whose Land was thus sold, will have lost the boon, given to you by that benevolent man for your good, which fact, ought to deter all from suffering it to get out of their hands for the Tax. This Land is growing valuable on account of the Timber, and the opening of roads. But you have time enough to redeem it, which can be done by the payment of the Tax, as follows:

1. Send your Deed, or a description of it, directed "Comptroller's Office, Albany, New York," and ask to have a Bill of the amount necessary to redeem said Land from the Sales, forwarded to you.

2 Send the amount with the Bill, back; directed as before, and the Bills receipted, will be returned to you.

3. Or if applied to, the Clerk of your County or Town, or any Lawyer in your vicinity, will attend to this for you.

4 Or, to persons in our vicinity, either of the undersigned, if applied to, will attend to this matter for you.

5 This done, your Land is saved, and the men who have bought it, and are eager for it, and who are hoping that you will not redeem it, will be defeated.

But this must be done quickly.

N. B. Will the Minister to whom this is sent, read it three Sabbaths to his congregation, and urge attention to the matter, or will any other person to whom this is sent, give the information.

☞ Be careful to send your own name and residence

CHAS. B. RAY,
J. McCUNE SMITH.

New-York Oct. 4, 1854.

For many grantees, taxes proved an unmanageable burden. And some grantees were not aware when taxes were due and which taxes were outstanding: tax notices appeared only in newspapers serving counties where grants were located. A Queens County grantee was unlikely to subscribe to the Malone Palladium many counties to the north.

In 1854, two of Gerrit Smith's agents were sufficiently concerned about the loss of the grantees' land for back taxes to flag the crisis in a broadside. Smith, for his part, put the land project behind him. He had found 3,000 black grantees. Those who wanted deeds, had them. Other issues commanded his attention. It was time to move on.

In this 1854 circular, agents Charles B. Ray and Dr. McCune Smith emphasized the value of the "Smith Lands" in terms of timber revenues, not agricultural potential. But the revised pitch mattered little to the cash-poor grantees. Hundreds of grants reverted to the auction block where Gerrit Smith himself had purchased Adirondack land so many years before.

To Gerrit Smith Grantees: Redeem Your Lands! Circular. Oct. 4, 1854. Gerrit Smith Papers, Courtesy of Syracuse University Library, Special Collections.

The attempt to combine an escaped slave with a so-called Adirondack farm was about as promising of agricultural results as would be the placing of an Italian lizard on a Norwegian iceberg.

Alfred L. Donaldson, History of the Adirondacks, Vol.II, 1921.

What do Deadwater, Kingdom's Forge, Tirrell Pond and Griffen have in common with black settlements like Timbuctoo or Blackville? Numberless nineteenth-century white-settled Adirondack hamlets vanished within decades of their founding, In the context of Adirondack back-woods settlements, the short life of the black enclaves on the "Smith Lands" was not unusual. Yet a century of regional historians have dismissed the "Smith Lands" project in terms of a presumed incompatibility of southern African-Americans with Adirondack farming.

When we had lived in this wilderness about 8 or 10 years, the town seemed to be at a standstill, there were as many people moved away as there were families that moved into town.

Livonia Stanton Emerson, "Early Life at Long Lake". No date. Unpublished. Courtesy of The Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, NY.

The "Smith Lands" settlement failed for many reasons - the risky nature of Adirondack farming, the grantees' inexperience and the late arrival of their mentor, John Brown, among them. No less influential was the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. A sop to the pro-slavery lobby, this legislation put every African-American in a non-slave state, whether fugitive or free-born, at risk for capture and enslavement. Black New Yorkers fled to Canada, black leaders made the promotion of the Underground Railroad their first order of business, and grantees balked at moving to a region where African-Americans were so few. Cities at least provided safety in numbers. The Adirondacks offered no such retreat.

Families are separating, leaving their homes, and flying in all directions to seek in Canada, under a British flag, the protection denied them in the free republic!

The Toronto Globe. Oct. 15, 1850.

"Effects of the Fugitive Slave Law". Theodor Kaufmann. Lithograph. 1850.
Courtesy of The Library of Congress.

LOCAL RESPONSES: FRIENDS AND FOES

Our white countrymen do not know us.

In 1848, Frederick Douglass' newspaper *The North Star* published a letter to Dr. James McCune Smith from Syracuse minister Jermain W. Loguen. Reporting on a seven-week tour of the "Smith Lands", Loguen lamented that unscrupulous guides had duped some settlers with misinformation about the location and value of their deeds. But Loguen also named many Adirondackers who could be trusted to assist newly arrived grantees, among them the abolitionist newspaper publisher, Wendell Lansing of Wilmington and Keeseville.

Years of campaigning on behalf of the anti-slavery Liberty Party had acquainted Gerrit Smith with many activists in northern New York, and Smith likely had supplied Loguen with the names of approachable Adirondackers like Lansing. Loguen's letter documents a rare point of contact between two sympathetic but independent worlds: black abolitionists from downstate, and white abolitionists in the north.

Wendell Lansing (1807-1887). Engraving. *History of Clinton and Franklin Co*. D. Hamilton Hurd. 1880. Courtesy of Feinberg Library, Plattsburgh State University, Plattsburgh, NY.

My best advise to my brethren is not to venture in search of their farms unless they can read or write, or in the company of friends who can do both ...

Jermain W. Loguen to Dr. James McCune Smith. Letter. *The North Star.* March 24, 1848.

[Lansing's] old homestead on the hill [in Keeseville] was one of the depots of the famous "Underground Railroad" for escaped slaves fleeing to Canada for their freedom! His house was a head-quarters for colored men and abolition lecturers.

"The Late Wendell Lansing." *The Plattsburgh Sentinel.* May 27, 1887.

In 1845, Gerrit Smith predicted that remote Clinton County in northern New York would "probably be the first in the state to throw off its political shackles and stand forth for the slave". A year later, Clinton County led the state with a pro-suffrage vote of 72 per cent or nearly 3 to 1, followed closely by Essex County with 70.8 per cent. (In contrast, New York County denied free black men equal suffrage by 6 to 1.) Adirondackers supported equal rights for African-American New Yorkers in many ways. Some worked

for the Underground Railroad. Farmer-surveyor "Jerry" Merrill helped guide black settlers to their lots and wrote a description of a "Smith grant" for The Impartial Citizen, a black newspaper in Syracuse. Merrill's measured endorsement may have eased grantees' concerns that Gerrit Smith's agents had overstated the value of the "Smith Lands".

... If their lands lie in Franklin County, they [the African-American grantees] will do well to put themselves under the guidance of the Merrills, in Merrillsville.

Jermain W. Loguen to Dr. James McCune Smith. Letter. *The North Star.* March 24, 1848.

I should think the lot was about on average with lots in general in this town, and a thorough-going, smart man acquainted with clearing land, might get a living on it.

"Franklin County Land." J.D. Merrill to Rev. Jermain Loguen, Letter. *The Impartial Citizen*. July 25, 1849.

Jeremiah ("Jerry") DeGroff Merrill (1815-1893). Courtesy of Mary Maxine Summers, Merrillsville, NY.

The early presence in the Champlain Valley of Quaker pioneers and New England Yankees had set the stage for a regional political culture that was uncommonly sympathetic to the anti-slavery cause. At the same time, some white settlers feared an influx of black homesteaders might upset the political balance of the community.

Our white countrymen do not know us. They are strangers to our characters, ignorant of our captivity, oblivious to our history and progress, and are misinformed as to the principles and ideas that control and guide us, as a people.

[African-American] New York State Suffrage Committee, ca. 1860.

"Arguing the Point". A. F. Tait. Louis Maurer. Courtesy of The Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, NY.

LEGACIES AND LESSONS

A scheme of Justice and benevolence ...

As an enduring settlement, Gerrit Smith's dream of Timbuctoo was never realized. But settlement is only one measure of success. Was Timbuctoo a failure if it enabled numberless black New Yorkers to vote? Was it a failure if it gave black people the means to leave the cities wracked by "Negro-Hate"? If it helped black and white abolitionists find a common cause, and set a precedent for interracial collaboration in the hard decades ahead?

More than the fledging and forgotten enclave that attracted John Brown to North Elba, Timbuctoo was an attempt to translate an ideal of racial justice into decisive, daily action, best fathomed in terms of the greater political context in which it was conceived. In these terms, Gerrit Smith's "scheme of justice and benevolence" is not so easily dismissed - less a failure, in the end, than a dream deferred, only now beginning to attract the recognition and respect that it deserves.

Katherine Butler Jones, descendent of "Smith grantees" Edward and Hannah Weeks, at the John Brown Farm, North Elba, in May, 2000. Photograph. Courtesy of Marion Sykes, Albany, NY.

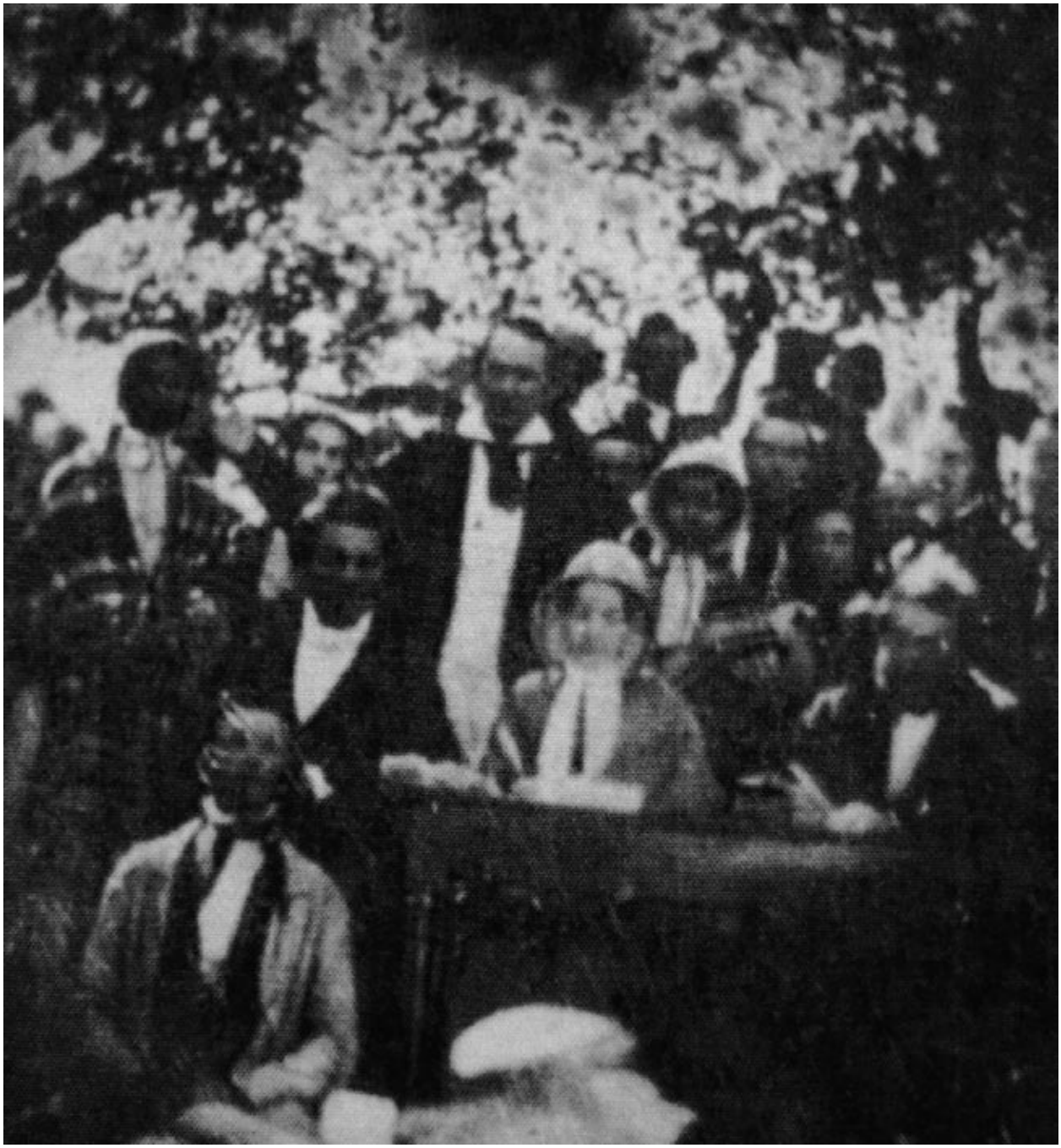
Working from the copy of the deed ... I found the exact location of the thirty-nine acres assigned to Edward Weeks. It lay deep in the woods of the town of North Elba, New York ... I wanted to see that land for myself.

Katherine Butler Jones. *They Called It Timbuctoo*, Orion. Winter, 1998

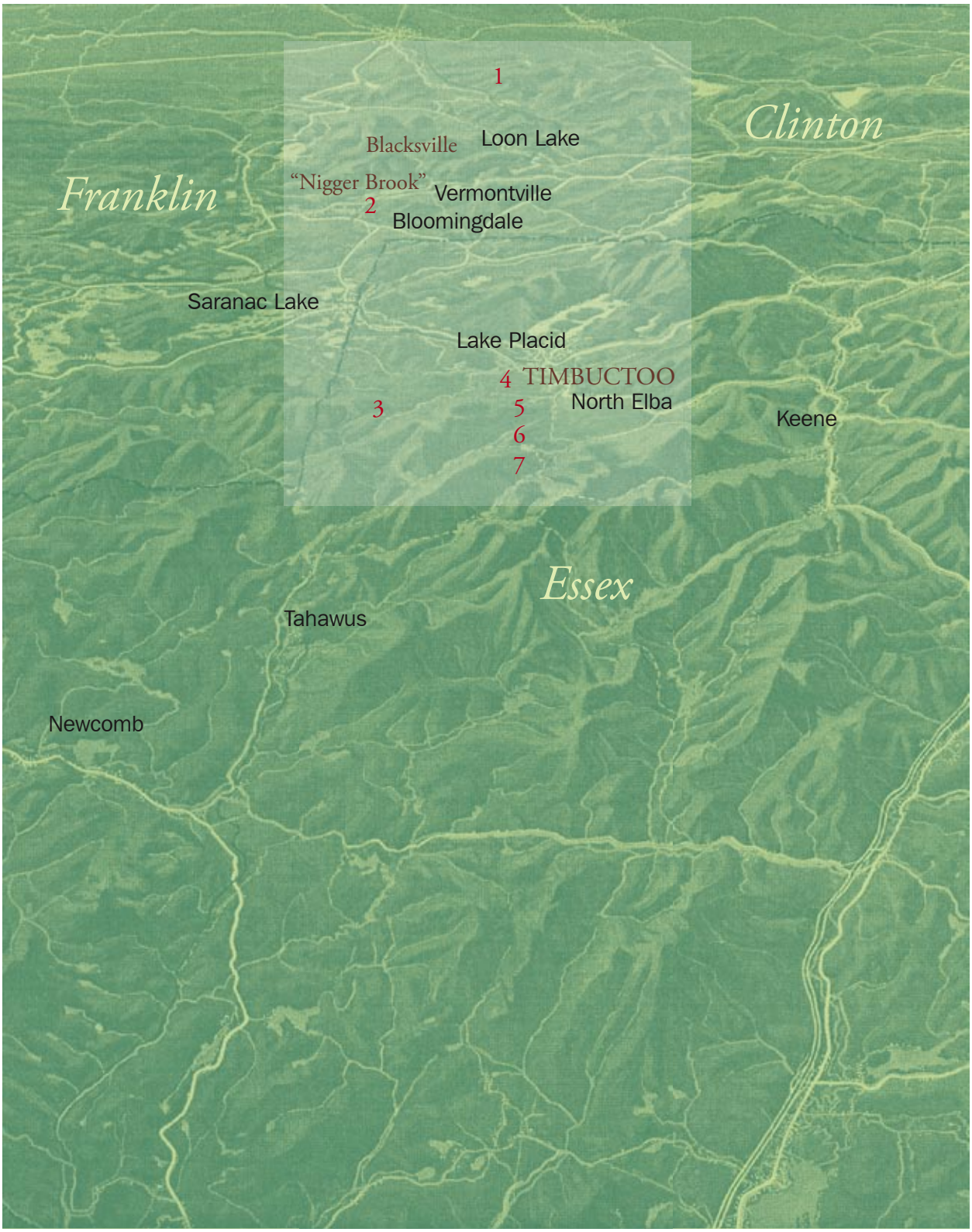
The effort to promote an Adirondack colony for black homesteaders was never the sole focus of Gerrit Smith, John Brown, Frederick Douglass or Henry Highland Garnet. Their hard work on Timbuctoo's behalf merited perhaps a page in the full books of their lives. Still, the legacies of Timbuctoo were many. A model of interracial cooperation, it set the stage for multiracial initiatives to come, and helped launch a lasting friendship between Frederick Douglass and Gerrit Smith.

... [T]he proceedings of the Cazenovia meeting are more incendiary in their character and more calculated to excite insurrection than all the documents which all the abolitionists have ever put into circulation.

Georgia Journal and Messenger. Sept. 18, 1850.



The Fugitive Slave Law Convention in Cazenovia, NY. Aug. 1, 1850. Daguerreotype. Ezra Greenleaf Weld. Courtesy of Madison County Historical Society, Oneida, NY.



THE "SMITH LANDS"

A Bird's Eye Approximation

Almost all the land that Gerrit Smith gave away to black New Yorkers was in Franklin and Essex Counties. Most grants were 40 acres (one fourth of a standard surveyor's lot). The highlighted area on the map suggests the rough location of the Franklin and Essex County grants that Gerrit Smith disbursed as they are recorded in his ledger of 1854.

1 - Willis Hodges, 2 - Johnathon Mingo, 3 - Dr. James McCune Smith, 4 - Elder Charles B. Ray
5 - James H. Henderson, 6 - Lyman Eppes, 7 - William Carasaw

"Nigger Brook" and "Nigger Hill"

Some grantees who settled in Franklin County put down roots that held their families to the region for generations. Alongside their white neighbors they forged Adirondack identities as farmers, guides, laborers, resort workers and woodsmen. By 1900, names like Hazzard, Morehouse and Brady were woven into the fabric of Franklin County towns. But these names no longer stirred memories of Gerrit Smith's great scheme. The sense of a connection to civil rights figures like Frederick Douglass or Rev. Henry Highland Garnet was gone.

From 1846 to 1850, when interest in the "Smith Lands" was at its peak, fewer than 150 men, women and children would move to Essex and Franklin Counties in response to Gerrit Smith's offer of free land. Fifty or so settled near the fledging hamlet of North Elba in a colony named after the royal Islamic African city Timbuctoo. As early as the 1820s, dispatches from European travelers about Timbuctoo had enthralled readers of black newspapers in New York. In this context, Timbuctoo, an emblem of black independence and self-sufficiency, was an apt name for a black frontier settlement borne of an agrarian idealism and the campaign foe black civil rights.

Blacksville

> *We find ourselves (through the mercy of God and the goodness of the honorable Gerrit Smith) today 'Under our own vine and fig tree', with none to molest us or make us afraid.*
>
> Willis Augustus Hodges. *A Free Man of Color*. 1849, written "(near) Loon Lake".

Timbuctoo

Who named it first? While the abolitionist John Brown, his son, John Brown Jr. and a black settler, James Henderson, refer in letters to Timbuctoo (or Timbuctoo, as Brown Sr. and Henderson spelled it), the origins of the name remain a mystery. No formal names described the black colonies near Vermontville in Franklin County, although these enclaves show up as "Nigger Brook" and "Negro Hill" on maps. Another short-lived enclave near Franklin County's Loon Lake was "Blacksville", which, like Timbuctoo, was never mapped.

CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Dreaming of Timbuctoo education program is a joint project of the Essex County Historical Society and JOHN BROWN LIVES!, a non-profit freedom education project. The program is based on the Dreaming of Timbuctoo exhibition conceived and produced by Martha Swan, Executive Director of JOHN BROWN LIVES!. Marjorie Light, National Board certified teacher and scriptwriter for "Northward to Freedom" a documentary on the Northern New York Underground Railroad, produced the curriculum lesson plans for the program. Publication design is by Bluespot Studio.

The Dreaming of Timbuctoo education program was developed for the middle and high school classroom to tell the story of 19th century philanthropist and reformer Gerrit Smith's efforts to deed a vast swath of Adirondack wilderness to African American pioneers. The program frames Timbuctoo in the larger context of voting rights and the allure of the agrarian ideal prevalent at the time. In addition to topics on the lives of the settlers themselves, discussion includes the abolitionist John Brown and his wife Mary, who moved the family to North Elba to help the settlers and to work their own farm in the Timbuctoo settlement. The program highlights the key roles of African American activists who forwarded the ideals of political equality. The program uses images, original documents, maps, and photographs to encourage students to learn about the settlers of Timbuctoo. Students explore primary and secondary sources, read an article written by a descendant, discover personal biases, consider ways to decrease prejudices, and create a diary of a Timbuctoo settler.

The education program is based on the Dreaming of Timbuctoo exhibition which was a collaborative effort by historians and independent scholars, photographers, and volunteer researchers from all over New York State. Amy Godine was the curator for the exhibition. The Dreaming of Timbuctoo exhibition was made possible in part with funding from the New York State Council on the Arts, New York Council for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, Carl E. Touhey Foundation, Puffin Foundation, Inc., International Paper Foundation, Inc., American Express Financial, Charles H. Douglas Trust/Essex County Historical Society, National Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, and numerous individual "Friends of Timbuctoo".

The Dreaming of Timbuctoo education program is funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a Federal agency that fosters innovation, leadership and a lifetime of learning. Any views, findings, conclusion or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

Elizabethtown, N.Y.
2006

DREAMING OF TIMBUCTOO

The Lessons

Lesson Plan One

"They Called It Timbuctoo"

Topics:

Primary and Secondary Sources, Genealogical Research, Voting Rights of African Americans, The Timbuctoo Settlement, Abolitionists, and Personal Narrative Legacies.

Overview:

Introduce students to the history behind this unique settlement in the Adirondacks and the people involved by reading the article "They Called it Timbucto," written by a descendant of one of the settlers. Before reading the "Dreaming of Timbuctoo," booklet have students become familiar with the concept of this community devised by abolitionists Garrett Smith to assist African Americans seeking voting rights.

Through the article, students will consider how history is recorded, what types of documents historians use, and how their own lives would appear to someone in the future. Document explanation attached.

Note: Various spellings were used, including *Timbuctoo, Tombuctoo, Toubouctou,* and *Timbucto.* For the purpose of ease of discussion, the first spelling will be utilized, except when referring to the article.

Materials Needed:

1) Some ephemeral that could serve as primary documents, such as an old letter, an expired driver's license, a marriage certificate, a plane ticket or itinerary, a blog, a journal, an email.
2) A class set of the article "They Called it Timbucto" by Katherine Butler Jones
3) A map of New York state

Purpose:

To help students comprehend how studying artifacts can lead to an understanding of history. Students will learn about primary and secondary sources and how they relate to their own lives, as well as historical records.

Length of Unit:

This lesson plan is for a forty-minute period.

Implementation:

As students enter the room, have the documents on the table. Ask them to discuss why people keep this type items.

Explain the difference between primary and secondary sources. Have students create a list of other primary documents.

As many students are familiar with police detective work from movies and television shows, ask them to consider how being an historian is similar to being a detective.
Read the article "They Called it Timbucto" by Katherine Butler Jones.

Read to the first section “To Timbucto” and then stop and have the students examine the map of New York State to locate the North Elba area, near Lake Placid.
Resume reading and stop at the section “John Brown’s Legacy.” Have students discuss why some historians consider the Timbuctoo settlement a success and not a failure.

Return to the reading, finishing the article. Ask students why they believe the author did not know of her family history. Have students record the items Jones used to piece together her family’s story.

Vocabulary from Reading:

Abolitionist: Someone who campaigned against slavery
Agrarian reformer: One who seeks an equitable basis of land ownership
Cache: (pronounced: cash) A hidden store of valuables
Landed Gentry: A person possessing large rural properties, upper class
Orator: A person skilled in giving public speeches
Philanthropist: Someone devoted to helping others

Homework:

Give students the attached handout. This student record is used in a subsequent lesson plan, which is included in the set. You may ask students to bring in, with permission, some of the primary documents they locate.

Evaluation:

Timbuctoo Crossword Puzzle, included in set.

NYS Learning Standards(s) Addressed:

Social Studies Standards:

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
Standard 3: Geography
Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government

ELA Standards:

Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.

Extension:

Research Gerrit Smith and his land grants by using the links provided in the included reference links. Have students create a broadside that could be used to draw African American men interested in voting to settle on Smith’s lands.

Learn more about John Brown and his efforts to abolish slavery. Students can examine John Brown’s actions leading up to and including the Harper’s Ferry raid and write a position paper.

Study the Underground Railroad in upstate New York. Students could write a letter as one abolitionist to another discussing beliefs and how he/she is assisting in the fight against slavery.

Students could write a newspaper article for a New York City newspaper of the time period, imagining that they had traveled to Timbuctoo, interviewed residents, and visited the homesteads.

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

1. What is the oldest item you own? Explain its history and how you came to acquire this item.

2. Share today's lesson with the oldest person available to you. Ask the person to relate a story of their family history. How did he/she come to know this story?

3. Are there any documents relating to this history known to the storyteller? If so, what is it? If not, why do you suppose there is not? Where could you go to find supporting evidence, if you were able?

4. Examine your room for primary documents. List the items below and on the back of the paper, if necessary.

The following is from: The Library Of Congress Website
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/psources/source.html
Last updated 09/26/2002, Accessed 10-20-06

What Are Primary Sources?

Primary and Secondary Sources

Historians use a wide variety of sources to answer questions about the past. In their research, history scholars use both primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are actual records that have survived from the past, such as letters, photographs, articles of clothing. Secondary sources are accounts of the past created by people writing about events sometime after they happened.

For example, your history textbook is a secondary source. Someone wrote most of your textbook long after historical events took place. Your textbook may also include some primary sources, such as direct quotes from people living in the past or excerpts from historical documents.

People living in the past left many clues about their lives. These clues include both primary and secondary sources in the form of books, personal papers, government documents, letters, oral accounts, diaries, maps, photographs, reports, novels and short stories, artifacts, coins, stamps, and many other things. Historians call all of these clues together the historical record.

The Historical Record

The historical record is huge. It contains literally billions of pieces of evidence about the past. Despite its huge size, the historical record gives us just a tiny glimpse of the past. Most of what happened in the past was never documented. Many sources of information about the past have been lost or destroyed. Some primary sources were accumulated simply by accident.

But some historical sources were created and saved by people interested in recording history. People kept journals, wrote diaries and autobiographies, recorded family trees, and saved business and personal letters and papers.

How can the historical record be both huge and limited? What kind of historical records do you leave behind in your daily life?

Lesson Plan Two

Primary and Secondary Sources

Topics:
Primary and Secondary Sources, Genealogical Research, and Personal Narrative Legacies

Overview:
After previously reading the article "They Called it Timbucto" written by Katherine Butler Jones, students realize how historians work like detectives, using primary and secondary sources to piece together a story. Students will use their own records to create a personal narrative based on primary documents from their own lives.

Materials Needed:
1) The personal primary source display used in Lesson One
2) Students' homework on identifying personal primary sources
3) Photocopies of Personal Reflection Record, see below
4) Rubric for grading narratives, see below

Purpose:
To increase student awareness of the wealth and dearth of primary sources. Although people leave behind a multitude of documentation, not everything is documented and some items are lost or destroyed.

Length of Unit:
This lesson plan is for a forty-minute period.

Implementation:
Put students into small groups and have them share their homework results and any primary documentation they were able to gather. After all groups are finished sharing, have the other members of the group pretend to be historians in the distant future. Then have them give assumptions they would make about life during this time period and the individuals based upon the primary documents available to them.

Ask the groups to discuss what kinds of other primary documents might be available about them at home or elsewhere or about the people with whom they reside. Create a master list on the board of other documents they might own, but did not record. (Examples include birth certificates, myspace site, school records, rental agreements or deeds, and notes from friends in their lockers.)

Ask them to share what items in their homes, lockers, or community records might reveal their heritage, belief systems, or values.

Next have students return to working individually. Have them fill out the attached form. After they have completed the brief synopsis, have them begin writing a report about themselves. The report should be written in regular third person narration, as is used in most textbooks. (Not third person limited or omniscient, as are many novels.) The students should attempt to document only the information available about them that are currently in existence. Students should complete this assignment for homework.

You may wish to write a narrative based on your primary documents you shared with the class and read it to them as a model.

NYS Learning Standards(s) Addressed:

Social Studies Standards:
Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
Standard 3: Geography
Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government

ELA Standards:
Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.
Standard 4: Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction.

Evaluation:
Use the rubric for the narrative included in the set.

Extension:
Interview and write a biographical piece on a relative.

Create a scrapbook, combining journaling with primary sources.

Use online sources to research heritage.

Partner with a nursing home or senior citizen group to create a narrative on others' lives.

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Personal Reflection Record

The items I located at home that are considered primary sources would tell a future historian that I...

The items from my home would indicate that society in the year 200_ was...

The items in my locker would lead an historian to believe that I...

Some primary sources about me that I didn't think of include:

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Narrative Rubric

Using Primary Documents to Create a Story

	A	B	C	Inc./F
REQUIRED ELEMENTS:	All elements are present and blend together seamlessly.	All elements are present and most blend seamlessly.	Some elements are missing and the story is disjointed in places.	Many elements are missing and the story is disjointed.
CONTENT OF STORY	Many sources are blended together in a seamless narrative.	Some sources are used to create a suitable narrative.	A few sources are used and the narrative is disjointed in parts.	No sources are apparent and the story lacks detail. The story does not flow.
HISTORICAL ACCURACY	All dates, events, and details are historically accurate.	Most dates, events, and details are historically accurate.	Many dates, events, and details are historically accurate.	Few dates, events, and details are historically accurate.
APPEARANCE	All pages are collated, are legible and neat, and attractive.	Most pages are collated, are legible, and neat, and attractive.	Many pages are collated, use a legible font, are neat, and attractive.	Few pages are collated, use a legible font, are neat, or attractive.
CONVENTIONS: (for example, spelling, capitalization, and grammar)	There are no errors in conventions.	There are only one or two errors with conventions.	There are three to four errors with conventions.	There are more than four errors with conventions.
DEADLINES:	All deadlines are met (plot, draft, edit, final)	All but one deadline is met.	Two deadlines are missed.	More than two deadlines are missed.

FINAL GRADE: _____

Lesson Plan Three

Discovering Personal Prejudices and Bias

Topics:

Rights of African Americans, The Timbuctoo Settlement, Personal Prejudices and Bias

Overview:
In "They Called it Timbucto" by Katherine Butler Jones, the author writes about being discriminated against when she and her husband tried to buy a home in Massachusetts. (p. 33) The settlers of Timbuctoo also encountered difficulties from some locals. Some residents tried to mislead and manipulate the new homesteaders, as described in "Dreaming of Timbuctoo" by Amy Godine and Martha Swan. The Timbuctoo residents were made to feel like outsiders when locals had difficulty accepting people different from themselves.

Materials Needed:

1) Computer lab (The lesson can be accomplished without this by utilizing extension activities.)
2) IAT Record, attached
3) Reaction Log for Extension Activity, attached
4) Rubric for Reaction Log, attached

Purpose:

To have students evaluate how they perceive others and to examine their personal preconceived notions.

Length of Unit:

This lesson plan is for a forty-minute period.

Implementation:

If you have access to a computer lab, have students log onto the Harvard website: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.jsp
There are a number of possibilities in the Implicit Association Test (IAT) that would work for this activity.

Evaluate the site and choose one or two suitable for your group. Possibilities include: Age IAT, Gender-Career IAT, Weight IAT, and Skin-tone IAT. The site has participants use two keys and the space bar to match pictures and words to two different topics. After filling out a brief survey (no personal identifiers asked), the students receive a report of how they compare to the others who have taken the test. Have students fill out the IAT record for reference purposes. (Note: If you do not have access to a computer lab, the activity may be done ahead of time individually on a classroom or library computer.) Each IAT is estimated at 10 minutes or less.

After students complete the designated number of tests, have them form small groups and designate a record keeper for what they feel are the top three answers to these questions:

1) What are some of the contributors toward prejudices and biases?
2) What might be a prejudice or bias in the United States that isn't one in another country?
3) How can we combat prejudice and bias?

When the small group discussion is over, have the groups share their responses. You might then ask if anyone would want to share his/her reactions to the Implicit Association Test. If you decide not to have them share in class, have students write a summary on the back of the log sheet. See homework description below.

NYS Learning Standards(s) Addressed:

Social Studies Standards:
Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
Standard 2: World History
Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government

ELA Standards:
Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.
Standard 4: Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction.

Evaluation:
Rubric for reaction log, attached.

Homework:
Pam Gibson and Amanda Lindberg, from the Department of Psychology at James Madison University, used the following activity in their course, "Diversity Issues in Psychology." For a twelve-week period, students recorded their thoughts and "responses to people who were different from them." They call these "Mindwatch Diaries" and students are required to use them twice a week. "Students identified the origin of the thoughts (culture, family, media) and described how the reaction affected their behavior toward the other." In the description of their course, they note that this activity could be done in secondary classrooms. Attached is a record sheet we've created based on their description of the activity to let you use as a teaching tool in your classroom.

Students should carry the form with them during the day and fill it out as close to their reaction time as possible over a three-day span.

Extension:
Knoxville Hate Trunk: http://www.discoveret.org/knohate/trunk.html
Description of in-class use:http:// www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=536

The Birmingham Pledge Foundation is a "grassroots effort to recognize the dignity and worth of every individual, by making a personal, daily commitment to remove prejudice from our own lives and to treat all people with respect."http:// www.birminghampledge.org/

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Reaction Log

Description of Person	Thought	Response/ Reaction	Origin of Thought	Impact
EX: Old man walking slowly down the sidewalk in front of me	Hurry Up! Get out of my way!	I sighed loudly and walked around him really quickly	US Culture values youth. My mom taught me otherwise	He didn't see me, but I didn't slow down enough to notice

On back of log, create a tally of any similarities in thoughts, responses, or origins

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Implicit Association Test "IAT" Record

Type of IAT taken:

Final results:

Your reaction:

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Implicit Association Test "IAT" Record

Type of IAT taken:

Final results:

Your reaction:

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Exploring Prejudices and Biases

Reaction Log Rubric

	4	3	2	1
REQUIRED ELEMENTS	Requirements are all met and log is thorough.	All basic requirements are met.	Most of the basic requirements are featured.	Two or more of the basic requirements are missing.
DATA COLLECTION	Data was collected as directed. No errors.	Data was collected. A few errors were made.	Some data missing and/or many errors.	Improper data collection. Many errors.
ANALYSIS OF DATA	Collated all responses and created tally of information.	Most responses were included in tally.	Tally has little or no information.	Tally has little or no information.
COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS	Participated fully in discussions or had detailed summary.	Student participated in discussions or had a summary.	Student did little to contribute or had a weak summary.	Student did not participate and did not summarize.

A = 16 POINTS, B = 10 POINTS, C = 8 POINTS, D = 6 PONTS, F = 4 POINTS

Total Points: _____

Grade: _____

Before we can study the central issues of life today, we must destroy the prejudices and fallacies born of previous centuries. ~ Leo Tolstoy

It is never too late to give up our prejudices. ~ Henry David Thoreau

Lesson Plan Four

Preventing Prejudice

Topics:

Personal Prejudices and Bias, The Timbuctoo Settlement, United States Citizens' Rights (1st Amendment, 15th Amendment, 19th Amendment, Fair Housing Act: Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Age Discrimination Act)
See: http://www.hum.wa.gov/FairHousing/History.htm

Overview:

People in Timbuctoo did not feel welcome by some of the people living in the area. Additionally, the author of the article mentioned the difficulty she and her husband had while trying to purchase a home because of their race. Explore prejudices and how to overcome them. Additionally, students will explore practicing tolerant behaviors.

Materials Needed:

1) Completed Student Reaction Log (from Lesson Three)
2) Suggestions by Jim Cole on how to decrease prejudice from website mentioned in the Implementation section below
3) Display or handout of Equal Rights for U.S. Citizens from information obtained from the above government website

Purpose:

To increase student awareness of prejudice and bias and provide concrete ways in which students can combat this in their own lives.

Length of Unit:

This lesson plan is for a forty-minute period.

Implementation:

Have students share some of the results from their Reaction Log. Students should have a climate of trust in the classroom to do this activity. If that is not present, perhaps the papers could be collected
and some shared by the teacher anonymously. You may want to also
have students share examples of discrimination they have observed or experienced, as opposed to ones they recorded.

The Beyond Prejudice website by Dr. Jim Cole features twenty-one suggestions on decreasing personal prejudices. Depending on the technology available to the classroom, you could project the site for a class discussion or photocopy a class set of his suggestions. Use the information from the website (http://www.beyondprejudice.com/reduce_your.html) and have students debate which ideas would be the most effective for students to try.

In item 16, Dr. Cole advocates caring for others. In this vein, you may want to introduce the "Welcome Wagon" idea described in the Extension section below.

Next, have students examine the Equal Rights Amendments and Acts of Congress. Have the students compare and contrast these to the experiences by the residents of Timbuctoo, as well as the experience of author Katherine Butler Jones when she tried to purchase her first home.

Finally, you may want to look at the brochure "Close the Book on Hate: 101 Ways to Combat Prejudice." You may download the pamphlet at http://www.adl.org/prejudice/default.asp or you may be able to pick up a free copy if you are near a Barnes & Noble that still has copies left of this popular brochure.

NYS Learning Standards(s) Addressed:

Social Studies Standards:
Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government

ELA Standards:
Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.
Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for critical analysis and evaluation.
Standard 4: Students will listen, speak, read, and write for social interaction.

Evaluation:
Reaction log rubric is located in Lesson Three.

Extension:
If students are interesting in making newcomers to the school feel welcome after their discussion about the residents of Timbuctoo, share with them the Welcome Wagon® story. (http://www.welcomewagon.com/AboutUs/Article.aspx?wwpg=about&poe=welcomewagon)

Brainstorm with the class on how to make new students feel welcomed in your school community. Ideas may include create a buddy system to show students around, giving them a welcome kit, or preparing a guide book to your school and area that could be housed in the school's library or guidance office. Check with the administration or guidance office to discover how many new students enter the school in a year, as this may impact your choice of how to make newcomers welcome.

Additional Extensions:
Quiz: Judging a Book by its Cover, a look at teens in the U.S.
http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/newnormal/quiz/index.html

Quiz on prejudices from Dr. Cole's website:
www.beyondprejudice.com/assess.html
http://
Book containing activities and quizzes related to this subject:
Singelis, Theodore, ed. Teaching About Culture, Ethnicity, and Diversity. California: Sage Publications, 1998.

Lesson Plan Five

Dreaming of Timbuctoo - Voices from the Past

Topics:
The Timbuctoo settlement, Homesteading, Abolitionists

Overview:
After students have studied the Timbuctoo booklet, have them put themselves into the shoes of the settlers. Students should use their resources to create detailed diary accounts of the homesteaders. Each student would be responsible for three to four diary entries. Another option is to create a front page of a fictional newspaper for the Timbuctoo settlement.

Materials Needed:
1) The article by Katherine Butler Jones, "They Called it Timbucto"
2) Assignment description, see below
3) Diary rubric, see below

Purpose:
To give students the opportunity to empathize with the settlers who left their homes to start a new life in the Adirondack wilderness and to see the world through their eyes.

Length of Unit:
This lesson plan is for a forty-minute period.

Implementation:
Below is the assignment for the Timbuctoo diaries. You may want to give the assignment before viewing the exhibit, so students can take notes. (If this is an activity you have done recently, you may want to modify the requirements so that students would create a fictional Timbuctoo newspaper.) Have them fill in your requirements for number of entries and paragraphs. Students should be given the rubric with the assignment and then turn it back in with the completed diaries.

As a model, you may want to read an example of another diary. Real diaries of the time period can be found at the University of North Carolina's website, "Documenting the American South." This collection contains the "North American Slave Narratives," which according to the Implementation (continued):
site "...includes all the existing autobiographical narratives of fugitive and former slaves published as broadsides, pamphlets, or books in English up to 1920." http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/

Before beginning the diaries in class, you may want to take time to show images of the Adirondacks. Links are located on the "Additional References" contained in the packet. You might discuss food eaten in that time period and sources. If possible, let them see examples of the people, places, and documents displayed in the exhibit.

Explain that imagery is writing that appeals to the five senses. Writing with voice allows the reader to imagine that a real person is speaking to them and lends authenticity to historical fiction. Remind them to avoid anachronistic errors, such as microwaves used to cook venison steaks.

NYS Learning Standards(s) Addressed:

Social Studies Standards:
Standard 1: History of the United States and New York
Standard 3: Geography
Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government

ELA Standards:
Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for information and understanding.

Evaluation:
Diary rubric is attached.

Extension:
Using the information from the readings and the booklet, explore the experience the Timbuctoo settlers had in creating their environment. Small groups pretend to be a family moving from New York City to the Timbuctoo settlement. Students should decide on roles, supplies, and create a plan for clearing the land, building a home, raising food, and earning a living. They could sketch out the design of their acreage and home.

Students could evaluate political cartoons from the exhibit or the time period of the Timbuctoo settlement, analyzing them for illustration, captions, word balloons, theme, symbols, and signs.

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Dreaming of Timbuctoo:

Creating a Diary in the Voice of a Homesteading African American

During this unit, each student will write a diary in the voice of one person who experienced life as a person involved in the Timbuctoo settlement. In addition, each student will create a works cited page (bibliography) properly listing all resources used in the creation of the diary.

Assignment Details:

Write _____ entries of at least three paragraphs each. If you want to include information about the trip from New York City to the Adirondacks, you must write using flashback, having your character reflecting back on the trip.

Entries do not need to follow a consecutive period, but can be spread across a longer time period. The entries must sound authentic and accurately recreate a person's daily life from the time period. The details and descriptions must be realistic and faithfully record historical events.

You must choose a plausible name and a job they could have held. Be sure to describe life in the Adirondacks and incorporate detailed information about your character's surroundings.

The diary entries must be written with a clear and distinct voice, incorporating vivid imagery and details throughout. The diaries are not just a listing of events that happen, but a reaction to the events, which reflects authentic-sounding opinions of your daily life and the people around you.

The dates of the diary entries must accurately reflect the time period. You may use any portion of the time period studied during this unit.

The works cited page (bibliography) must follow MLA style documentation.

Use the rubric to ensure that you are on track with all necessary components.

Name:_____ Class Pd. _____ Date: _____

Dreaming of Timbuctoo

	A	B	C	Inc./F
REQUIRED ELEMENTS: ___ entries of three paragraphs each (__ ¶s). Has bibliography	__ paragraphs in eight to ten entries.	__ paragraphs in eight to ten entries. Few errors in bibliography.	__ paragraphs in seven entries. Bibliography has some errors.	Fewer than __ paragraphs. Six or fewer entries. Many errors in bibliography.
CONTENT OF DIARY	Vivid imagery, striking details, and authentic sounding voice.	Contains imagery, details, and has a voice.	Has some elements of imagery, details, and voice.	Lacks imagery, detail, and voice.
HISTORICAL ACCURACY	All dates, events, and details are historically accurate.	Most dates, events, and details are historically accurate.	Many dates, events, and details are historically accurate.	Few dates, events, and details are historically accurate.
APPEARANCE OF DIARY	All pages are collated, are legible and neat.	Most pages are collated, are legible, and neat.	Many pages are collated, legible, and neat.	Few pages are collated, legible or neat.
CONVENTIONS: (for example, spelling, capitalization, and grammar)	There are no errors in conventions.	There are only one or two errors with conventions.	There are three to four errors with conventions.	There are more than four errors with conventions.
DEADLINE:	Diary is turned in on time, in class.	Diary is turned in on the due date, but later in the day.	Diary is turned in one day late.	Diary is turned in more than one day late.

FINAL GRADE: _____

INTERNET RESOURCES:

Historical

New York State Museum Press Release about Timbuctoo
http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/press/2003/timbuctoo.html

History Unveiled, Dreaming of Timbuctoo
http://www.apnmag.com/Back%20in%20the%20Day/winter2003/Timbuctoo/timbucto.htm

Voices, The Journal of New York Folklore
"The Making of an Exhibit"
http://www.nyfolklore.org/pubs/voic29-1-2/exhibit.html

Gerrit Smith Virtual Museum
http://www.nyhistory.com/gerritsmith/index.htm

Gerrit Smith Family Home and his history, Historic Peterboro
http://www.nyhistory.com/gerritsmith/gsestate.htm

Brooklyn Public Library
Online Exhibit
http://www.brooklynpubliclibrary.org/events/exhibitions/archive/timbuctoo.htm

Gerrit Smith Broadside Collection, Syracuse University
http://library.syr.edu/digital/collections/g/GerritSmith/index.html

On the Trail of John Brown: What Mary Brown Saw
http://www.adkhistorycenter.org/jbweb/intro.html

"Press Republican" Newspaper Article about the Timbuctoo Exhibit
http://archive.pressrepublican.com/Archive/2002/06_2002/06272002oacvr.htm

Harp Week – Text, Illustrations, and Cartoons from Harper's Weekly
about the 15 Admendment
http://15thamendment.harpweek.com

Primary Sources Definition
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/lessons/psources/source.html

Fair Housing History
http://www.hum.wa.gov/FairHousing/History.htm

Anti-Prejudice References:

Harvard Implicit Association Test
https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/selectatest.jsp

Knoxville Hate Trunk
http://www.discoveret.org/knohate/trunk.html
http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=536

Birmingham Pledge Foundation
http://www.birminghampledge.org/

Beyond Prejudice
http://www.beyondprejudice.com/reduce_your.html

Close the Book on Hate, Anti-Defamation League
http://www.adl.org/prejudice/default.asp

Quiz: Judging a Book by its Cover, a look at teens in the U.S.
http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/newnormal/quiz/index.html

Quiz on prejudices from Dr. Cole's website
http://www.beyondprejudice.com/assess.html

Welcome Wagon history
http://www.welcomewagon.com/AboutUs/Article.aspx?wwpg=about&poe=welcomewagon

Adirondack Life

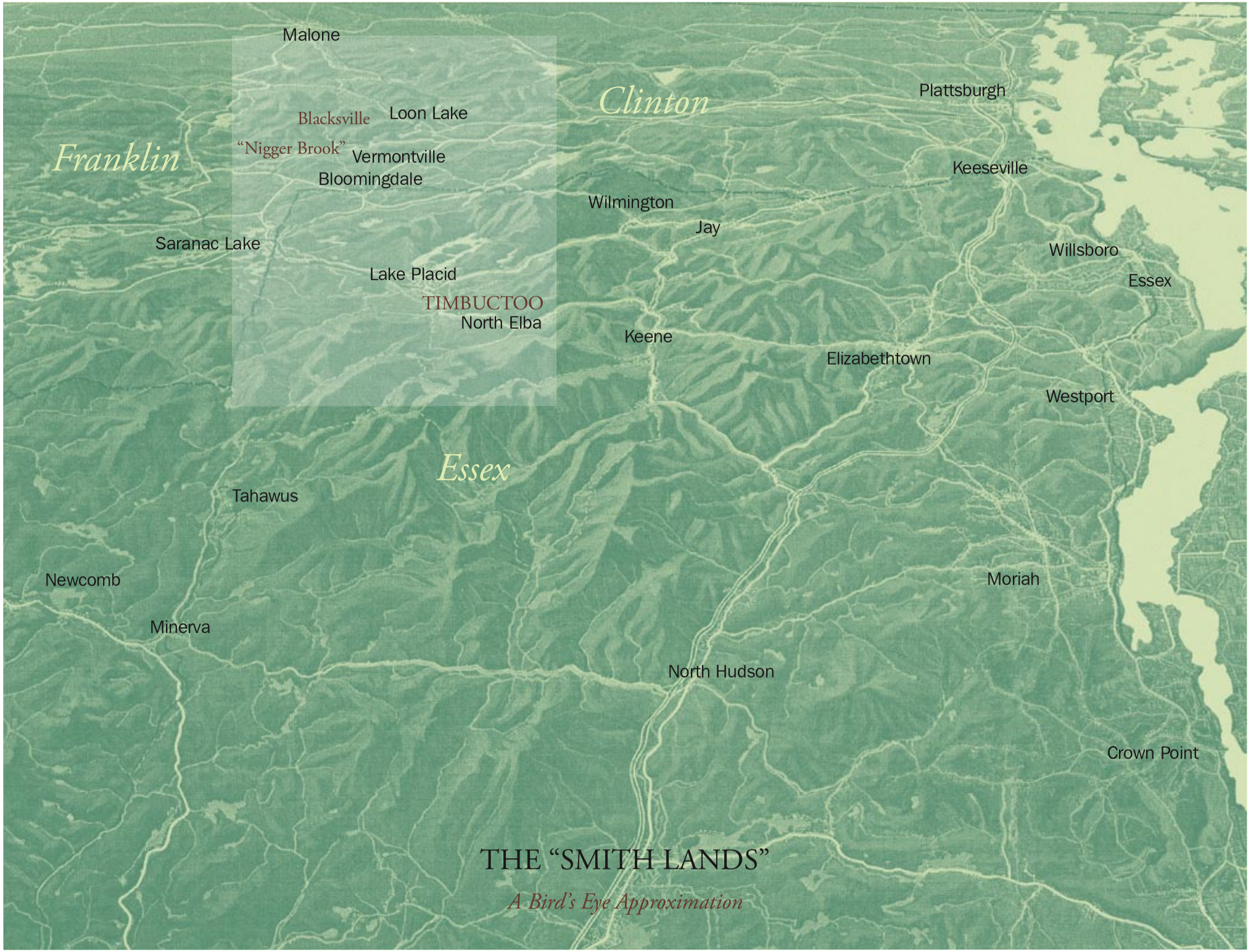
Essex County Historical Society and the Adirondack History Museum
http://www.adkhistorycenter.org

Adirondack History Network
http://www.adirondackhistory.org/

Tour the Adirondacks & Lake Placid
http://www.lakeplacid.com/flash/home/z-home.htm

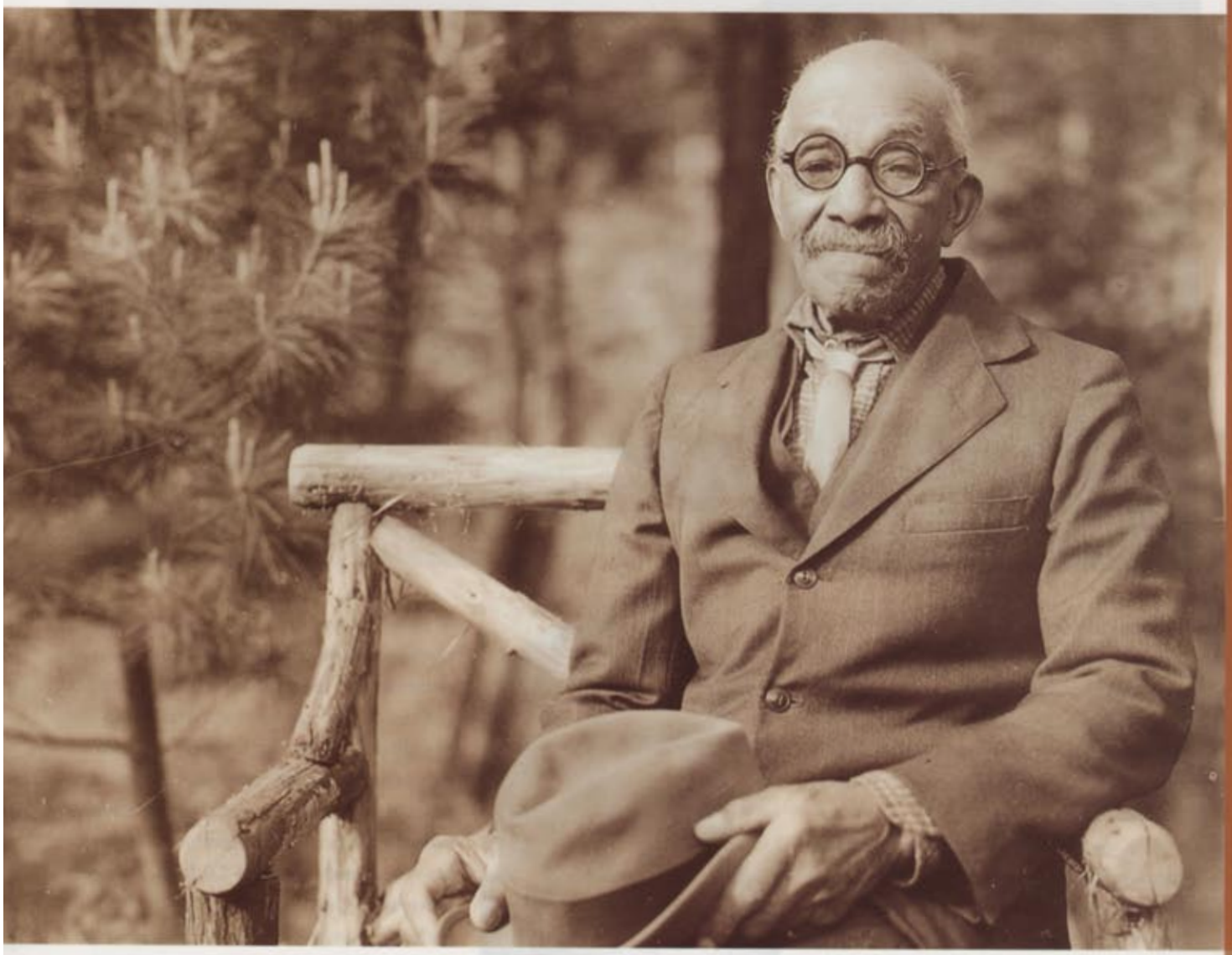
Online Adirondack Photo Gallery
http://www.adirondacks.com/frankhouck/art.html

Welcome to the Adirondacks
http://visitadirondacks.com/home/home.cfm


Malone
Clinton
Plattsburgh
Blacksville
Loon Lake
"Nigger Brook"
Vermontville
Franklin
Bloomingdale
Keeseville
Wilmington
Jay
Saranac Lake
Willsboro
Essex
Lake Placid
TIMBUCTOO
North Elba
Keene
Elizabethtown
Westport
Essex
Tahawus
Newcomb
Moriah
Minerva
North Hudson
Crown Point
THE "SMITH LANDS"
A Bird's Eye Approximation

they called it timbucto

by Katherine Butler Jones



WE WILL BE OUR OWN MASTERS. FREE TO THINK, FREE TO ACT;
AND IF WE TOIL HARD, THAT TOIL WILL BE SWEETENED BY
THE REFLECTION THAT THIS IS ALL, BY GOD'S WILL AND HELP,
FOR OURSELVES, OUR WIVES AND OUR CHILDREN.

—from the "Address to the 3,000 Colored Citizens of New York State Who Are The Owners of One Hundred and Twenty Thousand Acres of Land In The State Of New York Given To Them by Gerrit Smith, Esq. of Peterboro, September 1st, 1846. New York," by Rev. Theodore Wright, Charles Ray, and Dr. James McCune Smith

LEVELAND

special section

I grew up in Harlem in New York City in the 1940s and '50s, never imagining that my ancestors were landowners and farming people, nor that my father's family had roots in New York State dating back at least to 1775, when my great-great-grandmother was born, in Rensselaer County, New York.

As a girl, I had heard no stories around the kitchen table about my family's land and farming experiences, told by my aunts and cousins. They hadn't heard the stories either. Nor did my formal education include any accounts of northern, free African American families like mine—not a word through prep school, Mount Holyoke College, and Harvard University. I heard nothing of the story I am about to tell while I was raising my own children. It was only eight years ago, on a visit to my widowed mother, that I happened on a trove of papers, and began to know the history of my family's land. It is a personal story, but one that points to a larger, still untold American story.

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, my father's black varnished bookcase always seemed to dominate the foyer of our apartment, and it still did the afternoon that I picked up the key, slipped it into the keyhole, and opened the cabinet's double glass doors. My eyes traveled over the three shelves of leather-bound volumes of nineteenth-century classics—collected works of Dickens, Poe, and Stevenson—and came to rest on the bottom shelf and a cache of a dozen letters addressed to my father, Theodore Butler. The first letter I read described a first-hand account of a tumultuous race riot in New York City in the summer of 1900. Soon I was rummaging through stacks of test score results of dad's postal exams, sorting out a pocket-size folder filled with his YMCA membership cards, Colored Mens' Branch, dating from 1900. Beneath this pile, and next to a half dozen tintypes and Connecticut property tax receipts, I then found a yellowing, unsealed envelope.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Lyman Epps, Jr., the last resident and sole survivor of the settlement of Timbucto. ABOVE, TOP TO BOTTOM: The Adirondack Mountains, near North Elba; philanthropist Gerrit Smith, whose 1846 land grant at Timbucto gave land ownership to African Americans.

TOP: ©1993 PAUL REZENDES; BOTTOM: NORTH WIND PICTURE ARCHIVES

sell to one of your own race.... Pool your resources to buy oxen and plows to clear the land."

The majority of those who came to Timbucto were literate city folks, entirely new to farming. Typical was James Henderson, representative at the Negro National Convention held at Liberty Street Church in 1847. He came from Troy with his wife and five children, and hung his shingle on the tree next to his shoemaker shop. It may have been the same shingle—"Boot and Shoe Manufactory"—that marked his previous business in New York City, where he also founded an Evening School for Adults and Children. Henderson may have planned a similar program in Timbucto, but he got lost in the dense wooded area one bitter cold day, and froze to death.

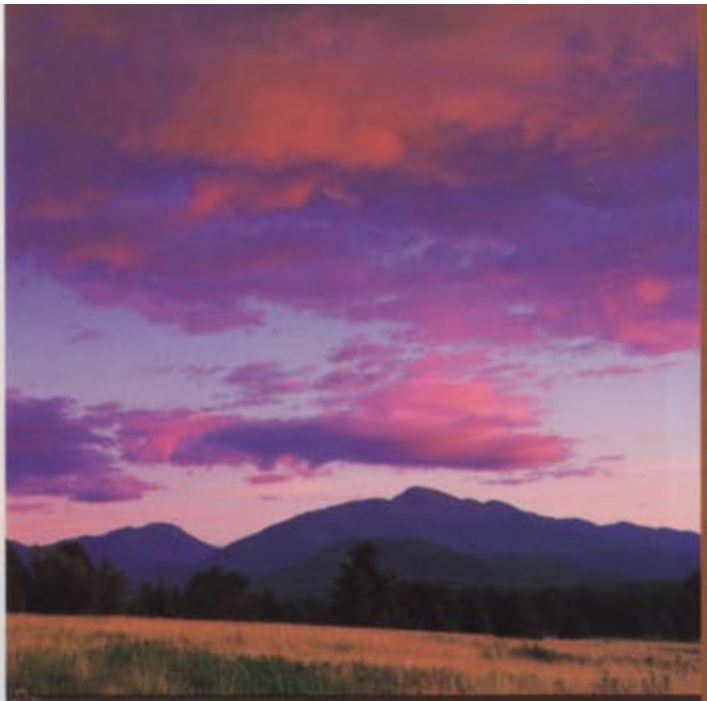
Lyman Epps also brought his wife and two children from Troy to Timbucto in 1849 when his son, Lyman Jr., was two years old. Six more children were born to him in North Elba. His was the only African American family to settle permanently in the town. At his death in 1942, Lyman Epps Jr. was the last of his family to die and be buried in North Elba, and the last survivor of Timbucto. We see him in a photograph as a distinguished looking man, peering into the camera lens, bald and bespectacled, attired in plaid shirt, tie, suit, and vest.

Timbucto proved to be a difficult home for many of these families, having no prior experience in farming. But a few did well and stuck it out on the land—for it was the land that ensured them the precious, all important right to vote.

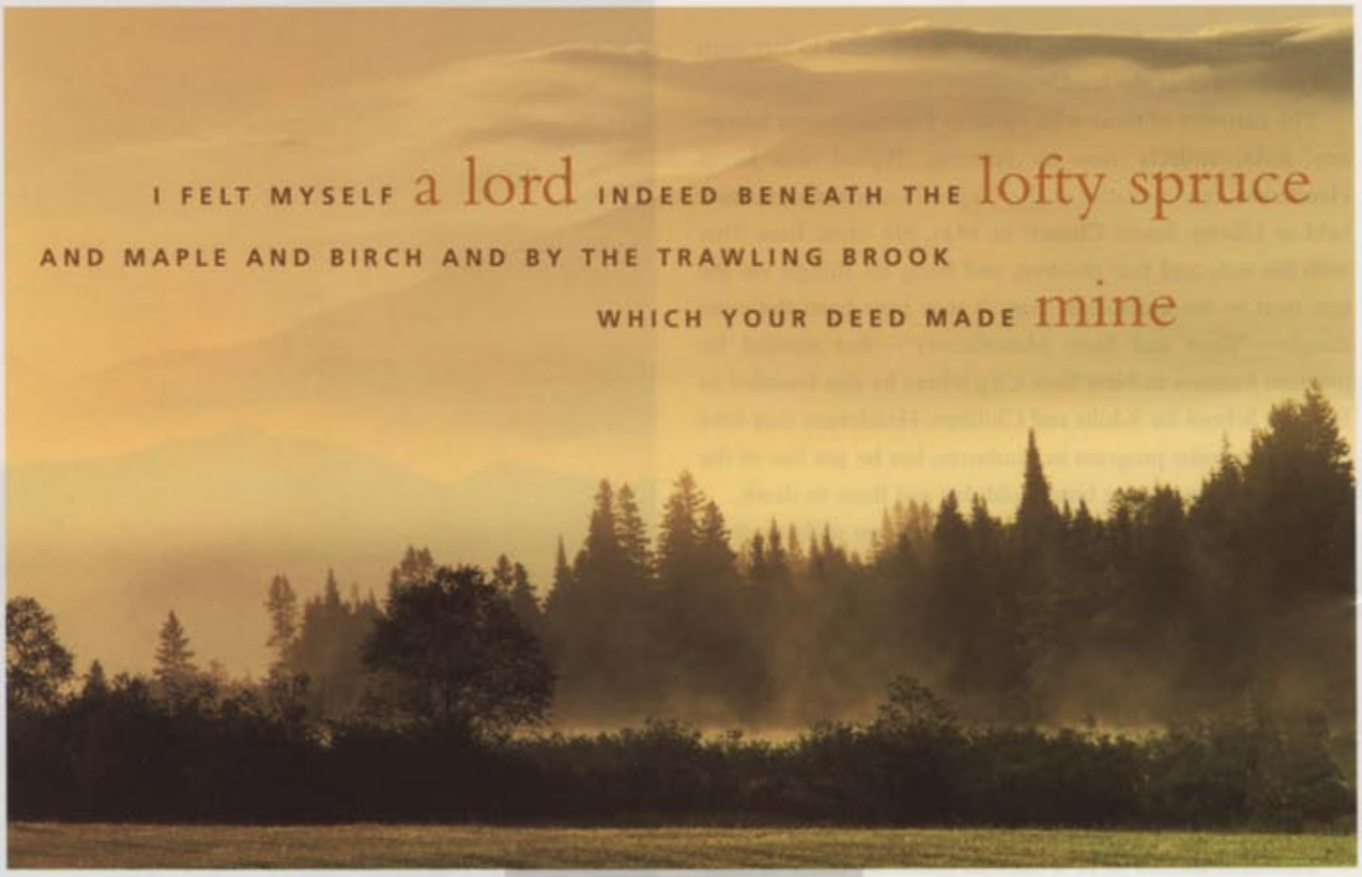
John Brown's Legacy

The settlement of Timbucto had a famous neighbor. When John Brown learned about Gerrit Smith's land reform experiment, he visited Smith at Peterboro. Subsequently, he moved his family there and enthusiastically purchased 244 acres of land adjacent to Timbucto with the intention of teaching the new black residents to farm productively. Although by August of 1849 his business interests in wool production had taken him to Liverpool, England, and far from farming instruction, his family of ten stayed on the land and built their farmhouse with the assistance of Lyman Epps. On his rare visits home, Brown often talked with his neighbors in nearby Westport about the evils of slavery, and about his formative plans as God's appointed instrument for its demise.

In 1856, John Brown set out from North Elba to protect the territory of Kansas from becoming a slave state. Brown's son Frederick was killed in that struggle—a victorious campaign that did bring Kansas into the Union as a free state. It was Brown's 1859 raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry that inspired the words of the Civil War anthem: "John Brown's body lies a'



TOP TO BOTTOM: The Adirondacks' High Peaks wilderness area; the author as a girl; a view from North Elba; Abolitionist John Brown gave Timbucto its name; the author's father, whose bookcase revealed the path to her past.



molding in the grave." There was also singing at the grave site that Brown had chosen for himself on his farm in North Elba. There, the abolitionist Wendell Phillips intoned the eulogy, as settlers from North Elba and its Timbucto colony, as well as surrounding communities, stood mourning the death of their neighbor and friend.

Gerrit Smith honored the North Elba community called Timbucto with his radical land reform efforts. African Americans honored this place with their demonstrations of self-sufficiency. John Brown honored it by choosing it as his last resting place. Though short-lived, Timbucto—nestled deep in what is now Adirondack Park—is an unforgettable symbol of hope and sacrifice.

The Lure of Land

The story of Timbucto points to a larger story of why land and ownership of land have been important to African American families in a unique way. It is startling to remember that in 1790, one-fifth of the population of New York state was still enslaved, making land ownership actually illegal for those African Americans. These Americans worked the land then just as migrant workers and sharecroppers do today, tied to the rich agricultural cornucopia, but gaining very little in return for their labor. A complex relationship to land developed from that particular history: African Americans felt the great lure of land, its beauty and fertility, but also felt estranged from it because of their terrible history of exploitation.

For a people who have known the agony of a system in which family members could be routinely sold away from one another—wives from husbands, children from mothers—land stood as one of the only tangible possessions that could not be easily confiscated. For African Americans, the attainment of land was a priceless step toward self-sufficiency and security.

ABOVE TOP: Despite rocky land and severe winters, about a dozen African American families settled at Timbucto and scratched out a living.
BOTTOM: The Reverend Henry Highland Garnet, who aided Gerrit Smith in settling Timbucto.

Carefully, I extracted an eight-by-ten piece of paper, and my hands began to tremble as I read the names: Hannah Dimond and Edward Weeks, my great-grandparents whose names I had heard mentioned, only very occasionally, by my cousin Sue. Here were their names, in ink, on a wedding certificate dated October 30, 1843. Moreover, the certificate was signed by Bishop Henry Highland Garnet, of the Liberty Street Church, Troy, New York.

In my African American history classes, I always familiarize students with Bishop Garnet's role as a leading black abolitionist and orator, a man who admonished slaves to revolt. I knew at once that I held a piece of history in my hands—a document that recorded a convergence of national and family history. This single piece of paper launched me on a long journey of research and discovery—an odyssey that eventually led me deep into the Adirondack Mountains, and to a fuller realization of what land has meant to my family, and to other African Americans.

That day in New York, holding the wedding certificate, I knew that my first step would be to find the place—the land that Hannah and Edward Weeks had called home. My search began at the Federal Archives in Waltham, Massachusetts, only a twenty-minute drive from my house. One afternoon in the archives, as I moved my fingers down the column of the microfilmed 1850 census for Westport, New York, my great-grandparents suddenly came to life before my eyes—emerging from four lines on an obscure data base:

> Edward Weeks (b) 28 barber $100 land
> Hannah Weeks (b) 35 at home
> Priscilla Weeks (b) 5
> Susan Weeks (b) 9 mos.

How, I wondered, had this new couple been able to buy land? I remembered that, four years before this census, a remarkable and little-known episode had occurred in New York: a wealthy Peterboro philanthropist, Gerrit Smith, had given land to African American men residing in New York state, expressly to enable more of them to vote. Was the Weeks's land connected to Smith's land grant? After extensive research, I did find Edward Weeks listed as a recipient of one of Smith's land grants. It was a parcel located thirty-seven miles from Westport, where the family had lived. Of course, I wanted to see that land for myself.

To prepare for the adventure, I spent a day poring over old maps with the help of several Syracuse University cartologists. Working from the copy of the deed that I had in hand, the cartologists and I found the exact location of the thirty-nine acres assigned to Edward Weeks. It lay deep in the woods of the town of North Elba, New York, at a spot a few miles from the present village of Lake Placid, where the winter Olympics were held. Although the cartologists informed me that the area was impenetrable and impossible to explore, their comment only whetted my curiosity. "Well," they warned, "wait until the black fly season is over before you go."

Soon my husband and I were planning a two-week research trip to the several places where the Weeks family had owned land. I had also found deeds for land in Washington County; in Keeseville, not far from the Canadian border; and in Westport on Lake Champlain. And I would visit an acre in Connecticut, willed to me by my father.

To Timbucto

One scorchingly hot July day we began our journey. I eased into the passenger seat, surrounded by AAA road maps, the *New York State Gazetteer*, and a history of the towns throughout the state. The "Northway," Highway 87, carried us to cool, high altitudes, and alongside precipitous drops, as my husband navigated the circuitous roads through the Adirondacks.

State Highway 73 leading off the Northway brought us to the village of Lake Placid, where we pulled up at a former railroad depot, now a historical museum. A woman wearing an ankle-length, blue flowered dress with a bonnet on her head appeared in the doorway—personifying our seeming transition into another time. Following her directions, we trudged along the road until we reached a spot we thought might be in the general area of the Weeks land parcel. It seemed likely, as the cartologists had said, that the land assigned to Edward Weeks had never been cleared. An old, dense forest blanketed the area, branches stretching their limbs high into the cloudless blue sky.

Probably Hannah, Edward, and Priscilla stood here too, and turned away discouraged. The effort of clearing the lot would have been enormous, and so he took his family another thirty-seven miles to Westport and settled there.

But other African American families who came to this place did make it their home. Their arrival in this forested land, like Gerrit Smith's land grant itself, was a bold response to a regressive piece of legislation passed in New York in 1821—a law that denied black men the right to vote unless they owned $250 worth of land. Prior to that act, a single qualification for voting (owning property valued at $100) had applied equally to men of both races. But the 1821 legislation required *only* black men to own land in order to vote, virtually eliminating the franchise for them, even after slavery ended in New York in

1827. In 1846 Gerrit Smith responded to this unjust restriction with an ingenious plan.

As a member of the landed gentry, Gerrit Smith owned 750,000 acres in New York state by mid-nineteenth century—much of it inherited from his father, Peter. With John Jacob Astor, Peter Smith had penetrated the rugged wilderness near Albany, trading colored glass and beads for animal skins and the lands of the Mohawks, Senecas, and Cayagas. Like his father before him, Gerrit Smith was known as a gregarious host, whose home became a way-station for escaped slaves on their way to Canada, as well as a resting place for travelers of all races and walks of life. Dutch families of wealth and privilege were frequent guests at the clapboard mansion, as were the African American abolitionists, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and Henry Highland Garnet.

As an agrarian reformer, Smith believed that every person who desired a farm should have one, and that no person should own more than one farm. After paying the tax debts on his lands and selling some of them at auction, he embarked on a plan to rid himself of what he considered excessive land holdings by giving away tracts to upstanding African American temperance people (a plan that stood in sharp contrast to his father's means of acquiring land from Native Americans). In order to identify and distribute land to worthy African American men, Gerrit Smith requested help from his friend, the Reverend Henry Highland Garnet. Garnet—purported grandson of a Mandigo chieftain, minister of the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy—is the man who had married my great-grandparents. Through their efforts, in 1846, 3,000 parcels of his land were set aside for distribution in Franklin, Delaware, Oneida, Essex, Madison, Hamilton, and Ulster counties—120,000 acres in all, a vast archipelago of land stretching from the Canadian border south to Long Island Sound. His land grants would provide many African American men with plots of land, each worth $250—the precise amount the enactment required a black man to own in order to vote.

Soon many families were headed toward North Elba to examine the lots they had been given. They came over bumpy roads with their meager belongings packed in ox-drawn carts. Men, women, and their children trekked from New York City, Troy, and other places throughout the state. Although some came only to turn away, about a dozen families settled here and managed to eke a living from the earth, growing rye, potatoes, oats, and other crops.

The African American homesteaders of North Elba found a rocky, mountainous land where winter temperatures were so cold that sparkling crystals of ice formed on mens' beards as they went about their outdoor work. But despite the hardships of starting a new farm, these men and women stayed. Their colony in the North Elba settlement was given a name of its own, Timbucto. Did the name represent the fourteenth-century city in the kingdom of Mali, once the center of African education, trade, and culture, or did it refer to the isolation of their land—or both?

After visiting the Timbucto settlement in 1850, another land-grant recipient (and distributor), Dr. James McCune Smith, penned a status report to Gerrit Smith describing the effect the place had on him: "I felt myself a lord indeed beneath the lofty spruce and maple and birch and by the trawling brook which your deed made mine." Unfortunately, the population of North Elba was far too small to support the family of this physician (who, incidentally, earned his degrees abroad since no university in this county would accept a black man). Dr. Smith must have left Timbucto reluctantly for his letter concluded: "I would gladly exchange the bustling anxious life for the repose of that majestic country."

The African American community on this land quickly became a symbol of endurance. In a written address to the newly land-endowed men, Charles Ray, Dr. James McCune Smith, and Reverend Theodore Wright (first African American graduate of Princeton University) implored them to "Pay your taxes and hold onto the land since it is a gift.... If you must sell,

timbucto TODAY

ADIRONDACK PARK today is a huge swath of land north of Albany, New York, encompassing most of Gerrit Smith's holdings, including North Elba. The park contains six million acres of land, approximating the size of Vermont, 40% of which is public and 60% private. Recently one owner, Marylou Whitney, submitted a plan to sell 15,000 of her 51,000 acres for commercial use. Many observers consider this application to be a ploy—to increase the value of the land which would then be negotiated for sale to a private group, The Nature Conservancy, for stewardship. A Whitney family spokesperson has said that the price paid for lumber from the land "is too low to pay the increasingly higher taxes." Gerrit Smith made the same determination regarding high taxes in 1846 when he allocated portions of his land to be given away "to the poorest of the poor and the most deeply wronged of citizens." A modest proposal: suppose the Whitney family, following historical precedent, chose to replicate Gerrit Smith's nineteenth-century land reform scheme by offering some acreage for poor families to farm?

Edward Weeks's father, John, learned that lesson well. Even though John Weeks's family was "free" and could not be sold, the senior Weeks purchased a half-acre plot in Jackson, New York, near the Vermont border in 1827, the year that slavery ended in New York State. But the small tract did not qualify John Weeks to vote. (He did, however, pay 47¢ in taxes on the land in response to the American Colonization Society's thinly disguised effort to rid the land of free blacks by offering to pay their way back to Africa.) Although his white neighbors owned hundreds of acres of land, previously acquired through lottery land drawings and grants, John and Esther had to expand their acreage gradually. But by 1850, they owned a forty-acre farm worth $1200. Now John Weeks could vote.

It was only after the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870 that propertyless black men in New York State could vote. The use of land and land ownership (including eminent domain and assessment) as a means of limiting rights and opportunities of citizens on the basis of race, wealth, and gender is not, sadly, a historical phenomenon. Decisions about whose land is confiscated, and to whom land is given or sold, remain crucial in the dissemination of wealth and power.

From the 1850 agricultural record for Jackson, New York, I learn that the Weeks family owned two cows, five pigs, one ox, two horses, and four sheep. The Weeks's farm also yielded a good crop: 100 bushels of oats, 200 bushels of Indian Corn, 100 bushels of rye. If I was surprised that Edward Weeks owned land in 1850, I was astounded to discover that John and Esther had a farm of such value at that time.

The story of John Weeks tells me that the goal of the land-grant experiment initiated by Gerrit Smith was accomplished, independently, by my great-great-grandparents. But the Weeks family experience of caring for land that they owned was all too rare for African Americans. How I admire the fortitude that they displayed in order to secure a modicum of independence and prosperity against the odds.

The pastoral land that my great-great-grandparents owned is embraced by the Green Mountains of Vermont which crisscross the horizon like a picket fence. This is the serene landscape, complete with grazing cows, that Grandma Moses captured in her paintings. I was elated to discover that my ancestors had selected such a pristine place to raise their family, and when my feet first touched the earth on the land that my great-great-grandparents owned, I felt a new connection with my forebears: I was walking the land that they had cultivated, on the place that they called home.

When we later drove to Westport, New York, a state trooper graciously gave me his Essex County map to help us find the way to the land of my great-grandparents. The land of Hannah and Edward Weeks sits high on a hill on Sam Spear Road. Standing on that hill, I felt a thread running straight from their lives to mine.

During these weeks of exploration, I also walked an acre that my father had owned in Windsor, Connecticut, next to his sister's farmland. Perhaps when my father willed me that acre he knew, just like his ancestors before him, that the struggle to acquire and keep land would be hard for African Americans.

He was still right in 1961, when my husband and I sought a home and a place for our children to grow up. At that time, there was no law in Massachusetts to prevent discrimination in sale of property. Neither neighbors' petitions against our pending purchase (a petition supported by clergy), nor telephone threats to the owner dissuaded us from our goal, but it took the involvement of the local Fair Housing group member, a Caucasian Canadian woman—a recent immigrant whose tenure in America was far shorter than my own—for us to buy our home in Newton.

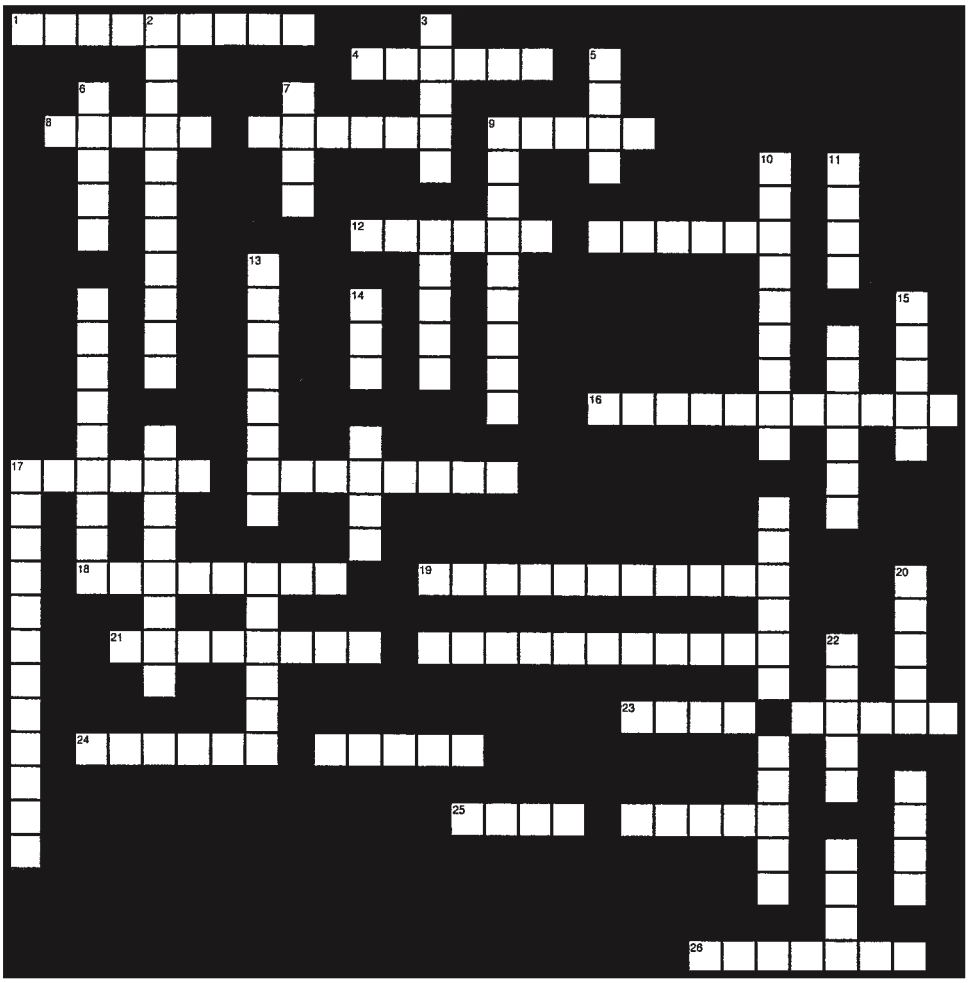
I wish that I had known then that my family was here before America was founded—that we have long been part of the warp and woof of this landscape, that each generation of my ancestors since 1799 has owned land. But I hadn't known because this story is still part of an untold history, a tale that has *not* been passed down from one generation to another. Perhaps the stigma of race made recounting too painful. Yet my story is hardly unique; it is the still undiscovered legacy of many African American families who have roots in the North. "When did your family migrate from the south?" I'm often asked. Although my paternal grandfather was born in Virginia and my mother is from Jamaica, West Indies, at least seven generations ago the trunk of our family tree on my father's side was planted firmly in the soil of New York State—with a taproot in some yet unknown part of West Africa.

This family history that I have learned is woven from slender threads—from letters, photographs, and tintypes, from speeches, marriage certificates, and old greeting cards. But as the threads have come together, they have formed vivid images of people who raised families, built institutions and communities, loved and cared for the land, and learned not only to survive on that land, but to thrive.

The Weeks wedding certificate, now framed, hangs on a wall in our home, so that my eight children will always remember our family story of land and tradition—a legacy whose first clues lay waiting on the bottom shelf of my father's black varnished bookcase.

Dreaming of Timbuctoo

Crossword Puzzle designed to accompany the article “They Called it Timbucto” by Katherine Butler Jones.
(Note: Both spellings of Timbuctoo were used in historical records.)



Across

1. A former community of African Americans in upstate New York
4. Approximate number of families who settled there
8. He couldn’t support family due to small population
12. A black abolitionist minister from Troy, NY
16. A mountain range in Northeast New York State
17. Believes everyone who wants to own a farm should, but only one: Agrarian _____
18. The _____ , nickname for Interstate 87, north of Albany
19. One who studies or creates topographical maps
21. This primary source started the author on a search for family history and land
23. Giving a free title to land
24. He gave land so African American men could vote
25. Bought land near Timbuctoo intending to teach farming
26. A journal is this type of source

Down

2. A network of people, routes, and safehouses to aid the people escaping slavery
3. A man who gained land from Native Americans by trading beads and pelts
5. In order to do this, African Americans had to own land worth more than $250
6. Had a shoemaker’s shop in Timbuctoo
7. Measurement of land
9. A textbook is this type of source
10. Author of the Timbuctoo article
11. Two time site of the winter Olympics in New York
13. The first African American graduate of Princeton
14. In 1821, this state removed property restrictions for voting for white men, but not for black men
15. Last name of the author’s great-grandparents
17. Someone opposed to slavery
20. Head of family whose son is buried in North Elba
22. A small town near Lake Placid, close to Timbuctoo