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 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 (Gretchen, 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, nestled between favoring counties, 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 pioneer, the kind of people who built this country. Some idiosyncrasy remains.”

As a judge in such a district, Cobb will get a certain number of frontier cases—sleeping, as far as the judge is concerned, the kind of people who will visit this country. Some idiosyncrasy remains.”

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

The importance of Cobb's case 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 by an Executive Council.

In New Hampshire, the Community 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 the judge's learning and prudence have a direct and personal importance.

State statutes now say a municipal court judge, as far as training, must be a learned, able and discreet person. Because of this, Cobb's court judges are not lawyers.

As a Negro and as a soldier, Cobb has established many marks. He served when the Army was being integrated, and, as an officer, took every command always previously held by whites.

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 go to? Cobb spent 12 of his 22 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 a Fort Devens and touring New England with his family on his time off.

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

So the Cobbs have settled in a rambling wooden house next to Colebrook Academy, have settled and continue to make friends.

But there's one first Ivorey Cobb didn't make. Many like him have come to the North Country, then found themselves too busy 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.