

The Black community in Clarke County A historical perspective

local newspapers and census records

Barry Mateer, February, 2025

This link leads to Findagrave Memorials of some of the earliest residents within the black community; including several former slaves and veterans of the Civil War; some are buried here and the headstones remain. Others have obituaries which say burial was in Osceola but no headstone remains.

<https://www.findagrave.com/virtual-cemetery/1916238?page=1#sr-14495137>

- 1846** Iowa becomes the 29th state. Clarke County is surveyed and mapped out.
- 1850** 79 residents in first census of Clarke County.
- 1852** 549 residents in census of Clarke County. City of Osceola established in 1851.
- 1854** 1,626 residents in census of Clarke County.
- 1855, Feb.** 2,000... in Clarke County. Osceola population 150.
No church buildings. No public schools. Two flourishing private schools in Osceola.
Of manufactories, there is one steam saw-mill.
- 1856** 3,978 residents **2 'colored' persons** were living in Clarke County
1,854 were female, 2,124 were male (*'Annals of Iowa'*)
- 1859** 5,006 residents in census of Clarke County. **871 houses for dwelling.**
- 1860** No Black residents could be found in the census as living in Clarke County.

Civil War (1861-1865) By end of The War of the Rebellion, 500 Clarke County men had volunteered/enlisted.

'Subject to Military Duty' roster of each township

- 1862 Clarke County had **872 men** included on the list. Edward Taylor in Knox Township was the only 'colored.'
- 1863 Clarke County had **474 men** included on the list, including at least 4 Black men of military age.
- 1863 Union County had 198 men on their list of men of military age; none were Black.

1862 There were **6 'negro' residents**. Out of a total county population of 5,693
Names not included in summary of this census. **990 houses for dwelling.**

1865 There were **30 identified as 'colored.'** Out of a total county population of 5,716.
1,025 houses for dwelling.

1870 **26 Black residents** 10 family groupings. column on census for 'color' included **white, black, mulatto**
7 of these 10 family names were not listed in the next census in 1880.

1875 **39 Black residents** in Clarke County 22 males and 17 females
Fremont Township was home to the only black couple living outside of Osceola Township.

437 Foreign-born residents of Clarke County. 32% of those were living in Hopeville.

1880 **57 Black residents** were living in Clarke County; in 12 family groupings

3 young males, ages of 12, 15, and 16 years old – listed as hired-hand or servant
(without other liked-named relatives present in the census)

1882 The African Methodist Episcopal Church was organized as a house of worship in the northwest part of town.

1885 **77 Black residents** in **city of Osceola** (Iowa census)
43 colored male citizens 34 colored female citizens

Birthplace of individuals seemed to be heavily in Missouri, Kentucky and Virginia
Most of the youngest residents were listed as having been born in Iowa.

Among the Clarke County population there were: **ex-soldiers** – 149 **Foreigners not naturalized** - 17
can neither read nor write – 12 **can read but can not write** – 19

1890 No Census data remains as the records were lost in a fire.

Osceola and Hopeville were identified as having an Underground Railroad station.
<https://www.bleedingheartland.com/2024/01/27/greenways-underground-railroad/>