

**STORIES FROM THE PECULIAR PARADISE
PROMINENT BLACK MEN
IN OREGON HISTORY**



JANUARY 30 TO MARCH 15, 2009



STORIES FROM THE PECULIAR PARADISE

Welcome,

African Americans have a rich history in Oregon dating back from as early as 1788 when the first recorded instance of a black man (Marcus Lopez) set foot in Tillamook Bay. Sixteen years later a black slave named York would be among the overland Lewis and Clark expedition who reached the mouth of the Columbia River near Astoria.

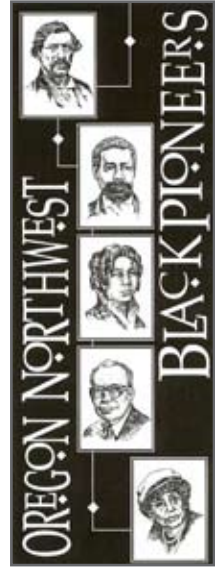
As Oregon was being explored and settled, the stories of blacks who came as slaves and free men and women has been largely unknown and undocumented. Though small in number their state-wide presence is documented and their life stories interspersed with those of other pioneers who came over the Oregon Trail in the 1800s to settle.

Their lives could not have been easy, given the fears of the Fugitive Slave laws, Oregon's own Exclusion Laws and the public's general attitude about African Americans. However in spite of immense obstacles, history records that they continued to come, to acquire property, to own businesses, to educate their children and to contribute to the communities in which they lived.

This exhibit highlights six stories of men who lived in the peculiar paradise called Oregon; a beautiful Eden-like place where the "peculiar institution" of slavery cast a shadow and yet the human spirit prevailed.

Thank you for coming,

The Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers



UP FROM SLAVERY

The first African slaves were brought to the Americas in the 1500s. For the next 300 years the slave trade and plantation system provided the backbone economy of manual labor in the emerging country known as the United States of America.

Slave documents bear witness to the trafficking, sale and ultimately the freedom of human beings during the time of this “peculiar institution.”



Slave Bill of Sale

The Slave Market Announcement – usually posted in and near the slave market to entice slave owners to come back to the market to inspect, bid on and buy slaves

Individual Sale Papers – the contract or “receipt” contract between slave owners

Manumission/Freedom Papers – Given to a slave at the time they were freed. The paper was signed by the former owner of the slave and certified that the African-American holding the paper was a free man or woman.

In theory, the manumission paper protected the former slave against capture under the Fugitive Slave laws. Since African-Americans could not testify in court, and had little legal standing even in the North, the manumission paper testified for them.



Manumission Papers



OREGON EXCLUSION LAWS

In June, 1844, the Provisional Government of Oregon enacted its first laws regarding the status of slaves, and therefore blacks, in the Oregon Country. Slavery was declared to be illegal, and settlers who currently owned slaves were required to free them within three years. Any free blacks age 18 or older had to leave the area, men within two years and women within three. Black children were permitted to stay in the Oregon Country until they reached age 18.

The original exclusion law was the infamous “Lash Law” which subjected blacks found guilty of violating the law to whippings -- no less than 20 and no more than 39 strokes of the lash -- every six months “until he or she shall quit the territory.” It was soon recognized that this punishment was far too severe, and the law was modified before it went into effect.

The new version, enacted in December, 1844, replaced the whippings with forced labor. If a black person was tried and found guilty of being in the Oregon Country illegally, he or she was to be hired out publicly to whoever would employ them for the shortest amount of time. After the period of forced labor expired, the “employer” had six months to get the black individual out of Oregon. Failure to do so was punishable by a fine of \$1000. This law was to go into effect in 1846, by which time those who wrote it doubtless hoped that most blacks would have left Oregon, but it was repealed in the 1845 session of the Provisional Legislature.

Another exclusion law was passed in September, 1849, which simply forbade blacks from settling in the newly-declared Oregon Territory. Any already in residence were permitted to stay. In 1851, Jacob Vanderpool, an Oregon City boarding house and saloon owner, became the only person known to have been exiled from the Territory under Oregon’s exclusion laws. The law under which he was charged and sentenced was repealed in 1854. However, another exclusion law took its place and on February 14, 1859 Oregon became the first state admitted into the Union with exclusion laws still written into the state constitution.



MOSES “BLACK” HARRIS

Harris was born 1800 and believed to have first come west in the 1820s to do fur trading and help build forts. Counted among his contemporaries and friends were other trappers and mountain men such as Jedediah Smith, Jim Bridger and Jim Beckworth. There are many wild tales about his antics; his ability to spin a good yarn, and even some modern day controversy from some who refuse to believe that he was, in fact, black.

However, his own words (as relayed by Jim Bridger) proudly proclaim how he saw himself:

“Well he sat down to dinner one day in a tavern, and a lady says to him: “Well Mister Harris, I hear you’re a great trav’ler” “Trav’ler marm,” says Black Harris, “this nigger’s no trav’ler; I ar a trapper, marm, a mountain-man, wagn!”

What is not questioned is that Harris spent many years exploring and trapping throughout the Rocky Mountains and the Oregon Territory. He was well respected by friend and foe alike, and he was a skilled guide.

As the migration to Oregon began, Harris became a well known wagon train guide and was considered an expert in winter travel. In 1845, he rescued the Stephen Meek party and guided them safely to The Dalles after they became lost in the high desert. In 1836, he helped guide the Whitman-Spalding party to Oregon; and in 1844 he piloted one of the largest immigration wagon trains ever to cross the Oregon Trail.

When alternative routes to the Barlow Trail were needed through the Cascades into southern Oregon, Harris worked alongside Jesse Applegate to explore and develop what became known as the Applegate Trail. Later Harris would rescue a party stranded on that trail.



Harris returned to Independence Missouri, where he is believed to have died of cholera in 1849.

To this day, there is a long-standing controversy about Harris's race, though artist Alfred Jacob Miller, who knew Harris well, once wrote: "He was of wiry form... with a face apparently composed of tan leather and ship cord, finished off with a peculiar blue-black tint, as if gunpowder had been burnt into his face."



LOUIS SOUTHWORTH

Southworth was born a slave in Tennessee about 1830 and was brought to Oregon in 1853. He was allowed to leave the territory to earn his freedom and found his way to the northern gold fields of California.

Unable to strike it rich, he used his talent on the fiddle to earn money in Yreka California by teaching violin and playing for dancing schools, earning \$400 to buy his freedom from James Southworth. He moved on to Eureka and Virginia

City, Nevada where he bought stock in the Comstock ledge.

On his way back to Oregon City, while in the Jacksonville area he was accosted by soldiers fighting in the Rogue Valley Indian War who threatened to take his rifle (which he had just bought for \$50) necessary for protection in this isolated country. He joined them because: "feeling as if I could not part with my gun, which was the only means of defense I had and joined the company." He fought in two skirmishes in 1856 and was wounded.

Southworth was an industrious man and held a variety of jobs, and would eventually raise \$1,000 (\$23,000 in today) to buy his freedom, making his

final payment in 1859. Though James Southworth circulated a petition to protect his “slave property,” in the end James gave Louis Southworth his freedom.

Southworth settled in Buena Vista in Polk County around 1870, purchased land and established a blacksmith shop and livery stable. In 1873 he married Mary Cooper of Salem. Cooper had an adopted son, Alvin McCleary. They all lived in Buena Vista while Alvin attended a two story school house, Buena Vista Academy. Southworth also attended the Academy where the principal taught him to read and write.

In 1879 Southworth traveled with a white friend, Jim Doty, up the Alsea River where they decided to homestead about four miles above Waldport. That same year Southworth began to run a scow (a flat-bottomed, rectangular boat), which ferried cargo and people up and down the river. He ran the scow for many years.

In 1880 Southworth chose to risked everything, his life and livelihood, to cast his ballot for Abraham Lincoln. Southworth took his right to vote seriously, and when a storm was blowing across Alsea Bay, everyone else in town was afraid to cross the bay to vote. Not to be stopped, Southworth rigged up oil cans on the front and back of his boat to provide extra flotation and braved the storm. He was the only one to cross the bay that day stating: “Boys, Abe Lincoln’s on trial every time there’s a big election in this country, so I’m going to cross the bay to vote or die in the attempt!”

In 1883, Southworth donated ½ acre of his land in Alsea Bay at Oakland Landing for a school. The school was called Darkey Creek School and served as the head of the school board. He was well respected in the community, and even during the days of KKK in Waldport, they left him alone. Southworth was likely the only black member of the Victoria Lodge of Masons at San Francisco and possibly the only black member of the Oregon Pioneer Association.





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In 1901, Southworth's first wife, Mary Cooper, died. In 1910 he moved to Corvallis and purchased a house on the corner of 4th and Adams, like the Victorian houses that still survive. His health started declining after that and members of the community raised \$300 to pay off his mortgage. In 1913, at age 84, Southworth married Josephine Jackson, 31 years his junior. He died in 1917 and is buried in Crystal Lake Cemetery in Corvallis.

According to a 1915 article in the Daily Gazette Times, when Southworth's fellow Baptist church members told him that he could not continue to play the fiddle at church, "I told them to keep

me in the church with my fiddle if they could but to turn me out if they must, for I could not think of parting with my fiddle. I reckon my name isn't written in their books here any more; but I somehow hope it's written in the big book up yonder, where they aren't so particular about fiddles," Southworth said.

In 2000, at the behest of members of the Oregon Geographic Names Board and approved by the United States Board of Geographic Names, two features on Southworth's land called Darkey Creek and Darkey Road were renamed Southworth Creek and Southworth Road out of respect for Southworth's influence on his community.

In February of 2005, Rep. Gordon Smith honored Southworth during a black history celebration in Congress. Smith had this to say: "Louis A. Southworth was a blacksmith, fiddler, and farmer. Though a combination of his contagious personality, appealing fiddle playing, and an unwavering devotion to civic duty, he became one of Oregon's most respected and well-liked citizens of his time...Despite the chaotic times in which he lived, Louis Southworth was embraced by his community...[and] provides one example of a man triumphing over seemingly insurmountable odds.

RICHARD BOGLE

Richard Bogle was born in Jamaica in 1835, stowed away on a ship to New York at the age of 12 and came by wagon train to Oregon at the age of 16. For the next few years he moved around the Oregon Territory then went south to Yreka and Deadwood California where by age 22 he had opened a restaurant, a barbershop and tried gold mining.

Bogle returned to Oregon in the mid-1800s and opened a barbershop in Roseburg (and later in Salem) where he met and married America Waldo in 1863. America was the slave daughter of Daniel Waldo and had been brought to Oregon with the Waldo family.



The Bogle-Waldo marriage took place on January 1, 1863 at the First Congregational Church in Salem and was officiated by the Rev. Obed Dickinson, who hosted the wedding reception. A black wedding taking place in a white church, and a party attended by both blacks and whites, was apparently too much for some people to handle. The event provoked nasty comments from Asahel Bush, first in his private letters and then in the Oregon Statesman; eventually, the incident made the newspapers as far away as the Portland Oregonian and the San Francisco Bulletin.

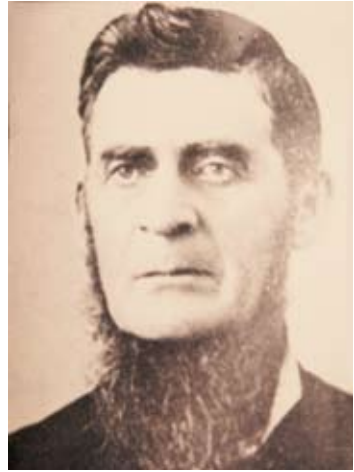


In 1864, the Bogles moved to Walla Walla, Washington where Richard bought a 200 acre ranch, and became a wealthy businessman and later one of the founders of the Walla Walla Savings and Loan Association.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AND REV. OBED DICKINSON

A controversial congregational pastor, Obed Dickinson, agreed to accept three black members into his church's membership labeling it the "nigger church." Dickinson spoke out against requiring blacks to pay the school tax without allowing them to attend public schools.

Dickinson's wife Charlotte welcomed black women into her home and taught them how to read and write. In January of 1863 Dickinson officiated at the wedding of America and Richard Bogle.



JOHN LIVINGSTONE

William Livingstone was born into slavery in 1836 in Missouri. At age 12 he was sold to a man who lived in Hannibal Missouri and is said to have grown up as a boyhood friend of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). He was later sold again to Judge Joseph Ringo for \$850.

Ringo freed Livingstone in 1863, but Livingstone came to Oregon with the Ringo family in 1864. The family settled in the Oregon City area where Livingstone was given a 40 acre tract of land.



Livingstone was a very industrious man who worked at several jobs to make a living including working as a hostler, buying a team of horses and transporting wood and lumber from the bluffs in Oregon City as the buildings and sidewalks were being built. He was a frequent sight coming down Singer Hill to Oregon City as sidewalks were being built along Main St. and on Seventh above the bluffs.

He continued to farm and acquire property, around Clarkes, and added another 180 acres in Eastern Oregon. He was a prominent member of the State Grange and a well respected businessman. When he died in 1912, he left an estate of about \$15,000 and hundreds of people attended his funeral. He is buried in the Clarkes Cemetery.



GEORGE FLETCHER

George Fletcher was born in St. Marys, Kansas in 1890. His family came to Oregon at the turn of the century and settled in Pendelton. Growing up he became friends with Native Americans from the Umatilla Indian Reservation and learned their language, customs and horsemanship.

By the age of 12 he had begun to participate in rodeos, and in 1910, at the age of 20, he took second place in a July 4th celebration rodeo in Pendelton, currently called the Pendelton Roundup.

In 1911, Fletcher made the finals in Saddle Bronc riding. He competed against Jackson Sundown, a Native American, John Spain, a European American, among others, for a World Title in rodeo. This competition became known as “the controversial finals” because of the diverse participants.



In that 1911 championship, Fletcher turned in a brilliant ride, but the judges requested a second horse for him and made him ride again. Again, Fletcher stayed on, though the horse bucked wildly. Again, the crowd roared its approval, but the judges placed him 2nd to John Spain (a white rider). The crowd was furious, and a near riot ensued. The people present recognized that an injustice had been done. Only the quick thinking of Sheriff Til Taylor saved the day.

Taylor took Fletcher's hat, tore it into pieces and sold the pieces to the protesting crowd of thousands. Taylor then awarded the money to Fletcher and named him "the Peoples Champion." Taylor wished for Fletcher to have a championship saddle like the one awarded to Spain, but one never materialized.

Fletcher went on to enter and win many saddle bronc competitions in Oregon until a wound sustained during World War I made it impossible for him to continue. After that, Fletcher worked as a ranch cowboy in the Pendelton area until his death in 1973.

Fletcher was inducted into the Pendelton Roundup Hall of Fame in 1969 and the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma in 2006.



WILLIAM TEBEAU

William Tebeau was born in 1925 in Baker City Oregon. His grandparents came west in 1885 and settled in Huntington just inside Baker County. His parents moved to the area later, and set up house in Baker City.

Tebeau was an excellent student with a special interest in writing and music. He played violin in grade school and later switched to the trumpet. Tebeau played first chair in the band and orchestra throughout grade school.



At age 12, he joined the Boy Scouts and worked his way up to the Eagle Scout designation and the Order of the Arrow. In 1943 Tebeau graduated from Baker High School and was admitted to Oregon State College (later renamed Oregon State University).

Tebeau's arrival in Corvallis was unexpected since he had not indicated his race on the application, and housing was an issue until he was befriended by several OSU staff members. He excelled in college and played trumpet in the ROTC band. Tebeau graduated from college in

1948 with a Bachelor of Science in Chemical Engineering. He was the first African American male to graduate from the school.

Tebeau returned to Baker City with no job opportunities before him. Finding work in the Northwest as an African American was no easy task, but Tebeau was not discouraged by the doors closed to him by race inequality. Instead, Tebeau chose to study on his own to become a licensed Civil Engineer. Along the way, Tebeau met and married Genevieve Bailey (a Pendelton High graduate). Tebeau eventually found a job with the State Highway Department (later renamed Oregon Department of Transportation) where he carved out a place in history; leaving his mark on Oregon civil engineering for decades.





STORIES FROM THE PECULIAR PARADISE

Tebeau's career with the Highway Department is legendary, because of his prolific production of education materials and outstanding skill in math and engineering. He rose to the engineer 7 position. In 1971, Tebeau was named Employee of the Year by the Oregon State Employees Association. In addition he was awarded Teacher of the Year in 1970 for his work as a part-time Instructor at Chemeketa Community College.



Tebeau is now retired after an illustrious career of four decades and continues to live in Salem with his wife, Genevieve. They have seven children, 13 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.



Further Readings about Salem and Oregon's Black History

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Also search on-line for "Salem Black history or Oregon Black History"





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The World Beat Gallery opened in 2006. It is located on the 2nd Floor of the Reed Opera House, on the corner of Court and Liberty in downtown Salem, Oregon.

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Salem Multicultural Institute was founded in 1997 to create an atmosphere of openness and appreciation for people of all ethnic backgrounds. We believe that education about and exposure to the traditions of different cultures can counter intolerance and enrich the community. We are best known for our World Beat Festival, held at Riverfront Park the last weekend of June.

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