

Howard Point-An Olympia Black History Landmark

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Alexander and Rebecca (Groundage) Howard emigrated from Massachusetts to Olympia in the late 1850s, just a few years after the town's founding. The Howards were among the earliest Black residents of Olympia and Washington Territory.

Shortly after their arrival they took over management of the Pacific House Hotel, built in early 1854 at Capitol Way and State Avenue. Under Rebecca's leadership, the Pacific House (and later Restaurant) achieved acclaim as a fine, well-run establishment comparable with restaurants and hotels in San Francisco. President Hayes visited Pacific House and spoke from the balcony in 1880.

Image: Ad for Pacific House and Restaurant, May 16, 1860, *Pioneer & Democrat Newspaper* or *Pacific Coast Business Directory* 1867.

Caption for Pacific House Image:

In its heyday, the Pacific House served as the informal headquarters of the Republican Party during legislative sessions. Rebecca's reputation as a successful, no-nonsense businesswoman commanded respect and empowered her to challenge anyone, even legislators, who dared call her "Aunt Becky" without her permission. [Pacific House, 1902. WSHS C2015.0.88.]

As their business blossomed, the Howards purchased the northern half of the Calvin Hale land claim along East Bay, including the point of shoreline that locals commonly called "Howard Point" into the 1900s.

The Howards' adopted Frank, the son of Native American Julia Pat-Ke-Nim and Hudson's Bay settler Thomas Glasgow, later became a businessman in his own right with interests in Olympia, Seattle and on the east coast. He married Lillian Howard in 1881 and they helped manage the Pacific House for a time.

Caption for Frank and Lillian images: Frank Howard Image from the *Olympia Tribune*, 1891 and Lillian Howard Image courtesy of the Howard Family.

The Howards continued to invest in real estate and eventually retired to their farm on Howard Point after accumulating a modest fortune. Rebecca passed away in 1881; Alexander in 1890. The land was later sold.

Over time, the place name “Howard Point,” associated with their property, fell out of common use. In 2017 community history supporters petitioned the US Board of Geographic Names to designate Howard Point as an official place name, approved in late 2019. Howard Point is one of very few place names in Washington named in honor of early Black pioneers.

Caption: Map showing Howard Point from Whitham and Page’s Map of Olympia and Surroundings, 1890, Washington State Archives.

Sources :

Adapted from Blackpast entry for Rebecca Howard
<https://www.blackpast.org/africanamerican-history/howard-rebecca-groundage-1827-1881/>

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Marjorie Queen, “The Probate Records of Mrs. Rebecca H. Howard 1862-1883,” privately published.

“Rebecca Howard died last Sunday,” *Washington Standard*, July 15, 1881, p 2.

Washington Standard, October 15, 1880, pg. 6

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