

# “Jude & Rhoda Hall” pocket-park at Swasey

Proposal June 2020

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Dear Swasey Trustees,

I am hoping that you will allow me to donate all profits from my three small mystery books highlighting Exeter history (Incident at Exeter Tavern, Incident at Ioka, and #3 due in 2021) towards a physical commemoration of the historical black community of Exeter. Exeter has State designation as the “Revolutionary Capital of NH”, and it would benefit us to also highlight the war contributions of our black citizens in a high-profile spot near our Independence Museum. Exeter had the highest percentage of blacks in NH after the war.

Exeter’s historical black enclave once stood near Swasey Parkway, Water and Green Streets (see 1845 map). I would like to honor that history and the contributions of its citizens with a small seating area on Swasey, near the historical black enclave. I believe this enclave once stood overlooking the parkway for over 100 years. I am not a scholar nor historian, and would welcome official confirmation.

My proposal is a small pocket-park with four benches (black metal town benches) along a curvy brick pathway, and a round, flat stone in the ground, centrally located and engraved - similar to the Exeter Gas Works Park. This park would be part of Swasey, and located at the very entrance to Swasey directly behind the head wall, as denoted in the picture. It is already sequestered from the rest of the parkway, and has trees and bushes. I envision a simple and low-maintenance area for sitting. Perhaps it could one day acquire State designation. Some of its many uses to serve both citizens and tourists are:

- A small outdoor classroom
- A gathering spot for local historic tours
- A ceremonial spot for Independence Festival, Memorial Day, etc
- A ceremonial spot for Juneteenth, Black History Month, etc
- A tourist destination, or stop on NH Black Heritage Trails
- A ready-made social-distancing gathering spot
- A place to enjoy coffee from St. Anthony’s, ice cream from Stillwell’s, etc
- A showcase/art/dining area for the Exeter Farmer’s Market

Why the name? I suggest “Jude & Rhoda Hall” because Jude was a noted soldier in the Revolutionary War, and fought at most of the famous battle sites in the North. Jude was arguably both the most famous patriot of color from NH, and also the most wronged in this town. See his Wikipedia entry. Rhoda was from the Exeter Paul family, her father Caesar Paul lived as an enslaved boy on Cass Street in the home of Major Gilman. Three of Rhoda’s brothers became some of the first black Baptist ministers in America. Jude and Rhoda lived on Drinkwater Road at Jude’s Pond and had many children. Three sons were kidnapped into slavery. This park would serve as a small redress of the Drinkwater Road event. I would like to partner with the town and other entities to make this a reality in a few years. I am happy to report indications of enthusiastic support by many citizens and entities for this project. I look forward to our discussion.

Thanks for your consideration,

*Renay Allen-Hitzrot*

CC:

Town Planner, Town Manager, Select Board, Heritage Commission  
Historical Society, Baptist Church, Racial Unity Team  
Independence Museum, Phillips Exeter (abutters)

