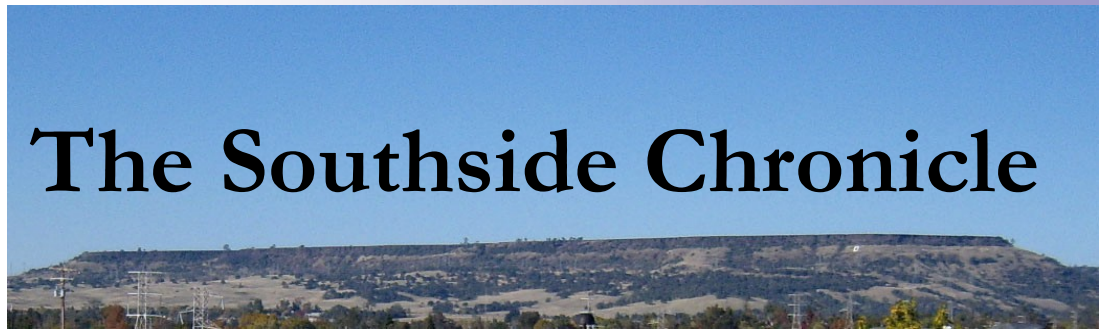


**July 2012**

Volume 4 Issue 2

Oroville, California

# The Southside Chronicle



## Inside this issue:

Membership	2
Poem by Margie McConnell	2
The Joseph Bell Family Story	3
The Joseph Bell Family Story Continued	4
The Joseph Bell Family Story	5
Advertisements	6

## Upcoming Events

### July 28, 2012

Board of Directors Meeting at New Home Missionary Baptist Church, 4380 Lower Wyandotte Re., Oroville, CA Society members and the public are invited to attend.

### August 25, 2012 11am

Board of Directors Meeting at New Home Missionary Baptist Church, 4380 Lower Wyandotte Re., Oroville, CA Society members and the public are invited to attend.

### September 22, 2012

BBQ fundraiser 11am-6pm VFW Hall, 1901 Elgin St. Oroville, CA 95966

### September 29, 2012 11am

Board of Directors Meeting at New Home Missionary Baptist Church, 4380 Lower Wyandotte Rd., Oroville, CA Society members and the public are invited to attend.

### November 2 & 3rd 2012

Reunion/Legacy Awards Dinner

## President's Message

**By Dr. John H. Rivers**

Greetings, I hope you and your family are enjoying the summer months, and that you are well and blessed. It is unfortunate that our grant proposal submitted to the State for Prop 84 funds was not approved again this year. We came close again after State Representative made two visits to our proposed building sites. We were encouraged after the first visit in 2010 but we came up short again this year.

We are even more determined now to push forward and identify other possible funding sources and continue to make a strong case for building an historic center and park in Southside. Our elders passed the baton to those of us who are willing and able to carry it across the finish line. I am encouraged by the presence of committed runners on our Board.

I am pleased to announce that plans for the fourth annual Southside Reunion and Legacy Dinner are complete. The planning committee consists of Chair, Mother Bertha Clark-Lewis, Capt. Leroy Gill, Ms. Billie Bell-Spencer, and Mr. Ron Charles, all former Southsiders who now live in Sacramento. Ms. Sandra Jensen, who lives in Paradise and Mr. Van Bilbo and Mr. Tim Martin, augment the committee, both live in Oroville.

The Reunion will be held at the Feather Falls Casino in Oroville, on the weekend of November 2 and 3, 2012. The Lodge at Feather Falls Casino has blocked off 15 rooms at \$99+tax per day. These great rooms are discounted for the Reunion, but must be reserved



Ms. Patricia Jones speaking at the 2012 Legacy Award Ceremony

by October 19<sup>th</sup> in order to get the discount. The rooms can be reserved by calling 877-652-4646, or 530-533-3885 and ask for reservations. You may also go to their website at [www.featherfallscasino.com](http://www.featherfallscasino.com), and go to reservations-arrival date-group code (SOAAHS) and the rooms will come up at the discounted rate. If you have any questions or needs, please call Carol Clark, Front Office Manager, 530-533-3885, ext. 102.

The cost for participation in the Reunion activities is \$35 per person if paid before October 1st, 2012. The cost will be \$40 after the cut-off date. A detailed program for the weekend activities will be outlined in our next newsletter in September 2012. Make plans now to be in the Casino with new and old (older) friends. You can send your payment to our office at 936 18<sup>th</sup> St. Oroville, Ca., 95965



Mrs. Faye Steele SOAAHS's oldest member at 99 years of age is shown here accepting her 2011 Legacy Award



Mr. Leroy Walter is SOAAHS's second oldest member at 95 years of age was in attendance at the 2011 Legacy Awards Ceremony

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

***By Van Bilbo***

I want to first of all take time to thank new member Karen Vercruse for joining SOAAHS and say "Welcome".

The Proposition 84 Grant, to build the Historic Center and Park, was not granted with our last request. However, as an organization, we are not discouraged and will continue the path forward. We are still achieving our goal of doing oral history videos of our elders, researching African American history in and around Oroville, working with other organizations to support the youth in South Oroville, networking with others historical societies and producing this newsletter with current updates and historical information.

However, we need your help. I hope you are enjoying the full benefits of membership by participating in the SOAAHS activities and volunteering when needed. Please take a few moments when you see a friend or family member to ask him or her to join us. It would help us in our effort to collect and preserve the history of South Oroville. The greater the numbers, the greater the benefits for all. Please give us your support by inviting them to our meetings, social gatherings and to become a member!

One final thought on this matter, don't let your membership lapse. Please renew your membership when you receive your renewal letter. Call 530-533-7388 if you have any questions concerning membership.

THEY CAME

With true grit

They came, by horses, ox drawn wagons, cars, and trains.

Over the mountains, rivers, deserts and plains.

THEY CAME

Trusting in ...GOD TO SEE THEM THROUGH... To make a better life  
for me and you.

Some came just to be free.

With perseverance and tenacity they came, in spite of oppression,  
rejection... disappointments, obstacles and pain.

THEY CAME

On land they were allowed to purchase and believing in themselves, they  
planted a seed. With honor, hope determination, dignity, back breaking  
work, pride and integrity---carved out a community--- for their families  
and fought for equal opportunities.

THEY CAME

Because of these Pioneers of old, doors opened for us that once were closed.

Let us never forget the price they paid for our freedom and equality.

Sacrifices were made, the foundation was laid.

THEY CAME

This project, their creation, a monument of history for the next generation.

To see what can be accomplished with determination.

THEY CAME

Time ran out for them you see. Now the dream is passed to you and me.

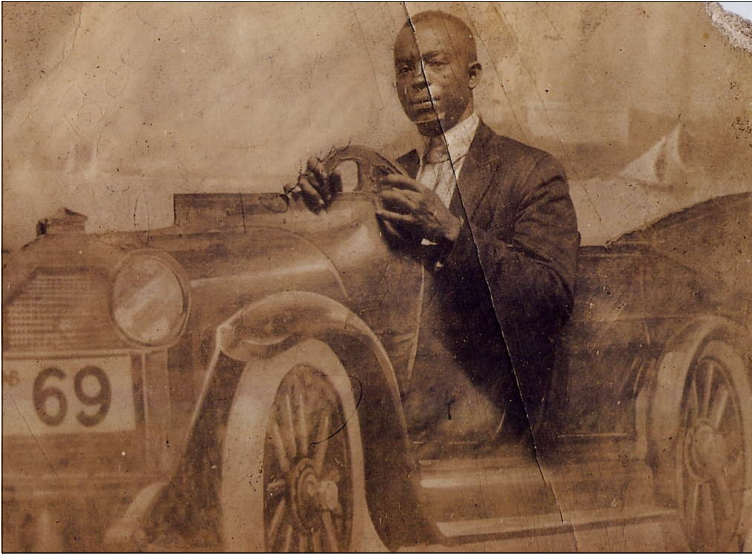
They came and planted a Tree.

By Margie McConnell

## Southside Pioneering Families

1915 - 1970

### [The Joseph Thomas Bell Family]



Mr. Joseph Thomas Bell

Isabel Wilkerson and Ira Berlin have written two important books which provide an explanation and description of the decades-long migration of Black citizens who left the South for Northern and Western towns and cities in search of a better life. According to Ms. Wilkerson, almost six million Black people left “The Old South” between 1915 and 1970. Most of the migrants chose to relocate in large cities or towns where jobs were available and where they were allowed to rent or buy homes. Others would locate themselves in smaller rural areas to work in agriculture, lumber, or construction. In most cases, their settlement patterns consisted of one or more members of a family arriving in an area, finding work and housing and then sending for other family members. This period of great migration of Blacks changed the economic, social/political, religious and cultural landscape in America.

Such was the case for the Joseph Thomas Bell family. Mr. Bell was born in New Orleans, LA on February 17, 1894. As a young man, Mr. Bell worked in a bakery and other

non-skilled labor jobs.

Mr. Bell migrated to southeast Texas where he met and married Delilah McWilliams in 1929. Seven children were born from this union. Mr. Bell had to fully use his God-given intelligence, will and determination to provide for his family’s needs during a time in American social history where Blacks were confronted with strict and unyielding discrimination in employment, education, health care, housing, and credit. During these times, Mr. Bell had to do what he could with limited opportunities similar to other Black male head of households. He turned to the hard work and risk involvement in farming, where he planted and harvested what he and his young family could manage, including cotton, sugar cane, and peanuts. He also raised hogs and chickens for his family table.

Through hard work and support from others in his family, Mr. Bell was able to keep his family stable, healthy, and tightly connected. When the crop season was over, he worked in a box factory in Carthage, TX to supplement and fill gaps in his family budget.

His wife Delilah passed away in October, 1947. He was left with seven young children to raise along. At that time, the children’s ages ranged between two and a half to sixteen years old. Mr. Bell wondered if Texas in the late 1940’s was a good place for a single Black man to raise his children. He had no immediate family in Texas during this time, however he did have an older sister in Oroville, Lizzie Bell Howard (Aunt Babe) and she agreed to help him help raise his children. Other Black families have followed this method of childcare and development since emerging from slavery. Mr. Bell saved his money until he had enough to migrate to Oroville to stay with Aunt Babe on Columbia Ave. in Southside.

The family boarded a train heading to California in the first week in January 1948, just three months after his wife died. The trip to California was not a common experience for the family. Seating on the train was segregated by race. The area designated for Whites had plenty of room for sleeping and relaxation. This was not the case for Blacks. The Bell family had to endure a hard, uncomfortable, and long three-day trip in order to experience better opportunities in Oroville.

After settling in Southside, Mr. Bell quickly found work at the Feather River Mill in Feather Falls, CA. He retired in the late 50’s and continued living in Southside until his health started failing. He moved to Sacramento to be close to his oldest son James and his oldest daughter, Jessie Faye. Later, it was necessary for him to move to Palo Alto, CA to live with another son, Joseph Edward. In failing health Mr. Bell was hospitalized at Stanford University Hospital where he passed on April 8, 1968. Delilah and Joseph’s character, work ethic, parenting skills, and legacy are clearly seen and attested to in their children and grandchildren. From very humble beginnings, their children are achievers and community servants.

continue on page 4



continue from page 3

James Edward Bell (first child, oldest son): He is the father of three, grandfather to six, and great grandfather to three. James finished his elementary and secondary education in Beckville, TX. AS a 9<sup>th</sup> grader, James teamed with a 12<sup>th</sup> grader to win a district mathematics competition, which enabled their team to participate in a competition at Prairie View A&M University. James enlisted in the Army at sixteen years old in order to help his family financially. Jobs for Black teenagers were hard to find then as they are today. He served in the Korean War and earned an honorable discharge after two years of service. After serving in the Army, James returned to Southside and went to work at the local cannery. Later he worked on the Oroville Dam project where he learned construction skills. He built a career for himself in construction while working in Sacramento and the Bay Area. He passed away August 7, 1992.

Joseph Edward Bell (second child, second oldest son): He is the father of six, grandfather to fourteen, and great-grandfather to twenty-one children. Joseph arrived in Southside when he was fourteen years old. He started his education in Beckville, TX. and continued his education in Oroville at Bird School and Oroville Union High School. He left OUHS before earning a diploma in order to work at a local automobile shop. Like other young Black males during this period of limited job opportunities for non-skilled youth, Joseph earned extra money by shining shoes, and through farm labor in Madera and Fresno. At eighteen years of age, he entered the U.S. Army during the Korean War. He earned the rank of Sergeant after just two years in the Army, which was not an easy accomplishment. Joseph did not finish high school, but didn't lose his motivation to succeed in life. He found work at United Airlines in San Francisco, and continued his education at San Mateo Community College where he earned an aircraft mechanic license. Joseph also participated in flight training at the Boeing Aircraft Plant in Seattle, WA and Denver, CO. He retired after forty-three years as a Senior Mechanic. He passed away on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 2003.



Bell Family members George, Jessie Faye, Billie and Evelyn

Jessie Faye Bell (oldest daughter and third child): She is the mother of nine, grandmother to fifteen, great grandmother to seventeen, and great-great-grandmother to one child. Like her two older brothers, Jessie Faye attended school in Beckville, TX until 1948. Jessie Faye was twelve years old when her mother passed; she at that time took on the role of mother in the Bell family by taking care of her younger siblings. Although her mother taught her to cook, wash, iron, clean, and attend to general housekeeping duties, Jessie Faye had to continue teaching herself to perfect these skills while adding both sewing and beautician skills to her work load.

Jessie Faye attended Bird Street School and Oroville High. She started her family before completing high school, but earned her high school diploma twenty years later. Jessie Faye moved her family to Sacramento, CA in 1961. She held a number of jobs while raising her children, including work at the State Franchise Tax Board and the State Personnel Board as a Clerk I. She attended Sacramento City College and majored in Graphic Arts. This accomplishment led to a promotion to Machine Operator. She was promoted to Printing Trade Specialist II, where she worked until retiring in 1989. Jessie Faye believes the biggest and most important role in her life is being Mom to her siblings and her children.

Dorothy Alice Bell Courville (2<sup>nd</sup> oldest daughter and fourth child): She is the mother of five and grandmother to three. Dorothy spent only a few months in Southside before moving to New Orleans to live with a cousin who raised her to adulthood. She completed middle school and graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1956. She got married while attending Southern University in New Orleans, LA., and later moved to Galveston, TX. Twenty-two years later, Dorothy returned to college and earned a Bachelor's Degree at Texas Southern University in Houston, TX. at the age of 47. She served as an elementary school teacher for twenty-two years. She was also a freelance writer and a poet. Dorothy retired in 1993 and passed away January 3 1996.

Billie Marie Bell Spencer (third oldest daughter and fifth child): She is the mother of three, grandmother to eight and great-grandmother to three. Billie completed her elementary and secondary education in the Oroville public schools and is a 1959 graduate from Oroville Union High with a focus in business.

continue on page 5

continue from page 4

She joined Oro Vista Missionary Baptist Church at age fourteen and was baptized by the late Rev. A. Paul Jones. Billie was very active in church activities. She was a member of the youth choir, junior mission, and was Secretary of the Sunday school for three years. After high school, Billie worked in a number of jobs during her early adulthood. Her jobs included a number of house cleaning positions, picking fruit, car washer, waitress at the historic Cotton Club, and Sales Clerk at Montgomery Wards Department Store.



WW 1 Soldier Ellick Bell, Joseph Bell's brother

Billie is one of the first Black Villagers to break the employee color line at local banks. She was hired by Central Valley Bank in 1966, after four years at the local bank she transferred to the Sacramento branch that lead to a forty-four year career in banking. She retired as a bank manager for Umpqua Bank in 2006. Billie is quite active in her church (St. John Missionary Baptist Church) in Sacramento where she held the position of Sunday School Superintendent for eleven years. She is also one of the founding Board Members for the South Oroville African American Historical Society.

George Grandville Bell (youngest son and sixth child): He is the father of four, grandfather to five, and great grandfather to one. He attended public schools in Oroville and later moved to New Orleans with his dad's other sister before returning to Southside one year later. He worked for United Airlines in San Francisco and for the City of Richmond. He also attended Contra Costa College in Richmond, CA where he earned and maintained a 3.5 grade point average. GC (his nickname) was employed by Prudential Insurance Company of America in 1973. He sold one million dollars of insurance in his first year. This accomplishment was achieved without any experience or background in insurance sales. Prudential gave him a testimonial dinner at the Marriot in Emeryville, CA. He was transferred to Los Angeles and continued to produce million dollar sales. George opened a brokerage firm in Jack London Square in Oakland, CA. He currently lives in Sacramento and owns a non-emergency medical care transportation company.

Evelyn Ada Bell Jones (youngest daughter and seventh child: She is the mother of six grandmother to seven and great-grandmother to one. Evelyn was two and a half years old when she arrived in Southside. Later she joined her sister Dorothy in New Orleans at the age of four. She completed her elementary education in New Orleans and returned to Oroville at the age of twelve and completed her secondary education.

Evelyn married into the another pioneering family the Broadways and later moved to Sacramento. She worked for the State of California as an Accountant Specialist I. In 1990 Evelyn retired from the State and moved to Washington State where she was employed at Pierce Community College as a Program Assistant Developer. Evelyn was very active in her church serving as Church Administrator; she also held positions in other church auxiliaries. Evelyn also founded a non-profit organization program, "The Morning Women Life Skill Training Services" for the benefit of high risk women. In 2009 she returned to Sacramento to be close to her children and grandchildren. She also returned to her home church, William Memorial Church where she is Assistant Church Mother, and organizer of the Women of Elegant Ministry. Evelyn is frequently invited as guest speaker by various churches for their special programs.

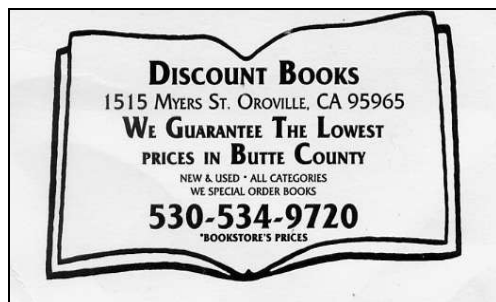
The seeds of heritage run wide and deep in the Bell Family and are being passed on to the current generations.

The contents for this article were provided by Billie Spencer, Jessie Faye Bell, and Evelyn Jones, as well as some of the narrative.

SOAAHS

936 18th St

Oroville, CA 95965

An advertisement for Discount Books, featuring a graphic of an open book. The text inside the book reads:

**DISCOUNT BOOKS**  
1515 MYERS ST. OROVILLE, CA 95965  
**WE GUARANTEE THE LOWEST**  
**PRICES IN BUTTE COUNTY**  
NEW & USED • ALL CATEGORIES  
WE SPECIAL ORDER BOOKS  
**530-534-9720**  
\*BOOKSTORE'S PRICES

An advertisement for Tong Fong Low, featuring a logo with the name in a decorative frame and the text "since 1912". Below the logo, it says "Charlie's Chop Suey". The address and phone numbers are listed for two locations:

**TONG FONG LOW**  
• since 1912 •  
*Charlie's Chop Suey*

2051 Robinson Street  
Oroville, Ca 95965  
hungry? 530.533.1488  
Tuesday-Sunday 11-9

2072 E 20th St. Ste 100  
Chico, Ca 95928  
hungry? 530.898.1388  
7 days a week 11-9  
[www.tongfonglow.com](http://www.tongfonglow.com)

An advertisement for Connelly's Roofing, featuring the company name in a bold, stylized font. The text below reads:

**CONNELLY'S**  
**ROOFING**

25 Years Experience  
Insured  
Cool Roof Certified  
Free Estimates

Adam Connelly — Manager  
Bill Connelly — Owner  
530-693-0381 CELL  
530-533-1516 PHONE  
530-534-3350 FAX

C-39 & General B  
CA, Lic. #601524 Email: [connellysroof@att.net](mailto:connellysroof@att.net)

An advertisement for Steve The Barber, featuring a logo with the name "Steve" in a large, stylized font and "The Barber" in a script font. Below the logo, it says "Serving Oroville Since 1961". The phone number and address are listed:

**Steve**  
*The Barber*  
**Serving Oroville Since 1961**

530 533-5000  
2051 Mitchell Ave. Oroville, CA 95966