

# Calvin T. ("Cal") Thomas (1846-1932)

By Jerry Long  
c.2026



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 8 November 1903, p.3  
and Hartford Herald, Wednesday, 18 November 1903, p.1:

WELL KNOWN COLORED MAN.  
Cal. Thomas, Proprietor of the Y. M.  
C. A. Barbershop.



Cal Thomas

Cal Thomas is one of the best known colored men in Owensboro. He is well known as the proprietor of the Y. M. C. A. barbershop, where he has been in business for some time. He is more particularly known as one of the very few negroes who vote and work for the Democratic party and its candidates at every election. Cal has been doing this for twenty-five years. His behavior is always consistent with his Democratic principles. He is ever polite and has many friends among the whites whom he is delighted to serve freely, faithfully and independently. He was born and reared at Hartford, in Ohio county, where he was a slave, but came to Owensboro in 1866, where he has resided ever since.



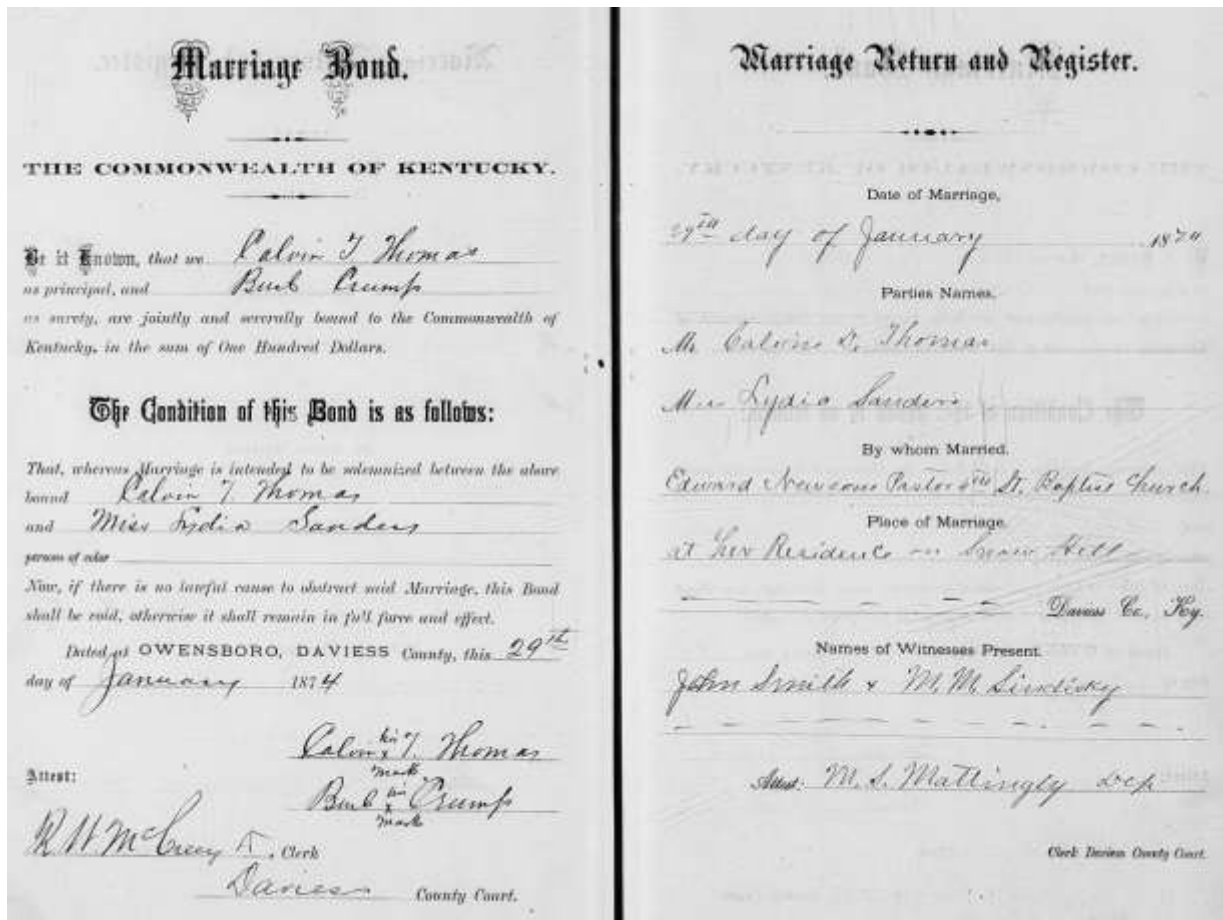
**Daviess County, KY 1870 Federal Census:**

p.262 – Owensboro

Helm, Clay	28	Black	barber	KY
			real estate \$3,000, personal property \$900	
Sarah	28	Black		KY
Mury	3	Black		KY
Harris	2	Black		KY
Georgiana	3/12 Feb	Black		KY
Daily, Susan	16	Black		KY
McClarty, Polly A.	32	Black	domestic servant	KY
Thomas, Calvin	23	Black	barber	KY



**Ohio County, KY Negro Marriage Book C, pp.128-129:**



Calvin T. Thomas married Miss Lydia Sanders on 29 January 1874 at residence of the bride in Snow Hill, Daviess County, KY. Snow Hill was a neighborhood in the eastern section of the town of Owensboro.



**Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 12 May 1876, p.5:**

East End Barber Shop.

Cal Thomas' barber shop, upper Main street, opposite Ford's drug store, is furnished with all the appliances necessary to the perfection of the shaving art. With good barbers, sharp razors, etc., a shave or shampoo is indeed a luxury. Cal. only charges 10 cents for a shave and does other work proportionately low.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 22 August 1884, p.4:**

Cal. Thomas will leave Saturday for St. Louis to procure fixtures for a new barber shop, which he will open in Rudd's block on St. Ann street immediately upon his return.

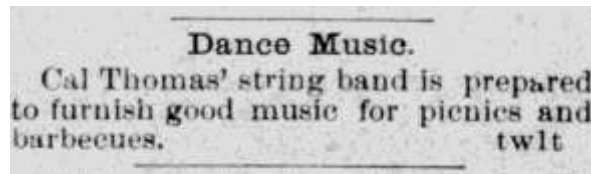


**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 6 March 1886, p.4:**

Cal Thomas has reorganized his string band, and is ready to serve at dancing parties and other entertainments. Ches Johnson and Bud Griffin are his associates.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 12 June 1886, p.4:**



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 13 November 1887, p.4:**

To My Old Customers. Failing to find a suitable stand to reopen my barber shop, I have arranged to take a chair in Elijah Hathaway's shop, near the Planters House, and ask my old friends and customers to call on me there. CAL THOMAS



**Messenger and Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 10 May 1888, p.5:**

.... A number of other gentlemen were called for and after persistent efforts Col. Powers was induced to respond. He made a very happy speech in the course which he took occasion to compliment Cal Thomas, the sole colored Democrat in the convention, who four years ago had the manhood to come over to the Democratic party and had faithfully worked and voted in the ranks.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 24 May 1889, p.1:**



.... A DROP TO THE BASEMENT, taken on the hydraulic elevator, brings one to the billiard room, which is thoroughly lighted and furnished with two fine tables and handsome appliances of every kind. The barber shop is on the other side and is the finest tonsorial. parlor in the State. Cal Thomas and four assistants will have charge of the shop....



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 29 June 1893, p.1:**

**The First Appointee**

.... Early Monday morning he made the first announcement of his intended appointments, and that was Cal Thomas, the only colored Democrat in Owensboro, to be janitor of the government building. In speaking of the appointment to a Messenger reporter, Col. Powers said that he had it his mind for a long time to reward Cal. for his devotion to Democracy under trying circumstances, whenever it came within his power. So when he was appointed collector the way was opened and Cal. Would have charge of the cuspidors of the custom-house. He first made the

announcement to a white man, who came to see him just after breakfast and made application for the job. Thomas had not even applied, but when he was notified, he was the proudest darkey in town....



**Hartford Republican, Hartford, KY, Friday, 30 June 1893, p.2:**

COLLECTOR POWERS' first appointment is that Cal Thomas, a negro, to be janitor of the Custom House. Thomas is a native of Hartford and bears the unenviable notoriety of being the only Democratic negro in Owensboro. H. C. Pace was also an applicant for the same place.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 1 September 1897, p.5:**

The Hartford Killing

Dee Walker, colored, who was killed Sunday night at Hartford by Eugene or "Shoat" Render, was a half brother of Cal. Thomas, the janitor of the postoffice building. Render surrendered himself into custody of the court, but his examining trial has not yet been held.



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 20 April 1898, p.4:**

Albert C. Thomas, son of Cal Thomas, formerly a pupil here in the colored high school, graduates this year in the Baltimore Medical college. The commencement exercises will held in Central Music Hall, April 21st, and be, Hon. Wm. T. Malster, mayor of Baltimore, will confer the degrees. Young Thomas is a bright fellow and will do credit to Owensboro in the practice of his chosen profession.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 23 March 1899, p.8:**

Cal Thomas invites all his friends to call and see him at 216 Allen street, as he has fitted up as fine a barber shop as there is in Owensboro. He has one of Eugene Berninghaus' fine Climax chairs, of Cincinnati, and all other furniture to match. His prices are the same as heretofore – hair cut, 15 cents; any kind of shampoo, 15 cents. He guarantees his work to be good and first-class. He asks for a part of the patronage of the citizens of Owensboro and Daviess county.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 16 July 1899, p.5:**

ACCIDENTAL.

Poisoning of Anthony Walker and Wife at Hartford.

Anthony Walker, colored, whose wife died at Hartford with symptoms of poisoning, and who himself was almost dead when found, is a half-brother of Cal Thomas, the colored barber, of this city. Walker has about recovered. The Hartford Republican says they took a dose of strychnine each, thinking it was quinine. The paper attributes it to accidental, though there were some suspicions that Walker had administered the poison to his wife.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 19 September 1899, p.5:**

A. C. Thomas, son of Cal. Thomas, colored, has received an appointment in the hospital at Worcester, Mass. He has been taking a course in medicine at Baltimore, Md., and the appointment is quite a compliment to the young man's ability.



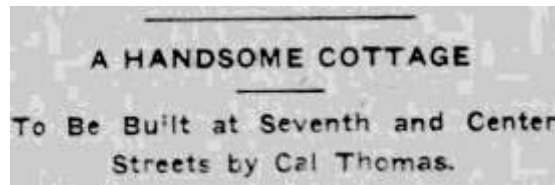
**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 22 May 1904, p.8:**

Cal Thomas, the colored barber, is the owner of a fine Edison Standard phonograph. in connection with this over sixty records, including band selections, vocal and instrumental music, solos, duets and quartettes, and the latest popular hits in the operatic music. Cal's outfit furnishes a splendid evening's entertainment for private families, parties, serenades, etc.. and for these he is open to engagements at any time on reasonable notice. Cal is always courteous and obliging and can be depended on to give good service.

[Note by Jerry Long – In the Owensboro, KY newspapers there were published numerous items about musical and phonograph concerts, dances, barbecues and performances by the Cal Thomas string band.]



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 26 March 1905, p.12:**



Cal Thomas, the well-known barber, has let the contract for a handsome cottage, to be built by the Frederica Realty company, under the supervision of Mr. F. N. Barnes, at the corner of Seventh and Center streets. It will have every modern convenience and will be beautiful in design.

The cost will be about \$1,600 exclusive of the lot.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 7 November 1909, p.2:**

LAST OF FAMILY OF NEGRO BARBERS  
Charlie Hathaway's Father Opened Shop Before War  
TAUGHT THREE OF HIS BOYS THE TRADE

CLAY HELM A PIONEER BARBER

Lawrence Grausz Is One of the Oldest White Barbers in The City

With the recent death of Charles Hathaway there, passed from the scenes of Owensboro tonsorial life the last of a family of colored barbers extending back to the days before the war. The father of Charles was Elijah Hathaway, who opened a shop here before the war and. which was for many years the principal barber shop of the town and the only one for .several years. He taught three of his boys the trade and they continued the business after his death, which took place several years ago and their business is still in existence and, probably, exceeds in age any one establishment in the city. Elijah, Jr., was killed a few years ago in a railroad accident and the other son, Sam, died a few years later.

The old man was economical but did not invest profitably but died possessed of some real estate, the chief property being the old Hathaway house on the north side of Second street between St. Elizabeth and Locust and which was inherited by Charley and in which he died.

Second Pioneer Barber

The next in time of priority in the business is Henry Clay Helm, colored barber on Frederica street between Third and Fourth, and who has been in the business continuously here for forty-four years, having come here from Louisville in 1865. He has, always been frugal and temperate and accumulated considerable property but lost much of it by going security for his friends. He is still in business and has promise of reaching the time for the celebration, of his golden jubilee in the trade. He was one of the intelligent negroes who recently registered as an Independent and counseled all of his race to free themselves from the servile bondage they, had been in, to the Republican local machine. He ran for a seat in the city council years ago and received the vote of one white man, the late Dr. J. F. Kimbley.

Cal Thomas is the other negro barber, who has been here for-many years. He is still a young man, having come here from Hartford while quite youthful. He is the real and original pioneer among those of his race in the matter of voting the Democratic ticket, which he has been doing for several years. He has also been advising his brethren to free themselves from Republican servitude and it is said he is now proud that so many of his fellows took his advice in the recent election.

Cal is another of the barbers who has saved his earnings and put them to good use and owns at least one good house and lot in the city....



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 30 September 1917, p.7:**

**NEGRO SHOT TO DEATH IN OHIO COUNTY**

Information was received in Owensboro Saturday afternoon by Cal Thomas, the colored barber of East Fourth street, concerning the killing of his nephew, John Morton, of Hartford. The tragedy occurred at 1 o'clock Saturday afternoon.

Morton was a well-to-do negro, owning a valuable farm and some town property in Hartford. Some time ago his wife divorced him. He was said to be insanely jealous of her and had threatened to kill her and their fourteen-year-old daughter. He went to her home Saturday during the noon hour and fired three shots at her from a revolver.

There was no one else at the home of the woman except her brother, John Parks, a young negro, sixteen years of age. After Morton had shot at his former wife and failed to kill her, Parks got hold of a single barrel shotgun and discharged it at close range, hitting Morton in the region of the heart, from which he died immediately.

Parks was arrested, but soon afterwards a coroner's jury liberated him after hearing the evidence, on the ground of justifiable homicide.

[Note by Jerry Long – John S. Morton (c1872-1917) was the son of Horace Morton & Lydia Ann Sutton. Horace is reported to be 35 years old in the Ohio County, KY 1880 census.]



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 4 July 1976,  
Bicentennial Section, Part III, p.13:**

**Blacks arrived in city in 1800**

.... "In April 1888, Daviess County sent a black delegate, Cal Thomas, to the Kentucky Democratic Convention in Lexington." ....



**Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 12 May 1929, pp.1B & 5B:**

**Phonograph Which Paid Cal's Way  
To St. Louis Fair Is Still in Use**

In these days of high powered radios and leather lunged phonographs, little value is placed upon the average early talking machine, but the antique phonograph of Cal Thomas, 82, retired colored barber, is not an average machine. Nearly a quarter of a century ago the phonograph took Cal and his wife to the St. Louis World's fair and is still in good working condition.

Until a few years ago, the old talking machine, with its decorated tin amplifying horn (Cal having pasted colorful pictures of birds and other subjects, interesting to him in its bell), was as much a part of Cal's barber shop as his razors and shears.

When business was quiet Cal would place one of his old wax records on the phonograph and listen to a melody of the past or perhaps while giving a customer a shave or haircut he would turn on the machine and give an added touch to his service.

Cost About \$20

Cal purchased the phonograph for about \$20, the exact price having escaped his memory, and immediately began a series of concerts throughout this section, stopping at a school house, barn or what ever building was available, and opening for business.

Admission was usually from five, to fifteen cents a person and many were the crowded houses he had to hear the new musical marvel of the age. Knottsville, Thruston, Calhoun, Maceo, Hartford and other towns the Owensboro district heard his phonograph and aided his world fair fund.

By the time of the world fair, Cal had made profit enough to take in the sights, paying all expenses and having some money left in the fund when he and his wife returned to Owensboro.

Cal Also Interesting

The phonograph continued to give good service until a few months ago and then like the "Deacon's One Hoss Shay" collapsed. Unwilling to throw it into the discard, Cal boxed it up and sent it back to the Thomas A. Edison company, where it was worked over and returned as good as ever. Repairs cost \$8.

Cal, like his phonograph, is interesting. Walking to Owensboro from Hartford during the Civil war, he was taken across the Ohio river into Indiana where he was turned over to the Union army recruiters. Soon afterward, by steamboat, he was transferred to Cincinnati and given training for war. Serving around Nashville, Tenn., and Huntsville, Ala., Cal was engaged in a few minor encounters.

When the war closed, Cal was at Huntsville. Soon afterward he returned to this section and decided to make Owensboro his home instead of Hartford. Learning the barber trade, Cal prospered purchasing a home at Seventh and Center streets, which is as well kept as any other home of its class in the city.

Now, in retirement, Cal and his wife are well cared for by the United States. Cal's pension being \$72 a month. This he says was brought about through the efforts of Congressman D. H. Kincheloe, in whom Cal has unlimited faith, for he is one of the few ex-slaves who are numbered among the followers of the Democratic party.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 9 October 1930, p.9:**

An inquest for determining the mental condition of Cal Thomas, colored, was instituted in circuit court yesterday. Well-known aged musician and barber of the city, now in his 87th year, Cal has shown signs recently of an impaired mind. Under the Cleveland administration, Cal was appointed as custodian of the government building, an honor of which he was always very proud. He was a Union soldier of the war between the states, but early in life espoused the principles of the Democratic party and has been a staunch Democrat ever since.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 30 June 1931, p.5:**

**Cal Thomas' Wife Dies  
Of Age Infirmities**

Lydia Thomas, wife of the well-known colored man, Cal Thomas, barber for many years here, died at her home, 830 East Seventh street at 10 o'clock Sunday night. Well known to many Owensboro citizens, Lydia Thomas, who was 85 years old, was respected for her upright life and Christian conduct. The funeral will be held at 10 o'clock this morning from the residence, with burial following in Elmwood cemetery.



**Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 28 September 1932, p.10:**

**Cal Thomas, Democratic  
Colored Man, Is Dead**

Calvin Thomas, 86 years old, retired colored barber and veteran of the Union army, died of complications, Monday night at his residence at Seventh and Center streets.

Cal Thomas was a staunch Democrat and was recently called on by Ex-Governor Beckham of Kentucky. He is survived by his niece, Mamie Haynes, who had attended him since the death of his wife last year."

Funeral will be Thursday afternoon at 2 o'clock.



20910

Form V. S. 1-A-280-2-17-31 COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY  
State Board of Health  
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS  
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

County Daviess File No. 562  
Registration District No. 410 Registered No. 562  
Primary Registration District No. 2145

City Owensboro (If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give the NAME instead of street and number)

1. FULL NAME Calvin Thomas  
2. Residence, Ky. 830 E 7th Ward (If decedent, give city or town and State)  
Length of residence in city or town where death occurred yrs. mos. ds. How long in U. S. if foreign born? yrs. mos. ds.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS			MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
3. SEX <u>M</u>	4. COLOR OR RACE <u>negro</u>	5. Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced <u>widowed</u>	6. DATE OF DEATH <u>Sept 27 1932</u>	7. I HEREBY CERTIFY that I attended deceased from <u>Sept 17 1932 to Sept 27 1932</u>
8. If deceased, widowed, or divorced, name of surviving spouse <u>Lydia Thomas</u>			I last saw <u>Calvin</u> on <u>Sept 17 1932</u> in the days to said to have occurred on the date stated above, at <u>830 E 7th</u>	
9. DATE OF BIRTH <u>June 20 1846</u>			The principal cause of death and related causes of importance in order of causality are as follows: <u>Interstitial Nephritis</u>	
10. Trade, profession, or particular line of work done, or occupation, service, handicraft, etc. <u>Barber</u>			Contributory causes of importance not related to principal cause: <u>Diabetes</u>	
11. Was deceased ever confined in any institution (mental and physical)?			Name of operation <u>no</u> Date of <u>no</u>	
12. BIRTHPLACE <u>Ky</u>			What last confirmed diagnosis? <u>Diabetes</u> Was there an autopsy? <u>no</u>	
13. NAME <u>Pleasant Walker</u>			13. If death was due to external cause (violation) AS TO THE following: Accident, suicide, or homicide. Date of INJURY <u>no</u>	
14. BIRTHPLACE <u>Ky</u>			Where did injury occur? (Specify city or town, county, and State)	
15. MARRIAGE NAME <u>Cloudy Moton</u>			Nearly whether injury occurred in industry, in home, or in public place.	
16. BIRTHPLACE <u>Ky</u>			Manner of INJURY	
17. INFORMANT <u>Mrs L Haynes</u>			Nature of injury	
18. RESIDENCE <u>Elmwood Cemetery</u>			14. Was disease or injury in any way related to occupation of deceased? <u>no</u>	
19. SIGNATURE <u>Calvin Thomas</u>			Signed: <u>Calvin Thomas</u> M. D.	
20. ADDRESS <u>Owensboro</u>			LABORATORY <u>Owensboro Ky</u>	
21. FILE NO. <u>2-27 1932</u>				

Kentucky Death Certificate, 1932 – # 20910: Calvin Thomas died – 27 September 1932 Owensboro, Daviess County, KY; cause of death – intestinal nephritis; age – 86 years, 3 months & 4 days; born – 20 June 1846 KY; race – Negro; marital status – widowed; wife – Little Thomas; occupation – barber; father – Pleasant Walker ; mother – Emily Morton; buried – Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY.



Grave of Calvin Thomas. Interred in section A, lot 46, Elmwood Cemetery, Owensboro, KY. Government monument issued for his service in the Union Army during the Civil War; member of Company H, 42nd U.S. Colored Infantry. His wife, Lettie, is buried with him in the same lot but her grave is unmarked.



### **U.S. Headstone Applications for Military Veterans:**

Application for a military grave marker for “Calvin Thomas, alias Calvin Morton”, was submitted on 17 August 1933. He served as a private in company H of the 42nd regiment of the U.S. Colored Infantry and died on 27 September 1932. The application had two errors – he was a Civil War veteran not a veteran of the Spanish American War; and he was buried in Owensboro’s Elmwood Cemetery, not the Greenwood Cemetery. The application suggests that he is also found under the Morton surname – his mother’s maiden name.

**APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE**

(PLEASE MAKE OUT AND RETURN IN DUPLICATE)

*du*

Name <i>Thomas</i> → <b>THOMAS, Calvin</b> alias	Rank ✓ <b>Pvt</b>	Company ✓ <b>K H</b>	U. S. Regiment, State Organization, or Vessel ✓ <b>42 Regt. U S Col Infantry</b>	Date of Death <b>9-27-'32</b>
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Name of Cemetary <b>MORTON</b>	Located in or near—		If World War Veteran—		
	City <b>Greenwood</b>	State <b>Owensboro</b>	Division <b>KY</b>	State	Emblem <b>Christian</b>

TO BE SHIPPED TO **American Red Cross, Federal Bldg., Owensboro, Kentucky** at **Owensboro, Ky**  
(Name of consignee) (Give town, county, and State)

POST OFFICE ADDRESS OF CONSIGNEE **Owensboro, Ky**

DO NOT WRITE HERE

Verified \_\_\_\_\_

Ordered \_\_\_\_\_

From **TATE, GEORGIA**

Shipped **11/10/33**

I hereby agree to accept the headstone at above destination, freight prepaid, and properly place same at decedent's grave.

This application is for the UNMARKED\* grave of **Spanish War Veteran** **DAVIES County Chapter,** **AMERICAN RED CROSS**.  
It is understood the stone will be furnished and delivered at the railroad station or steamboat landing above indicated, at Government expense, freight prepaid, and agreed it will be promptly removed and set up at private expense.

**679155**  
**OWENSBORO, KY.** Applicant **W. A. Slack Secy**  
Date **8-17-1933**

\*Stones must not be requested for any grave at which a private stone, monument, or other permanent marker is already erected or is to be erected.  
†State whether soldier, sailor, marine, Army nurse, etc.

