



## Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area

### Annual Report 2020

It hardly needs saying, 2020 was a year of pandemic dislocation, political discomfort, economic disruption and weather unpredictability. That's all history — though we know it's by no means over. Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area was far from idle during those 12 months. Although some partner internships had to be adjusted, budgets adapted, educational plans reconsidered and public programs modified or delayed, others continued comfortably and a few new ones were initiated. Organizations not already internet savvy conquered remote management and internet programming.

Delays or cancellations left Housatonic Heritage with a modest financial advantage for the year ahead, giving opportunity to, for example, consider new Native American heritage initiatives. National Park Service fund-matching expectations amid the Covid-19 crisis, though, remain a challenge for UHVNHA and its partners.

To give just two examples, Northwest CT Arts Council, a longtime regional partner, furloughed its employees and cancelled its spring fundraiser event and the Tribal Historic Preservation Office for the Stockbridge-Munsee Community of the Mohican Indians temporarily furloughed employees and closed its office (since reopened in Williamstown).

Despite all of that, here's an overview of activities of several of our enduring programs:

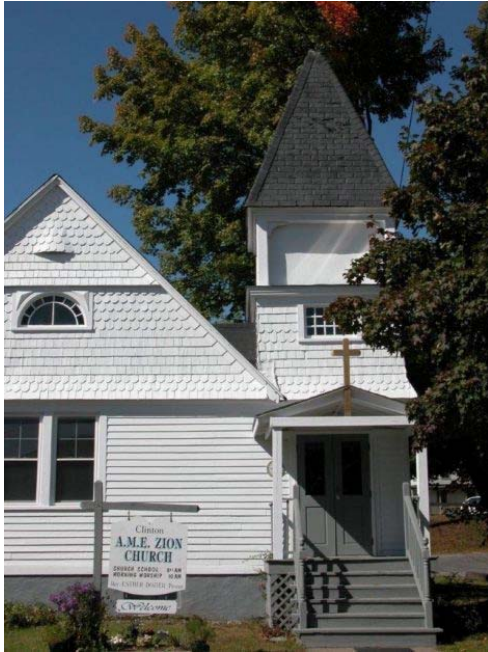
### Upper Housatonic Valley Native American Heritage Trail

In partnership with Bonney Hartley, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, historian Rick Wilcox and others, work was finally completed on a 'virtual walk' version of the Mohican History Walking Tour of Main street Stockbridge. A placeholder website has been created at [www.NativeAmericanTrail.org](http://www.NativeAmericanTrail.org), and features the Walking Tour online. Work continued on a map, narrative and app for a regional Native American Heritage Trail, recruiting students from Bard College at Simon's Rock in Great Barrington to assist.



Housatonic Heritage is also collaborating with the Berkshire Museum, Berkshire County Historical Society, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, The Trustees of Reservations, Williams College and Stockbridge Library in developing programs, events plus a regional Native American Heritage exhibit at Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, for summer / fall 2021.

## Clinton Church Restoration



Housatonic Heritage continued its supporting role in the effort to establish an African American Cultural Heritage Center at the historic Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church in Great Barrington. Restoration was halted for several months due to discovery of hidden roof/ceiling/wall and lower sill damage while a structural engineer was called in for a new building assessment.

Increased and unexpected costs required grant revisions and extensions and renegotiation of architectural/design and other fees. Despite all that – construction has resumed on the structure, and the goal of ‘watertight’ is imminent.

Meanwhile, interpretive planning continued, bolstered by a \$50,000 grant that Housatonic Heritage will administer on behalf of Clinton Church Restoration. Serious discussion of “the power of this space for the Black community” and how to interweave relationships with the white population are ongoing.

In announcing a \$50,000 grant through the Historic Preservation Fund, African American Civil Rights grant program, National Park Service, for the interpretive exhibit design, Housatonic Heritage’s Executive Director Dan Bolognani said ongoing support from the Park Service is a strong signal of the project’s importance. “Clinton Church served as a hub of faith, action and social gathering for the Black community for more nearly 150 years. Returning it to the center of community life in the hometown of author, scholar and NAACP co-founder W.E.B. Du Bois is vital. Housatonic Heritage is pleased to play a pivotal role in this important and historic undertaking.”

- Clinton Church Restoration organized a weekly streaming community read of Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*, with Frances Jones-Sneed (North Adams State University, retired) interviewing scholars in conjunction with each chapter’s reading.
- Beth Carlson and Kip Beacco of Silo Media created a fundraising film for Clinton Church Restoration, to be shown during a planned winter film weekend.
- Details about this historic preservation project: [www.ClintonChurchRestoration.org](http://www.ClintonChurchRestoration.org)

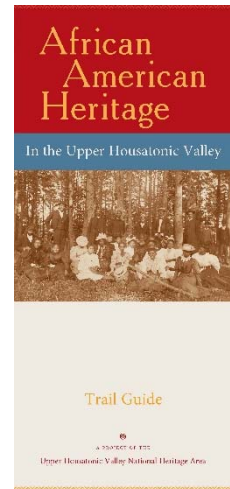
## Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail

The Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail ([www.AfricanAmericanTrail.org](http://www.AfricanAmericanTrail.org)) has undergone a redesign and update of the website and the six brochures that feature dozens of relevant sites throughout the region. The newly updated brochures have been distributed at public places and are available by calling / emailing us.

- Additionally, the Du Bois in Great Barrington Walking Tour added new content at [www.DuBoisNHS.org](http://www.DuBoisNHS.org), as more sites along the walking tour are filmed and added to the ‘Virtual

Tour'. Footage has been shot by film and media student interns at Simon's Rock (under faculty member Dien Vo's supervision) were to also assist with this project, until the Covid-19 interruption. David Glassberg (Public History, University of Massachusetts, Amherst) and Camesha Scruggs (PhD candidate, UMass Amherst) continue as consultants.

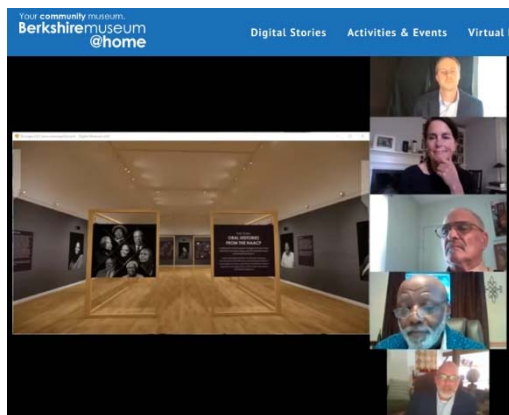
- Residents of the three member towns of the Berkshire Hills Regional School District (Great Barrington, Stockbridge and West Stockbridge) voted to change the name of Monument Valley Regional Middle School to W.E.B. Du Bois Regional Middle School.
- Housatonic Heritage co-funded interpretive trail markers for Bidwell House Museum's Native American Interpretive Trail in Monterey.



## Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center

With the UMass Amherst Library Special Collections' Oral History Center and the University of Connecticut's Connecticut Digital Archive signing on, the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College (Judith Monachina, director) broadened its resources and made great strides toward becoming the region's go-to resource for oral history know-how.

- New resources are being added to the Center's website ([www.OralHistoryCenter.org](http://www.OralHistoryCenter.org)) regularly, including an oral history 'Do It Yourself' guide, and links to other expert resources.
- The Center welcomed assistance of graduate students in recording new interviews. Deferred for now is a new Oral History of Conservation in the Berkshire Region, due to Covid-19 restrictions.



- Virtual exhibit. The NAACP Oral History Project exhibit, which opened in 2019 at the Berkshire Museum, and was made into a virtual exhibit in 2020, and is currently hosted on the Berkshire Museum's website. It was also a traveling exhibit at Lee Middle and High School, in 2020. Berkshire Museum and NAACP: The last two weeks of September, Ms. Monachina spent considerable time organizing and preparing to lead a panel discussion for the opening of the virtual NAACP exhibit. A special exhibit at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield is becoming a permanent online exhibition.
- The Oral History Center conducted 4 Essential Oral History interviews and processed them for podcasts and for the UMass archive.
- Oral histories are being digitized for Bidwell House in Monterey. Funding for technical assistance came in part from the Massachusetts Records Advisory Board.

- Internship collaboration was initiated with Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village. Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center has looked into producing oral history podcasts through BuzzSprout. Housatonic Heritage has also explored ways for partners to create webinars.

- Abby Adam, a Housatonic Valley Regional High School student, was summer intern performing archives quality control, inventorying the Frances Jones Sneed collection and auditing interviews.



- In its quest for excellence as a regional resource, the Oral History Center is now implementing recommendations of the Massachusetts State Historical Records Advisory Board for archives maintenance, storage safety and related policy.

- Four Towns Oral History Inventory. The final report for the Four Towns Oral History Inventory is complete. Two consultants, former librarians who volunteer at Sharon Historical, conducted the inventories of oral history items in the collections of Sharon, Sheffield, Kent, and Salisbury. We will analyze the report and consider next steps.

- A legacy collection is saved. The Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center was instrumental in digitizing 20 legacy oral histories of African American elders that were conducted in the 1990's under the auspices of Berkshire Historical and Frances Jones Sneed. Volunteers, under Berkshire Athenaeum director Alex Reczkowski, did the digitizing, and the Oral History Center has created an inventory of the collection and provided redundant backup of the collection.



- Next steps on this important collection includes working with Berkshire Historical and Jones Sneed to determine next steps: finalizing the archive (with transcripts) and then get them into the public realm, online, at the UMass Amherst Libraries Special Collections.

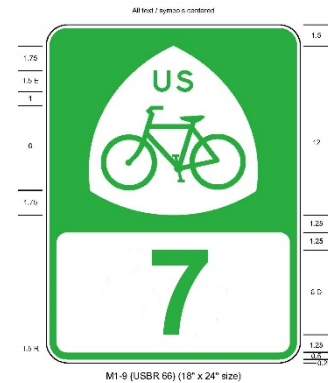
- The Oral History Center produced 7 podcasts in 2020, for the Essentials OHP (4), NAACP OHP 2), and for the WEB DuBois Read In series (1). In addition, our Housatonic Valley Regional High School intern produced one podcast under the supervision of the Center's Director, and all of the podcasts are currently hosted on Buzzsprout and available on our site.

- The Center also held held several workshops, including DIY Oral History workshop, and two workshop series to help people create podcasts using their oral history collections.

## Trails

Despite a COVID-19 induced slowdown, progress was made along the Western New England Greenway ([www.WNEGreenway.org](http://www.WNEGreenway.org)), a long-distance bicycling route that runs from Norwalk, CT to Montreal, Quebec.

Executive Director Bolognani and Housatonic Trails & Greenways Trail Committee volunteers took part in numerous meetings, including ones at Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's Outdoor Recreation Forum, Northwest Hills Council of Governments and CT Dept. of Transportation, with a presentation on the Western New England Greenway project, and via Zoom participated in a discussion of the Pittsfield Bike Master Plan.



- Plans are moving forward to install roadway directional signs along the CT portion of the Greenway, with Massachusetts and Vermont sections to follow.

## Operation Pollination

This regional program to promote pollinator habitat restoration has slowed in 2020, though planning is underway for several initiatives in 2021, including:

- Development of a 3-Step Program to protect pollinators that is low-cost and can be easily implemented without any specialized knowledge,
- Develop project theme, catchy title, branding and potential alliances, create draft text for webpage and PDF Flyer in consultation with local horticultural/landscape experts.
- Engage with key Operation Pollination Summit participants to gain their project support (including recognition of their organization on the project webpage and flyer).
- Outreach to leading landscaping businesses, garden centers, schools, colleges, faith-based organizations, businesses and to all 26 towns in the region to explain the project and encouraging their participation in promoting the program.
- Develop a system for fielding / responding to inquiries and questions.



Details of Operation Pollination are at: <https://housatonicheritage.org/heritage-programs/housatonic-heritage-operation-pollination/>

## Heritage Digital Projects

In support of our interpretive goals to embrace digital tools as a means for connecting ideas and people, Housatonic Heritage was a major catalyst in these 2020 projects:

- Became a media partner with MiRi Park (Performing Arts program, Cal State Channel Islands) to organize a national online Read-In of Du Bois' Black Reconstruction in America in August through November. <https://thereadinseries.com/>
- Provided a small grant to Great Barrington Land Conservancy / Housatonic River Walk to create and publish five virtual tours with native plants expert Russ Cohen ("Wild Edibles"). Other partners include Wild & Scenic Westfield River Committee and Massachusetts Rivers Alliance. <https://housatonicheritage.org/education/housatonic-river-walk-wild-edibles/>
- Partnered with Marvelwood School to begin planning of a virtual Housatonic Heritage Film Festival in spring 2021 (included would be films on McEnroe Farm, Bard College and Great Barrington Pollinator Garden, Greenagers, Housatonic Valley Association (Tom Zetterstrom on Enduring Marks on the Land), Kent Colliers, Du Bois and Mohicans.
- Continued as a partner for the Great Barrington Cultural District, Housatonic Heritage proposed engaging a student intern to create a social media / website. <https://www.gbulturaldistrict.org/>



## Major Grant-Supported Programs

The Northwest Connecticut Regional Food Hub (NWCT Food Hub) is an aggregator of locally grown food which makes it possible for farmers to work together to meet the growing demand for local produce.

We continued to support this project to create a viable Litchfield County, CT, food hub (which is related to the mission and goals of the Heritage Area), natural resource/working farms preservation, responsible land use, productive and natural means to return land to use, maintaining quality of life and economy of the region.

This is a 5-year implementation plan, with full operation anticipated by 2022. The Hub is working with 35 farmers and 26 wholesale buyers, including grocery stores, restaurants, and school and institutions throughout the western part of CT and MA.



Currently in its third year of operations, NWCT Food Hub is working closely with 30 farmers and 20 wholesale buyers including grocery stores, restaurants, and schools through-out the western half of CT.

Work over the last year included:

- Outreach to over 35 restaurants to expand sales channels for the region's farms including a webinar introducing the Hub to new customers and the development of a Press Kit
- Hosted a food safety training for 30 farmers
- Worked with 10 schools in the region on local produce procurement under our Farm-to-School initiative.
- Developed a new "Farm Share" program in partnership with local restaurants to provide local produce boxes during the pandemic.
- Provided weekly fresh, local produce during the growing season to 150 low-income households under the Produce Prescription program.

In 2020 The NWCT Food Hub launched a new "farm share" program when residents were having trouble safely getting the produce they needed and many of the farmers' normal sales channels were closed. We partnered with local restaurants who offered curbside pickup of fresh, locally grown produce to support these small businesses as well as meet residents' needs.

## Word X Word Festival

WordXWord uses spoken word, poetry and storytelling in shared space and time to celebrate diversity and creativity, empower the individual, foster understanding and empathy, and make authentic connections.

# WordXWord

Festival activities take place in a variety of borrowed spaces in partnership with business owners and key cultural partners. Events included Poetry and Story Slams featuring local performers as well as feature events. The common element to all performance events is the focus on work from a personal perspective, specifically intended for oral, live presentation.

While the week-long summer festival week remains at its core, today WordXWord presents events year-round. These events include poetry slams, commissioned challenges, workshops, and Poets Creating Conversation (see below).

2020 Highlights:

- **23 Events** (7 in-person, 16 via zoom)
- **871 Attendance** (at live events)
- **62 Poets** (individual poets that shared at least one poem at a live event)
- **47 Additional Poets** (participated in a community-based virtual poetry project presented via YouTube)
- **28 Videos Created** (includes recordings of live events as well as pieces created specifically for video)



## Connecticut History Day

In pursuit of its interpretive goal to engage youth in our heritage, Housatonic Heritage again partnered with the CT Democracy Center / State of CT to support the statewide Connecticut History Day competitions. CT History Day is one of 57 affiliate programs of the highly regarded National History Day program.

The program, designed to get youth interested about history by engaging them in meaningful projects that are then presented & judged in a public forum, had to be done in a virtual format in 2020.

- Housatonic Heritage collaborated with the CT State History Day coordinator (the state-level manifestation of National History Day) to create a 6 regional and 1 state version of the event.
- There were 1,700 students from across the state who participated in this year's regional competitions.
- This program is for students in grades 6-12 that encourages exploration of local, state, national, and world history. After selecting a historical topic that relates to an annual theme, students conduct extensive research using libraries, archives, museums, and oral history interviews. Students analyze and interpret their findings, draw conclusions about their topic's significance in history, and create final projects that demonstrate their work.



## Bascom Lodge Heritage Speaker Series

Housatonic Heritage again partnered with Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation & Recreation and Bascom Lodge Group to produce a season-long series of informative/educational presentations on a wide variety of heritage-related topics. The 21 events were all free and open to the public and are provided at historic Bascom Lodge atop Mount Greylock (Appalachian Trail) by trusted institutions and heritage organizations.



- The public presentations were provided each Wednesday and Sunday evening, from Memorial Day through Columbus Day.
- 719 people attended 21 distinct programs.

## Women of Tyringham Theatrical Program

Connecting the dots with history, oral histories, performing arts and community engagement – Housatonic Heritage threw its support behind the 'Women of Tyringham: Experiences of the Fifty-one Percent' (hereafter referred to as *Women of Tyringham*) project. This stage production will integrate oral



history and theater in order to document and celebrate the voices of women in Tyringham, Massachusetts.

Through audio-recorded, oral history interviews with a cross section of Tyringham women, the creators hope to reveal, examine and articulate their individual and collective stories. Director Ann Gallo aims to share their aspirations and experiences with residents and visitors alike. In partnership with co-playwright Anne Undeland, this project will transform the recorded oral history interviews into an original script, bringing to life theatrically the unheralded stories of Tyringham's women.

### **Women of Tyringham Project Goals**

- Celebrate and disseminate the voices of Tyringham's women through theater.
- Create an original script by transforming the content of collected oral history interviews with the goal of broadening the Tyringham community's understanding of the "fifty-one percent".
- Enrich the existing oral history interview collection of the Tyringham Historical Commission for a future initiative to fully digitize and create a publicly accessible oral history archive.
- Provide local area residents and visitors of all ages, ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds and education, access to community-based theater.
- Continue building community through the arts among the residents of Tyringham, MA.
- The current body of work includes 90 interviews, 30 of which Ms. Gallo recorded herself, 60 of which she digitized and will now be transcribed and could have been lost.

## **Greenagers at Cultural Landscapes**

Building upon the already successful region-wide program of landscape stewardship for teenagers,



Housatonic Heritage supports the Greenagers (Great Barrington) program to expand the opportunities for youth to engage in the upkeep and maintenance of critical landscapes (both cultural and natural).

As a practical, direct opportunity to engage youth in our heritage (an interpretive goal of Housatonic Heritage), in 2020 we continued to support the Greenagers Cultural Landscape Program, a region-wide program of landscape stewardship for teenagers that builds upon their existing, operational model.

- In 2020, the Greenagers work crews completed landscape jobs and trail restoration at four local cultural sites/heritage partners - The Bidwell House Museum (Monterey), Daniel Chester French's 'Chesterwood' (National Historic Landmark in Stockbridge), the Norman Rockwell Museum (Stockbridge), and at the estate of Edith Wharton 'The Mount' (National Historic Landmark in Lenox).

## The Mastheads

The Mastheads is a public humanities project centered in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. This program seeks to connect residents to the literary history of the region, create a forum for thinking about place, and support the production of new creative work. Founded in 2016, The Mastheads is at once an urban architectural experiment, a literary research initiative, a writers' residency, and an educational program.

Projects include:

- **Architectural Studios:** The physical spaces of The Mastheads are five writing studios on wheels, each an architectural interpretation of the original structures from which five American Renaissance authors worked while in Pittsfield: Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., and Henry David Thoreau.
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- **Writers' Residencies:** Every July, we host a month-long residency that brings five emerging writers from across the country to live and work in Pittsfield. Residents receive exclusive use of one of the Mastheads studios, a \$900 prize, travel reimbursement, and a private room in a house shared with the other residents. Beyond July, The Mastheads studios are open seasonally for day-residencies on the grounds of Herman Melville's Arrowhead.
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- **Public Humanities Programming:** We produce city-wide humanities programming with a new theme each year. Our events include public lectures, park festivals, community conversations, and literary readings. Featured historical writers have included Herman Melville, Edith Wharton, W.E.B DuBois, James Van Der Zee, Catherine Maria Sedgwick, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, Mark Twain, Henry James, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., and Fanny Kemble.
  - **Educational Programming:** During the school year, The Mastheads operates its poetry-in-schools program, Fireside, in Pittsfield's Public Schools. Students compose original poetry, and each ten-week course culminates in an anthology of student work and a community reading. We have also added a free Virtual Poetry School to this site!
- **Publications and Design:** Each summer we produce The Mastheads x The Berkshire Eagle Folds, a series of broadsheet folds inserted into the local newspaper that reach 30,000 doorsteps each issue. We design text-based public art installations each summer that have animated billboards, grocery stores, vacant storefronts, hardware stores throughout Pittsfield.
  - A summer internship program at Berkshire literary retreats, in partnership, with Berkshire NAACP, Multicultural BRIDGE, Wildseed and Harmony Homestead, in its third year sponsored

five virtual writers-in-residence with stipends, access to a robust virtual writing community and experimental public text installations.

## Northwest CT Arts Council

Northwest CT's network of creativity is organized through the Northwest CT Arts Council, and Housatonic Heritage is proud to support the important work of artist advocacy and promotion. The Council's mission is to engage the public in building a strong and connected arts and culture community that is integral to the economic development and the collective well-being of our region – important goals that are shared by Housatonic Heritage.



This organization is one of the 9 Arts Regional Service Organizations in Connecticut, and serves 25 towns, with programs and services that include:

- Printed monthly events calendar.
- Weekly email newsletter with events, opportunities, and workshops.
- Advocacy for the region at the state level.
- Arts Night Out Networking Events
- Annual Make Music Day
- New Litchfield Hills Creative Festival
- NWCT Cultural Directory
- Annual Litchfield Hills Creative Awards
- Professional Development Workshops
- Administration of Regional Initiative Grants
- Fiscal sponsorship services for artists and emerging nonprofits.

## Financial

For the calendar year 2020:

- Contributions from organizations and individuals \$79,522
- Grant income \$434,173
- Earned income \$719
  
- Grants made to other organizations \$227,706