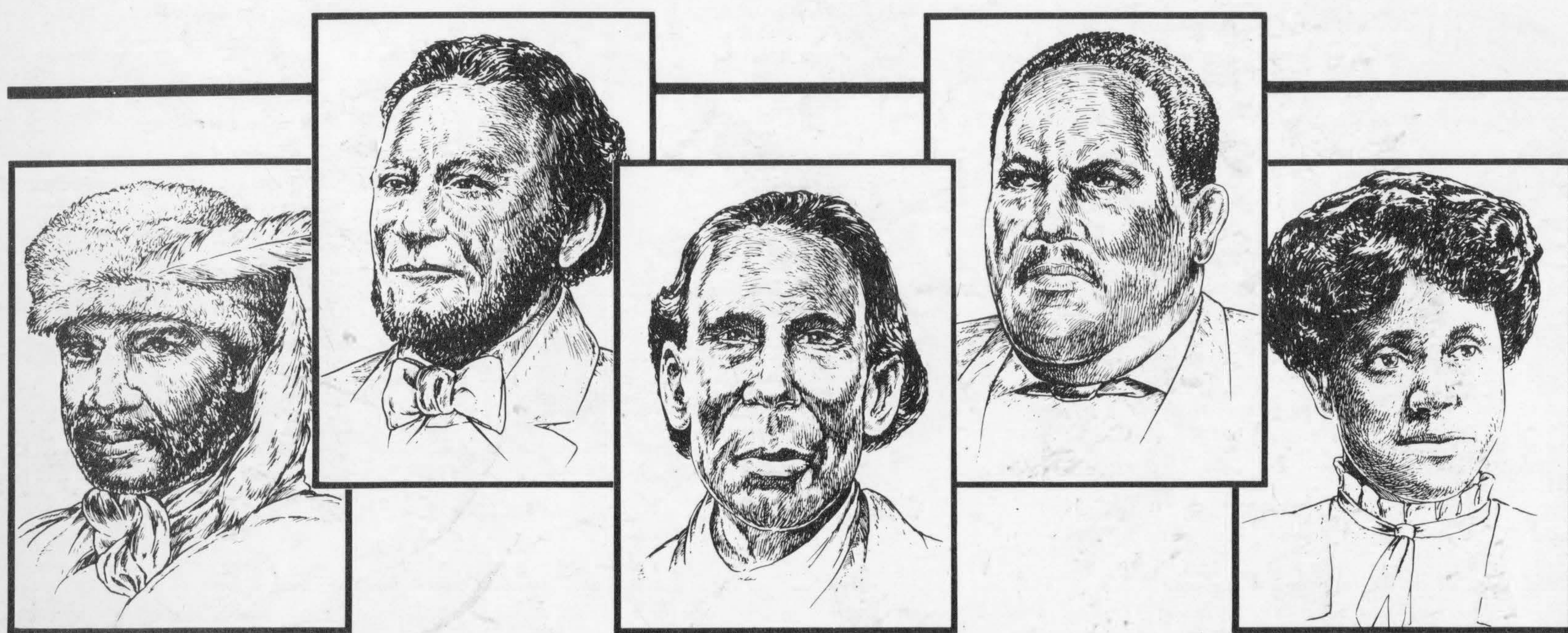




NORTHWEST BLACK PIONEERS

A CENTENNIAL TRIBUTE

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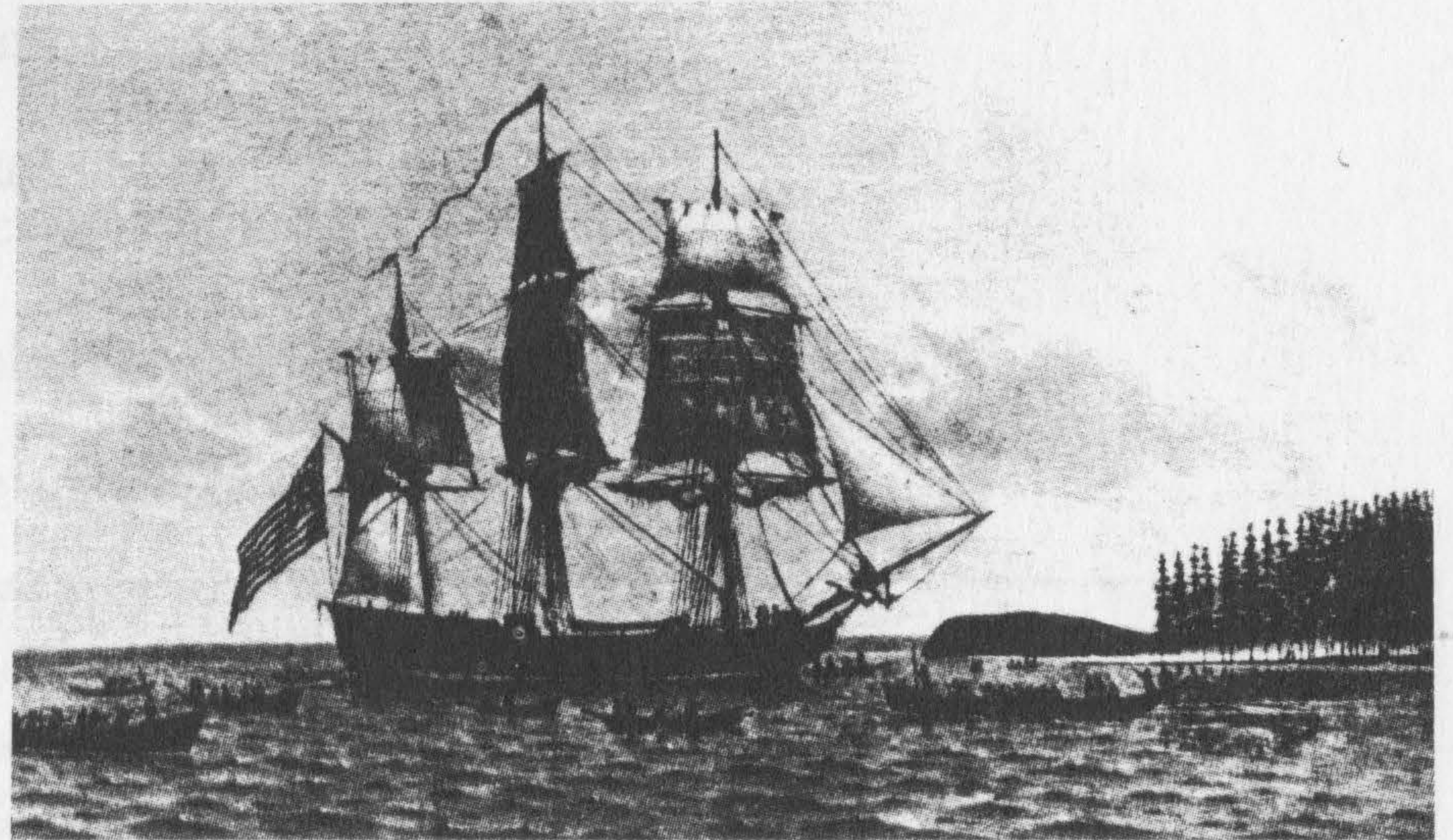
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RALPH HAYES
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
DECEMBER 1987

BLACK HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Up until 1788, the Pacific Northwest region was occupied mainly by Native Americans and a few British and French fur traders. The first American explorer of the region, Captain Robert Gray, sailed around Cape Horn, at the tip of South America, to make his way to the Pacific Northwest Territories. A trickle of explorers started to arrive in the area in the early 1800's, followed closely by settlers interested in farming the fertile land north and south of the Columbia River. By the late 1800's there were several thriving towns, including Olympia, Centralia, Tacoma and Seattle, all vying for access to the railroad that became the area's lifeline for growth and prosperity.



*The ship Columbia commanded by
Captain Robert Gray.*

The black population grew along with the development of the State of Washington. Black explorers gave way to black settlers, and finally black urban pioneers made their mark on the development of many cities and towns in Washington, particularly in Seattle.

The Explorers

Captain Robert Gray set out for the Pacific Northwest fueled by stories told by hunting and fur trading adventurers about the richness of game in the region. Trade with China was the ultimate goal of his first expedition, and to that end he sailed from New England around the Horn of South



*Captain Robert Gray,
American Trader and
Explorer.*

America to reach the Pacific Ocean. Finally, he landed in what is now Tillamook, Oregon, in late summer of 1788. Accompanying Captain Gray was a young man named Marcus Lopez, a native of Cape Verde Island near West Africa. Lopez started off as a cabin boy and was promoted to crew member by the time the sloop "Lady Washington" pulled into shore. Marcus Lopez became the first black man to set foot in the Pacific Northwest. Unfortunately, his visit was a short and fatal one.

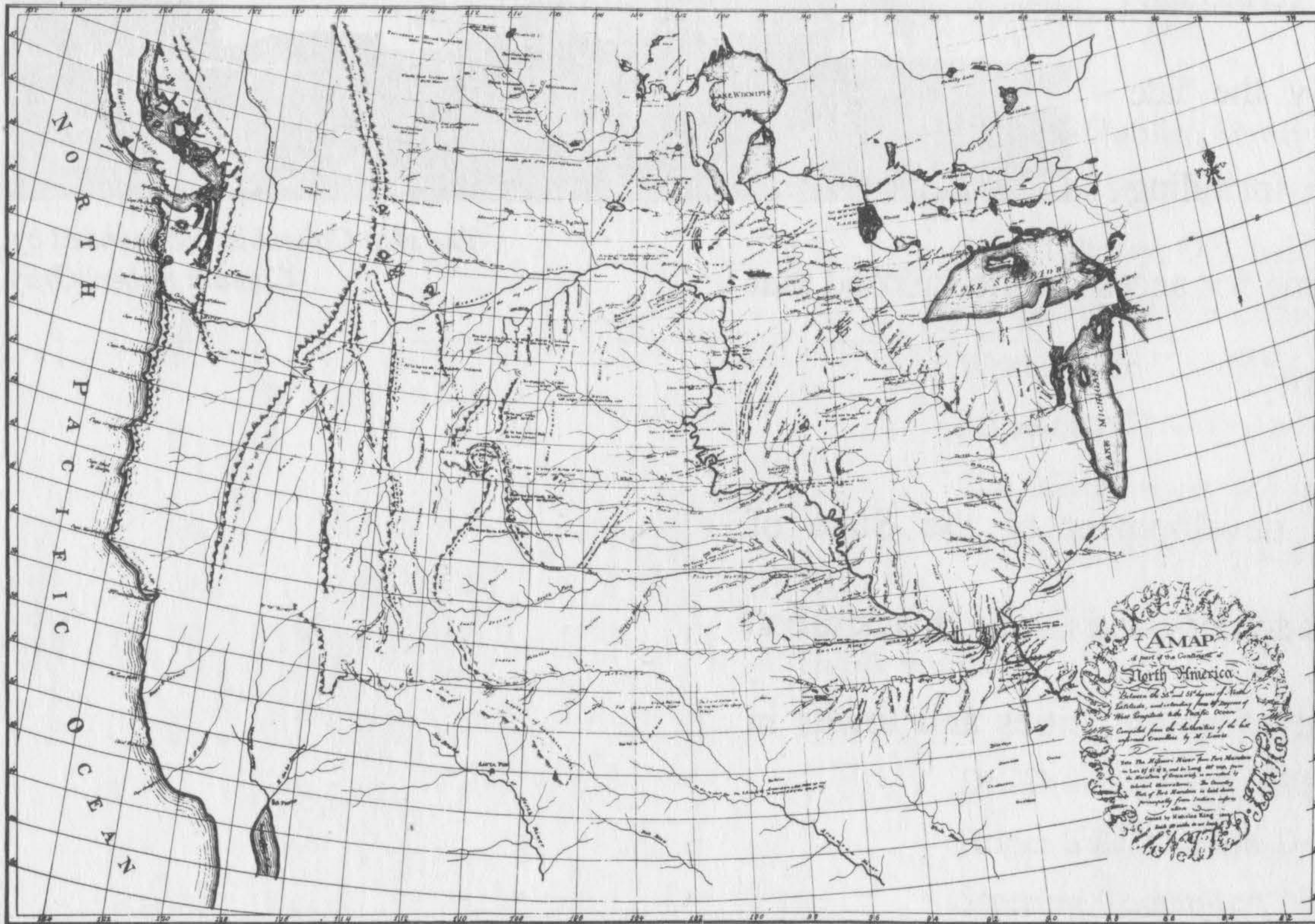
The Native Americans around Tillamook seemed to be friendly when they first met up with Gray's Party. Later, some equipment from the explorer's camp was

discovered missing, and it was assumed that the Native Americans had taken it. Marcus Lopez volunteered to meet with the Native Americans to negotiate a return of the goods, but he was later discovered dead by fellow shipmates.

Captain Gray continued on to China with his cargo of valuable furs. He eventually returned to the Pacific Northwest in 1792, where he discovered

the mouth of the Columbia River and its entry into the Pacific Ocean.

While Gray was trying to find a route by water to the Pacific Northwest, Thomas Jefferson was concerned with an overland route. He had just negotiated for one of the largest land acquisitions in history, the Louisiana Purchase. Jefferson had heard rumors about the rich resources of the area and



Tracing copy of the original map by Meriwether Lewis to President Jefferson from Fort Mandan, April 7th, 1805.

assigned Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to head up an exploring party. In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition left Missouri with a group of about thirty men, including Clark's black servant, York.

Because York was a slave, there is not much information available about him. In the diaries of the expedition, Clark makes mention of York's abilities as a hunter and his



York of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

general resourcefulness on the trail. Legend has it that York was very popular with the Native Americans, particularly the women, who were fascinated with the color of his skin and his sense of humor. The Lewis and Clark party arrived at the mouth of the

Columbia River in the winter of 1805, camped for several months, and then traveled back to Missouri. The expeditions were considered a tremendous success and York was given his freedom in 1806. He soon left Missouri for parts unknown, but rumors from native Americans at the time indicate that York went back west and lived with the various tribes he had met during the expedition.

Marcus Lopez and York are the only black explorers we know about during this time. It is safe to assume that others probably existed, as the area was popular with fur traders, sailors and other adventurers.

The Settlers

In the early to middle 1800's, the United States did not offer much opportunity for black people. Slavery was still in existence in the South, and blacks were not considered citizens, even if they were born free. The basic rights to own land, travel freely and pursue a chosen profession were not widely available to blacks. In fact, Missouri had a law on the



*George Bush,
Early Settler*

books forbidding blacks to settle in the state for more than six months.

The West, with its wide open spaces and lack of structured government, held great appeal for many pioneers. From the early 1800's on, caravans of settlers



The home of George Bush (Backside).

made the long, perilous journey across the country, seeking land and opportunity. Many followed the Oregon Trail, ending up at the Columbia River.

Among the steady stream of immigrants to the area were a number of black men and their families, including George Bush. Born in Pennsylvania a free man, Bush moved Missouri and married Isabell, a white woman. In 1844, at the age of fifty, Bush, his wife and five children

left Missouri with 800 others and headed for the Northwest.

Bush was considered one of the wealthiest members of the expedition and used his wealth to help several other families emigrate. The group spent seven months on the Oregon Trail before reaching their destination, a settlement on the south side of the Columbia River called the Dalles.



William Owen Bush

But the freedom Bush was seeking eluded him in Oregon. The Provisional Government had recently passed anti-black laws that were as repressive as those he had left behind in Missouri. Gravely disappointed by what he found, Bush, his family and several others crossed the Columbia River into what would become the State of Washington and formed the first American community there. He settled in what was "Bush Prairie," which later became Thurston

County. Bush was among many settlers trying to take advantage of the Homestead Act. The act stated that if an American citizen took possession of unsettled land and showed improvements on that land within four years, the land would legally belong to that person -- without putting out a cent of cash to purchase it. Because blacks were not American citizens, land ownership was still a dream for them. Bush's friend, a white man named Michael T. Simmons, helped Bush obtain ownership of his homestead. Bush had helped Simmons and his family immigrate to Washington several years earlier. One of the first acts of the Provisional Government in Olympia was to approve George Bush's petition to own his land.

In spite of his difficulty in obtaining ownership of land, Bush did very well in the Northwest. He was well known as an excellent farmer and was so prosperous that he purchased the first ship owned by the early settlers. This ship, "The Orbit," cost thirty-five thousand dollars and was used to ship wood products to ports in California.

George Bush's family also prospered. His eldest son, William Owen Bush, surpassed his father's farming abilities to the extent that he exhibited his produce at the Philadelphia Exposition during the Centennial Celebration. William Owen was also elected to the first State Legislature after Washington became a state in 1889. His greatest accomplishment there was to help pass legislation establishing a college for the study of agricultural science. This college later became Washington State University at Pullman.



William Owen Bush and his produce exhibit at the Philadelphia Exposition during the Centennial Celebration.

During his lifetime, George Bush established a good life for himself and his family. But he never became an American citizen with full rights. He died in 1863, five years before passage of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Constitutional Amendments, which gave black men full citizenship.

Born a slave in Virginia in 1817, another black pioneer to brave trials of the Oregon Trail was George Washington. Legend has it that Washington's mother was an English lady and his father a slave. Shortly after his birth, Washington was adopted by a white couple, James and Anna Cochran.



George Washinton, founder of Centralia

Washington did as well as a black man could in Missouri. He even was made a legal citizen of Missouri in 1843 by an act of the legislature. But Missouri citizenship did not help him prevail in the federal court system. Washington had a business in

Missouri, where he gave people goods on credit. One of his customers, a white man, refused to pay his debt. Washington took him to court, where he found that he was unable to prosecute because he was not considered an American citizen. The injustice of

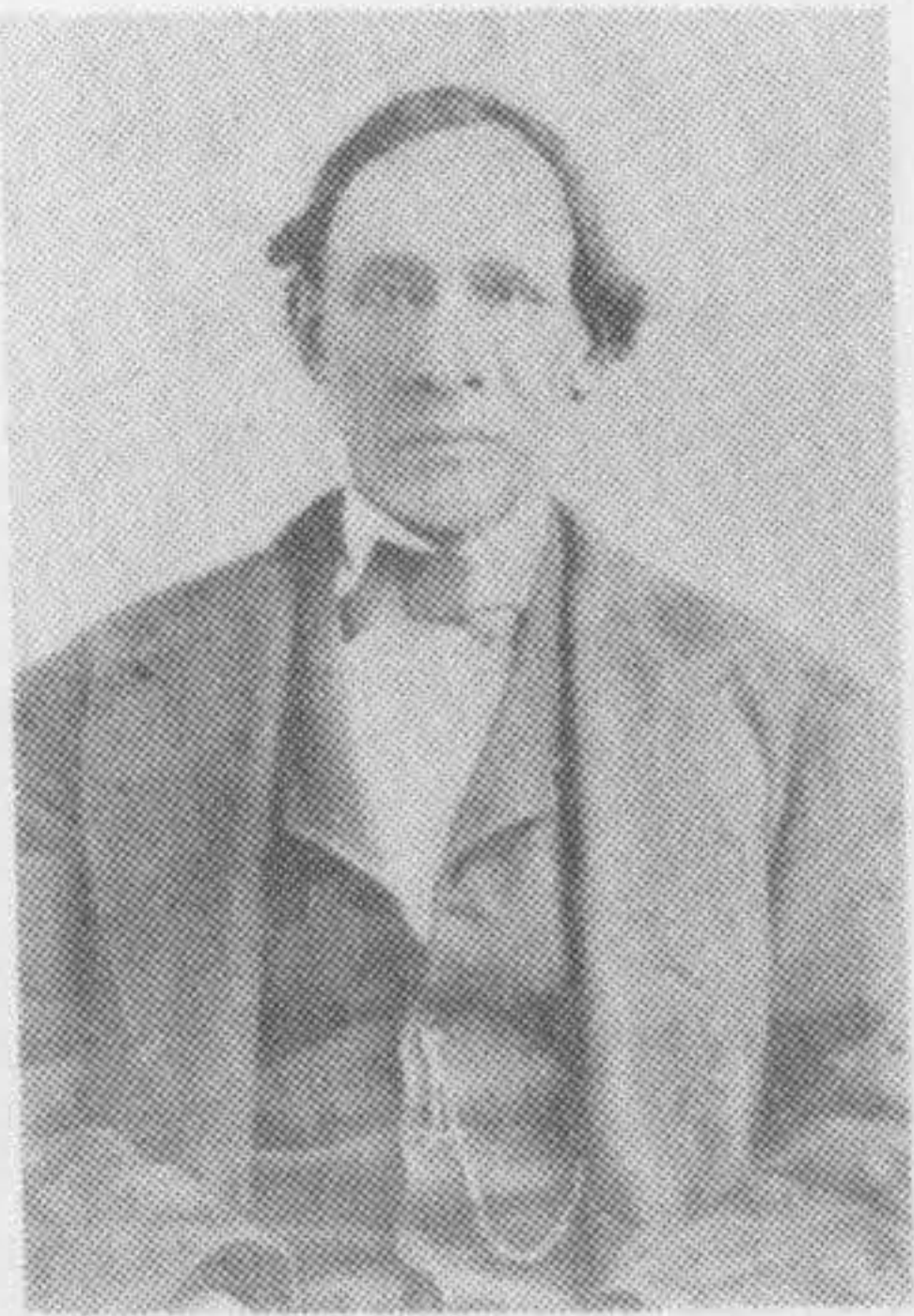


Panoramic view of early Centralia.

this case was the final event that turned Washington's thoughts westward -- to land where he thought life would be filled with more opportunity.

Washington and the Cochrans headed for the West Coast in 1850, following the same route as George Bush and many other pioneers. Washington arrived in

Oregon and remained there for nearly two years. He probably experienced the same disillusionment that George Bush suffered from the repressive anti-black laws. He decided to move north to an area called Centerville, which later became Centralia. A few years later, in 1853, the geographic area that would



*Portrait of
George Washington.*

become Washington state had become a separate territory from Oregon, paving the way for statehood in 1889.

Washington, like Bush before him, found that he couldn't own land because he wasn't a citizen. In 1852, the

Cochran's deeded Washington some land, for which he paid them two thousand dollars. This was the beginning of his considerable landholdings. A few years later the Cochrans deeded him an additional 640 acres, for which he paid three thousand two hundred dollars. He was now a large landowner.

George Washington was particularly interested in developing the town of Centralia. The town was on the railroad line, and this advantage gave him faith that the town would flourish and grow. To that end, he donated land for the construction of several churches. In 1891, as a symbol of his public spirit, Washington platted and designated a block of land as a public square.

Washington's first wife, Mary Jane Coones, was a Jewish black woman from Portland. They were married in 1869 and lived happily for the next 20 years until her death. He married again some years later, and his only child was born when Washington was 73. His second wife, who was white, left him and their young son two years later. When Washington died at the age of 88 in 1905, his



*George Washington
and his first wife
Mary Jane Coones.*

property was worth one hundred fifty thousand dollars. He was buried in the cemetery he had donated to the city, and all of his property was left to his second wife, whom he had never divorced.

The Urban Pioneers

While some blacks were proving themselves able farmers and ranchers, others were drawn to a more urban lifestyle. The railroads played a role in attracting immigrants to the Pacific Northwest by offering discounts to the



Panoramic view of Seattle in 1882 taken from Beacon Hill.

various towns on the line. Up until 1893, the terminus for the state of Washington was Tacoma, and Seattle played second fiddle to this prosperous town. When the Great Panic of 1893 hit, the railroads went bankrupt, along with many other businesses. When the time came to refinance the railroads with eastern money, those investors looked with great favor upon the

bustling town of Seattle. Seattle was in the midst of a construction boom as a result of being burned to the ground in the fire of 1889. In 1895, the Northwest terminus of the railroad became Seattle and Seattle's economic success was assured.

Blacks traveled by foot, train and boat to the Pacific Northwest, seeking what one new arrival referred to as "free air." The earliest black urban pioneer, Manual Lopes, was born in Africa in 1812 and was believed to have been

kidnapped and enslaved before arriving in Massachusetts. He probably worked as a sailer in New England before making his way to Seattle. Lopes arrived in Seattle in 1852 and promptly started a barbering business, complete with the first barber chair brought to Seattle via Cape Horn. He also operated a restaurant, in the same building that housed his barber shop, on First Avenue South. Well known for his generosity towards working men, Lopes often gave them meals and lodging even if they were unable to pay.

Lopes was unique in Seattle even by official standards -- the 1860 census listed him as the sole black resident of King County. But his personality was also unique. Lopes was known to be a devoted snare drummer who announced mealtimes at his restaurant with drum solos. Even though he was foreign born, he was an avid patriot. He was renowned for his Fourth of July celebrations, where he and a fife player named Kelly marched around town playing patriotic tunes. In 1859, Lopes sold his business to Dexter Horton

and then moved to Port Gamble, where it is assumed that he lived until his death.



William Grose,
Urban Pioneer.

More blacks moved to Seattle during the next two decades, increasing King County's black population to 22 according to the census of 1880. William Grose was one of those black immigrants.

William Grose was nicknamed "Big Bill the Cook," an apt description, as he was 6 feet - 4 inches tall and weighed close to 400 pounds. In spite of his bulk, he led a very active and adventuresome life prior to arriving in Seattle. He served in the Navy for four years, traveling to Japan and taking part in a rescue mission in the Arctic. He went to California to join the Gold Rush and formed a west coast branch of the Underground Railroad. Because he spoke Spanish, Grose was sent as a delegate to

"OUR HOUSE."

WM. GROSS & SON, Props.,
Mill Street, Seattle, Wash. Ter.

This hotel is located on the steamboat wharf, and is the best and cheapest hotel in the city for workmen. Table always supplied with the best the market affords.

Board and Lodging \$5.00 Board, per week \$1.00 Meals 25 cents Beds 25 cents.
Baggage conveyed to and from the house free of charge.

Advertisement for "Our House,"
a hotel owned and operated by
William Grose.

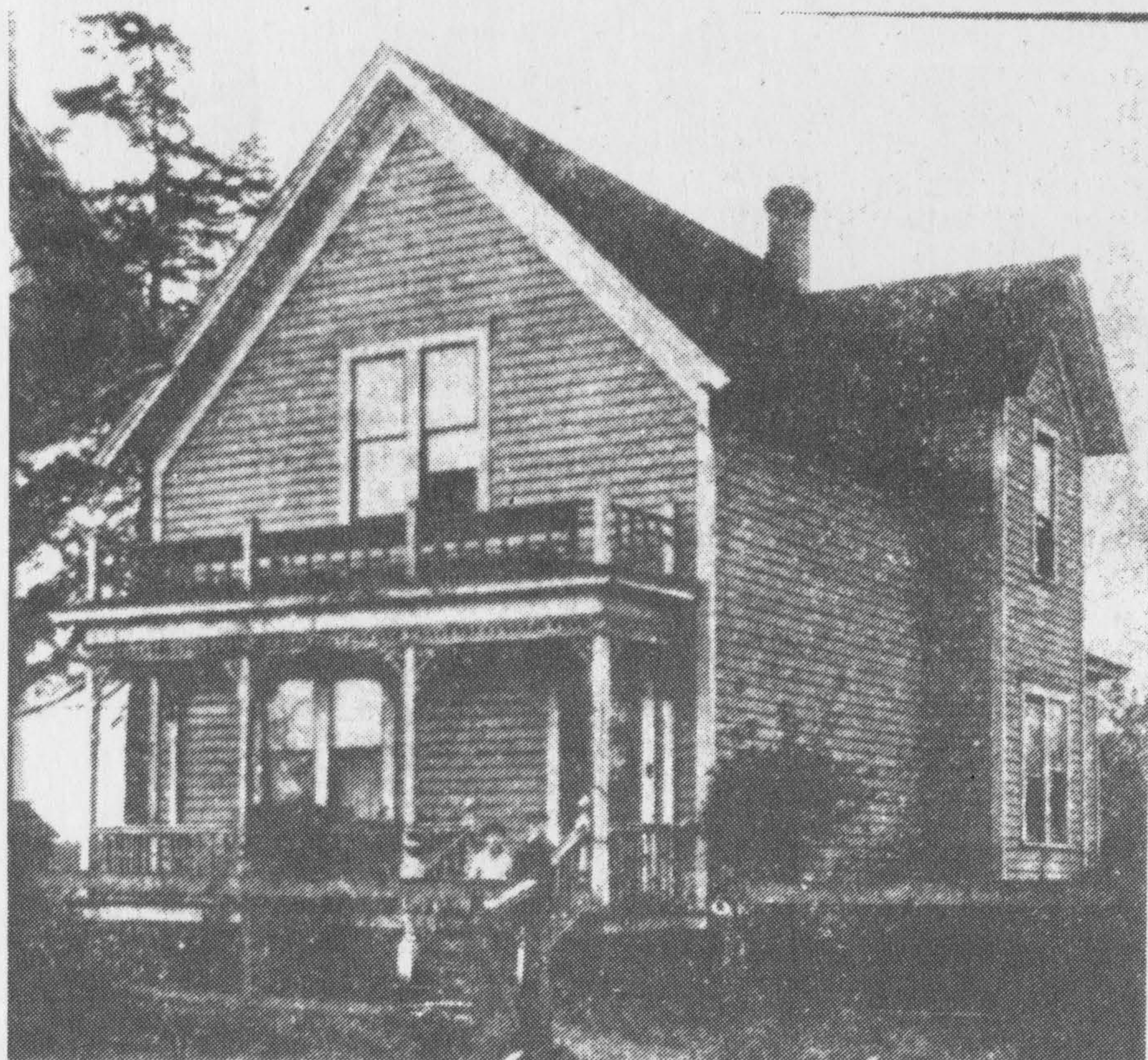
Panama to persuade the governor there to halt the return of escaped black slaves that had traveled to Panama via the Underground Railroad.

In 1860, Grose and his wife Sarah arrived in Seattle. He worked at the trade he knew best -- cooking. In 1876 he opened his own business, a combination inn and restaurant named "Our House." In 1883, he expanded his business by building a three-story hotel on Henry Yesler's wharf. Grose also bought 12 acres of land from Yesler for one thousand dollars in gold. This land was rolling farmland in what is now the Central District.

It may be hard to imagine farmland in what is definitely the urban area now, but many parts of Seattle in Grose's day were isolated rural communities, inhabited by wild animals such as bears. Black urban pioneers settled all over the city, from Queen Anne to Green Lake, and very often they had cows, chickens and

large gardens to sustain themselves. The most urban part of Seattle was the Pioneer Square area, and many black families started out there. Later on, particularly after the fire of 1889, black families bought land in the heavily wooded and undeveloped outlying parts of Seattle.

William Grose followed this same pattern, first buying a lot on Sixth and James and developing it, and later buying the acreage from Yesler in what would become the Central District. He became a prosperous rancher as well as a restaurateur. Despite the fact that the fire of 1889



The Grose family home, around 1893.

destroyed his restaurant and hotel, he still remained a wealthy man. In 1891, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reported his assets at two hundred fifty thousand dollars.

William Grose and his family played a key role in the black middle class in the late 1890's. Their house was the center of social life, and Grose sponsored the first black grand ball. In their leisure time, members of the black middle class participated in musical programs, picnics, barbecues, balls and excursions. An all-black performance of Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* and *Macbeth* was presented at the Seattle Opera House. While some members of the white community were experiencing the age of opulence, wealthier blacks were also enjoying luxuries and entertainment.



John Edwards Hawkins

William Grose appreciated the finer things in life, but his concern for those less fortunate remained. Like Manual Lopes before him, Grose never turned away a person in need. Legend has it that Grose sold his restaurant business to two young men just prior to its destruction in the fire of 1889. The business was uninsured, and the two men would have been instantly bankrupt had Grose not quietly returned the purchase money to them and sustained the loss himself.

The love and respect his fellow men held for Grose were clear when he died sometime around 1898. It is reported that so many people attended his funeral that sixteen carriages were insufficient to carry all of them to his burial plot at Lakeview Cemetery.

The first blacks who arrived in Seattle worked mainly as barbers and restaurateurs. Towards the end of the 19th century, the fields of law and journalism opened up to them. One of the most unique lawyers of the time was John Edwards Hawkins.

Born in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1866, Hawkins came to Seattle in 1890. He immediately started work as a barber in a building which housed many lawyers. Perhaps he was influenced by his customers, but he soon became determined to become a lawyer through diligent study. After working on his feet six and a half days each week, ten hours a day,

Hawkins would go home and study the law. He also studied with Judge Isaac Hall and W.A. Slate, an attorney. His hard work paid off in 1895 when he was admitted to practice in the King County Bar. He was the first black person in the state of Washington to be admitted to the bar without prior certification.

Hawkins handled both civil and criminal cases, but his most renowned suits involved racial discrimination. He sued many restaurants and other public places for refusing to serve blacks. Often he won his case -- but was awarded a mere \$1 in damages by the court. He was heart to say, "It's the principle, not the damages, we're after."

Hawkins became so successful at his practice that he bought a house on Capitol Hill and was later appointed the first black judge pro tem in Seattle.



Senator of the United States, H.R. Revels of Mississippi, Susie Cayton's father (sitting far left).

Equally concerned with civil rights, but more outspoken, was Horace Cayton. Born a slave in Mississippi in 1859, Cayton was sent to school by his father after emancipation. He continued his education at Alcorn College where he studied under Senator Hiram Revels, a renowned black Senator. Senator Revels' daughter, Susie, also went to Alcorn College, where it is assumed she met Horace.

It was very unique for a black man to rise from slavery to a college education, but it was doubly unique for a black woman to have a higher education. Most women were caught up in the demands of day-to-day survival. During slavery women had suffered severe exploitation. After emancipation, they faced the dual tasks of rebuilding their broken self-esteem and surviving in a generally hostile environment.

Many black women earned money at home, taking laundry. This was an arduous task, all done by hand. A woman would boil huge vats of soapy water, soak clothes in them, scrub stains away on a washboard and put the clothes through several rinses after lifting them out of the boiling water with long sticks. The laundry would be wrung by hand and then hung out to dry on clothesline. This process would invariably take an entire day.

Washing was only one time-consuming task for a black woman of that era. All food preparation, ironing, housecleaning, etc., was done by hand with no labor-saving devices. In addition to keeping the house in order and raising the children, black women were expected to help their husbands in their professions. Women were encouraged to bring home additional income as well.

Most black women led lives of unrelenting drudgery, unappreciated for their hard work and perseverance in keeping the family together. Socially, they were at the bottom of

society, regardless of their marital status.

This is one reason that Susie Cayton was truly special in her time.



Susie Revels Cayton

Susie Cayton received a college degree in journalism and wrote stories, one of which was published in *The Seattle P.I.* in 1900. *The Sydney B.C. Independent* described her as a "writer of force and ability." She was prominent in the upper segment of the black

social set and active in community affairs and charities. But her most unique position was that of associate publisher of *The Republican*, a black newspaper she ran with her husband Horace.



Horace Cayton

Horace Cayton came to Seattle in 1886, interested in pursuing a journalism career. Shortly thereafter, he became a political reporter for *The Seattle P.I.* But his true desire was to publish a newspaper for the black community. To that end, he leased the only black newspaper in Seattle, *The Standard*, which had been published by Britt Oxendine. As soon as Cayton started printing *The Standard*, the barrage of attack against state and local officials began. The local black population was so alarmed by the virulence of Cayton's editorials that it drew up a set of resolutions to publicly disavow him and his policies. Oxendine took direct action against Cayton by pulling the lease out from under him and removing the printing equipment.

This just spurred Cayton on to start *The Republican* in 1894. This paper was a forum for his pro-civil-rights and staunch Republican political viewpoint. In the 1800's, the Republican party -- the party of Lincoln -- was the voice of liberation for black people. As a result, blacks almost unanimously voted Republican.

The Seattle Republican
 Established May, 1894.
 OFFICE 714 THIRD AVENUE.

H. R. Cayton.....Editor
 Susie Revels Cayton.....Associate

SUBSCRIPTION RATES.
 One Year\$2.00
 Six Months 1.00
 Three Months 60

Bona Fide Circulation 2,500

Only Paper in the Northwest Successfully Edited by a Negro.

A Whole Page of Legal Notices.

Always Regular, Readable, Reliable, Republican.

Advertising Rates Furnished upon Application.

It Carries No Saloon Advertisements.

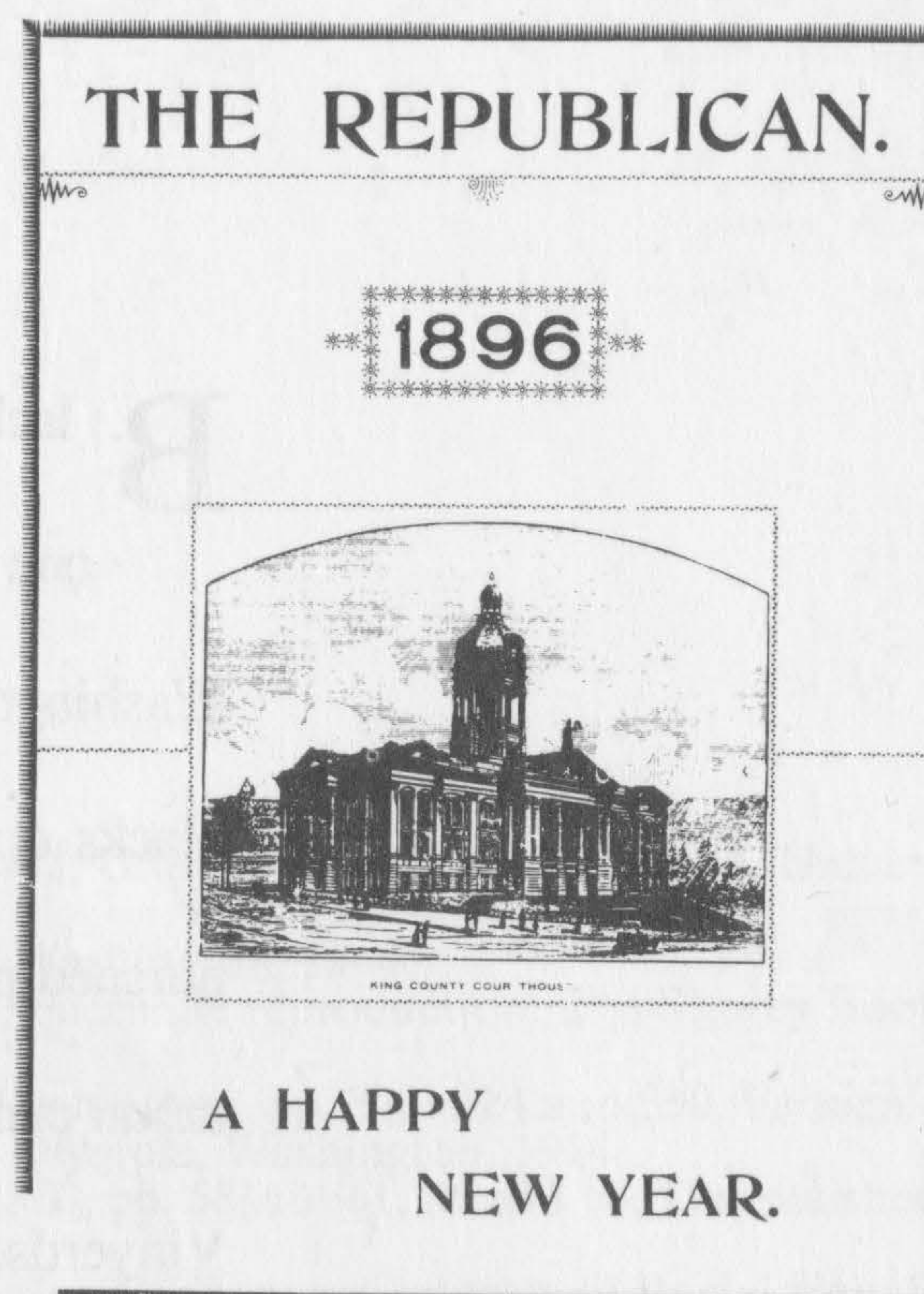
Entered at the Postoffice at Seattle as Second-class Mail Matter.

The Seattle Republican lasted from 1894 to 1915.

The Seattle Republican newspaper founded by Susie and Horace Cayton.

Susie Revels Cayton was also strongly committed to equality for blacks. Some believe she was the driving force behind her husband's political fervor. In a practical sense, Susie and Horace's marriage was mutually beneficial. Horace provided Susie a means of escaping the South, and Susie, the daughter of a Senator, gave Horace social status. Together they formed a formidable team as publisher and associate publisher of *The Republican*.

The Republican was published for twenty-one years, most of the time as a weekly newspaper. Its short stint as a daily in 1896 lasted for only a few months, but its influence on the black community was considerable. *The Republican* gave validity to the activities of the community and encouraged black participation in ongoing issues of the day. Its influence in Republican politics was considerable, and Horace Cayton was even a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1898.



*The Seattle Republican
Centennial Edition.*

The paper had its financial ups and downs, particularly due to Cayton's lack of restraint when describing local figures. For instance, he referred to a local black barber who refused to serve blacks as "a puke of the lowest ilk."

Cayton was arrested for libel twice. The more notorious case took place in 1901. He had mocked the Chief of Police and accused the Chief of graft. Cayton was arrested at home, carried off to jail and locked up with a hobo, refused bail, and denied communication with his layer and friends. The uproar surrounding Cayton's treatment was considerable, and *The Seattle P.I.* noted, "[That]. . .no case has attracted more attention from the public than this." The trial ended in a hung jury, but *The Republican* gradually began to lose its advertisers.

The paper finally folded around the time of World War I after Cayton wrote a series of anti-Ku Klux Klan editorials that completely dried up revenues.

The Clayton's did thrive, however, during the good years of *The Republican*. They were so well off that they owned a large house near Volunteer Park on Capitol Hill and had at least two servants, one Swedish and the other Japancse. They participated in various cultural activities and were members of a number of clubs. Horace and Susie Cayton were widely considered the best-known blacks in Seattle at the turn of the century.

Conclusion

Blacks arrived in the Pacific Northwest Territories in search of a better life, one without prejudice and restriction on their ambition. The state of Washington and the city of Seattle, while not perfect by any means, did offer blacks opportunities to follow their dreams. Many blacks opened businesses, pursued professions, reared families and prospered significantly in the growing urban centers of the Puget Sound. Urban pioneers like the Caytons, Cragwells, Vinyerds, Harrises, Harveys and Allens had an impact on their communities, and their descendants continue that tradition today. Blacks started churches early on in Seattle's history. The Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, the First African Methodist Church and Grace Presbyterian Church all played significant roles in the growing black community. Those churches are still active today. Other black families settled in rural areas and made farming their livelihood with land ownership a dream fulfilled. Ethel Craven and her son William settled Roslyn, and William became mayor of that town, the first black in the history of Washington to become a mayor. While blacks were not always significant in number, their contribution to the development of Washington state cannot be ignored. Descendants of the pioneer families still live in Seattle and its environs and they can feel pride in their freedom-seeking forefathers and the legacy they left behind.



*The First African Methodist Church,
14th Ave., between Pike and Pine,
Seattle, WA.*

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