

BLACK HISTORY

The Portland Observer

Portland Black History: Lost, Strayed Or Stolen

BY PROF. MCKINLEY BURT

I borrowed that description from the famous tape created by Bill Cosby--just put a little North West spin on it. Our area has produced innovators and achievers to match any other in the country. I was reminded of many during a meeting with a group that will be contributing to the Observer Newspaper's coverage of Black History Month.

Last year, there was extensive media coverage of the transfer of the famed 'Spruce Goose' to the Portland area for permanent display. This is the huge wooden 'flying boat' designed and built by the eccentric, millionaire engineer and movie producer, Howard Hughes (Jane Russell, "The Outlaw"). What most of us do

not know is that the critical controls for the eight huge engines were designed by a black engineer, Donald Rutherford who grew up in Portland and graduated from Benson Technical School.

He was on board for that first (and only) flight of what was then, several decades ago, the world's largest flying machine. His presence and expertise was critical to maintaining the giant power plants required to get the plane airborne. Anyone who has seen camera shots of the event, marveled at around the world, can remember waiting with tense and bated breath...will it take off?... Can that huge awkward 'goose' really fly? Do they make engines that powerful? Then Howard Huhes called on the

black engineer to "give it all you got!" And he did...and history was made.

In 1982 I did a local television program on Black inventors and with the help of a local Volkswagen dealer and a hardware company, I demonstrated for viewers the ingenious looking mechanism invented and patented by Mr Rutherford -- the device which facilitated the sliding doors now found on most vans in the world. Also he invented those handy little catches that fasten the cabinet doors in your kitchen, bathroom and workshop.

I was never able to get the folks at Benson High to honor him or to allow me to make a presentation that might serve to inspire and motivate

students with this ideal role model... You want to try? Liberals and educators give preference to that which holds the promise of immediate grants. Its a business, yet!

We would not omit here mention of a Mr. McWilliams, the most innovative of African American entrepreneurs to descend on Portland in the late 1940s. During a strike of the Portland Oregonian and Oregon Journal Mr. McWilliams beheld all those idle, talented white folks walking The picket lines on S.

W. Broadway and saw opportunity with a capital 'O'. Within a week He had rented space on Williams Avenue just south of Broadway, leased furniture and typewriters, and put in leased wires and teletypes to

Associated Press and other news services.

A week later I got a call to come down and install an accounting system for the "Algamated News Bureau" or whatever it was he called it. I almost fainted when I saw all the busy, efficient looking environs and all those happy-looking whites bent over typewriters, reading tapes or pasting up copy. This type of activity just didn't happen in the Portland ghetto -- still doesn't.

What Mr McWilliams had done (and on a shoestring) was to setup a network of small regional papers, each carrying copy and ads of special interest to that community: St. Johns, Milwaukie, Sellwood, Beaverton, Etc., six in all. This weekly format,

decades ahead of its time, went over like hot cakes. It seemed to good to be true, and it was. Dependent from the start on an uninterrupted cash flow, he was barely into the second month when the roof caved in.

His success and its implications was not lost upon the establishment, two envious and insecure blacks in the community nor on the two Portland daily newspapers who wanted their reporters back. Within a month, whispering campaigns, pressures on McWilliams creditors, bank ad advertisers made continued operation an impossibility. I almost cried at the demise of the operation and not just because I lost an accounting client. It could have been such a beautiful gambit in American enterprise.

Oregon's Exclusion Laws To Keep Blacks Out

An Act amendatory of an Act passed June 26, 1844, in regard to slavery and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Legislative Committee of Oregon as follows:

Section 1. That the sixth and seventh sections of said act are hereby repealed.

Section 2. That if any such free negro or mulatto shall fail to quit and leave the country, as required by the act to which this is amendatory, he or she may be arrested upon a warrant issued by some justice of the peace; and if guilty upon trial before such justice had, the said justice shall issue his order to any officer competent to execute process, directing said officer to give ten days public notice, by at least four written or printed advertisements, that he will publicly hire out such free negro or mulatto to the lowest bidder, on a day and at a place therein specified. On the day and at the place mentioned in said notice, such officer shall expose such free negro or mulatto to public hiring; and the person who will obligate himself to remove such free negro or mulatto from the country for the shortest term of service, shall enter into a bond with good and sufficient security of Oregon, in a penalty of at least one thousand dollars, binding himself to remove said negro or mulatto out of the country within six months after such service shall expire; which bond shall be filed in the clerk's office in the proper county; and upon failure to perform the conditions of said bond, the attorney prosecuting for Oregon shall commence a suit upon a certified copy of such bond in the circuit court against such delinquent and his sureties.

Passed by Legislative Committee, December 19, 1844.



A. Philip Randolph leads line of protestors outside the 1948 Democratic National Convention.



Rosa Parks, flanked by her attorney and a deputy, on her way to the jail. Parks refused to move from her up-front seat on a bus in Montgomery, Ala. in 1955.

National African American History Month From President Clinton

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating African American History Month, 1995.

Hillary and I join you in marking the brave efforts of the countless Americans throughout our nation's history who have demanded justice, declared an end to segregation, and fought to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

Today, there is a renewed sense of hope in America -- a hope based on the idea that our great diversity can unite rather than divide our society. It is the same hope that has inspired African Americans since our country's beginnings to dream of a nation



President William J. Clinton

in which all people enjoy the freedom to make their own lasting contributions to our world. If we are truly to build on history's rich lessons, we must always remember these pioneers'

pivotal roles in American history.

Ours can be a land of unprecedented peace and prosperity in the twenty-first century if we have the faith that Martin Luther King described, the faith to "transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood." We must never cease striving to bring people together across racial and cultural barriers. This is our generation's most solemn calling and most important challenge.

I urge everyone, during African American History Month and throughout the year, to take up this challenge and to learn more about the black Americans who have made this country great.

VESSELS Event For Businesses

VESSELS is normally closed on Mondays, a day when many other businesses are also closed, and their owners out and about. Well, on Monday, February 20, VESSELS will be open from noon to 4 pm especially for those who aren't able to get to the store any other time.

Admission to this special event is by presenting a business card, and the first 50 patrons will receive a free sample of tribal wrapping paper.

Business owners are encouraged to bring their employees and co-workers.

VESSELS, "Tableware With Meaning," specializes in ethnic and Afro-centric items for the dining room, bath and kitchen. Located at 2605 NE MLK JR Boulevard at the corner of Russell, VESSELS's regular hours are 10 am to 6 pm, Tuesday through Saturday. For more information, call 249-1952.

To Business Owner:

VESSELS is normally closed on your days off, but that is not the case in February. On Monday, February 20th, VESSELS will be open by special invitation, from noon til 4pm, to businesses usually closed on Sundays & Mondays.

Admission - present your business card. Free tribal gift wrap to the first 50 customers. Please bring your employees and co-workers. Please let us know you're coming, 249-1952.



Armed with a "covenant for America's future", the Black Leadership Forum, chaired by Southern Christian Leadership President Dr. Joseph E. Lowery (center), challenged the new Republican led Congress to "protect the progress made and guarantee the future advancement of the black community." The recent summit was in direct response to new House speaker Newt Gingrich's "Contract with America".