

BLACK HISTORY

The Portland Observer

Looking back on history: Memoirs of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw

by James L. Swinton

Zilpha was born in the state of Pennsylvania around 1790 to Christian parents. Her mother died when Zilpha was 12 years old. Her father then placed her under the care of Pierson and Rebecca Mitchel, who were Quakers, until she was eighteen. Zilpha said she missed the family devotions they had mornings and evenings where prayer and praises were offered to God daily. But her new Quaker family, their religious devotions were held, if any, only in their mind. As a result, Zilpha soon fell into sin.

But she said God rebuked her through a dream in which the Angel Gabriel said, "Jehovah was about to judge the world, and execute judgment on." After months of prayer seeking God's forgiveness for her sins, Zilpha said, "I distinctly saw the Lord Jesus approach me with open arms, and a most divine and heavenly smile upon His countenance. As He advanced toward me, I felt that His very looks spoke, and said, 'Thy prayer is accepted, I own thy name.'" From that moment, Zilpha never doubted God's love for her soul. This was the time of her total acceptance of God. And in the year 1808, Zilpha joined a local Methodist Episcopal Society.

Zilpha still felt the loss of her mother: "Oh, how often do I think of the advantage enjoyed by many young people, who are blessed with devout and godly parents, and of the little estimation they are held in by too many perverse and giddy children, who, instead of greatly prizing the grace conferred upon them, resent the kind restraints of family worship and attendance at the house of God."

In 1810, Zilpha married Joseph Elaw, who was not a Christian. Zilpha advised against such marriages: "Oh! let me affectionately warn my dear unmarried sisters in Christ, against being thus unequally yoked with an unbeliever. In general your lot would be better, if a millstone were hung about your necks, and you were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that you should disobey the law of Jesus [Matt. 18:6], and plunge yourselves into all the sorrows, sins, and anomalies involved in a matrimonial alliance with an unbeliever."

In 1817, while attending a gospel camp-meeting, a voice spoke to Zilpha and said: "Now thou art sanctified; and I will show thee what thou must do." Afterward, as she appeared not to be on earth, she prayed publicly. Many came to her requesting her

to present their petitions to God, thus began her "ministry of prayer." Before the end of the gospel camp-meeting, the Holy Spirit revealed to Zilpha that she was to be like another Phoebe [Rom. 16:1-2, a colleague of Apostle Paul] who was to visit families; she was to speak to them about salvation, the state of their soul, and to visit the sick.

This revelation confirmed what her sister, after recovering from a near death experience, had stated a year previous. Her sister had said she had seen Jesus, had been in the society of the angels, and that an angel came and told her that Zilpha must preach the gospel. Both of these revelations still didn't move Zilpha to preach. But doing a severe sickness, Zilpha said a person appeared and stood by her bedside and said: "Be of good cheer, for thou shalt yet see another camp-meeting; and at that meeting thou shalt know the will of God concerning thee."

It was nearly one and a half years later before Zilpha attended the next camp-meeting. While at the camp-meeting, a voice said to her, "Go outside of the tent while I speak to thee." Immediately, Zilpha went outside of the tent, and began to speak, as if involuntarily, exhorting the people. After Zilpha had finish

speaking, she said, "I sat down and closed my eyes; and there appeared a light shining round about me as well as within me, above the brightness of the sun; and out of that light, the same identical voice which had spoken to me on the bed of sickness many months before, spoke again to me on the camp ground, and said, 'Now thou knowest the will of God concerning thee; thou must preach the gospel; and thou must travel far and wide.' This is my commission for the work of the ministry, which I received, not from mortal man, but from the voice of an invisible and heavenly personage sent from God...my ministry was commenced in the midst of thousands who were both eye and ear witnesses of the fact."

After Zilpha returned home, she got the approval of all the ministers in the Methodist Society to preach, but jealousy soon developed toward her among many of her local class members. She became a personal witness to Matt. 13:57 "A prophet is not without honor, saved [except] in his own house."

On January 27, 1823, Zilpha's husband died. Afterward, she tried working as a maid, and also opening a school to pay off her debts. But Zilpha wasn't very pleased with her

situation because she knew she wasn't carrying out the commission God had given her. She thought of schemes and ways of how He would work the situation out, but she knew the scripture said: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:9).

After Zilpha finished her engagements in New York, she returned home to Nantucket. While at home, she experienced three visions, each more vivid than the previous: "I was caught up in the Spirit, away from and far above all sublunary things; and appeared to be standing on a very elevated place in the midst of tens of thousands, who were all seated around, clothed in white; my own complexion and raiment were also white and I was employed in addressing this immense concourse."

In 1839 as Zilpha again ministered in the southern states, she felt it was time for her to go England. When she returned to Providence, Rhode Island, Lady Hunter and many others, whites and blacks, contributed offerings to Zilpha for her expenses to England.

Zilpha left for England on July 1st, 1840 and arrived on July 25th. While in England, she preached over

a thousand sermons during her five year tour. Her biggest opposition came from some ministers who believe that women shouldn't preach, for they believed that Paul said women shouldn't speak in a church. But Zilpha responded: "The apostle [Paul] directed that a woman, when praying or prophesying should have her head covered [1 Cor. 11:5]; from which it may be inferred, that the praying or prophesying of a woman is allowable." Paul also said, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant: to his own master he standeth or falleth. Why doest thou judge thy brother?" (Rom. 14:4,10).

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"Remember, dear brethren, that they who will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and a numerous foolish and hurtful lusts, which will eventually drown them in perdition. Cease, therefore, from earthly accumulations; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Remember the love of money; for it is the root of all evil [1 Tim. 6:10]. Love not the world; for the love of God is not in those who love the world."

* Source: Andrews, William L. Sisters of Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986

Buildings of Portland's African-American History

Join the Bosco-Milligan Foundation in celebrating Black History month by participating in the first community meeting for the foundation's program "Buildings of Portland's African American History".

The free event will describe the Foundation's continuing effort to identify buildings and sites associated with African-American individuals, institutions and events.

In fall of 1995, the Foundation published Cornerstones of Commu-

nity: Buildings of Portland's African-American History. A dedicated team of professional historians (Dr. Darrell Millner, Dr. Carl Abbott, Dr. Quintard Taylor, McKinley Burt and Kimberly Moreland) was supported by a community-based History Committee, to tell the story of Portland's African-American community by connecting people with places, up through the early 1970s. Cornerstones documented 325 existing buildings where African-

American History happened! That extensive publication linked buildings to individuals, institutions, and events in Portland's African-American History.

As hoped, many people have expressed their interest in helping to "fill in the gaps" in Cornerstones and add many more people and places. An expanded publication with photographs will be developed by September 1997. At the February 15th meeting, a slide show of signif-

icant buildings from the 1995 publication will be shown. The Program Workshop will describe the project more fully, and seek individuals for the Community History Committee. In particular, we hope for the participation of people willing to share their experiences, memories, and any photographs and information related to African-American individuals, institutions, buildings and events.

This program is partially supported by funding from the State

Historic Preservation Office, Black United Fund, The Oregon Council for the Humanities, and a territory resource.

There is no fee for attending, but pre-registration is requested by calling the Foundation Office at 231-7264, so we can plan for handouts and refreshments. Special thanks to Mt. Sinai Baptist Church for hosting the event. You can park on the street or in the parking lot at the corner of 6th and NE Skidmore.

For additional information call

the Foundation Office at 231-7264. The Bosco-Milligan Foundation is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to establish the Architectural Heritage Center at 701 SE Grand Avenue in the West's Block Building, the oldest building in Portland's Central Eastside.

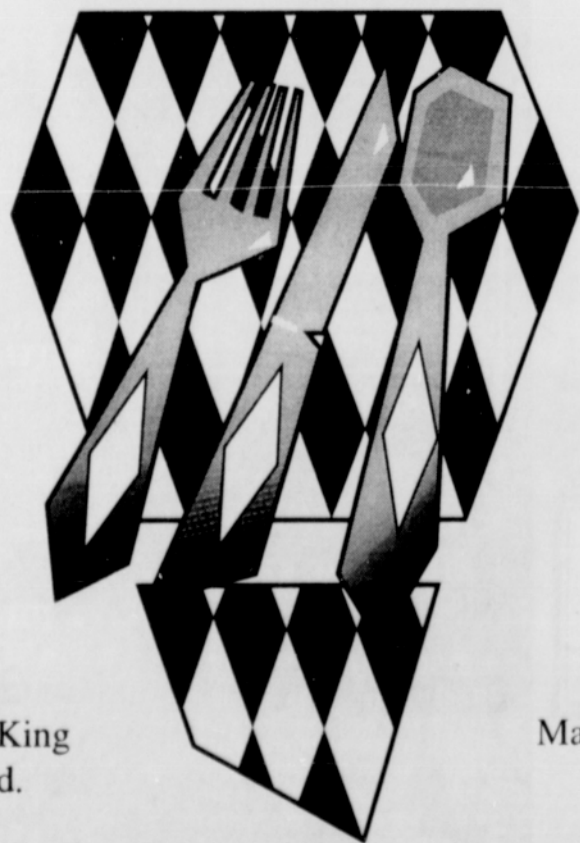
Project Kick-Off and Community Meeting Saturday, February 15, 1997, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon at Mt. Sinai Community Baptist Church 602 NE Prescott. Admission is free

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African American Women on tour



J. California Cooper (right), author, *Some Soul To Keep; Homemade Love; A Piece of Mine*. Bertice Berry Ph.D (left), author of *Bertice: The World According to Me*, published by Scribner. Photo by: Martin

DiIntelligent, inspirational and totally hilarious are all words used to describe talk show host and author Bertice Berry, who is scheduled to appear at the African American Women on Tour conference in Oakland, California, Friday, April 4 at the Marriott City Center at 8pm.

Presented by Allstate Insurance company, AAWOT is regarded as the nation's foremost empowerment conference for Black women.

The conference travels to five cities this year, including Dallas, TX, June 13-15; Chicago, IL, July 25-27; Atlanta, GA, August 14-16; and Philadelphia, PA, August 22-24. AAWOT features some of the nation's most sought-after speakers on Black female issues.

Berry, who will appear at

AAWOT's Opening Sessions, will also moderate a "Relationships Forum" hosted by Heart & Soul magazine. She will be joined by author/playwright J. California Cooper and legendary vocalist Gladys Knight on Sunday, April 6, sponsored by Chrysler Corporation.

Berry, a professor-turned stand-up comedian, burst onto the television screen as host of her short-lived self-titled talk show in 1993.

Now, back on the talk show scene on the USA Network, Berry also lectures and performs stand-up comedy nationally, while promoting her first book, *Bertice: The World According to Me*, where she shares her story of success and triumph despite the stereotypes of being an African American child growing up poor.

Also appearing at African American Women on Tour will be renowned author/playwright J. California Cooper on Saturday, April 5, sponsored by Mobil Oil Corporation.

Author of popular novels *Family*, and *In Search of Satisfaction*, Cooper has also produced four collections of short stories: *Some Soul To Keep*, *Homemade Love*, *The Matter is Life* and *A Piece of Mine*. Cooper's latest work, *Some Love, Some Pain*, *Sometime* is being heralded as one of her best works yet. She has also written 17 plays that have been performed on stage and radio. Awarded "Playwright of the Year" in 1978 for "Strangers", Cooper's work has a broad appeal to audiences of all ages and interests.

Vessels schedules activities for February

Vessels, "Tableware With Meaning," announces events in celebration and honor of Black History Month.

On Saturday, February 22, from 1:30-3:30 p.m., Vessels will present a wedding planning workshop, "Before Jumpin' the Broom". The workshop will feature details on wedding invitation etiquette and offer many helpful do's and don't's to follow to make this essential prelude to your wedding day a success. In addition,

the workshop will include ways to enhance your wedding by blending cultural elements into the ceremony. From decorating the broom to viewing an African wedding gown, the session is an event not to miss.

"Before Jumpin' the Broom" will feature a presentation by Barbara Taylor, president of Positive Gatherings, a meeting planning and consulting services business. Co-sponsors include It's My Kind of Face! Photography Studio and the Ramada

Plaza Hotel. Discounts and door prizes will be available. Because seating is limited, registration is required. Call Vessels at 249-1952 to reserve a space or for more information.

Vessels, "Tableware With Meaning", features ethnic items for the dining room bath and kitchen. Located at 2605 NE Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, at the corner Russell, Vessels is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.