

Charles H. Smith - Oswego City Barber

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The Oswego Daily Palladium.,
May 11, 1874, Page 4

Update: Charles Smith Renovates His Shop

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From: *The Oswego Daily Palladium*, May 11, 1874, Page 4.

FOREVER FREE FROM BONDAGE

Once Slaves, but Now Released -- Death of Charley Smith and Joshua W. Wright

Charles H. Smith, the colored barber, one of the "stand-bys" of the town, died last night, aged 70 years. He was born in slavery in Baltimore and served his master a long time as a house servant. In 1840 he escaped and reached Oswego by "underground railroad." He went on to Canada and for several years sailed on the lakes, but at length started a barber shop here 30 years ago. For 25 years he occupied the shop under Ould & Klock's building, but moved out the forepart of this week, the rooms being wanted for another purpose. Last Saturday night he swerved his old customers, of whom he had a regular line, whom he had shaved for many years – in the old place for the

last time. He seemed much affected at leaving, and after moving out, fell sick and grew worse till he died. His family think that his worry over the breaking up of his little business was a fatal aggravation of a long standing difficulty. Mr. Smith was an honest, industrious and economical man and a good citizen. His old friends and customers who had stood by him so long more out of personal kindness for the old man, are sincerely sorry he is gone. He has relatives in Baltimore.

Joshua W. Wright, born a slave in Wilmington, Dell, but who escaped at the age of 15, died in Syracuse yesterday, aged 61. He was reunited to his

family after emancipation was declared.

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Tudor Grant do at this meeting?
2. How did the author of the article describe Tudor Grant?
3. Does this prove that Tudor Grant had once been a slave?
4. What do you think Tudor Grant meant when he said he felt he had "always belonged to the race?"
5. Who was Lovejoy?

The Oswego Daily Palladium, April 01, 1882, page 4.

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Frank De Natale, a 12-year old barber. Lathers and shaves customers in father's shop, 416 Hanover Street, after school and Saturday. Location: Boston, Massachusetts. Photograph by Lewis Wickes Hine, 1 February 1917.

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Above: Advertisement in *The Potsdam Herald-Recorder*, August 19, 1910, page 10.

In the 1800's, the job of a barber was considered to be unskilled work. White citizens thought the job of a barber was too lowly. Therefore, barbers were predominantly enslaved or free black men.

Prior to the Civil War, well-to-do white men would frequent black barbers, but black men would either have to get their hair cut at home, or sneak in after hours.

Some escaped slaves would look for barbershops on their way to freedom in the north; seeking refuge from the black barbers.

(Hunter Oatman-Stanford, *Straight Razors and Social Justice: The Empowering Evolution of Black Barbershops*, *Collectors Weekly*, May 30, 2014.)

Right: Antique barber pole, 19th century



DID YOU KNOW...

Because black barbers were considered unskilled workers serving white clients, black activists encouraged black barbers to learn a skilled trade to break the suggested "servitude" to whites.

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QUESTIONS

Questions from the text:

1. Where was Mr. Smith born and under what conditions?
2. How old was he when he escaped slavery? What year did he escape?
3. What/who helped him escape to Oswego?
4. After reaching Oswego, where did Mr. Smith go?
5. After he reached Canada where did he go?
6. When did he start the barber shop?
7. Who were his last customers?
8. How old was he when he died?
9. Where does he have family?

Questions for further research and discussion:

1. What did being a house servant as a slave entail?
2. Why was he so beloved in his community of Oswego?
3. What does being a “stand by” mean and what clues do you have to make you believe Mr. Smith was considered a “stand by”?
4. Use census forms and city directories to determine Mr. Smith’s relatives.
5. What was the cause of Mr. Smith’s death? Why did he die so quickly?