

Summer 2001

Harold E. Richardson

Maureen Elgersman - Lee (ed.)
University of Southern Maine

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THE GRIOT

Preserving
African American
History in Maine

University of Southern Maine

Volume 4, Issue 3
Summer 2001

African American Archives of Maine

Public Hours

Tuesday: 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.,
1:30-4:45 p.m.
Wednesday: 9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.;
1:30-4:45 p.m.

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(207) 780-4269

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(207) 780-5492

Please note that the African American Archives of Maine is located on the second floor of the Gorham library until the renovations to the Portland library are finished.

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From the Editor's Desk



Maureen Elgersman Lee

was a key figure in improving the resources and infrastructure of the city of Portland and surrounding communities. Leadership, after all, is inherently about service, glorious or not. And at the end of this series of issues on Black leadership, I am reminded of the words

This edition profiles Harold E. Richardson, past president of the board of trustees of the Portland Water District. A different type of leader from the subjects of the previous two editions of the *Griot*, Richardson

that I keep posted on my office door. They remind me of all that we, as people, have done, and how much more we have yet to do.

"The world has no room for cowards. We must all be ready somehow to toil, to suffer, to die. And yours is not the less noble because no drum beats before you when you go out into your daily battlefields, and no crowds shout about your coming when you return from your daily victory or defeat."

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Maureen Elgersman Lee is assistant professor of history and faculty scholar for the African American Archives of Maine, University of Southern Maine Library

Please note: Changes in USM Library staffing have required changes in the public hours of the African American Archives. Please note that the African American Archives of Maine is now open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The new hours are posted on the left.

A PLACE IN TIME

Harold E. Richardson: Portland Water District

Harold E. Richardson was elected president of the board of trustees for the Portland Water District in 1963, making him the first African American elected to Maine public office.¹ This was nine years before Gerald Talbot was elected

to the Maine Legislature. Richardson was not the only Richardson son to enter Portland area politics.

William N. Richardson made a bid—although unsuccessful—for Cumberland County commissioner in 1970, and Clifford "Kippy" Richardson was elected to municipal office when he joined the Portland High School Committee in 1971.²

Harold Richardson won reelection to the board of the Portland Water District three times, giving him 20 years of service in that position. In reference to the 1968 election, Richardson expounded on why he ran for this office.

My primary reason for seeking reelection

"The duties of a trustee are not unlike those of a corporate director, requiring regular business judgments. For this reason, I am thankful for my 20 years of experience as a small business operator."

tion is to serve the public in the district's continued planned expansion of service to taxpayers at a minimum of operational costs. As I see the current situation, it is imperative the district lend its help to solve the local sewage

disposal problem in the most efficient manner and at a cost that won't unduly burden the already strained finances of our municipal government.³

Co-owner of the office-cleaning company known as Kippy's Service, Richardson drew parallels between the role of a trustee and that of a small business owner.

The duties of a trustee are not unlike those of a corporate director, requiring regular business judgments. For this reason, I am thankful for my 20 years of experience as a small business operator.⁴

In the 1970s, Harold Richardson was elected to his third and fourth terms on the board of the Portland Water District. In

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A Place in Time

Continued from the front

1978, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ranked Portland's tap water among the safest in the nation. Citing the clear water of Sebago Lake as the city's water source, Portland water ranked seventh among the more than one hundred cities tested in the water survey. The city of Boston ranked sixth and Providence ranked eighth in that study.⁵

Harold Richardson was a figure whose presence and influence far exceeded the Portland Water District. During the 1960s and 1970s, Richardson was a member of the Deering Lions Club and had been its president from 1969 to 1970. A member of the Civil Service Commission of Portland, a director of the Portland Boys' Club, and director of the West End Businessmen's Association, Richardson was well known and well respected. Richardson was also special deputy sheriff of the Cumberland County Firemen's Association and director of the Portland Veteran Firemen's Association.⁶

While, perhaps, not as glamorous as some positions in public office, Harold Richardson's leadership on the board of the Portland Water District was important to the residents of the Portland area. Well known to local residents inside and outside the Black community, Richardson was another of Maine's native sons and he represented the area well.

Notes

¹Harold E. Richardson Papers, 1. African American Archives of Maine, Jean Byers Sampson Center for Diversity, University of Southern Maine Library.

²"Third Richardson Brother to Enter Area Politics," *Portland Evening Press*, 20 June 1972, 1, 14. Harold E. Richardson Papers, 32.

³James C. Saunders, Jr., "Two Seek Water District Seat Monday," *Portland Evening Express*, 1968. Harold E. Richardson Papers, 1.

⁴"Two Seek Water District Seat Monday."

⁵"City's Tap Water Ranks High," *Portland Press Herald*, 20 June 1978. Harold E. Richardson Papers, 68.

⁶"Richardson Wins PWD Re-election in Small Turnout," *Portland Press Herald*, 23 May 1973, 9. Harold E. Richardson Papers, 31.

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Calendar of Events

HTY 141I

**African American History
to 1865**

Fall 2001

3.0 credit hours

This course introduces students to African American history from the arrival of twenty Africans in Jamestown, Virginia in 1619, to the end of the Civil War and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished slavery as a popular institution. Topics include race and American politics, slavery and the slave trade, the emergence of African American culture, and abolition. Various African American historical figures will be profiled, and the intersections of race and gender will be explored.

The course will be offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00-9:15 a.m. in Gorham. Call (207) 780-5239 for more details.

*The academic year 2001-2002
is a Convocation year, and its theme is
"Diaspora: The Meaning of Home."
Look for announcements about the
weekend of Convocation-related
events.*

Look for the next edition of the Griot in August

The Fall 2001 edition of the *Griot* will come out earlier than usual—expect to see it in late August rather than in October. The academic year 2001-2002 is a Convocation year, and its theme is "Diaspora: The Meaning of Home." The African American Archives of Maine, in conjunction with various local institutions, is planning a weekend of Convocation-related events. Look for details in August, and please, plan on attending in September!