

THE HISTORY OF TUSCOLA'S NEGRO* POPULATION

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The city of Tuscola has had a number of Negroes living in the community at various time periods. The biggest concentration at one time was from the 1890s through the mid 1940s. Following are the names of some of Tuscola's Negro residents:

Anderson, Arthur – Judged the most graceful walker at the 1898 “Colored Folks Cake Walk” in Tuscola, his partner was Cozy Chavous. Arthur later resided on DeWitt Avenue in Mattoon.
Anderson, James – in 1895, he was a barber; his residence was at 600 South Main; his barbershop was located at 11 North Main Street. **Archey (sometimes recorded as Archer), Franklin** – He was a barber. His residence was 14 W. Central Avenue. **Archey, John** – Son of Franklin and Maggie Archey. Born in Illinois. **Archey, Maggie** – Wife of Franklin. Born in Illinois. She was 19 years old in the 1880 census.

Box, Jim – Brother-in-law of Lemuel Riley, husband of Nancy Box, and father of Vernetie Box. The Box family was originally from Corinth, Mississippi. He was a handyman while living in Tuscola.
Box, Nancy – sister to Lem Riley and wife of Jim Box, she was domestic help in Tuscola. **Box, Vernetie** – daughter of Jim and Nancy Box.



Cecil "Pete"
Bridgewater

Bridgewater, Cecil "Pete" – A graduate of Tuscola High in the class of 1929, Cecil was born in Tuscola. His parents were Preston and Effie Chavous Bridgewater. Both Cecil and Harold Bridgewater were known as “Pete” by their Tuscola classmates. “Cecil was older than me,” said Harold. “They called him “Pete”, and called me “Repeat”. When mentioning “Pete”, that is the same as Harold Bridgewater. Cecil lived in Champaign and retired from the University of Illinois as an upholsterer. Cecil married Erma Scott and they had three children: Cecil Jr., Ronnie and Cassandra. Cecil Jr. was a successful trumpet player in New York. He has not only traveled all over the world playing trumpet, he is also a music director who made special arrangements for musicians. Ronnie is a teacher of music at the

University of Illinois.

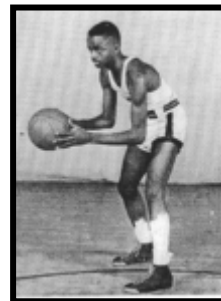
Bridgewater, Effie – Mother of Harold and Cecil Bridgewater. Born November 30, 1877 at El Paso, she was the daughter of Thomas and Mary DeGroat Chavous. Mrs. Bridgewater worked for James L. and Edith Bush as a domestic. She was working there at the same time Smiley Burnett worked at radio station WZD in Tuscola. Smiley called her “mom”, and Pete Bridgewater said that Smiley was especially keen on Effie's chocolate pie. Effie Bridgewater died December 5, 1975 in Champaign and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery. **Bridgewater, Geneva** – Daughter of Preston and Effie Chavous Bridgewater; she died in infancy and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery. **Bridgewater, Theodore** – Son of Preston and Effie Bridgewater, he died in infancy and in buried in Tuscola Cemetery.



Effie Bridgewater



Pete Bridgewater
pictured with classmate
Martha Brown



Bruce Kennard
Hayden, Jr. in a
photo taken in
Tuscola in 1943-44



John Chapman, Harold “Pete” Bidgewater and Milas Thomas at the Douglas County Museum, March 26, 1997.

Bridgewater, Harold “Pete” – Graduate of Tuscola High School in the class of 1935. He was born at his parents’ home in Tuscola on March 20, 1916. After graduating from high school, he married Ethel Cannon of Danville. At the age of nine years, “Pete” decided to take an Omaha, Nebraska-based correspondence course in taxidermy. He received instructions in the mail on how to stuff various animals, and then sent his finished product into the company to be graded. Pete notes that he is probably the first Boy Scout in Tuscola to get a merit badge in taxidermy. His scout leader was Ray Wulliman. Growing up, his friends included the Kennedy brothers, Byron Dust, Charlie Abercrombie, Stanley Romine, and Rex Robertson. Pete had fond memories of 1927-28 when the Star Store building was

vacant and Saturday dances there were all the rage. “Kids from Villa Grove caught the train and came to the dance, then rode back home later that night”, he recalled. The live band featured Harry Sherman Marsh on alto sax, Lewis “Luke” Belles, Forrest “Frosty” Ellis, and Willy Hixon on the mandolin. Pete was the featured tap dancer at the dances, having learned how to tap dance from someone who lived in the Meister house on South Parke Street in Tuscola. “Lessons cost 50 cents, which was a lot of money at the time,” said Pete. After high school, Pete joined the Mac Willis band, playing the bass fiddle at Wheat’s Steak House, Phren’s, the Eight O’Clock Club, and other area nightclubs in Champaign-Urbana. “At the Eight O’clock,” Pete said, “they called me the ‘Triple Threat Man’ because I could sing, dance, and play the bass fiddle.” The year 1953 saw the beginning of his remarkable radio career. He was an announcer on WKID and WITY radio stations and on WDWS for twenty years. Although he “officially” retired in 1995, he still announced a Sunday show from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. on the all-black station, WBCP (1580 AM).

Bridgewater, Preston – The father of Harold and Cecil Bridgewater, he played coronet with Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus Band. The family lived across the street from old North Ward School, 214 East Ensey Street. *Already a professional musician when they met*, Preston and his wife, Effie, were married in 1906 in Danville. He was a native of Kansas who came to live in Illinois in 1900. He grew up in the home of Benjamin Lafferty. Preston was already a professional musician when he met Effie. He died in 1921 in Kankakee. A son, Theodore, died in infancy and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery.

Buchanan, Billy Buck – Billy Buck was born in Southeast Missouri in 1848. His father was Negro and his mother was a Cherokee Indian. Billy came to Coles County at the close of the Civil War with Capt. Granderson Smiley. In 1868, he became a hired hand for Col. Lige McCarty, a large landowner.

For three years he was employed by James McCoughtry. For 16 more years, he worked for Dr. John A. Field. For five years he worked for the Henry Caraway family. Billy Buck lived in a rundown shack at the corner of South Main and Pinzon Street. He was familiar to local residents as a “shuffling figure with broom in hand sweeping the Main Street pavement”. Around 1935 or 1936, his shack was hit by a windstorm that blew off one room and a chimney. According to a 1936 newspaper article, this did not deter



Billy from remaining in his beloved shack. Because the chimney was gone, *“he built a fire on the dirt floor of the shack and went outside. When the room was heated, he opened the door and let the smoke out. Then he went inside to enjoy what heat remained.”* The rest of the house began to lean perilously, but Billy refused to move out. A wire was run around the shack and fastened to a big tree nearby to keep the building stable. Local citizens became very concerned that a human being should live in such squalid quarters, especially since it was located on one of Tuscola’s main thoroughfares. With Christmas on the way, local residents decided to collect money to build a new house for Billy Buck. According to the 1936 newspaper article, *“About \$85 was raised; carpenters, brick masons and others donated their services. Mrs. Walter Jones and Mrs. A. W. Bragg agreed to furnish the new cabin. A good bed, curtains, a rug, washstand and other comforts were provided. Dr. J. F. Gillespie gave a cook stove”*. The citizens of town built him a new cabin as a Christmas present the same year. Billy Buck died February of 1938. After his death, Billy Buck’s cabin was moved next to the railroad tracks near the west exit of the north part of Ervin Park. The wooden floor was removed and the City used the building as shed for mowers and other park maintenance supplies.

Calimese, Eunice – adopted daughter of Sherman and Maybelle Calimese. **Calimese, Grace Grigsby** – Is buried in Tuscola Cemetery. The inscription on her stone says 1882-1935. Her parents were among the early Negro families who came to Douglas County at the close of the Civil War. She was employed at a fraternity house at the University of Illinois, but lived practically her whole life in Tuscola. Her children were Ruth Calimese McMurray, Vergiealena Grigsby Cook, and Cozzetta Grigsby Earnest of Champaign. **Ruth Naomi Calimese** was born in 1914 to James and Grace Manuel Grigsby Calimese. A very accomplished woman, holding membership in Holy Cross Church in Champaign, the Champaign Education Association, National Education Association, and Retired Teachers Association. She was also a member and secretary of the National Association of Negro Musicians. She retired after more than 30 years in the Champaign Unit 4 School district, where she served as teacher and then assistant principal and counselor at Jefferson Junior High School. Her husband, Wilbern McMurray, was also a teacher in the Champaign school system and served as principal of Willard School from 1947 until 1964 and Marquette School until 1968. Ruth died in 1984 and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery.

Calimese, Isabelle – Born in 1852, widow of Peter Calimese; died in 1899. A resident of Camargo, Isabelle was living in Tuscola at the time of her death. Isabelle and Peter were parents of Eva Waldon, Robert Calimese, James Calimese, Maggie Allen, and Sherman Calimese.



Big Jim Calimese

Calimese, James Edward - Jim worked at the Douglas County Garage on North Main Street where he washed and waxed cars and handled the gas pump. He lived in a small interior room, without windows, on the second floor of the garage. He was a slow, easy-going man who always asked his customers if they wanted “geese” (gas). He is remembered for his huge hands. He was born in 1882 in Wolf County, Kentucky and came to Douglas County at an early age. He died in 1946 and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery. His daughter was Ruth Calimese; Cozzetta Grigsby Earnest and Vergiealena Grigsby Cook were his stepdaughters. His brothers were Sherman of Mattoon and Robert of Terre Haute.

Calimese, Mabel – Daughter of Robert and Dessie Derricksen Calimese, was born in 1907 in Tuscola. She was a 1925 graduate of Tuscola High School.

Calimese, Sherman – Son of Peter and Isabelle Calimese and husband of Maybelle Calimese. Father of Eunice and Henry Calimese. Sherman and Maybelle were living in Tuscola in 1926.

Chavous, Amanda – Servant in the home of Robert and Louise Foster. Mr. Foster was a druggist in Tuscola in 1880. **Chavous, Belle** - second wife of Solomon Chavous. The couple lived at the end of West Pinzon Street near the drainage ditch. She died in 1930 in Douglas County.



Cozetta Chavous

Chavous, Cozetta – Daughter of Thomas and Mary DeGroat Chavous, she was born in 1875 in Illinois. She was domestic help in Tuscola, cooking and keeping the house for the Ervin family. For 20 years, she worked at the University of Illinois. Her sister was Effie Bridgewater. She died in 1951 and is buried in the Tuscola Cemetery. **Chavous, Mahlon** – a pressman for the S.A. Richmond Patent Medicine Company (located where Jarman Center is now). In 1895, his residence was 27 W. Wilson. Mahlon was the uncle of Harold and Cecil Bridgewater.

Chavous, Solomon “Sol” – His name was often spelled “Chavours” in newspaper articles and official documents. He was born in Sangamon County, son of Thomas Chavous. Although he had no formal education, he could read and write. His half sister was Effie Bridgewater, so he was an uncle of Cecil and Harold

Bridgewater. He lived in Urbana and Tuscola, but died in 1933 in Kankakee. **Cockelreas, C. L.** – In 1900, he was a boarder in the Chavous home. He was born in 1870.

Davis, Charles – Son of James and Reba Davis, he attended school in Tuscola until the 5th or 6th grade, when the family moved away. Charlie died in 1978. His wife was Blondine. **Davis, James** Father of Laxey Mae Davis. He lived in Tuscola from 1935 until 1945 when he worked on the section crew for the Illinois Central Railroad. He also worked for Smith’s Lumber in Tuscola. Drafted during WWII, he served with the Quartermaster Corps on Okinawa. After the war ended, he stayed in Gary, IN with his wife, Reba, who had moved there during the war. When Reba died, Jim married Gertrude Joy in 1992.



Solomon “Sol” Chavous

Davis, Laxey Mae – Reared by James and Reba Davis after her birth mother, Essie Belle Wallace (sister to Reba Davis), died around 1932-33. ? Laxey Mae lived at the southeast corner of Ensey and Carico Streets while in Tuscola. The family then moved to Gary, IN; the Davis family consisted of five girls and two boys. **Davis, Reba** – First wife of James Davis. She and Jim met in Alabama and moved to Tuscola to live near Reba’s brother, Lemuel Riley. She worked for the VanVoorhis family while living in Tuscola. Charlie Davis was her son; she also raised her niece, Laxey Mae. She died in 1990.

Dixon, Mrs. Doc – She had a store in a building in the back yard of their home on the south side of town. Mrs. Dixon ran more of a convenience store than a grocery store where she sold soft drinks, cigarettes, candy, and a few staples. **Dixon, Doc** - He was a handyman for C. Ed Cox. Cox had a hardware store the first door west of the Tuscola Kandy Kitchen. Dixon took care of the lawn work at the Cox residence. **Easter, Kathryn** - Born in 1898, she lived at the corner of Ficklin and Court Street in Tuscola and hired out as domestic help for doctors and other prominent citizens. Among the people that we know she worked for were Pearl Bailey and Letha Williams. Letha was a 7th grade schoolteacher at South Ward, and hired Kathryn as a cleaning lady. *“I remember that she always wore white gloves and a hat,” said Letha. “She was very refined and loved pretty things. She seemed to be well-traveled and told me many stories. She thought the grocer, Bruce Williams, was wonderful because he was so good to her. I don’t think she had hardly anything, so she was always appreciative of everything anyone gave her”.* Kathryn loved red, so her friend and other employer, Pearl Bailey, made

arrangements for her to be buried in a red velvet dress. When she died in 1958, Kathryn was buried in Tuscola Cemetery.

Grigsby, Cozzetta - She was born in 1902 in Illinois, a daughter of Jerry and Grace Manuel Grigsby. Grace Manuel Grigsby later became Mrs. James Calimese. A 1922 graduate of Tuscola High, she married Robert Henry Earnest in 1928; he was a janitor at a U. of Illinois fraternity house. Cozzetta died in 1982 and is buried with her husband in Mount Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Vergiealena Grigsby – She was born in 1908 in Tuscola, the daughter of Jerry and Grace Manuel Grigsby. She was reared by her mother and stepfather, James Calimese. A 1923 graduate of Tuscola High School, she was a cook at the University of Illinois. Vergiealena married James G. Cook and they had a son, Jimmy, Jr. She is buried in Tuscola Cemetery.

Harrison, Miss Harriet Jane – In 1895, she was a laundress who owned her home at the northwest corner of East Ficklin and South Center.

Hayden, Bruce Kenard – This man touched many lives in Tuscola as a city mail carrier. He was born August 14, 1889 in Fulton, Kentucky. He married Myrtle Theodora Holmes in 1918. In the same year, he entered the military service, attained the rank of master sergeant and was stationed in France. He moved to Tuscola in the 1910s, and later became a mail carrier out of the local post office. He retired after 34 years of service in 1944. He and his family then moved to Springfield, where he became an employee of the Illinois State Department of Finance and Labor. He retired in



Myrtle and Bruce Hayden

1965 after 20 years at that job. While living in Tuscola, the Haydens belonged to the Salem Baptist Church in Champaign. Bruce Hayden was active in the church throughout his life, serving as Sunday School Superintendent for many years. After the family moved to Springfield, he was a deacon at Zion Baptist Church as well as Sunday School Superintendent; he also sang in the senior choir. He was a member of the Mayor's Commission for Senior Citizens, the Coroner's Jury, and various other civic organizations. His children were Bruce Hayden Jr. and Ruth Hayden Morgan. Bruce Sr. died in 1977 and is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield. In Tuscola, the family lived in the 100 block of West Overton Street. Bruce's first wife, May, died young and left a daughter, Ruth. When Mr. Hayden remarried, Ruth was raised by Myrtle Holmes Hayden. Bruce Jr. was Bruce and Myrtle's son.



Bruce Hayden Jr.

Hayden, Bruce Kenard Jr. – He was born in 1928, son of Bruce K. and Myrtle Holmes Hayden. Known as "Brucie" to Tuscola folks, he graduated from Springfield High School and received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in music from James Milliken University in Decatur. Like his father, Bruce Jr. is fondly remembered by local residents. A distinguished violinist (first taught by his father), he began his teaching career as Director of the String Department at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida. His musical career extended throughout the recording and performance medium across the country, playing with such groups as the Soulful Strings and the Schubert Theater Orchestra. Bruce Hayden Jr. was professor and director of music at Malcolm X College when he died in 1976; he is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield. Bruce Jr. married a graduate of Milliken University, Colleen Dowling; their daughter was Dr. Carla Hayden who was the executive director of the Baltimore Public Library System. Divorced, Bruce Jr. remarried and had a son Bruce Hayden III. **Hayden, Ruth Norris** - She was the daughter of Bruce Sr. and May Gordon Hayden. Ruth was a 1933 graduate of Tuscola High School. She married John Morgan and they resided in St. Louis until they both died.

Hayden, Mariah – The mother of Bruce Hayden Sr. was born in 1860. When she died in 1915, she was buried in Tuscola Cemetery. Her grave is just south of the Unknown Soldier’s memorial plot. **Hayden, May Gordon** - First wife of Bruce Hayden Sr. Born in 1887, she died at her home in Tuscola in 1917. When she died, she left her husband Bruce, as well as an infant daughter, Ruth.

Hayden, Myrtle Theodora Holmes – Second wife of Bruce Hayden, Sr., she was born in 1902 in DuQuoin, the oldest of five children born to John and Stella Lott Holmes. She married Bruce K. Hayden Sr., in 1918 and moved to Tuscola. They had a son Bruce Kenard Hayden, Jr. When she and Mr. Hayden moved to Springfield, she too was a very active church member, in civic and cultural affairs in Springfield through the James Weldon Johnson Study Guild, Urban League Guild, YWCA, and NAACP. She was employed by the State of Illinois for 21 years until her retirement in 1966. She loved music, gardening and flowers.

Hollis, Doc He was a barber. **Hunt, Thomas** - In 1895 he was a laborer whose address was West Pinzon Street. He owned his own home. **Logan** - resided at the same address as Thomas Hunt. **Hunt, Lufe** and **Hunt, Joe** - Sons of Lode Hunt. Lode lived on West Pinzon Street on the north side between South Main Street and Washington Street where he had a large garden. He had a two-wheel cart from which he sold his garden vegetables. He chanted “*Lode Hunt here, Lode Hunt here*” as he sold his wares. He is buried in Tuscola Cemetery and his tombstone inscription says “1875-1954”. Lode Hunt and Logan Hunt may be the same person. **Hunt, Mrs. James (Emma)** - In 1895, she resided on East Overton Street.

Jacob, Joshua – Born in North Carolina, Jacob was a laborer living in Tuscola in 1880, aged 60 years old at the time. **Jacob, Joshua Jr.** – Son of Joshua Jacob, he was born in Indiana and was 17 years old in 1880. **Jesse, George L.** – In 1895, he was a printer in the *Tuscola Journal* newspaper office. **Johnson, Jack** – A dishwasher at the City Hotel.

Lamb, Elizabeth – She was a hairdresser who lived in Tuscola in 1880. She was born in North Carolina and was 26 years old at the time of the 1880 Federal census. Her children included **Flora Lamb** (a domestic who lived at 216 South Main in 1895); **Nettie Lamb** (born in Illinois in 1873), and **Noble Lamb** (born in Illinois in 1876). **Lamb, Joseph** – a day laborer who was born in Tennessee. His name shows up in both the 1870 and 1880 Tuscola census. His wife was **Mildred Lamb** (born in Virginia in 1825). **Lee, Miss Maria** - A laundress living at 15 East Ficklin in 1895. She owned her own home. **Linn, William** – a laborer who lived at 128 E. Overton in 1895. The house was owned by Charles Jones.

Masters girl – Raised by a white couple named Frank and Minnie Masters, very little is known about her. She and her parents lived in a house behind DeKalb on U.S. Route 36. The daughter frequently visited and supposedly later moved to Chicago. **May, Frank** - Frank May was a barber. He lived in the 200 block of East Buckner Street. Frank May weighed about 300 pounds. The barbershop was located on North Parke Street between F. H. Jones Lumber and the photography shop. Frank May was killed when his coupe was hit by train engine 2701 at the Wabash railroad crossing in Tolono in 1928.

Menefee, Ruben – This old gentleman worked for Pearle Wardall and Bill VanVoorhis. He was unmarried. He did not have his own home. Later in his life, he slept in a cot in the back of the Tuscola State Bank. At the bank, he was the janitor and handyman. He died in 1936, and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery without a tombstone. **Mitchell, William “Billy”** – He was a porter at the Beach House. He lived at 231 East Ensey Street in 1895. He lived in the vicinity of Brookside Restaurant on North Niles Avenue. Billy and Janet Mitchell were parents of two sons. **John Mitchell**, whom his classmates in Tuscola called “Billy”, is the only one of the two boys who lived in Tuscola. He is a retired state policeman. Mr. Mitchell died in 1938, in Douglas County.

Page, Sarah J. – Born in Maryland in 1830, she was the mother of an adopted daughter, **Olla Fant**. Her husband was **Stephen Page**. Mr. Page was a laborer who lived at 213 East Ensey.

Phillips, Bingham and Flora – Mr. Phillips owned a dray business and had a team of high-spirited horses. The family was poor and they had several children. **Phillips, Vesta** – Attended grade school in Tuscola.

The **Lucian Reeves** family lived next to the Bragg house on North Main in Tuscola. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Reeves and a son, **Eugene Reeves**. Mr. Reeves worked for Mr. Bragg as his chauffeur. Just west of the Bragg house was a garage and home with bathroom, living room, and kitchen and closet downstairs, and on the second floor three bedrooms. The Reeves family lived there. The family was well-educated. One day Lucian Reeves and Mr. Bragg went to Indianapolis and for some reason, Bragg drove home. The car hit crushed rock on the side of the road, and Mr. Bragg was thrown from the car and killed. Shortly after that, the Reeves family moved away.

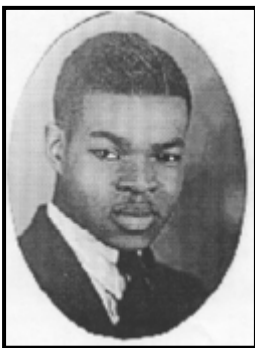


Nettie and Lemuel Riley

Riley, Lemuel – Born in Walnut, MS in 1893. He worked on the railroad for 25 years, as a guard at USI and an employee of the Tuscola Cooperative Elevator. He and his wife, Nettie, came to Tuscola in 1925 and lived on Carico Street for many years. He was a member of the Baptist Church and the Masonic Lodge in Champaign. In the early 1960's, he suffered a stroke and was forced to retire as a semi-invalid. He died in 1973. His sister was Nancy Box. **Nettie B. Garden Riley** married Lemuel in 1915, in Mississippi, came to Tuscola in 1925, remained in Tuscola after his death but was living in Gary, IN at the time of her own death. In the late 1950's, Geraldine Steele from Mississippi stayed with the Rileys and went to school in Tuscola.

Shedd, Laura – A washerwoman who was a boarder in the Harriett Harrison residence in 1880. **Shedd, Robert** – He was a porter at Washburns. He resided in 1895 at 131 E. Ensey in a home which he owned. He was a day laborer who was born in Tennessee in 1856. In 1870, he lived in the home of Joseph Lamb in Tuscola. According to a *Tuscola Journal* news clipping, by 1898, there was a **Mrs. Robert Shedd** attending “colored folks” social functions. **Slash, Andrew** – In 1895, he was a laborer living at 323 E. Overton Street in a house owned by J.F. Poole.

Walker, James - He lived at 203 N. Parke Street in 1895, where he served as a cook at the Beach House Hotel.



Howard Wright

Wright, Geraldine, daughter of Thomas and Willa Mae Jones Wright, was a 1935 graduate of Tuscola High School. She married Robert Johnson in Lafayette, Indiana around 1937 or 1938, and they resided there until they both died. They were the parents of Robert, Leslie, Jerry, Rosalyn, and Martha and had many grandchildren and step-grandchildren. During her years in Lafayette, she worked for the license bureau and a dry good store, but she was primarily a homemaker. She and her husband ran the Aero Inn Restaurant at the Aretz Airport in Lafayette from 1946 until 1953.



Geraldine Wright

Wright, Howard Leslie “Tommy” – Son of Thomas and Willa Mae Jones Wright, born 1915 and graduated from Tuscola High School in 1933. Both Geraldine and Howard were very bright students. Howard married Leora Easley in 1938 and had five children and several grandchildren. In 1970, he remarried. From 1952 until 1989, he operated his own janitorial service in Lafayette.

Wright, Thomas – Thomas’ mother had a terminal illness which left him an orphan at a very young age. Thomas was taken from his birthplace in Kentucky to live in Tuscola with a white couple named Josiah and Martha Jane (Easter?) Wright. It is possible that Tommy’s birth mother had been a servant in the Wright home. This Tuscola High School football player was a 1905 graduate of TCHS. He scored the winning touchdown at a Thanksgiving Day game against Arcola High’s football team. At that time, a negro person could not be on the streets of Arcola after sundown. After Tommy made the winning touchdown, he laid the ball down, climbed over a fence, ran across a field, and jumped into a waiting buggy that took him back to Tuscola. After high school, Thomas married **Willa Mae Jones** in 1914, in Champaign. Thomas’ father **Josiah** died in 1914, leaving a considerable estate. His total real estate holdings were valued at \$18,000 and he had \$6,000 in personal property when he died. His last wishes were that most of the real estate be sold for its cash value, and the remainder of the estate was to be shared with 18 cousins of Josiah. Thomas Wright got one share of Josiah’s estate and ownership of the family automobile upon his adopted mother’s death. When Martha died in 1925, Thomas acquired his adopted parents’ house.

Thomas operated a car garage on Wilson Street, where local residents with open vehicles parked them overnight. During the day in 1926 or 1927, the empty garage was turned into a skating rink, and “young Tommy” remembered that, as the boss’s kid, he had the privilege of skating there whenever he wanted to without paying. In the 1930s, Thomas did odd jobs around Tuscola. He died in 1942 in the Chicago Research Hospital and is buried in Tuscola Cemetery. Mrs. Wright, who was Bruce Hayden Jr.’s godmother, did domestic work in Tuscola, possibly for the VanVoorhis family. She died in Lafayette in 1990 at the age of 102 years.



Adrian S. Young

Young, Eliza – Born in Illinois in 1858, she was the wife of **Joseph Young**. In 1895, she lived at 518 S. Main in a house she owned. Joseph was a laborer who was born in Illinois in 1804. Joseph and Eliza had an age difference of 54 years. **Young, Tabby** – Mother of **George Young**, died while residing in the Beach House. **Young, Adrian S.** – Born 1870, in Illinois and died 1939 in Douglas County.

At one time, Tuscola had two churches with Negro congregations. One of the churches was located on Ensey Street in the northwest part of town (the second building west of North Niles on the north side of the street). Its name was the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church. The other church was located at the northwest corner of Houghton and Center Streets at 114 E. Houghton. The latter church was called the “White Horse Riders” church. Originally built in 1882 as an Episcopal Church called “St. Stephen’s”, the building was turned into a private residence by a local carpenter named Allen Trigg.

**Bishop Alexander Walker
Wayman of the African Methodist
Episcopal Church with members
of Tuscola, Illinois AME Church
at the dedication of the church on
June 23, 1873**





George Young

Pearle Ervin Wardall of Tuscola was a prolific writer. She was the granddaughter of the owners of Tuscola's well-known, turn-of-the-century hotel, the Beach House. The hotel had many intriguing visitors and staff members. At one point in time, Mrs. Wardall jotted down her memories of George, "Aunt Tabby" and Katherine Young. Following are Pearle's memoirs of the Youngs: *"A colored man appeared at the Beach House one noon and asked Sarah McNally, the cook, if she would give him something to eat. She always would feed tramps if they would do some work for the food. While he was eating, Sarah found out he had a mother and sister down south and he had tramped up north and wanted to make a home for them. His mother and sister had been slaves, but he was what he called Free Born. Sarah started him to splitting wood and filling up the wood boxes and went in and talked to Grandmother Beach about him. George Young attended to the cows, milking and feeding them and taking them to the pasture across the Illinois Central Railroad tracks. George was with Grandmother Beach for a good many years. He did all sorts of odd jobs; even blackening shoes for the traveling men. He saved his money and sent for his mother, Aunt Tabby, and Katherine, his sister. George rented a cabin over on the Gail lot next to the pasture where he took the cows. Aunt Tabby was a great big fat woman and Katherine was simple-minded. She never talked, but just made gestures with her hands. Aunt Tabby said she was whipped by an overseer of the slaves when she was a young girl and hadn't been right since, and had Katherine show Sarah the scars. They worked there and ate their food in the kitchen or wash house for several years. At last Aunt Tabby died and George put Katherine up in the asylum at Kankakee.*

George lived there around the hotel and got a salary as long as grandmother ran the hotel. But when Mr. Kessel took over after he married Aunt Jenny, they didn't get along. When my father S.B. Ervin moved into the house up here, George came to work for him and stayed here for years. My father, S.B. Ervin, raised cattle just across the railroad back of our home and we had a big barn and mules, and three cows, and horses and George was busy from morning until night working in the garden, mowing the yard, copping wood, milking, helping with the churning, and doing chores around the house. He used to load the hay on the rack and he would take a load of kids and drive over to feed the stock. He went by Uncle Rice and John's elevator and over the dredge boat bridge and then we all played over by the windmill while George did the feeding of the cattle. George was quite a character in our lives a good many years. He sang sad Negro melodies; one I remember well – "Go chain the Lion down" – it was weird. When Papa quit raising and feeding stock, he talked to one of the conductors of the C. H. & D. railroad and George got a job in Decatur at the station there, moving trunks and baggage. We were young and guess we lost track of him, but George Young was a good man and quite a feature in our young life. Always good-natured. Never used bad language"

Tuscola's white and Negro populations seemed to get along together. Articles in the 1897 and 1898 *Tuscola Journal* newspaper tell of a time when "colored folk's cake walks" were quite a social event in town. White residents attended the festivities as spectators. Around Christmas of 1898, the following news items appeared in the *Journal*: *"The colored people have arranged for a grand cake walk and dance at the opera house next Monday night. These cakewalks have always been productive of much merriment and with a few specialities in the way of clog dances, the proper cut of "de pigeon" and the latest of ragtime music. The projectors of the walk can expect a crowded house. Colored people from Charleston, Mattoon, Champaign, Decatur, and other towns will be present. The irresistible George Jesse of Charleston will no doubt be on hand to make a good showing in the walk. The cake walk will*

be in the charge of Arthur Anderson, Will Parker, and Robert Chevours (Chavous) and they assure the public an entertainment that will be worthy of patronage. The following prizes have been offered by the managers: 1st prize - \$5 and cake to most graceful couple; 2nd prize - \$2 for second best couple; Gold ring to the most lovely lady waltzer; \$2 for the champion 'buck' dancer; box of cigars for second best." A follow-up story in the next issue of the newspaper said, *"The grand march was led by Mr. Robert Johnson of Champaign and Mrs. Robert Shed of Tuscola. William Montgomery of Mattoon acted as "drum major". Mr. Arthur Anderson and Miss Cozy Chavours (Chavous) of Tuscola were judged the most graceful walkers. Mr. Harry Brumble of Champaign won the \$2 prize for the bet buck dancer. The prize for the most lovely waltzer was given Mr. Louis Brumble and Miss Gertrude Chavous."*

Pete Bridgewater said that the only time he ever heard a derogatory remark made against him in Tuscola was when a group of itinerant Texas pipeliners came into Riley's Pool Hall and one of them made a racial slur. Riley cracked the Texan over the head with a pool cue and ordered the men out of the building. Pete also recalls the day when the school track team went to a meet in Monticello. The team hadn't eaten anything that day, so Coach Vernon Askew took the boys to a Monticello restaurant. All the team players got their food except Pete Bridgewater. When it became obvious that Pete was being passed by, the players would not eat their meals until Pete got his. Askew eventually asked the restaurant owner why Pete hadn't gotten any food yet. *"We don't serve Negroes in here"*, he said. Askew answered, *"Then we won't pay for the white's food."* Then the whole team got up and walked out of the restaurant without eating or paying.

In Tuscola, Bridgewater said, there was more affection for the Negro residents than there was hate. When asked if growing up in a nearly all-white community placed him at a disadvantage, he said *"no"*. *"It was to my advantage,"* he said. *"I didn't know I was black until I moved up to Champaign. Blacks living in Tuscola didn't have to go through all the hullabaloo of prejudice"*, Pete recalled.

Local white residents thoroughly enjoyed the musical talents of the town's Negroes--everything from the sound of Preston Bridgewater's trumpet, to Pete's music and tap dancing, to Bruce Hayden's violin, to the choir music wafting out of the town's Negro churches, to the black bands and orchestras that played at the local pub and on radio station WDZ. Jerry Lynch and his Rhythm Club Band could be heard on WDZ, as well as at the Friendly Tavern on Rt. 36 in Tuscola.

* NOTE: During the period of this article, the black residents were referred to as "Negroes". Thus, that designation is used in this article.



Mac Willis and His Doctors of Rhythm Boys



Jerry Lynch and the Rhythm Club Band



Harold "Pete" Bridgewater



Cecil Bridgewater



Thomas and Mary Chavous



Bruce K. Hayden Jr. and Colleen Dowling (Hayden) as students at James Milikin University, 1951



Effie Bridgewater



Ralph Bassett, Bruce and Myrtle Hayden and granddaughter



Effie Bridgewater (I), Jessie Backento and Cozetta Chavous



Preston Bridgewater and Ben Lafferty



Mary Chavous

Pictures Courtesy of the Museum Association of Douglas County, *Cabin Chatter*, Lynnita Aldridge Brown, Editor