

## Emancipation Dances

Starting in 1920, the Linebarger Brothers, who opened the Lake Bella Vista summer resort in 1917, offered an annual "Emancipation Dance" for the resort's Black employees, plus those who came with their white employers to spend the summer, and those living in nearby communities. White spectators were invited to purchase a seat to watch and learn all the latest dances.

The following article, reprinted from the July 30, 1935, issue of the Linebargers' newspaper, the Bella Vista Breezes, announces the 15th annual dance:

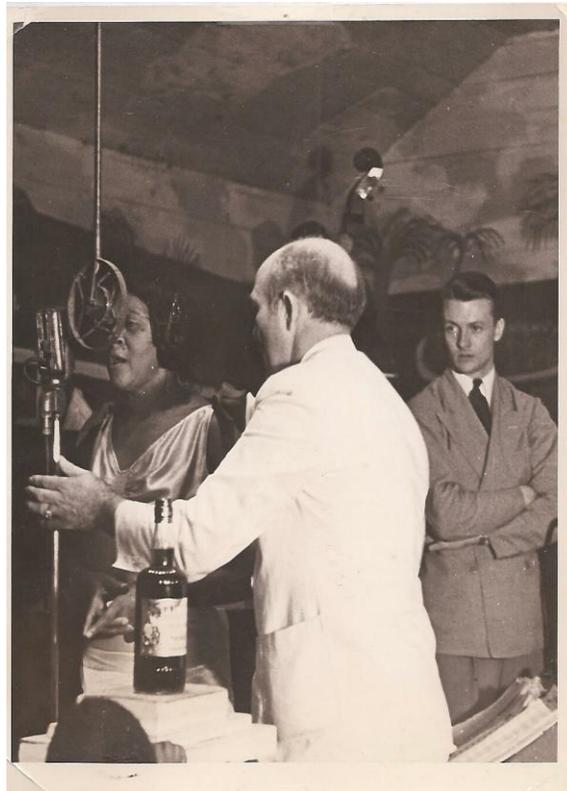
*"Beginning at midnight, August 4th, the colored employees from one end of the Bella Vista resort to the other will gather at the Pavilion for their annual emancipation dance which has been a custom of the resort for the past fifteen years. The chauffeurs and maids, and numerous friends, will have the opportunity of doing their fancy steps to the hot tunes of Ted Harris and his Rhythm Aces. The "black and tan" program will feature a grand march, "Watermelon Time," a prize waltz, "Harmonizing Waiters," and prizes will be given for the best dressed couple and the best buck and wing sour foot dance. The colored sponsors of the dance include T.W. Behn, Zollie Jackson, Melbourne Dale, P. M. Mitchel and Walter (Footh) Simpson. Seating capacity for 500 spectators will be provided and a nominal charge of 25 cents will admit the white folks who enjoy watching the dance....The colored dance will follow the usual Saturday night dance at Wonderland....Be ye colored or white, there'll be "gobs" of fun at Bella Vista next Saturday night."*

By 1940, the announcement of the annual dance referred to "negro" (not capitalized) rather than "colored." The July 30, 1940, edition of the Linebargers' Bella Vista Breezes announced the Emancipation Ball, saying, *"Held primarily for the faithful negro employees of resort cottage owners, the annual Emancipation Dance has grown in magnitude each year, and now attracts negro dancers from Fayetteville, Fort Smith, Joplin, Tulsa and other cities, both near and far. This year's big affair will be the 21st of an unbroken series....This week's session will probably draw a hot of splendid negro dancers whose jitterbugging antics will be worth coming miles to see."*

Interestingly enough, the announcement in the July 28, 1942, issue of the Breezes, of the 22nd annual dance, once again uses the word "colored": *"This has become one of the special features given each year at the resort for the colored servants,*

*chauffeurs, maids and other employees who come from far and near every year. The colored folks who live in the neighboring communities always participate."*

According to the website, <http://racereactions.about.com/>, the term "colored" never completely exited American society, with the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) still using the term in its name. The more modern term is "people of color," but the website says it should not be shortened to "colored," because that goes back to an era of painful exclusion when a number of facilities were labeled for "colored" or "white." Today, people of color have different preferences, with some preferring "Black," and others preferring "African-American" or the country of their homeland, such as "Haitian-American."



**C.A. Linebarger Sr. helps the singer who was entertaining at that night's Emancipation Dance get ready for her next number.**



The Dance Pavilion building was decorated especially for the annual “Emancipation Day” midnight dances.

Some correspondence for the black help in Linberger's Bella Vista, 1938

## 20th Annual Emancipation Dance

Saturday Midnight, August 4th  
*Lake Pavilion*

**Bella Vista Colored Employees**  
and their Friends, Chauffeurs and Maids

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**Black and Tan Program Begins at 12 Midnight**

Featuring  
**Jitter Bugs**

GRAND MARCH—Watermelon Time  
PRIZE WALTZ—Harmonizing Waiters  
Buck and Wing Sour Foot Dance  
Best Dressed Couple Prize

CONTINUOUS PROGRAMME

Screaming ❖ Yelping ❖ Crooners

Hundreds of White Spectators Attend and Are Cordially Invited  
500 SEATS ARE PROVIDED AT 25c EACH

## Bella Vista, Arkansas

COLORED SPONSORS—Robert Cooper, Olaf Carr and Simon Rivers.

This poster advertises the 20th annual Emancipation Dance which was held on August 4, 1940.

**Bella Vista Colored Employes  
and their Friends—Chauffeurs and Maids**

**Black and Tan Program Begins at 12  
Midnight Featuring**

GRAND MARCH—Watermelon Time.  
PRIZE WALTZ—Harmonizing Waiters.

Buck and Wing Sour Foot Dance  
Best Dressed Couple Prize

**Screaming --- Yelping --- Crooners**

HUNDREDS OF WHITE SPECTATORS ATTEND AND ARE CORDIALLY INVITED.  
500 SEATS ARE PROVIDED AT 25c EACH

**Bella Vista, Arkansas**

COLORED SPONSORS—Robert Cooper, Robert Bray, James Sheppard and Joy Moore.

This poster, year unknown, advertises the Grand March as part of the Emancipation Dance evening.