



***Evangelist Marteal Perry:
Community Builder and Founder of Santa Rosa's Juneteenth Celebration***

To many, she was known as Mother Perry. Born Evangelist Marteal Perry, she was a dedicated, passionate leader and staple in the community. She focused on teaching the community about the significance of Juneteenth, brought people and groups together, supported and raised kids in the community, and built community.

Originally from Alto, Texas, Mrs. Perry migrated to San Francisco and then bought property in Sonoma County. She was the founder of Santa Rosa's Juneteenth celebration, which honors the abolition of slavery in 1865, when slaves in Galveston, Texas were finally freed. When she had arrived in Santa Rosa, there was no Juneteenth celebration. She started the event in 1954 at her residence, in which most of the attendees were white. At that time, there weren't many Black people in the area, and learning about the history of slavery and Juneteenth was not only beneficial for Black people, but for everyone else in the community. Mrs. Perry also participated in the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration that was held at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, where she was able to collaborate and connect with the other community organizers and leaders. In 1970, the event changed from the Martin Luther King Jr. celebration to the MLK Juneteenth Community Celebration. After her passing, Marteal Perry's granddaughter Sydni Locke-Davenport honors her grandmother's legacy and contributions every year in June, while also participating in the MLK Juneteenth celebration that is now ran by Nancy Rogers.

Not only was she involved in the Juneteenth celebration, she was an evangelist and woman of faith. She used her vision to create the Prayer Chapel Outreach Mission Church in south west Santa Rosa in 1953. At the Chapel, there is a message from Mrs. Perry that she had instilled in her six children and the children she helped raise. The message reads, "A child brought up in church is very seldom brought up in court." Ms. Locke-Davenport believes that would be Mrs. Perry's message to the Black community today. What is happening today is no worse than what Mrs. Perry herself had experienced. Her granddaughter says that she would remind her that, "God guides you. Put your trust in Jesus and everything would end up alright."

Along with being a religious woman, she provided foster care for those who had been neglected and mentally ill, and was an advocate for child welfare, clean water and other social issues. Mrs. Perry was also a member of the Santa Rosa – Sonoma County Chapter of the NAACP and a founding member of the Head Start Program in Santa Rosa. She also built the first pool for the Black community on her property, which resulted in protests from the Ku Klux Klan. Mrs. Perry bore the physical and emotional scars of racism, hatred and white supremacy, yet she continued to be a leader and community builder.



Through her selfless actions and contributions, Santa Rosa has been grateful to have known and learned from Mrs. Perry. Her wisdom and work will continue to be passed down by her family and also those in the community who have been inspired by her legacy. Now more than ever, the Black community is learning to stand together and advocate long-lasting changes in their communities. The importance of Juneteenth, community building and community involvement shows how the actions of Evangelist Marteel Perry have so much significance in Santa Rosa, while also addressing the social injustices that are still occurring today.

References:

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