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**Potter from page 3**

20 miles northwest of Potter's home.

The ceremony for the new plaque was just one part of the Andover Historical Society's 40th annual celebration, which included crafts sales, a flea market, music from Lindsey Schust and the Ragged Mountain Band, children's activities, and more, including the popular railroad handcars.

The Historical Society has also preserved the site where Potter and his wife, Sally, are buried, near the old depot, which serves as the Society's headquarters and museum. It's also a hub on the Northern Rail Trail, popular with cyclists.

Nearby, on Route 4, a State of New Hampshire historical marker notes that the village "takes its name from Richard Potter, noted magician, ventriloquist, and showman." Although that plaque calls him "a master of the Black Arts," it does not note that he was a Black man.

The new plaque fills the void.

Lindsey Schust, who emceed the ceremony, recalled that when she was growing up, Potter's race was obscured or treated as an embarrassment. Now, she told me, "we don't have to hide that anymore."

"Having the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire marker is a major step forward for Andover," Schust said. "I hope that this will help make this feel like a very welcoming, open place."

Following the speeches, music with the Timbre Drums Ensemble, a stirring rendition of Amazing Grace from Louise Grasmere, and a New Orleans-style parade led by Tim and Jim Wildman, the crowd gathered around the site of the new plaque, mounted on a rock behind the depot. After removing a covering, Brenda Lett read the wording aloud.

"Richard Potter, a magician, ventriloquist, and humorist in the early 1800s, was the first American performer to gain nationwide fame. He helped make popular entertainment a major part of American life. Born in Boston to an enslaved mother, Potter studied there and in Europe with renowned performing artists. Early on, Potter's wife, Sally, assisted him on stage. He toured the Unit-

ed States and Canada for nearly three decades, charming audiences with his humor, ready wit, and showmanship. Nonetheless, he encountered racism and danger. Potter and his wife, Sally, both Black, moved to Andover in 1815, where he built a house of his own design. The Potters are interred here at Potter Place."

Lett, a Black Heritage Trail volunteer who lives in Manchester, told me afterward that she sees Potter as someone who "appeared to bring out the good in everyone."

He must have had some bad days due to racism, she said, but "it feels like the majority of his life was lived as a human being, and urging other people to treat him that way, which lifts up their own humanity."

Also at the ceremony was JerriAnne Boggis, the New Hampshire Black Heritage Trail's Executive Director. Based in Portsmouth, where the largest concentration of Black people lived in New Hampshire's early days, the Trail has of late been expanding its presence in other parts of the state. Boggis said they erected plaques last year in Hancock and Warner. Already this year, they placed one in Windham and one in Kittery, Maine, and have plans for additional markers in Exeter, Dover, Jaffrey, and Milford.

Boggis says it's important to tell the full story about New Hampshire's Black history. "We wanted to make sure that all these stories were revived, reintroduced to communities that had long forgotten," she told me after the dedication ceremony. There are stories of racism and stereotyping, she said, but also stories of inclusion. "The more we tell these stories, the more we bring them to life, the better we can build those bridges, bridges of understanding, and create, hopefully, a more just society."

"It's a big goal," she said, but it's one they are reaching for one plaque at a time.

*Arnie Alpert is a retired activist, organizer, and community educator long involved in movements for social and economic justice. Arnie writes an occasional column, Active with the Activists for InDepthNH.org.*

**Old Time Fair from page 2**

**Music Tent:** Charlie Baer, JerriAnne Boggis (Executive Director of BHTNH), Larry Chase (photos), Dan Comley (BHTNH photos), Cate Cushing (drum), Paul Currier (mandolin, dobro, fiddle, vocals), Seth Currier (sound), Dana Dakin (consultant), Louise Grasmere (vocalist), John Hodgson (speaker), Gary Samson (photos), Jim Schust (guitar), Grace Schust (drums and vocals), Lindsey Schust (drums, vocals, keyboard and MC), Ellie Taylor (speaker), Proctor Head of School Brian Thomas (speaker), and Tim and Jim Wildman (New Orleans jazz parade).

**Food:** Donna Thompson and the Andover Community Church.

**Crafts:** Laurette Carol, Bill Donaldson, Bog Mountain Pottery, Maria Casas, Eli Finkelstein, Walter Mayo, Gary Cassidy, and Bernard Joly.

**Demonstrators:** Caye Currier, Nancy DeCesare, Nell Brinstin, Priscilla Parmenter, Herbie Barton, and Spunk and Lance Ford.

**Non-profits:** Andover Energy Committee, Andover Hub, Andover Garden Club, Friends of the Northern Rail Trail, Salisbury Historical Society, and Wilmot Historical Society.

**Police:** Jake Hubbard

**Sponsors:** Belletetes of Andover, Bar Harbor Bank, Ledyard Bank, Huckleberry Propane and Oil, Spring Ledge Farm, JJ's Market, Proctor Academy, and the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire.

**Special thanks to:** John Hodgson, Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire, Dan Comley, JerriAnne Boggis, Gail Richards, Lindsey Schust, the Wildman Brothers, Timbre Drum Ensemble, Louise Grasmere, Jesse, Grace, and Jim Schust, and Bob Evans.