

New Hampshire's First Negro Judge Lives in Last Frontier

Ivorey Cobb Favors Colebrook's Rugged Life

By JOHN B. VALUE

COLEBROOK, N.H.—Ivorey Cobb lives in this diminutive town which was confirmed last week as a special municipal court judge for the state of New Hampshire.

It is a minor enough position in the catalog of the bench, but Cobb is a Negro and now he is the state's first Negro judge.

A retired Army major, Cobb has lived here since 1962 with his wife Elsie and his daughters Gretel, 16, and Louise, 10. Marilyn, 20, is away at college.

Well north of the White Mountains, Colebrook is sometimes called "The Last Frontier" by those who dwell or visit it. And Cobb feels it is this frontier atmosphere in part that brought about his appointment.

Cradled on the Connecticut River near the Coos Flats, resting between favoring mountains, Colebrook is only seven miles from the Canadian border. Across the river is Vermont and north and east piney Maine.

"This is sort of a frontier area where people share common burdens," Cobb said last week. "It was built by pioneers, the kind of people who really built this country. Some semblance remains."

As a judge in a such a district, Cobb will get a certain number of frontier cases—aching, killing too many deer, taking too many fish and so on like—but he will also

handle the kinds of cases that come before judges in every small town in the nation.

Outside of the matter of race, the importance of Cobb's appointment depends on how you look at it.

There isn't too much political about the appointment. Cobb was named by a Democratic governor and confirmed by an Executive Council preponderantly Republican. His politics aren't generally known.

In New Hampshire, it can be said, ability is considered, and the community of the law generally passes things around pretty equally.

In New Hampshire presently the Municipal Court (there is one for each community of 2000 or more) is the state's lowest.

But it is in this low court that most citizens get their only exposure to the bench and here the judge's learning and prudence have a direct and personal importance.

State statutes now say a municipal court judge, as far as training goes, must be "a learned, able and discreet person." Because of this, many of the more than 100 municipal court judges are not lawyers.

Cobb, however, has legal training. He graduated from Suffolk University Law School in 1960 and has been admitted to practice before numbers of courts.

In July, New Hampshire changes from a municipal to a district court system and then Cobb's new office may carry more weight as well as broken precedence.

As a Negro and as a soldier, Cobb has established many firsts. He served when the Army was being integrated, and, as an officer, took over many commands always proudly held by a white.

Cobb tells the story about his first experience with integration. In Korea, a white sergeant was transferred into his all Negro transportation unit. There was some uneasiness at first, he said, because the unit was highly trained and professional.

But, said Cobb, "after two weeks he didn't seem any different from anybody else."

Why pick Colebrook to settle? Cobb spent 12 of his 20 years in the Army overseas.

"I found many places I thought were the most beautiful places in the world. Places where I would like to retire," he said.

"Colebrook comes closest to being a composite of all those places. It gives you the outdoor life, the change of the seasons. It's really a wonderful area."

He discovered Colebrook when he was stationed at Fort Devens and touring New England with his family on his time off.

If individuals are prejudiced against the Cobbs here, they're taciturn about it. The only ill feeling, he said, has come through "hearsay."

So the Cobbs have settled in a rambling wooden house next to Colebrook Academy, have

settled and continue to make firsts.

But there's one first Ivorey Cobb didn't make. Many like him have come to the North

Country, then found themselves too busy is to take time for much hunting and fishing.

"Next year," said Ivorey Cobb.



COBBS OF COLEBROOK—Louise Minerva, 10; Gretel Anne, 16; Ivorey and Elsie. Marilyn, 20, is away at college.