

HEMPSTEAD

Digging into THE PAST

Officials tap
historian
ahead
of village's
375th
anniversary

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On Dec. 13, 1643, the Village of Hempstead was founded when Tackapousha, leader of the Marsapeag tribe, gave British settlers the use of 64,000 acres in what is now parts of the towns of Hempstead, North Hempstead and Oyster Bay.

The settlers, 18 farming families led by Presbyterian minister Richard Denton, later built a meeting house near a big pond where their cattle could drink, at what's currently Fulton and Franklin avenues in Hempstead Village.

More than three centuries later, the Hempstead Village board of trustees has hired a new municipal historian to research that history. The May 2 hiring comes ahead of the village's 375th anniversary in 2018, which will commemorate the agreement with Tackapousha.

The new historian, Reine Bethany, 62, a Hempstead Village resident for 24 years, has been digging into archives, documents and photos for her research. She receives a \$5,000 stipend for the yearlong position and hopes to hold historic workshops for schools and community groups.

Bethany said her goal is to "preserve the records of the progression of events in the municipality, so people can understand what went down before so they can shape their responses now."

Bethany, who also teaches English at Nassau Community College and the New York Institute of Technology, said the village has long played an important role as a "hub" of the Island, particularly after the establishment of the Long Island Rail Road station there in 1839.

"Hempstead was a place where everybody stopped on their way east or west on Long Island," Bethany said.

She also is writing an "Im-



Reine Bethany, Hempstead Village's newly hired historian, has been digging into archives, documents and photos for her research. Above, Bethany kneels by the headstone of Zachariah Greene.

Hempstead Village history highlights

Historians believe the name "Hempstead" could be from Hemel Hempstead in England or Heemstede in the Netherlands.

People of African descent came to Hempstead within its first decade, both as freemen and slaves.

Nehemiah Sammis established the "Sammis Tavern" at what is now Fulton Avenue and Main Street between 1660 and 1680.

George Washington stayed there in 1790 and the tavern is depicted in the village seal.

Many of the street and place names in the village and the town are names of early British settlers, including Denton, Carman, Fordham, Bedell, Hicks, Hewlett, Pine, Smith, Seaman, Coe, Thorne, Carle, Searing, Clowes, Sammis, Moore and Willets.

ages of America" history book about Hempstead Village, to be published by Arcadia Publishing in March 2018. There are several books in the "Images of America" series about Long Island, including titles on Montauk, Huntington Village, Brent-

wood, Freeport and the Shinnecock Indian Nation.

"I think it's important for every community," Mayor Don Ryan said of tracking its lineage. "I think it's good to be able to reference some of the highlights in our history.

It's a source of pride for our residents."

The village has committed to purchasing 250 copies of the book for \$3,400, a discounted price that means Bethany will not receive any royalties. The publisher would not agree to printing the book unless a certain number of copies were presold, she said.

Steven Rung, Hempstead Public Library's in-house archivist, commended Bethany's hiring and said he's been working to digitize publications and other documents from throughout the village's and library's histories.

Bethany said she wants residents to learn from her work as village historian.

"I want to encourage this village," she said. "I want them to have this volume that they can pick up and say, 'This is us, this is why we are here.'"