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Media Relations

April 29, 2016

New UNH Documentary Tells the Story of Black History in New Hampshire

DURHAM, N.H. -- How does New Hampshire, a state with the motto “Live Free or Die,” confront and understand its participation in slavery, segregation, and the neglect of African-American history? What happens to our identity as residents of this state and as New Englanders when we begin to acknowledge all of our past?

Shadows Fall North, a new film produced by the University of New Hampshire’s Center for the Humanities in collaboration with Atlantic Media Productions of Portsmouth, will try to answer those questions and more. The documentary will be presented Thursday, May 26, 2016, at 7 p.m. by The Music Hall in Portsmouth as part of its “Film Matters” series.

A panel discussion and Q&A will follow with producer Nancy Vawter; director/editor Brian Vawter; consulting producer and director for the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail JerriAnne Boggis; consulting producer and historic preservationist Valerie Cunningham; and David Watters, professor of English at UNH; with moderator Jason Sokol, associate professor of history at UNH.

Portsmouth, Milford, Canaan, and many other towns in New Hampshire have been home to natives of Africa and to African-Americans for centuries, but their stories have often been left out of official histories. Shadows Fall North focuses on the recovery of Black history in New Hampshire by two extraordinary women: historians and activists Valerie Cunningham and JerriAnne Boggis.

Among the history it covers is that of the African Burying Ground in Portsmouth. In use during the 18th century, the burying ground was later paved and built over. Coffins were found in 2003 during a construction project, and a memorial park opened at the site in 2015.

Through on-site footage and interviews, Shadows Fall North reveals how the work of dedicated citizens has been central in the push to make black history part of New Hampshire’s history. And it asks what it is like for Cunningham and Boggis to live in the state now, long after the era of slavery, long after the fight for Civil Rights, but as issues of race, identity, and belonging continue to arise in the region—and in the country.

Read more and see the preview at blackhistorynh.com. Tickets for the May 26 premiere are available at www.themusichall.org or from the box office: (603) 436-2400.

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