Their Stories: Oral Histories from the NAACP Returns to the Berkshire Museum October 2

Pittsfield – The Berkshire Museum and its partners at the NAACP Berkshire County Branch and Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College will present an updated, virtual version of their 2019 exhibition Their Stories: Oral Histories from the NAACP October 2, 2020 through January 10, 2021. The digital show will open with an online panel discussion moderated by Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center Director Judith Monachina on Friday, October 2 at 5:30 pm.

Their Stories: Oral Histories from the NAACP includes excerpts from interviews with 10 African American leaders and community members of the NAACP Berkshire Branch whose stories were a part of the NAACP Oral History Project conducted by the Oral History Center and the NAACP over a period of two years. These compelling, contemporary stories offer brief glimpses into each participant’s life and are presented alongside striking black and white portraits by photographer Julie McCarthy and a timeline of events – both local and national – that led us to where we are now. The exhibition was first presented February through May of 2019 and has since made pop-up appearances at Lee Elementary School and Lee Middle and High School. The virtual version that opens October 2 will include an updated timeline that highlights key events that have taken place in just the last year.
“Working with the 10 people represented in this exhibit, sitting with them and listening to their stories, was a great honor and privilege,” shared Judith Monachina, director of the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center. “The original show designed by the Berkshire Museum reflected the importance of these stories. Now the museum, with this virtual exhibition, helps us to share it with people during a time when we cannot easily gather. Listening to each other’s stories is even more important now than it was a year ago.”

Housatonic Heritage Executive Director Dan Bolognani added, "We’re pleased that we could be the catalyst for this important oral history project, and are extremely grateful to the Berkshire Museum for partnering with us to expertly create the public exhibit. Our region has a long history of thoughtful and socially active changemakers, and we’re grateful to our friends and neighbors of the Berkshires’ African American community for allowing us to share their stories through this project."

The online version of the exhibition will include a cutting-edge, 3D rendering of the museum’s galleries that guests can explore at their own pace and a pre-recorded video tour that guides viewers through the complete exhibition. Portraits and transcribed recordings of each participant may also be enjoyed separately from the 3D galleries. The new digital show at explore.berkshiremuseum.org/their-stories-oral-histories-from-the-naacp is the museum’s third online exhibition since its Berkshire Museum@Home series launched in March of this year.

Individuals featured in the exhibition include:

- Magdalene Adams
- Churchill Cotton
- Wray Gunn
- Mabel Hamilton
- Dennis Powell
- Reverend Charles Pratt
“This exhibition is the first of many future partnerships as we seek to create programming that amplifies the voices, works, and experiences of under-represented populations and spark new conversations about race and racism in our community” said Jeff Rodgers, executive director of the Berkshire Museum. “Black lives and black voices matter. And we are grateful to have the opportunity to once again work alongside our partners at the NAACP Berkshire Branch and Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center to lift those voices in this updated format.”

The museum, together with the NAACP Berkshire County Branch and the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College will present Our Own Words: The Importance of Sharing Stories and Listening in These Unprecedented Times, a live, virtual discussion on Friday, October 2 at 5:30 pm. Moderator Judith Monachina of the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College and panelists will discuss the Oral History Project, the museum exhibition, and the ways oral histories and sharing with and listening to each other can help us understand each other and then rise to the unique challenges posed by 2020. The event is free with registration and open to the community. Guests are encouraged to visit explore.berkshiremuseum.org/events to sign up in advance or tune in once the event has begun.

About the Berkshire Museum
Located at 39 South Street in downtown Pittsfield, Massachusetts, the Berkshire Museum combines art, science, and history to create thought-provoking experiences for the whole family through interactive programs, interdisciplinary exhibitions, and engaging online series. The museum building is currently open by reservation five days a week, featuring the Aquarium and first floor exhibitions including Berkshire Backyard, Rocks and Minerals, Animals
of the World in Miniature, and the Feigenbaum Hall of Innovation. Plan your visit at berkshiremuseum.org or go to explore.berkshiremuseum.org to enjoy the Berkshire Museum wherever you are.

**About the Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center**

The Housatonic Heritage Oral History Center at Berkshire Community College is a collaboration of Housatonic Heritage and Berkshire Community College. The Center serves the Berkshire and Northwest Connecticut regions by providing workshops, seminars, and technical assistance, and by connecting people with interests and skills in oral history practice. To learn more, visit www.theoralhistorycenter.org.

**About the NAACP Berkshire County Branch**

The mission of the NAACP Berkshire County Branch is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination. Learn more at www.naacpberkshires.org.