



Thomas S. Baxter

May 7 1843- July 26, 1917

Interred: Calvary Cemetery Section A



T. S. Baxter

Thomas S. Baxter was born May 7, 1843 into slavery in Fayette County, Kentucky. His father was believed to be Thomas B. Baxter, a white slave owner and his mother one of Thomas B.'s slaves. Thomas S. Baxter died on July 26, 1917. He was ill for many months before the day he passed. Thomas Baxter was born a slave, but was freed sometime before 1860.

He was married to Elizabeth J., who was also a former slave. According to his own notes in their family Bible, they had seven children. Elizabeth passed away on March 23, 1926.

Baxter was self-educated and he came to Shelby County shortly after the Civil War. Baxter was a teacher in one of Shelby County's Freedmen's Schools from 1868-1879. The federal government set these up to educate former enslaved people.

Baxter was a homeowner in Shelbyville, Kentucky. According to the 1880 census, he and his family lived on Clay Street. Baxter was listed in the census from 1880 to 1910 living in Shelbyville.

By the 1880s, Baxter was working as an editor while living on Clay Street. In 1883, he appeared at the Louisville City Directory as the president of an African American publication. He was an editor for the Ohio Falls Express newspaper from 1879-1904. Baxter has many articles in the newspaper. You can still find them to this day if you search Ohio Falls Express and read the newspaper from July 11, 1891.

Baxter also was involved in local politics, having served several terms as a member of the City Council from the Sixth Ward. He served his term as council member for 18 years, from 1892-1910, until he was forced out of council. One of the challenges Thomas Baxter had to face was his being replaced when the city redistricted the boundaries so that Baxter couldn't get reelected. The city moved



the district lines outside his house so he no longer lived in the district he had been elected to for the last 18 years. According to the Shelby Record, Baxter was the first and the longest termed African American elected to office in Kentucky.

Regardless of Baxter's being forced off the city council, his impact and involvement in his community is notable. He was a republican and heavily believed in what they stood for. Baxter was listed as "a power among his race in republican politics." He organized and was president of the first Republican Club and was a long-time member of the Shelby County Republican Committee. Listed in his death record, it was shown that T.S. Baxter was also an advertiser for local merchants. Baxter also participated in several associations. He was elected Grand Master of the Benevolent Order of the United Brothers of Friendship, served four terms of many lodges and temples not only in Kentucky but also in Tennessee, and served as Grand Secretary and Treasurer. He was also a bass drummer in local "colored" bands for over a third of a century.

Thomas Baxter was an important role model to all, but especially to African Americans in his day. He was among the most influential and effective persons that helped to change lives for other African Americans in Kentucky.

Resources:

- Martin, Todd. "T. S. Baxter: A nearly forgotten pioneer." Sentinel-News, Shelbyville. Feb 22, 2012.
- Overall, Vivian, and Collins, Kevin. "Thomas S. Baxter" *The New History of Shelby County*. Shelby County Historical Society. Harmony Press. 2003.
- Cecil, Heather. "T. S. Baxter" Article written for Friends of Grove Hill and Shelby Life Magazine.

Written by: Emma Alvey, Isabella Amya Swiger, Avion Marshall, Laken Butrum, Helen Villatoro
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