

Historic Site

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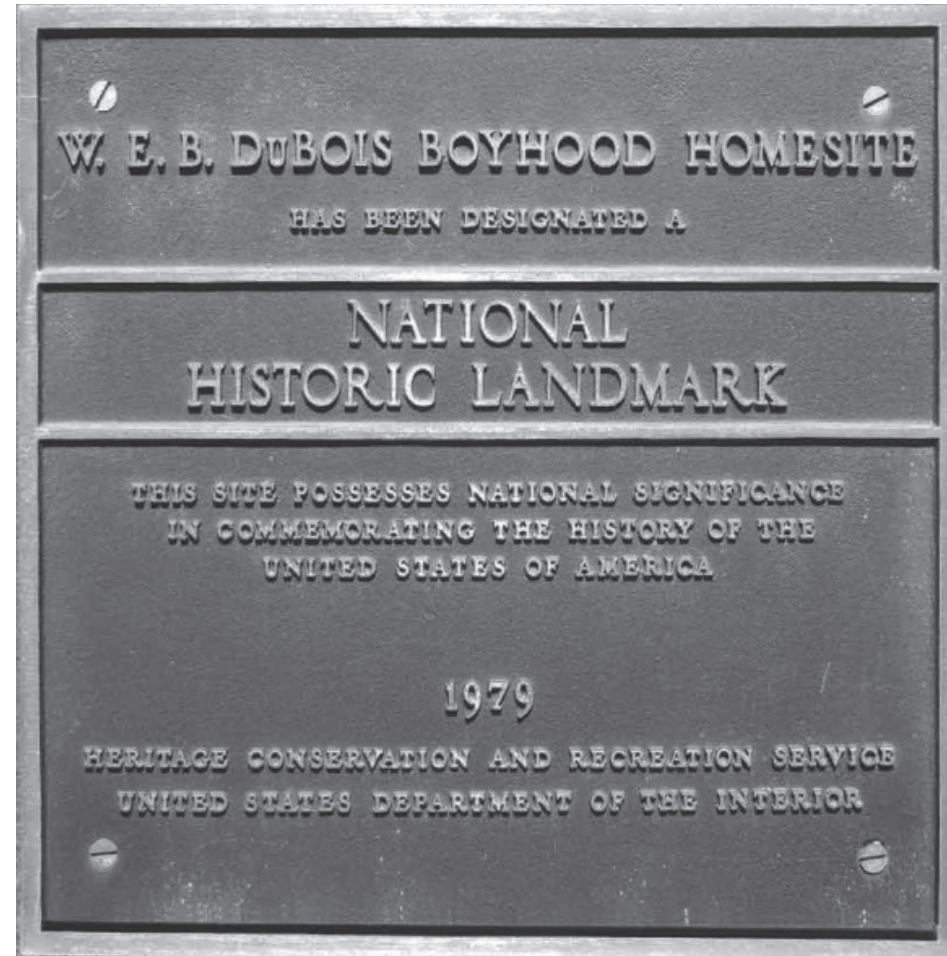
racy and Social Change, a facility to be located downtown. As longtime friends and supporters of the Du Bois Homesite, we hope you will celebrate with us this important step forward.

Given the importance of Great Barrington and the Homesite to Du Bois throughout his life, as well as the national landmark status of the Homesite, it makes sense for the W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site to be established in Great Barrington. The vision and program plan, *W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite and Great Barrington: A Plan for Heritage Conservation and Interpretation*, which was produced in 2008, recognized that the Homesite could not tell the whole story of Du Bois's long life and prodigious contributions. The Homesite is a sacred place for contemplating the place and people that shaped Du Bois in his early years and for recognizing the African American presence in rural New England.

During the past year, scholars from UMass Amherst and members of the Friends of Du Bois Homesite as well as an array of specialists in design and fund-raising have been creating the organizational infrastructure necessary for building a national destination. The immediate goal is to raise seed money to hire an executive director with the qualifications to build a national board and organization and implement the program plan. In addition to the program plan, we have written a business plan, which projects the total capital and operational costs for developing the three venues at \$12 million over a 10-year period.

The W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site is an independent organization. The property remains in the ownership of UMass.

We have established a formal relationship with the Upper Housatonic



Valley National Heritage Area to be our fiscal agent and to incubate the fledgling organization once a director is hired.

We have produced a beautiful fund-raising brochure (the cover is shown on the first page of this newsletter) and are in the process of creating a website www.DuBoisNHS.org.¹ The website is being developed, and we anticipate will be up and running by April.

The Friends will continue to be the local stewards of the Homesite and to sponsor programs in Great Barrington until we have a leader for the National Historic Site. Our goal is to raise the

¹ We gratefully appreciate the pro bono design work by Daniel & Roberts for the brochure and website.

necessary funds to hire an executive director. Your support and contribution for this crucial next step is especially appreciated. Contributions are payable to W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site and may be sent to:

The Du Bois National Historic Site
Housatonic Heritage
P.O. Box 493
Salisbury, CT 06068

We are counting on those of us for whom remembering Du Bois is imperative!²

² Thanks to Dolores Root for assistance with this article.



FRIENDS OF THE DU BOIS HOMESITE

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Working with the Du Bois Center of the University of Massachusetts Libraries to restore and maintain the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite, a National Historic Landmark

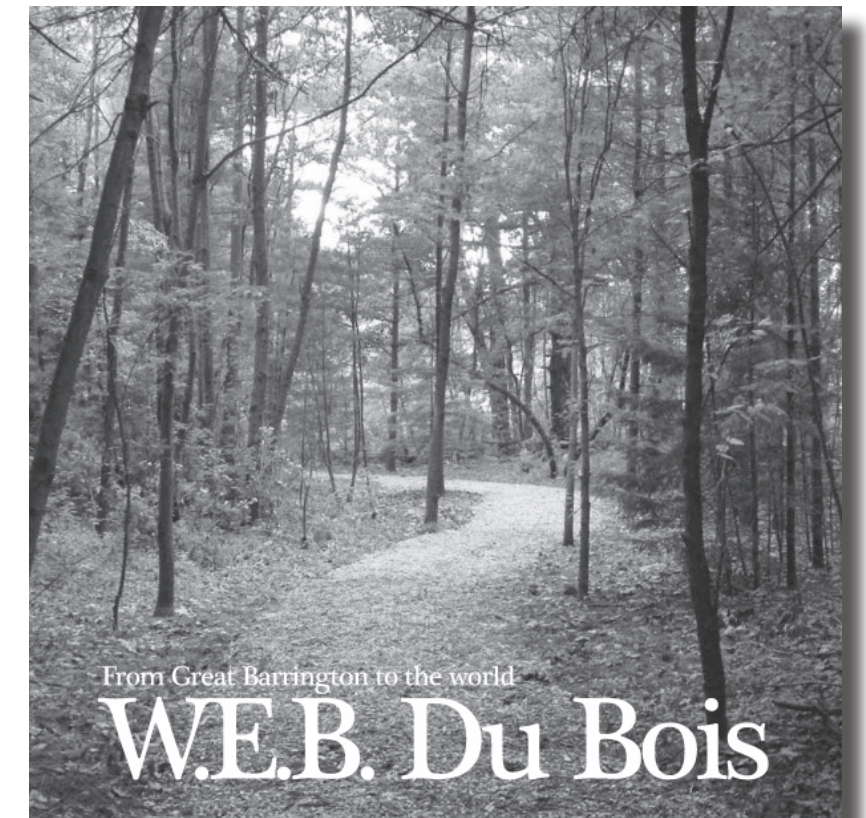
The W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site!

W.E.B. Du Bois spent a lifetime in the quest of change. And the Friends of the Du Bois Homesite is striving to change the way the social justice activist is encountered and considered in the context of his hometown.

The ongoing efforts of the Friends of the Du Bois Homesite and scholars at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst have made great strides toward creating a national destination in Great Barrington to honor the life and legacy of Du Bois. Significantly, the Homesite and two other venues in Great Barrington will make up the **W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site**.

Becoming the W.E.B. Du Bois National Historic Site is more than a name change; it appropriately recognizes the only location in the United States dedicated to remembering Du Bois. This national destination in Great Barrington will include: the Homesite on Route 23, an audio walking tour downtown and the proposed W.E.B. Du Bois Center for Democ-

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STEERING COMMITTEE Chairwoman Elaine S. Gunn, 1969 DuBois Memorial Committee • **Rachel Fletcher**, Great Barrington Land Conservancy • **Wray M. Gunn**, Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Great Barrington • **Bernard A. Drew**, Great Barrington Historical Society • **Frances Jones-Sneed**, Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail • **Joscelyn Forbush**, The Trustees of Reservations

'The cost of liberty is less than the price of repression.' — W. E. B. Du Bois

FRIENDS OF THE DU BOIS BOYHOOD HOMESITE
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Bernard A. Drew photo

Chatter

The Homesite is getting a facelift thanks to the generosity of the 1772 Foundation. The folks at the University of Massachusetts Du Bois Center, Physical Plant and a committee of the Friends (including anthropology Professor **Robert Paynter** and history Professor **David Glassberg**) are working with noted exhibit designer **Veronica Jackson** of the Jackson Brady Design Group of Washington, D.C., to develop new paths, including one that leads to the House remains, and new interpretive signage. The Halloween snow-storm set construction back a bit as the UMass Physical Plant crew had its hands full with the destruction at the Amherst campus. Plans are for the new trails and signage to open in the spring of 2012. • The UMass Amherst Summer Field School will be working at the Homesite between July 15 and Aug. 17. **Dr. Paynter** and **Whitney Battle-Baptiste** will be co-directors. Plans are still being made, so watch the website for information on the dates of the fieldwork and associated talks and workshops. • Battle-Baptiste, by the way, is the author of *Black Feminist Archaeologist* (Left Coast Press, 2011, 200 pages, \$29.95, paper), which includes a chapter, “The Burghardt Women and the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite.” • A steady stream of visitors to the Homesite in 2011 included members of the **Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society New England Chapter**, based in Boston, who came by bus to tour the Stockbridge Cemetery, the Du Bois birthsite and the Homesite in Great Barrington (photo above) and the Col. John Ashley House in Sheffield — sites on the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail. • **Linda Heywood**, professor and director, African American Studies, Boston University, through a National Endowment for the Humanities grant, brought secondary school teachers to Great Barrington twice for her African American History workshops, and they toured downtown Great Barrington (with guide **Bernard Drew**) and the Homesite (with guide **Bob Paynter**). **Rachel Fletcher** gave participants a Powerpoint presentation. • **Dr. Frances Jones-Snead** of Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, through an NEH grant, brought mostly college faculty to a summer institute, The Role of Place in African-American Biography, to Great Barrington for presentations by the same Friends.

Have I got a building lot for you! Warren Davis said

By Bernard A. Drew

Berkshire Natural Resources Council owns rugged mountainside acreage on East Sheffield Road in Great Barrington — the Wm. Taylor Day Forest Area. The property once belonged to Warren H. Davis of Great Barrington, a lumberman and land speculator who harvested timber on the land then sought to sell it. He first offered it to W.E.B. Du Bois before eventually transferring it to Day, who was a lawyer in town.¹

Correspondence in the University of Massachusetts Amherst Special Collections and Archives — available through CREDO — affords opportunity to learn more about how Du Bois became interested in acquiring his grandfather’s old place on Route 23. The Great Barrington High School alumni association invited Du Bois to speak at a reunion. Clarence Sweet exchanged several letters, and invited Du Bois to stay at his house.² Thank you, Du Bois said, but my wife Nina and daughter Yolande will come too. I will stay at the Berkshire Inn. You wouldn’t be a trouble, Sweet replied, but look, the inn has just been repainted. You may not be comfortable there. Edgar Willoughby has a nice little inn on Rosseter Street and he takes in a high class of Negro guests. We’ll stay at the Sunset Inn then, Du Bois answered. And they did. The Sunset Inn was next door to Davis’s home. While Du Bois attended to alumni matters, Davis took Nina and Yolande for a ride one day to show her some land. Nina told Du Bois about it.

¹ This material is adapted from a Warren Davis chapter in Drew’s new book, *Remarkable Deeds: A 1750s fur trader in Stockbridge, an 1860s restaurateur/horticulturalist in Pittsfield and a 1920s lumberman in Great Barrington all broke barriers as land speculators in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. They were all African-Americans.* (Attic Revivals Press, 2012, 104 pages, \$17.50).

² Sweet’s first letter was dated 1 June 1925. Du Bois’s telegrams were dated 7 and 16 July.

And he became interested.

Du Bois in a letter dated 11 September 1925, asked Davis for a biography for a profile to appear in *The Crisis*. Du Bois said he had been thinking about “the stretch of land with the lake” that Davis had shown Du Bois’s wife Nina. He liked it, but it was beyond his finances, Du Bois said.

Davis wrote back 16 September to say, “You have mentioned a lake. I think you mean the building site I talked to you about, two miles South of Gt. Barrington near the Brookside Estate.

“This particular farm has no buildings on it but a very high elevation that over looks the Connecticut Valley also the Catskill Mountains. The tract I refer

to has a frontage on the main highway, what is called the East Road, that leads from Gt. Barrington to Sheffield. The two parcels of land added together would contain 159 acres. There is a small brook running through the open lot.”

He would sell it for \$2,000, Davis wrote. If Du Bois decided to build, Davis would furnish the lumber at cost.

The property is the extremely rugged June Mountain³ land that is now the Wm. Taylor Day Forest Area.⁴ The only accessible building spots are close to the road; when farmer John Chadwick owned the place, he allowed Frank Mason to squat there in the 1890s and

³ He exaggerated by 100 acres.

⁴ The author serves as the property’s steward.

build a crude cabin by the stream. That cellarhole is still there, as are some stone foundation remains of a smallpox pest house hastily put up — far from the center of town — in 1902.

The site does have a view of a backwater pond from one of the Housatonic River oxbows, but no lake, as Davis pointed out.

Du Bois wrote again 20 October: “Mrs. Du Bois is very much impressed with that mountain side which you showed her and I, of course, know it. The price which you put on it is ridiculously small. At the same time it is impossible for me to try to buy it now as I am struggling with a second mortgage on our apartment house.”

Could Davis hold it for a year?

Du Bois on 17 July 1925 wrote to his cousin John Piper in Great Barrington to inquire about the condition of his grandfather’s old place. “Is it for sale? And what is the bottom price?”

Davis on 3 June 1926 wrote to Du Bois: “I am still holding the June Mountain tract which Mrs. Du Bois looked at. If you do not care to purchase all of this tract I would be willing to keep half of same myself and sell you the balance.”

Du Bois had lost interest.

Davis kept the land for another year, then passed it to lawyer Day.⁵

Du Bois obviously itched to own land in Great Barrington, little knowing the role Davis would play in the acquisition of the Burghardt homestead by Du Bois’s friends in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as a 60th birthday gift in 1928 — or the role Davis would play decades later in the acquisition of the same homestead by Walter Wilson and Dr. Edmund Gordon to establish the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Park — the cellarhole and foundation that today are held by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

⁵ Davis to William Taylor Day and Gwendolyn Owen Day, SBRD 248/239, 7 March 1927, three parcels comprising all of Davis’s holdings on June Mountain, 56 acres.

— B.D.

Credo is entry to a fascinating past

Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in October 2011 officially launched its Credo website which affords access to some 145,000 digitized pages from the W.E.B. Du Bois Papers — roughly through 1946 — according to Jeremy Smith, digital project manager (successor to Aaron Rubinstein, whom we met in Newsletter No. 4.

The website is easily found at <http://credo.library.umass.edu/>

Chancellor Robert C. Holub described Credo as “vast and essential” and “a dynamic electronic museum available to all anywhere.”

“It’s free,” stressed Amilcar Shabazz, chairman of the W.E.B. Du Bois Afro-American Studies Department.” That’s the way Du Bois would have wanted it.”

Pages are carefully indexed by names, dates and themes. One may view pages front and rear, and print them. Literary rights are still held by the David Graham Du Bois Trust.

Director of Libraries Jay Schafer said the effort to digitize the papers began two years ago, through a grant from the Verizon Foundation. A second grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities assures completion of the work by 2013, the 50th anniversary of Du Bois’s death.

African-American Studies professor William Strickland said he long felt study of Du Bois’s time in Baltimore was lacking. Plugging the city name into Credo, he found there were 832 entries. “If Credo can help me, it can help anybody,” he said, mentioning his continued reliance on his typewriter.

Chancellor Emeritus Randolph Bromery, who was instrumental in negotiating the university’s somewhat controversial acquisition of the papers in 1973 — he couldn’t use state funds — described a few tense moments when trying to shuttle the collection out of Egypt. It didn’t hurt that he bore something of a facial resemblance to then-president Gamal Abdel Nasser. “He had 95 years of an extremely productive life,” Bromery said of Du Bois, “and all of his papers are now together and on the 23rd floor above us.”