

# **Black Kentucky Pioneers:**

## **Thruston Cabell (c1836-1905)**

By Jerry Long, Owensboro, KY

While indexing the old issues of the Owensboro, KY newspapers for the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library I made many amazing discoveries. One of the most touching and interesting was the story of Thruston Cabell a former slave. His name is also found under numerous spellings – Thurston, Cabel, Cable, Cabbel, Cabbie, Coble, Cobbel. On his grave marked at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro his name is engraved Thruston Cabell. Thruston was born into slavery about 1836 in Richmond, Virginia. He, his mother, and brother, Ned, were owned by a planter near Richmond. At the time of the California Gold Rush in 1849 the family was separated. Their owner wanted to go out west to seek his fortune. He sold his property including his slaves at the time to have money for his trip. Thruston, then about 10, and his brother, about 8, were separated from their mother and sold to a slave trader from New Orleans. They were taken to New Orleans where again they were sold. Thruston was sold to someone in Henderson County, Ky., and his brother to someone in Texas. His mother, grief stricken, never gave up on looking for her sons. After the war, she searched for her boys, saved money and went to various states in the south that sold slaves to find where her sons were sold. She had traveled to several cities in her search and had friends write numerous inquiries all over the country asking, if they knew her boys. In 1889 by some accident she learned that Thruston had been taken to Henderson, KY. A letter was written to the Baptist Church in Henderson, who informed her that he had moved to Daviess County, KY. Another letter was addressed to the Baptist church in Owensboro, which was handed to Thruston Cabell. Several weeks afterward he was reunited with his mother in Richmond, VA. He brought her back to live with him in Owensboro for the remainder of her days.

Thruston Cabell had been brought to Henderson County, KY by Alexander Buchanan Barret (1811-1861), who at the age of 14 found employment in the office of an uncle in Richmond, Virginia. His uncle carried on a large tobacco trade in this country and in Europe. His uncle in 1833 sent Barret to Henderson, KY to take charge of his tobacco interests in this locality. A. B. Barret became one of the most extensive tobacco merchants in the world. He established numerous stemmeries including one in Owensboro. He was the wealthiest man in Henderson County and possible in the state of Kentucky. His estate was worth over \$3,000,000. (see History of Henderson County, Kentucky (Edmund L. Starling, Henderson, KY, 1887, p803) and History of Daviess County, Kentucky (Inter-State Publishing Co., Chicago, 1883, p338).

During the Civil War soon after his emancipation Thruston Cabell enlisted for service in the Union Army (listed under the spelling of Cobbel). On 16 August 1864 he enlisted in the 28<sup>th</sup> US Colored Infantry at Evansville, IN. He was mustered in on 20 August 1864 at Indianapolis, IN. At his enlistment he reported he was age 28, born at Richmond, VA and was a farmer. He

was promoted to the rank of corporal on 1 March 1865. He was mustered out of service on 8 November 1865.

In Daviess County, KY Thruston Cable married Mary Henry on 15 June 1872 (Negro Marriage Book B, p131). Thruston Cabel (35 laborer) was enumerated in the 1880 federal census of Daviess County, KY. Living with him was his wife, Mary (30), and two sons, Vivion (uncertain of spelling, 11) and John (6). They were residing in Owensboro on Walnut Street. Thruston's wife, Mary Cabbell, was interred at Owensboro's Elmwood Cemetery on 13 November 1881 ("Register of Interment, Elmwood Cemetery, 1877-1885 & 1900-1902"). Thruston Cable married Joanne Barnhill in Owensboro on 6 April 1882 (Negro Marriage Book E, p41).

Thruston Cabell's mother, Louise Smith, died in Owensboro on 27 November 1897. She is probably the Louisa Smith (black, age 78, born Virginia) who appears in the 1880 census of Richmond, Henrico County, VA; interestingly in the next residence listed was living Dr. Robert Gamble Cabell (white, a physician; he was born 1809 and died in 1889). Dr. Cabell was the son of Virginia governor, William Cabell, and Agnes Sarah Bell Gamble.

In the 1900 federal census of Daviess County, KY Thruston Cabble (born May 1840 Virginia) was listed. He owned his home in Owensboro and he was employed as a janitor. In his home was his wife, Joanne (born March 1845 KY); a niece, Nellie Triplett (September 1884 KY) and a son, John Cabble (June 1875 KY, employed at tobacco stemmery). The 1903 & 1905 Owensboro City Directories list that Thruston & Joanna Cabble were residing at 709 Walnut Street and he was employed as a janitor at the National Deposit Bank.

In 1904 Thruston Cabell suffered a stroke of paralysis and was forced to retire as a janitor at the National Deposit Bank in Owensboro. He had been employed there about 25 years. He died on 10 November 1905. Death notices were published in the Owensboro Messenger (12 November 1905 p9) and Owensboro Inquirer (12 November 1905 pp9 & 15). The Messenger gave his age as 68 and the Inquirer stated he had resided in Owensboro for forty years and noted that "He occupied a prominent place in colored society and had very many friends among the white people." In section B at Owensboro's Elmwood Cemetery a small grave stone engraved only with the name Thruston Cabell marks his grave. Thruston's final will was recorded on 20 November 1905, it named his wife, Joanna, a son, John.

Thruston Cabell's widow, Joanna, was residing at 709 Walnut Street in Owensboro when the 1910 federal census was taken. Joanna Cabell ("Aunt Joe") died at her home at 709 Walnut Street on 23 October 1912. She had been a janitress for many years at the Walnut Street city school. Her death certificate recorded that she was age 69, born in Daviess County, daughter of Henry & Johanna Triplett, and was buried at Elmwood Cemetery in Owensboro. She is listed as Joanna Triplett (age 24, born KY) in the 1870 census of Owensboro, KY; she was living in the home of Nellie Triplett (age 50, born KY). The 1900 census recorded that no children had been born to Joanna Cabell.

Since 2008 there has been an annual historical dramatization, "Voices of Elmwood", enacted at Owensboro's Elmwood Cemetery. Over the years I have suggested several characters

for portrayal that came to my attention while indexing the old newspapers. I informed other historians about the dramatic story of Thruston Cabell and suggested him for characterization. His life story was portrayed by actor, McCellus Mays, in the 2012 production. His portrayal was one of the most acclaimed in the series and his segment was filmed and aired on Kentucky Education Television on 27 October 2012.

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Owensboro Area Obituary Index ( <http://obits.dcplibrary.org> ), Daviess County Public Library, Owensboro, KY:

Name:	CABELL, Thruston
Obituary Source & Date:	Owensboro Messenger - 11/12/1905
Age:	68
Birth Date:	No birth date on record
Birth Place:	No birth place on record
Death Date:	11/10/1905
Death Place:	Owensboro, KY, Daviess County, KY
Cemetery:	Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY
Cause of Death:	paralysis
Survivors:	wife: Johanna Cabell; son: John Cabell
Comments:	[compiled by Jerry Long, Kentucky Room]

- Owensboro Messenger – 1905: 11/12 p.9; 'Black'; 'Uncle Thrus'; also spelled as Cabel; janitor at National Deposit Bank for 18 years; buried 11/12; 11/21 p.3; Owensboro Inquirer – 1905: 11/12 p.9 & 15 (Thruston Cabbie died Friday November 10, janitor at the Deposit Bank and its successor the National Deposit, in Owensboro, for 25 years, his service terminated about a year ago after suffering an attack of paralysis; brought to Kentucky from Virginia by the late Alexander B. Barret long before the Civil War; soldier - Civil War, USA, he served in the colored troops during the Civil War, receiving an honorable discharge; after the war he learned that his mother was still alive and he went to Virginia found her and brought her to his home here and cared for her the remainder of her life, "He occupied a prominent place in colored society and had very many friends among the white people")
- Owensboro Messenger – 1889: 7/23 p.1 (Martha Cabell searches many years for her two sons that were sold during slavery, she was a slave near Richmond, Virginia and in 1849 her master sold her sons, aged 8 & 10 years, to a slave-trader from New Orleans, where they were taken & resold, the oldest, Thruston Cabell, was sold to parties from Henderson, KY & his brother, Ned, was sold to a party in Texas, after many years of searching she has located her son, Thruston, who had relocated to Owensboro, where for some time he has been employed as a porter at the Deposit Bank, he sent for his mother, now 85, and had her brought to Owensboro, she also recently learned that her other son is doing well near Dallas, TX)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1889: 8/21 p.4 (Thruston Cabell went to Richmond, VA to meet his mother. "Aunt Louisa", after a separation of nearly 40 years); Owensboro Weekly Messenger – 1889: 8/22 p.3

- Owensboro Inquirer – 1890: 5/25 p.5 (Mrs. Thurston Cabbell of West Main Street is making some improvements on her neat little house)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1890: 6/1 p.6 ("Mother Smith", mother of Thurstion Cabell, West Walnut Street, will be 87 years old today, she is a Virginian)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1897: 11/30 p.1 (Louise Smith, 'Black'; mother of Thruston Cabell, porter at the Deposit Bank; buried yesterday; she was very old and no one knew her age; she was sold in the south before the Civil War, when her son, Thruston, was only a small child and he did not hear from her until five or six years ago, when he heard that she was still living; he went after her and brought her here and cared for her in her declining days)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1897: 11/30 p.8 (Louise Smith mother of Thruston Cabell died 27 November 1897 in Owensboro)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1902: 10/28 p.2 (Thurston Cabell left on a trip to his old home in slavery days)
- Owensboro Inquirer – 1904: 3/4 p.4 (became ill while at work at the National Deposit Bank, where he has been janitor for many years)
- Owensboro Messenger – 1912: 10/25 p.2 ("Aunt Joe" Cabel died 24 October 1912 at her home on Walnut Street in Owensboro; janitress for many years at the Walnut Street city school; her husband, Thruston Cabel, died several years ago)
- Messenger-Inquirer – 2012: 10/15 p.1B ("KET to spotlight 'Voices of Elmwood'", while many in the local area are familiar with "Voices of Elmwood," the event will soon have statewide reach the event will be filmed for Dave Shuffett's "Kentucky Life," a show on Kentucky Educational Television, it will air at 7 pm CDT Oct. 27; produced by the science museum and the Daviess County Public Library, "Voices of Elmwood" features wagon tours of the cemetery where local actors portray people from the region at their grave sites. they filmed the event Friday, capturing the entire stories of Carl Browder, regarded with his wife, Grace, as the local version of Bonnie and Clyde; and Thruston Cabell, who was sold into slavery at 8 years old, and became a Union Army soldier and pillar in Owensboro; the roles are played by Joe Berry and McCellus Mays, respectively)
- Messenger-Inquirer – 2017: 6/21 p.3D ("Honoring Our Veterans", his grave was marked with a military gravestone in a ceremony at his grave in Elmwood Cemetery on 8 June 2017, he served in Co. G, 28th Regiment, US Colored troops during the Civil War")

## A MOTHER'S SEARCH.

An Old Negro Woman Seeks Uncess-  
ingly for Her Children Sold in  
Slavery.

In Her Old Age to be Rewarded by the  
Sight of a Child Separated From Her  
for Forty Years.

[Cincinnati Enquirer Special.]

OWENSBORO, KY., July 21.—An interesting incident has just been brought to light in this city, in which Martha Cabell, who has served a great portion of her life in slavery in Virginia, and who forty years ago was separated from her children in order that her master might secure money with which he could enter on an adventure for enriching himself, is the heroine. The mother and her offspring were owned by a planter near Richmond, Va., and at the breaking out of the gold excitement in California in 1849 her master sold her two sons, aged 8 and 10 years to a slave-trader from New Orleans to secure money to go to the gold fields. The boys were taken to New Orleans where they were again sold, the oldest, Thruston Cabell, to parties in Henderson, Ky., and his brother Ned to a party living Texas.

As soon as her boys were taken from her the mother, who was held by the chains of slavery, set about to learn where her children were taken, and to keep trace of them, hoping that some day they would be reunited. She succeeded in learning that they had been

taken to New Orleans, but here she lost all trace of them, but did not despair, and continued her search by means of letters written for her by friends to various parts of the country, all of which were fruitless.

As soon as she was given her freedom she worked hard and saved her earnings in order to pursue her search. She managed, by stinting herself, to visit New Orleans, thence to Memphis, Nashville, Tenn., and many other places, at last returning to Richmond, Va.

During all her travels she would get friends to write for her to points where she would occasionally receive information which might possibly bring her some news of her boys. Finally she, by some accident, learned that Thruston had been sold and taken to Henderson, Ky. She got some of her friends to write to some of the members of the Baptist church at Henderson. A reply was returned that he had gone to Daviess county, Ky. A letter was addressed to the Baptist church in this city, which was handed to Thruston Cabell, who has been employed for some time as porter in the Deposit Bank. Thruston at once secured money and forwarded it to his aged mother, who is now 85 years old, and nearly blind. The money brought the mother to this place this morning, and the meeting of the faithful parent and her son was a joyous scene. She was also rewarded by learning that her other son is doing well near Dallas, Texas.

AN AFFECTING MEETING.

Thruston Cabell Meets His Mother at  
Richmond, Va., After a Separation  
of Nearly Forty Years.

Thruston Cabell, who went to Richmond, Va., a week ago for his mother, whom he had not seen since before the war reached his destination safely and found his mother well and beside herself with joy at meeting her long lost son. A gentleman who lives in Richmond writes:

"The great meeting between Thruston and his mother has taken place, and such rejoicing you never witnessed. It was so affecting that even the hack driver who took Thruston to his mother could not refrain from shedding tears.

"My wife and I went up to see them half an hour afterward and she almost shook our hands off thanking us for the interest we had taken in them. Mr. Lawrence Lottier, one of our most celebrated tobacco manufacturers, said he never wanted to witness so affecting a scene again. This gentleman has been very kind to old Aunt Louisa and has allowed her to live for years in one of his houses without receiving a return of any kind. He gives her a splendid name as one of the finest old colored women alive.

"Thruston is as happy as he can be. He sends his love to everybody and looks as pleased as a lover over his first engagement."

—Louise Smith, the mother of Thruston Cabell, the old colored porter at the Deposit bank, died Saturday about 11 o'clock of old age.

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**THRUSTON CABLE.**

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**Death of a Worthy Old Negro Who  
Gave Faithful Service.**

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The death of Thruston Cable removes a well known character. He was janitor of the Deposit bank, and its successor, the National Deposit, for the term of twenty-five years, his service terminating about a year ago, at which time he suffered a stroke of paralysis.

Thruston was brought to Kentucky from Virginia by the late Alexander B. Barret at a period long before the civil war. When a call was made for colored troops Thruston responded, and served his full term of enlistment, winning an honorable discharge.

When the war was over he learned that his mother was still alive and in indigent circumstances and he went to Virginia and found her and brought her to his home here and cared for her the remainder of her life. He occupied a prominent place in colored society and had very many friends among the white people.

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Owensboro Messenger, Sunday, 12 November 1905, p.9

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**FUNERAL THIS AFTERNOON**

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**Of Uncle Thruston Cabel, a Well Known Negro.**

The funeral of Uncle Thruston Cabel, one of the best known negroes in Owensboro, will take place at 2:30 o'clock this afternoon from the Colored Baptist church. "Uncle Thrus." was janitor at the National Deposit bank for eighteen years. During the past year he has been unable to attend to the work, but was a frequent visitor at his old working place. He was sixty-eight years of age.

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Owensboro Messenger, Friday, 25 October 1912, p.2

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**"AUNT JOE"**

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**FRIEND OF HUNDREDS OF WHITE PEOPLE IS DEAD.**

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**For a Long Number of Years She Was Janitress at Walnut Street School.**

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"Aunt Joe," known to hundreds of school children in the city and also known to scores of people in the city whose school days are now but memories, for a long number of years janitress at the Walnut street city school, died at her home on Walnut street at 8 o'clock last night following an illness of several months.

Aunt Joe Cabel was an ante-bellum negress, and was highly respected by hundreds of people in the city. Her husband, Thruston Cabel, who died several years ago, was also well known in the city.

Funeral arrangements have not been made, but the services will be conducted from the Colored Baptist church, and a part of the church will be set apart for the white friends of the old negress and for the school children. The funeral arrangements will be announced later.



Photo submitted by Vanetta McDowell.

**A grave making ceremony was held June 8 at Elmwood Cemetery for Thruston Cabell, an African-American who served in the Co. G 28th Regiment U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War.**

