



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### **Montclair History Center Welcomes Students Back to the Crane House & Historic YWCA Museum**

**Montclair, NJ** – Montclair, NJ – Like all organizations, the Covid pandemic affected the Montclair History Center’s (MHC) ability to serve the public when educational programming came to a halt in 2020. Through the course of the past two years, the organization shifted to virtual programming while we waited to safely allow the public back into our spaces.

This past academic year proved to be one of the most successful yet as school districts throughout Essex County and the state were ready to re-engage with in-person field trips and outreach educational programs. “We felt the need from students and teachers to return into immersive spaces and experience history right here in their own communities,” says Susanne Costa, Manager of Education at the MHC. MHC served more than 3,600 students and teachers from Montclair, Newark, and other districts on in-person field trips this past academic year. The MHC has maintained more than 30-year partnership with the Montclair Public Schools, welcoming every 3rd-grader into the Crane House & Historic YWCA Museum as part of the district’s Hometown History Curriculum with our “early life in New Jersey” program. Montclair’s rich history provides a dynamic “early life in New Jersey tour” where students explore 200 years of change in our communities and its impact on how we live today. This interactive program takes students through the Crane House & Historic YWCA Museum, experience a working 1796 hearth kitchen, and participate in a 19th-century schoolroom.

These programs would not be possible without the help of dedicated and longtime volunteer educator Janet Spoerl, who taught 3rd through 5th grade in Montclair public schools for 32 years.

“Being an educator gives a teacher the privilege of opening up a world of knowledge to every student under their care. It is exciting. Whether it is formal book learning in the classroom or experiential learning in any arena, every child should experience and delight in acquiring knowledge,” says Mrs. Spoerl.

Each year, former students and co-teachers of Mrs. Spoerl return to the MHC, reconnect with each other, and re-engage through Montclair’s rich and diverse history.

This year, and for the first time, we also welcomed all of Newark Public Schools’ 2nd-graders to the Crane House & Historic YWCA Museum. This opportunity made it possible to serve over 2,300 students and 280 chaperones from New Jersey’s largest school district. Our newly expanded education team is thrilled to welcome students back to in-person programming.

“We sought a diverse and experienced team of educators who truly have made a lasting impact on these students, which very often was the first field trip to a museum these students have experienced “ says Executive Director Angelica Diggs of the MHC.

Here are our team members.

- Manager of Education Susanne Costa began with the MHC in 2019 bringing in her experience as a former high school teacher as well as an educator at the New York Botanical Gardens and the Hermitage to develop and implement our educational programs. Susanne oversees the educators who come from a variety of backgrounds with an enthusiasm to bring history to life for students who visit our museum.
- “I’d always loved museums, and especially history. I realized that museums were where things had always ‘clicked’ for me, and I probably wasn’t alone in that. That’s how I knew the museum field was the right place for me,” says educator Elaine Davis, who received her B.A in History from Miami University and is now pursuing a M.A. in Museum Professions at Seton Hall University.
- “The most immersive and experiential part of the “early life in New Jersey” field trip is demonstrating for students how to cook over a working hearth fire. Educator Christopher Chan says, “I particularly enjoyed working at the hearth. It is the most hands-on of the stations and allowed me to offer the best experience for the students.” Christopher received his B.A in Anthropology and History from Rutgers University and Certificates in Public History and Cultural Heritage & Preservation Studies.
- Educator Ruqayyah Abdur-Rahman received her B.A in History from Kean University and is pursuing a M.A in Museum Studies at CUNY School of Professional Studies.
- The Newark Public School system is dedicated to serving bilingual students, celebrating cultural diversity in and outside of the classroom. The MHC ensures all students have a rewarding experience at our sites. Educator Bridget Allison reflects on bilingual instruction for students in the museum this past year. “The first group of students only understood Spanish. I was working in the Hearth for the first time after finishing my training...the students helped me with a few words and they all enjoyed learning about the history of cooking in a kitchen like the Hearth...I added onto the history of the Crane House [in Spanish] during my spare time, in case the children did not understand or have time to learn with the other educators.” Bridget Allison received her B.A in Food & Nutrition from Montclair State University.
- Educator Arielle Stephens received her B.A in History from Grand Valley State University and now pursues an M.A. in Museum Professions at Seton Hall University. Arielle shares a favorite memory with students this past year: “The students are all such unique and interesting people. One of my favorites was the student who insisted he would be able to stay up all night, every night, to tend the fire for everyone else so they wouldn’t be cold.”

The most fulfilling part of being a museum educator is knowing each student will leave learning something new, have a positive and memorable experience, and walk away with an understanding of what history means to them.

“The experience was memorable for my scholars,” shared a 2nd grade teacher of the Roberto Clemente School in Newark. “This enlightened my kids as to how people lived 100 years ago and beyond.”

The MHC provides in-person field trips for pre-k through college-level students, varying in topics from early life in New Jersey, discovering Black history, the history of immigration and migration patterns in New Jersey, and uncovering historic preservation. Details on our offerings can be found online here: [www.montclairhistory.org/class-trips](http://www.montclairhistory.org/class-trips).

The Montclair History Center, formerly the Montclair Historical Society, is an independent not-for-profit organization that has been dedicated to preserving, sharing, and educating people about Montclair’s history since 1965. For additional information, please visit the website [www.montclairhistory.org](http://www.montclairhistory.org), or contact the Montclair History Center, 973-744-1796, or [mail@montclairhistory.org](mailto:mail@montclairhistory.org).

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## Images

Image 1: Mr. Addison Jarvis and educator Mrs. Janet Spoerl. Mr. Addison was Mrs. Spoerl’s student at Bradford Elementary and is now a para educator at Hillside School.



Image 2: Educator Ruqayyah Abdur-Rahman with Newark 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students in the hearth kitchen.



Image 3: Educator Elaine David with Newark 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students in the Crane House & Historic YWCA Museum.

