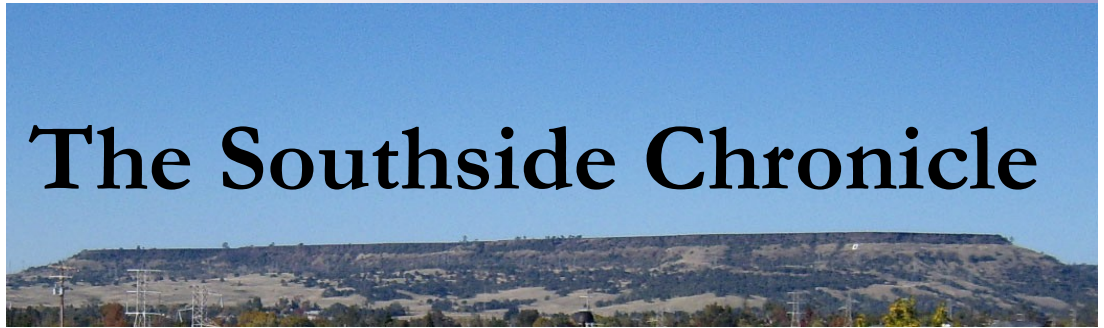


**February 2012**

Volume 4 Issue 1

Oroville, California

# The Southside Chronicle



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## President's Message

**By Dr. John Rivers**

Greetings and good health and prosperity in 2012. We took a little time off line after our third outstanding Southside reunion. We had almost 200 in attendance. The Mitchell family catered the dinner once again, and we were emotionally moved by the Legacy Program, which recognized the contributions of three matriarchs from three historic Southside families. Judy Johnson accepted the award for her mother, Mrs. Iva Johnson, and Van Bilbo accepted the award for his mother Mrs. Versie Bilbo. Kenneth Steele wheeled Mother Faye Steele to the front of the room where she could address the gathering. Each recognized family had a large number of their members attending.

We are now up and running while waiting for the State's decision on our grant proposal to build an historic center and park. We are encouraged and anticipate a favorable decision some time this spring. Keep those prayers coming.

We are asking again for any current or former residents of Southside to allow us to make copies of any old pictures of various family members. Pictures from your place of origin and various homes also would greatly add to our collection and aid in our efforts to tell our story for future generations. We greatly appreciate your help with this important part of our work, or you can call us (530-533-7388) and we will pick the pictures up, copy them and bring them back to you locally. Please send the pictures to our address, 936 18<sup>th</sup> St., Oroville, Ca. 95965. More next time.

Be well,

John

## Gene Weston: Friend, Mentor, Teacher

**By Dr. John Rivers**

Gene Weston was born in Eugene, Oregon in 1931 and was given the birth name Eugene Lane Weston by his mother, Jessie, because Gene was the first Black child known to be born in Eugene in Lane County. In fact, the Weston family was the only Black family living in Eugene in 1931. Gene's father, Vest Weston, was a musician, and he had an easier time getting work than other Black men living in the West during that era.

Sadly, Jessie died while giving birth to Gene's sister, after which Gene and his father moved to Oroville. Gene's father played music at the old Monday Club on Montgomery Street in 1946. Gene and his father lived in an apartment in downtown Oroville, far removed from the core Black community in Southside. Gene attended Oroville High School, where he played football and ran track. Hugh Harrison, the legendary coach at Oroville High, described Gene as "a good athlete and real good person. He had a great sense of humor."



Gene Weston

## Upcoming Events

**February 25, 2012** 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.

**March 31, 2012** 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.

**September 2012** Fundraiser BBQ, date TBA

**November 3, 2012** Save this date, Forth Annual Legacy Awards and Dinner.

(Continued on page 3 Gene Weston)

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## ***MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE'S CORNER***

***By Van Bilbo***

Our goal this year is to increase membership. We are now in our 4<sup>th</sup> year of existence and have a good sense of the direction in which we are headed. As we continue on our quest to preserve the history and serve this community, our needs are growing. By increasing the membership we will get increased financial support that is needed to sustain our research, it will allow us to continue to be involved in community activities and it will help us support the cultural center when and if we are awarded the Prop. 84 Grant from the State Parks Department.

New members will broaden our knowledge base in the membership pool. We currently have members with backgrounds in Community Activism, Research, Technology, History, Management, Religion, Law, Finance, Teaching, and Counseling. Each member's expertise adds to the possibilities of what SOAAHS can accomplish. Adding new members will greatly increase

those possibilities.

This year we would like to double our membership. I would like to ask every member to bring in at least one new member. If you have received this newsletter and you are not yet a member please consider joining. Your support will help us continue having the Legacy Awards Dinner, produce Oral History DVDs, publish The Southside Chronicle newsletter, and contribute to other organizations in the community working toward common goals.

Download an application for membership at [www.soaahs.org](http://www.soaahs.org) or contact us at SOAAHS, 936 18<sup>th</sup> St., Oroville, CA 95965 530 533-7075.

## **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.**

<b>Grant Broadway</b>	<b>January 15, 1942 to January 7, 2011</b>
<b>Theopolis Dennis*</b>	<b>April 18, 1909 to January 29, 2011</b>
<b>John A. Roe, Jr.</b>	<b>May 26, 1948 to February 19, 2011</b>
<b>Rosalind Arnelle Cumbuss</b>	<b>April 26, 1970 to March 30, 2011</b>
<b>Tommie Brown</b>	<b>April 25, 1936 to April 17, 2011</b>
<b>Maxine P. Broadway Moore</b>	<b>March 27, 1944 to April 18, 2011</b>
<b>Versie Bilbo</b>	<b>February 21, 1913 to May 24, 2011</b>
<b>David Norman Johnson, Sr.</b>	<b>March 2, 1952 to June 21, 2011</b>
<b>Katherine Harrison</b>	<b>February 21, 1920 to June 28, 2011</b>
<b>Edward (Bubba) Johnson</b>	<b>September 2011</b>
<b>Ernie (The Honeybee) Harris</b>	<b>October 2011</b>
<b>Bill Ross</b>	<b>October 2011</b>
<b>Cecilia Ann Williams</b>	<b>July 6, 1917 to October 18, 2011</b>
<b>Helena F. Heard</b>	<b>September 16, 1932 to October 18, 2011</b>
<b>Rev. Herman B. Osby</b>	<b>July 23, 1930 to November 24, 2011</b>
<b>Maggie Jean Tobias</b>	<b>September 27, 1942 to December 12, 2011</b>

**\*= over 100 years of age**

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 18<sup>th</sup> St., Oroville, CA 95965 or call 530 533-7388.

(Continued from page 1 Gene Weston)

A wide range of friends liked Gene. In spite of living away from Southside, Gene became a role model for other young Black men. One young man he mentored was Colonel Fred Jones, USMC, Retired. Colonel Jones said that after his father abandoned the family, Gene, Eloise's mother (Mrs. Ora Fields), and Papa Fields reached out to him. They encouraged Fred to do his best, stay goal-oriented, and help his mother, and they encouraged him to go on to college.

Gene served as a role model by not letting circumstances determine his opportunities. After graduating from high school he worked and saved money to pay college expenses. Like many other Black men and women in Oroville at that time, he worked at the cannery, and he also worked at Roberts Shoe Store on Myers Street.

Gene met his future wife, Eloise Johnson, when he was a freshman in high school and she was in seventh grade, and they got married when Gene was a junior in college. In spite of being married and raising children while attending Chico State, Gene stayed the course with support from the Fields family, teammates, and friends. Gene's determination to succeed was a real example of how a young Black man could raise a family, work, and achieve excellence in the classroom and at athletics events.

Gene enrolled at Chico State in 1953, where he was an outstanding track star and where he played an important role as a "trail blazer." Dan McDonald wrote in the Oroville Mercury-Register in 1990 that Gene had overcome racial barriers and financial hardships in order to attend college. At Chico State, Gene shared a room with two other outstanding athletes, George Maderos and Nick Stratigopoulos. Maderos went on to play and coach for the San Francisco 49ers, and he also served as head coach for the Chico State football team. Gene also played football at Chico State, but his performance at track events was where he broke records.

There were only five Black students at Chico State during the early 1950s. Two of these students were Ron Temple from Marysville and Harris Perry from Oroville. Both competed in the athletic program, Temple in football and Perry in boxing. Gene was Oroville's first Black student to graduate from Chico State College.

Gene was very popular on campus. While he did not belong to a social fraternity, he did organize what was called, "A united independent club for members of the Associated Student Body who did not have the money or the approval of sorority and fraternity members," and he was elected president of this group on March 14, 1957.

Gene was a great role model who encouraged other young people to achieve their goals by getting more education beyond high school. As one who took Gene's advice, Colonel Jones described Gene's greatest attributes as: a positive attitude, infectious enthusiasm, honesty, a great work ethic; sincerity, compassion, and generosity. Jones also admired the nurturing Gene gave his children and the love and respect he gave his wife. Jones stated, "Gene never complained, even when he was mistreated and he didn't get a fair break personally and professionally. He was a model citizen in the community, a graduate of Oroville High School, and a man of impeccable character, but he was unable to get an opportunity to teach in Butte County, his home."

After receiving his BA degree in Social Science 1957, Gene had to move his family to Porterville, where he was able to find a job teaching sixth grade. Moving to Porterville was very difficult for Gene and his family. At first, they could not find anyone to rent to them, but finally, a local furniture store owner broke the boycott and rented a house to them, and he also provided them with some furniture. This man felt that since the school district had hired Gene he was good enough to live in one of his houses. The local food markets would not take the Weston's checks until they made it clear that they intended to stay in Porterville.

Unfortunately, Gene was only able to teach in Porterville for less than a year, because he succumbed to kidney disease in 1959. Gene had kept competing in athletic events even after he had learned of his fatal kidney disease, and in spite of the fact that his doctors told him that he should stop playing sports if he wanted to live a longer life. Gene continued to compete, and he told his wife that he wanted to beat the disease. George Maderos, Gene's friend and roommate, related that Gene told his track coach that he was determined to compete, and, while he did not turn out for practice to make it easier on his kidneys, he did compete in league track meets. According to Maderos and also stated in the Oroville Mercury, "Weston virtually won the conference track meet single handed in 1956, after winning the 100, 200, and long jump, and anchoring the 440 relays."

Gene died April 4, 1959 at the county hospital in Tulare at the young age of 27. The local hospital in Porterville would not admit Gene and directed him to go to the County hospital in Tulare for treatment. Gene's wife, Eloise, raised their five children with the help of her supportive extended family. Deloris, the Weston's oldest daughter, has a son, Tyree Jones, who played basketball for the Denver Nuggets. Daughter Lyndonna is disabled due to an accident on the job, and twins Myron and Marilyn live in the area. Myron works as a supervisor at the local cannery, and Marilyn is a teacher in Marysville. Timothy, the youngest, is working on establishing his career after graduating from Las Plumas High School where he excelled in football and basketball. Phonechia Thomas, one of Gene's granddaughters, graduated from Chico State Summa Cum Laude and was Valedictorian. Phonechia has earned five college degrees and is currently working on a doctorate in Education. She owns a line of makeup business in Beverly Hills, and she also helped establish and open T.R.A.C.K (Teaching Recovery and Care for Kids).

Gene was elected posthumously to the Chico State Athletic Hall of Fame in 1990. George Maderos presented the award to Eloise Weston and stated, "Gene was probably one of the best natural track athletes I have ever seen. He was a great person and I was blessed to have known him. He was very giving. They don't come any better."



## 2011 Legacy Awards Winners



Mrs. Versie Bilbo



Mrs. Iva Johnson



Mrs. Faye Steele pictured with husband  
Mr. Costerroma Steele

## Slavery in Butte County

By Dr. John Rivers

Did you know that slavery existed in Butte County before, during, and after gold was discovered in Oroville in 1849? George C. Mansfield writes in his book, History of Butte County (p. 226), that within the first records of Butte County is the deed of manumission [legal act of setting slaves free] by Franklin Stewart to the slave “Washington.” Another manumission document was recorded in 1857, in which William Compton freed his slave Joseph Compton for two years faithful servitude. William could not write his name, so he made his mark on the manumission document instead.

The following is from the “Free Papers of the Slave Washington”:

“Known all men by these present that I Franklin Stewart, of the county and state aforesaid, for and in consideration of seventeen years of faithful servitude of my slave Washington, rendered by him in the state of Arkansas and Missouri, do hereby set free and emancipate him. The said slave, his age about thirty-four years; color, slight copper, and fully relinquish all right unto the said slave Washington which I might be entitled to in law or equity. Given under my hand and seal this 4<sup>th</sup> day of May, A.D. 1852.”

Signed, Franklin Stewart

## Photos from 2011 Legacy Awards



Mrs. Steele speaking at the Legacy Award ceremony



This year’s theme



Judy Johnson accepting the Legacy Award for her Mother Mrs. Iva Johnson



The Mitchell Family along with kitchen staff



Pictured are Chris Bauer President of the Tehama County Museum, Dr. John Rivers President of SOAAHS and Dale Wangberg V.P. of the Butte County Historical Society

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