

**May 2010**

Volume 2 Issue 2  
Oroville, California



# The Southside Chronicle

**Inside This Issue**

Membership Committee Corner	2
Historic Photos	2
Community Input Enhances Grant Effort	2
South Oroville African American History	3
Membership Application	5
Advertisements	6

**Upcoming Events**

**June 12, 2010** 1pm Board of Directors meeting at New Home Missionary Baptist Church. Do to graduations and vacations there will not be a Board of Directors meeting in May. Society members and the public are invited to attend all Board meetings.

**August 7, 2010** BB-Q Fundraiser. Time and location to be announced.

**November 5, 6 & 7, 2010**

You should plan now to attend the 2nd Annual Family Affair Reunion. Our first oral history documentary will be one of the featured events along with The Legacy Awards and a Guided Tour of Oroville. More details on the weekend of events will be announced in August.

**President's Report**  
*By Dr. John H. Rivers*

The BAR-B-Q and Cotton Club events which held on April 24th were successful. The Society made a net profit that will help support the development of our first oral history documentary. We are blessed to have such dedicated and committed Board members and friends of the society who helped make this achievement possible. Thanks to Joe Person, Sr. and Joe Person, Jr. who prepared the down home southern bar-b-q and to Vice President Bob Harris for his idea for the fundraiser and his generous donations and support during the preparation and expert assistance in carrying out the event.



Joe Person, Sr. at BBQ Fundraiser

Again our Board members from Sacramento came home to help us on our journey to build a historic center and park. Bertha Lewis-Clark and Captain Leroy Gill Jr. made donation of items and hard work during the day in serving and selling dinners. Billie-Bell -Spencer sold tickets and brought participants to the event. Ruthie Malone-Clark also supported our efforts by coming from Oakland to attend the Cotton Club event, as did Tony Mackey who came from San Jose. Others who made valuable contributions as servers were Patsy Thomas-Tobias, Hattie Walthall, Hazel Brookter, Sandy Jensen, and Irma and La Juana Jordan, who also arranged the layout and decorations for the Cotton Club. Thanks to Dr. Ed Davis, Dick Bjork and Van Bilbo who helped in all support areas during the fundraiser. Thanks to Roger and Bridgett Soudan and Mr. Walthall for judging the dance contest.

We also thank Henry Jordan for his excellent work and equipment that provided the great music for the day and evening. The music brought back good memories of a time when dancing and socializing were forms of cultural expression. We thank Doris Ristine-Brown for frying that great chicken for the Cotton Club snacks, and Pat Koskinen for publicizing the fundraiser.

We are getting ready to initiate the selection process for our 2010 legacy awards. As promised , we want you to help in this process by nominating individuals, living or deceased, who should be considered for the award this year. As listed in January's newsletters, the board's criteria for the award include:

- The person's values, character and behavior serve as a model for others to emulate.
- The person's work and deeds made it possible for other generations of African Americans to have a better life and more opportunities to develop their full human potential.
- The person demonstrated the ability and capacity to initiate independent actions which overcame the barriers of discrimination and social segregation.

Please consult your memories and identify individuals who meet one or more of these criteria. Send us a brief story about the person and list how they meet the criteria. It would be helpful if you included the dates and specific descriptions of events and activities that demonstrate how the person helped others and made other contributions in building a strong and healthy Black Community. Please send your stories to SOAAHS, 936 18<sup>th</sup> St. Oroville Ca., 95965. We need to have your recommendations by July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Your stories will help in our historical research, so please help us in this important effort. We will include your observations in the historical records that we are currently collecting. Be well, and be blessed.

## **MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE'S CORNER**

**By Van Bilbo**

As we move into our second year, the Society's vision is starting to take shape. Our goals include building a community center and promoting awareness of the contributions of African American residents of South Oroville by recording oral histories and collecting historical artifacts. The community center will provide a venue for educational and recreational programs and will fulfill the dream of elders who began this effort in 1968. SOAAHS has chosen to pick up where these elders left off when they selected the building site on Greenville St.

The desire to achieve the Society's goals is shared by our 89 members. Our membership includes current and former residents of Oroville, as well as individuals who have never resided in Oroville. Everyone involved contributes to the society in one or more of the following ways—by donating money or other resources, or by contributing ideas, time, talents, or historical information about South Oroville. The commitment of mem-

bers to achieving our mission is exciting and rewarding.

As we move forward, the need to increase our membership becomes more important, because making the dreams of our elders a reality is no easy task. Adding new members will allow us to continue the process of building a community center and completing our oral history project; it will also bring in members with new ideas who can add their own unique talents and resources.

Recently President Obama asked all Americans to get involved in their communities to bring about positive change. Joining SOAAHS affords you the opportunity to bring about positive change in South Oroville. If you are not yet a member, we urge you to join us as we work towards our important and historic mission. An application can be found on our website ([www.soaahs.org](http://www.soaahs.org)) or on page 5 of this newsletter.

### **Historical Photos**



The Cotton Club at Lower Wyandotte Rd. and V7 Rd.



Johnson's Grocery Store at Fallbrook Ave. and A St.

## **Community Input Enhances Grant Effort**

**By Sandy Jensen**

On behalf of SOAAHS, Dr. John Rivers has submitted a \$5 million grant application to the CA Dept of Parks and Recreation, which, if approved, would provide funding to launch the proposed community center and park. Funds come from Proposition 84, passed by CA voters in 2006 to create facilities that will foster "humane, livable communities." Dr. Rivers has previously authored more than 50 grant applications, many of which have been funded; thus his leadership and expertise have been invaluable to this grant application process.

Seeking input from members of the South Oroville community was an important requirement for grant submission. Five well-publicized community meetings were held in late January and early February to elicit input regarding challenges facing the community, as well as to establish the priorities for the proposed center and park. Attendees at these meetings outlined community challenges, including widespread poverty, high unemployment, illiteracy, crime, and a lack of social cohesion. Community members believe these

*(Continued on page Community Input 5)*

## South Oroville African American History

By Dr. John H. Rivers

### “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” Frederick Douglass, 1892

The history of economic development and the early settlement of Blacks in Oroville falls roughly into three stages: Stage One, 1850-1859, during which time gold mining provided the impetus for population growth for both whites and non-whites; Stage Two, 1860-1919, which was driven by mining, agriculture, food processing, lumber, and transportation projects; and Stage Three, 1920-1960, which was characterized by ups and downs in the local economy resulting from the Great Depression, warmer-than-usual weather, and significant growth in the lumber industry.

During Stage One, mobility rather than stability was the inherent characteristic of the population of Oroville, as individuals sought new economic opportunities. An editorial in the Daily Butte Record of June 10, 1858 stated, “The American people are the most reckless rushers after novelties on the face of the earth.” One can understand the editor’s concerns and comments, because he, like others, had invested capital and effort into the economic development of Oroville.

By 1859, Oroville had become a shadow of its former self; however it did not vanish as many other mining communities did. Many who had come to the area to better themselves economically settled in Oroville, including a small number of people of African descent. At the beginning of 1860, Oroville was ready for permanent settlement and the future growth and development that would become the focus and employment of various groups, including 917 Chinese, 41 Blacks, and 3,064 Whites.

According to the 1860 census, 30 of the 41 people of African descent living in the Oroville area resided in the City of Oroville. Dr. Lawrence E. Johnson, who conducted research on early Black settlers in Oroville for his master’s thesis, Negro Settlement in the Oroville Area, Middle Sacramento Valley, California, observed that the early 1860s opened the second stage of economic development in Oroville.

According to the 1860 census, the number of Blacks was small in comparison to whites, but those who settled in Oroville represented nearly 58% of the total Black population of Butte County. This may have been due to the kinds of occupations that were available in Oroville. Mining and general labor made up 50% of the occupations listed, while the remaining 50% of occupations required some skill, such as, boot maker, barber, blacksmith, cook, and bootblack. As early as 1860, a pattern emerged that indicated jobs were available and that whites would hire Blacks, which demonstrated a certain level of acceptance by the community. The availability of work, wages that were high enough to support a family and the opportunity to create a functional Black community in a legal Slave Free State were variables that enticed Blacks to settle in Oroville.

Half of these early permanent Black settlers migrated from southern states: Virginia (16), Kentucky (2), Tennessee (1), Missouri (2), and Alabama (1). Fourteen Blacks migrated from Mid-Atlantic States: Delaware (4), Maryland (2), New York (5), Connecticut (2) and Pennsylvania (1). One person came from Ohio, one was from California, one came from Mexico, and one from Jamaica.

In Stage Three of Oroville’s economic development (1920-1960), events paralleled problems in the larger society that were caused by the Great Depression. During this period there was also a climatic shift to a warmer weather pattern, and there was a significant growth in the lumber industry as California’s population grew and the demand for wood products increased. Unfortunately, a fire destroyed the sprawling Swayne Lumber Mill and 1,100 men lost their jobs, of whom 10% were Black. Despite this setback, previous Stage Two accomplishments had established a foundation for continued growth and development in Oroville.

Between 1930 and 1960 the Black population increased at a greater rate (235%) than for all other groups (120%). This large increase can be explained by the factors that had originally drawn Blacks to Oroville; namely, jobs, climate, and the draw of a functional Black Community.

Black families in Oroville did experience the pain of social distance and isolation, as well as various forms of employment and housing discrimination, but the strength of family, community, traditions and heritage, as well as hard work produced individuals who have made and continue to make significant contributions to our nation and its ideals of a free and just society. The following paragraphs provide brief sketches of the struggles and contributions of two of these outstanding individuals, Colonel Fred Jones and Captain Leroy Gil

#### **Colonel Fred L. Jones, United States Marine Corps**

Colonel Jones was born September 1, 1940 in Tarver, Georgia. His family moved to Oroville in the early 1950s from Hawthorne Nevada, where his father had worked at the Naval Ammunition Depot. Like many Black youths growing up in Southside, Colonel Jones worked to help pay the bills and sustain a stable family. Unfortunately this stability was shaken when his father left the family in Oroville and moved to an unknown location. Fred and his siblings took on the responsibility of providing for themselves with unsolicited help from other Black families and individuals in the Black community. Fred worked in the fields, picked fruit, worked at the food processing plant and sawmills, and shined shoes for “Shorty,” who had a shoe shine business on Myers St. in downtown Oroville during the 1950s and 1960s. Shorty let Fred keep all the money he made shining shoes, including the tips, which at times were quite good.

Fred graduated from Oroville Union High School with a solid academic record in addition to starring in football, basketball, and baseball. Fred played on the Tiger football teams that went undefeated in 1957 and 1958, with only one tie. He was selected as a starter for the

*(Continued on page 4 Struggle-Progress)*

*(Continued from page 3 Struggle-Progress)*

Northern California High School All Star Football team in 1959, and he received a football scholarship to Oregon State University, where he was a starter for two years that included OSU winning the 1962 Liberty Bowl. He graduated in 1964 with Bachelor of Science degree. Fred later earned a master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma in 1989.

Colonel Jones started his military career as a Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve in December 1964. He was the 43rd Black officer in the history of the United States Marine Corps. His service to country included tours in Dong Ha and Da Nang, Vietnam where he was assigned to the Force Logistic Command. Colonel Jones earned successive promotions throughout his military career, including command of the Logistic Support Units (LSU #1), 1st Battalion 9th Marines and 3rd Battalion 9th Marines and Commanding Officer, H&S Company Force Service Support Group. Colonel Jones was the first Black field grade officer ever assigned to Southwest Georgia Marines Logistics Base, Albany, GA. This assignment proved to be very successful and significant in preparing him for future assignments. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in June 1980, and in August 1982 he became the first Black Marine officer ever selected to attend the prestigious Industrial College of the Armed Forces (National War College) in Washington, DC. Colonel Jones was also only the second Black Marine Officer to command an aviation Group when he was assigned as the Commanding Officer, Marine Wing Support Group -17, 1st Marine Air Wing in Okinawa, Japan. Colonel served as the Chief of Staff, 3rd Force Service Support Group in Okinawa, Japan, and was Chief of Staff for the Marine Corps Systems Command in Quantico, VA. His military decorations and awards include two Legions of Merit, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal, Navy Achievement Medal, Combat Action Ribbon, and a number of other unit awards and citations.



Col. Fred L. Jones USMC

Perhaps one of the greatest acts of commitment of service to country and progress for Black people was the mentoring that Colonel Jones and his wife provided for four young Black Officers who went on to become Generals in the Marine Corps. Three of these Officers become three star Generals (Lieutenant Generals), and one two star General (Major General). The two star General, Dr. Clifford L. Stanley is currently serving in the Obama administration as the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. The Jones would host socials with the young Officers and their wives and share information on how to succeed as a Marine Officer in a sometimes hostile

environment. This act of support and commitment formed an effective "network" of Black Officers where they could call for professional advice. Two of the three star Generals are still on active Duty. Lt. Gen. Willie Williams (Chief of Staff for the Marine Corps), and Lt. Gen. Walter Gaskin (Deputy Chairman, NATO Military Committee), Brussels Belgium.

Colonel Jones is married to the former Shirley Tolbert of Mobile, AL, and they have three children--a son, Eugene, a Captain serving in the United States Navy; a son, Bryon, and a daughter, Debra. Colonel Jones regularly attends his high school reunion in Oroville, he is a sustaining member of SOAAHS, and he may attend the next Southside homecoming reunion to be held November 5-7, 2010.

**Captain Leroy Gill, Jr. United States Merchant Marines**

Captain Gill was born in Casa Grande, Arizona on July 9, 1939. His family moved to Oroville in 1946. His father worked in construction. His uncles and grandfather, William Berry Sr. worked in the lumber industry. Like many other Black youths of his generation, Leroy worked in the fields and orchards around Oroville to buy school clothes and other items deemed important to teenagers during the 1950s. He attended Burbank and Central Elementary Schools and graduated from Bird Street Middle School. He attended Oroville Union High School, but left after his junior year in 1957 to join the Navy with his long-time friend, Harold Washington. Both Harold's and Leroy's families were among the original group who settled in Oroville and developed a strong, functional Black Community in Southside.

Leroy is a member of a large extended family that includes the Clark, Berry, Colvin and Gill families, all of whom resided in Southside. His cousin, Brenda Harris-Berry, is currently the only Black elected official in Butte County. Leroy promised his parents he would complete his remaining high school requirements while in the Navy, and he kept his promise. He graduated in at the same time as the rest of his classmates at Oroville High School in 1958. Leroy served in the US Navy as a Third Class Quartermaster from 1957 to 1960, and he received an honorable discharge in July 1960.

Captain Gill's career in the Military Sea Transportation Service (a Federal civilian support agency) began in July 1964 as an Able Seaman. Following two tours at sea, Leroy enrolled in Crawford Nautical School and received his Third Officer's License in October 1966. He was promoted to Third Officer the same month. Leroy continued going to sea and simultaneously attending Crawford Nautical College, which resulted in his being promoted to Second Officer in 1969, First Officer in 1972, and Captain in 1976. Between 1974 and the mid-1976, Captain Gill served as a damage control instructor (DCO), fire and flooding techniques at Treasure Island in Oakland. He has served as Captain for a variety of ships, including cargo, passenger, hydrographic survey, special projects, missile trackers, and fleet auxiliary vessels. Captain Gill was the second Black Captain in the history of the US Merchant Marines.



Captain Leroy Gill, Jr.

*(Continued on page 5 Struggle-Progress)*

(Continued from page 4 Struggle-Progress)

Captain Gill was the first permanent Captain for the USNS Spica (T-AFS-9), which was a military sealift logistic ship purchased from Britain's Royal Fleet Auxiliary in 1981. As an important support resource for the Navy's Seventh Fleet, the Spica under Captain Gill's command was named the "top logistics ship" three times while serving in the US Seventh Fleet, and it was the only recipient of the "Afloat Transportation Award" by the National Defense Transportation Association in 1990.

Captain Gill commanded the USNS Spica during both Desert Storm and Desert Shield. He received many well-deserved awards during his 36 combined years of Navy and Merchant Marine service, of which 21 years were spent in command of several ships, including the USNS Navasota, Taluga, Meteor, Hess, Kawishiwi, Mars, Niagara Falls, and Spica. One of the most noteworthy awards was the "Superior Civilian Service Award," which he received four times during his career in the Merchant Marines.

Captain Gill retired in 1997 and currently resides in North Highlands, CA with his wife, Theresa, a member of the historic Southside Johnson family. His roots run deep in Oroville. One example of these roots is that for the past fifty years Captain Gill has had his automobiles serviced at Hobbie Auto Center, and he has used Dirk's Transmission for the past 35 years. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of SOAAHS, and he chairs the Legacy Awards Committee

(Continued from page 2 Community Input)

problems can be mitigated by providing a safe, affordable facility that offers recreational, educational, social, and cultural activities.

Three top priorities for the community center and park received consensus from community meeting attendees: (1) It should provide a place for education, training, and developmental activities for adults and children; (2) it should provide a place where families and community groups can meet, both informally and formally; (3) it should actively promote visual and performance art.

Examples of education and training activities are computer skills instruction, health/nutrition education, and after-school tutoring. Developmental activities could include adult literacy programs, as well as programs that encourage seniors and youths to interact. Youth from the community could be employed to monitor children's activities and to provide site supervision, and service learning programs should also be available.

Families will be able to use the park for picnics and recreation, and children can enjoy slides, swings, sandboxes, and a proposed water feature. Games such as horse shoes and volleyball could be enjoyed by all ages. The large social hall envisioned for the center can be used for weddings, funerals, conferences, workshops, or invited speakers. The indoor facility can also be rented by non-member groups.

Drawing, painting, and sculpture classes will promote visual arts; dance classes and amateur theater could encourage community members to participate in performing arts. Children and adults will be provided with various arts and crafts activities, and a quilting and other clubs could be formed. Art and photography exhibits throughout the building will educate those using the center, as well as to making it visually attractive. Statues of members of the community who have been important to its historical development can be placed in the park.

Keeping the community center and park as open and accessible as possible was a high priority for those attending the community meetings. At the outset, hours of operation for the center should be 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily; the park should be accessible from sunup to sundown daily. A locking gate would limit access in off hours. As demand for use of the facilities increases and funding permits, hours of operation can be lengthened.

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Membership  
Individual \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00  
Student (K-12) \_\_\_\_\_ \$20.00  
Student (College) \_\_\_\_\_ \$30.00  
Senior (62 or Older) \_\_\_\_\_ \$35.00  
Sustaining \_\_\_\_\_ \$100.00  
Family \_\_\_\_\_ \$150.00  
Organizational \_\_\_\_\_ \$150.00  
Life \_\_\_\_\_ \$4000.00

Make Checks Payable to: SOAAHS  
Mail to : SOAAHS  
936 18th St.  
Oroville, CA 95965

SOAAHS

936 18th St.

Oroville, CA 95965

**BRIGGS CAR CARE CENTER**  
**BRIDGESTONE Firestone**

**VIC BRIGGS**  
1600 Feather River Blvd.  
Oroville, CA 95965  
Phone: **530-533-9330**  
Fax: **530-533-9372**



**AVON**  
the company for women

**PATRICIA MOORE**  
AVON Sales Representative

Here to serve you

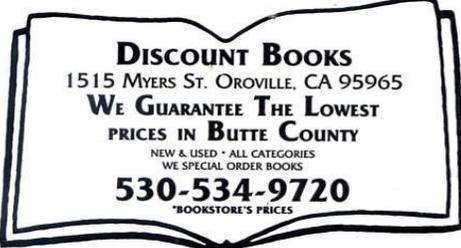
6719 Sprig Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95842  
916-338-4163 hm  
916-320-2704 cell  
[www.youravon.com/pmoore8416](http://www.youravon.com/pmoore8416)



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

2051 Robinson Street  
Oroville, Ca 95965  
*hungry? 530.533.1488*  
Tuesday-Sunday 11-9  
[www.tongfonglow.com](http://www.tongfonglow.com)

2072 E 20th St. Ste 100  
Chico, Ca 95928  
*hungry? 530.898.1388*  
7 days a week 11-9



**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