

King Brings Message of Hope to Portland

Resident remembers 1961 visit to Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church

BY SEAN P. NELSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Late civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. carried a message full of hope on a November 1961 visit to Portland.

King appeared downtown at the Portland Public Auditorium after the Jefferson High School Choir sang. Then-Gov. Mark Hatfield and Mayor Terry D. Shunk brought him greetings on behalf of the both the city and state.

"There must be people in this nation with a sort of divine content, it is no longer a choice between nonviolence or violence, it is a choice between non-violence or nonexistence," the Baptist minister told an audience of 3,500.

An African-American parishioner remembers King's visit and his reception at the Vancouver Avenue First Baptist Church.

Although King was slain, the historic church at 3138 N. Vancouver Ave. still stands.

"They had a reception for him at the parsonage so he could meet the ministers," recalled Henry Knight, 78, a member of the church for 53 years.

Hatfield helped plan the reception to introduce Dr. King to Pacific Northwest ministers, including the Albina Ministerial Alliance.

"To me he was one of a kind," Knight recalled. "He had a sharp wit. I don't know anyone I could compare him to."

King also took time out to talk to college students. He appeared as part of the Urban League of Portland's Equal Opportunity Program at Portland State during a commemoration of the Civil War with music and a discussion of the battles at Shiloh, Gettysburg, Vicksburg and Chancellerville.

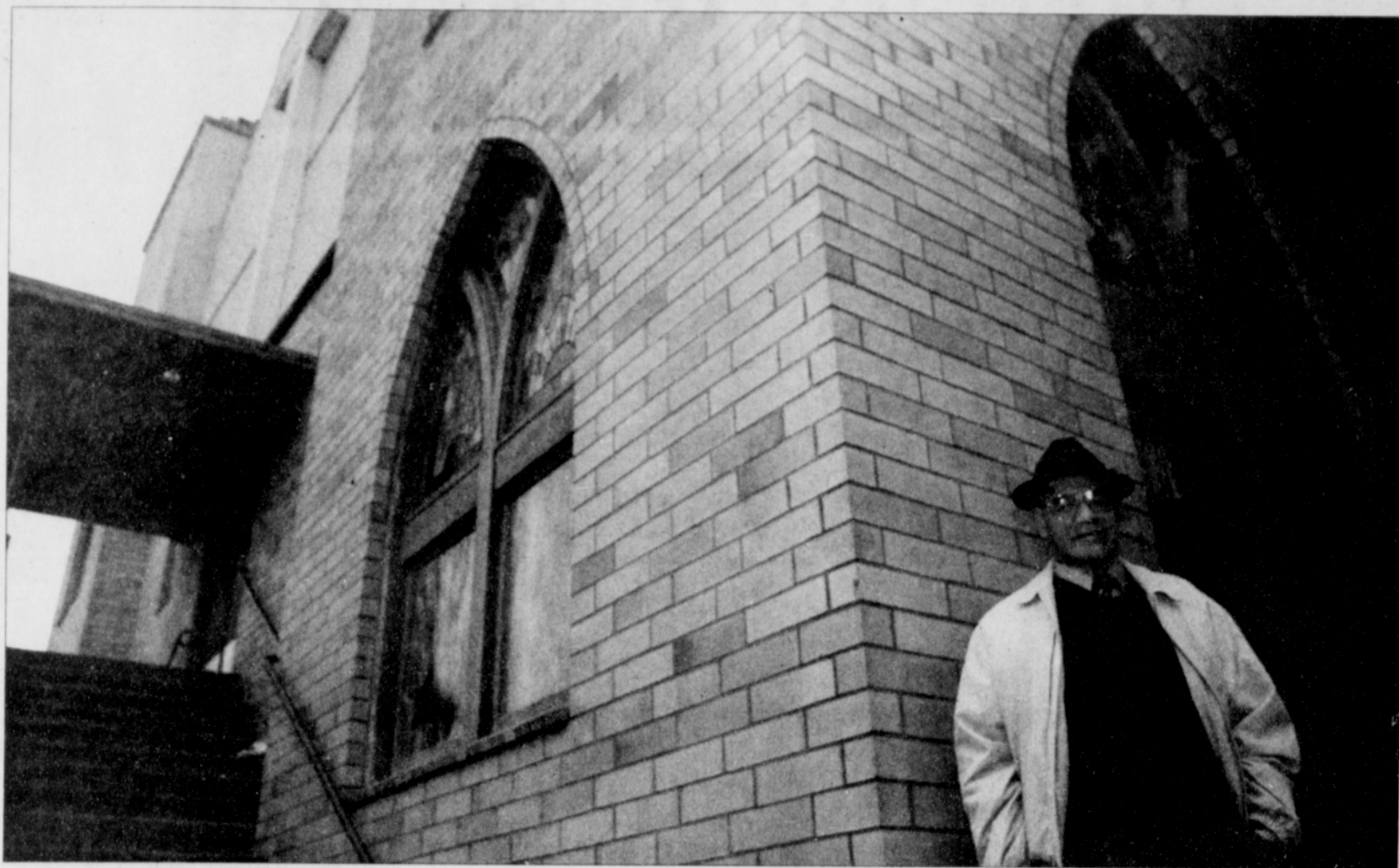
"We are on the border of the promised land of integration. But challenges remain," King said.

King, just 32 years old at the time, believed then that true integration of the races would occur before the turn of the century.

"Americans must rise above the narrow confines of their individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. They must rid themselves of the notion that there are superior and inferior races," he told area residents.

A little more than 7 years later, on April 4, 1968, the Oregonian carried a different story on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—the story of his assassination.

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 "MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP)—Nobel Laureate Martin Luther King Jr., father of nonviolence in the



Henry Knight, 78, stands outside the Vancouver Avenue Baptist Church at 3138 N. Vancouver Ave., where he met Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1961.

PHOTO BY DAVID PLECHL/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

"To me he was one of a kind. He had a sharp wit. I don't know anyone I could compare him to."

—Portland resident Henry Knight, talking about his 1961 meeting with Dr. Martin Luther King in Portland

American civil rights movement, was killed by an assassin's bullet Thursday night.

"King, 39, was hit in the neck by a bullet as he stood on the balcony of a hotel there. He died less than an hour later at St. Joseph Hospital."

Like the rest of the world, Knight was saddened by Dr. King's assassination.

"That was very disturbing and upsetting," he recalled.

King had come to Memphis lead protests on behalf of the city's 1,300 striking garbage workers, most of them African Americans. Tennessee Gov. Buford Ellington immediately ordered 4,000 National Guard troops back into the city and re-imposed a curfew that had been ordered a week earlier after a King-led march turned into

a riot.

"Police said incidents of violence, including several fire bombings, were reported following King's death," the article noted.

Dr. King's surviving wife, Coretta Scott King, spoke on the prospect of her husband's assassination when she presented a "Freedom Concert" in Portland on March 10, 1965. Mrs. King said she and her husband were accustomed to fear.

"My husband has no fear of death. He has said it does not matter how long you live, but how well... if you have to do this for a great cause...you are doing right."

"I have tried to prepare myself for whatever comes, because somehow I have felt all along that what we were doing is right. If you believe in your convictions, you must stand up for them. If you really believe in a cause enough, you are willing to die for that cause," Mrs. King said.

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Martin Luther King Jr.

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Architectural rendering, PCC Cascade Campus 2004

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