

EPITAPH

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**WELCOME TO THE
 FRIENDS OF THE AFRICAN
 UNION CHURCH CEMETERY
 DELAWARE CITY, DE**



Dear Friends,

2020 will be an interesting year. As Wes Jones' article on the Polktown Boyers shows, we are working to bring the people of Polktown into the historical record with as much of their history as possible. And we're looking to connect with descendants and relatives.

After many productive years as executive director, Linda Beck retired from this volunteer role in 2019. She continues on the board, contributing energy, expertise and institutional memory. Laura Lee gave a heartfelt tribute at our membership's Fall Fest and Linda's example will be a challenge to follow. The board has been working to hire a person as a paid executive director. We hope to make this happen in 2020.

In the past year, Vance Price has stepped in as our second re-enactor under the watchful eye of Pvt. Elbert (Willis Phelps) and we've continued to take our educational program to schools, libraries and community groups.

We've added an attractive entrance sign at the plaza to go with the state historical marker on the trailside, and we're working to get our grove of trees going so in future years people visiting or using the trail can stop in a shady spot for rest and reflection.

We also welcomed Liz Gordon to the advisory board. With her husband Jeff, she has very graciously hosted our past two member appreciation gatherings at the American Birding Society headquarters in Delaware City.

Your dues and donations are important. Of course, I want to thank you for your support. Please think about how you could become a hands-on member, as a volunteer or on our advisory committee. Check out our website at www.africanunioncemetery.org for opportunities.

Regards,

Craig O'Donnell, President

Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery 2020 Meetings

Delaware City Town Hall - 407 Clinton Street @ 6:30 p.m.

March 19

May 21 ♦ July 16

September 17

November 19

Open to the public

PLEASE JOIN US

Become a member or volunteer today It's through our partnership with history enthusiasts like you that we're able to continue "Making History Matter". Membership support helps the Friends care for the cemetery, and provides our education programs with the resources to serve more school students and other interested organizations. Volunteers are vital to the Friends group. If you are interested in volunteering your time, please contact us. Thank you for your support. Check out our website at www.africanunioncemetery.org

Tracy Beck, Membership Chair

Polktown Through the Eyes of the Census

By Wes Jones

What do we know about Polktown? Quite a lot: it was a vibrant community for well over a hundred years; it had a church, a cemetery, and a school; its residents were involved in all aspects of life in Delaware City. One thing we don't know is what kind of community it was. Today people move all the time for job opportunities or for lifestyle changes. Was Polktown like that – was it a community of transients, or home to people for generations?

Between genealogy websites such as Family Search and Ancestry, cemetery websites like FindaGrave, and DNA testing services it is very easy today to begin exploring your roots. But how do you research a community? A good place to start is the U.S. Census records.

In 1840 the census listed only the head of household by name; other people living there were counted as "Free White Persons" or "Free Colored Persons."

The 1850 census listed everyone living in the household, occupation, gender, age and color. Now we can begin to trace families by looking closely at the family members. So what can some of these sources tell us about the early community of Polktown?

We know that in 1835 Daniel Newbold, the founder of Delaware City, sold half an acre of land to "Perry Reynolds, Noah Chambers, William Jones, Shadrack Bowyer and Solomon Dean all of New Castle County and State of Delaware trustees of the African Union Church...in consideration of the sum of eighty dollars lawful money of the United State of America." [1] This land is the site of our cemetery.

Who were these five free black men with enough money to buy land for a church and a cemetery for an established congregation? Let's focus on one of them, Shadrack Bowyer (or Shadrack Boyer).

First, his name. The fable of Shadrach comes from the Book of Daniel, one of three Hebrew men thrown into a fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. He survived and was promoted to high office.

In the early 1830s Ezekiel Shaw and Robert Polk (white men) bought 16 lots south of the original small C&D Canal (today's Branch Canal) from Newbold. In 1843, Polk sold his eleven lots to James Henry in 1843, and in 1845 Shadrack Boyer and his sons

Joseph and Shadrack Jr. bought four of these lots, the southernmost, and immediately built several houses (Fig. 1). [2] Despite his brief ownership of these lots, Robert Polk lent his name to the community; it is called Polktown to this day. And before the eastern end of the canal was moved south to Reedy Point in 1927, Old Dutch Neck Road ran through Polktown, connecting Delaware City to the modern Dutch Neck Road near Icehouse Point.

We can look to the census records to find out much about these households. Keep in mind when searching that spelling is not always what you expect. Shadrach Boyer is found in the census as "Shadrach," "Shaderake," "Shadrick," "Shadrae," and "Shadrack," and his last name is often found as "Bowyer." This is typical of the older records.

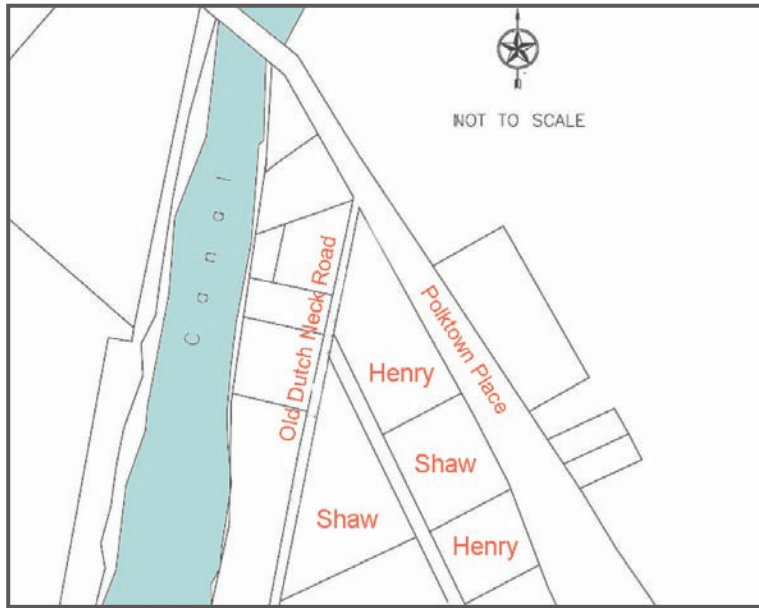


Figure 1 Polktown 1840 showing the properties owned by Shaw and Henry. [2]

These early census records were taken by a person walking from house to house, and they are listed by household and dwelling (structure). House numbers either didn't exist or weren't recorded. Sequential entries usually mean adjacent houses. See Figure 2, the 1850 census record for two Boyer households. [3]

In an effort to eliminate confusion, I have labeled the houses by a letter, and the Shadrack Boyers by a Roman numeral. There are some questions about the identity of certain people: some of these questions are answered by later census information.

1850: We see three adjacent Boyer houses in Polktown. In the middle house (House B)

we find Shadrack Boyer (let's call him Shadrack I), 71, a preacher by trade. This is one of the cemetery founders. Also living there are Shadrack Boyer II (37, son of Shadrack I); Maria A. Boyer (27) (who is she? Shadrack I's daughter, Shadrack II's wife?); and Manuel Boyer (8).

To one side (House A) lives Joseph Boyer (31) and his wife Harriet (28); Joseph is Shadrack I's son. On the other side in House C is Samuel Boyer (41) with Mary Boyer (32), Derias (14), Shadrack III (10), Joseph (8), Louisa (4), and Charlotte (infant). Was Samuel another of Shadrack I's sons?

127	127	Shadrack Boyer	71	M	B	Preacher	1000	Old	✓
		Maria A. Boyer	27	F	B			Old	
		Shadrack Boyer	37	M	B	Labourer		"	
		Manuel Boyer	8	M	B			"	
128	128	Samuel Boyer	41	M	B	Labourer		"	
		Mary A. Boyer	32	F	B			"	
		Derias	14	F	B			"	
		Shadrack III	10	M	B			"	
		Joseph	8	M	B			"	
		Louisa	4	F	B			"	
		Charlotte	infant	F	B			"	

Figure 2 1850 Census record for Shadrack Boyer I in Polktown [3]

1860: One house is occupied by Shaderake Bowyer II, 47, and Ann Bowyer, 40. Is she his wife? What happened to Maria, or is this the same person? Four children include

Polktown Through the Eyes of the Census

Emanuel Bowyer, 19, and Mary Bowyer, 7, probably a daughter. Surely this is the same house (House B) as in 1850. It appears that Shadrack I, the founder of the cemetery, is gone. Has he moved? Died? Is he buried in our cemetery?

Next door is Joseph Bowyer, 42, and Harriet Bowyer, 38, and their five children. This must be House A from 1850. Also in the household is Eslie Bowyer, 66, perhaps Joseph's mother.

1865: Property records show a Shadrach Boyer (II?) bought the eight lots at the northern end of the Polktown strip from James Henry, and within just three years transferred them to four other community members. [2]

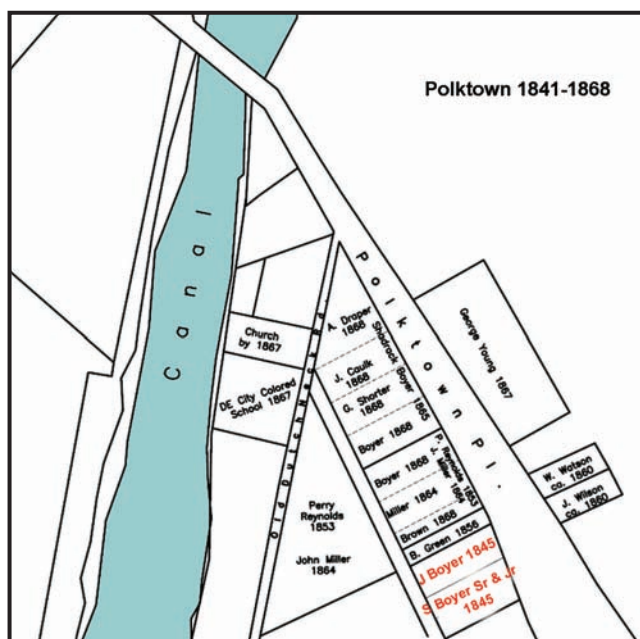


Figure 3

Property ownership in Polktown between 1841 and 1868 [2].

A map of property ownership from 1868 shows the growth in Polktown from 1841 to this time (Fig. 3). The original Boyer houses (A, B, and C) are on the two properties at the southern end of Polktown. Now we have a community - there is a church and school.

1870: We find Shadrack Boyer II, 56, laborer, Anna Boyer, 49, "keeping house," and daughter Mary, 16. This must be House B.

The adjacent House A is still headed by brother Joseph, now 52, and Harriet, 48. Their son Shadrack IV is 9. Also in the household is Cecilia Draper, 76. This might be "Eslie Bowyer" from 1860; perhaps she married a Draper in the previous 10 years, perhaps her last name was originally Draper and the 1860 census recorded it wrong.

1880: We find three adjacent Boyer households. In the first we find Shedrack Bowyer, 66, in good health, and M. Annie Bowyer, 61. Aha! In 1850 there was a Maria living in the house, in 1860 Ann, 1870 Anna, and now we have M. Annie. This was probably the same person, Shadrack II's wife. In

1850 there was a Manuel Boyer, 8; now, 30 years later, we find "E Manuel," aged 38.

Next door we find Joseph Boyer, 62, in good health, and Harriet, 58 (with a tumor). They have five children. One is Shedreck IV, 19.

In the third Boyer house Emanuel, 38, lives with wife Mary, 19, and a young daughter, also Mary. Is this the same E. Manuel recorded in the first house?

And the census now shows Cecilia Draper, 83, mother, living in the household of Alexander Draper. Is this the same woman from 1870 who was living with the Boyers?

1890: Census records were lost in a fire.

1900: We find two Boyer households. The first is headed by Shadrae Boyer, 32, and his wife Rebecca, 35, and seven children. Could this man be Shadrach IV? He should be 39 now, not 32, but note that his birth month is recorded as February.

The second comprises Albert Boyer, 25, his wife Ada, 19, and their son William.

1910: A Shadrach Boyer, 46, married (for the second time) to Henrietta, 30, with the same seven children as in 1900, plus three more from the second marriage.

Note that there is a Shadrach Boyer (Feb. 3, 1861–April 11, 1927) buried in Green Hill Cemetery along with his wife Henrietta J. (Apr. 5, 1871–June 11, 1936) [4]. Is this Shadrach IV? The birth years are off, but his birth month of February corresponds to the 1880 census. If you have a birthday celebration every year you are sure to remember the month, even if you don't know what year you were born in.

So from 1850 to 1910, a period of 60 years, we find three generations of the Boyer family living in the same house, with members of the extended family living right alongside. This speaks to the stability of the community. Of course the women moved to other houses as they married, but the sons brought their new wives and families into the house.

While we focused here on only the Boyers we shouldn't lose sight of the other families in Polktown during this time: Shorter, Bostic, Sadler, Pernell, Bayard, Elbert, Draper, Ambrose, Reynolds, Watson, Webb, and many more. Their lives are beyond the scope of this article.

References

1. Daniel Newbold to Perry Reynolds, Noah Chambers, William Jones, Shadrach Bowyer and Solomon Dean, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Book Y, Vol. 4, page 391, 1835.
2. Sheppard, Rebecca J., et. al., "Connecting the Free Black Community of Polktown and the African Union Church Cemetery," Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware, August 2015.
3. "United States Census, 1850," www.familysearch.org
4. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/191974555/shadrach-h-boyer>

Additional Sources

1. Mooney, D., Wiencek, R. & Wuebber, I., "Phase I Investigations of the African Union Cemetery Delaware City Branch Canal Project," URS Corporation, Burlington NJ, May 2009
2. Orr, Dr. David, "The African Union Church Cemetery - Delaware City, Delaware," September, 2009

Travel During Jim Crow

By Craig O'Donnell

If you lived in Polktown before the 1960s, you faced difficulties traveling by car. Imagine: a vacationing family could not use the restroom at a gas station, only could eat in certain restaurants or would be denied a hotel room. African Americans could travel, but they faced problems because of Jim Crow laws or individual prejudice.

Americans became fond of automobile trips in the 1920s. To help, New York City African American postal worker Victor H. Green first published the "The Negro Motorist's Green Book" in 1936. Cost: 25 cents.

Starting with the New York metro area, Green eventually expanded the publication to include all of the United States and then other countries. In the 1949 issue, Green and his staff put it this way: the book gives "the Negro traveler information that will keep him from running into difficulties, embarrassments and to make his trips more enjoyable. ... It will be a great day for us to suspend this publication for then we can go wherever we please, and without embarrassment." Publication continued until federal civil rights legislation was enacted in the mid-60s.

A trip to downstate Delaware, Maryland or Virginia could become a major undertaking.

In 2016, historian Carlton Hall of the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office researched the Green Book and its Delaware listings. Many were in Wilmington, with places to stay in Laurel, Rehoboth Beach, Dover and on Route 13 in Townsend.

"Before they would begin traveling, they had to know where they could stop and not stop," Hall said. "They'd pack two or three days of food and take extra gas tanks."

Esso gas stations were part of Standard Oil, which was a sponsor.

The Green Book was not polished. It was in a conversational, casual style with safe driving tips and advice on how to react if in an accident.

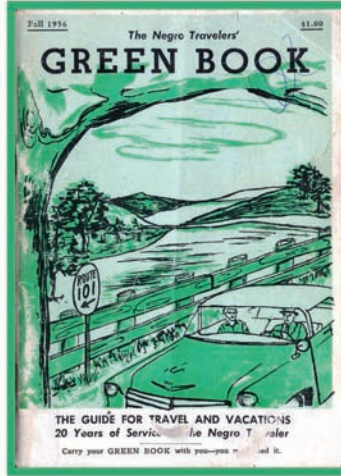
"You had to be careful," Hall said. "If you were in an accident, it was pretty much automatically your fault."

Green advised travelers which towns to avoid after dark. They simply were not safe, Hall said.

The 1937 Green Book had six places in Dover, mostly around Kirkwood, Division, Forrest and Lincoln streets, then outside city limits. Dean's on Forrest Street and Mosely's on Division were under "Hotels," but probably were guest houses. Weston's Tea Pot was a well-known spot. Found in several editions of the Green Book, the Tea Pot was owned by James D. and Ruth Weston.

"She ran a restaurant and a rooming house," recalled longtime Dover resident Ann Thompson. Those turned away from other restaurants frequented the Tea Pot for lunch or dinner. The picture window had the restaurant's name.

"I was surprised at just how hard it was to travel," Hall said. "I thought they could just travel and not be bothered, and I didn't realize they couldn't go into stores and couldn't use the restroom anywhere they needed. I've traveled a lot, and I feel I just take it for granted."



Formerly Weston's Tea Pot, this two story building adjacent to Booker T. Washington Elementary School was owned by James D. and Ruth Weston. It was a restaurant and rest stop for black travelers who, because of Jim Crow laws, were not permitted in "whites only" hotels in Dover. Jeff Brown Photo.

Adapted from Jeff Brown's original story for the Dover Post. See <https://www.doverpost.com/news/20170215/what-was-it-like-to-travel-during-jim-crow-era>.

Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery Membership Application

Submit this form with your check made payable to: Friends of the AUC Cemetery

Mail to: Friends of the AUC Cemetery, PO Box 4200, Delaware City, DE 19706

Date: _____ Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone #: _____ E-Mail: _____

E-mail for Friends Group ONLY. We will not share your e-mail address.

Membership Categories: Memberships are valid for 1 year

___ Individual (one person only) - \$10 ___ Family (family members at a single address) - \$20

___ Supporting - \$30 ___ Patron - \$50 ___ Sponsor - \$100 ___ Anchor - \$200

___ Benefactor - \$500 I would like to make a one-time donation of \$ _____ I am interested in volunteering ___

Please contact us at the above address or send us an e-mail: info@africanunioncemetery.org

