



EXHIBIT 8
 DATE 2/8/05
 HB 9

C&A GRANT #1127: IDENTIFYING AFRICAN AMERICAN RESOURCES
 SPONSORED BY THE MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 FEBRUARY 8, 2005

This is a special project grant to collect information about family papers, photographs, archival collections, and personal memories relating to black history in Montana. Specifically, this grant will fund the hiring of a temporary professional research historian to identify black heritage resources and compile pertinent information into an accessible database.

Recorded African American History is difficult to find in Montana. For example, the early economics of black communities were not compatible with expensive picture taking and the social environment didn't lend itself to newspaper coverage. Yet we must understand that the history of Montana and the nation will never be complete without the African American story.

Most of us accept the belief that our future is best guided by our history. We also believe that knowledge of our history has inspirational value, particularly in the shaping of young minds. It is extremely important that Montana's full history is conveniently available to all people.

Some rationalize that limited access to Black History in Montana is due to their small numbers and lack of national mobility, but there was a small but significant Black presence in many Montana communities. Leah Ward, popularly known as the "Angel of Mercy" for her benevolent service, came up the Missouri to Fort Benton in 1870. She started out operating her own laundry and lived there, caring for the sick, until she died in 1891. We would like to learn more about Leah. We know there are many more stories like hers and we need to learn about them and include them in our history.

The objectives of this project are to identify African American History material and prepare that information for public access. This will give students, teachers, and authors opportunities to acquire the information that they need to learn about the African American experience, effectively teach the subject, and write about it accurately.

This project will require the participation and generosity of the public in the form sharing their stories and historic material. By funding this project, the State of Montana will establish itself as the leader in the effort, thus providing the legitimacy needed to encourage public support. For all of the reasons given, we strongly believe that this grant will benefit all Montanans by presenting a more complete picture of Montana's diverse history and by giving the world a better understanding of African American contributions in the development of the West.

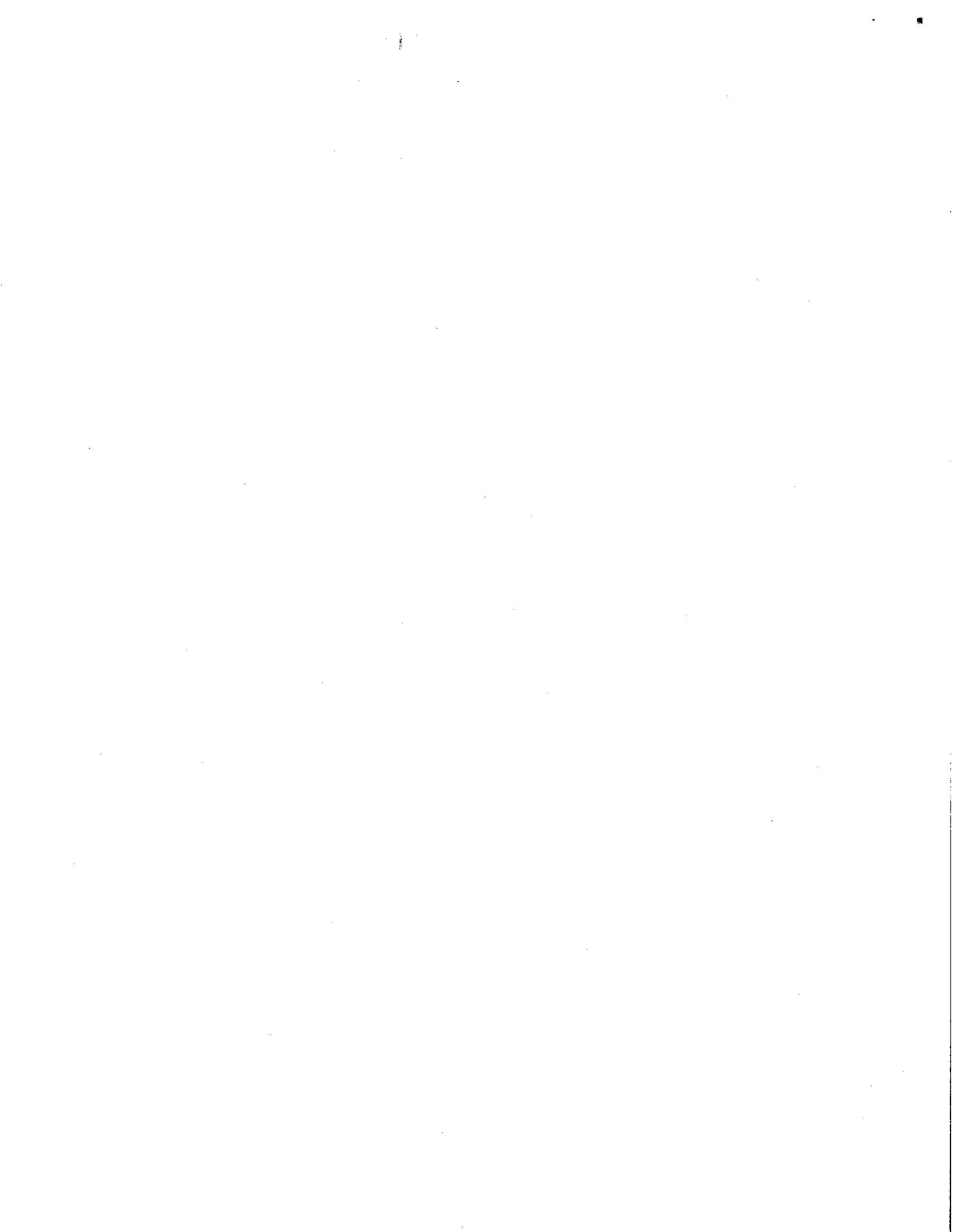
African Americans who came to Montana participated in all aspects of state development, and became an important part of society.

- ◆ **James Beckwourth**, a black Mountain Man from Virginia, explored, trapped, and traded in Montana. Jim lived among the Blackfeet and Crow Nations in the 1830s.
- ◆ Photographer **J. P. Ball** and **Joseph B. Bass** were newspaper editors in Helena.
- ◆ **James Snowden** of Miles City was a skilled blacksmith.
- ◆ **Duke and Maria Dutrieulle** were community leaders in Fort Benton, Helena, and Belt.
- ◆ **William C. Irvin** served as a Helena Police Officer in 1888.
- ◆ **William M. Morgan** was Constable in Great Falls in 1894, probably the first black to hold elected office in the State.
- ◆ **Walter Dorsey** and his family ran a popular grocery in Helena.
- ◆ **Samuel Lewis** was a Bozeman business owner.

As time went on, Montana produced its own notable blacks:

- ◆ **Emmanuel Taylor Gordon**, from White Sulphur Springs, became an internationally known vaudeville performer and spirituals singer.
- ◆ **Bunky Thomas** of Miles City rose high in the national ranks of the Postal Service.
- ◆ **Alma Jacobs** served as the Great Falls and the State Librarian from the 1950s through her retirement in 1983.
- ◆ **Zip Rhoades** was a talented basketball player from Kalispell and the University of Montana.

We have limited information on a precious few of these people, and have tantalizing leads about others. The Identifying African American Resources project promises to shed new light and encourage scholarship on these and other blacks who helped to shape our common heritage.



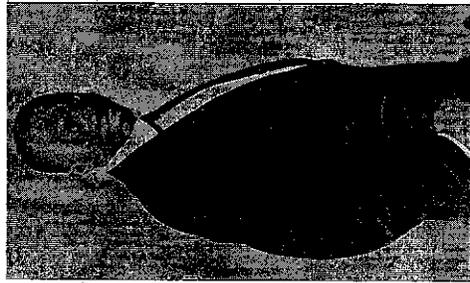


Photo courtesy of Montana Historical Society
A poor boy from White Sulphur Springs, Emmanuel Taylor Gordon became famous as a vaudeville performer and spiritual singer in the United States and Europe.

During the late 19th century, thousands of blacks were among the masses of westward-bound pioneers. Some were slaves, others were laborers, trappers or cowboys.

Blacks constituted 1.5 percent to 3 percent of Western settlers in the 1800s. And although their presence is not widely documented, many settled in Montana.

An 1885 Billings County census showed that nine of the county's 737 inhabitants were black, according to "The Negro Cowboys," a book by Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones. "Even the Montana range was never so jilly-white as it seems to be in Western fiction and on motion picture and television screens," the authors wrote.

According to the 1910 Census, more than 1,820 blacks lived in Montana out of a total population of 376,053.

Big Sky country lured some black cartmen and roundup cooks, but the largest percentage were laborers.

Historical information about Montana blacks is so fragmented that it's hard to draw conclusions about where blacks settled and why, said Bob Harris, president of the Great Falls chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

A large congregation of blacks apparently landed in Helena, possibly because of the discovery of gold, Harris said. The city saw two black newspapers come and go before 1911, "The Colored Citizen" and "Montana Plaindealer."

Blacks also operated a newspaper in Butte from 1902 to 1903, called "New Age."



A frequent visitor to the Rocky Mountains and northern Plains, mountain man James Beckworth in 1834 became "chief of chiefs" of the Crow Indian nation for seven years.

Being Black in Montana

James Beckworth went on to become a legendary mountain man.

At 24, he joined his first expedition to the Rocky Mountains as a scout, hunter and blacksmith. In 1824, he became an independent trapper, buying furs from the Pawnees.

He roamed the West from the Great Plains and the Northwest to the Cascades. His travels led him in and out of Montana, hunting and living among the Blackfeet and the Crow. In 1834, he became "chief of chiefs" of the Crow Indian nation for seven years, according to the book "Black Pioneers."

Beckworth married a Santee woman, discovered a pass in northern California that later was named after him and pioneered the Oregon Trail through Crow Country.

Mary Fields

Mary Fields was born in Tennessee around 1832, a slave to the family of a classmate of Mother Annadeus, who was responsible for the Ursuline Order of Catholic sisters at St. Peter's Mission, north of Cascade.

She was freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1864, and headed to Montana after hearing Mother Annadeus was sick with pneumonia.

Fields became a fixture at the mission, hauling freight to and from Cascade, raising chickens and doing laundry.

Fields, also known as "Black Mary," became known for her rugged character. She cussed, drank and smoked, and never went anywhere without packing a pistol.

In 1894, she was kicked out of the mission after a brawl with a hired hand accused of stealing. She moved to Cascade and opened a restaurant, but it was said that she was too generous to make a living at it.

She later became Cascade's postmaster, making her the second woman in U.S. history with a postal route.

Mattie Bell Castner

Mattie Bell was born into slavery in North Carolina in 1855 and was freed by her owner when she was 8.

She moved to St. Louis when she was 15, where she worked as a hotel maid for six years. She then headed to Montana, explore the golden opportunities of the West.

She was a laundress in Fort Benton until she could afford her own

James Beckworth

A freed slave from Virginia,



GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE

laundry. In 1887, she married Belt resident John Castner, a freighter, and the two became wealthy operating coal mines.

Mattie Castner opened a dining room, along with the Castner Hotel and stage shop. With the profits, she purchased lots, houses and ranches throughout the Belt area.

When she died in 1920, she was the largest individual landowner in Belt. She donated her estate and about \$25,000 to charities.

William Albert Bairpaugh

William Albert Bairpaugh was born in 1859, the son of a Cherokee chief and a black woman, and at one time operated one of the largest ranches in Montana.

Bairpaugh ran away from home after his mother re-married when he was 12. He joined a band and traveled the United States and Mexico, playing the coronet.

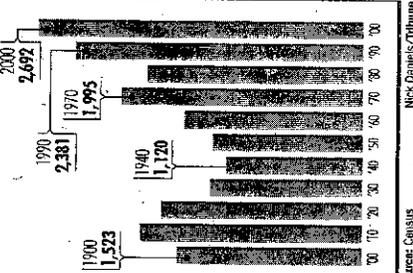
His travels brought him to the Great Falls area, where Bairpaugh worked briefly for Paris Gibson. He took up farming near Tiger Butte and became an avid hunter and fisherman. He got rich off of real estate, tried his hand at politics and became known as a great philanthropist. He could speak and understand several Native American languages.

Emmanuel T. Gordon

A poor boy from White Sulphur Springs, Emmanuel Taylor Gordon was born in 1893 and eventually made his name as a vaudeville performer and by singing spirituals across the United States and in Ex-

Blacks in Montana

Here are the number of African Americans living in Montana as recorded by each decade's census.



Source: Census
Nick Daniels/Thibault

square-foot library cost \$1.2 million and was dedicated Nov. 12, 1967.

She became cataloging librarian in Great Falls in 1946, and in 1954 became head librarian, a position she held for nearly two decades. Jacobs later was named Montana state librarian and worked in Helena from 1973 to 1981.

She died Dec. 20, 1997, in Bozeman.



Tribune file photo

Alma Jacobs, former Great Falls library director and Montana state librarian. She was matron of the Montana library system, a staunch opponent of censorship and the driving force behind the expansion of the Great Falls Public Library. She died at 81 in 1997 in a Bozeman nursing home.

Though she cussed, drank, smoked and never went anywhere without packing a pistol, former slave Mary Fields became postmaster in Cascade at the turn of the 20th century.

He also chauffered for circus guru John Ringling, did some acting and authored several books, including his autobiography, "Born to Be."

Gordon became friends with Ringling, who owned property near White Sulphur Springs, around 1919. Gordon learned to drive and repair cars from Ringling's chauffeur, and later traveled with Ringling as his personal cook and attendant.

Shortly after, Gordon recruited a partner and formed a vaudeville act, touring the United States, Canada and England.

He had a mental breakdown in 1947 and moved in with his sister, Rose, in White Sulphur Springs in 1959. He gave a few more concerts in Montana before his death in 1971.

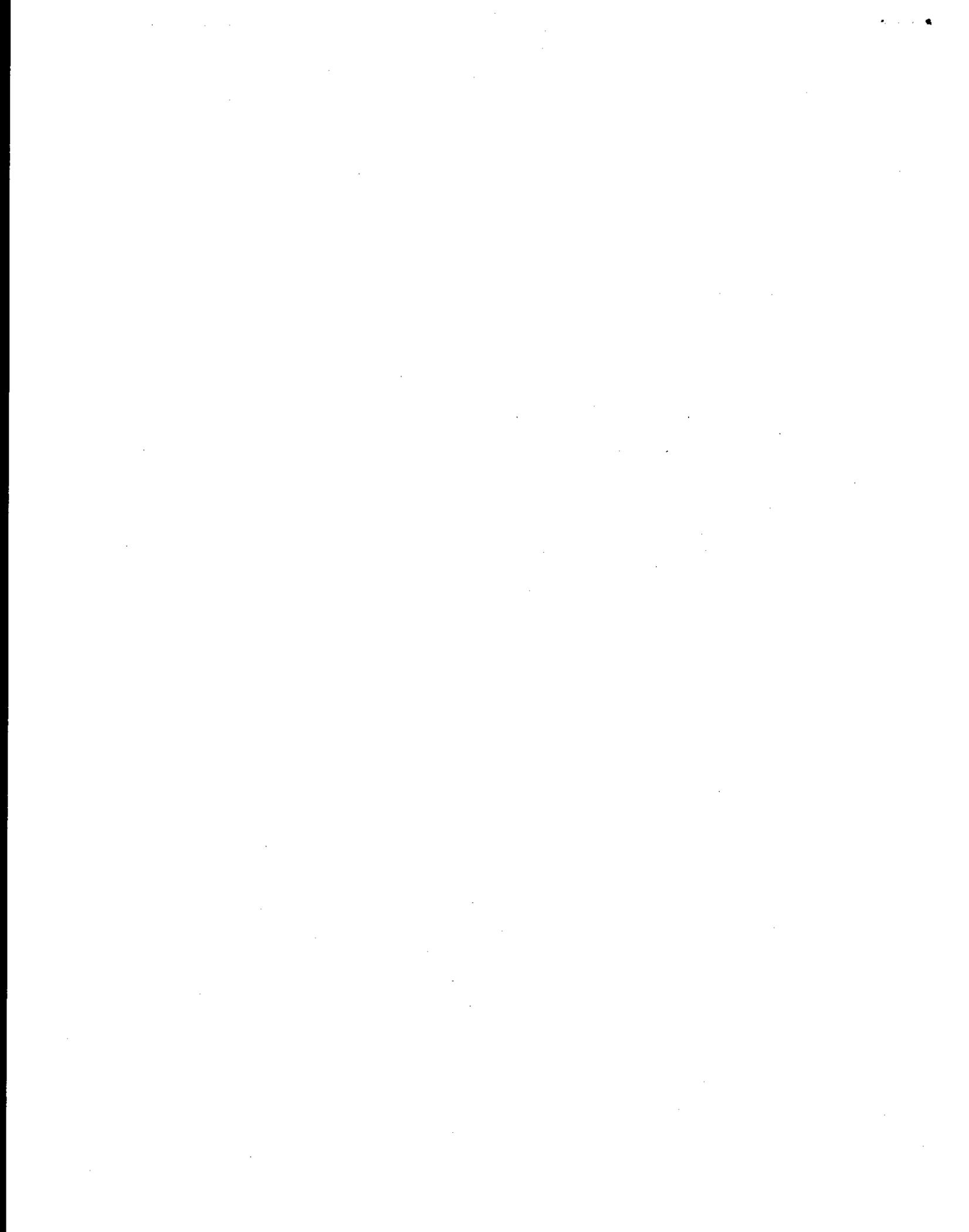
Alma Jacobs

Alma Jacobs was one of the biggest supporters of libraries in Montana.

Jacobs was born in Lewistown in 1916. A Great Falls High School graduate, she earned a master's degree in library science in 1942 from Columbia University.

One of her most visible accomplishments was spearheading construction of the Great Falls Public Library.

During the 1960s, Jacobs spoke to countless civic organizations, pleading for support for the building. She pushed for a library bond for more than six years, until a \$900,000 proposition was passed in 1965. The three-story, 60,000-



BLACK HISTORY MONTH

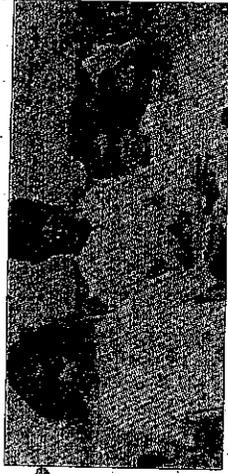


PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, HELENA
 Left to Right: Madeline Clark, Emma Smith, Lucille Thompson and Alma Jacobs. Spring Creek near Lewistown, circa 1920.

Black community has long history in Great Falls

By KEN ROBISON
 For the Tribune

Don't turn to the history books to learn the story of the early African American community in Great Falls. That story hasn't been written, but when it is, we are convinced that it will reveal a vibrant and complex black community operating as early as the late 19th century.

The constraints on the early black community in Great Falls loomed large, though they paled in comparison with the repression of Ku Klux Klan and counter-reconstruction darkness in Southern and border states.

As the town of Great Falls began to grow rapidly from 1886, the first blacks arrived, facing constraints on jobs, housing, union membership and social and political opportunities.

They found a tense environment shortly after the formation of Cascade County in the fall of 1887, when a white mob in Sun River held the county's first and last vigilante lynching, of a black soldier from Fort Shaw.

Despite the constraints, the fledgling black community found opportunities in the new town. Jobs in the service industry were available and home ownership was possible on the South

side, which was populated by workers of all races. A separate social structure emerged with a church and fraternal organizations. City streets were basically safe and secure. Black political activities were encouraged by both political parties, especially by the strong "Lincoln" wing of the Republican Party, led by the dynamic owner and manager of the Great Falls Leader, H. P. Rolfe.

Newspaper coverage of black community activities by The Leader, and to a lesser extent, by its older rival, Great Falls Tribune, was remarkably detailed and positive. The relatively balanced reporting by both newspapers enables a glimpse into life and activities in the black community. What that community accomplished in the early years of Great Falls is revealing.

Proudly standing on the southside of Great Falls is an elegant symbol of what blacks did with their newly won freedom in the early days of Great Falls. Union Bethel African Methodist

Episcopal (A. M. E.) Church. From the arrival of Edward Simms in 1886, efforts began to build a Christian community. As their numbers grew to 85 black residents by 1890, leading blacks of Great Falls formed an A.M.E. congregation, meeting at the first city fire station. The following year, through the appeal of churchwomen including Mrs. Tennie Finn Hagen and Mrs. Mamie Courtney, and under the guidance of a talented minister, the Rev. Joel H. Childress, a lot was donated by the Paris Gibson and an A.M.E. church was built at 916 5th Ave. S. In the words of Childress, "The negro is becoming educated, acquiring property, learning self-government and self-respect. The touch of freedom which he now enjoys... defies trespass or encroachment upon it from any man or nation." Ministers from the mainline Presbyterian and Methodist churches participated in cornerstone laying ceremonies in June 1890. The A. M. E. Church long served as the soul of the black community in Great Falls, and at the "heart" of the church were black women.

Separated and segregated from the white community in many ways, the black community worked hard to overcome isolation. For housing, the black community shared the southside of Great Falls, from 2nd Street to 14th Street South, and from 1st Avenue to 10th Avenue South with workers of all ethnic origins. Black Masonic, Odd Fellows, and other societies and clubs were formed. Black women centered their social life on the A. M. E. Church with frequent dinners and other fundraising activities.

Exemplifying early black residents are the three original trustees of the A. M. E. Church, Edward Simms, A. W. Ray, and William M. Morgan. Ed Simms came to Montana from Arkansas in 1882, worked for the post trader at Fort Shaw until 1886 when he and his wife moved to Great Falls. Simms opened a restaurant, built a house on the southside, and became active in every aspect of community activities including Republican Party politics. Sgt. Albert W. Ray was discharged from the 25th Infantry ("Colored") Regiment at Fort Shaw in 1890, moved to Great Falls, built a house on the southside, and actively participated in the community. William M. Morgan built a house on the southside in 1890 and became a highly respected member of the community, serving as Great Falls constable and later homesteading. All three men formed families, owned homes, acquired jobs, and became

respected beyond the black community. On New Year's day 1892, a grand ball and banquet was held in Great Falls by about 100 African Americans and an equal number of white supporters. The celebration honored the 29th anniversary of the day the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in the extensive coverage carried in the Great Falls Leader, the affair was held "to celebrate the auspicious morning when Abraham Lincoln, by a stroke of his pen, backed by the sabre strokes of the gallant armies which he commanded as president of the United States struck the shackles from 4 million slaves and transformed them into free men and citizens" in the late evening both black and white orators increased the political rhetoric, with Republican political activist, H. P. Rolfe giving a fiery speech commemorating the "grand act of the first republican president of the United States, 'Honest Old Abe.'"

Most male leaders in the black community were active in Republican party politics, which tended to dominate the overall political landscape in Great Falls in the early years despite the adherence of Paris Gibson and many city "founders" to the Democratic party. Yet, Republicans could not take the loyalty of black voters for granted. In 1892 Democrats made inroads in the black vote by two remarkable initiatives: first, naming a black candidate to their party's general election ballot; and secondly, by founding the first black newspaper in Montana. Black man, John Little, was named one of two Democrat candidates for two Democrat constables. While both Democrat candidates were defeated in the November election, Little's nomination may represent a first for any black in Montana. The second Democrat initiative led to the publication of a black weekly newspaper, The Advocate, during the fall of 1892 to help capture the black vote. However short-lived, this newspaper represents the first black newspaper known in Montana.

In the 1894 election, blacks again threatened to turn to the Democrats, but this time the Republicans had learned their lesson about holding the black vote. Republicans nominated William M. Morgan, as one of their two candidates for constable. Morgan went to bed one evening in early November 1894

after working that day as janitor at the Cascade county courthouse. The next day, he received 503 votes to defeat two Democratic Party opponents and win election as one of two constables for Great Falls. This marks the first known public election of a black candidate to office in Montana.

The story of young black policeman, George Williams, is remarkable. Williams served on the fledgling Great Falls police force during 1892 and 1893. One of four men on the force assigned zones of the city, Williams patrolled the "whites-only" northside of Great Falls. Inexplicably, not only did black patrolman Williams patrol the northside, but he even resided there, the only black known to live outside the southside.

These black achievements in early Great Falls are simply a sampling leading toward the present day. Blacks played a role and contributed to every aspect of Great Falls life with more recent examples including: Brother Van speaking at the Emancipation Day celebration in 1910 at the Union Bethel Church; black soldiers parading down Central Avenue in the fall of 1917 on their way to war; black night clubs (Ozark Club) and music contributing to the nightlife in the city; black women working to break down civil rights barriers; a young black student elected president of his senior class at Great Falls High School in 1965 (Waide Parker); a black woman leading the community to construct our fine public library and later heading the Montana State Library (Alma Jacobs); the first black baseball player in "integrate" fame as one of the greatest catchers in major league history (John Roseboro, Great Falls Electric); a black singer getting his start toward fame in country music (Charley Pride); black airmen serving at Malmstrom Air Force

Base, following in the proud tradition of black soldiers at Fort Shaw and Assiniboine.

What can we do to understand and recognize the lives, problems, and achievements of our black community? We need to encourage historical research and writing focused on black history. We should move the results of this research into what our schools are teaching. We can encourage the Cascade County Historical Society to gather material relating to local black history and to

present displays that highlight black history. We need to urge the Montana Historical Society to take similar actions on a Montana-wide basis. Finally, a gleam in the eye for the future will be to form a Montana Black American Museum in Great Falls.

Ken Robison is a member of the Great Falls/Cascade County Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, and historian at the Joel F. Overholser Historical Research Center in Fort Benton.

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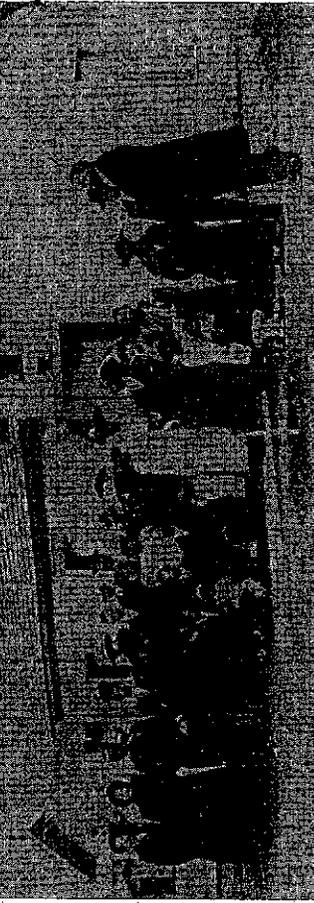
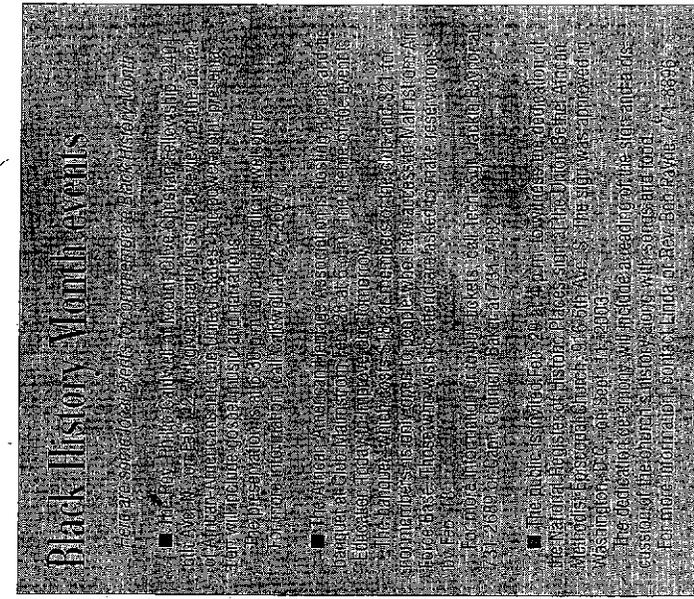


PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, HELENA
 Union Bethel AME Church at 916 5th Ave. South in Great Falls. The Church was built in 1891 and demolished in 1916 - 1917. The photo was taken in the Fall of 1916 by Pastor Rev. G.E. Horsley.



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Frontierswoman and former slave was a mission character

By SANJAY TALWANI
Tribune Staff Writer

Of all the people who braved the frontier of the Cascade area around the turn of the century, few inspired as many stories as Mary Fields, a.k.a. Stagecoach Mary, a.k.a. Black Mary.

She was born into slavery around 1832 in Tennessee to the family of a classmate of Mother Amadeus, the main force behind the presence of the Ursuline Order at St. Peter's Mission.

Freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, she came west from Ohio when she was about 53. Legend holds that in 1884, she heard that Mother Amadeus had pneumonia, so she made her way to Montana to take care of her.

“They say she had such a temper, the girls were afraid to come to school. She was the terror of the countryside.”

— Sister Mary Grace Connelly, speaking about Black Mary

For the next decade, as the mission educated white and Indian children by the hundreds, Mary was a fixture, hauling freight to and from Cascade, raising chickens and vegetables, doing laundry.

At the time, the roads were bad; wolves and hostile Indians sometimes made things worse. A few times when her stagecoach overturned, she stayed with her cargo overnight or longer to pro-

tect it.

But Mary was no nun. She was reputed to have a taste for whiskey, cigars and coarse language. She never went anywhere without packing a pistol and was said to have fought at least one duel.

“They said she had such a temper, the girls were afraid to come to school,” Sister Mary Grace Connelly, an archivist at the Ursuline Center, wrote years later. “She

was the terror of the countryside.”

She could drive horses better than most. She stood nearly 6 feet tall and wore mostly men's clothing, all of which led at least one visitor to refer to her as “that colored man” after a coach ride from the train depot.

In 1894, she was kicked out of the mission after a brawl with a hired hand she said she caught stealing.

So she found a new calling in the new town of Cascade, opening up a restaurant. But she was so generous, it was said, that she ran herself out of business.

So she reinvented herself as Cascade's postmistress, becoming only the second woman in U.S. history to be given a postal route. She took

to snowshoes when conditions warranted.

She was a local favorite, a mascot of the baseball team, and her birthday was a town event she enjoyed so much that she celebrated it twice a year. She was the only woman, other than those of ill repute, permitted in the local saloons.

At about age 70, she retired from the postal service and took in laundry to make ends meet. By 1910, the New Cascade Hotel had a policy of giving her meals for free.

Her laundry burned down in 1912, but was rebuilt with labor and supplies furnished by other residents. She died, unmarried and childless, on Dec. 5, 1914.



“Black Mary”
Fields

Since 1891, worshippers have kept the faith at Union Bethel church. They aren't about to stop now.

In God, they trust

By PAULA WILMOT
Tribune Staff Writer

Like the popular children's story about a little train engine that could, Great Falls' Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is the little church that could.

Built in 1891 and rebuilt on the same spot in 1917, the beloved church has been open continuously at the same location ever since — even during hard times when members of the congregation were forced to take turns paying the utility bills.

"Whenever two gather, you continue on," said Kathy Reed, 43, a life member of the church. "After being open all these years, I promise you that church won't close its doors."

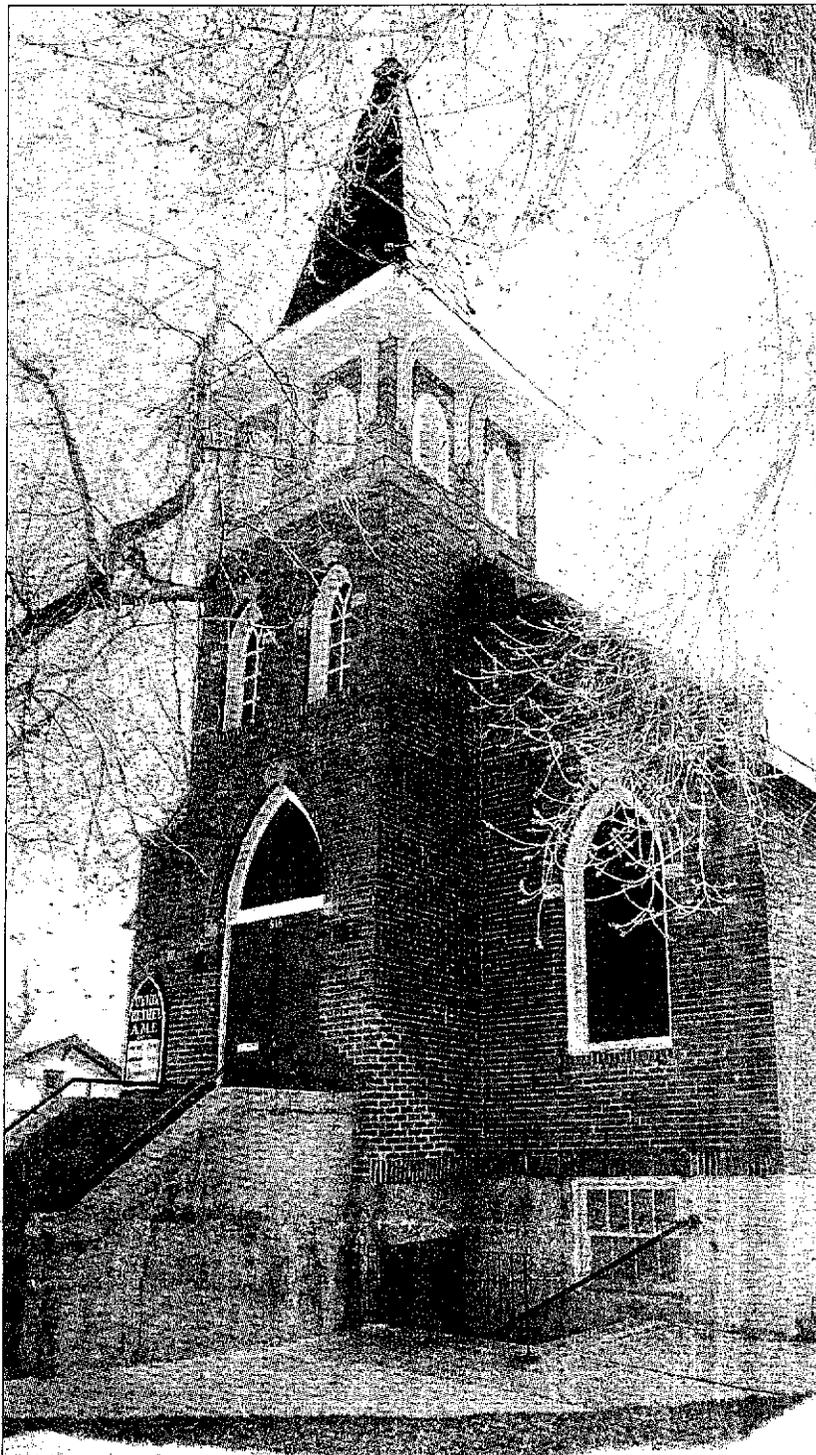
A move to list the church on the National Register of Historic Places has Reed's support. She sees it as a tribute to those who worked so hard to build the church so many years ago.

Pastor of the church since 1999, Robert Payne, 33, said the designation is important because it will show all races that there was an African-American presence outside the South in 1891 strong enough to build a church in such an unlikely place as Montana.

During a 15-year period when Union Bethel had no pastor, Frank Ghee and Eva Reed, Kathy's mother, made sure there was worship every Sunday. "Sometimes we had visiting ministers; sometimes we preached ourselves. The Lord has always blessed this church," Ghee said.

Giving the church a place on the Historic Register will be like rolling out a welcome mat, according to Ghee, 66. "It'll say 'hey, y'all, here is a place where you can come and meet God.'"

Just as Ghee and Eva Reed kept the church going, he said



“
Whenever two gather, you continue on. After being open all these years, I promise you this church won't close its doors.

— Kathy Reed, a lifelong member of Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church



Reed

the church kept Eva going. "She didn't die until 1989, after we had a pastor. In fact, few of our members have died since then. So, if you want longevity, sign on with us," he said.

'Precious in His sight'

"Black and yellow, red and white; they're all precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." The refrain is heard in Union Bethel every Sunday, according to the pastor.

"God doesn't draw lines, and neither do we," said Payne. "We're not all African-Americans here, and that is good."

Although Union Bethel is often called the "black church," Payne estimated the membership is 30 percent white. Several church families are interracial, he said. Payne's wife and one of his two daughters are white, he said.

Founded more than two centuries ago to protest segregation, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has never discriminated. African in the church name doesn't describe the membership. It refers to the church's beginnings in 1787, when Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, two slaves who had bought their freedom, walked out of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia to protest a policy requiring them to sit at the back of the balcony.

Early services of the AME church were held in a blacksmith shop, a circumstance which is depicted in a symbol on the wall of the local church combining a cross and an anvil.

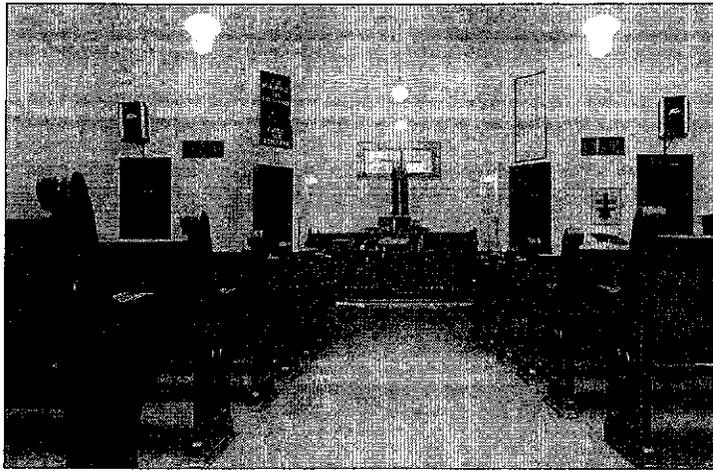
Building and building

Local historian Ken Robison, 64, became interested in obtaining the historical designation for the church after he saw how many blacks were on the early passenger lists of the Upper Missouri



Robison

River Steamboat Co. in the late 1800s. Robison began then to document early black history in Montana. According to Robison, the first black resident of Great Falls was Edward Simms, who arrived in 1886 and went to work as a hotel chef. Soon, Simms and others formed a fledgling congregation around teachings of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1890, its first minister was conducting services in the old fire station building on 2nd Avenue



TRIBUNE PHOTO BY STUART S. WHITE

Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, 916 5th Ave. S., is one of the oldest churches in Great Falls.

South near 4th Street.

A year later, the congregation was ready to build a church, and city founder Paris Gibson sold the 5th Avenue South property exclusively for that purpose. Selling price was \$1. The first service in the new frame church, built for a reported \$900, was July 5, 1891.

Built over a swamp, the church was falling to pieces after 26 years. After adding fill dirt, a new church — of brick — was begun on the site. A new pastor, the Rev. G.E. Horsey, arrived in 1917 and immediately began raising money to complete the new Union Bethel church. Aiming for \$5,000, Horsey targeted Great Falls' white residents as well as its blacks.

He appealed to the citizens through the Tribune: "Our good women will come to your door for your help; please do not turn us away empty handed."

The community provided then, and continues to do so, Ghee said.

"It's amazing," he said. "We might get a gift out of the blue of, say, \$500, and the next thing you know something needs fixing and it costs \$500. God prepared us to take care of that church."

Interior walls have been patched and painted. Pews, which are original, have been reupholstered. Wiring has been replaced and the steeple has been reshingled, but the Gothic-arched stained glass windows, destroyed by vandals 30 years ago, have been replaced with amber-colored textured glass.

Providing handicap access will be difficult, according to Ghee. "A ramp would affect the structural integrity of the building. We need the guidance of engineers for that project."

Robison hopes the historical designation will help the church raise money for such projects.

Double duty

When Payne arrived in Great Falls, he began a double life as pastor of Union Bethel Church and a missile officer at Malmstrom Air Force Base. The minister is an Air Force major, assigned to MAFB until 2004.

"I love the military, and I'm called to preach. This is ideal for me," he said. In fact, he said, his full-time salary from the Air Force enables the little church to have an ordained minister, which it otherwise couldn't afford.

Church membership numbered just 17 when Payne arrived in 1999. He succeeded a Seattle pastor who preached in the little Great Falls church twice a month. Still, Payne was startled when pews held as few as eight worshippers for some of his first sermons at Union Bethel.

But, like Kathy Reed and her parents before her, he "continued on," grateful for those who had assembled to worship. "They were a testament of the greatness of God," he said.

Now, services usually attract 55 or 60 worshippers, he said, and the congregation blossomed to 90 or more on Easter Sunday. Membership is now 60.

"I don't believe in accidents. God has ordered this for me, and if the Air Force sends me to a place where there isn't a church, it will be a sign that God has sent me there to start one."

Reaching out

It's the responsibility of a church to be involved in the lives of the people in the community, Payne said, and expanding church outreach is an important goal of Union Bethel Church.

Weekly food distributions, monthly preaching at the Rescue Mission and regular Bible studies

Sunday services

Union Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church has Sunday school at 9:45 a.m., followed by worship at 11. Bible study is at 7 p.m. Wednesdays and 6:30 p.m. Fridays. Breakfast is served the first Sunday of the month at 8:30 a.m.

are among the ways church members are reaching out to the community. Breakfast is served one Sunday a month before services.

"I'm in awe over what has taken place with that church," Ghee said. "It's endearing for me and the community."

That sentiment is exactly what Payne wants. "Sure, I'd like to replace the stained-glass windows, but my biggest concern is to help people belong here. Then, the numbers will take care of themselves," he said.

For Reed, love of the church has always been the people first, then the structure. "Of course, we need the building in order to give the people a place where they're welcome," she said. "My parents visited a number of churches, but they gravitated to the AME church because of the warmth," she said.

Looking back

"Our family built a kinship at Union Bethel," Reed said. This Easter, the little children reminded her of her childhood, when the Reed family was sometimes the entire Sunday school.

"I found myself remembering the speeches we used to give on Easter Sunday, especially my brother's part, quoting the shortest verse in the Bible, 'Jesus wept.' That was a big deal for him," she said.

She chuckled at the memory of her brother eating almost all of the communion wafers. "We were left with the crumbs," she said.

Although Payne is active military and Ghee and his wife are Air Force veterans, not all blacks in Great Falls have a Malmstrom connection, Reed noted. Her father, Eddie, came to Great Falls to play baseball with the professional farm team then called the Electrics. His wife was a lab technician at McGregor Clinic.

According to the 1900 census, blacks accounted for 128 of Great Falls' 14,930 residents. In 2000, the Great Falls population of African-Americans, alone and in combination with other races, numbered 782 of the city's population of 56,690. Of MAFB's 2000 count of 4,544, 369 were African-Americans, alone and mixed race.