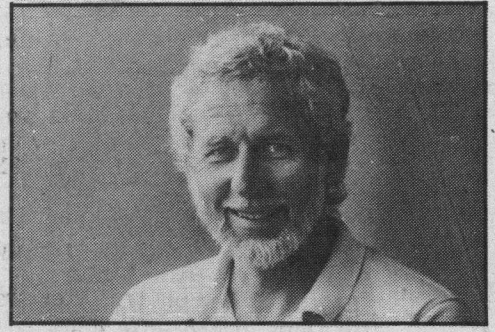


The integration of Santa Cruz County

Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

OK, IT'S QUIZ time. Tomorrow we celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday, so in honor of Dr. King, let's see how well you know your own community.

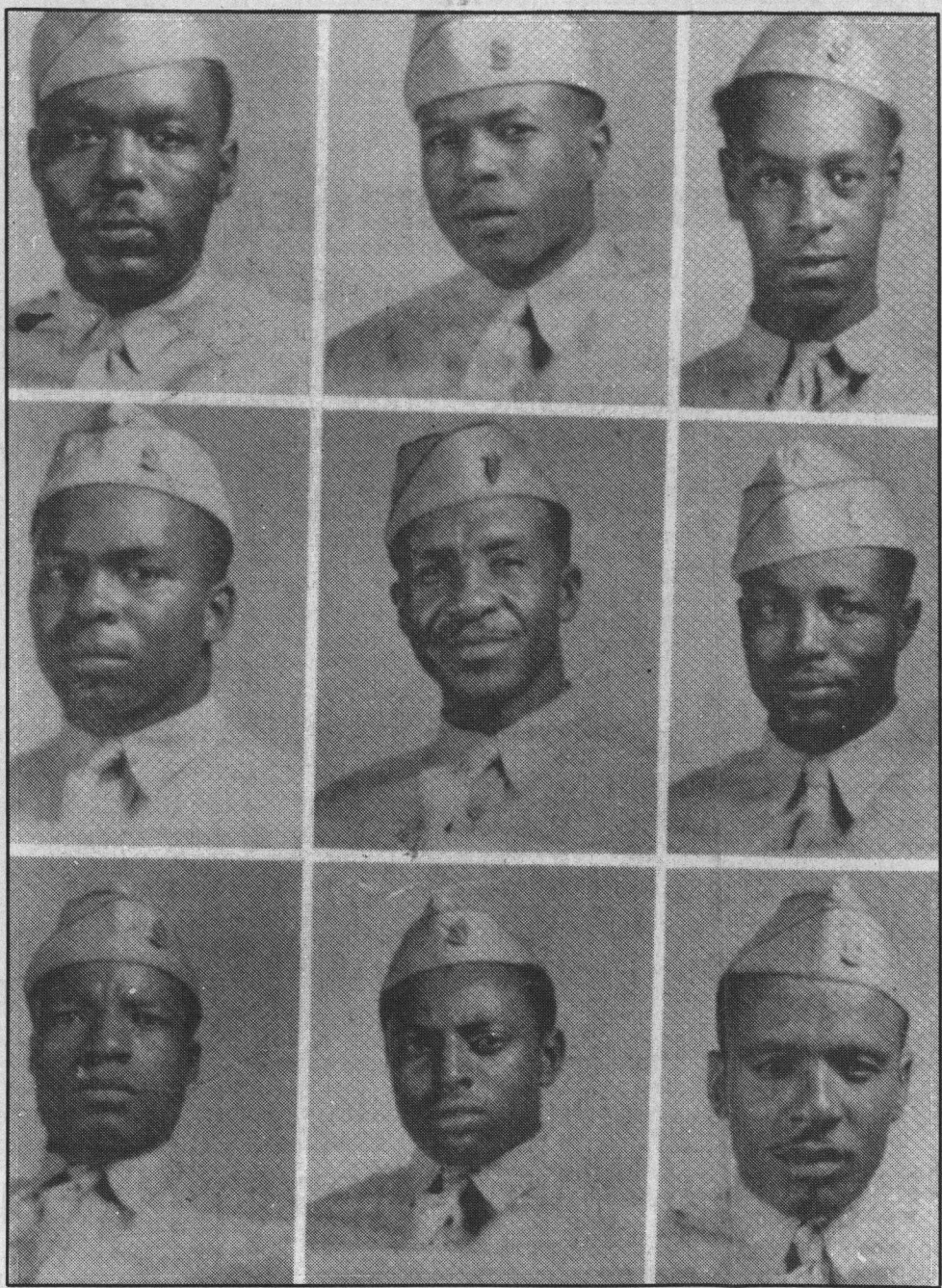
Which area in Santa Cruz County has the largest black population? Which has the smallest? Why?

According to the 1990 census, almost half of all the blacks living in Santa Cruz County live in the city of Santa Cruz. Admittedly the 1,021 blacks counted in 1990 only make up 2.08 percent of the city's population, but that percentage is the largest of any census reporting area of the county. Add the Santa Cruz black population to that of the Live Oak-Opal Cliffs-Twin Lakes area and 60 percent of all the blacks living in this county live in and around Santa Cruz.

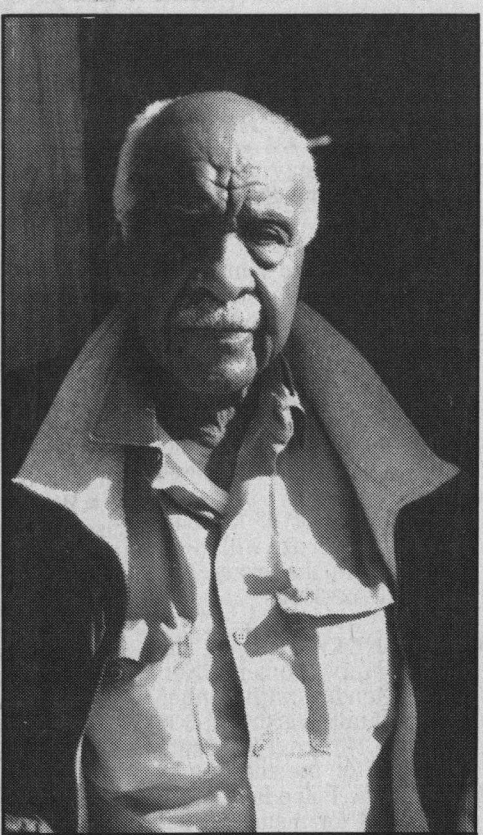
The smallest? Corralitos. Only two blacks were counted out in Corralitos in 1990, for .08 percent of the total population out there. Even Scotts Valley (.46 percent), Rio del Mar (.38 percent), Aptos (.61 percent) and Felton (.58 percent) had a higher percentage of blacks than Corralitos.

Why? The absence of blacks in Corralitos might be a result of some long, deep historic antecedents going back to the Civil War. In the early 1860s there were a number of Confederate sympathizers (known locally as "Seceshes") in the Corralitos hills, and they met frequently and secretly to rally for the rebel cause. I lived out in Eureka Canyon for almost a decade, and though I did not notice any particular evidence of racial prejudice, the longtime residents of Corralitos certainly seemed ornery enough. The recent gentrification of the Corralitos hills by upper middle-class whites fleeing one thing or another (they love country living until the power goes out and the creek eats the road), may account for the continuation of the theme, but for whatever reason, there are no black faces out in those hills.

NOW for the hard part. Why do over half of the county's blacks live in and around Santa Cruz? Your first impulse might be to credit the University of California campus with its inter-



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Sandy Lydon photo

Isaac Jackson, center-left, was a member of the all-black Coast Artillery unit that was stationed in Santa Cruz from 1942 to 1944. After his Army stint, Jackson, above, returned to Santa Cruz where he resides today. The 54th Coast Artillery, below, was positioned at Lighthouse Point in 1942.



came to help keep Santa Cruz from becoming part of the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and he arrived here on Easter Sunday, 1942. When I asked Jackson last February what kind of reception the 54th Coast Artillery received in Santa Cruz, he laughed.

"Santa Cruz had never seen so many black people before," he said. "They didn't know what to do." When some local business owners tried to make parts of downtown Santa Cruz off-limits to the black soldiers, Jackson said that his commanding officer (all the officers in the unit were white) went downtown and threatened to make the entire city off-limits if they persisted in harassing his troops. The promise of off-duty dollars won out.

The truce was tenuous. "They said we were welcome in Santa Cruz, but we knew we weren't," said Jackson. Subtle and not-so-subtle resistance met the soldiers at every turn. Efforts were made on both sides to ease the tension, and in May 1942, Dr. Pearl Oliphant called a meeting of most of Santa Cruz's blacks at Inez Smith's (Ed Smith, the bootblack, was her husband) home on South Branciforte Avenue to organize some USO activities for the black soldiers. Over time, an uneasy accord developed between the segregated army unit and the community it was protecting from international fascism and racism. (The irony is so thick in this story you could mine it.) Some of the families of the black soldiers followed them to Santa Cruz, and pretty soon there was a small black community out in the concentric circles of Garfield Park and on Fair Avenue.

ISAAc Jackson and many of his fellow soldiers left Santa Cruz in 1944 to be stationed elsewhere, but he, together with folks like John Bowen and Henry Pratt returned after the war to pick up their lives in post-war Santa Cruz. Most of the post-war blacks in Santa Cruz lived out in "The Circles" and many, like Ina Mae Pratt and Isaac Jackson, still do. Erva Bowen once told me a piece of doggerel which was in vogue when she came to Santa Cruz with her husband, John (another 54th Coast Artillery veteran) in 1945: "There's some blacks living on Fair — think you'd like to live out there."

The U.S. Army was the most powerful demographic force in the history of the Monterey Bay Region — there would be very little cultural or ethnic diversity in the region today had it not been for the military personnel brought here during World War II and the Asian war bride wives who followed later. The cultural and ethnic diversities of such places as Seaside (22 percent black in 1990), Marina (18 percent black and 20 percent Asian-American), and Santa Cruz are the lasting legacy of World War II's influence on the region. The coming of UCSC to Santa Cruz in the mid-1960s...

NOW for the hard part. Why do over half of the county's blacks live in and around Santa Cruz? Your first impulse might be to credit the University of California campus with integrating Santa Cruz (such as it is — a 2 percent black population can hardly be called a rousing success), but you would only be partly correct. Even before UCSC was a gleam in a regent's eye, there was a growing black population in Santa Cruz, the result of what, for the Monterey Bay Region, might be called the Great Emancipator — World War II.

On the day that Franklin Delano Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war in December, 1941, the United States military was segregated. We fought Adolf Hitler, and an equally xenophobic Japanese military machine (just ask the Koreans, Chinese, or the Filipinos) with a segregated military of our own. Filipino-Americans had their own units, Japanese-Americans theirs (the 442nd Regimental Combat Team), and blacks theirs.

And it was just such a segregated military unit, the all-black 54th Coast Artillery, which settled in at Lighthouse



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Point in the spring of 1942 to defend Santa Cruz from a possible attack by the Empire of Japan. Instant Integration. Santa Cruz's black population grew from a handful to several hundred in the twinkling of an eye.

IT'S difficult to know who was more surprised — conservative, white Santa Cruz where the few pre-Pearl Harbor blacks, like Joseph Smallwood (barber), and Ed Smith (bootblack), provided service to the white community — or the

black soldiers from the South who, joining the military in 1940 and expecting to stay in for a year, now found themselves perched above Steamer Lane, destined to be in uniform for "the duration."

Isaac Jackson was one of those GI's who

(22 percent black in 1990), Marina (18 percent black and 20 percent Asian-American), and Santa Cruz are the lasting legacy of World War II's influence on the region. The coming of UCSC to Santa Cruz in the mid-1960s helped accelerate the city's integration, but the base for it all was laid down by the war.

SOON they will be putting up a statue of a surfer out on Lighthouse Point, and there's already a museum there commemorating the importance of surfing and Steamer Lane to the city's history. Lighthouse Point is also known as the place where Santa Cruz's Progressive Era began when, in the early 1970s, the plans for a Convention Center galvanized the community. But there's no mention out there in either bronze or stone of the young black men who spent some of the best years of their lives ready to defend a community that didn't much care for them.

There ought to be.

Sandy Lydon is a member of the history faculty at Cabrillo College and will be co-hosting a celebration of the region's culturally diverse future Monday at 7 p.m. at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium.