



JerriAnne Boggis

Founder, The Harriet Wilson Project and Executive Director, Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire

In February 2002, JerriAnne Boggis, a long-term Milford resident, read an article in the local paper that would forever change the way she saw her adopted hometown and home state.

Jamaica-born, Boggis first came to U.S. as a student in 1977 when she went to college in Alabama. She transferred colleges two years later and moved to New Hampshire. As she said, “I had always planned to move after college, even after I got married and had kids I planned to move.”

However, that all changed that February when she read Peggy Miller’s article, “A Well Kept Secret,” in the Milford Cabinet. The article revealed that Harriet E. Wilson, the first Black woman to publish a novel in English in the world, was born and raised in Milford. Originally published in Boston 1859, Wilson’s book “Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black” is studied all over the world for Wilson’s innovative work of integrating two genres of the American literary tradition—the Sentimental Novel and the 19th century Slave Narrative.

Buoyed by this new knowledge that Black history in the state had its roots deep into the 1700s, and a growing sense of belonging, Boggis became the driving force behind the formation of the Harriet Wilson Project, a non-profit organization that was initially formed to promote the study of Wilson’s work in the Milford High School. The project morphed into much more. Under Boggis’ direction, the group staged events, wrote and produced a play on Wilson and established a Black History Trail that visibly tells Wilson’s story and Milford Black history.

In addition, the group commissioned an ambitious statue of Wilson for the Milford town park. After extensive fund-raising and promotion for the project, on November 6, 2006 the organization held a moving unveiling ceremony keynoted by famed actress and activist, Ruby Dee. The Wilson statue is the first figurative memorial in the state to honor a person of color.

In 2015, Boggis was named by the New Hampshire Humanities Council as one of the 40 most influential New Hampshire residents who have vastly enriched human understanding and whose original works and passion for excellence have put NH on the cultural map. In the same year, she also received the Telegraph award for being one of the 25 Extraordinary Women of Southern New Hampshire. In 2007, Boggis received the state Commission on the Status of Women’s 11th Annual Recognition Award for her tenacious efforts to raise awareness of Milford resident Harriet E. Wilson.

In 2009, Boggis was appointed to the U.S. Commission Civil Rights N.H. Advisory Committee and currently serves as its chair. She is on the Advisory Board for New Hampshire Listens and is a graduate of the Leadership New Hampshire class of 2018.

Boggis received her B.S. degree in Business Management at Southern New Hampshire University in Manchester and her M.A. in Writing & Communications at Rivier College in Nashua. Her publications include: *Refugee Resettlement in New Hampshire*, Center for the Humanities, UNH; “*Reflections and Memories*,” *Footsteps*, Cobblestone Press, 2005 and *Harriet Wilson’s New England: Race, Writing and Region*, Co-Editor, UPNE, 2007, a collection of essays, the first devoted entirely to Wilson and her novel. Harriet Wilson’s New England joins other critical works in the emerging field known as the New Regionalism in resurrecting historically hidden ethnic communities in rural New England and exploring their erasure from public memory.

A writer, educator, community activist and the Executive Director of the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire, Boggis currently works to correct the historical record on the racial complexity and richness of New Hampshire’s diverse past. By visibly honoring and sharing a truer more inclusive state’s history Boggis believes we can change the way our country understands human dignity when it is free of historical stereotypes.

Boggis is the proud mother of two sons, Shane and Marcus, and the doting grandmother to her grandson Ki-Mani and granddaughter Liana.