



# To Know My Name: A Chronological History of African Americans in Santa Cruz County

*By Phil Reader*

*In Memoriam for Helen Weston*

*From her friends, The Phil Reader family*

## **PREFACE**

**Sailors of African ancestry** were crew members aboard most of the vessels which explored the coast of California during the 17th and 18th centuries.

**Negro trappers and adventurers** like Allen Light and Jim Beckwourth, tramped about Santa Cruz county decades before any white Americans found their way to the area.

**Oscar T. Jackson** a young African American from Watsonville traveled around the world with all of the leading Black Minstrel troupes. During the 1880s, he performed before the royal courts of Europe.

**London Nelson, [a.k.a Louden Nelson]** an ex-slave from Tennessee, left his entire estate "to the children of Santa Cruz" and this generous bequest made it possible to reopen the local schools after they had been allowed to close.

**Ida B. Wells** one of the founders of the NAACP, and a leading figure in Black history, could be found with her family on the streets of Santa Cruz during the early 1890s.

**Daniel Rodgers** a Negro 49er from Arkansas, won his own freedom from an unscrupulous master and led a wagon train of ex-slaves to Watsonville where they established a large, vigorous Black community.

**Irva Bowen** became the first African American to be elected to office when she won a seat on the Board of Trustees for the Santa Cruz City Schools in 1978.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Americans of African lineage are a people whose historical legacy is of one bondage. Men and women stolen from their homes, stripped of their human rights, enslaved, embruted and subjected to every imaginable form of exploitation. Yet under these most undesirable of circumstances, they have not only persevered, but expanded as a social, economic and cultural group.

At the very same time, however, assimilation into the "mainstream" of American life has been slow and fraught with difficulty--that is even if assimilation is a desirable goal in the first place. For this, the reasons are many and varied, and would require a voluminous amount of space to elucidate upon. But for the purposes of this study, suffice it to say quite simply that all too often, African Americans have found themselves the subject of racial and economic prejudice.

Throughout the two hundred year history of Santa Cruz County, however, African Americans are, without question, the invisible minority. Until recently their numbers were always comparatively small, and this, in a strange way, may very well have been a boon. Racism has always been a basic component in the socio-economic makeup of this community, but it has been the more visible minorities which have borne the brunt of this mindless prejudice.

Even a cursory examination of local history will reveal the reoccurring cycle of "scapegoatism" which has long plagued the non-white citizens of the region. It began at the very advent of colonization during the 18th century, when the Spanish moved into the area establishing Missions and Pueblos for the dual purposes of economic gain and religious conversion.

They found living here, a migratory stone age people whom they immediately subjugated, forced them into a settled way of life and replaced their natural religion with Christianity. The padres looked upon these "Indians" as simple-minded children; controlling every aspect of their lives. In time, the ravages of European diseases, such as Small Pox and Syphilis, drastically reduced their number and those few that did survive, were forced into positions of servitude upon the cattle ranchos which dotted the area during the first half of the 19th century.

Next, it was the Spanish-speaking native born "Californios", who were to find themselves subjected to the intolerance and bigotry which so often is unleashed upon a conquered people. Following the American take over of California in 1848, there occurred a twenty-five year period of intense Hispanophobia during which the vast majority of the land found its way into the hands of the aggressive Yankees -- most in a dubious manner. It was a time marked by countless incidents of mob violence taking the form of beatings, murders and lynchings.

On the heels of this came a highly organized attempt to rid the region of Chinese. The slogan of the day was "The Chinese Must Go." and it can be found splashed across the pages of area newspapers during the 1870s and 1880s. A wave of anti-Oriental hysteria swept the state and gave rise to the Workingman's Party and the ratification of a new state constitution denying suffrage to any native of China. Riots in the Chinatown districts of most towns became common place and, in 1879, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Throughout the remainder of the century one minority group after another became the subject of this cycle of racism. These periods of oppression normally coincided with fluctuations in the economic scale. The anger and frustration at a system which brought about "hard times" were, all together too often, taken out on an innocent scapegoat, usually one of a different color or creed.

At the turn of the 20th Century and World War I, following wave after wave of European immigration, intense feelings of anti-foreignism and tendency towards isolation surfaced in America. The Great War, and the patriotic zeal which accompanied it, created the need for a new set of scapegoats and they were found in these newcomers with their strange languages, customs and ideas. Anyone espousing a so called "anti-American" ideology was suspect i.e. Trade Unionist, Socialist, or Anarchists.

However, racism in California hit its peak at the beginning of World War II, when hundreds of thousands of west coast Japanese were disposed of their homes and personal property, and sent to Internment Camps in isolated areas. Even today, the repression continues with a new wave of anti-Latino feelings as expressed in the passage of the controversial Proposition 187 in 1994.

Throughout every one of these epochs of our local history, there was an African American presence in Santa Cruz County, but because of their small number, they were spared the intensity of the racial hatred experienced by other minority groups; no beatings, lynchings, or forced relocations. But this is not to say that the settlement of black pioneers in the Monterey Bay region was not without incident.

During the 19th century, the Watsonville school system was segregated for a long period of time and between the World Wars, Negro tourists were barred from hotels and auto camps in Santa Cruz. When the 54th Coast Artillery Company was stationed at Lighthouse field in 1942, numerous local businesses refused to serve the members of this all colored unit. In the decades following the Second World War, many of the new African American families moving into the area found housing difficult to obtain and on several occasions, white residents attempted to block the integration of their neighborhoods, sometimes resorting to arson. The only employment available to colored workers were in low paying service industries, including that of a barber, shoe shiner, or general laborer. So even here in Santa Cruz County, with its reputation for tolerance, the path of progress for citizens of African descent has not always been smooth.

Viewed as a whole, however, there is a singular thread of success and accomplishment which runs through the history of various African American communities which have existed in our region.

During the final decades of the 19th century, sizable Negro settlements could be found in the Watsonville and Hollister areas. Both were vibrant and long lasting communities, which contributed much to the general populace. In some areas the race was represented by lone individuals, or single families.

There were Black sailors serving aboard the vessels that prowled the Pacific Ocean on voyages of discovery. Trappers and explorers like Allen Light and Jim Beckwourth were solitary men, who usually shunned the company of other men and saw the country while most of it was still quite new and unnamed.

But it was the gold rush of 1849, that great wave of western migration, that brought a generation of African American pioneers to California. They came from both the North and the South, and were both free men and slaves. Many of them brought their families and, unlike their white counterpart, a surprising number of unattached females could be found in the groups. One noble lady, Miss Julia Cole, of the Gilmore Colony, was 104 years of age when she made the journey across the plains.

Once these intrepid pioneers established themselves in the Monterey Bay area, they went on to leave their mark on local history. Much has been said and written about London Nelson, the Carolina born ex-slave, who, through a generous bequeath, saved the floundering Santa Cruz School District. In Watsonville, Jim Brodis, a runaway slave, has made the history books and even had a street named in his honor.

Nobel Prize winning author John Steinbeck drew upon members of the local Black community as inspiration for characters in several of his major works. Crooks, the Black hired man in *Of Mice And Men* is patterned after Ishmael Williams, a club-footed teamster from the San Benito Valley. Steinbeck fondly remembered the Strother Cooper family as part of a section on civil rights activists in one of his later works, *Travels With Charley*.

But beyond these few examples, the history of local African Americans has remained relatively unexplored. Virtually unmentioned in the annals of the Monterey Bay area is the fact that Ida B. Wells, one of the major figures in U.S. Black history, spent a large amount of time in Santa Cruz visiting with her family at their home on River Street during the 1890s. Also unheralded is the story of the first three Black graduates from local schools, all of whom went on to become the editors of large circulation newspapers.

This long hidden history is laced with stories of bravery and courage under the most adverse circumstances. Life under frontier conditions in early day California was difficult enough even for the relatively well-educated whites from the Northern and New England states. But add to this the double burden of slavery and discrimination and it is easy to see the outstanding quality of men and women who made up the pioneer African American communities along Monterey Bay.

What follows is an abbreviated chronological outline of the major events and people in this fascinating history. It is intended merely as a guideline for further research and story development, and like all history, it is ongoing. But, at the very least, it can be a starting place which will no doubt lead the diligent researcher to more interesting vistas and horizons.

## **CHRONOLOGY 1542-1860**

### **CALIFORNIA COAST 1542**

When Spanish explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo first sighted the coast of California, there were crewmen of African ancestry aboard his vessel.

### **THE PACIFIC RIM 1565+**

The Manila Galleons, Spanish trading ships making yearly commercial voyages to the east Asia region, also had a compliment of Negro sailors.

### **MONTEREY BAY 1602**

On December 16, 1602, Sebastian Vizcaino, a Spanish merchant-adventurer, sailed into Monterey Bay on a voyage of discovery. One able-bodied seaman, who was among those to make first landfall, was said to have been of African ancestry.

### **MONTEREY BAY 1770**

"The Sacred Expeditions" under Padre Junipero Serra arrived aboard the San Antonio to establish a mission. Two members of the crew were Alexo Nuno and Ignacio Ramirez, both former slaves of African descent.



*Grave of Alexo Nuno in Monterey*

## **MONTEREY BAY 1770**

The Presidio of Monterey was founded and became the governmental center of Alta California, the northernmost province of New Spain.

## **UNITED STATES 1776**

The thirteen colonies in British North America declared themselves to be a sovereign nation free from the rule of the monarchy.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1791**

The Santa Cruz Mission was founded on August 28 1791 by Father Fermin Lasuen.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1797**

The Pueblo de Branciforte was established on the bluffs above the east bank of the San Lorenzo River.

## **MONTEREY BAY 1818**

Hippolyte de Bouchard, a French privateer, flying the flag of Argentine, sailed up the coast and sacked Monterey, the capital city of Alta California. Many of those aboard his two vessels were Africans.

## **MEXICO 1822**

The Mexican nation was created when the area known as New Spain declared its independence from **the Spanish Empire. Alta California remained a province, with Monterey as its capital.**

## **SANTA CRUZ 1835**

Allen Light, a free black and native of Virginia, who was a crew member of the Pilgrim, (the ship which carried Richard Henry Dana), jumped ship at Santa Barbara and became a famous otter hunter. Known as "Black Steward", he explored the California coast, including Monterey Bay, where he probed the Pajaro, Soquel and San Lorenzo rivers in quest of pelts. He was the first African American to set foot in the land which one day would be Santa Cruz County.

## **CALIFORNIA 1843**

Joseph McAfee, a former slave from Kentucky and Missouri, came west to California in the wake of John C. Fremont's expedition, settling first in Solano County. In 1846, he joined the Bear Flag Party when they marched on General Mariano Vallejo at Sonoma. This event began the struggle which ended with the conquest of California by the Americans in 1848.

## **CALIFORNIA 1845**

Pio Pico, a Mexican political leader of African ancestry, became governor of Alta California.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1848**

Jim Beckwourth, free born native of Virginia, led a life of unparalleled adventure as a mountain man, trapper, Indian chief, Indian fighter, scout, businessman and horse thief. In 1848, he led a party west to California via the Santa Fe Trail. For a time, Beckwourth carried the express mail between Nipomo and Monterey. While on the central coast, Beckwourth took time to explore the Santa Cruz region.

## **CALIFORNIA 1848**

With the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, marking the end of the Mexican American War, Mexico ceded the lands of California to the United States. A few scant weeks later gold was discovered at Sutter's mill.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1848**

The town of Santa Cruz came into being as a American settlement on the west bank of the San Lorenzo River.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1849**

Daniel Rodgers arrived at the Pajaro Valley with his master from Arkansas on their way to the gold fields. They worked on the Amesti ranch and cut redwoods in the mountains above Soquel before continuing on to the mines. By 1852, they were back in Arkansas where Rodgers earned his freedom and prepared to lead a wagon train of his neighbors out west to the Pajaro Valley.

## **CALIFORNIA 1849-1853**

Countless numbers of African Americans, both free and slave, traveled to California in quest of gold. Many would later settle in Santa Cruz County. They include, among others, Robert Francis, Joseph Smallwood, George Chester, London Nelson [a.k.a Louden Nelson], James Brodis, Dave Boffman and Jim Nelson.

## **CALIFORNIA 1850**

California was admitted to the union as a free state although the Fugitive Slave Law was enforced during the first few years of statehood. A legislature dominated by southerners refused African Americans the right of testimony, equal educational opportunity, etc.

## **CALIFORNIA 1850**

The 1850 U. S. Census revealed no identifiable African Americans living in Santa Cruz County.

## **WATSONVILLE 1851**

Jim Brodis ran away from his master while mining on the Yuba River. He escaped to the Pajaro Valley where he worked for J. Bryant Hill and William F. White. Vowing never to return to his native Kentucky, he hid out until after Emancipation. Jim later purchased a farm on the Santa Cruz road near the Pioneer cemetery. There is a street in the area named in his honor.

## **WATSONVILLE 1851**

James Watson, for whom Watsonville is named and the first county judge, arrived at the Pajaro Valley with " his slave Jim". Although legend has it that Jim earned his freedom in the mines, what became of him is unknown.

## **MONTEREY BAY 1852**

A band of outlaws, led by a renegade black man-- probably a runaway slave- prowled about the Monterey Bay region, running off hundreds of head of horses and cattle. After they massacred more than a dozen people at the San Luis Gonzaga ranch, the gang was chased south by a vigilance committee.

## **CALIFORNIA 1852**

The 1852 California Census showed no African Americans living in Santa Cruz County.

## **WATSONVILLE 1852**

The town of Watsonville came into being as a settlement at the ford of the Pajaro River.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1852**

Dave Boffman, after earning his freedom in the mines, moved to the Santa Cruz mountains where he rented a sawmill. He later owned farms in Rodeo Gulch and on Vine Hill. He was the first Black to buy land in Santa Cruz County.

## **CALIFORNIA 1852**

The Franchise League was organized in San Francisco for the express purpose of gaining the right of testimony for Negro citizens.

## **WATSONVILLE 1853**

Robert Johnson and his family settled in Watsonville, being the first of Daniel Rodgers' Arkansas River Valley group to arrive. Johnson bought a large section of land in the East Lake district with the help of pioneers such as Sanborn, Alexander, Cooper, Martinelli and other like-minded liberal whites.

## **MONTEREY 1854**

The James Anthony family, a Black family who operated a inn and ferry service on the Salinas River, were massacred by a band of desperadoes.

## **CALIFORNIA 1855-1857**

A series of Colored Citizens Conventions were held at San Francisco and Sacramento aimed at securing citizenship enfranchisement for African Americans. Santa Cruz was represented by William H. Mills and later, Philip Bell. Joseph Smallwood, who represented El Dorado county at the meetings, moved to Santa Cruz in 1868.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1856**

London Nelson [a.k.a Loudon Nelson], born in North Carolina, relocated to Santa Cruz after gaining his freedom in the mines. He earned a meager living doing odd jobs while growing fruit and vegetables on his home site on Water Street.

## **CORRALITOS 1856**

Lewis Bardin, a slave of the James Bardin family, was brought to California where he worked as a servant in the Bardin household at Salinas. After ducking out on his old master, he farmed a few acres in the Corralitos district.

## **CALIFORNIA 1856**

As an offshoot of the Colored Citizens Convention, The San Francisco Mirror of the Times, the first Black newspaper on the west coast, began publication.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1857**

George Chester, native of Philadelphia, located in Santa Cruz for a short time before moving on to San Jose where he farmed a tract of land near Gilroy. In 1862, he returned to Santa Cruz and opened up a series of small businesses.

## **WATSONVILLE 1857**

John Derrick, a recently freed slave, and another of the Arkansas River Valley group, arrived at Watsonville to join Robert Johnson. He took up farming and awaited the arrival of Daniel Rodgers. He would later marry one of Rodgers' daughters and raise a large, very successful family.

## **SAN JUAN 1858**

Ishmael Williams, a club-footed ex-slave from Georgia arrived in eastern Monterey county, later San Benito county. He established himself at San Juan where he entered into business. The 1860 census appraised his real and personal property at over \$10,000. However, as the result of a bad marriage, he lost his capital and found work as a teamster at the New Idria Quicksilver Mines, hauling the Cinnabar to Alviso. He became well known through out the area.

## **WATSONVILLE 1858**

A few black children were allowed seats in the primary school by the teacher Dr. William Miller. But after a number of white parents complained, the children had to be removed and were taught in private homes.

## **CALIFORNIA 1858**

The Archy Lee fugitive slave case draws much needed attention to the problem of runaway slaves. It also sparks another round of Black activism. As a result, Lee was given his freedom and the Fugitive Slave law was no longer enforced in California.

## **WATSONVILLE 1859**

Richard Campbell, an ex-slave from Alabama, who had come west to California in '49, settled in the Pajaro Valley. For 33 years, he was employed as the janitor for the Bank of Watsonville.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1860**

The 1860 U. S. Census revealed that there were 32 African Americans living in Santa Cruz County.



## **SANTA CRUZ 1860**

Black jockeys and trainers began to appear at the horse racing track located near what is now Lighthouse Point.

## **WATSONVILLE 1860**

Daniel Rodgers arrived at the Pajaro Valley after a year-long ox cart journey across the plains. He brought with him his family and the news that a large number of other families would be following him from Arkansas. He quickly assumed the leadership of a flourishing African American community in Watsonville.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1860**

London Nelson [a.k.a Louden Nelson] died after a long illness. In his Will, he left his entire estate to the school children of Santa Cruz to be used for the enhancement of their education. His gift made it possible for the public school to reopen after white citizens had allowed it to close.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1860**

Ex-slave Dave Boffman, called "Uncle Dave", was bilked out of his land and possessions by then Sheriff John R. Porter. Uncle Dave lost the suit because Negroes were not allowed to testify in court.

## **CHRONOLOGY 1861-1899**

### **FELTON 1861**

A Black miner named Robins, living in Gold Gulch, was shot in the head during a quarrel over mining rights. John Lewis, another colored man, was arrested on a charge of Assault with Intent to Commit Murder. He was tried and acquitted when the jury could not agree.

### **WATSONVILLE 1861**

The local Black community hired Mrs. L. C. Clark to teach African American children at her home in Watsonville. Dan Rodgers and his sons-in-law Robert Johnson and John Derrick began what is to become a 20 year struggle to break the color line in Watsonville Schools.



*Dan Rodgers*

### **UNITED STATES 1861**

The American Civil War broke out after secession and the attack on Fort Sumner. Slavery was to become a flash point of the conflict. Locally, the residents in the cities of Watsonville and Santa Cruz generally supported the Union, while any of those in the outlying areas, farmers from the southern states and many Irish settlers, took the side of the Confederacy. The county sent several military units to fight for the north, while there was a limited amount of activity in the region by Confederate Irregulars.

## **CALIFORNIA 1862**

A second Black weekly newspaper *The Pacific Appeal*, was founded in San Francisco by Philip Bell and Peter Anderson.

## **CALIFORNIA 1862**

After much agitation, African Americans were finally granted the right of testimony.



*Philip Bell*

## **SANTA CRUZ 1862**

Joe McAfee, the old "Bear Flagger," moved to Santa Cruz where he opened a bootblack stand on Pacific Avenue. He became an orator for the local Republican Party.

## **UNITED STATES 1862**

In December, President Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1863**

The Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1st. The long nightmare of slavery was over. There was much celebration locally among both Blacks and whites.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1863**

Samuel Padmore, an old miner and swamper at several saloons on Front Street, died in his sleep. He was buried at the Evergreen Cemetery.

## **UNITED STATES 1865**

On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General U. S. Grant at Appomattox and the Civil War ended.

## **UNITED STATES 1865**

The 13th Amendment, formally banning slavery, was passed by Congress.

## **UNITED STATES 1865**

The Ku Klux Klan was founded in Tennessee. While there was some Klan violence in California, including a church bombing in nearby San Jose, there is no evidence of the "old Klan" ever being in Santa Cruz county.

## **CALIFORNIA 1865**

Another state convention of colored citizens was held at Sacramento and established standing committees on education and voting rights. Philip Bell represented Santa Cruz county while Joe Smallwood attended as a delegate from San Francisco.

## **CALIFORNIA 1865**

Philip Bell, after having a falling out with Peter Anderson, left the Appeal and began to publish The Elevator. There were then two Black newspapers serving California's African American population.

## **WATSONVILLE 1865-1870**

A large number of newly freed slaves arrived at Watsonville to expand the sizable African American community already residing there. Many of them were from Arkansas and Tennessee, part of Daniel Rodgers' contingent. They include William Morris, Emily Smith, Amanda Rodgers Logan together with her three young sons, Albert, Alfred and Oscar, James Calvin Williams, a blacksmith, and Jane Riley.

## **WATSONVILLE 1865**

Jefferson Rodgers, a newly freed slave, traveled to Watsonville from Tennessee via the horn in the company of his ex-masters James and George Rodgers. Jeff and his ancestors, back to his great grandfather, had been servants in the Rodgers household for over 150 years. He took up a farm of his own and became a much respected farmer in the Pajaro Valley.

## **WATSONVILLE 1866**

A separate "Negro" school was established for African American children on East Lake Avenue. The land on which it was built was donated by Robert Johnson with the proviso that it be used "as a school house to which all children shall be admitted irrespective of color for the purpose of education." The concept of a segregated school was, naturally enough, never a popular idea with the local black community. During the years of its existence (1866-1879), it had eight teachers; Miss M. J. Moltroupe, Miss A. Allison, Lois Poole, Mary Bell, the highly popular Miss Josephine Knowlton, Mrs. Kieth, Mary Hushbeck, and Fannie Gallagher.

## **UNITED STATES 1866**

The first Civil Rights Bill was passed through congress over President Andrew Johnson's veto. The act conferred citizenship enfranchisement to citizens "of every race and color." Once again celebrations were held all across the county. The 14th Amendment is also pushed through congress by radical Republicans, but it needed ratification by the states so it could go into effect.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1866**

The city of Santa Cruz was incorporated.

## **WATSONVILLE 1867**

The first Black church in Santa Cruz county came into being when the Reverend Adam B. Smith of San Francisco founded a branch chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Watsonville.

## **WATSONVILLE 1868**

The city of Watsonville was incorporated.

### **WATSONVILLE 1868**

Oscar T. Jackson and his brother Jethro moved to Watsonville where Oscar opened a barber shop and Jethro started a bill posting service. Oscar would later become a famous minstrel and travel world wide.

### **SANTA CRUZ 1868**

Joseph Smallwood and Robert Francis moved to Santa Cruz from San Francisco and set up shop at the Pacific Ocean House. They were 49ers who had met while they were living in Coloma, El Dorado County. Both were free born, well educated, and politically active. Joe Smallwood, a native of Emmettsberg, Maryland, had left a grown family in Philadelphia when he came west to the mines. One of his sons was the personal secretary to Salmon P. Chase, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Another, the Superintendent of Public Schools for York County, Pennsylvania. Joe had been a delegate to the Colored Citizens Conventions. Robert Coleman Francis, a native of Philadelphia, was not only a seasoned abolitionist, but a musician of some talent. As a youngster he studied with Frank Johnson, the most celebrated bandmaster of his day. Francis traveled extensively in both the United States and Europe with Johnson and was a composer of many musical scores. While in Santa Cruz, he wrote and arranged the music for the Santa Cruz Brass Band.

### **UNITED STATES 1868**

The 14th Amendment was finally ratified. The 15th Amendment, guaranteeing voting rights to Negroes, passed Congress, but it too must await ratification by the states.

### **WATSONVILLE 1869**

Alex Wilkins, a barber in Oscar Jackson's shop was shot and killed by outlaws as he was riding home after attending a Fandango at Whisky Hill (now Freedom).

### **SANTA CRUZ 1869**

The first Black children, those of George Chester and Robert Francis, began attending schools in Santa Cruz.

### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1870**

The 1870 Census enumerated 53 African Americans living in Santa Cruz county.

### **UNITED STATES 1870**

The 15th Amendment was finally ratified by a 2/3 majority of the states and Black voter registration began.

### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1870**

Within the first three months after the passage of the 15th Amendment, 100% of the black males living in the county registered to vote.

## **CENTRAL COAST 1870**

African Americans from throughout the central coast gathered in Allen's Hall at Watsonville to celebrate the ratification of the 15th Amendment. They were joined in their merriment by white supporters from all across the county. Joe McAfee and William H. Miller, a Salinas barber, were the orators of the day. The day long event included a breakfast, a picnic, a pot luck dinner and a dance. Thomas Snodgrass, an old time Abolitionist and avid supporter of Negro rights, was given an enthusiastic welcome when he entered the hall. The only drawback to the occasion was when a group of rowdies threw Cayenne pepper on the dance floor and shouted racial slurs at the dancers. However, they were quickly driven away.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1870**

Three Negro students had to be removed from Branciforte School when the state Legislature passed a bill, introduced by State Superintendent of Schools O. P. Fitzgerald, banning African, Oriental and Indian students from attending public schools. The trustees of Santa Cruz City Schools allowed the children to return to class in spite of the law.

## **WATSONVILLE 1871**

Benjamin Johnson, the eldest son of Robert Johnson, became the first African American to vote in Santa Cruz county history, when he cast his ballot in the school trustee election on April 30th.

## **WATSONVILLE 1871**

Gordon and Rosa Ison came west with their former master, John Glenn, from Knoxville, Tennessee. Gordon, a native of Virginia, found work with the Watsonville Water and Light Company, where he remained for over 30 years. Rosa Ison, born in Tennessee, was a servant in the household of General "Stonewall" Jackson during the Civil War.

## **CALIFORNIA 1871**

The Colored Citizen's State Educational Convention convened in Stockton for the express purpose of furthering the educational goals of African Americans in California. The convention initiated a petition drive aimed at forcing the legislature to rescind the law banning "children of African descent" from attending public schools. Joe Smallwood was a delegate to the convention from Santa Cruz and was elected to the Educational Executive Committee.

## **WATSONVILLE 1874**

Oscar T. Jackson, the barber turned minstrel, moved to the San Francisco Bay area to further his career. During the next three decades he would tour the world with the leading minstrel troupes of the day. In 1883, he played a series of command performances before the royal families of Europe.

## **WATSONVILLE 1875**

Virginia native, Strother Cooper, a farmer, arrived at the Pajaro Valley from Missouri bringing his large family with him. He was an energetic and highly personable young man who quickly endeared himself to the people of Watsonville. Both he and "Uncle Dan" Rodgers become charter members of Watsonville's infamous Galoot Club.

## **WATSONVILLE 1878**

Since the opening of the colored school in 1866, the African American families of Watsonville had sought entry for their children to the regular primary school, for which they paid taxes. Each attempt, however, had been rebuffed. By 1878, there were 18 students in attendance at the segregated Black school and the education there was not up to the parents standards. So when school opened in the spring, they marched their children to the primary school and demanded entrance. But once more they were turned away. Their reaction was to institute a boycott of the Black school, which then closed its doors. Robert Johnson, acting as the spokesman for the African American community, quickly filed a suit demanding their rights as citizens and tax payers. After much confusion, the courts ruled in their favor, ordering that the Black children be admitted to the primary school. The color line was at last broken.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1880**

The 1880 U.S. Census showed that there were 63 African Americans living in the county.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1880**

Joseph Smallwood Francis, son of Robert Francis and godson of Joseph Smallwood, graduated with honors (salutatorian) from Santa Cruz High. He was the first African American to graduate from a regular high school in California. While in school, he had served as the editor of the *Leisure Hours*, the school newspaper, and also worked at the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. Two years later, he passed the entrance examination to the University of California at Berkeley, where he majored in journalism and business.

## **WATSONVILLE 1882**

John Lincoln Derrick, son of John and Martha Derrick, and grandson of "Uncle Dan" Rodgers, graduated from the Watsonville School with a high school accreditation. The following year, he joined his friend Joseph Francis at Berkeley -- also as a journalism major.

## **WATSONVILLE 1882**

With the minstrel craze at its height, the young African Americans of Watsonville formed a group called "The Home Minstrels" and were received enthusiastically by their audiences and the local press.

## **WATSONVILLE 1883**

Black outlaw Charlie Fouche, while drinking at the Long Branch Saloon on Main Street, got into a gun fight with two Town Constables and was wounded. He was arrested on a charge of Assault with a Deadly Weapon, found guilty and sent to jail. A letter was found among his personal effects indicating that he had once been a member of the James Brothers gang.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1884**

Jim Nelson, a much loved street character in Santa Cruz, died on October 19th at the county hospital after a short illness. "Nigger Jim", as he was commonly known, with his hair twisted up in a series of braids, had entertained passerbys with his stories of the "old days" on and off for over 20 years. He had served aboard square riggers out of New Bedford Harbor during the glory days of whaling, worked in the gold fields of California in the days of '49, and he could "out fist" any man on the west coast.

However, his favorite yarn was about the time he had fought with Napoleon Bonaparte at the battle of Waterloo. Jim was able to add credence to the story by recounting this famous battle in vivid detail. He was buried at the Evergreen Cemetery.

### **SANTA CRUZ 1887**

William Morris and young Albert Logan, members of Dan Rodgers' Arkansas group moved from Watsonville and settled in Santa Cruz, thereby laying the foundation for a new African American community. Logan bought a large two story house on South Branciforte Avenue.

### **HOLLISTER 1889**

Arkansas native, Daniel Gilmore, founded a "southern-style" plantation in the Hollister Hills. He sent for a group of his ex-slaves to work on the farm, offering to pay for their transportation west and \$30 per month plus board -- a high wage for the time. Over 80 Blacks migrated to California at Gilmore's request, thereby seeding one of the largest African American communities in the central coast region.



*Scott Gilmore*

### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1890**

The 1890 U.S. Census showed the African American community stable at 62 members.

### **SANTA CRUZ 1890-1910**

As the 20th century approached and then turned, the emphasis of the Negro community shifted from Watsonville to Santa Cruz. One by one the old slavery generation of blacks passed on, while their children and grand children migrated to San Francisco and Oakland, where there were more opportunities for a young person. By 1910, the once thriving African American community in the Pajaro Valley had faded completely away.



*Ida B. Wells*

### **SANTA CRUZ 1892-1894**

During this time, a number of Negro families settled in the Santa Cruz area. Among them were William H. Johnson, who worked at the Santa Cruz County National Bank for 30 years, Lena Donlee, a Southern Hominy dealer on Pacific Avenue and Jack Harris, a bootblack together with his wife Victoria and their sons, Carl and Irvin. Two Black Civil War veterans named Alex Penn and Andrew Hall came to the area, as did the William Tipton family. William and Fanny Tipton, late of Tennessee and Mississippi, were the parents of several children and the guardians of two nieces, Anna and Ida B. Wells. The girls'

parents had died during the Yellow Fever epidemic in Mississippi. By the time the Tipton family moved to Santa Cruz, Miss Ida B. Wells was already famous as a writer and lecturer on the subject of lynching. Because of her outspokenness on the causes of racial bias, controversy seemed to follow her everywhere. She became a acknowledged leader in the civil rights and feminist movements. She was one of the founders of the NAACP, and during the course of her lifetime published several books and

was a columnist syndicated in most of the leading newspapers of the day. Following her death in 1931, her autobiography appeared posthumously. Fifty years later, her work was rediscovered by a new generation of black activists and she was made the subject of a PBS Television Special and, in 1989, her likeness was printed on a U.S. postage stamp. Not enough can be said about the role that Ida B. Wells played in African American history. Her sister Anna, a 1894 graduate of Santa Cruz High School, followed in her footsteps and became a lecturer and newspaper editor.

#### **SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA 1894**

Joseph Francis, now a resident of San Francisco, and John Lincoln Derrick, now of Oakland, began to publish *The Western Outlook*, a Black newspaper with a large following up and down the west coast. It would remain in existence until the Great Depression.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1894**

Anna Wells graduated with honors from Santa Cruz High, only the third African American to do so. A few years later, she moved to the midwest and became the publisher and editor of the *Chicago Searchlight*. Therefore the first three Black graduates from Santa Cruz county schools went on to publish and edit large circulation newspapers.

#### **HOLLISTER 1894**

The Gilmore Colony collapsed after a series of disasters. The African Americans of the group moved into Hollister, where they remained active even up to contemporary times.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1896**

Albert and Mary Logan converted their home on South Branciforte Avenue into a boarding house. For the next 50 years it became the social center for the Black community in Santa Cruz.

#### **WATSONVILLE 1897**

Strother Cooper died at his home on the corner of East Lake and Carr. His family moved to Salinas, where they were befriended by a young John Steinbeck, who would later write glowingly of them in *Travels With Charley*.

#### **WATSONVILLE 1899**

Robert Johnson, pioneer and leader of the school desegregation fight; his son Benjamin, the first African American to vote in the county; and James Calvin Williams, the longtime owner of a blacksmiths shop on Main Street, all died within two months of each other.



## **CHRONOLOGY 1900--1990**

### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1900**

The 1900 U.S. Census set the number of Black citizens in the county at 81.

### **WATSONVILLE 1900**

Martha Derrick, daughter of Dan Rodgers, relocated to Oakland where she joined her son John Lincoln Derrick. The Derricks were the last of the old generation of Negro families to leave the Pajaro Valley.

### **SANTA CRUZ 1900-1910**

Many new African Americans moved to Santa Cruz and enhanced the growing Black population already there. Among them were the Pinkney family, the Hunter family, the Berry family, Ed Bruce, Ed and Inez Smith, and Lou Venable. Venable later opened a restaurant on Pacific Avenue named "The Squeeze Inn" which became a favorite hang out for Santa Cruz High School students.

### **WATSONVILLE 1903**

"Uncle Dan" Rodgers boarded the train at the Watsonville depot for a visit with his daughter Martha Derrick in Oakland. As he detrained at San Francisco, he was killed in a freak accident. With his passing, the pioneer Black population of Watsonville no longer existed.

### **SANTA CRUZ 1905**

The Negro community of Santa Cruz was now large enough to support its own house of worship. On November 19, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church formed a local branch. For this purpose, they bought land on River Street. During its existence the church had two ministers, the Reverend T. A. McEachen and Reverend W. W. Howard.

### **SANTA CRUZ 1906-1910**

The Black population formed a baseball team, named the Santa Cruz Colored Giants, who played a full schedule of games against local white teams. Jack Harris was their manager and coach. Two brothers, Lou and Floyd Berry, and young Elwood Hunter were star athletes, not only with the Giants, but in the sports program at Santa Cruz High as well.

### **UNITED STATES 1909**

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP.) was founded in New York City by a group of black and white progressives. Its purpose was to work for equal civil, political and educational rights, to demand an end to segregation, secure the right to work, and to enforce the right of protection from violence and intimidation. It came into being as a result of a series of vicious race riots in both the north and the south.

### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1910**

The 1910 U.S. Census put the number of African Americans in the county at 83.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1910-1915**

The Black community continued to grow and become active at all levels of society. Colored children were enrolled at local schools in record numbers. Negro heads of households however, continued to be restricted to the same old traditional menial jobs in the service industries, including porters, shoe shiners, cooks, dish washers, and laborers.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1915**

"The Birth of a Nation" or "The Klansman", a racist movie produced and directed by D. W. Griffith was shown at local theaters to sell out houses. The NAACP attempted unsuccessfully to seek a ban on the movie because of its extremely negative portrayal of African Americans and its glorification of the Ku Klux Klan. The local press called it "the greatest movie ever made." This movie helped bring about a revival of the Ku Klux Klan.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1916-1941**

During this 25 year period, the attitude of Santa Cruzans toward its African American citizens did an about face. Up to this point in history it had been a tolerant community throwing up few, if any, road blocks into the path of their Negro brothers. Now, however, bigotry became a policy in many quarters as blacks were banned or discriminated against at local hotels, road houses and inns. Negro vacationers with their tourist dollars were unwelcome visitors at many recreational spots in the county. Finding housing and jobs became an impossible task, so many Negro families left the area in anger and discouragement. Even churches, the supposed moral pillars of the community, now refused to accept Black parishioners.

The causes of this sudden change in attitude are many-- periods of economic down slide, fierce job competition brought on by the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from Europe, and the lack of year-round employment generated by the county's continuing reliance upon tourism as its basic industry, just to name a few. The major reason, however, was the social changes brought on by the patriotic zeal, anti-foreignism, and isolationist tendencies which ran rampant during the period of World War I.

## **UNITED STATES 1917**

America formally entered World War I. An unusually large number of African Americans volunteered and served proudly in the various branches of the Armed Services.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1918**

Arthur Tate, a Watsonville bootblack, was nearly lynched by a group of irate citizens after he was accused of raping a white woman. He was later sentenced to San Quentin for six years.

## **UNITED STATES 1921**

As World War I ended, many thousands of Negro veterans remained on active duty and made a career out of the Armed Services.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1922**

Albert Logan, born a slave on an Arkansas plantation in 1860, died at his home in Santa Cruz. As a small child, he had been brought west by his mother as a member of the Dan Rodgers party. He had attended the black school in Watsonville before moving to Santa Cruz in the late 1880s. His wife, Mary, continued to run the boarding house on South Branciforte.



*Mary Logan*

## **SANTA CRUZ 1924**

A Ku Klux Klan Klavern was founded in Santa Cruz and for a time was quite visible including a daylight march in the Miss California parade.

## **WATSONVILLE 1928**

The Klan formed a Klavern at Watsonville.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1930**

The U.S. Census revealed that the African American population of the county had plummeted to 64.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1934**

Irvin Harris, a native of Santa Cruz and a graduate of local schools, was run out of town by the Sheriff and District Attorney after he was found at a party in the company of a white girl "from a well known family."

## **SANTA CRUZ 1938**

Mary Logan, widow of Albert Logan, died at her home on South Branciforte Avenue. The property passed into the hands of Ed and Inez Smith, who continued to operate it as a boarding house for black tourists.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1940**

The 1940 U.S. Census enumerated only 18 African Americans in the county, an all time low.

## **UNITED STATES 1941**

The United States entered into World War II. Once again, young African Americans enrolled in record numbers.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1942**

On Easter Sunday, the 54th Coast Artillery, an all-Black unit from Camp San Luis Obispo, was stationed at Lighthouse Point, then known as Phelan Park. From that moment on, race relations in Santa Cruz county were changed forever. Integration was quick and permanent. The reaction of white citizens was mixed and varied, but this was war time and change was coming like it or not. Local churches and civic groups welcomed the newcomers with a series of entertainments, dinners, teas, etc. Ed and Inez Smith transformed their home into a U.S.O. center for the colored soldiers from the 54th and nearby Camp McQuaide, as well as Fort Ord. When the city fathers tried to make certain parts of the city off-limits to

the men of the 54th, their Chaplain, Captain Baskerville, threatened to boycott "the whole damned town." Local businessmen were forced to choose economics over racism.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1944**

The 54th Battery was withdrawn from the area as the war wound down. But by the sterling example which these men set, they left behind a much changed town.

#### **UNITED STATES 1945**

World War II was brought to a close with the surrender of Germany and Japan.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1946-1950**

After mustering out of the service, several members of the old 54th returned with their families to start civilian life in their newly adopted hometown. Among their number were John and Erva Bowen, Henry and Nina Pratt, Isaac Jackson, Cornelius and Arvenia Bumpus, Fred and Jessie Guliford (with brother Frank), Russell Dawson, Frank Willis, William E. Jackson and Upsie Hannon. These patriots were to seed a new African American community. Other Blacks who arrived during this time were Mervin and Idessie Brantly, and Chylow and Mary Ellen Brown. The Missionary Baptist Church was also founded to meet the spiritual needs of the African American community.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1949**

A local branch of the NAACP was granted a charter with Chylow Brown, a community activist from Chicago and Detroit, as president, and Arvenia Bumpus as secretary.

#### **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1950**

The 1950 U.S. Census revealed that there were 106 African Americans in Santa Cruz County.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1950**

After five years of trying, Black veterans were finally admitted into American Legion Post #64.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1951**

The Reverend William Brant of San Francisco, was appointed pastor of the Missionary Baptist Church and came to Santa Cruz to look for a home to buy, so that he could be near his congregation. He made a down payment on a small house on Winkle Avenue in the Live Oak district. On the night before he was scheduled to take occupancy, arsonists set fire to the house, doing major damage. Furthermore, neighbors coldly suggested that he move his family to another community. In spite of the fact that a substantial reward was offered for the apprehension of the culprits, the crime went unsolved.

#### **SANTA CRUZ 1951-1960**

Throughout the decade, the Negro population of the county continued to grow as more families relocated to the area. In time a ghetto of sorts came into being in the area of west Santa Cruz commonly called "the circles." The NAACP, under the leadership of Erva Bowen and Arvenia Bumpus, flourished as an organization, both political and social, and gave some cohesion to the African American community.

## **UNITED STATES 1954**

The United States Supreme Court issued a landmark decision when it ruled that segregation in American public schools was illegal.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1960**

The 1960 U.S. Census showed that the black population of the county had more than quadrupled, to 504.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1960-1970**

This decade can best be described as a period of growing activism among a new generation of young Black adults. They joined with their elders to raise the political and social consciousness of the local African American population. The advent of Cabrillo College and U.C.S.C. only enhanced their efforts by sponsoring classes and workshops in Black culture and history. The NAACP pushed for fair housing laws, and together with a new group called the Urban Improvement Organization, lobbied for low-income housing projects in Santa Cruz County. Their struggles were spearheaded by Erva Bowen and Sy Rockins, and met with varying degrees of success.

## **SANTA CRUZ COUNTY 1970**

The 1970 U.S. Census totals showed that the African American population had then reached the 1,000 mark.

## **SANTA CRUZ 1970-1990**

These were decades of victory for the local Black community as low-income housing became a reality and many new industries located in the county, opening up job opportunities for minority workers.

On the social side of things, the N.A.A.C.P., in conjunction with the Black Cooperative Association, headed by Black Panther William Moore, began a free breakfast program for Elementary School aged children as well as a food bank. Among the most dedicated volunteers in this program were Helen Weston, "Momma" Brown, Lillian McCoy and Esther Bradley Delgado.

Another successful effort by local blacks was the drive to honor London Nelson [a.k.a Louden Nelson], the ex-slave, who, upon his death, directed that his entire estate be used to further the education of local children. Spearheaded by Lowell Hunter and Wilma Campbell, it commenced with an attempt to have the City School Board rename Mission Hill School, the "London Nelson School." Instead, however, the Board named their administrative offices on Mission Hill, the "London Nelson Plaza." Spurred on by this victory, the Negro community finally achieved complete success when, in 1979, a new community center, located at the old Laurel School, was named in Nelson's honor.

An offshoot of this drive was the election of longtime NAACP activist Erva Bowen to the Board of Education. Bowen was the first Black to hold an elective office in the history of Santa Cruz County.

The African American population, which currently makes up over 3% of the general populace, has long since moved beyond the "circles" and can be found scattered throughout the area. The Nelson Center, U.C.S.C., Cabrillo College and the NAACP continue to promote Black culture and draw attention to problems which exist within the minority community.

## APPENDIX AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Major Local Resources for African American History

Most of the following resource pools are of a general nature, but a patient researcher can abstract a tremendous amount of historical and genealogical data from their files.

#### **Santa Cruz County Government Center**

**701 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz, CA**

- County Recorder's Office: Vital Records (Births, Marriages, Deaths), Land Records and Maps.
- Clerk of the Superior Court: Wills and Probates.
- Board of Supervisors: Board Minutes and Actions.

#### **Santa Cruz Public Library, Downtown Branch**

**224 Church Street, Santa Cruz, CA.**

- California History and Genealogy Room  
Hundreds of volumes on California history and U. S. genealogy, U. S. Censuses: Several rolls containing Santa Cruz County enumerations: 1850 to 1920. Genealogy section contains five "How to" booklets on Black genealogical research. Area newspapers on microfilm from 1854 to present. One video tape copy of the 1989 P.B.S. Special on the life of ex-Santa Cruz resident Ida B. Wells.

#### **Watsonville Public Library**

**310 Union Street, Watsonville, CA**

- Stacks contain several books on California African America history. Watsonville newspapers on microfilm from 1868 to present.

#### **McHenry Library**

**University of California at Santa Cruz,  
Santa Cruz, CA**

- Stacks contain numerous volumes on Black history and culture, of vital importance are the works and autobiography of former Santa Cruz resident Ida B. Wells. Map Room has large collection Santa Cruz County history, including many indexes. Microform Room has U. S. Censuses (Santa Cruz and Monterey County rolls) and area newspapers on microfilm from 1854 to present. Special Collections also has large collection of local history.

#### **History Museum of Santa Cruz County**

**705 Front Street, Santa Cruz, CA**

- Archives and Research Center has numerous personal files, journals, reminisces. records, newspapers, photos, research collections, etc. Mostly north county material.

**Pajaro Valley Historical Association**  
**261 East Beach Street, Watsonville, CA**

- Archives and Research Center has photo collections, diaries, research files, family memorabilia, newspaper clippings, vital and cemetery records, etc. Pajaro Valley and south county only.

**Santa Cruz Sentinel**  
**207 Church Street, Santa Cruz, CA**

- Library has large collection of newspaper clippings. Most valuable for recent local Black history: 1964 to present.

## **Out of County Resource Centers**

**United States National Archives and Records Center**  
**Pacific Coast Regional Branch**  
**Commodore Drive, San Bruno, CA**

- For Black history and genealogical research, the National Archives have all U.S. Censuses, including slave schedules. Military and pension records for African Americans who served in any branch of the Armed Services from the Civil War to the Vietnam War. Also some Freedman's Bureau Field Office records.

**Sutro Library**  
**California State Library**  
**Winston Avenue, San Francisco, CA**

- A branch of the state library specializing in genealogy. State, county, and local histories, vital records, surname and locality files. Stacks contain dozens of books on Black history from California and all over the United States. Also a Black newspaper collection. Most importantly, Sutro has the three volume set of James de T. Abajian's "Blacks in Selected Newspapers, Censuses and Other Sources." A masterwork in Black history indexing.

**Oakland Public Library**  
**Lake Merritt Drive, Oakland, CA**

- Local History Room has a large collection of African American oriental material. Vertical files on individuals, families, and groups. Serial and Newspaper Room have vast accumulation of 19th and 20th century Black newspapers on microfilm.

**Bancroft Library**  
**University of California at Berkeley**  
**Berkeley, CA**

- The largest California history collection in existence. Contains a vast amount of material on African American pioneers. Also has a major collection of Negro newspapers. Houses the James de T. Abajian Collection consisting of 56 boxes of scrapbooks, note books, card files, etc.

## Northern California Center for Afro American History and Life

5606 San Pablo Avenue, Oakland, CA

- A private library, archives, and museum dedicated, as its title suggests, to the history and culture of African Americans in Northern California. Has a large collection of printed material, memorabilia and photos, also a section on Blacks in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties.

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