

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



1 River Park
I was born by a golden river and in the shadow of two great hills.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *Autobiography*
 [Walking tour begins at the entrance to River

Walk, Church and River Streets
 William Edward Du Bois was born not far from where the Housatonic River flows past the W.E.B. Du Bois River Garden Park (dedicated in 2002). He once said he learned to swim just upstream, and throughout his life chided townspeople for allowing the river to become polluted.



2 Birthplace
The house was quaint, with clapboards running up and down, neatly trimmed; there were five rooms, a tiny porch, a rasy front yard, and unbelievably delicious strawberries in the rear.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *Darkwater*
 [Walk 100 yards up Church Street to the birth site. Bronze marker on the right.]

Du Bois's mother, Mary Sylvia Burghardt, married Alfred Du Bois in February 1867. They rented a small rear dwelling owned by Thomas Jefferson "Did Jeff" McKinley, a former South Carolina slave. Harassed by Mary's cousins, Alfred left town on his own. Years later, in 1897, the small house was razed to make way for an electrical manufacturing plant. The Great Barrington Historical Society installed the bronze marker at the birth site in 1994.

Photo: Mary with infant son, ca. 1868-69.



3 Great Barrington Schools
The schools of Great Barrington taught a little but not much of economics. Their teaching of physiology, chemistry and physics was pretty good. ... History and English, ancient languages and mathematics were also taught, although the history was conventional rather than critical.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, "Woods of Time"

[Continue up Church Street to School Street.]
 William Cullen Bryant Elementary School, now Iredale 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 1906, when she and her mother took refuge in Great Barrington during the Atlanta race riots.

[Turn left at School Street, then right on Bridge Street. Proceed to Berkshire Co-op Market.]
 Now gone, the wood-frame Center School and two-story brick Great Barrington High School once stood side by side behind the market, reached by a narrow lane from Main Street. Du Bois recalled at Great Barrington High School under the tutelage of Principal Frank Hosmer. He was only 15 when he graduated in 1884. He lingered a year in Great Barrington, working as a typeprinter at Seales Castle.



4 St. James Church
That's where my mother took me every Sunday morning. I loved the singing.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS TO SHIRLEY GRAMM DU BOIS
 [Cross Main Street. Head south to St. James Church at the northwest corner of Main Street and Taconic Avenue.]

Mary Du Bois brought her extended household to the Increase Sumner estate on Main Street in 1870. The apartment over the stables was directly south of the church. Doing housework for the Sumners 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 Place.) In 1899 the Sumner property was cleared to allow construction of a railroad underpass and Taconic Avenue.



5 Town Hall
I did not notice many colored men at the town meeting last month; it seems that they do not take as much interest in politics as is necessary for the protection of their rights.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *How Two Years, 1883*
 [Turn around.]

Go back on the sidewalk to Great Barrington Town Hall. Du Bois attended meetings at the 1875 Great Barrington Town Hall, 334 Main Street, to collect news for the *Freeman* (later the *Globe*), a New York newspaper with wide African-American readership. He once chided in print his fellow Black residents for not turning out for a meeting at which a white man was given preference over a Black for a job as night watchman.

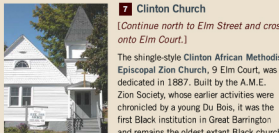


6 Main and Railroad Streets, Mural
 [Continue north on Main Street.]
 The 1860s Summer Block, 306 Main Street, is a commercial building with mansard roof. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Society held meetings in an upstairs room a century and a half ago.

[Turn left at Railroad Street.]
 Merchant Johnny Morgan had a news room at the foot of Railroad Street, and Du Bois often stopped in to read the latest publications. Morgan urged the youth to become an occasional newspaper correspondent. As a local correspondent for the *Springfield Republican*, Du Bois reported a fire at the Brookside barn south of town, 18 July 1885.

[Enter the alley beside 20 Railroad Street.]
 The Railroad Street Youth Project mural on the west wall of the alley, a three-panel 2018 mural (which succeeds 2003 and 2010 paintings) depicts Du Bois's life and times. West of the Triplex Theater, at the top of Railroad Street, Mary Du Bois in 1879 brought her family to live in a two-family house, now gone and replaced by a parking lot. Also gone is the 1872 Housatonic Railroad depot from which "Willie" Du Bois traveled to visit paternal grandfather Alexander Du Bois in Connecticut in 1883.

[Cross the Taconic Parking Lot.]



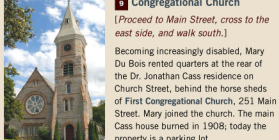
7 Clinton Church
 [Continue north to Elm Street and cross onto Elm Court.]
 The shingle-style Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, 9 Elm Court, was dedicated in 1870. Built by the A.M.E. Zion Society, whose earlier activities were chronicled by a young Du Bois, it was the first Black institution in Great Barrington and remains the oldest extant Black church building in Berkshire County. Du Bois, fresh home from Germany, gave a talk called "Some Impressions of Europe" for the congregation in July 1894. Clinton Church Restoration is restoring the property, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as a heritage site and cultural center.



8 Rosseter Street
 [Follow the lane past the Granary building to Rosseter Street and turn right.]
 Pass the site of Edgar Willoughby's Sunset Inn, a small bed-and-breakfast inn that catered to an African-American clientele in the 1920s and '30s. Du Bois booked a room when in town in the late 1920s to oversee work at the site today.

On the same side of the street is the former home of Warren H. Davis, 11 Rosseter Street (photo). Davis came to Great Barrington from South Carolina to handle horses for electrical inventor William Stanley, and later became a lumbering and real estate dealer. He was middleman when NAACP friends acquired the old Othello Burghardt property as a gift for Du Bois in 1928, and he secured tradesmen to work on the house.

There is no one up there that knows as much about the situation as you and I, and, therefore, depending upon you a great deal.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS TO WARREN H. DAVIS, 1928



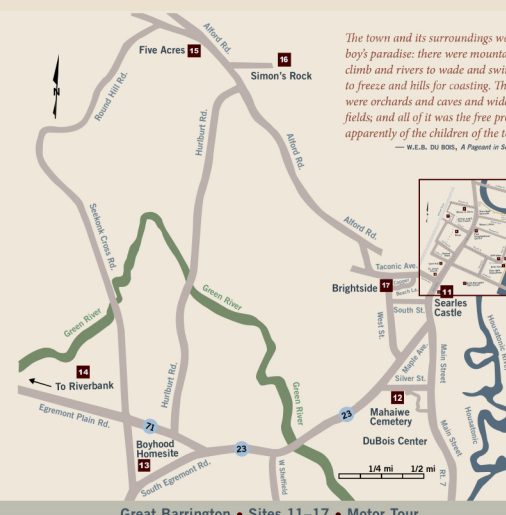
9 Congregational Church
 [Proceed to Main Street, cross to the east side, and walk south.]
 Becoming increasingly disabled, Mary Du Bois rented quarters at the rear of the Dr. Jonathan Cass residence on Church Street, behind the horse sheds of First Congregational Church, 251 Main Street. Mary joined the church. The main Cass house burned in 1908; today the property is a parking lot.

In March 1885 Mary Du Bois died. William moved in with his Aunt Frances Minerva Burghardt Newport on Upper Main Street a few months before he left to attend Fisk University, First Congregational Church, along with three other congregations, assisted with Du Bois's college tuition. In 1890 Du Bois returned the favor with a lecture in the sanctuary.

I am very grateful to you and the Sunday School for what you have done.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS TO THE REV. EVERETT SCODDER, 1886
 [Continue down Church Street to the starting point.]



Downtown Great Barrington • Sites 1–11 • Walking Tour



Great Barrington • Sites 11–17 • Motor Tour



10 River Walk
That river of my birth was golden because of the wooden and paper waste that soiled it. The gold was there, not ours; but the gleam and glint was for all.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *Darkwater*

Continue your walk on Housatonic because of the wooden and paper waste that soiled it. The gold was there, not ours; but the gleam and glint was for all.
 River Walk, which meanders in two sections behind River Street and, after an interlude, continues behind St. Peter's Church parking lot. Walk around Great Barrington's downtown. Many of the buildings and all of the businesses have changed, but the feel remains very much as it was in Du Bois's day.

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 caves and wide green fields, and all of it was the free property apparently of the children of the town.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *A Pageant in Seven Decades*



11 Searles Castle
 [Continue your tour by car. Head south on Main Street.]

As you drive from town, glimpse Kellogg Terrace, today called Searles Castle, across from St. James Church, behind the tall stone wall. The grand chateau Hopkins, widow of Pacific Railroad tycoon Mark Hopkins, in 1884–1886. Du Bois worked as a timekeeper in 1884–1885 and attended African Methodist Episcopal Society meetings in the large office. Today a private academy, the property is not open to the public.



12 Mahaiwe Cemetery
We bore him away to the northward, with his flowers and his little folded hands.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, "Of the Passing of the First Born," *The Souls of Black Folk*
 [Continue south on Main Street. Turn right on Silver Street, then left into Mahaiwe Cemetery. Go around the circle and to the bottom of the hill. Du Bois and Burghardt stones are on the left.]

Young Burghardt Du Bois died in Atlanta in May 1899 of diphtheria and was brought to Great Barrington to be buried (without stone) with his Burghardt ancestors. His mother, Nina Du Bois, who died in 1950, was interred in the same plot. The Du Boises' daughter, Nina Yolande Cullen Williams, died in 1961 and is also buried here. The Great Barrington Historical Society installed the bronze marker in the cemetery in 1994.

At the south end of Mahaiwe Cemetery a large obelisk monument marks the graves of some Burghardt ancestors. The Du Bois Center of American History, 684 South Main Street, exhibits artifacts and bibliographic materials related to Du Bois and Black history.

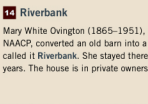
Photo: Gravesites of Nina Cullen and Burghardt Du Bois.



13 Boydhood Homestead
It is the first home that I remember.
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *Autobiography*
 [Proceed north on Main Street to Route 23. Turn left, then proceed 0.25 mile west of the junction with Route 71.]

A crimson sign marks the entrance to the parking lot at the W.E.B. Du Bois Boydhood Homestead. There he lived as a young child from age 2 to 6 with an extended family that included grandfather Othello Burghardt and his wife, Sara, and Willie's older half-brother Ilebeter and their cousin Inez.

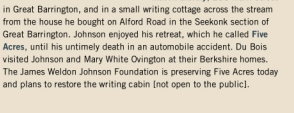
Today the Du Bois Center of UMass Libraries manages the five-acre, U-shaped property. A short wooded path takes visitors to a commemorative boulder, installed in 1969 when the property was dedicated as a park. South of the boulder, the foundation of the ancestral Burghardt home is the subject of archaeological research.



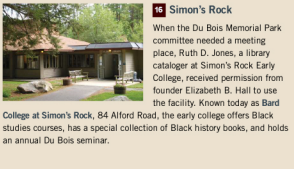
14 Riverbank
 Mary White Ovington (1865–1951), a staunch Du Bois ally at the NAACP, converted an old barn into a home in Alfred in 1920 and called it Riverbank. She stayed there off and on for the next twenty years. The house is in private ownership on Route 71.



15 Five Acres
 James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), a musician, lawyer, educator, and NAACP secretary, summered and wrote poetry at Riverbank. He also wrote at the Mason Library, 231 Main Street in Great Barrington, and in a small writing cottage across the stream from the house he bought on Alfred Road in the Seekonk section of Great Barrington. Johnson enjoyed his retreat, which he called Five Acres, until his untimely death in an automobile accident. Du Bois visited Johnson and Mary White Ovington at their Berkshire homes. The James Weldon Johnson Foundation is preserving Five Acres today and plans to restore the writing cabin (not open to the public).



16 Simon's Rock
 When Du Bois Memorial Park committee needed a meeting place, Ruth D. Jones, a library cataloger at Simon's Rock Early College, received permission from founder Elizabeth B. Hall to use the facility. Known today as Bard College at Simon's Rock, 84 Alford Road, the early college offers Black studies courses, has a special collection of Black history books, and holds an annual Du Bois seminar.



17 Brightside
"We were welcomed in the house; we ate bread and milk together in the big kitchen; and the Irish servants were kind."
 — W.E.B. DU BOIS, *Autobiography*
 Celeste Russell, wife of textile factory owner Parley A. Russell, provided young Willie—through the efforts of high school principal Frank Hosmer—with books of Greek. Du Bois was welcome at the Russell house, called Brightside, where he played with young Louis Russell and sometimes enjoyed a meal with Louis and the Irish serving girls. The house still stands, in private ownership, at the corner of West Avenue and Oppen Beach Lane [not open to the public].

PHOTOS: DECADEATION STONE MARKS THE DU BOIS RIVER GARDEN PARK. MARY SYLVIA BURGHARDT DU BOIS WITH INFANT SON "WILLIE" CA. 1868-69. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES, W.E.B. DU BOIS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS. AMHERST. REF. NO. 108. EVERETT COLLECTION. GREAT BARRINGTON HIGH SCHOOL. CLASS OF 1904. W.E.B. DU BOIS STANDING. LEFT: PRINCIPAL FRANK HOSMER SEATED. CENTER: SPECIAL COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES, W.E.B. DU BOIS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS. AMHERST. REF. NO. 380. ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH. GREAT BARRINGTON TOWN HALL. W.E.B. DU BOIS WALKING. CLINTON AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH. GREAT BARRINGTON TOWN HALL. W.E.B. DU BOIS. BOYDHOOD HOMESTEAD SIGN. SIMON'S ROCK ALUMNI LIBRARY.