



Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village

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Reclaiming A Forgotten Chapter of Black History in Vermont

Historic Brownington Village, Vermont—The new State of Vermont Roadside Historic Site Marker in the village opens with text that reads, “A Vermonter by birth, Alexander Twilight attended Middlebury College, graduating in 1823. He was the first African American to earn a degree from a United States College or University.” The plaque goes on to detail the life of this progressive educator, minister, and legislator who designed and built the monumental granite edifice at the Old Stone House Museum & Historic Village after which our museum is named.

We invite the public to join us in celebrating the 225th anniversary of the birth of this remarkable man for four days starting 1:00 PM Sunday, September 20. Sunday’s dedication ceremony will include the installation of the marker and the reading of the concurrent resolution designating September 23 as Alexander Twilight day throughout the state of Vermont. United States Representative Peter Welch will also [read a celebration and remembrance of Mr. Twilight](#) that he submitted to the United States Congressional Record on July 1, 2020.

“We are so pleased to begin to acknowledge the accomplishments, legacy, and influence on the lives of Northeast Kingdom residents of this 19th century African American educator,” Carmen Jackson, Old Stone House Museum Board of Trustees President, said. The ceremony will be recorded live by Kingdom Access Television and Northeast Kingdom Television and broadcast on Mr. Twilight’s birthday on Wednesday, September 23, 2020.

In the Vermont State House, Alexander Twilight’s birthday, September 23, was [officially designated as Alexander Twilight Day](#) on June 19, 2020. The concurrent resolution was sponsored by Vermont Senators John Rodgers and Robert Starr, and Vermont State Representatives Vicki Strong of Albany, Lynn Batchelor of Derby, Mark Higley of Lowell, Paul Lefebvre of Newark, Michael Marcotte of Coventry, Woodman Page of Newport City, Brian Smith of Derby, and Samuel Young of Greensboro. Many of the sponsors will be in attendance on Sunday, September 20.

“We hope everyone will join us safely for this important celebration,” Molly Veysey, Old Stone House Museum Executive Director, said. “Most days of the celebration, you can participate online via YouTube or local television. On Monday, September 21, we encourage you to join us to walk our newly opened historic trails (with masks and social distance) or sign-up FREE for a private museum tour. Finally, be sure to share your reflections with our Community Voice project that will be shared publicly on Tuesday, September 22.”



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Schedule of Events

September 20: Concurrent Resolution Reading and Historic Marker Dedication (View Online or On Local Television)

September 21: Trail and Museum Events (In-Person with Masks and Social Distancing or On Local Television)

September 22: Community Voice (View Online or On Local Television)

September 23: Alexander Twilight Day (View Online or On Local Television)

Find details on our website at OldStoneHouseMuseum.org/Alexander-Twilight-Day/. You can also [sign up for private museum tours](#) that take place on Monday, September 21 from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM. You may also join us at [our Facebook event](#) or on [our YouTube channel](#).

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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.



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About the Old Stone House Museum: Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Old Stone House Museum 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 Old Stone House 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 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 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.