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Troutbeck Symposium 2025: the latest chapter in continuing a vital legacy

By **Leila Hawken**

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Participating students and teachers gathered for the traditional photo at the 2025 Troutbeck Symposium on Thursday, May 1.
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Students and educators from throughout the region converged at Troutbeck in Amenia for a three-day conference to present historical research projects undertaken collaboratively by students with a common focus on original research into their chosen topics. Area independent schools and public schools participated in the conference that extended from Wednesday, April 30 to Friday, May 2.

The symposium continues the Troutbeck legacy as a decades-old gathering place for pioneers in social justice and reform. Today it is a destination luxury country inn, but Troutbeck remains conscious of its significant place in history.

A showing of student artworks within the theme of linking the past with the present opened the symposium on Wednesday evening. Each work of art had to draw on historical research to foster an informed dialogue between the artist and the contemporary audience.

The second day was devoted to student research presentations, showcasing teams from the region's leading public and private schools with strong programs aimed at cultivating engaged young historians. Primary source materials and live interviews with descendants were included in the process.



Topics were divided into blocks with guest commentators providing reactive response as each block of student presentations concluded. Serving as commentators were Dr. Hasan Kwame Jeffries, Ohio State University, and Dr. Christine Proenza-Coles, University of Virginia.

Resistance in the face of oppression and stories of resilience that spanned generations formed an important theme as students presented the stories of area settlers and residents who suffered but endured.

As a sampling, The Taconic School teamed up with The Salisbury School to unearth untold stories of Boston Corners. The Hotchkiss School looked into the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in Connecticut. The Cornwall Consolidated School students stepped up with their untold stories of early Cornwall women.

Other presentations explored criminal justice — witchcraft trials — dealing with society’s “undesirable” elements, individuals in history who took action, people and movements that formed resistance, and various forms of discrimination.

Praising the work of the students, Dr. Jeffries identified a theme of resistance and survival.

“The war ended but the resistance did not,” Jeffries said. “We don’t take indigenous people seriously,” he added. “White supremacy happened in our own back yards.”



A panel discussion among educators whose students had participated in the 2025 Troutbeck Symposium was held on Friday, May 2, to offer reflections the symposium, its value and future development. Panelists from left to right were Jessica Jenkins, Litchfield Historical Society; Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason, Brown University; Morgan Bengal, Old New-Gate Prison; Frank Mitchell, Connecticut Humanities; and student representatives Dominik Valcin Salisbury School, and Shanaya Duprey of Housatonic Valley Regional High School.

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“We saw the evolution of research,” said a Cornwall Consolidated School representative. That project moved into civic engagement by the students that moved beyond the classroom.

“This is not the past; this is part of the present,” said Dr. Proenza-Coles.

The third day invited area history educators to assemble and share ideas for redesigning elements of history education, a day of reflection.

The panel included Jessica Jenkins, Litchfield Historical Society; Wunneanatsu Lamb-Cason, Brown University; Morgan Bengal, Old New-Gate Prison; Frank Mitchell, Connecticut Humanities; and student representatives Dominik Valcin of Salisbury School, and Shanaya Duprey of Housatonic Valley Regional High School.

Valcin reflected on his work as a shared project within The Salisbury School, one where the inquiry would seek to find “the deeper story behind a base story.”

Duprey also spoke of process and the educational value of engaging with historical inquiry.

Each representing a profession that brings them into contact with historical inquiry, the panelists recounted tedious history classes of past decades. Jenkins described her own career as “public history.” Lamb-Canon’s experience began with choosing history electives in college. Bengal spoke of community engagement and the power of involvement with history.

“History is not the opposite of scientific inquiry,” said Bengal.

Significant discussion centered on the possibility of offering the Troutbeck Symposium model to a wider audience of school systems throughout the U.S.

“A community approach to education,” was a characterization offered by Troutbeck owner Charlie Champalimaud, commenting during a brief interview at the end of the symposium on Friday, May 2. She encouraged a push toward increasing even more the number of participating schools, their educational communities and symposium sponsors.