

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 1998

**BLACKS WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE
IN ALASKA'S HISTORY**

Historical Anecdotes

By

GEORGE HARPER

Published in the

Anchorage Daily News

Blacks in Alaska History Project, Inc.

On the road of life, people say "One person can't make a difference." For Black History Month 1998 Anecdotes, we randomly selected names of twenty-eight Black Alaskans who made a difference in the history of Alaska from The George Harper Collection. Twenty-eight historical anecdotes were prepared, and published in the Anchorage Daily News during February. We include all twenty-eight articles in this booklet.

For more information about Blacks in Alaska History Project, Inc., The George Harper Collection or our research contact:

Blacks in Alaska History Project, Inc.
P.O. Box 143507
Anchorage, Alaska 99514
907/333-4719

E-mail address
akblkhist@servcom.com

Web Site
<http://www.servcom.com/akblkhist>

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Black History Month - 1998 February 1, 1998

BLACK HISTORY **month**

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during February, Black History Month. Harper has selected 28 names from his files to show black people who made a difference in Alaska's history.

In 1898, when newcomer Melvin Dempsey, half Cherokee and half African, arrived on the beach of the new town of Valdez, he had no idea of the impact he would have on in many peoples' lives.

Dempsey was a merchant and prospector. He started a restaurant in 1898 and also organized the Valdez branch of the Christian Endeavor Society. He opened what was likely the first free reading

room in Alaska.

Dempsey is remembered for the help he gave prospectors, the relief station he established on the

Valdez Glacier and as postmaster of his mining camp on the Chistochina River near the Chisna River. The site is now named Dempsey.

■ George Harper is the founder of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. The project is dedicated to the preservation of black history in Alaska. There will be two exhibits on display this year for Black History Month: "Blacks and the Gold Rush" is on display at Grandview Gardens Cultural Center until Feb. 21; the "1998 Black History Month" exhibit will be at Nordstrom the entire month of February.

Black History Month - 1998 February 2, 1998

BLACK history

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Mattie "Tootsie" Crosby came to Skagway in 1900 at the age of 16. Her personality undoubtedly served her well through rowdy days in Skagway, over the grueling Chilkoot Trail to Dawson and into the plains of Flat and the Iditarod area, where she settled. She lived in Alaska 72 years.

She lived for 51 years in the Flat-Iditarod area, the owner of a boarding house and caretaker of all who came into her life. She grubstaked many miners in the gold days. Although much money came into her hands, she had nothing left. She did not fritter it away but helped so many down-and-outers.

She would not have it any other way. She was born with a generous heart.

The following is from a letter she wrote to a California newspaper after canceling a trip Outside: "I was very happy getting out my snowshoes and my sourdough clothes that I put on. I took a look around and it seemed like I had been away for along time and had just returned. There were my old stamping grounds. Up Flat Creek were the old tailing piles, the old worked-out claims. Best of all were my old sourdough friends that I almost left. ... Yes, here I am still in Alaska, writing to wish you a merry Christmas."

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Black History Month - 1998 February 3, 1998

BLACK HISTORY month

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Charlie Mae Moore was a magna cum laude graduate of Wiley College in 1955 when she arrived in Chevak to teach for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Little did she know her duties also would involve learning, counseling, writing, building programs and working to better the community.

By 1978, Moore had served in nearly every imaginable educational capacity and put her talents to work all over Alaska. She was one of the leading educators in the state.

Moore's life was dedicated to teaching others. In a quotation from "Profiles in Change," she states, "I think the thing that really impacted my life in the Bush was that I learned so much. I have never seen people with a greater tolerance, and so kind. ... There was so much I didn't know. How patient they were, how tolerant they were of me trying to superimpose some ideas that were just not workable ... they brought values to my family of sensitivity, warmth and an appreciation for a culture that I dearly love and treasure to this day."

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Black History Month - 1998 February 4, 1998

BLACK HISTORY **Month**

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Capt. Michael Healy, son of an Irish plantation owner and a French-African slave, was one of those who made a difference in the history of Alaska. He became an officer of the Revenue Marine, later the Revenue Cutter Service, then the U.S. Coast Guard. From 1868 he sailed the waters off the coast of Alaska until he retired in 1903.

He rose from a junior officer to captain and became the captain of a famous ship, the Revenue Cutter Bear. During the nine years he was captain of the Bear, Healy touched many lives during his trips north to the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea. From 1871 to 1888, more than 70 whaling ships were lost in the ice-laden waters of the Arctic Ocean, and during this time Healy saved more than 400 seamen.

Besides his regular duties, Healy was able to help Dr. Sheldon Jackson in constructing missionary schools along the coast of Alaska, supervising the construction of refuse stations and bringing medical doctors to the Alaska Natives.

Perhaps one of his greatest contributions was the importation of Siberian reindeer to Northwest Alaska. Healy and the Bear, with money collected by Jackson, brought the first 16 reindeer to Unalaska in the summer of 1891. From 1891 to 1902, more than 1,280 reindeer were imported to Alaska. In 1897, there were 1,466 reindeer in four herds; by 1940, there were more than 250,000 reindeer in Alaska.

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Black History Month - 1998 February 5, 1998

BLACK HISTORY **Month**

Editor's note: This is one in a series of anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper.

Don Miller was born in Jamaica and came to the United States as a young child. At an early age, Miller knew he wanted to be an artist. After high school, he joined the U.S. Army. In 1944, he was assigned to the Aleutians with a black infantry unit. Dashiell Hammett, editor of The Adakian, a military newspaper on Adak, selected Miller and Alva Morris, both black, as part of his staff. At Hammett's insistence, this would be the first integration of troops on Adak.

Miller was the youngest of the three artists on the daily paper. During his tour of duty, he pro-

duced cartoons that were an integral part of The Adakian and brought smiles to many homesick troops stationed on the island.

After military duty, Miller returned to college and pursued a successful career as an artist. He returned to Alaska in August 1989 as guest speaker at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art. Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. is proud to have in its collection copies of several of Miller's cartoons.

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Black History Month - 1998 February 6, 1998

BLACK History

By GEORGE HARPER
Special to the Daily News

In preparation for this anecdote on "Mother" Alice Lawrence, the last verse of the hymn, "Brighten the Corner Where You Are," written many years ago, came to mind:

"Here for all your talent you may surely find a need / Here reflect the bright and morning star / Even from your humble hand the bread of life may feed / Brighten the corner where you are."

In her little home in rough-and-tumble Mountain View many years ago, Mother Lawrence lit a candle and brightened her corner. The light spread throughout Mountain View, Anchorage, Alaska and east to the White House. And still they come. People down on their luck, needing a helping hand. People who seek an avenue to help others, bringing food, clothing and money to help keep the light burning.

On April 26, 1996, Mother Lawrence was presented the 1996 President's Service Award by first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton for feeding and clothing the needy from her home in Mountain View.

Let your light so shine that it glorifies your father who is in heaven. Keep the light burning, Mother Lawrence.

Black History Month - 1998 February 7, 1998

BLACK History

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

"Heretofore, all the stories of frontier life have studiously excluded the mention of Negroes except as a cook or some other menial so timid that he habitually went around with a look of abject terror on his face, literally afraid of his own shadow. And even in Alaska, writers have studiously avoided showing any Negroes in pictures purporting to depict life in the territory. As a consequence little is known on the outside as to the role the race is playing in the development of the territory."

The above is a quotation by George C. Anderson that appeared in *Color* magazine's April 1953 issue. Anderson founded and published the first black newspaper in Alaska in 1952. He was well aware of the lack of recorded history of blacks in Alaska. In his own way, he was the first black to try to correct the problem.

Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. is grateful for the efforts Anderson made and his contributions to the history of Alaska.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Black History Month - 1998 February 8, 1998

BLACK HISTORY Month

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Pete W. Aiken came to Alaska in 1942 on a tour of duty with the U.S. Army. He returned to Alaska and settled in 1951. A carpenter by trade, Aiken worked at Fort Wainwright. In later years, he owned and operated several businesses.

Aiken was a champion of civil rights, founding the Fairbanks branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and serving as president for many years. He was a member of the Fairbanks Human Relations Commission and Tanana Valley State Fair.

In 1964, Aiken was the first Alaska black to known to have held public office when he was elected to the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly. Aiken said after being elected, "I feel that people elected me because I am just Pete Aiken. The people who voted for me would have voted for me no matter what color I was. Even if I was purple."

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Black History Month - 1998 February 9, 1998

BLACK History

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John Parks came to Alaska in 1951 from California. He worked as a journeyman carpenter. Most people will remember him at his folding card table, in the lobby of the Anchorage Federal Building, registering people to vote in the next election.

Parks was president of the Anchorage branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He was an active Democrat and worked hard for the people of Anchorage. Throughout his long and productive life, Parks fought to improve the quality of life for blacks and for the Fairview community. He was a pivotal player in persuading local officials to improve roads, provide low income housing, create parks and recreation centers, initiate public transportation expansion, expand the police force and libraries, and improve community relations. They built the Eastchester post office primarily because of Parks' influence.

Parks still can make a difference, so register to vote.

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Black History Month - 1998 February 10, 1998

BLACK History

Willard L. Bowman was born in Grand Rapids, Mich. He joined the U.S. Navy at 19 and was stationed on the USS Honolulu at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese bombed the island on Dec. 7, 1941. During the war, he was assigned to duty in the Bering Sea at Kiska and Attu.

Bowman moved to Alaska permanently in 1950. He worked construction during his early years in Anchorage. He was a founding member of the Anchorage Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. He spent much time and energy advocating the hiring of blacks by local businesses.

In 1963, Bowman was appointed director of the Alaska Commission for Human Rights. He served under three governors and was on many state and city boards and committees. Bowman was the Alaska Press Club's Outstanding Citizen for 1964 and was recognized for outstanding service to Natives of Northwest Alaska and the Arctic Brotherhood. He was elected to the state Legislature in 1970.

Bowman died in 1975 at the age of 56 of bone cancer. Willard L. Bowman Elementary School is named in his honor.

Black History Month - 1998 February 11, 1998

BLACK History

Editor's note: This is one in a continuing series of anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper.

About 35 years after George C. Anderson began publishing The Alaska Spotlight, the first black newspaper in the state, Everett Louis Overstreet published the first nonfiction book by a black about blacks in Alaska.

Overstreet, an engineer, came to Alaska in 1975 to work on the trans-Alaska oil pipeline. After working on the pipeline, he settled in Anchorage and became involved in the community. He was a featured editorial columnist for The Anchorage Times, board member of Pacific University and president of The Alaska Black Caucus.

In 1988, Overstreet wrote and published "Black on a Background of White: A Chronicle of Afro-Americans' Involvement in America's Last Frontier, Alaska." The book covers Alaska black history from the early years up to the present with emphasis on social, cultural, economic, educational and legal involvement. The book is in its second printing and can be checked out at Loussac Library.

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Black History Month - 1998 February 12, 1998

BLACK HISTORY **Month**

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How many young men during wartime said "Let's join the service"? So off they would go to the recruiting station, sign up, and the one who came up with the idea would be rejected and his buddy stuck with an enlistment.

This is the case of Lawrence H. Campbell Jr. A buddy with an itch to fly persuaded Campbell to join him in taking the Army Air Corps pilot's examination. While he hadn't seriously considered a flying career, he took the exam and passed. His friend didn't. So started his long career in aviation.

Campbell was born in Oklahoma, went to high school in Portland, Ore., and entered Army Pre-Flight School at Tuskegee Institute. In 1948, he graduated from the U.S. Air Force Pilot School and became the first black pilot to fly a jet fighter.

After completing his tour of duty, Campbell joined the Air Force Reserve. He studied electrical engineering at the University of Portland and University of Oregon. He accepted a position with the National Transportation Safety Board and, with his family, moved to Alaska in 1963.

In Alaska, he continued his military career with the Alaska Air National Guard. In 1972, Campbell assumed command of the Guard unit and became the first black in the nation to do so. He retired in 1973 with the rank of colonel.

Gov. Walter J. Hickel presented Campbell with a distinguished service citation for his contributions to the Alaska Air National Guard, the city of Anchorage and the state of Alaska. The Guard presented him the Alaska Legion of Merit medal, the state's highest military honor, in 1992.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Anchorage Daily News

Black History Month - 1998
February 13, 1998

BLACK HISTORY Month

By GEORGE HARPER

Special to the Daily News

The Fairbanks News-Miner published this statement in 1994: "Throughout the summer-time, motorists heading into town from Fairbanks International Airport are greeted by a heart-shaped arrangement of golden flowers on a nearby hillside. The carefully manicured garden, welcoming arrivals to the Golden Heart City, is a popular photo-stop for tourists."

Alaskans take special pride in blooming flowers placed in public locations during the summer months. Many who drive in and around Fairbanks probably never give a thought to the person responsible for making

sure the flowers are there to enjoy.

The man largely responsible for the beautification of Fairbanks has made the project a big part of his life. George Byrdsong started giving away flowers when he was a child growing up in Louisiana. Byrdsong came to Fairbanks with the military in 1950 and was stationed at Ladd Field. He spent most of his military career in Fairbanks. The flowers around the city are largely his work. He organizes 100 or more people as volunteers to plant flowers in July. People sign up many months in advance to volunteer.

So when you drive in Fairbanks, think of one person who made a difference, George Byrdsong.

Black History Month - 1998 February 14, 1998

BLACK History

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For many years, one of the joys of attending Anchorage Symphony Orchestra concerts was the presence of Sybil Bingham playing the viola in the string section. Bingham, in her charming way, broke many barriers during her life. She was a member of the New York City Youth Orchestra and received a degree in chemistry from Queens College in New York, when white men dominated the field.

When she and her first husband, Ernest Cyril, came to Alaska in 1956, Bingham said: "I would never want to go back to living in New York City again." Unable to find a job in her field, she worked as a teacher's aide until receiving the necessary credits from the University of Alaska Anchorage allowing her to teach in elementary schools. By then she had discovered she loved teaching and, from 1973 until she retired in 1994, taught at Mountain View Elementary School.

Bingham, a lover of music, began playing the viola with the Anchorage Symphony in 1960 — another first for a black woman. She taught piano, viola and violin to many young children of Anchorage. Bingham died last year. Her love for music was passed on to her daughter, Nina, who plays the violin in the Anchorage Symphony Orchestra.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc.

Black History Month - 1998 February 15, 1998

BLACK History

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It often is said, "You can't fight city hall." But Mary Siah *did* fight city hall, and won, making a big difference in the city of Fairbanks.

Siah came to Fairbanks in 1953 with her husband, who was in the military. She encountered prejudice at the first place she lived, a trailer court with no running water or bathrooms. Everyone in the court had to use a common washroom. The owners informed Siah that the white women living in the court did not want her using the washroom. So, she had to go to a public washroom in town.

Siah was a fighter. In the early 1970s, she was in an automobile accident and spent many years in a wheelchair. Nevertheless, she was determined to walk again, so she did physical therapy in the local swimming pool. In 1977, they built a new swimming pool at the Lathrop High School, and planned to tear the existing pool down. That's when Siah went into action. She petitioned the borough and lobbied the Legislature for funding to keep the pool opened.

"I was determined to save it from being a parking lot," she said. "The community needed it because the warmer water is much more therapeutic than the colder water at the (other pool)."

As a result of Siah's actions, you still can swim at The Mary Siah Recreation Center in Fairbanks. Thanks, Mary.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks In Alaska History Project Inc.

Black History Month - 1998 February 16, 1998

BLACK History

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

During Zula Swanson Wester's day, people called her "Anchorage's first lady." Not because she was the mayor's wife but because of her history in the community.

Before the oil strikes, before the earthquake, before practically everything else that makes Anchorage of interest today — there was Zula Swanson.

Swanson came to Anchorage in 1929 from Portland, Ore. For \$2,000 she bought the Rendezvous building and a piece of land, and rebuilt the structure into a rooming house. Later it became the well-known Rendezvous Bar and Cocktail Lounge.

"Anchorage wasn't nothing then," she said. "But the land was flat and you got the

Cook Inlet. I could see it was going to be something."

One white sourdough said, "She did a lot for this country around here. She put her money back to work to give other people jobs. Everybody just loves her here."

Today, a multimillion-dollar J.C. Penney department store stands on the spot where Swanson ran her rooming house. She was a member of the Daughters of the Elks, the Anchorage chapter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Northern Lights Civic and Social Club.

She married Bill Wester at age 80. When she died in 1973 at 81, she was a real-estate entrepreneur worth half a million dollars and owned more land than anyone else in Anchorage.

Black History Month - 1998 February 17, 1998

BLACK History

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

Many people traveling the Alaska Highway may have encountered Henry Ward, better known as Hank, if they had car trouble anywhere near Delta Junction from 1951 to 1996.

Ward drove to Alaska in 1947, from California. He came here when many blacks had no idea where Alaska was. As a skilled mechanic, Ward made his way north, stopping along the highway and earning money by working on the broken-down cars of those driving the Alaska Highway.

Ward was born in Coolidge,

Texas, in 1911. He lived in Anchorage and Fairbanks before settling in Delta Junction. He wanted to be his own boss so he started Hank's Garage in the heart of Delta Junction. He had natural talents with anything mechanical and liked working with automobiles. He could fix a car when nobody else could.

For years Ward was the only male member of the Ladies Community Club. Some of his friends wanted to give him the nickname of "Sister Hank," but he put a quick stop to that and continued to help the club when they needed him.

Hank's Garage burned down in 1996 and some of Ward's zest for life left with it.

He died Aug. 20, 1997, ending the era of Hank's Garage on the Alaska Highway.

Black History Month - 1998 February 18, 1998

BLACK HISTORY Month

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

Over the past several decades, many authors have included tidbits of information about Joe Hill in their publications. In her new book, "Seldovia, Alaska," Susan Woodward Springer provided more insight into the life of Hill in Seldovia from the 1920s until he returned to Philadelphia.

The 1920 census shows a James A. Hill, age 35, living in Seldovia. Most likely this person is Joe Hill. He was born in Michigan and he was the owner of a barber shop. Hill was the first black man in Seldovia. He ran ads in the Westward Alaskan for his "Dance Hall and Dispensary." The dance hall was the social center of town, built on a rocky point at the mouth of the Seldovia Slough. It con-

tained a bar, a barbershop and dance hall. Many social affairs of Seldovia took place there.

Hill was liked around town because of his high standard of personal conduct. He ran a dance hall and tavern but did not drink. His was the best-known and most well-liked business on the waterfront. One of his major roles in Seldovia was that of philanthropist. He carried many fishing families through hard winters. He also showed movies twice a week.

"The beach below Joe's was also a favorite place for children to scavenge for money — change mostly, but on occasion a greenback. He neglected to sort this out from the end-of-an-evening rubbish on the floor, so out onto the beach it was swept," A.J. Clanahan said in "Seldovia, Alaska."

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks In Alaska History Project Inc.

Black History Month - 1998 February 19, 1998

BLACK HISTORY **Month**

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

On Feb. 2, 1996, Fairbanks postmaster J.C. Thomas retired from the U.S. Postal Service after 47 years, 37 of which he spent in Fairbanks. He came a long way from a being young man, polishing floors and dusting furniture for the Postal Service, to becoming postmaster.

At 19, while working in the postmaster's office in Oklahoma City, he said, "I'd sit at his desk and look over all these papers on this big, important man's desk, and it did feel good." Thomas promised himself that one day he would be a postmaster.

J.C. is the name he was christened with when he was born in a small ranch town in Oklahoma. He never had any trouble with his name until he went into the service. They demanded that he have an official name. So he used James Clarence for a while.

When Thomas looks back on his 1957 mail route in a downtown Fairbanks neighborhood, he remembers a circle of people, not mailboxes. Births, deaths, marriage proposals unraveling — Thomas saw it all. He was the constant in his customers' lives, a consistent event six days a week.

"Of course, I'm a sealed box," he said. "Just like a first-class letter — nobody's going to open it."

He became the Fairbanks postmaster in 1991, managing more than 56,000 addresses and demanding customers in the greater Fairbanks area. Thomas is active in the community and his church home of many years, Corinthian Baptist Church. He's a member of the Rotary Club of Fairbanks, the College Lions Club and is on the associate board of directors of the Salvation Army.

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Anchorage Daily News

Black History Month - 1998

February 20, 1998

BLACK HISTORY Month

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

Like many Alaskans, Franklin Fleeks came to Fairbanks with the military in 1958, as an audit specialist assigned to the controller's office at Ladd Field.

After leaving the military, he worked for the Internal Revenue Service and was the first black IRS agent in Alaska. He traveled throughout the Bush conducting workshops for village storekeepers.

Fleeks left Alaska briefly and obtained a law degree from the University of Puget Sound Law School. He became the first black attorney in Fairbanks. He was a member of the Alaska Bar Association, the American Bar Association and the National Bar Association.

Fleeks was active in the community of Fairbanks. He was a member of Fairbanks chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Kiwanis, the Boy Scout Council, the draft board, a minority contractors' group and local and statewide Democratic Party organizations. He still had time to coach adult softball teams and play golf.

"He was always there when I needed support. He was there as an opposing manager, player, friend and foe on the softball diamond," Bob Eley said.

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Black History Month - 1998 February 21, 1998

BLACK History

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

Verona Gentry, like so many other Alaskans, came here with her husband, Bill Gentry, who was in the military. Before arriving in Alaska, Gentry was a nurse midwife and delivered babies in London, Toronto and Swift Current, Saskatchewan.

Gentry met her husband and the father of her two children by picking his name out of a pen-pal section of a magazine. Bill Gentry was an American GI. She dropped him a line, he responded, and the two exchanged letters for five years. He proposed to her through the mail, and she accepted before she even met him.

"I just knew it was all right," she said.

Gentry started counting her deliveries after she had delivered babies for many years. After completing six months in Philadelphia to become certified to deliver babies in the United States, she returned to Anchorage and began a career in Alaska bringing babies into this world. After years

of delivering babies at Elmendorf Hospital, Community Hospital, Providence hospital and Alaska Regional Hospital, Gentry retired. She delivered her last baby — No. 1,300 — at Alaska Regional Hospital on Dec. 23, 1993.

Whenever Gentry goes out in public, she encounters one or more of her babies. Boy, did she make a difference.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks In Alaska History Project Inc.

Black History Month - 1998 February 22, 1998

BLACK History

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

On the road of life, people say, "One person can't make a difference." But one person, a black man, named Joseph M. Jackson, did make a difference in Alaska's history.

Jackson was a real estate broker, boxing tournament promoter, founder of a youth job program and an employment office for older folks. He founded, contributed to or championed many more endeavors.

"Whether it be young boxers or angry senior citizens, Joe Jackson goes to bat," wrote the Senior Voice in 1984. "At 71, Mr. Jackson maintained a schedule that would weary most people. From his small, cluttered office in East Anchorage, he juggles real estate deals, senior citizen issues, neighborhood campaigns and interviews with aplomb."

One Sunday in May 1987, Jackson's friends thought it would be nice to tell him thanks — thanks for all the years of being a leader, a catalyst, a gadfly for change to make life as good as it could possibly be — and not just for black people, but for everyone.

Jackson said to his friends: "If a person was going to say he wanted to take something to the grave with him, it'd be this — You showing your appreciation while I'm alive. It's awful hard to get some flowers and never have any chance to smell them."

To completely understand the contributions Joseph M. Jackson made to the Anchorage and the state, visit the Loussac Library.

Spend some time reviewing the Joseph M. Jackson Collection of historical information.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project. Visit the 1998 Black History Month exhibit at Nordstrom, on display through this month.

Black History Month - 1998 February 23, 1998

BLACK History

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

Larry Minix gained nationwide attention when photographs of him and his family appeared in the November 1969 issue of *Ebony* magazine. Nevertheless, the people of Nome knew already the contributions he had made to their city.

Minix was born in Louisiana in 1929. He served three years in the Army's military police. After World War II, he moved to Alaska because "it's the Last Frontier."

As a construction worker, he helped build the radar warning stations for the DEW line. He graduated from the Alaska Trooper Academy in Sitka, and started as a law enforcement officer with the Nome Police

Department in 1960. In June 1967, he accepted the job of jail superintendent at Nome. In January 1968, he returned to the Nome Police Department as chief of police. Two years later, he was appointed superintendent of the state jail at Nome.

"He came to us out of the South, and he adopted this town in the North as his home. And over the years we adopted him. We chose him to be our chief of police because he had common sense and understanding. He had humility and compassion for all of us," said Bob Scott of the American Legion.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project.

Black History Month - 1998 February 24, 1998

BLACK History

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

James Hayes was born in Sacramento, Calif., and came to Fairbanks with his mother in 1955 when he was 7. To help his mother, who was divorced, keep food on the table, Hayes shined shoes at the local barbershop and sold newspapers.

Hayes attended Fairbanks' Austin Lathrop High School, graduating in 1965. He went on to the University of Alaska, receiving a bachelor's degree in education in 1970. He continues his education to this day and is active in many community organizations in the Fairbanks area.

Hayes was the first black to serve on the Fairbanks North Star

Borough School Board, being elected in 1973. He also was elected to the Fairbanks City Council, in 1967 and again in 1990. In 1992, he was elected the first black mayor of Fairbanks.

"In Fairbanks, people tend to accept you as you are," Hayes said. "They just want to hear your platform and hear what you believe in, and then see you go out and work really hard. That's been the key to my success."

Family always has been the important center in Hayes' life. In addition to his duties as mayor, he also serves as assistant pastor at Lily of the Valley Church of God in Christ. He said, "I think religion complements being mayor, because the belief that I have in God helps me to survive the attacks I get from time to time."

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. Visit the Black History Month exhibit on display at Nordstrom through Saturday.

Black History Month - 1998 February 25, 1998

BLACK HISTORY

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

Zelmer Lawrence came to Cordova in 1938, after selling his newspaper in Seattle. His fiancée followed, arriving by ship at 4:30 a.m. By noon the same day, they were married. Two years later the Lawrences moved to Anchorage where Zelmer helped construct the two military bases, working first as a carpenter and, eventually, a supervisor. In what had to be somewhat precedent-setting for the day, he supervised a white military unit of Florida guardsmen.

"I happen to be one of the Depression kids. I was a bootblack, a waiter, I rode 100,000 miles on Pullman cars. I was a roughneck and always liked to be on my own," Lawrence said.

In what had to be somewhat precedent-setting for the day, he supervised a white military unit of Florida guardsmen.

"We almost had a race riot here because the white troops didn't want the black troops to come into a bar and sit beside them and have a drink," Lawrence recalled. "It was Norman Brown (founder of the Anchorage News) who was worried. Norman Brown came to me. he said, 'Zelmer why don't you open up a place (bar)?' "

With constant urging from Brown and a backlog of experience, Lawrence opened the Club Ebony in 1948 at Fourth and Cordova streets, where La Cabana Mexican restaurant is today.

The Club Ebony didn't have a dance floor, because the club didn't have a dance license. But that did not stop people from dancing, even the chief of police, his assistant and most of the patrolmen. The military police would come in droves to watch the people dance. Despite all the merriment, Lawrence says, things never got out of control at his club.

Lawrence closed the Club Ebony in 1953. Once again, he felt it was time to try something new. Anchorage will never forget Lawrence, his Club Ebony, the good times there.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks In Alaska History Project Inc. Visit the Black History Month exhibit on display at Nordstrom through Saturday.

Black History Month - 1998 February 26, 1998

BLACK HISTORY **Month**

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

All her life, Mahala Ashley Dickerson had been fascinated with Alaska. She remembers wishing she could see snow as a little girl. In 1958, she had planned to vacation in Europe, but changed her mind and came to Alaska instead.

"I didn't know anyone, but I just loved it," she said.

On her second day in Anchorage, she decided to stay. On Dickerson's first visit to the Public Land Office to file for a homestead claim, she found out

that she didn't leave intolerance behind. The white female clerk behind the counter refused to show her any maps. By this time in her life, Dickerson had faced and overcome many obstacles. If she couldn't go over the obstacle, she had to find away around the problem.

Patience and determination are only a few of the qualities that make Dickerson a successful lawyer.

Attorney Keith Brown said, "It is not possible for me to adequately describe what courage it took to move to Alaska in 1958 as a single mother of teenage triplet sons. Outdoor plumbing, subzero temperatures, unsurveyed paths that passed for roads, marked her early efforts to establish a home for her family."

Dickerson filed a claim near Wasilla. She and her boys proved up on the land. Dickerson still lives on the homestead.

To know Dickerson, take a look at some of the barriers she has overcome during her life.

She was born in Alabama. In 1935, she graduated with a degree in sociology from Fisk University. During the next 10 years, she married Henry Dickerson and give birth to the triplets. When the boys entered school, Dickerson entered law school at Howard University and graduated cum laude in 1948.

Dickerson passed the Alabama Bar in 1948, becoming the first black in Alabama to do so, and opened the first law office owned by a black in

Montgomery. In 1951, she moved to Indiana and practiced law before coming to Alaska.

With her admission to the Alaska Bar, Dickerson became the first black and the first woman to practice law in the state. She has received numerous awards over the years. She received the most prestigious award from the American Bar Association Commission on Women, The Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award, in 1995.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks In Alaska History Project Inc. Visit the Black History Month exhibit on display at Nordstrom through Saturday.

Black History Month - 1998 February 27, 1998

BLACK HISTORY Month

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

Blanche McSmith arrived in Kodiak in 1949 with her husband, William McSmith. A year later, they moved to Anchorage. They operated McSmith Enterprises, which included a real-estate business, an electrical appliance store and a liquor store.

Blanche McSmith became a precinct stalwart in the Democratic Party.

"It was clearly the party of the poor people, of struggling Americans," she said.

She became the first black to serve in the Legislature when Gov. William Egan appointed her, in 1959, to fill a vacancy created by his attorney general appointment. She served only one term, but pioneered the way for blacks in Alaska politics. McSmith co-sponsored with Rep. James Fisher legislation that established the first maternity home in Alaska (Booth Memorial Home).

After leaving office, McSmith continued to be active in Alaska politics. She also served in the Office of the Governor as state director of the Public Employment Program.

McSmith was among the group that saw the need for a branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Anchorage and served as the seventh president. She was associate editor in charge of local news of The Alaska Spotlight, Alaska's first black newspaper.

McSmith was the first black to research the early history of blacks in Alaska. She also organized the Afro-American Historical Society of Alaska Inc. For her service to the state, McSmith has received a variety of honors, including an honorary doctor of laws degree from Wiley College in Texas.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. Visit the Black History Month exhibit on display at Nordstrom through Saturday.

Black History Month - 1998 February 28, 1998

BLACK History

Editor's note: This is the last in a series of anecdotes involving blacks in Alaska history, prepared for the Daily News by local historian George Harper for use during February, Black History Month.

Robert Hatcher arrived on Adak Island in the Aleutians in 1944 after a long voyage from California via Okinawa, Japan. He was with the Quartermasters and trained in gun repair.

"Ordered to watch for bombers and enemy soldiers, Hatcher said, "The battle was over when we arrived. I didn't have to use any weapons or kill anyone.

"We had Adak National Forest on the island; it consisted of one or two trees at the time. We added to it, and that's where they got the name Adak National Forest."

Pfc. Hatcher worked as a machinist, creating all sorts of gun and boat parts. His duty assignments took him to Attu, Shemya, Kiska and Dutch Harbor. Hatcher decided to take his discharge in Alaska. For many years, he worked in a machine shop as a tradesman on Adak for the Department of Defense. Then he was transferred to Kodiak and worked for the Navy.

In 1971, he retired with a disability and went to work for Federal Credit Union as assistant manager and then branch manager.

Hatcher became active in community affairs in Kodiak. He was the first black to join the Pioneers of Alaska when he was accepted as a member in Igloo No. 18. He was the first black to be voted president of

a Pioneers of Alaska Igloo in 1987. He also was a member of the volunteer fire department, was the first black admitted to the Elks in Kodiak, was president of the VFW in Kodiak and worked for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration as the first state inspector in Kodiak. Hatcher is a longtime member of the Kodiak Electric Association and held the office of secretary-treasurer.

"We have enjoyed Kodiak and raising our children here. You can overcome anything in life. Alaska has been good to me, and this is my home," he said.

■ George Harper is the developer of the Blacks in Alaska History Project Inc. Visit the Black History Month exhibit on display at Nordstrom through today.