

# Sojourner Truth statue ends journey at home

By MARY CAREY  
Staff Writer

**NORTHAMPTON** — Sojourner Truth, abolitionist, women's rights advocate, itinerant preacher, former slave and one of Northampton's most famous citizens, made a comeback Sunday, with the unveiling of a bronze statue in her likeness in her old neighborhood in Florence.

Over 600 people turned out for a ceremony that included performances by the Florence Community Band and the Joyful Noise Gospel Choir, emotional and historical speeches, words from the sculptor and — finally — the 7-foot high bronze of Truth, herself, glinting in the sun.

"Honey, it's not big enough for the walk she's made. I'm so proud to be here. I made the journey," said an ebullient Sharon Harris of Springfield, after waiting her turn to have her photograph taken beside the towering Truth.

Harris's twin sister, Karen Hurd, of Northampton, a teacher at Bridge Street School and a member of the Sojourner Truth Memorial Statue Committee that labored for nine years on the memorial, was in tears.

"Hopefully it's another way to fight racism," Hurd said. "Children will see this and say to their parents, 'Who is Sojourner Truth?'"

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*The Rev. Andrea Ayzaiian*

Truth, born a slave in approximately 1797 and named Isabella Baumfree, came to Florence in 1843 to live with the Northampton Association of Education and Industry, a utopian community that disbanded in 1846.

She stayed in Florence until 1857, in a home near the corner of Pine and Park streets, where the statue now stands, before moving to Michigan.

Her memoirs, which she dictated, were published in 1850 as "The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave," making her a sought-after figure on the women's rights and anti-slavery lecture circuit.

The Rev. Peter Ives, speaking at Sunday's ceremony, called Truth, "a symbol of triumph for all the disempowered people in the world."

"We are very proud of Sojourner Truth, and I have a feeling that Sojourner Truth would be very proud of us, too," the Rev. Andrea Ayzaiian, said in a tearful tribute to the scores of volunteers and contributors to the \$200,000 project.

Committee member Reynolds Winslow of Amherst, who gave the



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The dedication of the Sojourner Truth statue drew a crowd of more than 600 people to Florence Sunday. Here people linger after the unveiling of the statue at the corner of Pine and Park streets.

opening and closing remarks at the ceremony, said both the appearance of the statue and the number of people who had turned out to see its unveiling exceeded his expectations.

"I was just blown away," Winslow said afterward of the moment the covering came off the statue.

Pictures of the two-foot high "maquette," or model, of the statue which two juries used in choosing the sculptor, had been widely publicized before Sunday's event, but few people had seen the finished piece.

Thomas Jay Warren, the Colorado sculptor, told the crowd that making the statue was "the greatest honor of my career."

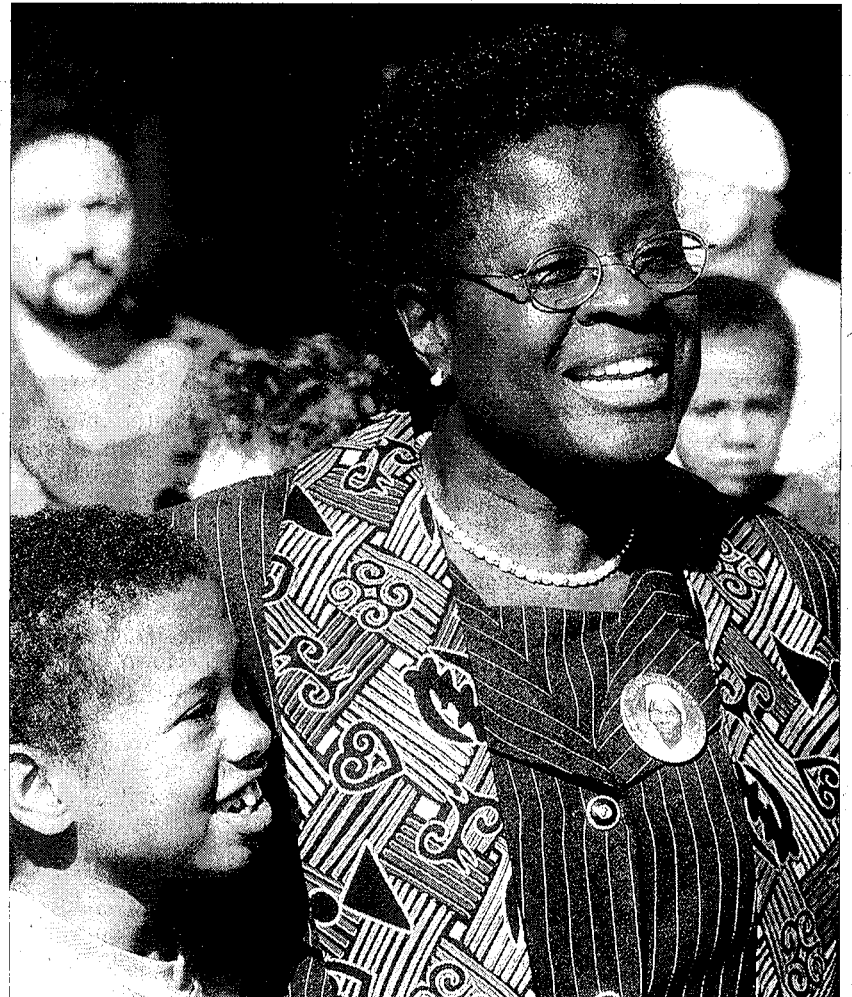
Warren said he became passionate about winning the commission after he researched Truth's history and saw several photographs of her. A towering figure in life at almost 6 feet tall, Truth had a "powerful physical presence" not captured in drawings he'd seen, Warren said in an interview after the ceremony.

"You can put this down: This is the best community I've ever worked with," the soft-spoken Warren said of his several years of collaboration with the committee.

Kamillah Smith, 8, of Florence, said the most noticeable things about the statue were Truth's eyeglasses and her cane, and how realistic her eyes and hair look.

"It's important actually," Smith said, upon reflection, of Truth's likeness. "Because it reminds you about what she did to help."

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Karen Hurd, a member of the Sojourner Truth statue committee and a second grade teacher at the Bridge Street School, stands with a former student Robeson Cowhey, 10, while singing "We shall Overcome," after the unveiling of the statue Sunday.