

2018 Schwartz Prize Nomination

Oregon Humanities is pleased to nominate our This Land program for the 2018 Helen and Martin Schwartz Prize for Public Humanities Programs.

This Land

This Land is an online multimedia project that collects and connects stories about land, home, belonging, and identity by Oregon's communities of color.



A still from the video "Future: Portland 2," produced by Ifanyi Bell as part of the This Land project

Launched in 2016 with a public debut in 2017, This Land is a dedicated section of the Oregon Humanities website (oregonhumanities.org/this-land) featuring nine nonfiction stories by Oregon artists. The project uses film, words, maps, photos, sounds, and graphics by artists and writers of color to build a broader understanding of how policies and laws shape systems of power and land ownership in Oregon's past and present.

Each This Land story is a collaboration between two or more artists working in different mediums to examine the effects of policies and legislation relating to immigration, citizenship, property ownership, and land use.

From racist place names in Oregon to alien land laws and Chinese hops farmers to wild-fire policies and tribal land, *This Land* explores little-known stories about the fight for place, home, and belonging and about how Oregonians of color have flourished, building homes and community, despite a long and continuing history of exclusionary policies. To date, the project has reached more than twenty thousand people in Oregon and beyond.



Ming Kee, an Oregon hops farmer, and family in 1928. Putsata Reang and Ivy Lin's story, "Bitter Harvest," describes how Chinese farmers like Kee helped establish Oregon's beer industry despite being prohibited from owning the land they worked.

This Land was launched with a grant from the Creative Heights Initiative of the Oregon Community Foundation, which encourages Oregon artists to test new ideas, stretch their creative capacity, and take creative risks. It is also made possible by the Oregon Cultural Trust.

The goals of the project are the following:

- Share with Oregonians the sometimes-hidden histories and contributions of Oregon's communities of color.
- Show the connection between land- and place-based policies and systems of power.
- Give artists and writers of color a platform to share their work with a larger community.
- Work with arts, culture, technology, and humanities individuals and organizations on a high-quality, high-visibility creative project.
- Create a platform where these and other stories about power and place in Oregon can live in the hope that over time the site will be populated by a wider range of stories.
- Build upon Oregon Humanities' reputation as a convener of stories, ideas, and conversations to engage a larger online audience beyond our existing subscribers and program participants, one that will be inspired to work with us toward our vision of an Oregon that invites diverse perspectives, explores challenging questions, and strives for just communities.

In an interview with Oregon Humanities about her contribution to the project, journalist Putsata Reang said, "All these stories are connected, and working on my small piece of it made me see how a common thread of injustice and discriminatory policies run through so many different communities on so many different levels. It can be heartbreaking; it was heartbreaking. But where there is hope is that we have an opportunity and a platform to actually bring these stories to light. Hopefully the more people that read our stories, the more they will begin to understand and see. I don't think you can make change unless you have the information."

Project Descriptions



Zahir Janmohamed interviews Paul Yang, pastor at Portland's Gospel Hmong Alliance Church, for his story, "Stake Your Place."

Bitter Harvest by Putsata Reang, Ivy Lin, and Melissa Lewis

Through short films, writing, and an interactive timeline, "Bitter Harvest" chronicles the legacy of Chinese farm workers who helped create Oregon's identity as a beer capital but were denied the right to own the land they farmed.

Earth on Fire by Christine Dupres, Jessy Damon, and Melissa Lewis

"Earth on Fire", an essay with accompanying audio clips and an interactive timeline, examines how the practices of Native tribes can act as a guide for creating effective policy for fire suppression and climate change.

Finding Home at the Mims by Nisha Burton

This video explores the history of the Mims House in Eugene, the first home in the city owned by African Americans and a sanctuary for Black travelers in the twentieth century which continues to provide a safe space for Eugene's Black community.

Future: Portland 2 by Ifanyi Bell

The short film "Future: Portland 2" explores the history and future of Portland's economic development. It is a sequel to Bell's previous film, "Future: Portland," which addressed gentrification and loss in Portland's African American community and was also commissioned by Oregon Humanities.

The Numbers by Sika Stanton and Donovan Smith

A short film featuring young residents of East Portland—known colloquially as “the Numbers” for its numbered streets—talking about their hopes and worries about their community.

An Oregon Canyon by Donnell Alexander and Sika Stanton

This short film and accompanying essay tell the story of one of Oregon’s first Black homesteaders, John Brown, and the efforts being made to honor him.

Reaching Back for Truth by S. Renee Mitchell and Joe Whittle

An essay with photos describing the early twentieth-century history of Black loggers in Maxville, an Eastern Oregon logging camp, and how the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center in Joseph, Oregon works to preserve their stories.

Stake Your Place by Zahir Janmohamed and Tojo Adrianarivo

An essay with photos that reports on community efforts in Portland’s Cully neighborhood to combat poverty, gentrification, and displacement.

To Live More Free by Ezra Marcos Ayala and Luis Rodriguez

A series of photos and audio interviews with undocumented residents of Southern Oregon addressing the difficulties of living and working without legal immigration status.

About the Artists



Filmmaker Ifanyi Bell at work on his video “Future: Portland 2”

Donnell Alexander is a Portland-based creator of cultural content whose writing and commentary has been featured in *Time*, Al Jazeera’s *Inside Story*, and *Narrative Global Politics* (Routledge, 2016). He authored the 2003 memoir *Ghetto Celebrity* and co-produced the 2009 animated short “Dock Ellis & the LSD No-No.”

Tojo Andrianarivo is a freelance photographer and graphic designer who has worked in a variety of industries including retail, entertainment, software, and nonprofit organizations. He specializes in portraiture and also does live music coverage for local and national media outlets.

Ifanyi Bell is a storyteller and artist whose Emmy-nominated work as a producer for various NPR and PBS stations spans subject matter ranging from education to science to arts and culture. Currently, Ifanyi serves as executive producer at Open Signal, a community media center in Portland. He is also the cofounder of Brushfire Creative Partners.

Nisha Burton is a creative filmmaker with thirteen years of experience in film production, editing, and graphic design. She blends animation, digital effects, and cinematography to incorporate an element of magical realism into all of her projects. She screens her films in both international film festivals and educational environments.

Jessy Damon, creator and leader of MidSun Productions, is a freelance audio engineer. She works in both live sound and in-studio sessions and across many musical genres. Currently, Jessy works with KBOO Community Radio and can be found engineering live music at various bars and pubs around the Portland area.

Christine Dupres (Cowlitz/Cree) is a writer, teacher, and citizen of the Cowlitz Tribe. She is the author of the recently published *Being Cowlitz: How One Tribe Renewed and Sustained Its Identity* (University of Washington Press), and is working on an upcoming book titled *Land and Being*. Dupres has a PhD in folklore and folklife from the University of Pennsylvania.

Zahir Janmohamed is the cohost of *Racist Sandwich*, a podcast about food, race, gender, and class. He is also a fellow at Kundiman, which supports Asian American writers, and is the recipient of this year's Katherine Bakeless Award in Fiction at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference in Vermont. From 2015 to 2017, he lived in Portland. He is now based in Columbus, Ohio.

Melissa Lewis is the data editor of the *Oregonian* and a Portland organizer of PyLadies, an international organization dedicated to teaching women the Python programming language. Previously, she was a data engineer at Simple and a data scientist at Periscope.

Ivy C. Lin is originally from Taipei, Taiwan. She became a Portlander in 2002 and has been telling Portland's lesser-known stories through video since 2007. Ivy's films have been screened at festivals throughout the Northwest, including "Beauty & the Sea," which won Best Documentary Short at the Northwest Filmmakers' Festival in 2015.

Ezra Marcos Ayala is a commercial and editorial photographer whose clients have included PlayStation, Southern Oregon University, the *New York Times*, and Travel Medford. He is a husband and father of three who drives a twenty-four-year-old Mercedes, likes hot weather year round, and lives in Ashland, Oregon.

S. Renee Mitchell is an award-winning journalist turned artist, who expresses herself through poetry, storytelling, grant writing, teaching, and creating multimedia experiences. Renee spent twenty-five years as a newspaper journalist in Seattle, Orlando, and Detroit, among other

cities, and is most known locally for her years as a Metro columnist for the *Oregonian*, where she was nominated twice for the Pulitzer Prize.

Putsata Reang is an award-winning Cambodian American journalist and author, and a graduate of University of Oregon's School of Journalism. Her work has appeared in publications including the *New York Times*, the *Guardian*, *Mother Jones*, and various literary anthologies. She is currently at work on a memoir about her family's experience fleeing the genocide in Cambodia.



Maricela, one of several undocumented Oregonians interviewed for Ezra Marcos Ayala and Luis Rodriguez's story, "To Live More Free"

Luis Rodriguez is a native Oregonian, born and raised in the Rogue Valley. He owns LUI-G Films, which specializes in commercial video and narrative films. As a passionate filmmaker, he strives to deliver captivating stories through all media platforms.

Donovan Smith is a journalist, creator, and owner of the clothing line Ignorant/Reflections.

Sika Stanton is an award-winning photographer and digital content producer based in Portland. She primarily works on short films and photography projects. She grew up in rural Maine and is a graduate of Stanford University.

Joe Whittle is an enrolled Caddo tribal member and long-time resident of Wallowa County, Oregon. When he's not wandering the wilds of the Wallowas and other parts of the West for adventure and fun, he's often doing it for work as a freelance photojournalist and writer, as well as a seasonal field ranger for the US Forest Service. His work can be found in the *Guardian*, *Outside*, *HuffPost*, *Backpacker*, *Travel Oregon*, the *Oregonian*, and *1859 Oregon's Magazine*.

Funding Overview

This Land was made possible by a grant of \$110,000 from the Oregon Community Foundation's Creative Heights initiative. The Creative Heights program aims to provide artists and other cultural creatives an opportunity to stretch their creative practice, provide unique opportunities for Oregonians to experience innovative arts and culture, and to increase Oregon's cultural visibility and vitality. The project received additional support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (\$25,000) and the Oregon Cultural Trust (\$20,000).

The majority of the project's budget (\$78,649) was allotted to honoraria for contributing artists. The artists who contributed to the project were recruited through an open request for proposals in 2016. Stories were commissioned over the next several months and published as they were completed. The first story appeared in February 2017 and the last was published in August of the same year.

Impact and Collaborations



Dominique, one other the young residents of East Portland interviewed for Sika Stanton and Donovan Smith's video, "The Numbers"

More than twenty thousand people have visited pages on the This Land website since its launch in 2017. Videos from the project have been viewed more than 6,300 times. Stories from This Land have also had significant impact beyond the Internet. For artists and many audience members, the project has been a way to validate and share under-told stories, and add to the varied and diverse tapestry of stories about Oregon. Additionally, it has given artists beautiful projects to add to their resumes, created and strengthened a network of Oregon artists of color, and empowered and given voice to those who have not had access to platforms like ours.

- "An Oregon Canyon," "The Numbers," and "Future: Portland 2" were screened at Oregon Humanities' Think & Drink programs as prompts for conversation.
- "An Oregon Canyon" was the subject of a panel discussion at the Bend Public Library cosponsored by Oregon Black Pioneers
- The films from "Bitter Harvest" were screened in Portland with a panel discussion featuring contributors Putsata Reang and Ivy Lin along with Tiah Edmunson-Morton, curator of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archive; Betty Jean Lee, granddaughter of hop farmer Ah Coe; David Wagner, family friend of hop farmer Ming Kee; and Patrick Harris, Executive Director of the Old Aurora Colony Museum.
- In February 2018, Metro East Community Media, a community access cable channel, played "The Numbers" and "An Oregon Canyon" in rotation for Black History Month.

- “The Numbers” has been screened in many venues, including at the Regional Arts and Culture Council’s ArtSpark gatherings, a festival of short documentaries in Portland, and as part of a rotating selection of films at the Hollywood Theatre’s screening room at the Portland Airport.
- Numerous nonprofits and governmental entities have used “The Numbers” in community meetings relating to gentrification, homelessness, and displacement. After one such meeting in Gresham, filmmaker Sika Stanton wrote, “The film and the youth’s voices gave people something to latch on to. It helped them talk about things that they knew were happening and were struggling to address. Too often, people are not talking to each other in this state. We make assumptions about people without taking time to know each other, assumptions about places without ever going there.”
- Stories from This Land have been incorporated into Oregon Humanities’ resources for high school teachers. These free curriculum guides offer discussion questions, standards, and printouts for lessons based on stories from This Land and Oregon Humanities magazine.

The This Land platform was conceived and developed simultaneously with an overhaul of the entire Oregon Humanities website that emphasizes media, giving us a more robust platform for sharing more stories in more ways than have been possible in our long-running magazine. The project also coincided with rapid growth in our face-to-face conversation programming, including the Conversation Project and Think & Drink, giving us opportunities to experiment with integrating our print and online storytelling and in-person experiences.

The Future

While the funding cycle for the grants that made This Land possible has been completed, Oregon Humanities has increased its media production budget to support additional staff and honoraria for freelance writers, filmmakers, and audio producers to allow us to continue to produce content-rich stories on our website. Our development team is also actively exploring other funding opportunities. We are also exploring how we can be opportunistic and use current tools and platforms to be responsive to changing community interests and needs. For example, we’ll consider how content from our print magazine might be adapted to This Land, perhaps with added audio or video. We also anticipate stories from our Pulitzer/Mellon-funded Emerging Journalists projects might work on This Land in 2019.

As part of outreach efforts around This Land, Oregon Humanities contracted digital marketing consultant Simon Tam to boost engagement on social media. The strategies and tactics he



JOE WHITTLE

Performers at the Maxville Gathering in Enterprise, Oregon. Joe Whittle and S. Renee Mitchell’s story, “Reaching Back for Truth,” explores the legacy of Maxville, a logging camp where Black and white loggers worked side by side at a time when laws excluding Black people from living in Oregon were still on the books.

helped us implement have informed our ongoing work in getting stories in front of new readers and viewers.

The stories in the This Land project continue to be relevant to the concerns of Oregonians. For example, Christine Dupres and Jessy Damon's story "Earth on Fire" has been shared frequently during the 2018 wildfire season, as much of the state was affected by fires and smoke. And as development across the city continues at a rapid rate, "The Numbers" and "Future Portland" have been useful tools for community members and organizations seeking to open the conversation up toward being more inclusive and forward-thinking. This Land remains an important part of Oregon Humanities' work to get people to listen, reflect, and work together to build more just communities.

Attachments

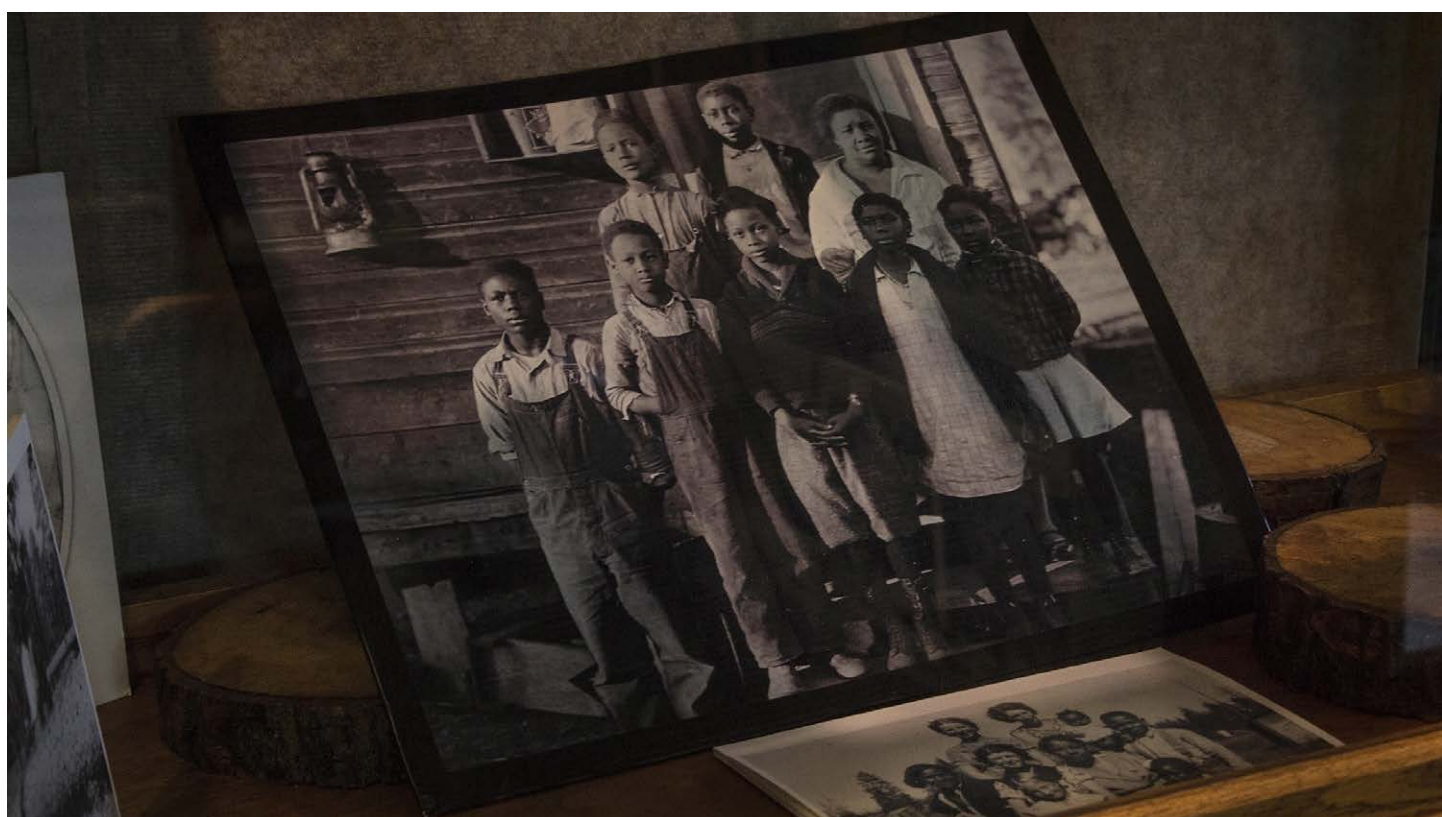
- "Reaching Back for Truth" by S. Renee Mitchell and Joe Whittle
- Postcard soliciting proposals for This Land

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SEARCH



Joe Whittle

Reaching Back for Truth

A woman's quest to discover her father's legacy uncovers the history of Oregon's Black loggers.

Essay by S. Renee Mitchell and photos by Joe Whittle

August 24, 2017

Belonging

History

Oregon

Place

Race

Home

The ordinary building in the heart of Oregon's first arts and cultural district is easy to overlook amongst the life-sized bronze sculptures, thriving art galleries, and busy restaurants, whose aromas beckon your detour along Joseph's downtown Main Street. But to Gwendolyn Trice, the founding executive director of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center, this place houses the heirlooms she holds most dear.

On an early July afternoon, the public museum is closed. So, Trice discreetly pushes the code to bid her entry. She immediately begins pointing at things behind glass walled cabinets and picking up artifacts to explain their function.

"That ukelin belonged to my dad," Trice notes, gesturing to a small instrument that looks like a cross between a violin and a ukelele. She calls attention to the plugless iron, which had been heated on her grandmother's wood-fed stove, and the wire container where raw popcorn kernels danced over an open campfire flame.

In this sacred space are the long-ago reflections that justify Trice staking claim in this Northeastern Oregon town, where the scenic wilderness is lush and unspoiled. It is here that Trice—a Black woman in a sea of conservative white faces who live engulfed by white snowcapped mountains—has finally found belonging in the dusty soil engraved with her father's footsteps.



Gwen Trice, executive director and curator of the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center, points out a document on display at the Center that lists the Black families (including hers) who traveled to work at the Maxville logging community in Wallowa County, Oregon, and their originating locations (primarily in the Jim Crow South). A map in the foreground uses red twine to trace their journeys across the continent to become some of the first Black residents of Oregon, a state founded with the intention of excluding Black people.

"Nobody talked about it," Trice says about Maxville's multiethnic biography. "If I hadn't started this [center], the history would be gone."

In its day, Maxville was one of the largest towns in Wallowa County. It was named after one of the logging superintendents out of the South. It was constructed in stages in 1923 in a remote meadow to the west of Promise Road and south of Bishop Creek. The unincorporated settlement, built by Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company, staked its claim on the land during a troublous period in Oregon history. At that time, the then-rapidly growing Ku Klux Klan was openly holding initiations in public squares, and the Oregon constitution forbade Black people from living, working, or owning property in the state, though that law was not widely enforced.

Though the exclusion clause of Oregon's constitution wasn't repealed until 1926, Bowman-Hicks ignored this state's racial allegiance and recruited experienced white and Black loggers from around the country. Most of the hundreds of white workers traveled from the deep South and Midwest, as well as parts of Oregon. Most of the sixty or so Black loggers came from Arkansas, Mississippi, or Louisiana, where Bowman-Hicks was already operating timber mills.

In 1923, Trice's father, Lafayette Trice, came to Maxville from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, with his father, Arthur, and younger brother, George. At the time, Lafayette was only nineteen, and, based on Trice's research of her genealogy, was the great-grandson of a "mulatto" slave named Morris Trice.

"A lot of colored families were looking for work and they brought people with them," explains Trice's older brother, Arthur, who was named after his grandfather. "You know how word of mouth goes. At one point, you have ten, then you have twenty."



A quote on the back of this educational token available at the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center says, "Those Maxville Days sure were different. It was 1923 and I was barely 19. One thing was immediately clear, I was one of the first colored boys to set foot in Wallowa County. We came by boxcar, my father,

Arthur 'Peg' Trice, and I. He worked on train engines while my brother and I earned our living as a log loader and a sawyer."

The secluded logging camp was arranged in neat rows with the social gathering spots, such as schools and the company-run commissary, surrounding the housing like a hula hoop. The town was unusual in that it allowed families. Single men slept in bunkhouses that were separated from the two-bedroom cabins for married couples. The town also had its own post office; medical clinic; blacksmith; eighty-room hotel with an expansive dining room; and a large horse barn that held seventeen work-horse teams and several large wagons. Trice's grandfather worked in the barn. Folks nicknamed him "Peg" because a wooden leg replaced one of his legs lost in a logging accident.

Though Bowman-Hicks defiantly introduced that part of isolated, rural Oregon to some of the first Black people it had ever seen, the company still adhered to the South's Jim Crow practices. Blacks lived in the northeastern edge of Maxville across the railroad tracks from white families. Both the baseball field and the swimming hole, made from a dammed-up stream, were located near the white part of town. The schools and baseball teams were segregated, too.

"The adjustments that were made by the minorities there were that you did what you were supposed to do," says Ester Wilfong Jr. His father was also a logger from Arkansas who worked for Bowman-Hicks in Maxville and Wallowa, about fifteen miles south. He was interviewed in the 2009 Oregon Public Broadcasting documentary film called *The Logger's Daughter*, about Trice's rediscovery of Maxville. "Keep your mouth closed and not step out of line and you would get along fairly well," Wilfong says.

The types of logging jobs—and the pay scale—were generally assigned based on race, with whites more likely working as section foremen, tree toppers, and truck drivers, and Greek immigrants working as bridge builders. Most of the hands-on jobs—such as log cutters, section hands, tong hookers, and log loaders—were the more difficult and dangerous.

"All that logging was tough business," Arthur Trice says. "Back in the day, you logged day in and day out. It was a pretty dangerous job. It was all manpower; all by hand."

The work was hard, and so was the living. Most of the houses lacked electricity and indoor plumbing; the families accessed water through an outdoor pump connected to a nearby spring. Residents also endured a generous visitation of blood-sucking bedbugs; mud in the spring and fall; and in the winter, snow storms and winter temperatures that dipped below minus twenty degrees. Death was also a regular visitor to Maxville, whether one's life ended under a felled tree, from diphtheria, or by accidentally being shot by a hunter.

Already burdened with the hardships of work and weather, Black loggers were also physiologically and psychologically suffering under discriminatory practices. Black workers were paid less, though it was more than what they were paid in the South. And they were expected to routinely defer to their Southern-bred neighbors and coworkers.

In a 1978 newspaper interview, Trice's father shared this 1925 trauma-inducing flashback: "I remember the night the Ku Klux Klan came to Maxville. Our boss de-hooded the leader and said, 'Don't come back here ever again.' And they never did. We'd see their crosses and fires burning sometimes, but they never came near us."

To build community, Blacks organized picnics to support Maxville's Colored Giants baseball team; or went to church in La Grande when a visiting Black preacher would be passing through; or held Saturday night card parties. In fact, Lafayette Trice earned the nickname "Lucky" because he was so skilled at getting winning hands.



A uniform used by the segregated Maxville baseball team on display at the Maxville Heritage Center in Joseph, Oregon.

Fraternalizing between the races was inevitable but limited. The single Black men who did want to get married generally hooked up with family members of fellow Black loggers. According to the 1930s Census, by the time Lucky was in his mid-twenties, he had married a woman named Nellie from Louisiana, his first of three wives.

"Oh, there was no dating," Wilfong says in his 2009 interview with OPB. "If it was dating, it was on the side that nobody knew about, and the after-hours kind of thing that you have to sneak around to do because those were the white girls. There weren't that many African American girls there."

As the timber market slowed in 1930, Bowman-Hicks started dismantling the train tracks and moving some of the tumbledown cabins to Wallowa. When Maxville officially shut down in 1933, Trice's father, then in his early thirties, moved to La Grande, a thirty-eight-mile drive southwest of Maxville, where his mother lived. And he also lived for a time in Baker City, where he drove a logging truck.

After Lucky joined the military and served in World War II, he met Dorothy Johnson, a seventeen-year-old from Valdosta, Georgia, who was living in a dinky Central Florida town with her mother. In the winter of 1945, Lucky moved back to La Grande and sent for his soon-to-be bride, who would become his third wife. There was a twenty-two-year age difference between them.

"It was the longest train ride I had ever been on," remembers Dorothy Trice, who is now ninety-one. "It was different and I guess it was exciting because the man was telling me a lot of stories about Oregon. And, at that age, I was believing everything he said," she says of Lucky.

By the time his new bride arrived in La Grande, Lucky was already a successful businessman with a downtown shoe shop he bought from a Greek entrepreneur. He also cleaned hats and sold cigarettes at his storefront and did janitorial work on the side for office buildings and businesses. Eventually, he started a furnace cleaning company and other entrepreneurial enterprises that catered to white customers. Initially, his wife financially contributed to the household by working as a maid.

"There was just hardly any Black folks here, so I don't know how long I was here before I was working; doing housework for a white woman," Dorothy Trice says. "You know, I didn't know anything about cleaning a bathtub because we didn't have a bathtub; we had a tin tub."

After their first child was stillborn, Lucky and Dorothy Trice conceived five boys and two girls, starting in 1948. Lucky was forty-five when the first child, Lafayette Trice Jr. was born, and fifty-six when Gwen Trice entered the world. All of his children and his wife were expected to

participate in the various businesses.

"He wasn't afraid of work," Dorothy Trice explains. "His kids, they all knew about working. We all worked." On his downtime, Lucky loved to hunt and fish, so his family's dinner table included elk, pheasant and crappie fish. "We had plenty of food to eat," she says.



A spring in the expansive forest meadow at the Maxville site feeds the remains of series of dammed ponds used for steam powered logging and milling equipment.

In a fishbowl of a small town during a time when bigger cities were grappling with racial unrest, Black people in La Grande were tolerated, as long as they didn't challenge the status quo. Notes Trice: "Blacks lived here as long as they didn't exist."

Lucky, though, was charismatic, visible and actively involved in the white community. He served as an American Legion district commander and was also active in the Rotary and Masonic Lodge and was a pilot for the Civil Air Patrol. He also was recognized for helping the US Army Corps of Engineers and Nez Perce Tribe establish the Lookingglass Hatchery, which raises spring Chinook salmon, in Elgin. Possessing an affable and persuasive temperament, Lucky

was called upon by whites and Blacks to mediate in challenging situations.

"Dad kept a lid on things," Trice says. "We couldn't stay here and stay alive if we acted out. If Blacks became too fractious, it would call attention to the whole (Black) community."

As Lucky was so well-connected, he learned that a fellow business owner—a white woman who ran a brothel—needed more help managing her responsibilities. So, in 1953, Lucky sent for his wife's mother, Grotis Smith, to move from Florida to Eastern Oregon to take the job in what Dorothy Trice called "a sporting house."

"She didn't do the bed work," Dorothy Trice clarifies, "she did the feeding and the washing and different things."

After years of earning a living in Florida by picking beans, Smith—who also did cleaning chores for a local attorney—bought and rented out homes in La Grande to white women or family members.

"She must have had six or seven shacks," Dorothy Trice says. "She would fix them up and rent them out. It wasn't an easy thing."

Over the decades before he died in 1985, Lucky provided his family with a stable existence. He was also able to buy a couple houses in La Grande because the previous owners knew him personally. Dorothy Trice has lived in the same house for more than sixty years. Their son Arthur lives three houses down. Another son, Doug, also still lives in La Grande. Her other children live in Seattle, Spokane, and Kansas.

After her husband passed, Dorothy Trice, who hadn't made it past the eighth grade, went to school and got her GED. When her energy holds up, she volunteers at a nearby nursing home. She is also the oldest member of her Baptist congregation, which has only a handful of other Black attendees. When questioned why she has stayed so long in a small town with so few Black people, her response is, "You just do your thing. Everybody is not going to make you feel good at all places anywhere."

Gwen Trice, however, says she never felt like she fit in. She felt silenced and invisible, so she left Oregon for Seattle as soon as she graduated from high school. After a twenty-year career at Boeing, Trice returned to school to study filmmaking and theater. She says it was a line from a Black play she was cast in—"Who is your father and your father's father? Say their name"—that got her attention. She says the play, which addressed the ongoing effects of slavery, segregation, and Jim Crow on Black people, made her want to understand more about her father's life path.



Gwen Trice, daughter of Maxville resident "Lucky" Trice, walks through the Maxville site on a summer evening sharing the story of the bustling village found here during the early twentieth-century logging days of Oregon. The hillside behind her shows the stumps of recently harvested timber and the replanted regrowth that follows, a telling reminder of what first brought Gwen's family to this remote part of Oregon in the 1920s.

"It took me back," Trice says. "It turned me around and changed my life."

As Lucky rarely talked to his children about his experience in Maxville, Trice says she didn't find out her father was part of Oregon's logging history until 2003 when details of his earlier life leaked out of casual conversations. With her training in theater and filmmaking, Trice went on a multimedia quest to discover her roots, starting at a reunion of white homesteaders in Wallowa County. Over the years, she videotaped dozens of hours of interviews with residents who had grown up in the area to see if they might remember her father or their life in Maxville. She ended up hearing stories that made her curious to learn even more.

"I just knew I needed to record these voices and I needed to have their stories in a permanent spot," she says. "So, I just started talking and asking questions and visiting people."

Ten years ago, Trice moved back to the place where she never felt completely at home in order to create space for her father's legacy. The Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center officially opened as a nonprofit in 2008. Since then, descendants of Maxville residents all over the country have brought their offerings of artifacts and reminiscences to Trice, like she was a priest hearing confessions.

In 2015, the eldest daughter of a Maxville family endured a ruptured spleen on her travels from Virginia to Northeastern Oregon to visit Maxville. She then mailed an antique sideboard, her parents wedding gift that was built by a German immigrant, who was Maxville's carpenter. The cabinet was used to store aluminum pots that were donated by fellow loggers on the couple's wedding day.

Trice has created space in the center to welcome each donation, from the yellowed newspaper clippings and photos to the donated 1931 Sheik condom container to the chunks of someone's log walls whose gaps were filled by torn baby blankets. Through grants and community partnerships, Trice helped save the only remaining Maxville structure from being demolished. The large wooden building served as a social center for Maxville residents and visiting dignitaries. And she was able to interview Maxville's last living Black logger, Alvin Marsh, in Lancaster, Texas, before he died in 2009 at age ninety-two.

Each summer, Trice and a bundle of volunteers organize the family-friendly Maxville Gathering, where attendees witness ax throwing, mule log skidding, and crosscut sawing, and participate in potato sack races and egg tosses. These community-building efforts—which harken back to Maxville's nearly forgotten history—are intended to remind people of what life was like in the woods, where Blacks and whites had to depend on one another to survive.



Musicians play on the stage during the 2017 Maxville Heritage and Watershed Festival at the Wallowa County Fairgrounds in Enterprise, Oregon.

"We connect folks who don't look like me to the same story," Trice says. "At the end of the time, they're weeping and hugging and leaving a little bit of money."

The retelling done at the Maxville Heritage Interpretive Center makes sure everyone belongs and that each cultural contribution is valued, not just whites whose photos and written histories reflected their own perspectives. At Trice's center, the storytelling bears witness to the Black loggers of Maxville; the Chinese laborers who helped build the Wallowa County railroad tracks; the Japanese immigrants who removed tree stumps and helped cleared the land for the logging and farming industries; the Greek immigrants who helped build and maintain the railroad and trestles; and the Nez Perce tribal members who were forced off land where they hunted, fished, and grazed their horses for generations to make way for white homesteaders who later sold that same land to timber barons.

"It's about everybody," Trice says. "I want to create a story of Oregon history to help change the

course of young people's lives and how they interpret their potential."

In late June, Trice's only child, Jordon, who lives in Reno, brought his ten-year-old son and his longtime girlfriend for a weekend family camping trip on wooded private property close to Maxville. He hasn't spent much time in La Grande and had never been to the Maxville site.

"You walk in and say it's a small town, but there's a lot of history here," he acknowledges. "I just don't know that much about it."

Dorothy Trice also says she doesn't know much about Maxville. Her memories of her husband Lucky are focused on the life they built together in La Grande.

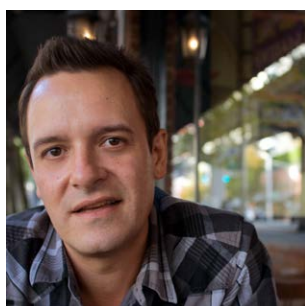
"Everybody knew him and respected him," she says. "That's the part that I know. So, that Maxville part, well, that was before I met him."

Trice is patient, though. It took her several decades as an adult to become aware enough to reach back and rummage through her family history. She then used this knowledge to sever the limbs of internalized oppression scraping at her core so she could build her own bridge to her truth. Her soulful quest started with a question intended to help establish one's identity: *Who is your father and your father's father? Say their name.* The answer changed everything for her. It brought Trice to Maxville, where she found her voice and her life purpose.

"The connection to the land," she concludes, "begins with a connection to yourself."



S. Renee Mitchell is an award-winning journalist turned artist, who expresses herself through poetry, storytelling, grant writing, teaching, and creating multimedia experiences. Renee spent twenty-five years as a newspaper journalist in Seattle, Orlando, and Detroit, among other cities, and is most known locally for her years as a Metro columnist for the Oregonian, where she was nominated twice for the Pulitzer Prize.



Joe Whittle is an enrolled Caddo tribal member and long-time resident of Wallowa County, Oregon. When he's not wandering the wilds of the Wallowas and other parts of the West for adventure and fun, he's often doing it for work as a freelance photojournalist and writer, as well as a seasonal field ranger for the US Forest Service. His work can be found in the Guardian, Outside, HuffPost, Backpacker, Travel Oregon, the Oregonian, and 1859 Oregon's Magazine.

Comments

7 comments have been posted.

Such a beautifully written piece about a history that might have been lost! And Joe's photos are evocative and lovely!

Kimberly A.C. Wilson | August 2018 | Portland, Oregon

Great piece! It was quite interesting, well-paced, and made me want to know more about this part of Oregon history that could have been lost to history if Trice hadn't stepped up. I have one small bone to pick, though. The author characterizes Trice as "a Black woman in a sea of conservative white faces." I've recently moved back to rural Oregon after spending most of my adult life in liberal "bubble" cities (mostly Portland, New York, and Oakland). Two years ago, I spent time in Northeastern Oregon, including the Wallowas. The sweeping generalization that all those white faces in the Wallowas must belong to conservatives? It's not true. I stayed near Enterprise with liberal friends and spent time on a ranch where a white mom talked about aside time and money (both in short supply on most ranches) so her children could attend day camps out-of-town, where they'd be exposed to more diversity. To my ear, growing accustomed to living in rural Oregon again, during these difficult and frightening times—we should be encouraging the liberals and moderates who live outside the bubble cities, where it is a heck of a lot harder to hold liberal views and attempt to make the world a better place. Please don't disappear us in the sea of conservatives, and please, don't feed the easy stereotypes with dismissive generalizations. Every white person you see rumbling around farm country in a plaid shirt, every white guy in camo on a hunting trip, isn't necessarily a conservative. I'm not particularly offended or anything; I just see this kind of thing as strategically unsound and divisive. My big fear is that liberal Oregon assumes it'll stay blue -- and it just may not. Which would be terrifying. We need to reach out in both directions. All my best, Another privileged white lady in Oregon

Another privileged white lady in Oregon | October 2017 | Central Oregon

S. Renee Mitchell is a brilliant writer! The story of Maxville still lives in the memory of the living African American descendants who have stories and a history to share. Descendants of the Andersons, Lowerys, Marshes Pattersons, Williams, Kings, Cooks, Thomases, and others still live in Oregon and Northern California. It's a fascinating history of their parents, grandparents,

aunts and uncles — and their youth! — Pearl Alice Marsh, Wallowa History Center

Pearl Alice Marsh | October 2017 |

We all have a story. Thanks to Renee Mitchell for introducing me to Gwen Trice's Maxville family heritage and narrative.

Lynnette Jackson | October 2017 | Portland, OR

Renee, what a lovely piece of work you've made, bringing history to life while creating an important record. Thank you!

BIJA GUTOFF | October 2017 |

Beautifully written and photographed. What an amazing tribute to the legacy of black Oregonians. The story now lives forever here.

Janita Poe | October 2017 | Atlanta, Georgia

What a heart warming story. Thank-You

Jeanne Bailey | September 2017 |

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This Land

Connecting stories of home, belonging, and identity

PHOTO BY KEVIN FREENY

This Land: Artists of color explore race, power, and place

This Land is an online multimedia project that collects and connects stories about land, home, belonging, and identity by Oregon's communities of color.

The project uses film, words, maps, photos, sounds, and graphics by artists and writers of color to build a broader understanding of how policies shape systems of power and land ownership in Oregon's past and present.

Visit oregonhumanities.org/this-land to explore little-known stories about the fight for place, home, and belonging and about how Oregonians of color have flourished, building homes and community, despite a long and continuing history of exclusionary policies.

Oregon Humanities

This Land is made possible by the **Creative Heights Initiative of the Oregon Community Foundation**, which encourages Oregon artists to test new ideas, stretch their creative capacity, and take creative risks.