

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Portland Observer

Black Police Officers And Firemen



Carman Sylvester

In 1904 - forty-one years after the Emancipation Proclamation - Portland hired its first black policeman, George Hardin. Responsible for Hardin's appointment, along with the good citizens of Portland, was the New Port Republican Club, which was popularized by waiters. Hardin served eleven years as policeman, and then was appointed to the sheriff's office as the first black deputy. He served for twenty-one years as deputy until his death in 1938. Samuel Blanchard and Mat Dishman were the first black sheriffs in Portland. Geraldine Avery was the first black police matron.

A. Waterford was the first African American fireman for the Portland Fire Department. Later, when

Penumbra Kelly became a U.S. Marshal, he appointed Waterford the first African American deputy U.S. Marshal. Waterford also served twice as an elections judge.

Following in the footsteps of George Hardin, Carman Sylvester became the first African American policewoman in 1973. She was also the first woman to work the street in uniform and as a regular patrol officer. But even in the course of her pioneering work, she managed to raise four children: Erika Lynn, Patricia Ann, Stefany Kae and Lenamé Marie. Currently, Carman works in the administration of the Portland Police Department.

Another pioneer in law enforcement is Vera C. Pool, who has twenty-

two years of experience in the criminal justice system, with the past twelve years in management. In 1970, Vera broke the color barrier as Multnomah County's first black female corrections officer. Now she works as the facility commander for the Multnomah County Restitution Center,



George Hardin

which helps convicted people to re-enter the community as responsible citizens.

Dr. Lee P. Brown is a very distinguished former police chief who has been at the helm of several of the country's largest urban police forces. During his more than thirty years in law enforcement, he has occupied top positions in the police departments of Houston, Atlanta and New York City. In 1975, he served as sheriff of Multnomah County (Portland). In 1976, Dr. Brown was appointed Director of Justice Services for



Vera C. Pool

Multnomah County, a department comprised of all that county's criminal justice agencies. Most recently, President Clinton appointed him to the position of



Dr. Lee P. Brown

Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (aka "Drug Czar").

NAACP



NAACP parade for Medgar Evers, June 24, 1963

In 1914, five years after the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the East, Portland started its own branch with 165 members. The aim of the Portland branch was to protest discrimination and to lobby for the passage of a public accommodation bill. The first successful campaign over a civil rights case was conducted by Rev. J.L. Caston, a young minister from Mt. Olivet Baptist Church.

The NAACP of Portland also participated in national African American issues. One good example would be the "Dr. Sweet Case," in which a black doctor was accused of killing two men who were a part of a mob attacking the doctor's home. Between the Portland and Veronique chapters, they raised \$200.00. They also hired the famous trial lawyer, Clarence

Darrow, who secured an acquittal.

Socially and educationally, the NAACP would often host seminars to acquaint African Americans with their history. In 1925, a Crispus Attucks program was initiated to enlighten the black community about the contributions of African Americans to American history.

In addition to the regular membership, a women's auxiliary helped raise money for the Scottsboro Boys defense fund. The NAACP also allied itself with the Oregon Commonwealth Federation to help secure the first black secretarial positions in the federal and state offices in Portland. Today, the NAACP continues to lead the way, along with other civil rights organizations, to maintain and improve the quality of life for all people.

Urban League



Bill Berry & first minority Rose Festival princess

The Urban League branch of Portland came into existence in 1945, 35 years after it was established in New York City. In Portland, the League's mission was to take an active role in finding jobs for blacks, negotiating with employers and sending out hand-picked workers to jobs previously held only by whites.

Bill Berry was recruited from Chicago to be the first head of this organization. When he arrived, he surmised that he had to get black people from the shipyards to their former homes. But he quickly reassessed the situation and dedicated his

efforts to integrating Portland's and Vanport's transplanted community into the mainstream.

Besides Berry, there was also Shelton Hill, and between them they worked with a number of department stores to change their policies concerning the hiring of blacks.

Bill Berry was Executive Director of the Portland Urban League from 1945 to 1956. He then left Portland to head the Chicago Urban League. Shelton Hill was then appointed Executive Director from 1956 to 1973. Portland still thrives because of their achievements.

Black Educators And Education



First African-American School teachers in Portland

children were accepted by the Portland Public School District. The next landmark happened in 1952 when Robert G. Ford and Leota Stone were hired as the first black teachers in Portland public schools, with Ford being the first black teacher in a Portland high school. In 1980, the first black superintendent was selected: Matthew Prophet. Dr. Prophet served from 1980-1992. Also prominent in Prophet's administration was Dr. Ernest Hartzog, Associate Superintendent. During Prophet's tenure, he emphasized serving the needs of at-risk students along with the development of a multicultural/ethnic segment of the curriculum. Due to the public demand for diversity within the Portland public schools, all racial and ethnic groups are represented in the school system.

Geraldine Hammond has been a true pioneer in education. She has worked in the Portland and Salem school districts as a teacher, principal and administrator.



Geraldine Hammond

Fred And Regina Flowers

Here is a personal by Regina S. Johnson-Flowers, describing life in Vanport with her family and husband, Rev. Fred Flowers, Jr.:

"Fred and I came to the Pacific Northwest with our families in the early 1940s. My family went directly to Vanport City, while Fred and his family traveled to Washington State and, later to East and West Vanport.

Vanport was a public housing project started by the Housing Authority of Portland in December 1941, and completed in 1943. It was recognized as the largest housing project in the United States. Built for war workers employed by Edgar Kaiser in the various shipyards, Vanport rested on a swamp between two major rivers.

Arriving in Vanport as youngsters, we saw that all the structures looked alike. Each unit was painted green with about 18 apartments to a unit. I lived on Cottonwood Avenue on the eastside, while Fred lived on Broad Acres on the northside. The city of Vanport was self-contained, having a post office, fire department, shopping centers, schools, hospital, jail, ballparks, recreation centers, movie theater and ice houses. We had always heard Vanport was a crowded place, but we took pleasure in meeting so many new people each and every day.

The apartments themselves were arranged in one long straight line, commonly called a 'shotgun' style. They consisted of a living room, eating space, kitchen, bathroom (showers) and bedroom. But there were no back doors. All the furnishings were provided: bed, divano, ice box, dresser, two-eyed cooking stove, etc. When something needed to be fixed, you could request a replacement. However, we had to supply our own linen, cooking pans, silverware and other extras to make the place liveable.

Every four units were connected



Rev. Fred Flowers and Mrs. Regina Flowers

to their own utility facility, where we got our heat (coal furnace), washed our clothes and bathed. Clothes could be hung inside the wash area or out on a community clothesline, weather permitting.

At the beginning of May in 1948, we heard rumors of high waters around Vanport. Most of us noticed the slough rising more than ever. But some of us were getting ready for our eight grade graduation, so the flood was the last thing on our minds. My Dad had to return to Oklahoma to be near his dying mother. He didn't want to leave, but he thought we'd be safe.

Each day, the water continued to rise. The government assured all the residents that the dike would hold. But some families didn't rely on that and left early in May.

Sunday, May 30, 1948, was a day I will never forget. In the late afternoon, we heard shouting that the railroad dike had broken, meaning that Vanport would be under water in a mere forty-five minutes. My mother and my two brothers hurriedly threw some things in a suitcase, turned off all the lights, locked the door and left the apartment. When we got to Cottonwood Avenue, I had never seen so

much confusion. People were sitting on the rooftops, hoping to ride out the flood. We finally reached Denver Avenue, with the water not far behind. I remember looking back and seeing those 18 apartment units floating on large waves, plus logs and everything else that got in the path of the water. Fred's father and mother heard the sirens, and were able to drive out because they weren't far from Denver Avenue. Fred and a friend weren't in Vanport that day, as they had gone to see a movie in Portland. The management of the movie theater stopped the movie and announced 'that Vanport was flooded and residents should go home.' We still laugh about that statement today. Fortunately, all of our close friends and relatives managed to get out alive, making us the largest group of homeless people in Portland's history.

Fred and I still think about the years we spent in Vanport. Although it was a temporary situation, it helped mold our character and shape our future. To this day, we cherish the great friendships and lifelong relationships that grew out of living in Vanport."

Education has always been the key to a successful livelihood for many groups. After the Emancipation Proclamation, many blacks felt it was a necessity. The year 1867 was important because William A. Brown attempted to register his four children in a Portland public school, and was refused admission. Mr. Brown then appealed to his friend, T.A. Wood, who met with the Educational Director and was told that if the African American children were admitted, the schools would lose their funding. Seeking a solution, the director suggested that the amount of money given for each student, approximately \$2.25

per quarter, be mandated for the renting of a building and the employment of a teacher to teach the black children. Unfortunately, this would net only \$35, placing an extreme financial burden on black parents to come up with the rest. Mr. Wood then filed an appeal in court, which was decided in favor of the school. Finally, to ameliorate the situation, the school board agreed to allocate \$800 for a separate school. In September of 1867, a school for black children opened twenty-one years before Plessy vs. Ferguson would establish the doctrine of Separate But Equal in Oregon.

For 78 years, African American

Black Elected Officials

tee's addressing economic development, Columbia Gorge scenic protection.



James Hill, Jr.



Margaret Carter



Avel Gordly

JAMES HILL, JR.
Jim Hill is the first African American to serve as Oregon State Treasurer. Mr. Hill was first elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1982. He co-chaired the Joint committee on trade and Economic Development, and served on the House committees on elections, the Judiciary, Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resource Treasurer.

MARGARET CARTER
Margaret Carter was the first African American woman to serve as a representative in the Oregon State Legislature. Ms. Carter was first elected to the Oregon House in 1984. She has served on legislative commit-

tion, sexual harassment and school revenue. She co-sponsored the Anti-Apartheid Divestiture Act of 1987, the Minority and Women's Business Act of 1987, and the bill establishing a state holiday to honor the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King.

AVEL GORDLY
Avel Gordly is the first African American legislator to represent a predominantly white Portland district. Ms. Gordly's selection has shown, in her words, that "One person really can make a difference...it is particularly important for people of color...and for women to be present in the policy-making bodies...otherwise, our voices won't be heard."