

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

## EVERETT'S NOTABLE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SONS & DAUGHTERS

By Michael Matarazzo

For the most part, African-Americans came to the City of Everett after the Civil War. Their history in Everett is one of great accomplishments in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The history of African-Americans in Everett is a proud and distinguished one and this article doesn't claim to highlight all of the people or all the contributions made to this City by the African-American community. Like the Italians, Irish, Jewish and other groups that settled Everett, the African-American community was comprised of hard-working parents who taught their children right from wrong, respect for themselves, their neighbors and neighborhood.

In recognition of Black History Month, let us recognize some of Everett's African-American sons and daughters.

### **Charles and Henrietta Shearer**

As Union troops closed in on Appomattox County, Virginia, Charles Shearer, the son of a slave owner and his slave, made it clear that when the troops arrived he intended to join them and fight for his freedom. For this belligerence, he was chained in a barn while his master made a quick getaway to escape the Union soldiers. When the soldiers found Charles, they allowed them to travel with them until the end of the war.

After the war, Charles attended Hampton Institute where he met his wife, Henrietta. Charles went on to teach at the Institute and in the Lynchburg Public Schools. Henrietta also went on to teach in Virginia.

In the late 1800's they moved north and eventually purchased a home on Sunnyside Avenue in Everett. Charles and Henrietta were committed Baptists and would often make the long trip to Martha's Vineyard for religious revivals. They fell in love with the Vineyard and late in the 1800's, they purchased property on the Island and in 1903, they purchased a home.

The Shearers would spend their summers on the Vineyard and, in an attempt to defray some of the cost of doing so; they built a structure next to the house and opened a laundry business. Ever the entrepreneur, Henrietta began offering a pick-up and delivery service for the laundry.

By 1912, the Shearers were able to expand their business and purchased a twelve-room home that they turned into Shearer Cottage a summer inn catering to the African-American Community. Shearer Cottage, which still stands today, was designated as the first stop on the African-American Heritage Trail of Martha's Vineyard in 1997.

### **Gustave Johnson**

Sunnyside Avenue was also the birthplace of Gustave Johnson an actor whose distinguished appearance and authoritative voice has resulted in many TV appearances on

Law and Order as a judge and movie roles in the Friends of Eddie Coyle and the Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight. Gustave is a co-founder of the New African Company a professional theater company in Boston that develops and produces works by, for and about Black people, and provides professional training and experiences in theater for people from the Black community in the Greater Boston Area.

### **Walter Carrington**

Walter Carrington's impressive career began as vice-president of his class at the Parlin Junior High an office that he continued to hold during his three years at Everett High School. While his educational resume as a student at Harvard and Harvard Law School, as well as a lecturer and director at Marquette, MIT and Howard University is impressive, it is his time as Ambassador to Nigeria that distinguished him as a champion of freedom.

In 1959, Carrington visited Nigeria as part of an international student program and was impressed with the country and in particular the University of Ibadan. Carrington saw great promise for the country, but when he returned in 1993 as President Clinton's Ambassador to Nigeria what he saw was not only a university but also a country in shambles.

Democratic elections had been recently annulled by the military and a pro-military leader was installed. Pro-democracy groups and the military government clashed and there was civil unrest throughout the nation. Instead of poising himself above the fray, Ambassador Carrington took an activist role for democracy. He spoke out against oppression and identified with the people of Nigeria and their desire to determine the future of their nation through free elections. He met with the opposition and openly spoke against the military regime, which is contradictory to the role usually played by diplomats.

The people of Nigeria possess an affection and admiration for Walter Carrington to this day. His courage, commitment and dedication to the Nigerian people and their struggle will not soon be forgotten.

In 2004 Carrington was named Warburg Professor of International Relations at Simmons College in Boston.

### **Marilyn Carrington**

Cancer – it is a word that frightens those who hear that it is attacking their body or that of a loved one. In 1999, Marilyn Carrington, sister of Walter Carrington, heard that terrible word and with a prognosis that called for her life to end within a year, she set out to make a difference.

A highly educated woman, Marilyn could not help but wonder how frightening the experience of the diagnosis and treatment of cancer must be to those without her educational background. In an effort to improve access to cancer treatment, she founded the Deaconess-Beth Israel Multicultural Cancer Task Force. This task force was designed to bring together families, survivors and patients to help navigate patients and their

families through the rigors, confusion and burdens of cancer treatment and to make effective treatment available to all.

In 2001, she was honored for her efforts by the United Way with their Champions of Change Award. Marilyn passed away in January of 2006.

### **Matthew Bullock**

The term student-athlete is often over-used, but in the case of Matthew Bullock, the term fits perfectly. Matthew Bullock was born to former slaves in 1881 in North Carolina. When the Bullocks headed north, they settled on Winter Street and their children enrolled in the Everett Public Schools.

While in school, Matthew Bullock distinguished himself as a talented athlete and a distinguished student. Well respected by his peers, Matthew was chosen by the players as captain of the 1899 Everett High School Football Team. In those days, being captain also meant serving as coach of the team. It is widely believed that Matt Bullock was the first African-American head coach of a predominantly white high school. (His brother Henry would also coach the team in 1901.) Bullock led the team to a ten win, two losses, and one tie season and an “Unofficial” State Championship.

After graduation from Everett High School, Matt was accepted to Dartmouth College where he participated in track and football and graduated in 1904. He continued his Ivy League education by attending Harvard Law School from where he graduated in 1907.

While studying law, Bullock earned money by coaching at Massachusetts Agricultural College, now known as UMASS. It is also widely believed that Matt Bullock was the first African-American head coach of a predominantly white college.

After earning his law degree, Bullock served as an Athletic Director and an instructor of economics, Latin, history and sociology at what is now known as Morehouse College and at Alabama A&M. He was admitted to the Massachusetts Bar in 1917 and served as an Assistant Attorney General in the Commonwealth.

Matthew Bullock was honored by both Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School with honorary degrees. He died at the age of ninety-one in 1972.

### **Lee G. Johnson**

The Honorable Lee G. Johnson is the Presiding Justice of Malden District Court. A standout student-athlete at Everett High School, Judge Johnson also served as Registrar of Probate for Middlesex County and a Commissioner for the Massachusetts Civil Service Commission.

A former probation officer and public school teacher in Everett, the Judge cares deeply about his hometown and for her youth and their future. Judge Johnson’s varied work experiences from teacher to private practice to public servant coupled with his street

sense and formal education gives him a unique and well-rounded view of society and the law.

**Rev. Dr. Al Sampson**

Rev. Dr. Sampson was born in 1938 in Everett, Massachusetts, and graduated from Everett High School in 1956. At 19, he felt the strong call to enter the ministry and was licensed to preach in his home church of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Malden.

Rev. Sampson made the trip from Baldwin Avenue to Raleigh, North Carolina to attend Shaw University where he honed his leadership skills. While at Shaw he was President of the student body, President of Shaw University NAACP on the campus and President of the Youth and College Chapters of the NAACP in North Carolina.

He helped introduced the first public accommodations bill in North Carolina history and led the voter registration and political education drive leading to the election of the first Black city councilman in that state. He was also instrumental in the campaign for the election of Carl Stokes, the first black mayor of a major U.S. city, Cleveland, Ohio.

Reverend Al Sampson worked as a reporter for the "Atlanta Inquirer" newspaper before joining the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) in 1962.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appointed Rev. Dr. Sampson as the National Housing Director of SCLC and he was the only member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) staff to be personally ordained by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA in 1966.

Rev. Dr. Sampson is the founder and president of Farmers Agribusiness Resource Management (FARM), President of the Metropolitan Council of Black Churches in Chicago, Former President of the Neighborhood Social Entrepreneurs Society (NSET) and President of the Metro Area African American Seniors Resource Network. Rev. Dr. Sampson also served as a Board Member of one the largest Black-Owned banks in America.