

A new exhibit sheds light on Astoria's history of racism and segregation

'Blocked out'

BY PETER KORCHNAK

A new exhibit at the Clatsop County Heritage Museum challenges visitors to confront a somber side of Astoria's history: racial discrimination and segregation.

"Blocked Out: Race, Place, and the Making of Modern Astoria," on view now, tells this often unknown story of Oregon's oldest town.

The centerpiece of the exhibit is a graphic map of Astoria depicting, in red-color overlays, locations where instances of discrimination occurred.

The idea, according to Dr. Chelsea Vaughn, curator for the Clatsop County Historical Society, who organized the exhibit, is to "connect racial discrimination to geographic space and locate ways in which actual physical places perpetuated and codified" these practices throughout Astoria's history.

The Astoria Column location is highlighted in the map because the year prior to its construction, the Ku Klux Klan burned a large cross atop Coxcomb Hill. Klan members' governance of Astoria in the 1920s led to the collapse of Astoria's Black community, Vaughn said, pointing to census data.

Today's American Legion building is on the map as the 1940s site of a separate USO that Black servicemen operated because they were barred from fraternizing with white soldiers (this was in the same space where the klan had held meetings decades earlier).

The historical society itself is in the red zone because it had displayed Chief Comcomly's skull in the 1950s. "It's very much about being accountable as well," Vaughn said.

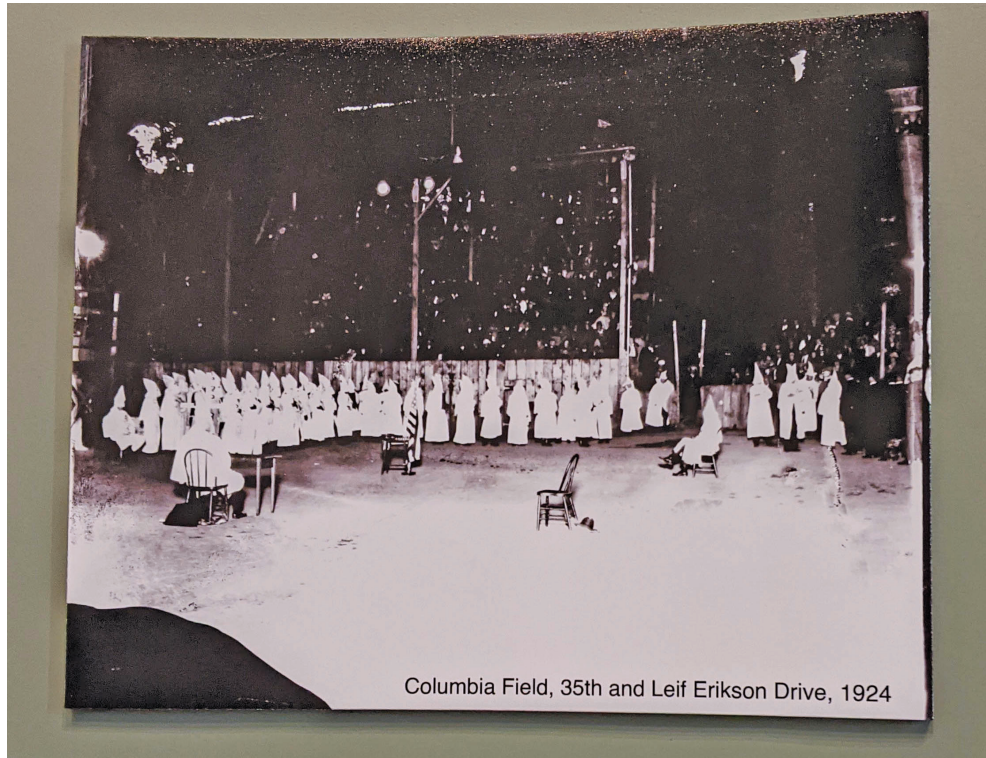
Texts, facsimiles and photographs support the historical narrative with specific, documented stories. The exhibition eschews physical objects, Vaughn said, in

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Photos by Peter Korchnak

Dr. Chelsea Vaughn, curator at the Clatsop County Historical Society, stands next to the new exhibit 'Blocked Out: Race, Place, and the Making of Modern Astoria' at the Heritage Museum.



Columbia Field, 35th and Leif Erikson Drive, 1924



ABOVE: Ku Klux Klan masks are seen in the exhibit.

LEFT: A photo of the Ku Klux Klan at Columbia Field in 1924.

'Blocked Out: Race, Place, and the Making of Modern Astoria'

On view at the Clatsop County Heritage Museum

1618 Exchange St., Astoria

Visit astoriamuseums.org or call 503-325-2203 for hours