Great Barrington • W.E.B. Du Bois • Massachusetts

River Park
I was born in a golden room and in the shadow of the great mill.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

Birthplace
The house was gone, with clapboards, railing and grates, much worn down, there were five rooms, a long porch, a yard full of weeds and dilapidated stables in the rear.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

Main and Railroad Streets, Main
(Continue north on Main Street)

Clinton Church
(continue north to Clinton Street and cross onto Elm Street)

Mossater Street
(Follow the lane past the granite building to Mossater Street and turn right)

Congregational Church
(Chapel on Main Street, cross to the east side, and walk north)

River Walk
The river of my birth was golden because the water and paper were white.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

Sears Castle
(Continue your tour by car head south on Main Street)

Shawbridge
(Turn left from Main Street and take Shawbridge St. for information)

Simsen’s Rock
When the Du Bois Memorial Park committee needed a meeting place, Ruth I. James, a literary category at Simons’ Rock Early College, recommended her daughter Elizabeth H. Ball to see the facility. Known today as Read Brook, the early college offers Black studies courses, in addition to a special collection of Black history books, and holds an annual Du Bois service.

Brightside
“We were welcomed in the house; we are fed and walk together in the big kitchen and the French servants were fine.”
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

Downtown Great Barrington • Sites 1–11 • Walking Tour

The town and its surroundings were a boy’s paradise; there were mountains to climb and rivers to wade and swim; lakes to freeze and hills for coasting. There were orchards and coves and wide green fields, and all of it was the first property, apparently of the children of the town.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk

Mary White Ovington (1856–1951), a staunch Du Bois ally at the NAACP, converted an barn into a home in Alford in 1920 and called it Brookhall. She shared it off and on for the next twenty years. The house is in private ownership on Route 71.

St. James Church
That’s where every other visit we got, Sunday morning, the church bells rang to announce worship.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

Great Barrington Schools
The work of great barrington taught a little but not much of the light.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

was conventional rather than critical.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, Autobiography

Church Street School, west beside Mineral Cosmetics, which you’ll pass on the left, was built after Du Bois left town to attend college. His daughter, Yolande, may have attended classes here in 1905, when she and her brother lived in Great Barrington during the family’s visits.

Main Street and Taconic Avenue
Mary Du Bois brought her extended household to the increased summer residence in Main Street in 1870. The apartment that the couple was directly south of the church. Using havens for the summers gave Mary an income. She attended services at St. James Episcopal Church next door. The church is now a cultural and performance venue, St. James Palace. In 1899 the summer property was claimed to allow construction of a rodeo arena and Taconic Avenue.

Town Hall
I did not notice many colored men at the town meeting last month; it seems that they do not take much interest in politics as it is necessary for the protection of their rights.

Go back on the sidewalk to Great Barrington Town Hall
Du Bois attended meetings at the 1875 Great Barrington Town Hall, 534 Main Street, to speak out for the Indian and later the Global, a New York newspaper with wide African-American readership. He once chided a priest in his New York residence for not turning out to a meeting at which a white man was giving a performance on a black for a job as night watchman.

Makahai Cemetery
We bow face away to the northwest, with its flowers and his little faded bands.
— W.E.B. Du Bois, "In Memory of the First Born," in So. of Black Folk

(Continue south on Main Street, turn right on Brookstreet, then left into Mahai Cemetery. Go around the circle and to the bottom of the hill. Du Bois and Bughtedall stones are on the left.)

Youth Burghardt Du Bois died in Atlanta in May 1899 of diphteria and was brought to Great Barrington to be buried without stones because of his Bughtedall ancestors. His mother, Nina Du Bois, who died in 1905, was cremated in the same jar. The Du Bois daughter, Nastor, died in 1911 and is also buried here. The Great Barrington Historical Society installed the totemic marker in the cemetery in 1994.

At the south end of Mahai Cemetery, a large obelisk monument marks the grave of ares Bughtedall ancestors. The Du Bois Center of American History, 684 South Main Street, exhibits artifacts and biographical materials related to Bughtedall and Black history.

Millbank
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Five Acres
James Wilson Johnson (1871–1940), a musician, teacher, educator, and NAACP secretary, supported race and poverty in his efforts. He also wrote the music for the creation of the NAACP's famous "Star-Spangled Banner." He was elected to the National Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1932.

@BlackRiver
James Wilson Johnson is a great example of how a black man can make a difference in society. He was a leader in the Civil Rights Movement and a supporter of the NAACP.

@Simonsrock
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