

A TIME LINE OF SOME IMPORTANT DATES IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE IN POUGHKEEPSIE

- 1687 First African-Americans arrive with British and Dutch settlers in Poughkeepsie. Most arrived as slaves.
- 1714 First census reports thirty African slaves.
- 1776 Dina, born in Africa, defends her master's mill house at the mouth of the Fallkill Creek during the American Revolution.
- 1827 New York State abolishes slavery.
- 1829 First school is established for African-Americans
- 1837 Catharine Street AME Zion Church is established.
- 1844 First public school is established for African-Americans elementary only.
- 1856 Jane Williams is the first black teacher to work at the school.
- 1860 Several hundred African-Americans from Poughkeepsie 1864 fight in the Civil War for the North.
- 1874 Segregation is abolished in N.Y.S. schools.
- 1879 Josephine Rhodes graduates from Poughkeepsie High School. The first African-American to do so.
- 1891 First Baptist Church is established. Ebenezer Baptist.
- 1892 Gaius Bolin is the first African-American to pass the New York State Bar exam.
- 1910 Booker T. Washington lectures at the Vassar Institute.
- 1920 Langston Hughs reads his poetry in Poughkeepsie.
Marion Anderson sings at the Bardavon Theater.
- 1922 The Catharine Street Center is established.
- 1940 Hannah Johnson is the first African-American Public Health nurse.
- 1940 200 African Americans serve in World War II.
Walter Patrice is the first African-American to receive a commission as an officer in the U.S. Army.
- 1944 Jane Bolin is the first African-American woman to be appointed as a United States Judge.
- 1944 Strudella Lawrence is the first African-American valedictorian at Poughkeepsie High School.
- 1946 Dorothy Edwards is the first African-American nurse hired by Vassar Brother's Hospital.
- 1947 Robert Vaughn is the first African-American hired by the fire department in Poughkeepsie.
- 1952 IBM hires it's first African-American professionals.
- 1957 Thelma Morris is the first African-American teacher hired by the city.
Victor Morris publishes the first African-American newspaper.
- 1965 Marie Tarver is the first African-American to win a public election in Poughkeepsie.
- 1970 Jeh Johnson is the first architect to build in Poughkeepsie.
- 1982 James Clarke is the first Superintendent of Schools.
- 1984 Sherwood Thompson, first African-American elected to the Dutchess County Legislature from the 10th District.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF IMPORTANT AFRICAN-AMERICANS OR ITEMS OF
IMPORTANCE IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY IN THE CITY OF
POUGHKEEPSIE 1700 - 1980

This is a small number of possible listings which may be found in the Reference Room at Adriance Library, in the files at the Poughkeepsie Journal, or at the Dutchess County Historical Society. It is possible for students to use these facilities in small numbers when it has been prearranged.

* * * * *

The list is chronologically organized for easy access to information about the time periods in local history.

- 1700's New York Manumission Society: An organization formed in the 1700's which worked for the freeing of slaves. The word manumission comes from "manumit" Latin: to free from bondage.
- 1804 Tony Fox was recorded as having been a slave holding negro. Investigation showed however, that the slave he bought, Margaret Fox, was in fact his wife, whom he purchased with the intent of freeing.
- 1700's Pinkster Festival: A week long festival celebrated by
1800's African-Americans in Poughkeepsie and towns along the Hudson River until slavery was abolished. This festival was a combination of Christian and African religious traditions. "Pinkster" quite likely was taken from the Dutch "Pentecost".
- 1840 Pine, Ezekiel: One of the first elected trustees of the A.M.E. Zion Church in Poughkeepsie.
- 1844 Poughkeepsie Colored No. 1: Poughkeepsie established its first school district in 1843 and in 1844 a separate school was established for African-American students. Over time the enrollment fluctuated between 20 and 70 students. It did not go beyond elementary grades and no African-Americans were allowed in "white" schools until the Rhodes family challenged the unwritten law in 1873. Rhodes's children were ultimately allowed to attend the all white schools but sacrificed his successful business to do so. After this the school was closed for lack of attendance. The first African-American student did not graduate from Poughkeepsie High School until 1879, sixty two years after slavery had been abolished in the State of New York. That first graduate was the Rhodes family's oldest daughter, Josephine.

- 1851 Bolding, John: This runaway slave from South Carolina, had his freedom bought by a group of Poughkeepsie citizens for \$1700.00 when he was caught in Poughkeepsie and turned over to a Federal Marshall in New York City. He had been operating a business in Poughkeepsie before his discovery as an escaped slave. After the Dutchess County Anti-Slavery Society succeeded in securing his release and purchased his freedom, he returned to Poughkeepsie, resumed his business and lived out his life.
- 1853 Williams, Jane A.: Probably the first African-American teacher hired to teach in the Colored School #1. She taught from 1853 until 1856.
- 1865 Bolin, Gaius, Sr.: Born the son of Abraham Bolin in 1865. He was the second African-American to graduate from Poughkeepsie High School in 1883. Spent two years studying Latin and Greek at Professor John R. Leslie's Select Classical School on Academy Street. First African-American student accepted and graduated from Williams College in 1889. In 1892 he passed the bar in New York State and practiced law in Poughkeepsie. He was elected president of the Dutchess County Bar Association in 1945. He became part of the leadership in the African-American community.
- 1870 Deyo, Isaac: In 1870, along with Abraham Bolin and Charles Cooley, he called an educational convention to discuss, the possibility of starting a Negro College in Poughkeepsie. The college was to be called the Toussaint L'Ouverture College in honor of the leader of the Haitian Revolution. Although they succeeded in having the state incorporate the college, they were unable to gain enough public support to raise the necessary funds. This was mainly because of opposition to "separate but equal" attitudes.
- 1891 Reverend Charles Fairess, along with other African-American citizens, was instrumental in organizing the first Black Baptist Church in Poughkeepsie. In 1891 this group, under the leadership of Rev. Fairess, formed the Ebenezer Baptist Church. They first met in different homes and then moved to the Leslie School on Academy Street. Reverend Fairess served as their first minister. After several moves they built their permanent church at Smith and Winnikee in 1905. This church began to give the A.M.E. Zion Church some competition for membership.

- 1894 Foote, Mrs. A.J.: The first African-American woman ordained in Poughkeepsie as a deacon in The A.M.E. Zion Church. This was a breakthrough for women, African-Americans, and Poughkeepsie.
- 1879-1923 Land, which is now occupied by Krieger School and across the street to the east by houses, was once known as Ruppert Park. The houses now occupy what was known as The Hudson River Driving Park, the only mile long racetrack in Dutchess County. Clayton Clearwater, an administrator with the Poughkeepsie School District, now retired, remembers as a boy going to the park to watch World War I planes land in the middle of the race track. He also remembers going to the County Fair there for several years. The stables and horses he says were kept across Hooker Avenue to the north. Several African-Americans made their living racing horses, as race horse trainers or as grooms at this race track. A few became well known. (SEE 1920'S)
- 1919 Crooke, Abraham Bolin: First African-American to play football on a Poughkeepsie High School Team.
- 1922 Payne, Bessie Harden, born in 1895, saw many changes occur in Poughkeepsie. She steadfastly continued an active role on behalf of African-Americans. Her father worked for thirty years as a waiter at the Nelson house although he could not take his family there for dinner. In 1913, Mrs. Payne and her mother Mrs. Mary Harden organized the Poughkeepsie Neighborhood Club. The purpose of the club was to help women do civic work. In 1917 the club sponsored the first Lincoln-Douglass dinner. This club helped to establish the Catharine Street Center in 1922. She married the Rev. Herbert Payne of the Ebenezer Baptist Church. She spent some years working as missionary in South Africa. Mrs. Payne became the first principal of The Little Red School House which later became Rehabilitation Programs, Inc.
- 1920's Price, Dr. Garrett A.H.: A physician and leader in the Ebenezer Baptist Church in the 1920's.
- 1920's Vincent "Skinny" Jackson was a jockey, riding at the Hudson River Driving Park, sometimes called Ruppert Park. Ruppert Park had the only mile long track in Dutchess County. The Dutchess County Fair was also held on these grounds which today has Krieger School on part of the property.

- 1920's Jones, Wyatt: A horse owner who earned his living raising and racing horses at the Hudson River Driving Park.
- 1932 Dr. Robert Wilfred Morgan was one of the first African-American professionals in Poughkeepsie, Dr. Morgan was a dentist who arrived in 1932 and became a leader in the Smith Street A.M.E. Zion Church.
- 1936 Reverend Eustace McMurrine started the African-American Pentecostal church on Tulip Street in Poughkeepsie in 1936. After his death his wife, The Rev. Marie McMurrine Watterson founded the Church of the Living God United in 1943.
- 1930's Reverend Arthur E. May was minister of the A.M.E. Zion Church in Poughkeepsie in the 1930's and an activist for African-American rights. He was part of the leadership in the NAACP which was started in Amenia, Dutchess County.
- 1930's Mohawks of Poughkeepsie were an African-American baseball team in the 1930's. Wilbur Thompson, father of Dutchess County Legislator Sherwood Thompson played for them and was elected To the Dutchess County Baseball Hall of Fame.
- 1930's Reverend Herbert Payne, husband of Bessie Harden Payne, in addition to serving as pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church for a few years, was appointed an administrator of WPA projects in the State of New York under the F.D. Roosevelt administration.
- 1930's Poughkeepsie All Americans were an African-American semi-pro football team active the in the 30's and 40's.
- 1944 Jane Bolin Mizelle, the daughter of Galus Bolin, Sr. and the first black woman judge in the United States, eloquently summarized the situation for Negroes in Poughkeepsie when she addressed the annual American Brotherhood dinner in 1944 as their guest speaker. She charged that there were no Negroes on the staffs of the District Attorney's Office, on the City Council, in the Fire and Police Departments, or in the local hospitals as doctors and nurses. There were also no Negroes as teachers in the schools or as skilled workers in the industrial plants. Even the local YMCA and YWCA emgaged om the racial hypocrisy by not allowing Negroes as members and thus "degerade the word Christian."

- 1946 Edwards, Dorothea L.: The first African-American nurse hired at Vassar Hospital in 1946.
- 1947 Robert Vaughn was the first African-American hired by the Fire Department in 1947. Upon his retirement in 1974 he had attained the rank of captain. He was the first African-American to serve on the Dutchess County Legislature and the first Dutchess County Deputy Coordinator.
- 1940's Mrs. Robert Morgan, President of the Women's Service Club during World War II which sent packages to men serving overseas and also published a paper called "The Patriot" which gave news of members in the Armed Forces.
- 1940's Robert S. Magill: Although African-American ballplayers had been playing in Poughkeepsie since 1883 when the Poughkeepsie "Eagle" reported a game between Poughkeepsie's "colored" baseball club and a visiting team from Connecticut it was Magill who made African-American sports well known in the area. Magill played on and coached almost all of the teams, including the semi-pro football team the Poughkeepsie All Americans. He was instrumental in forming the Poughkeepsie Net Club to promote tennis among African-Americans. He was inducted into the Dutchess County Hall of Fame and the Old Timers Baseball Association.
- 1940's Walter Patrice was a graduate of Poughkeepsie High School and the first African-American from Poughkeepsie to be commissioned an officer, first Lieutenant, in the U.S. Army.
- 1950's Columbus Stanley: One of the early African-Americans hired by IBM in the 1950's. He remained active in the community up until the present time and was elected to the City of Poughkeepsie Common Council several times.
- 1950's Calvin Waite, John Cooper, Harry Wilkinson and William Crawford are some of the first African-Americans hired by IBM in the early 1950's.
- 1950's Poughkeepsie Net Club: A club organized by Robert Magill to interest African-Americans in the sport of tennis.
- 1950's Morgan Reed was elected "Mr. Black Sports of Dutchess County" in the 40's and 50's. He played on all the African-American teams and promoted sports in every way he could.

- 1950's Ray Bradford was a baseball player on the Dutchess County colored teams. He was elected to the Dutchess County Hall of Fame, Old Timer's Baseball Association in the 1950's and 1960's.
- 1957 Morris, Thelma: In 1957, became the first African-American teacher appointed by the Poughkeepsie Board of Education. She served in 1990 as the first African-American president of Adriance Memorial Library and Mid-Hudson Library Systems.
- 1957 Victor Morris edited and published the Antler Digest the first African-American paper in Poughkeepsie from 1957 until 1979. From 1969 until 1979 Mr. Morris was also editor of the Mid-Hudson Herald. He was the president of the Dutchess Human Rights Council in 1965.
- 1963 Cecelia Magill served on Poughkeepsie's first Human Rights Commission in 1963.
- 1965 Ethel Vaughn was the only woman and first African-American appointed to the Urban Renewal Agency Board.
- 1965 Marie Tarver was the first African-American to win a public election in the City of Poughkeepsie when she was elected to the Board of Education. She is also the first African-American to be elected president of that board. In the 1960's Mrs. Tarver also directed the Poughkeepsie Model Cities Agency and the first to chair the United Way Campaign.
- 1966 Lorraine Roberts is listed in "Who's Who in Black America," Lorraine Roberts was the first African American to be appointed Department Head at Poughkeepsie High School in 1966. She is co-author, with Lawrence H. Mamiya of "Invisible People, Untold Stories: A Historical overview of the Black Community in Poughkeepsie" from which most of this material is taken. The book was published in 1987 by the Dutchess County Historical Society.
- 1968 Dorothy Stanley began as a substitute teacher in the Poughkeepsie Schools and went on to become the district's first African-American Administrator. She was appointed Dean of Students (1968) then Assistant Principal (1972 and later principal of Warring School. She was also the first African-American president of the Poughkeepsie City Schools Administration Association.
- 1968 Mrs. Robert Dixon, wife of Reverend Robert Dixon, was the organizer of The Cultural Progress Club in 1968.
- 1960's Carol Crawford attended Poughkeepsie schools and became a principal ballet dancer for the Dance Theater of Harlem.

- 1960's Reverend Robert Dixon: Minister at the Central Baptist Church in Poughkeepsie was an activist in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor of the city in the 1960's also.
- 1960's Vivian Gaines Tanner is the first African-American member of the Board of the Dutchess County Art Association (Barrett House). She is a painter and poetess and has had her paintings exhibited in galleries in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts.
- 1960's In the 1960's Ruppert Tarver became executive director of the Neighborhood Services Organization. He wrote the proposal for the founding of the Hudson Valley Opportunities Industrialization Center (HVOIC). He served on the first Board of Trustees of the Poughkeepsie Area Fund.
- 1960's Wiley Jackson was President of the NAACP during the 1960's and the leader of many demonstrations and activities to gain job opportunities for African-Americans in such stores as Woolworth's, grocery chains, and smaller stores that hired clerks.
- 1970 Bailey, Winston: Was elected to the Board of Education in the 1970's. Mr. Bailey also served on the Jamaican Concerned Citizens Committee.
- 1970's Stewart Bowles is the first African-American Chief of Police from the mid 1970's until the present.
- 1970's Johnson, Jeh: In the 1970's Mr. Johnson became the first African-American architect in business. He has design credits for the Dutchess County Mental Health Building (1969); St. Simeon (1970); Interfaith Towers (1973); Tubman Terrace (1974); Catharine Street Center (1979); and Beulah Baptist Church (1990). Mr. Johnson was appointed by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967 to serve on the National Commission on Urban Problems. He was also an instructor at Vassar College.
- 1970's William "Bill" Johnson is from Poughkeepsie and played football here. He entered the U.S. Football League in the 1970's playing for the Denver Gold team and then signed with the Bengals.
- 1974 Columbus Stanley: First African-American elected to the Common Council - 5th Ward Alderman.
- 1980's Boone, Gregg: Graduate of Poughkeepsie High School. Worked for the Poughkeepsie Journal as a cartoonist and in 1990 had his first Comic Book published.

- 1980's Clarke, James, Jr.: Became first African-American Superintendent of Schools in Poughkeepsie 1982. Left in 1989 to become Superintendent of Schools for Warren County, New York, Warren County Board of Cooperative Educational Services Superintendent. Mr. Clarke had been a teacher and a principal before becoming Superintendent.
- 1980's Douglas, Rodney: President of New Day Repertory Company. Mr. Douglas writes, directs, and sometimes stars in theater works which are performed throughout the Hudson Valley. He was the Director of the Catharine Street Center from 1984 until 1989 when he retired for health reasons.
- 1980's Duke, William: An actor and director who has appeared on Falcon Crest and on Broadway.
- 1980's Gordon, Sean: A graduate of Our Lady of Lourdes High School received many honors for his football career in the 80's.
- 1980's Morris, Myra: Daughter of Victor and Thelma Morris who became the first African-American member and soloist in the Poughkeepsie Ballet Theater.
- 1984 Sherwood Thompson became the first African-American elected to the Dutchess County Legislature.
- 1970's Parkinson, Clement: A leader in the 1970's until the present of the Jamaican community. He is the Director of the Northside Community Center.
- 1980's Barbara Jeter Jackson: Member and president of the Board of Education in Poughkeepsie.
- 1970's Patrice, Earline: Mrs. Patrice has been an activist in Poughkeepsie. She is known as "Ms. Santa Claus" for the Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter dinners and gifts for needy children which she organizes each year. Even after heart surgery she has continued her efforts on behalf of the children of Poughkeepsie.