

# NAACP Generations

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Vancouver NAACP assistant treasurer and artist, is aimed at exploring the NAACP's early history in Vancouver, the evolution of the Vancouver branch, and its contemporary stories and accomplishments.

"The NAACP has been really active in this area, been active since the 40s," Carter told the Portland Observer. "It kind of ebbs and flows with the time, but we still have a strong membership. And the ebb and flow comes with the activities and people who are really active in it. But we're still growing and we're still keeping it alive."

Other free events as part of Black History Month observances include a community art exhibit at the Angst Gallery at 1015 Main St., Vancouver, on Friday, Feb. 1; and "Soundtrack for a Revolution," a documentary film screening and discussion on Feb. 27 at the Old Liberty theater on 115 N. Main Ave. in Ridgefield.

Vancouver NAACP's formation in 1945 followed the largest single increase in Vancouver's African American population between 1940 and 1944, going from just 18 people to a population of 8,825. That boom coincided with a surge in the black population in the Portland-Vancouver area with the establishment of three Kaiser Shipyards to build ships for World War II.

A number of black residents were segregated in wartime housing at that time, which spurred a local group of concerned citizens to join and create the Vancouver NAACP, 33 years after the creation of the national organization was established, and 29 years after Portland's NAACP was formed.

The Vancouver NAACP then worked with Vancouver Housing Authority to integrate housing, specifically in the McLoughlin Heights neighborhood of Vancouver, which was a primary location of the black population back then, and the largest wartime housing project on the west coast at the

time.

After the war, the NAACP Vancouver worked to combat and eradicate the racial discrimination that confronted many of the black families who decided to stay in Vancouver in search of upward mobility through jobs, housing and education.

It was due in part from NAACP Vancouver and Urban League of Portland, that both Washington and Oregon created Fair Employment Practices Commissions in 1949.

1989.

Though Joshua passed away in at the age of 92 in 2012, the award that carries her name still exists today, and honors others in the community who work to eliminate racism.

The history of African-Americans in the Pacific Northwest is rich.

The first black man thought to have set foot in the Pacific Northwest, Marcus Lopez, touched down at Tillamook in 1788, as a crew member of Capt. Robert

*Though Joshua passed away in at the age of 92 in 2012, the award that carries her name still exists today, and honors others in the community who work to eliminate racism.*

Though this opened some jobs for African Americans, many still left Vancouver after the shipbuilding jobs ended, unable to find adequate employment and housing. By 1960, the black population in Vancouver dropped to just fewer than 500.

Nevertheless, the Vancouver NAACP survived that whole time and continues to work toward improving the lived experiences of the over 4,500 black residents who call Vancouver home today, about 3 percent of the total population, according to the 2010 Census.

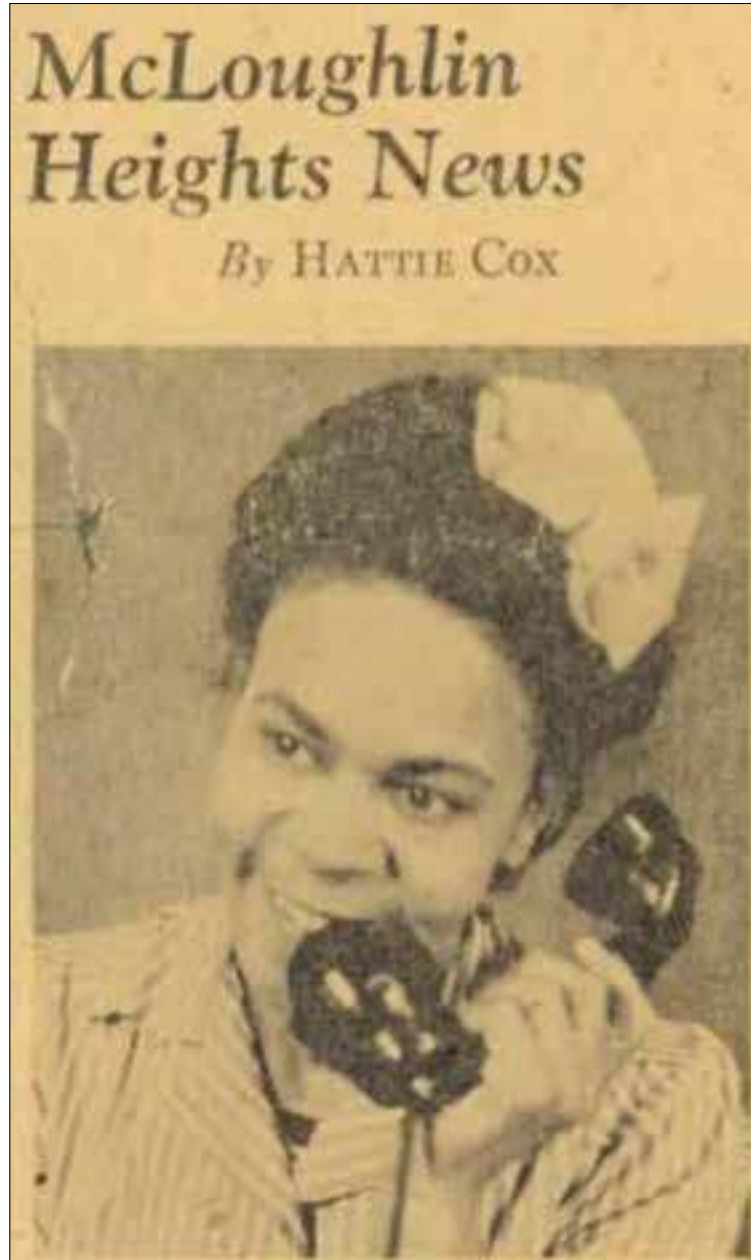
One of the founding members of Vancouver NAACP, Val Joshua, led the group as president for 29 years—from the early 70s to the early 2000s—and helped the organization grow. Her efforts helped to desegregate housing, teaching and places of worship in Clark County and she was honored by the Clark County YWCA, a civil rights organization, with the Val Joshua Racial Justice award in

Gray's Lady Washington.

Some black slaves brought to Oregon in the mid to late 1800s sought refuge in Washington due to Oregon's exclusionary laws. Despite being a "free state" that did not allow slavery, Oregon outlawed any black person from residing in the state at the time. When the Washington Territory was carved off from Oregon territory in 1853 it did not adopt the same laws. Only 20 black people were in the Pacific Northwest at the time, according to a US Census from 1860.

There were even black pioneers who each settled in Washington state in the mid 1800s—George Washington Bush in 1844, and George Washington in 1850. Bush's son, William Owen Bush, was later elected to the state legislature and introduced Washington's first civil rights act, which prohibited racial discrimination in public places, in 1889.

From 1899-1900, the all-black



1940s newspaper columnist Hattie Cox wrote about the who's who of the black community of McLoughlin Heights in Vancouver, which housed thousands of African Americans to work in the Kaiser Shipyards. Hattie wrote for the black newspaper *The People's Observer*, which *The Portland Observer* pays homage to in its name.

"Buffalo Soldiers" from Company B of the 24th U.S. Infantry Regiment were stationed at Vancouver Barracks, which was the first time in the history of the post that a unit from one of the Army's four African American regiments comprised the post's regular garrison of troops.

A retired Buffalo Soldier and Medal of Honor recipient, Moses Williams, was even buried in Vancouver shortly after moving there in 1899. A regional black newspaper at the time, *Portland New Age*, reported the black soldiers received racial prejudice from

some, though no lynching's or direct violence towards them were recorded.

To find out more about these histories, and the current priorities and future aspirations of Vancouver NAACP, join a panel discussion with past and present Vancouver NAACP presidents, and moderated by historical author Jane Elder Wulff, for "NAACP Generations" on Thursday, Feb. 7 at Clark County Historical Museum, 1511 Main St. Vancouver. Doors open at 5 p.m., and the event starts at 7 p.m., and tickets are \$5 and under.



## Charles Washington

Born: 1951 - 2012

Former Publisher of the Portland Observer

*In memory of an outstanding and dedicated member of Portland's Longest Standing Minority Publication.*

The Portland Observer

