

After the West Was Won

How African American Buffalo Soldiers Invigorated the Helena Community in Early Twentieth-Century Montana



During the Indian wars of the late nineteenth century, the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth U.S. Infantry and the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry served throughout the West, including in Montana. Many of the so-called “buffalo soldiers” stationed at Fort Harrison retired from the army in the nearby city of Helena. These men became prominent figures in Helena’s vibrant African American community. Above, a Tenth Cavalry escort to General Wesley Merritt enjoys lunch near St. Mary in 1894. A. B. Coe, Kipp, Montana, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 957-993

by Anthony Wood



On June 5, 1905, Jefferson Harrison set out on the Helena road from the bustling Fort Harrison. The three-mile journey in the drizzling rain gave Harrison the opportunity to consider the life he was leaving—as well as the one ahead. Only hours before, Harrison, a twenty-seven-year veteran of the Indian wars, the Spanish-American War, and the first Philippines campaign, had been a Color Sergeant in the Twenty-Fourth U.S. Colored Infantry. Now, after spending his adult life in the military, he was a civilian making his way toward his own home on Helena's west side.¹

The Harrison house on Hollins Avenue, where the retired soldier lived with his wife, Louise, was invitingly situated next door to the homes of former First Sergeant Charles Matthews and First Sergeant Nathan Walker. Like Harrison, both military men were in their mid- to late forties, had each retired as his company's highest-ranking noncommissioned officer, and each had families who had already lived in Helena for some time. The three men's adjacent residences at 534, 522, and 520 Hollins Avenue would become the center of a tightknit neighborhood of retired soldiers at the turn of the century. Private David Harris and his family, along with Corporal Samuel Bridgewater, moved into the west side neighborhood around this time as well, at 504 and 502 Peosta, respectively.²

The number of black former servicemen taking up residence in the capital city proved significant in comparison to other communities in close proximity to Montana's forts.³ In 1900, Helena boasted a relatively large black population of more than two hundred people out of an overall population of nearly thirteen thousand; moreover, the presence of single, black women of marriageable age distinguished Helena.⁴ In contrast to eastern Montana, where agriculture was the economic mainstay, there were a wider variety of vocational opportunities available to people whose skin color limited their prospects



for employment. This was true not only for retiring soldiers, but also for their wives, some of whom had followed the regiment from fort to fort throughout the West.⁵ A city of Helena's size offered a chance at part-time and full-time employment as dressmakers, typesetters, bakers, maids, and even small business owners.

Social institutions undergirding Helena's African American community flourished at the turn of the century. The city boasted a large and very active African Methodist Episcopal Church that served as a center for the community's public and religious functions. In addition, several fraternal lodges and numerous women's clubs established themselves as early voices in the fight for civil rights.⁶ The *Montana Plaindealer*, Helena's black newspaper, helped bring together the various segments of the city's African American community. By 1910, Helena's African American population rose to 425, making it the largest black community in the state.⁷

Circumstances were favorable for the ex-buffalo soldiers to start new lives in Helena, but their military past did not simply fade away as they exchanged their blue uniforms for civilian clothes. A glimpse into the former soldiers' lives reveals the ways in which their experiences as soldiers gave shape to their lives as

civilians and how they came to influence and enrich an emerging black community.⁸

The Making of a Buffalo Soldier, 1866–1905

The African American military tradition reaches back to colonial times. As a matter of official recognition, however, the first all-black detachment of soldiers fought for the Union army during the later years of the Civil War. Between 1866 and 1869, the original companies were reconfigured into four military units—the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Colored Infantry regiments—and sent to the Southwest to protect settlers. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, in addition to their regular duties, the two infantry regiments performed various public services, including stringing telegraph wire across the vast expanse of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. In contrast, the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry regiments led more exciting but dangerous lives, fighting various Indian tribes in all-out campaigns and brief skirmishes, earning the soldiers a certain amount of renown in the western territories. Apache accounts held that the members of the Tenth Cavalry fought like cornered bison, forever immortalizing the all-black units as “buffalo soldiers.”⁹



Beginning in the late 1880s, all-black units spent time at Forts Keogh, Assinniboine, Harrison, and Missoula. Above, cavalrymen drill near Fort Assinniboine under the command of John J. Pershing.

MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 946-929



Edward Reinig, photographer; MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, Pvc 74-104, 302 GP

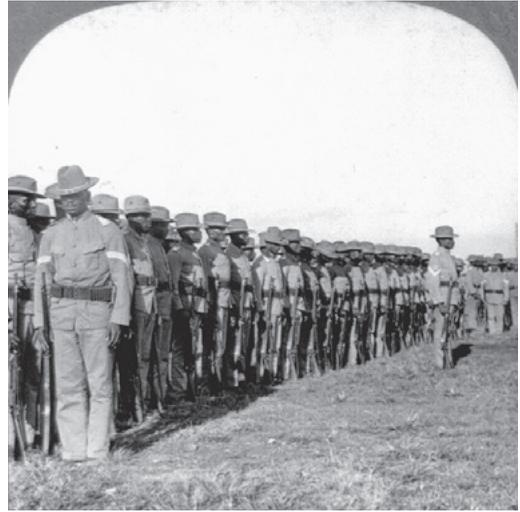
In 1896, Fort Benjamin Harrison (later renamed Fort William Henry Harrison) was completed just a few miles west of Helena. After their overseas deployment during the Spanish-American War, companies of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry returned there. The fort hospital and headquarters are pictured above, circa 1910.

Beginning in the late 1880s, the Twenty-Fourth and Twenty-Fifth Infantry regiments gradually made their way north to the Dakotas and Montana. Over the following decade, Forts Keogh, Assiniboine, Harrison, and Missoula, in turn, became a temporary home. During this time, the Twenty-Fifth captured the public's imagination as a bicycle division, performing patrols and other duties on two wheels. The experiment gained national attention when, in 1896, these African American cyclists embarked upon a remarkable pedal-powered journey from Missoula to St. Louis.¹⁰

The Spanish-American War erupted on the island of Cuba in 1898, and all four regiments of the Twenty-Fourth were deployed. While the Tenth Cavalry became renowned for its charge up San Juan Hill alongside Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders, the other black regiments distinguished themselves equally in less celebrated clashes; the Twenty-Fourth played a significant role in the capture of San Juan Hill and the Battle for El Caney. In the immediate aftermath of their victory in Cuba, the units were sent to repress guerilla fighters in the Philippines, a controversial campaign that lasted from 1899 until 1902 and took a particular toll on the many African American soldiers, who identified with the plight of the Filipino fighters. When they returned from the conflict, black veterans navigated resentments among the broader black community. That former slaves and sons of slaves were fighting for a country that recognized them as citizens in name only at times caused the broader black community to view black soldiers with animosity.¹¹

In 1900, Helena, pictured above right, boasted a black population of more than two hundred people. This relatively large community, along with the availability of jobs, made Helena an attractive place for African American veterans.

Another reason that veteran buffalo soldiers retired in Helena was the community of young, marriageable women. The women pictured at right are staging a Pageant of Many Nations at the Galen Building in Helena in 1914. Julia Palmer, seated on the throne, represents America. Also pictured, left to right, are (back row) Alice Fisher, Emma Dorsey, Marie Baker, Corrine Souls, Almira Kelly, Charlene Kelly, Inez Williams, (front row) Etta Bowles, Rebecca Anderson Palmer, Sadie Ford, Ruth Hooper, Sarah Ingram, Olga York, unidentified, Geraldine Lee, Hazel Cottles, Carrie Dorsey, Mattie McGinnis, Ella Anderson, Mrs. Mathews, and Polly Lee.



Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-80519

In the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, the Twenty-Fourth Infantry deployed to the Philippines in support of a controversial campaign to repress guerilla fighters. Many black soldiers identified with the plight of the Filipino guerillas and returned to the United States weary of a war that they felt was not theirs to fight. Above, the Twenty-Fourth drills at Camp Walker on Cebu Island.





A & P Curtin, B & S. Company, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 954-268



Edward M. Reinig, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, Plc 80-23.M1

From 1905 to 1910, a steady number of veterans moved into Helena. Most labored as porters for the railroads and hotels, but some aspired to go into business for themselves. The unidentified dry-cleaning and tailoring shop at right, photographed in Helena in July 1910, may have been owned by one such veteran.



Montana Plaindealer, August 30, 1907

J. B. Bass, owner and editor of the *Montana Plaindealer*, kept Helena's black community informed of local and national issues with articles and lengthy editorials. The paper also reported regularly on the activities of the town's numerous black social clubs and fraternal organizations.



In 1902 and 1903, four companies of the Twenty-Fourth returned to Fort Harrison from service in the Far East.¹² For many, the return to the United States meant their departure from the army as their terms of enlistment expired. Moreover, by 1904 the potential for another grueling South Pacific campaign seemed high.¹³ Some men already had families living in Helena, while others recognized it as a desirable place to begin a new life.

The Making of a Civilian, 1903–1906

In 1907, the *Montana Plaindealer* recorded the names of twenty-seven men identified as former buffalo soldiers living in Helena, asking for their attendance at a meeting. Three years later, nearly twenty additional African American men who had been listed in 1903 and 1904 city directories as members of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry appeared in the federal census. By tracking individuals year by year in city



directories, one can determine that some thirty-five to forty men left the Twenty-Fourth between 1902 and 1905, the time it was stationed at Fort Harrison, and continued to live and work in Helena up until 1910. Nearly all of these men were married, and a majority had two or more children. Thus, as many as one-quarter of the Helena African American population was directly related to a buffalo soldier during this five-year period.¹⁴

With only a handful of exceptions, the majority of Helena's African Americans worked in the service sector.¹⁵ Most black men, whose occupations were listed in the annual city directory, were laborers, waiters, or porters. Many black women found employment with wealthy families as maids or servants, a practice that would fade away during the 1920s.

In 1908, Jefferson Harrison, Robert Meade,



The majority of African Americans in Helena during the first decades of the twentieth century worked in the service sector as maids, servants, laborers, waiters, porters, or—like the unidentified man pictured above at the wheel of a 1915 Pierce Arrow on Helena’s Fuller Avenue—chauffeurs.

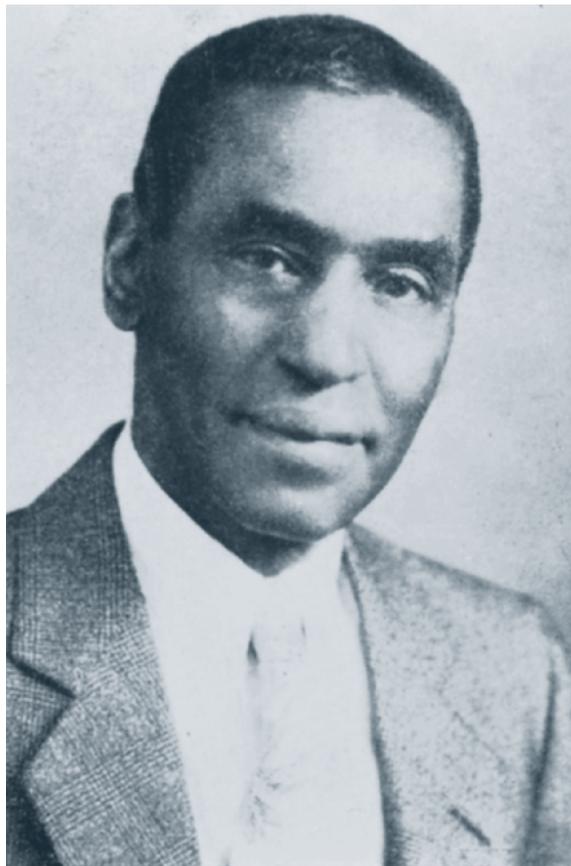
and David Harris, along with several other former soldiers, began working together under the tutelage of Julian Anderson, the Montana Club’s head bartender. Serving Helena’s leading citizens gave Anderson unprecedented access to powerbrokers and policymakers in both the city and the state. Such potential

influence at the highest levels raised his standing among the members of the African American community. The buffalo soldiers working under him enjoyed similar prestige.¹⁶

Former soldiers Samuel Stevens, James Simms, and Joseph Morandus—all capable horsemen and



teamsters—found work as coachmen for banker Thomas Cruse. They followed the footsteps of another of Helena’s other favorite sons, Nathaniel Ford, Thomas C. Power’s coachman. As a young man, Ford had worked as a teamster in Washington, D.C., where he met the new senator from Montana. Shortly thereafter, Ford accompanied Power back to Helena to maintain his team of four jet black horses



Golden Jubilee Edition: Recipes by the Master of Mixers (n.p., n.d.)

As head bartender at the Montana Club, Julian Anderson managed a team of African American employees. From 1893 until 1953, Anderson mixed drinks for Montana’s powerbrokers and policymakers. He was a highly recognizable and influential figure on both sides of the color line.

and drive the immaculate coach, thus gaining the ear of one of the most influential men in the state. In this way, Ford also became a leader within Helena’s African American community.¹⁷

Others started private ventures. In the early twentieth century, tailoring was a popular occupation for African Americans throughout the nation. Miles York, L. V. Graye, M. O. J. Arnett, and Harry Salsburg all operated tailoring and dry-cleaning shops in downtown Helena between 1900 and 1910. These businesses employed several men of the Twenty-Fourth. Sergeant Charles Matthews and his wife Callie, both skilled with a needle, worked as dressmakers and likely contracted out their skills to the city’s tailoring industry.

While a larger number of black men worked as porters for barbershops, very few of them worked as actual barbers. After several years in the employ of

Among the social institutions undergirding African American life in Helena were the women's clubs that eventually consolidated into the Montana State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs in 1921. The organization's annual meeting (right) took place at St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of Fifth and Hoback in Helena on July 19, 1929.

local clubs and hotels, former privates David Harris and Jasper Campbell started their barbershop in 1909 on South Main Street and stayed in operation for several years. This establishment was the first African American-owned barbershop in Helena, a source of great pride for the two ex-brothers-in-arms.¹⁸

The Making of a Citizen, 1905–1910

Historians use a variety of methods to gauge the level of individuals' participation in a community. Examining membership rolls of fraternal organizations, as well as of the lodges and clubs of their female counterparts, is particularly insightful in the context of early twentieth-century Helena. African Americans filled the halls of these organizations, creating a microcosm of social order, with various officers overseeing the activities of the members. The *Montana Plaindealer* often published a registry of the Masonic lodges' officeholders, including president, secretary, and treasurer. Nathaniel Ford and businessman M. O. J. Arnett became household names in the African American community during this time. Former sergeant Jefferson Harrison along with several other retired soldiers served as officers in Helena's local lodges. The list of officers for the Bathsheba Lodge, a black women's club, included not only Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Arnett, but also Mrs. George Simmons, Callie (CC) Matthews, and Louise Harrison, whose husbands had all served in the Twenty-Fourth. The Busy Bees Club was almost entirely made up of the wives of former soldiers. Much of the *Montana Plaindealer* "Local" section covered the social interactions and civic engagement of these leading women.¹⁹

Given their central roles in the community, it is not a surprise that the Harrisons were celebrated for their generosity as hosts of community functions and dinners. On April 24, 1907, they hosted a party the *Montana Plaindealer* called "one of those functions which it is only the lot of one to attend once in a life-



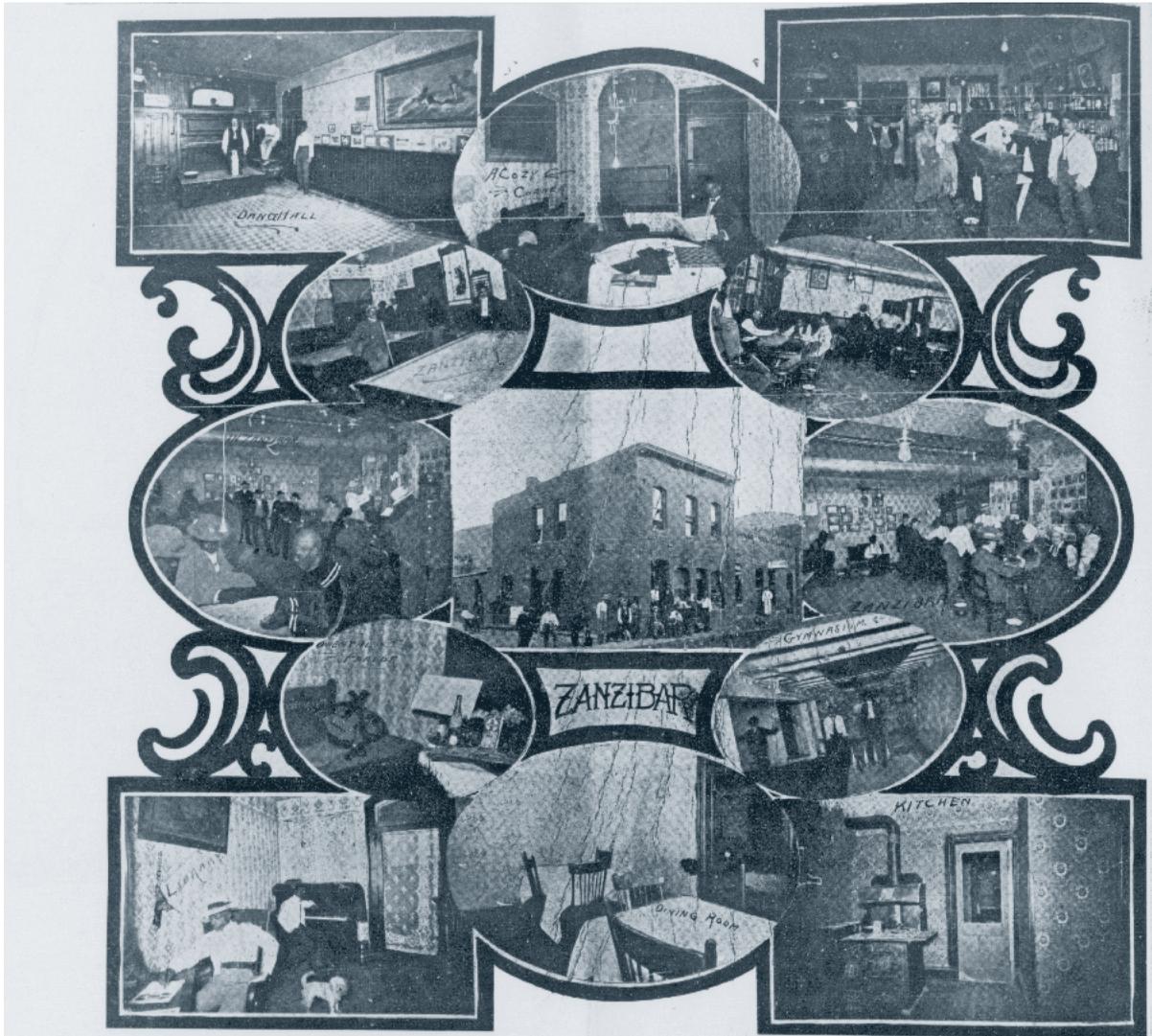
time." J. B. Bass's attendance afforded readers an all-encompassing review of the night's events, from the place settings and eleven-course meal prepared by Mrs. Harrison to the after-dinner enjoyment of fine cigars and champagne that flowed as "plentiful as water." The guest list was a "who's who" of the black community. Miles York, Nathaniel Ford, and several fellow veterans offered a toast to the former soldier on the occasion of his forty-fifth birthday.²⁰ A comradery first cultivated among the men of the Twenty-Fourth on the battlefield came to infuse Helena's social and civic life.²¹

While the black community was limited by a plethora of Jim Crow-era voting policies, segregation, marriage laws, zoning ordinances, and racist business practices, African Americans worked to



Grant-Kottas Family Archives

Miles York operated tailoring and dry-cleaning shops in downtown Helena between 1900 and 1910. In this photo, one of York's wagons is parked along a street. The woman on the right is Eva Lord Grant. The girl is probably Jeannette York.



THE FAMOUS ZANZIBAR-PEKIN IS NO MORE

The Doors are Locked and the Revenge of Lonomaid, Lissner, The Independent et al is Complete.

Just about one year ago the famous Zanzibar appeared in several of the eastern papers, showing the possibilities in store for a young man with hustling qualities, and what the owner at that time had accomplished in that line of business; it was indeed a very creditable showing. But since then a very different chapter has been enacted, the fact that one of the Proprietor was too much in the lime-light—"too bumptious" as Inspector General Goringtyn would have it—brought down on his head the maledictions of a coterie of pot-house politicians and veritable Negro haters who used an ungrateful and acrobatic city administration as a cat's paw to throttle L. V. Graye.

The administration Mover may

Since then it has been opened as the Pekin but was short-lived and on the first of the year its doors were locked and the famous Zanzibar and Pekin is no more. Other dens flourish; dance halls whose owners have been tried and convicted of infractions against the law, but they are not the same color of Graye, so they can continue to run.

It was a cruel fate and certainly a rank injustice, for as much as we are disgusted at this line of business and the characteristics of this man, we always contended that all should have a square deal. But this is not the era of the square deal and the Independent, Jake Lissner, Leonard Bailey, Brandagee, Longmaid and Mayor Lindsay were too much for the chocolate colored proprietors and they went to the mat for the full count of ten.

BUTTE NOTES

Mrs. Birthright has been quite sick, but is now convalescing. Mr. Geo. Willis is much better, since our last writing.

Each year they contribute something to their local church. This year, however, they chose to give the pastor a turkey for his New Year Dinner. May other Sunday Schools do likewise. Don't fail to attend prayer service at the Bethel Baptist Church.

Church and Society Directory.

St. James African Methodist Episcopal church, located at Co. 9th Ave. and Hoback street. Rev. W. T. Gilmore, Pastor. Services Sunday at 11 a. m. and 7:30 p. m. Sunday School, 2 p. m. A. Marshall, Supr., Carrie Dorsey, Chorister, Florence Anderson. Sec'y Prayer Meeting Wednesday Evening. Class meeting, Friday evenings.

R. J. Fletcher Lodge No. 101, A. F. and A. M., meets the first and third Wednesday evening of each month in the Lucas block. R. I. Ford, W. M.; C. Johnson S. W.; Spencer Smith, J. W. Geo. Alexander, Sec'y; W. R. Dotsey, Treas.

Byrd Lodge No. 11, A. F. and A. M., meets the first and third Monday evening of each month at 14 1/2 S. Main St. H. J. Baker W. M.; G. M. Lee, S. W.; J. Harris, J. W.; Chas. Eaton, Sec'y; W. C. Rose, Treas.

Bethlehem Lodge, O. E. S., meets the 2nd and 4th Thursday evenings of each month in their hall in Lucas block. Mrs. Chas. Johnson, W. M.; Mrs. N. Ford, A. M.; Albert Napier, W. P.; Mrs. M. Simmons, Treas.; Mrs. C. C. Mathews, Sec'y; Mrs. Joe Clark, Com.; Mrs. J. Harrison, A. B.; M. O. J. Arnett, W. G. Chas. Johnson, S. M.; J. S.

J. W. Cramp, N. F.; Albert Melan, W. Mason, Wardens; J. J. Tolbert, P. N. F.

Household of Faith, No. 842 2nd and 4th Tuesday evening month. Mrs. Sadie Ford, M. J. Lucy Nicholson, F. M. N. G.; M. Johnson, R. M. G.; Mrs. Cam N. G.; Mrs. Georgia Irvin, W. J.

Pride of Montana Lodge, No. 222 meets the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month at G. A. R. Hall. J. C. C.; H. Robinson, V. C.; S. S. F.; W. Cutler, M. of E.; J. H. I. of R. and S.; D. Gordon, M. A. Harrison, O. G.; W. C. Irvin, L. per. Prelec.

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BUTTE, MONT.

The Zanzibar Club, a busy nightclub owned by L. V. Graye, was shut down by a police raid in 1906. Although Helena officials justified the action as an effort to rid the city of prostitution, the *Montana Plaindealer* was quick to point out that brothels under white patronage were allowed to remain open. In a scathing January 4, 1907, editorial, Bass blamed the closure on "the maledictions of a coterie of pot-house politicians and veritable Negro haters who used an ungrateful and acrobatic city administration as a cat's paw to throttle L. V. Graye."

As the driver of Senator Thomas C. Power's famous team of horses, Nathaniel Ford enjoyed a prominent place in the community. Many African American men belonged to Masonic lodges. Here, Ford wears his fraternal apron.

improve their community's social and political standing in a variety of ways. Active in the push for social equality were men like newspaper editor J. B. Bass, who labored daily to bring the people of Helena, both black and white, to acknowledge and confront prevailing prejudices. The same could be said of Lloyd Vernon Graye, a successful businessman engaged in a variety of enterprises, some unsavory. In addition to running the famed Zanzibar Club until its racially motivated closure in 1906, Graye also operated several tailoring and clothing businesses and became infamous for his central role in the city's prostitution scene. Graye pushed the sociopolitical color line of the day, to the consternation of many members of the community, and experienced firsthand the racism of many leading whites directed toward African Americans who made attempts to advance beyond what was deemed socially appropriate.

Other members of the black community pushed back against racial inequality by other means. Community leaders Julian Anderson and Nathaniel Ford both risked being confined by their occupations; nevertheless, they rose to prominence by demonstrating fortitude and character. It was in this model that the buffalo soldiers exerted influence on their community.

The Undoing of a Community, 1917-1941

During Montana's economic depression of the late 1910s and 1920s, jobs quickly became scarce as hungry



J. P. Ball & Son, photographer; MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 957-605

new arrivals from drought-stricken areas took work in professions that had historically been available to African Americans. Meanwhile, the war in Europe had catalyzed a robust industrial resurgence on the nation's East and West Coasts. Seattle and Portland, in particular, attracted the Northwest's workers with good-paying factory jobs. These factors, in combination with a notable rise in racism, made the exodus of many of Helena's black residents all but inevitable.

In 1922, Jefferson and Louise Harrison boarded a train bound for Tacoma, Washington. Since the end of 1919, Harrison and his longtime neighbor Charles Matthews could no longer find employment in town; Harrison had taken a position as a watchman at Fort



Today, the row of houses of the black sergeants on Hollins Avenue and the names of Matthews and Walker stamped into the city sidewalk are among the only physical remnants of the lives of retired buffalo soldiers in Helena. Pictured above is 520 Hollins, the former home of Nathan and Louise Walker.

Harrison, while Charles helped oversee the Forge Department. Their long careers in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry likely benefited them in securing a job.²² Nevertheless, by 1922, the Harrisons could no longer stay in a place that offered little opportunity. In many ways, their departure signaled the end for Helena's African American community. The black population fell slightly between the years 1910 and 1920 and then plummeted by 50 percent in the 1930s. By 1940, Helena's African American community had all but dwindled away.²³

Buffalo soldiers played a prominent role in the emerging African American community in Montana's capital. Even so, for many African Americans living at the turn of the twentieth century, professionalism and social standing depended on their ability to find meaning and purpose through the limited opportunities available to them. The past experiences of the buffalo soldiers not only shaped their character, but prepared them for such a challenge.

Today, the Montana Historical Society's Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places

Project aims to uncover more of this unique chapter in Montana's history and to preserve what sites, stories, and records remain. Sadly, in Helena, as in many other cities across the state, scant evidence of the early black community survives. Urban Renewal initiatives in the second half of the twentieth century destroyed nearly 80 percent of the physical structures in Helena that once held black businesses, boarding-houses, and family homes.²⁴ Oftentimes the loss of these historic places renders invisible the last remaining piece of physical history connected to the families and individuals who once called it home.

Anthony Wood graduated from Carroll College in 2015 with a degree in history. While living in Helena, Wood worked with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office on the Identifying Montana's African American Heritage Places Project over the course of three summers. He is currently a graduate student at Montana State University in Bozeman, where he studies American history with a focus on social history in the West.

Notes

Abbreviations used in the notes include Ancestry.com (ANC); Labriola American Indian Center, Arizona State University (ASU); Montana Historical Society Research Center, Helena (MHS); *Montana The Magazine of Western History* (Montana); Mike and Maureen Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula (UM); National Archives and Records Administration, Broomfield, CO (NARA); *R.L. Polk & Co.'s Helena (Lewis and Clark County, Mont.) City Directory* (Helena, MT, 1900–1910) (Helena Polk Directory); *R.L. Polk & Co.'s Missoula and Hamilton City Directory and Missoula and Ravalli County Directory, 1905–6* (Missoula, MT, 1906) (Missoula Polk Directory). Unless otherwise noted, all newspapers were published in Montana.

After the West Was Won

1. *Returns from Regular Army Infantry Regiments, June 1821–December 1916*, r. 251, Microfilm M665, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., accessed through ANC; “1905 Helena, MT Daily Weather,” Weather DB, history.weatherdb.com/d/a/Helena,-MT/1905. Census data regarding African Americans in Montana can be accessed through the “Resources and Research” link on the Montana Historical Society’s “Identifying Montana’s African American Heritage Resources” webpage, mhs.mt.gov/Shpo/AfricanAmericans (hereafter African American Heritage Resources).

2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1910, Helena, Lewis and Clark, Montana, Roll T624_833, p. 13B, accessed through ANC. Private David Harris and his family, along with Corporal Samuel Bridgewater, moved into the Westside neighborhood around this time as well, at 504 and 502 Peosta, respectively. In addition to the residences of Harrison, Matthews, and Walker, the brick house at 514 Hollins, directly next to the Walker residence, was rented by a fourth Twenty-Fourth sergeant, Henry Coles, who lived there in 1908. Eventually, Harry and Ella Simmons, another African American couple, rented the home and lived there for several years. See Helena Polk Directory (1910).

3. Census records show that the first decade of the twentieth century saw no measurable increase in the African American population of either Havre or Miles City despite their close proximities to Fort Assiniboinne and Fort Keogh, which each had black regiments stationed

at them at some point. Only Missoula retained a population of a dozen or so African American men and their families, but census records do not indicate how many of these individuals were veterans who had been stationed at nearby Fort Missoula. See African American Heritage Resources.

4. *Ibid.* Montana passed strict anti-miscegenation laws in 1907 that remained in effect until the 1950s.

5. Erwin N. Thompson, “The Negro Soldier and His Officer,” in *The Black Military Experience in the American West*, ed. John M. Carroll (New York, 1971), 260–61.

6. Women’s clubs around the state existed independently from each other. Not until 1921 did they unite and form a federation of clubs. See “Lifting as We Climb: The Activism of the Montana Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs,” *Beyond Schoolmarms and Madams: Montana Women’s Lives* (Helena, MT, 2016).

7. African American Heritage Resources.

8. For blacks in the West, see Alexandra V. Koelle, “Pedaling on the Periphery: The African American Twenty-fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps and the Roads of American Expansion,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Autumn 2010), 305–26; Barbra Carol Behan, “Forgotten Heritage: African Americans in the Montana Territory, 1864–1889,” *The Journal of African American History* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2006), 23–40; Kenneth Robison, “Breaking Racial Barriers: ‘Everyone’s Welcome’ at the Ozark Club Great Falls, Montana’s African American Nightclub,” *Montana* 6, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 44–58; Christian McMillen, “Border State Terror: The Genesis of the African-American Community in Deer Lodge and Choteau Counties, Montana, 1870–1890,” *The Journal of Negro History* 79, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 212–47. Quintard Taylor’s scholarship on the topic is impressive: “African American Men in the American West, 1528–1990,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 569 (May 2000): 102–19; “From Esteban to Rodney King: 5 Centuries of African American History in the West” *Montana* 46 (Winter 1996): 2–23; *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528–1990* (New York, 1998); “The Emergence of Black Communities in the Pacific Northwest: 1865–1910,” *Journal of Negro History* 64, no. 4 (Autumn 1979): 342–51; *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle’s Central District from 1870*

through the Civil Rights Era (Seattle, 1994). See also William Lang, “The Nearly Forgotten Blacks on Last Chance Gulch, 1900–1912,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (April 1979): 50–57; and William Lang, “Tempest on Clore Street, Race and Politics in Helena, Montana, 1906,” *Scratchgravel Hills*, vol. 3 (1981): 9–14. For interviews, see Armeta Duncan, interview by Quintard Taylor, “Mrs. Armeta Duncan, April 4, 1974,” Spokane, Wash., Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Libraries; Raymond Johnson, interview by Quintard Taylor, “Raymond Johnson, March 3, 1974,” *ibid.*; William Knott, interview by Quintard Taylor, “Mr. William Knott, April 2, 1974,” *ibid.*

9. Carroll, *The Black Military Experience in the American West*.

10. H. W. Hovey, “The Twenty-Fourth Regiment of Infantry,” in *The Black Military Experience in the American West*, 93; Wes Hardin, “Wheeling through Yellowstone: A History of Early Bicycling in America’s First National Park,” *Montana* 64 (Spring 2014): 2–20.

11. The best record of such sentiments exists around the Spanish-American War, where many black citizens were outraged that African American officers were not permitted to command the black regiments. As such, they demanded that they not fight for a country that did not truly recognize them as valued soldiers or citizens. It was not until after the stories of their valor and heroism returned from Cuba and the Philippines that more pro-soldier sentiment disseminated among the greater population.

This does not seem to be the case in Helena. Among the factors contributing to Helena’s acceptance of black veterans was surely the significant economic impact that African American military personnel had on the black community. Lloyd Vernon Graye, for example, enjoyed the patronage of black soldiers at his saloon, the Zanzibar, from 1903 to 1906. Moreover, the accolades received during the Spanish-American War had earned buffalo soldiers notoriety with Americans of all races, and the larger African American community more deeply identified with the plight of the black soldier after an incident in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906.

Several members of the Twenty-Fifth Colored Infantry, along with other non-military personnel, supposedly fired shots, killing a white man, and accusations persisted even though it was reported that all the soldiers were in the

barracks at the time. President Theodore Roosevelt dishonorably discharged the entire company after the presumed shooters would not step forward. Outraged, the black community rallied around the wronged members of the Twenty-Fifth and black soldiers in general. J. B. Bass, the owner and editor of the *Helena Montana Plaindealer*, brought attention to the matter in lengthy editorials. See “Buffalo soldiers and the Spanish-American War,” *The National Parks Service*, www.nps.

gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-and-the-spanish-american-war.htm; Report of the Inspector General of the Army, “The Brownsville Affray,” in *The Black Military Experience in the American West*, 471–97; *Helena Montana Plaindealer*, Nov. 16, 1906.

12. Four companies of the Twenty-Fourth—roughly 250 of the regiment’s 1,000 soldiers—were assigned to Fort Harrison. See *Helena Polk Directory* (1904). Soldiers stationed at Fort Harri-

son were listed in the *Polk directories* alphabetically by their name, rank, and company of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Regiment. *Helena Polk Directory* (1903)

13. The second campaign in the Philippines began in 1906 and was fought primarily by the black regiments.

14. *Helena Montana Plaindealer*, June 29, 1906;

15. Several men and women worked in retail during this time, including the Dorsey family, who owned a grocery store on Eighth Avenue, and Dr. Fred Shelby, the city’s only black physician, who operated a drug store and pharmacy on Helena Avenue in 1910.

16. *Helena Polk Directory* (1910).

17. *Ibid.*; Vivian A. Paladin and Jean Baucus, *Helena: An Illustrated History* (Helena, MT, 1996), 110.

18. *Helena Polk Directory* (1910), 222.

19. Search for “Church and Society Notes,” *Helena Montana Plaindealer*, Feb. 28, 1908. Newspaper was accessed on *Chronicling America*, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>.

20. *Helena Montana Plaindealer*, Apr. 26, 1907; *Helena Polk Directory* (1907), 215.

21. *Helena Polk Directory* (1906), 66; *Helena Montana Plaindealer*, May 24, 1907.

22. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1920, Helena, Lewis and Clark, Montana, roll T625_972, p. 4A, accessed through ANC.

23. African-American Heritage Resources.

24. Information on buildings and structures associated with Helena’s African American past, including property record forms and maps of historic neighborhoods, was compiled as part of the Montana Historical Society’s African American history project. This research will be made available through the “Places” tab on the “Identifying Montana’s African American Heritage Resources” website.

J.P. Ball & Son, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives, Helena, 957-597



In the 1890s, William C. Irvin became Helena’s first African American constable. In so doing, he secured the support of the all-white police force as well as of voters within his own ethnic community. In the years preceding his appointment, Irvin had been part of an era of political and racial progressivism in the new state of Montana. The African American community in Helena sought to leverage its small voter base as a means to propel black citizens into public office, but previous campaigns had failed to appoint a new constable. Even though one black candidate seemed to have the support of the white community, some African Americans did not favor him because he had previously fought for the U.S. military.