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February 10, 2021

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vermont Artist Commissioned To Paint Alexander Twilight Portrait for Vermont State House

MONTPELIER, VT – Middlebury artist [Katie Runde](#) has been selected to paint a large-scale portrait for the Vermont State House of [Alexander Twilight](#), an important early Vermont educator and minister. Twilight is believed to be the first American legislator of African descent.

“I am honored to be commissioned to paint such an important figure,” Ms. Runde said, “both in terms of Vermont’s enterprising, progressive past and how we now choose to model our future.”

Mr. Twilight was a forward-thinking teacher and minister, beloved by his students, and today he is recognized as an important early Vermonter. His portrait was co-commissioned by the Friends and the office of [State Curator David Schutz](#) to honor Twilight’s achievements and character. The cost of the portrait will be covered by a generous grant from the [National Life Group of Vermont](#).

For several years, the Friends of the Vermont State House and Schutz have had Twilight on a short list of possible portrait commissions. It’s part of a larger plan to broaden the representation in the State House of women and people of color. “It is the edifice that represents our government, and all Vermonters need to feel connected to it,” Schutz said.

Mr. Twilight was a man of remarkable accomplishments. Born in Corinth, Vt. in 1795, he rose above his childhood status as an indentured servant to attend and graduate from Middlebury College in 1823. Middlebury claims him as the first American of African descent to graduate from college.

He devoted his life to education, moving to Brownington in 1829 where he became the principal of the Orleans County Grammar School and the pastor of the Brownington Congregational Church. Both institutions flourished under his leadership, and in 1836, he built an imposing, four-story granite schoolhouse and dormitory that still dominates the hilltop village of Brownington. Twilight called it “Athenian Hall,” and today it is owned by the Orleans County Historical Society and is known as The Old Stone House. That same year, Twilight was elected to represent Brownington in the Vermont Legislature.

Ms. Runde was selected from a field of 18 talented artists who applied for the commission after plans for the portrait were announced last year. A special committee of the Friends and the State Curator’s Office based their selection on Ms. Runde’s outstanding skills as a portraitist, and what the selection committee saw as her ability to capture the essence of her subjects and bring them to life.

Ms. Runde, 35, has lived in Vermont for the past 10 years. She is a realist painter and portraitist working primarily in oils. A lifelong artist, she apprenticed under realist painter Evan Wilson of Hoosick Falls, N.Y. She has a degree in folklore/ethnography from University College, Cork, Ireland, and an M.A. in religious studies from the University of Chicago Divinity School. She is a candidate for local ordination in the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont.

Creating the portrait is expected to take at least a year.

Schutz noted that it is not yet decided precisely where the large portrait will hang in the State House, but that it will be a prominent location.

“We are so very grateful to the Friends and to National Life as they provide this opportunity to portray America’s first legislator of African descent for the walls of our State House,” Schutz said, noting that the work will pay honor to “a remarkable early Vermont educator, and his lifelong commitment to his chosen community and school.”

National Life Group said that they are proud to fund the Alexander Twilight portrait. “Both Twilight and National Life have their roots in the early nineteenth century in Vermont. For National Life, this portrait is an opportunity to shine the spotlight on an extraordinary man who has not received the recognition he deserves as an educator, man of faith, and citizen legislator.”

“‘Do Good, Be Good, Make Good’ are our company’s core values,” said Chris Graff, vice president of communications. “Alexander Twilight personified those values, and National Life welcomes the chance to pay this significant and important tribute to someone whose story is worthy of a permanent place on the walls of the Vermont State House.”

Drew F. Bush, assistant director of the [Old Stone House Museum](#) said Twilight indelibly shaped the history of the region. “His dedication to his students is manifest in the monumental granite building he constructed as a dormitory (the heart of today’s museum) and our efforts to create programs and services that mirror his legacy of educational innovation.”

On February 24 at 5 pm Historic New England and The Old Stone House Museum will present an online lecture by Middlebury College scholar William Hart titled [“On His Own Resources: The Enigmatic Alexander Twilight, 1795-1857”](#) to register.

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