



MR. DAVID JOHNSON

August 3, 1926 – March 1, 2024

Sailor, postal worker, father, husband, social worker, civil rights activist & photographer Extraordinaire!

David Johnson, devoted, longtime Society member, was born August 3, 1926 in Jacksonville, Florida to Henry Morse and Willa Mae Peterson. At age 17, David was drafted into the US Navy during World War II, trained in Bainbridge, MD, and shipped out from San Francisco to the Philippines. His brief shore leave in San Francisco decided his home, **“The City by the Bay.”**

As a young man, David’s written application and passion for photography succeeded in getting him accepted at the California School of Fine Arts under Ansel Adams, the noted landscape photographer. He was the first African American student to become known as **“The Golden Decade”** of photographers.



DAVID JOHNSON

David Johnson was Society president from 1975 – 1977; served on the Board of Directors for a number of years including the time when Edmund S. Muskie, Secretary of State, was guest of the Society and the World Affairs Council of Northern California at the Sheraton Palace Hotel on December 4, 1980; served on Black History Week and Black History Month Committees; had several photography exhibits at the Society’s headquarters at Ft. Mason and the African American Art and Culture Complex, and several years ago at San Francisco City Hall. David created and paid for the Society’s Past Presidents’ Perpetual Plaque.

David Johnson’s accomplishments are too numerous to recite. His photographs of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s are in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and the UC Berkeley Bancroft Library Collection. David received distinguished awards, commendations, and proclamations from city, state, and congressional representatives.

- Eldoris Cameron

The San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, Inc., and community have lost a true hero! Learn more about David and his work in [A Dream Begun So Long Ago, The Story of David Johnson](#), by wife, Jacqueline Annette Sue, 2012.

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A Note from the Family:



David’s legacy will live on through a scholarship fund in his name to support young documentary photographers of color who hope to step into their own creative light. We welcome and appreciate donations at GofundMe: <https://gofund.me/736c2d50> Or use the QR code at left.

IN THIS ISSUE OF THE PRAISESINGER

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WHAT ABOUT BLACK POWER?

Black power is the same as white power but leave out the brutality.
Muhammad Ali

**SOCIETY
RELOCATION -
MEMBERSHIP
MEETING NEWS**

A Society member meeting was held on Saturday, April 20, 2024 to discuss the imminent relocation of the Society. The City and County owns 762 Fulton St. and other cultural centers, each operated by a culturally appropriate non-profit arts organization contracting with the City and County. The African American Arts and Culture Complex (AAACC) is operated by a namesake non-profit organization. After the delay caused by the COVID 19 shut down, the city has scheduled the retrofit of 762 Fulton St. to commence first of 2025.

Drew Howard, new Society member, has agreed to prepare a plan that gets the Society out of the building and into a temporary location. This will take a high degree of discipline, people power and cooperation among the Board and Society members. Other members volunteered to take on related roles.

- *Ginger Smyly*

The Society has endured many forced and voluntary relocations. The Society might change location, types of programs and services, but it will continue to uplift African American presence, contributions and history.

**RELOCATION,
PHASE I: PLANNING**

On March 11th the Society received word from the African American Arts and Culture Complex that we would have to vacate the building by October 1st for seismic retrofitting. The work will take place over a couple of years before the Society can return. A relocation plan has been developed to find a similarly-sized temporary location and to address moving the entire collection out of 762 Fulton.

The Board decided to reduce the library to only the rare and special books. Most of the volumes by and about African-Americans are available in public libraries and online. The bulk of the library will be donated or recycled; however, there might be places where they would be treasured. Any suggestions for possible groups or organizations which might like physical books would be welcomed. Contact the Society with your suggestions.

Other archival items in this rich collection will be transported to off-site storage where the Society currently is storing and conducting inventory of other items in the collection. Our art collection includes works by Sargent Claude Johnson and other local artists; these unique articles will be stored separately in a secure location.

- *Drew Howard*

If you have access to spaces available to rent, store items or if you can donate funds to assist in the transition, please contact the Board of Directors either directly or at info@sfaahcs.org.

At least one volunteer day in July/August will be held to help box everything up before the movers come in September. Please consider helping.

**SARGENT CLAUDE
JOHNSON
(1888 - 1967)
EXHIBIT**



- William Hoskins,
Executive Director-
Curator

Sargent Claude Johnson was born in Boston on November 7, 1888, the third of six children. Orphaned at an early age, he spent his early years with relatives and Catholic charities. During this time, he studied art, music, mechanical drawing and visual arts. After leaving Massachusetts and a short stay in Chicago, he moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1915. In the same year, he married his wife, Pearl Lawson and enrolled in the A.W. Best School of Art, studying drawing and painting. During the ensuing years, he moved to Berkeley, worked and continued to pursue his art studies and career. Johnson passed away October 10, 1967 in San Francisco.

The new exhibit presented by the Society, **Sargent Claude Johnson: An African American California Artist**, is designed to reflect and increase the public’s awareness of the life and contributions of a great African American California mid-century artist.

Sargent Claude Johnson is considered to be the first African-American artist in California to achieve national acclaim through traveling exhibitions hosted by the Harmon Foundation in the 1930s and 1940s and through exhibitions of the Harlem Renaissance in which his work is often included. The artist successfully assimilated three vital traditions: the New Negro movement and the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s; the form and tenets of European modernism, which first reached San Francisco through the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915; and the bohemian influences unique to the Bay Area. It is also the time when Johnson created an early masterpiece, **Forever Free** (1933.)

Grand Opening: Wednesday, June 19, 2024, 1-7:30 pm

Exhibit dates: Wednesday, June 19, 2024 - Saturday August 31, 2024

Reception: To be announced

Gallery Hours: Wednesday - Saturday, 1 - 5 pm or by appointment

Location: 762 Fulton St., 2nd fl. (AAACC) SF 415-292-6172 info@sfaahcs.org

This will be our last exhibit at the Fulton St. location for the next two years due to extensive seismic retrofit work starting end of 2024. As a result, we are in need of volunteers to assist in preparations for the move, and, to keep the exhibit opening and on view. Please us know if you are willing and able.

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Recommended Reading:

- ✓ Sargent Claude Johnson, edited by Dennis Carr, Jacqueline Francis and John P Bowles, exhibition book for the recent Huntington Library and Gardens exhibit.
- ✓ Sargent Johnson African American Modernist, edited by Lizzetta Lefalle and Judith Wilson

See photo album, last page, for preview of artworks

SOCIETY’S HOLDINGS
RETURN FROM
HUNTINGTON

Three Sargent Johnson pieces shown at the well-received Huntington Library and Gardens exhibit will be featured in the Society’s upcoming exhibit, June 19 – August 31. These legacy pieces were donated to the Society by Johnson’s daughter immediately following his death in 1967 and have not been shown at the Society since the 1990s.

REV. CECIL WILLIAMS

In April of this year, African Americans and the public at large, noted the passing of Rev. Cecil Williams, long serving pastor of Glide Memorial Methodist Church and co-founder with his late wife, Janice Mirikatani, of the Glide Foundation. Around 1963, Williams came to the Glide and Tenderloin communities and embraced and met the needs of the community’s residents, houseless, parolees, addicts, immigrants, youth, jobless, underemployed or gay. He was an important figure in the late civil rights movement and played a major role in the annual march and celebration of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday week-end. Williams played a role in launching and mentoring the careers of many social activists and leaders in the City and beyond. Thanks to you, Rev. Williams.

DR. NATHAN HARE’S
91st BIRTHDAY!

On April 9, 2024, **Dr. Nathan Hare** celebrated his 91st birthday in San Francisco. In attendance at the momentous occasion were Society members, Carl and Jayne Williams, along with many of Dr. Hare’s family, longtime friends, caregivers and professional and community colleagues.

- *Jayne W. Williams,
Esq.*

Among his many accomplishments, **Dr. Hare** is nationally recognized as *a founder of the Black Studies Movement and professor of Black Studies at San Francisco State University in the 1960’s*. The attendees enjoyed the opportunity to reminisce about “the movement” of the 60s – 70s and Dr. Hare’s contributions as a scholar and community activist during that time and following.



Dr. Hare and friends



Dr. Hare with Jayne and Carl Williams

AFRICAN AMERICANS
AND THE ARTS:

THE AFRICAN
AMERICAN
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY

In the early 1990s, with the popularity of black-themed films such as *Boyz in the Hood*, actress Sherri Young realized there was a push to have greater diversity in live theater. But, she observed, theater companies “were putting the bodies on the stage without really incorporating the culture as part of the production.” To counteract that, in February 1994, she directed and performed in a two-day showcase with other African Americans in a 70-seat San Francisco theater. “After the show sold out we had so much publicity that people kept calling and saying, ‘When are you going to do more?’ It wasn’t supposed to be a company. I wasn’t planning to do that.”

But due to popular demand, she founded the African-American Shakespeare Company. Today it mounts four productions each year, including one Shakespeare play, works by black playwrights, American classics, and a signature holiday show, *Cinderella*. Each play runs for three weekends, at the Taube Atrium Theater or the Marines Memorial Theatre. Their most recent Shakespeare play, *The Taming of the Shrew*, used a modernized script that replaced much of the archaic language. Set in the 1970s, with music and fashions of the time, it included references to black culture that might have been missed by white attendees.

“We try to bring the culture into the production itself,” said Sherri, in an interview at the company’s headquarters at 460 Gough Street. “Some productions we dive deep, and some productions it’s a smattering. ... Our official policy is: 90 % of the major roles will go to a person of color, and a majority of the cast will be African American.” The company acquired the Gough St. site in November 2021. “It was really, really lucky for us. It’s ours for now, on the graces of the building owner. We use it for our rehearsal space and ... staff.” Sherri said the company is still recovering from the pandemic. She estimates it will take two to three years “to see what the new audience will be. We’re still working on getting our audience back for *Cinderella*. We used to sell out.”

L. Peter Callender, a Trinidad native and longtime professional actor, joined the company in 2009 as its artistic director. One of his goals is to have a balanced cast of men and women on stage. This can be challenging, because Shakespeare’s characters are overwhelmingly male. For *Taming of the Shrew*, he left it up to the performers to decide whether they wanted to play a male or female role. In the end, three actresses opted to play men. “The artist’s job,” he pointed out, “is to get an emotional reaction out of you.”

The company welcomes newcomers who are interested not only in acting, but in costume design, set design, and lighting. Volunteers should be at least 16 years old. “We have a core group that we like working with,” said Sherri. “But we’ll take people at different levels, and let them work on their craft. So,

- Max Millard

there's always opportunities with us.”

The company has a robust arts education department that goes into schools, providing lesson plans and workshops, both during and after school. All the partner schools are invited to attend free student matinees of their current play on Thursdays.

One of the company's biggest boosters is San Francisco Mayor London Breed, who launched a program in 2021 called the Dream Keeper Initiative. “Coming out of the pandemic, London Breed identified that we need to get people back into San Francisco with events and programs,” said Sherri. Her company is among the more than 70 organizations that receive an annual grant to provide direct services, including the arts, to the city’s black communities.

This year, for the first time, the company will mount a big summer production, *The Little Mermaid*, featuring children from age 7 to 13. It will be based at 762 Fulton Street, which has separate rooms for classes in dance, vocals and acting, and a stage to rehearse the show. The tuition is \$25 per day. In July, the company will hold auditions for its upcoming season. Once the date is set, it will appear on the company's website, which also has information about *The Little Mermaid* and volunteering. “Talent is the first thing we look for,” Sherri emphasized. “The second thing is: This is an organization that invites people who are new to the arts. I think more than half the cast are new to Shakespeare in *Taming*.”

Asked about the value of plays beyond the entertainment level, Sherri replied, “Sometimes looking on the stage at someone else's life, you get a perspective on your life. Sometimes you can say, ‘Now I understand my mother, now I understand my sister.’”

To learn more about the company, go to www.african-americanshakes.org



L. Peter Callender and Sherri Young

BOOK CLUB UPDATE

Thanks, Shawna Sherman, for coordinating the African American Family Legacy Book Club. We are now upon our one-year anniversary. The Club just finished reading *On Juneteenth*, the tumultuous history of Texas by award-winning author and historian, Annette Gordon-Reed. Gordon-Reed amplifies the African American dilemma of dual identity as posited by W. E. B. DuBois through reflecting on her family remembrances growing up in Texas.

Next: Dorothy Lazard’s, *What You Don't know Will Make a Whole New World*. Lazard’s (recently retired Oakland Public Library librarian) memoir recounting her formative years during the 1960s, 1970s and beyond. July 6, 6 pm, via ZOOM. Next book club, September 23. Watch your email for registration information or contact the Society at info@sfaahcs.org

THREADS THAT TIE ...
 THREADS THAT BIND ...
 THREADS THAT WEAVE

Part 1



Martha Miller's wedding dress worn by Howard's daughter

- Drew Howard

When I was growing up there were numerous items in our house, ranging from silverware and quilts to photos and paintings. What ... gave rise to my imagination most was a shell display case my mother's grandfather had made with shells from the Falkland Islands. He had been shipwrecked on his way to the goldrush and eventually returned to Columbus, OH, with shells and no gold.

...it was not until I was married ... that my mom revealed the most valuable heritage - the "Free Papers" of her grandaunt Martha. A simple piece of paper folded twice to be size of a bookmark with the words "Martha Miller Free Papers" written in blue ink. This allowed her to travel out of Virginia and into Ohio in 1845, when another two dozen of other folks she grew up with were left behind. The significance of this paper has grown with me over time, and I feel a reverence, but I knew very little beyond what was written: ...

Our family heritage also included the wedding dress of this same Martha Miller. It had been hanging in a garment bag from the ceiling in the utility room for decades. At one time my mom showed it to me and explained that it had originally been white, but her grandaunt dyed it so she could wear it on other occasions. My mom (Dr. Ruth Howard) was interviewed in 1989 by The *San Francisco Chronicle* on the 144th anniversary of the Free Papers and mentions the dress, but I was still left with lingering questions about my great-grand aunt.

After my mom died in 2003, we donated it [the dress] to the Society.... there was no one else living to answer questions, but that was also at a time when genealogy was growing in popularity and ... sources were ... more abundant.

Martha Miller was the sister of Sarah Jane Miller Lee, my mother's grandmother. I began to look for the threads which connect these two sisters with Free Papers, a letter, and a dress. ... Using genealogy websites provides access to censuses, birth and death records; but sometimes it is a side move that opens even more. Having the name Samuel Miller in front of me from the Free Papers, and having received a copy of the entry of the deed in the Campbell County court record, I decided to search that name in Campbell County. I stared at the computer screen as I had one of the revealing moments seen often on "Finding your Roots." The man who had emancipated Martha... was one of the wealthiest men in ante-bellum Virginia and maybe the south... Seeing name and picture is out of the normal, and left me with my mouth ajar. "Two hundred years after his birth, Samuel Miller remained as much an enigma as he was during his lifetime." "He was a very private citizen who kept a low profile and set a rigid agenda, from which he did not deviate. Concerned that his plans would not be fulfilled if he did not prescribe all details for the disposition of his estate, he did not entrust anyone to pursue his goals with the same intensity of purpose."

Some Take Aways from Drew’s story:

Antebellum Virginia required emancipated Blacks to leave the state or face re-enslavement

Intimate relationships between White slaveholders and Black enslaved persons explain our genetic make-up

African Americans sought their fortune in California goldrush, though some were shipwrecked!

19th century folks were pragmatic: a wedding dress could be dyed and re-worn

African Americans can reconstruct a family’s story through deep dives in online and other sources

The library of the State of Virginia has a database of some 1851 Deeds of Emancipation and Manumission between 1751 and 1850. These are the ones recorded in county courthouses. After 1782 ...the acts were recorded in deeds. The deed of manumission has been described as being used to immediately set someone free and ... written into the will to be executed upon the death of the owner. This database had three deed entries for Samuel Miller, including Martha in 1845, and upon looking at the microfiche, I saw that one of the witnesses on Martha’s deed, and on an earlier one in 1839, was Edward Butler. That name rang a bell. ...It turns out that this Butler was another tobacco trader and, based on 1870 and 1880 censuses, married a woman about Sarah’s age and 18 years his junior. ...

... Numerous accounts spoke of [Miller’s] Last Will and Testament, but I was stymied in finding a copy online until I found the 1892 annual report of the Miller Fund in the University of Minnesota library. I saw that the first clause of the handwritten will was about Sarah. A house and lot in Columbus, OH, was to be held in trust for “Sarah, formerly my slave, but heretofore emancipated by me, and her children, should she have any, so long as she, the said Sarah, lives.” The first person her refers to in his will is Sarah. Further evidence of Sarah’s importance in his life is the fact that he had travelled to Columbus three months prior to writing the will in April 1859 to buy this property that he was then putting in trust to Sarah. ... Later in the will he emancipates Willie Ann “in consideration of her faithful services as a nurse to me in my ill health.” He also states “it is my will that my Executors shall cause her to be removed [to Ohio] at the expense of my estate.” This was necessary because Virginia required that emancipated people had to leave the state. This also led to some people petitioning the state legislature to be re-enslaved in order to reunite with the rest of their family still enslaved. These manuscripts are also on the University of Virginia’s website.

Indeed, in the subsequent clause to emancipating Willie Ann, he emancipates “all the rest of my slaves and direct that my Executors shall cause them to be removed, at the expense of my estate, from the State of Virginia, or from such other State as they may reside, into Liberia, in Africa, or some other non-slaveholding State.” Needless to say, this clause of the will was never enacted since Miller survived the Civil War. *End part I.*

Continued in the next *Praisesinger*

BLACK POWER

There is no such thing as Black Power just Black people with power.

NEED TECH HELP?

Check out the SF Public Library for help with [IT related issues](#).

**HARLEM OF THE WEST,
THEN AND NOW**

The long-anticipated Society film screening of the *Harlem of the West, Then and Now*, occurred on May 30th at the Buriel Clay Theater, AAACC. The film highlights the jazz era as it rolled out in San Francisco’s Fillmore district in the late 1930s through the 1960s. Conceived and produced through a collaboration with the Society and Citizen Film, a documentary film company based in the Fillmore, the film was made possible through a grant to the Society from the National Writers’ Project.

Musicians and others who lived through that period as youngsters, recount the hey-days of the time and the low days, when the redevelopment bulldozers swept through the district moving the “blight” and the people and the clubs and everything else out of the way. Special guests, Lewis Watts, co-author of *Harlem of the West...* and Sam Peoples, veteran musician, engaged in a conversation about the film and its import yet today. Following the screening, souvenir booklets that recall vignettes in the film were distributed to attendees. Jazz notes were in the air reminding the audience of the joy, the thrill, and, the sadness of our lives *Then and Now*.



Lewis Watts at film-related event; photos from the book; Honey Gallery supported filming

**FROM THE ARCHIVES:
The MANSFIELD BROS.**

Several photo albums, loose photos and documents were entrusted to the Society in the late 1990s, telling the story of the three Mansfield brothers, who all served in W.W. I.: snapshots of African American soldiers in uniform at Verdun and Longuyon dated 1919; shots of various ships at various ports, one decorated with flags and labeled, “November 11, 1918;” clippings of newspaper articles written from the field by Charles, Alonzo or Otis; typed letters from a son to his mother from France, and more. In addition to these rare WWI photos, were family photos in an album and tintypes dating from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. The Mansfields’ parents came to California and lived in the Delta in the late 1800s, migrating to San Francisco around the same time of the onset of the war. Archival items such as these describe the African American presence, history and contributions. Help us preserve and tell these stories.

- Ginger Smyly

SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS & OTHER INFO

Visit us at www.sfaahcs.org

- ✓ Grand Opening, Sargent Claude Johnson Exhibit, Wednesday, June 19, 1 – 7:30 pm
- ✓ Sargent Claude Johnson Exhibit, June 19 - August 31, 1- 5 pm, Society Gallery, call /email
- ✓ Field Trip: Maritime Museum, Saturday, July 13, 11 am
- ✓ Art Talk: Thursday, July 18, 7 pm via ZOOM, Dr. Jacqueline Francis, discusses Sargent Claude Johnson as modernist
- ✓ [View](#) Dr. Francis in conversation with the Society’s Virginia Smyly, on Sargent Claude Johnson, recorded on February 29
- ✓ Society Book Club via ZOOM; Tuesdays, July 23, and September 24. Look for registration emails
- ✓ Genealogy Resources Workshop, FALL 2024

CHECK YOUR INBOX FOR MORE INFORMATION
Call 415-292-6172 or [email](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org) us for information

THE SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

Volunteers are essential to the Society; serve on the Board, join a committee, volunteer at the gallery or in relocation activities.
info@sfaahcs.org or call 415-292-6172

PRAISESINGER ONLINE:

Read or download the *Praisesinger*. Read earlier editions of the newsletter on the [website](#)

SAN FRANCISCO
AFRICAN AMERICAN
HISTORICAL &
CULTURAL SOCIETY

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Eldoris Cameron & Ginger Smyly, Co-editors
Al Williams, President
William Hoskins, Executive Director

Photos: Jayne Williams, J. Francis, C. Rubio, D. Howard, D. Johnson, unidentified

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

(Your annual membership term is January 1 through December 31.)
LIFE members, your donation is appreciated

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PHONE _____ CELL _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

Please sign me up as a:

_____ Student	\$15	_____ Organizations	\$250
_____ Senior	\$25	_____ Small Business	\$350
_____ Adult	\$50	_____ Large Business	\$700
_____ Family	\$10	_____ Donor	
	0		

**If you do not plan to be an active member, please make a donation

Donation: \$ _____

Total: \$ _____

Membership fees and contributions are tax deductible

Make Your Check Payable/Mail To:

San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society

762 Fulton Street, 2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102
415.292.6172

I am interested in serving on the committee(s):

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ Development | _____ Library/archives |
| _____ Membership | _____ Programs |
| _____ Black History Month | _____ Communications |
| _____ Volunteer/Reception | _____ Other |

PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM -- PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM -- PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM – PHOTO ALBUM



"Four Sisters"



From the Society's Sargent Johnson Collection:
I., "Mask No. 1", "Self Portrait"



"By The Seashore"



"Head of a Boy"



Untitled



Untitled

These original Sargent Johnson enamels on steel and more will be on exhibit mid June – August at the Society gallery, 762 Fulton St., 2nd floor. See article in this edition for more information.

From this edition:



Top: Lewis Watts at Honey Gallery;
Bottom: original cover of Harlem of the West...



Mr. Davis Johnson
Photographer Extraordinaire



1847 dyed silk wedding dress as worn by
Howard's daughter