

Samuel Harrison

Samuel Harrison, a minister, political activist, and former slave, became one of Berkshire County, Massachusetts' most ardent abolitionists. Harrison was born enslaved in Philadelphia in 1818 but he and his mother were freed in 1821. Shortly afterwards the widowed mother and her son moved to New York City. When Harrison was nine years old, he returned to Philadelphia to live with an uncle.

Samuel Harrison tried hard to educate himself. In 1836, he enrolled in a manual school run by the abolitionist Gerrit Smith in Peterboro, New York. After only a few months, he transferred to the Western Reserve College in Hudson, Ohio (now Case Western Reserve University, in Cleveland, Ohio), an institution known for its abolitionist sympathies. Financial difficulties, however, forced him to return to Philadelphia in 1839.

In 1850, Harrison moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts where he was ordained as a preacher by the Berkshire Association of Congregational Ministers and became the first minister of the Second Congregational Church of Pittsfield, the first black church founded in the county. Harrison retired from his Pittsfield pulpit in 1862 and began working with the National Freedmen's Relief Association to solicit aid for former slaves on the South Carolina Sea Islands. In October 1863 Harrison was appointed chaplain of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment by Governor John A. Andrew. Almost immediately he was drawn into the dispute over discriminatory pay to the black soldiers. Harrison's demand that he receive the same pay as white chaplains led Governor Andrew and United States Attorney General

Edward Bates to write letters to President Abraham Lincoln to end the discriminatory practice. Lincoln did so in July 1864. Taken ill in March 1864,

Harrison was honorably discharged from the army. He spent his last years as pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Pittsfield. He died on August 11, 1900 in Pittsfield, MA.



Ulysses Frank Grant

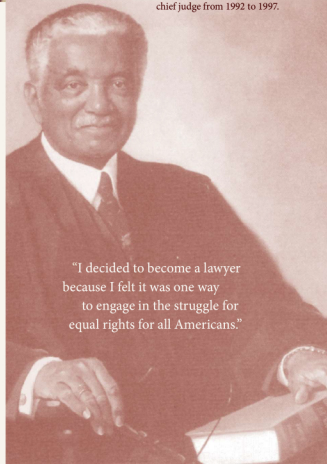
Frank Grant, born in Pittsfield and a resident of Williamstown, is noted as one of the greatest African American baseball players, yet widely unknown because he was barred from playing in the major leagues. Grant entered organized baseball in 1886, playing



for the Eastern League in Meriden, Connecticut. When the league folded, midway through the season, he signed on with the Buffalo Bisons, of the International League. Playing for Buffalo through 1888, Grant was the only black player to play three consecutive seasons for the same predominantly white team. By 1887, however, "Jim Crow had reserved a box seat in nearly all major and minor league parks." Ability did not matter; Grant was slowly squeezed out of organized baseball. His teammates refused to have their team photo taken with him, and other teams refused to take the field if he played. After 1890, Grant joined the Negro League's Cuban Giants and, later, the New York Gorhams as well as several other teams. Grant's professional career ended in 1903, and he faded into obscurity, spending the remainder of his life as a waiter in New York City. He died on May 27, 1937 and was buried in Ridgeway Cemetery in Clifton, New Jersey. In 1979, almost a half-century after his death, Grant was named to the Buffalo Bisons Hall of Fame and was honored with a plaque displayed in the stadium. In February 2006, Grant was inducted to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

John Garrett Penn

John Garrett Penn, chief judge of the United States District Court for Washington D.C., was born in Pittsfield on March 19, 1932 during the Great Depression. He was the son of John Penn of Reidsville, North Carolina, and Eugenie G. Heyliger Penn, who immigrated to the United States from Bermuda in the early 1920s. Penn's father was a carpenter and draftsman by trade but could not find any work in Pittsfield. After graduating from Pittsfield High School, Penn received his law degree from Boston University in 1957. In 1970, President Richard Nixon appointed Penn to the Superior Court of Washington D.C. President James Carter appointed Penn to the federal court bench in 1979. Penn served as its chief judge from 1992 to 1997.



"I decided to become a lawyer because I felt it was one way to engage in the struggle for equal rights for all Americans."

Stephanie Wilson

Stephanie Diana Wilson is an American engineer and a NASA astronaut. She flew on her first mission in space onboard the Space Shuttle mission STS-121, and is the second African American woman to go into space, after Mae Jemison. Born in 1966 in Boston, Massachusetts, Stephanie Wilson graduated from Taconic High School, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in 1984; received a bachelor of science degree in engineering science from Harvard University in 1988, and a master of science degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Texas, in 1992. She was selected by NASA in April 1996. Having completed two years of training and evaluation, she was qualified for flight assignment as a mission specialist. In July 2006 she spent 13 days in space. During the 13-day flight the crew of Space Shuttle Discovery tested new equipment and procedures that increase the safety of space shuttles, repaired a rail car on the International Space Station and produced never-before-seen, high-resolution images of the Shuttle during and after its July 4th launch. Wilson has logged over 28 days in space.



SAMUEL HARRISON AND SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAMUEL HARRISON SOCIETY. FRANK GRANT PHOTOS COURTESY OF BERKSHIRE EAGLE. JUDGE PENN PHOTO COURTESY JOHN GARRETT AND ANN ROLLISON PENN COLLECTION. STEPHANIE WILSON PHOTOS COURTESY OF NASA. PITTSFIELD PANORAMA PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOCAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT, BERKSHIRE ANTHANEUM.

