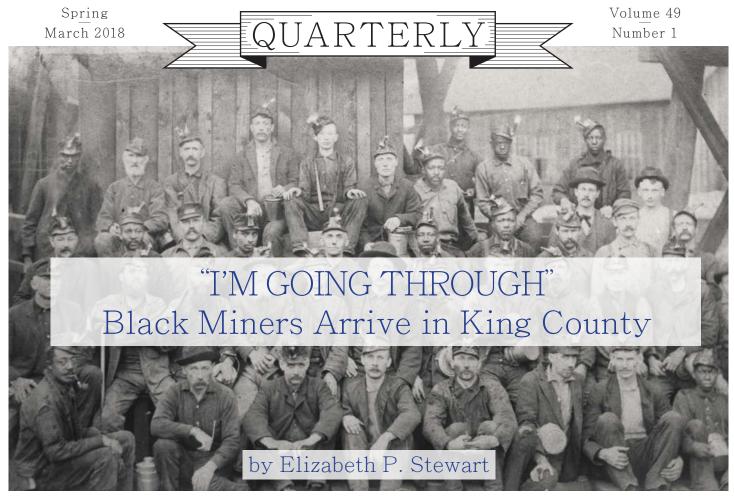
RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM



A word about racial terms: Everyone ought to have the prerogative to be identified by a term of their choosing, but in the 1890s African Americans were known in polite terms as "colored" or "negro" (uncapitalized), or in more impolite terms. These are not terms we use today, but in quotes I have preserved the original language. In the eighth paragraph I have reproduced a hateful term used by the person in history, because I believe it is important to understand the impact a word like that can have in an emotionally charged context. I welcome your comments.

In 1888 the largest single increase of African Americans in Washington territory came about when labor recruiter James Shepperson was sent South by the Northwest Coal Co. to bring mine laborers to the Roslyn mine. A mine strike called by the Knights of Labor had shut down the mine, and the company planned to restart it with African American strike breakers. Three hundred Black men from Virginia, North Carolina, and Kentucky were determined to escape the terrorism of the post-Civil War Continued on page 5

Also In This Issue...



Black & White
| currently on exhibit
| at RHM.



Museum Report
| by Elizabeth P.
| Stewart. Director.



Board Report: | 2018 goals and schedule.



Collections
| Report by Sarah
| Ramson, Curator







BLACK & WHITE

Then do you wear black? When do you wear white? From its beginning fashion was always more complicated than simply putting clothing on our bodies to protect us from the elements. Trends in black and white clothing, and their associated meanings, differ between communities and throughout time. Join us to learn about three trendsetters in black and white fashion: the church, Queen Victoria, and Coco Chanel. The black and white fashions featured in the exhibit were worn by Rentonites from the 1870s all the way up to the 1960s. The exhibit will also delve into how black and white photos color our view of history. Most of the artifacts have never been displayed before; you do not want to miss this exhibit!

From **JANUARY** 30 MAY 19

RENTON GETS ITS FIRST LANDMARK

Thanks to a new Historic Preservation ordinance passed by the Renton City Council in 2017, the F. W. Woolworth Building (now the Cortona Building) at 3rd and Williams became the City's first landmark. On November 30, 2017 the Landmarks Commission approved landmark status for the building, with Museum Director Elizabeth Stewart as a special commissioner. The ordinance creates an agreement between

the City of Renton and the King County Landmarks Commission for preservation services that makes propertyowners eligible for tax breaks and grantfunding. Here's hoping this is the first of many!



SHEILA WOOD MOTTERN 1941-2017

Sheila Wood Mottern passed away in November 2017. Sheila was a longtime volunteer and collection worker for the Museum, whose extensive research into the Klondike Gold Rush continues to benefit staff and researchers today. A descendant of Robert Henderson Wood, Sheila became so fascinated with her grandfather's and great-uncles' foray into Alaskan gold mining that she spent years uncovering the

minute details of every Renton Gold Rusher's experiences. The result was a comprehensive collection of stories that might otherwise have been lost. We are indebted to your work, Sheila.



MUSEUM REPORT

by Elizabeth P. Stewart, Museum Director

"Whenever I think about the past it brings back so many memories." – Comedian Steven Wright

he idea for our current fashion exhibit, *Black & White*, was stimulated in part by staff conversations about how we remember the past. The Museum holds over 18,000 historic photos, most of which are black and white, and thus we have a tendency to remember the past as a gray place. But the Victorians who had those photos taken saw them with different eyes. They knew that Auntie's shirtwaist was bright yellow and that grandmother's dress was a tasteful pastel, and that's what they saw in their minds' eye. Similarly, for people of a certain age, television and movies were also black and white, yet we all knew instinctively that Rob and Laura Petrie's home was tastefully decorated in the colors of the day, with avocado green or harvest gold kitchen appliances, and maybe a pop of color in the orange swag lamp or the abstract painting on the wall.

But as time passes, the past becomes a landscape of history, not memory. The danger is that we become nostalgic, we quaint-ify the past, and forget that it was populated by people not that dissimilar to us.

With *Black & White* we call into question, in a fun way, these assumptions about history. The exhibit brings out the best monochromatic fashions from our collection, and uses them to explore the meanings of color—or lack of color—through history. Because all colors have cultural meanings, whether it's the purity and piety of white or the soberness and style of black. The exhibit ends with an experiment that we hope will challenge your impression of the past as a dull sepiatoned place; you'll have a chance to look at black and white photos of three pieces of clothing from our collection and see if you can guess their actual color. The answers are around the corner, where we exhibit the real clothing.

The past was full of the same conflicts, passions, and joys that we experience today, and my recent research into the arrival of African American miners to King County also underlines that. White miners dreaded losing their jobs to African Americans from the South, and White company owners manipulated those fears to their advantage. It can be difficult to look at how our ancestors really behaved under duress, but when we do, we recognize—sometimes much to our chagrin—some of the same challenges that we see around us today. It's healthy to look at the past as a place full of color and human emotion, because that's how it really was.



Elizabeth P. Stewart

—
Director



Several episodes of "The Dick Van Dyke Show" were colorized in 2017, based on color references in dialogue and the memories of cast members and producers.



Black & White color experiment: Can you tell what color this is?

QUARTERLY Spring 2018

RENTON HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

Sarah Samson Graphic Design & Layout Karl Hurst City of Renton Print & Mail Services

RENTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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P (425) 255-2330 F (425) 255-1570

HOURS:

Tuesday - Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm

ADMISSION: \$5 (Adult) \$2 (Child)



UPCOMING



LA CAUSA BY LIVING VOICES March 31 11:00 am-12:00 pm

In the late 1960s a new movement changed the lives of Latin American farm workers who fought for civil rights, battled racism and indecent working conditions. Experience this important chapter of history through the eyes of one young woman.



BLACK & WHITE CURATOR'S TALK April 5 6:00-7:00 pm

How are national and international fashion trends expressed in Rentonites' clothing? Join Curators Sarah Samson and Kim Owens to learn more about the pieces that made it into the exhibit, and those that didn't.



REVEALING WOMEN'S HISTORY THROUGH FASHION April 28

11:00 am-12:00 pm

Join Michelle Marshman, History Instructor at Green River College, for a visual tour of women's 20th century history as illustrated by changing women's fashions. We'll hear how political and social change, times of economic boom and bust, and changing ideas about women's roles, inform the clothing women wear.

BOARD REPORT

The Board of Trustees for the Renton Historical Society has many exciting projects coming up for 2018, and we are looking for a few more motivated volunteers to help us make them happen! This year we'll be holding a bi-annual Board retreat, revising the Museum's Strategic Plan, and organizing our annual autumn fundraiser on Wednesday, September 26.

If you're interested in strategic planning or fundraising, if you would like to represent the Museum at community events, if you have a legal and/or human resources background, the Board of Trustees is a great way to volunteer for the Museum. Serving as a trustee is a great way to gain leadership skills and see behind-thescenes of one of the best small museums in King County. Board members serve three-year terms and the Board meets on the last Tuesday of every month, 5:30–7:00 pm. For more information, contact Elizabeth Stewart at estewart@ rentonwa.gov or 425-255-2330.



Board Secretary Antoin Johnson with Museum Director Elizabeth P. Stewart.

CECELIA CAREY MAJOR 1912-2018

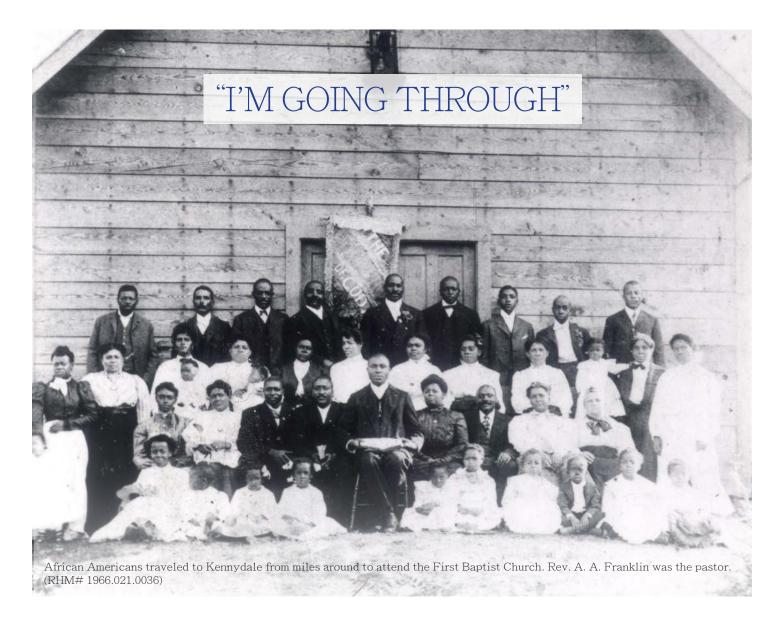
At the time of her death on January 6, Cecelia Major was the oldest living Renton High School graduate (Class of 1930). As active in adult life as she was in high school, Cecelia volunteered at the Renton U.S.O. during WWII and was a 99-year member of St. Anthony's. She was proud of her King County pioneer status, her coal mining roots through her mother, and her Irish heritage. Cecelia was a life member of the Museum and a tireless volunteer for us, for which we are very thankful.



JEAN RUFFALO NEWELL 1929-2018

We came to know Jean in 2009 when her daughter Joni approached us about the donation of a truly unusual piece of history: the beauty supply cabinet from Jean's Beauty Salon at 231 Wells Ave S. But Renton women knew Jean well. As the owner and operator of the salon for 55 years, she ensured that Renton's business, professional, and political women always looked their very best. The neon business sign and the cabinet—both now in our collection commemorate an extraordinary Renton businesswoman.





Continued from page 1

South. When they boarded trains for Washington territory they had no idea what they would encounter.

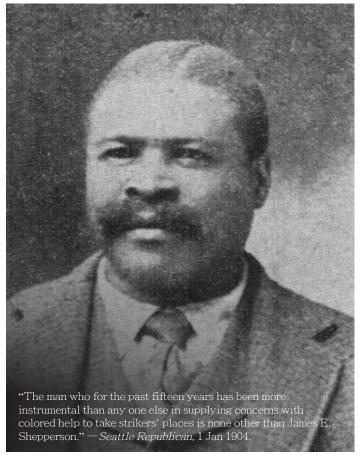
This was the first of similar waves of African American men and their families who settled in King County mine camps in the 1880s and 1890s. Caught between unscrupulous mine companies and unemployed White men, many learned coal mining on the job, and they worked as if their lives depended on it, because they did. They longed for the independent life promised to them when they left the South, but they also did not want to take food out of other families' mouths to earn a living. Their experience in the Franklin mine strike in 1891 is just one example of African American miners' flight from terror to paradise.

Born in Charlottesville, Virginia, James Shepperson was an educated man who traveled the U.S. before settling in Roslyn, WA in 1888. He quickly became well-known in King and Kittitas Counties. Shepperson traveled repeatedly, sometimes at great risk to himself, to southern states to promote mining jobs in Washington. He was intelligent, well spoken, and widely traveled; he had also been a member of the exclusively Black Prince Hall Masons for many years. All these attributes made him the ideal person to reach Black men in the South, while steering clear of White employers.¹

The 1870s through the 1890s represented a peak period

Cover photo: 25% of Coal Creek miners were African American in 1890. (RHM# 1983.074.1780)





of White terrorism against African Americans in southern states, as employers and farmers tried to hold onto Black labor as long and as cheaply as they could. Many African Americans were technically free but economically enslaved by a corrupt sharecropping system, debt peonage, and justice and political systems designed to protect White rights, all backed up by violence and designed to keep people of color poor and without options.

It's no wonder then that many men and their families jumped at the chance to put 3000 miles between them and the South. Ernest Moore described his grandfather John Hale's desire to get off the plantation just as soon as the Civil War ended: "I was freed, but had no place to go.... We had a meeting in the shack, and when all of our rags were tied and a few cooking pots were bundled and tied, we walked down the road to our life of freedom."2

By 1891 Hale was one of thousands of Black men looking for a way out, and James Shepperson's stories about regular wages, job opportunities, and houses provided by the Oregon Improvement Co. sounded like paradise. Hale and his family made their way to the Northern Pacific Railroad station in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1891, along with 650 other African American men and their families. Shepperson neglected to tell them they would be crossing picket lines made up of desperate mine workers, but the facts slowly dawned on the men as they rode the train. Fifteen Pinkerton guards started with them. In Pasco, WA fifty more armed Pinkertons got on, and the truth was unavoidable: Hale and the other men were told that miners in Franklin, Roslyn, and Black Diamond were striking, and rifles and carbines were distributed for self-defense. Several families,

Lime Kiln Club for the Black Miners' Association in Newcastle, ca. 1890—1910. Sign over the door reads "Paradise Hall." (RHM# 1984.075.1887)



anticipating trouble, left the train in Yakima, choosing fruitpicking over mining.³

On May 17, 1891 the train arrived in Tanasket, WA where the men got off to walk to Franklin. (Women and children continued on the train to Seattle, where they changed to a Columbia Puget Sound train that took them through Renton, Maple Valley, and Black Diamond to Franklin, arriving in the evening.) Fearful of the Whites' reception, the new miners sang "I'm Going Through" as they walked, to give them courage: "Come then, comrades, and walk in this way / That leads to the kingdom of unending day."4

White miners were initially calm at the arrival of the strike-breakers. Some sincerely hoped to win over the African Americans to their cause, and a committee of striking miners was ready to meet them with copies of "a circular addressed to all friends of united labor."5 The company had prepared temporary living quarters for them in the store, and the arriving miners walked through town unmolested. A reporter described their entrance to Franklin: "At a fence corner half a dozen men were gathered. They stared silently and sullenly at the black invaders... Not a word was said on either side.... From the hill overlooking the upper town a crowd of perhaps a dozen men looked down on the scene. At last anger found expression in words and a woman shouted 'Look at the nigger slaves.'"6 Those words would be burned in the newcomers' minds.

This was a critical moment for Franklin miners; a new mine slope was about to be opened that would employ 250 - 300men, and the Oregon Improvement Co. and the Knights of Labor were in conflict about who would dictate the terms of mining the new slope. Mine superintendent W. P. Williams summed up the company's position. "Shall we fill this mine with the old men who have been living in this section for years and continue the long experience of petty strikes, high wages, and union dictation?" he asked, "Or shall we bring in an entirely new force of men who will make a contract for reasonable wages and be amenable to discipline?"7

The more optimistic among the White strikers believed that both races could come together around issues of fair pay and safe working conditions. "If we could only meet the colored men and have a chance to talk with them, we feel sure we could induce them to refuse to go to work, but we know that the company will try to prevent us from talking with them," one miner said.8 The company men knew that race hatred would be a barrier to labor solidarity, and they used that fact to their advantage. While striking miners fantasized about raising money to charter a train and send them "home," Black families knew they were stuck; with no money and no friends or family in Washington territory, they could not quit Franklin if they wanted to.9

The two sides settled into a suspicious impasse, with a fenced line between the races manned by the company's hired security and Black and White guards; all were armed. Black miners took up their jobs, their families settled into hand-built shacks, and White miners continued to appeal to the Knights of Labor and Western Central Labor Bureau for help. Striking miners in Newcastle and Black Diamond kept their eyes on the Franklin situation. As the impasse dragged on, White miners lost hope that African Americans would join them in the strike, and by mid-June striking miners were increasingly desperate.

In defiance of the Western Central Labor Union, which had been supporting striking miners for more than a month, a group of representatives from different camps gave the Oregon Improvement Co. an ultimatum: "Be it further resolved, That we, the miners and mine laborers of King county, hereby agree to let the coal companies have their choice of either employing all white miners or all colored men, and we will not return to work unless all white miners are employed."10 Mine Superintendent T. B. Corey was downright cheerful about this ultimatum, since, in his words, "it made the issue one of race between the white and colored miners, and not one of wages or conditions of work between the coal companies and their employes [sic]."11

On June 27 the Oregon Improvement Co. moved eighty Black miners to Newcastle, spreading the effects of labor disunity. Armed White strikers, thinking that the African Americans would be disabled by the loss of so many of their number, moved on the Black encampment in the middle of the night. One African American guard, Ben Gaston, "a fine athletic fellow of about 26 years," was killed before the company guards repelled White strikers and stopped the Black men from retaliating.12

All sides were on high alert the next night when the company guards who had accompanied the Black miners to Newcastle returned. Accounts differ, but all agree that striking miners vented their frustration by firing on the train. The guards shot back, provoking an armed turn-out of Black men. Skirmishes continued throughout the night and day, until two companies of the Washington state militia were called in. Before the militia arrived, one White miner was killed, two severely wounded, and two women were slightly wounded.¹³

The train carrying the militia companies arrived on June 29, and they were greeted by a posse of armed Black miners. According to one observer, "They gave a cheer as it passed them, for their tired eyes and grimy faces showed that they had a long and anxious night's watch."14 With the militia encamped at Franklin and Gilman, the two sides again settled into an uneasy truce. The militiamen and Sheriff James H. Woolery tried to enforce a blanket disarmament of all sides. At a mass meeting in Pioneer Square, Judge James T. Ronald summed up the situation: "I do not believe...that either side has a right to resort to force against the other. Yet I believe this is a white man's country. But the negroes are here and must not be injured."15

African American miners were wounded by public sentiment that depicted them as the aggressors in the June 28th riot, and they defended themselves publicly. R. B. Scott pointed out that "those men at Franklin are black citizens. Many of them wear the button of the [Grand Army of the Republic], and they are not Haymarket rioters nor New Orleans Mafia."16 Three Black miners—John Bedell, Phil Taylor, and Prest Lovell cited African Americans' long history in the U.S., beginning in 1619, and insisted, "hence we feel a right to work in any part of our native country, and no true born American would raise any objections."17 J. H. Orr insisted that the "colored miners... were worthy and peaceable citizens who came here to make their homes and to build up the general interests of the people. All we ask is to be treated as are other citizens."18

On July 5, Black Diamond miners in the Knights of Labor accepted the contract offered to them. By July 12, 200 men were working in the Franklin mine, twelve of them White,



and the Seattle P-I reported that "the dividing line between the negroes and strikers is not so sharply drawn as formerly, and both parties are beginning to mingle without restraint."19 The militia's Colonel J. C. Haines believed that Franklin and Black Diamond were calm, and that any trouble would come from Newcastle or Gilman, but by July 19 Black families were moving into Newcastle without trouble, and the two races were sharing the baseball field.20

Though the mutual animosity continued to bubble under the surface, both sides found ways to make their peace with it. When the riots began, John Hale knew his days were numbered in Franklin, but he "argued himself out of leaving" until 1910 when he and his family built a home near Campbell Hill School in Renton.²¹ Others moved to Kennydale or the hills of Renton where they could own their own plot of land away from company towns. Those who stayed worked together with Whites in the mines, and for many it was a good living. In 1904 United Mine Workers opened an integrated local chapter in Franklin, and the union guaranteed that African American miners would have access to any job in any mine in Washington state.²² The homes these families found were not paradise, but they were getting a little closer to peaceful.

Footnotes on page 10



MEMORIAL DONATIONS

November 16, 2017 - February 15, 2018

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COLLECTIONS REPORT

by Sarah Samson, Curator of Collections & Exhibitions



Sarah Samson
—
Curator

In preparation for our next exhibit *On the Battlefront and the Homefront:*Rentonites in the Great War, we received a fantastic donation of a WWI mess kit from long-time member and volunteer Sarah Jane Hisey.
Hisey's father, Jack Allison, a Scottish immigrant, served in WWI with the 91st Division, 361st Infantry Regiment, Company D Engineers. Known as the "Wild West Division," the 91st was

comprised of men from Alaska, California, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. They mustered and trained at Camp Lewis, WA and left via train for the front lines in Europe on June 22, 1918.

Allison was a very deft draftsman, a skill his superiors would put to use for building plans, battlefront maps, and even the design for the official insignia for the 91st Division. His skill as a draftsman did not shield him from battle, however. He participated fully in the horrific trench warfare of the Allied Meuse-Argonne Offensive in northeast France. We were given access to a copy of his wartime diary, and it vividly recounts the constant shelling, gas attacks, and deadly German machine guns. After breaking through the German line in France, Allison proceeded with his regiment into Belgium where he experienced more trench warfare.

After the Armistice was signed in November, Allison and his regiment fell back to France, rebuilding infrastructure wherever they went. Though the Germans were gone and French refugees were returning to their homes, food and other supplies were scarce. The U.S. Army had no permanent place for soldiers so they lived an itinerant life, staying in barns or temporary "huts" and suffering the cold, rain, and "a sea of mud."

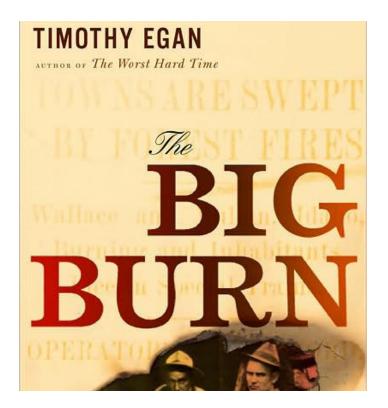
In total, Allison was away from Washington state for nearly 11 months. He ran into three other Renton boys while in Europe and he managed a two-week leave to his home in Scotland after hostilities ended. He visited Scotland, the place of his birth, as an American citizen; the U.S. had offered immigrants a fast-track to citizenship for signing up for Uncle Sam. Allison got his American citizenship less than one month before he pulled out of Camp Lewis.

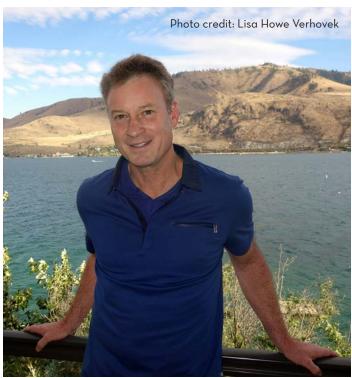
You can learn more about Allison and the other men and women of Renton and their experiences during WWI when the new exhibit opens May 29th!

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Mr. James E. Shepperson," A Picture of the First Grandmaster Prince Hall Masons of the State of Washington, 185 186 (RHM vertical files).
- 2 Ernest Moore, The Coal Miner Who Came West (N.p.: Northwest Advertising, Inc. 1982), 1-2.
- 3 Moore, *Coal Miner Who Came West*, 6-7. Later many insisted that they had been brought to Franklin under false pretenses; they were promised free housing and never told that they would immediately owe \$50.00 each for transportation. Daniel Webster, one of the recruits, and Rev. Hesekiah C. Rice, a Baptist preacher, both described the conditions under which the men were transported. "Dead Line Drawn," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 18 May 1891, p.1; "Fugitives from the Camp," *Seattle P-I*, 19 May 1891, p.2; "White and Black Men Talk; Talks with Representative Men of Both Forces," *Seattle P-I*, 19 May 1891, p.2.
- 4 Moore, Coal Miner Who Came West, 10.
- 5 "Coming of the Invaders; Miners Waiting to Meet Them on a Mountain Trail," Seattle P-I, 17 May 1891, p.1.
- 6 "Arrival of the Negroes," *Seattle P-I*, 18 May 1891, p.1. Charles H. Johnson later recalled this event in a letter to the editor, writing, "In Franklin alone, how long would an old colored women last should she have been among white miners (like one of their women) and stood in the highway and abuse every one that passed, and even curse and swear at us?" "Miners' Rights (From a colored standpoint)," *Seattle P-I*, 5 Jul 1891, p.4.
- 7 "Causes of the Trouble; Superintendent Williams' Statement of the Situation," Seattle P-I, 17 May 1891, p.1.
- 8 "What the Miners Say," *Seattle P-I*, 17 May 1891, p.2.
- 9 "White and Black Men Talk," Seattle P-I, 19 May 1891, p.2. Mine Superintendents Williams and Corey touted the skills of the new miners, and insinuated that there was no strike until the African American arrived to open the new slope and Whites refused to work with them.

- 10 "Miners' Ultimatum; All Colored or All White Men in King County Mines," Seattle P-I, 14 Jun 1891, p.8. WCLU initially perceived this ultimatum as a break with the union, although in the end they did continue to support the striking miners.
- 11 "Miners Warned Away," Seattle P-I, 15 Jun 1891, p.8.
- 12 "Story of the Riot," Seattle P-I, 30 Jun 1891, p.1.
- 13 "Red Riot at Franklin," Seattle P-I, 29 Jun 1891, p.1; "Story of the Riot," Seattle P-I, 30 Jun 1891, p.1. Park Robinson, Franklin mine boss, was later charged with the shootings of White miners Ed Williams and Thomas Morris; he pled self-defense. "Robinson Released on Bail," Seattle P-I, 30 Jun 1891, p.8.
- 14 "Arrival of the Militia," Seattle P-I, 30 Jun 1891, p.8.
- 15 "The Mass Meeting," Seattle P-I, 4 Jul 1891, p.2. Judge Ronald was elected Mayor of Seattle in March 1892.
- 16 "The Mass Meeting," Seattle P-I, 4 Jul 1891, p.2.
- 17 "From Colored Miners," Seattle P-I, 4 Jul 1891, p.4. They went on to blame new European immigrants as leaders of the opposition, saying "they come to this country for their liberty and freedom, and before they are naturalized they are ready to agitate strikes and lead riots." Prest Lovell was killed in the 1892 explosion at the Roslyn mine.
- 18 "Miners' Rights (From a colored standpoint)," Seattle P-I, 5 Jul 1891, p.4.
- 19 "Organizing Franklin Guard," Seattle P-I, 12 Jul 1891, p.8.
- 20 "The Forces at Gilman," Seattle P-I, 12 Jul 1891, p.2; "Negro Miners in Town," Seattle P-I, 20 Jul 1891, p.1.
- 21 Moore, Coal Miner Who Came West, 15.
- 22 Quintard Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), 27, 68; "Northwest Improvement Co.," *Cayton's Weekly* (Seattle), 27 Sep 1907, p.1.





BOOKMARKS & LANDMARKS: THE BIG BURN BY TIMOTHY EGAN

▼ eattleite Timothy Egan, a National Book Award winner, dramatically tells the story of a 1910 forest fire that galvanized public opinion about the wilderness. The wildfire stretched from Idaho through Montana, Washington, British Columbia, and devastated towns along its way. It spurred the emerging conservation movement and persuaded the public that more forests needed federal protection. As a result, the newly formed National Forest Service proved its worth and set in place policies still in effect today. As climate change increases the risk and severity of forest fires, it is important to understand the history of current policies. Join the conversation at the Renton History Museum, housed in a historical Art Deco fire station, where Egan will talk about his book and answer questions. No requests for book-signing, please.

On JUNE at 7:00 PM

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IN HINDSIGHT...



Detail of a dress reconstruction made by volunteers Bridget Shew and Cathy Lim for *Black & White*. They began with a photo of Annie Custer from our collection, conducted research about ca. 1910 clothing, and created an amazing reconstruction of the dress.