

Negro Republic Of Liberia Nears 100th Birthday

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AP Newsfeature Writer

WASHINGTON—The tiny, Negro Republic of Liberia will be 100 years old July 26.

Situated on the west coast of Africa, Liberia owes its existence to a group of American statesmen who felt, as early as 1800, that American Negroes could find a new and better life in Africa.

Founded by one-time slaves, the little nation today looks with pride on its achievements during the war, when it produced more crude rubber than any other country except Ceylon.

In 1817 a group of influential Americans formed the American Colonization Society in Washington. Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, a nephew of George Washington, was elected president and Francis Scott Key, author of the "Star Spangled Banner," vice-president. Other influential men of "Who's Who" status joined the society.

One of the Society's first acts was to sponsor the emigration to Africa of slaves who had achieved their freedom.

In 1820 the first contingent of 88 emigrants left the United States for Sierra Leone, West Africa. They found it unsuitable for colonization and sailed south to Sherbro Island. Here 22 persons died, including all the white men in the party, three of whom were Colonization Society agents.

Within a year another group had arrived from the states, and an expedition left the temporary settlement to travel south down the coast of Africa and find a permanent home.

Had Difficult Start
The expedition soon reached a likely-looking area next to the present site of Monrovia, capital of Liberia, and bought a coastal strip 130 miles long and some 40 miles deep, from the natives.

Those early settlers, it appears from all accounts, had it as tough as our own Mayflower clan. When the main contingent sailed south to inhabit the newly-acquired land, it was driven out by fierce native tribes and was forced to take refuge on a small island, afterwards named Providence Island, owned by a mulatto British trader.

Here the pioneers resolved to stay for the time being. Elijah Johnson, a leading colonist, voiced the thoughts of his fellows when he put foot on Providence Island and said "Two long years I sought a home; here I have found one and here will I remain."

Seven months later, in August 1820, Jehudi Ashmun made the trip from the states and took over virtual leadership of the struggling colony. By that time the settlers had fought off hostile native groups and established a "small community" on the mainland.

Growth Slow, Tedious
Slowly and tediously the colony grew. Each year back in Washington the Colonization Society met to plan future emigrations. At the meeting in 1824 Society members decided to call the new colony "Liberia," a name which it was agreed "denotes a settlement of persons made free."

And since President Monroe had given the enterprise his blessing, the "small community" was given the name of Monrovia.

By 1838 Liberia had grown suf-

ficiently to be chartered by the Colonization Society as a commonwealth. The idea behind this move was to give the colony opportunity to gain experience in representative government. And shortly afterwards pressure grew in Liberia for complete freedom from the Society.

A convention met to consider steps to be taken. On July 26, 1847, the convention issued a Declaration of Independence.

Delegates agreed that the form of government would be patterned after that of this country, and a flag was made resembling its basic design.

The Declaration of Independence went, in part, like this:

"We the people of the Republic of Liberia, were originally the inhabitants of the United States of North America. The Western Coast of Africa was selected by American benevolence and philanthropy for our future home.

Therefore, in the name of humanity and virtue and religion; in the name of the Great God, our common creator and our common judge, we appeal to the nations of Christendom and ask them that they will regard us with the sympathy and friendly consideration to which the peculiarities of our condition entitle us and extend to us that

comity which marks the friendly intercourse of civilized independent communities."

Prosperity Arrives
So Liberia became a free, independent republic. But not until 1862 did the United States recognize it as such. Liberia had already been recognized by Great Britain and France.

The period following U. S. recognition was a prosperous one for the Negro Republic. Liberian coffee commanded a high price and was the principal export staple for many years. Toward the close of the century it began to be supplanted throughout the world by Brazilian coffee.

Time and again the United

States stood in the way of attempts to encroach on Liberian sovereignty.

Today some 2,500,000 people live in Liberia. The 100th anniversary of independence will be celebrated by a two-year-long exposition in which foreign nations have been invited to participate.

In the words of Liberian President William V. S. Tubman, the independence of his nation is an event to be celebrated with "just and modest pride."

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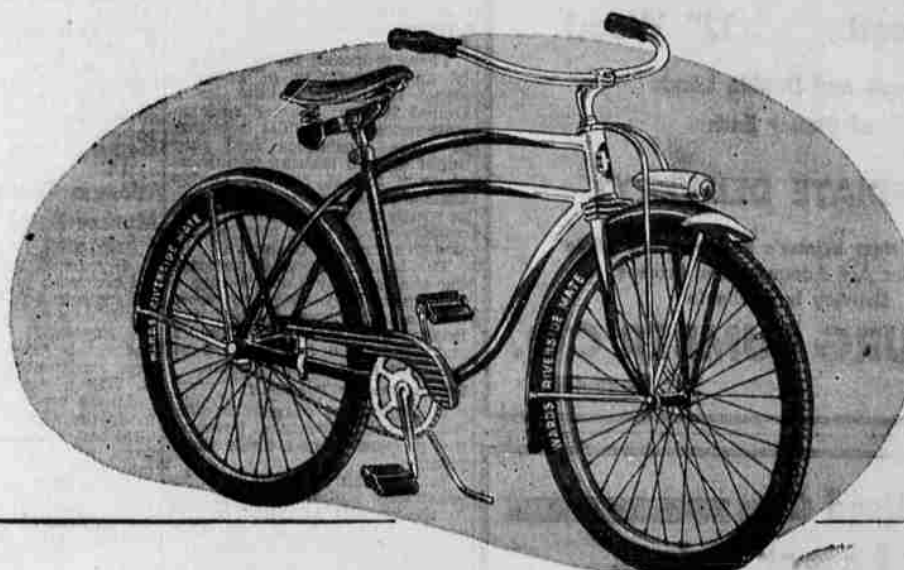
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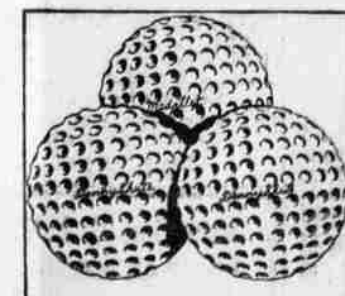
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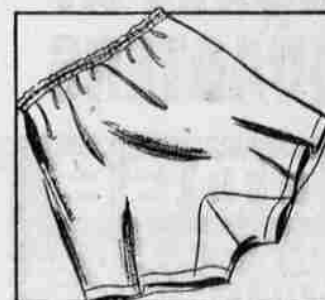
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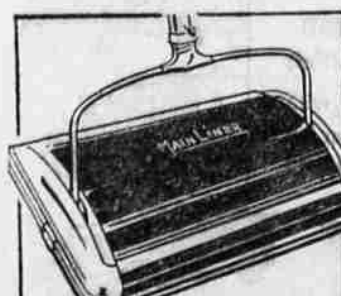
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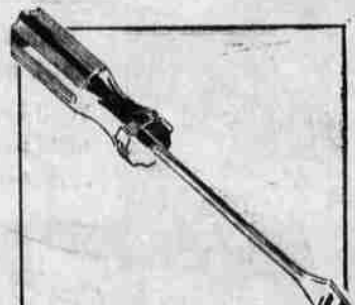
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