

Golden Nuggets

February 2008

Tuesday, Feb. 26, 7 PM
The Rediscovery of the Club Zanzibar
 Clarence Caesar & Keith Burns
 SAMCC, 501 Sequoia Pacific Blvd.



Vincent "Ted" Thompson on sax, and Walter Robinson on piano at the Club Zanzibar.
 Sacramento Ethnic Survey Collection, SAMCC

We're in for a very special presentation this month. Historian Clarence Caesar and writer collector Keith Burns will introduce SCHS members to the long-buried and almost forgotten story of one of Sacramento's most famous historic jazz clubs, the Club Zanzibar. The 1940s were the golden age of African American jazz clubs, and the Zanzibar was the "Top Spot of the Hot Spots." Located at Sixth and Capitol Avenue in the heart of the West End, it attracted prime time entertainers—and a multi-racial audience uncommon for the time.

A story within the story is the discovery in a sealed auction box purchase of the scrapbook whose contents began to reveal those long gone days. The speakers and other local history detectives tracked down people to provide more details. So prepare for an entertaining tale of the rediscovery of the Club Zanzibar. Burns and Caesar will show slides and provide recorded background music of the era. Light refreshments will be served. Guests are welcome and expected; it may be wise to come early to be sure of a seat. See Clarence Caesar's adjacent article for some important cultural background, and mark your calendars!

Sacramento's Club Zanzibar

By Clarence Caesar

The United States entry into World War II in December 1941 had a profound effect on the Sacramento region. This was especially true of Sacramento's African American and Japanese American populations. By the 1940s Sacramento's small black community included many native Sacramentans. During the ensuing decade they were joined by African Americans from other regions attracted by the jobs created by the military-industrial buildup leading up to the war. Sacramento's black population tripled during the 1940s to a total of about 7,500 persons by 1950.

World War II deeply affected Sacramento's long established Japanese American community. The Japanese air and naval attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, resulted in U.S. Executive Order 9066. This order effectively forced Japanese American citizens on the West Coast to immediately liquidate their assets and report to relocation centers and eventually to internment camps located throughout the western U.S. Many of their properties or possessions were sold to members of other ethnic communities, who sometimes offered to keep the properties until the original owner returned.

The misfortune suffered by Sacramento's Japanese American community provided unintended business and ownership opportunities for local African-Americans previously unattainable due to discriminatory practices or lack of capital. The rise of the restaurant and nightclub known as the Club Zanzibar was a graphic example of this dynamic at work.

Located at 528-530 Capitol Avenue, the Club Zanzibar was noted in the Sacramento City Directories of 1941 and 1942 as the "Zanzibar Café," an establishment then owned by

William C. "Nitz" Jackson and Herman B. Ford. After 1942, the business was still listed as the "Zanzibar Café" but with Isaac and Louise Anderson noted as Jackson's new partners. In early 1942 the Andersons had purchased the liquor license of a local Japanese American businessman forced to sell it by Executive Order 9066. The Andersons opened A & J Liquors on 4th and Capitol later that year. It was this liquor license that led to the Zanzibar Café's evolution into Club Zanzibar.

The Club Zanzibar operated from 1942 until 1949. During its existence it boasted one of Sacramento's first interracial clientele, fine dining, and some of the best entertainment available in the area during the 1940s. Stars such as Herb Jeffries, Kay Starr, Jack McVea (whose song "Open the Door Richard" was Billboard's No.1 hit in 1947), the Hunter Gray Trio, and many others performed there. Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie were also known to participate in informal Sunday afternoon jam sessions at the club with local musicians, a widespread practice among jazz musicians of the period. Club Zanzibar was Sacramento's version of similar jazz clubs that sprouted up during this time in larger jazz districts in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle.

The closure of the Club Zanzibar remains shrouded in controversy. By the late 1940s the Andersons bought out Jackson's interest in the club. Rumors of prostitution at the club prompted state liquor control officials to revoke the club's liquor license in November 1949. The Club Zanzibar closed a short time later. The prostitution allegations surrounding the club are still disputed by many African Americans who lived in the area during that time. Many saw the allegations as desperate actions of white men in power who were jealous of the club's success.

William Jackson left Sacramento for Southern California and lived there until his death in 1958. Isaac and Louise Anderson eventually moved A & J Liquors to a new location on Stockton Boulevard just south of Broadway where it operated until the mid-1990s. Despite its controversial demise, the social and cultural impact of the Club Zanzibar remains an

intriguing story within the larger cultural and ethnic history of Sacramento. -Clarence Caesar is a historian with California State Parks and an authority on African American history.



Calling All History Buffs!

Sacramento County History Day, part of the nationwide contest announced by the above poster, will be held on March 8th at American River College from 8 AM to 5 PM. **Judges are still needed for this event.** Contest evaluation criteria are provided. Information is available from Bobby Roy at 916-224-8244. Additional information about judging is online at www.sachistoryday.org/judges.

Each year more than a half million students advised by thousands of teachers participate in this very hands-on history competition, now in its 25th year. They conduct extensive research and then present their conclusions in a wide choice of formats including posters, papers, exhibits, web pages, documentaries, and performances. Winners may go on to compete in the California History Day finals, which will be held in Sacramento at the Doubletree Hotel from May 5-8. Judges are also needed for this contest. Nationwide finals take place in Maryland in June. Last year's Sacramento winners from Valley High School took second place nationwide with their exhibit on the 1918 Flu Epidemic. See the video link on page 4 for another recent local winner. Please come support these students! Or better yet, be a judge.

Days of '49

By Dan Winkelman

I'm old Tom Moore from the bummer's shore
In the good old golden days.
They call me a bummer and a gin sot, too
But what cares I for praise?
I wander 'round from town to town
Just like a roving sign
And all the people say, "There goes Tom Moore,
In the days of '49."

- Ol Put's Golden Songster

Lake Natoma's shoreline is a victim of these bummers. Piles and piles of rock remain, turned over by desperate hard-working prospectors seeking their fortune in gold. My canoe launch site is near the old Negro Bar diggings. Somehow part of the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area on the other side of the lake was named Negro Bar. At least the name continues. The actual Negro Bar was just below Young Wo Circle in the city of Folsom but is now inundated by lake waters.

Only a few African American miners set up the camp, becoming the first to placer mine the area for gold. They gave up, moved on, and their names are lost to history. All except one, Sam Smith, who was accused of murder and spent time in San Quentin.

The next set of miners who came through got more serious about extracting gold from the bar. These men were extremely rugged individualists whose quest for gold led them to band together to form the Virginia Mining Company. In 1850, two hundred and fifty men from the company built a dam at Negro Bar



that diverted the river into a canal and flume. The flume carried water for a mile above the river bed. Once the bed was exposed, the men scrambled into the dry river bed where they used sluice boxes to work the claim.

The expense and back-breaking labor that went into the dam, canal and flume was all for naught. Meager gold finds sent those miners on their way, abandoning what was left of their wasted efforts. They were followed by other mining companies that built more dams, flumes, and tunnels. Negro Bar merchants built stores, inns, saloons, and theaters for the miners, and the town managed to grow. Soon Chinese American "drift" miners dug tunnels throughout the area with such intensity that one miner described the result as "all gutted and tunneled; as if a million colossal rabbits had made it their warren."

This was not the worst of the indignities suffered by the town of Negro Bar. Gold dredgers from the Natomas Consolidated Company ran a large zigzag path through the town, river bed, and gravel bars of the American River. When I was a youngster, my mother gathered the family and we picketed the dredgers with signs proclaiming, "Stop Destroying California." No one cared. A rock crushing plant processed cobbles from the dredge fields. Finally, the site was flooded during the construction of Nimbus Dam.

Today I paddle the shoreline of Lake Natoma and marvel that the area has recovered enough to give the appearance of a natural setting. I often wonder what Negro Bar looked like 200 years ago. It's an enigma I can only resolve in my dreams.



In the days of old,
In the days of gold
How oft' times I repine
For the days of old
When we dug up the gold
In the days of '49.

-A retired State Parks ranger, SCHS Board member Dan Winkelman spends a lot of time canoeing and thinking on Lake Natoma.

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Out & About

Date	Time	Event	Place & Contact
Feb. Tues-Sun to April 20	10 AM to 5 PM (Free entry Sun- days until 1 PM)	Edwin Deakin: California Painter of the Picturesque. New exhibit of English born painter who settled in San Francisco in the 1870s. Stunning stills, romantic landscapes, architectural scenes & vanishing wilderness.	Crocker Art Museum 216 O Street Sacramento 916-808-7000 www.crockerartmuseum.org
March 1 Sat	10 AM	Women in History Tour. Discover some of Sacramento's interesting historic female folk resting in peace at the city's oldest cemetery.	Old City Cemetery 10th & Broadway (parking opposite) Sacramento
8 Sat	10 AM to 5 PM	Sacramento County History Day Daylong judging of outstanding student history projects is open to the public. For a sample, please view this 2006 national winning video from Mira Loma High School: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kawCcWyNv6o	American River College 4700 College Oak Drive Sacramento, CA 95841 916-868-1049 or 916-224-8244 www.sachistoryday.org
25 Tues.	evening	Awards Night. SCHS Annual Awards of Excellence. More details TBA. Hold the date.	Sierra Sac. Valley Medical Museum 5380 Elvas Blvd., Suite100 Sacramento