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The Rogovoy Report

Seth Rogovoy's Web Journal

A Critical Compendium of Cultural Observations

5.20.06

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River Walk Park in Great Barrington Named for William Stanley

RIVER WALK PARK NAMED FOR ELECTRICAL INVENTOR WILLIAM STANLEY

GREAT BARRINGTON, MA-The public is invited to celebrate the accomplishments of electrical inventor William Stanley, Jr., on Saturday, June 3, 11:00 A.M., when the Great Barrington River Walk dedicates a new trail section, the William Stanley Overlook, directly across from the site of the historic Horace Day rubberwear factory. It was here on the Housatonic River in 1886 that Stanley successfully transmitted high voltage alternating current electricity.

Stanley devised his innovative electric distribution system using an alternating-current transformer, powering lights in offices and stores on Main Street, Great Barrington. He went on to establish a manufactory in Pittsfield in the 1890s which evolved into General Electric. Ironically a later innovation in power transformer production incorporated polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), reckless handling and disposal of which resulted in major contamination of the river.

The Overlook, designed and built by Peter Jensen, and landscaped by Monica Fadding and Heather Cupo, extends the upstream River Walk trail approximately 50 feet and culminates in a cul-de-sac. A new 6 ft x 8 ft observation platform cantilevers over the riverbank, where the public may view for the first time the ruins of the rubberwear factory, and enjoy dramatic river views. Interpretative signage tells the story of Stanley's experiments and his role in Great Barrington's industrial history.

Stanley's grandson George C. Stanley and local historian Bernard A. Drew will be on hand for the special dedication and reception at the Overlook site on Saturday June 3, at 11:00 A.M. Mr. Stanley will address the Great Barrington Land Conservancy's Annual Meeting with keynoter speaker Kirkpatrick Sale on Friday evening, June 2, at 7:30 P.M., at the First Congregational Church, Great Barrington.

Of his grandfather, George Stanley says, "Stanley's transformer allowed power to be generated at places like Niagara Falls and easily sent to places like New York City. This made low-cost electricity available world-wide and opened the door to all the wonderful electrical devices we take for granted today."

Following the June 3 program, at 12:30 P.M., Drew will lead a walking tour of Great Barrington sites associated with William Stanley. Drew has prepared for the occasion "Fifty Sites in Great Barrington, Massachusetts Associated with William Stanley, Jr. and the Emergence of the Modern Electric Age." The publication is a companion to "Fifty Sites. Associated with the Civil rights Activist W. E. B. Du Bois," which Drew prepared for the 2002 dedication of the W. E. B. Du Bois River Garden park at the Church Street entrance to River Walk.

"Fifty Sites" is co-sponsored by the Great Barrington Historical Society and the Great Barrington Land Conservancy.

Recent contributors to River Walk include: the Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation; the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; the Town of Great Barrington; Katherine L. W. and Winthrop M. Crane III Charitable Trust; Lenox Garden Club; Turkeybush Foundation; Country Curtains and The Red Lion Inn; Windy Hill Farm; Wheeler & Taylor; Berkshire Bank Foundation; Pittsfield Cooperative Bank, Reistan Enterprises, and Berkshire Corporation.

Contact Rachel Fletcher, 413-528-3391, river@gbriverwalk.org, www.gbriverwalk.org

If you go:

Who: Great Barrington Housatonic River Walk

What: William Stanley Overlook Dedication and Reception

Walking Tour of William Stanley Sites in Great Barrington

Cost: Free

Where: Great Barrington River Walk via 39 Dresser Avenue, Great Barrington

When: Saturday June 3, Dedication at 11:00 A.M., Walking Tour at 12:30 A.M.

Info: Rachel Fletcher, 413-528-3391, river@gbriverwalk.org, www.gbriverwalk.org

Reservations: (Walking Tour only) Bernard Drew, 413-528-4953, drew24@bcn.net

Parking: available at Berkshire Corporation, River Street