

SEVEN

William Battis

My Contribution: I served as alderman of the Eighth Ward during the 1870s. After retirement, I owned several local businesses, including a grocery store, poolroom, shooting range, and restaurant, which all served as gathering places for individual and organizational advocacy for African Americans in the city.

My Legacy: I positively impacted the Eighth Ward and Harrisburg as a whole through my advocacy for justice as an alderman and through my activist work as a Black Democrat. I advocated for diversification of the Black vote beyond the Republican party, work that has certainly borne fruit in the 20th and 21st centuries of American history.

In My Words: “As my efficiency as alderman of the Eighth Ward might be impaired by reason of the publicity given to this charge if I should remain silent, I publicly deny my guilt of the offense charged and pronounce it false in every particular, and to have been prompted by malice and petty jealousy...The matter having now been finally disposed of, a sense of justice to myself requires this public denial of guilt.” — *Harrisburg Telegraph*, July 30, 1875.

Full Name: William Battis • Birth Date: June 10, 1830 (Certificate of Death) or 1838 (census record) • Death Date: May 18, 1907 • Place of Birth: Pennsylvania • Gender: Male • Race: “Mulatto” (1850 *Federal Census*) and Black (1880 *Federal Census*) • Places of Residence: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: 500 Spruce (1875-1876), 401 Spruce (1877-1878), 195 Angle Avenue (1880-1882), 501 State Street (1883), 913 ½ N 7th Street (business- 1884), 819 E. State Street (1884), 525 State (1885-1887), and 523 State Street (1888-1889). • Connection to the Old Eighth Ward: Resident and alderman from 1875-1879; store owner. • Family Members: Wife: M1: Nellie Battis. Wife: M2: Ella Battis. Daughter: Gertrude Battis. • Education: Could read and write. • Occupations: Alderman. Retail Grocer. Restaurateur. Shooting Range owner. Poolroom owner. • Church Membership: Unknown • Activism: William K. Alricks Club, The Central Blaine Club of Central Pennsylvania (hosted meeting in home for the Central Blaine Club of Central Pennsylvania in 1880 in support of James Blain, Republican nominee for president), Pittsburgh Colored Convention, and the Cleveland Tariff Reform Club. • Connections: William R. Dorsey, James H.W. Howard, William Howard Day, Joseph Popel, George H. Imes, John W. Simpson, Jacob Compton, David Chester, Spencer P. Irvin, and John Gaitor, Aquila Amos, Ann Amos.