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A New Look For Centuries of Vermont History

Historic Brownington Village, Vermont—When you next visit the Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village in person or online, you may notice something has changed. The museum launched a new brand, website and logo today to match the new direction on which it has embarked.

Work to revitalize the institution began with the hiring of a new dynamic staff and efforts to enlist a still growing group of accomplished advisors, according to Molly Veysey, Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village Executive Director. To better connect with the Northeast Kingdom community and beyond, work on the museum’s brand began in Fall 2020 in partnership with Flek Inc. of St. Johnsbury, Vermont. This work was made possible due to funding from the Northern Community Investment Corporation.

“We are excited to emerge in our region as the hub of culture, community and education we know we can be,” Veysey said. “Our new image reflects this energy. We’re staying true to our mission of preservation, education and inspiration. This mission means now, more than ever, serving as a community resource that can provide essential services and spark dialogue on inequality in our shared society.”

The Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village takes its new direction from the example of Alexander Lucius Twilight, an innovative educator who built the monumental Old Stone House dormitory at the heart of the village. Noted for being the first African American graduate of any United States college or university (Middlebury College in 1823), Mr. Twilight also was the first African American to be elected to the Vermont House of Representatives (in 1836).

Efforts this past year by museum staff and volunteers resulted in the [Vermont State House designating September 23 as Alexander Twilight Day](#). United States Representative Peter Welch also [read his own remembrance of Mr. Twilight into the Congressional Record](#) before sharing it at a ceremony for the first officially designated Alexander Twilight Day this past September.

The new brand reflects not only the legacy of Mr. Twilight but also the museum’s efforts at becoming a regional hub and community gathering place, according to



Veysey. Despite a pandemic, this past year saw the construction of a new one mile+ Twilight Educational Trail, the completion of pandemic safe educational and family programs, the installation of a new state roadside marker recognizing Mr. Twilight, the addition of Brownington's own a WiFi HotSpot and the delivery of nutritious foods to local food banks from the museum's Giving Gardens.

Veysey added that 2021 promises to be a big year. The museum will begin work to interpret trails at Willoughby State Forest's Civilian Conservation Corps Camp S-55, install a new Alexander Twilight exhibit, expand its Giving Gardens, add new educational and adult programs, and much more.

"The momentum leading to our new brand's launch has brought new partnerships and ideas to one of our region's most important historical places," Carmen Jackson, Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village Board of Trustees President, said. "We're not just looking to spark our own community but to create new opportunities for people in our local region and beyond."

"We believe this starts with an emphasis on Mr. Twilight and Brownington being the home of his choice," Jackson added. "It makes our grounds the physical manifestation of the man. We're excited to see where it leads us in partnership with those who are touched by our work."

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About Alexander Lucius Twilight: Born on September 23, 1795 Alexander Lucius Twilight graduated from Middlebury College in 1823, becoming the first African American graduate of any United States college or university. In 1829 he was hired to be principal of the Orleans County Grammar School and was minister to the Brownington Congregational Church. In 1836 he was elected to the Vermont House of Representatives, becoming the first African American to serve in a state legislature. Under his leadership, the Orleans County Grammar School thrived as a co-educational institution attracting both boys and girls from throughout New England who came from as far away as Boston and Montreal. Between 1834 and 1836 Mr. Twilight designed and built a four story granite dormitory, which he called Athenian Hall.

Mr. Twilight's father Ichabod was born in Boston in July 1765. Both he and Mr. Twilight's mother Mary were free and mixed race, most likely of African slaves and English colonists. Ichabod served in the Revolutionary War in a New Hampshire regiment and later moved with his family to Vermont where he and his wife were listed as "the first negroes to settle in Corinth" where they bought property, moving from Bradford on November 28, 1798.



Typical for children of his class, Alexander began working for a neighboring farmer when he was only eight. Reading and studying mathematics while performing farm labor, he was able to enroll in the Randolph Orange County Grammar School in 1815 at the age of 20. He enrolled in Middlebury College in 1821, graduating as the first known African American to receive a degree from any institution of higher learning in America in 1823.

In 1826 Mr. Twilight married Mercy Ladd Merrill from Unity, New Hampshire and taught in both New York and Vermont before assuming his position as principal at the Orleans County Grammar School. In addition to acting as minister for the Brownington Congregational Church, he led worship services and delivered sermons in numerous other churches. In 1847, he relocated to Quebec where he taught briefly. However, without his leadership the Orleans County Grammar School experienced declining enrollment. He was persuaded to return to Brownington where he resumed duties as both teacher and pastor. In 1855 Mr. Twilight suffered a stroke and retired. He died on June 19, 1857 and is buried along with his wife Mercy in the Brownington Congregational Church Cemetery.

About the Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village: Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village was established by the Orleans County Historical Society and has been operating as a museum since 1926. It has now grown from one building to become an impressive historic site with seven restored buildings and three neighboring structures, all dating from the early 1800s. Dedicated to its mission to preserve, educate and inspire, the museum annually attracts nearly 10,000 visitors from across the country and abroad.

Education has long been a cornerstone of activity in Brownington. The former granite dormitory is not the only historic building at the museum to tell the story of progressive education and diversity. Alexander Lucius Twilight's 1830 Federal style home houses his books and letters, along with letters from his students, in an archival vault. Further up the hill an 1831 Federal-style Hall House stands as a testament to Samuel Reed Hall, a recognized pioneer in progressive education. Hall founded America's first teacher training college in 1823 in Concord, Vermont, invented the chalkboard, and published the first teacher-training textbook in 1829.

Through unique educational programs that use select items from its permanent collection as teaching tools, the Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village embraces hands-on, experiential learning as a way of connecting individuals to a way of life that still has much to teach us. Notable past activities have included a barn raising with area vocational students and a tree trimming and replanting project that was incorporated into the 3rd grade science curriculum at the Brownington Elementary School. A thriving adult education program teaches such



traditional crafts as blacksmithing, rug hooking, stone wall building, and tree pruning. Spring and Fall Field Days for area schools, as well as its summer “Time Travelers Day Camp” emphasizes hands-on craft activities, theatre, and the scientific exploration of the garden and grounds.

The Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village is located in the Brownington Historic District just off Hinman Settler’s Road in Vermont’s scenic Northeast Kingdom. The museum is open May 15 to October 15, 11:00-5:00 pm, Wednesday-Sunday. For more information, call (802)754-2022 or visit www.OldStoneHouseMuseum.org.