

Thorntown's Colored Cemetery

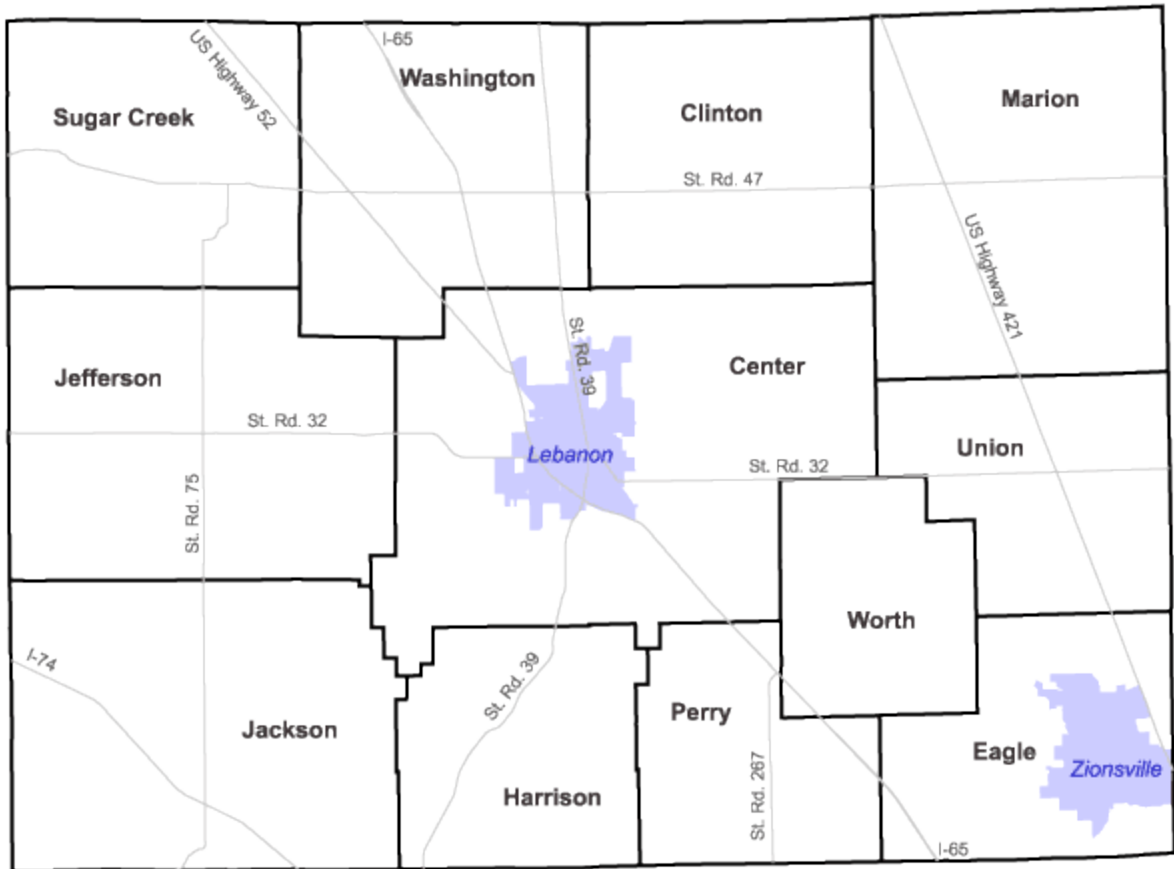
“Some of these adventurous men, having themselves been slaves, jeopardize their own liberty because they were truly desirous that their brethren should taste the sweets of freedom. No class of men are better prepared for this perilous and dangerous occupation than fugitives themselves partly because they were better acquainted with their own neighborhood rescuing friends, family, and acquaintances”.

-Reverend William M. Mitchell



Thorntown Colored Cemetery
Photo by author

Map of Boone County, Indiana



Source: Census 2000 Tiger files
Map produced by the Indiana Business Research Center, IU Kelley School of Business

N.p., n.d. Web.
<http://www.stats.indiana.edu/maptools/maps/boundary/townships_2000/Boone_township.gif>.

Just on the other side of the Montgomery County/Boone County line and past Sugar Plain Friends Church in Montgomery County, lies Thorntown's Colored Cemetery. Marked only by a small black and white sign to announce its presence, it is located on the west side of County Road 825 West in Boone County, one-half mile north of State Road 47 on the way to the Old Mill Run Park entrance.

When the Civil War ended in early 1865, many Blacks, newly freed from slavery, migrated to northern states to settle in cities and towns to begin a new life. Two Boone County communities, Lebanon and Thorntown, attracted many of these emancipated slaves due to the widespread Quaker presence. Quakers' reputations for friendship and assistance with Black fugitives was well known.

In this Boone/Montgomery County area, the Black community built four important structures for its residents; a school, a church, a Black Masonic Lodge and a cemetery. By 1866, the school stood at the northwest corner of the intersection of Vine and Franklin Streets. On Lot 10 at the west end of West Bow Street, the community built a small frame African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, later adding a three-room frame parsonage. The AME congregation flourished until about the turn-of-the-century, then faded away. The AME Church building was razed in the early 1920's. In 1868, a Black Masonic Lodge opened its doors. Sometime in early 1869, Black leaders in Thorntown decided the Black community should have a cemetery of its own since Black and Mulatto residents were not allowed burial in other Thorntown cemeteries.

On 15 June 1869, Quakers Elias C. Barker, and his wife, Hannah, sold a part of their property on the west side of what is now County Road 825 West to the trustees of the Colored Cemetery Committee for \$25.00. The deed clearly stated that the land was to be used as burying grounds for the Black people of the vicinity.

In 1975, an attractive marker with gold letters in a royal blue background was placed in the cemetery by the Society for the Preservation of Our Indian Heritage. That sign has long since disappeared, and a simple, small black and white marker has replaced it. Only four small weathered-granite stones, barely legible, still stand scattered throughout the cemetery. Evidence of other graves include cement bases and sunken spots. The first burial was possibly 1878, although death records in the Boone County Health Department's office only go back to 1882. Prior to that time, deaths were not officially recorded. In obituaries, instead of naming the Colored Cemetery as the place of burial, most records simply stated: "Buried in Thorntown".



Thorntown Colored Cemetery markers
Photo by author

The once large settlement of Blacks living in the Thorntown area and the surrounding community has disappeared. Time has erased much more than just the names on the graves; it has erased most details about the people who lived, worked, and came to be buried in the little cemetery, some with Montgomery County connections. Eventually the land became part of a hog farm. Now it is surrounded by crops and carefully maintained.

Pastor Larry Truitt of Sugar Plain Friends Church and the Thorntown Library have extensively researched the names of those thought to be buried in the Colored Cemetery.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Stone Inscription</u>	<u>Basic life and death information</u>	<u>Where Born</u>
* Mitchell, Daniel		50 years/22 October 1887	
* Mitchell, Daniel		53 years/9 months/ 22 September 1887	
* Rogers, Mary		53 years/1898	
* Unknown, James I		The last name is illegible	
* White, Jane		d. 18 August 1935 approx. 100 years at her death	
*Seawright, Emma Jane	Wife of J P	b. 18 March 1843 d. 21 June 1905	

*Smith, Nancy		80 years/d. 6 December 1892	
Blair, Abe (Blare)	Abram	b. 1835	Tennessee
Blair, Andrew	Son of Abram	34 years/1903	Tennessee
Blair, Anna	First wife of Abram	44 years/1884	Tennessee
Blair, Hazel	Daughter of Abram	4 years/1903	Indiana
Blair, Mary	Second wife of Abram	1 February 1894	Unknown
Chandler, David		1884 at age 23	Indiana
Derek, Elisha	Civil war veteran	1880-1883	Kentucky
Derrickson, Charles		b. 1818	Kentucky
Derrickson, Matilda		91 years/1906	Kentucky
Drake, Clarence		1909	Indiana
Mitchell, Alice		24 years/1886	Indiana
Morris, Susan		17 years/1882	Indiana
Rogers, Warren		75 years/1904	Kentucky
Rule, Thomas		64 years/1914	Tennessee
Schadd, Elias		b. 1834	North Carolina
Shad, James L	Son of J & J	17 years, two months, 16 days/10 or 16 January 1878	Indiana
Shad, John		75 years/1905	North Carolina
Sims, Mary A		15 years/1883	Indiana
Smith, Branson		85 years/1903	North Carolina
Smith, Celia		d. 27 September 1893	
Smith, Lindsay		87 years/1907	North Carolina
Smith, Maud		Three years/1906	Michigan
Smith, Preslay		1885	Unknown

Smith, Thomas		d. 15 August 1901 34 years at death	North Carolina
Tapp, Georgie		36 years/1907	North Carolina
White, William H		49 years/1906	Indiana

*No information is available about these people

Abram Blair

Abram Blair, Black, was born about 1835 in Tennessee where both his parents were born. His home by 1880 was in Sugar Creek Township, Boone County, Indiana, where he was working as a farm laborer. He married Anna Blair and had three children.

Andrew Blair

Andrew Blair, Black, worked on a farm in Sugar Creek Township, Boone County, Indiana. Born about 1869 in Tennessee, he was the son of Abram and Anna Blair. He died in 1903 at the age of 34.

Anna Blair

Anna Blair, Black, was born about 1848 in Tennessee. In the 1880 census, she listed her profession as keeping house. She was wife to Abram and mother to Andrew, Jess W, and Leone. She died in 1884 at the age of 44.

Hazel Blair

Hazel Blair, Black, was born in 1899. Her parents were Andrew Blair, born in Tennessee, and Matilda Bell, born in Indiana. On 13 August 1903, at just four years and 24 days of age, she died of tuberculosis.

Mary J. Rogers Blair

Mary J. Rogers Blair, Black, was born about 1845 in Kentucky. The 1860 census listed her living with her father Greenberry Rogers and her mother Hester Rogers. She married Abraham Blair 26 August 1886 in Boone County. Local newspapers documented that she died 1 February 1894 in Crawfordsville and was brought to Thorntown Colored Cemetery for burial.

David Chandler

David, Mulatto, was born about 1859 in Indiana to a father born North Carolina and his mother Mary Sprigmon, a washerwoman, who was born in Indiana in 1819. Mary's parents were from North Carolina and Virginia. In the 1880 census, he was living with his wife, Mary Chandler, and his mother, Mary Sprigmon, in Thorntown, Boone County. He listed his profession as brick molder.

David was widowed by 1880.

Charles Derrickson

Can be found in the Darlington/Garfield section

Elisha Derek/Derrick (Elijah Jefferson Derixon/Derrickson)

Elijah Jefferson Derrickson was born in 1827 in Carlisle, Nicholas County, Kentucky. In 1845, he married Mary Elizabeth Bromlett, eventually having four children. Between 1854 and 1860, he moved to Sugar Creek Township, Boone County. He enlisted as a Civil War veteran soldier, serving in the 55th Regiment, Massachusetts Colored Infantry. He was injured at Honey Hill 30 November 1864. After his recovery, he was attached to Hospital Beaufort, South Carolina. He was believed to have died around 1880-1883. He was a brother to Charles Derrickson, Darlington.

Matilda Derrickson

Can be found in the Darlington/Garfield section

Clarence Drake

Clarence Drake was born in 1908 in Indiana, and died by 4 March 1909.

Alice (Annise) Mitchel(I)

Alice Mitchell was born April 1863 in Indiana. She was murdered by a gunshot wound to the neck and succumbed to her injuries 1 July 1886.

The Alice/Annise murder involved four main players. William H. Harris, Black, was born about 1847 in Indiana to parents also born in Indiana. William barbered by trade and had served in the Civil War in the United States Colored Troops, Regiment 116, Company B from July 1863 to March 1864. William's wife, Margaret L., Mulatto, was born 1859 in Illinois to a mother born in North Carolina and father born in Kentucky. David Mitchel(I), Mulatto, was born in 1861 in Indiana to parents born in Virginia. David had barbered in William's shop for eight years. Alice Rose Mitchel(I), Black, was David's wife. David and Alice married approximately 1881 and had one child.

On 30 June 1886, Alice Mitchell was murdered. The event occurred about 9 pm on North Pearl Street, Thorntown. Alice's husband, David, arrived home from work barbering at William H. Harris' shop. He had heard gunshots fired on his way home. David could not locate Alice, so he asked his next-door neighbor, Margaret Harris, the wife of his employer, for information regarding Alice's whereabouts, but Margaret refused to help. David began his search in his backyard when he heard groans coming from Harris' backyard. David found his wife lying in a pool of blood with the entire right side of her neck missing. David took Alice into their home and called for help. Oddly enough, both William and Margaret Harris refused to help.

According to neighbors, the Mitchells and the Harrises had not developed a friendly relationship, so police arrested William after learning he had made threats against the Mitchel(I)s. William flatly denied any wrongdoing, remaining calm throughout his interrogation, even daring to sharpen his razors while awaiting his interview. William declared he was home sick when the shooting occurred. Local residents knew that William had been in Thorntown for 10- 12 years before the incident and had been a model citizen.

Meanwhile, Alice somehow stayed alive long enough to pronounce William her murderer. In her deathbed statement, she stated that William had called her to the backyard, shot her from behind, and then returned to his home. The gunshot had torn

away the entire right side of Alice's neck, severed the jugular vein, all the nerves and ligaments, and had torn open the carotid artery. Police did find the suspected Zulu gun in William's home, the bullets having been sold to William's son, Melkesedeck, born 1876, just the day before.

Scuttlebutt about town centered on the "intimacy" between William and Alice, although that intimacy took on two very different descriptions. Some stated that William had attempted to become familiar with Alice and she refused his advances. Others reported that William and Alice had begun an illicit affair and Margaret discovered the tryst.

Over the next three months, William's trial had not begun and the town's people threatened mob action if a guilty verdict were not returned. However, the local police convinced the people otherwise and peace reigned throughout Thorntown.

By late October 1886, William found himself in circuit court accused of Alice Mitchel(l)'s murder. In the end, the judge found William guilty and sentenced him to life in prison. Throughout the process, William adamantly maintained his innocence. After the trial, William was placed on a train bound for the Michigan City Prison. Guards had carefully searched him. During the trip, William asked to use the restroom. While there, William tried to slit his throat just above his Adam's Apple. While William's suicide attempt failed because the cut was too high, he did manage to sever 2/3 of his windpipe. Authorities determined that William had hidden a knife inside his bushy hair, did the deed, and tossed the knife out the train bathroom window. During his recovery, William told authorities to read his suicide note he had placed inside his coat pocket. Because William could not write, authorities learned this letter was written by Charles Gibbs, a Frankfort Black man who served time for theft. In William's manifesto, he begged a Christian minister attend to his last rites and to be buried back in Crawfordsville. He also implicated his wife in the killing, insisting she pulled the trigger because Alice told William of his wife's "meanness". No record was found of his wife's response to this accusation.

Eventually William was granted a pension based on an illness caused by his lungs hemorrhaging. He returned to a Lebanon jail and was cared for by a Mrs. Titus.

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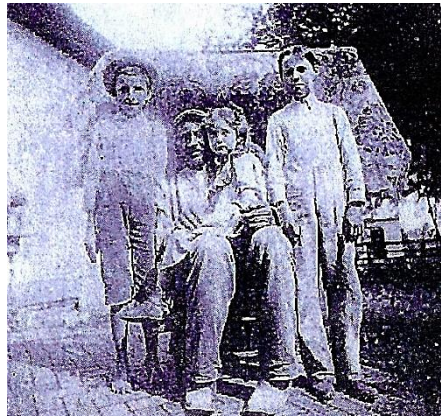
Susan Morris

Susan Morris, Black, was born about 1864 Indiana. In the 1870 census, she was living with Jeremiah Morris, Black, born about 1820 in North Carolina. Susan died 9 March 1882 at the age of 17.

Warren Rogers

Warren Rogers, Black, was born about 1829 in Kentucky. He lived in Sugar Creek Township, Boone County. His father was Greenberry Rogers, also born in Kentucky, and his mother Hester Rogers. He died 18 September 1904 from scrofula, a type of tuberculosis, and complications of bowel and kidney trouble.

Thomas Rule



Thomas Rule, second from left
Photo from Thorntown Public Library

Thomas Rule, Black, was born August 1851 in Cobb County, Tennessee. His parents were Carson Hayes and Lizzie Rule, both of Tennessee. By the 1910 census, he lived on Darlington Road. He married Elizabeth (Bettie), who had been born in Missouri. He listed his profession as farmer, served as lay preacher in the Black community, and worked as a farm hired hand. He died 21 December 1914 of heart disease.

Elias Shad(d)

Elias Shad, Mulatto, was born about 1834 in North Carolina. In the 1860 census, he lived with his wife Mary J. Shad in Sugar Creek Township, Boone County. He was a farmer and became the first Black man placed on the petit (trial) jury in Boone County, Indiana.

James (Jas) L. Shad

James L. Shad, Mulatto, was born 18/26 October 1860 in Boone County, Indiana. He died 16 January 1878.

John Shad

John Shad was born about 1830 in North Carolina to parents Eli Shad and Clara Steward(t) Shad. In different censuses, he listed himself as either Black or Mulatto. In the 1860 census, he lived near Otter Creek Township, Vigo County, Indiana, with his wife Jane and growing family. Civil War draft registration records indicated he served in

the Civil War, enlisting at Otter Creek Township, but no information about where he served was found. By 1870, lived in Sugar Creek Township, Boone County, working as a farm laborer. In 1880, the family lived in Jefferson Township and John worked as a farmer. By 1900, the family had moved back to Sugar Creek Township. John died 25 May 1905 of chronic nephritis at the age of 74.

Mary Sims

Mary Sims, Mulatto, was born about 1867 in Indiana. In the 1870 census, she was living with her father Henry, Black, a common laborer from North Carolina. She died 10 October 1883.

Branson Smith

Branson, Black, was born 12 August 1816 in North Carolina. He knew his father, Aaron Smith who was born in North Carolina, but never knew his mother. He died 21 May 1903 at the age of 86 of chronic stomach trouble coupled with a cold that settled on his lungs.

Celia Smith

In the censuses, there are two Celia Smiths that died at age 23 on exactly the same day, 27 September 1893. One Celia listed herself as White, but the other Celia was buried in the Colored Cemetery.

Linsey, Linsy, Lindsay, Lindsey, Lenzy Smith

Lindsay, Mulatto, was born 6 May 1820 in North Carolina to father Aaron Smith mother Elizabeth Evans, both of North Carolina. In 1850, the growing family lived in Harrison Township, Vigo County, Indiana. Aaron, a farmer, was unable to read and write. Living with the family at the time was Robert Walding, Black, born in Virginia, and at 100 years old was still laboring on the farm. By the 1860 census, Lindsay and his family lived in Sugar Creek Township, Boone County, Indiana. In the 1870 census, he had married Lavinia Smith, and worked as a common laborer.

By the 1880 census, he was widowed, worked as a farmer, and lived in Thorntown, Boone County, with his single sister Miranda, born in Indiana. By the 1890 census, he and his sister were back in Sugar Creek Township, but this time he identified as Black. Lindsay died 5 July 1907 from weakness brought on by old age.

Maud Smith

Maud, Black, was born in Michigan 17 June 1903 to parents Joseph Smith and Ethel Mitchel. Maud died of typhoid fever 8 July 1906.

Preslay/ Pressly Smith

Pressly was born about 1825. She died 20 July 1883.

Thomas Smith

Thomas, Mulatto was born February 1867 to parents Thomas B. Smith and Lottie Steward(t) in North Carolina. In the 1870 census, he was living in Sugar Creek

Township, Boone County, with his parents and several siblings as well as the Moses E. Arnold family. By the 1880 census, the family had their own home. In the 1890 census, he was farming and married to Josephine Smith. He died 15 August 1901 of pulmonary tuberculosis.

Georgie Tapp

Georgie Shad Tapp, Black, was born 21 May 1871 in North Carolina to parents John Shad and Jane Steward(t). She married James Tapp, born in Indiana, 1 March 1894 at age 23. In the censuses, she listed her occupation as a housekeeper. She died 21 May 1907 of heart valve disease complicated by rheumatism.

William H. White

William, Black, was born March 1857 in Thorntown, Indiana, to parents Harry White and Matilda White, both born in North Carolina. He died 9 January 1906 of heart disease.

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