

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Listening for a Change – Northfield Oral History Project Starts April 24, 2022

NORTHFIELD MA -- The 350th Anniversary Committee of the Town of Northfield is currently laying the groundwork for an ambitious slate of programs to be presented to Northfield residents and the wider community throughout the town's anniversary year in 2023. The Committee's goal is to "honor the past, enjoy the present and look forward to the future."

One of the initiatives that will begin during April of this year and has the potential to satisfy all three intentions is an oral history project conducted by Carrie and Michael Kline of Sunderland. After working extensively together for over 30 years on behalf of federal, state and local arts and cultural agencies throughout New England and the mid-Atlantic region, the team of professional interviewers, with previous documentary experience in the Valley, has received a grant from the Northfield Cultural Council to train up to 16 volunteers in the arts of listening and preserving local knowledge and memories of the people of Northfield in connection with the 350th Anniversary. Two consecutive training sessions will be held on April 24 and May 1, from 1-4 p.m. at the Centennial House B&B, 94 Main Street, Northfield.

The Kline's call their methodology *Listening for a Change*, which offers a clue to their approach, and which Carrie Kline describes as "respectful and encouraging." Developed over several decades, it is the strategies they employ to gather and shed light on local culture and history through the eyes of the people who have lived it. Local residents are a reservoir of information, inherited family stories and eye witness accounts about Northfield's rich history.

Through the training, the Kline's will expand the town's capability to elicit and record the recollections of Northfielders of all ages and affiliations with visits by volunteer interviewers. The first product of what they accomplish will be an 'voice bank' of stories which will be housed and preserved in the local library.

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Once the interviews are complete, the collection will be indexed for themes and stories that can be brought to life in theatrical, documentary or digital formats, panels and productions during the anniversary year.

The training is free and open to both Northfield and area residents with the expectation that the volunteers will conduct the interviews leading up to the year-long commemoration.

The Anniversary Committee believes that this 350-year milestone in the town's history provides a perfect opportunity to gather the recollections and memories of residents before they are lost, when they can entertain, educate or enrich our understanding of Northfield, and perhaps even influence the ways in which the town prepares for the future.

To that end, the Committee and the historians are also seeking residents who are willing to share their stories and reminiscences with the trained interviewers. Sharing is at the heart of a project like this. All stories have value. All stories help develop a feeling for what living in Northfield has been like from various points of view. All stories are instructive. Residents--current and past, year-round and summer, born here or transplant--can submit their own names or be recommended by their friends and neighbors to be interviewed by contacting the Community Engagement group of the 350th Committee at Northfield350news@gmail.com.

In their work, Michael and Carrie Kline have witnessed the power that gathering and sharing stories can have on communities—to widen the lens on an issue, to give people a voice, to impart meaning and even to heal. Together with their cadre of interviewers and willing interviewees, they hope to bring some of the story of Northfield to life through recording the experiences and perspectives of everyday people. Participants on both sides of the microphone will be engaged in the Anniversary as co-creators of the story of Northfield that no one person could tell.

A description of the oral history project appears on the Anniversary website, www.northfield350.org. For information about how to become a volunteer interviewer through the training, contact Carrie or Michael Kline at kline@folktalk.org or 978-894-4625 or via the Community Engagement Group of the 350th Anniversary at Northfield350news@gmail.com.

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