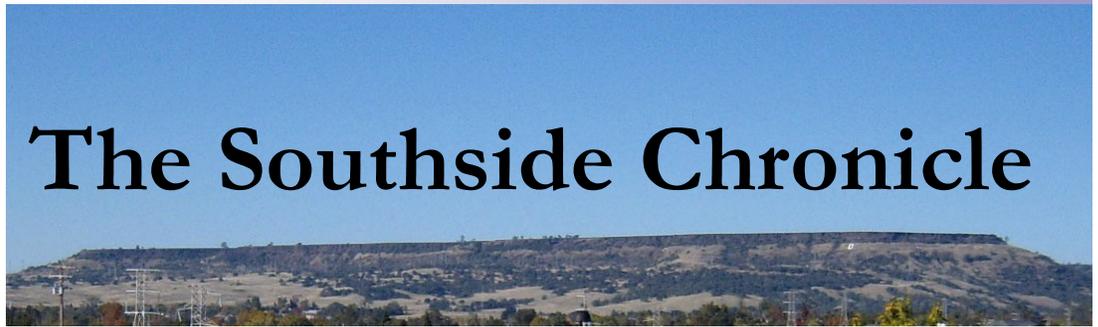


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The Southside Chronicle

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President's Message

by **Dr. John H. Rivers**

Our Country has produced a large number of exceptional women and men with different racial and ethnic identities. America's achievements have been made possible because of the documented records of contributions by individuals from each group.

When the country's history is written exclusively with "the big person's" perspective much of history is under reported and incomplete. The so-called common man and woman are not given their proper place in U.S. history. Young children are not taught an inclusive history. The results are often an understanding and expectation that give little regard for the essential contributions made by common folks.

I have received many questions about our work in recording the historical experience of Black Southerners who migrated to and developed their community in South Oroville. The questions range from; what's the historical value of old events to present day challenges, and how can you rely on verbal accounts that are not supported by written timely documents to compose a reliable record?

My answers are based on the value of stories and narratives that have been passed on from one generation to the next, Storied memories, family documents, local newspapers and official government records also preserve important information. Each generation has benefited from knowledge and wisdom gained with past social historical contexts. "Mother Wit", is a saying in the Black tradition, meaning common sense or reality. Pragmatism as a way of life has been one of the results from wisdom passed on by elders. Faith and resilience are two other virtues that shaped the character of many in generations during and after slavery.

The social realities and stories based on generational experiences are information and guidance for others. Of course, it is important to understand that American History is inclusive when it includes stories from all racial and ethnic groups, including those of European descent and from other places on the planet.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE'S CORNER

by **Van Bilbo**

March is membership renewal month. Membership dues are a major source of income for SOAAHS. Membership dues help pay operational costs, allows us to print and publish historical material, and it plays a big part in financing the cost of the Legacy Awards Ceremony. If you have already mailed in your dues Thank You Very Much. If you haven't sent in your dues, please do so at your earliest convenience.

Upcoming Events

April 11, 2020 10am

Board of Directors Meeting at the Elks Hooker Oak Lodge, 2453 V-7 Rd, Oroville, CA 95966. Members are invited to attend.

April 24th, 2020

12pm to 5pm

Fish Fry Fundraiser VFW Hall, 1901 Elgin St., Oroville, CA 95966. Call for information : 530 592-9555

Tommie Brown

(The next Generation)

by Dr. John H. Rivers

The numbers of Blacks migrants from southern states begin to increase in South Oroville, during 1940 – 1970. Like other emigrants the primary reason for this increase was driven by the quest for better jobs and wages. Additionally, people of African descent sought an opportunity for greater social opportunity and less southern style total discrimination.

The opportunity to enroll in integrated public schools and earn wages that were equal to Whites in the same jobs were two significant social benefits. Opportunities for jobs with higher wages or promotions to higher level supervisory or management positions were not open to Black people in Oroville and throughout Butte County. This social situation was a form of local Jim Crow practice. It was different from southern Jim Crow where there existed complete separation of work opportunities for White and Black people. Everyone knew their place in terms of where they lived, worked, and place for schooling.

Housing patterns in total Jim Crow conditions were strictly controlled and legal in the nation during the aftermath of the Civil War. As Blacks migrated to Oroville, they found their place was in an area south of the city limits, later referred to as Southside. The Brown family moved to Oroville in 1945.

Entertainment and Athletics are two activities where Black people could excel with less comparable restrictions. Perhaps this was caused by the fact that Whites place value on artistic and athletic ability and winning. Tommie Brown was a Southside resident who excelled in three athletic fields. Many former athletes, coaches, and fans believe that He was the best all-around athlete that has ever played in Oroville High School programs. This is a debated subject because there are other Southside Athletes that can be considered. David Washington comes to mind.

It is absolutely impossible to objectively decide on a winner because of the scope and content and different factors involved in making a comparison. The difference in size of the two athletes, (Tommie and David), the skills of the other players on their teams and those of their opponents, and the game schedules are a few of the variables that must be considered if one is to conduct an objective evaluation.

In the absence of an objective view, perhaps an effective assessment of Tommie's ability and achievements can be made by peers. Those who are athletes themselves can measure the abilities of another athlete. Colonel Fred Jones (RET) played football and basketball at OUHS and football at Oregon State University. In Colonel Jones words "Tommie Brown was the most gifted and finest athlete I have ever seen, to include several ALL AMERICANS that I player with and against in college".

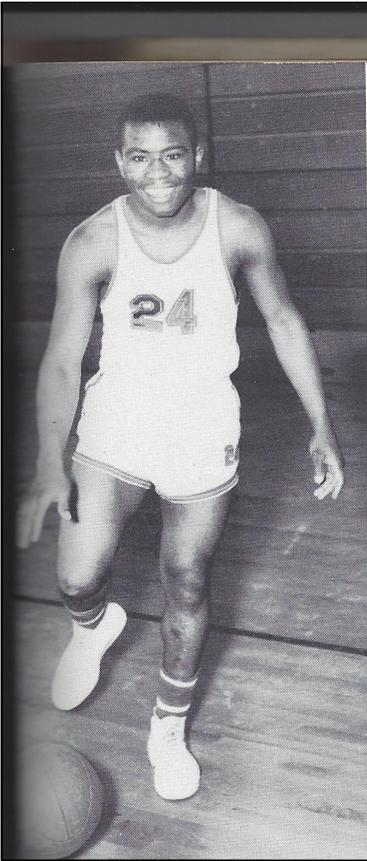
Tommie's football achievements were vast, exceptional, and unmatched. He was a natural outstanding running back. He didn't need a great deal of practice to make Barry Senders type moves; they were a part of his natural moves. Unlike today, high school football fans were not as concerned with yards per carry, but they were quite interested in the number of TDs that Tommie had in a game. They had become accustomed to expect that he would have a few each game.



Tommie Brown
Oroville High School Varsity Football

(Tommie Brown continued on page 3)

(Tommie Brown continued from page 2)



Tommie on the
Basketball court

Tommy was selected as a first team member of the All Sierra Foothill League teams in football, basketball and baseball, during his junior and senior years at Oroville High School.

Perhaps, the factor that sets Tommie apart from other peers was his ability to perform and excel at a high level in each of the three athletic programs. He used his agility, quickness, and ability to change directions left defenders reaching for air. Tommie's athletic intelligence was always on display whether on the court or field.

He was the first OUHS athletic selected to play in the annual high school Shrine All Star game in 1955. The best high school football players in California were selected to play in the game. Tommie was selected along with Dick Bass from Vallejo as the running backs for the Northern All-Star team. Dick went on to play for Los Angeles Rams in the NFL. Tommie played on two undefeated teams during his tenure at Oroville High. Tommie followed his coach (Joe Filipe) to Yuba College after his team went undefeated in 1955. Yuba College 1956 football team was also undefeated.

His talent in baseball was recognized by several major league teams who tried to sign him to a contract while he was still in high school. After finishing one year at Yuba College, where he was an outstanding hitter and catcher, Tommie signed a professional baseball contract with The Pittsburg Pirates. He played on their minor league team in San Jose CA. for several years.

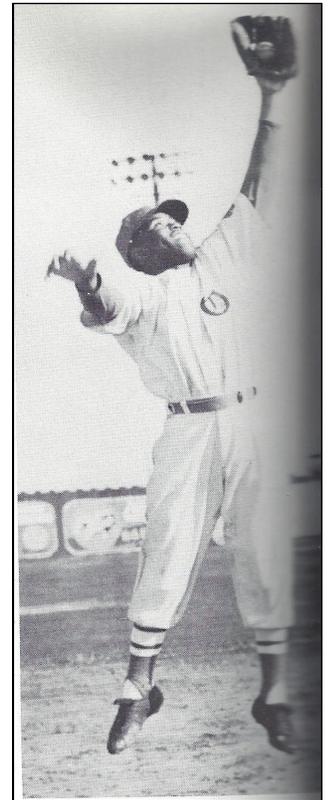
If Tommie achieved these outcomes today, he would certainly be referred to and treated like a Super-Star. While

he never behaved as a top dog or alpha male, other athletes would defer to his accomplishments and look to him as a model. Young individuals tried to copy his athletic skills in pick-up basketball games or touch football at Central Elementary school. Tommie was generous with his time. He would usually consent when younger athletics asked him to play with them in a competitive game.

While in high school Tommie demonstrated his leadership skills by serving on the student government council during his junior and senior years. He had a very non-threatening personality. People liked him not only for his athletic skills, but he was fun to be around whether fishing, boating, or playing a competitive game of pool at Mr. McCarter's pool hall. (the front) Tommie and Clyde Berry played a mean competitive game of pool late into the night until Mr. MC would tell them he had to close the hall because of his regular work schedule. Even with his quick feet and natural agility, Tommie's dance steps needed help. It's not clear why this would be the case.

Not known to pass on a challenge, Tommy was an active and very competitive dominoes and cards player. After his professional athletic life was over, he was a long-distance driver for Foster Farms until reaching retirement.

Tommie's Athletic legacy is firmly cemented in Southside's cultural foundation and the early achievements in OUHS Athletic programs.



Tommie Oroville High
School Varsity Baseball

"Mighty Rough Times, Hard Work, and Achievement"

By Dr. John H. Rivers

Alice and James Toney moved with their five boys from Monroe Louisiana to Oakland, California in 1943. Like so many other black families, the Toney family moved from their roots to a place away from strict Southern Jim Crow conditions to a milder form of California social distance and other forms of oppression. While California was not the promised land, it did provide greater work and educational opportunities for Black families.

The Toney parents stressed and saw to it that their children received and excelled in educational opportunities. One more child (Virginia) was born at home in West Oakland in 1945. Moving to an unfamiliar place to an urban city took courage, faith, and will. There are solid character features in each family member.



Rear Admiral

Robert L. Toney

The second son, Robert left his mark and contributions in U.S. Navy history, and a record of outstanding service to his Community. At eight years old, Robert along with two of his brothers shined soldier's shoes for 10 cents each plus tips. With this humble beginning, he learned important lessons that were foundational to his strong work ethic. He also observed his parent's work ethic, sense of responsibility, and enduring faith. With these values and beliefs, he prospered personally and helped others to set and achieve their personal goals. His legacy is loaded with historic achievements, empathy, and insistence on justice for all.

Robert started his leadership experience in youth social development programs which included Boy Scouts, YMCA High Lighters Club, and church youth programs. He held a leadership role in all of these activities. As a young pre-teen, Robert along with two brothers earned as much money as their dad each week. This entrepreneurial value was shared by all members of Alice and James Toney's family. The family did not let local Jim Crow conditions deter them from achieving their dreams.

Robert's family moved to Oroville in 1947. The family first moved into a house on Fallbrook Ave. James Toney bought land on Greenville St. that boarded a dirt road. After their house was built the family moved into their home with no running water or in door toilet. It is no stretch to state that the family "made something out of nothing". This was a similar story for some early Black families during the 1940s in Southside. They received much needed support from other Black families when their new home burned down and the family lost every material thing they owned. The fire destroyed their home and possessions, but not their determination, connectedness and faith.

Robert Toney graduated from Oroville Union High School in 1952. During his high school days, he was a scholar and athlete. His main sport was basketball which he played four years earning a scholarship to Youngstown University in Ohio. After two years, he transferred to Chico State University where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Social Science (pre-law).

While his academic talents were demonstrated in High School where he was a member of the California Scholastic Foundation (CSF), he also played trumpet in the high school band and was an officer in the California Cadets Corps for two years.

By far his most outstanding contributions and accomplishments was gained in a distinguished navel career and his public service.

(Mighty Rough Times continued on page 5)

(Mighty Rough Times continued from page 4)

Rear Admiral Robert L. Toney began his navel career when he attended Officer's Candidate School in Newport Rhode Island and was commissioned as an Ensign in the U.S. Navy in October 1957. Admiral Toney's 34-year naval career included assignments as: Deputy Commander, Naval Surface Forces U.S. Pacific Fleet, Commander, Logistics Group One and Maritime Defense Command, and Commander, Navy Base San Francisco. As Base Commander, he managed more than sixty thousand people from Monterey to the Northern California border with a payroll of 2.6 billion dollars.

After achieving the rank of Lieutenant Commander, Toney was made Director of the Navy's Minority Officer Recruiting Effort (MORE). The program was designed to recruit and bring more minorities into the officer's ranks. He established recruiting teams on many of the Black Universities like what was being done on predominantly White Campuses. The results were immediate. Along with this first Toney was the Third Black Admiral in the history of the U.S. Navy. His work in bringing more Blacks into the Officer's rank set the Navy on a course to full integration that is still paying large mutual benefits.

Admiral Toney's last command was as Director for Logistics and Security Assistance, U.S. Pacific Command Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii. He advised the Commander-in-Chief U.S. Pacific Command on all matters dealing with the defense of the United States through bilateral Logistics agreements, cooperative funds logistic planning, transportation, civil engineering and security assistance.

He was responsible for all U.S. military facilities resources in the 100 million-square mile Pacific Area from the West Coast of the United States to the east Coast of African.

Admiral Toney holds an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Humane Letters from Golden Gate University San Francisco and a Honorary Doctorate degree in Humane Letters from National University San Diego.

This great Navy Admiral and special Human Being passed away on November 4, 2016.



Mrs. Alice Toney and Mr. James Toney



Admiral Toney (center) with two of his brothers Glen (left) and Charles (right) attending a ceremony at Chico State University where Admiral Toney was being Honored as a Distinguished Alumni.

Home Grown Activist, and friend by Dr. John H. Rivers

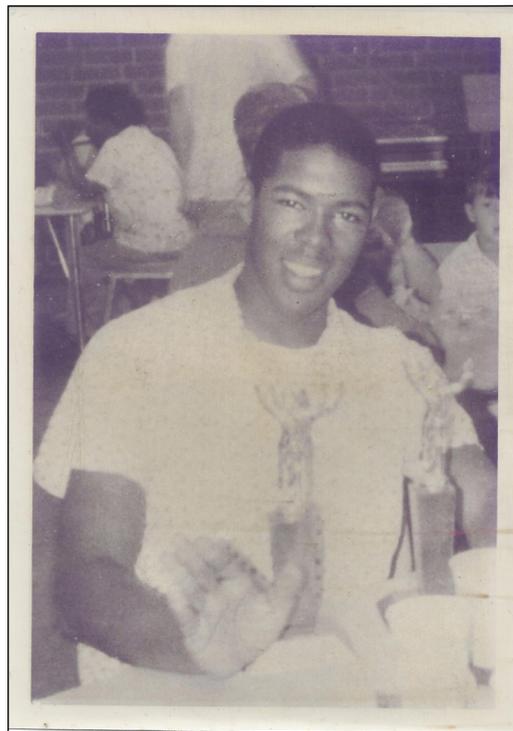
Harry Steele was the third son born to Costerroma and Alice Steele. The Steele family space is on the corner of Burlington and Wyandotte Ave., next to Martin Luther King Park in Southside. The family continue to own this property today.

The Steele family was one of those who helped develop Southside into a strong and cohesive community. Harry was an early prime mover and advocate for civil rights. He was the original organizer for the first Black Student Union at Butte College when the campus was in Durham, CA in 1968. Harry, Mrs. Iva Johnson, Edna Taylor and Mr. James Harris worked in the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Oroville Action Council during the late 1960's.

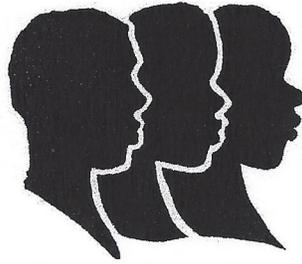
The council connected Southside residents with other activities and events taking place in Oroville and beyond. These included voter registration and connection to various social services, since no social services were in the Black Community.

Harry engaged the youth in cultural trips to the Bay Area and introduce them to music concerts, dramatic presentations, and sports activities in the Bay Area and Sacramento. Many of the young people had never experienced these kinds of activities, or even outreach to other cities in Northern California.

Harry's leadership in the Butte College Black Student Union was effective. He convinced the College Administration to hire a part-time Black Teacher and established the first Black History course at Butte College.



Harry Steele poses with 2 of his
basketball trophies.



**South Oroville African American
Historical Society
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone # _____

E-mail _____

Select Membership Type:

- 1. Individual-----\$50.00
- 2. Student (K-12)-----\$20.00
- 3. Student (College)-----\$30.00
- 4. Senior (62 and older)-----\$35.00
- 5. Sustaining-----\$100.00
- 6. Family-----\$150.00
- 7. Organization-----\$150.00
- 8. Life-----\$4000.00

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