

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: INDISPENSABLE TO THEIR COMMUNITY: AN
 EXAMINATION OF BLACK UNDERTAKERS IN
 BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Edwin B. Jackson, Master of Arts, May 2019

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African American involvement in the death trade has been present in American history since Africans were forced through slavery to come to America. The conclusion of the Civil War ushered in the long-desired emancipation of countless enslaved blacks and the professionalization of the undertaker trade. In Baltimore, Maryland there was a thriving free black population that gave birth to a number of successful black professionals and businesses. One of the most successful businesses was that of undertaking. The business of undertaking and the undertakers themselves provided an indispensable service to their community, while satisfying important cultural and traditional needs of African Americans and their deceased loved ones. Research concerning the black undertaker's role in the African American narrative is in its embryonic stages. It is clear however that these undertakers embodied the spirit of self-help and uplift.

The oldest of these black undertaking firms was Joseph G. Locks, Jr. Funeral Home, which served the East Baltimore black community for over 150 years and five generations. Through the lens of several funeral homes, this thesis reveals how they and

other undertakers answer the call of self-help and service to their community. This thesis also explores the records of the Board of Undertakers of Maryland, 1902 to 1935, and the impact of Jim Crow laws on undertaking. The Board of Undertakers professionalized the undertaking trade, consequently transforming black undertakers into funeral professionals.

Lastly this thesis explores the role of women in these black undertaking businesses, bringing to light their history as wives, daughters, and business women. These women took over the businesses they built with their husbands, continuing to grow their business into successful enterprises that thrived for years following their succession. These women laid the foundation for the black female funeral directors of today who still face many of the same issues as their predecessors.

INDISPENSABLE TO THEIR COMMUNITY: AN EXAMINATION OF BLACK
UNDERTAKERS IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

by

Edwin B. Jackson

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction	1
Background.....	1
History of Funeral Services and Embalming.....	3
Coming to America	3
Furnishing Undertaker and Death on the Plantation	5
Undertaking, Post-Civil War to the Twentieth Century	10
Summary.....	17
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review	19
Introduction	19
Maryland Board of Undertakers Meeting Minutes	19
Key Scholarly Works.....	20
Oral History	28
Baltimore-Based Literature	29
Summary.....	30
CHAPTER 3: Indispensable Community Undertaker	32
Introduction	32
Baltimore’s Quasi-Freedom, the Black Church and Burial Grounds.....	33
Booker T. Washington and the Business of Undertaking	42

Black Mobilization through Embalming	47
Summary.....	51
CHAPTER 4: Forging Relationships.....	52
Introduction	52
Alexander Hemsley, The Undertaker	52
Samuel Chase, Coffin Maker	54
John W. Locks, Hackman to Founder, and Family	56
Theodore Locks	60
Joseph C. Locks.....	61
Edna Francis Locks	63
Joseph G. Locks, Jr.....	64
Summary.....	64
CHAPTER 5: Maryland Board of Undertakers.....	66
Introduction	66
1902 Establishment of the BOU.....	66
NFDA and Racial Discrimination	70
Maryland Board of Undertakers and the Department of Health	74
Impact of Jim Crow on the Board of Undertakers of Maryland Licensing.....	78
Summary.....	83

CHAPTER 6: Black Women in Funeral Service	84
Introduction	84
Preparation of the Dead	84
Henrietta Duterte—First Black Female Undertaker	86
Martha Dungee—First BOU Licensed Black Woman	89
Edna Locks—Business Owner and Family Mentor	90
Elizabeth Elliott—Wife, Business Woman, Partner.....	92
Katie Williams—First Black Woman as Independent Licensed Undertaker	93
Helen Holland—Sole Proprietor, Undertaker, Mentor.....	94
Summary.....	95
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY	99
APPENDIX: List of Colored Undertakers in Baltimore City	103

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Background

In every black community there are individuals or entities that provide specific services for its members. This was especially true from post emancipation to the end of the Jim Crow era. During this period blacks worked tirelessly to improve their condition, obtaining skills and trades that would not only provide their families and themselves with better opportunities economically, but also provide quality services to their own communities that otherwise would not have been available due to the *de facto/ de jure* segregation. Some of these individuals engaged in professional occupations such as doctors and preachers. Others had success in trades such as barbering, carpentry, or undertaking. The establishment of black businesses and institutions allowed blacks to escape the white economic hierarchy.¹ The black community developed and grew stronger due to the institutions and businesses that were developed following emancipation.

In urban cities like Baltimore, blacks experienced residential “clustering” built around shared institutions such as businesses and churches. These institutions emerged not just as a response to white racism, but also because of the black community’s desire to participate in shared traditions. The rituals and practices in funeral services is perhaps one of the most powerful examples of these shared traditions. Men and women who became leaders in the community were driving forces behind churches, schools and

¹ Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South 1865-1890*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 79.

businesses. With emancipation in hand these leaders could now handle the question of race relations. Blacks were excluded from normal city resources and subject to systems of segregation in education, health and criminal justice. Establishing institutions fostered pride among its members, while producing a rudimentary economic infrastructure and a professional middle class.²

Following the Civil War, at the dawn of emancipation, the profession of undertaking developed, giving rise to new business professionals in the black community. Within the city of Baltimore, the Joseph G. Locks Jr. Funeral Home was founded around 1837 by John W. Locks according to the Maryland State Archives. The history of Locks Funeral Home opens the doors for this work.

Through the examination of this funeral home and its family members, we are able to analyze a number of larger topics and issues within the field of undertaking in the city of Baltimore. We will see first the development of this African American business and the role that each generation played in its development. Secondly, we will observe the evolution of undertaking as a profession in Maryland. Lastly, we will examine the progression of African American undertakers in Baltimore as business men and women and agents of self-help.

²Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South 1865-1890*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.), xxxiii.

History of Funeral Services and Embalming

Coming to America

Some ten to twenty million Africans were brought to North American shores to work in the fields and homes of their Euro American masters. Africans were forced to take on European culture, religious practices and names. As a result, many if not all their African traditions and culture were slowly torn from them. Despite the attempts of the white masters to erase all traces of Africa from the enslaved African, some African cultural memory persisted within their new way of life. These Africanisms involve a body of knowledge that was often passed down from the elders of the community, still permeating many aspects of African American culture to this day. Perhaps the most prevalent of these Africanisms can be found within the burial and funeral customs of black people. According to Suzanne Smith, “the trauma of capture, the Middle Passage, and enslavement in the New World only strengthened Africans’ and African Americans’ beliefs that death represented a freedom to return home to a spirit world superior to life on earth”³ and, for some, to Africa itself. The antebellum slave funeral evoked many West African burial rituals, while also following general trends in funeral customs in nineteenth century America. These rituals included bathing and wrapping of the corpse, laying out of the body on a cooling board, the wake, procession to the grave for burial, post burial feast, and the more elaborate “second funeral,” weeks, month, or even a year after burial.⁴

³ Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 25.

⁴ *Ibid*, 28.

Tracing the Africanisms to a specific ethnic group is extremely difficult due to the large number of groups that occupy the West African coast alone, however connections have been made to groups such as Bakongo, Bantu and Ibo. Michael Plater describes these Africanisms as “African transplants” stating, “the African American community transformed individuals upon death into symbols of freedom. Despite conflicting ideas concerning the social standing of blacks in the United States, through death they became elite sacred symbols.”⁵ The African American community created a unique interpretation of the rituals based upon the assimilation of African world views and Euro American perspectives. African transplants in death and funeral rituals established a cultural difference in African American and Euro American death beliefs. In African cosmologies about death, the dead and the living are never separated from each other, but intimately connected. For example, for black slaves, reverence for ancestors was very important, for they exist as powerful beings who continue to influence the living world. This belief promoted kinship and assured that the community adhered to funeral rites for fear of disrespecting the spirits of the deceased and causing trouble for the living.⁶ Another key component to African American funeral customs was public displays of grief such as loud outcries and lamentations. The public outcry often took place at different points in the service and according to tradition those who did not participate in the weeping were viewed by other mourners as suspicious. Through the development of funeral and burial

⁵ Michael A. Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond 1890-1940: The Story of RC Scott* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1996.), 87.

⁶ *Ibid*, 104.

beliefs, enslaved African Americans found a concrete and meaningful way to share grief, assert family ties, and build an independent spiritual and religious life.

The profession of undertaking in America can be traced to the colonial era. It developed out of necessity and economic opportunity. The early undertakers were cabinet makers. These men specialized in woodwork, making coffins on demand. In the middle of eighteenth century, the term “undertaking” would merely describe one who provided the coffin and removed the body. The need for coffins became so apparent many cabinet makers began to advertise the manufacturing of coffins and added verbiage of “undertaker” as a moniker in newspapers and fliers. By the nineteenth century the role of these wood workers evolved from merely providing the coffin to performing a range of functions.⁷ The occupation of undertaker and popular usage of the term rose by the mid-19th century and included such tasks as laying out of the dead, the coffining, and transportation of the body to the grave. Around these central functions emerged other auxiliary functions such as providing funeral merchandise or paraphernalia, like clothing, emblems and remembrances.⁸ Within this work the term undertaker is used to describe those professionals who provided these personal services.

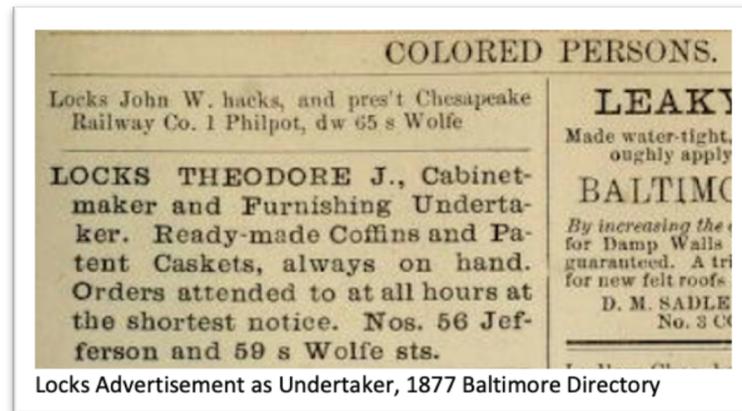
Furnishing Undertaker and Death on the Plantation

Following the emergence of the cabinet making undertaker, another variation of tradesman undertaker emerged, the furnishing undertaker. This individual offered his/her services for funerals and furnished other undertakers with the necessary supplies and

⁷ Haberstein, Robert and William M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (6th Ed. US: Burton and Mayor Inc., 2007), 152.

⁸ *Ibid*, 155.

funeral paraphernalia.⁹ Theodore Locks advertised himself as a furnishing undertaker in the 1877 Baltimore Directory.



As the furnishing undertaker, he supplied necessary funeral material needs to others in the undertaking trade. Because the furnishing undertaker provided supplies, those who received his services could now focus on other tasks concerning undertaking.¹⁰ The furnishing undertaker opened the door for practitioners to provide personal service to their clientele, an aspect not yet prevalent in the undertaking business, without being hampered by the crafting of material items, such as coffins. In the case of Theodore Locks, he provided the coffin, livery, attendance during the funeral, and additional services to other black undertakers.

Robert Haberstein's work, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, emphasizes that well before the occupation of undertaker, the care of the dead was a service rendered most often by adult females, more specifically nurses. Some would develop their skills to such a degree that they would advertise themselves in the

⁹ Ibid, 142.

¹⁰ Ibid, 143.

undertaking trade as “layers out of the dead.”¹¹ By the turn of the nineteenth century, the occupation of undertaker would bring about the involvement of other tradesman, craftsmen, and functionaries. At the same time, the role of women as layers out of the dead began to disappear. For men who previously had been involved in other professions, such as hack services, cabinet making, and sextoncy, undertaking was a short step from their previous vocations.¹²

The black undertaker followed a path of development that paralleled the white undertaker, however the black undertaker developed into a role with much deeper responsibility than his white counterpart. During slavery plantation masters were not required to give their slaves a burial, much less a proper burial. Slaves had to claim their own dignity since their master did not give them any. David Roediger’s work, *And Die in : Funerals, Death, and Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865* argues against the southern historical narrative that the majority of masters allowed slaves to have funerals out of kindness or benevolence. Roediger’s work reveals a mixed record of masters allowing slave funerals, arguing that masters instead allowed slave funerals out of paternalism and tolerance. According to David Roediger, “nowhere was the slave funeral legally protected as a human right.”¹³

Despite this, on many plantations slaves were still able to bury their dead in a manner that satisfied their cultural beliefs because of constant “insistence and defiance on

¹¹ Ibid, 147.

¹² Christopher Leevy Johnson, “Undertaking: The Politics of African American Funeral Directing” (PhD diss. University of South Carolina, 2004), 31.

¹³ David Roediger, “And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, and Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865,” *Massachusetts Review* (1981), 165.

the part of the slaves.”¹⁴ According to Suzanne Smith, the funeral was one of the few religious ceremonies in which slaves had some control.”¹⁵ They participated in the construction of the coffin, shrouding of the body, and the burial. When masters allowed their slaves to have funerals the ceremony took place at night or on Sundays so as not to interfere with work.¹⁶

For blacks during slavery the funeral involved the entire community and was, and still is, an important part of the black community. These funerals, in keeping with West African tradition, were rarely without display involving large, elaborate, and detailed burial rites. It was common belief among the slaves that without a proper funeral the departed spirits could not rest, and the community would be subject to haunting ghosts.¹⁷ These gatherings whether large or small were held to much scrutiny because whites knew that it also provided slaves the opportunity to plan escape or even revolt. Gabriel’s Rebellion in Richmond, Virginia was organized at a slave infant’s funeral and took place only days after the burial in August of 1800. Through this example we also see the relevance of the black preacher at the slave funeral.

Slaves insisted in having a black preacher preside over the funeral.¹⁸ The Commonwealth of Virginia, in response to Nat Turner’s revolt, passed legislation that

¹⁴ Ibid, 168.

¹⁵ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 25.

¹⁶ Roediger, *And Die in Dixie*, 166.

¹⁷ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (Random House: New York, 1972), 197.

¹⁸ Michael A. Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond 1890-1940: The Story of RC Scott* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1996), 109.

forbade blacks from preaching at unsupervised slave funerals.¹⁹ No evidence suggests that Turner organized his uprising at funerals, but it does show the fear whites had of blacks using the opportunity to organize an uprising and the black preacher inciting the uprising. The importance of the slave funeral did not diminish. The funeral instilled values that were beyond the reach of their slave owners.

Blacks have been involved in undertaking throughout their existence in the Americas. African American funeral directors can typically trace their professional lineage back to the period of antebellum slavery when certain slaves were designated as caretakers of the dead. On the American plantation and in the community, there was always a black, slave or free, who was responsible for the care of the dead. Historian Eugene Genovese contends in his work *Roll Jordan Roll*, “the most common slave funeral had a black man, trained or untrained, literate or illiterate to add necessity, solemnity, dignity, and religious sanctification to the cemetery.”²⁰

In one example, Charles Ball, a slave who helped with the burial of slaves, assisted with the burial of the son of two African-born slaves. He assisted the father in laying the remains to rest with a “small bow and several arrows; a little bag of parched meal; a miniature canoe and a little paddle with which he said would cross to his own country. . .” Ball goes on to say that these items would allow the child to be recognized as his son by his father’s deceased countrymen in the afterlife. The example of Charles Ball also signifies the importance that death held for the black slave.²¹

¹⁹ Roediger, *And Die in Dixie*, 165.

²⁰ Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 199.

²¹ Roediger, *And Die in Dixie*, 178.

The death rituals and customs gave slaves a transformative experience. From the transatlantic slave trade through the antebellum period death was often seen as freedom from slavery. Through these customs, death was one realm where slave could control their fate. Michael Plater describes the funeral in black culture as an “African transplant” noting that funeral rituals had more direct connections to Africa than any other African American tradition.²² For the African American, despite becoming more aligned with Judeo-Christian tradition the funeral was not only an important part of their cultural past but served as a means to preserve culture identity.

Following emancipation and the abolition of slavery blacks still held strong ties to their African past. While falling in line with general funeral customs of the nineteenth century blacks still maintained traditions that reflected both African and African American religious rituals. The funeral continued to be a community event and a number of these free black men and women continued to use the skills they obtained during slavery to provide funeral goods, hearses, coffins, and other services.

Undertaking, Post-Civil War to the Twentieth Century

Prior to the Civil War undertaking was rarely practiced as a sole occupation. Before the professionalization of undertaking it was common that a tradesman would perform some undertaking in addition to his or her primary occupation. In the city of Baltimore, one of the earliest examples of this combination dates to 1799 when Michael Jenkins added the undertaking trade to his already successful cabinet making business.²³

²² Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond 1890-1940*, 89.

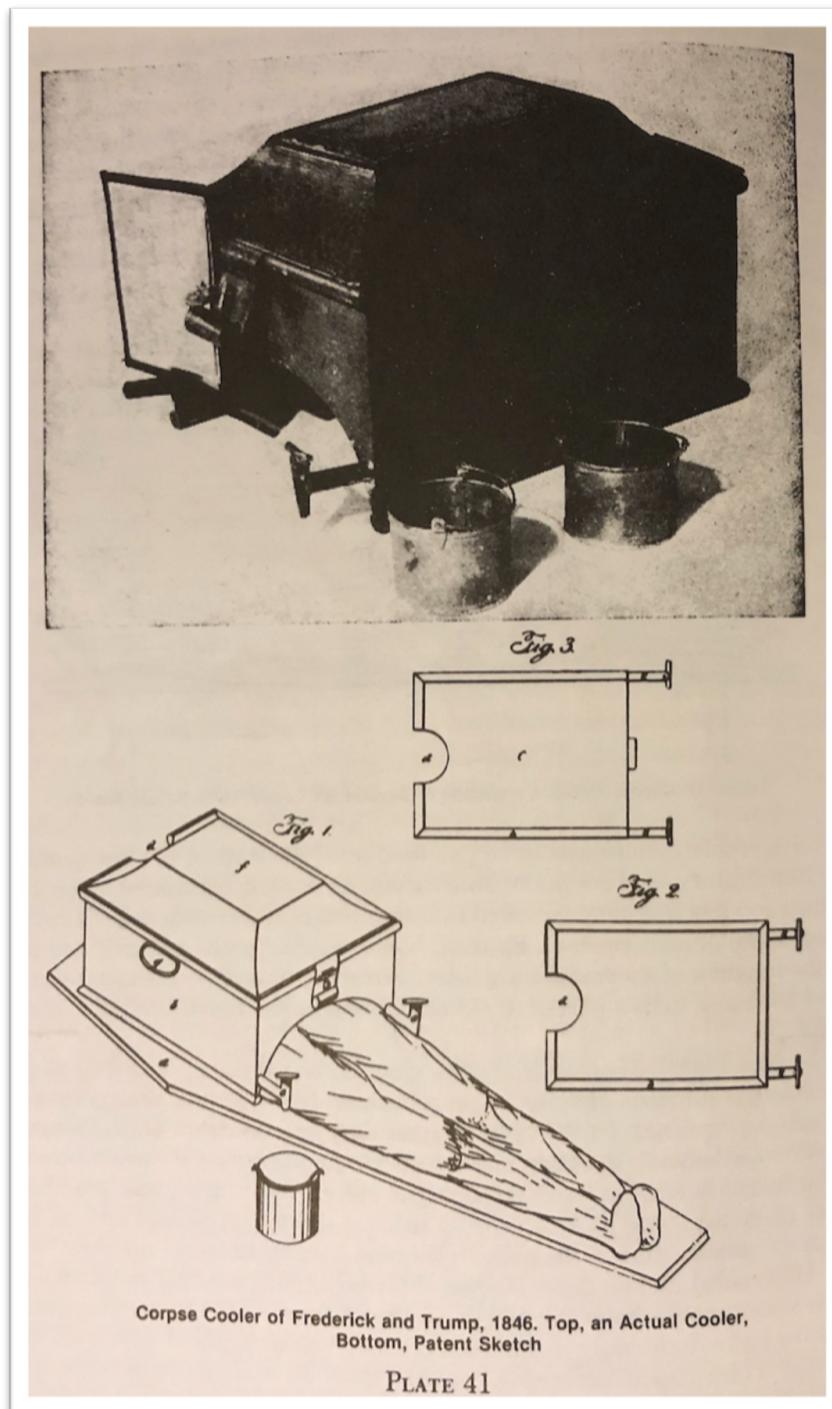
²³ *Ibid*, 140.

The cabinet maker undertaker combination was the most common combination because of the coffin making requests that often came with cabinet making. In the case of Baltimore, blacks operated as carpenters and added the natural addition of undertaking to their repertoire. Some of the earliest advertised examples of black cabinet making undertakers in Baltimore are in 1863 and 1864 through such persons as Samuel Chase, and James and Joshua Jordan.²⁴

The onset of the Civil War brought about changes in many aspects of American life. An important result of the war was that the skill of embalming came into very high demand. The war claimed the lives of more than 600,000 on and off the battlefield. The demand from family members to have their fallen loved ones be sent home for burial meant that preservation of the dead was essential. The trade of embalming fell under the auspices of the embalming-surgeon, anatomists, and later to undertaker's raising the profession of undertaking to new heights comparable to that of a physician or nurse. Without embalming the only reasonable option would have been to bury them where they fell. The skill of embalming revolutionized undertaking causing a transformation from a trade into a profession.

Prior to arterial embalming the available alternative for preserving the dead was a "corpse cooler or cooling board." This apparatus utilized ice as a preservative for the body by either strategically placing the ice on top of or beneath the body. One such device was invented and patented by Baltimore undertakers, Robert Fredrick and C.A. Trump in May of 1846.

²⁴ Henry R. Heiller, *E.M. Cross & Co. 's Baltimore City Business Directory*, 1863-64.

Corpse Cooler of Frederick and Trump²⁵.

²⁵ Haberstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 200-202

They advertised a “Corpse cooler.” This method of preserving the dead dominated from the 1830’s to 1870’s.

Advertisement and Refrigerator Type Corpse Cooler²⁶

ROBERT FREDERICK,
 Would inform his friends and the public generally, that he continues the business of manufacturing
FURNITURE,
 As well as repairing and painting, in superior style and at cheap rates.
 At his warehouse an assortment of various sizes
COFFINS
 are constantly kept, and those requiring would do well to call before purchasing elsewhere, as they will be sold very cheap for cash.

THE CORPS PRESERVER
 Can be had by applying to the advertiser or any of the Undertakers on moderate terms.
 All concerned are invited to give a call at my place of business.

CORNER OF MONUMENT AND ENSOR STREET.

a) Advertisement of Co-Inventor of Corpse Cooler, 1847

REFRIGERATOR TYPE CORPSE COOLER
 Patent Sketch
 1870

Inventor
 Howard V. Griffith
 by Edward Barrett

Witness
 J. H. [Signature]

Other crude methods such as placing zinc and lime in the abdominal cavity or immersing the body in alcohol were common practices as well. Advanced methods of embalming, such as arterial embalming, were used primarily in medical schools and employed the use of poisonous materials such as arsenic and mercury, both of which were not widely used until the Civil War.

Arterial embalming used the vascular system to distribute the embalming fluid throughout the body via the arteries, a technique which is still used today by embalmers.

²⁶ Haberstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 200-202

According to Suzanne Smith's *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death*, the "Father of American Embalming" Thomas Holmes developed interest in embalming during his time at medical school and developed a less toxic fluid for commercial use and a pump for the arterial injection. Prior to Holmes, poisonous compounds used were hazardous to medical students during dissection. On top of that bodies were either not embalmed or poorly embalmed due to lack of understanding.

Holmes found great success in embalming during the war while sharing his knowledge with a number of individuals like W.R. Cornelius. Cornelius, an undertaker and cabinet maker from Pennsylvania, prospered during the Civil War, by handling the embalming of the Confederate war dead having "buried and shipped to their homes something over 33,000 soldiers, employees, etc. of which I kept record."²⁷

It is important to note the distinction between undertaker and embalmer. Those practicing undertaking performed the personal services allowing families to having funeral services for the deceased. Commercial embalming did not arise until after the Civil War and was not part of the process for preparing the deceased for burial. Even so embalming was not available to all communities, particularly those in rural areas until the 1950's, if not later. It is important to note that not all undertakers perform embalming and vice versa. The respective tasks were often done by separate individuals. While undertaking was often a trade that was passed down generationally and more easily

²⁷ Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 34.

learned often due to it originating as community practice, embalming is scientific in nature has its origins in the medical field. Prior to the establishment of schools for embalming, one had to be taught by an instructor with considerable experience or learn from professional journals or textbooks.²⁸ Today many states still uphold the distinction between funeral director (undertaker) and embalmer, requiring separate tests for aspiring practitioners to earn the legal right to practice.

All manner of men and women enlisted in the Civil War, black, white, Indian, free and slave. Whether freedmen or enslaved, freedom was the goal of any black who enlisted. Many slaves would not only achieved free status during the war, but also acquired new skills and grasped opportunities that would assist in their transition to freedom. The earliest record of blacks practicing embalming is during the Civil War. One of the first black embalmers according to historical record was a man named Prince Greer. Greer was a slave following his master Colonel Greer of the Texas Confederate Regiments. When Greer's master was killed W. R. Cornelius handled the embalming and shipping of his remains. Prince Greer found great interest in the art of embalming becoming an expert and according to Cornelius could "raise an artery as quickly as anyone and was always careful."²⁹ Prince Greer remained with Cornelius until 1871, finding great success during the balance of the war. What happened to Greer after the war is unknown, but it would have been natural for him to transition into the undertaking

²⁸ Robert G. Mayer, *Embalming: History, Theory, and Practice. 4th Ed.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 482.

²⁹ Haberstein and Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 211.

profession. As one of the few, if not only black, with a mastery of embalming it would have also been natural for him to pass on this knowledge and skill to other aspiring black embalmers. Such notions, however are left to speculation.

Between the Civil War and the dawn of Reconstruction blacks in the South found themselves at a crossroads: go north towards an entirely new life or stay in the South in hopes of redefining their old lives. In the years following the Civil War the landscape of the undertaking profession changed as well. This evolution would bring on the expectation of the undertaker to perform all encompassing services including the embalming, dressing of the body, transportation of the body to the cemetery, and, at times, burial as well as an array of other requests that the family would have. According to Vanderlyn Pine in his work *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director*, the undertaker brought together the functions which were formerly scattered among and performed by several trades into a single unified occupation. An important reason for the undertaker's rise to prominence was the church's unwillingness or inability to maintain authority over all aspects of the burial process. Furthermore, largely because of urbanization and changes in the social order, families were increasingly unlikely to do such things themselves.

These expectations were not only important in the white community, but the black community as well. Although the black undertaker followed a path of development that paralleled the white undertaker, the black undertaker would develop into one whose responsibility was much deeper than his white counterpart. The Black undertakers

became more than just a funeral service provider. Many times, they found themselves at the forefront of the issues concerning the communities they served.

The twentieth century brought on new challenges and struggles for the black community; a new world developed under the name of Jim Crow. With the infamous 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, the concept of “separate but equal” was legalized. With the birth of Jim Crow black undertakers found themselves using their businesses as a form of self-help and racial uplift, while simultaneously using undertaking profits in the fight against prejudice and discrimination.³⁰ Booker T. Washington saw undertaking as one of the businesses that showed the great potential for the black entrepreneurs to serve their community and advance in the racially segregated marketplace. Washington noted “It is a curious fact that with the exception of that of caterer there is no business in which Negroes seem to be more numerous engaged or one in which they have been more uniformly successful.”³¹ For the black undertaker Jim Crow would ensure almost 100% of the black patronage. Those who offered services that catered to the specific needs of the black community such as barbershops, beauty salons, photographers, and funeral homes encountered little outside competition.

Summary

For the black community, the burial and funeral of a community member was of great importance. Slavery and white oppression denied black slaves a proper burial of their dead, attempting to cut ties with one of their most powerful connections to their

³⁰ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 48.

³¹ Booker T. Washington, *Negro in Business* (Ohio: Hertel, Jenkins & Co., 1907). 94

ancestral home. Even so blacks found ways to not only bury their dead in a way that was acceptable, but consequently preserve their African past. In the eyes of the black community death was a celebration of life, dignity, and ultimately freedom. Following emancipation, the black undertaker answered the call to bury the black dead in a way that respected the body, community, and the Africanisms to which they continued to adhere. Those black men and woman with early involvement in undertaking evolved from slaves to freemen and parlayed the skills they learned during slavery, such as carpentry and blacksmithing, to professional services for their community. These early black undertakers built businesses that respected their African past, allowing the community through the burial and funeral to celebrate life and freedom through death.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

To date there are only a few detailed works concerning the history of black funeral directors and the roles they play in the black community. The few works that do exist follow a pattern of explaining the African connection to African American burial and funeral practices, then transition to their main topics. These works have the same foundation for their research, but the framework is unique to each work and hence have their place in this work as well.

Maryland Board of Undertakers Meeting Minutes

This work utilizes an important primary source, the meeting minutes from the Maryland Board of Undertakers, 1902-1937, housed at the Maryland State Archives in Annapolis, Maryland.³² With the establishment of the board, undertaking became a regulated profession with rules backed by the Maryland state government. Like doctors and lawyers, undertakers now required a license to practice and practicing without one led to a minimum fine and maximum imprisonment. The minutes show the development of the laws and regulations governing the profession for over thirty years and indicate the evolution of undertaking methods in the state of Maryland.

The records also named the professionals working within the field. Specific to this work are those black professional men and women undertaking in the city of Baltimore from 1902-1937. Throughout the minutes the names of black undertakers practicing in

³² Maryland State Archives, State Board of Undertakers of Maryland, *Board Minutes 1902-1937* (Annapolis, Maryland).

the state are listed, revealing figures perhaps lost to time. Through the *Baltimore Afro American Newspaper* lives of these lost figures, specifically those relevant to this work, are brought out in greater detail. Lives of these figures including John Locks and his descendants detail their contributions and involvement to the black communities of Baltimore City.

Key Scholarly Works

Johnson's dissertation, *Undertakings: The Politics of African American Funeral Directing*, is an overlooked treasure concerning the topic of black men and women involved in undertaking.³³ He describes his work as an attempt to answer a question posed in the work *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond—The Story of RC Scott*. The question: are funeral directors still major power brokers in the African American community?³⁴ According to Johnson the answer is an emphatic yes. One could argue it was very much the part two to the book *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond*. Johnson does provide some context to the African American death practices, through its connection to Africa and its blend of Judeo-Christian practices. He also covers, possibly, the most well documented black undertaker, A.G. Gaston. Johnson not only shows Gaston's wealth, but his role in the civil rights movements and the black community of Birmingham, Alabama. Gaston is a perfect example of the complicated role that black undertakers sometimes played in service to their community.

³³ Christopher Leevy Johnson, "Undertaking: The Politics of African American Funeral Directing" (PhD diss. University of South Carolina, 2004)

³⁴ Michael Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond 1890-1940: The Story of RC Scott* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1996), 165.

An undertaker himself, Johnson hails from a long line of undertakers still serving black communities in South Carolina, some of whom he documents in his work. His book focuses primarily on the unique roles of black undertakers during the latter half the twentieth century. Johnson examines those undertakers who sought to better their community through politics. The meat of the work covers three prominent families in black undertaking who parlayed the connections their families had built over the decades to obtain political offices and advocate for their communities. Johnson's work serves as a mirror to how this work has been written.

Michael Plater's dissertation turned book, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The Story of R.C. Scott*, covers black business in Richmond, Virginia through the scope of death practice and the black businesses that grew out of the practice.³⁵ In a way, this thesis is structured after this work, using a specific funeral home and its proprietors as a foundation for a slightly larger topic.

Through the lives of R. C. Scott and A.D. Price, African American funeral directors in Richmond, Plater describes the funeral industry as a "cultural phenomenon." This cultural phenomenon affected the community in such a way that every funeral, for example, allowed the black dollar to rotate at least six times before leaving the community. Through his work Plater identifies the interconnection of African American business to the internal social and economic services it provides to the community. Plater clearly illustrates through these funeral directors how the business not only took significant risks to ensure the success of their business but surpassed their white

³⁵ Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*.

counterparts and competitors. Plater cites in one example that Richmond's black funeral directors as a collective group had more equipment than Richmond's white funeral directors.³⁶

Platers' scholarship concerning black undertakers raises the topic of folk beliefs and traditions that surround death in the black community covering themes such as the African origins of death, funeral, and burial practices. Platers also affirms that although burial societies preceded the funeral industry, the funeral industry gave rise to the insurance company. In Richmond the African American undertakers gave rise to the black owned insurance company known today as North Carolina Mutual. The company supported individuals and businesses in the black community adding in the further rotation of the dollar in the black community. Platers work is the basis for many academic works covering black undertakers and their place in the community.³⁷

Suzanne Smith did what no one had done in the field of study concerning black undertakers. Her work, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death*, brought to light their roles not just as vital members of the black community, but their roles during one of the most turbulent times in American history, the civil rights movement.³⁸ She very much picks up where Johnson left off and added more depth to Booker T. Washington analysis of black undertakers in 1902. While Johnson's work covered those in politics, at the spotlight, Smith's work covered those in

³⁶ Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, 8.

³⁷ Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, 149-150.

³⁸ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 9.

the background, those silent supporters during the civil rights movement; the financiers, the facilitators and sometimes orchestrators of the movement.

Smith works shows how funerals, much like during slavery, provided an opportunity to organize and agitate. She brings out numerous instances of black undertakers using their resources in the aid of their community. In many cases black undertakers had connections with white officials, owned substantial property that the community could use as gathering halls for meetings and events, and commanded wealth that few blacks held during that time. According to the author, these resources were indispensable to the community and to the civil rights movements in ways that not been drawn out and were lost until her work.

Karla Holloway, although not a historian by trade, created a work that studies “black death and dying to argue African American’s particular vulnerability to untimely death in the United States intimately affects how black culture both represents itself and is represented.”³⁹ *Passed On- African American Mourning Stories*, although very much a socio-economic study, highlights the stories of black being mistreated and devalued by white undertakers and the black undertakers who serve the community provide the foundation for her study. Holloway carves out the landscape of “black death” and burial practices as experiences during the twentieth century. Holloway affirms a shared experience of death and dying in Africa and America, paying special attention to the patterns of “black death” resulting from white rage targeting black community.⁴⁰

³⁹ Karla Holloway, *Passed On- African American Mourning Stories* (Durham & London- Duke University Press, 2002), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

Holloway's work also contains specific narratives of southern black undertakers who took up the business despite threats from white undertakers who lost black business with their arrival. These stories give an important African American perspective on why their dead are placed in the care of black undertakers. Holloway describes this perspective as a "cultural haunting, a re-memory" which blacks continuously experience as a reoccurring cycle of death. The stories recounted in this work also show the importance of black undertaking in these communities victimized by white violence and abuse, giving more credence to the role the black undertaker plays in society.⁴¹

The Death Care Industry—African American Cemeteries and Funeral Homes is the expanded work of *Lay Body Down*, written in 1996. The authors broadened their vision from *Lay Body Down*, which concentrated primarily on African American cemeteries, to address the entire death care industry as it relates to African Americans. A purview is provided of black burial grounds throughout the United States and Canada revealing glimpses of rites and rituals that bear similarities to Africa such as the ceremony, music, and mourning habits. The authors share the stories of the cemeteries from their establishment to, in some cases, their demise being lost to the intrusion of developers burying the cemeteries under new developments. African American cemeteries in their work specific to Baltimore include Laurel Cemetery and Mt. Auburn Cemetery. This work proved useful as a starting point in understanding black burial customs, traditions, and the African connection. Concerning African American funeral homes, the authors chose a number of family owned entities that have been in existence

⁴¹ Holloway, *Passed On*, 3.

since the 1800s. The only Baltimore area funeral home mentioned is that of March Funeral Homes, which was established in 1957. This led to the question of the existence of older Baltimore African American funeral homes. Two of these older funeral homes in Baltimore whose establishment dates back to the 1800's include Joseph G. Locks Jr. Funeral Home established in 1837 and Joseph Brown Funeral Home established in 1899. Many of the funeral businesses mentioned have significant involvement in the community and highlights the importance of the black funeral director.⁴²

Booker T. Washington's work *The Negro in Business* describes blacks who achieved success in several different business from catering to farming. His 1906 publication does not list every industry where blacks successfully progressed, but instead looks at a few examples that he feels are the most successful. His work is perhaps the first to give a positive analysis on black business in America and the first analysis of black undertakers. The tenth chapter of Washington's work "The Negro Undertaker" shows numerous examples of successful black undertakers throughout the country, their origins, their involvement in the community, and their wealth. These early examples of successful black undertakers allowed the comparison of black undertakers of Baltimore to be highlighted.⁴³

Juliet Walker's *The History of Black Business in America—Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* is perhaps the most comprehensive work concerning black business in America to date. Although Walker discusses the black undertaker in her chapter

⁴² Roberta Hughes Wright and Wilbur B. Hughes III. *The Death Care Industry: African American Cemeteries and Funeral Homes*. (2nd Ed. Hughes Wright Enterprises, 2007).

⁴³ Booker T. Washington, *Negro in Business* (Ohio: Hertel, Jenkins & Co., 1907)

“Undertaking and Cemetery Enterprises” the full significance of the black undertaker is not analyzed. Walker does suggest that after World War II mortuary businesses in the black business sector “remained one of the most profitable for blacks, since the wakes of most blacks were conducted by black morticians.” However this provides only a minimal glimpse into the business of the black undertaker. Nothing else is mentioned in reference to their proper place in history as servants of the community.⁴⁴

When it comes to understanding embalming practices of the past and present, no resource proved more useful than Robert Mayer’s *Embalming—History, Theory, and Practice*. A textbook by nature, the work is a required text for all students seeking a degree in mortuary science. This resource contains modern embalming techniques and the theory behind them while also covering the history of embalming from Egypt to the present. Limited information is mentioned concerning black undertakers historically, but within the history provided is the development of modern mortuary practices. This allowed for understanding early periods of the funeral industry and the evolving professional landscapes that undertakers, both black and white, were subjected to. The early pioneers of embalming, the development of mortuary schools, and the establishment of state regulatory bodies to govern the profession were of great importance to this work.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* (New York; Twayne Publishers, MacMillan Library Reference, 1998) 114-115.

⁴⁵ Robert G. Mayer, *Embalming: History, Theory, and Practice. 4th Ed.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006)

Dr. Kami Fletcher is one of the few academics researching black cemeteries and blacks in the death trade. Her dissertation and manuscript on Mt. Auburn Cemetery brought this research close to home. Fletcher's *City of the Dead for Colored People: Baltimore's Mt. Auburn Cemetery, 1907-2012* and *Real Business: Maryland's First Black Cemetery Journey on the Enterprise of Death (1807-1920)* analyzed Baltimore's Mt. Auburn Cemetery, its history, impact on the community, and how black undertakers profited from the business. Her work is the first to examine black undertakers in Baltimore drawing her analysis through the lens of Mt. Auburn Cemetery. She also uncovers the role black women in undertaking as more than wives of undertakers, but savvy business professionals. Although Dr. Fletcher's first look at black undertakers gave points for revision concerning the Board of Undertakers, her work ultimately provided insight into how black undertakers in Baltimore added to their wealth. Her continued writing and commentary on the subjects through blogs have been helpful in this research as well.⁴⁶

Every work focusing on black burials, funerals, and death customs begins with Africa and antebellum slavery. A popular source that gives great insight to antebellum slave burial practice and the African connection is David Roediger's *And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, and Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865*. Roediger not only highlights these connections but also shows the importance death held for the blacks

⁴⁶ Kami Fletcher, "City of the Dead for Colored People: Baltimore's Mt. Auburn Cemetery, 1807-2012." (PhD Dissertation, Morgan State University, 2012), Proquest. Kami Fletcher "Real Business: Maryland's First Black Cemetery Journey on the Enterprise of Death (1807-1920)" *Thanatological Studies* (2014): 53-85.

during slavery. Roediger argues that death for the antebellum slave signified freedom, while also providing a path of resistance. This resistance manifests itself in how blacks celebrated death as a return to Africa, and ultimately escape from slavery, while also preserving important elements of their African selves. Roediger also highlights that slave funerals provided means of planning resistance and revolts. *And Die in Dixie* is an absolute must read when writing about death, funerals, and burials in the black community. The author's analysis of the antebellum black burial custom is mirrored in the post antebellum black burial custom, making it a staple in this research area. This is shown through the connection to Africa and the use of funerals as a call to resistance.⁴⁷

Oral History

The death stories survive mostly in oral history. For example, the death of Emmitt Till, is known only because of the step-by-step account by Emmitt Till's mother, Mamie Till, who brings contributions of the black undertakers to light.⁴⁸ Through stories such as Emmitt Till, the four workers killed in Mississippi, Martin Luther King, Jr., during Selma, Alabama, demonstrations and the murders of others during the Jim Crow era, the author shows black undertakers as not only trusted professionals but also as organizers and facilitators for a larger stage and audience. The funerals of these and many other blacks during the movement bring out their unique role in the black struggle, laying out

⁴⁷ David Roediger. "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, and Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865." *Massachusetts Review* (1981): 163-183.

⁴⁸ DeNeen L. Brown, *Emmitt Till's Mother Opened the Casket and Sparked the Civil Rights Movement*, (Washington Post), 2018.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/07/12/emmett-tills-mother-opened-his-casket-and-sparked-the-civil-rights-movement/?utm_term=.d0f342e25fe4.

the broken bodies of black men, women, and children for “homegoing” and providing the platform for which the civil rights movement was fueled and made stronger.

Baltimore-Based Literature

Specific to Baltimore, sources such as Leroy Grahams *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*⁴⁹ and Christopher Phillips *Freedom’s Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860*⁵⁰ give important context to Baltimore’s black community and the environment in which these the black undertakers lived. Another contribution from the Maryland State Archives is *The Road From Douglass to Thurgood, Black Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920*, which gave a great starting point for this work. Within this project the changing landscape of Baltimore is shown as well as some key black Baltimoreans. Three of the individuals within the work, John W. Locks, Alexander Hemsley, and Samuel Chase, were all black undertakers in the city of Baltimore. Through these individuals we find an example of Baltimore’s black undertakers, who cooperated in the field of undertaking and served their community on the political stage as well.⁵¹

The *Baltimore Afro-American*, founded in 1892, is the longest running family owned African American newspaper in America. The *Afro*, for short, chronicled the lives and events of Baltimore’s African American community. In these archives the black

⁴⁹ Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*. (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).

⁵⁰ Christopher Phillips, *Freedoms Port: The African American Community of Baltimore 1790-1860*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

⁵¹ Maryland State Archives, *The Road From Douglass To Thurgood, Black Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920*, John Locks- Personal Life (Maryland State Archives, Last modified February 3, 1998).

<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/12388100.html>.

undertakers advertised their services to the community so that they may be called upon if needed. Within the *Baltimore Afro-American*, exploits and obituaries of the black undertakers provide the most revealing portraits of their lives.

The works *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The Story of R.C. Scott, Undertaking Politics*, and *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* provide contextual framework concerning African American funerals and burial traditions. These sources were also useful in filling in areas of the black undertaker's role and involvement in the black community. Other secondary sources, Haberstein and Lamers *The History of American Funeral Directing*⁵² and Vanderlyn Pine's *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director*⁵³ are vital in the understanding of the early undertaking, embalming, and funeral practices in America. Both authors give in-depth insight to the development of the funeral industry, which is crucial to the understanding of how black undertakers navigated within the field.

Summary

How does this work, *Indispensable to Their Community: An Examination of Black Undertakers in Baltimore, Maryland*, add to or differ from the other literature examining African American death customs and practices? The strength of this work comes from the Maryland Board of Undertaker records. Currently there are no literary works available that analyze the state's regulatory bodies of the funeral industry. The records from the

⁵² Haberstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*.

⁵³ Vanderlyn R. Pine, *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director*. (New York: Irvington Publishers Inc, 1975).

Maryland Board of Undertakers gives a glimpse into understanding the challenges black undertakes in Baltimore encountered with the establishment of these regulatory bodies. Further research and analysis of these regulatory bodies may shed insight to understanding the impact on the success of black undertakes to navigate their businesses, adhere to regulatory requirements to be certified professionally and continue to be forceful and stable leaders in their communities.

Indispensable to Their Community offers a look at the undertaking trade through the lens of early African American undertakers in Baltimore. Baltimore offers a unique landscape in which blacks in a southern city were able to thrive, creating institutions and building communities in the early nineteenth century. Examining Baltimore's black undertaker and their professional landscape adds to the few, but preeminent literature on African American funeral experiences. Works such as Christopher Leevy Johnson's *Undertakings: Politics of African American Funeral Directing* and Michael Plater's *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond 1890- 1940: The Story of RC Scott* tell the stories of black undertakers in their respected cities and the impact on the community. *Indispensable to Their Community: An Examination of Black Undertakers in Baltimore, Maryland* does the same, by bringing to light black business men and women who, through funeral service, left their mark on Baltimore's black community.

CHAPTER 3: Indispensable Community Undertaker

Introduction

Chapter 3 explores the multifaceted role of the funeral director in the black community with Baltimore as the background. *The History of American Funeral Directing*,⁵⁴ the publication by the National Funeral Directors Association used in several mortuary schools, failed to add the African American experience in the development of the funeral directing profession in America, only stating that “African American funeral homes still predominately serve African American families.”⁵⁵ Where do African Americans fit into the history of funeral directing? Was their development different from that of their white counterparts? What role did the black funeral director play in the African American historical narrative? Blacks involved in the profession were able to thrive outside of the imposed system of Jim Crow (de facto/ de jure) racism through black business. Undertaking was a trade that was able to thrive in this system of separate, but equal.

In recent years there has been some historical research concerning black undertakers in Baltimore, one via a dissertation and another through a blog.⁵⁶ Through analyzing these works we are able to dive deeper into the narrative both supporting and

⁵⁴ Haberstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*

⁵⁵ Ibid, 366.

⁵⁶ Kami Fletcher, “City of the Dead for Colored People: Baltimore’s Mt. Auburn Cemetery, 1807-2012” (PhD Dissertation, Morgan State University, 2012). Proquest. Kami Fletcher “History of Negro Undertaking in Baltimore?”

challenging the work that has already been completed to assemble a more accurate historical record.

Baltimore's Quasi-Freedom, the Black Church and Burial Grounds

Before the city of Baltimore became a thriving metropolis, it was known as Baltimore Town. During the colonial period from the mid-seventeenth to the eighteenth century, before the brick house and dense population, Baltimore held no more than two hundred residents. Only a few of those residents were of African descent and were most likely slaves. The entire state thrived on the seasonal harvest of tobacco, which like most southern states depended on slave labor. By 1790 the free population in Baltimore was 323, while the slave population was almost four times as great, numbering 1,255.⁵⁷

Slavery in Maryland proved to be more problematic compared to the other southern states. Harvesting was only possible half of the year, resulting in minimal field labor during the other half of the year. Because of the seasonal harvest work and the costliness of slave maintenance slave holders outside of the city began to employ other means to reap the full value of their slaves and as well cover expenditures. The most effective practices of the day were to hire out slaves within the city and surrounding towns during the off season. To make their slaves more profitable for potential offseason employment, slaves were often trained in different trades and crafts. Such skills included, but were not limited to carpentry, blacksmithing, and sailing. Diversifying seasonal work was beneficial for both the master and the slave. The master, through the funds their

⁵⁷ Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 27.

slaves earned, was able to finance offseason expenditures. At the same time hired out slaves were able to master their skills, earn funds for themselves, and in some instances achieve freedom for themselves and their families.⁵⁸

While slave labor was utilized in the city, Baltimore achieved remarkable growth with very little dependence on slavery. The city was booming with business and industry, such as textile factories, banks and insurance companies. Slave labor in Baltimore was rendered impractical as industrialists turned more to free workers. As the number of free blacks in Baltimore continued to increase employment became increasingly more difficult, due in part to the increased racial tensions and restriction of blacks to unskilled labor. Despite the barriers in their wake black residents held their position in the city, for them it was a pathway to the freedom. By the 1830s black residents began creating institutions to hurdle racial barriers, providing the community with social, economic, and political gains.

Many Maryland slaves, including Frederick Douglass, gained their first glimpses of freedom in the city of Baltimore. Having made their way to Baltimore, they were undoubtedly struck with wonder. Douglass recalled his cousin's description of Baltimore saying, "I could never...point out anything that struck me as more beautiful or powerful."⁵⁹ For Douglass, Baltimore held great significance not only as the place where he began his life as a quasi-free man, but also as the place that allowed him to develop as

⁵⁸ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 27-28.

⁵⁹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (London, England: Partridge and Oakey, 1855), 281-282.

a free thinker. For those slaves hired out, many experienced what historian Christopher Phillips called “quasi freedom.” Many masters would grant slaves permission to lease themselves on their own time, even to the extent of allowing their slaves to live away from them for extended periods of time. According to Phillips “such practices allowed slaves to improve their negotiating skills. . .and as means to purchase their way out of slavery.”⁶⁰ By 1810 the number of free and enslaved blacks in the city were almost equal. Black male slaves were the most successful finding work at the shipyards of Fell Points in East Baltimore. The ship building trade became one of the biggest industries in the city. Many black men found work on the wharves as draymen, caulkers, and porters.⁶¹

Along the shipyards of East Baltimore blacks formed some of the first free black communities close to where they worked. Due to the community’s year around dependency on death work professionals, black undertakers found incredible success. It also was a successful profession because of the racial oppression blacks experienced in everyday life. Marcus Allen affirms this fact stating, “In antebellum and postbellum Baltimore social and cultural factors such as the race of one’s father, the seasonal nature of work, literacy, knowledge of a useful trade, and racial oppression generally determined the economic outlook for African Americans before and after Emancipation.”⁶²

Frederick Douglass himself worked on the docks of Fells Point after he came from Talbot County. For black women, much of their work was in the homes of white

⁶⁰ Phillips, *Freedoms Port*, 24.

⁶¹ Rockman, *Scraping By*, 46.

⁶² Marcus Allen, “Cautiously Capitalistic: Black Economic Agency At The Savings Bank of Baltimore, 1850–1900” (PhD Diss., Morgan State University, 2013), 2, ProQuest.

upper- and middle-class employers. From 1810 to 1830 the slave population began a steady decrease and would continue to do so as the century continued. According to the United States seventh census taken in 1850, the Baltimore free blacks population stood at 29,075, while 6,718 people accounted for its slave population. To contrast those figures with the 1790 census, there were 927 free blacks and 7,132 enslaved persons.⁶³ Over the course of the nineteenth century blacks earned freedom in great numbers, maturing from a community of recently freed slaves and runaways to a community that was virtually free and thriving. Between 1852 and 1860, 52.6% of black community in the city was born free.⁶⁴ According to Fields, for the free black person, the city of Baltimore held a number of advantages. She states that “it offered greater independence and a greater sense of responsibility for his own life.”⁶⁵

Frederick Douglass achieved national prominence, which some would argue began during his early days on the docks of Baltimore among the large free black population. For the purpose of this work the focus however is geared toward the local business men who advocated for their community on a local and at times national level. A number of these men provided important support for Douglass in his local and national endeavors. These men also helped their families, businesses, and neighborhoods thrive. The project titled *The Road From Frederick Douglass to Thurgood Marshall: Black Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920* conducted by the Maryland State Archives, with the

⁶³ Barbara Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 13.

⁶⁴ Christopher Phillips, *Freedoms Port; The African American Community of Baltimore 1790-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 147.

⁶⁵ Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, 34.

help of a number of historians, was a project some 25 years ago chronicling what is now called “Old East Baltimore” and some of the individuals from that community.⁶⁶ Leroy Grahams work, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*, was instrumental to the work that the state archives produced.⁶⁷

Within Graham’s work there is a rich treasure trove of names, dates, and places that uncover the happenings of nineteenth century Baltimore. Three of these men mentioned in the work by the Maryland State Archives, John W. Locks, Alexander Hemsley, and Samuel Chase, were undertakers. These men were not only successful business men, but active members of their community. It is the lives of the black undertakers of Baltimore that fuels this research, their lives as undertakers, businessmen, and activists.

One of the first institutions the black community of Baltimore began came through means of religion. Before blacks built their own churches, they attended with whites in mixed churches around the city. According to Phillips blacks began to separate from mixed churches around the early part of the nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Religious sects of Christianity such as Methodism, which originally appealed to the blacks because of their acceptance into such churches as equal spiritual members, were no longer satisfactory for

⁶⁶ Maryland State Archives, *The Road From Douglass To Thurgood*, Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920, John Locks- Personal Life (Maryland State Archives, Last modified February 3, 1998).

<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/12388100.html>.

⁶⁷ Graham, *Baltimore*.

⁶⁸ Phillips, *Freedoms Port*, 126.

black community. As the black membership in the mixed churches increased, so did the concerns of the white membership.

White members grew increasingly concerned with the Africanisms black members displayed during worship services. Africanism such as, choral responses, spontaneity, singing, and communal interplay opposed the stoicism and decorum dictated by white members. Baltimore's white members of mixed churches increasingly found ways to segregate worship services. Black were relegated to segregated seating in the back of the church and the loft, often called "nigger pews" or the "African corner." Messages during worship services were delivered from a white perspective, often painting black members as lesser and subservient beings. Such messages were a far cry from the black interpretations of scripture that passed from the secret prayer meetings on the plantation.⁶⁹

Another insult to black membership of these churches was the restriction of burial in the church cemetery. Originally burial in the church cemetery had been open to all members. With the increase of black membership, white churches began to refrain from burying black members in the churchyard. For black members the white power structure of these churches mirrored the slavery institution they sought to escape. By creating their own religious communities, blacks were no longer subject to the racial caste system and white perceptions of black inferiority. They had unity and common purpose.

The need for spiritual freedom, cultural uplift, and Christian fellowship with members inspired Baltimore's black Christians to separate from white churches and form

⁶⁹ Phillips, *Freedom's Port*, 125

their own religious communities. Some of the first black churches such as Sharp Street Church and Bethel Church, became centers of black consciousness and organization. These religious communities soon became institutions that provided a sense of respect and racial pride. Another important institution grew out of the black church, African American burial grounds. For blacks the establishment of burial grounds they could call their own held great significance.

In 1807 seven trustees of the African Methodist Church, now the Sharp Street United Methodist Church, established the African Burying Ground which, became Mount Auburn Cemetery in 1894. The trustees purchased two and one quarter acres and eight square perches of land. Kami Fletchers dissertation “City of the Death of Colored People” shows the rise and downfall of this cemetery and what it meant to the black community of Baltimore. According to Fletcher, for many blacks owning cemetery property made them first time property owners, while at the same time allowing those owners to control an aspect of their existence, their deaths. “The burial ground gave blacks decision making power in where they were buried allowing free and enslaved blacks independence.”⁷⁰

Mount Auburn Cemetery developed over four phases transitioning from burying ground to business enterprise. The first phrase, the African Burying Ground, began with the seven trustees from Sharp Street United Methodist Church. As deed owners they owned the cemetery plots and made them transferrable to their descendants or anyone

⁷⁰ Kami Fletcher, “Real Business: Maryland’s First Black Cemetery Journey on the Enterprise of Death (1807-1920)” (Thanatological Studies, 2014), 57.

else they chose. To assist the black community in the burial of their dead, Sharp Street Church enlisted the aid of their numerous benevolent and mutual aid societies. The purpose of these societies was to assist with decent burial and financial aid during sickness and death. With establishment of a burial ground and the Potters field for the streets of Baltimore, burials at the segregated white church yard decreased in usage by as much as 56% between 1818 and 1838.⁷¹ The burying ground was in operation from 1807-1839.

The creation of the Belair Burial Ground began the second phase. The burial ground moved outside the city limits allowing for more spaces for burial. It is important to note Belair Burial Ground followed the trends other cemeteries of the day making it on par with cemeteries for whites. It transitioned to the rural garden model designed to fit the landscape and mirroring gardens, open meadows, and natural lakes. The burial ground allowed more blacks the opportunity to become land owners, but through an organized structured. Fletcher further explained that the burial ground established its own set of rules, generated income and incurred expenditures. Internments were now being scheduled, relegated to a sexton, and purchased creating a self-sustaining business.⁷²

The Belair Burial ground filled up in 1867 and land for a new burial ground was purchased in 1871 initiating the third phase, the Sharp Street Cemetery. Established during Reconstruction the Sharp Street Cemetery, according to Fletcher, reflected the progress of the black community as well as helped foster it.⁷³ The Sharp Street Church

⁷¹ Fletcher, *Real Business*, 58.

⁷² Ibid, 60.

⁷³ Ibid, 64.

moved its burial ground from Belair back to south Baltimore, where the black community of Hullsville was forming, disinterring all 469 deceased persons from the Belair Burial Ground. The new Sharp Street Cemetery boasted 2,410 lots, a vault, improved roads, and new panels. The cemetery also included an onsite office and employees to accommodate the increasing business, and implemented rules for internment, continuing its development as a business enterprise. The beautiful property was dedicated as the “The City of Dead for Colored People.”⁷⁴

In the final phase, the development of Mount Auburn Cemetery comes full circle as a business enterprise. The cemetery grew to such size and prominence that by 1900 it operated separately from the Sharp Street Church. With the revenue accrued from the cemetery Mount Auburn maintained its own staff and management in charge of the day-to-day operations, while the trustees of Sharp Street governed the cemetery via a committee. The cemetery also added economic opportunities for African Americans. Fletcher states a specific group of black businesses that benefited from the business enterprise were the undertakers.⁷⁵ Following Reconstruction African Americans gained new economic opportunities utilizing the skills obtained through slavery to now benefiting their men and women.

African American men, particularly cabinet makers, sextons, and hackmen, transitioned into the undertaking trade. As early as 1863 black men began listing themselves as undertakers in the Baltimore city directories. Undertakers were now

⁷⁴ Fletcher, *Real Business*, 64.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 69.

benefitting from the professionalized cemetery, claiming compensation for their services for burial. Because of the racial climate of the day black residents of Baltimore were not allowed burial beyond the potter's field or the city streets. The maturation of burial grounds for African Americans allowed black undertakers to ensure proper burial for clientele, but also to increase their wealth.

Through the cemetery records black undertakers such as Felix Pye, Theodore Locks, Hercules Rose, and John Toadvin are cited as earning revenue from their burials at Mount Auburn. For example, in 1906 Felix Pye buried 152 persons at Mount Auburn earning \$5,320.⁷⁶ Mt. Auburn Cemetery is an example of an institution that illuminates African American social and economic progression through the assertion of cultural identity and service to community.

Booker T. Washington and the Business of Undertaking

In the summer of 1908 the National Negro Business League, headed by Booker T. Washington, held a meeting at the Sharp Street Memorial Methodist Church in Baltimore. During this morning meeting Washington questioned those speakers at the session as to how they acquired their wealth. These black men proudly announced their acquisitions ranging between five thousand and one hundred fifty thousand dollars. The men who came acquired their wealth through a number of avenues such as real estate or catering. One group of men however astonished Booker T. Washington, those involved in undertaking. Washington who had once been quoted saying, "the trouble with us is that

⁷⁶ Fletcher, *Real Business*, 70.

we are always preparing to die,” was now praising the very men profiting from such thinking.⁷⁷

Although blacks had been involved in the undertaking trade since the institution of slavery, the early twentieth century showed a boom in successful black business through several enterprises, undertaking being one of them. Washington’s work *The Negro in Business* provides a look into those blacks who had success in several different business from catering to farming. His 1906 publication does not list every industry that blacks had successfully progressed, but instead looks at a few examples that he feels are the most successful. His work is perhaps the first to give a positive analysis on black business in America and thus the first analysis of black undertakers. Washington states that the successes of these black men and women is due to “racial instincts and interest that have created a demand which the white business men could not or were able to properly provide for.”⁷⁸ For those blacks who went into the undertaking trade they certainly met this criteria.

The funeral business operated on a segregated basis which provided valuable economic opportunity for African American entrepreneurs. African Americans who went into business provided internal social and economic services to the community. Few blacks during the early twentieth century commanded as much capital as the undertaker. Washington recognized this fact remarking, “it is a curious fact that with the exception of

⁷⁷ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 42.

⁷⁸ Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Ohio: Hertel, Jenkins & Co., 1907), 94.

that of caterer there is no business in which Negroes seem to be more numerously engaged or one in which they have been more uniformly successful.”⁷⁹

One of the men recognized in Washington’s analysis is Elijah Cook of Montgomery, Alabama. According to Washington, Cook was born into slavery some “60 years ago,” possibly the 1840’s, during which time his master allowed him to learn the carpenter’s trade. Cook earned his freedom by using his trade to pay his master twenty-five dollars a month. Following the Civil War his skills as carpenter allowed him to find work easily. He found himself involved in the undertaking trade after recognizing there was no black undertaker in Montgomery. As was common in most towns with no black undertaker, African American people were being carried to the cemetery in rough wagons. After being in business for twenty years he amassed upwards of twenty thousand dollars. In another example William Porter of Cincinnati, Ohio, born a slave in Tennessee in 1850, having spent twenty years in the undertaking trade at the time, amassed real estate holdings in Cincinnati of about twenty-five thousand dollars, not including his rolling stock.⁸⁰

Washington’s analysis of black undertakers reveals several aspects of how these business men conducted their lives and themselves in their communities. In the same example of Elijah Cook he used his economic affluence to establish the “first colored school in the city.”⁸¹ In another example of J. C. Jackson of Lexington, Kentucky, who worked with William Porter, used his prestige as an undertaker to achieve a number of

⁷⁹ Washington, *The Negro in Business*, 94.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 96.

⁸¹ Ibid, 95.

great accomplishments. Some of these accomplishments include serving as a trustee of Wilberforce University and Berea College. He was instrumental in the establishment of State Normal School for Negroes in Frankfort, Kentucky, now Kentucky State University and served on the Executive Committee of the National Negro Business League.⁸²

In Washington's analysis he describes in great detail the lives of two undertakers who achieved great success in their business, Preston Taylor and James Thomas. Taylor was involved in a number of ventures prior to undertaking, mainly aspiring to his "highest calling" of being a minister. After a stint in the military and as a contractor he served a pastor for two prominent churches in Nashville, Tennessee. He began his undertaking career in 1888 and found "unusual success."⁸³ At the height of his success he employed over twenty-one men and was involved in organizations such as the Odd Fellows Association and the Knights of Pythias. Seeing the need for a burial ground for the black citizens of Nashville, Taylor saw fit to purchase the Greenwood Cemetery.⁸⁴

James C. Thomas seems to be a special case in Washington's mind compared to the other undertakers he included in his analysis. Thomas receives his own chapter in Washington's book stating that Thomas, "is the richest man of African descent in New York."⁸⁵ Thomas was born in Harrisburg, Texas, in 1864. Due to the death of his parents at a young age, his resolve and self-discipline blossomed as he cared not only for himself but his six sisters as well. Thomas worked as a cabin boy and a hotel steward until 1897

⁸² Ibid, 98.

⁸³ Washington, *The Negro in Business*, 102.

⁸⁴ For more information about Preston Taylor see to Suzanne Smith's *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors And the African American Way of Death*.

⁸⁵ Washington, *The Negro in Business*, 104.

saving his money in the hope of owning his own business. Washington notes “at the time there were several Negro undertakers in New York, but Thomas believed there was room for another, and possibly a better one than any of those then existing.”⁸⁶

Washington affirms in his 1906 publication that Thomas held the distinction of being the second largest business in New York. Thomas also operated in the neighboring states of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, opening branches in several areas to meet the demand for services. Washington found it important to note that Thomas had been able to compete successfully with white undertakers, who for a long time had been providing the black communities with funeral services. Thomas’ success in undertaking allowed him to not only amass considerable wealth but allowed him to enter into avenues within and outside of his profession unavailable to blacks during that time. He held stock in the Chelsea National Bank of New York and became a welcomed member of the New York Undertakers Association, both primarily white supported entities.⁸⁷

Washington makes a final analysis concerning Thomas concluding that his success derives from two reasons; his ability to “measure up to the best and highest in his profession.....having keen business insight and the mastery of the field in which one may be engaged.”⁸⁸ The other reason for his success was his wife Ella Rollins, who Washington added “has been of great assistance to him in his business, having entire charge of the work in his absence.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Washington, *The Negro in Business*, 107.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 108.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 109.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 109.

Upon further review of Washington's analysis of black undertakers, we find commonalities between these men that lead to their success in the trade. The commonalities of the aforementioned individuals include their training, community involvement, and the support of their wives. These commonalities when restructured as criteria allows for analysis of what made these early black undertakers in Baltimore successful.

Ultimately, these business men and women's philosophy paralleled the doctrine advocated by Booker T. Washington: by controlling significant capital services they could demand and receive the privileges of democracy and capitalism.

Black Mobilization through Embalming

Following Reconstruction and the turn of the century, undertaking in American evolved. With this evolution came industrialization and modernization, and for blacks, mobilization. One of these modernizations was in embalming. According to Johnson, "during the reconstruction period embalming was unobtainable to the black community. Negro undertakers did not have the resources to buy machinery and tools for vascular embalming, when embalming was done it was done by a white embalmer."⁹⁰ When black families did want their loved one embalmed they were "forced to use back doors and basement entrances of white establishments."⁹¹ Many blacks left their southern communities after the war and made their way to larger cities and even north.

⁹⁰Christopher Leevy Johnson. "Undertakings: The Politics of African American Funeral Director." (PhD Dissertation., University of South Carolina, 2000), 4. ProQuest.

⁹¹ Karla Holloway, *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 18.

Nationwide, care of the dead and the funeral became less of a shared responsibility of the community. The responsibility began transitioning to trained professionals to coordinate funeral services and sell funeral merchandise. The African American population was no exception to this evolution and had to adapt to the modernization. With new freedom blacks were no longer being regulated to nights, Sunday funerals or secret services to bury their dead.

Blacks were now free to maintain their funeral traditions, continuing to view the funeral as one of the most sacred communal acts they could perform. As undertaking emerged as a profession in the nineteenth century it was even more significant in the African American community, which demanded a burial that celebrated their traditions. Several blacks who had been involved in the undertaking trade, be it cabinet maker, hackman or sexton made the transition to become professional undertakers. According to the United States 1890 census, there were 20,020 Negroes in business of which 231 were undertakers. According to the Baltimore City Polk Directory of 1901, twenty-four blacks were listed as undertakers.⁹²

When black men entered the business of undertaking they responded not just to the possibilities of economic advancement, but also to a sense of cultural and community responsibility. During a time when few entrepreneurial opportunities were open to the black population, this kind of business provided great opportunity. Holloway affirms that black undertaking was neither affected nor challenge by white competition. Businesses

⁹² Ralph L. Polk, *Polk Baltimore City Directories 1878-1902*. Detroit, Michigan: R.L. Polk & Company, 1870.

that specifically catered toward black needs such as barbershops, beauty salons, photographers, and funeral homes generally experienced little competition from whites.⁹³ Common factors of these creators of economic capital was their reliance on black clientele. Each was separate from the white business structure and non-threatening to the white elite.⁹⁴

Black folks who entered the undertaking business in many instances were still subject to the challenges of racism. At the end of the nineteenth century and even the beginning of the twentieth century, many black communities particularly in the South did not have black funeral parlors. These black families had little choice but to contract the services of a local white undertaker to handle the preparation of their dead. For the white undertakers the arrival of a black undertaker meant almost instant loss of business and, most importantly, loss of profits. The potential loss of revenue and perhaps just the presence of a successful black professional in his same field and vicinity in some instances lead to threats and even violence.

For example, in 1890 when William Ragsdale of Muskogee, Oklahoma, began to make transition from a horse-carriage supplier to an undertaking company, he feared that the success of his business would incite violence from the Ku Klux Klan. Ragsdale in prior years had lost his son to their bloody rituals because of a confrontation that stemmed from his entrepreneurial success.⁹⁵

⁹³ Holloway, *Passed On*, 21.

⁹⁴ Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond 1890-1940*, 6.

⁹⁵ Holloway, *Passed On*, 18.

The Jim Crow law in the South and the blatant discrimination in the North confined blacks to only a few prominent positions in the American economy. With limited educational opportunities and little room for upward mobility, the apex of African American professional achievement consisted of the preacher, teacher, lawyer, doctor, and undertaking.⁹⁶ The least demanding of these educational and licensure qualifications was undertaking. When the state of Maryland began regulating the field of undertaking in 1902, their requirements to receive a license was completion of high school and training under an undertaker for two years. The success of black undertakers stemmed from the maltreatment, the segregation practices, and the racially defined sociocultural environment during nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For years many blacks utilized the services of a white undertaker and would too often experience only poor treatment and service with many of their traditions and cultural needs being ignored.

First-hand accounts from black families using white undertaking establishments tell of experiences where black bodies would be hidden in the basement and white bodies would be upstairs awaiting burial. In addition, blacks could only enter through the back door or the basement and were subjected to careless night time and after hour services. Clarence Lighter, a black undertaker from Raleigh, North Carolina, echoed these maltreatments relaying his own experience during a meeting at the National Negro Business League in Atlantic City. Lightner reported that the “small white undertakers” who were doing business in the area around Raleigh were “maltreating our people.” In one incident he reports that a white undertaker that a black family employed came to their

⁹⁶ Johnson, *Undertakings*, 5.

home and “pushed the coffin on to the porch” remarking “we don’t do anything about putting bodies in the coffin.”⁹⁷ These stories of ill treatment and disrespect of black bodies would survive in the African American memories and would be passed down generationally.⁹⁸

Summary

Nineteen century Baltimore provided a unique landscape for Negroes to thrive. Blacks experienced freedom on a much larger scale than any other southern city. This freedom allowed blacks to build communities, businesses, and institutions, such as Sharp Street Church and Bethel Church, helping to sustain and grow the black community socially, politically, and economically.

These institutions also served as a catalyst for other successful endeavors. Baltimore’s black burial ground Mount Auburn Cemetery served as an engine for black undertakers to further their wealth. Black men achieved great wealth while serving their community. The end of the nineteenth century, however, brought about segregation and continued abuse by white undertakers allowing black undertakers to secure the black community’s patronage.

⁹⁷ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 56.

⁹⁸ Holloway, *Passed On*, 21.

CHAPTER 4: Forging Relationships

Introduction

The Maryland State Archives mentions a unique relationship between Joseph W. Locks, Alexander Hemsley, and Samuel Chase. Although they were businessmen, community activists, and social leaders with their own agendas and aspiration it is documented that these three men worked closely in the early years of their businesses. Hemsley was an undertaker, Chase a coffin maker, and Locks provided hearses. According to some death certificates, Locks himself served as the undertaker. Together these men provided undertaking services to the black community of East Baltimore. Locks and Chase eventually became prominent undertakers in the city of Baltimore, and Hemsley would serve as a prominent figure in handling the funeral services for John Locks.⁹⁹ Together, they provided services indispensable to their community.¹⁰⁰

Alexander Hemsley, The Undertaker

According to Hemsley's obituary he was born in Centerville, Maryland, in June 1848. He started to learn the undertaking trade under one of Baltimore's early black undertakers, William Dungee and completed his training under Samuel Chase. Before long he ran a successful business acquiring "the largest equipment that any colored

⁹⁹The Road From Douglass To Thurgood, Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920. John Locks- Personal Life, (Maryland State Archives, Last modified February 3, 1998). <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/12388100.html>.

¹⁰⁰The Road From Douglass To Thurgood, Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920, John Locks Professional Career (Maryland State Archives, Last modified April 02, 2003). <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/1000.html>.

funeral director in Baltimore possessed.”¹⁰¹ In a clear example of the close bonds between his business colleagues, Hemsley took charge of the funeral arrangements for John Locks. Observers remarked that the funeral was the “largest of any kind in that section of the city.”¹⁰² This illustrates a relationship that transcends the realm of business, but into the personal relationship.¹⁰³ After thirty-five years in the undertaking trade he turned control of the business to his son Samuel Hemsley. During his life he was involved in several secret societies including the Masons, the Nazarites, and the Odd Fellows. He had particular interest and involvement in the Odd Fellows.

From what has been recorded about Hemsley’s life we find a rare instance when the financial affluence he attained through his business is divulged. At the time of his passing in 1913, Hemsley’s estate was valued at nineteen thousand dollars¹⁰⁴ Not only did he leave a considerable sum for his family and charities, Hemsley owned nine properties including his funeral business and stables. While this is not reflective of every undertaker’s financial affluence this is evidence however of the wealth these undertakers commanded. His son, Samuel T. Hemsley continued his father’s legacy and ensured the business’ successful transition into the twentieth century, transforming it from an undertaking business to a remodeled modernized funeral home. Samuel T. Hemsley

¹⁰¹ “Alex Hemsley To Be Buried Today,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, March 22, 1913, Afro American Archives.

¹⁰² “Funeral of John W. Locks,” *The Day*, 1884, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁰³ *The Road from Douglass to Thurgood, Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920, John Locks Professional Career*, (Maryland State Archives, Last modified April 02, 2003). <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/1000.html>.

¹⁰⁴ “Inventory of the Estate of the Late Alexander Hemsley,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Apr 26, 1913, Afro-American Archives.

earned the distinction of being the first black funeral director to have an automobile funeral procession to pass through the city of Baltimore in 1914.¹⁰⁵ After the passing of Samuel T. Hemsley, the business was left to the care of his widow Francis Hemsley who led the business for thirty years. According to the *Baltimore Afro* she “upheld the tradition and reputation of fair dealing, efficiency, personal services and courtesy.”¹⁰⁶ For three generations Hemsley Funeral Home serviced the black communities of Baltimore as an institution on which blacks could depend on. The business was forced to close in 1968 when the City of Baltimore purchased the whole block where it was located to establish a school.

Samuel Chase, Coffin Maker

The origins of Chase’s relationship with Locks is unclear. However, it is logical to assume it started before Locks began undertaking in 1860. Chase was heavily involved in the Baltimore community through his work in several organizations such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, and the Nazarites. Locks and Chase shared membership at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church located in west Baltimore. Both had been members for decades, Locks as a child and Chase in his twenties or thirties and remained members until their deaths. Bethel was not just a spiritual center for several blacks in the community, but also a political and social center. As the oldest African American church in Baltimore, Bethel was at the center of several movements for racial uplift through

¹⁰⁵ “First Automobile Funeral,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 16, 1914, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁰⁶ “Public Has Been Very Nice,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Aug 24, 1968, Afro-American Archives.

politics and social events. Historian Leroy Graham's research notes that Locks and Chase were involved in several committees and at times even worked together on those initiatives such as the Maryland Emigration Aid Society, which focused on bringing blacks up from the South to Maryland via steamboat.¹⁰⁷ In another example of their collaboration towards the end of 1880 they were on the same committee protesting the school board's refusal to hire black teachers at the beginning of the 1881.¹⁰⁸ The fruits of their labor ripened four years later in 1888 after Locks passed, with the hiring of the first black teacher in Baltimore City, Roberta Sheridan.

Of all the undertakers in the Baltimore during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century none were perhaps more successful or commanded more funeral business in the black community than Samuel W. Chase. According to his family Chase never revealed the exact date of his birth but was born some 80 years prior giving him a birth year around 1835. His parents were free citizens of Baltimore who along with other families "had long been noted for their intelligence, probity, and resourcefulness."¹⁰⁹ As a young man he learned his trade of cabinet making and undertaking from James Davis, who he was apprenticed to by his father. He was also an apprentice alongside Bishop James Handy, prominent Baltimore African Methodist Episcopal minister, and William Gray who also made the transition to undertaker.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Graham, *Baltimore*, 235.

¹⁰⁸ Graham, *Baltimore*, 219.

¹⁰⁹ "S.W. Chase Laid To Rest," *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 30, 1915, Afro-American Archives.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Chase was one of the most respected undertakers in Baltimore not only because of his successful business, but because he trained a number of undertakers in Baltimore. Under his tutelage men such as the Alexander Hemsley, Charles Bailey, and Isaac Brown learned the undertaking business.¹¹¹ As Samuel Chase battled illness during the last decade of his life his son, P. Morton Chase, took over as manager. When the elder Chase passed, P. Morton Chase advertised the continuation of his father's business under "Samuel W. Chase and Son" and expressed his appreciation to his patrons for their support. He guaranteed the "most polite and courteous service at all times, whether in the city or suburbs, and most reasonable charges."¹¹² At the time of Samuel Chase's passing in 1915, he was the oldest black funeral director in Baltimore. Isaac Brown's descendants, who still operate the Chase business in Baltimore in 2018, celebrate over 100 years of service to the Baltimore community.

John W. Locks, Hackman to Founder, and Family

The Joseph G. Locks Jr. funeral home traces its history back to its patriarch, John W. Locks, a prominent African American undertaker and figure in Baltimore during and after the Civil War.¹¹³ John W. Locks was born in 1819 or 1820 (according to his death certificate) to free-born African Americans in Baltimore. Very little is known about his youth, however sources suggest that he was childhood friends with Frederick

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² "Display Ad 7- No Title," *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 24, 1917, Afro-American Archives.

¹¹³ "Prominent Undertaker Passes Away," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 15, 1911, Afro-American Archives.

Douglass.¹¹⁴ He spent some time indentured as a caulker in the shipyards of Baltimore. Records show his indenture as a “carpenter/joiner.” Mastering his craft, he eventually became well respected among his peers both black and white. It is not unreasonable to suggest that he was exposed to aspects of undertaking at a young age, one of those aspects being building of a coffin. Locks’ involvement in carpentry surely prompted the manufacturing of coffins on an as-need basis for the deceased members of his community.¹¹⁵

Traditionally the carpenter is the undertaker’s predecessor however, but there were many paths to the undertaking profession. According to the Baltimore City directories, by 1860 his profession changed from caulker to hackman (carriage driver/livery operator). A hackman provided transportation to individuals in the city and Locks provided those services also for the funeral processions. He was quite successful in this venture and acquired a livery stable on Wolfe Street in East Baltimore. His obituary states that “he possessed the confidence of the hackmen and undertakers of the city to a remarkable degree, and until incapacitated by sickness, was treasurer of the Hackmen's

¹¹⁴ Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*, Washington, D.C. (University Press of America, 1982), 120. See also- Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, 280. Allen, *Cautiously Capitalistic*, 140.

¹¹⁵ Following the historical trend, the development of the undertaker usually began from a trade which had involvement with the dead, such as carpentry. Involvement in such trades often transitioned to the undertakers trade. For more on the progression of the undertaker see *The History of American Funeral Directing*. Chapter 6- Early American Funeral Directing pg. 139-156.

Association, a society composed largely of white men.”¹¹⁶ Although John W. Locks never labeled himself as an undertaker in any directory, on some death certificates as early as 1875, he is listed as undertaker for a number of deceased persons.¹¹⁷

Board of Health, City of Baltimore,
 OFFICE OF REGISTRAR OF VITALS

Permit No. 1156.

The Physician who attended any person in a last illness is responsible for the presentation of this Certificate, signed out to the undertaker or other person superintending the burial, within twenty-four hours after the death, or, if requested so to do, under penalty of law.

NO PERMIT FOR BURIAL CAN BE OBTAINED WITHOUT A PROPER CERTIFICATE.

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH.

Date of Death, *March 5th 1875*

Full Name of Deceased, *Susan C. Green*

Sex, *Female*

Age, *7* Years, *0* Months

Color, *Mulatto*

Married, Single, Widow or Widower, *Single*

Occupation,

Birthplace, *Baltimore City*

Duration of Residence in the City of Baltimore,

Place of Death, *Dallas St.*

Cause of Death, *Malaria*

Duration of Last Sickness,

Place of Burial, *Dallas St. Burial Ground*

Date of Burial, *March 7th 1875*

Undertaker, *John W. Locks*

Place of Business, *68 South Vioff* Address *350 S. Brown*

W. H. White, Medical Agent

Extract from Regulations of the Board of Health to secure a full and correct record of Vital Statistics in the City of Baltimore.

SECTION 2. And it be further enacted and ordered, That whenever any person shall die in the said city, it shall be the duty of the Physician who attended during his or her last sickness, or the Coroner, when the case comes under his notice, to cause forty-eight hours after the death, to the Undertaker or other person or persons superintending the burial, a Certificate, as far as the same can be ascertained, the full name, sex, age and condition (whether married or single) of the deceased, and the cause and date of death, except in cases of births and deaths of illegitimate children.

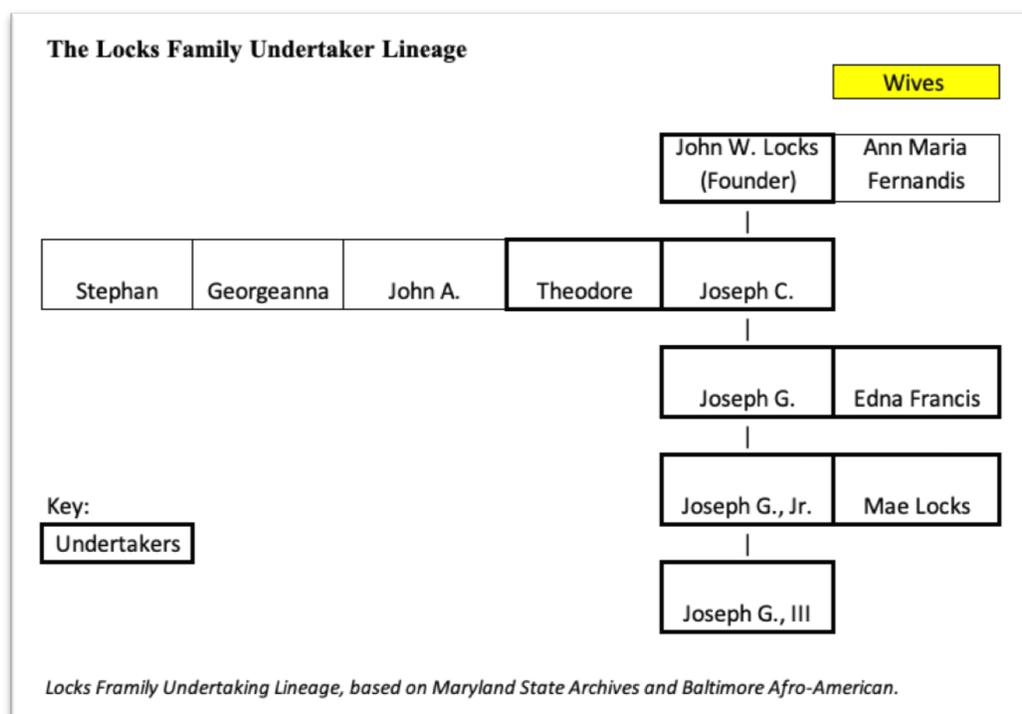
John W. Locks, Listed as Undertaker, March 7, 1875

John W. Locks married Ann Maria Fernandis on November 9, 1845, the eldest daughter of a Brazilian immigrant, John Fernandis who was a prominent barber in

¹¹⁶ The Road From Douglass to Thurgood, Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920, John Locks Professional Career, Maryland State Archives, Last modified April 02, 2003. <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/1000.html>.

¹¹⁷ Board of Health, City of Baltimore, Certificate of Death for Mary Cooper, February 5, 1875, Maryland State Archives.

Baltimore City. From their union came five children: Stephen, Georgeanna, John A., Theodore and Joseph C. Sadly, Ann Maria died on March 5, 1856, at the age of 34. Between 1857 and 1870 Locks married his second wife, Mary Ann. They had no children together. Locks' children watched as their father and his men readied horses and carriages for numerous jobs. Their father's profession ensured their places in the black middle class and provided them with opportunities to learn trades and business savvy.¹¹⁸



Eventually two of his four sons Theodore and Joseph became involved in the undertaking trade. First, Joseph joined his father in the hack business and later Theodore, as a cabinet maker. One can speculate that Theodore learned his trade as a cabinet maker

¹¹⁸ The Road From Douglass to Thurgood, Baltimore in Transition 1870-1920, John Locks- Personal Life (Maryland State Archives, Last modified February 3, 1998). <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/12388100.html>.

and undertaker from one of his father's business associates or even from John W. Locks himself. In one documented example John Locks sent his son Samuel Locks to live with John Fernandis, his father-in-law and successful barber, to learn the barber trade.¹¹⁹ It is safe to say he may have done the same for Theodore.

John W. Locks also instilled the initiatives of self-help into his children. Locks was active in his community through social and benevolent organizations. Locks, like other prominent African Americans, built professional relationships through membership in various fraternal and mutual aid societies. He was a member of the Olive Lodge 967 and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows. He helped to give back to his community by his participation in the Rising Star, Morning Star, and Evening Star Beneficial Societies.¹²⁰ Locks was also heavily involved in his church, Bethel AME, where he served on the executive board. At his death, John W. Locks estate was reportedly worth between \$25,000 and \$75,000.¹²¹

Theodore Locks

Following the Civil War, when the business of undertaking began to professionalize, skills and service expectations of their practitioners began to develop. Theodore Locks became the first in the Locks family to advertise himself as an undertaker. In 1878 he took out a sizeable advertisement as a cabinetmaker and furnishing undertaker, advertising "ready-made coffins and patent caskets. Orders

¹¹⁹ Phillips, *Freedoms Port*, 159. Note- Samuel Locks is not the son of John W. Locks, but his brother.

¹²⁰ "Funeral of John W. Locks." *The Day*, 1884, Maryland State Archives.

¹²¹ Allen, *Cautiously Capitalistic*, 186.

attended at all hours at short notice.”¹²² Although both he and his father had been in the business of undertaking prior to 1878, for Theodore to list himself as undertaker shows the new direction of the family business. He advertised himself as an undertaker until 1880 and a cabinet maker until 1890, however the reason for this change in profession is not clear. At least until 1886, Theodore was still in the undertaking business. In an article in the *Baltimore Sun* he was arrested for attempting to bury a deceased baby in Laurel Cemetery without a permit.¹²³ Three years later his profession changed in the directory to laborer. This arrest may have hurt his progress as undertaker causing him to change his profession.

Joseph C. Locks

Joseph C. Locks undoubtedly picked up where Theodore left off listing himself as an undertaker in the 1890 Baltimore directory.¹²⁴ The nature and extent of his training in the undertaking trade is once again unclear, but what is certain is the brothers continued the business started by their father John W. Locks. Not only did they inherit his business they inherited his connections. They still worked with other undertakers providing livery services upon request. Prior to 1890, Joseph listed himself as a hack driver as had his father before him. Under his father, and most likely with the assistance of his brother, he took the business savvy and connections he inherited to the undertaking trade. Locks also used his resources and connections to promote the ideology of self-help. In one example, he and other young men in East Baltimore organized the Utopian Literary Association.

¹²² Polk, *Polk Baltimore City Directories*, 1878.

¹²³ “Burial Without a Permit,” *Baltimore Sun*, January 19, 1886, Baltimore Sun Archives.

¹²⁴ Polk, *Polk Baltimore City Directories*, 1890.

The purpose of this organization was to realize a higher state of moral, intellectual, and social culture.¹²⁵ Blacks organized themselves into benevolent societies, literary societies, and social clubs all of which advocated services in the black community and the improvement of the race.¹²⁶

In 1902 the landscape of the undertaking trade in Baltimore underwent a massive change with the establishment of the Board of Undertakers (BOU). This board was responsible for determining who could practice undertaking and establishing regulations to govern the profession. With the establishment of this government regulated body the undertaking trade was a legitimized profession in the state of Maryland. Many undertakers, including Joseph C. Locks, now had to register with the board to legally continue to practice. A number of these undertakers both black and white had been in the business decades prior to the BOU's establishment. Joseph registered and was approved for his undertaker's license in 1902 and became among a list other blacks to be the first to do so.¹²⁷

In the midst of these changes, Joseph was training his son Joseph G. Locks (or Joseph C. Locks, Jr. according to some records) in the craft. An ad placed in the *Baltimore Afro American* in 1898 advertised "Joseph C. Locks and Son, Funeral Directors" and listed the 18-year-old Joseph G. Locks as an embalmer.¹²⁸ Not only were they advertising for business, they were also announcing a family business with a

¹²⁵ "A New Literary," *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 13, 1898, Afro-American Archives.

¹²⁶ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 257.

¹²⁷ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, April 23, 1908, Maryland State Archives.

¹²⁸ "Display Ad 7," *Baltimore Afro-American*, September 18, 1899, Afro-American Archives.

succession plan. Joseph G. Locks passed the undertaker exam, received his license, and announced his location of business in 1908,¹²⁹ while his father did not renew his license indicating that a change in ownership had taken place.¹³⁰ Joseph G. Locks unfortunately passed away at 30 years old to appendicitis in 1911, leaving the business seemingly without a successor.¹³¹

Edna Francis Locks

An interesting development took place after the death of Joseph G. Locks, when his wife Edna Locks took over the business. The funeral profession was a male dominated profession, even more so then than it is in the twenty-first century. In 1911 Edna received permission from the Board of Undertakers to continue the business of her late husband.¹³² As far as the records reveal, she was the second black woman to practice undertaking in the state of Maryland. She advertised herself in the *Baltimore Afro American* numerous times as a “Funeral Directress and Embalmer” and in a few early advertisements as a “Practical Funeral Directress, Embalmer, and Shrouder.”¹³³ Although this is a revolutionary development in terms of black business in Baltimore, a century prior it was not uncommon for women to be involved in various aspects of undertaking. As discussed earlier, women were involved in the preparation of the dead as early as the

¹²⁹ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, April 23, 1908, Maryland State Archives.

¹³⁰ “Classified Ad 8- No Title,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, June 6, 1908, Afro-American Archives.

¹³¹ “Prominent Undertaker Passes Away,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 15, 1911, Afro-American Archives.

¹³² *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, November 11, 1911, Maryland State Archives. .

¹³³ “Display Ad 2- No Title,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 31, 1912, Afro-American Archives.

colonial period. Following the Civil War and the professionalization of undertaking, the normalcy of female involvement in the care of the dead more or less died out.

Joseph G. Locks, Jr.

Edna Locks served at the helm of the Locks funeral business for almost 30 years until her son Joseph G. Locks Jr. came of age and took over the business in 1934 after passing his undertaker's exam.¹³⁴ According to the obituary of Joseph G. Lock Jr., who passed way in 2003, his mother Edna taught him the business.¹³⁵ Joseph G. Locks Jr. and his wife Mae Locks would run the business together for almost 70 years.

Summary

The founder, John W. Locks established many connections across city that served his business and his family well. He began by forging connections with Samuel Chase, a cabinet maker, and Alexander Hemsley, an undertaker for whom he would provide livery services for on numerous occasions.

The twentieth century brought on new challenges and struggles for the black community, a new world would develop under the name of Jim Crow. With the decision of the infamous 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case, the practice of "separate but equal" was legalized. The black undertaker would become more than just funeral service provider. At times they would find themselves at the forefront of the issues concerning the communities they would serve. With the birth of Jim Crow the black undertakers found themselves using their businesses as a form of self-help and racial

¹³⁴ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, March 27, 1934, Maryland State Archives.

¹³⁵ "Joseph G. Locks Jr., 92, Longtime City Mortician," *Baltimore Sun*, April 23, 2003, Baltimore Sun Archives.

uplift, while simultaneously using their businesses to fight against prejudice and discrimination.¹³⁶

For the black undertaker Jim Crow would ensure almost one hundred percent of black patronage. Those who offered services that cater to the specific needs of the black community such as barbershops, beauty salons, photographers, and funeral homes encountered little outside competition. In 1913 Basil F. Hutchins, a black undertaker of Boston, Massachusetts, representing the National Negro Funeral Directors Association gave a report at the National Negro Business League, organized by Booker T. Washington stating that “ninety percent of the work (black funerals) was then being done by a white undertaker...today, I am glad to know ninety five percent of the work is done by colored undertakers”.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 48.

¹³⁷ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 52.

CHAPTER 5: Maryland Board of Undertakers

Introduction

Understanding the reason and influences of the State Board of Undertakers of Maryland (BOU) is crucial to the understanding of the board as an entity. This chapter addresses the following questions: What are the origins and reasons for the creation of this regulatory body? How did the BOU regulate the profession, licensing, and laws? How did this government regulated body affect those blacks in the profession? Do we see any evidence of unfair treatment toward black licensees?

1902 Establishment of the BOU

In 1902, under the direction of the Maryland General Assembly the State Board of Undertakers of Maryland (BOU) was formed to begin regulating the undertaking trade.¹³⁸ The Governor appointed the five-member board, which was later expanded to seven members to regulate the undertaking profession in the city of Baltimore. Each member was required to be actively engaged in the undertaking profession for at least five years prior to appointment. Three members had to be Baltimore City residents. The secretary of the Board of Health and the commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department served ex officio. The board registered, certified, and licensed all undertakers in Maryland. Practicing without a license was illegal. The board also administered an examination to test applicants' knowledge of human anatomy, sanitation, disinfection,

¹³⁸ Maryland State Senate, Maryland General Assembly, *An Act To Create and Establish Board of Undertakers of Maryland, and to prescribe powers and duties of said board* (Maryland: 1902).

and embalming. In addition, the board was authorized to revoke licenses of undertakers "for proper cause" after a full hearing of all interested parties.¹³⁹

When the board was established, its jurisdiction was only applicable to the city of Baltimore.¹⁴⁰ The year prior to its establishment, Polks Directory for the city of Baltimore named twenty-four blacks who listed their occupation as undertakers. From May 22, 1902, the first meeting of the board, to July 1, 1902 those individuals who had been undertaking in the city of Baltimore prior to 1902 needed to only send in an application to receive a license to practice. Any undertaker who did not apply before July first would be obligated to take a written exam in order to obtain licensure. It is important to note that no indications or mentions of race are made until July 3, 1902 when Clarence Wright, a black undertaker, passed the licensing exam with a grade of 10.5/12.¹⁴¹ While very little research has been done concerning the board, some of the aspects are inaccurate and requires revision.

According to Fletcher in her Dissertation "City of the Dead for Colored People," she states that "the Maryland State Board Undertakers, established by an act of legislature January 1902, listed no African American undertakers as licensed. It was not until 1908 that twenty-four were licensed with five assistants receiving a license."¹⁴² Upon close inspection of the board minutes from 1902 it is important to note that while a number of names are listed, the race of the individual is not. Cross referencing each of these names

¹³⁹ Maryland State Archives, Board of Undertakers of Maryland, Chapter 496, Acts of 1908 (Maryland :1908).

¹⁴⁰ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, June 18, 1922, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁴¹ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, July 3, 1902, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁴² Fletcher, *City of the Dead*, 118.

with the *Baltimore City's Polk Directory* is necessary to ascertain the race of those individuals. After cross referencing all the names with the board minutes of 1902 and Polk's directory, twenty-one names are those of blacks recognized by the board as duly licensed undertakers, one of whom was Joseph C. Locks.

When the Maryland General Assembly of 1902 passed an act to create and establish the State Board of Undertakers of Maryland, the Secretary of the State Board of Health of Maryland and the Commissioners of Health of the city of Baltimore were considered *ex officio* members. As *ex officio* members, this allowed the State Board of Undertakers to not only be established, but to operate as part of the State board of Health of Maryland. All members of the board were required to take an oath to "faithfully and impartially discharge the duties of his office without partiality or fear."¹⁴³ The members of the board received no pay during their term and were required to meet at least once every year. According to the minutes taken by the board, the board actually met once a month.

One of the duties of the board was to keep a registry of "any and all persons, co-partnerships and corporations engaged in the business of undertaking in the state of Maryland."¹⁴⁴ The act describes undertaking as the care, preparation, disposition, or burial of the dead. A fee of five dollars was required to register and twenty dollars to obtain licensure. Those applying for licensure were required to appear before the board

¹⁴³ Laws of Maryland 1902, *Act to Establish State Board of Undertakers of Maryland*, Chapter 160: Section 3.

¹⁴⁴ Laws of Maryland 1902, *Act to Establish State Board of Undertakers of Maryland*, Chapter 160: Section 7.

who would then determine “upon due examination, that the applicant is of good moral character, possessed of skill and reasonable knowledge of sanitation, preservation of death, disinfection of the body of deceased persons, the apartment, clothing and bedding, in case of death resulting from infection or contagious disease.”¹⁴⁵

Under the act the board was also given the power to revoke any license that was granted with proper cause and hold a full hearing of all parties involved. Those registered undertakers had to renew their licenses with the board every year in order to continue to practice in Baltimore. Because of this, for a little over twenty years, the board recorded the names of each individual who renewed their license annually. This is the most direct way that the number of black undertakers registered with the board to practice undertaking in the city of Baltimore from 1902-1935 can be recorded and analyzed.

Those who did not renew their license, apply for a license, or register with the state board were not permitted to engage in the business of undertaking. Anyone found practicing without having fulfilled these requirements could be charged with a misdemeanor and be “fined not more than five hundred dollars or sentenced to undergo an imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year, or both, in the discretion of the Court, for each and every offense.”¹⁴⁶

With the establishment of the board, undertaking became legitimized profession. The board established the scope how an undertaker could legally operate. They also

¹⁴⁵ Laws of Maryland 1902, *Act to Establish State Board of Undertakers of Maryland*, Chapter 160: Section 8.

¹⁴⁶ Laws of Maryland 1902, *Act to Establish State Board of Undertakers of Maryland*, Chapter 160: Section 11.

established credentials and requirements that had to be fulfilled in order to practice undertaking in the state of Maryland. Furthermore, the state regulated body had the power to not only define who legally was an undertaker, but also who was not. Those men and women who had been practicing in the state years before the establishment of the board, black or white, were now subject to laws and regulation that could end their livelihood if they did not comply.

If one was not registered with the board, engaging in the undertaking profession was illegal. Until the 1920s the board only regulated Baltimore. Undertakers who practiced outside of Baltimore still applied for licensure to legitimize their business as well as carry out business in Baltimore if necessary. Joseph C. Locks, son of John W. Locks, legitimized the family business by receiving an undertaker license from the board to practice in the state in 1902.

NFDA and Racial Discrimination

Ostracization of black members from the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) persisted for years, despite protests from a few members, and was upheld again during the 1926 convention. When the NFDA was founded in 1882 it was open to all members regardless of race, but in the years following the *Plessy v Ferguson* decision of 1896 the funeral industry became subject to Jim Crow.

Racial discrimination was not foreign to the funeral services business. Smith asserts that African American funeral directors' racial discrimination with the funeral industry began in 1912 when the NFDA, the most recognized professional trade organization in the field, officially banned blacks from membership. During its national

convention in 1912, the NFDA adopted the following language in its membership clause: “But no delegate or ex officio member shall be admissible to membership in this association, however he or she may be accredited by a state or territorial association, who is not of the white race and actively engaged in the profession of funeral directing and caring for the dead.”¹⁴⁷

Being banned from the NFDA kept blacks from key aspects of business and professional development. All of the new trends, supplies, innovations, and regulations funneled through the NFDA first and trickled down to the rest. Membership in the NFDA held many benefits including protection from unfair competition and fraud, opportunities for continuing education, and access to trade publications that discussed trends in the industry.¹⁴⁸ This same organization called for the regulation of the funeral profession.

Under Booker T. Washington’s National Negro Business League (NNBL) black funeral directors formed their own organization, the National Negro Funeral Directors Association (NNFDA) in 1907¹⁴⁹. The growth of black funeral directors was unprecedented. In 1915 George W. Franklin proudly acclaimed “fifteen years ago there were less than 500 negro funeral directors in the United States, today there are over 1100 men and women involved in the business.”¹⁵⁰ One of the purposes of the NNBL was to inspire cooperation among its members economically. Plater explains that the black funeral business connected many aspects of the community’s daily life, such as the bank,

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 53.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 53.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 51.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 53.

the church, the florist, and cemetery. This allowed the black dollar to circulate within the community continuously before it left the black community. These cooperative efforts thus triggered the desired economic development in the black community.¹⁵¹ In Baltimore cooperation among black funeral professionals existed since the 1800's. The aforementioned John W. Locks, Alexander Hemsley, and Samuel W. Chase are examples of this cooperation. The cooperation laid the foundation for what became the Maryland Chapter of the National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association. Cooperative efforts were further extended and strengthened economically through the patronization of black burial grounds such as Laurel and Mount Auburn Cemeteries. These cooperative efforts were not just about economic advancement, but also the preservation of black dignity, which even in death, Jim Crow had jurisdiction.

When cross referencing the city directories of Baltimore and BOU records the rise in the number of black undertakers in the city can be recorded. A list can be compiled of those blacks involved in undertaking in the city of Baltimore (see Appendix A: List of Colored Undertakers in Baltimore City).

Prior to the establishment of regulatory bodies to govern the undertaking profession, its standard and code of ethics were determined by trade and profession organizations. The nineteenth century produced an age of professionalism and field standards that has previously belonged to many medical practitioners and lawyers. The professional/trade associations added further complexity to the undertaking field, emphasizing certain standards to regulate membership. Professional associations sought

¹⁵¹ Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, xxi.

to formulate standards, control membership, enforce inspection system, and assure clientele of the professional character and good moral standards of members. Trade associations focused mainly on the material interests of its members. The most important trade problem of the funeral director in the late nineteenth century was protection from the kind of competition that would ruin community growth and acceptance. According to Habenstein and Lamers *The History of American Funeral Directing*, associations employed two instruments to obtain their professional goals. The first of these is the use of educational prerequisites and training institutions in the instruction of new recruits in the profession. The second instrument is a regulatory system developed by the state as an extension of its police powers.¹⁵² This meant the regulatory system was delegated to small bodies or boards empowered by law to set standards for admission into the field, license, establish codes, and exert a significant amount of control over the profession.

An important method in the building of a respected vocation that tied the professional, others in the field, and community is a code of ethics. The licensing system gave protection to the professional through a legal code of ethics and established a legal registry of qualified practitioners. While a number of trade and professional organizations for funeral directors existed, none rivaled that of the aforementioned NFDA. The NFDA functioned both as a professional and trade association connecting members at the state, regional, and national level.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Habenstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, 293.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 293, 302.

Maryland Board of Undertakers and the Department of Health

As stated in previous chapters, the origins of undertaking began with the carpenter and cabinet maker. Following the Civil War, the cabinet maker made a natural progression towards undertaker and ultimately funeral director. This natural progression is applicable to those blacks involved in the death trade as well. In the city of Baltimore blacks and whites, during the end of eighteenth century, lived and work together in close proximity. This however does not mean that Baltimore was a city free of slavery or racial injustices. Unique to Baltimore, however compared to any other southern city was the large population of free blacks. Frederick Douglass, having escaped slavery on the eastern shore of Maryland, lived in Baltimore several years. In speaking of Baltimore, Douglass said “slavery dislikes a dense population.”¹⁵⁴

By 1850, ninety percent of Baltimore’s black population was free, but few owned property.¹⁵⁵ The author states that “craftsmen and trader, especially those who managed to acquire their own shops, stood tall in the black community, no matter the size or financial success of the business.”¹⁵⁶ Many of the blacks that owned property were exceptional business men and women, such as barbers, lawyers, doctors, pastors, and undertakers. Those families with skills and trades sought to pass on not just the business but these principles of self-help and responsibility to their children thus benefiting the community. As early as the 1820’s and 1830’s virtues of self-help were beginning to show in Baltimore’s free black community.

¹⁵⁴ Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom*, 147

¹⁵⁵ Phillips, *Freedom’s Port*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 157.

As the nineteenth century came to a close a number of states around the country began to regulate those individuals undertaking in the respective cities and towns. In 1937, the State Board of Undertakers of Maryland was reformed as the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers of Maryland.¹⁵⁷ These funeral laws formed the foundation for the regulation of practices in Maryland, many of which are still intact today. As the board regulated the practice of undertaking in Maryland, the rules and regulations enacted applied to both black and white practicing undertaking. This begs the question, did the board have discriminatory practices toward black undertakers? To even attempt to answer this question the board must be put under a microscope, first beginning with the Maryland General Assembly in 1902.

Following the late nineteenth century epidemics plagued a number of cities on the east coast, including Baltimore. The death toll numbered into the thousands. In Baltimore outbreaks of yellow fever and small pox during the 1870's kept citizens on high alert. Dealing with those individuals infected and disposing of their remains was a constant concern. For many the idea of Europe's black plague, which wiped out nearly one third of the continent's population several centuries before, was at the forefront of their mind.

For Baltimore's Department of Health, the oldest health department in the country, the containment and elimination of these diseases was their top priority. The numerous cases of death caused the undertakers to be on constant call. Many cities ordered the immediate burial of infected citizens. Both undertakers and cemeteries were

¹⁵⁷Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers of Maryland, Chapter 503, Acts of 1937, 1937, Maryland State Archives.

unable to keep up with the demand for burials. Because of this, many bodies went days without being buried or were buried in such haste that the graves went unmarked. As the century came to a close, undertakers handling the remains of the disease victims advertised embalming as not only a way to preserve the dead for funeral services and burial, but also as a public health benefit. The chemicals used in embalming purified those infected corpses, thereby eliminating exposure to the public, and further spread of the disease. With the spread of disease, a real fear in the eyes of the public, and the death toll rising, undertakers marketed themselves as not only funeral practitioners but as public health agents.

As public health agents, the undertakers now added to his/her already multifaceted role. At the end of the nineteenth century states began to regulate undertaking practices as well as pass laws requiring the permits for burial or cremation and filing death certificates.¹⁵⁸ The earliest death certificates in Maryland date back to 1875. The certificates contain vital information concerning the deceased such as the cause of death, the physician who pronounced the death, location of burial, and the undertaker carrying out the burial. The legislative pressure of the nineteenth century, in addition to social and technological changes, further laid the foundation for the establishment of undertaking as a specialized occupation.

Prior to the establishment of the State Board of Undertakers there was no regulation of the practice of undertaking. This meant that anyone involved in with the burial or funeral of a deceased could consider him or herself an undertaker. According to

¹⁵⁸ Pine, *Caretaker of the Dead*, 17.

Haberstein and Lamers *The History of American Funeral Directing* the basic functions of undertaking prior to 1859 included the laying out of the dead, the coffining, and the transporting of the body to the grave, while also providing funeral paraphernalia such as clothing, emblems and remembrances.¹⁵⁹ Any individual or business advertising the provision and performances of such tasks could be considered undertakers regardless of whether they performed one, a combination of a few, or all.

For some scholars, the specific tasks of the undertaker are a matter of contention, particularly when classifying who should be considered an undertaker. In Fletcher's article "The History of African American Undertaking in Baltimore" states that Baltimore's earliest black undertakers included, William J. Gray, William H. Bishop, Jr., James A. Handy, Samuel W. Chase, Jr., Felix Pye, Sr., Alexander Hemsley, and Theodore Locks.¹⁶⁰ The majority of these individuals who listed their occupation as undertaker in the city's directory held other occupations and were apprenticed into the death trade.

For example, Samuel Chase Jr, listed his occupation as a cabinet maker until the 1880's. The implication is that prior to the establishment of the BOU, blacks who did not list themselves in the directory as undertakers were not undertakers. However, this is a matter of contention within the narrative. Where does that leave those individuals involved in the undertaking trade, who did not list themselves in directories as undertakers? One such individual is a focal point of this work, John W. Locks. John

¹⁵⁹ Haberstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, 155.

¹⁶⁰ Kami Fletcher, "The History of African American Undertaking in Baltimore," *Black Perspectives (Blog)*, November 2015.

Locks never lists himself in any directory or census as an undertaker, but rather as a caulker in the 1860s and a hackman and President of the Chesapeake Railway Company in the 1870s until his death in 1881. However, there are numerous death certificates as early as 1875 with the name John W. Locks signed as the individual serving as undertaker.¹⁶¹ In a newspaper notice announcing the death of John W. Locks' grandson, Joseph G. Locks, he is mentioned as the "leading undertaker in the city during the Civil War."¹⁶² Even if John W. Locks did not ever list himself as an undertaker, he certainly took up that role with such frequency that the black community of Baltimore recognized him as such.

Impact of Jim Crow on the Board of Undertakers of Maryland Licensing

The act that established the Board of Undertakers of Maryland makes no mention of exclusion of blacks from practicing undertaking in Baltimore nor subjection of black undertakers to different standards in order to register and obtain licensure from the board. Although the board minutes do not show any apparent evidence of mistreatment of black undertakers in its by-laws, black undertakers were subject to the practices of Jim Crow. The funeral industry was infected with the disease of Jim Crow since its inception. Within the BOU, one of the most consistent examples of Jim Crow is shown during licensing examinations of apprentices looking to become full-fledged undertakers.

¹⁶¹ Board of Health, City of Baltimore, Certificate of Death for Mary Cooper, February 5, 1875, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁶² "Prominent Undertakers Passes Away," *Baltimore Afro-American*, July 15, 1911, Afro American Archives.

According to the board minutes, examinations were given two times a year. There were two parts to the examination, a topographical and practical. The topographical examination was a written exam that tested the applicant's knowledge of undertaking. All applicants were required to pass with a score of 75% or better. The practice examination tested the applicant's ability to "raise an artery" of a deceased person, a skill necessary to perform proper embalming. Black apprentices could not take either examination with white apprentices. White apprentices took their examinations during the morning, while black apprentices took theirs in the evening or the following day. Joseph G. Locks took his exam in 1907. On April 23, 1908 the BOU approved his licensure having passed his examinations.¹⁶³

One of the earliest issues in terms of race that the BOU minutes show in the records is the establishment of a separate school of instruction for black undertakers. The passing of the 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which led to separate, but equal legislation, extended into nearly every realm of American society. As the BOU continued to develop and establish laws in the protection of the profession, educational requirements for undertakers were beginning to be formalized. More than the traditional apprenticeship would be required.

In 1910 the BOU began to change educational requirements of their applicants in order to keep up with the evolving trends in the funeral industry and advancements towards professionalization. Prior to the establishment of formal embalming schools, there were individuals, some of them medical doctors, who specialized in embalming

¹⁶³ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, April 23, 1908, Maryland State Archives.

instruction. These individuals held courses in anatomy, chemistry, and embalming, which last from two days to three weeks.¹⁶⁴ Many funeral home owners did not have access to those courses because it required them to leave their business for days at a time. To have embalming performed, many had to hire a “trade embalmer.” These individuals would go to different establishments offering embalming services to those untrained in the art.¹⁶⁵

Whether embalming instruction came through the traveling instruction or trade publication, the NFDA always had first access to new knowledge and innovations in the field. Members could receive instruction at the annual convention be it at the state or national level. In the case of Maryland, undertaker members of the state board were all members of the NFDA and certainly would have received embalming instruction. In the annual financial reports sent to the State of Maryland and the NDFA trade publications, *The Casket* and *Sunnyside* are shown on the accounts. These publications are only available to members of the organization. The board members furthered the agenda of the NFDA, turning what was once merely ethical code into law and the professionalization of the field.¹⁶⁶

Embalming education was an important step to transform the undertaking trade into a specialized field. Prior to 1910 the state board requirements for embalming instruction was a two-year apprenticeship under a licensed undertaker. Before a school for embalming was established, one could receive instruction from a medical institution.

¹⁶⁴ Robert G. Mayer, *Embalming: History, Theory, and Practice. 4th Ed.* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 487.

¹⁶⁵ Mayer, *Embalming*, 484.

¹⁶⁶ *Board of Undertakers Minutes, Annual Income and Expense Reports 1902- 1935*, Maryland State Archives.

For example, Katie Williams, was the first black woman to receive her license from the state board outside of the surviving spouse clause. This clause allowed widows of male undertakers to continue business operations after the passing of their husband. Williams received her embalming instruction from Johns Hopkins School of Embalming according to her obituary.¹⁶⁷

On September 15, 1910, the BOU formed a counsel for school of instruction. The purpose of the counsel was to advise the board and licensees on the matter of education in the undertaking field. The question was posed to the counsel when addressing the progress of the establishing of a school, “Could you exclude colored persons from this school?” The response comes in typical legal fashion, “We beg to state the board cannot discriminate between white and colored race; we do not mean by this that you must establish a mixed school, but you must afford the same opportunities of instruction to colored people as you do to the whites and equal facilities must be afforded.”¹⁶⁸ This was not a reflection of the board’s interest in solidarity with black practitioner, but the legal obligation to uphold the Supreme Court *Plessy v Ferguson* decision of separate, but equal. In response to this assessment, the board formed a committee to ascertain the possibility of establishing a “school of instruction in embalming for colored applicants.”¹⁶⁹ The committee reached out to Winfield Winsey, a black doctor at the Provident Hospital in West Baltimore.

¹⁶⁷ “Final Rites for Mrs. Katie Williams Draw 3,000,” *Afro-American*, January 26, 1963, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁶⁸ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, September 20, 1910, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁶⁹ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, September 23, 1910, Maryland State Archives.

Established in 1894 by eight black doctors, Provident Hospital was the only hospital in the city of Baltimore where black doctors could practice and the only facility where blacks could receive dignified healthcare.¹⁷⁰ Provident already held a training school for black nurses making it the ideal facility for the instruction of black embalmers. A letter sent to the board by Winsey, expressed great enthusiasm to establishing the school at Provident Hospital after consulting his colleagues Dr. William T. Carr and Dr. Harry S. McCard stating, “They heartily approve the effort to elevate the standard of the state undertaker profession. They are willing to work along lines to be followed by those whom you are associated with in this matter.”¹⁷¹ The willingness of these black doctors and Provident Hospital staff went so as to offer a separate building in for anatomical instruction and a room for chemistry and bacteriology. Although the enthusiasm was received by the board the establishment of the school never past tentative stages.

From 1902-1935 blacks in the undertaking profession increased in number. In 1902, black undertakers practicing in the city of Baltimore numbered twenty-one. By 1923, thirty-three blacks were licensed undertaker in the city and by 1931, forty-six were licensed. The increase in number did so very slowly over time, this however was not due to any known efforts by the board to hinder growth.

¹⁷⁰ Yolanda A. Bean, “Upholding Black Life and Dignity in the Eleventh Ward: The Establishment of Provident Hospital and Other Business, Organization, and Institutions in Segregated Baltimore, MD 1894 to 1930” (MA Thesis, Morgan State University, 2010.), 21.

¹⁷¹ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, September 29, 1910, Maryland State Archives.

Summary

Examination of the Maryland Board of Undertaker's (BOU's) records at the Maryland State Archives was very revealing. With the establishment of the board the undertaking trade became both regulated and professionalized in the state of Maryland. The records explain in detail how the profession was regulated by the Board of Undertakers. Beginning in 1902, the Maryland General Assembly called for the establishment of a state regulated body that would oversee all activity related to undertaking; the funeralization, preparation and burial of the deceased person ("funeralization" is the preparation, and burial of deceased people). With the establishment of the BOU, black undertakers were required to pass both exams to become licensed. Being licensed do not afford the black undertakers the same access to additional continuing educational opportunities and fair treatment when it came to obtain a license.

The board records at the Maryland State Archives span from 1902 to 1937, when the BOU was reorganized to the Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers of Maryland. The number of blacks licensed by the board to practice are recorded. With this information we can see the rise and decline in the number of blacks practicing from the establishment of the board prior to integration. This primary resource has never been analyzed or researched for historical purposes and provides a unique opportunity to explore the undertaking trade in Baltimore.

CHAPTER 6: Black Women in Funeral Service

Introduction

In our history, there are endless narratives and accounts, many of which are still waiting to be told. These narratives become even more complicated with the addition of race and gender added to the picture. The study of African American funeral homes and funeral directors is one that is still in its embryonic stages, but the story of the women involved in the African American funeral home is almost nonexistent, having almost no narrative of its own. It can be argued that without the contributions of these women the longevity of their family businesses would have been limited. Through this chapter we will see how the roles of the women within funeral history evolved, the contributions of these women in the background of one of Baltimore's black community's most successful businesses, and also the role of women in the family business.

Preparation of the Dead

The examination of black women in funeral service begins in their early roles with preparation of the dead. Well before the Civil War, the rise of commercial embalming, and funeral undertaking in America began showing signs of developing into an occupation, the preparation and care of the dead was entrusted to friends and neighbors, primarily women. According to Lamer and Haberstein's *History of American Funeral Directing* the women "would develop a rough skill in laying out the dead, or, over a period of years would have given assistance often enough to feel an informal

responsibility to offer their services”.¹⁷² When there was no lady of the house, a nurse or midwife was employed to carry out preparation.

By the early nineteenth century, there is evidence of some women carving out a niche for themselves in the preparations of the dead. Those with skills found success in large cities, such as Philadelphia and Baltimore, and advertised their services as “shrouders” or “layers out of the dead.” According to Karol Weaver, these women closed mouths and eyes, removed organs, blocked orifices, and filled cavities with charcoal to retard purification. Their work allowed family members and friends to view their loved ones with minimal revulsion. These skills of handling remains, then preparing them for funeral and burial rites, was passed down generationally.¹⁷³ While rites and practices varied according to one’s beliefs and culture, women often times dealt with the strenuous task of preparing the dead. This meant preparing mangled bodies from accidents or war, bodies plagued with disease, and small children.

On the North American plantation black men, women, and children were sold to white masters. Not only were blacks forced to toil in the fields and homes of their masters, blacks were also forced to abandon their culture and traditions, and assimilate to that of their masters. One of the many practices absorbed was the death practices of their masters. It was not an uncommon practice for black women, often house slaves, to participate in the preparation of their dead masters and relatives. Within the black slave

¹⁷² Haberstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, 146.

¹⁷³ Karol Weaver, “Funeral and Burial Practices,” *The Encyclopedia of Great Philadelphia*, last modified July 16, 2016, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/category/karol-kovalovich-weaver/>.

community, death was a community event with its own practices and traditions from their African past and now a blend of Judeo-Christian practices of their masters. For the slaves, the sacredness of the body was apparent as it contained the link to their ancestral home. Once death occurred, whether at the hand of the oppressors or time, the body was placed in the hands of black women to be washed and wrapped, often with a white sheet or whatever they could spare. At the moment of death, which was often signaled by a loud wail from the family members, the women of the slave household were most often called upon to prepare the deceased for burial.¹⁷⁴

Henrietta Duterte—First Black Female Undertaker

Following the Civil War and the birth of emancipation, black men and women sought to make a new life for themselves as freed people with the skills they acquired during slavery to acquire funds, build institutions, and start businesses. The business of undertaking was a lucrative field open to blacks due to the racial divide that plagued the nation. The first woman to take up undertaking according to written record was a black woman, Henrietta Smith Bower Duterte of Philadelphia.¹⁷⁵

Henrietta Duterte was born in 1817 to a free black family in Philadelphia. Duterte was one of thirteen children born to John and Henrietta Bowers who previously lived in Baltimore prior to settling in Philadelphia in 1910. Her father worked as a sexton for the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia,

¹⁷⁴ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 28.

¹⁷⁵ Walker, *The History of Black Business in America*, 129.

suggesting her exposure to various aspects of undertaking throughout her life. In her adult life, she worked as a seamstress making garments for the middle and upper class.

In 1852 Duterte married a Haitian born coffin maker named Francis Duterte. Francis Duterte was involved in an organization called, Moral Reform Retreat, which focused on supporting equal rights for women and abolition of slavery. When her husband passed away in 1858, she defied gender norms by not only taking over her husband's business, but then continuing operation of the business in her own name. By doing this Duterte became the first female undertaker in the city and the nation. A surviving document, donated to The Library Company of Philadelphia, has this heading "To H.S. Duterte, Dr.; General Furnishing Undertaker, Address No. 838 Lombard Street."¹⁷⁶

Duterte, just as her husband, was involved in abolition becoming an agent of the underground railroad. According to historian Euell Nielsen,¹⁷⁷ in order to protect those blacks being hunted under the Fugitive Slave Act, Duterte would often times hide runaways in coffins and funeral processions to grant them safe passage through the city. Duterte was also a supporter of her community through philanthropic efforts. For example, she helped financially support the AME Church of St. Thomas as well as providing support to the Stephen Smith's Philadelphia Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons. In 1866 Duterte also helped create the Freedman's Aid Society Fair to assist formerly enslaved people in Tennessee. During her time as a business owner she

¹⁷⁶ Euell Nelson, "Duterte, Henrietta S. Bowers (1817-1903)" Black Past, last modified 2017. <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/duterte-henrietta-s-bowers-1817-1903>.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

conducted a successful business that brought in eight thousand dollars a year burying both blacks and whites. At the time of her passing in 1903, her estate included the undertaking business, hearses, horses, carriages, burial lots in four cemeteries, and houses.¹⁷⁸

From Duterte's life some similarities can be identified as attributes to early black female undertakers. One similarity is her early involvement in the business as the wife of an undertaker. The first women to own undertaking businesses married into profession, taking full control of them at the passing of their husbands. Each of Baltimore's first black female undertakers Edna Locks, Martha Dungee, Elizabeth Elliott, and Helen Holland were all wives of undertakers.

According to *To Serve the Living*, the black funeral industry created the job of the female funeral attendant, often called first lady or mortician nurse, to assist in the management of decorum and grief during the service.¹⁷⁹ Originally, the first lady assisted in the bathing and preparation of the deceased for burial. With the advent of embalming the "first lady" became more of an assistant to the bereaved family. Smith states the first lady was often the wife of a mortician and was expected to be emotionally sensitive and skilled in first aid.

James Thomas, the leading black undertaker in New York City during the early 1900s, observed new developments in the field. In 1900 funeral directing was beginning to require formal training and a license from the state where one practiced. He also noted

¹⁷⁸ Euell Nelson, "Duterte, Henrietta S. Bowers (1817-1903)" Black Past, last modified 2017. <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/duterte-henrietta-s-bowers-1817-1903>.

¹⁷⁹ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 86.

that the field was also open to the “lady mortician” whose duty was to prepare for burial the bodies of the women and children.¹⁸⁰

Booker T. Washington, in his examination of black undertakers, notes the accomplishments of the prestigious undertaker. He takes care to mention their humble beginning and the acquisition of wealth. Washington also takes care to mention the wives of these men. For example, after noting Preston Taylors’ accomplishments Booker T. Washington notes Taylor’s wife by stating, “in all his efforts he has the aid of his wife.”¹⁸¹ In another example William M. Porter of Cincinnati, Ohio, started as a hackman before making the transition to undertaker. His wife, Miss Davis, is mentioned by Washington as one whose “effort and judgement much of his success is due.”¹⁸²

Martha Dungee—First BOU Licensed Black Woman

The first black woman recognized by the BOU to practice is that of Martha Dungee. Although there is little documentation concerning her life, we find some information from her obituary notice in the *Baltimore Afro American Newspaper*. Her husband, William Dungee, was one of the earliest black undertakers in Baltimore practicing as early as 1865. William Dungee taught undertaking and cabinet making to the aforementioned Alexander Hemsley, one of the most successful black undertakers of the early 1900s who carried on until the 1960’s. Martha Dungee received her license

¹⁸⁰ Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 86.

¹⁸¹ Washington, *The Negro In Business*, 103.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 96.

from the BOU upon its inception in 1902. According to her obituary she was a well-known resident of East Baltimore and founder of the Miriam Court of Nazarites.¹⁸³

Edna Locks—Business Owner and Family Mentor

Edna (Francis) Locks was married to Joseph Locks in 1904, both were members of Water AME Church.¹⁸⁴ When Joseph Locks passed suddenly in 1911 from appendicitis, Edna Locks took over the family business. Having only been married for seven years and a young woman herself, she was now at the helm of the oldest and most successful undertaking families in the city of Baltimore. During her seven years of marriage it was necessary for her to learn the business, assist her husband in his duties and maintain operations in his absence. Shortly after the death of her husband, Locks petitioned the Board of Undertakers to continue the business.

In November of 1911, the BOU granted her permission to continue the business of her late husband.¹⁸⁵ She maintained management and ownership of the business for more than thirty years before her son, Joseph Locks, Jr., received his license to practice and was ready to take over the business. Often is the task of the wife of the business to pass on the nuances as well as the overall knowledge of the business. With the passing of her husband, she became sole proprietor of a successful business while maintaining her responsibilities at home as a mother. According to Joseph Locks, Jr., everything he learned in the business he owed to her.¹⁸⁶ Because of his mother's mentorship, Joseph

¹⁸³ "Funeral for Mrs. Mary Dungee," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 9, 1914, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁸⁴ *Baltimore Afro-American, 1904*, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁸⁵ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, November 14, 1911, Maryland State Archives.

¹⁸⁶ *Baltimore Sun*, April 23, 2003.

Locks, Jr. continued to operate a successful business for over seventy years until his death in 2003. Locks Funeral Homes is still in operation today.

Similar to Edna Locks, the majority of women became involved in the business or trade of undertaking because their husbands or fathers were actively involved. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a small number of women were involved in the business, often times managing or owning the business, in addition to performing key aspects of undertaking, including embalming. Several were active members of the National Business League and the National Negro Undertakers Association.

It is not unusual to associate women with the gruesome task of embalming. We like to think of them as nurses, as gentle angels ministering to dying humanity, and then leaving the sterner task of post mortem arrangements to men. But scores of colored women have gone beyond the death bed to the cemetery and managed successful undertaking establishments. They graduate from schools of embalming and do their own embalming, if necessary, in addition to owning their own cars, hearses, morgues, and mortuary chambers.¹⁸⁷

Those women who were engaged in the funeral business carried the mantle of other female entrepreneurial pioneers. The funeral business was one entity that provided females with an available means of demonstrating their business prowess. Edna Locks presents a model of early black female undertakers. From Edna Locks' example we find an important dynamic woman played in the family business as well as the

¹⁸⁷ *Minutes of the Silver Jubilee and Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the National Negro Business League and Affiliated Organizations* (Nashville: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1924), 176.

interconnectivity between the funeral home and the family home. Hence, the link between the funeral establishment as place of business and family home.

Elizabeth Elliott—Wife, Business Woman, Partner

Another example of Baltimore's early black female undertaker is that of Elizabeth Elliott. Elizabeth Elliott and her husband, Robert Elliot, ran a successful undertaking business together for over 20 years in the city of Baltimore. After receiving his training from John Jordan, one of Baltimore's earliest black undertakers, Robert worked for William Hickman's undertaking firm for thirteen years. With the assistance of his wife, Robert quickly became one of the busiest black undertakers in Baltimore. Elizabeth "worked indefatigably in helping him build the business."¹⁸⁸ Aside from her domestic duties as a mother and wife, she spent her time assisting her husband in all aspects of the business. The success of their business was due to the "untiring energy and business tact of his wife."¹⁸⁹ Through her years of experience, she was able to successfully manage the business.

Elizabeth was no stranger to the undertaking business. Having family ties to undertaking prior to her marriage made her an invaluable business woman and partner. Her brothers, Felix and Edward Pye also ran a very successful undertaking firm in Baltimore. When Robert Elliott passed in April of 1916, Elizabeth petitioned the State Board of Undertakers to continue their business and received her license to practice in

¹⁸⁸ "Robert Elliott Funeral," *Baltimore Afro-American*, April 8, 1916, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁸⁹ "Mrs. Elliott to continue Business," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 20, 1916, Afro-American Archives.

May of 1916. She had the assistance of her son in law, Charles Jones, who was a former apprentice under her husband and successful undertaker in his own right, and her brother, Edward Pye. It is also important to note that in 1923 Elizabeth took over operation of her brother, Felix Pye's firm, after he was unable to continue for a time.

However, rumors quickly manifested that Elizabeth formed a partnership with an employee, Leon Hall, and her son-in-law Charles Jones. Numerous times over the years Elizabeth felt the need to place statements in her advertisements with the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper reaffirming her role as sole proprietorship of her business. In one example, when Elizabeth confirmed her succession of the business, she adamantly stated that "no one is connected with me in this business. I am conducting the same absolutely myself."¹⁹⁰ It is more likely that she contracted his and other undertaker's services for embalming and/or funeral directing when the need arose.

Katie Williams—First Black Woman as Independent Licensed Undertaker

In the early 1900s the undertaking profession was dominated by men and the few women that did own their own business inherited them from their husbands. For a woman to enter the undertaking business on her own, with no inheritance from her husband or father, was a rarity. In March of 1920, Katie Williams was the first black woman in the state of Maryland to receive her license to practice undertaking via examination.¹⁹¹ Her husband, Clarence Williams, joined her in the business, earned his undertaker license, and served as her business associate until his death in 1926. Katie Williams was born in

¹⁹⁰ "Mrs. Elliott to continue Business," *Baltimore Afro-American*, May 20, 1916, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁹¹ *Board of Undertakers Minutes*, March 1920, Maryland State Archives.

1890 in Baltimore, Maryland, to William and Mamie Ringgold. She graduated from Johns Hopkins School of Embalming and was a founding member of Funeral Directors and Morticians Association of Maryland, which was the professional organization for blacks. Williams held affiliations with a number of community organizations and beneficial societies. She was often praised for her acts of charity and “the seriousness and devotion she placed upon her professional responsibility.”¹⁹²

Helen Holland—Sole Proprietor, Undertaker, Mentor

Helen Holland became sole proprietor of the business when her husband, George Holland, passed away in 1923. Holland and her husband were in the undertaking business together for over twenty years, achieving notoriety for their work during the influenza epidemic of 1920. They moved their business several times to accommodate the increased need for a larger funeral chapel in order to “serve our people better.”¹⁹³ During the epidemic, they held the reputation as having one of the finest chapels and most sanitary morgues in the city. After the epidemic, George fell ill from the strenuous work or possibly contracting a disease. While he was ill, Helen, with the help of her brother George Gibson, an undertaker, and the assistance of her nephew, Monicure Brown, kept the business intact and thriving.

Helen took complete control of the business when she received her license from the board in 1923. She was instrumental in the mentorship of several undertakers

¹⁹² “Funeral Rites for Mrs. Katie Williams Draw 3,000,” *Baltimore-Afro American*, Jan 26, 1963, Afro-American Archives.

¹⁹³ “Mrs Holland Filled Place Husband Left,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Oct 27, 1928, Afro-American Archives.

including her nephew. She put him through mortuary school, so he could learn “modern embalming and plastic surgery” keeping up with advancements in the industry.¹⁹⁴ Once he received his license from the BOU in 1926, Helen placed him in her services. Helen’s most notable apprentice, Herbert Nutter, became one of the most able funeral directors in Baltimore during the 1970s, eventually merging with what is in 2018 Howell Funeral Home.¹⁹⁵

Summary

This chapter reviewed the virtually untouched topic of black women in funeral services. The vital role that these women have played in funeral business is overshadowed by the male dominated industry. In Baltimore, most of the early black undertakers were all men who commanded wealth and community influence. When they passed away, if their male heir was not of age or not capable of carrying on the family business, the daily operation and affairs of business often fell to the spouse. Many of these black women maintained their family business and did so with great success. Within the Locks Family, there is a strong narrative of black women who took the helm of the family business. This chapter brings to light the women in the Locks family and other successful black female undertakers in the city of Baltimore.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ “Herber Nutter” *Baltimore Sun*, March 14, 2006, Baltimore Sun Archives.

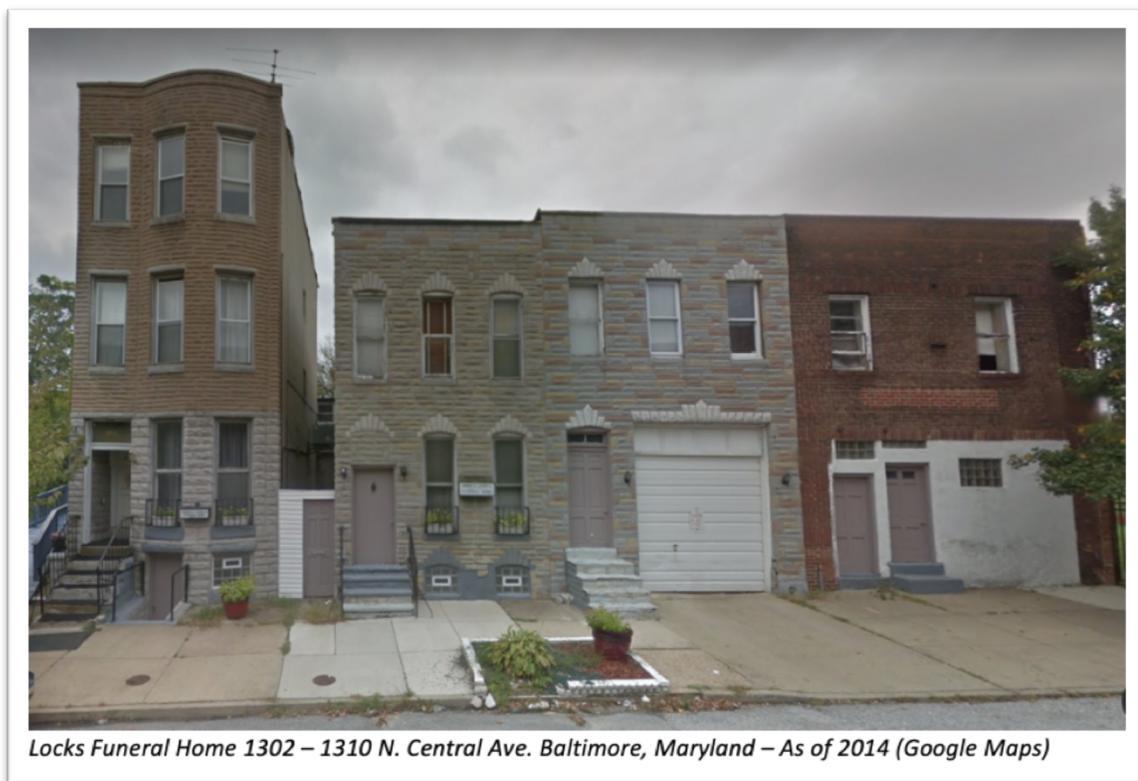
CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

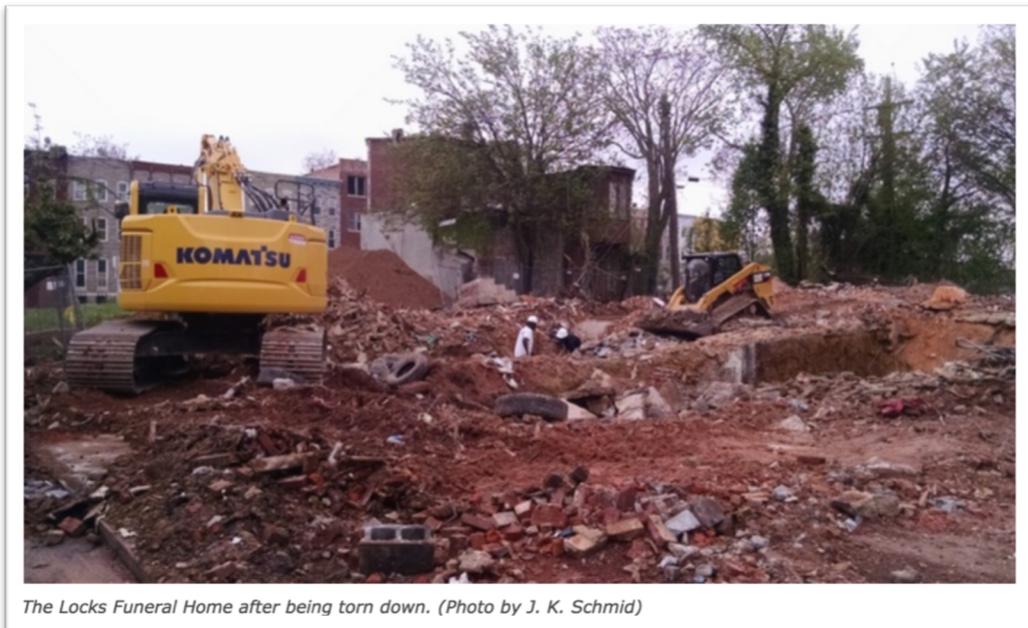
From slavery to freedom blacks have sought to have their cultural needs met particularly in the personal aspects of their life. The businesses that provided these personal services found success due to segregation, discrimination, and disrespect by the white community. The black undertaker is one of these businesses that developed out of necessity. Black men and women undertakers went into business not just for personal gain alone, but also to provide services that adhered to the community's cultural needs pertaining to burial and funeral practices. By providing such services black undertakers eliminated the communities need to seek out a white undertaker for burial or embalming services.

Through the lens of Joseph Locks Funeral Home and several other funeral home establishments, a piece of Baltimore's black funeral history is revealed. The founder of Joseph Locks Funeral Home, John W. Locks, negotiated a space in which he and his family prospered for generations. With his already successful hack business Locks built a successful funeral business that still operates in Baltimore, Maryland after 157 years. As a funeral director he built an enterprise that served his community. Locks worked with other undertakers in Baltimore City, building strong bonds of cooperation which benefited all parties involved. The foundation of these cooperative partnerships still exists today in the form of Maryland chapter of the National Funeral Director and Morticians Association. Locks worked with other leaders of the community to benefit the black communities of Baltimore and Maryland, a trend which his descendants and fellow undertakers followed.

John Locks and his descendants navigated through the evolving professional landscape of the funeral industry. The State Board of Undertakers established laws that transformed the family of undertakers from tradesmen to professional licensees. Edna Locks took advantage of the laws to take over the family business and obtain licensure after the passing of her husband. Edna Lock's transition to sole proprietor made her one of the first black women in Maryland to own and manage a funeral home. Defying the stereotype of women in undertaking, Edna Locks set the example for other black women to follow.

Joseph Locks Funeral Home, the oldest black business in America closed its premises and buildings were torn down April 19, 2017.





While the business is still in operation under the supervision of longtime employee Cynthia Galmore, time and circumstance were major contributors to the business' decline. Joseph Locks III, the heir apparent to the family business, passed away from cancer in 1992. It's an all too familiar occurrence in small family businesses, the succession plan often falls to the next generation. With the passing of Joseph Lock III the slow decline of the funeral home began. Although the Joseph Locks Jr. Funeral Home no longer physically stands, the institution and its family will forever be embedded in Baltimore history, funeral history, and black history.

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APPENDIX: List of Colored Undertakers in Baltimore City

Colored Funeral Directors (Undertakers) and Embalmers in Baltimore City

1901 (Polk Directory)¹⁹⁶

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Toy Askins | 13. William Gray |
| 2. Chase Bailey | 14. Geo. Handy |
| 3. John A. Bishop | 15. William Jackson |
| 4. I.L. Brown | 16. Joseph Locks |
| 5. Isaac Brown | 17. William Madden |
| 6. Edward Bryan | 18. Robert Parham |
| 7. Samuel Chase | 19. Felix Pye |
| 8. James Dennis | 20. Hercules Ross |
| 9. Martha Dungee | 21. William Scribner |
| 10. Dan Earles | 22. John Toadvin |
| 11. Robert Elliot | 23. James Williams |
| 12. Richard Gross | 24. Alex. Hemsley |

1902 (Polk Directory)

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. William Armistead | 14. Alexander Hemsley (livery and undertaker) |
| 2. Chase G. Bailey | 15. Samuel T. Hemsley |
| 3. John A. Bishop | 16. William J.G. Jackson |
| 4. I.L. Brown and Son (Isaiah L. and Morris) | 17. Joseph C Locks and Son (Joseph G.) |
| 5. Isaac Brown | 18. Joseph G. Locks |
| 6. Edward Bryan | 19. William W. Madden |
| 7. Samuel W. Chase | 20. Robert L. Parham |
| 8. Samuel W. Chase Jr. | 21. Edward W. Pye |
| 9. James H. Dennis (blacksmith and Undertaker) | 22. Felix Pye |
| 10. Martha A. Dungee | 23. Hercules Ross |
| 11. Robert A. Elliott | 24. William B. Scribner |
| 12. William J. Gray (Serena H. Gray) | 25. John H. Toadvin |
| 13. George A. Handy | 26. James W. Wilson |

¹⁹⁶ Ralph L. Polk, *Polk Baltimore City Directories 1901-1902*. Detroit, Michigan: R.L. Polk & Company, 1870

Board of Undertakers Black Licensees¹⁹⁷**1902**

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Alex Hemsley | 12. Isaac Brown |
| 2. Theo White | 13. Hercules Ross |
| 3. Edward Bryan | 14. John A. Bishop |
| 4. John H. Toadvin | 15. Robert A. Elliot |
| 5. Chase G. Bailey | 16. William W. Madden |
| 6. Felix B. Pye | 17. William J. G. Jackson |
| 7. Joseph C. Locks | 18. John Lloyd |
| 8. Clarence Wright | 19. Isaiah Brown and Son |
| 9. Samuel W. Chase | 20. John Owens and Son |
| 10. Mrs. William Gray | 21. William Johnson |
| 11. George Handy | |

1903

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Samuel Chase | 9. John Lloyd |
| 2. James Dennis | 10. Jos. Locks and Son (Jos. G) |
| 3. Martha Dungee | 11. William Madden |
| 4. Robert Elliot | 12. John Owen and Sn |
| 5. William Gray | 13. Felix Pye |
| 6. Alex. Hemsley | 14. John Toadvin |
| 7. William Jackson | 15. Theo. White |
| 8. William Johnson | |

1906

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Chase Bailey | 12. George Hooper |
| 2. John Bishop | 13. William Jackson |
| 3. Isaac Brown | 14. William Johnson |
| 4. Isaiah Brown | 15. John H. Owens and Son |
| 5. Edward Bryan | 16. John J. Owens |
| 6. Samuel Chase | 17. John Toadvin |
| 7. Robert Elliot | 18. Theo White |
| 8. Alfred Freeland | 19. Clarence Wright |
| 9. William Gray | 20. Felix Pye |
| 10. George Holland | 21. John Lloyd |
| 11. Alex Hemsley | 22. James Dennis |

¹⁹⁷ Maryland State Archive, *Board of Undertaker Minutes 1902-1935*

1907

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Isaac Brown | 13. Alex Hemsley |
| 2. Edward Pye | 14. Clarence Wright |
| 3. William Jackson | 15. James Dennis |
| 4. George Holland | 16. Felix Pye Sr |
| 5. Chase Bailey | 17. John A. Bishop |
| 6. R. Elliott | 18. Felix Pye Jr |
| 7. R. Parham & Co | 19. Isaiah Brown & Son |
| 8. John Owens & Co | 20. John Lloyd |
| 9. Samuel Chase & Co | 21. William Johnson |
| 10. H. Hughes | 22. Geo Hooper |
| 11. Sam. Hemsley | 23. William Scribner |
| 12. John Toadvin | |

1908

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Geo Holland | 13. Clarence Wright |
| 2. Theo White | 14. Alfred Freeland |
| 3. Felix Pye Jr | 15. John Toadvin |
| 4. Wm Jackson | 16. Edward Pye |
| 5. Isaiah Brown Jr | 17. WJ Johnson |
| 6. Isaac Brown | 18. John Lloyd |
| 7. Alex Hemsley | 19. John Owens & Son |
| 8. Chase Bailey | 20. Sam Hemsley |
| 9. Geo Holland | 21. John Bishop |
| 10. Theo White | 22. Geo Hooper |
| 11. R. Parham | 23. Joseph G. Locks |
| 12. R. Elliott | |

1909

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. R. Parham | 12. R. Elliot |
| 2. Wm JG Jackson | 13. Edward Pye |
| 3. Theo White | 14. Alex. Hemsley |
| 4. Jos. Locks | 15. J. Toadvin |
| 5. John Owens & Co | 16. G. Hooper |
| 6. Felix Pye Jr | 17. Wm Johnson |
| 7. Felix Pye Sr | 18. Isaac Brown |
| 8. Isaiah Brown & Son | 19. John Bishop |
| 9. A. Freeland | 20. Sam Hemsley |
| 10. Ch. Bailey | 21. Geo Holland |
| 11. Sam Chase & Son | |

1910

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. G. Holland | 12. Isaac Brown |
| 2. A. Hemsley | 13. R. Elliott |
| 3. G. Hooper | 14. A. Freeland |
| 4. F. Pye Sr | 15. J. Dennis |
| 5. F. Pye Jr | 16. C. Wright |
| 6. C. Bailey | 17. William Johnson |
| 7. J. Owens & Son | 18. J. Toadvin |
| 8. R. Parham & Son | 19. Joseph Owens |
| 9. S. Chase & Son | 20. John Bishop |
| 10. Isaiah Brown & Son | 21. S. Hemsley |
| 11. W. JG Jackson | 22. James Hayes |

1911

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Isaiah Brown | 12. J Owens & Son |
| 2. Isaac Brown | 13. F. Pye Sr |
| 3. Ch. Bailey | 14. F Pye Jr |
| 4. Sam Chase | 15. R. Parham |
| 5. James Dennis | 16. J. Toadvin |
| 6. R. Elliott | 17. Theo White |
| 7. A. Freeland | 18. C. Wright |
| 8. A. Hemsley | 19. John Bishop |
| 9. W. JG Jackson | 20. G. Hooper |
| 10. Wm Johnson | 21. G. Holland |
| 11. Jos Locks | 22. J. Hayes |

1912

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ch. Bailey | 12. Mrs. Joseph Locks |
| 2. Isaiah Brown | 13. J. Owens & Son |
| 3. Sam Chase & Son | 14. Felix Pye Jr |
| 4. R. Elliott | 15. Felix Pye Sr |
| 5. A. Freeland | 16. J. Toadvin |
| 6. G. Hooper | 17. Harry Vodery |
| 7. A. Hemsley | 18. C. Wright |
| 8. J. Hayes | 19. Theo White |
| 9. G. Holland | 20. Isaac Brown |
| 10. W JG Jackson | 21. Sam Hemsley |
| 11. W. Johnson | |

1913

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Sam Chase | 12. Geo Hooper |
| 2. A. Freeland | 13. Geo Holland |
| 3. Alex Hemsley | 14. Wm Johnson |
| 4. Sam Hemsley | 15. Mrs. Jos. Locks |
| 5. W JG Jackson | 16. John Owens |
| 6. Theo White | 17. Felix Pye Jr |
| 7. Isaiah Brown & Son | 18. John Toadvin |
| 8. Isaac Brown | 19. H. Vodery |
| 9. Ch. Bailey | 20. Ch. Wright |
| 10. John Bishop | 21. Charles Johnson |
| 11. J. Dennis | |

1914

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Isaiah Brown & Son | 15. Wm Johnson |
| 2. Ch. Bailey | 16. John Owens |
| 3. Sam Chase & Son | 17. John Toadvin |
| 4. Alex Hemsley | 18. Clarence Wright |
| 5. Sam Hemsley | 19. John Bishop |
| 6. Geo Hooper | 20. William Jackson |
| 7. Mrs. Jos Locks | 21. Milton Davis |
| 8. Felix Pye | 22. Wilburt Brown |
| 9. Harry Vodery | 23. John Johnson |
| 10. Theo White | 24. George Gibson |
| 11. James Dennis | 25. Chris Johnson |
| 12. R. Elliot | 26. Edward Ringgold |
| 13. A. Freeland | 27. Charles Jones |
| 14. G. Holland | |

1915

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Ch. Bailey | 15. Alex Hemsley |
| 2. S. Chase | 16. Sam Hemsley |
| 3. R. Elliot | 17. Geo Holland |
| 4. G. Hooper | 18. John Toadvin |
| 5. W. JG Jackson | 19. Edward Ringgold |
| 6. Mrs Jos. Locks | 20. R. J, Norrell |
| 7. John Owens | 21. Joseph Roechester |
| 8. Felix Pye | 22. Milton Davis |
| 9. H. Vodery | 23. John Johnson |

10. Theo White
11. Clarence Wright
12. John Bishop
13. Isaiah Brown & Son
14. James Dennis

24. Wilburt Brown
25. Geo. Gibson
26. Chris Johnson
27. Charles Jones

1916

1. Mrs. Robert Elliot
2. Geo Hooper
3. Felix Pye
4. H. Vodery
5. J. Bishop
6. C. Bailey
7. Isaiah Brown & Son
8. Sam Chase & Son
9. Mrs. Joseph Locks
10. John Owens
11. Clarence Wright
12. James Dennis
13. A. Freeland
14. Geo Holland

15. Wm JG Jackson
16. Theo White
17. E. Ringgold
18. S. Hemsley
19. J. Toadvin
20. Milton Davis
21. John Johnson
22. George Gibson
23. Chris Johnson
24. Jos. Roechester
25. Joseph Owens
26. Charles Jones
27. R. J. Norrell
28. Wilburt Brown

1917

1. Sam Chase
2. Isaiah Brown & Son
3. Mrs. R. Elliott
4. Geo Hooper
5. Wm JG Jackson
6. Edward Pye
7. Felix Pye
8. Edward Ringgold
9. James Dennis
10. Brown And Freeland
11. Theo White
12. Harry Vodery
13. John Toadvin
14. Clarence Wright
15. Sam Hemsley
16. John Bishop

17. Geo Holland
18. John Owens
19. Mrs. Locks
20. Bernard Hemsley
21. Milton Davis
22. John Johnson
23. Wilburt Brown
24. Jos. Roechester
25. Jos. Owens
26. Ch. Jones
27. Chris Johnson
28. R. Parham
29. R. J. Norrell
30. Brown And Freeland
31. James Dennis

1918

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Isaiah Brown & Son | 17. Geo Gibson |
| 2. Brown and Freeland | 18. Sam Hemsley |
| 3. Mrs. R. Elliot | 19. Geo Holland |
| 4. Geo Hooper | 20. Charles Jones |
| 5. Wm JG Jackson | 21. Milton Davis |
| 6. Chris Johnson | 22. John Owens |
| 7. R.J. Norrell | 23. Edward Ringgold |
| 8. R. Parham | 24. John Toadvin |
| 9. Felix Pye | 25. Theo White |
| 10. H. Vodery | 26. B. Hemsley |
| 11. Clarence Wright | 27. James Skinner |
| 12. Jos. Rochester | 28. Charles Young |
| 13. Joseph Owens | 29. Earl Bundy |
| 14. John Bishop | 30. Walter Spriggs |
| 15. Sam Chase & Son | 31. Charles Alexander |
| 16. J. Dennis | 32. Mrs. Jos. Locks |

1919

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. John Bishop | 18. RL Parham |
| 2. Charles Bailey | 19. Felix Pye |
| 3. Brown & Freeland | 20. Edward Ringgold |
| 4. Isaiah Brown & Son | 21. Theo White |
| 5. James Davis | 22. Harry Vodery |
| 6. Sam Chase & Son | 23. John Toadvin |
| 7. Geo Gibson | 24. Clarence Wright |
| 8. Sam Hemsley | 25. B. Hemsley |
| 9. James Hayes | 26. Jos. Owen |
| 10. Geo Holland | 27. Jos Rochester |
| 11. Geo Hooper | 28. Edward Pye |
| 12. Wm JG Jackson | 29. Milton Davis |
| 13. Chris Johnson | 30. Charles Alexander |
| 14. Charles Jones | 31. John Johnson |
| 15. Mrs. Jos Locks | 32. Charles Jones |
| 16. R J Norrell | 33. Clement Hall |
| 17. John Owens | |

1920

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|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. James Skinner | 18. Wm JG Jackson |
| 2. Katie Williams | 19. Chris Johnson |
| 3. William Bishop | 20. Charles Jones |

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|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 4. John Olney | 21. Mrs. Jos Locks |
| 5. Sam Chase & Son | 22. Edward Ringgold |
| 6. Mrs. Rob Elliot | 23. John Toadvin |
| 7. Felix Pye | 24. Harry Vodery |
| 8. Joseph Owens | 25. Clarence Wright |
| 9. R. L. Parham | 26. Joseph Rochester |
| 10. R J Norrell | 27. Isaiah Brown & Son |
| 11. Charles Alexander | 28. Sam Hemsley |
| 12. Charlese Bailey | 29. Mrs. George Hooper |
| 13. Brown & Freeland | 30. John Johnson |
| 14. Geo Gibson | 31. John Owens |
| 15. Clement Hall | 32. James Dennis |
| 16. James Hayes | 33. Bernard Hemsley |
| 17. Geo Holland | |

1921

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Robert Williams | 17. Felix Pye |
| 2. Edward Bryan | 18. Edward Ringgold |
| 3. Charles Bailey | 19. James Skinner |
| 4. John Bishop | 20. John Toadvin |
| 5. Brown & Freeland | 21. Harry Vodery |
| 6. Isaiah Brown & Son | 22. Katie Williams |
| 7. James Dennis | 23. Clarence Wright |
| 8. Mrs. Robert Elliot | 24. Joseph Owens |
| 9. Geo Gibson | 25. Jos. Rochester |
| 10. Geo Holland | 26. Charles Alexander |
| 11. Mrs. Geo Hooper | 27. John Owens |
| 12. Mrs. Charles B Jones | 28. Theo White |
| 13. Chris Johnson | 29. Clement Hall |
| 14. Mrs. Jos Locks | 30. John Johnson |
| 15. Wm JG Jackson | 31. Bernard Hemsley |
| 16. RL Parham | |

1922

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. James Deaver | 17. John Owens |
| 2. Ch. Alexander | 18. John Olney |
| 3. Ch. Bailey | 19. R L Parham |
| 4. John Bishop | 20. Felix Pye |
| 5. Isaiah Brown & Son | 21. Edward Ringgold |
| 6. Edward Bryan | 22. James Skinner |
| 7. Sam Chase & Son | 23. Mrs. Katie Williams |

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|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 8. James Dennis | 24. Robert Williams |
| 9. Mrs. Robert Elliot | 25. Clarence Wright |
| 10. Brown & Freeland | 26. Jos Rochester |
| 11. Geo Gibson | 27. Jos Owens |
| 12. Clement Hall | 28. James Hayes |
| 13. Geo Holland | 29. Sam Hemsley |
| 14. Mrs. Geo Hooper | 30. John Toadvin |
| 15. Wm JG Jackson | 31. Bernard Hemsley |
| 16. Mrs. Ch Jones | |

1923

- | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Joseph Warner | 18. John Bishop |
| 2. Charles Alexander | 19. Sam Chase & Son |
| 3. Brown & Freeland | 20. Milton Davis |
| 4. Isaiah Brown & Son | 21. James Dennis |
| 5. Edward Bryan | 22. Mrs. Geo Hooper |
| 6. Mrs. Robert Elliot | 23. Chris Johnson |
| 7. Geo Gibson | 24. Mrs. Jos Locks |
| 8. Gep Holland | 25. John Olney |
| 9. Mrs. Charles Jones | 26. John Owens |
| 10. R L Parham | 27. John Toadvin |
| 11. Jos Rochester | 28. Robert Williams |
| 12. James Skinner | 29. Jos Owens |
| 13. Theo White | 30. James Hayes |
| 14. Mrs. Katie Williams | 31. Sam Hemsley |
| 15. Robert Williams | 32. John Johnson |
| 16. Clarence Wright | 33. Bernard Hemsley |
| 17. Mrs. Charles Bailey | |

1924

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Charles Alexander | 16. Thomas Kelson |
| 2. Mrs. Charles Bailey | 17. Edward Graham |
| 3. John Bishop & Son | 18. John Stoens |
| 4. Brown and Freeland | 19. Mrs. Helen Holland |
| 5. Isaiah Brown & Son | 20. Mrs. Geo Hooper |
| 6. Edward Bryan | 21. Chris Johnson |
| 7. Sam Chase & Son | 22. Mrs. Jos Locks |
| 8. Mrs. Elizabeth Dennis | 23. Mrs. Katie Williams |
| 9. Mrs. Robert Elliot | 24. Robert Williams |
| 10. Geo Gibson | 25. Clarence Wright |
| 11. Clement Hall | 26. Jos Owens |

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 12. Sam Hemsley | 27. Milton Davis |
| 13. Bernard Hemsley | 28. John Johnson |
| 14. Byron Wright | 29. James Hayes |
| 15. Archibald Gaddis | 30. John Olney |

In 1925 the BOU minutes stopped recording names of licensees who paid dues and only recorded the number of undertakers. For the years 1931 and 1937, listings were located in the alternate sources of black licensed undertakers as footnoted.

1931¹⁹⁸

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Alexander, Charles | 24. Jennings, Robert Earl |
| 2. Bailey, Mrs. Charles G. | 25. Johnson, Chris H |
| 3. Brooks, Mrs. V.A. (FO) | 26. Johnson, John M |
| 4. Brown, Isaiah L. | 27. Kelson, Thomas |
| 5. Brown, Moncure A. | 28. Lively, Joseph A |
| 6. Brown, Wilbert (EO) | 29. Locks, Mrs. Joseph G |
| 7. Bryan, Edward | 30. Owens, John H |
| 8. Burkett, Charles H. | 31. Payne, Eugene |
| 9. Chase, P. Morton | 32. Pree, Ernest (FO) |
| 10. Cooper, Charles G. | 33. Redden, Jesse W |
| 11. Davis, Milton | 34. Sanders, Rayner |
| 12. Elliott, Mrs. Robert A. | 35. Skinner, James M |
| 13. Gaddis, Archibald Augustus | 36. Snowden, Mrs. Ida |
| 14. Gibson, George T. A. | 37. Spriggs, Walter B (FO) |
| 15. Graham, Edward (EO) | 38. Stevens, John D |
| 16. Gross, Lottie (FO) | 39. Toadvin, John H |
| 17. Halstead, Adolphus | 40. Waters, Eugene |
| 18. Hayes, James A. | 41. White, Theodore |
| 19. Hemsley, Bernard P | 42. White, William |
| 20. Hemsley, Francis A | 43. Williams, Katie R |
| 21. Hemsley, Samuel T | 44. Williams, Robert Edward |
| 22. Henderson, John W | 45. Wright, Byron |
| 23. Holland, Mrs. Helen A | 46. Wright, Clarence C |

¹⁹⁸ Maryland. State Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. *Official list of undertakers and embalmers licensed by the State Board of Undertakers of Maryland.* (Baltimore, MD :1931).

1937¹⁹⁹

1. Alexander, Charles
2. Bailey, Ida
3. Brooks, Virginia (FO)
4. Brown, Moncure
5. Brown, Roland
6. Bryan, Edward
7. Burkett, Charles
8. Chase, P. Morton
9. Cooper, Charles
10. Davenport, Louis (FO)
11. Elliott, Mrs. Robert (FO)
12. Gaddis, Archibald A
13. Gibson, George
14. Gross, Lottie
15. Halstead, Adolphus
16. Hayes, James
17. Hemsley, Bernard
18. Hemsley, Frances
19. Henderson, John W
20. Holland, Helen
21. Jackson, William (FO)
22. Jennings, Robert
23. Johnson, John
24. Kelson, George (FO)
25. Kelson, Thomas
26. Knight-Hunt Co., Inc (FO)
27. Linberry, J.L. Preston
28. Lively, Joseph
29. Locks, Joseph G. Jr (FO)
30. Metropolitan FH, Inc (FO)
31. Payne, Eugene
32. People's FH, The, Inc (FO)
33. Pree, Ernest (FO)
34. Redden, Jesse
35. Sanders, Rayner
36. Simms, Arthur (FO)
37. Skinner, James Milton
38. Snowden, Ida
39. Spriggs, Walter B
40. Stevens, John D
41. Sullivan, Samuel W Jr (FO)
42. Waters, Eugene
43. White, William E
44. Williams, Katie
45. Williams, Robert E,
46. Wilson, Elroy (FO)
47. Wright, Byron
48. Wright, Mamie W (FO)
49. Young, Robert

¹⁹⁹ Maryland. State Board of Funeral Directors and Embalmers. *Official list of undertakers and embalmers licensed by the State Board of Undertakers of Maryland.* (Baltimore, MD :1937).