



## DOUGLAS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

TIM FREEMAN

CHRIS BOICE

TOM KRESS

---

Douglas County Courthouse, Room 217  
1036 SE Douglas Avenue, Roseburg, Oregon 97470

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
December 2, 2022

### **New Exhibit Honoring Letitia Carson Opens December 9**

(Douglas County, Ore.) Douglas County Commissioners Tim Freeman, Chris Boice and Tom Kress, along with the Douglas County Museum staff are pleased to announce that they have the honor of unveiling, for the first time, a new traveling exhibit from [The Letitia Carson Legacy Project](#) and [Oregon Black Pioneers](#) honoring the life of one of Oregon's first African American pioneers on Friday, December 9, 2022, at the Douglas County Museum of History and Natural History, located at 123 Museum Drive in Roseburg, Oregon. The new exhibit, which is on loan to the Douglas County Museum, includes photographs, historic maps, newspaper articles, published works, and other documentary evidence about Letitia Carson, her family and the Letitia Carson Legacy Project. The public is invited to join the Commissioners, museum staff and volunteers on Friday, December 9, 2022, from 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm at Douglas County Museum for a special reception to debut the new exhibit detailing Letitia Carson's life and legacy.\* The traveling exhibit will be on display at the Douglas County Museum through January 2023.

***“It is our honor to be the first museum to unveil this amazing exhibit and celebrate the life and legacy of Oregon pioneer Letitia Carson. We are equally honored that Letitia chose to call Douglas County her home over one hundred and sixty years ago,”*** commented Commissioner Tom Kress, liaison Commissioner to the Douglas County Museum.

Letitia Carson was a Black Oregon homesteader, farmer and matriarch living in the time of Oregon's exclusion laws. She came to Oregon in 1845 with a white man, David Carson, with whom she would have two children. After David's death in 1852, the Carson land, cattle and belongings were sold by a neighbor who claimed she could not own land because of the whites-only provision of the 1850 Oregon Donation Land Claim Act. In two unprecedented court cases (1855 & 1856), Letitia successfully sued for compensation. A short time after settlement of the lawsuits, Letitia and her children moved to Douglas County, Oregon. For several years she reportedly lived in the upper Cow Creek Valley with the Hardy Elliff family, for whom she worked. She also served as a midwife for the community. On June 17, 1863, Letitia submitted a land claim for 160 acres along South Myrtle Creek, roughly 13 miles northeast of Myrtle Creek in Douglas County, Oregon. On October 1, 1869, Letitia's land claim near Myrtle Creek was certified by President Grant, making her the first black woman in Oregon to successfully secure a land claim. She lived out the rest of her days as a homesteader raising cattle, and pigs, and tending to her orchard of fruit trees. In 1888, she was laid to rest in The Stephens Cemetery, just a few miles from her homestead property.

***“We are so proud to make available this new traveling exhibit about Letitia Carson. Communities around Oregon will be inspired by her story and her legacy,”*** said Zachary Stocks, Executive Director Oregon Black Pioneers. ***“We especially thank Oregon State University's Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems and The Ford Family Foundation for sponsoring this important exhibit and opening event.”***

Oregon Black Pioneers is Oregon's only historical society dedicated to preserving and presenting the experiences of African Americans statewide. Since 1993, the organization has illuminated the seldom-told history of people of African descent in Oregon. Inspired by the tenacity of Black Oregonians who have faced discrimination and hardship to make a life for themselves here over the past 400 years, Oregon Black Pioneers honors their sacrifices by remembering their stories and by sharing them with the public. Oregon Black Pioneers' vision is to become the preeminent resource for the study of Oregon's African American history and culture. Special thanks to [OSU Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems](#) and [The Ford Family Foundation](#) for sponsoring this exhibit. The Letitia Carson Legacy Project is a

collaboration between Oregon State University, Oregon Black Pioneers, Black Oregon Land Trust, and Linn-Benton Branch NAACP and Museum. For more information about Oregon Black Pioneers log onto <https://oregonblackpioneers.org/>

Being at the heart of a natural resource-based economy, the [Douglas County Museum of History & Natural History](#) pays homage to the mining, fishing, farming and timber industries in Douglas County. Open to visitors for over 50 years, the Museum boasts Oregon's largest natural history collection with more than 7,500 preserved items that help tell the ancient and contemporary stories of the Umpqua River Valley. It showcases the wonderful ecological diversity of our county, as it traverses an amazingly wide range of elevations, environments, vegetation and creatures from the snowcapped peaks of Mt. Thielsen in the Cascade Mountain Range, through the Umpqua Valley – which is defined by the watershed basin of the Umpqua River, then over the Coastal Mountain Range to the crashing surf of the Pacific Ocean in Winchester Bay. The Museum also features cultural and period relics from a time when Native Americans inhabited the mountains, streams and shores of the County. Home to humans for more than 10,000 years, the valley is named for the Umpqua Tribe that still call this area home. It then chronicles the journey of the first non-native explorers, pioneers and settlers that came to our area as fur trappers, missionaries, prospectors, loggers, farmers and fishermen.

The [Douglas County Museum of History & Natural History](#) is located at 123 Museum Drive in Roseburg, Oregon (adjacent to I-5 off Exit 123 and the Douglas County Fairgrounds). It is open Tuesday through Saturday 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. It can take 1-3 hours to tour the museum depending on your pace. The Lavola Bakken Research Library is open Tuesday through Saturday 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm. Admission is free for members, ages 0-4 are free, students 5-17 are \$2.00, adults are \$8.00, seniors and veterans are \$5.00. The "Museum Mercantile," our Museum gift shop, offers the area's leading source of books on Douglas County's natural and cultural history, as well as a wide range of Oregon souvenirs and other great gift items including educational and historic toys. For more information or to volunteer at our Douglas County Museum of History & Natural History check out our website at <https://umpquavalleymuseums.org/> or call the Douglas County Museum at (541) 957-7007.

###

**Media Contact:** [Tamara Howell](#), Douglas County Emergency Communications & Community Engagement Specialist, Douglas County Public Affairs Office | Office: (541) 957-4896 | Cell: (541) 670-2804 | Email: [tjhowell@co.douglas.or.us](mailto:tjhowell@co.douglas.or.us)

*\* The special debut reception is free to the public and will take place in the Museum conference room. Attendees who want to tour the rest of the Douglas County Museum are asked to pay an admission fee (unless you are a museum member).*