

Milpitas Muse

January 2025

The Milpitas Historical Society Newsletter

Volume XLVI, No. 1

**Th Next Meeting: JANUARY 8th at 7:00 pm
LIBRARY MAIN AUDITORIUM
160 N. MAIN STREET, MILPITAS**

The Presentation

AFRICAN-AMERICANS OF SAN JOSE AND SANTA CLARA COUNTY

This month provides us with a special opportunity to learn about the role that African-Americans played in San Jose and Santa Clara County as early as the late 1700s (the early days of Spanish colonization), a subject explored in one of the books written by our speaker, Jan Batiste Adkins.

“An analysis of the settlers [living in early Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe] by researcher Edith Smith of Sourisseau Academy of SJSU shows five pobladores were identified as mulatto. They were Tiburcio Joseph Basques, 25; Philipe Tapia, 42; Joseph Romero, 35; Manuel Amesquita, 21; and Maria Petra Azebes, 17.”

It should be another wonderful presentation.



Antonio Maria Pico was born in 1809 in Monterey and the cousin of Pio Pico (governor of Alta California). He was the grandson of a mestizo grandfather and a mulatta grandmother.

Our Presenter



Jan Batisre Adkins is a lecturer, educator, and author of three different books on African-American history. She has earned a bachelor's degree in Political Science as well as master's degrees in Education and in Comparative Literature. One Master's Thesis was entitled "Literary Prose and Poetry in San Francisco's Black Newspapers, 1862-1995."

The Society's 2025 Annual Election

January is when the Milpitas Historical Society elects its Officers and Board of Directors for the new year. *We hope that as many members as possible will join us for voting.*

Here are the nominees:

Officers:

President: Bill Hare
Vice President: Catherine Pelizzari
Secretary: Carolyn Tiernan
Treasurer: Joe Ehardt

Board of Directors:

Community Outreach & Publicity: Mark Tiernan
Society History: Joanne Souza
Membership: Jathin Ullal
Archives: Joe Ehardt
Educational Outreach Program: Joe Ehardt
Liaison to PRCRC: Joe Ehardt
Hospitality: Unfilled position
Special Events: Unfilled position

A FREE Society Membership Benefit

The Society is still offering the commemorative floaty pen for free to all of its active members. To receive it we simply ask that you come to a monthly meeting to pick it up.



Installation Dinner Planning

Planning is underway for this year's annual banquet, usually held on the third Thursday of February in the early evening, subject to the availability of a suitable facility.

An announcement will be sent out in several weeks with the details of the location, the menu, and the cost. One favorite location is Giorgio's because of its good food and bar, but that facility is not conducive to an AV-based presentation, which we used to have when we held this event with buffet food at the BayView Golf Club in the Milpitas Hills.

I am exploring the possibility of returning to Bay View this year, although I am expecting its prices to be higher. The question is, how much higher are they now? In any case, this event is the most popular one of the year based on attendance and we are looking forward to another pleasant gathering.

The Society's 2024 Xmas Party



Our cleanup crew after many people had left in the afternoon filled with holiday food and good cheer.

The Hare Family's 3-week Trip in Europe



Renewal of Annual Society Dues

It's that time of year again. The renewal form is included in this mailing for your convenience.

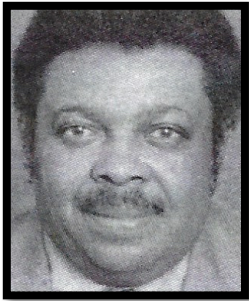
Our Society's Contact Information

You can contact the Milpitas Historical Society:
- by mail at 160 N. Main St., Milpitas CA 95035
- by email at tmhs@milpitashistoricalsociety.org
- our website: <http://milpitashistoricalsociety.org>
- by land-line at 1-408-262-1776 (Bill Hare)

TRIPPING THROUGH TIME:

A Few of Many Notable African-Americans in Milpitas History

Benjamin Franklin Gross Sr.



"Ben" moved to California from Arkansas to work in the Richmond Ford plant. He was strongly committed to the United Auto Workers Union's causes of racial equality and worker rights.

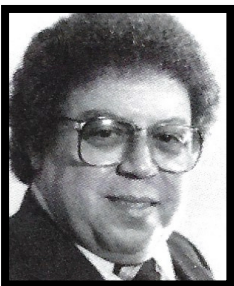
In the early 1950s, Ford management chose Milpitas

to be the new site for its larger and more modern plant when Milpitas' population was almost entirely white and there was virtually no available housing for Ford's large workforce. Milpitas was still only a small ranching and farming community of about 800 people (including the inmates of the County's Elmwood facility).

Ben became chairman of the UAW Local 560 Housing Committee and was a relentless advocate for integrated housing. Still very conservative, Milpitas did not warmly embrace his notion and the banks refused to offer mortgage loans to African-American workers, practicing what is referred to as red-lining. Ben Gross fought hard to overcome those barriers and Milpitas became the first planned integrated community in America, resulting in national coverage in the October 13th, 1967 issue of *Life* magazine.

Bringing the Sunnyhills project to fruition was only his first act of public leadership in Milpitas. Following that was his election as Director of the Milpitas Sanitation District, then three consecutive elections to the city council (1962, 1966, and 1970), as well as his position of mayor during his second term. Ben resigned from the council in 1971 when he was promoted to the UAW headquarters staff in Detroit. Upon his leaving, he stated that "this is one community which cares about all of its people."

Albert Augustine Jr.



Albert was one of a number of African-American lay leaders of the interracial Sunnyhills Methodist United Church on Dixon Landing Road, an important community institution from its opening in 1963 that was recently dissolved,

forcing its parishioners to find religious guidance elsewhere.

He served on the Milpitas Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Commission (PRCRC) which advises the Recreation Department, City Manager, and City Council on diverse matters such as recommending names (or renames) of parks and streets, suggesting priorities on park improvements and policies, as well as directly supporting events it sponsors including the Bike-Anywhere Day (originally Bike-to-Work Day) and Family Bike Day. Al's importance in Milpitas and Sunnyhills history is reflected with a park in his name, the Sunnyhills Albert Augustine Jr. Park, which is the second park on the Hetch-Hetchy Trail beginning in Milpitas.

Oliver W. Jones



Oliver was another of the important early lay leaders of the interracial Sunnyhills Methodist United Church, and the multi-purpose events building next to the church was named for him. The Sunnyhills Neighborhood Association used to hold its monthly breakfast meetings

in Oliver Jones Hall.

He was one of the original workers at the new Ford plant and he became a labor negotiator for the local UAW Union. He also was a founding member of Milpitas' Black Caucus opposing segregated housing.

After his death from pneumonia in June 1994 at the age of 78, Mayor Pete McHugh remembered him as a respected civic leader connected to senior-related activities and he proposed naming the Senior Center after Oliver, but the city council decided that they would honor him instead with some other proposal. Council member Barbara Lee suggested that something connected to the Hetch-Hetchy Trail through Milpitas would be more appropriate. Today, at Jacklin Road, the Oliver W. Jones Memorial Park (originally named after Walter Reuther of UAW fame) is the fourth park along the Hetch-Hetchy Trail.

Irene Jefferson

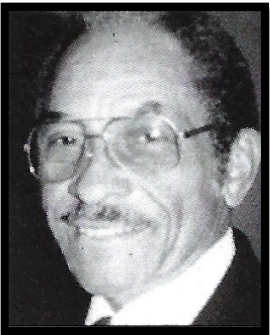


From 1966 to 1986, Irene served as our first African-American librarian in Milpitas and its branch manager within the larger Santa Clara County Library System.

In the late 1990s, then-current Milpitas librarian Ed Cavallini convened a meeting with Irene, who was retired at that time, and Community Arts & History Support in an effort that would result in 2002 in the formation of the Milpitas Black History Living Legacy Hall of Fame.

There are many honored inductees, including members now deceased, among whom are Chuck Murray (first president of the Milpitas Black Caucus and founder of the Black Studies Department at San Jose City College), Irene and Albert Augustine Jr., Dorothy Dixon, Oliver Dunbar, Billy Jefferson (one of the first two African-American members of the Santa Clara County Grand Jury), Quincy Jones (pastor, business owner and community leader), and Robert Pecot (civic leader for whom Pecot Park, in Sunnyhills at the start of the Hetch-Hetchy Trail, is named).

Oliver Dunbar



Oliver was yet another of the Milpitas Ford plant workers (as an assembler) who came from the Richmond plant and was an original member of the Sunnyhills integrated housing effort.

Originally from Arkansas like Ben Gross Sr., Oliver served during WW II in the

U. S. Navy from 1942-1945, after which he worked at the Port of Oakland until he joined Ford in 1947. He was an early member of the Black Caucus and former president of PAL football in Milpitas.

Oliver was another of the early parishioners of the Sunnyhills Methodist United Church, and in 1978 he was treasurer of the Sunnyhills Men's Club that later was renamed the Sunnyhills Breakfast Club.

Early Milpitas police chief Jim Murray knew Oliver Dunbar for four decades, remarking that Oliver "wasn't one of those people who would come in yelling when there was trouble." Murray added,

"He was the guy you could talk to and get advice from."

Lois Hogan



Published in a 1972 article in the Milpitas Post written by co-founder Elaine Levine, Lois Hogan said, "I don't know which has the most prejudice. It's a toss up between being a black & being a woman," although that did not stop her from becoming Milpitas' first African-

American female school administrator.

Educated as an industrial chemist, her company male colleagues did not take her seriously as a scientist. That oppressive work culture changed with the opportunity for her to teach math in the Mount Pleasant School District and later to teach chemistry at Milpitas High School.

She became chairman of the math and science department at Milpitas High, and she was elected president of the Santa Clara Valley Science Teachers Association. Looking for still other ways to help African-American students succeed and to be a role model, Lois became an advisor to the school's Black Student Union.

After that, her career would advance yet another step when she was promoted to the position of vice principal at Thomas Russell Middle School. Both Thomas Russell Middle School and Milpitas High School today are part of a major education complex in Sunnyhills that includes Marshall Pomeroy Elementary School and San Jose City College extension.

(Much of this information about these community leaders was collected by Joseph Ehardt from years of articles published in the Milpitas Post)