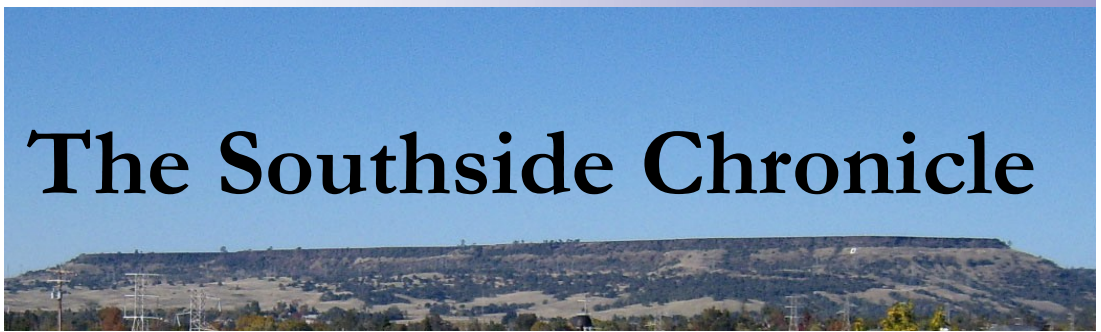


March 2013

Volume 5 Issue 1
Oroville, California



The Southside Chronicle

President's Message from Dr. John H. Rivers

Greetings friends;

It has been awhile since our last newsletter. I regret the lapse in time and can assure you that it does not represent a lack of vitality in the society. It does reflect the impact of the holiday season and the recovery period after receiving the negative decision of the State Park regarding our proposal to build our park and historic center.

The society is moving into our fourth year toward our fifth year anniversary with renewed energy, and a new plan to build "the dream" and continue research on the heritage and historical record and achievements of our Elders. Thanks to a small grant provided by the U.S. Bank, we are initiating a youth research internship program that will bring more young people into the ongoing work of the society. Researching local written history and collecting oral history continues and planning for the grand fifth annual reunion and Legacy Dinner and award is well on its way. Additionally, the Board will be holding its second donor dinner on March 29th.

We need your help with collecting old photos of earlier life in Southside. Please send us copies to the 936, 18th St. Oroville, CA. 95965.

Finally, we had an outstanding pictorial exhibit at Butte College during Black History Month in February. We thank Alex O'Neil and Dr. Ken Meier for their committed assistance in bringing this project from idea to reality. This marks the first formal connection between Butte College and The African American Community in Southside.

We appreciate your support and encourage you to keep history close to your understanding of its current and past continuation.

Until next time,

John

Taylor Memorial Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

"Under their own vine and fig tree" by Dr. John H. Rivers

The origin of the Taylor memorial C.M.E Church began in the early struggle, oppression and strife during the slavery period in American history. With few exceptions, African slaves needed to adjust to their new controlled situations in America through the only socially accepted pathway available to them. The Methodist Church in America had an anti-slavery stance, which had great appeal to African slaves and freed blacks in 1792. Black people, however, were not treated equally as members of the congregation. In 1792 Black Methodist were segregated into a balcony that was built specifically to keep black and white members separated during church services at St. George's church, and were not allowed to be buried in its cemetery.

Three years after the various independent Methodist churches in America were consolidated into one body; black members began to express their displeasure with the limitations placed on them by white church members. In a meeting of the Free African Society, Richard Allen, and Absalom Jones expressed their displeasure and stated their determination to erect a house of worship where they could worship God "under their own vine and fig tree". Richard Allen, a former slave, purchased his own

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Upcoming Events

April 27, 2013 11am Board of Directors meeting at New Missionary Baptist Church, 4380 Lower Wyandotte Rd., Oroville, CA. Society members and the public are invited to attend.

November 2, 2013 Fifth Annual Legacy Awards and Dinner, save this date.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE'S CORNER

By Van Bilbo

2013 has started out on a very positive note for membership. Board member and Secretary Barbara Stovall-Johnson have recruited 8 new members to start the year out. Thank you so much for your efforts Barbara. I would also like to thank the new members who consist of both past and present members of the Southside community for their support. Mrs. Mayola Stovall, Marie Stovall-Williams, Eddie Stovall, Freddie Stovall, Ret. Admiral Robert Toney, Charles Toney, Glen Toney, and Virginia Toney-Walker.

As a matter of fact, I would like to thank the entire membership for supporting SOAAHS. Our journey started almost 5 years ago seeking to fill a void. We recognized that the history of the proud people from Southside Oroville needed to be researched and preserved. Over the years we have done approximately 25 oral interviews of residents from Southside, most of whom were elders. These inter-

views have proven to be invaluable in documenting the history of Southside. The Annual Reunion/Legacy Awards Dinner has become a tradition. This event honors people from the past who have contributed to the betterment of Southside. It is also a time to rekindle old friendships and to start new friendships. We are in the planning stages of building a museum and park. Fifty years ago our elders set out to build a meeting place and a park for the people of Southside and we aim to complete the project. We have started a Youth Intern Program to get young people from the community involved in doing historical research and data collection. During 2012 and the current year, we have displayed a traveling photo exhibit of historical Southside at various events and festivals through out Northern California. None of these activities would be possible without the support of our membership. Once again, Thank You very much for supporting SOAAHS.

Continued from page 1 CME Church

freedom for \$2000 and bought property to erect an African Methodist Meeting House(later named Bethel) at his own expense. He became the first Bishop of the AME Church. By 1795, the number of church members increased, and by 1795, their numbers had reached 151; by 1813, it would reach 1,272.

Faced with strong opposition from white Elders in the Unified Methodist Episcopal Church, the new Bethel congregation was given their own spiritual and material freedom after receiving a favorable ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court and the Pennsylvania Legislature. In the words of Daniel Alexander Payne, the 6th Bishop of the African Methodist Church, "Such were the causes that brought about the origin of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Does it need the eye of a philosopher to see the hand of God in all this"?

Currently there are three major denominations of the Black Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist, Christian Methodist, and African Zionist-Episcopal Church.

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chico is the oldest Black Church in Butte County. It is the oldest and most continually used church building in the City of Chico. The Church's written history reveal that it was first constructed in 1867 on Main Street by the Methodist Episcopal Church South. The property was donated to the Methodist Church by John Bidwell, a large land owner and founder of the town of Chico. The Bethel congregation is believed to be the first organized effort to establish a church in Butte County. When the congregation outgrow their sanctuary in 1907, the church building was given to the St. Andrew's AME Church, Chico which moved the building to East 6th and Flume Streets. This parcel of land was deeded to the AME Church by John Bidwell in 1871. The name of the church was changed from St. Andrews to Bethel AME Church and was once again moved to its present site at the northeast corner of 9th and Linen Street.

This building has served the Black Community of Chico for 87 years, and continues to be a spiritual, social and educational beacon for the community at large. On February 18, 1994, the State Historical Resources Commission designated Bethel AME Church as a California Point of Historical Significance.

A Bethel AME Church was also constructed and established in the Oroville Southside Community in the early 1920's. It was located on the corner of Florence and Ontario. The Belcher, Bell and Manning Families were foundational members of this small Church.

The local Taylor Memorial Christian Methodist Episcopal Church is a branch of the Colored Methodist denomination which changed to the current name "Christian Methodist Episcopal Church" in 1954.

Taylor Memorial began on December 6, 1945. The church was established as "The New Light C.M.E. Church". The first Pastor was The Reverend S.M. Aldridge. The Presiding Elder was Reverend J.W. Bircher, and the Presiding Bishop was The Reverend Felix L. Lewis. The membership at this time included Professor and Mrs. Readie Turner and their two children, Pella Mae and Felix.

The church's first quarterly conference was held on December 6, 1946, and the first Board of Trustees was formed on December 22, 1946. The Church had three temporary buildings constructed and modified at 2990 Fort Wayne Street starting in 1948, again in 1949, and

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Continued from page 2 CME Church

the last construction under the Pasturage of Reverend J.T.Taylor, also the lead carpenter for whom the church is named. Reverend Taylor served as Pastor until his death.

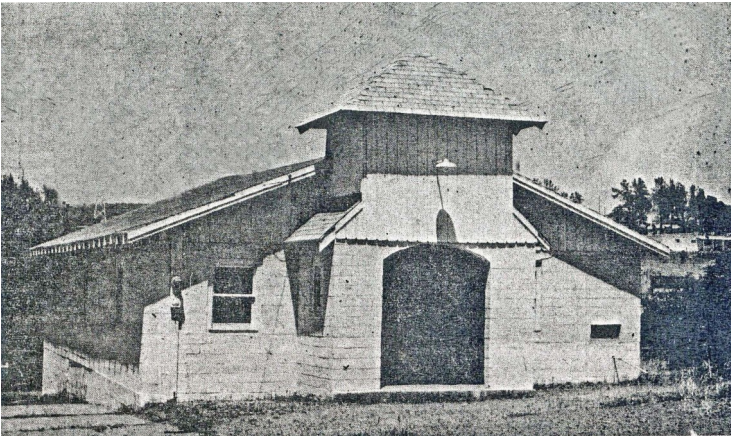
Under the leadership of Reverend James Belcher, the church was able to acquire and relocate to its current property at 1957”B” Street. The Presiding Elder at that time was Reverend Herman C. Riley, and the Presiding Bishop was The RT. Reverend Walter H. Amos.

Taylor Memorial has been blessed to serve under ten Presiding Bishops, sixteen Elders, and twenty one pastors since its inception:

[Taylor Memorial Presiding Bishops, 1945 – Present]

The Presiding Bishops during Taylor’s History were; C.E. Philips, Felix L. Lewis, John Claude Allen, Walter H. Amos, Norris S. Curry, James Lee Cummings, Nathaniel Lindsey, Edward Lynn Brown, Henry L. Williamson, SR. and the current Bishop, James B Walker.

[Taylor Memorial Presiding Elders, 1945 - present]



The original Taylor Memorial CME Church was located at
2990 Ft. Wayne Street

The Presiding Taylors Elders were; J.W. Bircher, Wellington Smith, John H. Dorn, L.S. White, Herman C. Riley, J.W. Harper, Rayford C. Bell, Leroy Johnson, Lawrence P. Lakey, Johnny B. Spearman, Robert Peoples, Harry L. Redds SR., Lummie Hearn, Thurston Callier, III, and the current Presiding Elder, Harlan K. Jones.

Taylor Memorial has been blessed to have 21 outstanding Pastors, some who have been previously mentioned, but other notables Pastors who helped build the church and the Black community included Reverend S.J. Strong, R.L. Armster, W.T. Warren, J.W. Holloway, J.E. Smith, Joseph B. Davis, Mart Thomas, David Goodson, and the current Pastor, Darlene Johnson/Munns. Pastor Darlene follow in the traditions and adopted “Social Creed “of the Church which seeks to serve the general welfare of church members and others in the community. While employed as a Financial Service Representative for the local Bank of the West

Branch, Pastor Darlene is active in the community and continuing the legacy of her predecessors.

This strong commitment to faith and service is shared by church members. Three Church Mothers (Mothers Thomas, Stovall, and Whitfield) shared the following observations regarding historical events in the Church and Community:

“Taylor Memorial had strong youth development programs that provide leadership training, ice cream socials, fund raising events and some held leadership positions in the church, such as, Sunday School Superintendent and Secretary. The congregation would fellowship with other Black and White Churches, as well as attends churches in Marysville and Sacramento”.

Black Churches have always provided the social, spiritual and, sometimes, the political cohesion in Southside. Taylor memorial have played a large role in historical events to fight against social injustice, and to promote social justice. Such was the case in 1985 when” members of the congregation marched and supported the march against the KKK and Nazis acts of intimidation”.

The Mothers observed some of the conditions their family faced during the 1940- 1960s when most of the Black families settled in Southside. “More job opportunities, higher wages and greater social integration in schools and workplaces” were the pull factors that attracted Black families to Oroville. While the Mothers acknowledge that various forms of “discrimination and distrust between groups existed when their families arrived in Oroville, the social contact between individuals at work and school and at shared religious events made it possible for good relationships to be established between individuals”. The mothers talked about “friends they made through some of these points of contacts”. Several members of the Taylor congregation were members of the NAACP, Butte County Black Caucus, and the Black Ministers Alliance.

The Mothers also talked about the closeness that existed between families and individuals in Southside during the early stage of settlement. The norms and expectations were, “that when someone had a significant problem, such as when Mother Stovall’s house burned down, the Taylor congregation and community helped her family to restore”.

The presence of strong faith and call to service is a vital and descriptive part of Taylor Memorial ‘s history, and a concept that is at the very heart of Pastor Darlene’s mission statement for the Church “and not by sight, and we enter God’s House to worship and leave to serve”

Rev. Mert Thomas 2012 Legacy Award Winner

By Van Bilbo

The old saying, “If you want something to get done, ask a busy person to do it,” definitely applied to Mert Thomas, Jr., who never turned down an opportunity to serve others. Mert participated in a wide variety of organizations, including the Butte County Park Commission, Butte County Association of Governments, Oroville Citizen and Review Council, Martin Luther King, Jr. Park Committee, and the Schools Drug Abuse Committee. He was also involved in Oroville Head Start, Oroville Senior Project, NAACP, SCORE, Acquisition Development of Oroville, the Greater Oroville Senior Organization, the United Way, YMCA, and the Tri-Counties Economic Development Corporation for the Southside Community Center Project. With Mert’s persistent activism, the Southside Community Center Project received over five million dollars in grants and matching funds, and the ground-breaking for the Center was a very proud moment for Mert, because he had lived to see a 30-year dream come true. Mert also established Thomas Family Children’s Services, a nonprofit corporation that provided infant care and pre-school education, and which received a state grant to subsidize funding for the children of low-income families. In 1999 Mert Thomas received dual awards as Citizen of the Year and Humanitarian of the Year.

Mert Thomas, Jr. was born in Schaal, Arkansas on October 31, 1930 to Mert Thomas, Sr. and Johnnie Mae Thomas. He attended elementary school there, and, after completing eighth grade went to Fargo Agricultural School, a private residential institution for black youth in Arkansas. In 1946, when Mert was 16, the family moved to Oroville, where he graduated from Oroville High School in 1948 and studied accounting at Yuba College in 1950.

Mert was a family man. He married his high school sweetheart, Lorraine Stovall, in 1950. Their marriage lasted more than 50 years until his passing in October 2001. Together they had seven wonderful children, six girls and a boy: Elaine, Belinda, Sherry, Queen, Marilyn, Rochelle, and Michael. Family played a very important role in Mert’s life, and he never missed a family gathering, whether it was a wedding, graduation, or homecoming celebration. He would often get off work and drive to the Bay Area to attend a function; then make a return trip, always making it back in time to go to work. When relatives and friends came to visit during the summer, Mert would take all the children to the Feather River to enjoy a day of swimming and barbecues. He made everyone feel welcome, and there are generations of friends, relatives, and neighbors who will always remember his unconditional loving guidance and nurturing.

After finishing school, Mert was employed for a short time at Hobbie Chevrolet, where he worked as a mechanic’s helper and detailed cars. In 1951 he joined the U.S. Army and spent the next two years as an Airborne Infantryman. After leaving the military, Mert began working at Butte County Hospital, where he started out in the Housekeeping Department, but was later promoted to Head of Housekeeping. Mert was well-respected by management and staff. He wore many hats while working at the hospital, such as driving the hospital’s ambulance to transport patients to and from places like Sacramento, the Bay Area, and Los Angeles. He also taught safety classes to the entire hospital staff. Deacon Virgil Scott started his career with Butte County Hospital in 1959 when Mert hired him to work as a janitor. Deacon Scott remembers, “Mert was fair and just as a supervisor. Even though he faced lots of opposition as a supervisor because of his color, he never backed down.” Deacon Scott also recalls that Mert had ten people working for him—five blacks and five whites. He helped those who worked for him to further their careers by recommending them for assignments in other departments when openings became available. During the summer months Mert worked two jobs, keeping his job as supervisor at the hospital during the day and working the night shift at the Stokely-Van Camp Cannery. When the hospital closed in the early 1970s, Mert began working full time at the cannery as a warehouse supervisor, and he worked there until his retirement in 1998.

Church activities played an important role in Mert’s life. As a child he had participated in church activities at Bright Star Baptist Church and Tabernacle Methodist Church in Schaal, Arkansas, and when he moved to Oroville as a teenager he joined Taylor Memorial CME Church, where he remained a member until his passing. Mert worked tirelessly in the church, always willing to give a helping hand to church members as well as nonmembers in the Southside community. He was known throughout the community for his infectious smile and good deeds. In 1985 Mert became the minister of Taylor Memorial, and he would lead the congregation for 15 years and serve as a true inspiration to its members. In 1989 Mert received the



Rev Mert Thomas

Continued on page 5 Rev. Mert Thomas

Continued from page 4 Rev. Mert Thomas

prestigious title of church Elder. He made sure his children, relatives, and neighbors knew the Lord, and he shared personal history, current events and his love of the Lord through storytelling. Mert developed a close association with many of the local churches and often enjoyed good old-fashioned fellowship with their members. Many of Mert's civic activities were conducted through the faith-based community. He was extremely dedicated to the Word of God, and he lived by example every day.

In the mid-1980s Mert accepted his first public policy position as a Park Commissioner for the City of Oroville. He went on to become the first and only African American to serve as a member of the Oroville City Council, and later as Vice Mayor and Acting Mayor. Following Mert's death in 2001, Dennis Diver, who had served with him on the City Council, remembered Mert as, "a true pillar of the community, dedicated, hardworking and caring. It was a true privilege for me to serve and work with [him]. I'm not certain this city has ever seen a public servant of [his] caliber before." (Oroville Mercury-Register, Oct. 25, 2001)

Everyone who knew Mert Thomas, Jr. was better off for the experience. He was a crusader for the South Oroville community, and his legacy lives on today.

2012 Legacy Awards Photos

Lloyd Cooper and Vaughn (DeDe) Bradford were in attendance



Michael and Sherry Thomas receiving award for their father from Legacy Awards Chairman Capt. Leroy Gill



Singer Deborah Madden performing



Mrs. Margie McConnell reading her poem entitled
They Came

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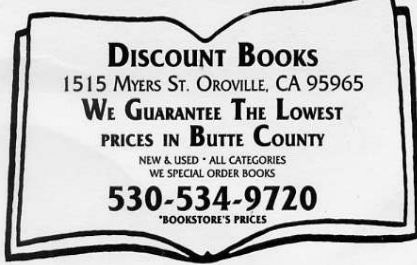
In Memoriam

This section is dedicated to people of the Southside Community who passed away in the previous calendar year.

May they Rest in Peace

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Samuel (Sammy) Harris | October 5, 1942 | December 28, 2011 |
| Jasmine Carol Lamumba | November 29, 1993 | January 24, 2012 |
| Leimomi Theresa Diane Murray | September 28, 1989 | April 23, 2012 |
| Faye E. Steele | September 12, 1912 | August 26, 2012 |
| Belinda Thomas-Richards | April 4, 1954 | September 3, 2012 |
| Vincent (Punkin) Allen | May 5, 1966 | December 17, 2012 |

Please let us know if we have missed anyone, if so we will place the person's name in a future newsletter. Contact SOAAHS, 918 18th St., Oroville, CA 95965 or call 530 533-7388.



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