

Do You Know the Way to Russell City?

By Edwin Okong’o
Staff Writer

Unlike the Titanic, it is unlikely that someone will make a movie about the fate of Russell City, a historic city for Bay Area blues enthusiasts.

In fact, some of the people who were at the Hayward-Russell City Blues Festival last weekend knew little or nothing about the lost city that they have been celebrating for the past five years.

“Please don’t ask me about it,” said Theresa Roberts with a smile, almost embarrassed for failing to know.

Roberts and her daughter, Tiana, were at the festival for their second consecutive year. Although she has lived in Hayward since 1971, the Arkansas-born mother had no idea where Russell City was. She did not

even know that the city does not exist anymore.

“I have heard every musician on stage mention the city but I never bothered to ask,” said Roberts.

Another blues lover, Erin Griffin, explained that Russell City was near San Lorenzo. After a severe earthquake, (she could not remember the exact year) the city “fell down.” It later incorporated into Hayward, according to Griffin.

She was wrong. Apart from the incorporation, the rest of Griffin’s story did not correlate with any of the information gathered from reliable sources. There was no earthquake mentioned and the city did not fall.

“That is just what I hear,” Griffin said in her own defense. “I am from the East Coast and

have only lived in Oakland for a year.”

Griffin then turned to her best friend’s father, Ron Miller, for help. He was just returning from the vending area of the festival.

“I went there once when I was a kid but I barely remember anything,” Miller said.

However, Miller knew where the city stood before it disappeared. Some displaced residents of the city moved to the Kelly Hill area of Hayward where he lived.

Unlike Roberts and others, when Frank Faté heard Russell City mentioned several times at the festival three years ago, he researched its history. However, he did not go beyond knowing the location.

“I am having a grand time and the little I know is enough for me,” said Faté.

Some of the festival’s performers who at one time performed in Russell city did not know much about the city either.

“The club was just one of many hole-in-the-wall places we played back in the days,” said Fillmore Slim, a legendary San Francisco blues artist.

Slim went on to explain that he lived in “the real city” (San Francisco) and came to Russell City occasionally to perform. It was a little country farming town with unpaved roads, he recalled.

“There were pigs, cows, cotton...” said Slim.

“There was no cotton,” fellow musician Bobbie Webb interrupted, and they both laughed.



B Street Blues: Hundreds of blues fans gathered on the front lawn of city hall to enjoy an afternoon concert by legendary blues artists. **Photos/** Marie Reyes



Singin’ the blues: Beverly Stoval mesmerizes the crowd with her sultry voice and lyrics at the Hayward/Russell City Blues festival.

“I was angry. They took away my roots,” said Muniz. “As a Native American, it was like being robbed a second time,” she added.

Festival performer Billy Dunn remembered when he played with Big Mama Thornton at the Russell City Country Club. Russell City was a rough place where even the police were scared to go, Dunn said. There were regular shootouts in the area, but the bouncers at the club where he played were tough, he said.

“I don’t miss the city,” said Dunn.

Fred Perazzo, 73, also played at the Russell City Country Club with L.C and A.C, the stage names of the Robinson brothers, Leonard and Arthur, who were regulars at the club.

The city was located west of Interstate 880 in the Winton Avenue area across the railway tracks near Southland Mall, according to Perazzo.

“I was sorry to see Russell City go,” said Perazzo.

Many renowned blues artists such as Big Joe Turner and Big Mama Thornton played blues in the city during the early stages of their music careers, according to Ronnie Stewart, the Executive Director of the Bay Area Blues Society. In 1963, Russell City was torn down to give way for commercial development and incorporated with Hayward, Stewart said.

Five years ago, the Bay Area Blues Society launched the Hayward-Russell City Blues Festival to celebrate the history of Russell City.

Senate Blocks Gay Marriage Amendment

By Jim Puzanghera
Knight Ridder

President Bush and supporters of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage suffered an embarrassing defeat Wednesday when the proposal failed to get even a simple majority in the Republican-controlled Senate.

The amendment lost with 50 senators voting to block it and 48 voting to advance it on a procedural vote, leaving backers 19 votes shy of the two-thirds majority they eventually would need to pass a constitutional amendment saying marriage can be only between one man and one woman.

“The president and the Republican leadership’s attempt

to divide the country backfired and instead it divided the Republican Party,” said Cheryl Jacques, the president of Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights organization that opposed the amendment.

Six Republicans bucked their party leadership and voted against the measure. Three Democrats sided with Republicans on the procedural vote, which needed the support of 60 senators to bring the amendment to a full Senate vote.

Supporters of the amendment said they weren’t embarrassed, proclaiming Wednesday’s vote a positive first step. They said they were happy to highlight the gay marriage issue during more than three days of debate.

“The battle has just begun,” said Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., the main sponsor of the amendment.

Conservative activists said they would continue to press the issue and that Wednesday’s vote showed them which senators they needed to try to defeat in November elections.

“There ought to be votes until the desire of the American people has been realized on this,” said Gary Bauer, the president of the conservative group American Values, citing national polls that show a large majority of Americans oppose marriage for gays and lesbians.

Bush said he was “deeply disappointed” by the vote.

“Activist judges and local

officials in some parts of the country are not letting up in their efforts to redefine marriage for the rest of America and neither should defenders of traditional marriage flag in their efforts,” Bush said in a written statement. He urged the House of Representatives to approve the amendment, which it will consider in September.

But the Republican decision to focus on gay marriage could harm the party with moderate voters this November and put some moderate members of Congress in an awkward situation, said Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, a political analyst at the University of Southern California.

“It was not a success on any

level for the president,” she said. After a Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling last year that legalized gay marriage and with San Francisco issuing same-sex marriage licenses, Bush in February called for a constitutional amendment banning such unions. He devoted his weekly radio address Saturday to the issue.

Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., the Democratic presidential candidate, and his running mate, North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, oppose gay marriage but don’t believe a constitutional amendment is necessary. They didn’t cast a procedural vote on Wednesday.

Democrats this week charged that Bush and Senate

Republicans were deflecting attention from ignoring more important issues, such as terrorism and U.S. intelligence failures, by focusing on gay marriage.

“This is merely a political issue,” Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., said Wednesday, noting that no federal court has ruled in favor of same-sex marriages. “It’s a waste of our time.”

But Republican supporters said “activist judges” were preparing to strike down the federal Defense of Marriage Act, a 1996 law signed by President Clinton that prohibits same-sex marriages. They said that waiting until federal courts act would be too late.

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Faculty Dancers Bare All

By Jodee Schwan
Staff Writer

After three years in the works, the “Undressed Project” was finally unveiled.

The Jon Sims Center for the Arts in San Francisco has been home to this emerging project for the past three years, while Cal State Hayward dance lecturer Eric Kupers and his cast explored interpretive dance — and did so completely nude last weekend.

“Night Marsh” began with an icebreaker performance by Kupers, co-producer and co-director of the Dandelion Dancetheater. He is the first to reveal himself to the audience. After Kuper has been dancing on stage a while, another cast member comes on, fully dressed, and points out all the flaws Kupers has and why he could never be a real dancer. Then all the dancers come on stage without a care about their bodies. The play begins.

At the beginning, it’s a bit uncomfortable watching dancers who are stark naked.

But after ten minutes or so, the message of the dance permeates through the nudity. The dancers are neither uncomfortable nor embarrassed by their bodies and therefore neither is the audience. There were dancers of many shapes, sizes, proportions and races. One man performed with a prosthetic leg.

Why the performance was called “Night Marsh” was clear. The audience was shown a film of a woman walking through the forest at night. She enters a cellar in the middle of this forest, and the play begins. It is understood that this is her first time here and she is not comfortable with her own body, let alone the nude bodies of those around her.

As the dance goes on and

more people appear on stage, their roles in the underground cellar are revealed to the audience. The woman who is new to the cellar watches the others dance and interact with each other and with this she becomes more and more comfortable until she finally joins in the dancing.

And in their heads, so does the audience.

Sims Theatre is a place where gay, lesbian and transgender individuals can perform and display their art, poetry and paintings. The center hosts five programs

where people can come and express their talents or get help developing it.

“Night Marsh” is held in studio three, where 85 people sit in a cramped, warm space to watch the performers. There almost appears to be no set. It is not fancy, but it’s the play you’re supposed to focus on anyway.

A sliding entrance fee of \$10-\$15 was posted, but no one would have been turned down for lack of money. The performances ran through Saturday.



High Art: Dancers in flight.

Photo/ Courtesy