

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROOTS

Twenty successive years of reunions of Relatives of Old-Timers have been fruitful and rewarding experiences. Those who have attended and who have planned the incredible events are more grateful and more dedicated than ever to keeping alive the memory of their predecessors. They value the friendships which began in the 1880s and early 1900s with the arrival of "Negro" pioneers from all of the United States.

With five generations (ROOTS and SHOOTs) actively participating, it is reasonable to expect the annual reunions to continue for years to come. The picnics provide an opportunity for renewal of friendships, family gatherings, and exchange of historical remembrances, reminiscing, and expressions of ethnic and family pride.

The founder, Arline Yarbrough, was motivated by an old snapshot of friends with whom she seemed to have lost close contact. She longed to visit with them and to hear about their families. She felt strongly that there were others who harbored the same longings for those "good old days." She knew that within that group there was much valuable history which needed to be shared and preserved. With the help of her supportive husband, Letcher Yarbrough, ten friends were invited to a dinner party in their home. It was a delightful reunion and it was then that the concept for the first reunion picnic evolved. The guests and the Yarbroughs became the "founding group": Louise and Charles Adams, Emma and Leonard Gayton, Cecelia and Roy Holmes, Evelyn and Charles Taylor, Bernice Black Gray, and Willetta Riddle Gayton. All of the founding group were residents of Washington prior to 1940. They thought of themselves as old-timers as compared to the many newcomers who migrated to Washington as a result of World War II, immense growth in population, and in changes of life styles.

The first reunion picnic was held at Seattle's Seward Park in 1972. A large banner reading HAPPINESS IS OLD FRIENDS welcomed over 300 old-timers and their families. It was a joyous, emotional day as old friends greeted each other. One attendee describe the event as being "just like heaven."

The next year a more appropriate title was adopted. Relatives of Old-Timers (ROOTS) embraced all relatives of pre-1940 settlers of Washington.

Seward Park was the picnic site for the next seven years. Attendance escalated to an average of 1,200 including former residents who came from other states and Mexico. ROOTS outgrew the site and moved to Gas Works Park. The increased parking space, larger covered area, and other improved facilities were welcomed. The picnic has never been rained out, but it is comforting to know that in the event of inclement weather, plans need not be canceled.

The purpose of the ROOTS reunion is primarily social. However, such gatherings provide knowledge and inspiration to adults and youth alike. They are reminded of the importance of strong family ties, good citizenship, and loving attitudes as exemplified by their foreparents.

May each moment of this Twentieth Anniversary celebration be filled with happiness and add to the already rich storehouse of memories.

- Arline Yarbrough -