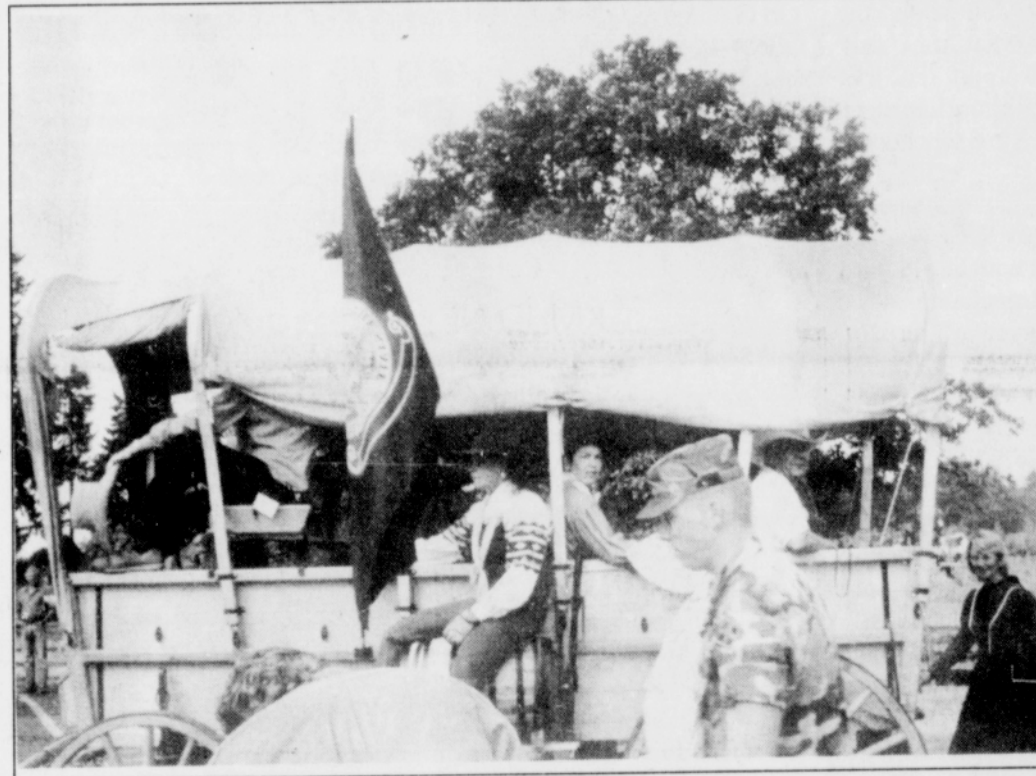


Buffalo Soldiers Ride Again



In a similar spirit of Oregon Trail renaissance, a Portland cultural group rounded up resources to sponsor a unit of African-American horseback riders dressed in the mid-1800s uniforms of black cavalry troopers, known as "buffalo soldiers."

"The buffalo soldiers played prominent and important roles in the history of this country and the Oregon Trail," says Mark Little of Hyalite Inc., a local nonprofit group that promotes cultural diversity.

During and after the Civil Wars, black cavalry and infantry units were assigned to posts at the gate of the Oregon Trail in Independence, Mo., and at various locations along the route.

Buffalo soldiers also served at Fort Vancouver. Little said: a number of them are buried there, including Moses Williams, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

The buffalo soldiers—a moniker of honor given by Americans Indians alluding to the black troopers' curly hair and enduring strength—served with distinction. They successfully handled some of the frontier Army's toughest assignments. Little emphasized, "despite being discriminated against by the military establishment. They were given some of the poorest food, poorest equipment and poorest treatment by the poorest officers."

Still they gained an impeccable record of successfully aiding wagon and pack trains, miners, settlers and maintaining law and order. Far more than the noted Texas Rangers, the buffalo soldiers were a major police force on the Western frontier. However, Little lamented, "there are only scattered

mentionings of them in books and films."

The Portland Buffalo Soldiers troop participated in the Oregon Trail program in remembrance of the old-9th and 10th cavalry regiments, and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments, black units that patrolled the U.S. Western frontier after the Civil War, and in remembrance of the non-military black pioneers who participated in the Western expansion along the Oregon Trail.

Osker Spicer (Oregonian staff) says, "also note that the black cavalry troops, that we commemorated spent almost as much time protecting Ameri-

can Indian territory from white land grabbers as they did fight in tribal battles. The black troops helped patrol wagon trains leaving on both Oregon and Santa Fe Trails from such posts as Ft. Dodge and Ft. Riley Kansas, and later various forts along the Oregon Trail after these units were transferred to the Northern Plains and N.W. Regions during the 1880's."

The black troops served as frontier police of sorts battling white cattle rustlers, highway men, gangs, etc. It's a misnomer that all they did was fight their Red brothers and sisters. In fact, Blacks and Reds were extensively intermixed—many of the tribal groups that fought the cavalry included black Indian members. Also many of the cavalry troops were of mixed black-Indian ancestry.

History can paint a very complex picture. Despite the sacrifices made by black pioneers of black troopers on the frontier, mainstream U.S. history books have denied them a rightful place.

Our participation in the celebration was to some degree a way of rectifying the denials.

Thousands cheered (in Oregon City: 1993) and started to realize that all races and cultures helped build this country. It was a very emotional experience for all of us—we could feel the spirits of our ancestors with us as we sat tall in those saddles representing



them...finally, recapping some acknowledgement for their great contributions and sacrifices.

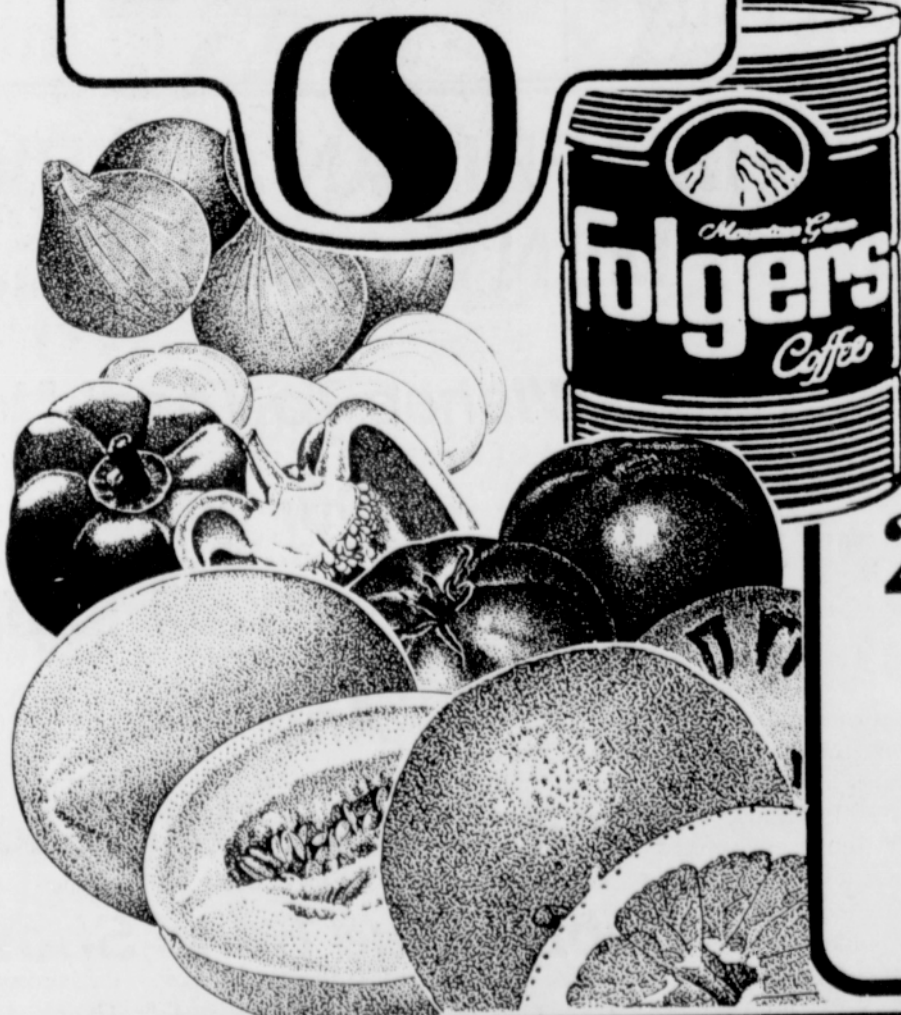
At a reception at the Texas One Restaurant in N.E. Portland on that Sunday evening, September, 1993, we all agreed that there have been no more prouder moments in our lives!! And some of our group represented our country on battlefields going back to World War II and Korea. It was quite an honor to stand up for our great ancestors, men, women, and children who came west in search of peace, security and freedom.

(The Portland Observer staff thanks John M. Craig and Oskar Spicer for the special effort and contributions of materials and photos that made it possible for us to share with you, our readers, this special event—the celebration of the Oregon Trail.)

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