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A Gannett newspaper



Elliott surges to victory,
\$202,650 in Daytona 500
— Page 1B

The competition's stout
as brews tickle palates
— Page 1C

Black roots go deep in Idaho

Tiny, quiet group helps build state despite racism

This is the second of three parts.

By CHARLES ETLINGER
The Idaho Statesman

Idaho territorial Gov. Caleb Lyon's dream is a fanciful footnote to Idaho history.

Shortly after the Civil War, Lyon proposed that a large colony of blacks be imported to Idaho. They would mine gold to pay the war debt.

And they would give Idaho enough residents, for admission to the union. The state would have had a substantial, if not predominant, black population.

Lyon's plan, of course, never got anywhere.

Brotherhood may have been implicit in the plan, and Idaho, as historian Arthur Hart points out, has in some ways done well by minorities. Idaho was the fourth state to give women the vote and the first state to elect a Jewish governor, Moses Alexander.

But blacks often have been victims of racism as they quietly made their contributions to life in the state.

Black Idahoans, although given scant attention by historians, have a history reaching



Idaho Historical Society

Elvina Moulton was a former slave.

back as far as that of whites.

York, a Virginia slave owned by explorer William Clark, was in the Lewis and Clark party when it crossed the Continental Divide into Idaho at Lemhi Pass in August 1805.

Ebony and possessed of herculean strength,

York was considered "great medicine" by the Indians he encountered on the trip.

When Idaho Indians were told a black-skinned man was in the expedition, "they seemed quite as anxious to see this monster as they wer(e) the merchandize which we had to barter for their horses," Meriwether Lewis wrote in his journal.

Blacks trickled into Idaho during the Boise Basin gold rush, before the Idaho Territory was established in 1863, according to historian Merle Wells.

"In the early days, they most often came as hired hands, domestic workers, miners, a sprinkling of cowboys, and later, as railroad workers, military-attached persons and a few professionals," Mamie Oliver, an associate professor of social work at Boise State University, said.

They came to Idaho like everyone else, looking for work, said Oliver, who is writing a book on the black experience in the state.

Blacks homesteaded in the 1860s, she said. A 99-year-old Boise woman is the daughter of a pioneer black family that settled in Nampa then.

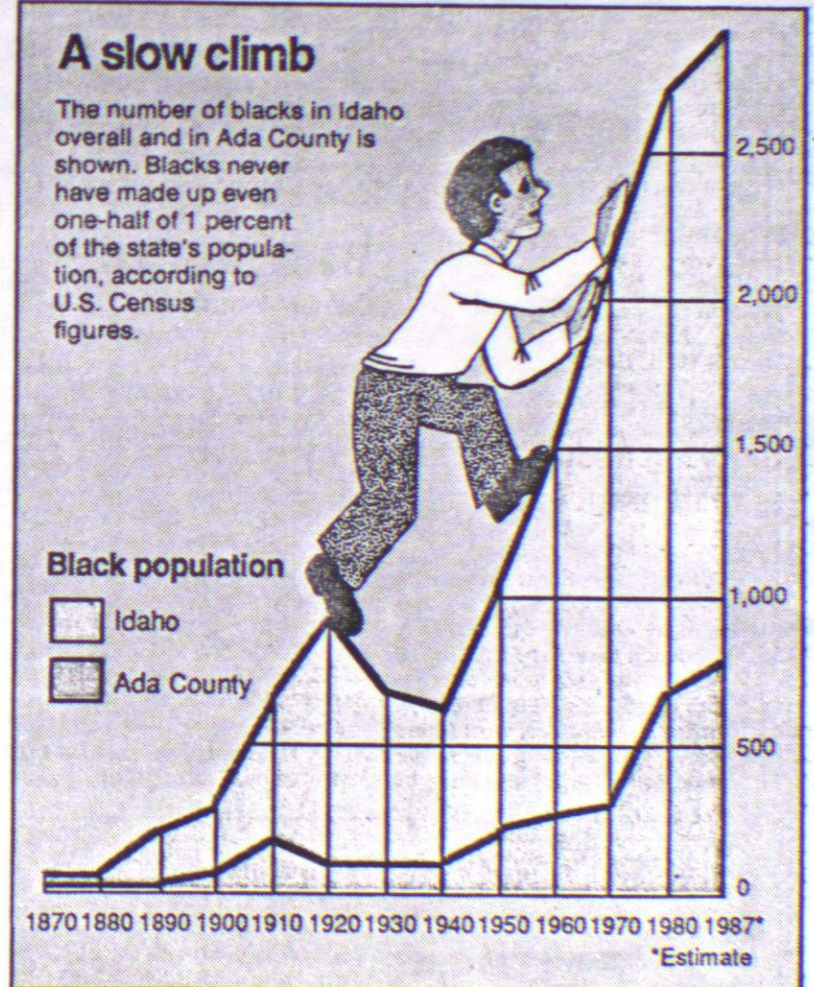
Idaho territorial law was tinged with racism typical of the times: In criminal cases, the law banned testimony against or for whites by blacks, mulattos (people with at least one-eighth Negro blood), Indians or Chinese.

When blacks surfaced in the press, it often was in crime stories. The Idaho Tri-Weekly

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A slow climb

The number of blacks in Idaho overall and in Ada County is shown. Blacks never have made up even one-half of 1 percent of the state's population, according to U.S. Census figures.



Ann LaRose/Statesman

Refugees allowed to leave Beirut camp

oppressed and alienated to with- more vocal about social attitudes



Crash puts doctor's aide

Blacks

Continued from Page 1A

Statesman reported in 1869 that John West shot to death Bob Moody, the pioneer black barber of Boise, in a gambling quarrel.

There is another mention of John West in the paper, six months later, as "a colored citizen of Boise (who) made several efforts on Monday to deposit his ballot, but was refused the right." Poll officials probably did not know of a federal law ensuring that blacks could vote, the article said.

Black women were even less visible. One was Elvina "Aunt Vina" Moulton, a former slave. She was on her way to California in 1867 with a white family when she had enough of traveling, having walked part of the way barefoot. So she settled in Boise. Moulton knew her place, even in death. She said everyone in the predominantly white First Presbyterian Church, of which she was a charter member, treated her well. But she said she preferred a funeral in a mortuary, not the church, because "there might be some feeling."

Some people just would not rock the boat because they had to survive, Oliver said.

Church activities

By the early 1900s, church activities had become a focal point for Boise blacks, she said, with social events, family gatherings and community and women's groups.

Still standing is the 1921 building that houses the St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, 128 Broadway Ave. The church dates at least to 1909.

Like Southern rural black churches, St. Paul's "provided the much-needed spiritual and social order that enabled people who felt oppressed and alienated to withstand the pain and suffering," Oliver said.

As the century turned, Boise's black population was growing faster than the vastly larger white population. The African-American Municipal League boasted a membership of more than 100.

Census takers listed 168 blacks by 1910, more than were to be counted in any census until 1950. Always, though, blacks were a tiny minority.

There was a substantial Ku Klux Klan contingent in Boise during the 1920s, as elsewhere in Idaho, fueled in part by the post-World War I Communist scare.

In 1924, KKK members gathered on the hills back of North 14th and North 15th streets for weekly initiations. Robed guards held back 500 spectators.

Racism could be deadly for both blacks and whites, as it apparently was in the case of Pearl Royal Hendrickson. He was a black man who homesteaded alone on the Boise Ridge for 15 years, starting about the time of the KKK initiations.

Hendrickson defied a federal eviction order in 1940 to make way for the Boise Peak Recrea-

Ahead

Tuesday: For some blacks, living in Boise is like a long visit, because of limited black culture and organizations. Despite that, many blacks have stayed in Boise, facing subtle discrimination and ignorance.

tion Area. He killed two men who came to arrest him, only to be shot to death later in a hail of bullets by a 50-man posse.

The son of a Forest Service ranger involved in the incident said years later the government ejected Hendrickson, but not white squatters, because of his skin color.

Had to stay in her room

The same year, famed contractor Marian Anderson was allowed to stay at the Owyhee Plaza Hotel while in Boise for a concert — but on the condition she remain in her room while at the hotel, according to Warner Terrell Jr., a waiter there at the time. Terrell's wife, Clara, was pictured in The Statesman holding her infant son, Warner III, with the great singer looking on.

The Terrell family illustrates the deep roots some blacks have in Boise and how circumstances have improved for blacks since World War II.

Warner Terrell III is a vice president of the Idaho First National Bank and handles \$750 million in investments. His grandfather, Warner Sr., a train porter and a janitor from Kentucky, settled in Boise in the early 1900s.

Blacks came to Boise in increasing numbers with the opening of Gowen Field during World War II and with the establishment of Mountain Home Air Force Base. Some were hired by large corporations, and others came to be student-athletes at Boise State University and stayed.

The Southern racial upheavals of the 1960s touched Boise slowly. Only gradually did black leaders openly confront whites with the racism in their midst.

It is a matter of population, Oliver explained: "People become more vocal about social attitudes about race as their numbers increase. A small number of people feel powerless."

The president of the Boise NAACP then, the Rev. M.A. Givens, assured the public in 1966 that Black Muslims selling literature weren't well-received in his neighborhood.

"There has been a wonderful feeling between the Negroes and the white people in this area," Givens said. "We're anxious to keep the peace, not join this rioting."

Boise's first rally

Boise's first civil rights rally was staged at the Statehouse a week after the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis in April 1968. An interracial crowd of 700 joined hands and sang *We Shall Overcome*. Less than 40 blacks attended, outnumbered by police, many of whom were in plainclothes.

A smoke bomb was set off in the Ada (Egyptian) Theater during a benefit showing of a film about King in 1970. White pickets marched outside protesting the screening, claiming he was a tool of the Communist conspiracy.

In 1971, the Rev. James Hubbard told a business group, "Beyond a shadow of a doubt, Boise is the most racist-minded community this side of the Mason-Dixon Line."

"This town is ripe for a racial outbreak," Hubbard said, citing numerous fights between blacks and whites, a report disputed by police. There was no outbreak.

In the 1970s, the growth in the black population was more than double the 50 percent increase in the white population.

Scattered about the city and its

suburbs, blacks no longer live in ghetto-like concentrations such as once existed near River Street.

Asked for accounts of "interesting" blacks in Boise of the past, Oliver cited a seemingly commonplace example: Marnie Green, a refined and enterprising cook who worked for wealthy families and learned to make money by catering.

Green fulfilled her ambition to own a house on Harrison Boulevard, although some believe she was not accepted by whites as an equal, Oliver said.

"I think it's remarkable that some blacks can stay in isolation out here without the community some blacks have to have," she said.

"It's the whole history of black people — surviving in spite of oppression, negativism and inequality."



Idaho Historical Society

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