

LONG ISLAND

Words of early African American poet Jupiter Hammon heard at Joseph Lloyd Manor



Lauren Brincat, the curator for Preservation Long Island, conducts a tour Saturday at the Joseph Lloyd Manor house in Lloyd Harbor where enslaved poet Jupiter Hammon lived. Credit: Elizabeth Sagarin

By Joe Werkmeister

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Updated October 14, 2023 6:52 pm

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In a small, dimly lit room on the second floor of the Joseph Lloyd Manor house, the powerful words of the first published African American poet, Jupiter Hammon, rang out over a speaker.

The recording of Hammon's "An Essay on Slavery" by the artist and poet Malik Work provided a profound backdrop for guests as they toured the room believed to be the sleeping quarters for enslaved people under the Lloyd family in the 18th century.

As a celebration of the poet's Oct. 17 birthday and for Black Poetry Day on Oct. 14, the Lloyd Harbor Historical Society partnered with Preservation Long Island on Saturday to host tours of two nearby historic homes in Lloyd Harbor where Hammon once lived.

In 2019, Preservation Long Island launched the Jupiter Hammon Project to shed new light on his writing and its impact and to “critically rethink how we interpret the entangled stories of the Lloyd family and the people they enslaved,” according to the Cold Spring Harbor-based nonprofit.

The tour began at the Henry Lloyd Manor house where Hammon was born in 1711 and continued to the Joseph Lloyd Manor house where he lived after the Revolutionary War. It was at the larger Joseph Lloyd estate where Hammon authored “some of his most important works about slavery and emancipation,” said Andrew Tharler, the education director of Preservation Long Island.

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“His writing and his life are remarkably complex and interesting,” Tharler said. “He’s writing about freedom and emancipation while he’s still enslaved and doing it when all these ideas about liberty and independence are sort of percolating in the country as we transition from colony to United States.”

Tharler said Hammon wrote “An Essay on Slavery” in 1786 when he would have been about 75. The poem reveals Hammon’s optimism for a future with freedom, while also showing an understanding that justice moves slowly, Tharler said.

“This poem and essay really represents Hammon’s strongest condemnation of the institution of slavery,” Tharler said to the handful of guests on the first tour.

Alexandra Wolfe, the executive director of Preservation Long Island, said Hammon’s writing is “infused with religion and faith.”

She said the “humanities aspect” of his story stands out to her.

“He has a unique voice that is the equivalent of Thomas Jefferson in terms of the time and what’s going on,” she said.

Lauren Brincat, the curator for Preservation Long Island, introduced the guests to the Joseph Lloyd Manor house and noted its 2020 designation as a national Literary Landmark in honor of Hammon.

On the first leg of the tour, Ceil Stepanian and Rosemarie Goldman of the Lloyd Harbor Historical Society provided an overview of the Lloyd family's history and described the different rooms where the family lived alongside enslaved people like Hammon.

In the kitchen, Stepanian demonstrated placing a yoke — a wooden crosspiece used to carry pales of water — over her shoulders. It was one task an enslaved person like Hammon probably did each morning, she said.

Tharler said many people don't realize how significant slavery was in the North, noting that New York had more enslaved people than any colony north of Maryland.



He said he hopes people "recognize the role that slavery had in shaping both society in the past and ... the legacy of slavery and how it continues to inform the way Long Island looks today."



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