A n audience of more than 100 joined the Friends of the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite and Memorial Park at Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Great Barrington on Oct. 18, 2009, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the 1969 W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite and Memorial Park Dedication.

Du Bois’s maternal Burghardt family lived at the Homesite from the 1820s, if not before. Du Bois himself lived for a time as a boy in the early 1870s. It was presented to Dr. Du Bois on his 60th birthday by his friends in the NAACP, but he was never able to complete restoration. In 1967, Walter Wilson and Dr. Edmund W. Gordon acquired the property and formed a committee in hopes that one day it might become a memorial for Du Bois in his own town. Spurred by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, the committee dedicated the Homesite as the W.E.B. Du Bois Memorial Park on Oct. 18, 1969. Civil rights activist and future Georgia legislator Julian Bond gave the keynote address and Ossie Davis presided as master of ceremonies.

The 40th anniversary program featured original committee members Elaine S. Gunn and Edmund Gordon and one of the incorporators, Frederick “Fritz” Lord, was in the audience.

“We heard that the Black Panthers would be coming. We heard that the chief of police had stored riot gear in the basement of Town Hall. The event went off without a hitch,” said Gunn, a retired elementary school teacher who is Chairperson of the Friends of the Du Bois Boyhood Homesite. Since then, however, she said, “attitudes in town have changed, thank God.”

Gordon, now faculty emeritus at Teachers’ College, Columbia University, spoke of his friend Walter Wilson’s vision.

UMass Amherst Director of Libraries Jay Schafer reported on improvements made to the trail and signage installed at the Homesite, and described the digitalization of about 100,000 of Du Bois’s papers. He announced the creation of the W.E.B. Du Bois Center at UMass. Artist and designer Michael Singer of Michael Singer Studio unveiled the planning report: W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite and Great Barrington: A Plan for Heritage

Continued on next page

Dr. Edmund Gordon, co-chairman of the Du Bois Memorial Park committee in 1969, provided a four-decades perspective on the Du Bois legacy in Great Barrington.
40th Anniversary
Continued from previous page

Conservation and Interpretation.

Vocalist MaryNell Morgan and the Gospel Choir of Price Memorial African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Pittsfield, sang a selection of hymns that included Du Bois’s favorite, “Go Down Moses”. The Rev. M. Louise Williamson presided and Church Trustee Wray Gunn assisted.

At the conclusion of the service, candles were lit in remembrance of Ossie Davis, Walter Wilson, David Graham Du Bois, Ruth Jones, James Weldon Johnson, the Rev. Esther Dozier, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Shirley Graham Du Bois and others who honored Dr. Du Bois through efforts to restore the Homesite.

Documentary footage of the 1969 dedication featuring Ossie Davis and Julian Bond played at the Triplex Cinema lobby for the month.

— Rachel Fletcher

The Friends Celebrate Du Bois’s 142nd Birthday

The Friends joined with Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church on Feb. 27, 2010, to celebrate the 142nd birthday of W.E.B. Du Bois. Financial historian Gene Dattel, author of *Cotton and Race in the Making of America*, was the featured speaker. Du Bois was very aware of the link between cotton and race. In 1911, he published a novel, *The Quest of The Silver Fleece*. The silver fleece was cotton. As with Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington, Du Bois understood the centrality of cotton to the American and African American experience and incorporated cotton into his vision of the future of Blacks in America. Dattel compared the views of all three in the presentation, “Cotton Captivity: The Fate of African Americans.”

Managing Director Maurice Hobson of the W.E.B. Du Bois Center at UMass Amherst and anthropologist Robert Paynter reported on recent activities to promote the Du Bois legacy at the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite and the Center. The Rev. M. Louise Williamson moderated. Musical offerings were performed by The Just-Now Choir of the Clinton A.M.E. Zion Church.