



Nat Love, known as "Deadwood Dick", won the title of expert marksman on July 4, 1876 in competition in Deadwood, S.D., where he also earned his nickname. The range rider was one of a number of blacks who made names for themselves in the Wild West.

(Howard University Moorland-Spingarn Reacher Center photo)

Blacks make mark on History

by Henry Duvall

Did you know that a black doctor performed the world's first successful open heart surgery? Or that the phrase, "The Real McCoy" was coined to identify the invention of a black man? Or that the song "I'm Just Wild About Harry," which Harry Truman so fondly embraced, was written by blacks?

These achievements and others make up a part of American history that many people aren't aware of.

February is Black History Month, which means a time to remember, a time to learn the little-known facts about black contributions to America and the world, says Dr. Olive Taylor, assistant professor of history at Howard University.

Taylor is the consultant for an hour-long special television documentary to be aired during Black History Month called "Black Achievement in American History." The nationally syndicated program, which features Taylor, Sidney Poitier, Cicely Tyson, Andrew Young and others, highlights black achievements from the Revolutionary period to the 1980s.

Blacks made contributions to America even before the birth of the nation, says Taylor. On March 5, 1770, a runaway slave who became a

sailor, Crispus Attucks, became the first American to give his life in the struggle between the American colonies and the British. Attucks and compatriots were killed in the Boston Massacre.

There were even black Minutemen who joined whites in answering Paul Revere's call to arms. And black militiamen Pomp Blackman and Prince Esterbrook made the heroes' honor roll at Lexington and Concord, Mass.

In 1773, a black fur trader, Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable, founded the settlement that was later to become the city of Chicago.

During the post-Revolutionary period, a number of blacks gained acclaim. Among them was inventor, scientist and astronomer Benjamin Banneker, who helped survey and plan the city of Washington, D.C. He is also believed to be the first person to build a clock in America.

Poet Phillis Wheatley became the first black woman to have a book published in America, and it is believed that her book was the second to be written by an American woman.

Blacks were an integral part of the Western movement, says Taylor. She points out, as an example, that James Beckwourth, a former slave, discovered the pass through the

Sierra Nevada Mountains which still bears his name.

There were a number of black cowboys. Among them was Bill Pickett, a rodeo star, who was cited for developing "bulldogging." Another was Nat Love, known as "Deadwood Dick," who won the title of expert marksman in competition in Deadwood, S.D., where he earned his nickname.

Blacks have been responsible for scores of inventions. Taylor notes that Elijah McCoy's invention of automatic "lubricators" for machinery during the Industrial Revolution was so useful that it was called "The Real McCoy," hence the origin of the popular phrase to indicate authenticity.

Jan E. Matzeliger invented the "lasting machine" which revolutionized the shoe manufacturing industry. Inventor Granville T. Woods made significant contributions to the development of automatic air brakes. And Garrett A. Morgan received a U.S. patent for his invention of the traffic light.

Blacks have also made significant contributions to medicine. In 1893, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams performed the world's first successful open heart surgery in Chicago. And Dr. Charles Drew, a professor of surgery in Howard University's me-

dical school, developed a method for storing blood for long periods and has been called "The Father of the Blood Bank."

Many black literary and cultural contributions have been made to America and the world. During the Harlem Renaissance period, Eubie Blake, Aubrey Lyle and Noble Sissle wrote and produced one of the early black revues—"Shuffle Along"—that appeared on Broadway. Out of that revue came popular American hits—"Im Just Wild About Harry," which Harry Truman used as his presidential campaign theme—as well as "Love Will Find A Way" and "Shuffle Along."

It was also during the Harlem Renaissance period that Carter G. Woodson, who established the "Journal of Negro History," spearheaded efforts to foster a national observance of black history. In 1926, "Negro History Week" emerged, and was expanded to a month-long celebration during the 1960s.

The observance of black history is important, says Taylor, because America and its institutions have been shaped by the contributions made by blacks. "The knowledge and appreciation of black history establishes the fact that all Americans have benefited from the presence of blacks in this country."