



Courtesy of Jeffrey Fletcher

The Ruby & Calvin Fletcher African American Museum, Connecticut's first African American museum, displays a vast collection of artifacts dating from the Atlantic slave trade to the Jim Crow South. Next spring, the museum's exhibits will be relocated to the childhood home of John W. Sterling, the namesake of Sterling Memorial Library.

The renovation is set to be completed by the spring of 2024, with total costs estimated to be between \$2.5 and \$3 million dollars, according to museum collector Jeffrey Fletcher. Since Fletcher officially founded the museum in 2021, the collection has been housed in a 4,700-square-foot historic registered home provided by the town of Stratford.

When the museum first opened, Fletcher named the museum in honor of his parents, Ruby and Calvin Fletcher, who grew up in Camden, South Carolina and Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina respectively during the 1940s. As Ruby Fletcher relocated from the south to Colchester, Connecticut, she collected artifacts from auctions and tax sales; these items serve as the foundation for the museum's archive.

"Her collection was telling a story, and it was telling a story about her life growing up in the South," Fletcher said of his mother, Ruby. "She used those objects to talk about racial discrimination, Jim Crow, oppression and all the things that went along in terms of why African Americans migrated from the South to all points across the United States to get fair housing and equal rights."

Jeffrey Fletcher inherited the collection of artifacts when his mother passed away in 2000. Taking inspiration from the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., Fletcher amassed over 7,500 pieces of African American artifacts, including authentic items as well as reproductions, to make African American history accessible to the local community.

“The history of how African-American and Black people came to this country and helped build this country is important for us all to never forget,” said Stratford mayor Laura Hoydick, who supported the museum’s establishment. “Segregation, where we were, and how far we’ve come is another lesson that is important to all of us. It’s just such a gift to our community to have someone of his caliber and [to have] his and his mother’s collection here.”

Now, Fletcher plans to repurpose John W. Sterling’s childhood home — a vacated colonial mansion owned by the town of Stratford that offers nearly 10,000 square feet —to permanently host the collection. Sterling’s great-granddaughter, according to Fletcher, requested that Sterling’s childhood home be used to support arts and culture.

Sterling left \$15 million to the University upon his death in 1918, funding the construction of the Sterling Memorial Library.

The project’s initial funding came from Shearman & Sterling LLP, a law firm based in New York City that Sterling co-founded in 1873. According to William Roll, chief operator at Shearman and Sterling, Fletcher emailed the firm’s senior partner, David Beverage, two years ago asking if the firm would be interested in supporting the effort.

“We thought it made great sense, the connection between one of Shearman & Sterling’s founders and doing something good from a social and historical perspective,” Roll said. “It was a nice intersection of our firm’s commitment to diversity and understanding and appreciating history.”

Shearman & Sterling provided the museum with \$157,000, according to Fletcher, while the town of Stratford has contributed three-quarters of the total cost, or approximately \$1,875,000. The museum is looking to secure another \$500,000 to complete the project. Hoydick called the project “a costly venture” for both Fletcher and Stratford taxpayers.

Fletcher retired from the New Haven Police Department in 2015 after serving as an officer for 20 years. Now, all NHPD officers are required to visit the museum as part of cultural sensitivity training for officers, and Fletcher said he is working to develop a policing exhibit at the museum.

The museum is currently located at 952 East Broadway Stratford, Connecticut.

Correction 5/18: A previous version of this article incorrectly stated that Calvin Fletcher grew up in Reno instead of Fuquay-Varina, North Carolina. The article has been updated with the correct information.

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