

In 1870, forty year old Nancy Wallace was living on 4th Street in Hastings with her husband John and two children, 9 year old son James and 6 year old daughter Louanna. Like most of her neighbors she was far from her birthplace, living among strangers. What set Nancy apart was her color and recent freedom from slavery. She had arrived in Minnesota Territory with her 2 year old son James sometime in 1863. Traveling was risky for blacks during the Civil War so it is likely her journey was fraught with anxiety.

Her husband John had come to Minnesota from Kentucky with Company F, Third Minnesota Regiment in 1862. It is uncertain how John, a slave from Tennessee, came to be serving with the Third Minnesota. After the regiment suffered an embarrassing surrender to Confederate Col. Nathan Bedford Forrest, John accompanied them to Minnesota. What is certain is that he wanted his family with him in Minnesota instead of him returning to the South to join them there.

He hired a "white" man to bring Nancy and their two sons to Minnesota. Only Nancy and James arrived here. Their second son was taken away from her in St. Louis. This information was recorded by Blanche Lovejoy, a neighbor of the Wallace family, so whether "taken away" means he died or was stolen is not clear. Either way, Nancy lost a child on her journey to join her husband here. Within a year of her arrival, she gave birth to their daughter Louanna.

John Wallace was one of several black men living in Hastings at this time who served in the Civil War. Abraham Davenport was one of them. Abraham was born as a slave in Raleigh, N.C. served in Company H 11th Regiment, U. S. Colored Infantry and came to Hastings in 1869. At the time of the 1870 census he was single and like John worked as a laborer.

Another laborer was 37 year old John Foster from South Carolina. His 35 year old wife Elizabeth was from North Carolina and worked as a washerwoman. They lived in the downtown area near the Overall family. Living with the Overall family at this time was a 30 year old barber, John Mason from Indiana, 21 year old Millie Wright, and nineteen year old Lottie Adams, a milliner; bringing their household to 9 people.

Lottie Adams' family and the Overall family were close friends so it was no surprise that A. J. served as a witness when she married Stewart Patterson, a 40 year old Porter from Virginia on September 21st. The other witness was A.J.'s partner in the barber shop, 22 year old Wesley Taylor from North Carolina.

The 8-24-1872 Hastings Gazette under the title of "The Colored Troops Fight Nobly" reported that A. J. Overalls, Wesley Taylor, George Daniels, John Wallace, Abraham Davenport, John Foster, James Lewis all signed a printed petition which had already received several hundred signatures around the state withdrawing their traditional support for Hon. Charles Sumner and instead pledging themselves to stand by the old republican party. They would vote and use their influence to secure the election of Grant and Wilson. This petition was an example of the new citizens following through with their commitment to be "well read".

Included here are several more newspaper articles that show a number of ways the black community joined together for self improvement and to celebrate their new role as free citizens.

1-9-1875 Hastings Gazette . "The celebration of the emancipation proclamation by the colored people of this city on Friday evening of last week was a decided success."

3-27-1875 Hastings Gazette "Literary. - But few of our readers are aware that we have in this city in full blast a literary club, under the name of United States Debating Society. It is composed of American citizens of African descent, and is the incipient expression of a vaulting ambition which aims at not in less than that intellectual power, which the colored man thinks he has but to reach forth and possess. At the last meeting the credit system was discussed and among the barbers the cash down idea was most popular. The best informed among them also have knowledge that the freedman's bank of Washington, left a considerable number of their colored brethren minus the deposits which they had eked out from their hard earnings."

5-27-1875 Hastings Gazette . "Everything is lovely in Hastings. The colored people at that place held a meeting in Germania Hall a few nights ago, to rejoice and jubilate over the passage of de civil rights bill.* Addresses were made by the Rev. Mr. Jones (colored) of Minneapolis, and Mr. Taylor, (colored) of Hastings, and responded to on the part of the white trash, by Col. T. O'Leary and D. Chamberlain, esq the affair closing with a dance, both colors freely intermingling. Just think of it, the O'Learys affiliating with the demed nagur. It must be now de kingdom's comin', and de year of Jubilee." Stillwater Gazette reprinted in the Hastings Gazette

*The 1875 Civil Rights Act

The last biracial U.S. Congress of the 19th century passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875. It protected all Americans, regardless of race, in their access to public accommodations and facilities such as restaurants, theaters, trains and other public transportation, and protected the right to serve on juries. However, it was not enforced, and the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional in 1883.

The fight for civil rights moved to the judicial realm. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that designating separate railway cars for whites and blacks was constitutional, as long as the facilities were "equal." The "separate but equal" doctrine stood until 1954, when the Supreme Court ordered *school desegregation* in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

3-1-1877 Hastings Gazette . - Independent Order of Grand Templars (I. O. of G. T.) a Temperance Society was organized by the colored citizens of this city:
WCT - Wesley Taylor - WVT - Nina Overalls; Chaplain - Rev. William Lee; Financial Sec. - Mary Taylor; Marshal - John Foster; Guard - John Wallace; Right Supporter - Annie Lee; Left Supporter - Elizabeth Foster, P.W.C.T. - Lincoln Overalls.
The lodge consists of fifteen members, with A. J. Overalls as deputy and will meet every Tuesday evening."

The 1880 census showed a decrease in the number of colored citizens from 40 to 24. There were no barbers. A.J. Jack Overalls and Robert Burns had moved to St. Paul and Wesley Taylor to Prescott.

Just a year later Andrew Jackson Overall died. The April 27, 1881 issue of the Hastings Union carried his obituary, "One of Hastings' old settlers, A.J.Overalls, has passed to the other side. He died on Tuesday after a long sickness. He was one of the first colored citizens of Hastings, having come to this city in 1857. Jack was one of the boys in his day, but some years ago experienced religion and since then lived according to his lights. He had many friends in this city and all regret his demise."

Andrew Jackson Overalls was a unique person who stood up for his beliefs. Born a free man, he worked to achieve full citizenship for himself and other males of his race to enjoy all that being a citizen entailed. He was a true Civil Rights Activist. He was buried in Lakeside Cemetery.

George Daniels, his wife Chloe and their six children left Hastings in 1879 moving to Medford, Minnesota in Steele County. Their family had grown to include six children by this time and he was still farming.

Henry St. Clair and his family were still neighbors of the LeDuc family. Their eldest daughter Ella, 16, had married Harrison Cook from Point Douglas. At the time of the census she was living with her parents and Harrison was living in the Aspinwell hotel where he worked as a porter. Harrison Cook was born in 1848, in Huntington, Pa. He enlisted in the Union Army on September 5, 1864, company B of the 41st United States Colored Infantry.

Nancy and John Wallace were living alone on 4th Street. James was living in a boarding house downtown and worked as a yard man at a hotel. Louanna, who would have been 15 does not show up on the census and there is no record of her burial in either of the city cemeteries. A later census shows that Nancy gave birth to 3 children, with only one, James, still living.

Five years later, the Wallace house was full again when Nancy's niece Ella Curry and her husband James and daughters Georgianna and Mary Ellen moved to Hastings from Harrisonburg, Virginia. They moved in with John, Nancy, James who was again living with his parents with his wife Ella and 6 month old daughter Nellie May. It was a full house.

Currys stayed there only long enough to get established. Jim Curry's first job was working for Charles Mather, the postmaster, helping around his home at W. 8th Street. For a time his pay was 50 cents/day and later it increased to about 1.25/day. He took any kind of work from farm laborer to carpenter. For short periods in 1886 and 1894 he slung hash in the Ryan Hotel, in St. Paul. His first investment in Hastings was to buy a lot, where he helped to build a house which he later sold. In 1889 he purchased two lots and built a fine 9 room home at 801 W. 4th Street. He later purchased 8 adjoining lots and became a real farmer, purchasing a cow from Otto Poore. He built a barn, bought some chickens, was given a horse and had a large garden. In the summer of 1894 he was offered a good job at a summer resort at Prior Lake, owned and managed by William Hull from Hastings. He was the handyman there for 19 seasons. He loved swimming since he was a young lad so one of his tasks at the resort was teaching young and old to swim.

James and Ella Wallace moved next door to his parents on 4th Street and eventually had seven children.

The next segment of this series will continue the story of the Wallace and Curry families.

