

North Hampton Historical Society

presents



Sketches of Lee: A Black American Experience

Presented by Michael C. Ward

North Hampton Town Hall March 27, 2019 at 7:00 pm

Michael Ward began the story of his family with “A Colored Man in Exeter”, the first of four volumes in the collection “Sketches of Lee.” Traditionally black families have maintained their oral histories over generations. The Wards of Lee, New Hampshire were no exception. The Ward family’s place in local (Lee, Durham and Exeter, NH) history is notable. The family left Brooklyn, NY in the summer 1957 to escape gang violence, ending up on a dirt road in Lee. In doing so they became the “Index of Integration” for Lee and the Oyster River School District in Durham, NH. In 1959 Harold Ward retired from the US Navy as a Petty Officer 1st Class, Commissaryman. Once “retired” he then began his professional career in order to support his wife, Virginia, and their 4 children. And just like them, he too became the “Index of Integration”, but this time in the Exeter, NH restaurant trade. Ward’s Exeter experiences are captured in the first volume, **Sketches of Lee: A Colored Man in Exeter**. None of these stories have ever been told outside of the family. Some of them have an edge, some are funny, some are not, but all of them are accounts of how race affected, or not, Harold Ward’s life and the progression of a relatively “normal” family. The stories are un-buffered, direct and honest. It has been wrenching to recount them. Some will be equally painful to read.

Michael C. Ward graduated from the University of New Hampshire. A software engineer by profession, he began to write for enjoyment. In May 2015 his father, Harold Ward, at age 94 was in declining health. He asked his son to write the stories of the family’s existence. Harold Ward wanted his “grand and great-grandchildren to know from whence they came.”

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