

“ No warmer friends have I had anywhere than in **Pittsfield**. I seemed to begin life anew. ”

— REV. SAMUEL HARRISON



BERKSHIRE MEDICAL INSTITUTE 1822-1850

for manufacturing jobs in the West. Many of those who remained were employed in service jobs, such as hotels.

A countywide chapter of the NAACP was founded in 1918 and in the 1960s its offices were located at 467 North Street in Pittsfield. The NAACP sent residents to participate in the 1963 March on Washington, registered voters during the Freedom Summer of 1964 in Alabama and Mississippi, created affordable housing in Pittsfield, organized sympathy protests at the Woolworth's on North Street, initiated a collection of Black history and literature at the local office, hosted a number of cultural fairs, and was the conduit for communication to the national organization when some citizens of Great Barrington sought to stop a memorial dedication at the boyhood home of W. E. B. Du Bois in the mid 1960s.

As the twentieth century wore on, the town became a thriving small metropolis, and the black population grew once more, especially with an in-migration from a number of southern states. African Americans in Pittsfield supported the abolition of southern Jim Crow laws in transportation, education, public accommodations, and voting, while at home they protested discrimination in jobs and housing. Judge John Garrett Penn, Dorothy Amos, Margaret Hart, and Stephanie Wilson exemplify Pittsfield's black community who continues to thrive, fight for equal rights, and produce outstanding citizens.



Samuel Harrison Society

It is the mission of the Samuel Harrison Society to restore and preserve Reverend Harrison's homestead; use 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.

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

www.samuelharrison.org

ABOVE: SAMUEL HARRISON HOUSE, BUILT MID-1850'S, COURTESY MICHAEL KIRK; COVER: SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, BUILT 1846, COURTESY SAMUEL HARRISON SOCIETY.

THIS BROCHURE WAS PAID FOR WITH FEDERAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT FUNDING (CDBG) THROUGH THE PITTSFIELD DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MADE AVAILABLE FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD).

African American Heritage

Pittsfield • Massachusetts



Pittsfield serves as the hub of community life in Berkshire County.

It is the largest town, boasts the largest population, and is the center of industry in the county. The city is also home to the largest number of black citizens in the county. It is not surprising that so many blacks who were born or settled in Pittsfield became outstanding community, state, regional, and national leaders.

The earliest recorded black presence in Pittsfield dates to 1761 during the same year the town was incorporated. According to anecdotal sources, Blacks were present from the beginning of white incursion into the area. Certainly, they were present as early as 1752, when whites settled the town, because "many of the early [white] citizens of Pittsfield held slaves."

In Pittsfield's early days, blacks supported the establishment of the town's agricultural and skilled labor base. In 1760 the black population of Berkshire County was 3 percent and there were forty-five black residents in Pittsfield in the 1790 census. One of the first residents was the slave woman Pendar who gained her freedom and made a livelihood in the town until her early nineties. At this time, a few blacks established themselves in the town as independent small farmers although most tilled the soil of others.

Pittsfield, in the 1840 census, had 202 Blacks, the largest number of any town in Berkshire County, which had 1,259 black residents. Rev. Samuel Harrison was a prominent voice in the black and white community of Pittsfield during this time period. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many blacks left Pittsfield



TRAIL GUIDE

A PART OF THE
Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail