

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 1997

"BLACKS AND THE GOLD RUSH"

HISTORICAL ANECDOTES

By

George Harper

Published in the

Anchorage Daily News

Blacks in Alaska History Project, Inc.

The last week of January 1997, Susan Morgan, Hometown Editor of the Anchorage Daily News, invited George Harper to submit short articles about Blacks in the history of Alaska for each day of Black History Month. Mr. Harper prepared twenty historical anecdotes on Blacks and the Gold Rush. They were published during February and March 1997. All twenty articles are included in this booklet.

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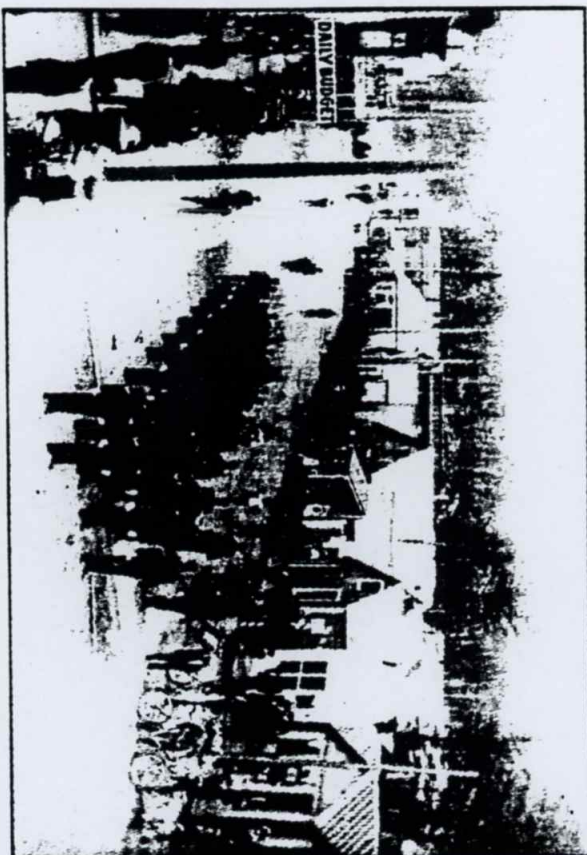
Photo exhibit honors role of blacks in Alaska gold rush history

Editor's note: When they raised the American flag in Sitka in 1867, there were blacks living in Alaska. Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. is dedicated to the preservation of black history in Alaska and constantly is searching for additional historical photographs and items of interest to add to the George Harper Collection of historical data.

In celebration of the centennial of the gold rush, Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc., prepared a photograph exhibit for Black History Month 1997, "Blacks and the Gold Rush." From data collected in preparing this exhibit, George Harper has selected several items to write about during Black History Month. This is the first of the series.

"Colored Troops to Relieve Soldiers at Wrangell and Dyea" read an Associated Press dispatch from Vancouver, Wash., and published in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on May 14, 1899.

"Company L, 24th Infantry (colored) from Vancouver barracks, left this evening for Seattle, from which point they will leave for Alaska on May 15. Fifty-six men, under command



National Park Service
Company L, 24th Infantry marches down the main street of Skagway on July 4, 1899.

of Capt. Henry W. Hovey, will take station at Dyea, relieving Capt. R.T. Yeatman and Company H, 14th Infantry, and 49 men, under Lt. J.C. Jenks, will proceed to Fort Wrangell, relieving Capt. Bogardus Eldridge, and Company B, 14th Infantry."

Before arriving in Alaska, the 24th Infantry had many roles in frontier America, including the Indian wars and the Spanish-

American War in Cuba.

On May 15, 1899, Company L of the 24th Infantry left Seattle aboard the SS Humboldt. The steamer arrived at Fort Wrangell on May 18 and a detachment of one officer and 46 enlisted men debarked. When the Humboldt arrived at Dyea on May 20, those remaining of Company L, two officers and 48 enlisted men, debarked.

When Company L arrived at Dyea in May, the town was becoming a ghost town. In July, the White Pass and Yukon Route bought out the tramway and shut it down, putting about 75 people out of work. Hovey requested the troops be moved to Skagway. Before the decision to move reached Hovey, a forest fire broke out about two miles south of camp. Within 20 minutes after the last boat full of supplies and men left the wharf, the fire roared in on the camp.

The U.S. Court called upon Company L to protect U.S. marshals in enforcing a decree of the court on Oct. 1, 1900. A detachment of 12 enlisted men went to Haines Mission, Alaska to prevent trouble between Chilkat Indians on July 9, 1901. They returned to Skagway on Aug. 10, 1901.

"In interpreting the Army's role in maintaining peace and order on Taiya Inlet, the service must recognize the role of the black soldiers of Company L, 24th United States Infantry. Capt. Hovey and his black soldiers spent three years in the area. Their good discipline and appearance made a favorable impression on all with whom they came in contact," the National Park Service said.

Eugene E. Swanson: Veteran and Alaska homesteader

Editor's note: In celebration of the centennial of our state's gold rush, Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. prepared a photograph exhibit for Black History Month 1997, "Blacks and the Gold Rush." From data collected in preparing this exhibit, George Harper has selected several items to write about during Black History Month.

By **GEORGE HARPER**
Special to the Daily News

One of the most difficult things to get accustomed to in doing research of blacks and the gold rush was the names given blacks in newspapers and books about the gold rush. From my research, I have learned the term historically was descriptive rather than derogatory; however, it's hard to hear it even today.

A good case in point is the first time I heard the name of Swanson. I was watching television in my favorite tavern in downtown Anchorage. Several people were talking about my appearance on local television. A fellow customer, a Native Alaskan, stated: "When I was growing up on the Yukon near Rampart, there was a black man we called 'Nigger Swanson.'"

My first thought was to smack him upside the head, but I had second thoughts and just filed the information for future research. Sure enough, there was a black man who lived in Rampart whose last name was Swanson. The sad part of the story is that he called his horse by that derogatory name.

Over the years, I have uncovered more information of this black man from Rampart, all of it indicating he was an upstanding man who contributed to his community. His name is Eugene E. Swanson.

Eugene E. Swanson was born in Chicago in 1868. He joined the U.S. Army and served in the Spanish-American War in Cuba. He arrived in Alaska aboard the S.S. Humboldt, as a private with Company L, 24th Infantry, on May 20, 1899. In 1902, he was dis-

charged from the Army and, for a while, made his home in Skagway. He was employed as an expressman.

In an article in the March 7, 1942, issue of Fairbanks News-Miner, Swanson stated: "In 1899, I came north again, landing at Skagway. I was in Dawson a couple of years, then went to Nome and finally, in 1904, settled at Rampart."

An application for a free survey of his homestead claim was submitted in 1923. Swanson was married with an adopted child. But by 1927 he was a widower.

Swanson wrote to the General Land Office in Washington, D.C., regarding his homestead claim in August 1925: "I located a homestead claim adjoining Rampart, Alaska, in the Fairbanks Land District about 15 years ago and have always lived on the land. ... I have never received any notice since the survey was made and would like to know if my claim has been approved." Patent for the claim was issued December 1928.

The 20 acres contained a two-story log house, a log stable, machine and tool shop.

Swanson had a mine claim on Hunter Creek, a rich, gold-producing stream near Rampart. When work on the mine demanded, he hired people to help him. He paid going wages and never had any labor trouble.

Word of Swanson from the article of March 7, 1942: "Throughout the years, I've done comfortably well in mining, but now I'm not so skookum as I was that hot July 2 in '98 when the Ninth dismounted, scaled the hill of San Juan to spike the guns of the Spanish batteries that raked us with terrible accuracy as we made the ascending charge."

Swanson died in Fairbanks in 1943 at the age of 78.

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Anchorage Daily News

February 5, 1997

D-2 Wednesday, February 5, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

R.H. Creecy: 'Beauties on parade'

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By GEORGE HARPER
Special to the Daily News

One of our favorite articles is from the Fairbanks News-Miner of Jan. 3, 1928, about Mr. R.H. Creecy. The headlines read: "Beauties on parade awe Kuskokwim" and "R.H. Creecy marvels at lovely femininity and sees autos for first time in this city."

The article reads as follows:

"I never before saw women that look like these women," A.H. Creecy, Spanish-American War veteran, said today in Fairbanks, as he watched modernly dressed women passing by on the street.

Creecy, who has been prospecting in the Endicott Range and who works an open-cut mine in the Kuskokwim, came to Fairbanks by airplane from Wiseman last evening for medical treatment.

The city life of Fairbanks astonishes him. He says he imagined there was nothing here but the Fairbanks Exploration Co.

Creecy last saw Fairbanks in 1900 when he was 25 years old, just before he went into

the Kuskokwim. He left here then because he did not think there were any good prospects in this section of the country.

What particularly interests him, after the marvelous galaxy of handsome matrons and pretty maids, are automobiles, which he is seeing for the first time. Calling them "porcupines," he said:

"I can't figure out which is the front end of them and which way they are going to go.

"Fairbanks is as big a city as I want to see," he continued. "I'm surprised at the tall buildings and wide, solid streets."

He is enjoying his first fresh fruit in 35 years.

In speaking of the Kuskokwim, he declared:

"There's lot of gold there. What the country needs are prospectors. The young fellows going into there now are looking for employment in mines and don't want to prospect."

"Well," he concluded, "I think I'll go down to the hotel and sit in the window and eat some fruit and watch feminine beauty and the 'porcupines' go by."

Note: There was an error in the original article — Kuskokwim should be Koyukuk.

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Anchorage Daily News February 7, 1997

E-2 Friday, February 7, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY month

The death of Philip Goodwin in gold rush Nome

By GEORGE HARPER
Special to the Daily News

In celebration of the centennial of our state's gold rush, Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. prepared a photograph exhibit for Black History Month 1997, "Blacks and the Gold Rush." The exhibit will be displayed on the third floor of Nordstrom through February. From data collected in preparing this exhibit, George Harper has selected several items to write about during Black History Month.

In the early days of Nome, the people were proud of their dogs. In fact, there was a kennel club in the town. There was one major problem the people of Nome refused to face up to, and that was the large number of malemute dogs running loose in the town.

Many children and adults, over a period of years, had been attacked by dogs, and the town council, refused to pass a dog-control ordinance. So, you can see, the conditions were right for the story quoted below, from James Doolittle's book "I Could Never be So Lucky Again."

"One recollection still sends chills through me. We had many dogs running loose in town all the time and some of them were vicious, especially when they were hungry. There was a black lad in our school named Philip Goodwin. He was older than I, but we were good friends. One winter day when school let out and we were all running home,

Philip tripped and fell. In an instant, a half dozen or more malemute sled dogs jumped him. Many people came running, but before the dogs could be pulled off they killed him. It was my first loss of a close friend."

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Anchorage Daily News

February 8, 1997

Saturday, February 8, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Historian recalls miner's demise

Editor's note: When they raised the American flag in Sitka in 1867, there were blacks living in Alaska.

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By GEORGE HARPER

Special to the Daily News

William Wimbish and John Cooper in 1910 were partners working a claim on Gilmore Creek, north of Fairbanks in the Fairbanks Mining District.

Wimbish was last seen in town in late November. Cooper told people Wimbish had gone downriver to hunt, or had gone to Chandiar.

On a visit to Cooper's claim in August 1911, Isaac Ogren's attention was called to a pile of ashes on a hill by the frequent glances of Cooper. Ogren "felt sure Cooper had something hidden there." A search of the pile uncovered the bones

of a human.

On Aug. 17, 1911, a coroner's jury visited the claim at Gilmore Creek, and found the charred bones in the wood pile to be those of Wimbish, his fellow Negro miner.

The jury concluded Wimbish came to his death around the end of November 1910, and that Cooper killed him.

In November 1911, a grand jury indicted Cooper of murder in the first degree for the death of Wimbish. The case was heard by Judge Murane.

According to an account at the time, excerpted from the Fairbanks News Miner: "After five and one-half hours of deliberation were all required by the jury in the Cooper trial to reach an agreement Saturday night, after the case had been put in their hands and so, at 11 o'clock they were back in the courtroom after having found John Cooper guilty of first degree murder. The jury's verdict included the designation of life imprisonment as the punishment."

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Anchorage Daily News

February 9, 1997

Sunday, February 9, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Soapy Smith sues

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

By GEORGE HARPER
Special to the Daily News

In the late 1800s, Soapy Smith sued the Seattle Daily Times for defamation, for an article published in that paper's June 4, 1898, edition. He sought \$25,000. The Times responded with another article, part of which is quoted here:

"The article over which these Alaska magnates have allowed their wrath to rise until they could no longer hold it in, will be recalled by readers of The Times. Briefly stated, it was a story ascribed to Mrs. Mattie Silks, who formerly lived at Skagway. Mrs. Silks occupied a room in the Occidental Hotel at Skagway adjoining the office of Deputy Marshal Taylor. There was a colored woman murdered and robbed at Skagway during the last week in May, and Mrs. Silks claimed she overheard Taylor, 'Soapy' and two other men dividing the money which had been taken from the colored woman and plotting at the same time to kill her (Mrs. Silks). Mrs. Silks decided to go afar from Skagway ... The Times published her story."

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Anchorage Daily News February 11, 1997

D-2 Tuesday, February 11, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY month

Miss Tootsie braved the rugged life of the gold rush

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Mattie "Tootsie" Crosby was one of the first black women in the Iditarod-Flat area, now the McKinley Mining District, and one of the early successful entrepreneurs.

Miss Tootsie, as people called her, arrived in Skagway at age 16 in 1900 from Chicago. She was one of thousands who came to Alaska in search of gold and fortune. The gold rush attracted few women; the life was rugged and raw. Disappointment was more common than wealth. Miss Tootsie survived life in Skagway, traveled the Chilkoot Trail on her way to Dawson City and finally settled in Iditarod. Later she moved to Flat, where she lived until entering the Pioneers' Home in Sitka in 1962.

"The Crosby," according to Miss Tootsie, "was the finest bathhouse in Alaska." It well may have been. Her ad in a local paper in 1914 stated: "The Crosby, massage and bath parlors. Medicated, mineral vapor, steam, tub, salt and fresh water baths. Electric and

faradic massage treatments by expert attendants. Lighted by gas and heated by steam."

Miss Tootsie wrote articles, which she submitted to the Star News, a newspaper in San Diego, for many years. The articles unraveled stories of days in tents, grubstaking, holing up for 70-below winters, an eye that was frozen and lost, breakups that brought out wooden sidewalks as the only means to stay on top of the mud, and constant remembrances of the people she encountered — people with whom she kept in constant contact.

One of the last things she wrote in a letter to her editor perhaps best sums up her philosophy of people and life in Alaska: "I am not qualified to write about civil rights, regardless of the fact that I am a Negro, and I am not too far from 90. ... We are taught that youth is the seed time of good habits and Alaska is most wonderful land of youth."

Pioneer and sourdough Mattie "Tootsie" Crosby died Oct. 11, 1972, at the Fairbanks Pioneers' Home at the age of 88.

Right: Mattie "Tootsie" Crosby with neighbors standing on the boardwalk at Flat City, Alaska.

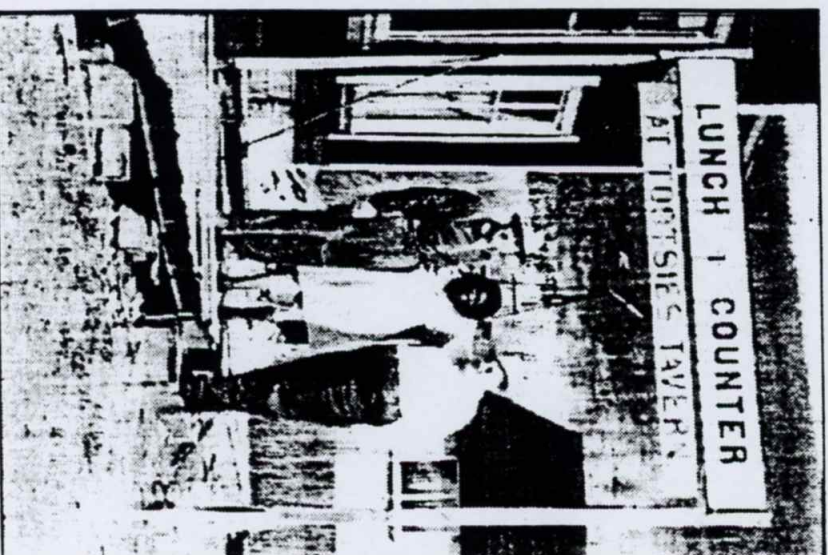


Photo courtesy the Lulu Fairbanks Collection. Unusually of Alaska Fairbanks

Anchorage Daily News

February 12, 1997

C-2 Wednesday, February 12, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Gold miner shares fortune

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

When the gold rushes started, there were 35,000 people in Alaska. Due to the influx of gold-seekers, the population increased to 63,500 for the 1900 census. Many people came to Alaska to make their fortune. Many upon arrival at their port of call immediately booked passage on the return trip back to San Francisco.

Will T. Ewing was one of the many who stayed in Alaska and found his fortune. When Ewing returned to Tacoma about 1906, the headlines of the local newspaper stated "Ewing: Now-wealthy Alaskan back in town where he drove patrol wagon."

Part of the article is quoted here: "Negroes here are planning a big reception for Bill Ewing of Fairbanks, who has just returned from Alaska. He has a large acquaintance ... having at one time been ... driver of the patrol wagon ... He quit that job to go north and prospect, a course that led to this present wealth, for he struck it rich in the Tanana country and had the good sense to hold on when he came into possession of this money."

Ewing died at his Harvard ranch home near Oakland, Calif., in June 1923. He was 68 years old. Ewing left his entire estate, valued at approximately \$150,000, to the Booker T. Washington Institute in Tuskegee, Ala.

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FAX COMMUNITY NEWS ITEMS to 258-2157 at least a week before the event, or mail to: Hometown, Anchorage Daily News, P.O. Box 149001, Anchorage, AK 99514.

Anchorage Daily News

February 13, 1997

C-2 Thursday, February 13, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY month

Melvin Dempsey

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

They could see the Valdez Glacier from Valdez Arm when Melvin Dempsey arrived aboard the Alliance on Feb. 26, 1898. Dempsey was the descendant of a Cherokee Indian plantation owner and a Negro slave. The following quote is from the recently published book "Valdez Gold Rush Trails of 1898-99," by Jim and Nancy Lethcoe:

"On March 23, he opened his restaurant; on April 24, he organized the Valdez branch of the Christian Endeavor Society; on May 9, he called the citizens' meeting that led to the ouster of the first township committee; on May 12, the new township committee presented the Endeavor Society with a free lot for their Hall and Reading Room."

Dempsey is most remembered for his efforts to help prospectors. He also had a mining claim and mining camp on the Chisna River near the Chistochina River. He was appointed postmaster of Chisna which later became Dempsey.



Anchorage Museum of History and Art

Melvin Dempsey stands in the doorway of the Christian Endeavor Free Reading Room about 1899.

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CORRECTIONS

The Black History Month photograph on Page C-2 of Thursday's feature section was not of Melvin Dempsey. It was a photograph of Clifford Hancock, featured in today's Black History Month story on Page F-2.

If you believe an error has been made, please call (907) 257-4304.

Anchorage Daily News

February 14, 1997

F-2 Friday, February 14, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Clifford Hancock: Adventure in the Yukon

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Many people came to Alaska during the gold rushes by different means and for different reasons. Clifford Hancock came to Alaska in an unusual way.

The following is quoted from an unpublished memos of Robert J. Farnsworth:

"On the troop train coming out from Chicago, there was a porter named Clifford Hancock. He gave excellent service and asked my father if he could go along. So Father took him on as cook and helper. He was not an enlisted man. As he had to return to Chicago with his car and then return to San Francisco, Father felt he would not make it. He wired from Chicago, 'Hold the boat, I'm coming,' a rather expensive thing to do at \$1,000 a day. He arrived the day before we sailed and for 18 years stayed with us, prov-

ing to be the most valuable person we ever had."

Hancock, along with Capt. C. S. Farnsworth and family, and the troops, left San Francisco on June 25, 1899. They arrived at Dutch Harbor on July 4, 1899. Here Hancock started his Alaska adventure, taking care of the needs of the Farnsworths, learning to live in the harsh environment of the Yukon and adjusting to a new lifestyle.

The group was stationed at Fort Gibbon, at the junction of the Tanana and Yukon rivers, and later moved to Fort Egbert at Eagle City. Hancock was active and constantly was entertaining people.

Hancock and the Farnsworths left Fort Egbert in the summer of 1911 and returned to San Francisco by way of Dawson City, Whitehorse and Skagway. They left Skagway on the S.S. Humboldt.

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Anchorage Daily News

February 15, 1997

E-2 Saturday, February 15, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

'Chicago Ed': Gold rush con

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

People from all over the world came to the gold fields of Alaska and Canada to prospect for gold. Others came to con prospectors out of their gold. Such was the case of Edward Posey, alias "Chicago Ed."

Posey came to Dawson on July 27, 1898, and worked as a porter at the Fairview Hotel. He also sold merchandise on commission. On Feb. 18, 1899, Posey was charged with "not having any visible means of maintaining himself; is a loose, idle, disorderly person and vagrant within the meaning of the Act" in *The Queen vs. Edward Posey*.

Posey was known by the Northwest Mounted Police as being a regular rowdy and

hobo." He had been loafing in the attic of the Monte Carlo, urinating in the fire pails. He also cut holes in the ceiling over the rooms occupied by some of the girls.

Corporal J.J. Wilson stated, "They say he is a 'spotter' for house robbers and that he sells fancy goods and makes a note of the houses he visits."

A report from Chicago said, "Mr. Ed Posey, known generally as 'Chicago Ed,' is entered on the police records of Chicago as a house locator. He peddles small toilet articles in a valise, thereby gaining access to houses and finding out the interior plans, etc., which information was turned over to a gang of house thieves."

Posey was sentenced to "six months imprisonment with hard labor."

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Anchorage Daily News

February 16, 1997

K-2 Sunday, February 16, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Woman gets rich during Gold Rush

Editor's Note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

BY GEORGE HARPER
Special to the Daily News

There were a few African Americans who survived all of the hardships of life in the gold fields and found their fortune. They escaped Alaska and the likes of Soapy Smith to return home. Such was the case of Mrs. G. B. Verden. The following article appeared in the Home Pioneer Press on March 7, 1908.

The headline read: "Negress Returns from Alaska — With a Million."

"Des Moines: To save her aged parents from starving, Mrs. G. B. Verden, a negress, went to Alaska goldfields 13 years ago. Today she returned to Des Moines, fashionably clad, with jewels and gold nuggets galore, and with mining interest near Gold Run worth a cool million.

"Upon her arrival here, Mrs. Verden ordered that her parents, who were slaves before the war, be removed from their home,

'Mrs. Verden got her start by running a hotel at Gold Run, at which she received \$109 a month for each man's board.'

— Home Pioneer

Press on March 7, 1908

and she has begun the construction of a mansion in East Des Moines for them. Mrs. Verden got her start by running a hotel at Gold Run, at which she received \$109 a month for each man's board. This netted her sums which, by wise investment, have made her very wealthy."

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Anchorage Daily News

February 17, 1997

C-2 Monday, February 17, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

How Eagle City got its name

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Elva R. Scott, Eagle City historian, mentioned in her paper titled "Rascals to Knighthood — Eagle City 1897-1905" about Becky White, "a colored woman whose specialty was 'Plain and Fancy Washing.'" Part of the paper is quoted here.

"As the early settlers penetrated the vast interior of Alaska by traveling the Yukon River, they established their first communities on the banks of the river. In 1897, this was the case of Eagle City, which was populated with courageous, adventuresome folks ranging from rascals to one known knight, with the majority of solid honest citizens falling in between."

Cash J. Darrell wrote in an article in *The Alaska Life*, "Eagle on the Yukon:"

"Eagle City was first conceived by a disgruntled stamper living in a small cabin near the foot of the Slide in Dawson

whose name was Old Man Martin. ... His idea was nourished by what he considered a great injustice upon the part of Col. Steele and his red-coated minions, referred to in the vernacular as Snake-legs."

Old Man Martin joined his partners, the Hudson brothers, and agreed to establish an American town across the border. They recruited Professor Howard, Barney Gibbons, Ed Martin, George Graves, One Thumb Jack, Jenny Moore, Becky White, "Doc" Pernault, "The Kid" and several other people.

"The motley crew shoved off in a large scow and four smaller river boats. They were heading for Circle or Rampart. ... (It was) noon the next day when they pulled into the bank below the high bluff. ... Tents were hurriedly pitched ... a council was called ... an eagle soared overhead as though an omen. ..."

The rest is history. Check it out at the library.

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Anchorage Daily News

February 21, 1997

F-2 Friday, February 21, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Cpl. Benjamin Green: 'A fine bass voice'

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

During their three-year stay in Alaska, many men of Company L, 24th Infantry were stricken with gold fever. As many as two dozen soldiers were discharged in Skagway and Fort Wrangell. Several of these soldiers were discharged because they were incarcerated in the federal jail or were AWOL.

Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. has been able to find data on several of these men that were discharged from the Army and remained in Alaska. Among them was Cpl. Benjamin Green.

Green was born in Ohio in 1875. He came to Fort Wrangell with Company L. He served in Skagway and was discharged from the Army there. The March 26, 1940, issue of the Alaska Miner recorded Green's life in Alaska:

"Death came quickly and unexpectedly to Ben Green, Negro, a longtime resi-

dent of Fairbanks. While walking on Fifth Avenue ... Sunday night he suffered a heart stroke, and life became extinct as he fell to the sidewalk.

"Green, who lived at 703 Seventh Ave., was 64 years old. ... He first came to Alaska as a corporal with Company L, 24th Infantry, a Negro regiment of the United States Army. His outfit was stationed at Skagway for a while. ... He had a fine bass voice. ... He had traveled in the states several seasons with a Negro minstrel troupe.

"In Fairbanks, for many years, Green had conducted shoeshine stands. ... Green was a large man weighing in the neighborhood of 260 pounds."

The Dorman H. Baker Post of the American Legion conducted the last rites for Green. Interment was in the Legion plot of the Fairbanks cemetery March 28, 1940.

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Anchorage Daily News

February 22, 1997

L:2 Saturday, February 22, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY month

Preston a mysterious man

Editor's Note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Over a period of several years Steve Levi of Anchorage and Bruce Haldeman of Fairbanks have been submitting copies of historical newspaper clippings and book references to the George Harper Collection. Both of them submitted documentation on Walter Preston, sourdough and prospector. Preston traveled around many gold fields of Alaska after his arrival in the territory.

Preston is listed in the 1901 Alaska-Yukon Gazetteers as a cook in Dawson City. Next, his name appears in the Fairbanks Daily Times in Aug. 21, 1906. He appeared before Judge Wickersham, charged with stealing a dog. The following is quoted from the newspaper: "Preston, who is a colored man, was charged with grand larceny, but he protested his innocence and while technically guilty, was in a measure partly justified in what he did ... The charge of grand larceny was withdrawn. Preston was arraigned on a charge of petit larceny. He was given a 10-day sentence, inasmuch as he had been patiently waiting for the five months to have a trial."

In 1911 and 1912, Preston is listed as living in Valdez and working as a scavenger.

First forward to 1939 to Emil Oliver

Goulet's book, "Rugged Years on the Alaska Frontier." Goulet writes: "In June (1939) an old colored man, well in his 70s, arrived at Paxson with a few personal belongings. He was en route to a placer claim he had staked out on the opposite side of the Gulkana River. His name was Walter Preston. For one of his race, he had a serious outlook on life. He let it be known he wished to be called Mr. Preston at all times, and Mr. Preston he was to us."

Preston camped at Paxson for several days and on June 11 he set out, taking what supplies he could shoulder with him. He promised he would return within 30 days.

The Oct. 22, 1940, a written account describes Preston's disappearance: "On previous occasions, he had stayed in the hills on his prospecting trips longer than he had originally expected, and this fact leads many of his friends to believe that he is all right and that his absence is intentional."

But Goulet continues: "Mr. Preston never came back. Whether the swift waters of the Gulkana River claimed him, or some wild animal claimed his life, or whether he died of a heart attack or accident is a story all its own; but that he was part of the toll of the wilderness was all of which we ever felt sure."

■ Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. is dedicated to the preservation of black history in Alaska and constantly is searching for additional historical photographs and items of historical interest to add to the George Harper Collection of historical data.

Anchorage Daily News
February 23, 1997

K-2 Sunday, February 23, 1997

BLACK HISTORY month

Anchorage Daily News

Many blacks left out of early census counts

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A census of the U.S. population attempts to count everyone in the country at a specific time. The 1900 census of Alaska took place when the people of Alaska were suffering from gold fever. The population was mostly transient and in a constant state of flux. As a result, they did not count many people in Alaska in

the census. To add to the enumeration problem, the literacy rate was very low and many people could not read nor write, especially the men of the 25th Infantry.

Nome was a busy town, with passenger ships arriving on an hourly basis during the census. Some ship crews were counted, some were not. Many Blacks missed the enumeration.

An officer of the 24th Infantry at Skagway enumerated the men assigned to his company including the men stationed at Fort Wrangell and the soldiers in the Sitka jail. Fort Wrangell also counted the men stationed there as did the people in charge of

the Sitka jail. The traffic between Skagway and Dawson City was very heavy. They did not count many people in transit between the two cities.

Add to all these problems the spelling of place names and people's names, and you can guess the counting got complicated. The 168 black people listed in the official census report may be incorrect in some respects.

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Anchorage Daily News

February 27, 1997

C-2 Thursday, February 27, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Gold-rush women had interesting occupations

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Records of black men, women and children in a number of the gold-rush camps exist. Newspaper articles and books written about women in the gold rush usually were vague about their means of employment. Historical documents, such as court records, were more precise. As time goes by, and we continue to have access to the vast amount of information available on the World Wide Web, more historical documents will become available for research.

Some women were dance hall girls, show girls or prostitutes. Histories of these women traditionally have been buried under righteous indignation or relegated to hid-

den archives. A check of historical records suggests that some of Alaska's leading families started with some of these women.

In S.D. Clark's "The Developing Canadian Community," he stated: "The female population (of Dawson) for the most part consisted of public entertainers, dance-hall girls and prostitutes, and the free-flow of gold encouraged such occupations, while other occupations were lacking to attract more respectable women."

We can't say for sure the occupation of some black women, but we can guess they were more than housekeepers, dance-hall girls and entertainers in the gold fields.

Read between the lines of recorded history. Mrs. G. B. Verden returned to Des Moines with more than a million dollars' worth of gold nuggets and jewels. She operated a hotel outside Nome at Gold Run. Miss Tootsie operated the finest bathhouse in Alaska, The Crosby at Flat City. A black woman was murdered and robbed at

Skagway by Soapy Smith and his gang in 1898. Leuci Williams from San Francisco worked at a sporting hotel owned by John Moore in Sumdum, Alaska, in 1900.

Some black women in gold-rush camps such as "Black Kitty" at Circle City and "Black Alice" at Nome were prostitutes. "Snake Hips Lil" of Dawson City was a dance-hall girl.

Mary E. Thomas, alias "Black Mary," ran a house in Petersburg and kept seven or eight girls. She also had federal charges against her for prostitution in Ketchikan.

Lael Morgan of the University of Alaska Fairbanks is writing a book about this subject. The book should be out soon.

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Anchorage Daily News
February 28, 1997

2 Friday, February 28, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY month

Violence took its toll in frontier Alaska

Editor's Note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Iife in Alaska during the gold rushes was dangerous and violent. First, prospectors were lucky if they got to Alaska without their ship sinking. Next was the bad weather that Mother Nature would throw at them at any time. Last but not least were their fellow prospectors.

Included in history books, personal adventures and newspaper clippings are the trials and tribulations of unlucky prospectors. Black prospectors were not excluded.

Violence was common in many gold towns. This quotation is from the Fort Wrangell News of Aug. 10, 1908:

"Benj. Starkie, the defendant, and Minnie Jones, both colored, have been occupying a house just back of Judge Sunmacher's

Included in history books, personal adventures and newspaper clippings are the trials and tribulations of unlucky prospectors. Black prospectors were not excluded.

office. ... Tim Callagan (white) went to the Starkie residence and demanded admission, which was refused. ... sometime around 6 o'clock Tim broke in the door ... whereupon defendant Starkie, who had an ax in his hand, let fly at Tim's face." Charges were not filed against anyone. "A man's home is

his castle and none may enter therein when forbidden, regardless of what the reputation of the house may be."

In the Sept. 13, 1906, issue of the Fairbanks Evening News the following story appeared: "Willie Hooper, a colored habitue of the restricted district, was brutally assaulted last night by some person whose identity is not yet fully established. Within a few minutes after the crime was committed ... Ike Moses, a man without any settled residence or occupation, (was) under arrest."

A story in the Sept. 9, 1899, Alaskan (Sitka) states: "Deputy Marshal Tanner, of Skagway, brought over two prisoners ... E. C. Barhydt, a notion peddler, who was charged with attempt to commit murder on the person, a Negro ..."

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Anchorage Daily News

March 1, 1997

H-2 Saturday, March 1, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Some blacks bent laws

Editor's Note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Black prospectors came to the gold fields from all over the United States and islands in the Atlantic Ocean. Some of these people had a positive affect on the land and other had a negative impact.

William W. Waddleton was one who had a negative impact on Juneau. Waddleton arrived in Alaska in September 1893. He was born in South Carolina in 1857 and his occupation was listed as newspaper reporter and miner.

In 1917 Waddleton became the first person arrested in the Territory of Alaska for sedition. Waddleton acted as a sort of unofficial lawyer in the Juneau community for certain people. They charged him with sedition because he urged people to "resist conscription and the registration for the draft . . . (and) to assist in promoting strikes to embarrass the government."

They arrested Waddleton and bail was set at \$1,000. There was a hung jury on June 8, 1917.

Another influential black was L.T. Watson, who came to the Southeastern panhandle about 1890. He was a close friend of the Tlingits under Chief Krshakes. He sat on the local Tlingit council. When they discovered gold on the hunting grounds of the Tlingit, the mining claims were filed under Watson's name because Tlingits were not allowed to own land under federal law. Watson staked claims at Kitkum Bay, Dorothy Springs, Tracadero Bay and Prince of Wales Island. Watson died in Wrangell in 1933.

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Anchorage Daily News
March 2, 1997

-2 Sunday, March 2, 1997

Anchorage Daily News

BLACK HISTORY month

Many black prospectors lived and died alone

Editor's Note: This is one in a continuing series of historical anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during Black History Month. Harper is the founder of Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

One of the sure ways to make the headlines of one of the many newspapers published during the Gold Rush was to strike it rich, commit a crime or die. A review of many Gold-Rush era newspapers revealed some interesting articles about black prospectors. Many prospectors lived alone

and died alone. Such was the case of Dave Colgate, operator of the U. S. Roadhouse outside Nome. An article in the Nome Nugget read: "The body of Dave Colgate, which was found by Andrew Peterson of Salmon Lake ... was found lying along-side his sled with his gun. All four dogs of his faithful team stayed with him. They had not had food for 11 or 12 days."

Frank J. "Fortymile" Smith was found dead in his cabin at 7 below, on Big Eldorado Creek by George Smith, another black.

The Fairbanks News-Miner reported the death of Ronald Griffin on Jan. 14, 1916. "Early this morning Ronald Griffin, a

well-known colored man of Fairbanks, was found in his cabin in an unconscious condition ... lying on the floor without any clothes on, and from the appearance of the room he had just taken a bath ... there was no fire in the cabin and ice had formed on the water in which he had been bathing, and on the floor around the body of the stricken man."

Another story from the Fairbanks News-Miner reported the death of Mrs. Cooper. "Mrs. M. E. Cooper, a colored woman who has been conducting the Kentucky Restaurant at this place, died this morning, her death being brought on, it is

supposed, by an attempted abortion performed on herself."

Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. is attempting to find as many names of blacks in Alaska during the gold rushes as possible. In the future their names, including names of the men of the 24th Infantry, will be listed on the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. web site.

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