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Exploring the Bryan Homestead: A way to connect with nature

by Tina Lesniak | Jul 30, 2024 | Hampshire Hilltowns, Local News, More Local Headlines

CUMMINGTON — For the first time in years, the public is invited to explore the Bryant Homestead through thematic walking tours inspired by the legacy of William Cullen Bryant, a local poet, journalist and editor. DeTours: Exploring the Bryant Homestead began on July 13 and will continue through August. In partnership with Trustees of the Reservation, the Cummington Historical Commission and Project Art, the tours will be led by local experts in fields that Bryant's work helped to shape.

“We had our first walk last Saturday, July 13, Nature As Jazz led by Mike Kolodny, [a master jazz saxophonist] and it was a deeply meditative, expansive deep listening experience,” said Maude Haak-Frendscho, administrator and program person for the Cummington Cultural District. “After some time listening together on the porch, Mike playing for us — playing with the birds and wind — all of us discussing presence and relationship, we took a brief walk down the Sugarbush trail. Overlooking the stream we paused to listen and make gestures, body percussion, and vocalizations in response to the sounds around us. A red-tailed hawk flew through the trees behind our little gathering.”

The Bryant Homestead serves as a touchstone for the town of Cummington and one of its most influential residents. Bryant had a productive life working as a poet, journalist and editor, who also did significant work with the environment and social movements, including abolition. Born and raised in the town, Bryant left his mark on many aspects of it. According to June Lynds, select board member and Cummington Cultural District member, Bryant purchased the land for the Bryant Free Library, constructed it, and then donated its first 4,000 volumes.

“Cummington has a rich history of being a home to artists, poets, and activists, and continues to be home to many,” said Haak-Frendscho. “The Homestead buildings and land, a Trustees property, are open for outdoor exploration, but the house has been closed to the public for a few years, and greatly missed by the community.”

The second walk, led by J.S. Bryant School, called Growing from Farm to School: A walk through history honoring the land and its roots in the LGBTQ+ Community, took place on July 20. This 300-

acre farming campus, located next to the Bryant Homestead, is named after Bryant's daughter, Julia Sands Bryant, the first steward of Bryant's legacy. Sands Bryant was an early leader in the LGBTQ+ community.

The series continues with walks on Aug. 10, 17 and 24. The first, Stepping Back in Time: Science in the 19th Century and Nature Now, led by John Burns, will feature a walk along the Sugar Bush Trail and look at science and environmentalism in the late 1800s. The following week, artist Kim Nestor-Carlino will lead Deep Presence: Cultivating a Sense of Place a hike through the frame of her artistic practice. Historian and archivist Carla Ness will lead the final walk on Aug. 24 visiting locations in the town that marked events in Bryant's lifetime.

"We have the trustees' support for deTours, and, in the process, we are hatching some longer-view ideas for partnership with the trustees in hopes that this programming attention can eventually lead to greater resources and access to this local treasure," said Haak-Frendscho.

The events are free, operating rain or shine, and will have refreshments available at each. For more information about the tours, visit www.cummingtonculture.art.



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