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## A Snip of Life: Black Barbering in Nineteenth-Century Mattoon, Illinois

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The nineteenth century was a period of great change for African Americans, especially in the second half of the century. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, legally freeing all slaves in captured territory.<sup>1</sup> It was the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865 that made slavery illegal in the United States and it marked a turning point in the lives of black Americans, even those who were already free.<sup>2</sup> While it was a legal turning point, the new law did not necessarily change people's attitudes toward African Americans, and many states passed acts segregating black citizens.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the state of Illinois was much more progressive; in 1865 the state repealed a previous law that made it illegal for blacks to move to Illinois and continued passing anti-segregation acts well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> In 1885 public accommodations were barred from discriminating against black customers and this included barbershops.<sup>5</sup>

Before the Civil War barbering was a service that was commonly provided by black men, both enslaved and free. This trend continued after the war, as it was a lucrative business option for many black Americans.<sup>6</sup> Many barbers obtained at least some wealth and increased their social standing through their work; they gained connections to wealthy and influential white men and, in the antebellum period, there was no white competition. Black people were considered by many to be natural hairdressers, so their dominance in this field was not questioned.<sup>7</sup> In the early days of Mattoon, Illinois, prior to the Civil War, there were twenty black people in the city. Of these twenty, ten were male and four of these men were barbers.<sup>8</sup> While it is likely that most of these men did not own the barbershop in which they worked, the fact that 40% of the black men in Mattoon were barbers suggests that this was an attractive occupation that provided a living wage. While evidence of black barbers in Mattoon, Illinois, in the nineteenth century is difficult to attain, it is clear from the available material that barbering, while lucrative, was a fairly unstable position with high

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<sup>1</sup> "Featured Document: The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives & Records Administration, accessed December 5, 2015, [https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured\\_documents/emancipation\\_proclamation/](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/).

<sup>2</sup> "13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Primary Documents of American History," Library of Congress: Virtual Programs & Services, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/tr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>

<sup>3</sup> M. Ruth Little, "The Other Side of the Tracks: The Middle-Class Neighborhoods That Jim Crow Built in Early-Twentieth-Century North Carolina," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 7, Vernacular Architecture Forum: 269, accessed November 18, 2015, doi:10.2307/3514397.

<sup>4</sup> "African Americans in Illinois," Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, accessed December 5, 2015, <https://www.illinois.gov/iHPA/Research/Pages/AfAmHist.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> "African Americans in Illinois."

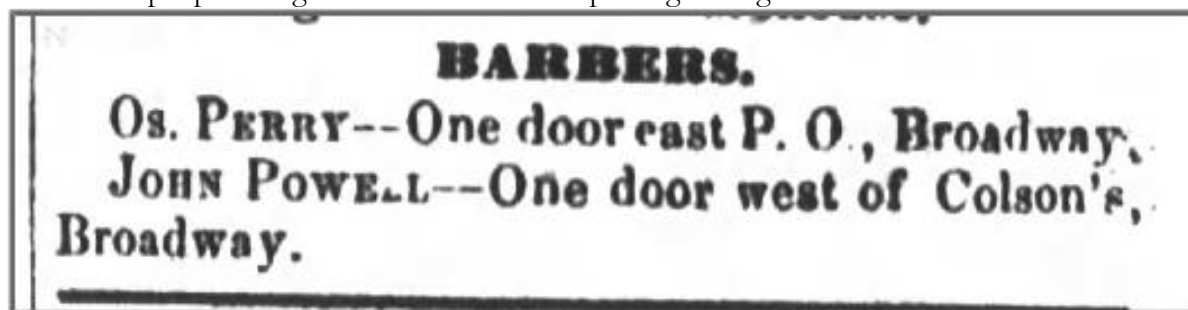
<sup>6</sup> Quincy T. Mills, *Cutting Along the Color Line: Black Barbers and Barber Shops in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 17, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Mills, *Cutting*, 18, 27-29, 21, 15.

<sup>8</sup> 1860 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 64; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

turnover. It is also apparent that personal feelings regarding black barbers were highly mixed. The evidence provides insight about how the white population perceived their black neighbors and opened the door for the appearance of white run barbershops.

The area that eventually became Mattoon Township was first settled in the early 1830s because the land was fertile.<sup>9</sup> However, Mattoon was not mapped as a town until 1854, when it was determined that the Illinois Central and Terra Haute and Alton railroads would intersect at the site.<sup>10</sup> The town was first platted by James T. Cunningham, an early resident, and his map was published in 1856.<sup>11</sup> Prior to the arrival of the railroads in 1855, Mattoon was a completely rural area. What is now the city of Mattoon was comprised of a house and several shanties built for railroad workers. Just two years after the tracks were laid, Mattoon consisted of over 100 buildings and became a village; by 1861 Mattoon was a city.<sup>12</sup> This rapid transformation reflects the impact the railroad had on the area, and indicates that it would have been an attractive place in Coles County to establish a barbershop.<sup>13</sup> Because Mattoon was located at the crossing of two railroads, the barbers would have had access to both the people living in Mattoon and those passing through on the railroads.



Barbers, Business Notice, *Mattoon Gazette*, October 7, 1863

Mattoon was planned on all sides of the tracks from the outset. It was laid out as a grid and the original planning focuses the town to the east of the Illinois Central Railroad and to the south of the Terra Haute and Alton line.<sup>14</sup> The town was concentrated around the rail crossing and the city hall was located just northeast of where the tracks intersect, indicating that this was an important place in the city. It also suggests that the intention was always to expand west, making this the center of town.<sup>15</sup> This central downtown area would have been the ideal place to locate a shop, as it would see the most business and flow of traffic. It is situated on the railroad crossing and at the location where the railroad stopped, so a passenger could easily access any of the businesses on this street. This area is where the majority of the barbershops were located. In the 1890s, most of these shops were on Broadway Avenue, which began at the railroad, just south of the crossing, and ran east toward

<sup>9</sup> *Mattoon*, map, in Ronald Nichols, comp., *Historical Plat Maps of Coles County, Illinois* (Dixon, IL: the PRINT shop of Dixon, Illinois, 1982), 42; "History of Mattoon," Eastern Illinois University: Localities, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://www.eiu.edu/localite/mattoonhistory.php>; "Localities: Mattoon Timeline," Eastern Illinois University: Localities, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://www.eiu.edu/localite/mattoontime.php>.

<sup>10</sup> "Localities: Mattoon Timeline"; Alexander Summers, *Mr. Mattoon's City: 1855-1955: 100 Years—The Story of Illinois: 1855-1955: 90 Years—The Story of Mattoon's First Permanent Bank* (Mattoon, IL: National Bank of Mattoon, 1955), accessed October 22, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/mrmattoons/city1800summ>, 5.

<sup>11</sup> James T. Cunningham, et al., *Mattoon as Laid Out by James T. Cunningham and Others*, map-photocopy, Coles County Clerk's Office.

<sup>12</sup> Craig Sanders, *Mattoon and Charleston Area Railroads* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 11; "Localities: Mattoon Timeline"; Summers, *Mr. Mattoon's City*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Voss Hubbard and Newton E. Key, "A Chronicle of the Coles County (Illinois) Region," EIU: Localities, <http://www.eiu.edu/localite/coleschronicle.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Cunningham, *Mattoon as Laid Out by James T. Cunningham*.

<sup>15</sup> J.W. Smith, *Birds Eye View of Mattoon, Illinois 1884*, map, Chicago: Shober & Carqueville, 1884, from Library of Congress, *Map Collections*, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/g4104m.pm001671/> (accessed October 20, 2015).

Charleston.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the city directories available for this area only extend back to 1895, but it is evident that from the beginning the barbershops were situated on Broadway Avenue. A business notice, published in the *Mattoon Gazette* in 1863, states that Os. Perry (likely Austin Perry, the first barber in Mattoon) and John Powell operated their barbershops on Broadway Avenue.<sup>17</sup> In 1902 another newspaper article indicates that Austin Perry, the oldest black man in the city, had his barbershop in the same place on Broadway Avenue for over thirty years.<sup>18</sup> Other reports reveal that Austin Perry's shop was close to the railroad tracks, as an article in 1879 indicates that adulterated lemonade was being sold from a stand between his shop and the Illinois Central Railroad track.<sup>19</sup> It can be inferred that Austin Perry was taking advantage of his proximity to the railroad and that his shop was well known enough to be used as a landmark. Although the 1903 article presented some facts incorrectly, including a statement that Austin Perry married Susan Powell, when he actually married Susan Finch in 1860, his shop's location is likely accurate due to his high status in the community and the common knowledge of where his shop was located.<sup>20</sup> Although Perry was highly regarded within the community, even serving as alderman of the town council for two terms in 1880, it is evident in the newspaper articles that the personal feelings among the townspeople about their black barbers was mixed.<sup>21</sup>

The barbers in Mattoon appear to have been well liked. One newspaper, in 1860, notes that "John Powell is the best barber in town" and another, from 1864, states that he was known in the west of the state as "Honest John," implying that it is the reason an escaped murderer, from Paris, Illinois, assumed his identity.<sup>22</sup> These early articles indicate that this Mattoon barber was well known outside the immediate area, probably due to the presence of the railroad. His reputation was considered so respectable that his identity was co-opted by a known murderer on the run. In 1881 an article enthused that John Powell, likely the son of the John Powell mentioned above, was returning to Mattoon and entering into a partnership with another black barber, Flavius Brooks.<sup>23</sup> It goes so far as to state, "[t]hese men are nice gentlemen and good businessmen and we predict for

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<sup>16</sup> A. Sumerlin, comp., *Directory of Coles County and the City of Mattoon: 1895-6: Comprising a List of Residents, Business, Houses, Churches, Societies, and Miscellaneous Directory* (Mattoon, IL: Mattoon Commercial Print, 1895), 184; A. Sumerlin, comp., *Mattoon City Directory 1898* (Mattoon, IL: Mattoon Commercial Print, 1898), 225.

<sup>17</sup> "Mattoon Business Directory: Barbers," *Mattoon Gazette*, October 7, 1863, accessed December 1, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753096/mattoon\\_business\\_directory\\_barbers/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753096/mattoon_business_directory_barbers/)); Onaiwu W. Ogbomo, *Photographic Images & the History of African Americans in Coles County, Illinois* (Charleston, IL: Eastern Illinois University, 2002), 16.

<sup>18</sup> "Just Two of the Business Men of Old Times Still on Broadway. Tell of Changes That Have Occurred in Mattoon Since its Infancy—Interesting," *Mattoon Daily Journal*, July 26, 1902, accessed December 1, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3752947/mattoon\\_daily\\_journal/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3752947/mattoon_daily_journal/)).

<sup>19</sup> "City in Brief," *Mattoon Gazette*, July 11, 1879, accessed December 2, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753028/city\\_in\\_brief\\_mattoon\\_gazette\\_11\\_jul/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753028/city_in_brief_mattoon_gazette_11_jul/)).

<sup>20</sup> In fact, John Powell had a step-daughter who spent time with Austin Perry in August 1860, indicated by a newspaper article about Powell drunkenly assaulting her when she was talking with Perry. It is possible that Susan Powell and Susan Finch are, in fact, one and the same, and the newspaper was merely mistaken on the surname. "Almost a Tragedy," *Mattoon Gazette*, August 30, 1860, accessed December 1, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753106/almost\\_a\\_tragedy\\_mattoon\\_gazette\\_30/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753106/almost_a_tragedy_mattoon_gazette_30/)); "Just Two of the Business Men"; Marriage record of Austin Perry and Susan Linch, dated December 18, 1860, Mattoon, Illinois, *Coles County Book of Marriage Records, Volume B*: 218, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, Charleston, Illinois.

<sup>21</sup> "Just Two of the Business Men."

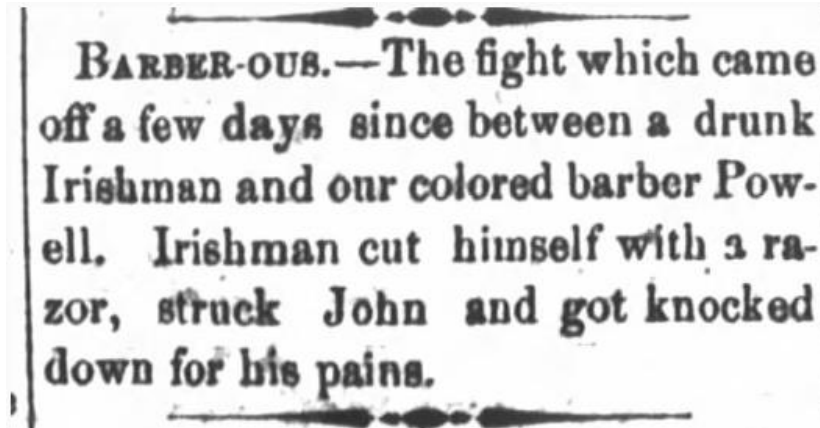
<sup>22</sup> *Mattoon Gazette*, June 14, 1860, accessed December 1, 2015, Newspapers.com

([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753115/john\\_powell\\_mattoon\\_gazette\\_14\\_jun/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753115/john_powell_mattoon_gazette_14_jun/)); "Local Items: Arrest of Jake South," *Mattoon Gazette*, May 11, 1864, accessed December 1, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753079/local\\_items\\_arrest\\_of\\_jake\\_south/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753079/local_items_arrest_of_jake_south/)).

<sup>23</sup> 1900 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 252 A (stamped), dwelling 399, family 427, John Powell; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; "The City in Brief," *Mattoon Gazette*, November 25, 1881, accessed December 3, 2015, Newspapers.com

([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3752977/the\\_city\\_in\\_brief\\_mattoon\\_gazette\\_25/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3752977/the_city_in_brief_mattoon_gazette_25/)); "Early Days in Mattoon," *The Mattoon Daily Journal Gazette and Commercial Star*, April 27, 1927, accessed December 4, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3819586/early\\_days\\_in\\_mattoon\\_journal\\_gazette/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3819586/early_days_in_mattoon_journal_gazette/)).

them the success they deserve.”<sup>24</sup> This language indicates that these men were well regarded within their communities and the people of Mattoon wanted them to succeed. This article is unusual in that it does not indicate the racial status of the two barbers, as was common practice in the newspaper. That information was obtained from the *Directory of Coles County and the City of Mattoon.: 1895-96.*<sup>25</sup> This is not because only black men were barbers at the time; in fact by 1881 there had been at least two white barbershops opened in Mattoon.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, in 1862, a year prior to the first white barbershop, these men were being referred to as “colored” barbers within the text of newspaper articles.<sup>27</sup>



“[O]ur colored barber Powell” gets into a fight with a drunk Irishman, *Mattoon Gazette*, April 17, 1862.

If the use of a color descriptor had been adopted due to the presence of white barbers, it would not have been used prior to the opening of a white barbershop. The use of a racial status indicates that although the black barbers in Mattoon were well regarded, they were still considered different. This use of the term colored was quite common in Mattoon newspapers in the nineteenth century and it indicates that these men were looked at somewhat patronizingly rather than as direct equals.

This view is also evident in the manner in which white barbers are referred to in the newspapers. The first white barber in Mattoon was J.H. Conner, who opened his shop in 1863 and a notice was issued regarding his establishment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “The City in Brief.”

<sup>25</sup> Sumerlin, *Directory of Coles County*, 11, 131.

<sup>26</sup> “Local Items: Special Notice,” *Mattoon Gazette*, February 28, 1863, accessed December 1, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753103/local\\_items\\_special\\_notice\\_mattoon/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753103/local_items_special_notice_mattoon/)); “City in Brief: A new drug store,” *Mattoon Gazette*, June 20, 1879, accessed December 3, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753064/city\\_in\\_brief\\_a\\_new\\_drug\\_store/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753064/city_in_brief_a_new_drug_store/)).

<sup>27</sup> “BARBER-OUS,” *Mattoon Gazette*, April 17, 1862, accessed December 2, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753094/barberous\\_mattoon\\_gazette\\_17\\_apr/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753094/barberous_mattoon_gazette_17_apr/)).

<sup>28</sup> “Local Items: Special Notice.”

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**SPECIAL NOTICE.**—A new Barber Shop has been opened by Mr. J. H. Conner, near the North entrance of the Essex House. Those who don't like to have their heads "woolled" by a darkey barber, will do well to call on Mr. Conner, as he is not only *white*, but seems to be a gentleman, and shaves well.

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Special Notice regarding the opening of a white barbershop, *Mattoon Gazette*, February 28, 1863.

At the end of the "Special Notice" the writer states, "he is not only *white*, but seems to be a gentleman, and shaves well."<sup>29</sup> The order of this list and the italicization of the word *white* indicates that the most important aspect was his whiteness, followed by his comportment, while the fact that he shaved well was his least important quality. While this should be the most important component of barbering, the fact that it is not considered so in this case indicates that the community may have preferred to be shaved by a white man, regardless of his skill. This, combined with the use of the term "darkey barber," denotes a lack of respect and suggests a prejudiced view of black barbers.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond the preferential attitude toward white barbers, there were articles that questioned integrity of black barbers without proof. In 1878 the *Mattoon Gazette* ran a story from the *Washington Post* titled "An Honest Barber," which featured a white customer who tested his black barber and was shocked when the man turned out to be honest.<sup>31</sup> The article concludes with the remark that the customer "walked out more astonished than if he had just put his hand on a red-hot stove under the impression that it was his umbrella."<sup>32</sup> This language indicates a general belief that barbers were not honest, and as most barbers were black at this point in time it can be inferred that it is a belief in the dishonesty of black barbers specifically. Interestingly, this clashes with the language used to describe the Mattoon barbers, including the characterization of the first John Powell as "Honest John" and the second John Powell, along with Flavius Brooks, as "nice gentlemen and good businessmen."<sup>33</sup> This indicates that there was a confused, and somewhat paradoxical, view of black barbers in Mattoon in the nineteenth century. This view was partially due to prejudice towards black Americans, which was somewhat tempered by the relative lack of white people in the barbering profession and thus a lack of interracial job competition.<sup>34</sup> The black barbers of Mattoon that were successful earned the trust and business of their patrons by providing good services. The quality and level of service provided by the barbers of Mattoon may have been a factor in the apparent instability of Mattoon's barbering business.

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<sup>29</sup> "Local Items: Special Notice."

<sup>30</sup> "Local Items: Special Notice."

<sup>31</sup> "An Honest Barber," *Mattoon Gazette*, May 23, 1879, accessed December 4, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753034/an\\_honest\\_barber\\_mattoon\\_gazette\\_23/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753034/an_honest_barber_mattoon_gazette_23/)).

<sup>32</sup> "An Honest Barber."

<sup>33</sup> "Local Items: Arrest of Jake South"; "The City in Brief."

<sup>34</sup> Mills, *Cutting*, 21.

Based on census reports and city directories barbering appears to have been an unstable business in Mattoon, Illinois. Between the years 1860 and 1900, there were only two barbers that remained the same throughout every census and city directory; they were Austin Perry and Milford Norton.<sup>35</sup> Although the number of barbers increased consistently as the city grew in population, there was a high turnover rate. In fact, between 1895 and 1898 only fourteen out of the 25 barbers remained unchanged while eleven were replaced.<sup>36</sup> That is a 44% turnover rate over three years. Furthermore, of the 11 barbershops in 1895, only four remained owned by the same person and entirely new establishments replaced the others. This represents a 64% turnover rate for the businesses alone. During this three-year period there was both high employee and business turnover.<sup>37</sup> Between 1898 and 1900 the number of barbers increased from 24 to 38, a large increase over two years. However, only 26% of the entire community of barbers had been working in Mattoon for more than a year. 73% of barbers were completely new.<sup>38</sup> This high turnover rate was not confined to the 1890s. Between 1860 and 1880 only two barbers remained the same, while the remaining seven opened their shops sometime between 1861 and 1870.<sup>39</sup> In 1880 only four barbers were the same as in 1870, and in 1895 only three remained from 1880.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, the 1890 census was mostly destroyed in fires, and the records for Mattoon did not survive. However, it is likely they would reveal a similar story. This indicates that while barbering was an attractive occupation for black men, due to the relative lack of competition with white workers and the possibility of gaining wealth, it was not a very stable occupation. It is not clear whether these men lost their positions and establishments due to a lack of profit, or if they merely moved elsewhere, but either way their shops were unable to survive for a long period of time in Mattoon. Because of the number of barbers in the city, it is likely there was a great deal of competition, which may have driven out some of the barbers. In spite of Mattoon's rapidly increasing population and business from the railroad, Mattoon clearly could not sustain the number of barbers or barbershops it contained. It is also possible that increasing competition from white barbers negatively affected the ability of both black and white barbers to operate their businesses and make an adequate living.

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<sup>35</sup> 1860 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 64, dwelling 458, family 458, Austin Perry; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1860 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 64, dwelling 455, family 455, Milford Norton; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1870 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 207 A, dwelling 247, family 239, Austin Perry; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1870 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 207 B, dwelling 249, family 241, Milford Norton; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1880 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 215 (stamped), dwelling 356, family 406, Austin Perry; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1880 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 216 (stamped), dwelling 359, family 409, Milford Norton; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; Sumerlin, *Directory of Coles County*, 124, 129; Sumerlin, *Mattoon*, 151, 158; 1900 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 252 B (stamped), dwelling 409, family 428, Austin Perry; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1880 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon, p. 253 B (stamped), dwelling 420, family 449, Milford Norton; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>36</sup> Sumerlin, *Directory of Coles County*; Sumerlin, *Mattoon*.

<sup>37</sup> Sumerlin, *Directory of Coles County*, 184; Sumerlin, *Mattoon*, 225.

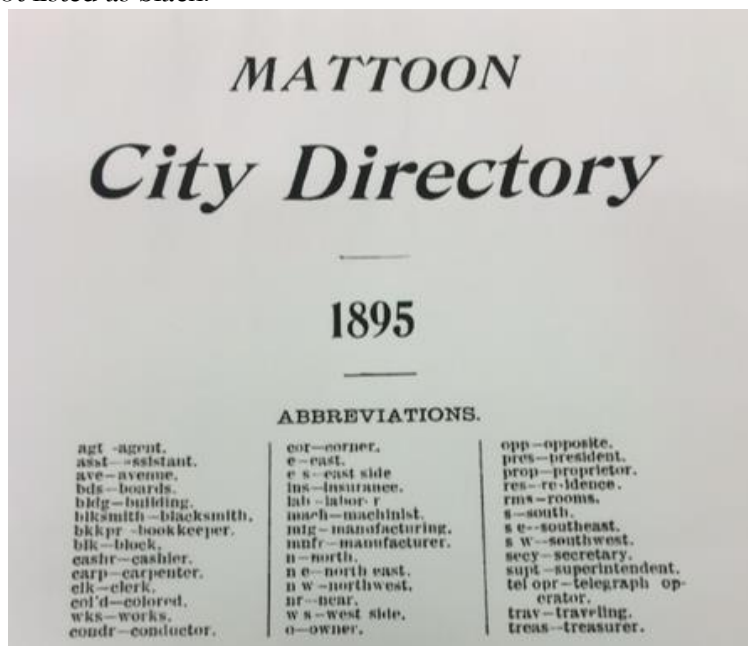
<sup>38</sup> Sumerlin, *Mattoon*; 1900 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>39</sup> 1860 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1870 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>40</sup> "Genealogy: Census Schedules," University of Delaware Library, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://guides.lib.udel.edu/c.php?g=85348&p=548893>.

The notice for the first white barbershop in Mattoon suggests that there were some people who did not want to visit a black barber.<sup>41</sup> There is no evidence of how many people felt this way, nor how many people visited any of the barbershops. However, it is possible that with the advent of white barbershops, many barbers of both races were not able to attract enough customers due to the competition. There may have been enough people who preferred white barbers to negatively effect black barbers, but it may not have been enough to support a white barbershop.

White barbers suffered from the same high turnover rate as black barbers. The first white barbershop in Mattoon opened in 1863, but J.H. Conner is not listed on the 1870 census.<sup>42</sup> In addition, there are two articles in the *Mattoon Gazette* from 1879 and one from 1880 that mention a white barbershop, but there are no white barbers listed on the 1880 census, indicating that by the time the census was taken, the shop or shops had closed.<sup>43</sup> City directories list when a person is colored, and in 1895 ten of the twenty-five barbers were not listed as such, while in 1898 twelve of the twenty-four were not listed as black.



List of abbreviations, including col'd for colored,  
*Directory of Coles County and the City of Mattoon.: 1895-96.*

Only five of these white barbers remained; half of them were no longer in the barbering business in Mattoon only three years later. In fact, the majority of the black barbers remained the same between 1895 and 1898.<sup>44</sup> However, it appears that white barbers were starting to push black barbers out of the market. In 1895 white men owned six of the eleven barbershops and by 1900 twenty-two of the thirty-six barbers were white compared to only sixteen black barbers. Black men no longer made up

<sup>41</sup> "Local Items: Special Notice."

<sup>42</sup> "Local Items: Special Notice"; 1870 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>43</sup> "City in Brief: A new drug store"; "The Dukes," *The Mattoon Commercial*, October 16, 1879, accessed December 2, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753052/the\\_dukes\\_the\\_mattoon\\_commercial\\_16/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753052/the_dukes_the_mattoon_commercial_16/)); "City in Brief: The white man's barber shop," *Mattoon Gazette*, June 18, 1880, accessed December 2, 2015, Newspapers.com ([https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753041/city\\_in\\_brief\\_the\\_white\\_mans\\_barber/](https://www.newspapers.com/clip/3753041/city_in_brief_the_white_mans_barber/)).

<sup>44</sup> Sumerlin, *Directory of Coles County*; Sumerlin, *Mattoon*.

the majority of the business, as they had just five years prior.<sup>45</sup> This indicates that the market was shifting to favor white barbers over black barbers, suggesting a very different business climate than that forty-three years prior when Austin Perry first established his barbershop in Mattoon.<sup>46</sup>

Barbering in Mattoon began in 1857, only two years after the railroad crossing was established. The barbers of Mattoon took advantage of their proximity to a major stop on two railroads to establish profitable businesses. Most barbershops were located in the central downtown area on Broadway Avenue, near the intersection of the railroads. By doing so they were able to obtain both local and traveling customers, and some became known in more than just their locality, at least as far as Council Bluffs, Iowa.<sup>47</sup> These early barbers were black men, although there were some early attempts at establishing white barbershops. These black barbers were subject to conflicting attitudes; the evidence shows that they were regarded in a positive manner, but also that they suffered from prejudice due to the color of their skin. Regardless of racial prejudice, these men were able to hold the market for nearly forty years before the majority of barbers became white men. However, the profession was far from stable. There was a high turnover rate among barbers, and by 1900 only two of the original Mattoon barbers remained. These men were the first barber, Austin Perry, and another named Milford Norton, who would later work in the shop of his son Riley Norton.<sup>48</sup> While these men were able to remain successful through to 1900, and even later, many of the barbers of Mattoon did not remain for more than two years. This turnover rate suggests that the growing city could not support the amount of barbers that wanted to work there. However, barbering was still a lucrative business where black men could achieve success, gain the trust and respect of their community, and potentially rise above the prejudice that pervaded the United States in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>45</sup> Sumerlin, *Directory of Coles County*, 149; 1900 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>46</sup> Ogbomo, *Photographic Images*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> "Local Items: Arrest of Jake South."

<sup>48</sup> Sumerlin, *Mattoon*, 151, 158. 1880 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>; 1900 U.S. census, Coles County, Illinois, population schedule, Mattoon; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed October 24, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.