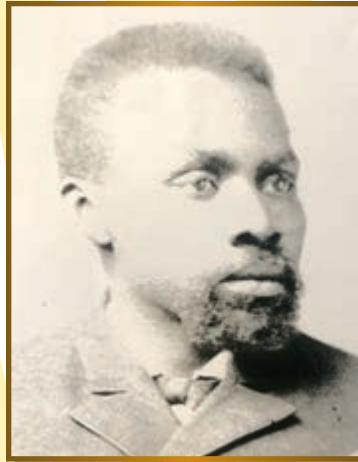


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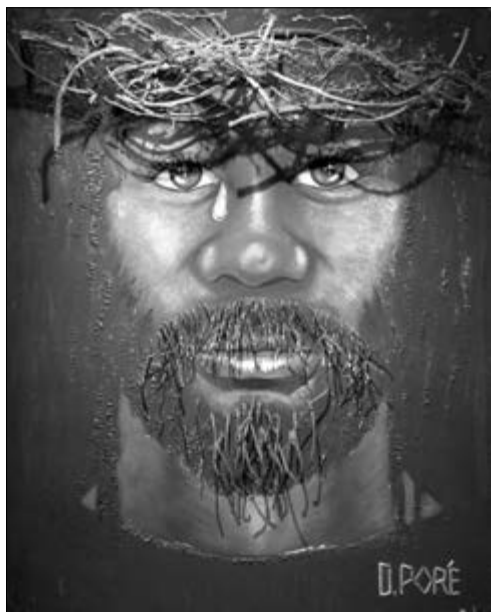
CELEBRATING LOCAL *African American Excellence*



BLACK *History* MONTH

A PUBLICATION OF
The COLORADO COUNTY
Citizen

Lift Every Voice and Sing



Citizen archives

A portrait by Columbus pastor and artist Dan Pore from the February 2016 Live Oak Art Center "Another Side of Color" African American art exhibit.

The song, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," was first written as a poem. Created by James Weldon Johnson, it was performed for the first time by 500 school children in celebration of President Lincoln's Birthday Feb. 12, 1900 in Jacksonville, FL. The poem was set to music by Johnson's brother, John Rosamond Johnson, and soon adopted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as its official song.

Today, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" is one of the most cherished songs of the African American Civil Rights Movement, and is often referred to as the Black National Anthem.

*Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of
Liberty;*

*Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the roll-
ing sea.*

*Sing a song full of the faith that
the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope
that the present has brought
us.*

*Facing the rising sun of our
new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is
won.*

*Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope un-
born had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which
our fathers sighed?*

*We have come over a way that
with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our
path through the blood of
the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our
bright star is cast.*

*God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus
far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we
pray.*

*Lest our feet stray from the
places, our God, where we
met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the
wine of the world, we forget
Thee;*

*Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand.
True to our God,
True to our native land.*

A note from the Editor

For this special Black History Month section of The Colorado County Citizen, I wanted to break away from the norm and do something different.

Keeping our stories alive, and continuing the sometimes difficult conversations regarding fairness and overcoming racism and injustice is essential to keeping history from repeating itself. It's our responsibility to ensure that we continue to learn from our past mistakes. Especially because we are nearing a time when the number of people who shaped the era of the Civil Rights movement are dwindling, we must fight to keep telling these stories for the sake of future generations.

Some of the people featured in this section have passed away, but their legacies live on.

Others like Mr. D, Robert Sanders, Police Chief Wilton White, Jr. and Robert Burford are still alive, and deserving of recognition while they are still here to receive it.

And, we also have bold, bright young people coming on the horizon - like Joel Usher - blazing through with their accomplishments.

One thing that few of us consider is the power within the lessons we learn, and experiences that we take from our own personal stories.

Everyone has a story to tell.

You don't have just look at school history books to learn about black American achievers and history makers. We live with them, go to church with them and see them in the grocery stores. February is black history month, but we can celebrate black people we know who work hard to make a difference every day, not just in February. And even then, it would be impossible to recognize all of them.

To all who have paved the way, thank you.



To all who continue to lead the way, thank you.

And to our children who will become leaders in future generations, be brave, strong and resilient.

It is our hope here at The Colorado County Citizen that you will enjoy this special feature. This county is full of fascinating, noteworthy citizens, and we look forward to sharing more of their stories next year and in the years to come.

Alesia Woolridge
Managing Editor,
Colorado County Citizen

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Finding the Cs with Robert Sanders

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE
editor@coloradocountycitizen.com

It's a humid Saturday morning, and Robert Sanders is on his second cup of coffee and "hitting second gear." He takes a break from carpentry work in his yard to give a piano lesson to a new student.

He offers the youngster a seat on his front porch, and the two chat for a while. Forever the educator, Robert is teaching the young student, even in the conversation on the porch.

Once the screen door to Robert's living room opens and the piano lesson begins, Robert's tone changes from lighthearted to directive.

School is in session.

Robert motions for the student to take the piano bench.

There are five pianos in the living room: an antique piano that belonged to Robert's mother who also played, black baby grand, Hammond organ, digital piano and a keyboard.

The child starts toward the baby grand. Robert stops the student, instructing him to "always approach the piano bench from the side furthest from your audience."

The student changes course and goes around the right.

"Where is middle C," Robert asks. The child plays middle C on the piano. "Good! Okay, now find the Cs, do you know where the rest of the Cs are?"

The pupil lowers his eyes as he stammers for an answer.

"If you don't know, that's okay. You are here to learn. Music requires you to be honest with yourself; not with me, but with yourself. Okay, let's find the Cs," Robert says assuredly.

A child prodigy on the piano, Robert

Sanders - award winning Jazz, R&B, and Classical pianist, has performed since he was five years old and playing in his father's church. Recording artist, producer, director, composer, music professor and teacher, including the National Guild of Piano Teachers' Interscholastic League Piano Competition over a five-year period, there isn't much he hasn't done musically.

The only child of Rev. and Mrs. R.B. Sanders, Robert's roots are in Columbus and Eagle Lake. Robert's father served as pastor of Greater Smith Chapel Baptist Church in the 1950s, and both of his parents were educators. "My daddy played with bands from Kansas City. Lots of those musicians from the 'Chitlin Circuit' used to come stay with us here in Columbus on their way to the next gig," Robert remembers.

Robert recalls his friends asking his mother if he could come outside to play as a child, and he could; after his daily piano practice.

He loved sports and played several in high school. "I ran low hurdles, played basketball and went to state in tennis. Everybody wants to play sports, man. But, it's easy to get injuries in sports. I wanted longevity. I knew I could play music for the rest of my life," Robert says.

After earning his bachelors and masters degrees from Prairie View A&M University, the kid from Columbus who played for church gatherings was performing for audiences in France, Germany, and Bogotá, Colombia. Sanders performed in Columbia at the Bicentennial Independence Celebration, and was a house guest of President Alvaro Uribe Velez.

"Music is the universal language, it's good all over the world. You may be in

a place where nobody speaks your language, but an E in music is an E all over the world," he explains.

Sanders has also worked on film scores, including collaborating on the score to the motion picture, Lord of the Rings. (Yes, that Lord of the Rings.)

Robert hosts the Labor Day Country Jazz Jam at his home in Columbus every year. "Some of my buddies come down here and we just jam," he says, seemingly unaware that he - and those "buddies" - are some of the most respected musicians in the world.

His style of playing is a conundrum:



Courtesy

Jazz, R&B and Classical pianist Robert Sanders.

refined, funky and emotional. Whether he's performing at Live Oak Art Center in Columbus or on a stage in Europe, his audiences are hypnotized by his legendary sound. He takes listeners from jazz to blues to classical with the precision and seamless transitions of a skilled carpenter - which Robert also happens to be.

■ SANDERS, 11

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Nancy J. "Nannie Jo" Castle

Colorado County's Renaissance Lady

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE

editor@coloradocountycitizen.com

Hair stylist. Insurance agent. Restaurant owner. Historian. Cookbook author. And, of course, musician/singer/song arranger.

Nancy Josephine "Nannie Jo" Walker Castle, a lifelong resident of Eagle Lake, did it all.

Born Apr. 11, 1927 to Leona Carter-Walker and George Walker, Nannie was the youngest of four.

She graduated Salutatorian of the E.H. Henry School Class of 1944 in Ea-

gle Lake.

After graduating, Nannie married Sylvester Castle, and they had their daughter, Christina.

She and Sylvester worked for the Wintermann family for a number of years.

Nannie later graduated from the Walls School of Beauty Culture in Houston in 1953, and opened Nannie's Beauty Salon in Eagle Lake.

Nannie and Sylvester opened the Highland Grill Cafe in the 1950s. The restaurant was a popular hang out spot for local teens, and was one of

the first restaurants in Eagle Lake to serve an integrated crowd.

Her lifelong love of cooking led her to publish a cookbook, "Cooking with Nannie Jo," in 2002.

Nannie was active in numerous community activities, including Revitalize Eagle Lake, E.H. Henry Alumni Association, the Eagle Lake Historical Committee, A.H. Simmons Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star and she was a contributor to the first edition of "A History of Eagle Lake" published in 1987.

Of all of her endeavors, music was probably closest to Nannie's heart.

■ CASTLE, 7

Sister Rosetta Tharpe

The Godmother of Rock and Roll

BY JOHN R. JONES

Citizen Reporter

Where else can the historic, remarkable trailblazing musical path of a young, poor, black woman start other than an unlikely place deep in the heart of the South? On top of the obstacles set in place, this person was a woman born and raised in a time where men still dominated all aspects of life, including music. She is the Godmother of Rock and Roll, Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

The title "Godmother of Rock and Roll" was not a self-proclaimed title, but one bestowed upon her by those who followed in her musical footsteps. She influenced the likes of Aretha Franklin, Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, Johnny Cash, Little Richard and Chuck Berry.

Born in 1915 in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, Sister Rosseta Tharpe picked up a guitar at four years of age. By the time she was six years old, she was touring the South with her evangelist mother. She came from a family of traditional

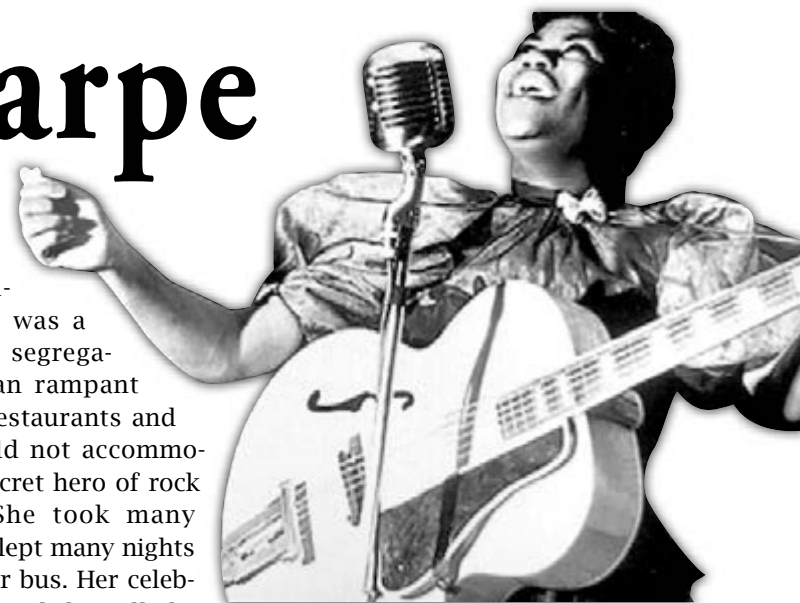


Courtesy photos

evangelists who were cotton pickers by trade. Her mother took her to Chicago where they joined the Roberts Temple Church of God in Christ. There, Rosetta played the guitar and sang gospel songs until 23 years old. She left Chicago and headed for New York where she signed with Decca Records. She began singing secular songs and writing secular music, which shocked many in the gospel community. However, she never left her true roots in the gospel arena and successfully combined religious and secular music. She collaborated with Duke Ellington and even toured with the all-white, male band, The Jordanaires,

where she started playing to white audiences. This was a time where segregation still ran rampant and most restaurants and hotels would not accommodate the secret hero of rock and roll. She took many meals and slept many nights on their tour bus. Her celebrity status took her all the way to Europe, where she was widely accepted and appreciated.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe played in concerts with over 20,000 fans. Sadly, that came to an abrupt halt when she suffered a stroke and died in 1973. She played to the very end, just like a true rocker. In July 1998, she was posthumously honored with the U.S. Postal Service with a 32 cent stamp. On Jan. 11, 2008, the Pennsylvania Governor declared that day Sister Rosetta Tharpe Day in recognition of her remarkable musical legacy.



Her style combined Delta blues, New Orleans jazz and gospel on her box guitar. This eventually became her signature style, especially on the new "electrified" guitar that hit the music scene. She combined that spirituality with blues and swing with a mean guitar lick that she played like a grand master. Sister Rosetta Tharpe was confident, charismatic and raw in her performances, inspiring generations of rock and rollers. Her style and substance can still be felt to this day. After all, she is the Godmother of Rock and Roll.

Colorado County boasts Harvard grad

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE

editor@coloradocountycitizen.com

Robert Burford was born and raised in Columbus, one of James Hansen and Eddie Beatrice Burford's nine children.

Robert was a studious child, and grew up attending St. Paul Methodist Church in Columbus. His family says it was apparent early on that he had a brilliant mind.

Robert is the grandson of Dr. Sam Burford, who was one of the earliest black medical doctors in Columbus.

In high school, Robert was active in band and a number of academic competitions, advancing to state level in most events he participated in.

He received The State Fair of Texas Honor Award, which was awarded annually to the 10 most outstanding young men in the State of Texas, and graduated Valedictorian of Riverside High School in 1966.

He attended Texas A&M University in College Station. While there, Robert was a member of the Corps of Cadets and received the Distinguished Student Senator Award.

Though his years at Texas A&M were highly successful academically, they weren't without difficulty. Robert's intelligence and determination did not exempt him from experiencing harsh acts of racism and prejudice, and his mother often expressed her fear of someone harming him.

"The only thing that was going to

stop me from being a lawyer was death," Robert recalls.

Robert graduated Cum Laude from A&M in 1969, and left Texas for Cambridge, MA to attend Harvard Law School.

He was an active student at Harvard as well, with positions in the Harvard Legal Aid Bureau, Harvard Black Law Students Association and the Ames Moot Court Competition, which for more than 100 years has been one of the most prestigious competitions for appellate brief writing and advocacy in the nation.

During his years at Harvard, Robert also worked on the Tom Bradley for Mayor campaign in Los Angeles in 1972, and was a law clerk at IBM in New York.

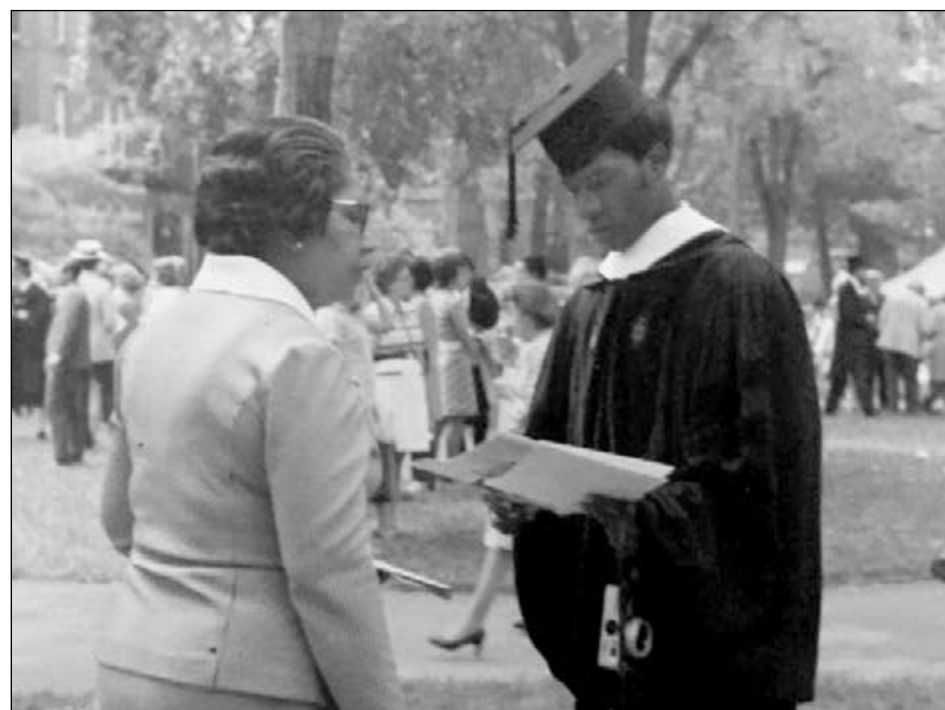
He graduated from Harvard in 1972, was admitted to the Texas bar in 1973, New York state bar in 1974 and North Carolina state bar in 1980.

Robert's long career in law has been fascinating, with work in areas of law including counseling, negotiations, securities work, litigation and entertainment law.

In addition to his law practice, Robert has served as a visiting law professor at North Carolina Central University School of Law, consultant for the NAACP and has traveled the world.

His daughter, Rebekah L. Buford, followed her father's footsteps and is an attorney for HBO in New York.

Still in practice, Robert currently resides in North Carolina.



Courtesy

Robert Buford and his mother, Eddie Beatrice Burford, at his graduation from Harvard Law School.

From the Eagle Lake Headlight archives

March 30, 1967 - The Eagle Lake Headlight reported Jewell Hemphill would be on the ballot for a seat on Eagle Lake school board.

She ran against all white, male incumbents - Paul Powers, William L. Farris and Raymond H. Waddell.

Jewell was seeking an "unprecedented first term on the board for a colored citizen."

The front page article said, "Hemphill, an employee of A. B. Store, is a native of Eagle Lake and is active

in youth and church affairs. This will be the first venture into politics of a Negro candidate for any kind of a position in this county."

The April 6, 1967 edition of the Headlight reported that Powers, Farris and Waddell were re-elected, and Hemphill received 144 votes. Still, her run for school board in 1967 opened the door for other black citizens of Eagle Lake to run for Eagle Lake city council, Rice CISD school board and mayor.

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Booker Memorial Temple

Evans' legacy and labor of love

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE
editor@coloradocountycitizen.com

Rev. Carl Evans was born Mar. 15, 1935 in Columbus to Mrs. Vivian Evans Moore. On a 1940 United States Federal Census, Evans was recorded to be 11 years old, and the head of household, Fleming Evans, was his cousin. Evans was raised by relatives, including his aunt Gussie Evans Booker, and uncle Rev. Gusta Booker, Sr.

He began preaching at the age of 17, and was licensed to preach in the Church of God in Christ in March 1953.

Evans' pastor and mentor, Rev. Gusta Booker, Sr. licensed him to preach.

Evans served as Booker's assistant pastor at the Church of God in Christ until Booker's death in 1962.

Evans said in his biographical sketches that he received inspiration from God to build what would eventually become Booker Memorial Temple Church of God in Christ in Columbus.

Evans recalled that he promised Booker on his deathbed that he would build a church as a memorial to him, and that as long as he lived, Booker's name would never die. Evans said Booker gave him his blessing to build the church.

Evans said when he started the church, there were only four members: Mother Gussie Booker, Brother Will Green, Sister Lilly Green and Sister Alma Glover, all senior citizens.

Building Booker Memorial Temple proved to be a tough task for Evans, but he persevered.

Evans wrote about the drive to acquire the land and building for Booker Memorial Temple, stating, "We began the drive with \$70.00 (sic) in the red, and by asking other churches and friends to come and help, a fund drive was held and \$750.00 (sic) was

raised."

A lot was located and Evans, with only the \$750, was \$250 short of the purchase amount. Evans went to the bank and borrowed \$250 to purchase the lot.

Evans and the congregation now had a lot - but no building.

The group found an army barrack owned by the late Mrs. E. Irvin. Irvin's asking price for the building was \$1,000 and again, Evans found himself strapped for cash.

"They only had \$500. Mrs. Irvin told Rev. Evans that she would let him have the building, with a clear title, with the agreement that he was to pay the remaining \$500 within one years (sic) time, so as not to hold up construction of the building," Evans recalled in his writings.

Evans asked for help from people in Columbus and El Campo to help him build the church, but had little success.

"They said we had no collateral," Evans recalled in his writings.

One day, Evans was driving home from his job at the Q.P. Store and was listening to radio station KYOK out of Houston.

Brother George Nelson, a personality on the station, was advertising church financing from Grogan Building Supply Company in Houston. Evans wrote down the phone number to call when he got home.

A Grogan Building Supply representative came to Columbus to visit with Evans about his plans the next day.

The representative returned to Houston, advising Evans that he would get back with him in a few days.

Thursday, Evans received a call from Mr. Grogan himself, requesting to meet with Evans Friday at 6 p.m.

"I picked up Mother Booker and the

other members to meet Mr. Grogan at my home. When we got to my home, a black Cadillac was parked in front. A chauffeur (sic) got out, opened the door, and a little short man with an overcoat and hat got out and introduced himself as Mr. Grogan," Evans wrote.

Evans said after completing the application Grogan took from his briefcase, an agreement to loan Evans \$11,000, the total for completing the necessary work, was made.

An additional cost of \$400 to move the building was paid by Mr. Grogan.

"He said he would give us a turn-key job. We had a ten year payment plan. By the grace of God, the note was repaid within 8 years," Evans recalled in his writings.

The first Memorial Service for the late Rev. Gusta Booker at the Booker Memorial Temple Church of God in Christ took place in March 1967.

When it was time to remodel, Evans recalled in his chronicles that the church was approved for a \$25,000 loan from "Columbus Colorado County Federal Savings and Loans, with Mr. S.K. Seymour."

In writing about his congregation, which grew from a handful of senior citizens to about 50 members at the time of his sketches, Evans said, "We are so blessed to have a membership so closely knitted with love one for the other. The members works (sic) together closely in harmony as one."

Booker Memorial Temple Church of God in Christ received its certificate of incorporation in June 1976.

Evans received his radio telephone third class operator permit from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in July 1978, and went on to host a popular Sunday night gospel show, "The Sweetest Music This Side of Heaven," on KULM for a number



This photo is from page 63 of the book, *Around Columbus*, by Roger C. and Marilyn B. Wade.

Rev. Carl Evans preaching at the podium of Booker Memorial Temple Church of God in Christ in Columbus.

of years.

Evans was a commanding presence in the pulpit, with his 6'1", 200-plus pound frame and booming voice. Evans was highly sought after for his preaching and music. He traveled throughout the county and surrounding areas preaching, laying hands, and casting out diseases for people. Evans hosted revivals and "tarrying services" that drew people from all around.

Evans was an advocate for the elderly and the underprivileged, spearheading and assisting with a number of programs to help senior citizens and the less fortunate in the county.

Rev. Carl Evans passed away Jan. 16, 2013 at the age of 77.

The church, now called Booker Memorial Temple Independent Holiness, is still located at 815 Bonham Street, and is under the leadership of Rev. Ervin Mayberry, Sr.

** Information in this article is from writings and other memorabilia donated by Rev. Carl Evans to the Nesbitt Memorial Library archives, and Colorado County Citizen newspaper archives.*

Dr. Samuel Burford

One of the county's earliest black doctors

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE
editor@coloradocountycitizen.com



Samuel Henry Burford was born in 1863, the same year President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing African Americans from slavery.

As with most African American families, tracing lineage back more than three generations can be sketchy. It is believed that Sam, and his mother, Mary, were descendants of slaves owned by Dr. Jonathan Burford of Fayette County, Tenn.

Mary and her children were willed to Jonathan's daughter, Phebe Burford Shaw, after Jonathan's 1849 death.

The Burfords and Shaws moved from Tennessee to Colorado County with

their slaves around 1852.

In 1880 Sam's mother, Mary, now a free woman, was documented as living in Columbus with her four children: Harriet, Amanda, Sam and Julia.

By this information, Sam would have been 17 years old at that time. Sam returned to Tennessee and attended Meharry College, a medical school for black students, in Nashville. Sam, now Dr. Samuel Burford, graduated from medical school in 1893.

It is unclear how Dr. Burford found the means to pay for his education, however, several of Jonathan Burford's grandsons also received medical degrees.

After his graduation, Dr. Burford returned to Columbus to begin his practice.

Dr. Burford's office was located over Dr. James Byars' Drug Store at the corner of Milam and Walnut Streets in the building that later became Fehrenkamp

Bros. store.

Byars fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War at age 17 with Bradford's Battalion.

Another doctor, Dr. Robert Hansen, also practiced medicine in Columbus, and Drs. Hansen, Byars and Buford became good friends.

Dr. Burford married Fannie Prince Nov. 29, 1900 in Columbus. They had a son, James Hansen, named for Dr. Burford's two friends, born Jan. 1, 1902.

Dr. Burford moved his medical practice to Wharton in the mid 1920s, and died there Aug. 2, 1929 at the age of 66.

He is buried in the City Cemetery in Columbus.

** Information for this story compiled from Buford family oral accounts and documents, research from Mary E. Youens Hopkins, and the Biographical Dictionary of American Physicians of African Ancestry, 1800-1920.*

Castle

Continued from 4

She began playing the piano at five years old under the instruction of her aunt Panola Duncan.

By the time Nannie was seven years old, she was playing for Friendship Baptist Church.

At 17, Nannie was offering piano lessons, and went on to teach hundreds of piano and singing students from beginners to advanced musicians.

She was a highly sought after pianist, arranger and vocalist. She was a regal sight at the piano; a petite woman with perfectly styled hair, dress draped gracefully over the piano bench.

However, her soulful, multi-octave voice rarely needed a microphone.

Choirs and vocalists under her direction performed on radio, television and album recordings.

Nannie was a regular collaborator with Rev. Carl Evans of Columbus for musicals and the radio show Evans hosted on KULM.

Several of her music and voice students went on to record musical proj-



ects of their own.

From jazz to gospel, Nannie played with the best of the best.

She was a member of the Spiritual Harmonizers, a popular local gospel group, and was a constant guest of the I.H. Smaller Band at Club Eldorado.

Nannie Jo Castle passed away at the age of 76 in March 2004.

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Courtesy | Nesbitt Memorial Library

Black Colorado County citizens gathered for a Juneteenth celebration circa 1910. The photo was taken by Oscar Zumwalt.

Historic Emancipation Trail approved for study

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE
editor@coloradocountycitizen.com

An unlikely collaboration to honor African American history and telling a more expansive and accurate story of how critical slavery was to the development of the state and nation took place in Washington, D.C. last month.

President Donald Trump signed a bill into law Jan. 27 to commission a study for the 51-mile Emancipation Trail from Galveston to Houston.

This is a necessary first step toward a national landmark commemorating when Texas slaves learned they were free. On June 19, 1865, Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger and Union troops sailed into Galveston Bay,

where he issued General Order No. 3 informing them of the Emancipation Proclamation that President Abraham Lincoln had signed nearly two and a half years earlier.

The proposed trail would begin at the building where Granger made his announcement and would go along Interstate 45 and Texas 3 to Freedman's Town before ending in Emancipation Park in Houston.

After that first Juneteenth, Freedman's Town, located in Houston's Fourth Ward, became a destination for newly free blacks from Texas and Louisiana.

The Emancipation Trail will be only the second National Historic Trail honoring African American history, the other one being the 54

miles between Selma and Montgomery in Alabama — which, in a march led by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1965, capped a civil rights campaign that would lead to passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Naomi Mitchell Carrier, founder and executive director of The Center for African American Living History, fought back tears as she explained what it could mean for telling the full history of Texas. Carrier has spent decades researching the history of the trail.

Carrier said there were 300,000 men and women who helped build Texas's wealth through slavery, and they have long been left in the shadows of history. "There is so much history that the people need to

know."

In Bill Stein's "The Ungilded History of Colorado County," celebrations of the end of slavery, known as Juneteenth, were documented in Colorado County as early as 1876.

"In Columbus, the black population continued to stage annual celebrations of their emancipation from slavery, usually on June 19, or 'Juneteenth' as it came to be known. In 1876, the celebration featured a parade, a dance, speeches by local white citizens, and, evidently, a baseball game. Similar festivals were held at Oakland in 1877 and at Weimar in 1878 and 1879. The 1879 Columbus Juneteenth celebration, held at the grove north of town, attracted some 600 people," Stein wrote.

Mr. D gives haircuts and history

BY ROYCE CALDWELL
reporter@colordacountycitizen.com

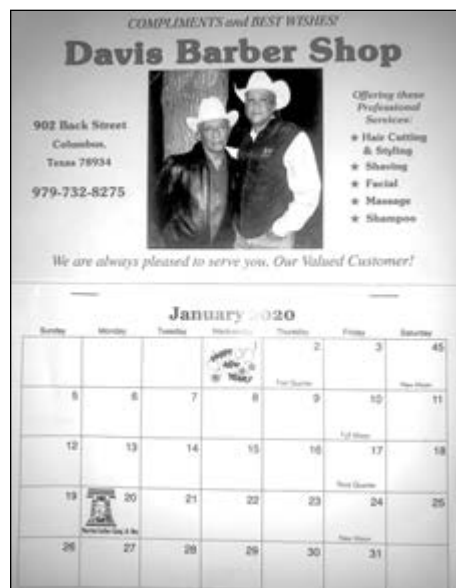
Going to the barber shop is a layered experience. A trip to the barber shop is about more than just getting a haircut.

It's a safe place for men to talk sports, women, politics and life. With rhythm and blues playing in the background, Mitchell Davis, Sr., known to many in the Columbus area as Mr. D, has provided that safe place for men since 1964.

America - and Columbus - was a different place in 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed in July of that year, making racial discrimination illegal. The campus that now houses Columbus Junior High School was Riverside School, the school for black Columbus children prior to integration (which didn't occur for another two years).

Mr. D. grew up in New Ulm, and graduated from Austin County High School in Sealy. After two years in the United States Army, he graduated from Tyler Barber College in 1963. A year later, Mr. D opened Davis Barber Shop right up the street from Riverside, and around the corner from St. Paul Methodist Church.

Mr. D said he chose to become a barber



Courtesy

Mr. D has made a calendar for his barber shop customers that features a photo of he and his son, Mitchell, Jr., for 32 years.

because of his dad. "My dad was a barber. I watched him cut hair and he taught me how to cut as well," Mr. D recalls.

In addition to attending barber school in the 1960s, Mr. D also furthered his education in carpentry.

He now owns about seven rental

properties, and nearing 80 years old, still does his own maintenance and repairs on the properties.

Mr. D has one son, Mitchell Davis, Jr. and two grandchildren.

Mr. D has given his customers a complimentary calendar with a photo of he and his son during the holiday season for 32 years.

For 56 years now, Every Friday and Saturday one can go to Davis Barber Shop and find Mr. D cutting hair, telling stories, giving advice and dancing to the rhythm and blues playing from his radio.

Another thing that hasn't changed is Mr. D's Friday and Saturday visits to Schobels Restaurant, where he is a beloved regular customer.

Times and hairstyles have changed, but Mr. D's love of the Columbus community hasn't.

He shows no sign of slowing down, and a visit to his shop guarantees you a haircut, history lesson and a safe place to just be yourself.



Courtesy

Mr. D with his grandson (and author of this article) Royce Caldwell.

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The COLORADO COUNTY
Citizen

Eagle Lake Police Chief Wilton White, Jr.

Fulfilling a dream

BY REBECCA S. JONES

Editor's note - This article has been edited for length.

A native of Hempstead, Wilton White, Jr.'s fondest memories as a child included spending time during the summer at his grandparents' house. His grandfather, Harry Taylor was a hard-working mechanic and farmer, who taught him how to ride horses and the basics about working on engines.

During his high school years, he was active in the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) - a work program which allows students with enough credit hours to leave school and work. He said, "In school I wasn't really athletic. I was too short for basketball; too slow for track; and too little for football; but, I found something

I could do and that was the military."

After graduating from Hempstead High School in 1979. In 1982, he enlisted in the United States Army. White said, "As it turned out I had a knack for that military stuff. Even though I was asthmatic, I never let that stop me. I would buy shorts with pockets and would put my inhaler in my pocket. Whenever I felt myself having an attack, I would give myself a few puffs and keep going."

Although White entered the military as a Diesel Mechanic he quickly emerged as a leader. He perfected the skill of shooting his rifle, and rose to the rank of Sergeant within a two-and-a-half-year time span, amidst receiving other medals and commendations. During his tenure there, he devoted four years of service in Regular Duty and served another two years in the Texas National Guard; before receiving an honorable discharge in 1988.

Upon being discharged from the military, he moved to Fort Hood and

matriculated at Central Texas College, where he earned an Associate's degree in Criminal Justice. Following, he relocated to Houston and secured employment at Armored Transport Texas. While picking up and delivering money to varying enterprises in the city; he decided the time had come for him to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming a police officer. Thus, he enrolled at the University of Houston - Downtown and began his studies to obtain licensure. He would work during the day and attend class at night. His sacrifice was rewarded in December of 1989, as he attained his license to become a certified police officer in the state of Texas.

When he applied at the Brenham Police Department, White was told there were no openings available. At the time, the department only had one African-American police officer, Mr. Bill Mays. Mays retired shortly afterwards, and White was called back by Brenham PD who offered him the position. After happily accepting the invitation, he began working as a police officer just a month after earning his license.

White maintained an unblemished record during his four-year tenure with the Brenham Police Department. While there, he served on the Interview Board and became a Field Training officer before applying with the Texas Department of Public Safety. Consequently, he was hired on with the Department of Public Safety in January, 1994. He continued his professional legacy of excellence, during the 13 years he dedicated to the department - serving on the Interview Board and as Field Training Of-



ficer to both male and female troopers.

As a Texas state trooper, White received many awards and accolades for his service. He was recognized with the Driver's Safety award, for having written over 760 speeding tickets - more than any other officer in the region. Also, in 2004, he was hit by a drunk driver while working for the DPS and was seriously injured to the point, that he was off work for nine months. As a result, he was summoned to Austin to receive the Star of Texas award presented by then-Governor Rick Perry. Having "won the war, but lost the battle," is how White described his transition from State Trooper with the DPS

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Sanders

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When he's not working on music, Robert can be found using his hands to create another form of art - carpentry.

"Watch your head," he says as he leads the way up a stairway in his backyard to show off a recent project.

One of the pieces he is most proud of is his kitchen table - handcrafted by him in the shape of a grand piano. The white and black silverware under the clear casing on the table is arranged as - you guessed it - keys on the piano. Robert beams as he lifts the top of the piano (er, table) to show the storage area underneath.

"It took me about a year to make this. I love it and I get all the bragging rights," he smiles.

After touring the world, working as a band instructor for high schools and serving as the Director of the Jazz Ensemble at Prairie View A&M University, Robert shows no signs of slowing down.

He has retired from education, but still teaches piano as his schedule per-



Robert Sanders playing at the Columbus Live Oak Art Center.

Citizen | Alesia Woolridge

mits between gigs.

"I have taught for over 20 years, and I have students who are accomplished pianists themselves. It gives me goosebumps to see my students succeed," he says.

The piano lesson for Robert's newest student draws to a close, and after an

hour of learning finger placements and playing the C scales, Robert commends his pupil on a job well done.

Before the lesson concludes, Robert, with a light layer of sawdust on his baseball cap and clothes, takes to the piano and plays about a minute's worth



Courtesy

Columbus native and world renowned musician Robert Sanders.

of whirlwind jazz as effortlessly as one would turn the page of a book. He turns to his student, smiles and says, "Be patient and practice. I couldn't have played that if I hadn't first learned to play this," playing the C scale the child just learned.

White

Continued from 10

to becoming Lieutenant of Operations at Prairie View A&M University.

As such, Lt. White began working in this capacity in April, 2007. He devoted over a decade to the Prairie View community before retiring in 2018, with a combined sum of 27 years of experience serving in law enforcement. Although Lt. White had accomplished much, he still felt a void within. He said, "I had to clean my heart because I had been overlooked twice for the Chief position at Prairie View. So, when I got to where I could retire, that's what I did. Because, I felt I had done everything throughout my career that I could, to become Chief; but, that wasn't where God wanted me to be."

While enjoying retirement, one of White's friends contacted him and shared that Eagle Lake Police Department was in search of a Chief. He encouraged White to apply. Following the urging of his friend, White applied but never heard anything back from the agency. After some time passed, his friend reached out to him again and

told him that the search for a Chief had begun again. This time, White was reluctant to apply due to his first experience. However, after relenting to the constant urging of his friend, Gus, he decided to apply on a Friday evening.

The following Monday, White received a call and was asked to meet with the City Manager that Thursday. He complied and was informed that he would be considered for the position after completing the company's requirements. The rest literally became history!

Last year, Chief Wilton White, Jr. was sworn in as the official head of the Eagle Lake Police Department. This feat establishes him as the first African-American to serve in the position in the agency which was established in 1888. When asked how it feels to accomplish his lifelong dream, Chief said, "It feels wonderful! This is the last dream I wanted to accomplish, I always said, 'this would be the last thing I did, before I got out of law enforcement. It's a small agency and I have a lot of young guys under me and the people here have been great; they have welcomed me in, and it has been good."

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Usher building bridges, serving the community

BY ALESIA WOOLRIDGE
editor@coloradocountycitizen.com

The calling on some lives can be as clear as day, and Joel Usher's call to service is one of them. Joel is a product of the Columbus community, and a 2001 Columbus High School graduate.

Joel's postcollege years have been filled with a number of activities closely tied to the Columbus community.

He is the owner of Kpai Group, worked seven years as director of the Columbus Boys and Girls Club, and served as Associate Minister at New Greater Smith Chapel Baptist Church.

Working alongside New Greater Smith's pastor, Joseph Hargrove, Joel's dedication and hard work helped grow the youth bible study at the church from four-five participants to nearly 40.

Joel is active in local politics as well, serving as a Columbus Community and Industrial Development Corporation (CCIDC) board member and

current Columbus ISD school board member.

Joel's love of children and community have allowed him to build bridges across racial, religious and economic divides.

His ability to build those bridges made members of Glidden Baptist Church take notice of him when they were in search of a pastor.

Joel says the church had been without a pastor for about seven months when Ron Mostyn, chairman of the church's leadership committee invited him to come preach.

"They asked me to come preach, and I did. After the first sermon, Ron told me they were interested in having me as pastor. I told him I wasn't looking to be a pastor, but I would come preach. They asked me to come back again. I told them no. I prayed about it, and in my prayer, I asked God to make it clear for me if this was the place for me. A month went by, and they asked me to come back, and that was when I knew,"

Joel reflects.

Joel is the first black pastor of the predominately white congregation.

When asked how it feels to be a history maker, Joel says, "It still feels surreal. But I already had connections with most of the people in the church through my other affiliations throughout the community."

Joel recalls asking members of the congregation if they were ready for any possible backlash they might encounter by calling a black pastor to the church. Their answer to Joel? "We are being led by the spirit of God, and we understand there may be some that will not agree with our decision to call you to be pastor. But, we are going to do what God is leading us to do."

Joel and his wife of 14 years, April have two children; 12-year-old Elijah and 8-year-old Arielle, both CISD students.

Joel says his vision for the church is to "go into the community and teach them salvation. Meet people where they



Courtesy

Members of the Glidden Baptist Church congregation pray over their new pastor, Joel Usher.

are and go from there. The thing that I love about the Glidden Baptist Church congregation is that they have a true heart to want to serve."

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