

Washington Informer Charities Heritage Tour Takes Guests to Learn About the Black Presence at Tudor Place

Georgetown Site Shares Critical Stories of 19th Century Black Washingtonians

By James Wright
WI Staff Writer

Juanita Katon loves history and was thrilled when asked by Washington Informer Newspaper Publisher Denise Rolark Barnes to lead a tour of the company's annual African American Heritage Tour.

"I have always loved history," said Katon, 65. "Throughout high school and college, I took Black history courses. It was always love."

Katon is the owner and operator of DC In Black LLC, a firm that offers tours of Black historical sites in the Washington area. On July 20, she led a group of 36 Washington Informer Charities African American Heritage Tour participants to the Georgetown in Northwest, D.C. to visit Tudor Place.

The group was scheduled to visit the historic house and garden with an emphasis on the free and enslaved African Americans who lived and worked there. Visitors can tap into Tudor's Black history thanks to the site's special exhibit: "Ancestral Spaces: People of African Descent at Tudor Place."

"I was actually here 20 years ago for an event but that was long before the African American component was added," Katon told The Informer.



▲ A portrait of John Lockett, a Black man who worked 44 years at Tudor Place as a gardener. (Ja'Mon Jackson/The Washington Informer)

THE HISTORY OF TUDOR PLACE

Over the years, the history of Tudor Place has emphasized the family of Thomas and Martha Peter, who was the granddaughter of Martha Washington, the inaugural first lady of the U.S. and wife of the first president, George Washington.

The Peters bought the 8.5 acres property in 1805 for \$8,000 which would be about \$215,000 today, with adjustments for inflation. Mark Hudson, the executive director of Tudor Place, told the Informer that he is not aware of how the property got its name.

Tudor Place opened to the public as a house museum and garden on October 8, 1988.

TIME TRAVELING 200 YEARS, LEARNING THE BLACK PRESENCE AT TUDOR PLACE

Tour attendees were divided into three sections for the purpose of touring the historic house.

They were met by Janet Wall, Tudor Place's director of development and communications along with a docent, at the end of the pebble-laced walkway.

In the house, group members were able to see where the Peters resided but focused on the activities of the Black people who also occupied the property.

Some rooms had pictures of the descendants of slaves as well as noted Black gardener John Lockett, a Black man who escaped slavery in Lewinsville, Virginia and worked 44 years at Tudor Place.

"He got together with some other guys, and he was like, 'That's it. Let's go, let's get out of here.' They started walking out. Some Yankees came up to them and said, 'Hey, what are you guys doing?' They said, 'Oh, well we're just visiting some friends. Those guys said 'Ok,' and they let them go. And

John Lockett just kept walking."

As part of the exhibit a retelling of Lockett's experience shares that he never stopped, but "crossed the Chain Bridge and made it to Georgetown," where he ran into Brittanica Peter and told her he needed a job. After working there he was able to move his wife and family to the D.C. area, where they were instrumental parts of the District's Black community.

"A docent said Lockett walked more than three miles each working day to Tudor Place from his home in Capitol Hill because he wished to maintain the independence of his family from the Peters. In each room, a docent explained where and how Blacks lived in the house.

Further, docents shared stories of other Black people who were part of the life of Tudor Place such as enslaved plasterer Samuel Collins and the Pope Family.

Sandra Mason went on the Informer's African American Heritage Tour



▲ Washington Informer Charities African American Heritage Tour participants learn about some of the Black history at Tudor Place in Washington, D.C. (Ja'Mon Jackson/The Washington Informer)

in 2023 and enjoyed it so much she opted to participate again this year. She said the Tudor Place tour was "revealing."

"I have been to Georgetown a million times, but I never heard of this place," said Mason, 77. "I found the tour to be very informative, but I became a little emotional finding out our history. Touring the place, I tried not to get an attitude."

DMV freelance tour guide Mike Cohen also attended the tour and shared that sites like Tudor Place can help in advancing Black narratives and promoting further healing and progress between white people and African Americans.

"These are the kinds of stories that need to be told and not suppressed," Cohen said. **WI**
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