

GENERATIONS:
The Family and Ancestry of Oscar Micheaux

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FOREWORD

In the late 1980s, at the request of both Micheaux family members and academic researchers, my late mother, Juanita Neuforth, and I began to hunt for genealogical data about Oscar Micheaux. This search for his family and ancestry is part of an ongoing effort to which many others have contributed. As more resources on Afro-American families become available, we hope to find more information. In turn, this may help answer many questions about Oscar Micheaux himself and his work.

All four of Oscar Micheaux's grandparents were slaves in western Kentucky. At the present time, the identity of the families they served has not been confirmed, although there were white slaveholders in the area carrying those same surnames and others that might provide further connections.

FIRST GENERATION: THE MICHAUX GRANDPARENTS

Oscar's paternal grandparents, **David and Melvina Michaux**,¹ served in slavery in Calloway County, Kentucky. Oscar Micheaux's autobiographical novel, The Conquest, provided the following information about the family name and his grandfather:

" ... It is a peculiar name that ends with an 'eaux,' however, and is considered an odd name for a colored man to have, unless he is from Louisiana where the French crossed with the Indians and slaves, causing many Louisiana negroes to have the French names and many speak the French language also. My father, however, came from Kentucky and inherited the name from his father who was sold off into Texas during the slavery period and is said to be living there today."²

Melvina Michaux, Oscar's paternal grandmother, was born April 10, 1832³ in Alabama⁴. After the Civil War, she moved her family from Calloway County, Kentucky, north across the Ohio River to Massac County, Illinois, where many other former slaves had settled. There she was married March 8, 1868⁵ to Nelson Matlock, another ex-slave, born about 1822 in Kentucky⁶.

¹"Andrew Jackson Michaux," The Great Bend Tribune, Friday, January 16, 1942. (N.B.: This obituary is the only source this author has found which gives the name David Michaux.)

²Oscar Micheaux, The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p. 10. (N.B.: Despite Oscar's statement that the Michaux/Micheaux name came from his grandfather, researchers should take care not to forget the possibility that this surname might have been passed down from Oscar's grandmother, Melvina. It was not unusual for surnames to come down matrilineally in slave families.)

³Tombstone of Melvina Michaux, Lot A-5-2, Eden Valley Cemetery, Stafford County, Kansas.

⁴1870 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, population schedule, Twp. 15 South, Range 5 East of the 3rd P.M., page 272, dwelling 210, family 210 (Nelson Metlock household); NARA micropublication M593, roll 255, and 1880 U.S. Census, Barton County, Kansas, population schedule, City of Great Bend, page 18, family 169 (W.P. Michaux household); NARA micropublication T9, roll 373.

⁵Massac County, Illinois, Marriage Records, License No. 2178 (N.B.: The "Illinois Statewide Marriage Index 1763-1900" maintained by the Illinois State Archives indexes the bride as Melvinia Mesker.)

⁶1870 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, *loc. cit.*

The 1870 U.S. Census⁷ there shows Matlock (or Metlock) (aged 48, Black, occupation farming) as head of a household including Melvina (41, Mulatto) and her unmarried Michaux children: Calvin S. (22, Mulatto, farming), William P. (21, Mulatto, farming), Edward (13, Mulatto) and Andrew (10, Mulatto). Also listed was a female named G. Allen Gray (17, Mulatto, house keeping).

Apparently widowed and having resumed the Michaux name, Melvina and three of her children became part of the "Exoduster" movement into Kansas during the late 1870s. At that time, a number of such families took up homesteads or bought property in southern Barton County and northern Stafford County, among them two of Melvina's sons and her son-in-law⁸.

In January of 1880, Melvina's son, William P. Michaux, purchased⁹ a lot in the City of Great Bend from Elizabeth Vancil and her husband. This property is located at what is now the southeast corner of Seventeenth (formerly Elizabeth) and Morton Streets. Later that year, the U.S. Census¹⁰ there shows Melvina (aged 53) in the household of her son, W.P. (30, occupation laborer). Others in the household included Hulda Michaux (6, identified as W.P.'s niece) and five white boarders: R.H. Spencer (female, 60, music teacher), Alice Newcombe (female, 14), Emma Van Pelt (female, 17, servant), Luella Chaffee (female, 15) and R.X. Charles (male, 25, printer). Mrs. R.H. Spencer (born Elmina P. Keeler) was one of New York State's Civil War heroines, having served as Hospital Matron of the 147th New York through Gettysburg and many other significant battles.

Apparently, Melvina not only took in boarders, but also worked as a seamstress. A city directory of Great Bend, published in 1886, shows "Malvina Misher" practicing that trade from the residence on the corner of Morton and Elizabeth Streets¹¹. In June 1900, she and her son, William P. Michaux, were enumerated in the census of Seward Township, Stafford County, Kansas.¹² Upon his death later that year, Melvina inherited the house and lot in Great Bend, as well as other property. Described as "only heir of Wm. P. Michaux, deceased," she deeded that house and lot to her grandchildren, Frank and Olive (Michaux) Robinson, in 1909¹³.

Melvina remained in Great Bend until shortly before her death, when declining health forced her to move in with her daughter, Harriette (Michaux) Robinson, on a farm in Stafford County. It was there that Melvina died March 5, 1916¹⁴. Her will¹⁵ directed that her property be divided between her children, Calvin Swan Michaux, Harriette Robinson, Andrew Michaux, Edward Michaux and grandson, Frank Robinson. Codicils written in 1908 and 1913 revoked legacies to Calvin Swan Michaux and Frank Robinson, since she had conveyed the property concerned to them by deed. It should also be noted that her son Edward predeceased her and that

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Standard Atlas of Stafford County, Kansas (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1904), pp. 11, 13.

⁹Barton County, Kansas, Deeds, Book F, p. 242 (Lot 12, Block 64, Original Town).

¹⁰1880 U.S. Census, Barton County, Kansas, *loc. cit.*

¹¹~~The Great Bend City Directory and Business Gazetteer~~ (Great Bend: Will E. Stoke, Job Print., 1886), p. 43.

¹²1900 U.S. Census, Stafford County, Kansas, population schedule, Seward Twp., page 328, dwelling 72, family 72 (Wm. P. Mish___ [illegible] household); NARA micropublication T623, roll 501.

¹³Barton County, Kansas, Deeds, Book 46, p. 599.

¹⁴Tombstone of Melvina Michaux, Lot A-5-2, Eden Valley Cemetery, Stafford County, Kansas.

¹⁵Barton County, Kansas, Probate Records, Case No. 1789.

accounts show Melvina's estate receiving monies from his estate. The following obituary appeared in a Great Bend newspaper the day after her death:

"The death of Mrs. Melvina Mischeaux, mother of A.J. Mischeaux of this city, and C.S. Mischeaux and Mrs. Harriet Robinson, of the south side, occurred yesterday at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Robinson, from cancer. She suffered from the disease for two years and the last two months had been in very poor health.

"Mrs. Mischeaux, was one of the most respected colored women of the vicinity and was a woman admired and respected by those who knew her. Nearly ninety years of age, she was an active woman, religious and a power for good among her people. She came to this county about thirty years ago from Illinois and the family settled on a farm on the south side. Of the family only three children are left. For many years Mrs. Mischeaux lived in this city and not long ago moved to the farm on the south side to be with her daughter.

"The funeral services will be held tomorrow morning at 11 o'clock from the Mt. Pleasant church, south of the river and will be conducted by Rev. Biggers of Pueblo, interment being made in Eden Valley cemetery."¹⁶

The known children of David and Melvina Michaux have been identified as:

- +1 i. CALVIN SWAN MICHAUX (1847-1932)
- +2 ii. WILLIAM P. MICHAUX (1849-1900)
- +3 iii. HARRIETTE MICHAUX (1854-1921)
- +4 iv. EDWARD MICHAUX (1857-1910)
- +5 v. ANDREW JACKSON MICHAUX (1859-1942)

FIRST GENERATION: THE GOUGH GRANDPARENTS

The maternal grandparents of Oscar Micheaux were **John and Louisa (Smith) Gough** (sometimes Goff), ex-slaves who migrated to Massac County, Illinois, from Graves County, Kentucky. They were formally married in Massac County, Illinois, on 10 April 1866¹⁷ and subsequently appear there in the 1870 U.S. Census¹⁸ in the household of George Smith (aged 28, Mulatto, occupation farming, born in Kentucky), his wife Almire (27, Mulatto, keeping house, born in Tennessee) and daughter Ellen (9, Mulatto, born in Kentucky). John "Goff" was listed next (aged 42, Black, farming, born in Kentucky), then Louise (36, Black, keeping house, born in Kentucky) and Bell (16, Black, born in Kentucky).

Very little is known about John Gough. He was born in Kentucky in 1816¹⁹ and died in

¹⁶"Mrs. M. Mischeaux," The Great Bend Daily Tribune, Monday, March 6, 1916.

¹⁷Massac County, Illinois, Marriage Records, Book A, p. 524.

¹⁸1870 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, population schedule, Twp. 15 South, Range 5 East of the 3rd P.M., page 271, dwelling 204, family 204 (George Smith household); NARA micropublication M593, roll 255.

¹⁹Gough-Micheaux Tombstone, Great Bend (formerly Woodlawn) Cemetery, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas.

Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, October 26, 1906.²⁰ Identical funeral notices were published in two local newspapers:

"The funeral of John Goff, colored, who lived in the southwest part of town, took place Sunday afternoon at 2:30 from the A.M.E. church. Mr. Goff was about 80 years of age, and death was caused by cancer of the stomach. Interment was had in Woodlawn cemetery. The funeral was largely attended."²¹

Louisa (Smith) Gough was born in 1833²², also in Kentucky, and was probably the grandmother to whom Oscar Micheaux was closest, since his paternal grandmother had removed to Kansas before Oscar's birth. She is the grandmother who, with Oscar's sister Olive, joined the homesteaders in South Dakota. She received a land patent for 160 acres on "the southeast quarter of section thirteen in township one hundred one north of range seventy-seven west of the fifth principal meridian" in Tripp County, South Dakota²³ in 1911.

Louisa must not have stayed in South Dakota very long after "proving up" her homestead. She moved back to Great Bend and died at her daughter's home there two years later, on November 2, 1913. The very brief notice of her death stated:

"Mrs. Louise Gough died Sunday night at the home of her daughter, Mrs. C.F. Michaux, of this city. Funeral services will be held at the A.M.E. church Tuesday afternoon at 2:30."²⁴

Funeral home records²⁵ indicate that Louisa was the daughter of Louis Harden and Bettie Smith, both natives of Kentucky.

The Goughs share a tombstone with their daughter Bell (Gough) Michaux and granddaughter, Veatrice Michaux, marking a cemetery lot originally purchased by John Gough in Great Bend (formerly Woodlawn) Cemetery. It is a substantial stone and was probably provided by Oscar Micheaux.

The only confirmed child of John and Louisa (Smith) Gough was:

1+ i. BELL GOUGH (1856-1918)

SECOND GENERATION: PARENTS, UNCLES AND AUNT.

1. Oscar Micheaux's parents were **Calvin Swan and Bell (Gough) Michaux**. Calvin Swan Michaux (usually referred to as C.S. or Swan) was born about 1847²⁶, probably in

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹~~Barton County Democrat~~, Friday, November 2, 1906, and ~~The Great Bend Rustler~~, Monday, October 29, 1906.

²²Gough-Micheaux Tombstone, Great Bend (formerly Woodlawn) Cemetery, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas.

²³Bureau of Land Management, Accession/Serial No. 207233, BLM Serial No. SDGGY 0004629, South Dakota, Gregory Land Office, issued June 17, 1911.

²⁴~~The Great Bend Tribune~~, Monday, November 3, 1913.

²⁵Records of Bryant-Christians Funeral Home, Great Bend, Kansas.

²⁶1870 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, population schedule, Twp. 15 South, Range 5 East of the 3rd P.M., page 272, dwelling 210, family 210 (Nelson Metlock household); NARA micropublication M593, roll 255; and 1910 U.S. Census, Barton County, Kansas, population schedule, City of Great Bend, Third Ward, page 13, dwelling 16, family 18 (Calvin S. Micheaux

Calloway County, Kentucky. He would have been in his late teens when the Civil War ended and the family moved to Illinois. On January 7, 1875²⁷, he married Bell Gough at Metropolis, Massac County, Illinois. She was born June 11, 1856²⁸ in Graves County, Kentucky, to John Gough and Louisa Smith.

According to Oscar's book, *The Conquest*, C.S. " ... was a farmer and owned eighty acres of land and was, therefore, considered fairly "well-to-do," that is, for a colored man."²⁹ C.S. and Bell, after a time, moved from the farm and into the nearby town of Metropolis. As Oscar explained, "Not so much to get off the farm, or to be near more colored people (as most of the younger negro farmers did) as to give the children better educational facilities."³⁰ The family later returned to the countryside, where they all worked at truck gardening, milking cows and keeping a flock of chickens.

Oscar's uncle, William P. Michaux, died in Kansas in 1900, leaving considerable property. Once again, Oscar's novel, *The Conquest*, reported the resulting change in his parents' circumstances: " ... father fell heir to a part of the estate of a brother which came as a great relief to his ever increasing burden of debt."³¹ It was also at about this time that Oscar himself left Metropolis to earn his own way in the world. Prior to 1904, C.S. had gone ahead to Kansas, where he appears without his wife and children in the 1905 state census of Stafford County.³² Soon thereafter he was joined by Bell and their younger children.

Like many farmers at that time, regardless of ethnic origins, the Michauxs also purchased³³ property in a larger, nearby town, in this case Great Bend. This was to enable the children to attend Great Bend schools during the fall and winter. Located at 2523 Eighth Street, the Michauxs would live there until 1915.

In 1915, the family suffered a double tragedy. On Monday morning, May 3, the family's two-story, eight-room home was entirely destroyed by a fire which started in the kitchen flue.

"An alarm of fire was turned in about nine o'clock this morning from the residence of Swan Mischeaux in the southwest part of town, two blocks north of the round house.

"The fire started in the kitchen flue, and fanned by a strong wind from the northwest the house was soon a mass of flames. The firemen responded to the call promptly but owing to the fact that the house was about six blocks from a water hydrant,

household, 2523 8th Street), NARA micropublication T624, roll 432.

²⁷Massac County, Illinois, Marriage Records, Book 2, p. 48. (N.B.: The "Illinois Statewide Marriage Index 1763-1900" maintained by the Illinois State Archives indexes the groom's name as Calvin S. Maschaur.)

²⁸Gough-Micheaux Tombstone, Great Bend (formerly Woodlawn) Cemetery, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, and "Mrs. C.S. Michaux," *The Great Bend Tribune*, Monday, December 23, 1918.

²⁹Micheaux, *op. cit.*, p. 10..

³⁰Micheaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

³¹Micheaux, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

³²Decennial Census of Kansas 1905, Stafford County, population schedule, Seward Township, dwelling 103, family 103 (C.S. Michaux household), Official Records of the Board of Agriculture, State of Kansas, Series 430-432, roll 4754.

³³Barton County, Kansas, Deeds, Book 43, p. 152 (Lots 18, 19, 20, Block 36, Arkansas Valley Town Company Addition, City of Great Bend).

they had to run 2200 feet of hose to reach the building and then the pressure was so weak that nothing could be accomplished except to keep the flying embers from doing other damage to the neighboring houses. The fire boys and the neighbors by hard work were able to save a part of the contents, but the house, which was a two-story eight room structure, was entirely destroyed, together with an adjoining kitchen and wash house. \$60 in cash which was in the house was also saved. There was about \$1500 insurance on the place.

"The Mischeaux family is one of the highly respected colored families of the community; had a fine home and their loss will be considerable."³⁴

Just over a week later, May 12, the family was devastated by news from Pueblo, Colorado, that their young daughter, Veatrice, had been shot by a jealous suitor³⁵. She died six days later³⁶.

Bell never fully recovered from the tragic loss of her beloved daughter and died December 21, 1918, at the home on North Washington Street in Great Bend, to which the family had moved following the fire. A local newspaper paid tribute to her memory with this obituary:

"The death of Mrs. C.S. Michaux, colored, occurred Saturday night at the family home on North Washington Street, following a second stroke of paralysis. She was stricken first last May and had since been an invalid and only able to be out of bed a part of the time. She was a fine woman and good mother and her death will be regretted by many who knew her sterling qualities. She leaves a husband and five daughters and four sons. The sons are Swan of Hutchinson, Will of Chicago, Finis of Newport News (in the navy), and Oscar of Sioux City, Iowa. The latter is a writer and the Literary Digest recently carried an article about one of his books. The daughters are Mrs. Ida Payne of Pueblo, Mrs. Maude Pritchard of California, and Mrs. Gertrude Cravens, Mrs. Olive Robinson and Mrs. Ethel Wilson of this city. Mrs. J.A. Michaux is a cousin. Mrs. Michaux was born in Kentucky and married there. She and her husband first moved to Illinois and about 17 years ago located in this city.

"Mrs. Belle Williamham Michaux was born in Graves county, Kentucky, June 11, 1856, and was married to C.S. Michaux in Metropolis, Ills., Jan. 7, 1872. To the union eleven children were born, five boys and six girls, of whom nine are still living. They are: Mrs. Ida Payne, of Pueblo, Colo., William Owen Michaux, of Chicago, Ills., Sergt. F. Michaux, of Newport News, Va., Oscar Michaux, Chicago, Ills., Mrs. Maude Pritchette, Los Angeles, Calif., Mrs. Olive Robinson, Mrs. Ethel Wilson, and Mrs. Gertrude Cravens, of this city, and Swan Michaux, of Hutchinson.

"Mrs. Michaux united with the Methodist church when she was twelve years of age and lived a faithful christian life, and at the time of her death was a member of the Stewardess Board of the local church.

"Funeral services will be held at the A.M.E. church tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock and interment made in the local cemetery."³⁷

C.S. survived his wife by several years and died January 24, 1932, as reported by the local press:

³⁴"Home Burned This Morning," *Barton County Democrat*, Monday, May 3, 1915.

³⁵"Girl May Die," *The Great Bend Tribune*, Thursday, May 13, 1915.

³⁶"Girl Died Last Night," *The Great Bend Tribune*, Wednesday, May 19, 1915, and "Beatrice Micheaux Dies," *Barton County Democrat*, Wednesday, May 19, 1915.

³⁷"Mrs. C.S. Michaux," *The Great Bend Tribune*, Monday, December 23, 1918.

"The death of Swan Michaux, one of the older colored men of Great Bend, occurred Sunday morning at the home of his daughter, Mrs. E. Wilson, on north Washington. He had suffered a paralytic stroke some time ago, and though he had recovered sufficiently to be able to get about town, he had been failing steadily of late months and the last two weeks had been confined to his bed.

"Mr. Michaux was a hardworking, industrious man, and a good citizen. He was the father of a large family, and he had the joy in his late years of knowing that each son and daughter had received a good education, and were successful, prudent and saving.

"His wife died several years ago. He is survived by the children, and by a brother who lives in Great Bend besides other relatives and friends. His oldest daughter, who lives in Denver will be here for the funeral. Two daughters in California will be unable to come, one of them being sick, and the other unable to leave her position.

"A son in New York, who visited here last summer will also be unable to come because of his work.

"Funeral services will be held Wednesday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock at the A.M.E. church and burial will be made in the Great Bend cemetery."³⁸

Calvin Swan and Bell (Gough) Michaux were the parents of eleven known children:

- 6+ i. IDA MICHAUX (1876-1957)
- 7+ ii. WILLIAM OWEN MICHAUX (1878-1924)
- 8+ iii. LAWRENCE MICHAUX (1879-1898)
- 9+ iv. FINIS MICHAUX (1882-1948)
- 10+ v. OSCAR MICHEAUX (1884-1951)
- 11+ vi. MAUDE MICHAUX (1886-1967)
- 12+ vii. OLIVE M. MICHAUX (1889-1957)
- 13+ viii. ETHEL MICHAUX (1890-1974)
- 14+ ix. VEATRICE MICHAUX (1892-1915)
- 15+ x. GERTRUDE MICHAUX (1893-1973)
- 16+ xi. SWAN MICHEAUX (1895-1975)

2. William P. Michaux, second known son of David and Melvina Michaux, was born May 28, 1849³⁹, presumably in Calloway County, Kentucky. As mentioned above, he and his mother came to Kansas as "Exodusters" in the late 1870s. He obtained property in North Seward Township, Stafford County, Kansas,⁴⁰ which he farmed, and also a home in nearby Great Bend.⁴¹

He died suddenly at his home in Stafford County, September 18, 1900. A brief obituary stated:

³⁸"Swan Michaux Dead," The Great Bend Tribune, Monday, January 25, 1932.

³⁹Tombstone of William P. Michaux, Lot A-5-1, Eden Valley Cemetery, Stafford County, Kansas.

⁴⁰Standard Atlas of Stafford County, Kansas (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1904), pp. 11, 13.

⁴¹Barton County, Kansas, Deeds, Book F, p. 242 (Lot 12, Block 53, Original Town Plat, City of Great Bend).

"William Micheaux, of north Stafford county died at his home on Tuesday, September 18, 1900, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. The deceased was a bachelor, aged about 50 years, and had a good home, in which he kept his mother. He was sick only about a week, with pneumonia. His burial was in Eden cemetery Wednesday afternoon. He was a colored gentleman, highly respected by all his neighbors, and all have a kind word for him, and his aged mother."⁴²

3. Harriette Michaux was born in 1854⁴³, probably in Calloway County, Kentucky, and was married to Napoleon Robinson on December 27, 1869,⁴⁴ in Massac County, Illinois. He was also born in Kentucky in 1846,⁴⁵ probably in the area of Paducah, McCracken County, which is just across the Ohio River from Massac County, Illinois.

The Robinsons came to Kansas in the late 1870s and settled in North Seward Township, Stafford County, purchasing property there and also in Byron Township.⁴⁶ Napoleon died unexpectedly November 8, 1909, while on a visit to Topeka. A Great Bend newspaper reported:

"The many friends of Napoleon Robinson, an esteemed colored citizen of Seward county were shocked to hear of his sudden death which had occurred at Topeka on Monday, where he was visiting. He was getting along in years, but had been active right along, and feeling very well. The body was brought to this city Wednesday morning, interment being made in Eden Valley cemetery on Thursday. Mr. Robinson was a man who was well liked by all. He was a hard working man who had amassed quite a bit of property, which he was always turning in the interests of promoting the welfare of his family, educationally, as well as otherwise. He is survived by a widow, eight sons and one daughter."⁴⁷

His widow, Harriette, passed away December 8, 1921, during a bout with pneumonia:

"Mrs. Napoleon Robinson, one of the early day and well-known colored residents of the south side, died at the family home twelve miles southeast of this city at 3 o'clock this morning, death being due to pneumonia.

"She leaves to mourn her death, two daughters and seven sons, two brothers, C.S. Micheaux of this city, and A.J. Micheaux, of the south side, besides other relatives and friends. No funeral arrangements have been made."⁴⁸

The following day, the newspaper reported funeral arrangements:

"The funeral of Mrs. Napoleon Robinson will be held Sunday morning at 11 o'clock, December 10, at the residence twelve miles south, burial in the Eden Valley cemetery. Rev. S.B. Anderson of the A.M.E. of this city will conduct the service. She was

⁴²"Death of Wm. Micheaux," The Barton County Beacon, Friday, September 21, 1900.

⁴³Tombstone of Harriette Robinson, Lot A-14-2, Eden Valley Cemetery, Stafford County, Kansas.

⁴⁴Massac County, Illinois, Marriages, License No. 2439. (N.B.: The "Illinois Statewide Marriage Index 1763-1900" maintained by the Illinois State Archives indexes the bride's name as Harriet Mishew.)

⁴⁵Tombstone of Napoleon Robinson, Lot A-14-3, Eden Valley Cemetery, Stafford County, Kansas.

⁴⁶Standard Atlas of Stafford County, Kansas (Chicago: Geo. A. Ogle & Co., 1904), pp. 11, 13.

⁴⁷"Napoleon Robinson," Barton County Democrat, Friday, November 12, 1909.

⁴⁸"Mrs. Napoleon Robinson," The Great Bend Tribune, Thursday, December 8, 1921.

a faithful member of this church.⁴⁹

According to the 1900 U.S. Census⁵⁰, Napoleon and Harriette (Michaux) Robinson were the parents of thirteen children, ten of whom were living at that time. These were:

- i. MAMIE (ROBINSON) POPE (1871-1953).
- ii. EVALINA (ROBINSON) DOWNEY (1875-).
- iii. NELLIE ROBINSON (1877-).
- iv. EDWARD WINFRED ROBINSON (1880-).
- v. ARTHUR ROBINSON (1882-).
- vi. FRANK ROBINSON (1883-1966).
- vii. HARLEY W. ROBINSON (1886-1965).
- viii. WILLIAM ROBINSON (1888-).
- ix. EARL ROBINSON (1891-1945).
- x. JESSIE ROBINSON (1892-).

4. Edward W. Michaux is the "mystery man" of this family. According to the 1870 U.S. Census⁵¹ of Massac County, Illinois, where he was listed in the household of his mother and step-father, he was born about 1857 in Kentucky. Papers⁵² passed down from his younger brother, Andrew J. Michaux, include a letter dated December 3, 1910, from the Republic of Liberia, in which E.E. Snow notified the family that "... Mr. E.W. Micheaux is dead. He departed his life on the 26th day of October 1910." It was noted that further information could be obtained from the Editor of the African League, who was the administrator of his will. Accounts in the probate file of Edward's mother's estate⁵³ do show entries for monies received from Edward's estate, as well as a payment of \$10 to Mrs. E.E. Snow for a copy of his will.

5. Andrew Jackson Michaux was born February 17, 1859, in Calloway County, Kentucky,⁵⁴ and, according to his obituaries, came to Kansas in 1883.⁵⁵ He pre-empted a homestead claim in Comanche Township, Barton County, Kansas,⁵⁶ and built up extensive agricultural interests in both Barton and Stafford Counties. Numerous investments in bonds, banks and local companies probably contributed to people describing him as the richest Negro in Kansas and banker to the black community. Probate records⁵⁷ also prove that A.J. was one of the backers of Oscar's film company, owning 50 shares in the Micheaux Film Corp., "appraised value

⁴⁹"Funeral of Mrs. Robinson," The Great Bend Tribune, Friday, December 9, 1921.

⁵⁰1900 U.S. Census, Stafford County, Kansas, population schedule, Seward Township, page 328, dwelling 68, family 68 (N. Robinson household); NARA micropublication T623, roll 501.

⁵¹1870 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, population schedule, Twp. 15 South, Range 5 East of the 3rd P.M., page 272, dwelling 210, family 210 (Nelson Metlock household); NARA micropublication M593, roll 255.

⁵²Family papers in the possession of the heirs of Pauline (Robinson) Harris.

⁵³Barton County, Kansas, Probate Records, Case No. 1789.

⁵⁴"Andrew Jackson Michaux," The Great Bend Tribune, Friday, January 16, 1942.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, and "Andrew Michaux Dead," The Great Bend Tribune, Monday, January 12, 1942.

⁵⁶Barton County, Kansas, Homestead Patents, Book U, p. 427, Homestead Certificate 5465, Application Number 8062.

⁵⁷Barton County, Kansas, Probate Records, Case No. 4412.

none," at the time of his death in 1942.

A.J. was the father of two children⁵⁸, mother unknown: Nellie Bly (Michaux) Johnson⁵⁹ and Fred D. Michaux. On May 29, 1899⁶⁰, in Barton County, Kansas, he married Lillie A. (Smith) Robinson, a cousin of his sister-in-law, Bell (Gough) Michaux. This marriage produced no children, although she had a son, James Menloe Robinson, Jr., from a prior marriage. In The Conquest⁶¹, on page 174, Oscar Micheaux related a surprise visit from his cousin, Menloe.

Upon his death in 1942, the Great Bend newspaper eulogized A.J. Michaux:

"Andrew Jackson Michaux (c) was born February 17, 1859 in Calloway county, Kentucky, the son of David and Melvina Michaux. At the close of the Civil War, he moved with his mother to Massac county, Illinois where he grew to young manhood.

"In 1883 he came to Kansas and pre-empted a claim in southeast Barton county, and later he was united in marriage to Lillie Robinson May 29, 1899. No children were born to this union. In 1901, he moved to Great Bend which has since been his home. He departed this life January 10, 1942 at the age of 82 years, 10 months and 24 days. He leaves to mourn his loss, his wife, Mrs. Lillie Michaux and several nieces and nephews.

"Funeral services were held January 14, 1942 at 2 o'clock from the Cook & Weber Mortuary, Elder C.G. Hanna officiated."⁶²

His widow, Lillie A. (Smith) Robinson Michaux died April 12, 1948⁶³, leaving her estate to her granddaughter and sole heir, Pauline (Robinson) Harris, East Moline, Illinois.

Although A.J.'s obituary does not mention his son and daughter, the estate records mentioned above clearly show that he was the father of two surviving children:

- i. NELLIE BLY (MICHAUX) JOHNSON (1889-1969).
- ii. FRED D. MICHAUX (1891-1952).

THIRD GENERATION: OSCAR MICHEAUX AND HIS SIBLINGS

6. Ida Michaux, Oscar's oldest sister, was born in Massac County, Illinois, about 1876⁶⁴, according to census records. However, California death records⁶⁵ give her date of birth as February 28, 1892, and her death in Los Angeles County, California, on August 6, 1957. She and her husband L.S. (or L.G.) Payne had previously lived in Pueblo and Denver, Colorado.

In The Conquest, Oscar mentioned that "After my oldest sister graduated she went away

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Death Record of Nellie B. Johnson, "California Deaths 1940-1997," The California Department of Health Services, Office of Health Information and Research, Vital Statistics Section (electronic edition available for research at www.rootsweb.com). (N.B.: This record states that Nellie's mother's maiden name was Brown.)

⁶⁰ Barton County, Kansas, Marriages, Book C, p. 390.

⁶¹ Micheaux, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁶² "Andrew Jackson Michaux," The Great Bend Tribune, Friday, January 16, 1942.

⁶³ Barton County, Kansas, Probate Records, Case No. 5634.

⁶⁴ 1880 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, population schedule, Brooklyn Precinct, page 91, dwelling 438, family 438 (Swan Misher household), NARA micropublication T9, roll 235.

⁶⁵ Death Record of Ida M. Payne, "California Deaths 1940-1997," *loc. cit.*

to teach ...⁶⁶ and later recounts a visit he made to her on his way to Chicago⁶⁷.

7. William Owen Michaux was born in Massac County, Illinois, in 1878⁶⁸ and preceded Oscar to Chicago. According to *The Conquest*, "... my oldest brother quit school and went to a near-by town and became a table waiter, much to the dissatisfaction of my mother, who always declared emphatically that she wanted none of her sons to become lackeys."⁶⁹ Upon reaching Chicago, Oscar found himself disappointed in his big brother:

"... He had been traveling as a waiter on an eastern railroad dining car, but in a fit of independence -- which had always been characteristic of him -- had quit, and now in mid-winter, was out of a job. He was not enthusiastic concerning my presence in the city and I had found him broke, but with a lot of fine clothes and a diamond or two."⁷⁰

W.O. died with family members in Great Bend, Kansas, at the relatively young age of 47, having become ill in Kansas City:

"The death of W.O. Micheaux, colored, occurred this morning, from heart trouble. He was a son of C.S. Micheaux, of this city. He had been sick since last January, and in a Kansas City hospital, until about two weeks ago, when his sister, Olive Robinson went there from California, and his sister, Ethel Wilson here, brought him to this city. At first it was thought there was some improvement in his condition, but he gradually grew weaker until the end came. He was unmarried and 47 years of age. No arrangements had been made for the funeral at noon."⁷¹

A later report indicated that the funeral was held Wednesday, June 18th, from his sister Olive's house at 1620 Morton⁷².

8. Lawrence Michaux was born about 1879 in Massac County, Illinois, and appears aged one year on the 1880 census there⁷³. Records in the Illinois State Archives show that he enlisted as a private in Company C, 8th Illinois Infantry, for service in the Spanish-American War⁷⁴. In *The Conquest*, readers learned of his fate:

"When the Spanish-American War broke out the two brothers above me enlisted with a company of other patriotic young fellows and were taken to Springfield to go into camp. At Springfield their company was disbanded and those of the company that wished to go on were accepted into other companies, and those that desired to go home were permitted to do so. The younger of the two brothers returned home by freight; the other joined a Chicago company and was sent to Santiago and later to San Luis DeCuba, where he died with typhoid pneumonia."⁷⁵

⁶⁶Micheaux, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁶⁷Micheaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-23.

⁶⁸Tombstone of W.O. Michaux, Great Bend (formerly Woodlawn) Cemetery, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas.

⁶⁹Micheaux, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁷⁰Micheaux, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

⁷¹"W.O. Michaux Died Today," *The Great Bend Tribune*, Monday, June 16, 1924.

⁷²"Micheaux Funeral," *The Great Bend Tribune*, Tuesday, June 17, 1924.

⁷³1880 U.S. Census, Massac County, Illinois, population schedule, Brooklyn Precinct, page 91, dwelling 438, family 438 (Swan Misher household), NARA micropublication T9, roll 235.

⁷⁴"Illinois Spanish-American War Veterans Database," Illinois State Archives (electronic edition available for research at www.cyberdriveillinois.com).

⁷⁵Micheaux, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

This is confirmed from family papers, which pinpoint Lawrence's death as occurring on October 14, 1898⁷⁶.

9. Finis Michaux, as noted above, went with his brother Lawrence to enlist for the Spanish-American War, but came home when their company disbanded. He later enlisted in the United States Army and was in the service when his mother died in 1918. According to the records of the Los Angeles National Cemetery⁷⁷, he served as a Private First Class in Company A, 404th Signal Battalion. Both the cemetery and California death records⁷⁸ show that he was born January 22, 1882, in Illinois and died November 26, 1948 in Los Angeles County, California.

10. Oscar Micheaux was born January 2, 1884⁷⁹, in Massac County, Illinois, and died March 25, 1951⁸⁰, in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. He married Orlean E. McCracken on April 21, 1910⁸¹, at Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. The story of their ill-fated marriage was recounted by Oscar in *The Conquest*. She was killed by a runaway horse in Chicago in 1917⁸². On March 20, 1926⁸³, Oscar married Alice Burton Russell at Montclair, Essex County, New Jersey. She was born June 30, 1892⁸⁴, at Maxton, Robeson County, North Carolina, and died in December 1984⁸⁵ in New Rochelle, Westchester County, New York. Since a plethora of biographical information by numerous authors has been written about Oscar's life and relationships, this section simply states the confirmed genealogical facts of his life.

11. Maude Michaux was born 1 September 1886 in Massac County, Illinois, and died in July 1967 at Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California⁸⁶. At the present time, nothing more is known about Maude, other than that her married name was Pritchette.

12. Olive M. Michaux was born at Metropolis, Massac County, Illinois, May 7, 1889 and died September 5, 1957, in Los Angeles County, California⁸⁷. After she graduated from Great Bend High School, Great Bend, Kansas, in 1909⁸⁸, her brother Oscar persuaded her to join

⁷⁶Family papers in the possession of the heirs of Pauline (Robinson) Harris.

⁷⁷Los Angeles National Cemetery, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California, Plot 144 R-B 5 (electronic edition available for research at www.interment.net).

⁷⁸Death Record of Finis Michaux, "California Deaths 1940-1997," *loc. cit.*

⁷⁹Certificate of Death for Oscar Micheaux, North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Registrar's Certificate No. 394.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Cook County, Illinois, Marriages, License No. 532535.

⁸²"Pastor's Daughter Killed by Runaway Horse," *Chicago Defender*, Saturday, August 18, 1917, cited by Pearl Bowser and Louise Spence, *Writing Himself into History: Oscar Micheaux, His Silent Films, and His Audiences* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000), p. 255, note 30.

⁸³Certificate of Marriage for Oscar Micheaux and Alice Burton Russell, New Jersey Bureau of Vital Statistics, Certificate No. 292 (located by Prof. Richard Grupenhoff).

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵Social Security Death Index (electronic edition available for research at www.rootsweb.com).

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷Death Record of Olive M. Wise, "California Deaths 1940-1997," *loc. cit.*

⁸⁸*Great Bend High School Alumni Directory, 1888 to 1997* (Norfolk, VA: Bernard C. Harris Publishing Co., Inc., 1997), p. 201.

him in his homesteading efforts on the Rosebud in South Dakota. There she obtained a land patent for 160 acres in Tripp County⁸⁹, as had her grandmother, Louisa Gough. She returned to Great Bend and lived at 1620 Morton (the house deeded to her and her first husband by Melvina Michaux⁹⁰) for a number of years before moving to Los Angeles. Her first husband was her cousin, Frank Robinson, to whom she was married May 30, 1910, at Kansas City, Missouri⁹¹. He was born December 29, 1883, in Stafford County, Kansas, the son of Napoleon and Harriette (Michaux) Robinson, and died February 21, 1966,⁹² at Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas. They were divorced in 1929⁹³. Her second marriage was to a Wise.

13. Ethel Michaux was born August 6, 1890, at Metropolis, Massac County, Illinois, and died July 1, 1974, at Pasadena, Los Angeles County, California⁹⁴. She lived in Great Bend, Kansas, from 1901 until 1956, graduating from Great Bend High School in 1909⁹⁵. In 1918 she married Elic "Ex" Wilson, who died in Great Bend January 4, 1948, at the age of 62 years, 11 months and 12 days⁹⁶. Ethel's obituary in The Great Bend Tribune stated:

"Mrs. Ethel Michaux Wilson, 83, died Monday at Pasadena, Calif. She was born August 6, 1890, in Metropolis, Ill., and married Elic Wilson in 1918 who preceded her in death in 1930. She has lived in Great Bend since 1901, and Pasadena, Calif., since 1956.

"Survivors are one daughter, Mrs. Verna L. Crowe, Pasadena, Calif.; and two grandsons.

"The music funeral services will be at 10 a.m. Friday at the Cook and Weber funeral home with Rev. David White officiating. Burial will be in the Great Bend Cemetery. Friends may call at the funeral home from 9-10 a.m. Friday morning."⁹⁷

14. Veatrice M. Michaux's story is a tragic one. She was born in Massac County, Illinois, in 1892⁹⁸ and graduated from Great Bend High School in 1910⁹⁹. In May of 1915, she was visiting her oldest sister, Ida (Michaux) Payne, who then lived in Pueblo, Colorado, when she was shot by a jealous suitor and died on the 18th of that month. The Great Bend Tribune reprinted a Pueblo newspaper account of the incident, which is excerpted here:

"Beatrice Mischeaux, the young colored woman who was shot through the abdomen the night of May 11 by Arthur Norman, a jealous suitor, died last night at St. Mary's hospital.

"She was 22 years old and was visiting her sister, Mrs. L.G. Payne, 1623

⁸⁹Bureau of Land Management, Accession/Serial No. 305981, BLM Serial No. SDGGY 0004658, South Dakota, Gregory Land Office, issued December 19, 1912.

⁹⁰Barton County, Kansas, Deeds, Book 46, p. 599.

⁹¹Barton County, Kansas, Divorces, Case No. 12087.

⁹²"Frank Robinson," The Great Bend Tribune, Tuesday, February 22, 1966.

⁹³Barton County, Kansas, Divorces, Case No. 12087.

⁹⁴Death Record of Ethel M. Wilson, "California Deaths 1940-1997," *loc. cit.*, and Social Security Death Index, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁵Great Bend High School Alumni Directory, 1888 to 1997, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁶"Elic (Ex) Wilson Dies at St. Rose Hospital," The Great Bend Tribune, Monday, January 5, 1948.

⁹⁷"Mrs. Ethel Michaux Wilson," The Great Bend Tribune, Tuesday, July 2, 1974.

⁹⁸Gough-Micheaux Tombstone, Great Bend (formerly Woodlawn) Cemetery, Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas.

⁹⁹~~Great Bend High School Alumni Directory, 1888 to 1997, *loc. cit.*~~

Berkley avenue. Her home was in Great Bend, Kansas. Norman had been attentive to the young woman but his interest in her was not encouraged by Miss Micheaux. On the night of the shooting Norman had endeavored to make a "date" to call on Miss Micheaux, but was unsuccessful. He came to the Payne home, however, just in time to see Miss Micheaux and Clyde Baker, a colored steel worker, leaving the house. Norman followed them. When they returned from attending a downtown picture show Norman sprang from bushes near the door of the Payne house and shot her down and then fired four shots at the fleeing Baker without effect, the woman said. Miss Micheaux was taken to the hospital immediately. While it is evident that the bullet had penetrated a vital portion of the body, she showed signs of improvement and her recovery was considered probably. An inquest will be held today by Coroner Taylor."¹⁰⁰

Veatrice's body was returned to Great Bend¹⁰¹ for burial in the lot where her maternal grandparents, the Goughs, were buried.

15. Gertrude E. Michaux was born in Massac County, Illinois, November 25, 1893 and died November 21, 1973, at Inglewood, Los Angeles County, California¹⁰². She graduated from Great Bend High School in 1914¹⁰³. On June 15, 1914¹⁰⁴, she was married at Great Bend to Gus Cravens. She later married J. Britton Sims.

16. Swan Emerson Micheaux was born in Metropolis, Massac County, Illinois, October 3, 1895, and died in Great Bend, Barton County, Kansas, July 6, 1975¹⁰⁵, having been a patient at a local nursing home for some time. His marriage to Inez Johnson on July 12, 1916, at Hutchinson, Reno County, Kansas, ended in divorce in 1947¹⁰⁶. Inez was born in 1892 and died April 15, 1963, with burial in Fairlawn Cemetery, Hutchinson, Kansas¹⁰⁷.

The extremely brief obituary published in The Great Bend Tribune leaves many questions about Swan unanswered:

"Swan Micheaux, 79, died Sunday at the Central Kansas Medical Center, Great Bend. Born in Ill., he married Inez Johnson. He lived most of his life in Great Bend.

"Surviving him is his daughter, Lucile Micheaux of California.

"Funeral services will be at 2 p.m., Wednesday, at the Cook and Weber Funeral Home with Rev. John Augman officiating. Burial will be in the Great Bend Cemetery. Friends may call until service time at the funeral home."¹⁰⁸

As documented by many researchers into the workings of Oscar Micheaux and his film and book companies, Swan Micheaux worked with his brother for about eight years (1919 to 1927). Soon after Oscar's marriage to Alice Burton Russell, Swan left and for a year was manager of imported films for the New York City offices of the German Agfu Raiv Film Corporation. Next,

¹⁰⁰"Story of Murder: No Arrest Yet," The Great Bend Tribune, Thursday, May 20, 1915.

¹⁰¹"Funeral of Miss Micheaux," The Great Bend Tribune, Thursday, May 20, 1915.

¹⁰²Death Record of Gertrude E. Sims, "California Deaths 1940-1997," *loc. cit.*, and Social Security Death Index, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰³Great Bend High School Alumni Directory, 1888 to 1997, p. 202.

¹⁰⁴Barton County, Kansas, Marriages, Book F, p. 364.

¹⁰⁵Social Security Death Index, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰⁶Barton County, Kansas, Divorces, Case No. 16531.

¹⁰⁷Reno County Genealogical Society, Cemetery Records of Reno County, Kansas, 1865-1978 (North Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, Inc., 1980), p. 243.

¹⁰⁸"Swan Micheaux," The Great Bend Tribune, Tuesday, July 8, 1975.

he became Vice President and General Manager of Dunbar Film Corporation in New York City. He would also make a moderately successful film of his own called *Midnight Ace*. His later years in Great Bend were spent as a handyman. His remains rest beside those of his brother Oscar in the Great Bend Cemetery.

AFTERWORD

Where does this quest lead next? Currently, the slave schedules of the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Censuses for Calloway and Graves County, Kentucky, are being examined. These schedules do not list the slaves by name, but by age, sex and color. This data, however, may provide leads and help identify or eliminate other possibilities. For instance, in Calloway County, where Oscar Micheaux's father, uncles and aunt were reported to have been born, there was a white Micheaux/Michaux family which did own slaves and which probably migrated from Powhatan County, Virginia. Also of interest is a slaveholding family there with the surname Swann (Oscar's father and brother both bore the given name Swan), who came there from North Carolina. Examination of other legal records regarding these white families might provide information on the slaves they owned.

Also of help-- or hindrance-- is information provided to census takers by the family itself. Oscar's paternal grandmother, Melvina, consistently told census takers that she was born in Alabama and that both of her parents were born in Virginia. Her son, William P. Michaux, also consistently had his father's birthplace listed on censuses as North Carolina. His siblings, however, gave other answers to that question, including Kentucky, Mississippi and Virginia.

As with the history of any American family, it is simply a continuing effort to take the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle out of the box, put them on the table and assemble a picture. Some of the pieces may be lost, only to be found again; others may never be found. But, sooner or later, we will be able to identify the picture.

Karen P. Neuforth, December 29, 2001