

Making history: Lois Sayles

by Kathryn Hall Bogle

A time capsule marked for opening in 1998 will tell students at Roosevelt High School of Lois A. Sayles, a librarian who brought fame and fortune to the school and its library in 1965.

Lois Sayles was the first black librarian to be hired in Oregon. Sayles came first to the Multnomah County Library in 1953 to work as a children's librarian downtown and later at the Arleta branch of the Portland Library Association. A Texan, Sayles received her bachelor's degree (*cum laude*) in social science from Texas College in Tyler, but went on to earn her M.A. degree in Librarianship from the University of Denver in 1952.

Having acquired an appreciation of the West, Sayles was delighted when a job as a librarian opened for her in Portland. Marian Herr, head librarian at the time and retired now, as is Sayles, paved the way for a genuinely warm welcome for the young librarian from staff and in the general community. "My first impression," says Sayles, "were of a friendly, helpful staff. They all seemed to want to help me adjust to life in Portland and to my first real job as a librarian in a real library system."

"I loved working directly with children at Arleta, and to visit the elementary schools nearby. Under the established program I visited Creston, Kellogg, Arleta and five other schools supplying book talks, and pertinent library information to acquaint the children with the use of a library."

"A couple of years later," continued Sayles, "I wanted to have the experience of working with high school students and I applied for a position with the Portland Public Schools. They were 'not ready' to receive a black librarian in high schools at that time, I found, so I applied for a similar position in

Vancouver, Washington.

"Over there it was different. At Fort Vancouver High School, they welcomed me with open arms. I stayed there about seven years and helped plan the new library from the blueprints on, when the new Columbia River High School was built. But I yearned to work closer to my home in Portland, and I jumped at the chance to sign on to be librarian at Roosevelt High School when, by chance, I heard of the opening from Mary Reike, a Portland School Board member at that time."

Sayles stayed at Roosevelt for about 14 years striving for excellence all the way. Through professional literature Sayles learned of the Knapp Foundation Award under the auspices of the American Library Association which could open up possibilities for improving library services to students. If the Knapp Foundation wished to demonstrate good services, Sayles wanted Roosevelt to be the model. Roosevelt High School applied and, after diligent preparation, they were one of the two high schools in the nation chosen to demonstrate how a library can be a central part of a high school.

The rest is history. The Knapp award brought national acclaim and \$200,000 to Roosevelt. Knapp committees came and moved about the school for a week, talking to students, to teachers, taking pictures. Britannica made a film narrated by Chet Huntley for use by libraries. "A copy of the film may still be in the archives of the Portland Public Schools," says Sayles. "I wrote a report for the capsule telling how we moved from a conventional type library to become a 'media center.' We acquired a graphic arts center and an audiovisual department. We had four full-time librarians and 12 assistants."

"Within a five-year period more than 3,000 visitors came from Australia, England, Sweden, South Af-



Lois A. Sayles, Educational Media Specialist, with friend Mark Hatfield in 1965.

rica as well as from all parts of the United States. Along with all the changes, my title in the capsule reads 'Lois A. Sayles, Educational Media Specialist.'"

In 1965, Sayles was chosen one of the "Ten Women of Accomplishment" in Education in Portland.

Before her retirement, Sayles spent several summers living in Salem and working in the Oregon State Library. "For a while I worked with children through correspondence with them, filling their book requests and needs with notes

flying back and forth between us. I also had an interesting experience working in the reference department supplying material for the state legislators who needed to research a law that needed to be tracked down."

Since her retirement Sayles has traveled with her husband, Walter Sayles. She also plays a good steady hand of bridge and keeps up her affiliation with her beloved clubs and sororities including The Links, Inc., Delta Sigma Theta, Delta Kappa Gamma and others.



Lois A. Sayles, in retirement. (Photo: Edward Peterson)

Jan Ernst Matzeliger (1852-1889)

Born in Paramaribo, Dutch Guinea, he earned passage to the United States as a sailor and arrived in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1876. After laboring ten years, Matzeliger invented and patented an automatic Shoe-Lasting Machine in 1883. The patent was purchased by the United Shoe Machinery Company of Boston, which revolutionized the shoe industry, creating thousands of jobs and cutting shoe prices in half. He was posthumously awarded a gold medal by the Pan-American Exposition in 1901. A statue was erected in his honor in Lynn, Massachusetts, the shoe capital of the world.



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