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Moses Moore: A Documentary Biography

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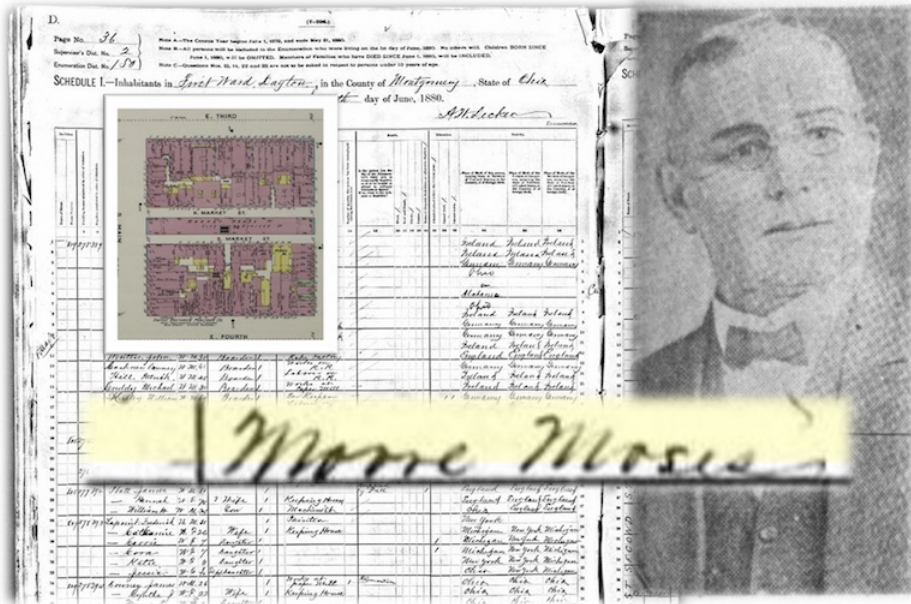
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THURSDAY JANUARY 27, 2022

Moses Moore: A Documentary Biography

By Heidi Gauder

ABOUT THIS SERIES

In the 1880 census, African Americans in Montgomery County, Ohio, numbered 1,310 — or less than 2%. The enumeration files for that census included Moses C. Moore, a single male, 30, born in Kentucky, living on East Second Street in Dayton and working as a laborer. His race was noted as “mulatto.” Although this census entry is fairly unremarkable, it provides a first glimpse of Moore’s life in Dayton. In time, Moore proved to be an astute businessman and a generous resource for Dayton’s African American community. In one Dayton history, Moore is described as the “wealthiest black man in Dayton before 1900.” Even though that assertion is difficult to prove, it seems likely that the wealth he accumulated far exceeded that of many Daytonians at that time. Wealthiest or not, he was a remarkable man.

Moore died in 1927. None of his children survived him; his first wife died; and his second wife remarried within a few years of Moore’s death. His story is told here through newspaper accounts, public documents and maps. Largely absent from this story, however, are the words of Moore himself. Although this void presented challenges to piecing his life together, his presence in multiple sources provides a sense of his busy life.

You can read the other installments on the Roesch Library blog:

- [Moses Moore: Political Action](#)
- [Moses Moore: Business Grows](#)
- [Moses Moore: Entertainment and Sports](#)
- [Moses Moore: Building Portfolio](#)
- [Moses Moore: Community Needs](#)

PREVIOUS POST

Moses Moore: Political Action

Part 2 of 6 in a documentary biography of Moses Moore, who became known as the wealthiest Black man in Dayton in the late 1800s.

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Setting the Tone

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BEGINNING AT THE END: THE OBITUARY

Moore's obituary gives some details of his early years. He was born in Paris, Kentucky. Further research adds to that detail: Moore was born around 1851 in Paris, Bourbon County, Kentucky. The 1860 census enumeration for Bourbon County includes a William Moore, age 45, living with Harriett Moore, age 26, and Moses Moore. Although this census lists Moses Moore's age as 18, this author believes that this listing is the correct family entry and that his age was an enumerator's error.

William "Billy" Moore's occupation was blacksmith, and he reported a personal estate value of \$100. All of the household members were born in Kentucky, and their race was listed as "mulatto." The mere identification of the family by name in the census indicates that they were free persons of color. Prior to emancipation in 1863, enslaved people — Kentucky was a slave state — were not identified by name, much less occupation. As free people of color, the Moore family was unusual for that time and place. In 1860, Bourbon County had a population of 14,860; of this number, 7067 people were enumerated as "colored," which included the category "mulatto," and of this population, 6767 people were listed as slaves (46% of the total county population), leaving the remaining 300 people — 2% — as free persons of color.

CLUES LEAD TO A DEAD END ... AND A DETOUR

Moore's obituary next notes that he left Paris for Wilberforce High School in Xenia when he was 20, which would have been around 1871, staying only one year before heading to Dayton for employment. It is unclear how he learned of Wilberforce, although an 1871 school catalog lists several students from Paris, Kentucky, over the years 1859 to 1870. However, no documentation has yet

confirmed his attendance, and other events seem to point to the case that he never went at all.

A Feb. 5, 1872, *Cincinnati Enquirer* article points to a different trajectory in the 1870s, at least for a while. On that day, the newspaper reported that Zack Godman, who “bore a bad character, and was under indictment for several grave offenses,” was shot and killed by Moore. According to another account, the two had a previous quarrel, and Godman had threatened Moore’s life. Moore, for his part, was alleged to have kept an illicit gaming and liquor house, where his friends would “meet to drink whisky and play cards, especially upon the Sabbath.” The Paris *True Kentuckian* newspaper confirmed that Godman had been indicted for horse stealing and that Moore ran a gambling and drinking saloon — and that he was set to go to trial for shooting Godman. Nothing more appears in the newspapers regarding the trial’s outcome, but court documents indicate that he was found guilty of murder and remanded to the Kentucky Penitentiary in November 1872. Although the sentence was 10 years, he was living in Dayton by 1880, so it is not clear how long he was in the penitentiary.

STARTING SMALL: LUMBER, CIGARS AND A SALOON

Following his move to Dayton, he worked as a laborer in the lumber trade until he had saved \$100, per his obituary. This type of work would not have been unusual for an African American man at this time. Historian Margaret Peters found that the top five jobs for African Americans in Dayton, as listed in the 1870 census, included private servants, laborers, public servants, washer women and hostlers — people who cared for the horses of visiting people. This description fit Moore and his roommates well; in the 1880 census, Moore was listed as a laborer, while one roommate, Maudie Garrett, was a washer woman; the other roommate, Charlie Smith, worked at a restaurant. Before the end of the decade, however, Moore’s situation changed dramatically.

Once again, his obituary picks up his next circumstances: “When he left the lumber trade the late Adam Schantz, sr., gave him a start in business for himself with a cigar stand, which was located on S. Market st.” Nothing exists to explain how Moore connected with Schantz, who was a well-known Dayton entrepreneur who was involved in Dayton breweries and owned many properties; perhaps it was their mutual interests in real estate and racing horses. In any case, Schantz and his son knew Moore well enough through the years to be sureties on his legal documents.

Moore noted his business beginnings with a cigar stand, but during the 1880s, he was also engaged in other business ventures. For several years he was listed in the city directory at 127 E. Second St., where he ran a saloon in the same block as the *Dayton Herald* newspaper building at 100 E. Second St. This location seemed to offer a convenient vantage for the newspaper, as it reported on multiple fights at his location, which the newspaper described as a “notorious dive.” In 1885, he married Martha Hurst at her parents’ house in Xenia, where the wedding was hailed as a “brilliant social event.”

NEW VENTURES: RESTAURANTS, RACEHORSES

After his marriage, Moore was listed in the city directory at a new address, 14 E. Market St. Market Street once ran east-west from Main Street to Jefferson Street, between Third Street on its north and Fourth Street on its south; the space is now occupied by the RTA hub. In the past, however, a covered market ran down the middle of Market Street, and at the Main Street end was the Dayton Police headquarters. The entire block functioned as a retail and hospitality space, as Sanborn fire insurance maps indicate shops surrounding the market, including The Club, the saloon and restaurant run by Moore.

It was also in the 1880s that he began racing horses. An 1888 article lists the placements of Moore’s horse, Ferlistor. This hobby continued for the rest of Moore’s life. A 1901 newspaper article hints at his success as an owner:

“In one week last year Branch won ten races for Mose Moore and is said to have earned for Moore in that time in purses and bets about \$25,000.” Even his obituary mentioned some of his horses, including Marion Gloosbey, Gypsy George, Who Knows Me, Uncle Velo, and Delco-Light.

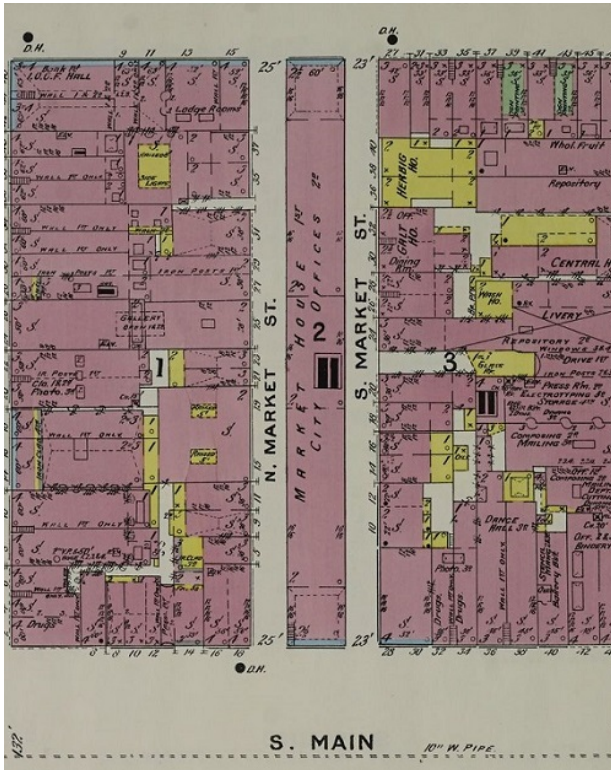
By the 1890s, Moore was running two saloons — the one on Market Street in downtown Dayton and a roadhouse at Germantown Street and Lakeview Avenue, which no longer intersect at that location; on present maps, the site is at Germantown Street and James H. McGee Boulevard. The roadhouse brought particular trouble to Moore; in 1893, he was indicted for violating the “mile-and-a-half” liquor law, which prohibited the sale of liquor within a mile and a half of the Soldier’s Home, known today as the Dayton Veterans Affairs Medical Center. On Sept. 2, 1898, the *Dayton Herald* announced that the police chief, Thomas J. Farrell, had been served with charges of permitting gambling in various saloons, including Moore’s roadhouse. The next day, Moore, described as “a prominent politician and the keeper of a resort,” was arrested for running a game of chance; he was taken to police headquarters along with five slot machines.

Moore had sporting interests throughout this decade as well. In addition to racing horses, he was the financial backer for a Dayton middleweight wrestler named Jake Snyder, whom newspapers called the “middle-weight champion wrestler of America.” Newspaper coverage indicates the popularity of the sport in Dayton. One article recounts Snyder’s match with Frank Gehle, who was forced to end the match so that he could catch the last train of the night back to Piqua.

- Next: [Moses Moore: Political Action](#)

— *Heidi Gauder is a professor in the University Libraries and coordinator of research and instruction. In locating records and information about Moses Moore and his family, she received assistance from Suzanne Dungan,*

Paris-Bourbon County (Kentucky) Public Library; Shawna Woodard, Special Collections, Dayton Metro Library; and Amy Czubak, Montgomery County (Ohio) Records Center and Archives. [View the sources used in this series.](#)



Market Street

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Moses Moore's saloon/hotel was located on South Market Street. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Dayton, Montgomery County, Ohio. Sanborn Map Co., to 1898 Vol. 1, 1897.



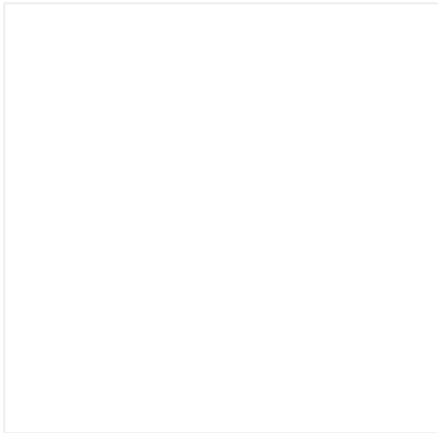
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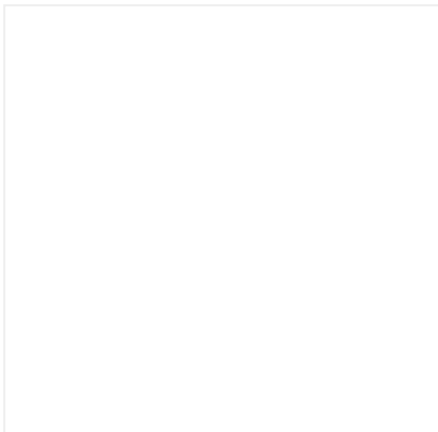
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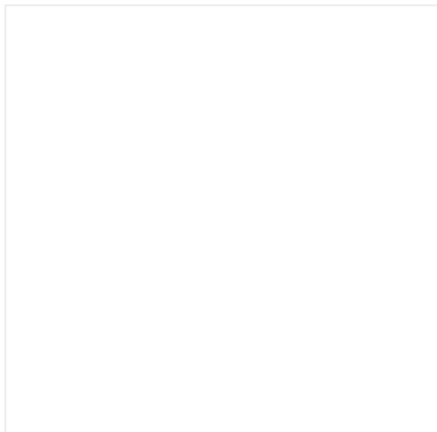
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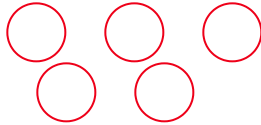
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