

## News Alert/Press Release

TO: All Area Media Outlets

FROM: The Deep River Historical Society

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**For Immediate Release**

### **National Public Radio Feature Story On Connecticut's Ivory Trade Airs on *Morning Edition***

***Most listened to radio news program in America***

**Deep River, CT....**While powerful international action is underway to save the endangered African elephant by ending the global ivory trade, the hidden history of Connecticut's past role in that trade has sparked unprecedented local efforts and a National Public Radio news story about it.

On Tuesday, August 19, the feature story, "Elephant Slaughter, African Slavery and America's Pianos," was broadcast on NPR's *Morning Edition*, the largest radio news program in America with 14 million listeners. *Those who missed the broadcast can hear it any time on the NPR website where a full replay, transcripts, photos and links can be found:* <http://www.npr.org/2014/08/18/338989248/elephant-slaughter-african-slavery-and-americas-pianos>

The NPR story, developed by Science Correspondent **Christoper Joyce**, is a retrospective on the old ivory trade in Connecticut, in the towns of Deep River and Essex. For over a century, companies there were the world's largest importers of ivory, used mainly to manufacture piano keyboards. Today, citizen efforts in these towns have taken root to help save the endangered African elephant by working to achieve a worldwide ban on the sale and trafficking of all ivory.

\* \* ~ **End Short News Alert** ~ \*

From 1840 to 1940, two companies—Pratt Read in Deep River and Comstock Cheney in Ivoryton, a section of Essex—imported as much as 90% of the world's ivory to make combs, billiard balls, toothpicks, buttons and most significantly, piano keys for an uncontested global market. \*

"From the start of the Industrial Revolution and expanding through the Civil War, piano key-veneer production by our two Connecticut factories had no equal—Pratt Read and Comstock Cheney supplied all of the major piano makers from Baldwin to Chickering to Steinway," said historian Brenda Milkofsky, Director and Curator at the Connecticut River Museum in 1990, when the exhibit "Combs to Keyboards: Ivory Cutting Industry in the CT River Valley" first documented the extent of Connecticut's involvement with elephants.

By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the prodigious output of these two factories resulted in annual piano sales exceeding 350,000 a year. (One elephant tusk could make 45 piano keyboards.) So extensive and profitable was Deep River's ivory keyboard business, that the trade earned the little river town its title, "Queen of the Valley."

To fuel this prosperity, and to supply the trade over its lifetime, at least 500,000 African elephants died for their tusks,\* and two million African natives were kidnapped to carry those tusks from the interior to coastal ports in Africa for shipment to Connecticut.\* Over half died in the grueling transport, and those who survived were sold by the ivory traders as slaves on the international market.\*

Rather than shying away from the towns' dark history, the people of Deep River and Essex are speaking up, acknowledging their past, teaching it to the younger generations, and contributing directly to anti-poaching and elephant rescue efforts in Africa today.

"Deep River and Essex have a unique relationship to the elephant," said Jeff Hostetler, President of the Deep River Historical Society, and an expert on the area's past ivory industry. "We have a special responsibility here to help prevent the elephant's certain extinction if the illegal ivory trade is not stopped."

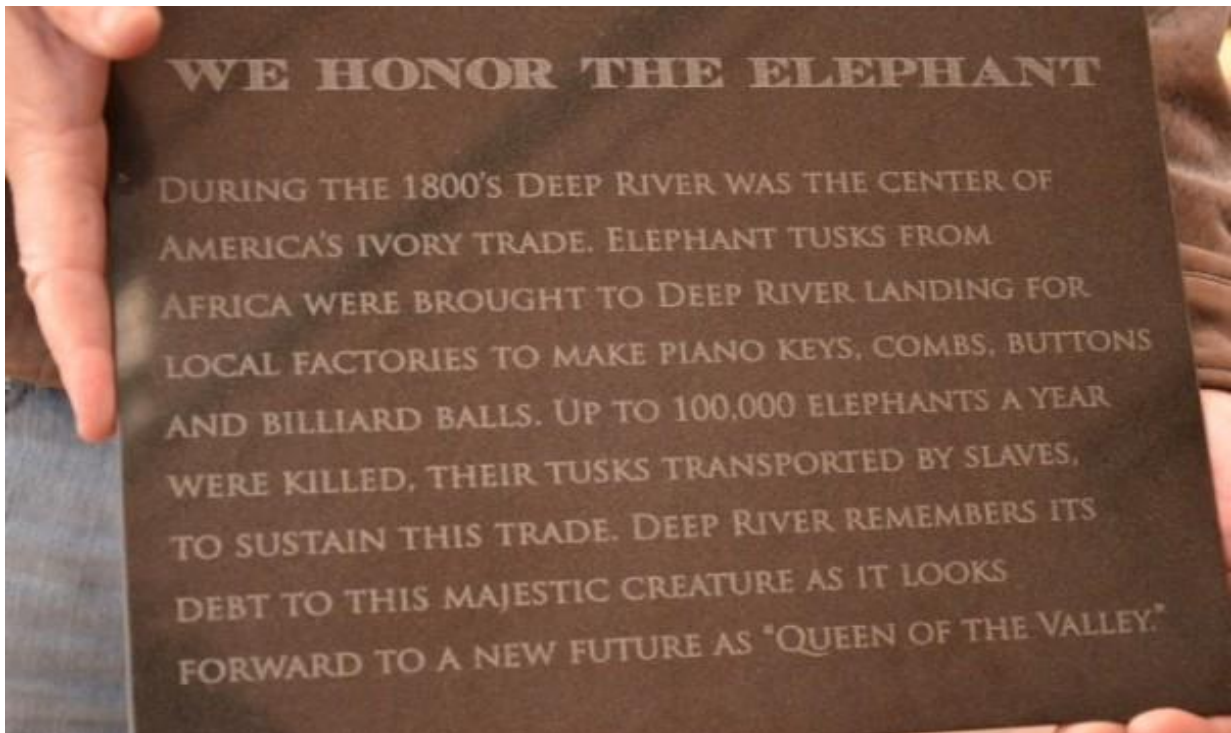
Fueled by massive poaching, the African elephant is gravely endangered today, with total numbers at 400,000, down from several million in 1890. A new study published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, documents that 100,000 elephants were poached between 2010-2012. If present killing rates continue—100 a day to tap an \$18B/yr ivory market centered in China—scientists say elephant birthrates will be unable to keep pace: Extinction by 2030 for savannah elephants; 2024 for forest elephants.

"While we can't change the past, we can change the future," said Peter Howard, Chairman of the Deep River Elephant Tusk Force, the local citizens group working to raise public awareness. His group has the cooperation of the Historical Society, where the Tusk Force is housed, as well as the Rotary Club, the Selectmen's office, and the schools.

Citizen efforts in the town have been praised by the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Daniel Ashe, who wrote in a recent letter to Mr. Howard: "The example set by the people of Deep River will inspire citizens across the nation to join the global fight against poaching and illegal wildlife trafficking."

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While visiting the Deep River-Essex areas to see the old ivory factories, and to interview historians, town leaders and citizen activists for this story, NPR reporter Christopher Joyce made his first stop the **Deep River Town Hall**. A large statue of an elephant stands outside, donated in 2012 by the Rotary Club, and accompanied by an inscribed plaque. It marks the town's commitment to "Honor the Elephant" and to "remember our debt to this magnificent creature." (See full text of plaque in photo below)



**“We Honor the Elephant” plaque on the statue of the elephant located at the Town Hall, Deep River, CT**

“The town’s decision to adopt the African elephant as the town icon is an important source of hope, and it has unlocked a compassion for elephants that would not have been possible in this community without its shameful history,” said Dr. Paula Kahumbu, a distinguished National Geographic Explorer and CEO of *WildlifeDirect*, an anti-poaching organization in Kenya. Dr. Kahumbu was a keynote speaker at last year’s Deep River elephant education program, where local funds were raised to support her group, as well as another international anti-poaching organization, *Save the Elephant*.

“People in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Connecticut did not understand what their use of ivory meant for the elephant or the slave, just as the Chinese today turn a blind eye to poaching to satisfy their desire for ivory trinkets,” said Mr. Howard.

“But people of the 21<sup>st</sup> century *do* know about the elephant’s plight, and we’re determined that on our watch we will not allow this majestic animal to go extinct,” he said.

The Tusk Force efforts include public education programs in the schools and the broader community to raise awareness of the elephants’ endangerment; direct support for save-the-elephant, anti-poaching organizations; CT state legislative initiatives to join NY and NJ in closing illegal ivory trade loopholes; and school children efforts to support young elephants, orphaned by poaching.

To learn more about the elephant and the work of the Deep River Tusk Force, go to <http://www.deepriverhistoricalsociety.org/elephant.html>

Mr. Joyce, an experienced journalist and NPR Science Correspondent for over 20 years, has visited Africa often, reporting on wildlife, and especially the plight of the elephants. His stories can be heard on all NPR's news programs, including NPR's *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered* and *Weekend Edition*.

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***\* Sources for facts and figures cited in this press release can be found in the accompanying document, "Sources, NPR Press Release."***

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**Additional NPR Story Background:** Mr. Joyce's NPR story includes coverage of the former **Pratt Read Co.** in Deep River, now the Piano Works Condominiums; the **Comstock Cheney** plant in Ivoryton, now Moeller Instruments; and the world's last remaining **Ivory Glass Bleach House**, on the grounds of the Deep River Historical Society. Also visited was the **Deep River Landing** on the Connecticut River, at the foot of Kirtland St., where hundreds of thousands of tusks were offloaded for the Pratt Read Co. ivory business in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Experts heard on the NPR program include **Jeff Hostetler**, Deep River Historical Society President and **Rhonda Forristall**, Curator at the Historical Society; **Richard Conniff**, of Old Lyme, nationally known author, naturalist and wildlife expert. Additional reference sources include **Brenda Milkofsky**, of Essex, independent curator and CT Valley historian; and Higganum author **Anne Farrow**, expert on northern slavery and the impact of the ivory trade on Africans. Citizens interviewed for the story who discussed what is being done today in Connecticut to help save the elephant include **Dick Smith**, Deep River's First Selectman; **John Guy LaPlante**, Deep River Piano Works resident and local historian; **Lorianne Penzara-Griswold**, Deep River Rotary President; **Marta Daniels**, Chester writer and independent historian; and **Peter Howard**, chairman of the Deep River Elephant Tusk Force.

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**For further information:**

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**Deep River Historical Society website on the elephant and the ivory trade:**  
<http://www.deepriverhistoricalsociety.org/elephant.html>

**National Public Radio website with the Connecticut Elephant story:**  
<http://www.npr.org/2014/08/18/338989248/elephant-slaughter-african-slavery-and-america-pianos> Listen to the full story as aired, read a summary, view photographs, illustrations and additional information on the ivory trade, as well as links to related ivory and elephant websites.