

Compiled by

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with the help of several

Friends of Oak Hill Cemetery

There may be quotes and terms used in some of the articles that used today, may make some people uncomfortable, but we are trying to maintain some of the historic integrity and have chosen not to edit these when possible.

Before we begin:

Welcome to Oak Hill Cemetery, and thank you for your interest in the history of the cemetery. The number of burials and the walking distance makes it impossible to include the story of all buried at Oak Hill, but we hope we have selected a cross section that reflects the community. If you have additional information, or a special story about your family please share it with others.

Why tour a cemetery? We prefer to remember the contributions that were made while people are living, but as many of the pioneers of the community have no ancestral homes, and the homes and businesses associated with them no longer exist, what better place to gather than their final resting place. Real Estate may change hands, but as long as good records are kept, your place of burial, marked or unmarked, will stand the test of time.

What we have found. Most of our information has been taken from the Obituaries and other Oak Hill Records, both printed and saved to microfiche. Until about 1880 it was of the opinion that it was the responsibility of the family to maintain the records of burials on a family lot. We have had to rely on outside sources to verify some facts and time tables.

In the earliest obituaries it was just the facts, but as time went on there was an emphasis on:

- Where you were born followed by the path you took to get to Cedar Rapids followed by who were your survivors and which family members predeceased you.
- Your Church Affiliation
- Your Occupation
- And in more recent times your membership in clubs and organizations. There is strong Masonic presence in Oak Hill Cemetery, for example, Mt. Olive lodge No. 17; Masonic Blue lodge; O.E.S.; as well as the Elks Lodge. Traditionally, if you were new in town, your church affiliation or participation in fraternal or social organization opened some doors as a way of introduction.

Unlike other obituaries, I am also noticing it appeared to be important to include the give first name of a married woman, in a time when many others disappeared as Mrs. (husband's first name) Married Name. For example Cemetery Records list Mrs. Elizabeth Blakey followed by (Mrs. John Blakey). I am curious, was this cultural custom, or a courtesy given by John Ely to give women an identity? The records also used the title Miss and Mrs. with these names. By comparison some other ethnic groups women of the time period were lost in the identity of the title Mrs. Husband's Name.

Although there were no known definitions for segregated areas within the records, we have found clusters within the cemetery and the patterns have a common theme of church affiliation and or occupations. (Many of those who had a family member who worked for the railroad or the hotels near Union Station are buried together.) In some cases we have had a difficult time identifying families to feature because for a lot of years, race did not appear on the burial records. The only means of confirmation was if a State of Iowa death certificate was included in the records, or it was indicated by funeral home record. Since the museum gallery display on Buxton Iowa was opened, we are also seeing the pattern of that common birthplace, within our clusters as well.

In the early to mid 1900's the Board of Directors of Oak Hill Cemetery determined with the trend of a smaller families and a more mobile society, that large family burial plots were not in demand and several lots chosen to be subdivided into single lots to accommodate families who preferred to choose single or double grave spaces. This was done in every block that still held open spaces. Within these subdivided areas, clusters of a common theme did appear.

A Brief History of Oak Hill Cemetery:

Territorial government for the area was established June 12, 1833 with the first State Capital at Burlington. That year the first survey was made of Jones and Western Linn County with the sale of lands advertised to take place in January of 1840. With transportation difficult at that time of year, Judge George Greene, then a school teacher near Ivanhoe, set out on a mission to have Marion Iowa designated a United States Land office rather than requiring the settlers to make the trip to Dubuque. Townships of Linn County were developed from the years 1841 through 1906.

Although the west side of the river (Kingston) may have been settled as early as 1838, the claim of William Stone on the east side of the river was jumped by Osgood Shepherd, who held possession until 1841, when he sold most of his interest in the claim to a group of men who included Judge Greene, and Nicholas Brown. In 1841 the town was laid out and named for the rapids in the river. By 1842, Greene and Brown were proprietors of the water power and construction of the first dam was begun.

By 1849, Dr. Seymour Carpenter arrived by horseback, followed in 1852 by his father Gabriel Carpenter, who purchased a large tract of land in what is now the southeast part of the city, Fifth Avenue was one boundary of the farm, which extended west to the river, including the areas where Mercy Hospital and McKinley school now reside. But there was the issue of the Village or Washington Cemetery.

It was taken for granted that no one would question the use of the land as a cemetery even if there was no legal claim to the property. Development would soon to overtake this peaceful country setting. The Higley Family had purchased the land adjoining the Carpenter property, on which this cemetery was located as part of a much larger parcel of land and arrangements were made to relocate the bodies buried there to the newly organized Oak Hill Cemetery.

First established as a for profit cemetery as the Oak Hill

Cemetery Company with Gabriel Carpenter and Freeman Smith as owners who made arrangements for the relocation of the bodies in the Washington or Village Cemetery to the new location laid out as an exact match in Blocks 1-60 of the present day Oak Hill Cemetery.

As written in History of Linn County Iowa, dated 1911 by Luther Brewer and Barthinius Wick:

The beginning of Oak Hill Cemetery dates from an ordinance of August 23, 1853. Gabriel Carpenter had purchased 300 acres of land adjoining the city. The ordinance enacted that "the proposition made by G. Carpenter in respect to ten acres of land for purposes of graveyard be filed and accepted." The legal and other difficulties in the way were surmounted and on February 22, 1854, it was resolved to quit claim the interest of the town in the present burial ground to Smith and Carpenter, at such time as they shall lay off and deed to the corporation a block of ground in the Washington Cemetery for a "potter's field" which shall contain at least three acres.* It was conditioned also that Smith and Carpenter should give bond for the careful removal of all occupants of the present burial ground before making any use of the land.

*This "potter's field" is known today as City Cemetery. Although it adjoins Oak Hill Cemetery it is maintained by the City of Cedar Rapids Parks Department, and is not part of the records of Oak Hill Cemetery.

By the fall of 1868 an announcement appeared in the Cedar Rapids Times of the incorporation of the Oak Hill Cemetery Association, a non profit organization, which expanded the property and made improvements to the existing grounds. The Directory of the Association was as follows: John Weare, George Greene, Dr. John F. Ely, Sampson Bever, N. B. Brown, William Greene Charles Weare, A. C. Churchill, and Gabriel Carpenter. Oak Hill Cemetery has remained a not for profit cemetery to this day.

At this time I would like to point out some interesting facts about the original Board of the Association as it was formed in 1868. Although the Civil War was over, two members of this board **Gabriel Carpenter and Sampson Bever arrived here from the State of Pennsylvania**. By 1700, one in 10 Philadelphians owned slaves. Slaves were used in the manufacturing sector, notably the iron works, and in shipbuilding.

Abolition debates in the Pennsylvania Assembly began in 1778, using the language of the Declaration of Independence. It is also probably not a coincidence that the discussion began after the "Lower Counties" were finally separated from Pennsylvania as the independent state of Delaware (1776). This removed perhaps three-fourths of the slaves who would have been affected by any act of the Pennsylvania Assembly.

The law for gradual emancipation in Pennsylvania passed on February 1780. But the law was no proclamation of emancipation. It was deeply conservative. The 6,000 or so Pennsylvania slaves in 1780 stayed slaves. Even those born a few days before the passage of the act had to wait 28 years before the law set them free. This allowed their masters to recoup the cost of raising them.

The abolition bill was made more restrictive during the debates over it — it originally freed daughters of slave women at 18, sons at 21. By the time it passed, it was upped to a flat 28. That meant it was possible for a Pennsylvania slave's daughter born in February 1780 to live her life in bondage, and if she had a child at 40, the child would remain a slave until 1848. There is no record of this happening, but the "emancipation" law allowed it.

The 1780 abolition law actually had more immediate impact on the free blacks than the enslaved ones. The abolition of slavery was very gradual, while the restrictive laws on free blacks were lifted at once.

Excerpts taken from Slavery in the North Douglas Harper is a historian, author, journalist and lecturer based in Lancaster, Pa. The names John Weare, Dr. John F. Ely, and Charles Weare, also appear on this original list of members of the board. Closely associated by marriage and business dealings, these men as well as Lowell and Lawson Daniels, took an active role in the administration of Oak Hill Cemetery. This family tradition continued until recently, as there had always been a member of the Ely Family on the Board of Directors of the Cemetery Association.

When The African Methodist Episcopal Church of Cedar Rapids was organized in 1871, just six years after the end of the Civil War, congregation began constructing its first permanent home on land granted by Dr. John F. and Mary (Weare) Ely.



(Dr. and Mrs. Ely were strong abolitionists).

A Baltimore Bishop helped dedicate the new structure on July 1, 1876, before 64 enrolled members. The church reincorporated under the name Bethel African Methodist Episcopal in 1931, when it began work on its second and current sanctuary.

Susan and Charles Pugh Block 10 Lot 4 SG 12 & 13



Susan E. Pugh was born into slavery in Caldwell Co. Missouri in 1860, as Susan Jones. When she was about 3 years old, she came with her parents Richard and Malvina Jones to Decatur County Iowa. The family was nearly overtaken by rebel soldiers at the Iowa line, but the Iowa home guard protected them and they crossed safely into Iowa. She received a grade school education in country school in Decatur County. By making and

selling rag rugs, and working for her board, she was able to attend high school in Osceola. Returning to Decatur county she attended three sessions of normal school and received a teachers certificate in 1878. She went to Bethany Missouri, where she taught and where she met Charles Pugh. The couple married in 1883. As a deaconess of Bethel A. M. E. church she was also a member of the Colored Federated Women's Club. One of the first women drawn for jury duty in Linn County, Mrs. Pugh believed that she was the first Negro woman on an lowa jury.

As a young man, Mr. Charles Pugh worked for a doctor in Missouri, who passed on his interest in politics to the young man. Charles would later be appointed deputy sheriff under Sheriff A. J. Allen of Decatur County. Mr. Pugh was a barber in Kansas, Missouri, and Iowa for more than 35 years. He once opened a shop of his own on Tenth Street SE, when he felt the prices at the "uptown shops" were too high. This shop drew in customers from the old packing plant where he once worked, as well officials and a "bigwig who wanted a shave in a hurry so he could catch the train".

Herman C. Howard Block 11 Lot 3 SG 8

Born in Paducah Kentucky on February 2, 1891. As resident of Cedar Rapids for 45 years, he worked as a porter at the Union Station for 15 years. Many others worked for the Railroad, and the Hotels and service industries in the downtown area (see section later in this booklet featuring others)

Charles H. Henderson Block 51 Lot 3

Charles H. Henderson who was born and reared as a slave in Alabama and who could remember the Civil War, died at his home in Cedar Rapids at the age of 103. Mr. Henderson, who was married seven times, lived in Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas before coming north. He came to Cedar Rapids from Davenport about 21 years before his death. He spent his time working at odd jobs, and caring for his small apartment building. His is one of several known Oak Hill Cemetery burials with the distinction of "Born into slavery, Died Free". (There is no marker on his burial space)

Other family members buried at Oak Hill Cemetery

Laura Henderson (wife of Charles Henderson) Block 177 SG 34

Mrs. Henderson was born March 19, 1879 in Tallassee Alabama and had been a resident of Cedar Rapids for 35 years at the time of her death in 1946. She was a member of the Christ Sanctified Holy Church and of the missionary society of that church.

George R. Collins Block 180 Lot 75

George R. "Buck" Collins became one of Coe College's greatest athletes in the early 1920's at a time when a Black man was a rarity in college football. A halfback, Mr. Collins starred on both offense and defense, winning All-state and Midwest honors. He also played on the baseball team. After he graduated from Coe in 1923, he was active in the Clan of "C" organization of Coe athletes.

He was a teacher and coach before entering the mail service. A mail carrier in Cedar Rapids for 16 years, he had a downtown route and was known by scores of people for his efficiency and friendliness. He was greeted daily by many people who has seen him play football on 3 of Coach Moray Eby's greatest teams at Coe.

Other family members buried at Oak Hill Cemetery

Block 176 SG 10 & 11

Mrs. Emma Victoria Collins died June 6th 1937. Her obituary listed her as a member of Bethel A.M.E. church and a charter member of the Jolly Sixteen Club. Husband, Russell Collins, died June 7th 1939. Both were born in Missouri, For 15 years, Russell was custodian of the Shenandoah post office, retiring in 1929 when they moved to Cedar Rapids. At the time of the death of Russell Collins, the couple was survived by the following children; Dr. Elmer Collins, a surgeon in Washington D.C.; George Collins, former all state football player at Coe College; Eugene, Detroit Michigan; and Robert, Cedar Rapids, also former athletic stars; Emmett, Mrs. Ruth Blackburn, former Omaha Y.W.C.A. worker, and Maxine Collins, of Washington D.C.; son Lynn, P. Collins preceded them in death when he drowned July 4, 1928 at lowa City while a student at the university.

Dr. William H. Beshears Block 180 Lot 88

Born William Hutchason Beshears in St. Joseph Missouri October 12, 1897 to parents Strothers and Georgia (Lanier) Beshears. He lived in Cedar Rapids for 41 years, arriving about 1917. City Directories list his practice as located at 323 S. 2nd Street in 1918. As a World War I veteran, there is no entry for 1919 but his practice resumed at that location in 1920. As an interesting note, city directories list a soda fountain was located at the address of his office space during his absence.

During his lifetime he served as President of the NAACP in or about 1926, and was a member of the Masons. He was a practicing dentist at the time of his death in 1958.

Records indicate he and wife Helen (Dameron), were the parents of a daughter named Barbara Jean, who died at birth in October 1923 and was buried at Linwood Cemetery. His residence after he returned from military service was listed as 815 S. 9th Street (B) on map below). We have no record of Helen after 1938, but Dr. Beshears was married to Kathleen in 1946. She is listed as a survivor in his September 7, 1958 obituary along with the following; William H. Jr. in California, William Henry and Wesley Howard, both at home and a brother, Dr. R. P. Beshears, a dentist in St. Joseph, Missouri. Kathleen died in June 2000, her obituary lists two sons,

William "Bill" and Marlene; Wesley and Marcia; two daughters Suzy Beshears and Ethel Andrea Thomas-Giles. Preceding in death was an infant son Richard Wayne.



Cecil Reed Block 180 SG 231

Cecil Reed, the first African American and only black Republican elected to the lowa House of Representatives was 50 when the federal Civil Rights Act was signed into law in 1964. Born in Collinsville Illinois, his family moved to lowa with his father's railroad job about the time of World War I. He graduated from high school in Cedar Rapids, worked as a shoeshine boy, then as a cook, waiter, and bartender. At some point he opened and operated a broiler chicken processing plant. He and his sister, worked as a dance team in the 1930's and he played bass in his orchestra.

In 1949 he became the first African American Chamber of Commerce member in the state of lowa. By the early 1950's he had established his own floor refinishing business and a business selling building maintenance supplies. This grew into a sizable business and eventually involved many family members including his son Richard. When the Reed family took a trip west, white innkeepers refused them lodging. That experience lead to the 1953 opening of the Sepia Motel on the Lincoln Highway. The motel accommodated everyone and many Black entertainers took advantage of this area as it was the only Motel/Hotel where they were welcome. About 5 years later the highway was moved and the rooms were converted to rental units.

His legislative career lasted only one term as Democratic Governor Harold Hughes appointed Republican legislator Reed to the Iowa Employment Security Commission, launching a career in government service which included appointments as regional administrator for the Department of Labor and assistant administrator of the Job Corps.



Above, the Sepia Motel
At right, June 25, 1967
Rep. Cecil A. Reed became the
first Negro in the history of Iowa
to preside over the House of
Representatives. He filled in for
Speaker Maurice Baringer for
30 minutes. (as reported by the
Cedar Rapids Gazette)



Other family members buried at Oak Hill Cemetery

Block 29 Lot 2 SC 4 & 5

Mrs. Julia (William G.) Reed was a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church and Silver Leaf chapter No. 5 of O.E.S. She was a past grand matron of Electa Grand Chapter of O.E.S. of lowa and jurisdiction and of N.A.A.C.P.

William G. Reed was a retired Union Station Employee. Mr. and Mrs. Reed were the parents of 3 daughters and 2 sons, one of whom is Cecil A Reed. He was a Member of Bethel A.M.E church, Masonic Blue lodge, Consistory, Shrine, K. of P. and O.E.S.

Lulu B. Walker 180 SG 141 (Daughter of William and Julia (Jones) Reed was a Self-employed caterer

Dorothy Robinson Block 182 Lot 14



Dorothy Robinson was the first black nurse to work in a Cedar Rapids hospital. Encouraged to pursue nursing by her mother, who died when Dorothy was 5, she graduated in the 1930's from Provident Hospital Nursing School with better than a "B" average. She was certified in Illinois and lowa. "I was prepared for competing with white nurses because the school had set high requirements so we would be prepared." She set a goal and

never thought there would be trouble finding a job in a city where she felt she belonged. When she returned to Cedar Rapids to get a job, she was told the only position open was for a cleaning lady on the 3rd floor. Robinson did domestic work to earn money while seeking a nursing position. In between domestic jobs she would receive work that involved patient care. She helped new mothers at home, and cared for a patient with pneumonia. Seven years later, a nursing supervisor at St. Luke's contacted her with an offer of general duty nursing. Finally she would get a chance to prove herself. She asked the nursing supervisor "Do you know that I am a Negro?" The response was "I'm not interested in your color, I am interested in your qualifications." Although there was an adjustment period for both staff and families, the hospital administration was supportive. She worked there, taking a brief break from 1952 to 1958 to be near family in California, returned to Cedar Rapids and worked at St. Luke's until 1978, retiring as head of urology. She was quoted as saying "Being first was not easy, but there wasn't anything that couldn't be taken care of." In the mid 1970's she was a panel member for community affairs to bring harmony between the black and

white races. She was quoted as saying she never thought of herself as a pioneer, but "I opened the doors".

"You want people to know you have been there and left a good impression."

Viola Gibson Block 179 Lot 80

Viola Gibson was a resident of Cedar Rapids from age 9 arriving from Tennessee, to her death in 1989. She was educated in the Cedar Rapids public schools, was trained as a practical nurse, and worked as a Red Cross home nursing instructor. Spurred by the denial of the access of African Americans to the Ellis Park Pool, Mrs. Gibson helped to resurrect the Cedar Rapids chapter of the NAACP in 1942. She served on the Cedar Rapids-Marion Human Relations Council and led a campaign to convince the lowa congressional delegation to support the 1964 Civil Rights Act.



Newly Elected officers of the Cedar Rapids chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Front Row left to right: The Rev. Waldemar W. Argow, vice-president; Mrs. Viola Gibson, president; Jeanne Walker, secretary; Mrs. Estella Turner, assistant secretary; back row The Rev. C.H. Copeland, retiring president; L. M. Bragg, treasurer; Emma Turner, second vice presiden; Earl Carr, youth advisor.

Mrs. Gibson was instrumental in the inclusion of Black History in our schools. In a speech given in 1963 explaining the need for teaching Black History, she said, "If we want our children to grow up and be respected, we must set an example and teach them to respect others."

Mrs. Gibson provided leadership for countless community and religious organizations. Children who attend the Linn County Day Care Center, learn to swim at the Bender Pool, participate in programs at Jane Boyd Community Center which she was involved in building, benefit from the dedicated service of Viola Gibson. She was also active in establishing the senior and low-income housing in the Oak Hill area as she was a member of the Mayor's Committee for Oak Hill Citizens and was involved in the creation of the Witwer Senior Center.

In 1970, a park next to Metro High was named in her honor. In 2001 a call was made for nominations for the naming of a new elementery school in northeast Cedar Rapids and the school was named Viola Gibson Elementary. She was once quoted as saying, "I never did anything for recognition, I just did things because they needed doing."

Henrietta Washington Block 132 Lot 2

We have celebrated the lives of some very contempory Black Women but on the other extreme of history, all that is known is a small notation in the death register that follows:

Colored woman brought to this county by Geo. W. (M.?) Clarkson(?) with whom she lived for many years. Lately on the William Stewart farm. This was followed by the death date of September 18, 1881. (William Stewart was a native of Pennsylvania and the Stewart Memorial Library at Coe college was donated in memory of Mr. & Mrs. Stewart. There is no marker on the lot, and nothing else to tell her story.

An 1850 Census record lists her as 21, female, from Virginia. Although Ellen Taylor was the first woman in the city, Henrietta Washington may have been the first in Linn County. Was she another of the "contraband" blacks we will explore in the Ellen Taylor story? Was she a housekeeper or family nanny?

Richard Gomer Block 142 Lot 1271

Richard Gomer was a member of Company 54 Mass. Infantry. Led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the Fifty-fourth was made up of free Blacks including the sons of Frederick Douglass, who were instrumental in the formation of the unit. On July 18, 1863, the regiment won undying glory by leading the bloody assault on Fort Wagner near Charleston, South Carolina. In the attack nearly half the regiment was killed, wounded or captured. Colonel Shaw was among those who died. The survivors of the Fifty-fourth went on to participate in the eventual capture of Fort Wagner several weeks later. This company was the inspiration for the movie Glory.

Amelia Jackson Culp

As a charter member of the Bethel A.M.E. Church she filled every office in that institution. For four years she had been a missionary in Africa and on her return she spent time lecturing.

Other family members buried at Oak Hill Cemetery

Cemetery records show that Mrs. Culp purchased the lot in 1895 at the death of first husband Richard Gomer 1845-1895.

Also buried on the lot is Charles Gomer, 1828-1902 (relationship not stated) who died in 1902.

In addition to Amelia Jackson Culp, buried on this lot are 2 granddaughters, (children of her stepson Thomas Jackson) Daisy and Maxine Jackson both died of Tuberculosis in 1931.

Another husband, Josephus Culp is buried in Block 177 SG 21

Marshall Perkins Block 144 Lot 1280

Marshall Perkins, son of a Virginia slave, was born February 25, 1862 in Palmyra Missouri.

He operated the first black owned restaurant in Cedar Rapids for 44 of the 55 years that he and his wife Louisa lived in the city. Located on First Avenue between 2nd and 3rd Street SE he decided on the name Marshall's since it was his first name



and he thought it had more appeal than his last name. The Perkins family lived above the restaurant.

Photo taken about 1890

Other Perkins family members buried at Oak Hill Cemetery Fred & Bertha (Tate) Perkins Block 180 SG 160 & SG 161

Fred Perkins, born September 11, 1889 in Cedar Rapids. He grew up working in the restaurant, and attended the old Jefferson Grade School. In a 1968 Gazette article, he recalls he was at one time a schoolmate of Sutherland Dows. When he was 16 Fred "quit school for good and started hard work". He drove a coal wagon, helped put in sewers and did construction. He took a course at the Cedar Rapids Business College and was recommended for a bookkeeping job. He did not get it. He passed the Civil Service exam but did not get a permanent job. After that he went to railroading.

For 44 years, Fred Perkins was a railroad man, first as a chair car porter, then as a brakeman for 30 years.

Asked about segregation: (this was 1968)
"Oh yes, I have been segregated, but not in Cedar Rapids.
Business people treated me like everyone else."

Asked about advice to young people: (this was 1968) Reluctantly he said "I think younger people expect too much from their parents, who are not able to do all of the things their children expect of them." He added, I think southerners are getting carried away by themselves doing things they couldn't do down South.

Asked about rioting: (this was 1968)

The average person coming up from the South is buying a home here. He has no reason to riot and lose everything. And in a riot you have got to lose. Everyone loses.

Advise from a man who had seen the African American population of Cedar Rapids grow from a dozen families to an approximate population of 1,300.

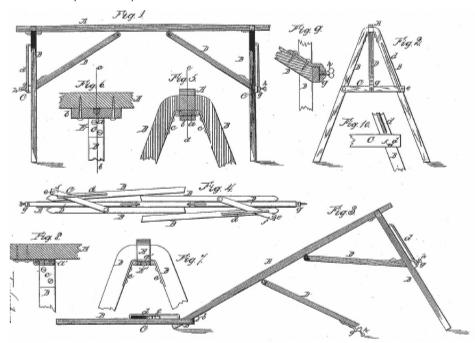
His wife, Bertha (Tate) Perkins was born Mach 23, 1904 in Straight Creek Kentucky

Obadiah B. Clare Block 156 Lot 1314

An African American born in New York in 1851, he moved to Cedar Rapids in 1880. On October 9, 1880 he received patent number 390,753 for a trestle for his invention, a trestle that could be folded compactly and easily transported and set up to support heavy carpets for beating to remove dust.

On April 23, 1904 Obe's wife, Ida died. He married Nellie (Wiley) Spinks on Nov. 8, 1909. During his life, Obadiah worked as a farm laborer, servant, laborer, restaurant manager, janitor, saloon manager, and teamster. Obadiah B. Clare died in 1916 and was buried with his first wife.

(Information from Black Inventors from Iowa2.pdf 2008 as found on the State Library web site)



Ellen Taylor Memorial Marker Block 202

The obituary of Mrs. Ellen Taylor reads:

Mrs. Ellen Taylor died at 7:20 o'clock yesterday morning at the residence of Mr. E. C. Thomas, 918 South Eight Street, at the age of 92 years. She was the oldest and first colored settler, in the city coming here in 1865. She leaves three granddaughters to mourn her loss; Mrs. Viola Green, of Toledo; Mrs. Olena Roper, of St. Louis and Mrs. Mattie Morgan of this city. The funeral will be held at 2 o'clock Sunday afternoon from the A. M. E. church.

In 1862, Iowa Infantry Company was sent to Missouri to confiscate "contraband" blacks off plantations. 100 were sent to Iowa by train with the last stop in Tama/Toledo. As the farmland in Missouri was not good, many of these were tradesmen rather than agriculturists.

By 1865 Ellen who was married to Johnson Taylor, a carpenter came to Cedar Rapids. He died before 1880. She had 4 daughters, and 4 granddaughters. According to the above obituary, 3 of the granddaughters survived her.

Mrs. Taylor was at the home of E. C. Thomas, who was married to granddaughter Mary. (Location A on map on page 7) He was one of the founders of the A.M.E. Church.

Granddaughter Mattie (Martha) was married to James Morgan. She in turn had 4 daughters, one named Ardath, who married Robert Collins They became the parents of Dr. Russell Collins. Dr. Collins is noteworthy in history as he trained to be a fighter pilot at the Negro Air Field in Tuskegee Alabama before the end of the program.

(Information as researched by Pamela Nosek)

Rev. Andrew Ford Block 173 Lot 47

Born June 29, 1845 on a farm adjoining that owned by George Washington Mount Vernon Va., Rev. Ford served in the Civil War with Company H, First Negro Infantry.

Rev. Andrew Ford, with his wife, **Romelier**, served as the first associate pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of Cedar Rapids when it was organized in 1871.



Other family members buried at Oak Hill Cemetery

Reuben M. Ford (brother of Rev. Andrew Ford) Block 10 Lot 3 SG 9 Born about 1879 farm near Mt. Vernon Virginia, moved to Cedar Rapids from Philadelphia about 1919. He was employed by the city sanitation department. Mr. Ford was a member of the Order of Eastern Star, Mt Olive Lodge No. 17, AFL Union local, and the Mt. Zion Baptist Church.

Mrs. Reuben (Nina E.) Ford SG 10

Daughter of Horace and (Pamela*) Wilson was born in Excelsior Iowa in 1885. Living in Cedar Rapids approximately 35 years, she was a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church and its prayer band as well as Rebecca Chapter O.E.S.

Clarence "Baldy" Wilson SG 1

Same parents as Mrs. Reuben (Nina) Ford, Clarence was born in Buxton Iowa in 1886. He was often known as "Baldy" during his 43 year residence in Cedar Rapids. He was married in Buxton Iowa, to Almena Curtindow on February 21, 1912. He was employed at the old Majestic Theater for 12 years and the State Theater for 7 years before taking a job as Police Station custodian in 1936.

Almena "Midge" Wilson SG 2

She was born Almena Louise Curtaindahl at Chicago to parents Harry L. and Anna (Zinn) Curtaindahl in 1896. She married Clarence Wilson on Feb. 21, 1916 (date different from his obituary). She was a seamstress for the Roosevelt Hotel and then employed by Mercy Hospital before retiring. She was a charter member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, where she was on the Mother and Deacons Board, and she was a 50-year member of the Eastern Star.

Adolph Rudolph "Skinny" Wilson SG 16

Adolph Rudolph "Skinny" Wilson was born June 3, 1890 at Excelsior Iowa to Horace and Permelia* (Trice) Wilson. He was married to Martha Genrich on October 28, 1922 in Cedar Rapids. Mr. Wilson was a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Mt. Olive Masonic Lodge, and Imperial Council of Shrine at Des Moines. He played with the Colored Giants ball team for years and was a member of the American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps, and played with the Peoples band for many years.

Martha F. Wilson SG 15

Martha F. Wilson was born August 31, 1900 at Lotts Creek Ia., the daughter of William and Amelia (Wetsel) Genrich. She lived in Cedar Rapids for 40 years, and worked as a housekeeper for the Sheraton Montrose Hotel. Mrs. Wilson was a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, and was also a member of the Mothers Board, and the Lift and Climb club.

Sally Alice (Wilson) Johnson SG 11

Sally Alice (Wilson) Johnson was born February 3, 1882, at Charlottesville Virginia to Horace and Permelia (Trice) Wilson. She had been a resident of Cedar Rapids for 43 years at the time of her death in 1965.

^{*}Seem to have differences in this name throughout records related to other family members

As you leave the Cemetery:

The walking distance at Oak Hill Cemetery does not allow us to feature everyone we would like. We invite you to explore many of the other families represented and the lives their stories tell.

William Oliphant Block 62 Lot 50

Born in Alabama in 1892, he was the last surviving member of his family in the Cedar Rapids area. His family came to Cedar Rapids when he was a young boy. Oliphant was well known in baseball circles, having played with semi-pro teams and in sandlot circles here. A lover of horses, he was for many years, an attendant in the Montrose stables and traveled over the United States with the Montrose horses. He specialized in the training and care of jumping horses and was an expert rider. He had also boxed professionally. Prior to his retirement because of ill health, he was the janitor at the police station.

Others of Interest:

Arthur Andrew Jackson

Block 177 SG 35 & 36

Arthur Andrew Jackson was born Feb. 5, 1882 at Sigourney lowa and resided in Cedar Rapids for 52 years. He was an employee of the lowa Illinois Gas and Electric Company, but was best known as a music instructor and clarinetist in concert and popular orchestras.

Mrs. Francine (Fannie) Jackson born in Lexington Kentucky, September 17, 1885 was a resident of Cedar Rapids since 1910. She played piano in the old Praha and Ideal theaters on Fourteenth Avenue SE and also played in an orchestra with her husband at theaters in and around Cedar Rapids in an earlier day.

William Henry Martin Block 169 SG 31

William Henry Martin was born July 8, 1837 in Virginia. Although there is no obituary on file, this location and time period, has not escaped our attention.

Mrs. Kissiah Harts Block 171 SG 24

Retired, was born June 30, 1843 in Mississippi. This location and time period, has not escaped our attention.

Mitchell Edward Harris Block 29 Lot 2 SG 7

Mitchell Edward Harris a sewer construction worker, died with co-worker Theodore Wold in a cave in of wet, heavy sand in an unbraced ditch at the construction site of the new Washington High School in 1956. His identity was known immediately as he was the only African American on the construction job.

Edward Davidson Block 176 Lot 2

Edward Davidson died July 25th 1935 from injuries suffered in a motorcycle accident. Services were conducted at Mount Zion Baptist church, with members of the Knight Riders motorcycle club of which the youth was a member, acting as pallbearers and escort.

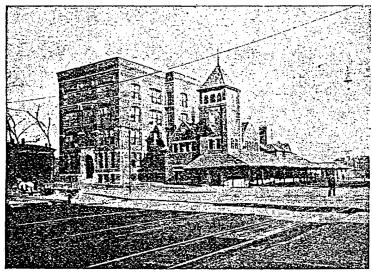
Alvia Reno Joyce Block 29 Lot 2 SG 8

Born in Minneapolis MN about 1882, Mr. Joyce spent most of his life in Cedar Rapids. He was employed as janitor in the physical department of the Y.M.C.A. from about 1920. He was affiliated with Mt. Zion Baptist Church and was a past grand senior warden and past grand custodian of A.F. and A.M. of the grand lodge of lowa, was a member of Mt. Olive lodge No. 17 Silver Leaf chapter No. 5 of O.E.S. and Zeid Temple No.90 and Consistory.

Railroad and Hotel History:

Many of the early arrivals were connected to the Railroad and the Hotels that were built nearby. June 15, 1859 marked the entrance of the railroad into the city. Railroads were built, leased, consolidated, and incorporated through a series of economic booms and downturns. The Officers of the BCR&N has the large representation at Oak Hill Cemetery, as it began in 1868, and after years of construction, purchases of additional lines, and reorganization, the BCR&N became part of the Rock Island Line in 1903. This makes it difficult to define which workers with a railroad connection, worked for which railroad company, or if they happened to work for both.

As for hotels, the Empire, the Grand, the Allison (our first modern and fireproof hotel built to replace the Clifton or Northwestern Hotel) the Magnus, the Taft, the Eppley, the Montrose, and finally the Roosevelt were all located near the Union Station and the downtown tracks. These businesses provided many service job opportunities, as well as skilled positions of tailors and seamstresses.



The Cedar Rapids Railroad headquarters as it appeared in the Rock Island Magazine 70th Anniversry Edition, October 1922

The Railroads:

With the tour, we have mentioned **Herman C. Howard** a resident of Cedar Rapids for 45 years, he worked as a porter at the Union Station for 15 years and **William G. Reed** was a retired Union Station Employee because of his railroad job about the time of World War I he moved his family to lowa, here are others:

Block 29 Lot 1 SG 16

Sidney Tate, born October 17, 1888 in McDowell North Carolina. His occupation was listed as retired flagman of the North Western Railroad

Block 173 SG 32

John Louis Blakey born 1857 in Virginia. His occupation was listed as Porter

The Hotels:

Block 29 Lot 1 SG 1

Lillian Lorraine Horne was born in Mexico Mo. about 1890 As an employee of the Eppley Hotel, she was affiliated with the Bethel A.M.E. Church and a member of the Silver Leaf Chapter No. 5 of the O.E.S. and the Padmore temple of the Elks Lodge. Block 29 Lot 2 SG 1

Miss Eva Marie Watkins, born St. Joseph Missouri about 1900 was employed by the Montrose Hotel. She was a member of Padmore Temple, Daughter of Elks of Cedar Rapids.

Block 182 SG 18

Gracie Mae Thompson

Born in Milan Tennessee in 1908, she was a resident of Cedar Rapids since 1943. Mrs. Thompson was a housekeeper and seamstress at the Montrose Hotel for many years and a member of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

Douglas Starch Works / Penick & Ford:

In 1895, when the incorporation of the lowa Mill & Elevator Company was amended to become Douglas & Company. The change was made by brothers Walter D. and George B. Douglas, who shared their father's interest in the milling industry. In 1903,



they formed the Douglas Starch Works in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, the largest starch industry west of the Mississippi River. In May 1919, a massive explosion of unknown origin destroyed the entire plant, killing 48 workers. George B. Douglas (Walter died in 1912 on the Titanic) managed to keep the business together until he sold it to Penick & Ford, Ltd., in December 1919.

Penick & Ford was founded by William Penick and his brother-in-law, James Ford, who formed a partnership in Shreveport, Louisiana, to sell barreled syrups and molasses in canned form. In 1913, the Corn Products Refining Company (which had purchased a 25 percent stake in Penick & Ford) was forced to divest its interest in Penick & Ford after a Supreme Court ruling resulting from President Theodore Roosevelt's trust-busting campaign. The interest was subsequently acquired by F. T. (Fred) Bedford, son of E. T. Bedford, who ran the Corn Products Refining Company. But F. T. Bedford was determined to build his own company.

After purchasing the Douglas plant, F. T. Bedford incorporated it as Penick & Ford, Ltd on February 7, 1920. By 1921 the newly rebuilt plant was producing corn syrup.

Following is a small group of names with a connection to the company:

Block 30 and Vacated Walkway SG 6

Louis Milling Bragg was born April 22, 1890 in Farmerville LA, he was a resident of Cedar Rapids since 1920, and a retired employee of Penick and Ford Ltd. Mr. Bragg was a member of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, the American Legion, Mt. Olive lodge, and the Silver Light Gospel singers.

Block 171 SG 23

Morgan Lewis born February 26,1871 in Kentucky died February 16, 1922. His occupation was listed a Laborer for the Penick and Ford Starch Works.

Block 177 SG 51

George W. Christian was born August 13,1872 and was a resident of Cedar Rapids for most of his life, and a retired employee of Penick & Ford.

Block 180 SG 82

Charles Henry Boone, lifetime resident of Cedar Rapids and former employee of Penick & Ford

Block 181 SG 102

Booker T. W. Jones Born October 7, 1904 at Buxton Iowa. Employed for many years at Penick & Ford

Block 177 SG 22

Charles Francis Conway, born August 3, 1872, Montreal Canada, was an employed as a laborer of the starch factory.

The Buxton Dowa Connection:

The history of Buxton, Iowa, is unique for its times. During the mid-1880's a man named J.E. Buxton was an agent for the Consolidated Coal Company (CCC). The CCC was a part of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company. It wanted Iowa coal to fuel its trains. After opening several coal mines in Iowa, J.E. Buxton's successor and son, Ben, was confronted with a scarcity of white laborers. The idea surfaced to recruit black workers from the South. CCC sent a team of agents to Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee to recruit black workers. Unlike other coal towns, the railroad purchased all the Buxton coal creating constant work at high wages.

By 1900 Buxton was thriving and became the largest coal mining town west of the Mississippi River. It also was the largest unincorporated city in the nation. By 1906 the Ackers Coal Company and the Regal Coal Company opened mines near Buxton. The 1,183,143 tons of coal produced that year made Monroe County the largest coal producer in Iowa.

As World War I began in France 1914, Buxton reached its peak in coal production. By the time the black soldiers returned in 1919, coal demand had decreased. Buxton had begun its decline. Blacks had begun leaving Buxton in 1911. After several huge fires destroyed parts of Buxton in 1916, more residents began to leave.

Buxton remains a proud and unusual moment of lowa history. www.iptv.org/iowapathways

It is impossible to identify and list all of the families at Oak Hill Cemetery with a Buxton, Iowa connection, we have put together a small cross section of names we have found.

Block 29 Lot 1 SG 14

Dorothy Ione Smith was born July 15th 1917 in Buxton Iowa, the daughter of Clarence and Harriet Ione (Crank) Smith; Survivors included: Mrs. Robert L. Brown, Mrs. Earl W. Carr, Ernestine and Marjorie Smith and two brothers Edward T., and Clarence C. jr. (we can only assume they were all born at Buxton Iowa.

Another Buxton birthplace was **Elmer Hurst** (SG 6) born September 27,1900

Block 29 Lot 2 SG 18

Mrs. Georgia Mae Chipley Daughter of Milton Atkinson and Lula Henly, was also born at Buxton Iowa February 22, 1911.

Block 171 SG 33

Robert J. Blakey son of John and Lucinda (Reeves) Blakey was born May 10, 1880 in Charlotte VA Died at age of 40, on November 30, 1922. Cause of death was listed as pneumonia but death certificate lists occupation and location where disease was contracted. This was listed as a miner at Buxton IA.

Block 174 SG 25

Bennett T.Crank was born Charlottesville Virginia, Sept 22, 1860. *Occupation was listed as retired mine worker*, at the time of death May 1, 1931.

Block 180 SG 221

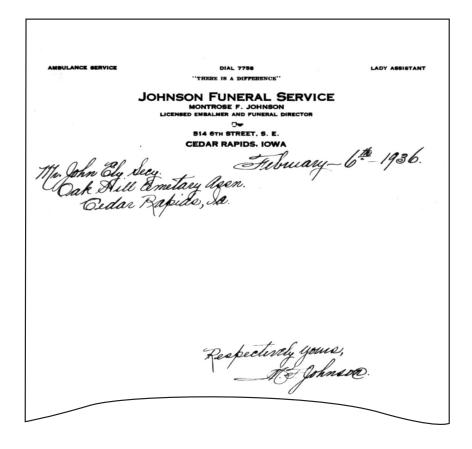
Magnolia M. Fields was born January 15, 1924 in Buxton Iowa, as was her foster parent, Elmer Hurst. Magnolia worked for the Wilson Packing House, and the Jane Boyd Community Center.

The Funeral Home

To quote The Story of Cedar Rapids, by Janette Stevenson Murray and Frederick Gray Murray copyright 1950 as the book discusses early settlers and their successors:

"The Negro population of the city is about 1000. It was less than half that number before the two World Wars and the coming of our corn processing plant from Louisiana. They reside largely in the southeast and northwest part of the city. One of their number is a popular dentist. They support three churches with pastors well respected in the ministerial union. The birthrate is low. Doctors shake their heads over the cases of rickets and tuberculosis **and alas, they can support a Negro mortuary**."

We are not sure of exact dates of operation. Within the records we have found the following letters. We know some of the Johnson Funeral Home records date from 1935-1938 and the Rice Funeral Home records date from May 1937 to August 1953. Although we believe Mr. and Mrs. George Rice are not buried at Oak Hill, we do have family connections such as Block 29 Lot 2 SG 3 Mrs. Elizabeth (John) Blakey was born at Charleston VA June 21, 1870 and came to Cedar Rapids from Buxton IA about 1915. Mrs. George Rice was one of her grandchildren. Rupert Rice, Block 29 Lot 2 SG 11, brother of George Rice, is buried at Oak Hill





Epidemics (Onfluenza and Tuberculosis)

The South side of the cemetery, where the block numbers take on 3 digits, such as Block 101 etc. was developed as immigrant populations were rising, and the business and residential areas around Oak Hill hosted a variety of nationalities. It was also the time period of serious influenza (1918, 1925 and 1928) and tuberculosis (1921-1926) outbreaks, creating patterns as well.

Block 172 SG 40

Mrs. Mary Willis, housewife, born 1868 in Kentucky, died from Influenza in 1925.

Block 173, Lot 33 SG 9

Mrs. Harriet Lee, born in 1850 in Virginia, died May 28, 1928 of Broncho Pneumonia with Influenza Infection as contributory.

Block 173, Lot 34

Martin Lee, born in 1838 in Virginia, died of Pneumonia as well on December 14, 1928.

Block 169 SG 36

Eighteen year old student **Earl Brown**, who died May 23, 1921 was one of our tuberculosis victims.

Block 171 SG 25

Horace Wilson Jr. born 1886 Polk county lowa was another of our tuberculosis victims with a death date of May 13, 1922.

Block 171 SG 28

Mrs. Essie (Louis) Bragg, of Louisiana, 21 year old housewife (husband worked for Penick and Ford starting in 1920) died of tuberculosis July 14, 1922.

Block 173 SG 10

Mrs. Nettie Clarke daughter of Richard and Nettie (Johnson) Bass died December 24, 1926, of Tuberculosis.

Richard Bass, Company B 3rd U. S. H. Art. With a death date of January 12, 1928 Richard Bass is not buried within Oak Hill Cemetery, but in the adjoining city cemetery. According to a memo to the Graves Registration Officer at the Court House, a request may have been made for the soldier's grave provided by Oak Hill (Block 172 Lot 31 SG 31) to be used for the burial of Mrs. Nettie Bass, wife of Richard Bass at the time

of her death in October 1923. The note dated 1942, indicates a check of the records within the City Clerk's office listed the burial date in City Cemetery as January 15, 1929. We have not yet been able to confirm which list had the correct date.

Other Employment Opportunities:

We have found jod descriptions from hotel staff to foundry workers and everything in between:

Block 29 Lot 1 SG 5:

Keever Davis was an employee at Sanitary Farms Dairy Block 29 Lot 2 SG 9:

William John Miller was born in Washington DC about 1889. He was employed as a conveyor operator at the Iowa Electric Light and Power Company for 34 years.

Block 30 and Vacated Walkway SG 3 & SG 4

William Warren was employed as the Chauffeur for the James E. Hamilton family (prominent banking family) for 55 years of the 63 years he was a resident of Cedar Rapids.

His wife Vennie Z. (Price) Warren, is buried next to him. Listed among the survivors was a daughter, Dorothy Robinson. (Possibly her step mother)

Block 166 Lot 19

William B. Lowery was born August 6, 1876 in Cedar Rapids lowa. He was a graduate of Coe College class of 1901. He entered the ministry in the A.M.E. Church and held pastorates in lowa and Illinois. He was statistician of the Chicago Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal church.

Also buried was

Miss Frances (Fannie) Lucille Lowery, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Luther Lowery. She was born in Cedar Rapids, attended local schools including Coe College for one year and lowa University for one year. She was a member of the Modern Debs club. Her death in 1937 was from tuberculosis and the friends and family were directed to the Johnson Funeral home.

173 SG 42

Edward Boyd Occupation on death certificate was listed as Laborer for Ford Paving Company

Explore your place in history

Oak Hill Cemetery Association

1705 Mt. Vernon Rd. S. E. Cedar Rapids Iowa