

LOCAL HISTORY

The first annual Juneteenth celebration in San Diego took place 40 years ago

Over 300 Join To Enjoy 'Juneteenth'

By DON WILLIAMSON
Staff Writer, The San Diego Union

For some people, it was 220 pounds of barbecued ribs and an afternoon of gospel music. For others, it was an

unknown in other parts of the country.

In the last decade, however, there has been an introduction of these celebrations across the United States, and many blacks who had

that all the food was donated and the seniors grew the vegetables in their gardens, and worked together to cook the meal," she said.

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thing you had to pay was five cents a bottle for the red soda pop," she said.

Jackson indicated that red soda pop was the traditional beverage to symbolize red wine, but still main-



The San Diego Union-Tribune



Street Seniors Social Club, was attended by more than 300 people who spent the afternoon commemorating an independence day that few Americans know exists.

On Jan. 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which outlawed slavery and freed slaves within U.S. territories.

Word quickly reached slaves and slave owners in the South, but the communications network of the day failed to transmit news of the historic event to other parts of the country for quite some time.

On June 19, 1865, more than two years after the presidential edict, Maj. Gen. Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas, and found slaves still working on the plantations.

His announcement that freedom had been declared began the tradition of Juneteenth — or The Nineteenth, as it originally was called — which is a state holiday in Texas.

Observances spread to states such as Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas, but remained virtually

Street Seniors, who are part of the Neighborhood House Senior Center. Southcrest and Memorial senior centers, also located in Southeast San Diego, joined in the festivities, which were held at Neighborhood House.

"I remember my mother and father saying blacks didn't really celebrate the Fourth of July," said Rosemary Pope, client support specialist at Neighborhood House and a coordinator of senior activities. "But I never really knew the significance of Juneteenth."

Pope noted that four years ago, a Thirty-Fifth Street member who had moved to San Diego from Texas mentioned that he missed having Juneteenth celebrations. "We decided it would be a good activity for the group and the tradition began," she said.

The menu, which consisted of barbecued ribs, pinto beans, rice, greens, candied yams, watermelon, corn on the cob, hotwater cornbread and red soda water, was the traditional Juneteenth fare, according to Pope.

"The really beautiful aspect was

backyard of W.L. Shelby, 62. He is an Arkansas native and remembers the Juneteenth celebrations of his youth.

"We (blacks) knew about July Fourth, but we had to work on that day. We were given June 19th off to celebrate our independence. It was a holiday the whites gave you separate from their day of independence," he said.

Two other club members who are familiar with Juneteenth and disagree about its significance are Alma Jackson, 72, and Cornelius Peoples, 73. Both are from small towns in Texas.

"We called it The Nineteenth," said Peoples. "They said it was the day the Negroes were freed. The white man set aside that day to let us know. We'd kill a hog and a cow, barbecue all night, play baseball and drink white lightning."

Jackson remembers more sober celebrations.

"The church gave us the Nineteenth, because we didn't have any dance halls. Everybody brought different food and it was all free. The only

a good idea to continue the celebrations.

"That wasn't the day we were freed," he said and indicated that it might be better to stick with July Fourth.

But Jackson sees it differently.

"It's a foundation. There's no more harm in the Nineteenth than in Washington's Birthday or any other holiday. And it lets our children know where we came from. If we kill it, they'll never know. We came a long way and it was no disgrace to be emancipated," she said.

Another Juneteenth celebration is slated for tomorrow in Southeast San Diego in the 2900 block of Imperial Avenue from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The event is sponsored by the Imperial Avenue Business Association and will include music, food, displays, awards to public employees and a display of American flags along Imperial Avenue from 25th Street to 32nd Street.



In 1980 Neighborhood House, a multi-service social agency, held a picnic in Southcrest Park to celebrate Juneteenth on the 115th anniversary of the day in 1865 when slaves in Texas were told that they were free. By 1983 the event drew 300 people.

From The San Diego Union, Saturday, June 18, 1983:

Over 300 Join To Enjoy ‘Juneteenth’

By DON WILLIAMSON, Staff Writer, The San Diego Union

For some people, it was 220 pounds of barbecued ribs and an afternoon of gospel music. For others, it was an historical observance that brought them closer to their roots.

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The annual Juneteenth celebration, sponsored by the Thirty-Fifth Street Seniors Social Club, was attended by more than 300 people who spent the afternoon commemorating

an independence day that few Americans know exists.

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Word quickly reached slaves and slave owners in the South, but the communications network of the day failed to transmit news of the historic event to other parts of the country for quite some time.

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His announcement that freedom had been declared began the tradition of Juneteenth - or The Nineteenth, as it originally was called which is a state holiday in Texas.

Observances spread to states such as Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas, but remained virtually unknown in other parts of the country.

In the last decade, however, there has been an introduction of these celebrations across the United States, and many blacks who had been unaware of Juneteenth have established annual commemorations.

This year marks the fourth such celebration by the Thirty-Fifth Street Seniors, who are part of the Neighborhood House Senior Center. Southcrest Memorial senior centers,

also located in Southeast San Diego, joined in the festivities, which were held at Neighborhood House.

"I remember my mother and father saying blacks didn't really celebrate the Fourth of July," said Rosemary Pope, client support specialist at Neighborhood House and a coordinator of senior activities. "But I never: really knew the significance of Juneteenth."

Pope noted that four years ago, a Thirty-Fifth Street member who had moved to San Diego from Texas mentioned that he missed having Juneteenth celebrations. "We decided it would be a good activity for the group and the tradition began," she said.

The menu, which consisted of barbecued ribs, pinto beans, rice, greens, candied yams, watermelon, corn on the cob, hot water cornbread and red soda water, was the traditional Juneteenth fare. according to Pope.

"The really beautiful aspect was that all the food was donated and the seniors grew the vegetables in their gardens, and worked together to cook the meal," she said.

"The 160 pounds of beef ribs and 60 pounds of pork ribs also were donated, and four seniors who are retired chefs started cooking the ribs Thursday."

Those ribs were cooked in the backyard of W.L. Shelby, 62. He is an Arkansas native and remembers the Juneteenth celebrations of his youth.

"We (blacks) knew about July Fourth, but we had to work on that day. We were given June 19th off to celebrate our independence. It was a holiday the whites gave you separate from their day of independence." he said.

Two other club members who are familiar with Juneteenth and disagree about its significance are Alma Jackson, 72, and Cornelius Peoples, 73. Both are from small

towns in Texas.

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Jackson remembers more sober celebrations.

“The church gave us the Nineteenth, because we didn’t have any dance balls. Everybody brought different food and it was all free. The only thing you had to pay was five cents a bottle for the red soda pop,” she said.

Jackson indicated that red soda pop was the traditional beverage to symbolize red wine, but still maintain a Christian atmosphere.

“We sang Christian songs and got happy -just like today,” she added.

Peoples, however, isn’t so sure it’s a good idea to continue the celebrations.

“That wasn’t the day we were freed,” he said and indicated that it might be better to stick with July Fourth.

But Jackson sees it differently.

“It’s a foundation. There’s no more harm in the Juneteenth than in Washington’s Birthday or any other holiday. And it lets our children know where we came from. If we kill it, they’ll never know. We came a long way and it was no disgrace to be emancipated,” she said.

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