

YesterYear

Minorities in Townsend

Before gold was discovered at Grass Hopper Creek (Bannack), Montana was largely populated by the indigenous Native American tribes. The Flathead, Shoshone, Blackfoot and Crow Indians were all known to live and hunt in what is now Broadwater County.

By the time Townsend was founded, the area was predominantly white and has remained that way. However, there were minorities in early Townsend – mostly African American and Chinese.

Among the very first men to “set foot” on the area, staked out to become Townsend, was Everett Smith a blacksmith. He built a log structure on the corner of Broadway and N. Oak (where the Ambulance building was located). Everett did not stay long and was seen pulling his anvil and blacksmithing tools on a sled heading towards White Sulphur Springs.

The Christian and Richardson families were also early residents of Townsend. The Richardson family lived in a small shack along the alley behind the Townsend Mercantile (where J Rock jewelry and Helping Hands for Kids are now). They had 2 children--Lulu and Horace. Lulu married George Christian who was very well respected in the Canton area. They lived in a small house on the old Canton Road.

Mr. and Mrs. Dick Weedon lived at the old Duck Creek ranger station and planted a fine orchard there (author's note: my family used to pick apples at the orchard up Duck Creek in the 1970s). They moved to Townsend and build a large two-story home that was recently demolished to create the new Billings Clinic parking lot to the north of the Clinic.

It is very hard for me to write about Nigger Scott. The term is extremely offensive but history cannot be changed by whitewashing it. Nigger Scott was another African American who was well regarded in Townsend and was trusted and hired by many in Townsend.

John Ogelsby owned a ranch on lower deep creek and was known to be an excellent cook. He ran a restaurant called the City Restaurant. The City Restaurant was in a small building attached to the McCormick Stables (about where the City Hall is now located).

Mrs. Laura Sidney was a well know woman in Townsend. Mrs. Sidney was a former slave that came to Bedford in the early 1870's and lived in Townsend most of her life. She died in 1940 at the age of 90.



Slave girl, Laura Sidney, spent almost all of her life in Townsend.

Of course, there was a small community of Chinese immigrants that ran laundries and had fine gardens that helped feed the residents of Townsend. Many also remember the opium dens of the Chinese community.

Jim Lee had a two-apartment building where he ran a laundry and did all of the Townsend House's laundry work, as well as a variety of individuals. Lee had often had other Chinamen that showed up out of nowhere and departing unnoticed. One of Lee's apartments also functioned as an opium den.

Luck Lee and Ming Toy lived and worked in a building located somewhere behind the Commercial Hotel along the Pierce ditch. They were familiar figures in Townsend and it was a novelty to visit their laundries and watch them work using wooden tubs.

A gardener named Seeco and two other Chinamen lived in a very rough shack located in Ragen's field (roughly behind the house at 4th street and Harrison. He was a familiar sight in the 1890's carrying a rattan basket on his shoulder and selling vegetables throughout town. It seems he was not well liked by the Chinese community; in 1907 the Townsend Star had a small squib when he died stating "The county cared for him – his Chinamen friends wouldn't have anything to do with him after he got sick."

Two Chinese immigrants got into a quarrel and Sam Wah killed Lee Lou. On July 7, 1886 the Trenchant had an article that said "Sam Wah shot and killed Lee Lou. Sam slipped out of town but was overtaken up Deep Creek by Deputy Sheriff F. McCormick. A coroner's jury decided the murder was justified and let him go."

All of the information for this article came from the Broadwater Bygones, available at the Broadwater County Museum, and from Linda Huth's presentation "A Walkdown Mainstreet". Visit the Museum and talk with curator Linda Huth to learn more about the minorities in Townsend and Broadwater County.