

Diamonds in Iowa: Blacks, Baseball, and Buxton

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Between the years 1900 and 1926 there was, in the unlikely state of Iowa, a mining town called Buxton where equality and opportunity for Negroes was possible and even encouraged. During a time and in a region where ethnic diversity was a rarity and integration an uncommon practice, Buxton stands out as a singular example of a relatively prosperous community bridging cultural and racial differences.

In Buxton, where the population reached 9,500 during its zenith, black and white coal miners worked side-by-side in the Consolidated Coal Company mines. This company, known for its progressiveness and use of up-to-date technology, provided other amenities above the standard for miners. This centrally planned town with permanent homes, hotel, many shops, carnival ground, parks and an artificial lake was unique. It also included YMCAs. A three-story YMCA used by the blacks featured a fine library reading room, a gymnasium with extensive athletic and gymnasium equipment, showers and lockers, an opera stage and auditorium. A smaller YMCA, built for boys, included tennis courts and a swimming pool in addition to the gymnasium.

The YMCA trained boys and men in sports and sponsored basketball and baseball teams. These teams played surrounding towns and the highly skilled Buxton Wonders Baseball team played Omaha, Kansas City, and Minneapolis teams. Initially an all-black team, it eventually became integrated. Education, culture and sports played an important role in making Buxton what one Buxton resident nostalgically called “Black man’s utopia in Iowa.”