

# The Blackstone River Valley Regeneration Story

## Southeast Ohio

October 19, 2006



Dr. Robert Billington  
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council  
Rhode Island



# Blackstone River Valley, USA



Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution

“The Blackstone River.....carried enormous waves of prosperity, hope and the dreams of generations. It has also seen disappointment and despair as its waters carried away the textile industry to other shores.

But today, that has all changed thanks to the marvelous restoration and reclamation projects.”

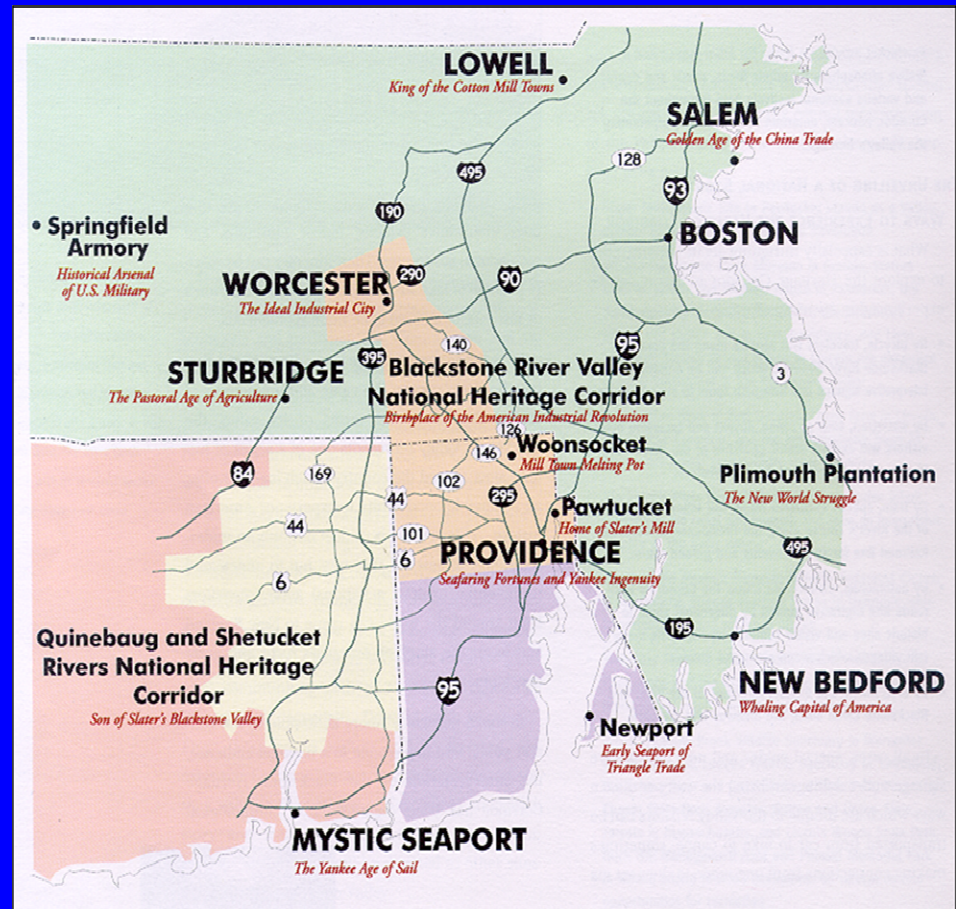
(J. Reed, US Senator, April, 12, 2006)



The Blackstone Valley is located in New England, the northeast corner of the United States. It is home to over 500,000 people living in twenty-four communities throughout a 454 square mile watershed.

It's the first industrialized river in North America.

This is where the American Industrial Revolution was launched and a business manufacturing model. Expanded, to transform the United States into an world super-power.



# United States

○ National capital



0 250 500 mi



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Millions of immigrants came to the Valley in search of the American dream. Yet, after 150 years of economic growth and success, the Blackstone Valley experienced a brutal economic and social downturn bringing high unemployment, empty factories, a decline in morale, and a polluted river.

In 1982 the unemployment rate was at a high of 14%.



From a dream, and a need to survive, emerged leadership, corporate responsibility, and a vision that sound tourism development could regenerate the Blackstone Valley.

This action in collaboration with other community building concepts, led to a drop in unemployment, improved quality-of-life, and return of pride-of-place.

Assisting with the turnaround, the US Congress recognized the significance of the Blackstone Valley by establishing the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission in 1986.





This Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission was designed to support, protect and celebrate the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution.

After years of economic, environmental, socio-cultural and historical degradation, thoughtful tourism development emerged in the Blackstone Valley to transform it into an interesting place to live, work and visit.

Today the Blackstone Valley is a viable destination and represents sustainable tourism management principles.



The Blackstone River Valley takes a place in the history of the United States because it is where the American Industrial Revolution began, thus changing the landscape and transforming life in America. The 46-mile long Blackstone River flows from Worcester, Massachusetts to the top of Narragansett Bay, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The importance of the Blackstone River arises in its power and energy produced by its 438 feet drop.

Only the Niagara River drops faster in North America, making the Blackstone a powerful river to harness.

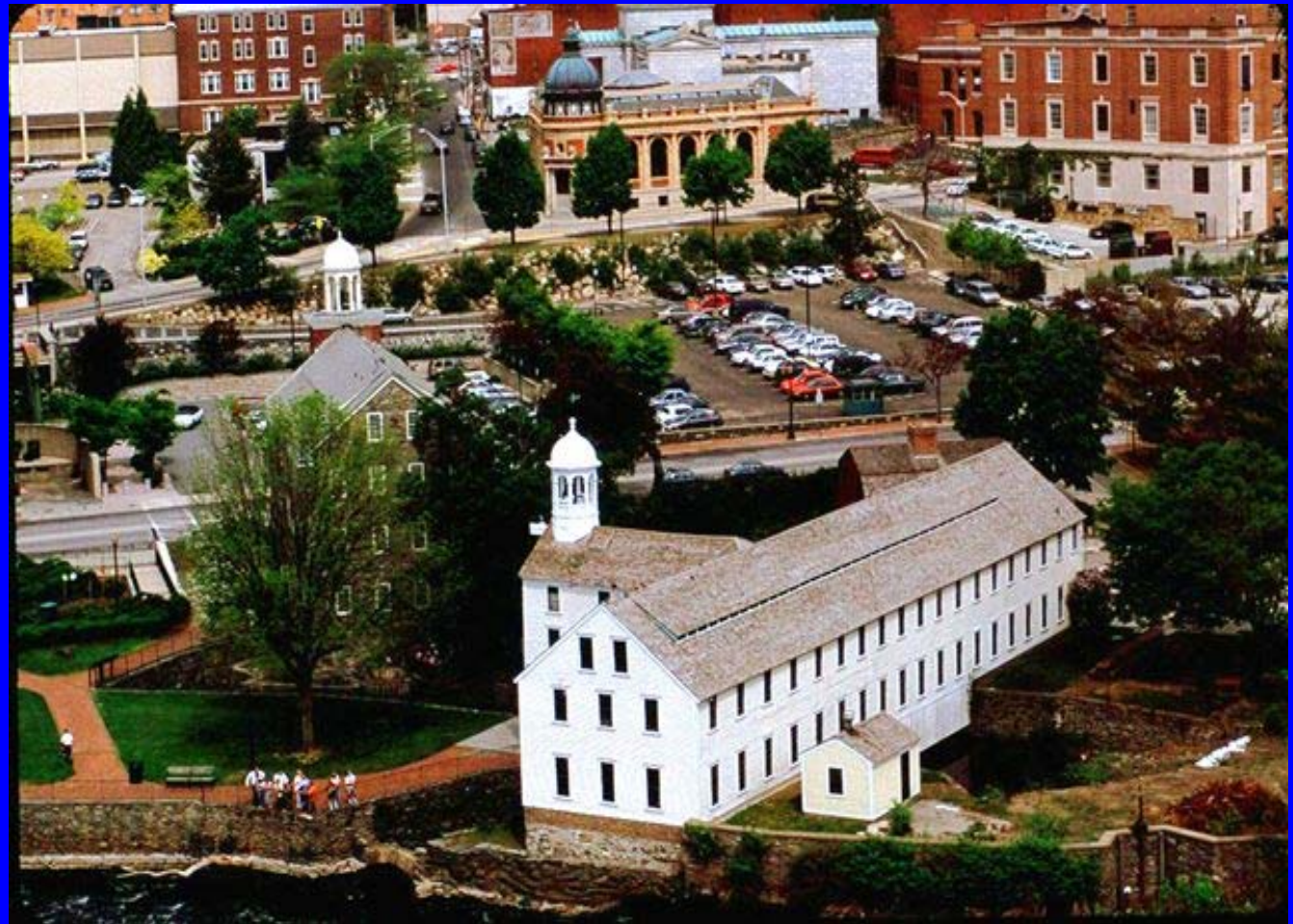
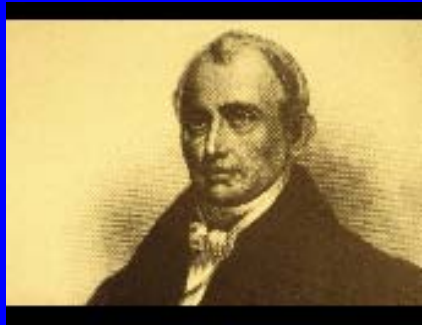


Samuel Slater became the “Father of American Manufacturing” and began the American Industrial Revolution.

He apprenticed for 6 years in Belper, England. Under an embargo of knowledge, he left Belper and secretly came to America.



Slater was able to reproduce the British cotton spinning, roving, and carding machines he had used as an apprentice in England, thereby giving birth to the America's Industrial Revolution; and with it, the sense of corporate responsibility.



For thousands of years the pristine waters of the Blackstone River were home to Atlantic Salmon, Shad, and Alewives, coming north up Narragansett Bay from the Atlantic Ocean.

The Nipmuck, Wampanoag and Narragansett Indians migrated along the banks of the Blackstone River.

Likewise, European settlers arrived to the Blackstone in 1635, building farms and villages along the river and using its waters for living, fishing and powering gristmills.



While encouraging economic growth, the textile industry had severe damaging impacts on the environment of the Blackstone River. Beginning with the construction of Slater's mill, private businesses built 45 dams in the Blackstone. As industry searched for financial growth, they unthinkingly disregarded the sustainability of the region and the health of the River.

This could be viewed as “corporate irresponsibility,” but more than likely no one knew they were polluting the Blackstone River.



Corporate Social Responsibility, as understood at that time, created a way of living never seen before in America. Families lived in houses built by the mill owners, attended corporate-built churches, made their purchases at corporate-owned stores, and sent children to school on Sunday to keep them occupied on their only day off. Private enterprises were growing as vehicles for economic development.

More factories were built, and more families came to work.

This pattern of development in the Blackstone Valley sustained itself well through the 1940's.



In the 1930's inexpensive, reliable electrical power and low-cost unorganized labor encouraged factories to abandon the Blackstone Valley and move South to the Carolina's, as they sought more efficient ways to manufacture. The exodus continues today.

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution the Blackstone River Valley attracted over 1,000 textile mills.





The Blackstone Valley was tired, abused and depleted. It needed a way out of high unemployment, abandoned mills, and a deteriorating quality of life.

No tourism materials developed by Massachusetts or Rhode Island, included the Blackstone Valley as a destination. Public policy-makers were indifferent to the difficulties the Valley was enduring.

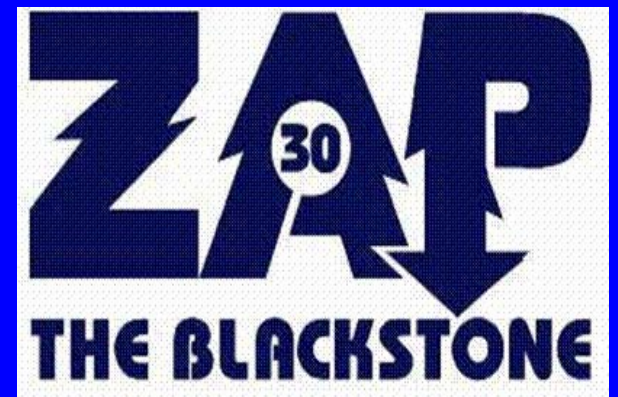
In response, corporate social responsibility was a priority emerging from within the community.



In the 1970's, signs of sustainable development began to emerge. Project ZAP, a locally based community initiative, turned out 10,000 residents, corporate and government leaders, to clean-up the Blackstone River. In addition, the creation of Earth day, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the US Clean Water Act emerged.

The state of Rhode Island was asked to analyze the creation of a linear park along the Blackstone's banks in the 1980's.

Because the Blackstone River flowed through Massachusetts and Rhode Island, this project required bi-state collaboration: Rhode Island and Massachusetts would have to clean the river and consider Purchasing land along the Blackstone to insure restoration.



# All ages turn out to clean-up the Blackstone River in 1972



Almost one hundred thousand automobile tires have been removed from the river and its embankments, and estimates indicate that it will take ten more years to clean up the river to a moderate level for swimming and fishing.

Community leaders have attracted hundreds of residents each year, to work on Blackstone River clean-up projects.



As the Valley embraced 24 communities in over 400,000 acres of land, where 500,000 residents lived and work, the nation needed an efficient and effective way to manage and interpret this challenging this landscape. A new type of historic and land preservation management for America called a National Heritage Corridor was designed.

The National Park Service would work collaboratively with both states and 24 communities, but it would not own land or buildings. Redevelopment projects would be undertaken by state, city entities, with the National Park Service providing, technical assistance, and financial support.



The characteristic of this new act provided that a top-down management framework from the federal government is not necessary. Instead, the Act is based on two principles: leadership from above and leadership from below.

This federal legislative Act was important to give local leaders a way to assist in preservation and protection of the lands along the river and to obtain resources to encourage economic development, while maintaining and enhancing the character of the Valley: its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of residents.



The US Department of Interior appointed a nineteen-person Commission to supervise and direct this partnership. The Commission's responsibilities were to (1) operate within the community; (2) improve the quality of the river; (3) preserve the history of the Valley; (4) support the diverse cultures and traditions; (5) develop interpretative programs about the Valley and; (6) integrate and encourage quality economic development. The Commission as of 2007 has 25 members.

Regeneration was based on the community needing to work together and corporations recognizing and managing their social Responsibility.



A strategy to plan tourism began with the incorporation of the not-for-profit organization, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, and the development of a business plan for tourism improvements in nine of the Valley communities. Despite many skeptics, the Council initiated a tourism development vision in 1985. In support of this vision, Rhode Island designated the Tourism Council as the regional tourism development agency for the Blackstone Valley.

The Council is now responsible for tourism development in Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Cumberland, Lincoln, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Glocester and Burrillville Rhode Island.





Comprehensive planning continued with the creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission to achieve the macro objectives the US Congress defined in 1986. These goals embraced education, land-management planning, historic and heritage preservation, environmental protection, and respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of the local communities.

Even though tourism was emerging in the Valley, the Heritage Corridor adopted strategies of sustainable tourism development as a Way to accomplish its objectives.



The first step towards transforming the Valley was to create a framework to encourage and promote socially responsible practices among corporations, consumers and communities.

The Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Commission encouraged residents and businesses to act responsibly and to prioritize a long-term return on investment instead of short-term economic benefits, which would support harmful and wasteful land use. Building a sense of responsibility among residents was essential in order to regenerate the Valley.



The Tourism Council created a Regional Comprehensive Tourism Plan for the Blackstone Valley in 1992.

The plan promoted Valley-wide economic development, while preserving factory-rich landscapes, socio-cultural diversity, and enhancing a highly degraded environment. The plan pointed the direction for public and private sectors to take creative actions and to advocate Valley tourism strategists to “think regionally and act locally.”

US Congressman, Kennedy, in April of 2006 stated, “the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has worked to inspire private and public investment, and renewed sense of pride in the Blackstone Valley.”



David Stein, Principal Partner of RE:Investments, Inc, a developer of historic real estate, noted “the Tourism Council built and maintains widespread support for its vision from every constituent and stakeholder of the community including residents, regulators, politicians, the National Park Service, environmental organizations, colleges and universities, as well as the business community.”

This strategy was also the basis for tourism planning in the Blackstone Valley of Massachusetts and ultimately it became the foundation for the development of a joint tourism strategic plan and program, which has been in place since 2000.



Stein noted that the real estate firm was first drawn to the Blackstone Valley because of its rich history and abundance of magnificently crafted mill buildings poised for adaptive reuse. “We stayed to work in the Blackstone Valley largely because of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.”

“The Council is first among organizations, in the public and private sectors, dedicated to strengthening Valley communities and to fostering economic growth. I attribute my company's success directly to the extraordinary work and accomplishments of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.”



As a result of “planning and doing,” in two decades of the Tourism Council has overseen the emergence of the region as a significant destination for both heritage and nature-based tourism.

David DePetrillo, Director Rhode Island Division of Tourism and immediate past Chair of the U.S. Council of State Travel Directors stated, “The Blackstone Valley is probably one of the best examples in the country of a destination that built its tourism promotion and product development program from practically a zero base. The numerous innovative new products it has developed...have helped to solidify the tourism industry as a critical part of the region’s economic base.”



Meanwhile, the US Government has assisted the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission with \$1,000,000 yearly to develop programs.

The Corridor expends these funds on programs to clean the river, develop tourism, construct museums, interpret the national story, and develop a river access system. The place-making actions of the Tourism Council and the National Heritage Corridor have attracted over \$350,000,000 in private investments, along the river, since 1986.



Creativity, leadership and collaboration at all levels of the community have helped the Blackstone Valley.

Four Visitor Centers are open in the Valley with another under construction.

Samuel Slater's Mill has been preserved and is the centerpiece for riverfront development, a museum offering working exhibits and living history presentations.

Park Rangers travel the Valley to "tell the story" of the Birthplace of America's Industrial Revolution and now there are at least 21 species of fish living in the Blackstone River where in 1970 there were two species.





The Blackstone Canal, constructed alongside the river in 1828, has recently been placed on the US National Register of Historic Places and is now a destination for education, public recreation and passive enjoyment.

Many of the Blackstone's mills and mill villages are being restored and converted into housing or sophisticated office and retail space.

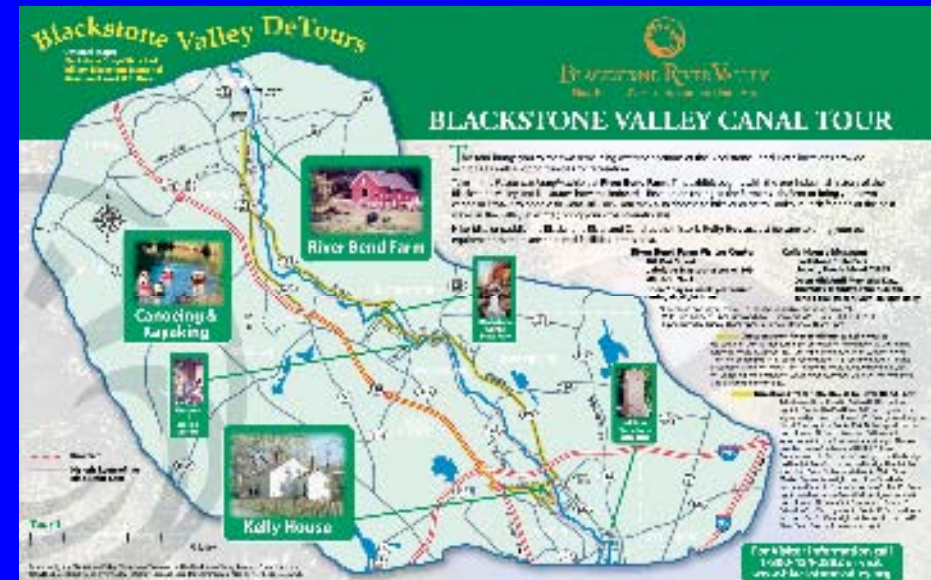
The city of Woonsocket led the effort to preserve its history and the culture of the Valley by developing a museum to give tribute to the immigrant groups who shaped the lifestyle of the Valley.



The cities of Pawtucket and Providence have developed arts districts. A bicycle path that extends the length of Blackstone is one-half constructed.

Since 1993, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has carried nearly 300,000 people on the riverboat *Blackstone Valley Explorer*. In 1999, the Council launched two 50-passenger ferryboats to to use the riverway as an alternative to the Interstate Highway System.

In 2000, a British-built canal boat, was imported to serve as Rhode Island's first floating bed and breakfast.



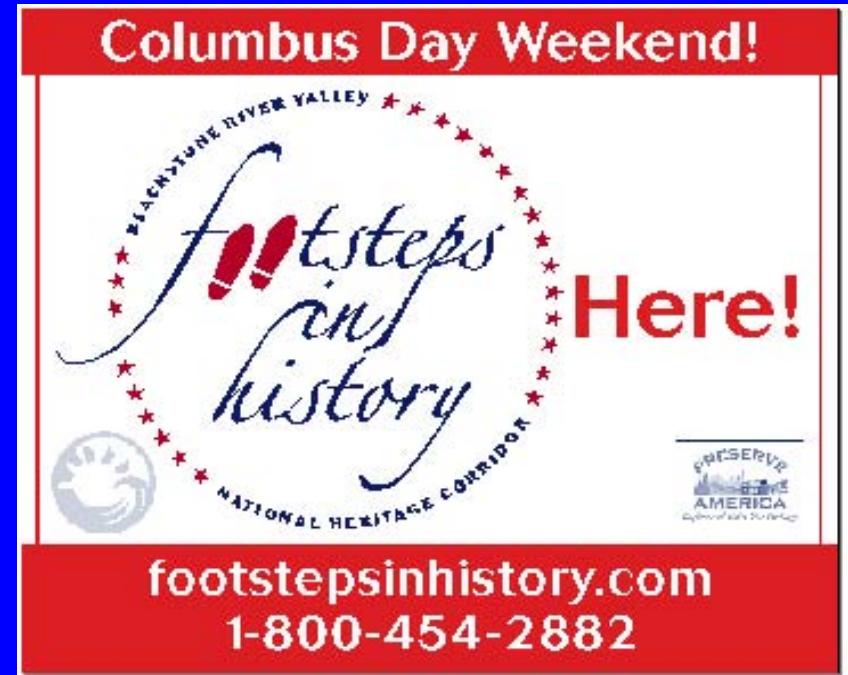
Events like the Rhode Island Chinese Dragon Boat Race and Taiwan Day Festival collaborate with city and state governments, private developers, local residents, the Chinese American Church, the Taipei Office of Culture and Economic Development and the Taiwan Visitor Association to develop an riverfront event with international entertainment.

Herb Weiss, Cultural Affairs Officer Of Pawtucket said, “The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council works closely with the City of Pawtucket to plan and develop tourism in our community. Through their efforts, Pawtucket has become a destination for tens of thousands of people.”



In 2005 and 2006 a first-time collaborative event highlighted the historic, artistic, cultural and environmental attributes of the Blackstone Valley providing a weekend to celebrate the Preserve America designation.

The program is an inclusive, arts, environmental, heritage and cultural event encompassing 24 communities and 150 venues throughout the Valley.

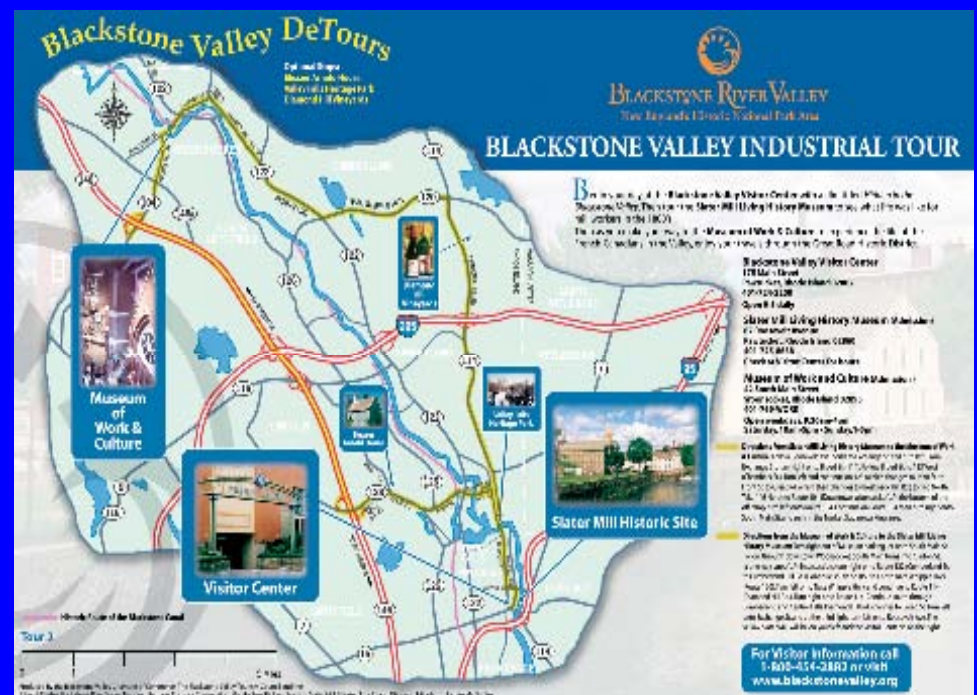




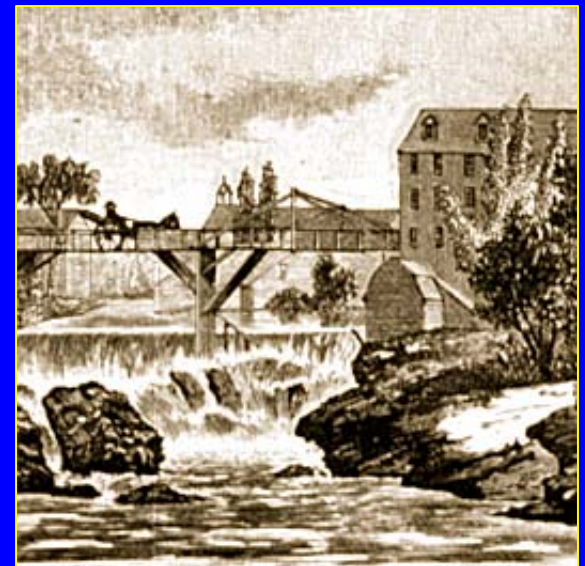
In March 2006, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council was present to receive a \$120,000 federal grant from First Lady Laura Bush to expand the Blackstone Valley Footsteps in History event through 2006 and 2007.

Elderhostel, study groups, and communities have used the Blackstone Valley as a classroom. The Tourism Council currently offers ten Elderhostel programs annually. Today, several regional educational institutions, such as Johnson & Wales University, Holy Cross College, Clark University, Brown University, and University of Rhode Island include the Blackstone Valley as part of their curriculum.

John Gregory, President of the Northern Rhode Island Chamber of Commerce notes that “because of the pride instilled by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the business community has stepped up to contribute.



In other cases it's encouraging employees to volunteer for everything from community clean-up days to volunteering for the National Park Service. The Chamber is fortunate to have a partner like the Tourism Council. We have worked with them on traditional projects as well as less traditional projects like the Blackstone Valley Flood Forum in early 2006. The Tourism Council and the Chamber reacted to the concerns of the community after the flood in October 2005 and the forum was one of the results of that shared pride in the Valley."



These positive changes led corporations to be responsible for community stakeholders. Several Blackstone Valley investors and corporations are making decisions on their future plans using social and ethical principles, realizing they could be more profitable by being sensitive to the preservation, social and environmental goals of the community.

According to Stein, “having reached the end of its useful life as a source of water power the Blackstone River was depleted of life and left unfit to attract new life. Into this environment steps the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. It started with the basics -a vision of a renewed, richly revitalized river valley. It was a vision of a region where people are drawn to live, work, recreate and otherwise celebrate the natural and made-made wonders.”





To match the industrial starkness of the Valley with its post-industrial vision, the Tourism Council set about the daunting task to lead this catalytic change pixel-by-pixel.

According to Fraser (2005), Rodwell (2006) and Dodds & Joppe (2005), the definition of corporate social responsibility and sustainable tourism share similar principles and elements, in that both concentrate on identifying and engaging stakeholders and assuring forethought of how their actions impact others.



“The Valley has come back to life, with new generations living along its banks and a river that is cleaner and more usable everyday. It is certainly a destination and hopefully becoming one of growing international recognition”

(US Senator Jack Reed, April, 2006)



While the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council considers heritage development, social improvement, infrastructure development, education improvements, cultural sharing and economic development all equally important “bottom lines,” and essential for a destination to develop and maintain genuine competitiveness, economic impacts of tourism are always of most interest to practitioners.



According to a preliminary study for the calendar year 2004, performed by the Research Department of the Travel Industry Association of America, 12% of the visitation to the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor is for business purposes, 48% of visitors stayed overnight and \$474.4 million was spent on transportation, lodging, food, entertainment and recreation, and incidentals. This activity generated 6,400 jobs, \$124.6 million in wages and salary income and \$39.6 million in tax revenue.



With 21 years' experience in sustainable tourism planning and development in the Birthplace of America's Industrial Revolution, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council collegially shares its expertise. Led by skilled practitioners, this Laboratory program provides a transformative learning experience that prepares key decision makers and shapers, to contribute effectively to their communities.

Peter Conway, Vice President of Conway Tours/Grayline highlighted collaboration existing in the Valley stating:

“The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has demonstrated how important it is for non-profit tourism agencies to work with corporations and the business community at large to achieve their goals.



To augment its budget, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has reached out to companies such as Conway Tours/Gray Line of Rhode Island to build partnerships in order to further develop and enhance tourism in the Blackstone Valley and beyond.”



Sustainable tourism planning and development has created positive changes in the Valley over two decades.

Partnerships among the private and public sectors, historic preservation, landscape enhancements, and education have stopped the economic “free-fall” and created awareness “to endure that the Blackstone Valley is not just a place to live but a place worth living.”



Through the Blackstone Valley’s efforts, business constituencies have begun to recognize the importance of being responsible to the society where they operate, beyond their traditional functions of encouraging wealth and profit.

The Blackstone Valley uses Geo Tourism Principles and U N World Tourism Organization principles to move toward a sustainable visitor destination. The Valley has worked to preserve its environment, respected the socio-cultural authenticity of the local communities, and provided economic growth to its stakeholders.

Leadership, creativity, collaboration and commitment from all sectors of the community have lead the Valley to find its direction, follow its vision and share it with others along the way.





Geotourism principles are practiced in Blackstone Valley.

Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographic character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well being of its residents.

National Geographic Society's principles: Integrity of place, international codes, market selectivity, market diversity, tourist satisfaction, community involvement, community benefit, protection and enhancement of destination appeal, protection and enhancement of destination appeal, land use, conservation of resources, planning, interactive interpretation, evaluation.

# Blackstone Valley State Park, Visitor Center



In September of 2006 US Congress reauthorized the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor for an additional 5 years.



# Tourism Economic Impact in the Blackstone Valley Massachusetts and Rhode Island

•Total Person Trips	2.3 million people
•Travel Expenditures	\$474.4 million
•Travel Generate Employment	6,400 people
•Travel-Generated Payroll	\$124.6
•Travel-Generated Taxes – State and Local Government	\$39.6

# Branding Blackstone River Valley

- The Blackstone brand was one of an industrial wasteland. This had to be changed
- Our brand is more than slogans and signs
- The brand had to include customer service
- Our brand involves a high level of quality
- The brand is the lifestyle of the region



BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY  
National Heritage Corridor Commission

1000 North Street  
Worcester, MA 01095  
Tel: 401-752-8250  
Fax: 401-752-0630



BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY  
National Heritage Corridor Commission

1000 North Street  
Worcester, MA 01095



## EXPLORING VERNAL POOLS

Winter 2000



### Saturday Ranger Programs

Every year more and more frogs, salamanders and turtles disappear from the Blackstone Valley. Help us save them!

#### January 15th (1-3pm), February 5th (1-3pm)

Join an aerial search party at Riverland Farm

Each year frog, turtle and salamander breeding pools are filled in and destroyed in the Blackstone Valley. Help us locate the pools and save their inhabitants. Learn about the lives of frogs, turtles, and salamanders. Learn how to find breeding pools on an aerial photograph. Learn how to locate pools on a topographical map. Visit one of the pools! A perfect activity for ages 7 to 90. *Free to all.*

#### March 4th (1-3pm), March 11th (1-3pm)

Join a forest search party to find vernal pools at Purgatory Chasm

In March of every year salamanders, turtles, frogs, and other fascinating creatures lay their eggs in vernal pools in the forest. Using maps created during January and February's programs, we will locate and explore a vernal pool. Visitors will start up with beaver fairy stories, huge wood frog egg masses, and perhaps a ♀ spotted salamander. Participants will learn how to locate a vernal pool near their home and save their neighborhood pool from destruction. For all ages. *Free to all.*

#### March 18th (10am-3pm)

Especially for Educators! *Free! A Vernal Pool Exploration at Rhode Island Audubon North Smithfield RI.*

Vernal pool education expert, Gail Howe from Mass. Audubon's Worcester Office will lead a vernal pool workshop on how to involve your civic group or school class in the vital effort to save our valley's vernal pools. Call 401-762-0250 to sign up.

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission



## BLACKSTONE CANAL NORTHBRIDGE - UXBRIDGE, MA

### Towpath Walk



*A self-guided walk along  
the historic Blackstone Canal.*

John B. Chute

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission



## SPRING EVENTS IN THE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

2002

April • May • June



*Spring games at the Willard House  
and Clock Museum, North Grafton, MA*

John B. Chute

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

National Heritage Corridor Commission





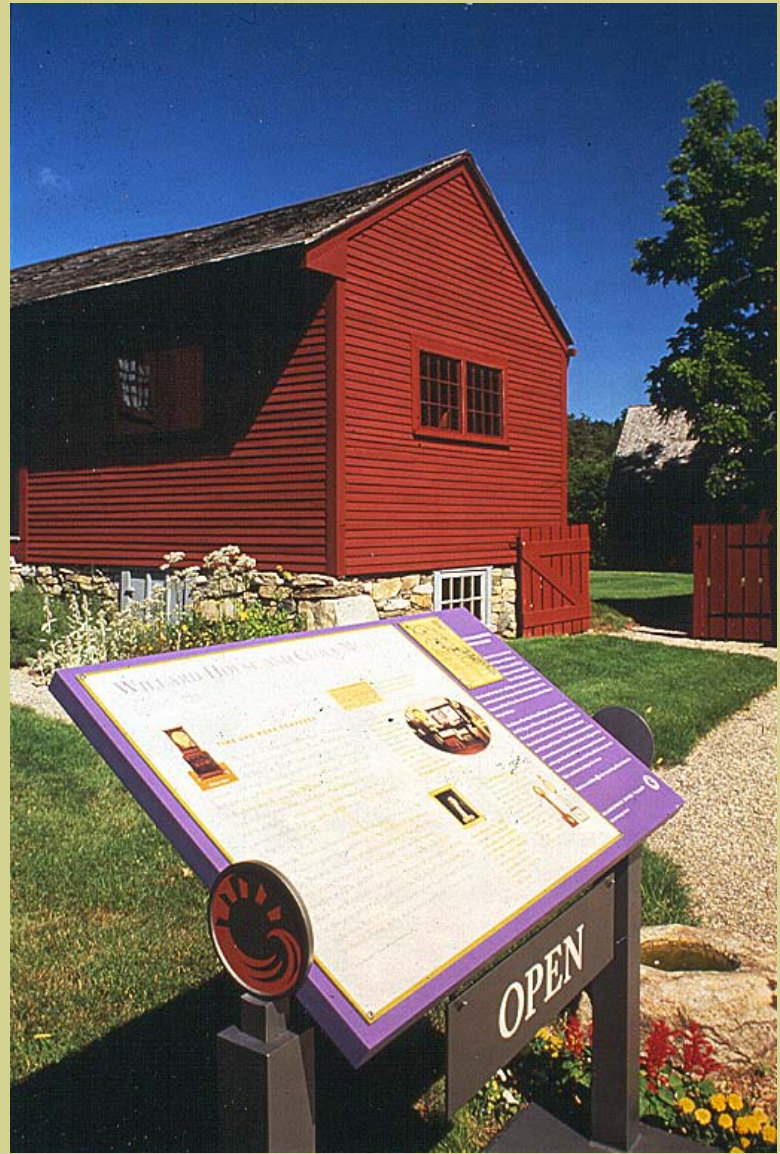




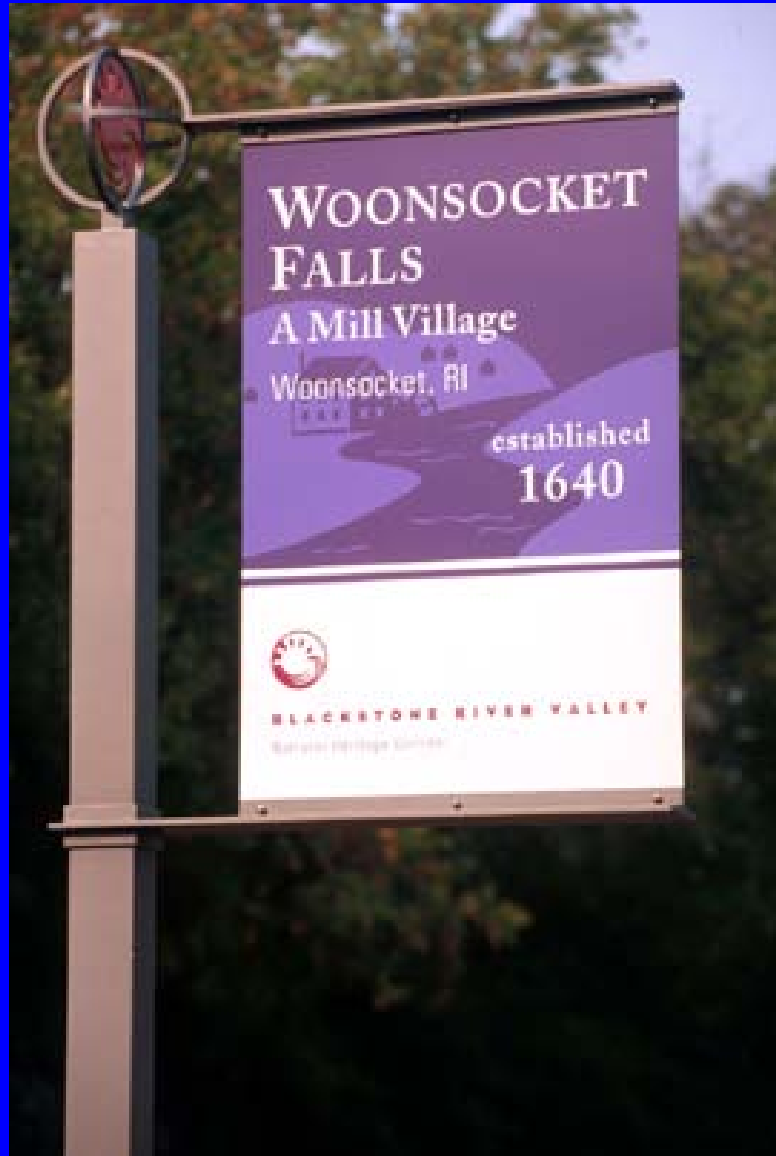
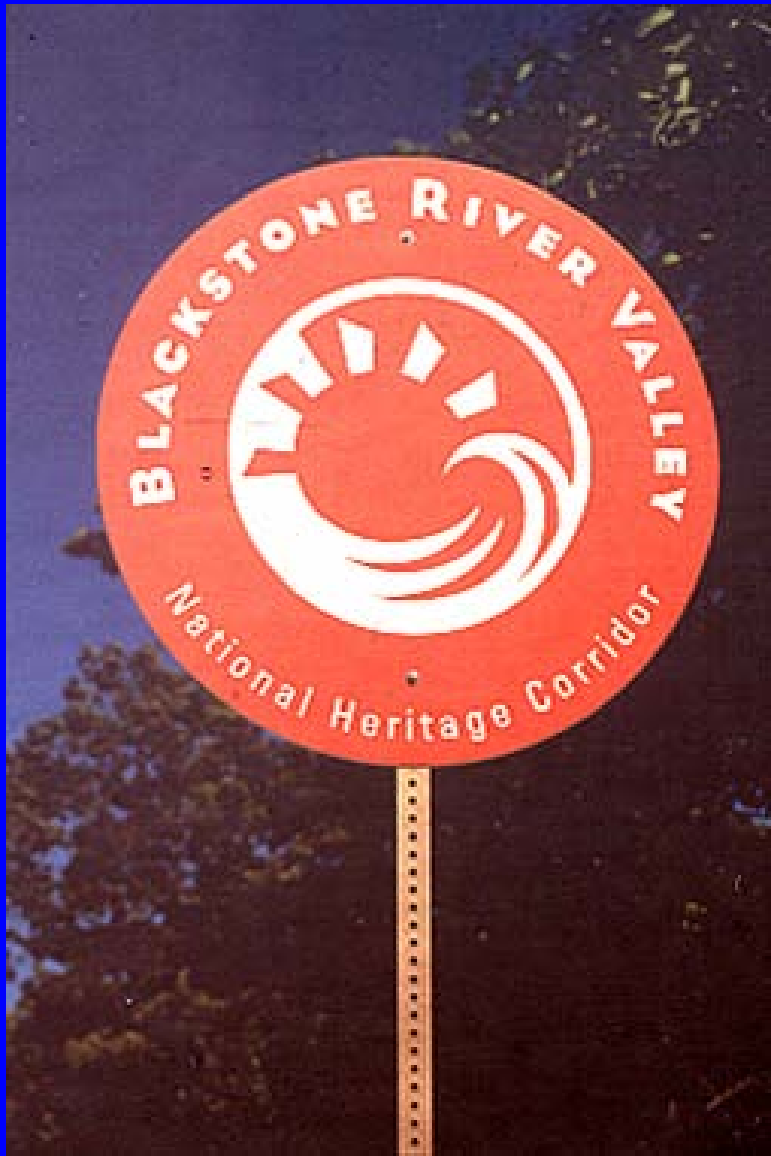
By **BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY**  
*New England's Historic National Park Area*

**EXPLORE THE PANORAMIC REGION OF 400,000 ACRES THAT**  
 is revered for magnificent fall foliage, quiet New England  
 villages, farm stands and fruit groves ripe for the picking,  
 vibrant outdoor recreation, and a spectacular display of  
 American architecture through the ages. Located in the heart of  
 New England, stretching from Worcester, Massachusetts to  
 Providence, Rhode Island, the Blackstone River Valley is a  
 very special National Park. Running the length of "America's  
 earliest working river," the 46-mile Blackstone, it is here  
 that America's Industrial Revolution began in 1793.

Stop by one of our Visitor Centers: Pawtucket, Wrentham, Uxbridge  
**1-800-454-2882 • [www.blackstonevalley.org](http://www.blackstonevalley.org)**









# BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

New England's Historic National Park Area





A blue-toned illustration of a village scene. In the foreground, a long wooden boat with a curved prow is on the water. Several people are on the boat, some standing and some sitting. In the background, there are several houses with gabled roofs and chimneys, and a large tree. The scene is rendered in a sketchy, line-art style.

**Thank you**