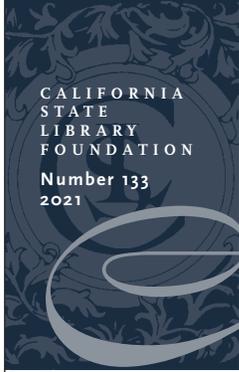


CALIFORNIA
STATE
LIBRARY
FOUNDATION

Number 133
2021

Bulletin





Bulletin

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The *Bulletin* is included as a membership benefit to Foundation members. Membership rates are:

- Associate: \$40-\$99
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Back Cover: From a full-page ad placed by Ebony Magazine in the New York Times dated November 30, 1967

Illustrations and Photo Credits: Courtesy of the California State Library collections, the Burgess family, and Brittneydawn Cook.

Design: Angela Tannehill-Caldwell | www.angelacaldwell.art

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Family Record.

MARRIAGES.

MARRIAGES.

Autobiography

of Nelson Bell

I was born in Mecklenburg County, Virginia about the year 1790. My parents dying in my infancy, I was brought up in the family of my master, whose name was John Gregory.

During my childhood I had many serious thoughts on the subject of religion, and would at times lead a life of prayer, and then again become as careless as my companions.

At about the age of twenty years I was permitted to take a wife, and about the same time found relief from the burden of my sins. I joined the Baptist church at the Buffalo Meeting House about ten miles from Clarksville, in Mecklenburg coun-

About six years from the time of my experiencing religion my master's family being broken up by his death, his slaves were sold on the block at Mecklenburg -

Court House. My wife and children being bought by a Mr. Finch near Washington, and I was bought by a trader and taken to New-Orleans. There I fell into the hands of a Mr. James Sparks. At this time I took another wife. At his death I was held as security for debt by a Mr Bell, and my wife and family were sold or taken to Louisville Kentucky.

In the year 1850 I was brought by Bell to California.

Rufus M. Burgess Jr., the son of Josephine and Rufus M. Burgess, born in 1896



Reparations in the Form of Truth for Rufus Burgess (Nellson Bell)

By Antonio “Tony” Ray Harvey

On September 30, 2020, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Assembly Bill (AB) 3121, a significant piece of legislation better known as “The Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans.” The law established the first-in-the-nation nine-member commission to investigate the history of slavery in the United States, the extent of California’s involvement in slavery, segregation, and the denial of Black citizens their constitutional rights. Former state assembly member Shirley Weber (D-San Diego), who was the chair of the California Legislative Black Caucus, authored the bill. Weber was appointed California’s Secretary of State by Newsom in January

2021. AB 3121 advanced descendants of enslaved Americans one step closer to getting restitution for centuries of free labor and legal discrimination that followed it. The task force has two years to examine how much the state benefited from those practices and policies.

“Our painful history of slavery has evolved into structural racism and bias built into and permeating throughout our democratic and economic institutions,” Gov. Newsom stated. “California’s rich diversity is our greatest asset, and we won’t turn away from this moment to make right the discrimination and disadvantages that Black Californians and people of color still face. While there is still so much work to do to unravel this legacy, [this piece] of leg-



The cover of the Burgess family Bible that contained Nelson Bell’s autobiography has been in the family for five generations.



EDITOR’S NOTE

Antonio “Tony” Ray Harvey is a local historian for the Sacramento Branch of the Black Panther Party, reporter, sports journalist, and photo-journalist who has lived in Sacramento, California, for almost 35 years. He is originally from Champaign, Illinois.

Harvey graduated with a journalism degree from California State University, Sacramento (Sacramento State University), authored the book The Homicidal Handyman of Oak: Morris Solomon, Jr., and has appeared as a guest in several true-crime television documentaries. He is near completion of his second true-crime novel, American Vamp.

Family Record.

BIRTHS.

BIRTHS.

who soon left me to follow the desires of my own heart - a privilege, which for fifty years I have longed to possess.

I now live in my own house in the town of Coloma, and here I expect to spend the few remaining days of my pilgrimage.

For fifty years I have have been a pilgrim, on the way to the Celestial City; sometimes falling into the Slough of Despond; sometimes in Doubting Castle; and making altogether a very slow progress, but still am on the way, and nearly to^{the} crossing of the river, and when the messenger from the King of the Celestial City comes to summon me away I hope, through faith in Christ to cross over singing "Oh Death where is

thy sting, Oh Grave where is thy victory."

Man has deeply wronged me, and I have been very unfaithful, but "the goodness of God endureth forever."

isolation takes important steps in the right direction to building a more inclusive and equitable future for all.”

In the year 2021, obscured California history has clouded the vision of residents of the Golden State concerning Black people and their willingness to live productively years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863.

In 1908, Lt. Col. Allen Allensworth and four other Black families bought 800 acres of land 40 miles south of Fresno. It was the first town in California established exclusively by African Americans and a place where people of color could be self-reliant through education and hard work. Allensworth’s colony was supplied with a schoolhouse, library, general stores, a post office, restaurant, hotel, Baptist church, and numerous structures necessary to operate as a business and residential area. At its peak, Allensworth had 300 residents. Unfortunately, the town began to decline in 1914 due to an insufficient water supply and the removal of a train depot that was used to transport farming resources.

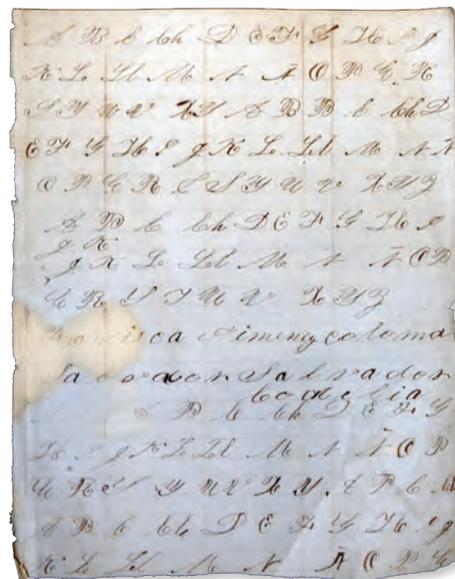
One hundred years ago, Manhattan Beach city officials seized beachfront property owned by an African American couple, Charles and Willa Bruce, citing an “urgent need” to build a city park. Los Angeles County’s Bruce’s Beach Park was the location of the first West Coast seaside resort for Black beachgoers and a residential enclave for a few African American families. After Manhattan Beach’s land grab, the area was not developed for recreational use after it was vigorously snatched from the Black owners. In addition to the confiscations of the Bruces’ land, purchased for \$1,225 in 1912, the beach city grabbed about two dozen other properties from African American families along the city’s Pacific shore using eminent domain laws.

Among 40 million Black residents in the country, 2.5 million African Americans reside in the state of California, according to the 2019 United States Census. The University of Virginia Library listed in its



Ringlets of hair found in the family Bible are believed to be from the first wife of Rufus M. Burgess.

Writing samples and/or templates of the alphabet were also found in the family bible.



U.S. Census study, “Free African American Population in the U.S.: 1790-1860,” that there were 962 free Black people living in California in 1850.

Twins Jonathan Burgess and Matthew Burgess say the (AB) 3121 task force – composed of eight Black Americans and one Japanese American – could do its due diligence by looking closely at the Gold Rush era in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Specifically, in the Sierra Nevada foothills town of Coloma, California.

Jonathan Burgess said there is historical information about his family that has been “suppressed” by the state of California.

“We talk about Bruce Beach. That was the 1900s. We talk about Black Wall Street (in Tulsa, Oklahoma). That was in the 1920s,” he said. “I’m talking about this stuff that was going on before the 19th century. So now when we can really talk about reparations, I can prove that my great-great-grandfather [had a claim on] a gold mine (land) and it was taken from him.”

It all started on Jan. 24, 1848, when a carpenter from New Jersey by the name of James Wilson Marshall discovered shining flakes of gold in the American River at the base of the Sierra Nevada near Coloma. The discovery immediately led to thousands of miners from across the country and

around the world, seeking instant wealth and descending upon the area in the fever of the Gold Rush, including a slave owner from the state of Louisiana.

At the onset of the Gold Rush, Rufus Burgess, the twins’ great-great-grandfather, arrived in California as an enslaved person, owned by Robert Bell from Louisiana, with a caravan of pioneers seeking gold in late 1848 or 1849. Rufus Burgess’s autobiography, handwritten in an old family Bible, stated that Robert Bell obtained Burgess for an unpaid debt and brought him to California where he worked in the mines. By paying off the debt, Rufus Burgess eventu-