

THE SAMUEL HARRISON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Summer 2008

Inagural Edition

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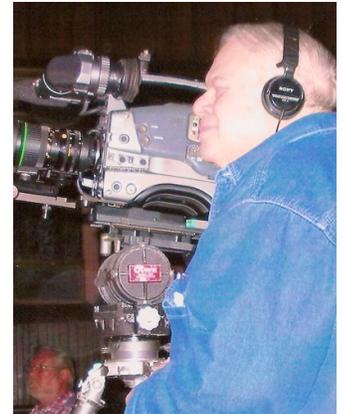
*Join the Friends of
Samuel Harrison*

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

**We would love to
hear from
you.**

Video Filming of Restoration Project

David Kreisworth, a former cameraman for ABC who is now living in the Berkshires, has agreed to document the restoration of the Samuel Harrison House by filming the various stages of progress. He was a cameraman and engineer for ABC Radio and Television in New York and also worked for Broadcast Quality Video for 25 years until he retired about 10 years ago. He now does free-lance video work especially for fundraising and community service. He also works on video projects for local access television on Pittsfield Cable. On Wednesday, June 25th, David was able to get an initial thirty minutes of taping with the help of Ivan Newton and the contractor, Peter Hamm. David is very enthusiastic about the Samuel Harrison project and is happy to be involved.



Restoration Progress Report



Peter Hamm from Historic Preservation Associates gives us an update on the status of restoration at the Samuel Harrison House. To date the front foundation wall has been rebuilt and the rest of the foundation has been re-set and re-pointed. The chimney has been re-built and the old roof has been stripped and repaired in preparation for new wood shingles. Structural work has begun and lines run for new underground electrical service and plumbing connections. Construction of reproduction exterior doors and window frames has been completed and there has been preliminary excavation and site work done.



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

www.samuelharrison.org

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Linda Tyer
President

SAMUEL HARRISON SOCIETY



Welcome to the Samuel Harrison Society's inaugural newsletter. This very first issue is being released on the day of the ground breaking ceremony commemorating the restoration and preservation of the historic Samuel Harrison House. It all began in May 2004 when Ruth Edmonds Hill, great-granddaughter of the Reverend Samuel Harrison (1818-1900), traveled with her husband, Brother Blue, to Pittsfield from Cambridge by train to meet with a small group of Pittsfielders interested in saving the Samuel Harrison House. Ruth's intuition that her family homestead had historic value saved the modest 19th century house in one of Pittsfield's oldest neighborhoods known as Morningside from the wrecking ball. She had notified the Massachusetts Historical Commission of her great-grandfather's lifelong pioneering spirit and they, in turn, denied the city's request to demolish the deteriorating structure. At just about the same time, filmmaker Mike Kirk was producing a documentary "A Trumpet at The Walls of Jericho: The Untold Story of Samuel Harrison" which aired on PBS in February of 2005.

Today, the Samuel Harrison Society is extraordinarily grateful to Ruth for trusting our stewardship of her family homestead. We are committed to honoring Harrison family history by restoring and preserving Reverend Harrison's homestead; using it as a place to teach the values embodied in 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. We have a significant, yet still undiscovered, piece of national history and civic pride right here in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The Samuel Harrison House is a National Register of Historic Places landmark, a National Parks Service "Save America's Treasures" Preservation Project, and a Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Project.

The Samuel Harrison Society's very first champion was Congressman John Olver who believed in our efforts and secured a Save America's Treasures matching grant in the amount of \$246,000. Congressman Olver's significant support validated our belief that we have an historic asset that needs saving and launched a collaboration of efforts by Mayor James M. Ruberto, State Representative Christopher Speranzo and State Senator Ben Downing. Their combined contributions have provided the financial means to achieve the restoration.

It is with great pride that we have achieved this milestone – a ground breaking. And we anticipate with enthusiasm a day in the not too distant future when we welcome our first visitors to the Samuel Harrison House.

Sincerely,

Linda M. Tyer
President
Samuel Harrison Society

More Treasures Found...

During recent renovations and demolition on the inside of the house, some amazing artifacts were uncovered. Peter Hamm reports that some of the things found in the basement include an old ladle, a cover from a



ledger book and some small animal bones. In the attic they found some bottles including one from the Berkshire Brewing Company. We know this would not have been Samuel Harrison's! They also found some Edgeworth tobacco tins. Perhaps the greatest find in the attic was a wooden

sword that was most likely a child's toy. Other items found include a hat pin, an old coin, a marble and pieces of pottery. Peter was also able to salvage several layers of wallpaper from the kitchen which might be useful when it comes time for interior restoration work.



LAWN CARE SERVICES

After much searching and prodding, we finally have someone to work on the over-grown property at the Harrison house.



Ray Jones from Energetic Lawn Care & Landscaping, Inc. has agreed to take care of the overgrown vegetation and removal of debris. He will then maintain the grass on a regular basis. For future reference, Mr. Jones also does snow removal in the winter and his wife is a professional landscaper.

Ray Jones can be reached at Energetic Lawn Care, P.O. Box 794, 1304 Churchill Street, Lanesboro, MA 01237; (413) 442-4873; energetic@vgrnet.net.



2008 4th of July Parade in Pittsfield.

The SHS was accompanied with marchers from the Morningside and Westside Initiatives and Downtown, Inc.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

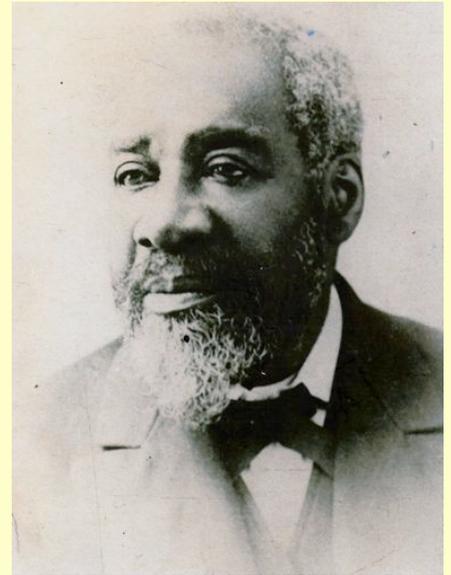
"Colors of War" @ 7:00 pm
Ventfort Hall, Lenox, MA
August 21st, 2008.

Groundbreaking Ceremony: At the Harrison Property, August 22nd @ 10:00 am.

Next Board Meeting: September 25th @ 5:30 pm.

Out of the Archives

Timeline of Samuel Harrison's Life (Based on his Autobiography and other sources)



- April 15, 1818 Samuel Harrison is born in Philadelphia, PA.
- Abt. 1821 Mother living in New York with the Bolton family, originally from Savannah, GA. (1820 census lists John Bolton in NY with 3 slaves). The family returned to Savannah sometime after Samuel's birth and received their freedom. The Harrison's went to New York and lived with the Bolton family on Liberty Street.
- Abt. 1823 Samuel attended school in New York until about 1827.
- Aft. 1827 Samuel sent to Philadelphia to learn the shoe trade with an uncle who was a minister – born a slave in South Carolina.
- 1836 Samuel stayed with his uncle until he was 18 years old. Samuel's mother moved to Philadelphia. Attended church at the 2nd Presbyterian on St. Mary's Street.
- 1836 Samuel went to school in Peterboro, Madison County, NY supported by Gerrit Smith, Esq. (The Peterboro Manual Labor School).
- Oct. 1836-1839 Samuel attends and graduates from the Preparatory School at Western Reserve College (now Western Reserve Academy) in Hudson Ohio.
- Summer 1839 Samuel returned to Philadelphia and worked eight months for Judah Dobson, a bookstore owner and publisher. He also worked at a shoe bench on South Third Street. Joined the Demosthenian Institute (An African-American literary and debate society). Also had a shoe making business on South Second Street below Chestnut.
- Abt. 1840 Samuel marries his first wife Mary Ellen Rhodes from Delaware.
- June 1847 Samuel went to Newark, NJ and opened a shoe shop. Went to the Third Church of Newark and did missionary work in the village of Orange.
- 1848 Samuel became licensed to preach by the Newark Presbytery (an intern step to ordination).
- Jan. 1850 Harrison moves his family to Pittsfield, MA and serves as first minister of the 2nd Congregational Church.

Samuel Harrison Timeline continued...

- 1850 Harrison ordained by the Berkshire Association of Congregational Ministers shortly after arriving in Pittsfield.
- 1852 Purchased a lot of land on Third Street in Pittsfield for \$50.
- Fall 1858 Samuel had built and moved into his own home at 82 Third Street in Pittsfield.
- 1860 Samuel secured a mortgage from Berkshire County Savings Bank for \$150 to pay off his personal debts from construction of his house.
- 1862 Harrison abruptly retires from the pulpit of the 2nd Congregational Church. Works for the National Freedman's Relief Society until 1863.
- July 18, 1863 Col. Robert G. Shaw leads the Massachusetts 54th Volunteer Regiment in the assault on Ft. Wagner.
- Aug. 1863 Samuel goes to South Carolina to express the sympathies of the Commonwealth to the men of the 54th as directed by Gov. John A. Andrew.
- Nov. 12, 1863 Samuel receives a commission and is mustered into the army at Morris Island as Chaplain of the 54th until March 14, 1864. He was discharged from the army due to health reasons. Returned to work with the National Freedman's Bureau.
- July 1865 Moved from Pittsfield to Newport, RI and the Union Congregational Church.
- Dec. 1866 Went to Sanford Street Congregational Church in Springfield, MA (now St. John's Congregational Church) and was the acting pastor for four years.
- 1870 Went to Portland, Maine and was the acting pastor for the Fourth Congregational Church from Aug. 1870 to April 1872.
- April 1872 Harrison returned to Pittsfield and the 2nd Congregational Church.
- 1874 Published a sermon entitled "Pittsfield: Twenty-Five Years Ago."
- 1877 Published "An Appeal of a Colored Man to his Fellow Citizens of a Fairer Hue in the United States."
- Dec. 27, 1883 First wife Ellen Rhodes dies.
- April 12, 1885 Samuel remarries Sarah Adams (Davis) in Springfield, MA.
- 1899 Samuel Harrison writes his life story.
- Aug. 11, 1900 Samuel dies and leaves a great legacy to his family and to history.

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

Help Support the Samuel Harrison Society

Join the "Friends of Samuel Harrison"

Name: _____

Address: _____

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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

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