William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was a tireless and often radical crusader for social justice. His international legacy as a defender of freedom grew from his work as a pioneer sociologist, educator, author, and editor. He instigated the Niagara Movement and helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Editor of the NAACP's The Crisis magazine, he gave intellectual voice to America's complex and fractured drive for equality.

W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite: a National Historic Landmark

“In general thought and conduct I became quite thoroughly New England.”

— W.E.B. Du Bois, Summer 1907

Du Bois held degrees from Fisk University and Harvard (Ph.D.). He studied as well at the University of Berlin. Teaching at Wilberforce University in Ohio, he met Nina Goner (1875–1938) there, and they married in May 1906. He also taught at the University of Pennsylvania, then served on the Atlanta University faculty until 1910. For the next twenty years he worked with the NAACP, an organization he helped to found. During racially stressful times in Atlanta, Du Bois sent his wife to stay with his Chief James in Great Barrington, where Burghardt Gordon Du Bois was born in 1887. His life was tragically brief. Nina returned to Great Barrington for their daughter Nina Yolanda Du Bois’s birth in 1908. Du Bois was last here in 1886, in the home of various owners. He lived in Africa, Ghana, on 27 August 1906, the eve of the great match in Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

Great Barrington in the 1870s and 1880s was evolving from a rural agricultural to an industrial and commercial economy, with a nickel mill, tin mine iron furnaces and other factories. Clothing, furniture, and food stores lined Main Street. Longtime farmers and millhands, including members of the Du Bois’ own maternal Burghardt family, gravitated to the village to find work. Great Barrington hosted a population of 472 in 1885, when young William was 6. Of other citizens, 87 were classed as “native blacks” in that year’s state census. The Great Barrington of his youth included Blacks free since the American Revolution, ex-slaves who had fled the South, and a growing number of domestic service who came to work with their well-to-do employers.

Du Bois’s hometown of Great Barrington profoundly influenced the formation of his ideas, life, and career. He visited frequently and attempted to refurbish his grandfather’s old house. Many building sites associated with Du Bois are now gone, but Du Bois was fond of Great Barrington; he believed his experiences here helped shape his later ideas. In almost every political event around the world today, you see how essential Dr. Du Bois’s themes are—peace, justice, equity and the centralness of the color line.”

“On this wide and lovely plain, beneath the benediction of grey-blue mountain and the low music of rivers, lived for a hundred years the black Burghardt clan.”

— W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868 birthday gift to 1870.

Friends of the Du Bois Homesite, with the Du Bois Center of UMass Amherst Libraries, works to restore the W.E.B. Du Bois Boyhood Homesite 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.

P.O. Box 3018
Great Barrington, MA 01230
info@DuBoisHomesite.org
www.DuBoisHomesite.org

Friends in the NAACP purchased the homestead and presented it to Du Bois as a 60th Birthday gift in 1928. He cherished the surroundings that stirred his imagination when he was a child.

Long years I have carried them tenderly over all the earth.

— W.E.B. Du Bois, 1868 birthday gift to 1870.


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