Friends of the Du Bois Homesite

Mission
Friends of the Du Bois Homesite is a community-based organization that supports the restoration, maintenance, stewardship and awareness of the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite, a National Historic Landmark, as a public memorial to the Great Barrington native who became a leading scholar and activist in the civil rights movement in the United States and around the world.

Statement of Purposes
The W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, is a National Historic Landmark owned and maintained by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Friends of the Du Bois Homesite works within guidelines established by the university and serves as the university's stewards of the homesite.

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Du Bois Memorial Park in Great Barrington re-opens, thanks to UMass Amherst

WARENESS of W.E.B. Du Bois in the Great Barrington community is high. Town voters in May 2005 endorsed the installation of marker signs at the highway entrances to town, proclaiming this the birthplace of the famed civil rights activist. The time couldn't be better for the Friends of the Du Bois Boyhood Homesite to become stewards of the property, as the result of an agreement reached in February 2008.

The Steering Committee of Friends of the Du Bois Homesite in the last several years has had frequent discussions with key administrators and faculty of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst about ways to restore the National Historic Landmark property on Route 23 as a fitting public memorial and destination. The University's Du Bois Center is dedicated to aggressively promoting the legacy of Du Bois, and the Homesite is one of several endeavors to emerge.

The University's staff, under the direction of Bruce Thomas and John Matthews, is clearing a small portion of the eastern side of the property so a few cars can safely pull off the highway and park. There will be signage, a kiosk and a light foot trail to the memorial boulder.

Dr. Thomas Cole, Chancellor, and William Strickland, political science professor, UMass Amherst, toured the Du Bois site. (Rachel Fletcher photo)

Continued to next page
Many at the University have worked hard toward this endeavor, including Robert Paynter, professor, Department of Anthropology, who has conducted three archaeological field schools at the Route 23 property; William Strickland, professor, and Amilcar Shabazz, chairman, Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies; Esther Terry, vice chancellor for student affairs and campus life; Robert S. Cox, head of Special Collections, University Archives; David Glasberg, professor, Department of History; and Whitney Battle-Baptiste, assistant professor, Department of Anthropology. State Senator Ben Downing and Representative Smitty Pignatelli have wholeheartedly endorsed the effort.

The five-member steering committee, which will direct Friends of the Du Bois Homesite activities and monitor the property, draws members from four supporting community organizations as well as the original W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Committee, which organized in 1968. That steering committee, with Elaine S. Gunn chairwoman, has met with Mr. Schafer and others from the University since January 2006 to discuss the property. Other Steering Committee members are Rachel Fletcher, representing the Great Barrington Historical Society; Frances Jones-Sneed, history professor at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, representing the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail; and Bernard A. Drew, representing the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; was enthusiast.

Friends of the Du Bois Homesite have been working for almost 40 years to make this happen. Mr. Schafer, Director of Libraries, W.E.B. Du Bois Library, has been an active supporter since 1999, and he is excited to be a part of the new initiative to restore the boyhood home of Du Bois in Great Barrington. He has been the subject of a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography by David Levering Lewis. Now it is time to complete work on one of the few physical locations on which the laptop computer is perched. (Rachel Fletcher photo)