

African American Collection of Maine

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The African American Collection of Maine welcomes donations of materials on African American life in Maine.

The African American Collection of Maine is a member of the Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity in Maine.

<http://library.usm.maine.edu/special-collections/jbscenter.html>



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From the Editor's Desk



The African American Collection of Maine's 2006 annual exhibition, "Black Bangor: African Americans in a Maine Community," continues to be well attended. *The Griot* also continues to offer glimpses into Bangor's African American history. This issue focuses on the Jackson/Warner family, a family with Connecticut roots and a significant community presence. William Pierson's *Black Yankees* is reviewed in this issue, and the calendar of events provides information on an exciting conference called Black New England being planned for June.

Even as we continue to focus on this year's activities, plans are being made for the 2007 annual exhibition. This will be the second installment in the Collection's African American social history series, and will focus on the rich history of Portland's Black community. As with the Bangor work, community partnership will continue to be important to the exhibition's success. If you have materials or information to share, please feel free to contact me. I look forward to hearing from you!

—Maureen Elgersman Lee, *associate professor of history and faculty scholar for the African American Collection of Maine at USM*

A Place in Time: The Jackson/Warner Family of Bangor

The early twentieth-century history of Bangor's African American community is filled with engaging stories of family.

One such story is that of the Jackson/Warner family. Connecticut natives Elizabeth Jackson Warner and her husband, James Henry, were both from Connecticut. It is likely that

Elizabeth Jackson migrated to Bangor in 1912; James Warner had already been residing in the city for some time before her arrival. Jackson and Warner soon married, and had two daughters, Beryl and H. Althea, by the time the 1920 census was taken. Also living in the Warner home in 1920 were Elizabeth's sisters, Helen and Rose Jackson, both of whom worked as domestics.¹

When Warner died in January of 1943, he had lived in Bangor for more than 50 years, he had spent more than 30 years working for the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, and he had spent more than 10 years working at the Tarratine Club, an exclusive institution whose members had included former Vice President Hannibal Hamlin. The Warner family seems to have had significant financial status, for the 1930 manuscript census records their \$6000

Fourteenth Street home as the most valuable Black-owned property in the city at that time.²

Through 1930, the manuscript census consistently identifies Elizabeth Jackson Warner as a "housewife." However, the *Bangor Daily News* reports that her

sphere of influence went well beyond the private. According to the newspaper, Warner was an integral part of the Bangor-Brewer YWCA. Her roles included serving as a cook, a desk clerk, and even a confidante to local young women. Warner also opened her home to students at the University of Maine (her daughters' undergraduate institution) as well as to older women from the Y. When Warner left Bangor in 1952 for the home her daughters built for her in Baltimore, Maryland, the local newspaper noted that the city was

"losing an outstanding citizen." Elizabeth Jackson Warner died in Baltimore just one year later, in the fall of 1953. At the time of Elizabeth Jackson Warner's death, her sister, Rose, lived in Boston and her sister, Helen, resided in Connecticut. Both of Warner's daughters lived in Baltimore.³



Helen Jackson worked as a domestic; Gerald E. Talbot Collection, African American Collection of Maine.

¹ Obituary of Mrs. Elizabeth Warner, *Bangor Daily News*, 23 September 1953, 12; Obituary of James H. Warner, *Bangor Daily News*, 6 January 1943, 5; U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 Census of the United States (manuscript), Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.

² Obituary of James H. Warner, 5; U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 and 1930 Census of the United States (manuscript), Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine; Obituary of Mrs. Elizabeth Warner, 12.

³ Jeanine Fenwick, "Well-Loved Bangor Woman is Leaving," *Bangor Daily News*, 12 November 1952, 12; Obituary of Mrs. Elizabeth Warner, 12.



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Calendar of Events

Save These Dates!

The Center for New England Culture presents

Black New England: Life, History and Community in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont

June 23-24, 2006

University of New Hampshire, Durham

A two-day conference that will gather scholars, teachers, researchers, community members, and members of local organizations to share their work and insights on the Black experience past and present in northern New England.

Panelists include:

Professor James Horton and Professor Lois Horton

Local Community Leaders and Scholars

Panel Discussions

- The Black Presence in 19th-Century Northern New England
- Black Family History and Genealogy
- Civil Rights and Immigration
- Black History in New England Museums, Historical Societies and Communities

Co-sponsored by the Office of Black Heritage Partnerships at the University of New Hampshire, the African American Collection of Maine at the University of Southern Maine, the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, and the Harriet Wilson Project.

For information contact the Center for New England Culture at (603) 862-0353 or visit www.neculture.org.

In Review

William D. Piersen. *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

The primary questions asked in William Piersen's *Black Yankees* pertain to the era of colonial slavery, but are remarkably similar to those still being asked—and more frequently answered—about twentieth-century Black life in northern New England. Piersen seeks to answer the following questions: “What was it like to be an African immigrant in colonial New England? What attitudes and assumptions underlay the Afro-American response to Yankee culture? What does the development within the confines of a predominantly white and ethnocentric New England of an Afro-American folk culture . . . say about the creation of American culture?” (p. ix)

Piersen argues:

Blacks who were taken into New England's bondage were clearly engulfed in a pervasive, narrow-minded Euro-American society that had no interest in fostering Afro-American autonomy. The New England experience was often cruel, and the numbers

alone suggest it was among the most unequal of black/white cultural contacts in the New World. Nonetheless, despite the strictures of bondage, the black Yankees of eighteenth-century New England created a sustaining folk culture of their own. (p. ix)

Black Yankees should not be mistaken for a text with windows on the slave experience in eighteenth-century Maine. Although Massachusetts gets significant attention, there are few substantive references to places that fall within the geographic boundaries of Maine. Piersen advises readers early on that the small Black populations of Maine, Vermont, and most of New Hampshire remove them from many of the book's considerations. However, *Black Yankees* does succeed as a general history of slavery in other parts of New England and as a lens through which to view the processes and the products of a syncretic “Black Yankee” culture.

Recent Publications

The following books were recently reviewed in the American Historical Association's journal, the *American Historical Review*. They may be of interest to readers of *The Griot*.

Jean Fagan Yellin. *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*. New York: Basic Books, 2004. [Reviewed by Jane Rhodes, Macalester College.]

The author provides a comprehensive biography of Jacobs, author of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

Gregory Mix. *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005. [Reviewed by Michael J. Pfeifer, Evergreen State College.]

Gregory Mixon explores the context and anatomy of one of the most famous of Southern race riots, a dark moment in race relations that will mark its centennial anniversary this year.

Alison Piepmeier. *Out in Public: Configurations of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. [Reviewed by Amy G. Richter, Clark University.]

Piepmeier reinterprets the lives and texts of five women, including Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells, in exploring the visibility of American women's bodies during the nineteenth century.

Please note that *The Griot* will now be produced twice per year—spring and fall.