

(PIONEERS, from page 1)

family, here since 1914, is said to have arrived by covered wagon from Nebraska.

"Pop" and Mrs. Mitchell had a home in town and also a ranch in Paradise Valley. The Mitchell ranch, located just this side of Warm Springs, provided the only recreation available here, complete with swimming pool and dance hall. The Mitchell's daughter, Natalie, was the first Negro child born in Las Vegas. She now makes her home in Seattle, Washington. After Mrs. Mitchell's death, "Pop" moved to Los Angeles and is believed to be still living there.

The Tom Harris and Levi Irving families arrived here from Texas in 1913 (remember the wives were sisters). The Irvings owned considerable property including a ranch in Paradise Valley. He was the first Negro to drown in Lake Mead (on a fishing trip).

Mrs. Georgia Simpson, who retired from Kit Carson school in 1965 after a long teaching career, is the daughter of Mrs. Harris who died last November at age 95. Mrs. Simpson's and her husband, Ralph's daughter, Cecile was the second Negro child to be born here. She is employed at the Motor Vehicle Department.

CLARENCE AND I had a fascinating visit with Mrs. Simpson in her home at 700 Jackson. She told us that when Cecile was born, there were, by actual count, 65 Negro residents, and all the males with the exception of four were employed by the railroad company. Mrs. Simpson's first teaching experience was at Garnett's Railroad Section on Salt Lake Highway. There was no unified school district but a law existed which stated that wherever there were 4 or 5 school age children in a community, the County would have to provide a school. Her first school was comprised of all boys and all of the same family--the Hardistons. Thus Mrs. Simpson is the first Negro teacher, although Mrs. Mabel Hoggard is the first Negro teacher in Nevada to be employed by the school district.

We also called on "Mother" Stevens for whom there is no more apt description than "saucy". Las Vegas' gain was Idaho's loss in 1923 when the Stevens family took residency here. "Mother" Stevens was the mother of seven children, four of whom are living; Mrs. Susie Maufus who resides with her mother at 1004 Wyatt, Mrs. Juanita Barr (wife of City Hall's popular Larry Barr), Oren "Buster" Stevens, and Ray Christensen. She is also the proud matriarch of 18 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren, four of the latter live in Hawaii. One of her granddaughters (Susie's daughter) was a charter four-year member of Las Vegas' famed Rhythmettes and the only Negro member in its History. Susie's son, Albert was one of the first members of the R.O.T.C. at Las Vegas High School.

The Stevens' first residence in Las Vegas was at 212 N. 2nd street and bought their first home here at 302 N. 2nd. Similarly, Mrs. Simpson said their first home was at 209 N. 3rd street - now 210. But of course, the desert began at 'F' street and Harrison was the boundary of civilization. North of Owens there was nothing, I was told, but Updyke's Pig Farm.

We should have mentioned that Mrs. Simpson has two grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Clarence relates that when he arrived in 1922, Mark Withers, a Negro, was the city's first poundmaster and had been holding the job for some time. Actually, there was nearly no race discrimination practiced in the early days. The single place of business to refuse Negroes service was the old Miller Hotel which we know as the Sal Sagev. One Negro, remembered only as "Kelly" was very affluent, owning property all throughout the downtown area.

Although prostitution was legal in Nevada, gambling was not legalized until 1926. Fred Balzar, a gubernatorial candidate, campaigned with legal gambling as his platform. Balzar became Governor, but gambling was limited to draw poker, and pan. Instead of a "take-off", each player paid table rent (60 cents an hour to play). Clarence Ray's first job in a gambling house here was at the Exchange Club on So. First St. where he collected from players for the house. It was not until March 10, 1931 that gambling opened up with craps, 21, etc. as we know it now.

ACTUALLY THE first "boom" came with the Boulder Dam project, which is actually built in Black Canyon, in 1931, and the first great influx of Negroes arrived when employment was opened to them in 1932. There was

Early Settlers Recall Las Vegas Way Back When



Clarence Ray



"Mother" Stevens



Mrs. Georgia Simpson

no construction of homes or other dwellings, however. Tent cities were established in several areas between here and the Dam for housing. One was located where Pittman is today; two others enroute to the project one of which bore the name of Oklahoma City and the other, Jericho.

Clarence Ray, with two partners, Bill Jones and Clarence Reid opened a gambling club in 1931 at 210 Stewart Street (across from the Post Office) and were the first Negroes to own and operate a gambling establishment in the state.

Among the prominent families who lived here in 1931 was the Innesly family headed by Dad, known to everyone as "Uncle Jake Innesly". Uncle Jake and his son, Boise both worked on the Dam, but later opened the "Oklahoma Cafe", the second Negro business in the city, in the 200 block on First Street. Later they acquired a liquor license, and still later moved to the west side. Broadening their operation, they went into the Ebony Club with gambling at 501 Jackson.

Their next move was to merge with P. L. Jefferson, who was operating the Brown Derby with only a beer license. In 1955, Boise sold out to P. L. and went into business at the Community Grocery Store on 'D' street which he later sold to Roland Johnson.

Recruitment of Negroes to work in the Magnesium Plant in World War II resulted in an even bigger influx of Negroes to Las Vegas, and is responsible for the city's heavy Negro populace.

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