

Grant brings art to Twilight trail

by Sylvia C. Dodge

BROWNINGTON — When you think of recreational opportunities in Orleans County, you can add a new place to your list. With grant funding provided last year by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation, the Old Stone House Museum in Brownington is now the home of the mile-long Alexander Twilight Educational Trail encircling the museum's 60-acre complex.

The trail winds along meadows where, last week, young goats frisked around their mothers, through a forest of mixed hardwoods, on to the observation tower on Prospect Hill. Educational placards posted along the trail mirror Alexander Twilight's teaching theories — his "natural theology" — which was heavily influenced by the natural world. Alexander Twilight, credited with being the first black college graduate in the country and Vermont's first black legislator, built the Old Stone House in the 1830s as a classroom facility and boarding residence for students at the Orleans County Grammar School where he was headmaster.

This year, with help from a \$33,200 grant from an organization based in Concord, New Hampshire, called the Northern Forest Center (NFC), work to broaden the scope of the trail beyond just a place to walk, snowshoe, or cross-country ski will get started. The grant money, which comes through a two-year collaboration of NFC, Northeastern Vermont Development Association, and the Northern Border Regional Commission, includes multifaceted

elements that will enhance the trail with public art and also engage local schoolchildren with the project.

The NFC grant is designed to make the "northern forest" region an eco-friendly tourist destination.

A "call for art" has gone out to encourage teaching artists to apply for a program dubbed "Open to Interpretation." Projects inspired by the history and culture of the Old Stone House Museum and the legacy of Alexander Twilight will get the highest priority.

Artists in diverse areas — music, theater, visual arts — are encouraged to apply.

Director Molly Vesey of the Old Stone House Museum, said she is pleased a partnership with Catamount Arts means artists' applications can be submitted through a digital technology called "slideroom."

According to the prospectus for the project, the selection committee "will not only consider proposals for such traditional public arts projects such as outdoor murals and sculpture, but also for environmentally friendly work, creative interpretive signs, art benches, bike racks, light/sound installations, as well as original plays or musical compositions written for onsite performance."

A unique aspect of the project is that local schoolchildren will be part of the selection process. After jurors whittle down applications to six finalists, students from Brownington Central School will be involved in the choice of the four winning applications, Ms. Vesey said.

In late autumn, the four winning artists will be invited to teach local schoolchildren about public art.

Each will get a \$1,250 stipend for teaching four-hour-long sessions. The artists will get an additional amount of between \$7,500 and \$10,000 to spend the winter at home creating artwork that will be installed along the trail next spring.

Teachers who wish to take advantage of the autumn opportunity for their students to learn about public art should contact the Old Stone House Museum. Ms. Vesey said the museum has applied for a Vermont Arts Impact Grant it hopes will cover busing students to the museum for the classes. If the grant does not come through, the artists would teach sessions at local schools.

The two-year-long trail and art project started with phase-one work last summer. Trail construction was done by the Youth Conservation Corps under the supervision of the Northwoods Stewardship Center.

Corps members also installed an informational kiosk at the trailhead

near the museum's welcome center and posted signs along the trail offering information about ecology and wildlife.

For example, hikers can read about the bobolink, a bird that was once abundant in the region, but experienced a dramatic population decline as farmers moved to cutting hayfields earlier. Bobolinks nest in the tall grass of late spring, and early mowing of fields destroys the birds' nests and babies.

Planners hope the second-phase of the project will be completed next year by Juneteenth 2022. They also hope artwork created by local schoolchildren can be installed along the trail.

Artists have until August 15 to submit application materials for review. Submissions should go to catamountarts.slideroom.com. The prospectus for the art opportunity is available on the websites of Catamount Arts and Old Stone House Museum.

Caspian Arts to host exhibits

Caspian Arts is excited to announce two summer events. A studio tour will be held on Sunday, July 11, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Artists in Greensboro, Hardwick, Craftsbury, Albany, and West Glover will open their studios so visitors can view the creative results of months in pandemic isolation. Maps for the tour are available at The Miller's Thumb Gallery in Greensboro and online at www.caspianartsvt.com.

The Whitewater Gallery at 6

River Street, East Hardwick, will host a Caspian Arts exhibit for four mid-summer Sundays. Visit the gallery on July 18 and 25, and August 1 and 8, between 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. to view unique local art. Works range from paintings, art quilts, jewelry, sculpture, assemblages, carving, and more.

Visit the Caspian Arts website at www.caspianartsvt.com or call (802) 533-7733 for more information. — from Caspian Arts.

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