



**BAINBRIDGE ISLAND
MUSEUM OF ART**

Weaving Histories
Exhibition Interpretive Panels
February 2018

Panels include:
Kitsap County Black History
Karen's Dream
African Tribal Art

KITSAP COUNTY BLACK HISTORY

Weaving Histories is a display of three distinct collections, 1) Tribal Art and Artifacts, 2) Karen Vargas' ancestors from Virginia (late 1800s through 1940s), and 3) Kitsap County's own African American History. Each region of the United States has its own diverse stories of population, growth, and migration. Washington State's own history is interesting including early free (non-slave blacks) and later new populations engaged in the military in many capacities. Specifically, Kitsap County was a magnet for many seeking employments in the military and the shipyards.

The Kitsap County Black Historical Society has dozens of archival bins filled with stories, newspaper clippings, photographs, personal letters, and documents of achievement. These include pivotal histories of early pioneers, urban resettlement (such as the Sinclair Park Project), notable

achievements of individuals in political and civil life, as well as stories of strife and pain such as a cross-burning in Poulsbo.

On display is a photograph of a large convention of the Colored Women's Association, Loxie Eagans (major civic figure in Kitsap County), 1951 diplomas from Olympic College, earned by Marie and Ellwood Greer (founding members of the local chapter NAACP, and Mrs. Greer founded the WYCA and Domestic Violence Shelter in Kitsap County).

Included are photographs of John Henry "Dick Turpin" (the first Black Chief Petty Officer in the US Navy), Women Riveters during WWI, Al Colvin (Tuskegee Airman in WWII), and even a playbill of a Quincy Jones celebration in Seattle. Quincy Jones lived in the Sinclair Park Project which was created through 'eminent domain' to re-locate Black citizens from downtown Bremerton.

This exhibit is the tip of the iceberg of the available collections and untold stories. We collectively seek to expand these archives and enhance our understanding of the rich contributions of Black citizens—past and current – in Kitsap County. Please join us in expanding our knowledge.

KAREN'S DREAM

Karen Vargas recalls a dream from 2007—the meaning of her dream was not revealed to her for several more years. In her dream, she is standing amidst a pile of rubble. There is destruction all around her. Karen does not know where she is, or how she arrived there.

She sees a doorway and makes her way towards it. She opens a large door leading to a stone staircase. The stairs descend into darkness, but she is compelled to find her way. She follows the stairs downward and slowly a glimmer of light appears. She follows the light towards the bottom and discovers an illuminated blue pool. There are images swirling in the water. Karen looks closer and sees what she thinks are portraits. She cannot make out any faces... suddenly she wakes up.

In 2014, Karen's Aunt passed away. She went back to Virginia to spend time with her family. While helping to make funeral arrangements—all the details of who to notify, and what food to prepare—she reclined by the fireplace.

She noticed a large old photo album. She learned that these were family photographs—including old tintypes dating back to the late 1800s. This collection of photographs had been salvaged from a house fire, and many were damaged beyond repair. But Karen wondered if any could be salvaged.

She had a friend who worked for the Virginia Historical Society, so she took the portraits there for consultation. A few months later they contacted Karen and said they were able to save over one hundred of the images. This started Karen on a personal journey to research and document her family's "Hidden History."

In 2015, Karen Vargas' father died in Norwich, Connecticut. Karen spent that summer with her mother, grieving. She began to wonder more about her family's history as Black Americans, and in particular how and why her father's side of the family had migrated north. She spent the next few months in the local library in Norwich, pouring over diverse civic, census, and courthouse records.

After several months (and with her family in the Northwest wondering when she might ever come home), she was approached in the library by a gentleman. He introduced himself as the local historian and they began chatting about family genealogies. After he discovered their mutual histories in the Pacific Northwest, he strongly urged her to inquire about the Certificate Program in Genealogy and Family Studies at the University of Washington. After a close friend was sent to retrieve Karen, she returned to find letters of invitation to this program. Karen did enroll in the

program and has since completed her own Certificate in Genealogy and Family Studies.

In addition to her own family's "Hidden History," Karen Vargas along with many others is dedicated to researching and preserving Black History within Kitsap County. Many efforts, including those of the Black Historical Society of Kitsap County are ever more devoted to these critical legacies.

AFRICAN TRIBAL ART & ARTIFACTS

The twenty sculptures on view are on loan from a regional couple. They traveled extensively around the world collecting art and objects with specific cultural legacies. These objects have ended up on display through conversations about “Healing Histories”—an effort to learn more about the tribal roots of local African Americans.

BIMA is displaying these as part of *Weaving Histories* and to help generate interest and support in the Marvin Williams Center in Bremerton. This new multi-cultural heritage, community, and vocational center is opening the Living Arts Cultural Heritage Center this coming spring.

This exhibition aims to inspire interest in multi-cultural histories and cross-cultural exchange. We encourage those with collections or other resources

to join the efforts of the Marvin Williams Center, and to enhance our region's multi-cultural efforts.

We thank the Collectors who have lent these objects, and Dave Bond (BIMA volunteer) who has researched these sculptures with us. We invite viewers to help confirm or revise information about these pieces as part of this educational journey.