A Place in Time: George Ross and Samuel Osborne

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From the Editor's Desk

The start of a new academic year always seems to bring renewed energy and intellectual engagement. In keeping with those ideas, this issue of the Griot shines a light on Lewiston's George Ross and Waterville's Samuel Osborne, two Virginia-born men who will be featured in the African American Collection's 2008 annual exhibition. The Griot also reviews The Women Who Raised Me, the recently published memoir of actress-activist Victoria Rowell, a Maine native and recent USM honorary degree recipient. The Women Who Raised Me is available in the USM Portland campus bookstore.

—Maureen Elgersman Lee, associate professor of history and faculty scholar for the African American Collection of Maine at USM, on academic leave for 2007-2008.

A Place in Time: George Ross and Samuel Osborne

Labor has long been the barometer of African Americans' status in society, both locally and nationally. Labor impacts all aspects of life, including housing, education, health care, and consumerism. And while it may not rival cities like Portland or even Bangor, the labor history of Black men in central Maine during the early to mid-1900s reveals some of the ways in which they have been valued, endearing members of their communities. Prominent among the legends of Black labor in central Maine is the story of George Ross. A Virginia native, Ross graduated from Bates College in 1904. After graduation, he developed a local market niche by manufacturing and selling ice cream from his Elm Street residence. As the Maine taste for ice cream was seemingly well pronounced already by the 1930s, Ross's business was frequented by Bates students and local residents alike.

Held in high esteem in Waterville history is Colby College janitor, Samuel Osborne. Sources indicate that Osborne was born into slavery in Virginia in the 1830s, and that he was later liberated by the Union Army and brought to Waterville by Colby alumnus Colonel Stephen Fletcher. Osborne spent 37 years as a janitor at Colby before his death in 1904. More than a mere custodian, he was a mentor to hundreds of Colby students who annually addressed the graduating class during commencement celebrations. Samuel Osborne, his wife, Maris, and their children—two of whom attended Colby—all left indelible imprints on central Maine history.

[Information provided by the Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections, Bates College, Lewiston; and Colby College Special Collections, Waterville.]

On the Bookshelf

The Women Who Raised Me: A Memoir

By Victoria Rowell

Victoria Rowell relates in her recently published memoir, The Women Who Raised Me (William Morrow/Harper Collins), her recollection of a fourth-grade incident at St. Patrick's Grammar School in Roxbury, Massachusetts. While serving detention for whispering in English class, Rowell weighed the options of waiting to be dismissed against being able to catch the last bus to her thrice-a-week ballet lessons. As Rowell moved to leave the classroom, suddenly [the nun] ran toward me and I picked up my pace, racing down the hall. Terrified, I outpaced her, running down the stairs, taking two steps at a time. Becoming winded, the red-faced nun stopped and leaned over the banister, screaming at me as I dashed toward the exit.

SISTER: Why can't you be like all the other girls?
ME: Because I'm not! (132-33)

No truer words were spoken, for the story of Victoria Rowell's life thus far is unlike any you have read or are likely to read in a very long time. Millions of people, both nationally and internationally, are familiar with the range of Rowell's work on daytime television...
African American Collection of Maine
University of Southern Maine
P.O. Box 9101
Portland, ME 04104-9101

Nonprofit Organization
US Postage
PAID
Portland, ME 04101
Permit #370

Calendar of Events

“Remember Me?” The Life and Legacy of Jean Byers Sampson
Sampson Center annual exhibition
October 15, 2007-January 18, 2008,
Special Collections, Glickman Family Library, USM Portland campus
Opening reception and award gala: October 15, 2007, 5:30-7:30 p.m.
Abromson Community Education Center, USM Portland campus

In the Center of It All:
Glimpses of African American Life in Central Maine
The African American Collection of Maine's 2008 annual exhibition
February 1-April 15, 2008
Opening reception: February 1, 2008, Exhibition preview: 4-5 p.m., Reception and program: 5-7 p.m.
Glickman Family Library, USM Portland campus

For information and access inquiries call (207) 780-4275

Victoria Rowell continued

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