



Orange County Government  
Office of the County Executive Steven M. Neuhaus  
**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **County Executive Neuhaus pays tribute to Black History Month**

*Orange County has a rich tradition of Black History, dating back to the 1600s*

Goshen, N.Y. – Orange County Executive Steven M. Neuhaus is proud to recognize Black History Month, which runs through the month of February.

“Black Americans have made important contributions to the history of Orange County and our country, which I am proud of,” Neuhaus said. “February provides an opportunity to recognize and celebrate these achievements. Now more than ever, we must celebrate the achievements of all our people in order for our nation to truly fulfill the promise of our founding fathers, that all men are created equal.”

President Gerald R. Ford officially recognized Black History Month in 1976. Since then, every American president has designated February as Black History Month.

Orange County has a rich tradition of black history. In 1612, Jan Rodriguez, an interpreter for the Dutch West India Company in New Amsterdam (now New York City), began working in Orange and the surrounding counties. According to County Historian Johanna Yaun, Orange County played an integral part of the Underground Railroad, a group of secret safe houses and routes used by slaves to escape to freedom in Canada in the late-1850s and early-1860s.

Approximately 160,000 soldiers of African-American descent served in the Civil War on the Union side. Several hundred were from Orange County and received pensions after the war, using these funds to buy small homes and farms here.

Yaun noted: “In 1870, Washington’s Headquarters in Newburgh was the setting for a visit by Frederick Douglass who came to commemorate the passage of the Civil Rights of 1870, which reinforced the right of African-American males to vote. “As the County Historian, I am proud that Orange County has such a rich tradition of black history.”

Egbert Alsdorf served on the Newburgh school district’s Board of Education from 1862-65 and ran a successful shipping company. His family also founded the Alsdorf School of Music and Dance in the 1860s and it was in operation until the 1950s. Artist Horace Pippin, who lived in Goshen, had his artwork featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Pippin grew up drawing pictures of scenes from Goshen’s Historic Track. He died in 1946 at age 58.

Orange County was also key in the beginning of the country’s civil rights movement. The NAACP was founded in 1909 and that same year a chapter was formed in Middletown.

“Black History Month provides a wonderful opportunity for us to learn more about the many contributions that Black Americans have made to this country’s rich history,” said Fred Cook, chairman of Orange County’s Human Rights Commission. “The Human Rights commission appreciates that County Executive Neuhaus has recognized these wonderful achievements.”

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