



Black History Month — February 2009

By Chuck Gerdau



Historian Carter Woodson (1875-1950) is known as the “Father of Black History.” He originated the remembrances as a black history week in 1926. Woodson chose the second week of February because it marked the birthdays of two Americans who greatly influenced the lives and social condition of African Americans: former President Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Woodson also founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. (www.asalh.org)

Solomon Perteat – A Free Man of Color

Most historians would agree Solomon Perteat was the most important black man of 19th Century Tuscaloosa. Perteat was a storekeeper, real estate developer, a plasterer, and part owner of a tanyard in Newtown.

You will find several different spellings for Perteat’s surname, including Perteet, Perteit, Poteat, etc. Many have chosen the spelling on his tombstone “Perteat” as the official spelling, as this name is found in his native Georgia.

He owned his own home and was able to help other blacks in gaining their freedom. He was also able to secure the freedom of his wife Lucinda and their children.

A map of Newtown shows the tanyard that Perteat was involved with called the “Pertite & Marlowe” tannery. Among his business dealings in Tuscaloosa was with Robert Jemison. There are over 100-recorded transactions of land in Tuscaloosa involving Perteat.

Solomon Perteat was born about 1786 in Wilkes County, Georgia. He came to Tuscaloosa County in

the 1820’s, a black craftsman who had never been a slave. His mother was Ruth Perteat, and his father is unknown.

Solomon Perteat’s daughter, Martha, married James Abbott, a free black man, about 1827 in Tuscaloosa. James Abbott was a barber from New York.

James Abbott ran the following advertisement in the local newspaper in 1827:

James Abbott Barber (Late of New York)

MOST humbly and respectfully takes the liberty of informing the inhabitants of this city, that he has located himself expressly for the accomodation of those gentlemen who may think proper to employ him in his profession. His office is kept next door below the State House where he will be found ready to Shave which he does with a keen Razor, or Cut Hair, which he pledges himself he can do in the most approved and fashionable style of the day, except when absent on professional business. Tuscaloosa, Nov. 17, 1827

On January 14, 1829, the General Assembly of the State of Alabama granted the following to Perteat:

“That Solomon Perteet, a free man of colour, be, and he is hereby authorized and empowered to manumit and set free certain slaves, to wit: his wife Lucinda and child Jackson, also William, the son of his wife, when he shall have attained the age of twenty- eight years, the property of the said Solomon Perteet ; reserving however to creditors all theirjust rights.”

Perteat was able help slaves to free themselves. He would purchase slave with an understanding that he would be repaid by those slaves in order for them to gain their freedom.

The 1840 Census lists Solomon Perteit living with 2 males ages 10-23, 1 male age 35-54, 2 females under



Black History Month — February 2009
Continued from page 7

the age of 10, and 1 female 35-54.

The tornado of 1842 completely destroyed his Newtown home that sat between 7th and 8th Streets and west of 34th Avenue.

When Sir Charles Lyell visited Tuscaloosa in 1846, he was surprised at Perteat's accumulation of wealth from his real estate transactions.

Perteat's wife, Lucinda, listed herself as a gardener in the 1860 census.

Perteat's tombstone reads "A free man of color, born in Wilkes County, Georgia, died at his home near the city, October 3, 1863, aged 76 years. By an industrious and honest life, he earned and left to his wife and children a handsome and comfortable estate."

At least three of their children survived him.

Dr. Reuben Searcy, Dr. John Drish, E.M. Burton, and

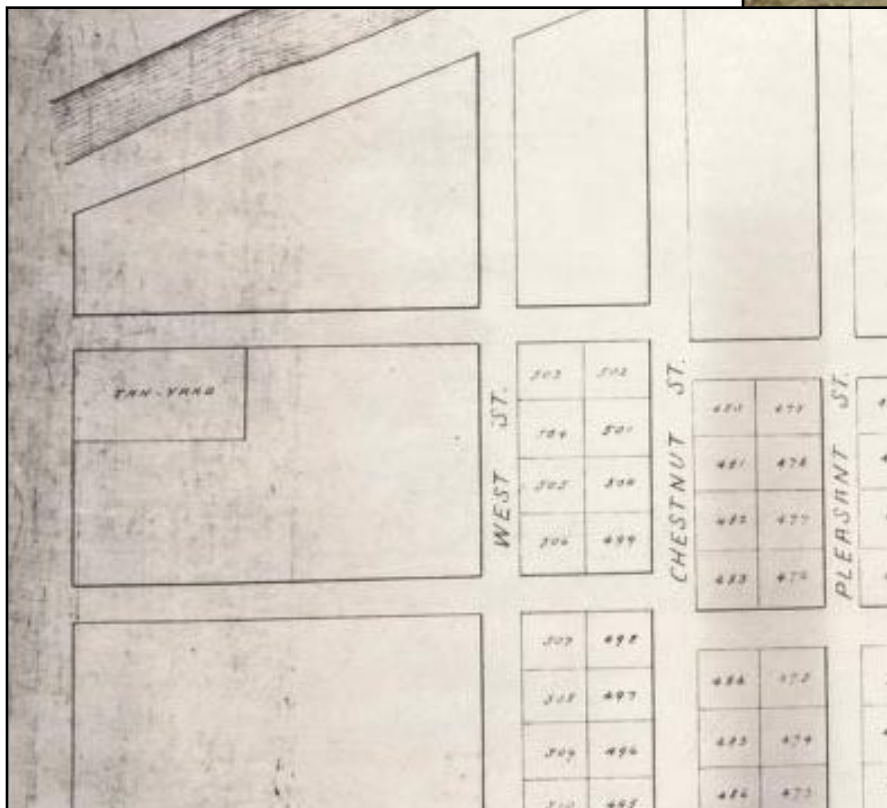
Leonard B. Neal, all well-known contemporaries of Perteat, witnessed Perteat's will.

The Perteat plot has a wrought-iron fence and another marker, which marks the grave of the infant son of Martha Perteat and her husband James Abbott. Three other burials have been identified in the plot using ground scanning radar.

His burial next to the graves of whites broke tradition; yet it was a testament to the man Perteat was and the respect his contemporaries gave him.



The Perteat Plot at Greenwood Cemetery



Soloman Perteat's tombstone.

(Left) Newtown map showing Perteat's Tanyard property.