In Search of Freedom

Working north to a new kind of life, blacks found new forms of discrimination. Eventually they organized to seek equality, but the battle for civil rights continues today.

The first recorded black residents of Beloit, the Emmanuel Craig family, settled on the west side of the Rock River in the Portland Avenue area sometime between 1836 and 1839.

A coachman, recognizable by his uniform and high black stovepipe hat, Craig died in 1858 at the age of 115 years.

The Gilliam Perry and Joseph Bowling families arrived in Beloit in the 1840s. The Perry family arrived in 1846 and lived at the corner of St. Lawrence Avenue and Fourth Streets. Bowling, who arrived with his family around 1846, was one of the town’s first bootmakers, his place of business being located on the west corner of State Street and Grand Avenue.

Around 1850 Dave Young came to Beloit from the deep south. A widower with three children, Alex, Essex and Anna, the family grew in Beloit to include 16 more children.

Another noteworthy black settler was Joseph Graham. He came to Beloit from New Madrid, Mo., in 1864 with his wife Mary and five children. Joseph, Elizabeth, John, Laura and Ed, and Dr. William Strong, Graham worked for the old Wheeler Windmill factory as a fireman. Their residence was on Race Street, then on the banks of the stream that powered the nearby mill.

Another black making his residence here was William Atwood Waffens who came as a small boy in 1858. Five years later the Strothers and Reiger families settled here. Notable from this group was Johnny Strothers, who after arriving in Beloit joined the Union army as a “one hundred day” man, the only black soldier to enlist from the area. Strothers marched in the Old Soldiers parade on Memorial Day until his death in 1927.

A large room in the Edgewater “Y,” provided by Fairbanks, Morse & Co. for its first black employees, was used for many purposes, including regular Bible studies. The leader appears to be J.D. Stevenson who came here from Tuskegee Institute. The photo came originally from 1932 F-M photo files.

Another house believed to have harbored escaped slaves was the A.B. Carpenter home at 1620 Shore Drive, the present headquarters of United Steelworkers of America Local 1533. This home is said to have had a tunnel extending to the river to help slaves in their move north out of Beloit.

Slave was the hero

Dr. Robert Irman, professor emeritus of history at Beloit College, believes most of the information that has surfaced is legend more than anything else. As to who was in a more vulnerable position, slave or abolitionist, Richard Hartung, director of the Rock County Historical Society, believes emphasis should be placed on the slave.

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1986

the South

better occupational and living opportunities in the North.

Migration "period when a large black population had increased numbers of orders from foreign countries for the manufacture of machines.

To meet the demands while hampered by the cutoff of immigrants, Fairbanks turned its eyes south with the hope of finding an inexpensive labor force which would keep costs down and maximize profits. Recruiting blacks, especially from northeastern Mississippi, meant Fairbanks-Morse could save five to six cents per man per hour.

Of the newly settled blacks, 72 percent came from Mississippi, specifically Pontotoc, Houston, Okalona, Tupelo, New Albany, West Point and Ripley. About 15 percent migrated from Tennessee, two percent from Arkansas, two percent from Louisiana, with the remainder coming from Kentucky, Oklahoma, Missouri and Alabama. The migration to Beloit was a kirkhip enterprise in which entire families, extended and conjugal, were transported from these southern states.

'Defender' gave hopes

For many blacks the migration northward was joined with hopes for better wages and a chance to escape persecution.

Other reasons brought the blacks northward. Many were better with the Southern way of living or desired to live near relatives. Others had hopes for better education for their children or to avoid segregation.

An additional pull-factor was the newspaper "The Chicago Defender" which circulated throughout the South. The paper gave vivid accounts of the social environment in the North with its jobs, open schools and respect for civil rights, and pictured the south as a land of oppression with no access to jobs or schools.

One black woman put it, "I like it here better because down South you can't buy anything except your landlord goes with you and signs for you. Nobody trusted you. Here all you have to do is tell them the husband works at Fairbanks and you get credit."

The Great Migration, the move to Beloit meant uprooting entire families and breaking up old communities. Migrating families wished to settle where labor advantages and educational opportunities for children were best. For those choosing Beloit the source of these advantages was Fairbanks.

New roles unexpected

The factory found itself faced with new problems neither expected nor anticipated. A variety of paternal roles, including dealing with issues of housing, recreation and social betterment, were thrust on the management. The results were less than ideal, and the blacks in Beloit continued to suffer discrimination.

Most of the blacks during this period were brought to Beloit through the recruitment process used by Fairbanks. The recruiting system was important for several reasons.

The war and immigration restrictions limited the availability of white labor but the recruitment might have occurred even without these factors due to the increased demand for diesel engines for agricultural uses.

The factory used black personnel to recruit and bring black labor north. John McCord, at the time in charge of janitors in the office area, convinced personnel manager Eugene Burglin that he could go south to assist Fairbanks in meeting its labor shortage. McCord started recruiting in 1916 and was soon the dominant force in the factory's recruitment process.

McCord, as well as his successor Walter Ingram, recruited blacks primarily for Fairbanks.
Factory used black recruiters to bring black labor north

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Another labor source tapped by Fairbanks was the Tuskegee Institute. Several students from the school were given the opportunity to work at the factory during summer vacations to earn money for the upcoming semester, although they were responsible for covering their own transportation costs.

To accommodate this group during their stay in Beloit, Fairbanks built a YMCA on Sixth Street, an area designated for segregated housing by Fairbanks for black employees. Some skills were learned but most of the work was no better than shoveling sand in the foundry.

Also recruited from Tuskegee was an individual named J.D. Stevenson.

Steoven was hired

Joseph Emerson (1821-1900). One of the first two faculty members of Beloit College, Emerson was born in Connecticut and came to Beloit in the 1840s. He taught Greek and Latin at the college for 30 years later. He was a director of the board chairman of Beloit Box Board Co., wingology at Beloit College for 25 years, Wing Sand's American Red Cross, and secretary of the Wisconsin Board of Juvenile Court Judges. He served on the Governor's Committee on Children and Youth and received an honorary life membership in the Beloit Historical Society for his outstanding service.

Yee Shee Wong becomes first Chinese woman in Beloit hall

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Helen Brace Emerson. (1838-1929). Mrs. Emerson began the art collection at Beloit College through personal gifts of art objects and the gift of her property as a permanent endowment to sustain the collection. She was also helpmate to her husband, Prof. Joseph Emerson.

Joseph Emerson. (1821-1900). One of the first two faculty members of Beloit College, Emerson was born in Connecticut and came to Beloit in the 1840s. He taught Greek and Latin at the college for 30 years later. He was a director of the board chairman of Beloit Box Board Co., wingology at Beloit College for 25 years, Wing Sand's American Red Cross, and secretary of the Wisconsin Board of Juvenile Court Judges. He served on the Governor's Committee on Children and Youth and received an honorary life membership in the Beloit Historical Society for his outstanding service.

Theodore M. Robie. (1892-1982). A distinguished engineer with Fairbanks, Morse & Co. for 40 years, Robie was a diesel engine expert honored for his contributions promoting world-wide diesel standards. He was active in civic organizations, particularly the Boy Scouts from whom he received the Silver Bear Award for his service.

Monte E. Wing. (1897-1976). An outstanding geologist and professor of geology at Beloit College for 25 years, Wing founded the National Association of Geology Teachers and formed the small but successful company Wing Sands after researching Beloit's sands.

Yee Shee Wong. (1894-1967). Believed to be the first Chinese woman to live in Beloit, Mrs. Wong was born in China and came to Beloit in 1923 to join her husband, Wong Kwong Hon, owner of the Chop House Restaurant. After her death in 1938 she raised their seven children alone and continued in the restaurant business.

Her courage and the high sense of education's value which she instilled in her children have been a significant contribution to the community and the country she adopted. Members of the family have 25 college degrees and among them are successful engineers and doctors, an occupational therapist, college vice president, nurse, author and several teachers.

Betty Walrath

Olive Peterson's parents were Patrick Nunn, left, who was Indian and white, and Alice, Indian and black.

Although the camp was necessary and recruiting, some felt it also acted as a temporary remedy for preventing blacks from filtering into the white neighborhoods.

Many new arrivals in Beloit expressed a feeling of relief, no longer was there any cause to "run like rabbits." Charles Simmons, whose family migrated to Beloit, did not believe there was any opposition to the migration except possibly from the Italian community. Many Italians feared they would lose their jobs or suffer wage decreases, a fear which contributed to the growing friction between black and white laborers at Fairbanks.
White population resisted accepting black migrations

Views on the move

Neal Harris, another migrant to Beloit originally from Tuskegee, Ala., expressed a different opinion. He realized that after crossing the Mason-Dixon line he was still not free. Restaurants practiced segregation, and factories placed blacks where they needed them without regard to skills.

Other blacks had different reactions about their moves to Beloit. Fanny Weatherall was very happy upon settling in Beloit. Her only complaint was that her father had arrived six weeks before the rest of the family to raise enough money to bring the others north to join him.

Ambrose Gordon notes that his parents thought favorably of the Beloit move. Upon the Gordons' arrival in Beloit, Fairbanks was just completing the Flats at the West bluff. The photo is dated 1929, is copied from the F&M files, and was loaned by Evelyn O'Kelley.

A rambling and spacious building housed the Edgewater Apartments shown in this view from the drive. The building was located off Sixth Street in the general area where the Quest Club, a structure now housing a church group, was built.

Acceptance difficult

With each successive group of migrants the white population, accustomed to the presence of blacks, found it difficult to accept them. Integration became a growing concern, with segregated housing becoming a popular idea. Even blacks with the money to build homes reported persistent problems with realtors and building contractors.

A reading room, modestly furnished, provided a quiet spot in the "Y," the backyard of which overlooked Rock River from the west bluff. The photo is dated 1929, is copied from the F&M files, and was loaned by Evelyn O'Kelley.

A result of these prejudices Fairbanks found itself constructing permanent housing for its black employees. By 1917, Fairbanks Morse had decided to build for both black and white employees, both groups having the opportunity to purchase or rent the company housing. Fairbanks, however, along with the rest of the white community, did not move against segregation. White employees had a chance to purchase housing adjacent to the plant, while blacks were faced with renting apartments located across the river.

Flats get new YMCA

The Eclipse Homemakers Inc., a separately owned subsidiary of Fairbanks Morse, constructed 138 separate units for the factory's white employees. Post and Co., architects from New York who had designed the Wisconsin state capitol, furnished plans for these modern artistic homes for the Eclipse Home Addition, still to be seen next to Fairbanks and across the street from the Beloit Mall.

Across the river the Edgewater Flats, built as housing for black employees, consisted of four concrete block apartment buildings containing 24 two-story units. Eventually they became a nucleus for the black community. Because the Beloit YMCA enforced segregation until 1945, Fairbanks built a new "Y" adjacent to the Flats for the social betterment of its black employees. J.D. Stevenson was originally hired by Fairbanks to supervise the Flats.

It was his responsibility to supervise the dining hall, provide single men with accommodations, and supervise the various activities at the Edgewater YMCA. Black youths set up their own "Hi-Y" Club at the Edgewater "Y" for such activities as scouting and athletics under Stevenson's guidance.

Fairbanks, well aware of the segregation

purchased homes directly and had the houses financed by the sellers. The petition was another tool used to prevent blacks from moving into certain white neighborhoods.

Land use protested

The Edgewater Flats gave the impression the racial problem in Beloit was under control. Even before the Flats were completed, however, certain issues began surfacing, each related to the location of the apartments and the housing policies being developed by Fairbanks.

Harry Adams, mayor of Beloit in the years 1914-17, argued Fairbanks had purchased the land without conferring with the city and had failed to state the intended use of the land until the transaction was closed.

In a special meeting he expressed concern over the location of these blacks in one place and the purchase by Fairbanks or its representatives of the Edgewater Addition. Adams led the public to believe that the addition, located on the McGavock tract, had always been kept in mind for park development.

Supposedly plans were made as early as 1913 for the development of a park two miles north of Beloit on the west bank of the Rock.

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Edgewater apartments and grounds on Beloit's west side are shown in this side view photo dated 1938 in company files. The four concrete block apartment buildings, often called "the flats," provided homes for the nucleus of the black community, while individual architecturally designed homes were constructed on the east side for white employees.

Billiards were a diversion for the young factory worker, man of them from Tuskegee Institute, who found the Edgewater "Y" the center of their socializing and recreation.
Tenement building blocked under guise of city park issue

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River, later to be known as Big Hill. The McGavock tract would have been part of a riverside boulevard connecting Beloit with the park area.

Adams agreed with Fairbanks that the city should locate as many blacks as possible in one section, although he did not believe it was in the best interests of the city to locate them on the land selected by Fairbanks.

Adams was hinting that the blacks should be placed outside the city altogether. Trains entering and leaving Beloit on the Northwestern tracks, he argued, would “see this beautiful (McGavock tract) built up with houses that will not be of special credit to the city.” Adams stated other tracts were available north of the city which would not be objectionable to Beloit citizens.

The mayor further contended that if Fairbanks carried through with its plans, the entire proposed park system would have to be abandoned at least another 20 years.

In the article “Condemnation of Edgewater Site is Resolution Text” in the Aug. 21, 1917, Beloit Daily News, the real issue finally surfaced. Alderman Oliver D. Wheeler expressed the opinion that the issue of purchasing the Edgewater site was nothing more than a farce and that the real issue was that of keeping blacks from the east side of the river.

Lloyd Yost, another alderman, continued: “If Beloit industry is to survive and expand, then the employment of Negroes is a necessity. This must be accepted if the city is to grow and keep pace with modern conditions.”

J.D. Stevenson, executive secretary of the Edgewater “Y,” posed in his office for this 1928 photo.

Tenements blocked

Yost concluded with the observations that “the site to locate Negroes . . . had been determined without reference to the east or west sides of the river as the best location available for all concerned, that they must be housed and (that) the controversy is not a park question at all.”

Although the Edgewater Addition became a dead issue, Adams did succeed once in restricting the Fairbanks construction. A petition was presented to the mayor and council by west side residents who felt property values and neighborhood safety would decrease if tenements for black laborers were located on blocks adjacent to white neighborhoods.

From August 1917 through 1920 the council was able to prevent Fairbanks from constructing such tenements. In 1920, three years after Adams left office, the city enacted “Ordinance 129” which authorized bonds in the amount of $10,000 to purchase the Garden Plain Addition for a public park. The four-acre tract was named Vernon Park.

Housing was not the only area where blacks experienced discrimination, although the forms of discrimination were not directly visible to the black community. As one northern black minister stated: “Well, they’re treated more like men up here in the North, that is the secret of it. There is prejudice here, too, but the color line is not drawn in their faces at every turn as it is in the South.”

Downtown segregation

A number of other forms of discrimination met blacks settling in Beloit, from not being served at lunch counters to being overcharged. The downtown area was the area where discrimination and segregation were most prevalent.

When the first group of migrants arrived there were no signs of discrimination in the hotels or restaurants. By 1920 the restaurants would no longer cater to blacks. In the South only a railing had separated blacks and whites in restaurants, but in the North a number of methods were used.

Lorenzo Grady noted that “in Mississippi you were told to go to the back door and you would be served,” but that in Beloit blacks were turned away, “We do not serve colored.” Blacks were told.

Many lunch counters were segregated. Attempts were made to integrate counters at Kresge’s and Woolworth’s. In one instance a group of women staged a sit-in at Woolworth’s, an effort which failed.

Ben Gordon, like many, thought such problems should not have been common here. Beloit’s social make-up was similar to that of Madison and Milwaukee, cities considered by blacks to be “open” and having few if any racial barriers.

YW more progressive

It was not until 1940 that public accommodations at restaurants and lunch counters were made available to blacks.

Even then the only places that would serve meals to blacks were Walgreen’s and Plumb’s Restaurant, a locally owned business.

The situation lasted until 1954 when the Beloit Community Council on Human Rights discovered that Wisconsin had a public accommodations law (1895) which stated “No one could be denied service because of color, race or creed.”

Leon Peterson, left, and his wife, Ocie, were active members of the community, highly respected by black and white alike.

The Peterson home for many years was this house located at 125 S. Park Ave., South Beloit. A widow, Mrs. Peterson later lived on Church Street in Beloit.

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At the corner of St. Paul Avenue and Shaw Street stood the Emmanuel Baptist Church of the 1920s, meeting in what was built as a large home. Identified in this group posed outside the church are: front row from left, Elhur Gaither, Eva Guyton, Mallie Bell, Mrs. Weatherspoon, Lula Brown, Mrs. Fountain, Elia Harris, Mrs. Grey, Lottie Hyde and Lou Scott; second row, Nannie Love, Delia Pigue, Sarah Printup, Maggie Gordon, the Rev. W.E.W. Brown, Mrs. Fox, Nettie Duncan, Annie Barr Jinks, Edna Morris, Willie Townsend, Albert Scott, Frankie Ollie; and back row, Joe Drommond, Jesse McShan, Georgia Printup, Jennie Hyde and Beulah Hyde.
No dorms for black students; business studies discouraged

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The girls were not allowed to meet at the YWCA but in the homes of the girls or at the churches. In 1922, however, with Charlotte Townsend the new executive secretary, black girls were permitted to meet in the YWCA itself, then located over the Majestic Theater. That year a black girls club was formed called Tacincu which remained in existence until 1966.

Marshall prominent

Discrimination was also found in the hospital. In 1922 three hospitals existed in Beloit where blacks could get wards, semi-private and private rooms. The next year the Beloit Municipal Hospital opened, which while being tax-supported nevertheless segregated white and black patients.

The hospital prohibited blacks from getting ward rates or even being placed in wards they were required to room alone or with other blacks in higher-priced private wards; they were not permitted to room in the less expensive wards with five to six beds. To make matters worse some doctors refused to treat black patients, or if they did, only on a limited basis. Dr. Davis, for instance, treated blacks on Sundays only.

One black doctor of particular importance was Dr. Marshall. Although the hospital staff did not accept him, his efforts in helping the community, especially the black community, did not go unnoticed. If he received a patient he was unable to treat he would send him or her to Madison. He was also instrumental in encouraging girls to go into nursing.

Once when asked if he would ever be allowed on the hospital staff Marshall replied he would not accept if they offered.

Apparenty not until Mrs. Rabie Bond complained to city manager Archie Telfer did the hospital finally change its policies, ceasing segregation in 1946.

College no better

Even at Beloit College segregation could be found. At one time blacks attending the college had to find their own housing in the black community because of rules prohibiting blacks from living in dormitories.

Interestingly, blacks were also discouraged from taking business courses because there were no retail or office jobs in the town.

In 1930 Velma Ferne Bell wrote a study entitled "Race Prejudice," an overview of discriminatory practices used against the black community, for her bachelor's degree.

Blacks also felt that discrimination was occurring at Fairbanks Morse. Black recruiters came to believe, after beginning to work there, that limitations had been placed on advancement. For example, the end of World War I brought a reduction in foundry work, which was not often, possibly once every one or two months. Ben Gordon believed the "chills" had long-term effects. He noticed that those who remained in the brass foundry died at a younger age than most.

Due to the health hazards and pressure from the union, Fairbanks finally constructed a new brass foundry in 1941.

Work was hard, dirty

In the 1960s Ben Gordon argued that Fairbanks and Beloit Iron Works were the only factories in the area to hire blacks because they had foundry operations. Many blacks thought it was a "gentleman's agreement" between the two firms that "if one plant did not hire them, the other would." The only way out of this confinement was to leave Beloit, which many blacks did when the 1930-32 recession hit Fairbanks.

The work in the plants was hard, dirty and noisy, and injuries were a common occurrence. Being confined to such surroundings produced low horizons for many, with occupations including "shakeout laborer" or chipper and grinder.

A shakeout laborer was responsible for taking hot castings out of sand molds and removing any hot sand from the castings. A chipper and grinder's role was to smooth out the rough edges around and within the engine by using air hammer and chisel. Workers were highly susceptible to eye injuries and loss of hearing, and injury and death were not uncommon, especially the area where castings were poured.

Another area considered dangerous to work was the brass foundry. Because brass was handled in open-hearth furnaces the problems of fumes and ventilation were continuous. If exposed to the fumes for a period of time, employees risked the chance of getting "brass chills," a condition in which the person coming into contact with brass would choke, become nauseous and break out in a cold sweat. The disease was marked by the green color of the bed sheets in the morning.

Drinking the cure

Many thought it best to be a drinker when working in the brass foundry, for at the time the only known antidote was alcohol. The frequency of "brass chills" depended upon one's exposure to the fumes, which was not often, possibly once every one or two months. Ben Gordon believed the "chills" had long-term effects. He noticed that those who remained in the brass foundry died at a younger age than most.

Due to the health hazards and pressure from the union, Fairbanks finally constructed a new brass foundry in 1941.

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unequal school students were viewed as dis-
able to apply them.

Although Fairbanks would not train blacks in specific skills, they were not adverse to helping them gain basic knowledge. Fairbanks sent blacks who worked in the powerhouse to school for six weeks to learn about combustion in relation to the boilers. Aside from their basic training, however, blacks had to take what was given to them in the form of jobs and money. But for specific skills, area vocational schools told blacks that learning a trade was unlikely at area firms that they would be able to apply them.

Training unequal
Job training programs set up during the late 1920s and early '30s for high school students were viewed as discrimina-

The Rev. John D. Peterson, Leon Peterson's father, was a minister in Beloit. Leon's mother is at right. Today fourth and fifth generations continue in Beloit.

ploidal. Each summer Fairbanks would recruit six to seven black students and train them in less-skilled jobs of chipping, grinding and pouring iron in the foundry. White students were recruited to be trained in the machine shop under a structured apprenticeship program.

Most blacks regarded Fairbanks as a white-owned, white-managed and white-supervised organization with little room for blacks to prosper. Unionization seemed the only way to fight segregation policies, but a union was not formed until the late 1930s. Even then many blacks were hesitant to join for fear of losing jobs.

Fairbanks did have a company union before the C.I.O. local was organized, but a black still had to be twice as good as a white to get any job normally held by whites. The company paid blacks less than whites and kept blacks from advancing over whites, a policy which hindered attempts by outside unions trying to come in.

The company dismissed individuals who voiced their support for unions, even going to the extent of closing down whole departments if talk of unionizing persisted.

Ben Gordon, persuaded by union literature published in the Chicago Defender, was aware of discriminatory hiring and firing procedures at Fairbanks. He himself, prior to union organization, had been fired for scrapping one casting in the foundry.

Gordon knew that if working conditions were to change the power of the foreman would have to be broken. It was a change in external conditions which allowed this. As the country made its way into World War II, Fairbanks, fearing a loss of profits, had to capitalize on government contracts for diesel engines.

The government stipulated that Fairbanks could not discriminate on any jobs which it was awarded, opening the way for black unionization. Ironically the downtown merchants were supportive, being aware that an increase in wages meant an increase in sales.

Once the union had established itself questions arose concerning the effectiveness of uniting labor. For the blacks unity had been a problem since the beginning of the migration period. The movement northward had meant adjustment from an agrarian to industrial lifestyle, and the accustomed social environments had changed along with everything else. Even the church, once the focal point in the black community, no longer held sway.

Troop was organized
Complete blame cannot be put on Fairbanks for discriminatory actions. The company contributed to black history in Beloit in many ways, some of them positive, such as in the assistance it provided in establishing social and recreational outlets for the black community.

Probably one of the most important and influential organizations initiated by Fairbanks was the help of John D. Stevenson, who was a black Boy Scout troop. Stevenson became first scoutmaster, serving until his death in 1929. The troop committee consisted of James Gordon, Lon Ausley and Leon Peterson. Stevenson was concerned about the

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Scout work for black girls didn't start until '40s here

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Girls had less luck

In the 1940s black scouts were being accepted by other troops to re-establish the neighborhood concept. Several blacks were in Troop 10 at First Presbyterian Church became involved in first aid contests and did well in competition. In 1940 the area had its first black Eagle Scout in Anthony Tardolo of Troop 615, sponsored by St. Paul Lutheran Church.

Beloit's black girls were not so fortunate. Girl Scouts, under Mrs. Betty Justus, accepted no black girls until 1944 when the national office advised the Beloit Girl Council to start work among black girls.

Community blacks had become upset because the scout troops were using the tax-supported public schools, which meant money was coming from the pockets of blacks for exclusively white use. Rubie Bond initiated the move to integrate the Girl Scout troops, writing to the national office to make a formal complaint about the Beloit situation.

Mrs. Justus, who was executive secretary in the regional office, thought Mrs. Bond had overstated her bounds, but a meeting was called for black mothers at Burdge school. Mrs. Bond attended despite not being invited. At the meeting the leader of the white girl scout troop at Burdge expressed feelings identical to Mrs. Bond's that something needed be done.

Girls get a troop

By the end of the meeting it was clear some of the white women present at the meeting were unaware of the implications of separate clubs and discrimination in Beloit. Many thought the blacks wanted to be separated.

Rubie Bond, who had gained the group's respect, was offered leadership of a black troop, which she declined. A segregated troop was finally formed in Burdge School under Della (Mrs. Elias) Ingram's leadership. The troop lasted about two years before the members were allowed into white troops.

In 1971 a formal effort was begun to increase the membership of black girls in Badger Council of Girl Scouts. Chairing the first meeting were J. Van Alfred Winsett, a board member, and Mrs. George Barry, council president. The meetings formed a base for what more recently has become the Badger Council Black Task Group, which has met over the past few years to give the council direction and help in promoting Girl Scouting in the black community.

In June 1985, the task group undertook planning a Beloit Juneteenth Day Celebration. The half-day event, which recognizes freedom from slavery, was supported by numerous community groups. The program included talks about June­teenth Day and black history, gospel singing and break dancing.

A nother organization playing an important role within the black community is the W.B. Kennedy Lodge of the Masonic Order established around 1923. Among its charter members and early contributors were Alva Curtis, Chicago dentist Dr. F.E. Norman, T.H. Samuels, the Rev. W.E. Brown and J.D. Stevens. Approximately 15 men were involved in starting the club.

Curtis had belonged to a lodge in St. Louis, and he thought he should have one in Beloit. A permanent charter was granted to the lodge on July 12, 1924, under the leadership of grand master Samuels.

For relief and truth

The lodge, named after a member from the St. Louis lodge, was originally chartered under Illinois jurisdiction and transferred in 1925 to the Wisconsin Jurisdiction. Although separate from the white lodge efforts have been made to work together, to a point just short of a complete merger.

Membership in the W.B. Kennedy Lodge was not taken for granted. Considerations were age, occupation, social standing and living location, with the lodge having three governing principles of brotherly love, relief and truth. The lodge's numerous activities have included establishing a scholarship fund and helping blacks travel to Mississippi to see relatives, services benefitting both members and non-members.

On Oct. 26, 1925, the W.B. Kennedy Lodge accepted a sister chapter, the Rebecca Chapter 123 O.E.S. Present at the chapter's inauguration were the worthy grand patron, brother Lee Taylor, and the worthy grand matron, sister Daisy Carthell. The membership grew from 17 to the present 69, and became Rebecca Chapter 4 of Wisconsin with the jurisdiction change.

In fall 1924 Ethel Conwell started the Culture Club in affiliation with the Association of Colored Women's Clubs, state and national. The club formed as a philanthropic organization with a focus on charities. Contributions have been made to the elderly, fire victims, and such programs as Reading is Fundamental. Membership is approximately 50.

First for Wisconsin

Other black organizations became prominent in Beloit over the years aimed specifically at raising black status and providing solutions to the city's discriminatory practices.

In 1919 an organization was formed to represent the black community as it sought equality with the white population, the first Wisconsin chapter of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It was instrumental in establishing the chapter...
The name of Dr. George Washington Hilliard is immortalized in the memories of those whose lives he touched as he grew up in Beloit and became both a physician and concerned citizen. It is also immortalized in Beloit by the park named for him. Hilliard Memorial Park is in the South Fields Area where Hilliard grew up. Young, gifted and black, Hilliard was raised in Beloit where he attended Strong Elementary School, Roosevelt Junior High School and Beloit Memorial High School. He graduated from Beloit College in 1932.

A native of Tocapla, Miss., where he was born in 1911, he played football for both Beloit High School and Beloit College where he earned a bachelor of science degree. His church home while he lived in Beloit was Emmanuel Baptist.

Worked couple years

After his Beloit College years, Hilliard dropped out of school for a couple years to work. He studied at Homer G. Phillips College in St. Louis, Mo., and Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., where he received his medical degree in 1942.

He also studied at Howard University in Nashville and completed a residency at Freeman in Washington, D.C. He studied gynecology and pulmonary surgery. Dr. Hilliard served his internship at Galanger Memorial Hospital in Washington, D.C., and residencies at Galanger, and at Rockefeller Memorial in New York City.

Returning to the Midwest, he established a practice in Milwaukee, and specialized in pulmonary surgery. In his professional career he was a delegate to the Wisconsin State Medical Society for ten years, treasurer of the Milwaukee County Medical Society one term, was a member of the National Federation for Clinical Research, a fellow of the American College of Surgeons, a member of the American Medical Association, and of National Black Medical Association.

Established clinic

The clinic he established in Milwaukee was still in existence when the park was dedicated in his name during the bicentennial year of 1786.

As a concerned citizen he was active in Milwaukee NAACP, Boys Club and Milwaukee Urban League. He served on the Milwaukee Commission of Community Relations.

A member of WE Milwaukeeans, business-civic group, he was especially active during the racial turmoil in the city. He also was a member of Metropolitan Church in Milwaukee.

The park dedication program noted Dr. Hilliard "was an avid student of medicine, an excellent teacher within his own profession, and a person with great understanding and love for his fellow man. His early death in 1964 was a great loss to people everywhere as well as to his family."

Dr. Hilliard's parents were Mrs. Victoria Vance Hilliard and George Hilliard, both of whom preceded him in death. At the time of the dedication, his stepmother, Leolah Hilliard and a brother, Nimrod Hilliard, lived in Beloit, and a sister, Mrs. Fannie Gooden, lived in Rockford.

— Minnie Mills Enking

NAACP promoted education, pushed teacher recruitment

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were J.D. Stevenson, Lawrence Osley, W.S. Williams, Leon Peterson, Dr. E.F. Norman, the Rev. Fox of the Baptist Church, and the Rev. Parker of the Method-Episcopal Church.

The chapter membership also included such white activists as Prof. Geoff Crawford, Prof. Lloyd Ballard, the Huffers and even the Morrills. The first secretary was Leon Peterson. The chapter originally used Booth's Hall on East Grand Avenue for meetings.

R easons for establishing an NAACP chapter in Beloit were more than simply local discrimination problems, although these were important enough. Soon after the chapter was organized it set its sights on improving public facilities, employment, housing, health and education in an organized manner. The NAACP provided legal help and even lawyers when needed, and brought in programs and such nationally known speakers as Roy Wilkins, W.E.B. DuBois, Walter White, William Pickens and James Weldon Johnson.

Recruiting teachers

At least in its early years, the NAACP chapter was more closely concerned with national rather than local issues. Its official publication, "Crisis," provided information on national events, was widely read by blacks. The viewpoint in the black community was that the Beloit Daily News provided little coverage of black activities, unless a robbery or murder was committed, which had a good chance of making the front page.

In the 1920s the NAACP emphasized housing and education issues, making a big push to recruit black teachers. The 1936 saw a continuation of his housing and employment problems among blacks in Beloit, with the black labor force demanding equal pay for equal work and an upgrading of jobs.

During this decade the NAACP had few members. In the 1940s the chapter increased its popularity and activities, but many still regarded it as having insufficient force to push through certain issues.

A group of women who felt something more than a social club was needed, which many regarded the NAACP as, formed the Women's Community Club (WCC) on May 9, 1943. At its peak the club had a membership of 75 women.

WCC made demands

The WCC demanded fair treatment of black students from teachers and principals, and pushed for garbage pickup at the EdgeWater Plaza and the east end of St. Paul Avenue. They voiced concern as to the lack of black mail carriers in Beloit. Ruby Bond was instrumental in getting the club leadership.

Some said that as the WCC increased its activities opposition to the club intensified. But the club, which emphasized white and black cooperation in solving the city's civil rights problems, received support from the white community and college as well.

Three white women in particular lent assistance and support: Mrs. Helen Richardson, Mrs. Roger Birdsell, at the time a member of the school board, and Helen Callahan, a teacher. Their support included talking to white friends, clubs and school principals to gain their support.

By 1946-47 the club died out, caused by a decrease in enthusiasm and pressure from other black leaders who frowned on the club's activities. The NAACP chapter also felt the WCC was pushing too hard in certain areas.

Desegregation became the emphasis of the NAACP in the 1950s. Raymond Wright was president of the organization, and at the time quite a few whites worked with the organization. One of the chapter's projects was gathering information on downtown Beloit sales people. Assisting were the Rev. Oliver Gibson and the Rev. U.S. Pride, who were instrumental in placing several black sales people into downtown department stores. Sadie Bell being the first to work in these stores.

As desegregation increased in popularity in the 1960s, protests against segregated public facilities began to mount. Dr. Lucas Porter, with the assistance of Ruby Bond, founded the Beloit Human

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A birthday party scene from about 1950 includes John Henry Carter sitting in front; and seated, Jimmy Freeman, Phillip Byrd, Hattie Carter, Maxine Mahan and Raymond R. Byrd; and standing, unidentified, Shirley Hoffman, Becky Byrd Cook, Elaine Sanford, Kathryn Byrd Lomax, Norma Hoffman, unidentified, unidentified, Janet Stewart Sanlin, Toni Mahan Pinson, Gwendolyn Walker.

Courtesy Fanny Byrd

Park immortalizes George Washington Hilliard

The dedication program typified Dr. Hilliard as "one of many who lived, worked and served in this community."

— Minnie Mills Enking
Velma Bell Hamilton named Beloit College valedictorian

Continued from page 155

Rights Council in the early 1950s. Through his efforts the city made increased progress toward equal access to public facilities throughout the community. As a minister, Dr. Porter had the support and cooperation of other ministers in Beloit, black and white.

Although considered a successful organization, the council, like the NAACP during the latter part of the 1960s, had a low membership. Low participation was due largely to the popular idea that the work of the two organizations was best left to those who “know what the whole thing is all about.”

Activism aimed at segregation continued through the early 1960s, highlighted by a march led by the Rev. Oliver Gibson, the Rev. U.S. Pride, and the Rev. A.D. King, brother of Martin Luther King. Approximately fifty Beloit citizens participated in the march.

Gibson also marched around the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. Through the NAACP he was effective in stirring up black consciousness in Beloit, with the prevailing social current of the ‘60s.

Revived in the ’80s

Active participation against segregation waned in the early 1970s, with the Beloit NAACP chapter coming near extinction and remaining largely inactive until the presidency of Frank Humphrey. Humphrey assumed the presidency in February 1982 and quickly revitalized the organization.

In 1984 the branch attracted National NAACP recognition at the 75th national convention in Kansas City, Mo., for significantly increasing its membership. In the next year, the convention, June 1885 in Dallas Texas, the branch was awarded the prestigious Thalheiman Award for its progressive programs and successful growth and rights area. The branch was specifically commended for its leadership in advancing the Economic Fair Share program in the state of Wisconsin and promoting community political activism.

Also that June the Beloit branch established an office at 1224 Fourth St., the first time in its history the chapter had a permanent place of operation.

Today, through Humphrey’s leadership and guidance, important goals and projects have been set. The NAACP will be working with organizations such as Minority Excellence, a youth group formed several years ago at Beloit Memorial High School. The Beloit Minority Coalition will help resolve “the present crisis involving black and economically deprived youth in this community.”

The NAACP branch is also seeking increased membership through the Fair Share Program from local businesses benefiting from the business of black consumers. This firm effort will be encouraged minority group members to become active voters. NAACP also plans to groom minority candidates for public office.

The Beloit chapter will be assessing past programs for their effectiveness and will continue upscaling efforts toward an equitable balance for minorities in the local economic picture.

Other organizations such as the (E) Quality Commission and the Beloit Equal Opportunities Commission have also supported the black community through such efforts as city school desegregation.

Beloit’s black population has been increasing over the years. In 1980 3,997 blacks lived in the city, forming 11.3 percent of the total population, and by 1985 the black population had increased about four percent to 4,140.

Ausley led students

Organizations are not the only ones contributing to the advancement of Beloit’s black community. Individuals have also had a significant impact upon the community.

In education important firsts were made on both high school and college levels. Among the first important black graduates at Beloit College was Samuel Ausley (1897) in both the first black baseball and football star Theodore Strothers (1898), Merrill Strothers (1899) and Grace Ausley (1900).

The first blacks to graduate from Beloit College included George Woodson (1891), James Carter Brown (1895), William Ausley (1901), Theodore Strothers (1902), Merrill Strothers (1903) and Grace Ausley (1904). Ms. Ausley was both the first black woman to graduate from Beloit Memorial High School and the first woman to attend Beloit College.

Two other blacks must be cited for their contributions to Beloit College. Charles Winter Wood attended the college and was a Shakespearean actor, in 1893, 1895 and 1898 playing the roles of Heracles and Oedipus. He also played the role of Dr. Lawd in “Green Pastures.” Velma Bell Hamilton (1830), the second black woman to graduate from the college, was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in her junior year and graduated valedictorian of her class.

Firsts made in Beloit

The list of blacks making noteworthy contributions to the community is filled with notables. Heading the list is Joseph Bowling, the first black bootmaker who settled here in 1840. In 1920 five blacks made significant contributions: V.E. Guy was the first black tax collector, Dr. F.E. Norman the first black dentist, Ludi Gilmer the first black doctor, Aduba Gordon the first black nurse at Beloit Memorial Hospital, and W.S. Williams, justice of the peace, the first black public official in Beloit.

In the 1960s two other black accomplishments. In 1961, Robert Gilliam became a member of the Beloit Fire Department and in 1964 Ambrose Gordon became a member of the South Beloit School Board.

Other firsts achieved

Other contributions should be mentioned as well. David Grady was the first black to serve as president of a major service organization, the Kiwanis. Wyettta Branch was the first black woman to serve on the Police and Fire Commission. Rebecca Cook was the first black woman to serve as president of a major service organization, the Kiwanis. Wyettta Branch was the first black woman to serve on the Police and Fire Commission. Rebecca Cook was the first black woman to serve on the Police and Fire Commission. Rebecca Cook was the first black woman to serve on the Police and Fire Commission.

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The Beloit chapter was very active in the late 1980s, with members working toward equal access to educational programs for black students and supporting the black community through such efforts as city school desegregation.

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In the 1970s others made their marks. In 1970 Robert Gilliam was elected to the Rock County Board of Supervisors. Milton Brown became the first member of the Blackhawk Technical Institute Board of Directors in 1974 and continued through 1981. Walter Knight was elected to the Beloit Council in 1972 and became a member of Blackhawk Technical Institute board.

Another prominent black occupying a position on the Beloit Council was Clarence Givhan. Barbara Hickman became principal of Merrill School in 1975 and in 1985 was named “Principal of the Year” in the Beloit School System.

Struggle not over

Blacks in Beloit face a future filled with uncertainty. Some, such as Humphrey, believe such uncertainty should not be an unsurmountable obstacle. Blacks have historically received inferior treatment in this nation since the origins of slavery, and going against the odds is not a new problem for black families.

Long-time Beloit black resident Benjie Gordon believes that the community’s fragmentation is at least partly at the root of Beloit’s problems. “In my view,” Gordon says, “excessive individualism has affected blacks as well as whites and is at the root of most of our community’s problems.”

Difficulties within the community might then be resolved by pooling resources, establishing closer ties and formulating cooperative coalitions.

Central to such an effort would be the need, as Gordon states, “to return to a state of spiritual awareness” in which greater emphasis is placed on being of service than being served.

The Rev. Lonnie Flowers believes that whatever direction blacks take, the effort toward equality must continue. “If history teaches us anything,” Flowers observes, “it teaches us that whenever we stop struggling, we start dying. Whenever we give up the fight, we’re beaten.

“And we know that the struggle is not done with, and the fight has not been won.” Flowers says. “So we can’t afford to stop.”

Tom Polski