

NATIONAL HISTORY

SAN DIEGO HISTORY

NATHAN HARRISON

1850 CALIFORNIA BECOMES A STATE

On September 9, 1850, California became the 31st state. Though California entered the Union as a "free state," slavery of some African Americans persisted unofficially, and laws regarding enslavement of indigenous peoples remained in force into the 1860s.

1863 THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION IS ISSUED

With this executive order issued during of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln declared freedom for all enslaved people. It was put into full effect with the ending of the war in a Union victory in 1865.

1870 THE 15TH AMENDMENT IS RATIFIED, OFFICIALLY GRANTING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN THE RIGHT TO VOTE

Despite the Amendment, black voters continued to face barriers to exercising this right, including poll taxes and violence.

1798

SPANISH COLONIAL CENSUS

This census listed the men, women, boys, and girls of the Presidio de San Diego district. Separate listings are made for each of the missions and the Presidio itself; the numbers are also identified either as "Indian" or "Spanish," and other categories.

Circa 1820 DON PIDO PICO SETTLES IN SAN DIEGO IN THE 1820s, BEFORE BECOMING THE GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA

His governorship was the last under Mexico. His family is known to have Spanish, Indian, and African ancestry.

1839

ALLEN LIGHT, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN MARINER, SETTLES IN SAN DIEGO AND BECOMES A NATURALIZED MEXICAN CITIZEN

Mariner Allen Light carried sailor protection papers during from 1827 to maintain his status as a "free man and citizen of the United States of America." These papers were discovered in the walls of the Machado Chapel in Old Town in 1948.

1869

FREDERICK COLEMAN, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN MAN, DISCOVERS GOLD IN JULIAN

Frederick Coleman was a rancher who resided with an Indian family in a little valley north of the Cuyamaca Mountains. Coleman had fled the American South for the gold fields of northern California, and then made his way down into the mountainous region of San Diego County. While riding his horse along a creek, Coleman sighted gold, sparking a mine gold rush to the area.

1833

NATHAN HARRISON BORN

The historical accounts relating to Nathan Harrison's early life vary considerably. A firm birth year cannot be definitively established, although it is most likely that he was born in the early 1830s.

1850-1852

NATHAN HARRISON ARRIVES IN CALIFORNIA

The Santa Clara census places Nathan Harrison in that county for the first time in 1852. Santa Clara County, which at the time stretched from Santa Cruz in the west to Merced and Stanislaus to the east, was adjacent to many areas that contained sizable veins of precious metals and saw explosive growth during the California Gold Rush. This census listed Nathan Harrison as a sixteen-year-old black male, born in Kentucky but having last lived in Missouri.

1850s-early 1860s

HARRISON WORKS AS A MINER IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA'S MOTHER LODE REGION

Sanborn 1861
Alameda River
El Dorado County, California
Nathan Harrison (Sanborn 1861)

1875

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT IS ENACTED

In response to continued abuse following the end of the Civil War, The Civil Rights Act of 1875 was designed to protect against discrimination in hotels, trains, and other public spaces.

1896

THE PLESSY V. FERGUSON CASE IS DECIDED, UPHOLDING RACIAL SEGREGATION AS CONSTITUTIONAL

This decision set a precedent, allowing for "separate but equal" schooling facilities and public institutions.

1909

THE NAACP IS FOUNDED

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established to further justice and to fight race-based discrimination.

1872

AMERICA NEWTON MIGRATES TO THE JULIAN AREA IN 1872

American Newton was a former enslaved person who arrived from Missouri. In Julian, she made her living as a laundress for local miners.

1880

A TOTAL OF FIFTY-FIVE AFRICAN AMERICANS RESIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

These residents were predominantly formerly enslaved people from the South. Sixty percent of this population resided in the backcountry of Julian.

1885

A DIRECT RAIL ROUTE FINALLY REACHES SAN DIEGO AND RESULTS IN A POPULATION BOOM

The lack of direct rail access had previously hampered population growth of San Diego, including African American migrants coming from other parts of the United States.

1886

THE COLORED VOTERS POLITICAL CLUB IS ESTABLISHED

The Colored Voters Political Club was the first African American political club in San Diego. Between 1885 and 1900, San Diego's African American population rose dramatically, though it was still less than one percent of the total population. With the increase in numbers, African American San Diegans came together to form groups in which they could share and express themselves in ways which were not permitted in a predominantly White setting.

1887

THE HOTEL ROBINSON IN JULIAN IS BUILT

Albert Robinson, a former slave from Missouri and his wife, Margaret, owned and operated the Hotel Robinson in Julian. From 1887 until Albert's death in 1915, Margaret Robinson continued ownership until 1921.

1892

ISAAC ATKINSON STARTS THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN-OWNED NEWSPAPER IN SAN DIEGO, THE COLONIZER

Isaac Atkinson sold his bakery in Julian, moved to San Diego, and eventually started The Colonizer. His Democratic views prompted the Republican San Diego Union to label him a "Judas" and African American Democrats as "heals of nature."

1898

JOSEPH SMITH MURDERED ON PALOMAR MOUNTAIN

A drifter hired by Joseph Smith eventually murders him in 1888. In an incident of vigilante justice, the murderer is captured and Nathan Harrison is called upon to serve on a makeshift jury. The drifter is found guilty and sentenced to death by hanging. Later, at the site of Joseph Smith's "Palmar property," Uncle Nate cooked for the visitors who came far and wide."

1859

JOSEPH SMITH ESTABLISHES A HOMESTEAD ON PALOMAR MOUNTAIN

Joseph Smith, often called the first white settler on Palomar, built a spacious adobe house, and became instrumental in opening Palomar Mountain to US planning. A keen and well-connected businessman, Smith served as overseer of the roads traveled by the Butterfield Stagecoach Line.

1860s-1870s

HARRISON LIKELY MAKES INITIAL VISITS TO PALOMAR MOUNTAIN

The archaeological evidence hints that Harrison may have made initial visits and seasonal occupations to Palomar Mountain during this period.

1860s-1870s

HARRISON WORKS AS A LABORER IN MONSERATE, NEAR PRESENT-DAY FALLBROOK

The Great Registers of 1875, 1877, and 1879 list Harrison as a laborer in that area near Fallbrook, located in northern San Diego County.

1910

THE COMMITTEE ON URBAN CONDITIONS AMONG NEGROES FORMED

New known as the National Urban League, this organization was founded to advocate for racial and economic justice for African Americans.

1916

THE GREAT MIGRATION FROM THE AMERICAN SOUTH TO THE NORTH, MIDWEST, AND WEST BEGINS

In response to Civil War and Reconstruction experiences, and with the availability of city jobs increasing, many African Americans moved from Southern states to growing urban areas like Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, and Detroit.

1920s

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE IS IN FULL SWING

Taking its name from the New York City neighborhood, this African American-led arts and culture movement spreads throughout the country.

1887

BETHEL AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL (AME) CHURCH IS FOUNDED. IT BECOMES THE FIRST ORGANIZED BLACK RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION IN SAN DIEGO

Solomon and Catherine Johnson were instrumental in the formation of the first Black church in San Diego, the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. The membership of the church met in the Johnson home on the corner of F and Union Streets until funds were raised to secure a church site.

1889

EDWARD W. ANDERSON ESTABLISHES XL LAUNDRY

Edward W. Anderson arrived in San Diego in the mid-1880s from Kentucky before beginning his successful laundry business in 1887 at age 25. As owner of XL Laundry, he managed the largest steam laundry in the region with 35 employees. The original location was at 546 Seventh Avenue, pictured here, but later the business moved to 10th Avenue and Island Avenue.

1897

ANDERSON V. FISHER, 1897 IS THE FIRST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION CASE OF ITS KIND IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

In 1897, Edward W. Anderson, prominent entrepreneur and political organizer, and his wife, Mary, were refused state fair performance at the San Diego Fairgrounds when they were denied their chosen seats near the orchestra, theater manager John C. Fisher explained. "I do not allow colored people on that floor." Anderson filed a lawsuit for \$299 in damages, and was awarded \$150. The judgment was reversed by a higher court on Fisher's appeal and Anderson was ordered to pay Fisher \$9.25 in damages. Even though Anderson's legal action was ultimately unsuccessful, his challenge set a legal precedent.

1890

A TOTAL OF 289 AFRICAN AMERICANS RESIDE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY, ACCORDING TO THE 1890 UNITED STATES CENSUS.

These images are likely the only surviving historical record of these San Diegans and their time here. These studio portraits were taken at Turner's Elite Studio and Kimble's Chicago Art Gallery, both located on Fifth Avenue in downtown San Diego.

1891-1893

BLACK PIONEER STUDIO PORTRAITS

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1874

HARRISON LOSES LOUIS ROSE'S TORTOISE, WHICH IS INSTRUMENTAL IN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SAN DIEGO

Louis Rose was San Diego's first Jewish settler and was instrumental in the early development of San Diego. From 1873 to 1883, Rose served as Postmaster in Old Town, San Diego, working out of his store in town. In 1875, Louis Rose left Harrison in charge of his store while he left for a business trip north. Included in Harrison's duties was the care of Chai, Rose's large pet tortoise. Chai went missing from his usual haunts a few days after Rose's departure. Though he did his best to locate him, Harrison dared not leave the store on account of possible customers. When Rose returned two weeks later, he never saw a word of Chai, but suggested a place that located the creature miles away.

1875-1879

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1941

THE UNITED STATES ENTERS WORLD WAR II FOLLOWING THE ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR

Aboard the West Virginia, African American men attend Doris Miller acts with "distinguished devotion to duty, extraordinary courage and disregard for his own personal safety during the attack on the Fleet," which earns him the Navy Cross.

1948

EXECUTIVE ORDER 9801 LEADS TO THE DESEGREGATION OF AMERICAN ARMED FORCES

In response to increased violence and intimidation after the Brown v. Board of Education ruling, the bill passed Congress and was signed into law. Meant to ensure equal voting rights to African Americans, it had limited impact, but paved the way for more effective legislation.

1954

THE BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION CASE IS DECIDED, PARTIALLY OVERTURNING THE DECISION OF PLESSY V. FERGUSON

Thurgood Marshall, NAACP chief counsel, argued for the plaintiffs in the landmark case. The decision declared segregation in schools unconstitutional.

1955

ROSA PARKS IS ARRESTED FOR "CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE" IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA FOR REFUSING TO GIVE UP HER SEAT TO A WHITE BUS RIDER

This defiant act made Rosa Parks a symbol of the Civil Rights movement and inspired others to action.

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1959

THE LEMON GROVE CASE, IS THE US'S FIRST SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL DESEGREGATION CASE

The incident occurred in 1930 and 1931 in Lemon Grove in San Diego's East County, where the local school board attempted to build a separate school for children of Mexican heritage. On March 30, 1931, the Superior Court of San Diego County ruled that the local school board's attempt to segregate 75 Mexican and Mexican American elementary school children was a violation of California state laws because ethnic Mexicans were considered White under the state's Education Code.

1963

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S "I HAVE A DREAM" SPEECH IS DELIVERED TO A CROWD OF MORE THAN 250,000

Made during the March on Washington on August 28, 1963, King's iconic speech remains one of the largest demonstrations ever held in Washington, D.C.

1964

CIVIL RIGHTS ACT IS SIGNED INTO LAW

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, followed other, less impactful legislation and prohibits discrimination of all kinds based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin.

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THURGOOD MARSHALL BECOMES THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

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1968

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. IS ASSASSINATED AT THE LORRAINE MOTEL IN MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. NOW THE SITE OF THE NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

Following the attack by Alabama state and county law enforcement on peaceful demonstrators, President Johnson called for legislation to protect voting rights. This Act, which has been amended several times to maintain these provisions and expand their coverage, made race-based restrictions on registration and voting illegal.

1969

SENATOR BARACK OBAMA BECOMES THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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2000

AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY IS 163,276 (5.3%) OUT OF A TOTAL COUNTY POPULATION OF 3,086,913

The 2000 Census reported that the African American population in San Diego County was 163,276, or 5.3% of the total county population.