Friends of the Du Bois Homesite

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

UMass Builds New Woods Trail, Parking Lot

We knew it would happen, we just didn't know it would happen in such a short time and with such pleasant results.

There are a new walking path to a special destination, signage and a parking lot at the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite on Route 23, constructed in two weeks' time and now open to the public.

Here's how it went.

July 8: The Friends steering committee received e-mail notice a grounds crew from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, would arrive July 10 to clear trees on the eastern portion of the U-shaped property. Foresight Land Services in late June had identified all of the property's boundaries and installed granite posts.

July 10 to 12: Six workers and their supervisor, Jack Rogala, head of Grounds Service at UMass, arrived for the first of three intense days of cutting and chipping a stand of nearly 40-year-old, self-seeded pine trees. It was a difficult task, Rogala said, as there was at first no place to fell a tree, no place to chip.

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Steering Committee Chairwoman Elaine Gunn, above, spoke at the preview and MaryNell Morgan-Brown, left, sang.

UMass Chancellor Thomas W. Cole Jr. and Dr. Edmund W. Gordon and Dr. Susan Gordon examine the descriptive sign at Memorial Boulder with UMass Amherst Director of Libraries Jay Schafer.

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

Friends of the DU BOIS BOYHOOD HOMESITE
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set up the chipper. Neighbors Ted and Alice Hitchcock graciously allowed storage of trucks and equipment along their driveway.

The UMass workers, despite at least one equipment crisis, completed their task, including placing the wood chips along a section of existing farm road and onto a new, short, meandering path to a boulder placed on the property in 1969 for the dedication of a memorial park.

At various times Steering Committee members Rachel Fletcher, Elaine Gunn and Bernard Drew were at the site, as were Robert Paynter and David Glassberg, anthropology and history faculty at UMass, respectively, and Jay Schafer, director of libraries, and also Bruce Thomas, UMass landscape architect.

July 14 to 17: A work crew from Gary Oggiani's Great River Construction Co. of Great Barrington removed tree stumps, smoothed the land (which slopes gently to the west, and, below the topsoil layer, is pure sand) and staked out a parking area for about eight vehicles. Mass. Highway engineer Kevin Whalen confirmed the best location for the driveway. Equipment operator Dan Andrews did most of the backhoe and roller work. By Thursday, it was ready for a delivery of surface material.

July 21: Two men from Great River and Jeff Wood from Ghi Signs in North Canaan installed two poster cabinets, one at the edge of the trailhead, another at the turn in the path. Robert Cox, head of the UMass Du Bois Library archives, had designed the two informational posters, which Ghi printed on vinyl over aluminum. Steering Committee members on different days took care of small details to ready the property for a preview for UMass interim Chancellor Thomas W. Cole Jr., whose keen interest in the property had resulted in $50,000 in funding for this step of what will become a much larger project.

July 23: Rachel Fletcher and Mark Pieropan installed the last interpretive sign, next to the memorial boulder.

July 24: Four vans arrived from UMass at Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Great Barrington for a brief program. Speakers included Dr. Edmund W. Gordon who, with the late Walter Wilson, in 1967 had purchased the property with the intention of making it into a Du Bois memorial.

Dr. Gordon, John M. Musser Professor of Psychology, Emeritus, Yale University, and Richard March Hoe Professor of Psychology and Education, Emeritus, Teachers College, Columbia University, told how he and Du Bois became friends in the early 1950s when both lived in Brooklyn. “He lived next door to the clinic where I was chief psychologist,” Gordon