

# THE SAMUEL HARRISON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fall/Winter 2008-09

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To find out more  
information, call  
(413) 663-7868  
Ask for Dawn

We would love  
to hear from  
you.



Harrison and Blayne Whitfield, Great Great Grandson.

On Friday, August 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00 a.m., the Samuel Harrison Society hosted a groundbreaking ceremony that marked the official start of renovation work on the 150 year old house at 82 Third Street in Pittsfield which belonged to the Rev. Samuel Harrison. The event was well attended and special guests included Senator Benjamin Downing, Representative Christopher Speranzo, Council President Gerald Lee representing the office of Mayor James M. Ruberto and Ruth Edmonds Hill, Great Granddaughter of Samuel

The opening remarks were given by the president of the Samuel Harrison Society, Linda Tyer. Ruth Edmonds Hill spoke to the crowd about the history of Samuel Harrison and his family and the events that have led up to this historic occasion. Blayne too has fond memories with his family growing up and living in the house once owned by his famous grandfather. He spoke of the present efforts to make Samuel Harrison's life story a legacy for all to share. Special guest speaker Jerome Spratling, representing Pittsfield's next generation of leadership, shared his thoughts on the significance of this project and what it will mean to the youth of the community in the future. Special commemorative gifts were then presented to the honorary guests followed by the ceremonial groundbreaking.

After years of planning, the 19<sup>th</sup> century home finally began its \$500,000 restoration and is on its way to becoming an important landmark for the City of Pittsfield and a place of civic pride. When the project is complete, possibly by late next year, the Harrison House will serve as a museum of Black history.

## Restoration Progress Report



Peter Hamm from Historic Preservation Associates gives us an update on the status of restoration at the Samuel Harrison House. The exterior restoration work is almost complete! The window sashes are being painted and the windows should be installed by the end of January. A setback occurred in December due heavy rains that caused a 20' section of the foundation wall to collapse.

There was no damage to the house itself and a new concrete foundation has been poured. Work on the basement level is ongoing and work on the interior will begin in the spring.

The Samuel Harrison Society  
P.O. Box 378, Pittsfield, MA 01202

[www.samuelharrison.org](http://www.samuelharrison.org)

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**Dawn Morin**

## Did You Know....

In December 1902, funds were raised for a memorial tablet that was to be placed in the Second Congregational Church in memory of Samuel Harrison who had passed away in 1900. It was to have the following inscription as reported in the *Pittsfield Sun*, December 11, 1902:

“In Memory of the Reverend Samuel Harrison, 1815-1894. Ordained and Settled over this Church as its First Minister, 1850-1862. Again its Minister from 1872 until his death. Member of the Association of Congregational Ministers of Berkshire County for Forty Years. Chaplain 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862. A Wise Leader, an Honored Citizen, an Ardent Patriot, a beloved Messenger of the Lord, he wrought well for his People, his Country and his God. I have Fought a good Fight. I have finished my Course. I have kept the Faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of Righteousness.”

The tablet (or a portion of it) was recently discovered at the Second Congregational Church with a slightly different inscription. It was a great find!



**\* August 21, 2008 \***  
**The Samuel Harrison Society attended the summer play, "The Colors of War: A Story of Love and Courage" at Ventfort Hall in Lenox, MA.**

## **MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

SHS on "Jerry's Place," on Pittsfield Public Cable TV – February 6, 2009.

Black History Month – Art Project sponsored in part by the SHS at the Lichtenstein in Pittsfield February 11<sup>th</sup> – March 8<sup>th</sup>

4<sup>th</sup> Annual Samuel Harrison Birthday Celebration on April 11<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. at the Second Congregational Church

Annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade  
City of Pittsfield

**Scheduled Board Meetings:**

January 15<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.  
February 12<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.  
March 12<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.  
April 2<sup>nd</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.  
May 14<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.  
June 11<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 p.m.



## HOUSATONIC HERITAGE WALK 2008

On October 5, 2008 the Samuel Harrison Society, in conjunction with Heritage Walks 2008, sponsored a historic walk through downtown Pittsfield that highlighted African-American history and included stops along the way that have been designated by the African-American Heritage trail as historically significant. Frances Jones-Sneed, Professor of History at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and Society Board Member, led the walk throughout Pittsfield's urban center starting at the corner of North and Linden Streets

and ending at the homestead of Rev. Samuel Harrison. Stops along the way included the former NAACP Office at 467 North Street, Persip Park at the corner of North Street and Columbus Ave., Woolworth Protest Site at 137 North Street where NAACP members protested the chain's refusal to serve blacks at lunch counters in the south, Park Square, the Berkshire Athenaeum, Charles A. Persip American Legion Post 68, the Rainbow Restaurant, former site of the Second Congregational Church and the Rev. Samuel Harrison house at 82 Third Street. The group of about twenty hikers joined us and had a wonderful time. Temporary trail maps are available through the Samuel Harrison Society. Look for an official trail guide and map to be published in the Spring!



## THE BIG READ – Pittsfield Community Reading Project

The Samuel Harrison Society participated in the Pittsfield community reading project called The Big Read. This year the events for this program focused on Harper Lee's book, *To Kill A Mockingbird*.

This project is sponsored by the National Endowment of the Arts and is an initiative to get communities all over the country to rediscover the classics of literature through this initiative. The City of Pittsfield planned a month long celebration with events that included art shows, theatrical performances, book readings, writing workshops and much more.



The Samuel Harrison Society chose to host a family genealogy day at the Second Congregational Church to encourage the community to talk about various aspects of their lives while living in Pittsfield. The theme, "Growing Up In Pittsfield" focused on community activities including leisure time, family/church life, work and school experiences, etc., and the participants were encouraged to share their oral histories documenting the rich cultural heritage of the city. Working on your family history and genealogy is a great way to document and share your heritage and to preserve those precious memories for posterity!

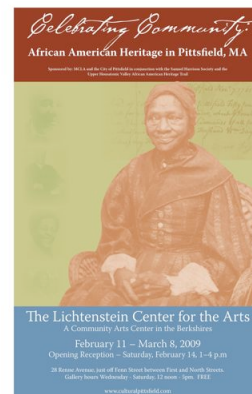
## More Pictures from Groundbreaking Ceremony



## African American Heritage in Pittsfield – Art Project

The City of Pittsfield Office of Cultural Development, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) African American Biography Project, the Samuel Harrison Society, and the Upper Housatonic Valley African-American Heritage Trail joined forces to present an exhibition celebrating Pittsfield's African-American culture and heritage.

“Celebrating Community: Pittsfield’s African-American Heritage” was on display at the Lichtenstein Center for the Arts in downtown Pittsfield from Wednesday, Feb. 11, through Sunday, March 8. An opening reception was held Saturday, Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, which had a special focus of collecting images and stories of love, family and relationship within the Berkshires’ African-American community in honor of Valentine’s Day.



The “Celebrating Community” exhibition was in two parts. First, was an installation designed by MCLA Graphic Designer Leon Peters that served as a guide to African-American history and sites in the City of Pittsfield. The second half is a collection of photographic portraits of contemporary members of Pittsfield’s African-American community by Pittsfield photographer Ernie Kirk. “Celebrating Community” also included the opportunity to collect memories, images, and oral histories from the Pittsfield community by videographer Mati Kin in order to continue and expand the story of Pittsfield’s African-American community, which has had a history and presence here since the Revolutionary War.



We offer a special thanks to Frances Jones-Sneed, Society Board Member and Professor of History at MCLA, for her inspiration and vision for this project and all her efforts in organizing such an important event that adds to the rich history of the City of Pittsfield.



### 141<sup>st</sup> Birthday Celebration of William Edward Burghardt DuBois

On Saturday, February 21, 2009 at 2:30 pm, there will be a birthday celebration of W.E.B. DuBois at the Clinton African Methodist Episcopal

Zion Church in Great Barrington where Dr. DuBois attended church as a young man and wrote of Great Barrington’s rising African American culture.

Architect John James and Dr. Frances Jones- Sneed of the Samuel Harrison Society will be at the event to present the progress made on the restoration of the Samuel Harrison House in Pittsfield to the public.

Other discussions will include new developments in regard to the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail. David Levinson, Author and Anthropologist will present new research on Elizabeth “Mum Bett” Freeman and a Memorial for W.E.B. DuBois boyhood homesite will be presented on the National Landmark in Great Barrington.

### 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Birthday Celebration of Rev. Samuel Harrison



Plans are underway for the celebration of Samuel Harrison’s 191<sup>st</sup> birthday on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at 2:00 pm at the Second Congregational Church in Pittsfield.

Special guest speaker is Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing who will give the keynote address. Elected in 1982, Rep. Rushing serves the Ninth Suffolk District in the House of Representatives.

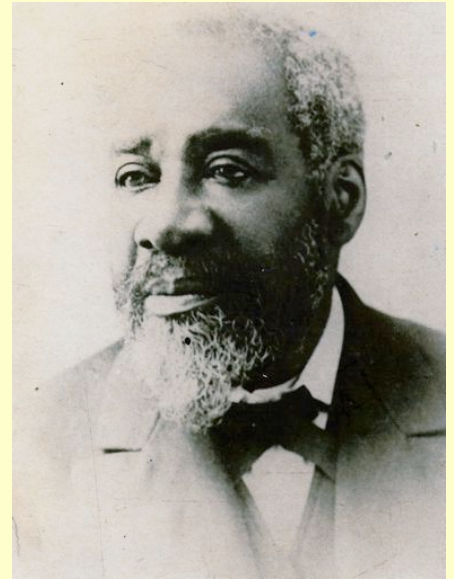
Representative Rushing is a human rights and civil liberties advocate and the issues of highest concern to him relate to economic and housing development; environmental justice and health care.

Mark you calendar and check out our website for updates on the birthday party plans.



# Out of the Archives

## Bolton Family of Savannah, Georgia



In Samuel Harrison's autobiography written in 1899, he states that his mother and father were slaves belonging to John Bolton who lived in Savannah, Georgia. When Samuel Harrison was born in 1818, the Bolton family was in Philadelphia, where his mother was a "waiting maid" for her mistress. Having been born to slaves, he too was considered a slave. Some time after his birth, he writes that the family returned to Savannah where they received "emancipation papers" from their owners. While the circumstances and documentation regarding this gift of freedom have yet to be discovered, there is much that has been learned about the slave owning family of the Boltons. The Bolton genealogy can be traced back to 1100s in England and can be found in the book *The Family of Bolton in England and America 1100-1894: A Study in Genealogy* (Embodying the "Genealogical and Biographical Account of the Family of Bolton," published in 1862 by the Rev. Robert Bolton, A.M. rewritten and extended.) by Henry Carrington Bolton, PhD, and Reginald Pelham Bolton, M.Inst.C.E., New York: Privately Printed, 1895.

The progenitors of the Bolton family in America were Robert and Ann (Clay) Bolton. Robert Bolton was born in St. John's Parish in Wales and came to the American colonies in 1718, settling in Philadelphia, PA. He married Ann Clay in 1721 in Christ Church in Philadelphia and was a successful and well-respected merchant.

Their eldest son, Robert, was born on January 1, 1722 in Philadelphia. He received an excellent education and led a carefree life. At the age of nineteen he found his religious inspiration through the preaching and lessons of Rev. George Whitefield. His sisters were sent to Rev. Whitefield's Orphan House (Bethesda College) near Savannah. Robert married Susannah Mauve. Being afflicted with a pulmonary condition, he found the climate of Savannah, Georgia more suitable for his health and moved there sometime after 1741. He began acquiring property, even receiving grants from King George II. He lived a Christian life and was a well-respected man. He died at the age of 67 on May 4, 1789.

His only son was also named Robert Bolton, Jr., who was born in Christ Church Parish, Savannah, Georgia (now Chatham County) on December 1, 1757. He received a good education and learned business through placement in one of the first commercial houses in Georgia. Upon his father's death, he acquired one of the largest estates in Savannah. He too received land grants from King George III in the town of Brunswick, parish of St. David. He took up the cause of liberty and was with General George Washington at Trenton, NJ on December 25, 1776. He married Sarah McClean of Chestertown, Maryland in 1781 and lived in Philadelphia for a while but returned to Savannah and was one of its most prominent citizens. He was also a very successful merchant with the commercial house of Newell & Bolton and then Robert & John Bolton. They were one of the first exporters of "Sea Island" cotton. He was a very religious man and active in the church community and supported Christ Church.

About 1784, hearing that his young cousins, John, Edwin and Curtis Bolton of Chestertown, Maryland had been left orphans (their parents died of "a prevailing epidemic"; two other children died as well) and being cruelly treated by their guardian, Rev. Maclure who cared more for their property, Robert Bolton brought them to safety in Savannah. He brought up these children as his own, two marrying his daughters and taking John into business, making him junior partner of the commercial house of Robert and John Bolton.

On his death bed, Robert Bolton wrote a letter to his family asking them to keep their religious faith and giving them advice on how to make their way in a world full of "vice and wickedness." Of particular interest, he instructed them "Never suffer the poor and distressed to depart from your doors with a frown; remember you are but stewards, and woe be to those that are unfaithful to the trust reposed in them. Be you kind to your servants, know that they are not your slaves by right, but by custom. God made all free; but man in his depraved state, enslaves man; therefore it is your duty to make their servitude more a pleasure than a burden." He died in Savannah on December 4, 1802 at the age of forty-five.

His Last Will and Testament is dated November 19, 1802 and proved in the Court of Ordinary for the County of Chatham on February 7, 1803. He left his large estate to his wife and children, specifically making arrangements for his slaves. To his wife he left "as many of the negroes as she may wish to keep about her." To his eldest daughter he left the following negroes: "**Sam, a Blacksmith and Harlow, his wife, with their children Jenny and Sam.**" (According to Samuel Harrison's application for marriage to his second wife, he lists his mother's name as Jenny. It is believed that this is his family. Most likely, he was named after his uncle and grandfather.) Robert had other slaves that he bequeathed to his children, including George, a Blacksmith and his wife Hannah, Jack a Blacksmith, Cudjoe a boy, Ben and George a painter. Others were named, Joe, Tom, John, Coxe and Boatswain, Cudjoe a cooper and Eve, his daughter. A clause in Robert Bolton's Will specifically forbade a "public sale of any of my negroes, either for the purpose of division or for any other cause; if they must be sold, they shall choose their own masters."

Because some of the negroes he bequeathed in his Will were owned jointly with Robert and John Bolton, (the commercial business and his cousin) he only had a two thirds ownership of them. So, another clause in the Will allowed his cousin John Bolton the option of paying two thirds the value with interest to the child they were intended for. This is most likely how he became the owner of Samuel Harrison and his parents.

John Bolton was the eldest son of John and Eleanor (Dougherty) Bolton of Chestertown, Maryland born on August 31, 1774. His father was the third son of Robert and Ann Bolton of Philadelphia and had purchased a large estate in Maryland known as Bolton's Meadows. He was active in the cause of liberty and was a member of the Association of the Sons of Liberty for the Eastern Shore of Maryland. John and Eleanor both died of scarlet fever as well as two other children in 1784. The surviving children were Ann, John, Edwin and Curtis. John Bolton, Jr., married twice, first to his second cousin Anne (daughter of Nathaniel Adams and Anne Bolton – they had no children) and then to another second cousin, Sarah Bolton in 1804 (daughter of Robert and Sarah Bolton of Savannah). Besides becoming a business partner with Robert Bolton, he became in 1816, one of the first Vice-Presidents of the American Bible Society for George, an office which he held until his death. After moving to New York, he became alderman of the ninth ward in 1834. He was one of the first organizers of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company. He died at Baltimore on October 15, 1838 and was buried in the family vault at St. Luke's Church in New York City.

Samuel Harrison must have had some affection and respect for the Bolton family as he named one of his sons, Samuel Bolton Harrison in 1841. It is some consolation to know that while Samuel and his parents were slaves, they at least belonged to a family who had a conscience about the institution of slavery and showed compassion for those held in bondage, bestowing upon them the ultimate gift of freedom.

*-Dawn Morin*

## About the Samuel Harrison Society

The Samuel Harrison Society is a non-profit organization whose mission is to restore and preserve Rev. Harrison's homestead; and use it as a place to teach the values embodied by his noble life, his enduring beliefs, his extraordinary writings; and to define a chapter in the story of us as a people by providing greater insight into African-American history.



*PRESERVATION WORKS!*

**SAMUEL HARRISON HOUSE**

- THIS PROPERTY, WHICH IS LISTED IN THE STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, HAS RECEIVED A MATCHING GRANT FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS PRESERVATION PROJECTS FUND THROUGH THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION, SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH WILLIAM FRANCIS GALVIN, CHAIRMAN.
- RESTORATION OF THE SAMUEL HARRISON HOUSE IS BEING SUPPORTED IN PART BY A SAVE AMERICA'S TREASURERS GRANT ADMINISTERED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND BY THE PITTSFIELD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT RECEIVED FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

JAMES M. RUBERTO, MAYOR

**THE SAMUEL HARRISON SOCIETY, INC.**

JOHN A. JAMES, ARCHITECT  
AGRICOLA CORPORATION HISTORIC PRESERVATION CONSULTANT

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Tax-deductible contributions, payable to the Samuel Harrison Society, are welcome and may be sent to:

**Samuel Harrison Society  
P.O. Box 378  
Pittsfield, MA 01202**

**[www.samuelharrison.org](http://www.samuelharrison.org)**

The Society welcomes volunteer assistance, application for membership and donations.