

HISTORIC NEW ENGLAND

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Historic New England Welcomes the Witness Stones Project into the Stopping Stones/Recovering New England Voices Initiative

HAVERHILL, MA – [September 17, 2025] – Historic New England is proud to announce that the Witness Stones Project, a nationally recognized educational initiative based in Connecticut, has joined the organization as part of its Stopping Stones program under the Recovering New England Voices initiative. This transition marks a significant step forward in Historic New England’s work to recover hidden histories, commemorate enslaved individuals, and foster a deeper understanding of America’s complex past.

The Witness Stones Project, founded by Dennis Culliton, has installed more than 300 memorial markers in six states while developing a curriculum that engages students and communities with the history of slavery in New England and beyond. As the educational arm of Stopping Stones, Witness Stones will expand its reach nationwide, pairing memorial installations with classroom learning and community dialogue.

Stopping Stones, created by the Engagement Arts Fund, is a nationally branded, locally based public art initiative that honors enslaved Americans through the installation of permanent markers and community ceremonies. More than 90 markers have already been installed in eight states, from Vermont to Texas. Together, Stopping Stones and Witness Stones create a powerful model of remembrance and education, inspired by Europe’s Stolpersteine Project, which commemorates Holocaust victims with “micro-monuments” placed in public spaces.

“This collaboration enhances Historic New England’s mission to preserve and expand diverse histories,” said Vin Cipolla, President and CEO of Historic New England. “By uniting the Witness Stones curriculum with the national reach of the Stopping Stones program, we can ensure that the lives and legacies of enslaved people are recognized, remembered, and taught to future generations. Together with our Recovering New England Voices initiative, this program will deepen our understanding of the past while fostering healing and dialogue in the present.”

Paul Growald, founder of Stopping Stones, underscored the impact of this comprehensive approach: “Joining with Witness Stones enables us to bring forward a powerful educational dimension to the public art installations. I have long envisioned curriculum components that accompany our memorials, inviting participants of all ages into this work. This partnership fulfills that vision, aligning remembrance with

education and community dialogue in a way that can truly transform how America reckons with its history.”

A Comprehensive Approach to Memory and Healing

The merger brings together the strengths of both initiatives: Stopping Stones’s place-based public art and Witness Stones’s award-winning educational model. Together, they will operate within Historic New England’s Study Center under the umbrella of Recovering New England Voices (RNEV). RNEV supports research, storytelling, and public engagement that elevates underrepresented histories, including those of Indigenous peoples, women, immigrants, LGBTQ communities, and enslaved individuals directly connected to Historic New England’s properties.

The Stopping Stones team is led by director Pat Wilson Pheanious, a ninth-generation descendant of enslaved individuals in Guilford, Connecticut. Her family’s story was among the first researched by the Witness Stones Project in 2017, grounding this work in lived experience. “Embracing the past is vital to shaping America’s future,” said Pheanious. “This collaboration ensures that the work of these programs will remain strong, protected, and accessible to communities everywhere.”

Looking Ahead

By joining forces, Stopping Stones, Witness Stones, and Historic New England are building a comprehensive platform for remembrance, education, and restorative justice. Their combined efforts will ensure that more Americans—students, descendants, and communities alike—can engage with a richer, more inclusive understanding of our shared history, fostering reflection, healing, and change for generations to come.

The public is invited to join this important conversation at the [Historic New England Summit](#), November 13–14, where Stopping Stones will be a featured program.

For more information on Historic New England’s partnership with Stopping Stones or to learn how to participate, please visit the [Historic New England](#) and [Stopping Stones](#) websites, and look for updated information in the weeks ahead.

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About Historic New England

Historic New England—founded as the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in 1910—is the oldest, largest, and most comprehensive independent preservation organization in the United States. Historic New England welcomes the public to thirty-eight exceptional museums and landscapes, including several coastal farms. The organization operates a major collections and archives center in Haverhill, Massachusetts, and has the world’s largest collection of New England artifacts,

comprising more than 125,000 decorative arts and objects and 1.5 million archival documents including photographs, architectural drawings, manuscripts, and ephemera. Engaging education programs for youth, adults, and preservation professionals, and award-winning exhibitions and publications are offered in person and virtually. The Historic New England Preservation Easement program is a national leader and protects more than 129 privately owned historic properties throughout the region.

About Stopping Stones

Stopping Stones, an initiative of the Engagement Arts Fund, is a nationally branded, locally-based public art project that honors enslaved Americans through permanent markers and community ceremonies. Each installation reflects the initiative's commitment to education, remembrance, and fostering multiracial healing. Through its work with local partners, Stopping Stones inspires communities to confront America's history of slavery, engage in racial healing, and support reparative justice.

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