

HERITAGE NEWS

Fall 2023

Rainier Valley Historical Society Volume 32, Issue 2

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There's a New Mural in Town!

"Riding the Number 7" was unveiled on September 30th, at a celebration in the alley next to Columbia City Gallery. Artist Tina Garrick Albro depicted everyday heroes as passengers on the 7 Rainier. The mural was created with a grant from the Columbia/Hillman Arts and Culture District Arts Revitalization Projects, funded by the City of Seattle, Office of Arts and Culture.

The passengers are all people who have lived and worked in Rainier Valley and made it a better place to be - some in very visible ways and some in quiet, less visible ways:
John L. O'Brien
Suzy, Lou and Mondo Banchero
Fujitaro Kubota
Bob Santos
Ruth Woo
Claude Forward
Fred Hutchinson
Aki Kurose
Jean Veldwyk
and Tom Garrick

The Seattle Channel interviewed descendants of those "on the bus", Fujitaro Kubota's granddaughter Linda Kubota, and John L. O'Brien's daughter Karen O'Brien. Their interviews along with Suzy Banchero's connection to the 7 Rainier will be aired in January.

A limited edition print of the mural, mugs, and cards are available at Columbia City Gallery this holiday season. A portion of the sales is being donated by the artist to RVHS. Thank you Tina!

"Riding the
Number 7"
mural installed
in the alley
outside the
Columbia City
Gallery



A Good Time at the RVHS Founder's Dinner Celebrating History Makers!

This year's return to the annual RVHS Founder's Dinner and Auction was one of the best! We gathered on October 14th to honor founder Buzz Anderson's legacy and celebrate RVHS 2023 History Makers Kubota Garden Foundation and community leader Herb Tsuchiya. The event was a fantastic success with ukulele musicians starting off the social hour, followed by an Asian-themed menu, heart-warming award presentations, and a fun live auction with Mary Charles' debut as auctioneer. Critical funds were raised for our educational programs and archives care from the generous donations in the room.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to those who attended the dinner in contributing to an enjoyable time for all.



RVHS Founder's Dinner Co-Chairs Karen O'Brien, Becky Corpuz and Mary Charles follow Wendee Ong of the Blaine Ukulele Group of Seattle, dance the "Hukilau."

Herb Tsuchiya - RVHS History Maker 2023



Herb Tsuchiya's Japanese parents emigrated from Hiroshima prefecture in 1917. The Tsuchiya family were rice farmers in Montana where his father worked as a railroad laborer. Herb was born at Harborview Hospital in Seattle in 1932, the youngest of seven, and was named for U. S. President Herbert Hoover. His mother, Momoyo, was working as a waitress for a Japanese restaurant when his father, Nobuichi, left the family for Japan just as Executive Order 9066 forcing the relocation of West Coast Japanese inland came into effect and the family had to assemble with their two suitcases each for the bus caravans to Puyallup.

After release from the 3.5 year incarceration, Momoyo Tsuchiya and her family were first housed at the Seattle Japanese Baptist Church and then in public housing at Stadium Homes on Empire Way, and finally settled in at Rainier Vista on Columbian Way which felt "luxurious."

Herb Tsuchiya went on to be honored with numerous professional and community awards based on his work with underserved populations including seniors, immigrants and low-income children. When Herb co-founded Kin-On Health Care in 1985, it was the first nursing home in the nation serving non-English speaking elderly. He worked for King County Public Health at both Rainier Park Medical Clinic and Columbia Health Center after he owned and managed the Genesee Street Pharmacy for his profession.

In the 1990s Herb joined a community theater group for a production of "Breaking the Silence" as a way to share the Japanese experience of incarceration in the 1940s. Herb commented, "the whole Japanese-American community did not talk about the camps and yet it's what totally defines all of us. We all had that common thread of experience."

Herb Tsuchiya passed away on August 21, 2023. His celebration of life was held on November 25, 2023. Herb's three rules of life, "Be Kind, Be Kind, Be Kind" steered his life of caring for, giving to, helping, and serving others. His legacy of service will be remembered.

Kubota Garden Foundation - RVHS History Makers 2023



Kubota Garden Foundation

Pictured back row, left to right: Kentaro Kojima, Jeannette Vinson, Elaine Shimono, Susan Lansverk, Ellen Phillips-Angeles, Laura Wildfong, Marjorie Lamarre, Dylan Okimoto. Front row, left to right: Allan Kubota, Kara Mayeda, Phyllis Grant, Joy Okazaki, Marguerite Russell (Not pictured: Anyo Domoto, Emiko McKittrick, Mary Lou Torpey, and Scott Vokey)

Kubota Garden Foundation, (KGF) was established in 1989 to support, enhance, and perpetuate Kubota Garden within the spirit and vision of Fujitaro Kubota and his son Tom Kubota. KGF has led or partnered with others on over 10 construction projects including the Terrace Overlook, the Ishigaki drystack stone wall, the Ornamental Wall, the Entry Gate, and made ADA accessibility improvements; KGF has partnered with Seattle Parks & Recreation on programming and events at Kubota Garden in Rainier Beach making lasting contributions to Southeast Seattle and beyond.

History of Kubota Garden Foundation

Fujitaro Kubota was interested in the garden becoming a public space. When he passed away in 1973, the family approached the City of Seattle to discuss their purchase of the garden, but the City declined. In the late 1980s, when developers were eager to purchase the 20-acre property and build condominiums, community members advocated for the City of Seattle to purchase the garden. Councilwoman Jeanette Williams found the necessary funds to make the purchase in 1987. Several of those community members formed Kubota Garden Foundation in 1989 to continue a partnership with the City and assure the preservation of the entire garden as envisioned by the Kubota family.



The Midwife and the Oysterman

- by Nancy Dulaney

We are grateful to a student researcher, L.S., for bringing the Dixon family to our attention. We have gleaned much from archival documents, census records, newspapers and local books. We present here a story about the Dixon family who were among the first Black property owners and residents in Rainier Valley.

Roscoe Dixon is credited with being the first Black business owner in Astoria, Oregon. One hundred years later his youngest daughter, Theresa Dixon Flowers, donated Dixon and Flowers family photos to the Oregon Historical Society in 1984. The Biographical Notes included with the collection reference his birth in Virginia in the 1840s. After time in Portland and Astoria, Oregon; Victoria, B.C.; Dyea, Alaska and additional unknown elsewhere in between, the Roscoe Dixon family lived in the Brighton Beach neighborhood as early as 1908.

Roscoe Dixon and his younger brother Robert's birthplace was Richmond, Virginia. By 1850 they, with their mother Agnes and George Lee, had escaped slavery there via the Underground Railroad to New Bedford, Massachusetts, where whaling ships fed the economy. Roscoe was seven and Robert was four years old. The Fugitive Slave Act, recently passed by the U.S. Congress, threatened runaways with arrest and return to their enslavers in the South and the family was subject to this Act. Agnes Lee was still in residence in New Bedford when she wrote her last will and testament in 1885, though she had by then lost George to death. At some point in time, Robert and Roscoe Dixon had both headed west.

Roscoe worked in Portland, Oregon,

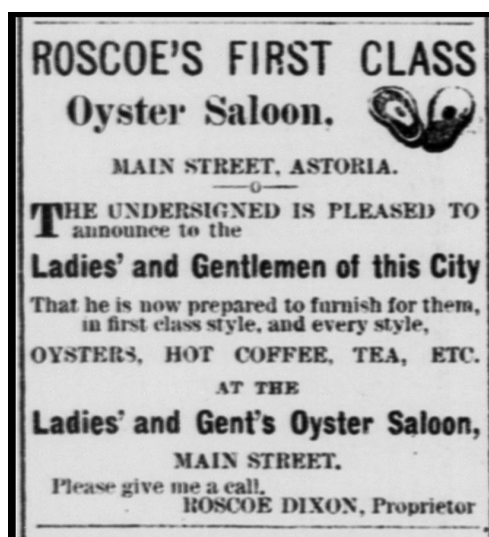


Portrait of Theresa Dixon, circa 1870 – 1880, Dixon family photographs, Org. Lot 1421, Portrait of Roscoe Dixon, circa 1881, Dixon family photographs, Org. Lot 1421, Oregon Historical Society Research Library.



as a “col., [colored] cook” (*Polk's Portland, Oregon, City Directory, 1874*) and “oysterman” at the Gem Saloon at First and Stark. Roscoe soon established an oyster saloon in Astoria, where he offered “Fancy Roasts and Fried Oysters” for 35 cents and Boston Crystal Ice Cream.

The Daily Astorian 2/24/1881:



In 1880, Roscoe Dixon married Theresa Brown, a young woman originally from Macon, Georgia. The 1870 U.S. Census has 12-year-old Theresa Brown as part of the household of a cooper (barrel maker) and his wife, in their 30s and

white, living about 20 miles east of Astoria on the Columbia River. The Biographical Notes mention a sea captain that brought Theresa to Astoria around Cape Horn. She received training as a nurse in the area and provided private duty care and midwifery services into the 1920s. Her daughter Theresa was interviewed by Seattle historian Esther Hall Mumford in August 1979, when she recalled of her mother, “She worked for many years. I know times when she wouldn’t get home to stay for a year. She’d go from one case to another.” (*Seattle's Black Victorians 1852-1901*, p. 130).

Roscoe's brother, Robert Dixon had first arrived in Seattle in 1865; he gave cuts and shaves downtown on Columbia Street for nearly 50 years. In 1883 Robert, then in his 40s, married Rebecca Grose, daughter of well-known and successful Black entrepreneurs William and Sarah Grose. William Grose had purchased some 12 acres of land from Henry Yesler at East Madison and became the first Black property owner in the area. Over the years parcels were sold to other Black families ready to build their homes. This area formed the north end of today's Central District.



6533 43rd Avenue S, Puget Sound Regional Archives, Property Record Card, 10/1/1937 – The Dixon Home

Back in Astoria, Roscoe Dixon lost his oyster house business in about 1885. Daughter Theresa later attributed the failure to the railroad collapse—the transcontinental railroad had fallen short of reaching Astoria by a mere 58 miles. The town’s big dreams of expanding into a major port town to rival Portland had to be put on hold.

The Dixon family was growing and the children’s birthplaces trace their travels. Roscoe and Theresa’s son Chester Ingersoll Dixon was born in Astoria in November of 1882. First daughter, Christine Mabel, was born in Victoria, B.C. in November of 1885 and Theresa Virginia, in Seattle in December of 1894.

The Black population of Seattle’s four wards in 1890 was 286 of the nearly 43,000 total residents in the city (U.S. Census). Roscoe found work as janitor, conductor, grocer, waiter, cook, and steward that decade. In October of 1891, he was considered for a position as city hall janitor, but political concerns involving race were raised and the motion for the appointment failed (*The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*). This is the first mention of Roscoe Dixon in Seattle newspapers. He

did eventually work for Seattle City Hall.

Other opportunities presented themselves. Robert Dixon and his brother-in-law George Grose became investors in the Seattle Klondike Grubstake and Trading Company in 1897. In a letter published in *The Seattle Republican* in June of 1898, the column “Alaskaites Write” mentions Roscoe Dixon’s plans to stay in Dyed for the summer and, if times got better, to move his family up. How this venture ultimately fared as the gold rush in Dyed soon fizzled is unknown.

Since arriving in Seattle, the Dixons had lived on 10th and 17th Avenues, on Washington Street, and various other locations. Mrs. Theresa Dixon signed the real estate contract for two lots in the Palace Garden replat of Tract 32 of Kelsey’s Brighton Beach Acre Tracts with a purchase price of \$1,600 to be paid in \$20 monthly increments in 1908. By the time Roscoe and Theresa Dixon settled in their Rainier Valley home with their daughters, their son Chester had been in the U.S. Navy for 11 years. As a teenager in Seattle, he had enlisted as apprentice boy

and eventually served 37 years, a veteran of three wars. In 1920 Mr. Dixon was noted to be the only Black Chief torpedo man with permanent appointment (*The Northwest Enterprise*, 4/25/1945).

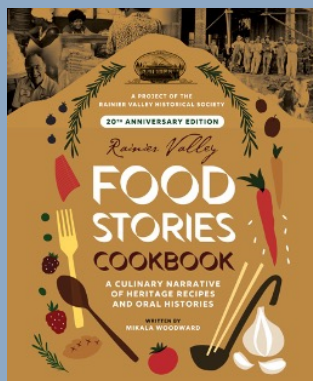
During an unusually cold and snowy January of 1916, Roscoe Dixon succumbed to heart disease at 72 years of age. Mrs. Dixon remained in the family home with daughter, Theresa, who was working as a nurse. After Mrs. Dixon’s death in 1927, Theresa Dixon remained living on 43rd Avenue South until about 1938, when she left for California to work at the Los Angeles County Tuberculosis Hospital. Sister Mabel returned to the family home until the 1940s while working at the King County Tuberculosis Hospital.

Early Black residents of the Pacific Northwest, the Dixons called Rainier Valley “home” for some 30 years. This family contributed to the health and well-being of Seattle residents from their arrival just prior to the financial panic of 1893 up until the Second World War with Chester’s military service and the women’s work in public and private health.

What's new in the Archives!

- 2023.001 - Memorabilia of Elsie Charles and Myron Maxwell donated by Mary and John Charles
- 2023.002 - Two City of Seattle plat maps of Pritchard Island Addition, Seattle Post-Intelligencer from 9/27/1925 with a promotional article and map of the Uplands, and Pritchard Island ghost story-donated by Margaret Nicosia
- 2023.003 - Photocopy of Barbara Heston Moore's grandfather, Robert Hammill Heston, a Rainier Valley streetcar conductor, and a photocopy of Rainier Post Auxiliary #2289 of VFW, window display at VFW hall titled "In Memory of our Departed Comrades" donated by Barbara Heston
- 2023.004 - Rainier Beach Grocery letter opener circa 1930 donated by Chris Wagner
- 2023.005 - The Gale Allen Dunlap Collection: Dunlap and Blinn family photos, letters, property records, burial records, maps, and family research history donated by Arline Dunlap Berg

*holiday
gift!*



A membership or donation of \$100 value or more, receive a copy of the newly released 20th Anniversary Edition Rainier Valley Food Stories Cookbook!

Support Rainier Valley History

If you haven't joined Rainier Valley Historical Society or renewed your membership this year, we urge you to do so now.

RVHS is a 501(c)(3) organization, your donations are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

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Donations, memberships and merchandise sales are also accepted on our website: www.rainiervalleyhistory.org.

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Rainier Valley Historical Society's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret and share the history and heritage of Rainier Valley and its people and to engage public involvement in and appreciation of its diverse cultures. Our geographic boundaries are from Dearborn Street on the north to the city limits on the south, and from I-5 to Lake Washington.

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