AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN SARATOGA

African-Americans have lived in the Capital District for centuries, with 400 serving in the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. Nearby Saratoga Springs has long served as a tourist destination for white and black Americans. In the nineteenth-century, the tourism of wealthy white travelers provided African-Americans, including Harry T. Burleigh, with a range of work and business opportunities. So a small year-round presence of 3-5% of the population – growing from 88 in 1830, to 158 in 1855, to 315 in 1960—increased in summer months. African-Americans lived and worked throughout the community of Saratoga Springs. Many settled on Congress, William, Cowen and Franklin Streets close to big hotels and businesses downtown where many were employed. While many held jobs in services – including music and entertainment, cooking, cleaning, racing, staffing dining areas, and laundry – African-Americans were also respected jockeys, entrepreneurs, and business owners in Saratoga Springs.

1 Jack’s Harlem Club
Jack’s Harlem Club, owned by Isaiah Jack, served both African-American and white Saratogians. This African-American owned and operated business lasted as a club only through the 1940s, however, his restaurant lived much longer and was equipped with a cabaret on the second floor. This cabaret became Jack’s Harlem Club in 1950. Jack invited singers, impersonators, and comedians to contribute to the entertainment of black and white Saratogians and visitors.

2 Hattie’s Restaurant
Hattie’s Restaurant, known as the Chicken Shack, served as an integrated restaurant that fed Southern cooking with a Louisiana flavor. Solomon Northup, an African-American owned and operated business lasted as a club only through the 1940s, however, his restaurant lived much longer and was equipped with a cabaret on the second floor. This cabaret became Jack’s Harlem Club in 1950. Jack invited singers, impersonators, and comedians to contribute to the entertainment of black and white Saratogians and visitors.

3 Saratoga Race Course
Saratoga Race Course, opened in 1863, is the third oldest racetrack in the U.S. It’s been in use almost every year since 1864 and in 1966, was ranked as “Sports Illustrated’s #10 sports venue of the twentieth century.” It employed many African-Americans as jockeys, grooms, and stable hands, Isaac Burns Murphy, the “Prince of Jockeys,” especially thrilled crowds in the 1880s and 1890s. Some African-American jockeys, like Wesley Smiley, became trainers.

4 Solomon Northup
Solomon Northup – a free person of color who was tricked, taken away from his home in Saratoga Springs, and sold into slavery – is an integral part of Saratoga’s history. Solomon and his family moved to Saratoga Springs in March 1854, initially residing on Washington Street, and later moved to the United States Hotel. Northup, like many of his African-American contemporaries, worked in tourism, first as a hack driver for Isaac Taylor who owned Washington Hall and later at the United States Hotel, where he got to know Judge Marvin, the man who ultimately helped secure his release from captivity in Louisiana. Northup was a musician who frequently played at the United States hotel and other area hotels. Solomon’s story not only produced great works like the book and later film, Twelve Years a Slave, detailing his enslavement and escape, but also increased popular interest in Saratoga Springs.

5 Saratoga Spa State Park
Saratoga Spa State Park, established in 1911 as the New York State Reservation, preserved the spring waters and was built as a resort to draw in all Americans to a European-style spa springs experience today. It is a nationally acclaimed historical landmark, and has been home since 1960 to the Saratoga Performing Arts Center as well as many springs and bathhouses.

6 Grand Union Hotel
The Grand Union Hotel, which employed African-Americans as service staff, is where Harry T. Burleigh worked in summer 1892 as a wine steward. Under a new owner in 1872 the hotel became one of the world’s largest hotels, with music performances by Victor Herbert and his orchestra – possibly with a Burleigh cameo. There was a dining room serving 1,400, 824 guest-rooms, a mile of covered piazzas, two miles of corridors, 12 acres of carpeting and an acre of marble tops and floor tiles.” (Denby 42)

7 United States Hotel
Vacant since 1865 for the United States Hotel was rebuilt at a cost of more than a million dollars in 1874. At the height of hotel construction in Saratoga, the United States Hotel was among the largest hotels in the world. It contained “768 rooms, a parlor greater than four thousand square feet, and a dining room of more than ten thousand square feet” (Stenglass). Hotel manager Joseph Smith wrote in 1889 that “(the wait- ers employed at the Spa are usually colored men, the [United States Hotel] never having had any other.” (Armstead)