

Empowering

continued ▲ from front

African Americans of Portland is one in several other city-specific, historical books that Arcadia Publishing has released under their series Images of America.

A city plan to revitalize inner northeast Portland in the early 1990s inspired Moreland's ever-increasing interest in local history. As a city planner, she was worked on a citizen advisory team to research and produce a historical document highlighting the history of African Americans in Portland from 1805 to present, including people, places and events and contributions.

"It's always interesting to research because the more you learn about our local history, you learn about what part we played in American history," said Moreland, who currently serves on the board of directors for two heritage organizations, Bosco-Milligan Foundation and

an idea still in its blooming stages.

In June of 2011, Moreland's idea to publish a snapshot of local African American history was approved. However, three months later, research was delayed when Moreland was diagnosed with breast cancer.

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— Kimberly Sower Moreland

Oregon Black Pioneers.

Oregon Black Pioneers is volunteer advocacy group for local black history. Proceeds of the book's sales will go directly toward the organization to help establish the state's first African American museum,

Thankfully, doctors caught her symptoms early and after undergoing treatment, Moreland is now cancer free. Inspired by a friend, Arcadia author and breast cancer survivor, she published her book in January.

Researching today is much different than it was 20 years ago, said Moreland. "You have all the information at your fingertips," she said. "We are lucky in this era of the Internet to have access to local archives that have photos of African Americans."

Moreland collected images from the Oregon Historical Society, Portland State University, and private albums including from the Verdell Burdine and Otto G. Rutherford Family Collection, one of Oregon's most telling socio-political commentaries about African American life in Portland.

Sometimes her investigations, took her as far as Victoria, Canada or the University of Montana just to retrieve a single photo that might tell the life story of a woman or man so interesting as Portland's first black lawyer, McCants Stewart, who arrived to Oregon in 1902 and battled for black rights before committing suicide in 1919.

From hundreds of black and white and sepia-toned photos, Moreland pieced to-

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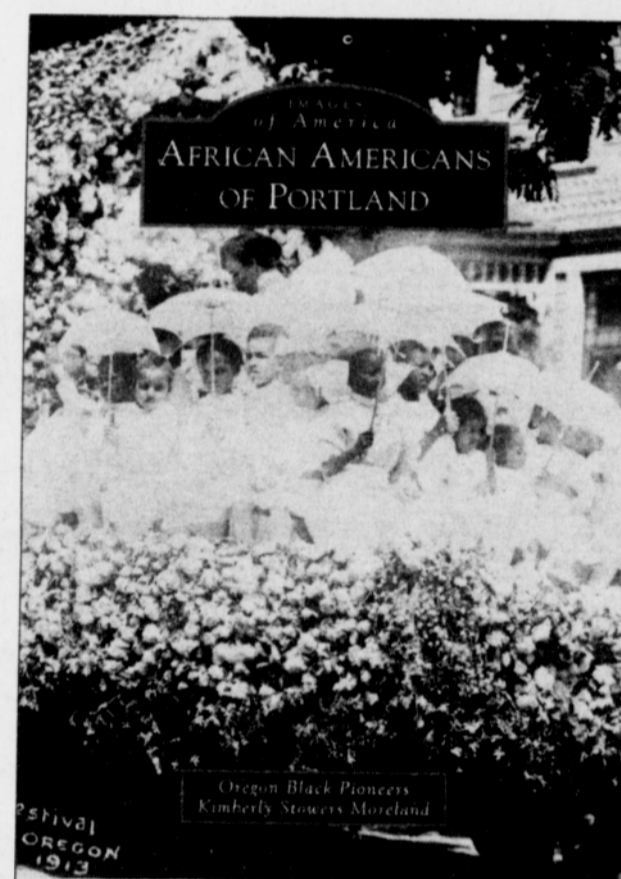
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gether a slice of the local African American narrative, one that reflects how prior to World War II, roughly 3,000 blacks established several social institutions that continue to work on the behalf of African Americans today.

A few include the Billy Web Lodge on North Tillamook, the Mount Olivet Baptist Church a few blocks away, built in 1921 and still standing, as well as the Portland chapter of the NAACP, established in 1914.

In 127 pages, her pictorial book supported by detailed captions and divided by eras, is not meant to be a comprehensive history of African Americans in Portland, but a snapshot. For example, missing photos fail to portray the thriving black musical district that formerly existed along northeast Williams Avenue.

While the positive contribution made by black in Portland is not one often told and the effects of gentrification are making their visible history even more obscure, Moreland said it is all the more powerful knowing our ancestors worked hard so that blacks have the rights they do today.

"I was really empowered by the strength of the pioneers and our ancestors," she said, "How much they were able to build in a backdrop of a very racist, anti-black sentiment."

Moreland's book, "African Americans of Portland," is available through the Oregon Black Pioneers, local retailers, and online at amazon.com and arcadiapublishing.com.