

The African American Community in St. Joseph, Missouri in the 1920s

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The African American Community in St. Joseph, Missouri in the 1920s

Introduction

The 1920s is a good period with which to begin to better understand and tell the story of the African American community of St. Joseph, Missouri. There is useful basic source material available online through Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and Missouri Death Certificates. It was a time of great change on a national scale: service in World War I had introduced many men to a wider world and had raised expectations of increased opportunity. The Great Migration had begun, with thousands of individuals leaving the south for northern cities. St. Joseph had a substantial Black community, some native to the city but many others from elsewhere. Using available sources it is possible to begin to piece together a picture of what their lives were like.

Methodology and Sources

This study uses as its basis a data set of 4,320 individuals identified as “black,” “colored,” and “mulatto,”¹ in the 1920 federal census and the 1921 City Directory for St. Joseph, Missouri. This number represents all such individuals so designated in those two sources.² This large data set provides the needed information to make generalizations concerning the African American community. This emphasis on the utilization of quantitative evidence in order to understand demographic trends follows the basic methodology utilized by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure.³

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
Last Name	First Name	Maiden Name	Gender	Address	Occupation	Spouse	Children	Job	Place of Birth	Graduation	Race	Sex	Place of Death	Burial	Cause of Death	Notes	Y		
1	Adams	William	m	Francis, 214 S	laborer in packing house			1899 Missouri											
2	Adams	Ella	f	8th, 1426 S	laundress	Williams, William Jr.		1871 Missouri					7/17/1922 8th, 1426 S	Abland	burned in a house fire				
3	Adams	Williams M	m	8th, 1426 S	laborer at packing house	Ella		1900 Missouri											
4	Adams	William M	m	8th, 1426 S	laborer at packing house			1900 Missouri											
5	Adams	Jones	m	8th, 817 S	laborer for street dept			1884 Georgia											
6	Adams	Henry	m	Angelspie, 1711	butcher in packing house			1872 Missouri											
7	Adams	Connellus	m	10th, 205	butcher in packing house			1878 Missouri					7/17/1926 8th, 518 H	City Cemetery	cerebral hemorrhage				
8	Adams	Berneth	m	Missouri, 302 S	laborer in packing house			1889 Arkansas											
9	Adams	Paul	m	Missouri, 323 W	laborer in packing house			1889 Arkansas											
10	Adams	Lunsford	m	State Hospital	patient			1884 Texas											
11	Adams	Manford	m	State Hospital	patient			1902 MD											
12	Adams	Weller	f	Missouri, 211 W	housewife	Robert		1900 Arkansas											
13	Adams	Robert	m	Missouri, 211 W	laborer in packing house	Hellie		1896 Arkansas											
14	Airka	William	m	8th, 2501 S	porter W 211 S 7th			1869 KY											
15	Airka	James T	m	1,10, 208 S W	physician			1872 NC					2/10/1908 St. Louis	Rocky Mt, NC	from death cert, "shot around the brain" suffered when shot with gun				
16	Alexander	Berneth	m	15th, 313 N	hog butcher in packing house			1884 Missouri											
17	Alexander	Samuel	m	12th, 313 N	former salesman	Jean		2/2/1884 Lexington, KY					4/7/1940 2nd, 416 N	St. Mary	mitral regurgitation				
18	Alexander	Alisa	f	10th, 209 S	student			1910 Missouri											
19	Alexander	Eda	f	10th, 209 S	student			1904 Missouri											
20	Alexander	Holland	f	10th, 209 S	student			1910 Arkansas											
21	Alexander	Mary Elizabeth	f	10th, 209 S	housewife	William	Eda, Holland, Alisa	1/17/1904 St. Joseph					5/11/1972 St. Joseph	Abland					
22	Alexander	William	m	10th, 209 S	butcher in packing house	Mary Elizabeth	Eda, Holland, Alisa	12/15/1876 Cumberland Cou, MO					12/17/1928 20th, 509 S	Abland	pederasty tuberculosis				
23	Alexander	Howard	m	2nd, 1,110 W	porter in saloon	widowed		1875 Missouri											

Screen shot of the large data set

¹ The “mulatto” designation is problematic; racial classifications on the census were made according to the opinion of the enumerator based on appearance. It was not until 1970 that individuals were allowed to self-identify. https://www.pbs.org/race/000_About/002_04-background-03-01.htm

² It is likely, given the transient nature of the African American community and other data-collection challenges that this number is low. However, I am confident that the individuals identified are a representative data set, thus making generalizations based on the cohort valid.

³ The Cambridge Group is housed in the Department of Geography and Faculty of History at the University of Cambridge, UK. It was founded in 1964 by Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley. campop.geog.cam.ac.uk/about/history/

To put some meat on the statistical bones, additional information concerning the community and individuals within it has been gathered.⁴ This combination of demographic/statistical (quantitative) evidence combined with more traditionally biographical (qualitative) evidence is a methodology I used in the monograph *Women, Rank, and Marriage in the British Aristocracy, 1485-2000: An Open Elite?*⁵ In that work I found that this combination provided a useful lens through which to view a large group of individuals.

Summary

The data set which forms the basis of this report provides information on 4,320 individuals designated as “black,” “mulatto,” or “colored” on the 1920 federal census and the 1921 City Directory for St. Joseph, MO.

Basic Categories:

Gender:

1,858: female, 43%
2,460: male, 57%
2: unknown

Race:

1,068: mulatto, 25%
3,252: black, 75%

Transience

The data from the 1920 federal census and the 1921 City Directories make it clear that the Black community was quite transient. Many of the adults living in St. Joseph at that time had come from somewhere else, and many were to move on to somewhere else. Even for those who remained in the city for an extended period of time tended to move residences quite frequently. It is not at all unusual to find a different address listed for an individual in the census than what is later in the City Directory.

Great Migration: The Great Migration refers to the large-scale movement of Blacks from the south into the more urbanized cities of the north from about 1910 through the mid-1970s.⁶ While St. Joseph is not one of the cities that are generally identified as being major

The large data set gives a good indication of at least 625 individuals who appear to have come to St. Joseph as a part of the Great Migration; 238 (38%) of these were women and 387 (62%) were men. This differential is in keeping with patterns that are seen with immigrant

⁴ To date, no good archive of primary source material such as letters, diaries, etc. has been located. To fill in this gap, stories from the local newspapers and sources such as the year books from Bartlett School have been utilized.

⁵ Kimberly Schutte, *Women Rank and Marriage in the British the British Aristocracy: An Open Elite?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁶ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, (NY: Vintage, 2010), 8-9.

communities; it is not unusual for young single men to migrate alone, or for men to move without their families until they get established. These individuals were born in southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Tennessee.⁷ Many of those who appear to have come to the city as part of the Great Migration worked in the packing houses.

Work/Labor

The large data set brings home the lack of opportunity open to African Americans in St. Joseph in 1920. For men the overwhelming majority listed some sort of “laborer” as their occupation, most of them labored in the packing houses. For women, those that listed an occupation outside of the home nearly always listed some sort of domestic service. “Laundresses” below provides more detailed information on one group of these women. The lack of opportunity is underscored in the examination of the 1921 graduates of Bartlett High School below. The education that these individuals received was quite good and the hopes that each expressed at graduation often were for higher education and a professional career; and yet, nearly none of them were able to realize those dreams. A disheartening number ended up working in the packing houses or as domestics.

The number of professionals is vanishingly small. There were a small number of physicians, attorneys, ministers, and teachers. In 1920, all of these individuals came from outside of St. Joseph. The biographical sketch of Dr. John Russel Asbra Crossland below provides some insight into the experience of this small group of individuals.

Additional Questions

This report represents the barest scratch on the surface of understanding the complexities of the African American community of St. Joseph in the 1920s. There is much more to investigate. Among the most pressing questions:

It would be interesting to look at issues surrounding the Great Migration to St. Joseph over time. While simply looking at place of birth works for the 1920 cohort, a more complex analysis examining the place of birth of parents will provide a more nuanced understanding, especially for the years after 1920. It would be interesting to track the 1920 cohort through the 1930 -1950 census records to determine how many remained in the city and where those who left went.

The role of the church in the community bears further examination: Pastors were among the most educated and respected members of the Black community. Nearly all of them came from outside of the city and who chose to make St. Joseph their home, if only for a short time. The recent PBS series by Louis Gates Jr., *The Black Church and Gospel*, illustrate the importance of the church. Additional research into the Black churches in St. Joseph, the men who were their pastors, and the congregations would add an important element to the understanding of the Black community.

⁷ Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, (NY: Vintage, 2010), 9.

Music and other creative endeavors: Ten people identify themselves as musicians in the large data set; certainly, there were many others who were not professional musicians, but who possessed a great deal of talent. In the late 19th century new types of music – the blues and jazz – were emerging. As African Americans moved to the north in the Great Migration they took their musical traditions with them and those traditions were altered by the urban landscapes in which they found themselves. Newspaper accounts make it clear that there were a great number of establishments in St. Joseph that catered to the entertainment of the Black community. It is certain that those places were filled with music – it would be fascinating to find out more. In the early 20th century, a young man named Roscoe Jamison came to St. Joseph with his mother and sister. By 1917 he was making a name for himself as a poet; unfortunately, he died suddenly in 1918. Without a doubt there were others with literary talents.

Health Challenges: The work that so many in the African American community did was not conducive to good health. Anyone who has read Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, has a good idea of the conditions that workers in the packing houses faced. Tuberculosis was an ongoing threat, and the mechanisms of its transmission were not well understood.⁸ The data set lists 28 individuals who died of tuberculosis in the 1920s. Utilizing the Missouri Death Certificates that are online through the Secretary of State's Office, it is possible to get a deeper understanding of the health challenges that faced St. Joseph's Black community.

Conclusion

St. Joseph is a city that tells certain parts of its story relatively well: Joseph Robidoux, Jesse James, and the Pony Express. But there are so many other stories to tell: women, the Jewish community, the working class. All of these are the stories of what built this city. The story of St. Joseph's African American community is one of the least understood elements in our history. Looking at the growth of St. Joseph through the lens of the Black experience yields a very different result than simply seeing it as the city where Jesse James died.

⁸ Tera W. Hunter *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 196-197.

Laundresses

Introduction:

There is no occupation that is more evocative of the life of Black women in the period from the end of the Civil War until about 1930 than laundress.⁹ Harriet Tubman, rightly remembered for her brave actions in opposition to slavery was also a skilled laundress.¹⁰ By 1880 at least 98 percent of the Black women who worked for a wage in Atlanta performed some type of domestic service. For most of these women, this was a profession which they entered as children between the ages of 10 and 16 and they could expect to continue to work well into their 60s.¹¹ In 1900 Black women made up 11 percent of the women in the United States, but they were nearly 65 percent of the laundresses.¹² In the decades following the Civil War, some form of domestic labor was the only real work opportunity for Black women.¹³ For these women, work was a means to support themselves and their families, it was not something that they undertook for any sense of personal fulfillment.¹⁴

Langston Hughes captured the image in his 1925 poem, first published in the January edition of *The Crisis*, “A Song to a Negro Wash-Woman”:

*Oh, wash-woman,
Arms elbow-deep in white suds,
Soul washed clean,
Clothes washed clean, --
I have many songs to sing you
Could I but find the words.*

Was it four o'clock or six o'clock on a winter afternoon, I saw you writing out the last shirt in Miss White Lady's kitchen? Was it four o'clock or six o'clock? I don't remember.

⁹ After 1920, changes in technology led to the sharp decline in the number of laundresses. C.G. Woodson, “The Negro Washerwoman, A Vanishing Figure,” *The Journal of Negro History* 15:3 (July 1930), 269-70; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 91.

¹⁰ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 75.

¹¹ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 50.

¹² Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 77, 296n.

¹³ A very few were able to enter the professions as teachers, doctors, nurses, etc. Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 82; Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 11-12; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26.

¹⁴ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

*But I know, at seven one spring morning you were on Vermont Street with a bundle in your arms going to wash clothes.
And I know I've seen you in a New York subway train in the late afternoon coming home from washing clothes.*

*Yes, I know you, wash-woman.
I know how you send your children to school, and high-school, and even college.
I know how you work and help your man when times are hard.
I know how you build your house up from the wash-tub and call it home.
And how you raise your churches from white suds for the service of the Holy God.*

*And I've seen you singing, wash-woman. Out in the backyard garden under the apple trees, singing, hanging white clothes on long lines in the sun-shine.
And I've seen you in church a Sunday morning singing, praising your Jesus, because some day you're going to sit on the right hand of the Son of god and forget you ever were a wash-woman. And the aching back and the bundles of clothes will be unremembered then.
Yes, I've seen you singing.*

*And for you,
O singing wash-woman,
For you, singing little brown woman,
Singing strong black woman,
Singing tall yellow woman,
Arms deep in white suds,
Soul clean,
Clothes clean, --
For you I have many songs to make
Could I but find the words.*

Laundresses:

In the years following the Civil War, Black women did most of the laundry in urban areas.¹⁵ Laundry was the most despised of household jobs, and white women would outsource it whenever they had the chance to do so. Even poor women scraped together the discretionary income needed to send at least some of their laundry out.¹⁶ No “respectable” white woman could afford to be seen doing her own laundry.¹⁷

¹⁵ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 69.

¹⁶ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 56-57.

¹⁷ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 94.

Laundry was a skilled profession; the knowledge made Black women valuable while they were enslaved and remained an important element in their quest to make a living until about 1930.¹⁸ The work that a laundress performed was backbreaking: She hauled heavy loads of dirty clothes from the homes of the white customers on Monday mornings. She had to draw or haul gallons of water to wash and rinse the clothes. She had to use hand-cranked devices to squeeze the water from wet laundry. The work that a laundress performed was hot and uncomfortable: She often had several cast iron pots boiling simultaneously. She kept several irons in the fire at a time, using the heavy implements to smooth clothes after they were dry. The work that a laundress performed was skilled: She rendered potash and fat to make the lye that was then used to make soap. She created products to lift stains and whiten clothes. She boiled wheat bran to extract the starch used to make the clothing crisp.¹⁹ The industrial production of cloth used in the making of clothing added to the difficulty of laundry work. It increased the amount of clothing that people owned and washable fabrics such as cotton increased the need for laundering.²⁰

Laundry work provided benefits to the Black women who did it: they often worked in groups, sharing the labor and supplies. Laundresses had to provide the wash tubs (often made from beer barrels that were cut in half), batting sticks, washboards, cast iron pots for boiling, as well as the soap and starch and fuel. Sharing these things as a community made it easier for each woman to make a living.²¹ The alleys and backyards where they gathered to work provided a space for the development of a community that shared knowledge, ideas, and offered support. They were able to choose whom they worked for, the hours they were willing to commit to the job and had the ability to work from home thus making it easier to fulfill family responsibilities.²² For women with childcare responsibilities, laundry work was preferable to other types of labor. Laundry was done in their own homes and provided the flexibility to allow them to keep an eye on the children.²³

Laundry work provided Black women with a measure of independence and even power that other jobs did not. They had the ability to increase their earning by taking on additional clients and also to speed up work by soliciting aid from family members (often children).²⁴ The fact that most laundresses worked in their own spaces, rather than in the homes of the

¹⁸ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 74-74.

¹⁹ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 78-79; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 56-57.

²⁰ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 56-57.

²¹ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 56-57.

²² Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 69, 73, 79, 84; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 62.

²³ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 26, 62; Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 84.

²⁴ Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 53.

white employers gave a freedom and safety to these women that they prized. It provided them with a buffer against the sexual and physical abuse which had been an omnipresent threat under slavery.²⁵ Laundresses in several cities organized and struck for better working conditions and wages. In Atlanta, Raleigh and Kansas City they formally unionized.²⁶ Instead of undercutting one another, washer-women collectively set prices and determined the holidays that they would take off. In many cities, they created mutual aid societies to provide support to members when they were ill. The strategies that these women developed in order to resist unfair and exploitative working conditions formed the basis for a growing Black political sensibility.²⁷ This inherent power did not go unnoticed. White society, in the years after the Civil War, expended great effort in trying to strip Black women of their dignity. They were the subject of mocking minstrels and unfair civic policies; there were attempts in some cities to prosecute them for vagrancy in retribution for their refusal to work within the confines of white households. Despite this, Black laundresses did not back down; they did not relinquish their independence. With their use of the blacklist against employers who were abusive, these women became the personification of the good help that is hard to find.²⁸

Laundresses in St. Joseph:

In the 1920 census 370 women identified themselves as laundresses or wash-women.²⁹ Of those, 157 were identified by the census-takers as Black and 58 as Mulatto; that is, 58 percent of the women who were laundresses were non-white.³⁰ This percentage is lower than might have been expected; however, a close examination of the information provided by the census shows a stark contrast between the races. None of the women identified as Black or Mulatto worked in commercial laundries, all either worked from their own home or a small number worked in the private home of their employers. Nearly all of the white women laundresses were employed in the growing number of commercial laundries in the city. This underscores the differences in the opportunities afforded to women of different races.

The change in technology which threatened the livelihood of St. Joseph laundresses is made clear with an examination of advertisements in the local newspapers. Along with racialized images being used to sell commercially created laundry products, there were also advertisements – clearly aimed at white women and their husbands – touting the economic

²⁵ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 79, 95-96.

²⁶ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 74, 106; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 75,88,131.

²⁷ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 74-75, 85, 92.

²⁸ Blair LM Kelly, *Black Folk: The Roots of the Black Working Class* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2023), 93, 96-97, 100.

²⁹ See Table at the end of this section for a listing of the women, their addresses, ages, and the number of children in the home.

³⁰ This does not include the one Mexican.

benefits of sending laundry out to a commercial laundry. This had an impact, the 1930 census lists 272 women as laundresses, a 26 percent decrease over a decade before.³¹

**Make The
Laundress Happy**



by making it possible for her to turn out beautiful, snowy white, clothes like new.

Red Cross Ball Blue
will enable the laundress to produce fine, fresh-looking pure white clothes instead of the greenish yellow usually obtained. **RED CROSS BALL BLUE** always please.

5 cents.
*all up-to-date grocers.

St. Joseph News Press, April 6, 1920

³¹ This finding calls for more careful examination of the 1930 federal census in order to determine a breakdown between Black and white women.



The Most Economical Way of Washing

To the average American housewife who employs a laundress the cost of each washday is about \$3.30, an investigator learned recently, after extended inquiries.

He found the usual wage of a laundress to be \$2.25 a day; two meals, 70 cents; carfare, 12 cents; and water, soap and fuel (gas, electricity or coal) 25 cents.

In some cities the average was higher; in some, less. And in most cities this figure did not include the ironing.

The average cost of family bundles sent to us for Family Laundry Service, varies from \$1.25 to \$1.75. Of course a few are more; many are less.

If you place no value whatever upon your own time, the cost to you of our Family Laundry Service is but a few cents more than what it would

cost you to wash at home.

In detail: Our man calls for your family bundle. We wash everything—fine garments and heavy household goods, each according to its class; wash them in pure soft water and suds of fine, flaked soap.

We iron the flat pieces, like bed linen, tablecloths and napkins. Most of the underwear we dry so fluffily that it requires no ironing. Things such as skirts, childrens' clothes and other garments that need it, we starch and return ready for you to iron.

We do all the heavy work, leaving to you only a small part of the lighter. And the cost is less than washday in your own home.

Telephone and we will have our driver call for your family bundle.

For a few cents more we do all the ironing
Main 386

Conser Laundry and Dry Cleaning Co.

St. Joseph Gazette, April 11, 1920

More Laundry for Less Money

Our Nu-Way System of handling your big bugbear—the weekly family washing—is meeting ready response from the housekeeper, who in this new and better way has found the quick and cheap answer to the problem of how to handle this vexing problem.

Flat Work 7c per lb., Wearing Apparel 15c per lb.

Flat work includes towels, sheets, table linen, rags, blankets, quilts, rugs and such heavy pieces.

Wearing apparel includes shirts, soft collars, underwear of all kinds, dresses, waists or any wearing clothes.

Here Is How It Will Work Out In Your Case. These Are Actual Bundles

TWO PEOPLE		FOUR PEOPLE		SIX PEOPLE	
Nu-Way Charges		Nu-Way Charges		Nu-Way Charges	
7 pounds of flat-30 pieces	.49	23 lbs. of flat-55 pieces	\$1.61	30 lbs. of flat-75 pieces	\$2.10
6 pounds wearing-15 pieces	.90	12 lbs. wearing-38 pieces	\$1.80	18 lbs. wearing-50 pieces	\$2.70
13 lbs. total Nu-Way price	\$1.39	35 lbs. total Nu-Way price	\$3.41	48 lbs. total Nu-Way price	\$4.80
Home Cost		Home Cost		Home Cost	
Laundress 1/2 day	\$1.25	Laundress 2 half days	\$2.50	Laundress 2 days	\$5.00
One meal	.25	Two meals	.50	Two meals	.50
Soap	.10	Soap	.20	Soap	.30
Fuel, starch, etc.	.20	Fuel, starch, etc.	.25	Fuel, starch etc.	.30
Total Home Cost	\$1.75	Total Home Cost	\$3.45	Total Home Cost	\$6.10

It will be seen that by this method the average price per pound by our system is only 10 cents—a better and cheaper method than you can possibly use by the “home” laundry. Take the laundry out of your back yard and put it ALL in our Nu-Way plant and save money, work and time. We use the Refinite Water Softener System. This guarantees that your clothes are washed in the purest of water.

The Nu-Way Laundry Company

This is not a department only—We have a whole plant given over to this Nu-Way System for family washings.

1512-14 St. Joseph Avenue

Main 731, 732

St. Joseph Gazette, April 25, 1920



When the Washwoman Fails to Report

There was a time when failure of the washwoman to come when expected was almost a tragedy—it meant unaccustomed work and heavy toil by the housewife—not pleasant at any time, and more than trying on sultry summer mornings.

But many housewives now have learned that the non-appearance of the laundress is really a blessing in disguise—it has taught them to try our modern laundry service.

And now, here's counsel that's sound for you also—don't wait for the laundress to disappoint you—try this newer, better way—this family laundry service way—it will bring you washday ease, and economy, too.

Why not get in touch with us today?

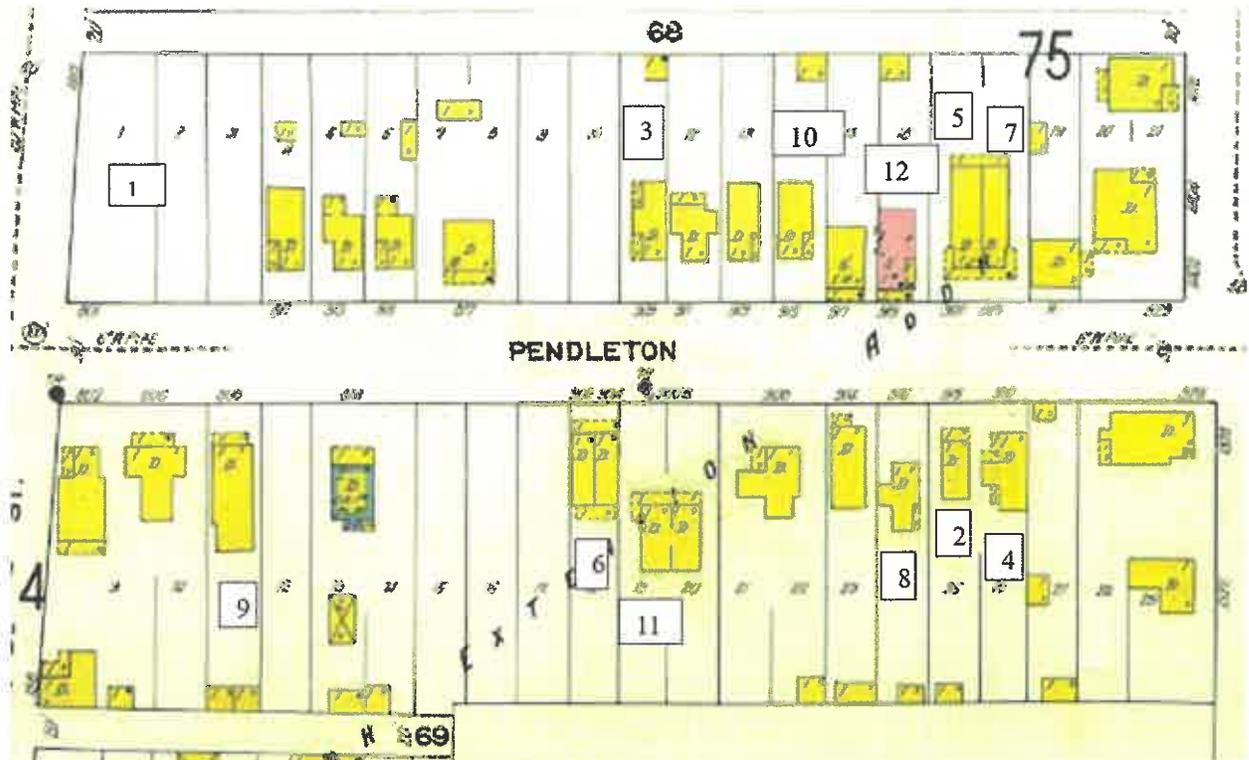
Conser Family Laundry and Dry Cleaning Co.
It's Ten Times Past Our Way
 Phone 388

Send it  to the Laundry

St. Joseph Gazette, July 25, 1920

Pendleton St. Laundresses

The secondary literature discussed above states that often Black laundresses worked together in neighborhood groupings. There are indications that this occurred in St. Joseph. The 1920 census and the 1921 City Directory allow us to create a picture of neighborhoods where there were a large number of Black laundresses. One such neighborhood was the 800-900 block of Pendleton Street. Fifteen women living at twelve addresses identified themselves as laundresses. An examination of available biographical information supports the general information about the nature of laundry work at this time. Many of the women lived and worked with relatives. The Sanborn map shows that the neighborhood was characterized by relatively large back yards and both sides of the street had alley access. These are the spaces where the women would have congregated and collaborated.



1911 Sanborn Map

1. Amanda Matthews Briscoe and Laura Briscoe McGee, 801 Pendleton³²
Amanda is Laura's mother. Additional information on Amanda and Laura below
2. Susan Ellsworth & Mattie Jones, 918 Pendleton
Susan is Mattie's grandmother. Additional information on Susan below
3. Mary Evans and Nannie Keebough, 909 Pendleton
4. Anna Gorman Dawson Logan, 920 Pendleton
Anna was born in 1854 in Clay County, MO to parents who were born in KY.
Additional information on Anna below
5. Anna Hazelrig, 921 Pendleton
6. Louisa Holley, 902 Pendleton
7. Carrie Johnson, 923 Pendleton
8. Julia Johnson, 916 Pendleton
Her divorce in 1922 was likely the talk of the neighborhood. Additional information below.
9. Ethel Parker, 808 Pendleton
She was married to Abram Nave's coachman and in 1907 she claimed to be a relative of Asaie Mitchell, who had recently died, claiming a share of her estate.
10. Mary Robison, 915 Pendleton
11. Annie Stewart and Mattie Washington, 906 Pendleton
Additional information on Annie and Mattie is below.

³² The 1921 City Directory does not list an 801.

12. Alice White, 919 Pendleton

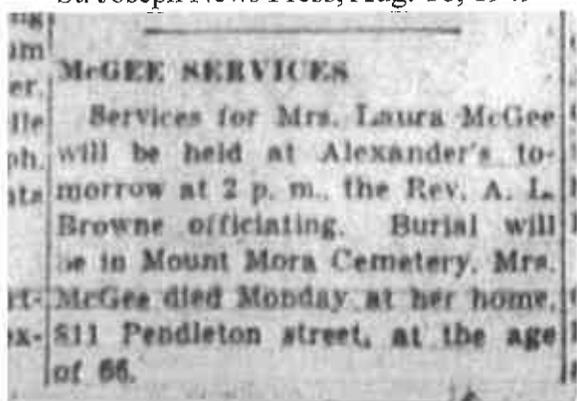
Laura Briscoe McGee

(Jan. 11, 1883- Aug. 15, 1949).

Born in St. Joseph, to William Briscoe and Amanda Matthews. Married to Bernie McGee.³³

Died of heart disease at 811 Pendleton. Buried at Mt. Mora.

St. Joseph News Press, Aug. 16, 1949



Amanda Matthews Briscoe

(May 3, 1860-Oct. 20, 1944)

Born in Easton, MO, daughter of John Mathews³⁴ and Mary Minor.³⁵ Married to William Briscoe and mother of Laura McGee. Died of pulmonary hypostasis at 811 Pendleton. Buried at Mt. Mora. Intriguingly, 811 Pendleton is currently being rented by an individual with the last name of Briscoe.

Susan Ellsworth

According to an article in the *St. Joseph Gazette*, June 14, 1890, Susan was married three times. Her first husband served in the Civil War and died of wounds that he received in that conflict. Because of her loss, she was entitled to a pension from the United States, but – like many Black women – she had trouble collecting what she was due. In 1890, John C. Bender³⁶ set up business at 405 Edmond Street as a pension claim agent and purported to be able to secure the pension that Susan was owed. He did get her pension paid, but he extorted a significant portion of the funds as his fee. Susan took him to court and he was fined for the extortion. In the 1920 census she identifies herself as a laundress, but in the 1921 City Directory she lists herself as a hair dresser.

Anna Dawson Logan

³³ Dec. 6, 1883-Feb. 28, 1938. Born in Richmond, MO. Worked as a porter & waiter in a club. Died at 811 Pendleton of tuberculosis of bladder and kidneys. Buried at Mt. Mora.

³⁴ Born in Leavenworth, KS.

³⁵ Born in Kentucky.

³⁶ June 5, 1831-April 18, 1901. Bender was born in Hesse Darmstadt and is buried at Mt. Mora.

(April 17, 1854- June 11, 1928). Born in Clay Co., MO. Both of her parents were from Virginia. Listed as mulatto. Married to William Logan.³⁷ In 1905, Anna was one of several small investors who lost their money due to the failure of the American Mercantile Company. Anna lost \$35, a substantial amount of money for her. In the 1910 census she is the mother of four, all of whom are living. She died at 920 Pendleton of chronic spinal muscular atrophy and is buried at Ashland.

Julia Johnson

(1889-).

Born in Alabama. 1920 census lists her as mulatto. Married to Robert Johnson; divorced in 1922. She charged him with “indignities, such as to render her condition in life, as his wife, intolerable, in this, to-wit: that the defendant, although an able-bodied man, has failed, refused, and neglected to provide or furnish plaintiff with the absolute necessities of life; that he squandered his money in gambling and riotous living and forced this plaintiff to support herself, although plaintiff was in feeble health and in no condition to earn a livelihood, and that defendant has frequently abused plaintiff and cursed her and called her vile and indecent names. . .” Nothing more is known about her at this time.

Annie Washington Stewart

(1885-) Born in MO, father from New Orleans, mother from MO. In the 1920 census she rents at 906 Pendleton³⁸ and is supporting a 14-year-old stepson, Robert Ewing. She is married to Oliver Stewart³⁹ In the 1930 census she is living with her sister Ida Spriggs at 906 Pendleton⁴⁰ and working as a dishwasher in a hotel; she is listed as single.

Mattie Ada Beatty Washington

Jan. 18, 1872- Jan. 3, 1964. Born in Platte City, MO. 7th grade education. Married to William Washington.⁴¹ Their daughter is Lydia [Corbin] Died at 513 S. 18th St. of broncho pneumonia. She is buried in Weston, MO.

Other St. Joseph Laundresses

Using tools such as Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and Find A Grave, it is possible to gain at least a bit of a picture of the lives of the African-American laundresses who lived in St. Joseph in 1920/21. Not surprisingly, the picture that emerges is not particularly surprising – we learn of the everyday joys and sorrows of their lives, as well as more catastrophic occurrences.

³⁷ (1830- Nov. 9, 1925). Born in Kentucky. Anna is the informant on his death certificate, but she does not know the names of his parents. He died at 920 Pendleton of chronic nephritis. Buried at Ashland

³⁸ Her family the Washingtons live next door.

³⁹ (2/16/1866-10/1/1945). Born in Kansas. In 1920 is a furnace tender for private families. Died of rectal cancer. Buried at Mt. Olivet

⁴⁰ Ida May Washington Spriggs (July 31, 1886- May 25, 1963). Ida is listed as the owner of the property, valued at \$300. She is listed as a laundress. She died at Jackson Rest Home and is buried at City Cemetery.

⁴¹ (April 1, 1872-Sept. 6, 1946). Born in Weston, MO, as were both parents. Received a 1st grade education. Laborer in a packing house. He was politically active. Died at 513 S. 18th St. of angina. Buried in Weston.

We see a group of women with a great determination to do what was necessary, legal or not, to survive.

Education was often not something that these women were able to achieve. In the first decades of the 20th century, relatively few young people – of any race – graduated from high school. Juanita Bartlett Armstrong⁴² was salutatorian of Bartlett High School in 1910. She spoke on “The Ideal Girl” at the graduation ceremony. More typical was Eva Mae Morton⁴³ who had a 4th grade education and Minnie Henderson⁴⁴ who finished 8th grade.

For many of these women marital strife was a part of their lives. Reading the accounts that appear in the newspapers, one can not help but feel that many of them were not given the support that was needed. In 1907, under the headline: “Ran Wife Out of House: Albert Buckner Acted Very Badly, but Police Judge Decided to Give Him a Chance,” is the story of Albert Buckner’s abuse of his wife Sarah.⁴⁵ Albert was arrested on charge of disturbing the peace. “Buckner’s wife appeared against him and testified that Buckner came home drunk last night and tried to run her out of the house. Buckner promised to be good, and was paroled.”⁴⁶ Two years earlier, Ella Huston⁴⁷ divorced her husband Charles Huston, whom she had married in 1899, after he was sent to the penitentiary for trying to kill her.⁴⁸ Carrie Carter Wallace Selectman⁴⁹ had a terrible marital history. In 1891, her first husband, Abe Wallace was arrested “on a state warrant sworn out by his wife charging him with assault and battery. Wallace has a tendency to accumulate large and indigestible jags and when in that condition comes home and plays ‘tattoos’ on his wife’s head with beer bottles and in sundry ways amuses himself. His wife got tired of his private theatricals and has concluded that ‘Abe’ needs a rest.”⁵⁰ In 1909 she sued her second husband George Selectman for divorce charging that “he beat and cursed her. . . She also alleges that he ran her down the street with a knife.”⁵¹ Georgia Kimbrough Turner⁵² was married to Spencer Turner. The *News Press* and the *Observer* in August 1923 reported that she has filed for divorce on grounds of cruelty and abuse. It is not clear if the divorce was ever finalized.⁵³ Hattie Powell Lewis Rucker⁵⁴ divorced her first husband Charles Lewis.

⁴² July 25, 1891-March 7, 1929. Born in Carrollton, MO. Married George Thomas Armstrong on July 8, 1912, and by 1920 had three children with three more in the years following. She died at Noyes Hospital of complications of influenza and is buried at Ashland Cemetery.

⁴³ 1886-Dec. 30, 1940. Born in St. Joseph. Died of cerebral hemorrhage and buried at City Cemetery.

⁴⁴ Jan. 10, 1881-April 3, 1957. Born in Weston, MO. Late in life she worked in the cafeteria at Lindburgh Elementary School.

⁴⁵ Sarah Ellen Glover Buckner (June 27, 1878-May 2, 1949). Born in Platte City, MO. Married to Albert Buckner and had four sons and one daughter.

⁴⁶ *St. Joseph News Press*, Oct. 16, 1907. Albert is frequently mentioned in the press over the next two decades for small-scale criminal activity including the scattering of trash from his wagon in 1923.

⁴⁷ Oct. 1871-April 27, 1941. Born in Kentucky or Virginia. She died at 2110 Messanie of accidental burns and is buried at City Cemetery.

⁴⁸ “Convict’s Wife Sues Him,” *St. Joseph News Press*, April 16, 1906.

⁴⁹ July 10, 1885-Dec. 8, 1957. Born in Columbia, MO. She died at Missouri Methodist Hospital of cerebral hemorrhage and is buried at City Cemetery.

⁵⁰ “Charged with Wife Beating,” *St. Joseph Herald*, Aug. 28, 1891.

⁵¹ “Chased Her With a Knife, Says Wife,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, Sept. 19, 1909.

⁵² Jan. 21, 1895-Feb. 2, 1966. Born in Richmond, MO. She completed high school.

⁵³ In 1928, Spencer was arrested for drunk driving and possession of liquor.

⁵⁴ July 10, 1870-Sept. 30, 1941. She married Abraham Lincoln Rucker on Sept. 18, 1915.

Many of these women lived with other family members who were also working as laundresses. In 1920, Carrie Carter Selectman lived at 2208 Herman Ave. with her mother Lucy Watts Price and her daughter Ella Wallace – all three women were working as laundresses.

Children were frequently sources of trouble for their mothers. Edward Buckner, the 12-year-old son of Sarah Ellen Glover Buckner was arrested in March 1910 on charges of breaking into a vacant house and was committed to the Northwest Missouri Colored Orphanage.⁵⁵ In 1919, Edward was arrested on charges of stealing 200 quarts of whisky and 12 bottles of gin from the St. Charles Hotel.⁵⁶

Widowhood made it necessary for women such as Hester Washington Dixon⁵⁷ and Anna Crowley (and many others) to work as laundresses.

There are tantalizing indications of the fun that this community had. There are quite a few family members who are arrested on liquor charges and gambling. In 1907, Pauline Quarles Lake was a part of a choir comprised of members from various churches.⁵⁸ In 1933, Louis Buckner, the son of Sarah, is given a mention concerning a party at the American Legion Post: “The Hot Pepper boys, Louis Buckner and Elbert cooper, two colored sons of jazz, scored with piano and drum numbers. Buckner wearing gloves to play the piano.”⁵⁹

Several of the women merited mentions in the local press for their litigious activities. Amanda Mathews Briscoe⁶⁰ unsuccessfully sued the street railway company in 1919 alleging that she was injured while riding.

Attempts to save did not always go well. In 1905, the American Mercantile Company, a local bank failed taking investors’ money with them. Anna Logan lost \$35.⁶¹

Charitable activities were an important part of the laundresses’ lives. In 1930, Amanda Mathews Briscoe, Laura McGee, and Nannie Keebough were among those who contributed \$1 to Community Chest.⁶²

In 1914 Carrie Carter [Wallace Selectman] was arrested with another woman on charges of highway robbery for holding up Ike Weinshank on 8th and Sacramento Streets and stealing \$4.51.⁶³ Gertrude Kiles was arrested in September 1924 for cutting Stella Johnson with a razor. She plead guilty was sentenced to three months in jail.⁶⁴

For Hester Dixon being a laundress was likely a step up. In December 1890 she was fined \$10 for residing in a “bawdy house.”⁶⁵

⁵⁵ *St. Joseph Gazette*, March 17, 1910.

⁵⁶ “Files Suit Charging Six with ‘Booze’ Theft,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1919. Edward is mentioned frequently in the papers well into the 1940s for his criminal activity before dying in 1965.

⁵⁷ April 4, 1861-Jan. 26, 1930. Born in Lexington, MO. Died of a cerebral hemorrhage and is buried at City Cemetery.

⁵⁸ “Melodies to be Chorus Feature,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, July 28, 1907.

⁵⁹ Kuehn Chosen as Legion’s Head,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, Sept. 28, 1933.

⁶⁰ See information under Pendleton St. Laundresses for more biographical information.

⁶¹ “Local Investors Lose Thousands,” *St. Joseph Gazette*, April 13, 1905.

⁶² “Pass \$121,000 Mark,” *St. Joseph News Press*, May 24, 1930.

⁶³ “Negroes Bound Over,” *St. Joseph News Press*, Nov. 30, 1914.

⁶⁴ “Negroes Plead Guilty to Assault,” *St. Joseph News Press*, Feb. 17, 1925.

⁶⁵ “In the Recorder’s Court,” *St. Joseph News Press*, Dec. 3, 1890.

A disheartening number of these women and their families spent the end of their lives at State Hospital #2.⁶⁶ Katie Marshall Thackston⁶⁷ died at the hospital of broncho pneumonia. In 1959 Stella Mae Smith Finnell⁶⁸ died there of chronic brain syndrome associated with senile brain disease. Georgia Kimbrough Turner died there in 1966 of cardiac decompensation.

Utter tragedy never seemed to be far away. On July 3, 1922, fire broke out at 1426 S. 8th Street, the home of Ella Adams. Her husband Williams Adams and two other men who were in the house at the time escaped, but Ella, aged 56, was trapped in her room and burned to death.⁶⁹

Table 1: Black Laundresses in St. Joseph in 1920⁷⁰

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Adams, Ella	1426 S 8th	49	
Anderson, Mary	2109 S 8th	41	7 & 11-year-old grandchildren
Ardell, Prudie	711 Richardson	16	lives with widowed mother
Armstrong, Juanita	1333 N 12th	29	3 children between 4 & 15
Austin, Mattie	917 S 8th	24	
Balley, Ida May	1613 S 17th	28	
Barnes, Stella M	Franklin	37	
Bartlett, Susie	519 E Isabelle	35	14-year-old son
Birch, Ora	425 E Isabelle	27	14-year-old son
Blagman, Mary M.	108 Highland	69	
Blue, Minnie	1327 S 4 th	41	9-year-old grand daughter
Boyles, Queen	1312 Holman	?	
Bradford, Lena	846 22nd	39	13-year-old dau., 16-year-old son
Branch, Hettie	1201 N 19th	30	
Brassfield, Mattie	506 N 19th	50	
Brazelton, Myrtle	Pryor	39	
Brewer, Cora	N 19th	45	
Briscoe, Amanda	801 Pendleton	56	
Brooks, Mildred	1028 Francis	53	
Brown, Cordia	1509 S 13th	28	
Brown, Elizabeth	114 Robidoux	75	

⁶⁶ The institution for the insane.

⁶⁷ Dec. 23, 1876-July 22, 1934. Born in Carrollton, MO. The 1920 census lists her as a widow living with her two sons.

⁶⁸ May 17, 1892-Nov. 28, 1959. Born in St. Joseph. Buried at Ashland Cemetery.

⁶⁹ "Negress Burns to Death," *St. Joseph News Press*, July 3, 1922.

⁷⁰ Information taken from the 1920 federal census

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Bruce, Tina	1718 S 6th	39	4-year-old son
Buckner, Hattie	706 S 21st	49	
Buckner, Sarah E	628 N 24th	40	
Butler, Ruby	1324 Holman	19	
Calemease, Ethel	834 S 20th	23	2-year-old son, 3-year-old dau.
Callier, Mollie	910 Douglas	49	
Carter, Martha	1313 N. 16th	45	12-year-old son/ private home
Casey, Mattie L	209 Iowa	43	13-year-old son, 7-year-old dau
Cassney, Angie	510 Kemper	56	
Clark, Harriet E	1220 N 6th	32	
Clark, Josie	705 Richardson	31	
Clark, Lizzie	Corby	65	
Clay, Lulu Belle	1214 N 12th	10	Living with grandmother
Coleman, Landora	923 N 7 th , rear	36	
Cora Anderson	710 Richardson	23	13-year-old nephew
Corporal, Mary	Corby	48	
Craig, Elizabeth	708 S 21st	33	
Crews, Hannah	417 S 16th	40	
Cross, Nannie	1612 Holman	52	9-yr-old dau, infant grandson
Crowley, Anna	W. Augusta	30	
Crowley, Maggie	1624 Moss	39	5 children between 0 & 8
Dale, Laura J	1901 Mulberry	44	
Davis, Bessie	2774 Messanie	37	
Davis, Lizzie	711 S 20th	32?	
Dawson, Lizzie	719 Pendleton	35	7-year-old dau
Dennings, Hattie Beckham	1805 Mulberry	24	
Dewey, Laura	45 Scott	46	
Dixon, Hester	111 W Augusta	58	
Donald, Ella	513 E Isabelle	61	
Duggs, Elizabeth	1604 Holman	45	widow
Ellsworth, Susan	918 Pendleton	66	8-year-old dau
English, Margaret	1898 Felix	49	
Enyrd, Ora	1305 N 19th	38	
Evans, Mary	909 Pendleton	25	
Finley, Nettie	N 4th	56	
Finnell, Stella	N. 3rd	32	
Finney, Mari	1214 S 18th	40	

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Fisher, Mary	1324 Holman	52	
Floyd, Ruth	2508 Messanie	23	
Franklyn, Anna	1514 Grand	40	
Franklyn, Gertrude	1514 Grand	34	3 children between 16 & 0
Frederick, Anna	1335 N 12th	48	
Gibson, Ollie	?	47	
Gilliam, Pauline	1207 S 16th	35	10-year-old dau, 14-year-old son
Glaspy, Lula	1520 S 8th	35	
Gorman Logan Dawson, Anna	920 Pendleton	66	8-year-old granddau/
Greene, Julia	616 S 22nd	69	
Guthrie, Edna Mona	1505 Holman	32	3 children between 12 & 15
Harrington, Martha	1825 Mary	59	
Harris, Minnie	808 N 4 th , rear	43	4 children between 12 & 18
Harvey, Flica	1824 Mulberry	80	
Haven, Lilly M	2134 S 7th	19	
Haven, Lottie	809 Jefferson	54	
Hayes, Rosa	512 E Isabelle	49	
Hazelrig, Anna	921 Pendleton	45	16-year-old stepson
Hendersson, Minnie	420 Angelique	39	
Hilderbrand, Ida	116 Dewey	28	2-year-old son
Hoag, Lulu	1312 N 7th	54	14-year-old dau
Holland, Viola	1819 Holman	26	4 children between 0 & 6
Holley, Louisa	902 Pendleton	65	
Hunt, Mary	1823 Mulberry	39	
Hunter, Lou	1707 Beattie	50	
Hurst, Atoha S	1718 Messanie	38	
Huston, Ella	2110 Messanie	47	
Jackson, Mamie	2522 Messanie	40	11-year-old grandson
Jackson, Marie	1303 S 8th	39	13 & 16-year-old daus
Jackson, Martha	810 N 2 nd , rear		
Jackson, Mattie	1819 Dalton	35	
Johnson, Alto	1817 Mulberry	27	16-year-old stepdau
Johnson, Carrie	923 Pendleton	42	
Johnson, Elizabeth	1213 S 17th	38	
Johnson, Julia	916 Pendleton	31	

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Johnson, Mittie	901 S. 16th	38	4 children between 13 & 17
Johnson, Nannie	812 N 4 th	40	
Johnston, Pearl	406 N 19th	25	4-year-old dau
Jones, Aron	605 S 20th	60	8-year-old grandson
Jones, Clara	1406 N 17th	27	
Jones, Lulu	2572 Messanie	46	4 children between 14 & 22
Jones, Mattie	918 Pendleton	27	8-year-old sister
Jones, Millie	720 N 2nd	56	
Keebough, Nannie	909 Pendleton	32	
Keller, May	120 W Michel	41	
Kiles, Gertrude	1408 N 17th	24	widow
Lake, Pauline	1028 Francis	52	
Lamaster, Lizzie	625 Albemarle	52	Small grandchildren
LaMasters, Alice	1523 Buchanan	61	5-year-old grandson
Leftridge, Mattie	101 N 18th	49	
Lemaster, Eliza	1328 N 12th	47	13-year-old grandson
Lenear, Martha	1203 N 19th	37	
Lewis, Kate	1907 Angelique	65	
Lewis, Lulu	1819 Mulberry	46	
Lewis, Maggie	1608 Holman	36	
Madison, Maggie	1718 Seneca	40	
Madison, Rebecca	500 N 19th	45	
Maloney, Bessie M	1825 Mulberry	29	8-year-old dau, 4-year-old son/ married but no husband listed
Martin, Louise		61	15-year-old son
McDonald, Anna Mary	909 S. 16th	39	
McGee, Laura	801 Pendleton	36	8-year-old dau
Mcharg, Lizzie	805 S 21st	48	
McNeal, Fannie	1226 N. 10th	38	
Meredith, Laura B	842 22nd	36	15-year-old dau
Meyers, Delilah	1502 Moss	52	
Midgett, Bertha F.	1806 Main	38	
Midgett, Iva	609 Lincoln	20	
Miller, Luella	619 Sycamore	49	9-year-old niece
Mitchell, Agnes	1609 Holman	29	2 children, age 9 & 3
Mitchell, Dora	1812 Holman	37	2 children 3 & 2
Mithcell, Laura	421 E. Franklin	58	

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Montgomery, Jennie	923 N 7 th , rear	42	
Moore, Alice	1420 N 18th	?	2 grandchildren age 5 & 3
Moore, Grace	1420 N 18th	22	2 children age 5 & 3
Moore, Katherine B	1814 Mary	33	4 children between 1 & 19
Morre, Lena	1416 S 13th	27	
Morton, Eva Mae	520 N 2nd	34	5-year-old dau
Morton, Sarah	520 N 2nd	66	5-year-old granddau
Murphy, Mattie	514 Jackson	50	
Nance, Jane	1823 Mulberry	57	3 grandchildren between 6 & 13
Nichols, Adie	817 Olive	30	14-year-old dau
Nichols, Mandy	817 Olive		14-year-old granddau
Norman, Lora	405 S 16th	50	
Northrop, Amanda	923 ½ N 7th	72	
Offutt, Bridget	2108 S 5th	33	3 children between 6 & 16
Paris, Alberta	206 Oak	36	
Parker, Ethel	808 Pendleton	40	8 children between 1 & 15
Payne, Alverta	628 Corby	16	
Payne, Amy	2520 Messanie	36	
Payne, Carrie	628 Corby	31	3 children between 7 & 16
Payne, Emma	609 Lincoln	32	
Payne, Iola	2027 Frederick	34	14-year-old son
Payne, Virginia	1812 Holman	50	2 grandchildren age 3 & 2
Perry, Amanda	1805 Mulberry	56	
Powell, Agnes	225 Nebraska	45	
Powell, Mary	2022 Holman	49	
Price, Lucy	2208 Hermon	63	
Rector, Florence O	1717 Olive	65	
Reynolds, Anna	1407 N 17th	?	2 grandchildren age 8 & 6
Rhodes, Viola	1332 N 12th	20	5-year-old son/widow living with father
Roberson, Rinda	212 Clayton	47	
Roberts, Amelia	1631 Bartlett	21	1-year-old dau

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Robinson, Mariah	1822 Angelique	52	
Robison, Mary	915 Pendleton	35	9 children between 17 & 4 -- widow
Rone, Lizzie	710 Dewey	40	
Ross, Ella	1824 Holman	47	Age 17 & 13
Rucker, Annie	1709 Beattie	34	4 children between 2 & 12
Rucker, Hattie	1220 Grand	48	
Scott, Zarilda	807 Corby	62	
Selectman, Carrie	2208 Hermon	34	
Seymour, Mahalah J	1218 N 6th	54	
Shumaker, Mattie	113 W Augusta	51	15-year-old dau
Sims, Mary	508 N 19th	32	
Smith, Mattie	515 E Isabelle	60	
Smith, Pearl	1503 N 12th	35	
Stapleton, Martha	1507 N 12th	32	2 children 9 & 5
Stewart, Annie	906 Pendleton	36	14-year-old step son
Stone, Anna	703 Pendleton	57	
Stone, Josephine	1413 N 13 th	32	4 children between 5 & 10
Taylor, Birdie	1101 Main	37	
Taylor, Mary J	Messanie	51	
Teasdale, Ella	1717 S 8th	39	3 children between 8 & 11
Terrell, Lottie	1409 N 13th	29	2 children, 5 & 1
Thackston, Katie	615 Lincoln	45	20-year-old son
Thomas, Maggie	1422 Richardson	37	
Thomas, Myrtle	2110 Messanie	33	
Thompson, Mary	578 N 3rd	41	
Thompson, Mary	828 S 21st	28	
Thorps, Florence	1501 N 12th	35	14-year-old dau
Thuston, Malinda	2516 Messanie	38	4 children between 6 & 18
Tillman, Jennie	1313 N 15th	38	5 children between 3 & 16/ widow
Todd, Annie	1427 N. 13 th	69	
True, Eliza	713 N 24th	63	
True, Mariah	1815 Mulberry	67	
Turner, Emma	2005 N 19th	29	3 children between 5 & 9
Turner, Georgia	910 Douglas	24	
Turner, Minnie M	1119 N 4th	38	
Waldron, Mary	828 S 21st	42	

Name	Address	Age in 1920	Children at home/family
Waldron, Rhodda	710 S 21st	59	
Wallace, Amanda	933 N 7th	60	
Wallace, Ella	2208 Hermon	18	
Wallace, Minnie	N. 16th	33	6 children between 1 & 14
Ward, Emma	804 N. 2 nd	45	5 children between 2 & 19
Ward, Mary	1717 S 8th	27	
Washington, Mattie	906 Pendleton	37	
Washington, Mattie A	521 N 19th	47	
Weaver, Katie	1203 S 8 th		
White, Alice	919 Pendleton	18	Young siblings
Whitehall, Berthel	1610 Holman	24	3 nieces/nephews between 5 & 15
Wilkerson, Mary	705 S 20th	60	
Williams, Belle	1316 S 20th	55	
Williams, Kate	923 N 7th	63	
Williams, Rena	1806 Main	60	
Williams, Susie	Bartlett	42	
Willis, Martha	1406 S 14th	31	
Wilson, Emma	1614 Holman	65	10-year-old lodger
Winston, Mary	1805 Felix	41	
Woodson, Anna	1512 Olive	35	9-year-old dau
Woodson, Cora	1805 Mulberry	42	

An Extraordinary Life: Dr. John Russel Asbra Crossland



St. Joseph is city that takes great pride in its history and spends a great deal of time talking about certain aspects of that history. But sadly, we do a poor job of understanding the history of large portions of our community, and that includes the African American community. Like our population overall, the African American population of St. Joseph has remained remarkably stable since the city's inception – roughly 12% of our total population. Within that community there were a wide diversity of individuals – people with all sorts of backgrounds who worked at a wide variety of jobs. From the mid – 19th through the mid-20th centuries, the number of black professionals in the city was quite small, and most of those came from outside of the city.

A fascinating example of this group is Dr. John Russel Asbra Crossland, a physician and politician, and a larger-than-life character. Crossland was born on April 24, 1864 – almost exactly one year before the end of the Civil War. He was born in Bennettsville, South Carolina to enslaved parents: Frank and Sarah Jane Crossland. Frank took the name of the man who held him in bondage, Dr. William Crosland – the 1860 census shows William owning more than 60 individuals ranging in age from infant to 90; Frank and Sarah Jane were among those.⁷¹ Bennettsville was the closest town to the Crosland plantation, its economy was dependent on the cultivation of short-staple cotton by an enslaved workforce. In 1865, the town was occupied by Union troops under the command of General Sherman. We know that the black Crossland family remained in the area following the war – the 1880 census lists them; Frank is a mattress

⁷¹ <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Crosland-44>; <https://freepages.rootsweb.com/~ajac/genealogy/smarlboro.htm>

maker; his wife Sarah is ill, suffering from paralysis; their daughter Francis is 18; John is 16 – interestingly given his future, he is listed as being unable to read and write; there is also a 2 year old granddaughter living in the home. The town had a 1-room schoolhouse for the black population,⁷² and it is likely that John received his early education there.

In his late teens, John left Bennettsville and South Carolina, and there is no record of his ever having returned.⁷³ He enrolled in Shaw University in Raleigh, NC. Shaw is a private Baptist, historically black university. It was founded by Henry M. Tupper, a white northern missionary who had come to the area during the Civil War and decided to remain to help the freedmen. Like other institutions of its kind, it took a very paternalistic approach to the education of its black students and placed a heavy emphasis on religion and morality.⁷⁴ For ambitious young black students of that time there were real barriers to gaining a successful college education: most came from deprived educational backgrounds (it is not likely that the one-room school in tiny Bennettsville, South Carolina had a lot of college prep courses) and even more deprived economic conditions.⁷⁵ These schools played a very important role in creating an educated black middle class – the students who attended the historically black colleges and universities were characterized by an immense drive to succeed which made them among the first members of their community to gain a profession.⁷⁶ I have not been able to find a record of what he studied there; however, Shaw did have one of the few medical colleges open to black students and it seems likely that this is where the idea of training to be a physician took root.

Crossland did not attend medical school at Shaw, instead he moved to Nashville, TN and enrolled at Meharry Medical college. Like the medical school at Shaw, Meharry was affiliated with a missionary-founded college, Central Tennessee College.⁷⁷ Though Meharry, which still exists, was considered one of the best medical colleges open to black students, it had real limitations. Its budget was tiny, it had substandard equipment and library, and its faculty was comprised of local white physicians, who had either been slave holders themselves or were the sons of slaveholders, who taught on a part time basis.⁷⁸ An important element in the education that the students at Meharry received was the reminder that they had a responsibility to their

⁷²[From interview, “I am a Negro,” of Walter Coachman, pastor of Manning Grove Holiness Church in Bennettsville. <https://sciway3.net/proctor/marlboro/afram/nefro.html>]

⁷³ No idea when or where his parents died or are buried.

⁷⁴ Todd L. Savitt, “Training the ‘Consecrated, Skillful, Christian Physician’: Documents Illustrating Student Life at Leonard Medical School, 1882-1918,” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 75:3 (July 1998): 250, 253.

⁷⁵ Todd L. Savitt, “Training the ‘Consecrated, Skillful, Christian Physician’: Documents Illustrating Student Life at Leonard Medical School, 1882-1918,” *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 75:3 (July 1998): 255, 262.

⁷⁶ Todd L. Savitt, “Entering a White Profession: Black Physicians in the New South, 1880-1920,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 61:4 (Winter, 1987): 514.

⁷⁷ Darlene Clark Hine, “The Anatomy of Failure: Meical Education Reform and the Leonard Medical School of Shaw University, 1882-1920,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 54:4 (Autumn, 1985): 515.

⁷⁸ Darlene Clark Hine, “The Anatomy of Failure: Meical Education Reform and the Leonard Medical School of Shaw University, 1882-1920,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 54:4 (Autumn, 1985): 516.

race, and that a major part of their career would be racial betterment.⁷⁹ Crossland graduated from Meharry in February 1888,⁸⁰ and was still there when a new building for the medical school was opened in October. He contributed \$5 to the building fund.⁸¹ It was while he was a student here, that John met the young woman who would be his first wife, a student at Central Tennessee College, Ada Willis. He appears to have remained in Nashville until early 1890 when he moved to St. Joseph.

It is unclear what prompted Crossland to leave the South and come to St. Joseph. There is no indication that he knew anyone here. Most newly graduated black doctors of this time remained in the South where they had grown up and gone to school.⁸² Some communities sent delegations to the medical schools to try to attract a doctor to come to their city, but it isn't clear if that's what happened. He did come alone, leaving Ada, who was working as a secretary at Central Tennessee College, behind in Nashville. Whatever brought him here, the city would be his home with very short breaks, for the next 60 years.

The first mention of John in the St. Joseph press was on Aug. 1, 1890 when he is listed as a speaker at the celebration marking the 56th anniversary of the emancipation of the enslaved persons in the West Indies.⁸³ The next day, the *News Press*, carried the story of his runaway horse: "A broken buggy, a shattered stairway and a horse standing in the basement door of Mrs. Pritchard's residence, southwest corner of 6th and Jule streets,⁸⁴ calmly surveying the destruction he had wrought, furnished the attraction for a crowd about 10 o'clock this morning." Apparently, Crossland had been visiting a patient, when the horse bolted, running south on 6th St. The horse bolted into the stairway leading to the basement at Mrs. Pritchard's house, but the buggy was hung up in the doorway, attracting great attention.⁸⁵

Crossland soon was a prominent – and divisive – figure in the African American community of his adopted home. On December 31, 1891, he was a guest at the New Years Eve party at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Robinson,⁸⁶ 1113 Jules.⁸⁷ The *News Press* described this as a gathering of the most prominent members of black society in St. Joseph. The article spends a lot of time listing those in attendance and what they were wearing: "The host and hostess received their guests with much hospitality, while the latter were clad in full evening costumes. The hostess wore a black silk, fashioned in the most artistic style, with diamond ornament." John "delivered the toast of the evening, taking for his subject, "The Effects of the Holidays," in which he drew vividly before the audience the manner in which the holidays are

⁷⁹ Todd L. Savitt, "Entering a White Profession: Black Physicians in the New South, 1880-1920," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 61:4 (Winter, 1987): 508.

⁸⁰ "Twenty Graduates," *The Tennessean*, Feb. 14, 1888."

⁸¹ "Dental and Medical: Preparing Colored Men for Service in these Professions," *The Tennessean*, Oct. 24, 1888.

⁸² Todd L. Savitt, "Entering a White Profession: Black Physicians in the New South, 1880-1920," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 61:4 (Winter, 1987): 509.

⁸³ "Is Freedom's Day," *News Press*, Aug. 1, 1890.

⁸⁴ Now the U.S. bank parking lot.

⁸⁵ "A Horse in a Hole," *News Press*, Aug. 2, 1890.

⁸⁶ Robinson operated a barber shop at 314 Felix.

⁸⁷ City Hall now stands there.

enjoyed in the various communities. He brought before them the generosity and hospitality of their own firesides, which demonstrated the effects of civilization in the race.”⁸⁸



It is in 1891 that the dual nature of the coverage of Crossland becomes apparent. The *Herald* notes on April 4 that he has been charged with perjury – but no details of the case are given. In the same publication on July 9, it is noted that he was leaving for Hopkinsville, KY where he “will assist in an important surgical operation.” In September 1891 he left St. Joseph again to travel to Kentucky to marry Ada and bring her back here. They arrived back in St. Joseph on Sept. 3 and were serenaded by the Richmond Quartet, a musical group which was a popular act in local venues.⁸⁹ The newspaper reported that John would bring Ada back to his “elegant home” at 220 N. 6th St.

After his return in 1891, Crossland became a leading figure in Republican politics; activities that would eventually make him nationally and internationally famous. In February 1892, he was chosen by the black political club, the Harrison and Morton Club, to serve as delegate to the national Republican convention.⁹⁰ The next month he addressed a Republican rally at Turner Hall; and he did so again in April.⁹¹ In mid-1892, he was a leading candidate for the office of city physician, which was a political appointment in the gift of the mayor. Crossland was described as “the big medicine in the Republican pow-wows.”⁹² The *Gazette* stated, “The Republicans promised Dr. Crossland the office of city physician for services rendered. It now remains to be seen whether or not Mayor Shepherd will redeem that

⁸⁸ *News Press*, Jan. 2, 1891.

⁸⁹ *Herald*, Sept. 3, 1891.

⁹⁰ “Indorsed Dr. Crossland,” *Herald*, Feb. 9, 1892; “On to Victory,” *Herald*, April 5, 1892.

⁹¹ “Republican Rally,” *Herald*, March 26, 1892.

⁹² *Gazette*, May 15, 1892.

promise.”⁹³ On April 23, the *Gazette* reported that Crossland’s name was not forwarded to the city council for the office: “The Republican party has thus put itself on record as ignoring the desires of the [black] voters of St. Joseph, voted the Republican ticket at the recent city election, believing that in so doing they would aid a competent man of their race to secure a lucrative office. The doctor has been shelved in a manner that says to [that community] ‘we want your votes but not your applications for recognition in the way of spoils.’ [They] St. Joseph will make reply at the polls this fall.”⁹⁴ To make up for the loss of the position, he was made a delegate to both the state and congressional Republican conventions. As the *Gazette* noted: “This kind of balm may soothe the doctor’s spirit, but there isn’t much in it either in a political or financial way.”⁹⁵

On July 2, Ada gave birth to Crossland’s only child, a son, John Russell Asbra Crossland Jr. The family moved to a “cozy little home”⁹⁶ at 633 Albemarle. His medical practice is at 815 Francis.⁹⁷ By 1900, they moved to 813 Francis, renting rooms conveniently next to his practice. There are notices in the papers referring to him as a good doctor.

In October 1892 the Harrison and Warner Club, a black Republican club, was organized with Crossland as president. “The club starts off with 275 members, all of them good workers. The intention is to enroll every colored man in the city under the banner of the Republican leaders.”⁹⁸

On Dec. 22, 1892, Crossland was at the African Methodist Episcopal Church at 22nd and Francis at an organizational meeting for a literary convention. Also at the meeting was the Principal of Bartlett High School, Professor William H. Jones. The two men knew each other through political circles but were known to not like each other. On the church steps words were exchanged between the two – stories vary about what was said, some said that it was over the way that delegates for the literary convention were to be chosen, others said that Crossland had made rude comments about Jones’ wife. When the kerfuffle was over, Crossland found himself on the ground with a dislocated left shoulder. He pressed charges against Jones, who ultimately paid a fine. The affair was covered in great salacious detail in the press.⁹⁹

In 1894, Crossland was appointed assistant City Physician. According to press reports, he used his position to help other African Americans gain employment. In the summer of that year, this policy caused him some problems. He had helped Arthur Williams get a job as a “nuisance inspector,” basically like our property maintenance inspectors today. Williams was caught taking bribes and other inappropriate behavior and he was fired by the Board of Health. Williams blamed Crossland for the loss of his job and one night soon after his firing, he waited outside Crossland’s office on Francis St. with a loaded revolver intending to kill him.

⁹³ *Gazette*, April 15, 1892.

⁹⁴ “Dr. Crossland Shelved,” *Gazette*, April 23, 1892.

⁹⁵ “The Colored Brother,” *Gazette*, April 24, 1892.

⁹⁶ *Herald*, Dec. 4, 1892.

⁹⁷ Where Club Geek is now.

⁹⁸ “Colored Men Organize,” *Herald*, Oct. 4, 1892.

⁹⁹ “The Brethren Fight,” *News Press*, Dec. 22, 1892; “They Scrapped,” *Herald*, Dec. 23, 1892; “Smote Him,” *Gazette*, Dec. 23, 1892; “Professor Jones,” *Herald*, Dec. 24, 1892; “Professor Jones Fined,” *Herald*, Dec. 31, 1892.

Bystanders came to Crossland's aid and little damage was done.¹⁰⁰ Williams went to trial in late June, but it resulted in a hung jury.¹⁰¹

In the last decade of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th, Crossland continued to be active in Republican politics – his reputation as a skilled political operative brought him to the attention of state and national officials, making both friends and enemies along the way.¹⁰² By November 1898 he is a member of the state Republican Committee and president of the Negro Republican State League. He was sent on a week-long speaking tour of nine congressional districts where he made 39 speeches to rally support for the Republican party.¹⁰³ In the summer of 1900, his reputation was such, that it was rumored that he was a candidate for Congress – a rumor he denied.¹⁰⁴

All of this politicking bore fruit in November 1901 when he was summoned to Washington D.C. by the Theodore Roosevelt administration. “He left immediately and expects to return in a few days with a rich, ripe, juicy federal plum. It is said that this will be one of three offices – recorder of deeds of the District of Columbia, surgeon in one of the marine hospitals in the East, or minister to Liberia.”¹⁰⁵ It was the last option – he was appointed Minister to Liberia.

Liberia was a relatively young nation in West Africa. It was established in 1822 by free blacks from the United States.¹⁰⁶ When Roosevelt was elected in 1901, he took a greater interest in the U.S.'s relationship with Liberia than had been the policy of previous administrations. The president was of the opinion that it was a good policy decision to send a black man to represent our interests there.¹⁰⁷ Crossland was the man chosen to undertake that mission.

In the Spring of 1902, as he prepared to take up this exciting position, he was given a number of celebratory send-offs, here in St. Joseph – where more than 300 gathered at the Lyceum Theater to wish him well;¹⁰⁸ and across the state.¹⁰⁹ But by the end of that year, troubling reports were filtering out of Liberia about the actions of the U.S. minister; most disturbing the story that he had shot an electrical engineer named J.R. Faulkner. Apparently, Crossland was boarding at the Faulkner home in the Liberian capital of Monrovia. Crossland said something disrespectful about Faulkner's wife and the two men got into a fight that resulted in Crossland's shooting of his landlord. Additionally, Crossland's secretary at the embassy stated that he was afraid of Crossland,³⁴ and that the secretary kept a loaded revolver in his desk in order to protect himself. The secretary stated that it was his opinion that Crossland

¹⁰⁰ “Dr. Crossland's Assailant,” *Gazette*, June 15, 1894.

¹⁰¹ “A Threat to Kill Crossland,” *Gazette*, June 21, 1894.

¹⁰² “Colored Men Will Meet,” *Gazette*, Feb. 29, 1896; “Bumped Bill Botts,” *News Press*, Aug. 25, 1896;

“Colored Men's League,” *Gazette*, June 15, 1898; “Dr. Crossland on Top,” *Gazette*, April 1, 1899.

¹⁰³ “Dr. Crossland's Trip,” *Herald*, Nov. 8, 1898.

¹⁰⁴ “Is Not a Candidate,” *Herald*, July 24, 1900.

¹⁰⁵ “Dr. Crossland is Summoned,” *Gazette*, Nov. 29, 1901.

¹⁰⁶ William E. Allen, “Liberia and the Atlantic World in the Nineteenth Century: Convergence and Effects,” *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 19.

¹⁰⁷ Emily S. Rosenberg, “The Invisible Protectorate: The United States, Liberia, and the Evolution of Neocolonialism, 1909-1940,” *Diplomatic History* 9:3 (Summer, 1985): 191.

¹⁰⁸ “Farewell to Dr. Crossland,” *Gazette*, March 12, 1902.

¹⁰⁹ “New Minister to Liberia,” *St. Louis Republic*, April 2, 1902; “Reception to Dr. Crossland,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, April 3, 1902.

was mentally unstable.¹¹⁰ The State Department recalled Crossland and he returned to the United States, declaring loudly to any who would listen that he had acted in self-defense, and that he had not been recalled, but was just on a leave of absence.¹¹¹ His failure in his embassy was seen by many as letting down his race. The journal, *The Professional World*, stated “The Crossland episode will be a source of much regret to the [African Americans] of Missouri, first because Dr. Crossland is [black] and secondly because he is a Missourian. His appointment was the first of the kind ever given to [an African American from Missouri], and the fact that it was found necessary for the state department to dispense with his services as minister is to be regretted.”¹¹²



Dr. J. R. A. Crossland, St. Joseph, Mo., Ex-Minister to Liberia, member of the Republican State Central Committee for many years and one of the race's most distinguished physicians.

All his protests were for naught, Crossland returned to St. Joseph and took up his role as a physician in private practice. If he, and others, thought that he would have a quiet life; they were mistaken. On the morning of Sept. 6, 1904, Crossland got into an argument with Dr. William S. Carrion, another black physician with offices on Francis Street. The two men were at Thomas J. Wilson's barber shop, at 814 Francis¹¹³ when Crossland allegedly made rude comments about Carrion's wife. The two men left the barber shop and went to their offices where they got revolvers and returned to the street where they began shooting at each other. Crossland was hit; “the bullet, which shattered the jaw is embedded in the neck, directly below

¹¹⁰ “Negro Diplomat Shot a Man,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, Dec. 8, 1902; “Dr. Crossland's Woes,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Dec. 9, 1902;

¹¹¹ “Crossland Denies Charges of Unbecoming Conduct,” *St. Louis Republic*, March 31, 1903; “Crossland Gives His Version of Liberia Incident,” *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, March 21, 1903; “Will Not Resign,” *News Press*, March 24, 1903.

¹¹² *The Professional World*, Dec. 26, 1902.

¹¹³ Roughly the parking lot of Snyder and Associates.



Perhaps as a result of this great personal tragedy, Crossland married Myrtle Carr unexpectedly in Chicago in May 1918.¹¹⁹ This marriage appears to have been somewhat volatile.

In the aftermath of the tragedy of WWI, Crossland was able to find some meaning in the devastating loss. In Aug. 1921 he was appointed Special Expert in the Veterans' Bureau, charged with looking after the interests of black soldiers and sailors. He was to move to Washington DC, where he had an office with a force of clerks and stenographers to aid in his work.¹²⁰ In that role, which he held until 1923, he traveled widely advocating for the needs of African Americans associated with the armed forces.¹²¹

While he did great good in this role, it was not good for his marriage. His union with Myrtle broke down and Crossland filed for divorce. On May 9, 1923, Myrtle filed an answer to his divorce petition in which she stated that "since Crossland was appointed technical assistant director of the veterans' bureau by President Harding he imagines that all the women of the country are infatuated with him. The petition further says his salary is \$290 a month, and that he spends all of it. The answer gives the names of several women in different cities with which Crossland is alleged to have corresponded. Crossland often calls women by long distance telephone, the wife charges, and sends money to them."¹²²

Dr. Crossland returned to St. Joseph, where he married for a fourth and final time in 1927. His wife was a well-known figure in St. Joseph in her own right. Hattie La Fitte Buren was the widow of the Rev. Nathaniel Buren, and in her role as a minister's wife she played an important role in black St. Joseph society, something she continued after her marriage to Crossland.

¹¹⁹ *News Press*, May 27, 1918.

¹²⁰ "Negro Appointed in Veterans' Bureau," *New York Times*, Aug. 31, 1921.

¹²¹ "Will Visit Nine States," *Observer*, Jan. 6, 1923.

¹²² "Crossland's Wife Fights," *News Press*, May 9, 1923.



MRS. HATTIE L. BUREN.

For the remaining 25 years of his life, he continued to be active in politics and he was seen as an important man in St. Joseph. He continued his very successful medical practice and treated both black and white patients. By the mid-1940s, his health began to fail and he gave up his practice. On September 1, 1950, the *News Press* carried a tragic headline: "Crossland Held Insane." The judge committed Dr. Crossland to State Hospital #2.¹²³ Perhaps thankfully, he died on Sept. 12 and is buried at Ashland Cemetery.¹²⁴ Six days later, his wife Hattie died.¹²⁵

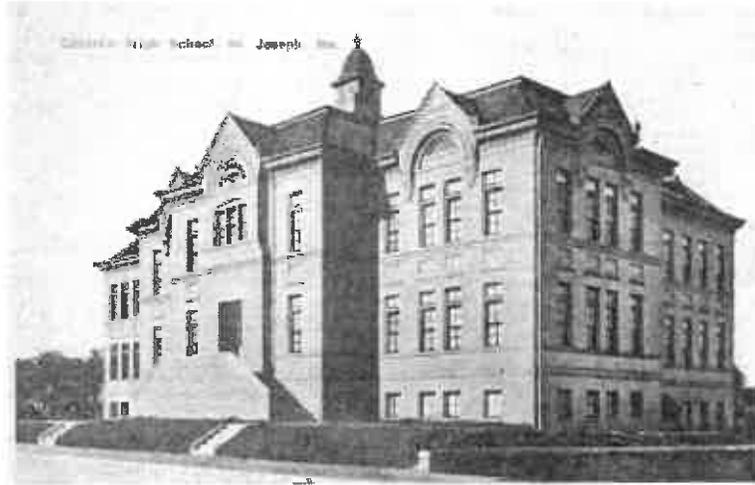
The life and career of Dr. John Russel Asbra Crossland provides a fascinating window onto a period of history that is characterized by immense change. Born as the Civil War ended to parents who had been enslaved, he managed to gain an education that was very unusual for a man of his race and economic standing. He left the South and came to St. Joseph, where he knew no one and made a huge impact and did great good for the entire city. He was a larger-than-life character and perhaps not the easiest man to like, as his frequent altercations attest. But he achieved so much on such a grand scale that it is impossible not to admire him.

¹²³ "Crossland Held Insane," *News Press*, Sept. 1, 1950.

¹²⁴ "Crossland Dies at 82," *News Press*, Sept. 12, 1950.

¹²⁵ "Deaths Close," *News Press*, Sept. 18, 1950.

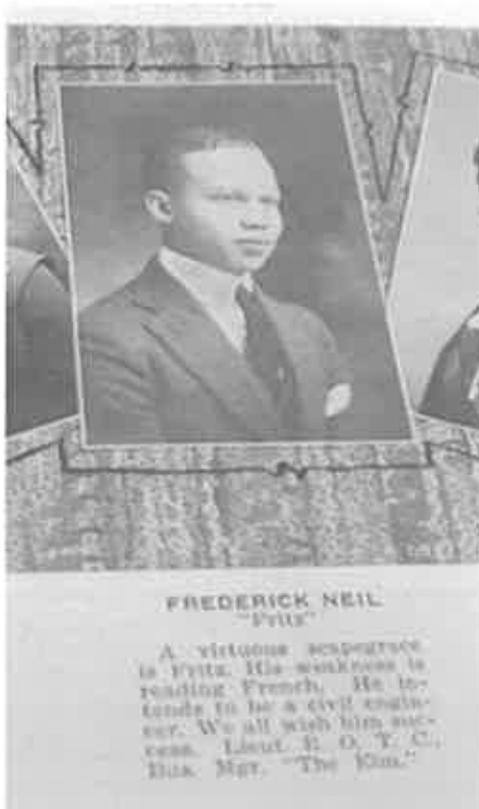
Potential Too Often Unrealized: The 1921 Graduates of Bartlett High School



In the 1920s, most students in St. Joseph did not attend high school. This was particularly true in the black community, where systemic racism and economic challenges made it more difficult for them to pursue their education. St. Joseph had only one black high school, Bartlett High School, located on 18th Street (where the Bartlett Center is now). The 1921 Bartlett High School yearbook is available online. It is fascinating, and sometimes heartbreaking, to look at the faces of those graduates and learn what happened to them after graduation.



Lucille Robinson: In 1920 she lived with her Uncle and Aunt Albert and Cordelia Walker. Albert was a laborer in a packing house. In 1926, Lucille has become a teacher in the public schools in St. Joseph – she is to teach 5th grade for an annual salary of \$1,100, the lowest salary of any of the new teachers (all of whom were white).



Frederick Neil (Nov. 8, 1902-Nov. 23, 1942). Under his high school picture, Frederick's weakness is listed as reading French and he intended to become a civil engineer. That did not happen, instead he became an elevator operator at the Plymouth Clothing Company. He died young from angina pectoris caused by mental excitement exacerbated by influenza. He is buried at Ashland cemetery.



Mayme Jones (d. Oct. 8, 1974) After graduation Mayme attended the University of Nebraska, Lincoln and became a teacher in Troy, KS. She married the Rev. Dewey Gorman, who preached part time at the First Baptist Church in Elwood while holding down a job as a butcher at Armour.



Nellie Thomas was born in Georgia. In St. Joseph she lived with her Uncle and Aunt Rev. Nathaniel and Hattie Buren. Under her yearbook picture she expressed an ambition to attend Fisk University and to teach music. It is unknown if she fulfilled those ambitions.



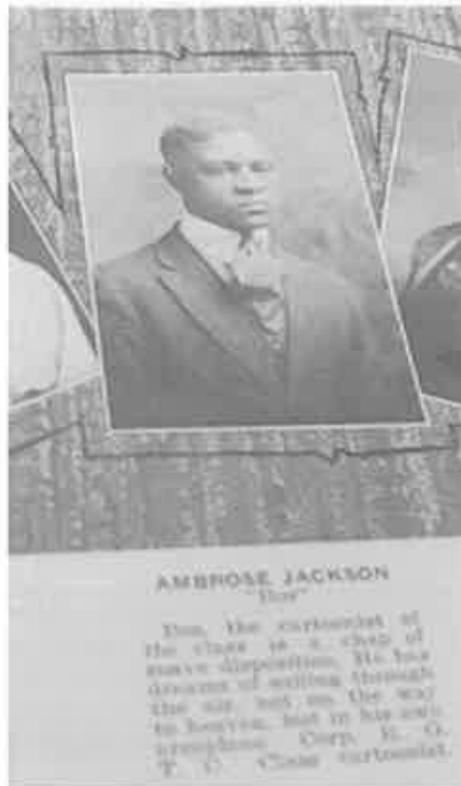
Milton Bledsoe (d. Oct. 1978) was extraordinary. In high school he was the editor of the 1921 year book. After graduation graduated from the University of Nebraska School of Journalism. In the 1940s he was the editor of the *Kansas City Call*, an influential African American newspaper, and worked on the staffs of several other important newspapers. He was the leader of the Kansas City NAACP chapter in 1950. He was active in city politics in Kansas City.



Eda Alexander (June 4, 1903-June 27, 1996). Eda was a St. Joseph native. After high school, she attended KU. She moved to Los Angeles with her husband Frank Conway where she died.



Anita Gentry (March 4, 1902-Aug. 25, 1958). Anita was born in Richmond, KY. Like several of her classmates, she graduated from the University of Nebraska with a teaching degree (which is exactly what she said she was going to do!). She had a short, apparently unhappy marriage with Peter G. Griffin, and her daughter Margaret was born in 1925. Anita taught in the public schools in St. Joseph for many years. In later life she moved to Ann Arbor, MI to live with her daughter.



AMBROSE JACKSON
"Doc"

Doc, the cartoonist of the class is a chap of sunny disposition. He has dreams of sailing through the air, not on the way to heaven, but in his own airplane. Corp. E. G. T. C. Class cartoonist.

Ambrose Jackson (July 17, 1901-Jan. 30, 1972). Ambrose had “dreams of sailing through the air,” but instead spent his entire career as a butcher at Armour. He had three children, and his son Ambrose Jr. served in WWII and in 1953 was the commander of the Roy Curd American Legion Post. Ambrose Jr. later moved to Omaha where he opened the city’s first black-owned architectural firm; Ambrose Sr.- who was the cartoonist for the 1921 Yearbook -- must have been very proud.



Beatrice Handy (Jan. 14, 1903-Feb. 25, 1938). Census records indicate that Beatrice had a difficult home life; her parents did not live together and she lived with her grandmother at times. After high school she married Fred Coleman in 1923. The 1930 census states that they ran a boarding house at 737 S. 6th St.. She died of pulmonary tuberculosis at age 35 and is buried at Ashland Cemetery.

These are the faces and stories of St. Joseph history – stories that are too often not told.