

# Salem, Oregon

TCE408H Fall Term 2013- Kalia Flocker

## Census Data: Marion County, Oregon.

	<b>Total</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Indian</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>1850</b>			<i>9 3 adults; 1 slave</i>			
<b>1860</b>	7,088	7,022	20 free colored <i>18 total, 6 adults</i>	46		
<b>1870</b>	9,965	9,854	62 colored <i>61 total, 33 adults</i>	22	27 Chinese	
<b>1880</b>	14,576	14,165	27 colored	79	305 Chinese	
<b>1890</b>	22,934	21,615	729 Colored	219	371 4 Japanese, 367 Chinese	
<b>1900</b>	27,713	26,837	876 colored 49 Negro		313 4 pacific Islander, 89 Japanese, 220 born in China. (found by place of birth) 235 Chinese	
<b>1910</b>	39,780	38,788	58 Negro		288 Chinese	934 Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and all other
<b>1920</b>	47,197	46,074	72 Negro			1,051 Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and all other
<b>1930</b>	60,541	59,673	63 Negro			805 People of all other races
<b>1940</b>	75,243	74,644	67 Negro			532 People of all other races
<b>1950</b>	101,401	100,283	138 Negro			980 People of all other races
<b>1960</b>	120,888	119,879	226 Negro	450	289 104 Japanese, 76 Chinese, 109 Filipino	44 People of all other races
<b>2000</b>	136,924	113,746	1750 Black or African American	2064 American Indian and Alaskan Native	3304 Asian	18,060 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific native and those of more than one race
<b>2010</b>	154,637	122,213	2283 Black or African American	2284 American Indian and Alaskan Native	4215 Asian	23,642 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific native and those of more than one race

To write the numbers as consistently as possible, I created categories based on modern American society's modern definitions of race. In the fine print I have included the terms used in that particular census. I also combined some categories like white males and white females into one number not available on the University of Virginia Library site.

In years 1920-1960 I also combined native-born white males, native-born white females, foreign-born white males, and foreign-born white females into one whole sum.

The italicized information in the chart is from the Salem Historical Society's website. All the other data is from the University of Virginia Library site.

The 2010 and 2010 data is from Census Viewer.com.

### Ethnic History of Salem

The Native Americans were already "a dying group" when Salem began. They were migrants on the town's fringes. Very few Native Americans were seen in Salem after the 1840s. "Chief" Quinaby lived on handouts. He was a minor town person until he died in 1878. The Salem area was uncontested by Native Americans.<sup>1</sup> "Salem remained unusually homogenous," white and native born.<sup>2</sup>

"Rarely welcome, Blacks came with the first settlers but were never numerous." There were a handful of blacks in the 1870s.<sup>3</sup> In January 1868 there was a news article about the "Emancipation Jubilee" which shows a "white population beginning to accept black citizenry in its midst." Both blacks and whites attended it.<sup>4</sup> Six slaves in Salem had been freed by the Proclamation.<sup>5</sup> Between 1868 and 1890 there were apparently a few black families because Little Central School, an officially segregated two-room schoolhouse, was set up. In 1872 there were 15 students.<sup>6</sup> In 1893 Liberty neighborhood in South Salem ordered all blacks out.<sup>7</sup>

Chinese, coming to build railroads in the 1870s, settled in Salem.<sup>8</sup> The Chinese were "forced into a decrepit, downtown Chinatown."<sup>9</sup> Chinatown was two blocks downtown where the several hundred Chinese were allowed to live.<sup>10</sup> There were numerous Chinese in Salem between 1880 and 1900. In 1897 there were 300 Chinese, and they lived in "high rent, unhealthy wooden hovels."<sup>11</sup> "In Marion County feelings against Chinese did not result in overt acts... [instead Salem lacked] regard for acceptable sanitation and even less regard for the white doctor's treatment of contagious diseases."<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1900s a small Japanese community began to form.<sup>13</sup> "Anti-Chinese feeling prevailed in Salem, but there were apparently no physical attacks."<sup>14</sup> Between 1900 and 1920 the Chinese and Japanese "kept low profiles."<sup>15</sup> By 1920 Chinatown was gone.<sup>16</sup> The early 1920s were also when the KKK became highly influential in Salem.

"Klavern 29 in Salem, with a thousand [members], was said to be the largest west of the Mississippi." It was led by the postmaster and met at theaters downtown. The KKK attended Salem parades, marching and making floats, in the early 1920s and in 1923 the KKK parade was the longest

---

<sup>1</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 12.

<sup>2</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 6.

<sup>3</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 12.

<sup>4</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, "Perseverance," 18.

<sup>5</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, "Perseverance," 19.

<sup>6</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 80.

<sup>7</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, "Perseverance," 137.

<sup>8</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 12.

<sup>9</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 14.

<sup>10</sup> Porter & Gibby, "Salem: Oregon's Capital City."

<sup>11</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 30.

<sup>12</sup> Mersinger, "Salem's Chinese Americans."

<sup>13</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 81.

<sup>14</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 30.

<sup>15</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 60.

<sup>16</sup> Stein, "Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital," 80.

march Salem had ever seen. KKK pressure and violence was one of the reasons the Chinese community left in the 1920s.<sup>17</sup>

In 1926, Oregonians repealed the 1849 legislation forbidding Negroes and Mulattoes from living in Oregon.

By 1936 the NAACP reports there were “no blacks [in Salem] but inmates at Penal Institute and Insane Hospital.”<sup>18</sup>

There was a “no coloreds” policy in both of Salem’s hotels, because both Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson came in the 1950s to perform in Salem and both had to be driven to Portland for lodging.<sup>19</sup>

In more recent years, between 1960 and 1980 there have been an increasing number of Blacks and Hispanics in Salem.<sup>20</sup> Still, Kathy Bailey reports that hers was the only black family in South Salem in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

The influx of blacks between 1970 and 1980 was mostly from out-of-state. Blacks were actively recruited to Salem by colleges, government agencies, and major corporations. However, they came and went and Salem had a hard time retaining blacks.<sup>22</sup> Part of this may have been due to how there was no central black location in the community, leading to feelings of isolation and lack of cultural and professional support.<sup>23</sup> Until very recently, Salem had no black radio programs, hair salons or barbershops, and virtually no cosmetics in black skin tones, or greeting cards without white faces.<sup>24</sup>

### Interviews

On Friday November 22, 2013, I visited Paradise Island Mobil Home Park and dropped in on the SEW WHAT! group – an informal social group open to anyone who would like to come and sew. There I spoke with four women who had grown up in Salem about what they recalled from their youth regarding demographic changes in the Salem area.

#### Jean Price:

Her family moved to Salem when she was two, in 1947. She says it was “a safe town,” somewhere people didn’t think twice about walking around at night or letting children venture out on their own.

When she was in eight grade she saw her first black person. “I never saw a Black person at all until I was 14.” It was a girl in her music class. “She pretty much kept to herself.” Price recalls that the music teacher slapped the girl in front of the class, but doesn’t remember why. The girl and her family moved out of Salem shortly after arriving.

During her youth, Hispanics were a migrant community who arrived in Salem only in the summer. They picked in the fields. This is a topic all four of the women talked about. They all recalled working on the Platoons – they, their siblings, and sometimes parents, would be bussed out to the farms in the summer to pick in fields for some extra money for school clothes or fun trips.

Price recalls that in July, when she picked blackberries or raspberries, she “would be the only white person there.” She was eight or nine when she began picking; her sister was twelve or thirteen. “I

---

<sup>17</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 133.

<sup>18</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 136.

<sup>19</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 141, 142.

<sup>20</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 156.

<sup>21</sup> Wallig & Green, “African Americans in Salem.”

<sup>22</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 185.

<sup>23</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 187.

<sup>24</sup> Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, “*Perseverance*,” 188.

remember being appalled,” she said, recounting how the little kids, three or four years old, were picking in the fields with their parents. Babies were tied to the end of the row so they didn’t wander off. “It was hot out there.”

Price reported that the migrant workers often lived in housing provided by the farms. Those homes were “miserable little hovels,” but Price speculates that because the Hispanic population was migrant, and not an established part of Salem’s community, the farmers could get away with that. Later, when her family was looking for horse stalls, she realized what was offered as a horse stall had been migrant worker’s houses. They “were not treated well at all.”

By the time her son, now 35, was in High School, there had become a well-established Hispanic community in Salem.

Despite the strong Ku Klux Klan influence in Salem in the early 1920s, Price reports never noticing any sort of KKK related things in her youth.

### Suzanne Bennett, 74:

Her family moved to Salem when she was seven. She graduated from North Salem in 1957.

(Bennett spoke with Judy Polston and Michele Byrum, and I have included her input after both Polston’s and Byrum’s.)

### Judy Polston, 85:

She recalls the greatest variety of people in Salem came during WWII when the army base was set up at the fairgrounds. There were all sorts of different people, from all over the country.

Also in WWII she recalls an internment camp in Portland for Asians.

Hispanics, she says, have become a stable population only in the last twenty or thirty years. “[I’m] beginning to feel like I’m inundated by them,” she says, laughing, discussing how there has been a large growth of Hispanic restaurants in the town.

She says the “Negro” people came first.

In 1945, a junior in High School, she met her first “Negro.” It was a boy in her class. She is not certain what his name was, but believes it was Clint. He finished school and graduated. Her uncle Joe often said, “It doesn’t matter if you’re black, white, or green all over, we’re all Americans.” Polston said most all of the blacks were from the Portland area. “We didn’t know what Negroes were here in Salem.” She speculates that there was a long adjustment period for Clint when he arrived in Salem. Polston says some of her classmates were simply “in awe of him.”

The “Negro trash,” as they were called, were simply the lower class, she explained. They had the hardworking jobs, traveled, and followed the crops. Some of the women compared the Black and Hispanic situation to the *Grapes of Wrath* novel by Steinbeck.

In her time living in Vet’s Housing, when her husband was out of the navy, they had a very dark skinned mailman. She doesn’t know if he was Arabic or Hispanic, or of a mixed heritage perhaps, but she says he wasn’t “Negro.” Her neighbor, Joe, had a daughter Carol who was three or four. One day she cried, “Mama! Mama! Here comes the dirty mailman!” Joe was very upset by this. Polston told the tale fondly, saying: Carol just didn’t know what to think; she’d never seen someone with dark skin before. She just assumed he was dirty.

Both Bennett and Polston discussed a popular Chinese restaurant, “The Chinese Garden” that had been around in their youth. It later went out of business around the time that fast foods and other competitors moved into the area.

### Michele Byrum, 70:

She recalled her work on the Platoons as “an eye opener,” “an experience I’ve valued from that point forward.” She recalls that some of the migrant workers lived in their cars. The kids worked in the fields. They were dirt poor. “We were out in those fields messing around,” she said. “These people were working for their living.” “[They were] making their living doing what we were doing for extra money.” That was in the mid fifties and early sixties. She said it was a shock and it showed her “the plight of the migrant workers.” She said working in the fields taught her two things: “1) you learn how to work, 2) you learn how to work with people not of your social class.” There were no Hispanics in her school. Later at the Oregon College of Education (later known as Western Oregon) she worked with the migrant worker community.

Regarding her schooling, Byrum said, “I don’t remember any ethnic groups,” and “Of course, I don’t pay any attention to them, even now.”

She had her first black peers in college. There were two black girls from Portland. One was on the rally squad. Byrum reported there were a large number of Hawaiians in college because of a reciprocity program that gave them in-state tuition. It was a temporary group though, because they returned to Hawaii to teach. She also recalls a peer whose parents were rounded up and taken to an internment camp during the war (Linda Takeuchi, although the spelling is uncertain), so she had some Asian peers.

The first black she met was in Alaska on a military base. They were both three and in the hospital, but both were able to be up and about. She recalls her mom was terrified about how she would react to a black person, but the first words out of Byrum’s mouth were: “Hi, wanna go play?” She recalls her doctor was also black, which was unusual for the army, and “he was a good Doctor.”

Although she didn’t recall the name of the singer, she remembered an opera singer who came to Salem for a concert and was not allowed to stay at either of the Hotels, so they took her to Portland for the night. She says Salem was anti-black, but also explains that is “painting with a large brush.” There were also people who were not. It just didn’t often come up, she said. Not something you notice until something like the singer incident.

She recalls no blacks in any of her K-12 schooling.

Although she recalled the fact that historically Salem had once had a large Chinese population, she says they were all gone by her youth. It was “long before my time.” She speculates that they were squeezed out by city growth.

Of Native Americans, she recalls the Chemawa Indian School. It was established to turn Native Americans into whites, she says. She thinks it was a federal program because they were taken from all different tribes. It was a boarding school. On the weekends maybe once to twice a month, the Native Americans were bussed into Salem to go shopping down town. They wore regular clothes, “Americanized,” but tended to have longer hair.

Towards the end of the interview she said, “Before I would’ve said we were just a white-bread town... but we weren’t.” “[We were] certainly not a homogenized community at all, now that you really think of it.”

Bennett spoke with Byrum, recalling at one point that “I was afraid of Indians.” They discussed how heavily the Cowboy and Indians films influenced popular understandings of the Native American and white interactions.

Bennett graduated in 1957 and recalled one black student in all of her schooling, and that was an exchange student. She agreed with Byrum saying that Salem was anti-black. Even her kids saw very few blacks. They both recalled a shoeshine man named Jim though, when Bennett was thirteen or fourteen. He worked at the Salem Senator Hotel and lived across from Bennett. He was black.

Bennett also recalled the Japanese being gathered up and taken to the internment camps. She added to Byrum’s discussion of the Chinese saying that they came back after the second world war

because some of her brother's school mates from Haysfield were, by the time of their 65<sup>th</sup> reunion, again living in the Salem area.

### My Findings:

While Salem is no longer a sundown town, it clearly was in the past. As James Loewen defines them:

"A sundown town is any organized jurisdiction that for decades kept African Americans or other groups from living in it and was thus "all white" on purpose. There is a reason for the quotation marks around "all-white": requiring towns to be literally all-white in the census – no African Americans at all – is inappropriate, because many towns clearly and explicitly defined themselves as sundown towns but allowed one black household as an exception. Thus an all-white town may include nonblack minorities and even a tiny number of African Americans."<sup>25</sup>

Salem was an "all-white" town as early as 1920 and possibly as late at the 1960s. From the women I interviewed, all four of them could recall the first time they met a black person. This signals that they lived in a place with exceptionally few blacks. There were exceptions to the "all-white" status of Salem, Oregon, however these were individuals of ethnic minorities who were unique in their non-whiteness. The shoeshine man recalled by Bennett and Byrum is an example of a black man who managed to live in Salem at a time when ethnic minorities were not welcome.

Like Byrum said though, the fact that Salem was anti-black didn't come up often. It wasn't something you noticed frequently. But racism does not have to be overt to be able to powerfully motivate a family to leave. Clint, the black student Polston remembered from high school most likely did have a very rough transition to living in Salem. To this day, Polston respectfully called the blacks or African Americans "Negros." This is a term the rest of the country deemed outdated in the seventies but it was because of Salem's "all-white" population that the term likely went unchallenged during Polston's middle years.

For Salem, as with other sundown towns around the nation, the deterioration of race relations began in the late 1800s. "This era, from 1890 to the 1930s, when African Americans were forced back into noncitizenship, is called the Nadir of race relations in the United States."<sup>26</sup> It began with the Chinese, who, as Byrum said, were gone long before her time. Chinatown disappeared by the 1920s and in the 1930s there were no blacks living in the community. The Hispanics who came to work in the fields were not allowed to stay. The Japanese who have lived at Lake Labish before WWII had little to return to and very few came back to Salem.

These demographics are clear in the stories told by the four women I spoke with. Byrum recalled no students of color in her classes before college. Bennett recalled one exchange student. Polston recalled Clint, and Price recalled an eighth grade girl who did not stay long. Whether being slapped in school directly caused the black student's family's quick flight from Salem is not clear, but she and her family would've faced a great deal of covert racism and prejudice from living in an "all-white" community. Like Polston said, "we just didn't know what Negros were here in Salem." And that makes a great deal of sense. As Loewen said, "because African Americans increasingly lived in separate neighborhoods, whites no longer had the benefit of knowing them individually, so they fell back on thinking stereotypically about them as a group."<sup>27</sup> And these

---

<sup>25</sup> Loewen, "Sundown Towns," 4.

<sup>26</sup> Loewen, "Sundown Towns," 25.

<sup>27</sup> Loewen, "Sundown Towns," 88.

stereotypes, the way they would have been treated as different, if not inferior at least something to be in awe of, would put a great deal of stress and pressure on the blacks hoping to live in Salem.

The final, most convincing point towards Salem being a sundown town comes from the numbers themselves. There were blacks, Chinese, and Japanese settled in Salem in its past. There was a growing Chinatown. There were settled black families. There were generations of Japanese farming near Lake Labish in North Salem. On their own, these populations would have continued to grow. Something forced them out. It was not a race riot, as was the case in some sundown towns. It does not appear to be a response to a public hanging of a minority group member. It appears to be from subtler forms of harassment, intimidation, and day-to-day covert racism that pushed the minority groups from Salem.

And once they were forced out, something kept them out. James Loewen puts it well:

Humans are unpredictable. People are always moving into and out of small towns in America, even into dying towns for all kinds of reasons. So would African Americans if given a chance.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years, some social scientists... have increasingly relied upon individual decisions by African American families to explain America's intractable residential segregation. Blacks don't want to live in an ocean of white faces, goes the reasoning. If we stop to think, however, sundown towns and suburbs cannot possibly result from decisions by people of color who happily choose to live in black neighborhoods. For there would always be at least *a few* African Americans who would choose to live in majority-white neighborhoods for some of the same reasons whites do: better schooling, nicer parks, investment value, and social status... Others would move for convenience... Still others would wind up in formerly white towns owning simple to the vagaries of fortune. Voluntary choice simply *cannot* explain what kept sundown towns and suburbs *so* white for so many decades.<sup>29</sup>

Without there being continuing pressures, Salem would not have remained so white after it expelled its minority groups. The Chinese would have returned and blacks would have continued to settle and set down roots. The numbers were growing in the late 1800s, and then they fell. This began, for both the Chinese and blacks, in 1910. The reports from the four women I spoke with suggest that the numbers remained incredibly small through the sixties. Census data backs it up with the small numbers of minorities increasing for blacks between 1930 and 1960 but at no where near a large enough rate to increase the percentage of blacks in the total population.

---

<sup>28</sup> Loewen, "Sundown Towns," 145.

<sup>29</sup> Loewen, "Sundown Towns," 147.

## Works Cited

Bennet, Suzanne. 22 Nov. 2013. Paradise Island Modbil Home Park.

Byrum, Michele. 22 Nov. 2013. Paradise Island Modbil Home Park.

"Historical Census Browser." *University of Virginia Library*. N.p., 2007. Web. 19 Nov. 2013.

Loewen, James W. *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. Print.

Monica, Mersinger. "Salem's Chinese Americans." *Salem (Oregon) Online History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.

Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers. *Perseverance: A History of African Americans in Oregon's Marion and Polk Counties*. Salem: Oregon Northwest Black Pioneers, 2011. Print.

Polston, Judy. 22 Nov. 2013. Paradise Island Modbil Home Park.

Porter, Paul, and Gibby Susan. "Salem: Oregon's Capital City." *Salem (Oregon) Online History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.

Price, Jean. 22 Nov. 2013. Paradise Island Modbil Home Park.

"Salem, Oregon Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts." *Salem, OR Population*. 2011. Web. 26 Nov. 2013.

Stein, Harry H. *Salem: A Pictorial History of Oregon's Capital*. Norfolk: Donning, 1981. Print.

Wallig, Katherine, and Virginia Green. "African Americans in Salem." *Salem (Oregon) Online History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2013.