

# AAHM Sojourner

**Newsletter of the  
SPRINGFIELD AND CENTRAL ILLINOIS AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MUSEUM**

VOLUME 7, NO.1

WINTER-SPRING 2023

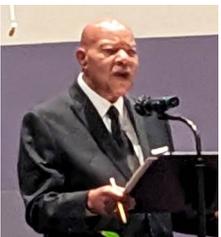
## INSIDE LOOK



**Museum welcomes  
Director Nalo Mitchel**  
PAGE 2



**Congratulations  
History Bowl  
Participants**  
PAGE 5



**"Watch Night"  
Produced by  
Robert Davis**  
PAGE 6

## LOOKING FORWARD: 2023 ACTIVITIES PLANNED

*We will tell authentic stories about African American life in Central Illinois, past and present, celebrating our history and culture, while planning our future.*

*\*There will be construction at the museum during the summer, please check the website or call for updates.*

### Current Exhibits

- The Middle Passage, an Interactive Slave Ship Experience
- "Something So Horrible," Springfield 1908 Race Riot
- Illinois African American Pioneer Families
- Illinois Freedom Project
- Lincoln Legacy Scholars: Bishop Desmond Tutu, Neil deGrasse Tyson, and the Little Rock Nine exhibit of artifacts and magnificent oil portraits
- Illinois Juneteenth Exhibit, a timeline of laws and events in the nation, Illinois, and Springfield that lead to Juneteenth becoming a national holiday
- "Follow the Recipe," African American Cooking from Slavery to Today
- Oak Ridge Cemetery, The Colored Section
- Our Footprints, Our Stories: History of selected structures/buildings in NE Springfield and the people associated with them
- Illinois 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry United States Colored Troops: Steps on The Road to Freedom

### Upcoming Special Events

- African American Music: Musical performances of gospel, blues, jazz and soul music, May 20, 2023, 7:00 PM, Hoogland Arts Center, 420 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St., Springfield, IL (for tickets and information, AAHM website, [www.spiaahm.org](http://www.spiaahm.org))
- "History Comes Alive" Programs, Central Illinois African American Stories (Every Saturday, June-August at 1:30 PM)
- The African American History Summer Camp Grades 4-6, June 12-18, 2023, at Abundant Faith Christian Center, 2525 Taylor Ave., Springfield, IL (information, AAHM website, [www.spiaahm.org](http://www.spiaahm.org))
- *1619: The Journey of a People*, a musical based on the work of Hannah Nicole Jones, July 1 at 7:00 PM and July 2 at 2:00 PM with a panel discussion. Hoogland Arts Center, 420 S. 6<sup>th</sup> St., Springfield, IL (for tickets and information, AAHM website, [www.spiaahm.org](http://www.spiaahm.org) or the Hoogland Arts Center, [www.hcfta.org](http://www.hcfta.org))
- The African American History Museum Gala, October 21, 2023, The Northfield Center (Information, AAHM website, [www.spiaahm.org](http://www.spiaahm.org))



## Message from the Executive Director

### OUR MISSION

\* We will tell authentic stories about African American life in Central Illinois, past and present, celebrating and sharing our history and culture while planning our future.

\* We will do this through scholarship, oral history, exhibits, partnerships, our board of directors, our supporters and our friends. We are and will continue to be community builders.

\* We recognize that our stories are unique but connected to those of other communities and we will support those interconnections. We will be integral to the cultural life of our area. We will partner with like-minded organizations. We will be proactive in our community. We will study and apply best practices in business, scholarship and communication.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2023

- Carolyn Farrar, *President***
- Dr. Sheila Caldwell, *Vice President***
- Brady Odom, *Recording Secretary***
- Aaron Pearl-Cropp, *Treasurer***
- Nell Clay**
- Robert Davis**
- Dawn DeFraities**
- Kathryn Harris**
- Tom Hutchinson**
- Dr. Ann Joseph**
- Lazell Logan**
- Gail Simpson**
- James Lewis,**  
*Board Member Emeritus*

**Nalo Mitchell, *Executive Director***

**AAHM website:** [spiaahm.org](http://spiaahm.org)  
**Email:** [siaahf@yahoo.com](mailto:siaahf@yahoo.com)  
**Address:** 1440 Monument Ave.,  
 Springfield, IL 62702  
**Mailing Address:** P.O. Box 301,  
 Springfield, IL 62705  
**Telephone:** 217-391-6323  
**Follow us on Facebook**

Greetings to the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum (AAHM) Board of Directors, Members, Volunteers and to the Community,

I am honored and privileged to accept the position as the First Executive Director of the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum. As a descendant of one of the Pioneer Families featured at the museum, it brings me great joy to serve in this capacity.

Thank you to Board President Carolyn Farrar and the AAHM Board for this distinguished opportunity. I look forward to working with you in a spirit of excellence as we strengthen the museum’s partnerships, while increasing our visibility, membership and volunteer opportunities.

AAHM has been a staple in our community and Central Illinois since it was established in 2012. It continues to remain strong due to the commitment of:

- The AAHM Board
- Members
- Financial Supporters
- and Volunteers

The Springfield community is important to me as I’ve lived here for more than 18 years. My family roots date back to the 1800’s and I am related to the John Curtis Family. This is the place where I was blessed to meet my husband, Pastor Darrell Mitchell and blessed to raise all 3 of my beautiful children.

I’ve worked with AAHM for several years by featuring The African American History Bowl, Tuskegee Airmen Exhibit and the Museum itself when I served as the Coordinator of School, Family and Community Relations for District 186. I also worked with the Teaching and Learning Team to help establish a partnership between the District and AAHM that still exists today.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) are at the forefront of AAHM as we look to provide equity for all who walk through our doors as well as for those who have the opportunity to experience one of the traveling exhibits. One of my goals is to continue to enhance opportunities for all students and persons regardless of their race, socio-economic background or disability because Black History is American History.

Our community desires for all to thrive and we can do that by making DEIA a part of our commitment as a whole. AAHM <https://spiaahm.org/> will continue to live out the current mission statement and “tell authentic stories about African-American life in Central Illinois, past and present as we celebrate and share our history and culture, while planning for our future.”

I look forward to seeing you soon!



Sincerely,

*Mrs. Nalo Thomas Mitchell*



is the newsletter of the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum, 1440 Monument Avenue, Springfield, Illinois. Sue Massie and Jenni Dahl, co-editors

# LOOKING BACK AT 2022

## AAHM SUMMER CAMP

The Museum's 2022 summer camp was designed for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. It transpired June 13-17, 2022. The theme for the camp was "Learn From Your Past - Create Your Own Future." The director of the camp was Pamela King. Her co-directors were Nell Clay, Rhonda Cook and Jenni Dahl. The camp was sponsored by Springfield Memorial Foundation. Participants were provided two snacks and lunch each day. The delicious lunches were provided by Queen B Catering.

The camp featured four historical figures: Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Each day, campers were provided educational information through lectures, crafts, and activities.

For Harriet Tubman, we played the video "Soldier of Freedom". Kathryn Harris portrayed Harriet Tubman and talked about the life of Ms. Tubman. Each camper painted a lantern and was provided a candle to go in the light to symbolize Harriet's guiding light toward freedom. Robert Davis portrayed Frederick Douglass and talked about the life of Mr. Douglass.



For Abraham Lincoln, we took a trip to Lincoln's New Salem and visited the home of President Lincoln. The campers had an opportunity to tour the area, make yarn dolls, and candles.

For Dr. King, we discussed the Dr. King exhibit, reviewed some of his quotes, and had the students write their own civil rights statement. We gave them the opportunity to decide on a critical issue that they felt important to them. The campers made protest signs and planned a march for the final program.

Betsy Dollar of the Springfield Art Association, worked with the students to create Kinta cloths. The National Park Service presented a program entitled "Journey to Greatness." A group of young dancers worked with the campers to perform a dance for the end of camp program.

For the final program, the campers wore period costumes, and marched in to the song "Stand Up." This song was led by two of the campers and was originally recorded by



Cynthia Erivo. The campers left the main room while pictures of camp activities were shown. The campers marched back in with their protest signs, wearing their new camp t-shirts.

Through the generous sponsorship of Springfield Memorial Foundation, each camper was provided a t-shirt, a book bag, and four books - one for each individual presented during camp.



The 2023 summer camp will be held at Abundant Faith Christian Center, 2525 Taylor Ave., Springfield, IL from June 12 - 17, 2023. Please visit our website at [www.spiaahm.org](http://www.spiaahm.org) for additional details.

## Renovation of the Museum

Last year the City of Springfield received a grant from the Department of Natural Resources to renovate and expand the AAHM building. The building is owned by the City.

The \$662,000 grant is to be used to expand the exhibit floor which will include two partitioned exhibit galleries, a community meeting room and exhibit storage. The project also includes capital improvements to the roof and other building infrastructure. John Shafer is the architect for the project and work is estimated to begin early May. Depending on how the work proceeds, the museum may be temporarily closed at times during the summer. Closures will be posted on the website.



## Nell Clay Honored with NAACP'S Webster Award

Nell Clay, Board Member, and Past President received the 2023 NAACP Webster plaque. This is a prestigious award given for exemplary service to the Community. Nell was presented the award by her daughter, Teresa Clay and her granddaughter, Jessica Simmons.

## The Kwanzaa Window

The AAHM participated in the 2022 Holiday Walk sponsored by Springfield Memorial Foundation by decorating a Kwanzaa window in the INB building on Washington St. For the second year, the window was decorated by Sonya Perkins, one of our volunteers.



## Lecture-Music Demonstration

The Lecture-Music Demonstration was held on May 21, and was entitled Exploring The African American Genres. Dr. Ann Joseph, board member and musicologist, led participants in exploring and discovering the early origins (pre-1619) and the evolution of the inherited music genre. Throughout the program, demonstrations of music elements and related style concepts with motifs were performed by the JAS TRIO members Steve Alexander and Allen and Judy Betts Davis.





## Black History Bowl 2022

The AAHM completed another impactful Black History Bowl for 2023, held during Black History month. Springfield High School emerged victorious during the Finals, after competing against Lanphier and Southeast High School in the Preliminary on February 1, 2023 and the Final on February 26, 2023.

Lanphier High passed the Rudy Davenport Traveling Trophy over to Springfield High. Each member of the winning team received an individual trophy, and all remaining students received certificates of participation.

The Black History Bowl is yet another example of the efforts of the AAHM to inform and educate the Springfield community regarding the importance of this country's history, which is incumbent upon all Americans to learn and embrace.

Since its inception in 2019, the Bowl has been an instrument to encourage, excite and bring renewed interest to students as they learn and absorb the rich history of African Americans. Each year District 186 has continued to grow its involvement in this endeavor and make it a valuable asset and tool for fun and extracurricular learning.

A special thanks goes to Board Member Gail Simpson whose original idea and continued coordination has added to the success of the Bowl. Former Board Member, Dr. Kamau Kemayo, moderator, Terrance Jordan, the District 186 team, and Superintendent Jennifer Gill are major contributors to our success. We look forward to many more AAHM African American History Bowls and perhaps even greater student participation.

## Art for the Ages

The AAHM in coordination with District 186 has for the past two years (2022 and 2023) held an all-student art exhibit in the Museum. First graders through high schoolers provide original artwork for display. In order to allow for the best presentation; the AAHM through a grant the first year, and continuing the second year without those funds, has had all the artwork framed and provided to the artists. The Exhibit began February 18, 2023, and will remain up until March 31, 2023. The participation of the students and excitement of parents and visitors viewing the exhibit has helped the Museum decide to make this an ongoing venture.



## ISM Teacher Appreciation Event

The AAHM participated in the Annual Teacher Appreciation event presented each year by the Illinois State Museum. Dr. Ann Joseph, a contributing consultant, prepared the exhibit and Jenni Dahl provided video excerpts during the event.





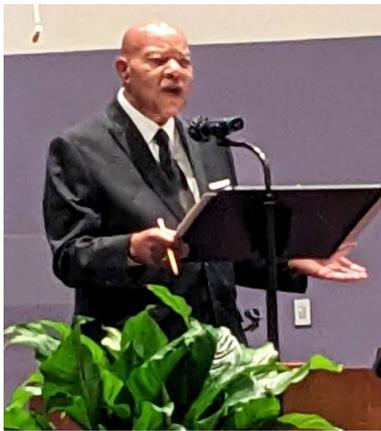
## Watch Night Celebration

The African American History Museum and Union Baptist Church co-sponsored “Watch Night” on December 31, 2022, a production written by Robert Davis. It was an important feature of the City of Springfield’s First Night celebration. In attendance was an audience of over 270 both in the auditorium and virtually.

The origins of Watch Night and its significance date back one-hundred and sixty years to December 31, 1862. Then enslaved people, freemen, abolitionists, and common folk sat in churches, meeting houses, and open fields watching and waiting for the first day of freedom to roll in. It was to occur the next day on January 1, 1863, when President Lincoln had promised to sign and issue a proclamation emancipating or freeing the enslaved people in states or parts of states in rebellion against the Union. Lincoln kept his word!

The impact of President Lincoln signing of the Emancipation Proclamation cracked open the door to freedom inviting the Blackman to join the Civil War fight for what President Lincoln later termed, “the Nation’s new birth of freedom.” Lincoln went on to state, “I never, in my life, felt more certain that I am doing right, than I do in signing this paper.” He further noted “If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act and my whole soul is in it.”

During the Watch Night Celebration, a cast dressed in period clothes discussed Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation from various perspectives. Davis said, “Unfortunately many people do not know what Watch Night is or represents. That is why it is important to have historical dramatizations such as this one which educate, entertain, and provide important information about current and historical events in America’s History.”



## Watch Night Performers

Robert Davis portraying Frederick Douglass, former slave and now freeman known worldwide who spoke on the topic: "A Glorious Era Has Begun." He analyzed Lincoln's proclamation using universal principles comparing it to the Catholic Emancipation and the British Reform Bill.

Patricia James Davis was the narrator.

Kamau Kemayo as the Reverend Henry Turner of the historic Israel Bethel Church (A.M.E.) described the first day of freedom.

Kathryn Harris as Harriet Tubman spoke on being Bound for the Promised Land;

Dr. Yvonne Singley spoke as Mrs. Frances Titus who describes the meeting between Sojourner Truth and President Lincoln on Oct. 29, 1864;

Aaron Pearl as a member of the United States Colored Troops challenged those who asked the question "Will the Black Man Fight" against his former owner for his freedom and those of his people?

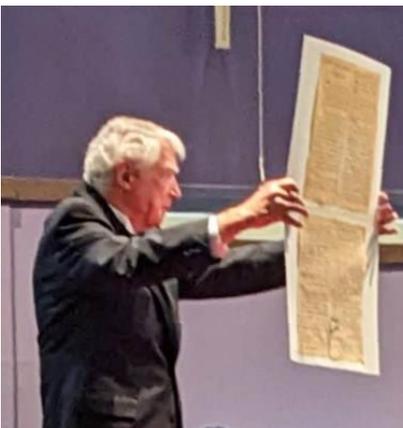
James Patton III read a letter from General Thomas answering the question, Will the Black Man Fight. The letter ended by stating, "As I rode over the battlefield and saw bodies of colored men lying side by side with white men on the very works of the enemy, General Thomas stated, "Gentlemen, the question is settled; Negroes will fight."

Kent and Sue Massie as Union Soldier Lieutenant Hannibal Johnson and his wife, recount Lt. Johnson's historic journey back home traveling behind enemy lines with the help of many brave Negroes.

Robert Lenz as President Abraham Lincoln, who read the Emancipation Proclamation;

Roger Bridges as Secretary of State Stewart;  
James Cornelius as a member of Lincoln's cabinet;

Nell Clay presenting the horrors of slavery as "A Pox On Your House."



African American History Museum  
Springfield and Central Illinois  
P.O. Box 301  
Springfield, IL 62705-0301



## MEMBERSHIP

Members receive membership cards, the *Sojourner* newsletter and museum communications. Members at the Sustaining level and above also receive invitations to previews, grand openings and special VIP events.

### Membership Categories

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual \$ 25   | <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting \$ 100-\$ 199 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family \$ 50       | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining \$ 200-\$ 499 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Youth/student \$15 | <input type="checkbox"/> Advancing \$ 500-\$ 999  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior \$20        | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$1,000      |
- Business Member \$500-\$999 (includes business listing at museum events)
- I would like to pay now for three years of membership . AMOUNT enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

Your check should be made payable and sent to the African American History Museum of Springfield and Central Illinois (AAHM) , P.O. Box 301, Springfield, IL 62705-0301