

## Gerrit Smith's Birthday Celebrated with a Timbuctoo Documentary

The Gerrit Smith Estate National Historical Landmark will hold its annual commemoration of Gerrit Smith's birthday at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 5, 2022 at the Smithfield Community Center in Peterboro NY. The guest speaker is Paul Miller, an independent writer, photographer, and filmmaker based in upstate New York. Miller states, "I've been astounded by how many New Yorkers do not know who Gerrit Smith is and how large he loomed in the history of the state and the nation."

In 2015 Miller began filming in Peterboro and Lake Placid to capture the history of Gerrit Smith's 1846 "scheme of justice and benevolence" of giving 120,000 acres of land to 3000 Black Americans so that they would be eligible to vote in New York State. These land grants helped establish a pioneering Black settlement called Timbuctoo which is located near present day Lake Placid. Timbuctoo brought abolitionists John Brown and Gerrit Smith together in their legacy fight against slavery.

Miller's film *Searching for Timbuctoo* reveals the hidden history of this long-lost community and follows SUNY-Potsdam archaeologist Dr. Hadley Kruczek-Aaron who, since 2009, has tried to unearth the elusive Timbuctoo settlement. Miller filmed Dr. K-A and her team of students who have permission to break ground at the John Brown State Historic Site. Kruczek-Aaron did her doctoral dissertation on her public digs at the Gerrit Smith Estate in Peterboro. Amy Godine, author, historian and noted expert on the Timbuctoo Black settlement, and Martha Swan, founder and executive director of John Brown Lives!, share historical background in the film. Norman K. Dann PhD, Gerrit Smith biographer, is also interviewed in the film. District 20 Congressman Paul D. Tonko performs the voice of abolitionist Gerrit Smith in the film.

Paul Miller holds a bachelor's degree in English from Roosevelt University and a master's degree in History and Media from the University at Albany NY. A native of Chicago IL, Miller now resides in Delmar NY with his wife and two sons. After the film, Miller, an experienced television professional, who has worked for national shows and networks including The History Channel, National Geographic Channel, PBS, and "The Oprah Winfrey Show," will host a question and answer period about the film and about Timbuctoo. "I hope," expressed Miller, "that this film illustrates how we, as a nation, are still grappling with the very same issues -- race, voting rights, income inequality, extreme political partisanship --the same things with which Smith, Brown, and the African American settlers at Timbuctoo had to contend. Maybe the film helps provoke thought on the perils we face and a path forward together."

The program will be at Smithfield Community Center, 5255 Pleasant Valley Road, Peterboro NY 13134 is free and for the public. For more information [www.GerritSmith.org](http://www.GerritSmith.org), [info@gerritsmith.org](mailto:info@gerritsmith.org), 315-684-3262.



Underground Railroad Stationmaster and Abolitionist Gerrit Smith's Annual Birthday Program will be held at 2 pm Saturday, March 5 in the Smithfield Community Center, 5255 Pleasant Valley Street, Peterboro NY 13134. Film maker Paul Miller will present his documentary *Searching for Timbuctoo*, which captures the history of Smith's gift of 120,000 acres of land to Black Americans to be eligible to vote.



Paul Miller will present his documentary *Searching for Timbuctoo* on Gerrit Smith land grants to African American men at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 5 at the Smithfield Community Center in Peterboro NY. Miller holds a bachelor’s degree in English from Roosevelt University and a master’s degree in History and Media from the University at Albany NY. A native of Chicago, Il., Miller now resides in Delmar NY with his wife and two sons. After the film, Miller, an experienced television professional, who has worked for national shows and networks including The History Channel, National Geographic Channel, PBS, and “The Oprah Winfrey Show,” will host a question and answer period about the film and about Timbuctoo.



Filmmaker Paul Miller with a land registry book carried by Charles B. Ray, a land agent for Gerrit Smith’s land gifts to African American males.



The film *Searching for Timbuctoo* reveals the hidden history of this long-lost community and follows SUNY-Potsdam archaeologist Hadley Kruczek-Aaron PhD who, since 2009, has tried to unearth the elusive Timbuctoo settlement. Now, Dr. K-A and her team of students have permission to break ground at the John Brown Farm State Historic Site.



John Brown’s Farm is located in Timbuctoo lands donated by Gerrit Smith to Black American males.



Congressman Paul D. Tonko performs the voice of abolitionist Gerrit Smith in the *Searching for Timbuctoo* film.