

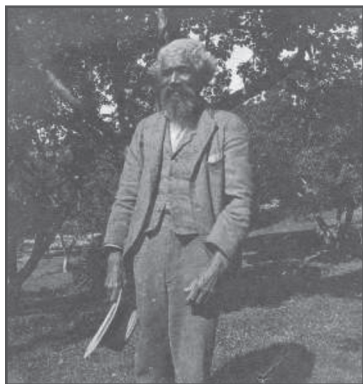
African Americans have been a part of the diverse population of South Sound since American settlers arrived in 1845. However, records regarding early African Americans in the Olympia area are scant. The fragments of stories that survive offer a window into the daily life of Washington's Capital City and environs. Most came of their own accord, looking for a place to improve their chances for a better life. They worked as laborers, domestic servants, or as stewards on Puget Sound's "Mosquito Fleet" steamboats. Others became business owners, worked as restaurateurs, barbers or bootblacks. Despite their struggles against discrimination, they made their homes here and were an integral part of the social fabric. This brochure will introduce you to some of these people.

Thomas Park, a brick mason by trade, was a lifelong associate of the Robert Frost Family and is buried in

the Frost Family Plot. "Henrietta," domestic servant for Elisha Ferry who later became governor of Washington, only appears once in Olympia's census. Leander Bushon's apparent business success beyond Olympia after apprenticing in Samuel Stork's mercantile remains to be researched. The women of color identified as prostitutes in the census disappear as abruptly as they appear in local records. Yet all of their stories show the South Sound's population is more complex and interconnected than many early histories indicate.

While few structures associated with their lives survive, the stories connected to these sites reflect the diversity of experiences that make up African American history in Olympia and the Pacific Northwest.

In some cases first names are used to avoid confusion with relatives of the same last name.



Thomas Park, WSHS Photo



Unknown man, Private Collection

1. Former Olympia City Hall

Southeast corner Plum St & 8th Ave



Olympia City Council, 1988, Jet Magazine Image

This modern-style building housed Olympia's city government from 1966 to 2010. In 1988 Olympia voters helped make history when they elected local community organizer Cora Pinson to the City Council, the first African American woman to hold such a position in Washington State. Pinson served on the Olympia City Council from 1987 to 1991.

Pinson was born in Memphis Tennessee and graduated from Hammond Business College in Indiana. Afterwards she operated a modeling agency in Chicago until a friend convinced her to come west in 1975.



Cora Pinson swearing in, 1988, Jet Magazine Image

Active in numerous community groups and government agencies, Pinson served on the Olympia Downtown Revitalization Committee and was an active member of the Olympia Kiwanis. She also served on the Department of Social and Health Service's Advisory Committee and in the Housing Authority of Thurston Co., the Thurston Co Economic Development Council and the Visitor and Convention Bureau. She was also a founding member of the New Life Baptist Church in Olympia.

Pinson's political activities included serving with the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, as Precinct officer for the Thurston County Democratic Party and as president of the Northwest Conference of Black Elected Officials.

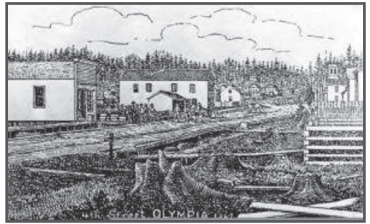
Among her outreach efforts Pinson hosted a local radio show where she discussed racial diversity and worked to uncover and preserve the history of African Americans in Thurston County.

Cora Pinson died in 1994 at age 53. Her passing prompted the Washington State Senate to pass SR8663 honoring her countless hours of community service.

2. Our House Restaurant

(Site only, building demolished)

Southeast corner Franklin St & Fourth Ave



"Our House Restaurant," (left)

City of Olympia Collection

The James and Mary Mars family arrived in Olympia from Victoria BC in 1870. James left Massachusetts as a young man and worked at sea until he joined the 1849 California Gold Rush. Afterward he relocated to Victoria where he worked as crew on Puget Sound steamboats. Mary Thompson was born in Missouri and arrived in Portland, Oregon in 1852. She moved to Victoria in 1860 where she met James; they married later that year.



James Mars, Roger Easton Collection, Olympia Tribune Souvenir Edition 1891, the State Library collection

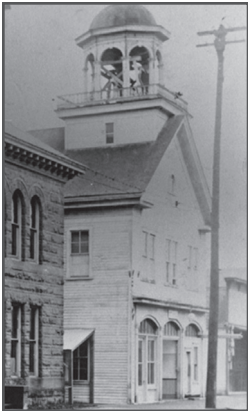
After their arrival in Olympia, James worked as a laborer. In 1879 they opened the “Our House Restaurant” at this location, offering reasonably priced meals prepared, as the press described, in ways that “remind one of home and mother’s cooking.” The Mars family was renowned for their hospitality and were well respected citizens of Olympia.

Mars James, restaurant, s e cor 4th and Franklin.

Polk’s Puget Sound Directory, 1887

James and Mary had four children. Their eldest son, James Mars Jr, passed away in 1886. In 1891 illness struck the Mars family; James and son Jesse passed away; Mary followed in 1892. Their funerals were widely attended by Olympia residents. Their daughters, Ella and Lizzie, moved to Spokane to live with relatives.

3. Columbia Hall
(Site only, building demolished)
North Side Fourth Ave
between Washington St & Franklin St



Columbia Hall, circa 1880s, WSHS Photo

Olympia’s first city hall, built in 1869, also housed the Columbia Engine Company No. 1, Olympia’s volunteer firefighting organization. In 1883 the firefighters elected thirteen year-old Jesse Mars, son of James and Mary Mars, as a member of the department. Jesse is the earliest known African American to serve as a firefighter in Olympia.

Jesse was a member of the fire department until his death from illness in 1891 at the age of 22. In his honor, Columbia Engine Co handled his funeral arrangements and passed a resolution of respect for his service in the department. He is interred at Odd Fellows Cemetery, Tumwater with his family.



Columbia Engine Company #1, 1880s, at Columbia St. Firehouse. Jesse Mars 3rd from R, City of Olympia Collection

4. Pacific House Hotel
(Site only, building demolished)
Northeast corner Capital
Way & State Ave



Pacific House, shortly before demolition, Roger Easton Collection

Built in the 1850s as Olympia’s premiere hotel, by 1859 the Pacific House was operated by Alexander and Rebecca Howard who came west from Massachusetts.

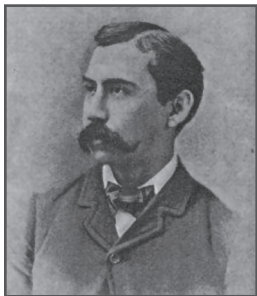


Rebecca Howard, Private Collection

Under the Howard's leadership, the Pacific House achieved fame as a fine, well-run establishment comparable with restaurants and hotels in San Francisco. Rebecca's reputation as a successful, no-nonsense businesswoman commanded respect and empowered her to admonish anyone, even legislators, who dared call her "Aunt Becky" without her permission.

In its heyday the Pacific House served as the informal headquarters of the Republican Party during legislative sessions. In 1880, President Rutherford B Hayes visited Olympia and addressed a crowd from its second story balcony.

In 1862 the Howards agreed to take custody of six-year-old Isaac Glasgow, rescued by a group of concerned local women from a life of abuse from his father. The Howards renamed him Frank and later adopted him as their son. Frank became a businessman in his own right with interests in Olympia, Seattle and on the east coast.



Frank Howard, Olympia Tribune Souvenir Edition, 1891. Washington State Library.

The Howards retired to a small farm on Olympia's east side after accumulating a modest fortune from business investments. [See Site #11 Cemetery]



The door to Rebecca Howard's Safe

5. Bill Williams' Bootblack Stand

(Site only, building demolished)
 Southwest corner Capital Way & Fifth Ave



Odd Fellows Hall at Capitol Way and 5th Ave, Washington State Library Collection

After a life of adventure and hardship, Bill Williams settled down in Olympia in the 1880s and operated a bootblack stand in his final years. Originally located in front of Young's Hotel at Capitol Way and Olympia Ave, he later moved to this site. In an 1893 interview, the press described Williams as a large gregarious man with long white hair, whose pipe was his "constant companion."

Born in Baltimore in 1820, he went to California by sea for the 1849 Gold Rush. However, his successful mining operation attracted the attention of bandits who robbed him of his gold. Afterwards he worked as a cook on coastal steamships. He later joined the Hudson's Bay Co in northeast Washington and British Columbia until he again followed new gold rushes on the Fraser River and the Caribou in the late 1850s.

Williams opened a restaurant while in British Columbia. He became friends with steamboat captain Woodbury Doane who was a frequent customer. Doane later became a successful restaurateur in Olympia and may have convinced Williams to relocate here as well. As Williams' health declined, he took up boot-blackening for a living and became a well-known part of the Olympia community.

Williams' years among the diverse populations of miners, fur trappers and natives made him fluent in Spanish, French and German as well as English. He could also converse with natives in the Chinook Jargon trade language. Among his longtime friends was Jim Daugherty who became wealthy in the Yukon Gold Rush. Daugherty provided Williams with a trust fund, allowing Williams to spend his final years in relative comfort, operating his stand as a place to socialize more than as a business.

6. Tilton House

(Site only, building demolished)

Southwest corner Columbia St and 10th Ave



Tilton House, 1860s., WSHS Collection

Eight-year-old Charley Mitchell came west to Olympia in 1855 as a domestic servant with the family of James Tilton, the first Surveyor General of Washington Territory. Mitchell's mother was a slave owned by Tilton's cousin and his father was a white oyster farmer. Tilton assumed responsibility for Mitchell after his cousin passed away.

In September of 1860 Black stewards working aboard Puget Sound steamboats convinced Mitchell to stow away on the steamer *Eliza Anderson* bound for British Columbia. There he could join the community of free Blacks living in Victoria. The British Empire outlawed slavery after 1834 and many Blacks who came west made their way to Victoria to escape the contentious and rapidly changing laws in the US.



Steamer Eliza Anderson at Victoria BC, Dryden's Marine History, p76

While underway Captain Fleming discovered Mitchell and placed him under arrest, intending to return him to the Tiltons. However, protestors in Victoria filed a writ of *Habeas Corpus* and authorities took Mitchell into custody. The next day the courts granted him his freedom.

While the Tiltons insisted Mitchell was not a slave, the 1857 Dred Scott Supreme Court Decision held slaves were constitutionally protected private property unless states voted to ban slavery, which Washington had not done. For their part, the Tiltons masked their indignation at Charley's leaving through derision, commenting in the press that, "his services have lately not been equivalent to his expenses."

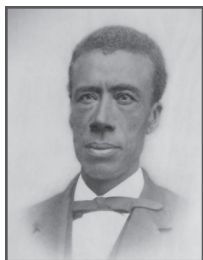
After Mitchell won his freedom he joined the free Black community in British Columbia, but his life afterwards remains largely unknown. In 1876 a "colored man" named Charley Mitchell left Sooke in a canoe but was drowned when bad weather set in.

7. Quincy-Campbell Home

(Site only, building demolished)

Capital Campus, west end of the Temple of Justice

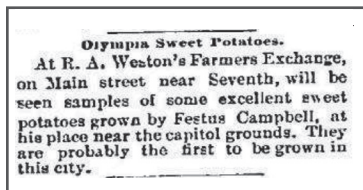
Before construction of the current capitol complex in the 1920s, this area was a residential neighborhood. Festus Campbell and Mary Quincy, lifelong companions who relocated from Massachusetts to Olympia together in the 1870s, kept house and maintained a showcase garden at this site.



*Festus Campbell,
First Baptist
Church,
Pittsfield Mass.*

Festus Campbell began life as a slave in Louisiana but escaped to Massachusetts by the 1850s. He found work as a servant for Dr. Robert Campbell in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and adopted the family name. Campbell travelled throughout Europe with the family where he mastered French, Spanish and other languages. As an adult he became an ordained Baptist minister and opened multiple restaurants in Pittsfield. Campbell also operated a successful greenhouse and invested in real estate.

In the 1860s he hired Mary Quincy to manage one of his restaurants while he travelled for business and to preach the gospel. However, by the 1870s Campbell's business ventures were in decline. When Rebecca Howard recruited Quincy to work at the Pacific House Hotel, they relocated to Olympia. After their arrival, Quincy continued working as a cook and domestic while Campbell applied his extensive knowledge of horticulture to grow flowers, fruits and vegetables for sale and assist others with their gardens. He also served briefly as a minister at the Olympia First Baptist Church.



Morning Olympian, 29 October 1893

Campbell was well-read and kept an extensive personal library in their home. He was an occasional speaker to the Thurston County Horticultural Society

and in 1909 won a medal for his produce at the Seattle Alaska Yukon Pacific Exposition World Fair.

Although not married, they lived together until their deaths; Quincy in 1909 and Campbell in 1910. Their obituaries describe their long relationship as close but platonic.

8. Territorial Capitol Building (Site only, building demolished)

**Southeast corner
Legislative Building**



*Territorial Capitol Building.
Washington State Digital Archives*

Built in 1855 to house the territorial legislature, the territorial capital also served as the first state capitol briefly after 1889. Among the legislators elected to the first state legislature in 1889 was William Owen Bush, pioneer agriculturalist, representing Thurston County.



*William Owen
Bush, WSHS
Collection*

William was born in Missouri in 1832, the eldest son of George and Isabella Bush. [See Bush Homestead, Site #9] At age 17 he travelled to California for the 1849 Gold Rush but returned shortly after. William married Mandana Smith Kimsey and together they farmed the Bush family claim after his parents passed away in the 1860s. Their farm became a model of

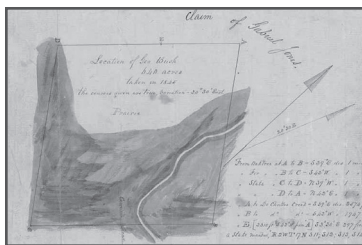


*Bush Homestead on Bush Prairie,
Henderson House Museum Collectiona*

agricultural excellence and a showcase for good farming practices. In 1872 William helped establish the Western Washington Industrial Association to promote agricultural exhibitions of local products. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 the Bushes wheat won “best in the world” and the display became a permanent exhibit at the Smithsonian in Washington DC.

During his term in the state legislature, William helped establish an agricultural college, now Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. In 1892 William took Thurston County produce to the Chicago World Fair where it once again won many awards.

After a lifetime of hard work and achievement, Mandana Bush passed away in 1899; William followed in 1907. They are buried near George and Isabella Bush in the Tumwater Union Pioneer Cemetery.



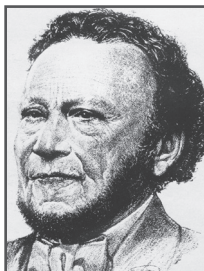
*1855 Map of Bush Family Farm,
WA State Historical Society*

9. George and Isabella Bush Homestead (Site only, building demolished) Intersection 88th Ave and Old Highway 99, Tumwater



*Bush House, 1970, Olympia Historical Society,
Roger Easton Collection*

George and Isabella Bush arrived on Puget Sound in 1845 as part of the first group of American settlers. George was born about 1790 and was mixed race. He served in the war of 1812 and later may have traveled west and worked as a fur trapper. He returned east and became an expert cattle rancher and farmer. In 1832 he married Isabella James, a white woman. Together they built a prosperous farm in Missouri where they raised several children.



*George Bush,
an artist's
rendering,
no known
photographs exist,
WA State Archives*

In 1844 the Bush family came west by wagon to Oregon Territory with a group of friends including Michael Simmons. When they arrived they found laws barring settlement by non-whites already in place. Unwilling to separate, the group chose to move north of the Columbia River where Oregon laws didn't yet apply. The group settled near Tumwater Falls; the Bushes staked a claim to the south, on what is still known as Bush Prairie.

The Bush family's farming expertise played a critical role in the community's survival in the early years and their home became a stopping place on the trail to Puget Sound. By 1850 the Bushes had over 100 horses, cattle, sheep and pigs and 10 oxen which they generously shared with struggling neighbors.

After congress extended Oregon Territory north of the Columbia in 1848, George's title to his claim was in question. In response, 55 of their neighbors and friends petitioned congress to grant them title to their farm; congress passed the legislation in 1855. Later, during the conflict over treaty provisions between natives and white settlers in 1855-56, the Bush homestead was "neutral ground" due to the family's good relations with natives. After George and Isabella's deaths in the 1860s the farm remained in the family for many years and became a showcase for good farming practices. [See Territorial Capitol Building, site #8.]



Bush House, late 1800s, Olympia Historical Society, Roger Easton Collection

10. Union Pioneer Cemetery

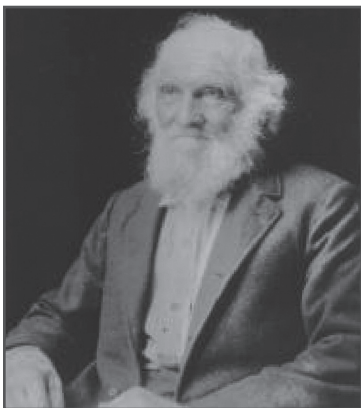
5700 Littlerock Rd,
Tumwater



George and Isabella Bush Marker, Edward Echtle Photo

Established in the early 1850s on Jesse Ferguson's land claim, Union Pioneer Cemetery is one of the first American cemeteries in Washington State. Many of the earliest settlers in this area are buried here, including pioneers George and Isabella Bush, along with many of their descendants. [See site #9.]

Over the years Union Cemetery suffered from the effects of neglect and vandalism. In the 1970s the site was in disrepair when the Thurston County Black Women's Caucus restored George and Isabella's marker as a historic site. In 1977 the City of Tumwater assumed ownership and still maintains the cemetery.



H Sanford Bush, (1840-1913) son of George and Isabella, Olympia Historical Society, Roger Easton Collection

II. Masonic and IOOF

Cemeteries

**3802 Cleveland Ave SE,
Tumwater**



Festus Campbell Marker, Edward Echte Photo

The entrance road to the Odd Fellows Cemetery from Cleveland Ave is the dividing line between the Masonic and Odd Fellows Cemeteries. Masonic cemetery was founded in 1859 and IOOF in 1869.

A number of Black pioneers are buried on either side of the road dividing the cemeteries. Rebecca and Alexander Howard, Festus Campbell and Mary Quincy are in Masonic Cemetery. Thomas Park lies nearby with the Robert Frost Family in an unmarked grave.

Bootblack William “Bill” Williams and barber Isaac Dixon lie in adjoining plots just south in IOOF Cemetery while laborer Nathaniel Willis is in an unmarked plot in Block 51.

Record keeping in the early days was inconsistent and a number of burial locations remain unknown. Obituaries place the Mars Family in the IOOF Cemetery while “Lizzie” Golden, a brothel owner who died in 1902, was buried in Masonic. It may be they were buried at county expense and the names of those interred went unrecorded.

Masonic Memorial Park

Festus Campbell (1822-1910)

Mary Quincy (1909)

Block 55, Row 30

Thomas Park (1916)

Block 51, Row 11

Rebecca Groundage Howard (1827-1881)

Alexander Howard (1810-1890)

Block 61, Row 16

“Lizzie” Golden (1902)

Location unknown

Odd Fellows Cemetery

Isaac Dixon (1873)

Block 31 lot 30

William “Bill” Williams (1820-1898)

Block 30 lot 32

Nathaniel Willis (1911)

Block 151 lot 18 [no marker]

James Mars (1828-1891)

Mary Thomas Mars (1848-1892)

Jesse Mars (1891)

Locations unknown



© City of Olympia and Olympia Heritage Commission 2013

Special thanks to Ed Echtle for the content

Acknowledgements:

Olympia Heritage Commission

Blackpast.org

Olympia Historical Society

Bigelow House Preservation Association

Henderson House Museum

Washington State Women's History Consortium

(www.washingtonwomenshistory.org)

This brochure has been financed in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior administered by the Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and the City of Olympia. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or DAHP.

This program received Federal funds from the National Park Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in departmental Federally Assisted Programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of Federal assistance should write to:
Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service,
1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240

Thanks to Thelma Jackson and Ed Echtle for their work on the Thurston County African American Oral History Project

For more information on Olympia's heritage
visit olympiawa.gov/historic or call phone: **360.753.8314**
