Survival Strategies of Black Kalamazooans: Migration, Kinship Networks and Work in a Midwestern Village, 1860-1900

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SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF BLACK KALAMAZOOANS: MIGRATION, KINSHIP NETWORKS AND WORK IN A MIDWESTERN VILLAGE, 1860-1900

by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of History

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1997
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1997
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Western Michigan University, 1997

An investigation of the lives of African Americans in a small Midwestern village in the second half of the nineteenth century finds that paradigms vary significantly from that of urban Northern or rural Southern black lives. Three survival strategies are explored: work, migration, and kinship networks. Residential and home ownership patterns are explored, as is the structure of the village, neighborhood, and home. The work of men and women, education, state of birth and subsequent migrations, household structure, and kin relationships are analyzed.

The study uses only public records: manuscript census records from 1860, 1870, and 1880; Kalamazoo City Directories from 1867 to 1872; County Death records and local cemetery burial records; Probate records; Deeds, Chancery and Civil Court records; Bird's Eye View and Plat maps; and newspaper articles.

The biography of Rachel Pollard (1835-1884) illuminates the life of a black washerwoman whose estate was probated after her death. An inventory of her goods is included. Her work as a washerwoman was typical of widowed African American women.
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INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century African-Americans in search of personal freedom and economic opportunity made their way to every area of the United States. Abundant scholarship has revealed how blacks lived in urban centers, while a smaller body of work examines the lives of rural blacks. But small town African-Americans of the second half of the nineteenth century have been neglected. This research focuses on Kalamazoo, Michigan and the small black community that formed in this Midwestern village in the years after the Civil War.

This study looks at three survival strategies of Kalamazoo's black population: migration, kinship networks and work. These three strategies were used to cope with their environment, which included the town, neighborhood and home. As they coped with the environment, they took advantage of opportunities for recreation and education, but they were also subject to the stresses of sickness and death.

Pursuing their dreams through hard work on farms and in small towns of the North, some were able to settle down and purchase property. Men worked as farmers, laborers, in service and in skilled trades, while single women worked as domestic servants. Widowed black women most often worked as washerwomen, a trade that while looked down on by whites, often proved fairly lucrative. Some married or widowed women ran boarding houses for the streams of people
who came to Kalamazoo looking for economic opportunity and a modicum of social equality.

Without recourse to diaries or letters, and with secondary works few or none, public records had to be fully utilized to explore how black Kalamazooans survived. From census records, City Directories, death and probate records, among other sources, we can examine family structure, residential patterns, work participation, education, sickness and death. One individual whose life comes into sharper focus through probate records is Rachel Pollard, a widowed washerwoman. Her life story gives examples of the survival skills as well as the environment in which black Kalamazooans lived in the last half of the nineteenth century.
Families that stay in one place for generations usually manage to accumulate the kinds of sources historians traditionally study. So far research in Kalamazoo sources has failed to turn up any personal artifacts on the families mentioned in this work. But public records contain a wealth of information. Census records, City Directories, Death and burial records, Deed, Chancery and Probate Records, Newspapers, and other primary sources from the years from 1865 to 1894 have been gleaned for every trace of information. A list of African-American citizens of Kalamazoo put together from the 1867, 1869, 1871, 1873 and 1894 City Directories was used as a starting point. These names were cross-referenced through all the other sources. Most of the black people listed in Kalamazoo city directories from 1867 to 1873 disappeared from the view of information takers after one appearance. A small group of residentially stable folks can be found in most of the documents of the post-war period, but they had for the most part disappeared from view by the end of the century. By 1894 a new set of black residents seems to have established themselves. These names look more familiar to students of local African-American history; these people stayed and formed the nucleus of Kalamazoo’s black elite in the early to mid-twentieth century.
MIGRATION

The first survival technique practiced by African-Americans throughout the nineteenth century was migration. Escaping slaves and free blacks headed north following the path to economic and personal freedom. Many flocked to the large cities of the North: New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Detroit and Chicago. Here larger black populations provided support networks as well as competition in occupations open to African-Americans. In many cases the competition between recent immigrants and African Americans engendered an atmosphere of hostility, and racial tensions could always be sparked. Some blacks continued to move on, searching for economic opportunity and social freedom.

Residential Stability

City Directories and census records for Kalamazoo from the late 1860's to 1880's show a significant number of residentially stable black families as well as short-term residents.1 Both residential patterns are examples of African-American migration paradigms. Many African-Americans, in their effort to find a place where they could participate in the prevailing economic structure, moved frequently. This situation contributes to a lack of data, especially for poorer blacks who were most likely to migrate in search of a better situation. David
Katzman, in his useful book *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century*, points out that these marginal, residentially unstable people were least likely to be counted by census takers or be included in city directories, so their number is difficult to gauge.²

Michigan: A Magnet for African-Americans

From the beginnings of statehood, Michigan had proved a magnet to blacks emigrating or escaping from the South. In 1810 Michigan had a "colored" population of 144 persons. The numbers grew each decade, until by 1860, there were close to 7,000 blacks in the state of Michigan, most of them clustered in Detroit and the rural southwestern corner of the state.³ By mid-nineteenth-century a well-organized Underground RailRoad operated in Southwest Michigan, creating a haven for blacks in Cass County. Both freed people and escaped slaves traveled to Cass; some may have been attracted to Cass county, and then moved the short (one days travel by wagon, or less, by train) journey to Kalamazoo.⁴

Kalamazoo’s black citizens during the years surrounding the Civil War came from all over the United States but the highest percentages were from the Ohio Valley (see Appendix A). Migration breakdown by age shows an interesting pattern, with older blacks born in the deep South or middle Southern states, while younger people were often born in the Ohio Valley. First children of these Ohio Valley born couples frequently were born in Ohio or Indiana, while younger children were most often born in Michigan. This pattern shows a trend toward
frequent moves, probably in search of greener economic and social pastures. Some major migrations to Michigan and Canada can be traced to specific events. Race riots in Ohio in 1829 and 1830 drove out over 1000 blacks.⁵
KALAMAZOO

Small Northern towns like Kalamazoo differed from urban or Southern areas in several key aspects: most Northern small towns had extremely small black populations; recently established villages had relatively open social structures which left room for outsiders; booming economic growth and political liberalism in the Midwest led to an atmosphere in which African-Americans encountered less overt racial hostility and discrimination. It would be naive to claim that social and economic discrimination did not exist in small towns like Kalamazoo. Separate churches and organizations, residential separatism, and menial occupations, along with patronizing mentions in the local papers, attest to ingrained social attitudes that prevented blacks from full participation in white society.

A Midwestern Village

Kalamazoo in the second half of the nineteenth century could be considered the quintessential Midwestern village. In 1860 it had 6,070 people, 215 of them black. The town’s economic success still depended on farming, but industry boomed too, powered by ready access to wood, water, transportation and manpower. Its population expanded as newly laid train tracks brought more and more people into town. By 1870 the population had grown to 10,085. As the population grew, native New Yorkers who had settled the village since the 1830’s
were joined by Dutch immigrants, led by Paulus DenBlyker in 1850. Within this rather homogenous community 361 African-Americans made their homes in 1870.8  

Employment opportunities for men of both races abounded.9 Blacks performed service jobs that whites would not accept, therefore white Kalamazooans had little to complain about or fear from blacks. The numbers shows a huge differential among black and white citizens of Kalamazoo and numerical superiority eased white fears. Benjamin Wilson, expert in Southwestern Michigan African-American history, states, "the majority of whites exhibited little hostility toward the small percentage of blacks...for they posed no threat to the numerical status quo."10 In areas with larger black populations, fears over competition for jobs, housing and the looming specter of racial mixing were potent contributors to racial problems.  

Newspaper References to Blacks in Kalamazoo  

Along with the booming economy Kalamazoo offered another feature that may have attracted blacks in the 1860's and 1870's: its proud political heritage as a Republican stronghold.11 Newspapers frequently reported on issues of concern to blacks. The Kalamazoo Gazette and the Daily Telegraph provided coverage of the events leading up to Civil War, including positive reviews of abolitionist speakers who came to Kalamazoo. After the war, incidents of black crime, suicide and racial violence in other parts of the state and country got front page
status. The Gazette also printed news for and about the black community, including social notices, gossip, advertisements, and church affairs.\textsuperscript{12}

Kalamazoo’s newspapers frequently featured notices of its black community activities, as well as problems, and these give both positive and negative examples of attitudes towards black citizens. The following article is an illustration.

Marshal Beaman about a week ago complained of a poor, crazed, colored woman for being drunk and disorderly, and she was arrested and kept in jail a week, and brought before Justice Davis last evening, when the prosecution introduced seven or eight witnesses, but one of which swore positively that she was drunk, and none of them that she was disorderly. The marshal himself was not positive that she was drunk. The jury were [sic] out but one moment and brought in a verdict of ‘not guilty.’...Ex-Justice Hopkins defended in an able manner, and Wm. [William] Shakespeare acted as Prosecutor, but declined to make an argument on such flimsy unsatisfactory testimony. It is time that such prosecutions as these should end, where there is not the least excuse for a case.\textsuperscript{13}

Another, more festive event warranted much coverage in the Gazette. The First of August Celebration commemorated the British abolition of slavery in its Caribbean Island possessions.\textsuperscript{14} The August 3, 1877 Gazette provided a lengthy review of the festivities that covered two columns of text. The first paragraph reads:

\begin{quote}
JUBILEE

FULL PROCEEDINGS OF THE
FIRST OF AUGUST CELEBRATION

Speeches by O.W. Powers, Esq. and Maj. R. F. Judson

At an early hour this morning the colored citizens of the place began stirring themselves, making preparations for the celebration and soon people from the country began to arrive. Nearly every train on the
different roads brought more or less delegates to the celebration.\(^{15}\)
The article goes on to describe the refreshments (lemonade) and prints in entirety several speeches made in the shady glen.

Another event attended by black and white Kalamazooans was a minstrel show that evidently had some negative consequences.

Mr. Editor: This troupe of colored minstrels gave an entertainment at Union Hall last week Thursday evening. There was a large audience present with a good sprinkling of colored people. The performance so turned the heads of some of the colored girls that they went back on their 'fallahs' and gave the performers a party at the house of Charley Stuart, on Ransom street, where they had a hilarious old time. Not being fully satisfied with this performance, one married woman and a grass widow followed the troupe to Allegan and then to Grand Rapids.

Not a little bad blood has been developed among our colored citizens by the visit of this troupe to Kalamazoo, and at least one divorce suit is in the immediate future.\(^ {16}\)

The mention of "grass widow" is interesting, since it commonly meant a woman who was divorced or never married, but who, for proprieties sake, called herself a widow. A woman in this situation probably had to work. If it was universally practiced that she referred to herself as married or widowed this may have contributed to over counting of married women working in many studies.\(^ {17}\)

James Devries, whose book Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town: The black Experience in Monroe, Michigan 1900-1915, is one of the rare secondary sources available, asserts that denigrating or sensationalized depictions of blacks in local newspapers are evidence of a negative bias toward blacks.\(^ {18}\) Though the bias is evident in the patronizing, jocular tone of these and other articles, these
references are valuable. They give a rare glimpse into relations between blacks and whites, as well as the internal workings of the black community, albeit as observed by white outsiders. The black community created and maintained its social structure by organizing and participating in group activities. The enjoyment of "Celebrations" and "Entertainments" was essential to the establishment and survival of the black community.

Class Issues

A small town like Kalamazoo offered few opportunities for a black elite to develop before the turn of the century. Church membership and property ownership were the leading avenues to social acceptance by the black elite in most communities. According to Katzman, Detroit's black residents focused on property ownership as the key to individual advancement, with segregated churches and organizations providing social outlets. These social groups became highly class conscious by the mid 1800's. One had only to look at a families church membership to determine social and economic standing in the black community.19

Katzman describes the "elite...and middling class" as members of the AME church in Detroit, while the Baptists were predominantly "from the lower part of the working class...and the lower class."20 Kalamazoo had two black churches, the Second Baptist at Water and Kalamazoo, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of Water and Pitcher Streets.21 These would
have provided the setting for the social rituals described by Katzman.

Another, more intellectual ambiance was provided by the Frederick Douglass Club for Negroes. According to Willis Dunbar, Caroline Bartlett Crane established this club in the Unitarian Church sometime after its new building was constructed in 1894.22

Probably Kalamazoo's black citizens would have appreciated an intellectual outlet. Most adults and school age children were literate. The 1880 manuscript census report had a column headed "Cannot read" and one marked "Cannot write." The few African-Americans in Kalamazoo who were marked in these categories were older and Southern born.

Further evidence for literacy and written communications with kin can be inferred from notices in local newspapers alerting local residents that letters could be picked up at the post office. Many long-time black Kalamazoo residents received letters. Mrs. Lucy McKay received notices on August 1 and 29, 1871. Rebecca Hammond received notices on August 16, 1868, January 24, 1871, and October 11, 1871. Her husband Lovett received a notice on October 6, 1868. Martha Artis received notices on December 13, 1870 and February 15, 1871. Rachel Pollard received a notice on November 16, 1870.23
KINSHIP NETWORKS

Frequent correspondence suggests close-knit kin groups who missed family and friends far away. Examination of the intervals between letters to specific individuals reveals that people may have been writing to announce their imminent arrival or plans to travel North. Whether travel was undertaken for pleasure or in search of economic or educational opportunities, kin networks were vital. Upon arrival in new surroundings, most black folks lived with family members or kin as boarders or visitors sharing homes and rooms.

DeVries' study of blacks in a small Midwestern town shows how important kinship networks were to physical, social and economic survival. Small in number, far from larger populations in Northern cities and Southern home towns, surrounded by whites who treated blacks as less than equal, black Northerners needed to create and maintain their own support networks. Larger cities like Detroit could sustain formal groups that provided help for the poor. For example, the "Willing Workers," a group of elite black women in Detroit, aided what they called the "very poor," but Kalamazoo blacks had to care for their sick and poor within a more informal community structure.

The Extended Family

The presence of kin networks is the most important feature of rural and
small town black life, according to DeVries, Wilson and others. Extended family networks included nuclear families living in homes they owned on the same street, like the Hedgebeth family, or large extended groups, like the Green and Goins household. Unfortunately census records do not indicate if and how these people were related. In fact, one family may have been boarding with the other. Without differentiating between boarders (who presumably pay) and relatives (who presumably do not) we cannot judge for sure the amount of increased work for woman like Emily Green who was "keeping house" for seven people. The Green household was headed by Gabriel Green, 44, who worked as a "Day Laborer," along with Emily, age 24, keeping house, and three girls: Lucinda, 14; Verlinda, 5; and Sophronia, one year old; all at home. Also living with them were Verlinda Goins, age 58, and Michael Goins, age 65, whose occupations were listed as "none," along with Stevan Goins, an 18 year old barber and Ross Goins, a 16 year old Day Laborer.26

If the relatives were healthy women, young or old, they probably helped with housework or child care, thereby contributing to the relative comfort of the home. If they were working women they contributed income that theoretically could be used to hire other domestic workers, as could have the relatively well-off Hedgby (Hedgebeth) family, headed by Thomas, aged 58 and wife Mary, 53. Three of their four daughters, Martha, 9, Lillie, 13, and Celia, 16, were in school. Their oldest daughter Mary Jane, age 23, worked as a hairdresser, a high-status occupation for black women.27 Census lists show Matilda Wilkins, a 40-year-old
cook was part of their household. The Hedgebeths were one of Kalamazoo's wealthiest black families, homeowners with $2000 worth of real estate and $300 of personal property. Possibly Matilda Wilkins worked for them as a cook, though she may have boarded in the Hedgebeth home while working as a cook elsewhere.

Women's Work in Extended Families

The presence of boarders, visitors and extended families increased the work load of women who had to prepare food, and provide clothing and linens. In a valuable article entitled "A Mother's Wages: Income Earning Among Married Italian and Black Women, 1896-1911," Elizabeth Pleck used statistics from a Department of Labor Bulletin of 1896 to calculate the percentage of black families keeping lodgers. Pleck finds the numbers: Atlanta, 8%, Nashville, 6%, and Cambridge, 8%, "puzzling" since the relative absence of lodgers disputes her contention that black women worked more inside the home for pay as well as outside. But in a later article, "The Two-Parent Household: Black Family Structure in Late Nineteenth-Century Boston," Pleck postulates that the higher the status of the family, the less likely they would have boarders. Wealthier, high status black families would be more likely to have family members living with them.

DeVries has pointed out that a great variety of family structure existed among black families in Monroe, Michigan. The same holds true for
Kalamazoo’s black families. While families with four or more children existed, they were not the majority. A list of pupils attending the "Colored School" in 1863 shows nine families with four or more children in school, while nineteen families had one to three children in school. Most of the families consisted of a father, a mother, and two, three or four children. One large family was the Mosses, headed by 40 year old Richard, a Brick mason and his wife Joanna, age 38, who kept house. Their children were Richard, 14; Calvin, 13; Joseph, 12; Sarah, 11; Zach, 10; W.H., 8; Thomas, 6; Louisa, 5; James, 3; and Carrie, one year old. All attended school except the four youngest.

The importance of education meant that some households included visitors or relatives who came to go to school. One household that may have been augmented by a visiting scholar was the Clay family. The household included James Clay, a paperhanger, aged 41 and born in Virginia, his Tennessee born wife, Susan, 37, who kept house. Living with them were their 16 year old daughter Angelina, who worked as a domestic servant, and another girl, Sarah Holden, age 14, who attended school. Both girls were born in Indiana. As in many cases, here it is difficult to determine if a single person living in a home with a family was considered a boarder, a visitor, or a member of the family. The possibility that these young women were cousins or friends who lived together indicates that African-American women, like women everywhere, enjoyed and relied on shared living quarters, long visits and other close relationships. Noted scholar Darlene Clark Hine stresses the formation of female networks from slave days that
eventually coalesced into the club movement and organizations of the post-bellum and early 20th century.\textsuperscript{34}

Survival usually required contributions from numerous wage earners, but some families managed to accumulate enough to purchase property. This also required more than one wage earner, since the average home could cost over twice what a male workers made in a year.\textsuperscript{35} Dedicated to economic prosperity and possessed of enough capital and working contributors, a few families, including the Hedgebeth, Rolson, McKay, and Dye families\textsuperscript{36} were able to buy property. Property ownership seems to have been the key to maintaining residential stability. Though not dependent upon a male head of household, widows Emily Dye and Josephine McKay needed the labor of several individuals to maintain home ownership. Rachel Pollard belonged to what I have termed the shifting household, moving frequently, continually forming and regrouping in order to survive.

Combined Households

Whether families combined households out of necessity or desire to be near friends or relatives, it is clear in several cases that more than one black family group resided together in Kalamazoo in the period under study. Several examples exist in the black community of female headed households with more than one wage-earner, like Emily Dye and her son John, but other common groupings show the diversity of family structure. Anne Moore, a 48 year old
widow born in Virginia, headed a household that consisted of herself, sons Mark, 29, a barber, Joe, 28, a "Store Porter," David, 27, a "RailRoad Baggageman," and daughters Rebecca, 17 a "Domestic Servant," and Mary, 15, "at home." Next door lived Catherine Forbes, a 38 year old "Washwoman," Catherine Hill, also a "Washwoman" and 38, and Emily Clifford, a "Domestic Servant," age 15. On the same block lived Phillip Stern, a 32 year old "Drayman," his 33 year old wife, Rebecca, "keeping house," Lucretia, age three and Harris, one. Martha Cubbins, a 39 year old black "Washwoman," headed a household of six children. Silas, age 18 "works on the RailRoad" while Andrew at 17 was "traveling with the circus." Martha Cubbins and her two eldest were born in Indiana. The rest of the children were born in Michigan. Her fourteen year old daughter Estelle was a "Domestic Servant," while the three youngest, Drusilla, Albert and Artemesia were "at home."

Burden Family Reconstruction

One prominent family with a male head of household was the Burden family. South Carolina born Amanda Burden, 33 and her 48 year old husband William owned a home on Ransom Street. William, or W.H. as he was frequently referred to in documents, worked as a "Farm Laborer" along with their son, James, 15. Their eldest daughter, Susan, age 12, attended school. Two younger girls remained at home, Sarah, 4 and Agnes, 2. Charles Burden, brother of William, boarded with the family. As farm laborers William and James Burden
probably took home about $2.00 a day each, if indeed, they worked for someone else. It is quite possible they worked on their own farm, since they owned property.

William and Amanda Burden purchased a half lot and home on Ransom Street and in 1880 they paid taxes on $300.00 worth of real estate. In 1884 they had money problems stemming from a promissory note they signed in 1878. A white woman, Anna M. Cornell, sued them for return of $175.00 on the original note and $28.15 in interest, along with $30.00, "as a reasonable solicitors fee...and such further relief ...as shall be agreeable to equity and good conscience." William and Amanda had put their property up as collateral, and while no record of any action exists, they probably settled out of court since they continued to occupy their home.

The Life and Death of a Boarding House Owner

Another court case illuminates Matilda Whitworth's life. Court records detail her real estate dealings, property, career and death. She had trouble over a land deal with the A. M. E. Church in the late 1860's. In a long civil suit, members of the African Methodist Episcopal church sued her daughter and only heir, Emily Helms, over a property dispute. A church minister stated under oath that Helms was a former slave. This information indicates Matilda had been a slave at one time. Probate records valued her estate at $1,500 when she died in 1869.

Upon her death from cancer, Whitworth's estate paid William T. Stillwell,
M.D. $11.00. The estate also paid $6.00 for a burial plot, $2.00 for a head stone, and $13.50 for "a coffin and box for a colored woman." The estate also paid off several contractors, including one James Campbell who delivered a load of wood for $1.00, painted a "man house" for $9.00 and a "girl house" for $16.00. The interesting designation by sex gives rise to speculation that these may have been boarding houses. The cost of the paint job also indicates these must have been large structures; the abstract of the deed shows two building that Whitworth "erected or caused to have erected" on her property. Possibly she ran a boarding house with separate facilities for men and women.42 This type of facility was needed for newcomers who came to town looking for work.
THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Most blacks found lodgings or homes in a neighborhood now designated the "North Side." During the late 1800's the residential section corresponded to an area roughly bounded by Harrison Street on the East, Kalamazoo Avenue on the South, Westnedge Street on the West and Parsons on the North. It was an area close to the river and surrounded by train tracks and factories (see map in Appendix B).

Most of Kalamazoo's blacks lived alongside working class and poor whites in a neighborhood bounded by factories, railroad tracks and river bottom (see Appendix B). Water, sewer, gas and electricity came late (1890's to 1940's) into these homes. Unpaved streets meant dust in the summer and mud in the spring and fall. The village built a waterworks in 1869, but at the time only 350 families could afford the five to ten dollars per year for service. Factory smoke meant dirty air and dirty homes. A town booster, David Fisher, writing in support of industrial growth, complained that "our women wear beautiful white dresses and our men always have clean shirts on." An article in the Telegraph complained of "Too Much Clean Linen and Too Little Factory Smoke". Homemakers and laundresses who lived in the industrial district must have looked very differently at smoke that dirtied linens and homes.

Emily Dye, James and Hymilla Clay and the Burden family all lived in a
block bisected by the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern RailRoad tracks in the early 1860's. Another track passed right next to Ann Moore's house and Mrs. Mckay's. The noise and soot of the steam engines must have made cleaning a difficult chore. Added to road dirt and air-borne soot from four railroads bisecting the neighborhood were smoke and pollutants from nearby factories, ironworks and slaughterhouses. The neighborhood contained lumber yards, a vinegar factory, freight yards and several mills. There was also a bakery, a meat shop, and several grocery stores within walking distance.

Whites and blacks lived side by side, with black homeowners and renters living next to white renters, and to a lesser extent, white homeowners. Many of the white homeowners were foreign born. They were mostly Irish, with a few Dutch and Scottish interspersed. Jane Crain, a 51-year-old Irish widowed washerwoman, lived with her two sons, Thomas, 18 and George, 15, farm laborers, next door to the Green/Goins family.
THE HOME

The North side, like all of Kalamazoo, experienced a housing boom in the 1860's-1870's, and most residents lived in solid newly built detached, single family dwellings. This observation is echoed by DeVries's observations of Monroe, Michigan, where "each of the...black families resided in a single dwelling." 48

Extensive research has yielded no indication that any of the homes of people mentioned in this paper remain. Few if any buildings of comparable age, original cost, and location remain standing. Much of the housing in the area where African-Americans were concentrated was torn down for factories; there are numerous vacant lots now. But it is possible to make some statements based on original plat maps, Bird's Eye views of Kalamazoo, and studies of architecture. A post-war housing boom on Kalamazoo's North side, coinciding with rampant population growth throughout the city, meant that homes on Ransom, Edwards, Willard and Walbridge streets were probably only ten to twenty years old.49 As in most Kalamazoo neighborhoods, at least half the housing stock on the North side was rental, with owner-occupied homes interspersed.50

Often Dutch and Scottish land and home owners rented or sold property to their black neighbors.51 Paulus DenBlyker, born in the Netherlands, sold many North side acres, some to African-Americans. Emily Dye, a widowed washerwoman, purchased "lands and premises" on March 16, 1874 for $625 from
Angus and Mary MacDougal. These Scottish immigrants continued to live on the other half of the lot at 19 Walbridge. In 1880 Mrs. Dye paid taxes on $200 worth of real estate. Existing upon her income as a washerwoman, plus the income of her son John, a hotel porter, Mrs. Dye managed to obtain and keep her property as well as send her daughter Nettie to school.

Their home on Walbridge Street was a detached, probably two story home with a large yard. It may have included front and back porches, an attic and basement. A tour of extant homes in the neighborhood shows mostly wooden farmhouse types, with a few brick Victorians. Inside, a typical home would have a three or four bedrooms upstairs with a living room or parlor, dining room and kitchen downstairs. A front and back porch increased the living and work space, while a fairly big yard contained the privy and possibly other smaller structures. Plat maps show a number of properties with smaller structures, like the John Clay residence next door to Mrs. Dye on the corner of Walbridge and Ransom. Two smaller structures occupy either end of the small lot. If these were homes, they probably provided two or three rooms per family, with shared cooking and living spaces.
MEN'S WORK

Though African-Americans rarely found employment in the higher paid manufacturing jobs in their own neighborhood, they were welcome in service positions, and many black men made their living as day laborers, hostlers, draymen, or barbers. While black men are found preponderantly in these positions, census returns show that fully half the white male respondents listed farm laborer as their occupation, while another quarter called themselves "day laborers." There did not seem to be any systematic division of employment by race, though the bankers, lawyers, large landowners and city officials of Kalamazoo were exclusively white (and male).

A breakdown of male employment figures from the 1870 Manuscript-script census shows a majority of black men worked in skilled occupations including whitewasher, blacksmith, painter, plasterer, shoemaker, wagonmaker, brickmason, and barber (see Figure 1). According to Peter Knight, author of *The Plain People of Boston*, one of the few studies that has focused on quantitative analysis of working people, the preceding categories are skilled or "Petty Proprietary." A sample of occupations deemed unskilled or service found among Kalamazoo's black men include teamster, well digger, store porter, waiter, porter, laborer, cook, and drayman. Laborers and farm workers, if counted together, outnumber skilled labor, but some farm workers were farm owners. The average
Figure 1. Men's Occupations.

wage for a day laborer was $1.50, entitling a hard working man to $9.00 per week, or $36.00 per month.\textsuperscript{56}

Barbers are included in service workers, though this designation is questionable. Some owned their own business and their training and contacts gave them status in the black community. It may be more appropriate to designate barbers as skilled workers or as professionals.\textsuperscript{57} A small number of men were professionals, including two clergymen and one doctor. Census records show "Physician" as the profession of Robert Whitefather, a 35-year-old who owned $1,000 worth of real estate. His wife Martha, 28, kept house and cared for their children, Jane, age four, and Sarah, eleven, who also attended school.\textsuperscript{58}
WOMEN'S WORK

A statistical breakdown of all 91 black women listed in the 1870 manuscript census for the Village of Kalamazoo show that married women, regardless of age or number of children, were not working outside the home (see Figure 2). Young women before marriage worked as domestic servants, while widowed black women, regardless of age, worked most often as washerwomen. Of the forty-eight women aged 30 to 50, thirty were listed as "keeping house." Eighteen women were enumerated as domestic servants, but the crucial information here is that these women were overwhelmingly young, single women from age 13 to 30 (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Women's Occupations.
Figure 3. Percentage of Women in Occupations by Age.

Washerwoman

The next highest category of women's work was washerwoman. Washing was backbreaking labor that white women eagerly relinquished. In the nineteenth century washing was considered the lowest of occupations by white commentators and most frequently fell to the hands of Irishwomen and African-American widows. For women with children, especially widows, washing was one of the few occupations that could be pursued in their own homes rather than in the homes...
of white employers. Black men were reluctant to have their wives work in the homes of whites, and black women also preferred to work at home, if paid work was a necessity. The convenience and relative high pay of laundry work, along with the lack of other, more prestigious options, made it the work of choice for women with children.

An average laundrywoman’s workweek started on Monday. Most washerwomen walked to the homes of clients to pick up the clothes and take them home to wash, though wealthier clients may have preferred to have their laundry done in. At home the entire week was spent washing and ironing. First drawing gallons of water from outdoor wells, she carried the water indoors, softened it with lye, and heated it on her wood stove in two large washtubs. After adding homemade soap, she scrubbed the clothes in hot water, rinsed them in clean water, starched and wrung them out. After hanging to dry the clothes needed to be ironed, another hot, heavy, job. Flat irons heated on the stove pressed shirts, petticoats and dresses into complicated tucks and ruffles. On Friday or Saturday washwomen or their children delivered the clean, ironed clothes to the back door and received their pay, if they were lucky. If a customer found fault with the work she might refuse to pay the washerwoman.

Washing gave time off on weekends, and hours could be arranged to suit the needs of the worker and her family. The average washerwoman made about $1.50 per day, comparable with what the average black man could make as a day laborer. Along with the income from one or more working children, this
income could provide a living. But women with sick or young children, like Rachel Pollard, lived in poverty on these wages.

According to Carter G. Woodson, eminent black scholar and founder of the *Journal of Negro History*, the African-American washerwoman held a strong position in the black community. Her labor provided financial security to purchase property when black males could not find paid work. According to John Blassingame, in a study of black social life in Southern cities, also cited washerwomen as social leaders who contributed heavily to the formation and success of black social institutions like churches and insurance societies.

**Domestic Service**

Washing had advantages when compared with the other employment opportunity for black women, domestic service. Service, especially live-in domestic work, could not easily be combined with child care. Jacqueline Jones describes family disruption and neglect stemming from the necessity for maids to leave their own children at home alone while caring for their white employer’s children. Single black women had limited access to higher education and were kept out of more prestigious occupations; they took perennially available domestic service jobs. Contemporary documents suggest that most domestic servants found their lot an extremely hard and lonely one. Problems included isolation, lack of free time, and backbreaking labor.

Twenty Kalamazoo women recorded this occupation, while one each
claimed seamstress, cook and chamber-maid. Domestic servants ranged in age from fourteen to forty five, but most domestic servants were in their teens and twenties. Presumably these young women went on to marry and left domestic service, those who remained single probably, like Elizabeth Anderson and Jane Letts, remained in domestic service.

It was a hard life especially for those who "lived in." Live in domestic servants were on call virtually twenty four hours a day. Working twelve to fourteen hours a day in the homes of whites was the least popular of occupations. Susan Armstrong, a 30 year old servant who in 1870 lived with Daniel and Mary Roberts and their 9 year old daughter Cora, may have found the situation unsatisfactory. By 1871 Susan had moved to another position, as a servant in the establishment of Miss Bessie Patrick. Miss Patrick ran a "ladies select boarding and day school," with thirty students. David Katzman describes what could be the amount of work thirty "ladies" generated for Susan Armstrong. Daily chores included lighting fires in stoves, fireplaces or furnaces, preparing and serving meals and cleaning up afterward, making beds, doing light dusting, sweeping or scrubbing floors, answering the doorbell and running errands.

Jane Letts and Amanda Bonds worked in hotels. Jane, age 45 and illiterate, labored for Charles Brown, a circuit judge, his wife and four children, Sarah Gibson and her son John, and two single gentlemen; George Hitchcock and Arthur Perry. The work of Amanda Bonds, age 28 and a chambermaid at the Kalamazoo House, Kalamazoo's largest hotel, must also have been dreary and
difficult. Alice Kessler-Harris points out that chambermaids often worked more than fifty four hours a week.\textsuperscript{70}

Jane Mason, 40 and Maggie Hall 17, worked for Frank Curtenius, a bank manager who was also village president.\textsuperscript{71} He and his wife Kate had two children. Two servants to share the work may have lightened the load, but the home of a village leader would have required constant labor to keep up. Whether Mrs. Curtenius was a good employer is unknown, however, many servants found their employers capricious, demanding and patronizing.\textsuperscript{72}

Jennie Adams, listed in the 1870 census as a "Domestic servant" presents an interesting case. Her name is listed along with hundreds of others under the address of the Kalamazoo Asylum for the Insane, with no indication whether she was an inmate whose occupation before incarceration was domestic servant, or a servant at the asylum. The latter is most likely, partly because no other blacks are found in the asylum at this time, also because the next census finds her out of the asylum and working for another woman.
SICKNESS AND DEATH

Adams died in 1924 of chronic myocarditis, and was buried in a section of Riverside Cemetery called the Field Vault. Whether this was "Potter's Field" or a vault belonging to a Funeral Director named Clarence Field, who owned a funeral parlor at 123 S. Westnedge at the time, is unknown.

Without a family to care for and comfort her, Elizabeth Anderson, a 41 year old, single, domestic servant, may have suffered as much from neglect as illness on January 10, 1892, when she died of pneumonia.

Unlike Elizabeth Anderson, Emily Dye, a widowed washerwoman, had a family and property. At the time of her death in 1891 she had purchased burial plots for herself and her children in Riverside Cemetery, but their names do not appear in county death records. Possibly the Dye family did not call a doctor or alert authorities when a death occurred at home. Given the stable residential pattern of the Dye family it seems likely they stayed together in health and in sickness.

Tuberculosis

Sickness, especially upper respiratory illness, was an ever-present concern for Kalamazoo's black families. Most families lost children to consumption, typhoid, scarlet fever, pneumonia, whooping cough or measles. Consumption,
now known as tuberculosis, killed by far the greatest number. While no statistical comparison between black and white deaths has been done for Kalamazoo, of the 56 deaths among the black population recorded from 1867 to 1885, 21 died of consumption, scrofula, or wasting, all forms of tuberculosis.

Tuberculosis caused the body to waste away while the lungs disintegrated with bloody coughing. Highly contagious patients needed to be kept in quarantine and strict sanitary measures enforced. According to the Women's Improvement Club of Indianapolis, a black women's group devoted to battling consumption at the turn of the century, closed homes heated by coal or wood stoves were prime villains in the spread of the disease. Urban blacks around the turn of the century were more than twice as likely to die from tuberculosis, according to Jacqueline Jones, and washerwomen were especially susceptible, due to the heavy physical labor to which they were subjected.78

A possible reason for the high death rate from tuberculosis stemmed from the lack of hospital care for the poor in Kalamazoo; before 1889 charity cases were confined in the county jail.79 For wealthy and even middle class whites, the most common treatment for consumption consisted of travel to more congenial climates and water cures. One black man, Charles Craig, is listed in the 1871 Kalamazoo Directory offering an "Hygenic Cure."80 Hygienic, or water cures, were popular forms of health care in the late nineteenth-century. Treatments involved bathing in cold and hot water, wrapping and sweating, exercise and wholesome food. While these treatments may have been administered by family
members in the home of Kalamazoo's black folks, it is highly unlikely that Charles Craig's establishment served his own community. No details exist, but Katzman and others note that black business owners, especially those who provided personal services, like barbering, only served a white clientele, and possibly Craig catered to whites, not blacks. If this is true, then black sufferers had nowhere to turn for help besides their family or kin.

Even if health care had been available, poverty and a tradition of home care kept most black children at home through sickness and death. The difficulty of caring for tuberculosis patients, along with the trauma of watching a family die one by one, placed a great strain on mothers. One woman, Rebecca Hammond, must have suffered a great deal. Within four years, between June 1872 and November 1876, she lost five children. They ranged in age from 1 month to thirteen years old; most died of consumption and typhoid. When her husband Lovett died in 1882, she married his brother, Thomas Hammond. A few years later, tragedy struck again, when their little girl Rosetta, six, died of consumption in 1891.81
EDUCATION

Poor health, the need for older children to work, and frequent moves may have caused school attendance rates to fluctuate, but it did not stop most black families from sending their children, both male and female, to school. The majority of children of both sexes attended school up until age twelve (see Figure 4 & 5). Kalamazoo’s black children went to school in both segregated and

![Graph showing school attendance by age and gender.](image)

**Figure 4.** Percentage of School Attendance by Age and Gender.
integrated schools. From 1861 to 1872 Kalamazoo's black children attended a segregated "colored school" located on the corner of North and Walbridge. In 1872 they were transferred to the Frank Street School where they attended school with white children. During ten years of segregation the Colored school had eight white teachers, at least one of whom, Anna Jannasch, had recently graduated from the local high school.

Attendance records for the colored school exist, but their accuracy are questionable. They range from a low of 43% attendance rate, with a
corresponding 67% absentee rate averaging over the school year, with 11.7
tardinesses per pupil in 1862-63, to a high of 98% attendance with .04 tardinesses
in 1869-70. The total enrollment for the colored school fluctuated markedly
during the same period, ranging from a low of 67 in 1864-65 to a high of 101 in
1869-70. Several explanations are possible for the extreme fluctuations,
including inaccurate record keeping, spotty attendance due to ill health, work
schedules, poor weather, or frequent moving.
Rachel Pollard moved frequently, but the 1870 census lists her children, Elizabeth, age 14, and Thomas, age 10, as attending school. This tiny piece of information tells little by itself, but by linking all every available bit of information the life of one individual can, to a certain extent, be reconstructed. This life can shed light on the experience of many. Migration patterns, living conditions, kinship groups, black-white relations, work, marriage and childbearing patterns can be deduced from Rachel Pollard’s life through public documents. This offers a rare glimpse into the life of a poor black woman in a small Northern town in the nineteenth century.

A separated and widowed mother throughout her twenty four documentable years in Kalamazoo (1860-1884), Rachel Pollard practiced a number of survival skills as a washerwoman. Consumption claimed three of her children, and she died of the same disease in 1884, setting off a property dispute between the surviving two children. It was this dispute that provides the most detailed look into the life of a nineteenth-century African-American woman in Kalamazoo possible. Her presence in Kalamazoo City Directories, Census records from 1860, 1870, and 1880, Death records, and Probate inventories make it possible to reconstruct more of the picture.
Migration

Rachel Pollard was born in Ohio in 1835. She died in 1884 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In between she married, lived in Canada, bore two daughters, moved to Kalamazoo, had three more children, moved several times, and worked as a washerwoman and died in 1884. These are the bare facts.

Census records show that Rachel’s parents were born in North Carolina. They moved to Ohio sometime before Rachel’s birth in 1835. Allen was born in Virginia, though the couple probably met in Ohio. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth-century newly-emancipated slaves from Virginia settled in Ohio. Conscience-stricken masters, mostly from Virginia, bought property and settled their freed slaves in Ohio. Likely, Rachel and Allen met in Ohio, married, and decided to follow the North Star in pursuit of their dreams. Probate records indicate some estate in Indiana; possibly they stopped for a short time there, but by 1855 they had settled in Canada. There they saved $200 and had two children, Susan, born in 1855, and Elizabeth, born in 1856. By 1860 Rachel and her younger daughter had moved to Kalamazoo, but since Allen and Susan do not appear in local records, they may have stayed in Canada.

Residential Mobility

Pollard first appeared in Kalamazoo in the 1860 census, living with an older black woman, Sarah Patterson, age 50 and born in Maryland. The two women lived together in Patterson’s home on Ransom Street. Census records
show Patterson possessed $75 worth of personal estate, while Pollard had $300 in real estate. In all probability, census takers incorrectly attributed Patterson's real estate to Pollard, as subsequent directories and censuses show Pollard moving frequently. This probably would not have been the case had she owned property. The residential stability of black homeowners in Kalamazoo during this period is well documented. For example, Emily Dye lived two doors from Mrs. Patterson. Throughout her residence in Kalamazoo Mrs. Dye remained in that same home. S. Paterson is listed on the plat map as homeowner, while Rachel Pollard is nowhere indicated as owning property in Kalamazoo, and her extremely unstable residential pattern is further grounds for the argument that census takers incorrectly attributed property ownership to Rachel Pollard.

Family Structure

Rachel Pollard's relationship with Mrs. Patterson and her daughter Ann, is unknown. At some point between 1856, when her second daughter Elizabeth was born (in Canada) and 1860, when she first appears in the Kalamazoo census, Rachel came from Canada with her daughter Elizabeth. The 1860 census shows Rachel, age 25, Elizabeth, age 5, and Thomas, 4 months old and born in Michigan. Therefore we know she lived in Kalamazoo for at least four months before the census. The whereabouts of her husband Allen P. Pollard and her oldest daughter, Susan, are unknown. Because Rachel is named in the city directories for 1867-68 and 69-70, it can be assumed she lived as head of
household. But in the 1871-72 directory, she is named as widow of Allen P. Though no record of his death appears in Kalamazoo, it is possible he died in 1872, because she gave birth to her last child, Clarence, in 1872. Possibly they remained married, and he remained in Canada with her daughter Susan, visiting Kalamazoo from time to time. This could explain Thomas, born in Michigan in 1860, Catherine, born in Michigan in 1867, and Clarence, born in Michigan in 1872. The long spacing of these births would further support this hypothesis, since the couples first two children were born within a two year span. Another possibility is that Rachel had her last two or three children by another man, one who lived in Kalamazoo.

After 1872, city directories list her consistently as a widow, and as was common with most widows, she made her living as a washerwoman. Between 1872 and 1878 she lived in the same house on Willard Street, but after the deaths of three children in 1878-9 her living arrangements changed. The 1880 census shows Rachel, her oldest daughter Susan (newly arrived from Canada?) Rachel's youngest son Clarence and Susan's son William Johnson living together at 54 Edwards. By 1883 Rachel had moved again. On August 4, 1884 she died.88

Deaths From Consumption

Rachel Pollard lost three children to consumption. According to Kalamazoo County death records, Elizabeth Pollard died at age twenty two of consumption on February 11, 1878. Catherine Pollard, age eleven, died of
consumption on October 2, 1878. Thomas Pollard died at age nineteen of consumption, on December 13, 1879. Rachel buried all three in Riverside Cemetery, not an insignificant fact. Burial plots cost $6 apiece, and an entire funeral, carriage, coffin, box, gravediggers and lot cost over $30 in 1867. The difficulty of caring for consumption patients along with the trauma of watching her family die one by one within less than two years must have placed a tremendous strain on Rachel. Possibly it also exposed her to the infection that caused her death in 1884.

The Probate Inventory of Rachel Pollard

When she died, Rachel Pollard left an estate worth over $200.00. Probate inventories valued her household goods at $18.35. Evidently her property was valuable enough for the heirs to fight over, because her probate records contain an order to secure the premises from entry, an indication that an unauthorized person had already come in and taken some things.

An inventory of household goods like Rachel Pollard’s is nothing short of a treasure trove for the historian. No other document can give such insight into the daily life, the standard of living of long gone people. If nothing else is left in writing, a will and probate inventory can be the only clue into a complex human existence, hence much must be gleaned from the list of inanimate objects (see Figure 6).

Rachel’s inventory shows she owned several tools for laundry, including
INVENTORY

A TRUE AND PERFECT INVENTORY of all Real Estate, Goods, Chattels, Rights, and Credits of Rachel Pollard, deceased

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<th>Cents</th>
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<td>6 00</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 00</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Earthen Jar</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parlor Stove &amp; Pipe</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedstead</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Stands</td>
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<td></td>
<td>75</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All 30 50

Figure 6. Probate Inventory of Rachel Pollard.

two wash tubs, two hand sledges for pulling heavy tubs filled with water, one
clothes ringer, two plates (probably flatirons) and one fluting iron. Her washing
equipment carried a value of $3.75. What is missing here is instructive. She has
no ironing board, clothes frames for hanging or stretching shirts, or clothes pins
for hanging up clothes to dry. Wash tubs held hot soapy and clean rinse water.
Clothes were dunked, scrubbed on the sledges or washboards, rinsed, wrung
through the clothes ringer, dried by hanging either indoors or out, then taken
down and ironed. The plates, or flat irons, were for petticoats, sheets and large
items, while the fluting iron was for ruffles and "ruching".

"Cook Stove and Furniture" heads the probate inventory and describes the
most valuable item in Rachel's home: a stove and the requisite pipes, pans, grates
and hobs needed to operate it. While probate inventories generally undervalue
items, a new stove in the 1870's would have cost at least twenty dollars, with
a used stove worth fifteen, according to inventories of items at the Kalamazoo
Hospital for the Insane taken in 1872. Rachel's stove could not have been "a
cooking-stove constructed on true scientific principles, which unites convenience,
comfort, and economy," like the stove advocated by Catherine Beecher in
American Woman's Home. With proper management, Beecher's technologic-
ally advanced stove required only one coal-hod of hard coal per 24 hours of
use. The price of this wonderful stove is unavailable, but even the cheapest
stove during the 1870's would have cost three or four times the value of Rachel's
stove. Her stove would most likely have used twice as much fuel and required
much attention to operate efficiently.

Beecher’s advice to the frugal nineteenth-century housewife calculated that a Midwestern winter would require four tons of coal per year; at $12.00 a ton this would have been a large expense for Rachel. If, as scholar Jacqueline Jones suggests, the average washerwoman made $8.00 a month, $48.00 a year for coal would have been half her salary, obviously out of reach. A more reasonable alternative was wood. At $2.50 a cord, it was more affordable, though no less difficult to manage than coal. It had to located, cut and stacked, if purchased, it was usually delivered but had to be stacked and carried indoors. Possibly Rachel purchased her wood from Spencer Hedges, a black Civil War veteran who listed his occupation as woodman.

The six woodbottom chairs represent kitchen or dining room chairs, but no table appears on the inventory. One can only speculate about the absence of a table. Did the daughter take the table or was Rachel so poor that she couldn’t afford a table? Maybe she used the stands, listed last on the inventory, to take the place of a table. Sturdy, useful plain woodbottom chairs cost close to $1.00 apiece new. These provided seating in the kitchen while the rocker must have given Rachel a comfortable place to sit while shelling peas to eat from her "vegetable dish."

Rachel’s kitchen equipment seems to have been a mixture of necessities and superfluous items, but some essentials are missing. She had a number of spoons and knives, but only one fork; two tea cups and saucers but no teapot. A
set of glassware: tumblers, a fruit dish and a sugar dish, probably in a matching pattern, may have been treasured items kept more for decoration and status than common everyday use. The glassware and the silver plated spoons indicate that Rachel Pollard attempted to participate in the acquisition of decorative goods that characterized the Victorian era. While plated teaspoons and pressed glass represented cheaper goods\textsuperscript{98}, to a poor woman like Rachel, they were probably treasured possessions.

The rest of her kitchen goods had more prosaic uses. To prepare food, she had a grater, a potato masher, skinner knife and chop knife or cleaver. These utensils indicate she ate meat, vegetables, potatoes, maybe some cheese. The syrup dish probably held molasses, commonly poured over cornbread and served as breakfast\textsuperscript{99}.

Catharine Beecher advocates having several earthen jars, for holding butter, lard and the like. Because of the way the item is positioned in the inventory it could have been a chamber pot instead of a kitchen item. Rachel Pollard may have lived in two rooms; a kitchen and a bedroom, since there seems to be little furniture for any other room. A "Parlor Stove and Pipe," along with a bedstead and two stands comprised the bedroom or parlor furniture. Certainly she would have had bedding and quilts upon the bedstead, but no mention of them occurs in the inventory.
Disputes Among the Heirs

Rachel Pollard’s estate inventory reveals information while raising even more questions, as do the references in local census and city directories. Mobile individuals like Pollard usually leave researchers holding quite a few dead ends. Her traceable migrations, however, were by no means unusual for nineteenth-century African-Americans who owned no real estate. Leaving behind few traces, these lives are part of the invisible poor, those whose lives only got noticed when things went wrong. If Rachel Pollard’s heirs had not disagreed over the settlement of her property, no record beyond a few tantalizing, but easily missed mentions in census records and city directories would exist. Pollard’s hand written will mentions a daughter, Susan M. Johnson, and a son, Clarence Pollard. The 1880 census shows Rachel, Susan, Clarence, and another young boy, William Johnson, whom census remarks show as "living with Mrs. P.,” but it is most likely he was the son of Susan. This is the first time Susan and Clarence appear. When Rachel made out her will, she left $5 to Susan and the rest of her estate, including $200 in the Bank of Canada, plus her goods and chattels, to her son Clarence, 12, at the time. William H. McCourtie, a wealthy Kalamazoo businessman, appealed to the probate court to be made administrator of the estate. The fact that an administrator was named to prevent the further removal of those goods and chattels and the fact that Susan Johnson’s residence was unknown leads to speculation that she and her mother were estranged, and that Susan took some things from the house and left town. This is corroborated by the
missing items, which can only be speculated upon, but the detailed inventory would certainly have listed clothes, bedding and textiles had they been present. It is possible that Susan left town with all the movable goods she could carry after her mother died, leaving Clarence, an orphan, to fend for himself. In 1886 William H. McCourtie, the same man who acted as administrator of the estate, petitioned for guardianship of Clarence and the estate, so that Clarence, a minor, would retain his portion.

Unanswered Questions

Here is another mystery. Why would McCourtie, a real estate and grain dealer, owner of Merrill and McCourtie Mill, one of Kalamazoo’s wealthiest white men, take an interest in the affairs of a poor black washerwoman and her child? McCourtie owned a large flour mill nearby the north side neighborhood. His home was on 321 Woodward Avenue, a wealthy neighborhood within walking distance of Rachel’s various homes. Mrs. Pollard may have gained the friendship and sympathy of the McCourtie family while she worked for them as a washerwoman.

To become guardian and administrator of the estate, McCourtie, along with Moses Kingsley, secretary and treasurer of Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Co. and Treasurer of Citizens Mutual Fire Insurance Co. had to put up a bond of $300. Wealthy and prominent men may have had money and time to spare, but becoming administrator and guardian is something only a good friend
of the family would undertake. Even if he had gotten involved for altruistic reasons, the fact that he knew about Rachel's plight indicates there was some contact between them.
CONCLUSION

As this connection illustrates, the lives of Kalamazoo's black and white citizens intertwined in numerous ways, contributing to the social, economic, and physical character of the city. Though the population was small, white and black Kalamazooans interacted in a variety of ways: as neighbors, in employer-employee relationships, as buyers and sellers of goods, services and real estate, at social events, and maybe even as friends and lovers.

Most African-American families in Kalamazoo hovered on the line between working poor and lower middle class. Though they earned enough to survive and in a few cases, prosper, most often it took the work of several family members to survive. Moving up meant property ownership, which a few families and one or two women, with the help of wage earning children, managed to attain. Teenage sons worked as laborers or porters, while daughters worked in domestic service. While the labor of several family members was often needed to move up in the world, the incidence of wives who worked outside the home in Kalamazoo is low. This calls into question the heavy emphasis by scholars on women's wages in the black family, at least in a small town Northern farm/industrial economy. With men usually earning a living wage, my research shows that most married women were not employed. Single women and widows however were almost invariably working.
The occupations open to black women during the last half of the nine-
teenth century were not prestigious, but they provided a living wage. Single
women worked as domestic servants, while widows labored over laundry tubs to
feed their children and pay their taxes. Married women kept house and took in
boarders. In order to augment their financial status, or simply to survive, many
women and families pursued other strategies to earn money. Kin networks pro-
vided visitors, boarders and extended families. Children often helped out but
most children between six and twelve attended school. As homeowners and tax-
payers black Kalamazooans, both men and women, contributed to the financial
stability of the community. Through their efforts, a socially marginal working
class group moved toward middle-class status. By the mid-1890's, a larger, more
economically and socially cohesive group of blacks inhabited Kalamazoo.

Rachel Pollard's story fittingly illustrates the survival strategies of
Kalamazoo's African-Americans. She was an unknown woman; traces of her life
in public records were overlooked for a century. She migrated from her state of
birth, Ohio, to Canada and then Michigan in search of opportunity. She joined
with other women and families in kin group networks that helped in adjusting to
a new environment. She suffered poor living conditions and the ravages of ill-
nesses, but managed to give her children decent burials with her hard-earned
wages as a washerwoman. She forged a relationship with a powerful white man
who could help in times of emergency. Her experiences during the years immedi-
ately following the Civil War shed light on the lives of ordinary black people who
lived, not in big cities or on Southern farms, but in small Midwestern villages.
NOTES

1. I have designated as "short term" people whose names appeared in only one or two City Directories and one Census.


8. Dunbar, Kalamazoo and how it grew...and grew, p. 209.


10. Wilson, The Rural Black Heritage Between Chicago and Detroit, p. 75.

12. Examples are too numerous to detail, for instance; 

Kalamazoo Gazette Saturday June 3 1876 p. 4 col. 1. "The Colored Band furnished the Gazette force, about one o’clock this morning, some of their most stirring music. The boys played well and they will please accept the thanks of the Gazette." 

Mary Ann Haws Johnson recorded at least twenty-five references to black Kalamazoo activities in the Gazette between 1870 and 1877. RHC A-2028.


15. Weekly Gazette, Friday August 3, 1877, page 6, col. 3-4.


17. For a thorough and relevant study of the significance of marriage titles in women, see John Monro Edwards, "Mrs., Miss, or Mary: Appellative Indicators of Social Status of Wage-Earning Women in Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1859 & 1870" (M.A. thesis, Western Michigan University, 1992, 6).


20. Ibid., 135.


22. Dunbar, Kalamazoo and how it grew...and grew, 113. Dunbar is the only source I found who mentions the Frederick Douglass Club and the date he gives is unclear. It appears that this is the forerunner of the Frederick Douglass Association, which was established in 1919 as a recreational center for black servicemen. Dunbar states on page 182 of Kalamazoo and how it grew that until 1941 the Frederick Douglass Association operated out of rented facilities. There is no connection with the Unitarian Church.

23. Coller File, Archives and Regional history Center, Kalamazoo, Michigan. If only we could see the contents of these letters; they would provide a
much needed insight into traveling patterns and into personal relationships between correspondents.


26. *Ninth Census of the United States, 1870 Manuscript, Kalamazoo County, Michigan, Village of Kalamazoo; Microfilm M-593. Reel 680, p. 6. Archives and Regional History Collection, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI. References to the "Goens" family of Van Buren County, Mi. and a picture of "Frank Goens on his family's farmstead in Van Buren County" are found in Benjamin Wilson, *The Rural Black Heritage Between Chicago and Detroit, 1850-1929.*, 54, 64. The variety of spelling in nineteenth-century sources makes it quite likely that these families are related.*

27. In an interview with Ruth Moerdyck, published in *Emancipated Spirits: Portraits of Kalamazoo College Women*, Pauline Byrd Johnson describes her mother: "Mother went to beauty school in Buffalo, New York, for a year...She was an expert in that area, and she had no intention of being a servant. She was very smart; she didn't open a shop because she didn't want that overhead, but she went to people's homes. She had some of the most outstanding women of this town as clients."


32. *Catalog of the Officers, Teachers and Pupils of the Kalamazoo Public Schools for the School Years 1859-1871*. Kalamazoo: Board of Education, 1871; 27.


37. 1870 Census of the United States (Manuscript), Kalamazoo County, Village of Kalamazoo, MI; p. 241, National Archives Microfilm.

38. 1870 United States Census for Kalamazoo Village, p. 236.

39. 1870 United States Census for Kalamazoo Village, p. 244.

40. Massie and Schmitt, Kalamazoo: The Place Behind the Products, 102.


42. State of Michigan Probate Records, no. 1376.


44. Massie and Schmitt, Kalamazoo: The Place Behind the Products, p. 72.

45. Kalamazoo Plat Map for 1869, p. 36.

46. Plat Map of Kalamazoo County, 40.

48. DeVries, Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town, 16.

49. Massie and Schmitt, Kalamazoo: The Place Behind the Products, p.81.

50. Based on my own examination of census records and plat maps, I have reconstructed the North side neighborhood in question.

51. Evidence for this comes from plat Maps showing residences with owners name superimposed. Census records go in order down streets, so that next door neighbors can be determined. In some cases, by comparing the actual address of an individual from City Directories with census information it is possible to reconstruct entire blocks. Census information gives country of birth.

52. Kalamazoo County Index to Deeds, Number 5 Roll 231, Liber 65, 1867, p. 173.

53. Catalog of the Officers, Teachers and Pupils of the Kalamazoo Public Schools, for the School Year 1863-64. Manuscript in Kalamazoo Local History Room, Kalamazoo Public Library, p. 27.


56. Larry Massie and Peter Schmitt, Kalamazoo: The Place Behind the Products, p. 70.

57. Katzman, Before the Ghetto. See chapter entitled Work for a pertinent discussion of employment among blacks in Detroit. P.p.s. 115-117 refer in detail to issues of class, status and discrimination for black barbers.


59. "A Washerwoman." The Independent. 57 (November 10, 1904). This confessional tells the story of a young white woman who was forced by circumstances to become a washerwoman. Her obvious shame is revealed by her refusal to identify herself, but her repeated defenses of washing as a profession make it clear that though she feared the world’s scorn, she preferred washing, and the decent money she made doing it, to other options.


64. Woodson. *Journal of Negro History*, 269-277.


73. *1870 Census for Kalamazoo Village*: 152. *County of Kalamazoo Record of Deaths*, Book 3, p. 40. *Burial Record for Riverside Cemetery*, p. 2. An example of the inconsistencies in the records is the divergent ages given Jennie Adams at death. Burial records show her to have been 72 years at
death, while the official death records put her age at 52. According to her age at the 1870 census, 19, her birth date was 1851, making her 73 at the time of death.

74. Burial Record Riverside Cemetery, p. 2.

75. Kalamazoo County Record of Deaths 1867-1885. Manuscript, Kalamazoo County Building, Kalamazoo, MI.

76. Emily was buried June 2, 1891 at 76 years of age; she is buried in Section G14 of Riverside Cemetery. John Dye was buried April 5, 1887 at 35 years of age, also in Section G14. Burial Record Riverside Cemetery, p. 250.

77. Wilbur H. Watson, ed. Black Folk Medicine. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1984, p. 33. Watson asserts that African-Americans were often reluctant to call doctors or any authorities. It may also be that inconsistent record keeping kept the Dye deaths out of the books.


79. Dunbar, Kalamazoo and how it grew, p. 124.


81. Kalamazoo County Record of Deaths 1867-1885, p. 178.

82. Dunbar, Kalamazoo and How It Grew...and Grew, 97.


85. I was unable to find any records of Sarah Patterson in Deeds Records.

86. Kalamazoo County Index to Deeds, 1867, number 5, p. 173, manuscript, Kalamazoo County Building.

87. Plat Map of Kalamazoo County (N.P. 1873): 40.

88. Rachel Pollard appears in the 1860 Census on page 493; the 1879 Census on page 244; and the 1880 Census on page 122. She appears in Kalamazoo City Directories in 1867, 1869, 1871 and 1873.
89. Costs are taken from the Probate Record of Matilda Whitworth, Village of Kalamazoo Probate Court, Microfilm roll 122 number 349, Kalamazoo Courthouse. It is extremely doubtful that Rachel Pollard was able to afford the full funeral with carriage, etc. Rachel, Thomas and Catherine (Caddie) are buried in Section F 84 of Riverside Cemetery. Riverside Cemetery Burial Records, p. 658.

90. No cause of death is listed for Rachel Pollard in the Kalamazoo County Record of Deaths 1867-1885.

91. Andrew Carlson, Probate Clerk, conversation with the author November 17, 1992.


100. During a November 17, 1992 conversation with Probate Clerk Andrew Carlson, he indicated to me that a $5.00 bequest was considered the minimum that one would leave an heir; in effect, it was writing them out of the will without actually doing so. Also, he told me that an
administrator is usually appointed when there is a dispute, and the house being sealed indicates there has been problems with unauthorized entry by individuals, usually relatives.

101. Though it must be stated that most of Kalamazoo was within walking distance throughout the 19th century. Brown, Brown's Directory of Kalamazoo, 97, Plat Map of Kalamazoo County, 47.


Appendix A

Birth Place
Birth Place

Number

Statistics Taken

North
Ohio Valley
North East
South
Deep South
Explanation of

NORTH

Michigan
Canada

OHIO VALLEY

Ohio
Indiana
Kentucky
Tennessee
Illinois

NORTH EAST

Connecticut
Pennsylvania
New York
Vermont

SOUTH

Virginia
Maryland
South Carolina
North Carolina
West Virginia

DEEP SOUTH

Mississippi
Louisiana
Alabama
Georgia
Florida
Appendix B

Author's Drawing of North Side
Authors Drawing
showing segment of North Side
(compiled from Kalamazoo County Atlas and City Directories 1860-1885)
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