



Above is a view of Main Street in Jamestown, seen from the intersection at First Street. The two pictures at left show Colonel Silas Shearman in his later years and as in his early adulthood.

The project, called the Underground Railroad Tableau, will become a major piece of public art. Jamestown's resident sculptor David Poulin, under the direction of a committee of local historians and benefactors, has been commissioned to create the tableau. The committee is headed by honorary chairperson, Isabelle Jackson. Members include Inez Alston, Pat and Bobby Dickey, Florence Hinson, George Lawn, Paul Leone, Diane Peterson, David Shepherd, Dr. Georgiana Stewart, Lula and Vivian Taylor, and B. Dolores Thompson. Russ Diethrick sits as treasurer. The tableau will consist of three life sized figures sculpted in bronze to represent Silas Shearman, Catherine Harris and an anonymous fugitive slave.

*The slaves would talk but little; were very cautious; some of them told me that, after they started, their masters hunted for them, that they would lay down by logs in the woods and hide behind trees and see their masters go by; after they got by they would skip out and follow on, watching their masters. I can't tell how many came to my house, but this continued for several years.*

In 1850, the emerging village of Jamestown was 40 years old. James Prendergast had built his first house and sawmill in 1810 on the banks of the Outlet near today's power plant. The village grew north on Main Street from the Outlet to the crest of the hill at Fifth. The village cemetery, today's Dow Park, stretched from Fifth to Seventh streets between Washington and Cherry. Northwest to the boat landing was wet swampy land.

Catherine Harris came to Jamestown with her infant daughter Maria in 1831 shortly after her first husband died. She was born on a farm near Meadville, Pa., in 1809. She married John Harris in 1835, and together they built the house on Seventh Street, a short block from the cemetery, that she still occupied in 1902. Mrs. Harris performed domestic services and nursing for the residents of the village and treated the injuries of runaway slaves. Later, she was instrumental in helping to establish the Blackwell Chapel AME Zion Church. The building that now occupies the site of her home is the parsonage of that church.

Other black folk, mostly free but including runaway slaves, settled in the vicinity as the years passed. C.R. Lockwood estimated the number at about 100 in 1850. The area took on the designation "Little Africa."

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ris with consultations with Phineas Crossman and others whom Mrs. Harris had mentioned. His information credits Silas Shearman, harness maker, as principal among Jamestown's UGRR operatives.

The collaboration between Silas Shearman and Catherine Harris is compelling history and a metaphor for the universal collaboration between white and black abolitionists. Today, the Underground Railroad is being celebrated on both state and national levels in a determined effort to identify UGRR sites and personalities. Local historians are being called upon to provide information and documentation. Jamestown's UGRR history is a piece of the large and intricate UGRR puzzle that continues to be assembled. The substantial documentation of a history that was by necessity secretive gives that documentation considerable historical value.

A local initiative is under way to memorialize the collaboration between Silas Shearman and Catherine Harris.



Above is a view of Main Street seen from the corner of Main and Third streets in 1860. At left is Catherine Harris.