

cover story

Key dates in Black history in Oregon

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE • The Bulletin

The key events of Black history in the United States are long and rich, infuriating to modern sensibilities and often disheartening to read about, but important to know and understand. Black History Month has been decreed every February by the President of the United States since 1976. Other countries also have designated months celebrating the history of their Black citizens, but the reason why we celebrate in the U.S. comes from historian Carter G. Woodson who was bothered that textbooks largely ignored the Black population and events that mattered to his community.

So he formed an organization now called the Association of the Study of African American Life and History in 1915 and through it developed the idea for Negro History Week in February of 1926.

Eventually, the week was expanded to the entire month of February, which Woodson chose because it includes the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

Here are just a few important moments in Black Oregon history including several

broader national events that every American should know and should inspire further research and reading throughout the year, not just every February.

Not every significant event can be included, blackpast.org is a good resource for finding more information on large-scale national events.

Oregon history compiled from oregon-humanities.org, oregonblackpioneers.org and Bulletin archives.



1513, present-day St. Augustine, Florida — Juan Garrido becomes the first documented Black person to set foot on what would become U.S. soil when he accompanies Juan Ponce de Leon on his search for the fountain of youth.

August 1619, Virginia colony — The first enslaved Africans arrive in the British Colonies of North America.

Sept. 9, 1739, Stono, South Carolina — About 60 armed slaves attempt to flee to Florida, kill 25 colonists and are then pursued and most are killed on-site or captured and executed at a later date.

March 5, 1770, Boston, Massachusetts — Escaped slave Crispus Attucks becomes the first killed during the Boston Massacre. The conflict is regarded as the spark to the American Revolution.

1776, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania — The Continental Congress remove a passage from the proposed Declaration of Independence condemning slavery after pressure from the southern colonial representatives. Author Thomas Jefferson owned over 600 human beings throughout his lifetime.

1788, near present-day Garibaldi, Oregon — Black sailor Marcus Lopeus arrives in Oregon with the crew of the Lady Washington captained by Robert Gray. Lopeus sticks his sword in the sand where it is taken by a member of a local tribe. The two fight and Lopeus is killed making him the first confirmed Black person to set foot in Oregon and the first to die in the state.

June 25, 1844, Oregon — Oregon exclusionary law goes into effect forbidding Black pioneers to settle in the territory. According to oregonhumanities.org, an Oregon City saloonkeeper named Jacob Vanderpool is the only person to have been expelled from the state after he is turned in as violating the law by a competitor.

1845 Myrtle Creek — Letitia Carson arrives in Oregon with her husband. When he died she successfully sued the executor of his estate for their shared property and later filed a claim under the Homestead Act becoming the only Black woman granted a 160-acre homestead.

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