

BLACK HISTORY

Black Oregon Pioneer Legacies Revealed

Group wants to establish museum

(AP) — The legacy of John W. Jackson is slowly being uncovered, helping to illuminate the state's early African-American history.

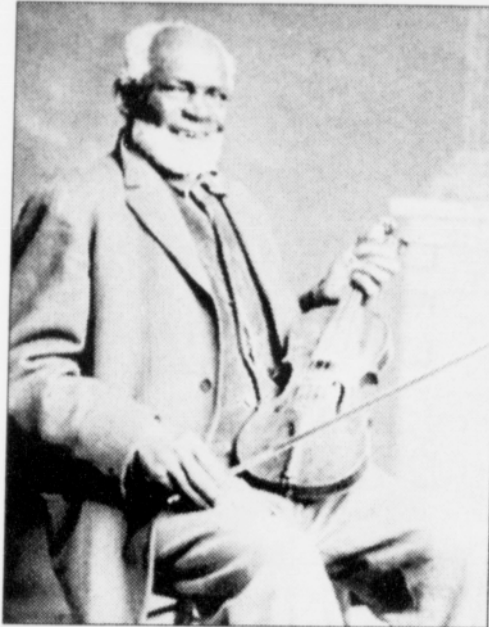
The discovery of Jackson, a black pioneer, Civil War veteran and respected farmer who lived in the Salem area in the late 1800s, may not have happened if it weren't for a chance meeting last summer at the World Beat Festival in Salem.

Gwen Carr of the Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers learned that a Salem family came across references to a slave while delving through old family records for details about their ancestor Adam Stephens, a well-known pioneer who has a Salem school named after him.

Both Stephens and Jackson were members of the Hayesville Farmers Club, and, as it turns out, their grave-stones are not far from one another at the cemetery. There are two stones for Jackson, one that was placed by a veterans organization to honor his service in the Civil War.

Jackson now joins a growing list of Oregon's black pioneers, all of whom the Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers plan to feature in an African-American museum in Salem.

One census record and gravestone at a time, Gwen Carr and her colleagues are uncovering Oregon's black history and learning that it extends surprisingly further than once thought.



Louis A. Southworth (1830-1917), was a respected homesteader near Waldport on the Oregon Coast and later donated land for a school-house.

"Most people think that it's relegated primarily to the Portland area, and for the most part it has been," Carr said. "But in addition to that, we are finding that it extends to every corner of the state, from the shores of Tillamook and Clatsop County all the way to the northeast to Wallowa County and even down in Southern Oregon in Malheur and Harney counties."

The all-volunteer group, founded in 1993, has discovered that there is early African-American history in 27 of Oregon's 36 counties.

"That surprises a lot of people; frankly, it surprised us," Carr said. "But I think it just attests to how rich our history is here, and we find great pleasure every time we find just a tidbit of information."

Because so much black history research already has been done in the Portland area, she said, the group chose to focus initial efforts on the Mid-Valley. So far they've identified more than 100 black pioneers in Oregon, with the majority in Marion and Polk counties. Those findings will be published in a book by the Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, which they hope to publish in the summer.

Last year, the group placed a gravestone at Pioneer Cemetery in Salem in memory of the 43 black pioneers buried there. Each of their names is etched in the stone.

There never has been a large population of black people living in Oregon. Even today, they account for about 2 percent of the population.

Although most of Oregon's black history dates to the mid-1800s, there is a record of black people arriving even earlier. Portland author Elizabeth McLagan describes the first recorded instance in her book "A Peculiar Paradise."

"On Dec. 21, 1787, the Lady Washington set sail from the Cape Verde Islands, heading south and west toward Cape Horn and into the Pacific Ocean, then turning north to explore the coast of the North American continent. Among those on board was Marcus Lopez, the first black person to set foot on Oregon soil."

Interestingly, some of these early discoveries were at a time in Oregon's history when black people weren't even allowed in the territory. By 1844, Oregon had declared both slavery and the residence of blacks within the territory to be illegal.

Organizers are in the process of developing plans for the museum, including identifying a location and securing grants and other fundraising opportunities, as well as collecting artifacts.

It would be the first statewide African-American museum in Oregon, and organizers envision it as a full-scale operation that would attract visitors from across the nation, in a central location with ample meeting space.

Building a museum from the ground up is no easy task.

It begins with developing a compelling subject—something the Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers already have done.

Doctor Survives Racial Hostility

DeNorval Unthank, doctor and civil rights activist, spent most of his life confronting social and institutional racism.

After moving his family to an all white neighborhood in Portland in 1929 and opening a private medical practice in the city, he and his family were frequently targets of racial hostility with broken windows, threatening phone calls, etc.

Refusing to submit to racism, he worked to overcome the economic and social barriers in Oregon.

In 1958, the Oregon Medical Society named him Doctor of the Year. For his role in bringing down racial barriers, the city of Portland named DeNorval Unthank Park in North Portland in his honor in 1969.

Unthank was the recipient of several citizenship awards, the first African American member of the Portland City Club, president of the local chapter of the Na-

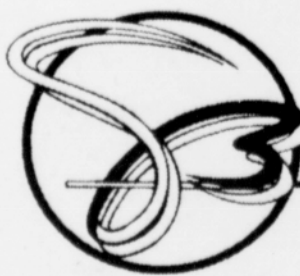
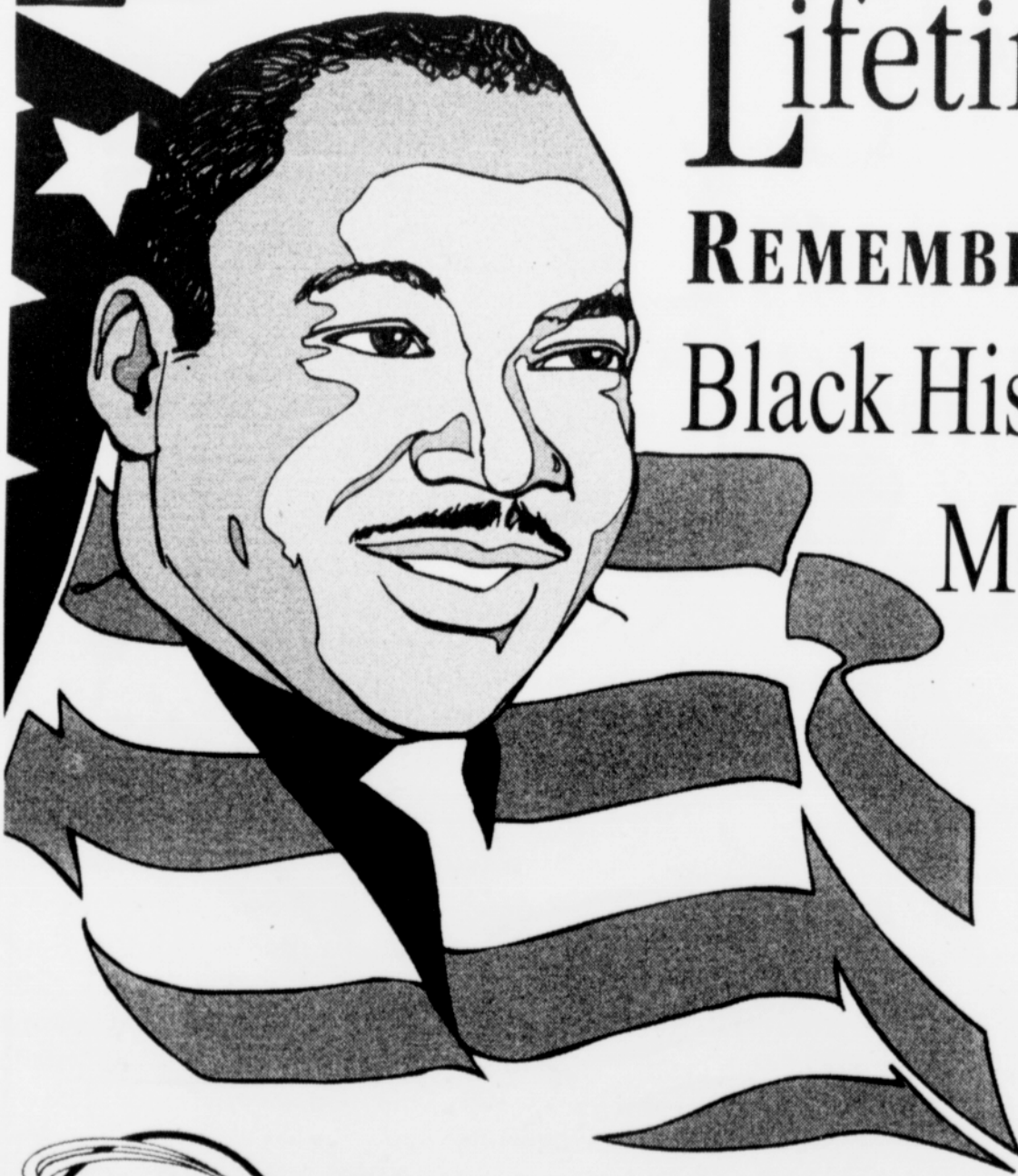


DeNorval Unthank

tional Association for the Advancement of Colored People, cofounder of the Portland Urban League and sat on Oregon's Committee for Equal Rights and the Council of Social Agencies.

Thanks to the Black Pioneers of the Pacific Northwest for this story.

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