

SOLVING FOR X: Addressing the Unknown Variables in an African American Family

*Carl Leak**

The September 1990 Centennial Edition of the *Thomasville Times* featured a photograph of Harriet “Granny” Kanoy and family estimated to have been taken between 1900 and 1910. Blanche Greene, Harriet’s granddaughter, provided the photograph along with the name of each person pictured. She identified the individual seated on the right-hand side of the steps as her grandmother Kanoy.¹ A portion of the description in the newspaper reads: “Harriet Kanoy came to Thomasville after the Civil War and set up house at what is now the corner of Gail Street and Cox Avenue. ...The area became known around the city as Granny Town.”² There was no additional information and, therefore, unfortunately, the photograph was not placed within the context of a larger story. This article intends, through an examination of public documents ranging from 1869 to 1934, to provide the genealogical and historical details that could not be captured in the brevity of a caption.

Approximately thirty years or more before the family photograph was taken, Harriet Law had married Louis Kanoy in Davidson County.³ Louis is not pictured in the photograph featured in the special edition of the *Times*, so one significant detail about the Kanoy’s marriage certificate is that it introduces him into the family narrative. Beyond this, the document also provides possible pathways to a prior generation. The name of Harriet Kanoy’s mother, Mariah Law, is listed along with both the parents of Louis Kanoy. These details will be addressed further along in the discussion; the emphasis for now will be on this couple’s early years together in Thomasville.

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¹ Photograph of Harriet Kanoy and family, ca. 1908, Thomasville, North Carolina; author’s private collection.

² “Thomasville’s Granny Kanoy and Family,” *Thomasville Times*. 29 September 1990, p. E5.

³ Davidson County, North Carolina, Colored Marriage Licenses, Lewis Kanoy and Harriet Law, 3 Feb 1869; Register of Deeds, Lexington.



Setting up House: The Foundation of Granny Town

The description from the *Thomasville Times* makes reference to Harriet Kanoy “setting up house” in Thomasville after the Civil War. What exactly did that process entail? Davidson County property records provide some insight. In October 1877, eight years after Louis and Harriet Kanoy married, they purchased a tract of land totaling six acres from Calvin Taylor and his wife Sophia for fifty dollars. A brief passage from their deed follows:

This indenture made between Calvin Taylor & wife Sophia of the first part and Louis Kanoy of the second part all of the County of Davidson and the State of North Carolina adjoining the lands of Job Culbreth and others ...containing six acres, more or less to have and to hold the aforesaid tract of land, minerals excepted & all privileges ...thereto belongs to Louis Kanoy and his heirs.⁴

The information drawn from this land record establishes location. It is consistent with the captioned description of the dwelling depicted in the published family photograph. That source located it at the corner of “Cox Avenue and Gail Street.” The Taylors, another African American family, had

⁴ Davidson County, North Carolina Deed Book 35:68-69, Calvin Taylor and wife Sophia to Lewis Kanoy, dated 27 October 1877; Register of Deeds, Lexington.

purchased these six acres just two years earlier in 1875 from James M. Leach.⁵ I include the references to the two previous landowners because they provide important historical context. The Taylor and Kanoy families are representative of an ever-increasing number of African Americans in North Carolina who gradually earned enough to become property holders in the decades succeeding the abolition of slavery.⁶ James M. Leach was a Congressional representative and a Confederate officer during the Civil War. He also owned slaves.⁷ In the 1850 slave schedule, he listed a dozen slaves ranging in age from two to twenty-eight years. It is not clear from the evidence found to date whether Louis Kanoy, Calvin Taylor, or any members of their families belonged to James Leach before emancipation. However, this brief lineage of landownership for the area that would become Granny Town provides a perspective on early Thomasville and Davidson County that has, for the most part, been ignored in published histories. While many previous works have chronicled the impact of the Civil War on Thomasville, none have discussed slavery in any detail.

Ten years after the land transaction between the Taylor and Kanoy families, Louis and Harriet Kanoy would sell two of their six acres for \$50; interestingly, this is the same price they originally paid for the entire tract in 1877.⁸ It is the first of two sales that would occur within the first twenty years after purchase. These transactions seem to show the Kanoy's using their land as a source of supplemental income to the family business of farming.⁹ The second instance occurred in 1896, when a number of property owners in Thomasville leased portions of their lands to a members-only organization called the Thomasville Shooting Club.

The initial members of the club were the town's elite, but they were later joined by many individuals from more distant places. Most were wealthy or famous individuals from all over the world who traveled to Thomasville to hunt and socialize with peers. In his book, *The Good Doctor's Downfall*, Wint Capel wrote that the shooting club allowed Thomasville to "...shift its focus from the needy to the filthy rich."¹⁰ The property owners who leased land to the shooting club agreed to a price of one dollar per acre; the frequency of the payments is

⁵ Davidson County, North Carolina Deed Book 45:13, J.M. Leach and wife L.L. to Calvin Taylor, dated 8 Apr 1875; Register of Deeds, Lexington.

⁶ Loren Schwenger, *Black Property Owners in the South, 1790-1915* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 172-173.

⁷ "James Madison Leach," *United States House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives* (website): ([http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/L/LEACH.-James-Madison-\(L000170\)](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/L/LEACH.-James-Madison-(L000170))): accessed 6 Feb 2014); 1850 United States Census, Slave Schedule, Davidson County, North Carolina, North Subdivision, unpaginated, beginning right column, line 4, "James M. Leach" (slaveholder); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>): accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication M432.

⁸ Davidson County, North Carolina Deed Book 39:414, Luke [sic] and Harriet Kanoy to P. P. Pendley, dated 9 Dec 1887; Register of Deeds, Lexington.

⁹ See entry for "L. Lee Kanoy" in Levi Branson, *Branson's North Carolina Business Directory* (Raleigh: 1889), vol. VII (1890), 248

¹⁰ Wint Capel, *The Good Doctor's Downfall* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004), 38-40

not apparent in the original agreement. The rental could have been paid monthly or at some other regular interval during the various hunting seasons. The total territory leased amounted to 60,000 acres. The participating landowners included both black and white citizens, among them, Louis Kanoy. The document specifically gave club members the right to shoot quail, snipe, woodcock, turkeys, "...and any other game bird found upon the lands ... now owned by the said parties of the first part."¹¹ The discovery of this arrangement is significant because it reveals African Americans playing an integral economic role in what was still a developing town. Previous works that have chronicled the history of Davidson County and Thomasville have featured the Thomasville Shooting Club. None have mentioned the role of black landowners and their contribution to its hunting and other recreational facilities.

The deeds executed by Harriet and Louis Kanoy between 1877 and 1896 also have great genealogical value, especially as they relate to Louis. The 1896 lease to the shooting club, for example, is the last document indicating that Louis Kanoy was still alive. On the 1900 census, Harriet Kanoy is listed as a widow.¹² Based on this sequence of records, it can be deduced that her husband probably died between 1896 and 1900. As is often true in genealogical research, this is an instance in which alternative records are needed to fill the void when vital records are not available or have yet to be discovered. In the years after 1900, Harriet Kanoy would begin the process of passing her property on to second, third, and fourth generation Kanoy descendants. It was during these years, the early to mid-1900s, that the community would begin to assume its present identity as Granny Town.

Becoming Granny (Town)

By 1907, the Kanoy children had grown into adulthood and started families of their own. Harriet began to give away portions of her land and dwellings. She sold lots to her son Joseph, her daughter Mariah, and others for the cost of one dollar per transaction.¹³ In addition to helping her own children, she also reached out to neighbors with financial assistance. Annie Bratton, a longtime resident of Granny Town, remembers firsthand accounts about Harriet from Kanoy family friends. Annie elaborated upon Harriet's willingness to provide for the needs of her community.

¹¹ Davidson County, North Carolina Deed Book 48:180-183, Louis Kanoy *et al* to Thomasville Shooting Club, dated 1 Jan 1896; Register of Deeds, Lexington.

¹² 1900 United States Census, Population Schedule, Davidson County, North Carolina, Thomasville Township, North Precinct, page 10A, line 17, "Harriet Kanoy" household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>; Accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication T623, Roll 1192.

¹³ Davidson County, North Carolina Deed Book 62:315, Harriet Kanoy to Joseph Kanoy, dated 27 Aug 1907; Register of Deeds, Lexington; also same jurisdiction, Deed Book 62:485, Harriet Kanoy to Mariah Kanoy, 7 Oct 1907.

She knew how to handle money. She was the Granny, you know. ...[W]henever people would need something she would go to the closet in that back room where she had something like a wood stove or a chimney and she would give them what they needed.¹⁴

In addition to this financial outreach, Harriet Kanoy would also become a mother to members of her extended family well into her eighties. Based on oral history, we know that Harriet's married daughter Mariah Lindsay¹⁵ died about the time her third child, David, was born. According to the 1920 census, David Lindsay (aged six), along with his siblings Dorothy (aged eight) and Alice (aged ten), lived with Harriet.¹⁶ While no record has been found establishing the date of Mariah Lindsay's death, evidence of her passing is contained in Davidson County probate records. A 1914 document from an estate file reads:

...Mariah Lindsay, late of said county, is dead without leaving any Will and Testament ...and that Alice R. Lindsay, Dorothy Lindsay, and David L. Lindsay are entitled as heirs and distributees thereof.¹⁷

The administrator for Mariah Kanoy was her sister Hannah Rhodes. Three years later, in 1917, Hannah wrote a letter to Davidson County's Clerk of Superior Court. Below is a portion of the correspondence:

I beg to report that as administrator of the estate of Mariah Kanoy, I received no funds or assets belonging to said estate. The few articles of household furniture were turned over to the grandmother who cared for the children of [the] deceased.

Respectfully submitted –
Hannah Rhodes.¹⁸

As brief as this communication is, it highlights the circumstances surrounding

¹⁴ Annie Bratton, interview with Carl Leak, residence of Annie Bratton, 7 Dec 2013.

¹⁵ Davidson County, North Carolina, Colored Marriage Licenses, Watt Lindsay to Mariah Kanoy, 23 Dec 1908; Register of Deeds, Lexington.

¹⁶ 1920 United States Census, Population Schedule, Davidson County, North Carolina, Thomasville Township, page 24A, line 32, "Harriet Kanoy" household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: Accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication T625, Roll 1295.

¹⁷ Application for letters of administration (11 Sep 1914), Mariah (Moriah) Lindsay (1914) estate, Davidson County, North Carolina Estate Records, 1817-1948, as derived from digitization of the original series at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, collected as "North Carolina, Estate Files, 1663-1979" (database), *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1911121>: accessed Jun 2014), Davidson County, Surname Letter L, Lindsay Mariah (1914), image 3 of 5.

¹⁸ Letter from Hannah Rhodes to Davidson County Clerk of Superior Court (14 Nov 1917), Mariah Kanoy (1917) estate, Davidson County, North Carolina Estate Records, 1817-1948, as derived from digitization of the original series at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, collected as "North Carolina, Estate Files, 1663-1979" (database), *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1911121>: accessed Jun 2014), Davidson County, Surname Letter K, Kanoy, Mariah (1917), image 2 of 3.

Harriet Kanoy's role as a caregiver for her grandchildren. The estate file not only provides more specific information about the death of Harriet's daughter, Mariah, it also corroborates the identity and relationship of the three young children listed as inhabitants in her home in the 1920 Federal Census.

In an interview conducted in 2007, Blanche Greene, a granddaughter of Harriet Kanoy, added what she could remember about Harriet's taking on the responsibility of raising her grandchildren. "Granny took them in after their mama died. She didn't want them to go to a nursing home or orphanage."¹⁹ One might wonder why Harriet, in old age, would take on the added responsibility of raising her grandchildren. But clearly, it was not the first time she had mourned the loss of her offspring. According to the 1900 federal census, Harriet had given birth to eight children but only four were still living at that date.²⁰ While we have no knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of these earlier children, it is highly likely that such experiences contributed to the sense of family and community for which she later became known. It was this aspect of her character which led relatives and non-relatives alike to refer to her as "Granny." Because she was the matriarch of a small community, the residents would soon begin to refer to the area off Cox Avenue in Thomasville as "Granny Town," or in the early days, "Granny's Town."²¹

Names and Naming Practices in the Kanoy Family

For many African Americans, slavery is the one historical period which impedes and, many times, brings genealogical research to a halt. This section will address a single aspect of one of the many difficulties which the peculiar institution poses – the question of given names, surnames, and identity. Barbara Howell identifies the following common obstacles when researching African American surnames. First of all, there is the revocation of the African names of slaves coming directly from the continent. Secondly, even when blacks used particular surnames during slavery, they often dispensed with them after emancipation in order to permanently disassociate themselves from their past. Many former slaves chose new surnames based on a word indicative of a physical characteristic, a trade, or a previous master. Sometimes, they even assumed the surname of an affluent American or a notable local or national figure.²² To complicate the issue even further, many freedmen moved several times after emancipation, choosing a different surname each time, sometimes out of sheer preference and sometimes for survival. Since it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write, there could be many variations in the spelling of names, not only from one place to another but from one document to another.

¹⁹ Blanche Greene, interview with Carl Leak, residence of Blanche Greene, 28 Jan 2007.

²⁰ See note 12 above.

²¹ Annie Bratton, interview with Carl Leak, residence of Annie Bratton, 7 Dec 2013.

²² Barbara Howell, *How to Trace Your African-American Roots* (Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1999), 110.

Oftentimes, given names as well as surnames were adjusted or changed for reasons both related and unrelated to slavery. Franklin C. Smith and Emily A. Croom point out that spelling variations can sometimes be linked to differences in pronunciation. This was especially true when a former slave gave information verbally to a clerk or other official for use in a public document.²³ Smith and Croom provide the example of “Harrit,” “Harriet,” and “Harret” all being used on various documents to indicate the same person. This circumstance makes it necessary to give close attention to detail and continuously compare many records before reaching conclusions.

All of these issues come into play when considering the evidence surrounding the Kanoy family. For instance, the 1869 marriage license lists both the mother and the father of Louis Kanoy (Morris and Etta Wagoner) along with the mother of Harriet Kanoy. Harriet Kanoy’s maiden name is given as “Law” and, on the same document, her mother’s name is also listed as “Mariah Law.” The name “Law” is also used one year later in 1870, when, on the federal census, Harriet’s last name is Kanoy (spelled “K’noy”) and her younger sister Lucy’s surname is given as “Law.” When we move forward to 1900, the first name of Harriet Kanoy’s mother is verified on the federal census, because she lived with Harriet at this time. Also present is a man who is, most likely, her stepfather, James E. Waller.²⁴

Here is an instance which will require additional research. A best guess in this situation is that Mariah, Harriet Kanoy’s mother, remarried because, in 1900, the census indicates that she has been married to James Waller for forty years, placing the date of their union in 1860. However, considering the historical context and what is known about African American surnames historically, the scenario could be more complicated. If Harriet Kanoy was, as indicated by oral history, a slave, then was Law the surname of her last slave owner? Could it have been the name of a previous slave owner or did she assume the name for any of the other reasons discussed earlier? To further complicate the issue, there is also the question of marriage. If Harriet Kanoy’s mother married in 1860, then was the marriage recognized legally? If so, is it possible that the Wallers were free people at the time of their marriage and not slaves? But, if they were slaves, is it possible that the couple enjoyed the rare condition of having their marriage recognized and respected by the slave owner? These questions and their many possible variations will only be answered if additional evidence is discovered. But the value of the information found to date should not be underestimated. This is definitely true in the case of the 1900 federal census because, in African American genealogy, it can be extremely difficult to discover multiple generations before the Civil War. For this reason,

²³ Franklin Carter Smith and Emily Anne Croom, *A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering Your African-American Ancestors: How to Find and Record Your Unique Heritage* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2008), 106.

²⁴ See note 12 above.

the inclusion of Harriet Kanoy's mother and potential stepfather as cohabitants in her household is truly a godsend.

Another noticeable theme within the Kanoy family was the repeat use of given names. For example, Harriet Kanoy's mother was named Mariah.²⁵ Harriet and Louis Kanoy would go on to name a daughter Mariah, probably in her honor. Harriet's younger sister was named Lucy, and Harriet and Louis Kanoy would name another daughter after her. When Harriet's sister Lucy eventually married and had children, she, in turn, named one of her daughters Harriet. Traditionally, across cultures, repetitive naming practices could be employed for a number of reasons, including honoring the memory of a relative or facilitating the passage of cultural and material legacies from one generation to the next. In the Kanoy family, specifically, it seems also to indicate a certain level of family loyalty and affection, especially in the case of Harriet Kanoy and her sister Lucy. According to the 1870 census, Harriet Kanoy worked as a cook in the home of a white family and was estimated to have been twenty-one years old. Her sister Lucy, aged twelve, was another servant in the same home. The age difference suggests that Harriet Kanoy may have played a significant role in rearing her younger sister. More importantly, if Harriet Kanoy did arrive in Thomasville shortly after the Civil War, then it is likely that her sister Lucy came with her. The names they assigned their children are evidence of their tightknit relationship as siblings.

Future Work

A point of departure which may eventually lead to clues about Harriet Kanoy's origins is the 1870 federal census. As mentioned earlier, this census return indicates that Harriet Kanoy and her sister Lucy worked as servants.²⁶ Hannah W. Wallace (listed as H. W. Wallace), a widow, was the head of the household in that year. Her husband, Thomas C. Wallace, had died just two years previously in 1868. As it turns out, the Wallace family came to Davidson County from New Bern in Craven County where they had been slave owners.²⁷ The Wallace family was very extensive and resided in Beaufort County at one point prior to relocating to Davidson County. Thomas C. Wallace's estate file is lengthy. He had many debts that were disputed in the courts of Davidson,

²⁵ See note 3 above.

²⁶ Her name is spelled "Harriet K'noy" in this record. 1870 United States Census, Population Schedule, Davidson County, North Carolina, Thomasville, page 206A, line 9, "H. W. Wallace" household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication M593, Roll 1134.

²⁷ 1860 United States Census, Population Schedule, Craven County, North Carolina, Fifth Ward, City of New Bern, page 58, line 16, "Thomas C. Wallace" household; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication M653, Roll 894. See also 1860 United States Census, Slave Schedule, Craven County, North Carolina, New Bern, unpaginated, beginning left column, line 37, "Thomas C. Wallace" (slaveholder); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication M653.

Beaufort, and Craven counties. Because the estate settlement took place from the late 1860s into the 1870s, no slaves were listed as property. Interestingly, however, one of the debts attached to this settlement was owed to Calvin Taylor, the African American blacksmith who sold the original property of Granny Town to Louis and Harriet Kanoy.²⁸ These documents, along with other sources involving Thomas C. Wallace before 1865, should be examined in hopes of possibly pinpointing more evidence about Harriet Kanoy's life, in general, and her journey to Thomasville where she would settle for the rest of her life.

Harriet Kanoy died on January 26, 1934. The cause of her death is listed as pneumonia brought on by influenza. Her birthplace is given as Rockingham County, Virginia.²⁹ Harriet Kanoy's point of origin is yet another avenue that will need further exploration. Available sources from Rockingham County, Virginia, will be examined without ignoring available sources from Rockingham County, North Carolina—since portions of it lie on the border between the two states and the informant could have confused its name with that of the Virginia county. At the moment, however, the available evidence seems to point to Virginia. Although census documents from 1870 and 1880 list North Carolina as her birthplace, Harriet Kanoy was not the head of household in these instances. In 1870, Harriet Kanoy was a cook and a servant, so it is unlikely that she was consulted individually in that year as to her place of birth; in 1880, it was probably Louis Kanoy who reported for his entire household. On the other hand, the census taker may not have consistently bothered to ask about birthplace and simply filled in a standard "North Carolina" in the designated column. Notably, however, the census records from 1900 to 1930, when Harriet Kanoy was head of household, are very consistent in listing Virginia.

As for Louis Kanoy, the evidence found to date suggests that he may have been from Davidson County or a nearby area. A major challenge in his case will be the surname issue addressed earlier. There are several variations for his parents' surname Wagoner, as listed on slave schedules and on other census documents. "Wagoner," "Wagner," and "Waggoner" are just three examples of these variations. To add to this complication, unlike Harriet Kanoy, Louis Kanoy has not been located on the 1870 federal census or in any other document for that matter; the parents identified on his 1869 marriage license are

²⁸Thomas C. Wallace (1870) estate, Craven County, North Carolina Estate Records, 1745-1945, as derived from digitization of the original series at the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, collected as "North Carolina, Estate Files, 1663-1979" (database), *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1911121>: accessed Jun 2014), Craven County, Surname Letter W, Wallace, Thomas C. (1870), 29 images. See also Thomas C. Wallace (1869), Davidson County, North Carolina Estate Records, 1817-1948, as represented in the same database, Davidson County, Surname Letter W, Wallace, Thomas C. (1869), 85 images.

²⁹North Carolina State Board of Health, Certificate of Death, Davidson County, North Carolina, Thomasville, p. 445 (File #12), "Harriette Kanoy," digital image, "North Carolina Death Certificates, 1909-1975" (database), *Ancestry.com*, (<http://www.ancestry.com>: accessed Jun 2014).

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH 445

1. PLACE OF DEATH
County Davidson
Township Thomasville
City Thomasville
Registration District No. 29-80 Certificate No. 12

2. FULL NAME Harriet Kanoy
(a) Maiden name: No. 600 ONE AVE. (b) Street (if different from above) _____
(c) Place of abode: _____ (d) Ward: _____

3. SEX Female 4. COLOR OR RACE Colored 5. MARRIAGE STATUS Married
6. RELATIONSHIP TO DECEASED Wife of Louis Kanoy

7. DATE OF BIRTH (month, day, and year)
8. AGE (month, day, and year) 59

9. PLACE OF BIRTH (city or town, county, and State)
Rockingham N.C.

10. NAME James Waller
11. MARRIAGE PLACE (city or town, county, and State) No information
12. MARRIAGE DATE (month, day, and year) 1/23/36

13. DECEASED LAST WORKED AT (occupation, month, and year) Domestic
14. OCCUPATION Domestic

15. DATE OF DEATH (month, day, and year) 1/26/36
16. TIME OF DEATH (month, day, and year) 1-26-36

17. CAUSE OF DEATH (state in full)
Pneumonia

18. MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH
I HEREBY CERTIFY that I attended during the illness of the deceased from _____ to _____
I last saw her alive on _____ death is said to have occurred on the date stated above, at _____
The principal cause of death and related causes of importance in order of most were as follows: _____
Contributory causes of importance not related to principal cause: _____

19. SIGNATURE OF PHYSICIAN (name, address, and date)
W. H. Thomas, M. D., Thomasville, N. C., 1/26/36

20. FILED 1/26/36

MARGIN RESERVED FOR BINDING
N. B.—WHILE IN HAND, WITH UNPAID INK—THIS IS A PERMANENT RECORD. Every item of information should be carefully and accurately stated. PHYSICIANS should state cause of DEATH in plain terms, so that it may be properly classified. Make statement of OCCUPATION in very full particulars. See instructions on back of certificate.

Death certificate of Harriet Kanoy.

likewise very elusive. This absence of information will make drawing a link to his past all the more difficult but hopefully not impossible. With respect to Louis, the only other clue found to date is connected to the family photograph. The gentleman seated in a chair on the porch to the right is identified as Adam Kanoy, the brother of Louis Kanoy. Adam may be the stone yet unturned that will provide additional information about Louis's life before his marriage with Harriet Law.

Conclusion

Thomasville was not incorporated as a town until 1852. However, African Americans were present from the outset. In 1850, Davidson County was divided into northern and southern divisions on the federal census. That year, there were a total of 2,992 slaves listed on the slave schedule countywide in comparison with a free black population of 196.³⁰ Ten years later, in 1860, there were 3,082 slaves countywide in comparison with a free black population of 148.³¹ Thomasville had only been in existence eight years by 1860. The federal census lists a total of 220 citizens. The 1860 slave schedule gives a figure of fifty-seven slaves and twelve slave owners living in the town—including twenty-

³⁰ Totals tabulated by the author using the search engine for "1850 United States Federal Census" and "1850 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules" (databases on-line), *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed Jun 2014).

³¹ Totals tabulated by the author using the search engine for "1860 United States Federal Census" and "1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules" (databases on-line), *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed Jun 2014).



Grave marker of Harriet Kanoy at Thomasville City Cemetery, photographed 5 January 2013.

six slaves belonging to the town's founder and former state senator John Warrick Thomas (listed as J. W. Thomas).³² There were no free persons of color living in the township at this time.

Published works overlook the roles slaves played during Thomasville's developing years. Previous writings about African Americans in Thomasville or Davidson County are problematic in at least one of two ways. Either the information provided is oversimplified or the works contain general mischaracterizations of the town's black residents. To be fair, both issues are mainly due to the spirit of the times in which these works were published. The limited perspective running through the historiography explains why the present article and others like it are both genealogically interesting and a public history concern. The two passages below are indicative of the problems inherent in the literature to date:

Before the war and during the war it was a very rare case to hear of an outrage being committed. The negro [sic] was happy in his surroundings, having no cares for the future, knowing he would be provided for even in sickness and old age.³³

Likewise, it is occasionally that we meet an old-time colored person

³² 1860 United States Census, Slave Schedule, Davidson County, North Carolina, North Subdivision, p. 19, beginning left column, line 21, "J. W. Thomas" (slaveholder); digital image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>; accessed June 2014); citing NARA microfilm publication M653.

³³ P.L. Ledford, *Reminiscences of the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Thomasville, NC: 1909), 100.

who politely takes off his hat in the presence of a white person and assures you with evident great pride: "Yes, suh, Boss; I's a ole-slav'ry nigger."³⁴

In the first example, P. L. Ledford is referring to the time before and after the Civil War. In the second passage, Calvin Leonard's "old time" is an allusion to the period of slavery. Both books are considered authoritative works for documenting the city's beginnings. Ledford's book was published in 1909, over one hundred years ago, and Leonard's book was published in 1927, over eighty years ago.

In 1925, M. Jewell Sink's *Davidson County: Economic and Social* appeared. There is no doubt that this is a work of great historical value. The book cites substantial statistical information on African Americans in Davidson County, especially in the areas of education and agriculture. However, there are still many disconcerting analytical conclusions about the educational "needs" of people of color at that time.³⁵ Again, the era in which the book was published is its primary limitation; undoubtedly, the thinking of that age was a major influence on its perspective and the standards of scholarship prevailing at that time differ greatly from those of today.

Mary Green Matthews published *Wheels of Courage and Faith: A History of Thomasville, North Carolina* in 1952 and added to the rich data provided in Sink's 1925 work. The book included a list of African Americans from Davidson County who served in the Confederate Army, along with a brief section on black physicians practicing in Thomasville in the early 1950s. Although the coverage is still limited to less than a page, its value lies in the names it provides. Genealogically speaking, in terms of the Confederate soldiers identified, Matthews's book can serve as an alternative source for placing African Americans before 1865, when names were not included on slave schedules.³⁶

Wint Capel, in a book published in 1991, dedicated an entire chapter to integration and race relations in Thomasville,³⁷ but this work focused on the Civil Rights Movement of the mid- to late twentieth century, mostly ignoring the earlier period. Mr. Capel cannot be blamed for this omission because the early years of the town were outside the purview of his work, but the absence of background indirectly points to the need for more detailed information about Thomasville's developing years.

Finally, in 2010, Tonya Lanier published *African Americans of Davidson*

³⁴ Calvin Jacob Leonard, *Centennial History of Davidson County, North Carolina* (Raleigh NC: Edwards & Broughton, 1927), 160.

³⁵ M. Jewell Sink, *Davidson County: Economic and Social* (Durham, NC: Press of the Seeman Printery, Inc., 1925), 75.

³⁶ Mary Green Matthews, *Wheels of Courage and Faith: A History of Thomasville, North Carolina* (Thomasville, NC: 1952), 111, 303-304.

³⁷ Wint Capel, *A Recent History of Thomasville, North Carolina, 1952-1991* (Thomasville, NC: W. Capel, 1991).

County. This was, in large part, a pictorial history focusing mainly on Lexington, North Carolina, and it included brief comments on the county's early days. From a county-wide perspective, her work is very relevant in terms of African American culture and history; however, it does not include significant material on Thomasville's black citizens.³⁸

The Kanoy family photograph published in the Centennial Edition of the *Thomasville Times* was important because it provided a glimpse into the lives of an African American family; their experience, in turn, sheds light on the developing years of a town. The information shared in this article is intended to expand upon that brief allusion to a section of Thomasville known as Granny Town and its namesake, Harriet Kanoy. However, the story of the Kanoy family is only one facet of the larger picture. There are other historically black neighborhoods in Thomasville dating back at least to the early to mid-1900s, if not before. African American natives of Thomasville are familiar with communities such as Rabbit Quarters, The Hill, King Row, New Town, East End, and, of course, Granny Town. But how were these areas shaped and what is known about their individual origins? Who were some of the first inhabitants? These are random questions, of course, but it is through the search for answers that a void in the published record will be filled. Although genealogy is one vehicle for addressing such questions, there is an urgent need for a multi-disciplinary approach to communities throughout the entire region, not only in Thomasville.

In his recent article, "I Was Raised Poor and Hard as Any Slave: African American Slavery in Piedmont North Carolina," John David Smith made reference to "underappreciated pockets" in the Piedmont region where slavery existed but is mostly ignored for many reasons. One explanation is that the institution of slavery was not as robust and central to community life in the Piedmont as it was in the eastern and southern portions of North Carolina.³⁹ Hopefully, examples of towns and cities like Thomasville and the experiences of families like the Kanoys will cause researchers from various disciplines to rethink past popular assessments of communities in this region and their place in the broader historical landscape. When it comes to African Americans, in particular, such reassessments are long overdue.

³⁸ Tonya A. Lanier, *African Americans of Davidson County* (Mt. Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010).

³⁹ John David Smith, "I Was Raised Poor and Hard as Any Slave': African American Slavery in Piedmont North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* vol. 90, no. 1 (Jan 2013): 1-25.