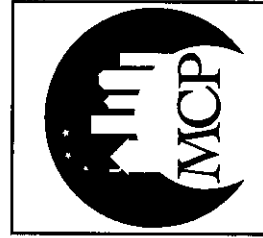


SPRINGFIELD'S URBAN HISTORIES:

ESSAYS ON THE QUEEN CITY
OF THE MISSOURI OZARKS

STEPHEN L. MCINTYRE, EDITOR



moon city press
springfield missouri
2012

- 38 1933 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*.
 39 *News-Leader*, February 5, 1928, 12, 21.
 40 *Springfield Directory*, 1931, passim.

41 Ann Fair Dodson, "Paul Harris: A Man of North Springfield," *Springfield*, 2.4 (September 1980): 25; Betty Jane Turner, interview by the author, Springfield, MO, April 4, 2004. Mrs. Turner was raised on the city's north side. Her family opened and continues to operate Rathbone Hardware/Ace on Commercial Street.

42 *Springfield Leader and Press*, September 11, 1938, E5. The author of the article, Docia Karrell, is not listed in any of the directories of the 1930s, so her affiliation with either side of the city cannot be traced.

43 Examples of newspapers articles that address the nature of Springfield's northside-southside conflict include *Springfield News Leader*, September 27, 1987, 1A, and December 8, 1987, 1B. Older accounts include articles in the *Springfield Leader*, February 3, 1916, 3, February 5, 1928, 20, February 7, 1928, 1. Conclusions about geographic origins of businessmen are based on an analysis of the birthplace of fathers of forty-six northside businessmen and sixty-six southside businessmen. Information was drawn from city directories and the U. S. census.

44 Proquest, *Heritage Quest Online*, [http://0-www.heritagequestonline.com](http://0-www.heritagequestonline.com/www.coolcat.org/).
 SGCLS (accessed June 1, 2009). Conclusions about the class composition of the city are based on an analysis of 152 northside households located on seven streets and 135 southside households located on eight streets.

45 For more information about class relations in Springfield during labor strikes, see Chapters Five and Six in this volume.

46 Additional information about the relationships between businessmen and socio-economic class may be found in works by Burton J. Bledstein and Robert Johnston, ed. *The Middling Sorts: Explorations in the History of the American Middle Class* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 239, 291; Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003), 15, 52.

47 *Growth of a City*, 27, 29, 30, 36; *News-Leader*, March 5, 1933, C3.

48 R. J. Johnston, *The American Urban System* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), 215; Risa Palm, *The Geography of American Cities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 240, 218. The shopping center frenzy began in Springfield in the 1940s along Glenstone Avenue. In 1946, the city's first shopping center, The Plaza, was built next door to a popular theater. Richard Grosenbaugh, *A Million Hours of Memories: A Condensed History of Springfield Missouri Published on Its 150th Birthday* (Springfield, MO: 1979), 64.

49 R. J. Johnston, *Urban Residential Patterns* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1971), 40, 84-86. *News-Leader*, September 19, 1976, B2; *News-Leader*, December 14, 1994, B8.

50 *Leader and Press*, July 23, 1970; Malcolm J. Proudfoot, "City Retail Structure," *Economic Geography* 13.5 (October 1937): 425; Palm, *The Geography of American Cities*, 240-242. Outlying business centers, like commercial business districts, use closely spaced retail establishments and enjoy a volume of sales only exceeded by the CBD. These centers may not draw customers from all parts of the city, but may draw them from long distances outside the city.

MEMORIES OF WALTER MAJORS: SEARCHING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN SPRINGFIELD

Richard L. Schur

SOMETIMES, MERELY TINKERING WITH WHEELS AND AN ENGINE CAN challenge the reigning power relations and dismantle stereotypes as much as leading a protest march, especially in a region that could be hostile to African Americans. This chapter explores the social memory of Walter Majors (ca. 1879-1949), an inventor, entrepreneur and, in his own way, a social activist. Born in Springfield, Missouri to parents who had been enslaved, his life reveals both the possibility for and the limits facing African Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The local memory of his accomplishments also testifies to ongoing challenges and struggles. The name and legend of Walter Majors has captured enough people's imaginations in the last two decades that his actions have been chronicled in a variety of Springfield publications, he has been the source of inspiration for a number of ideas for commemorating the local African American community, and files (albeit small ones) exist in local archives about him. In many regards, Majors is a local legend. When Majors is remembered, it is his patents and his successful attempt to build the first car in the city that take center stage and, thus, define his importance.

The interest in Majors, since the 1980s, also suggests that the figure of the black inventor offers a potential path for communities to examine historical racial inequalities without succumbing to the hopelessness, guilt, and despair that accompany histories of lynchings, racial segregation and racial violence. The "resurgence" in interest in Walter Majors seems to parallel or correspond to the increase in local discussion of the 1906 lynching in Springfield's city square. Many discussions of the history of Springfield's African American community begin and end with this event. A local white professor, Katherine G. Lederer, began researching the African American community's history and collected many photographs and documents of the community during the 1980s and 1990s.¹ She identifies the lynching as the turning point in the growth and development of the African American community: "It [the lynching] was soon forgotten by the white community even though the natural growth of the black community was halted by this terrible injustice."² Lederer's research also uncovered the vibrant African American community that existed before the lynching and the community that persevered after. Despite the wealth of information that she and others, especially amateur historian Harold McPherson,³ have uncovered, this

lynching remains the one thing that most people, local or not and historian or lay person, know about Springfield's African American community.⁴ In many respects, Springfield and its African American community have faced a key choice about how to narrate the past. Should Springfield focus on the 1906 lynching or on individuals like Walter Majors? Or how can the community create a healthy balance between these competing perspectives on Springfield's past?

Cultural and Familial Context

Walter Majors was born in Springfield, probably in 1879, to Peyton and Emily Majors. In 1852, Emily Majors, then only one year of age, came to Springfield as the slave of Joseph Weaver as part of his inheritance from a deceased relative.⁵ The Weavers were a fairly prominent and wealthy Springfield family. The origin of Peyton Majors is more ambiguous. In the 1870 census, there is a Paxton Majors, who came from Texas and worked for Edwin Robberson. Later census records, however, indicate that Peyton Majors was born in the east, either Tennessee or Virginia. There is also a possibility that Peyton Majors might have been a slave inherited in 1852 by Josiah Campbell, another influential Springfield family, from a Samuel Majors, who lived in Tennessee. I mention this remote possibility along with Emily's relationship to the Weaver family only to help illustrate how a large portion of Springfield's African American community was deeply intertwined with the city's founders and their accumulation of wealth. Even though Springfield is not generally viewed through the lens of slavery, an 1858 assessment of property in Greene County determined that nearly twenty percent of local wealth was held in slaves.⁶ The 1860 census suggests that nearly one-eighth of Springfield's population of 13,186 were African American slaves. (See Table One.) Whatever his origins, Peyton married Emily on April 4, 1871, in Springfield.⁷

Throughout his life, city directories and census records indicate that Peyton worked as a laborer. Because racial slavery, racism, and segregation

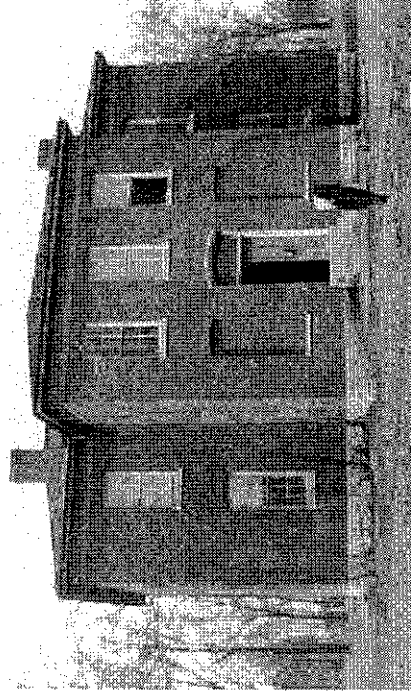
Table One. Population of Greene County, by Race and Decade

Year	Greene County	African American	Percentage of Total
1850	12,715	1,237	9.72
1860	13,186	1,668	12.60
1870	21,549	3,249	15.07
1880	28,817	2,808	9.74
1890	48,616	3,441	7.07
1900	52,713	3,298	6.25
1910	63,381	2,625	4.14

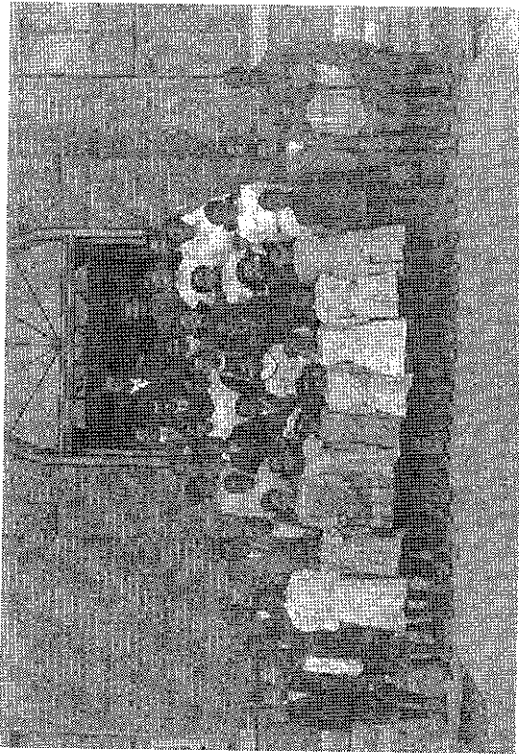
Source: Fairbanks and Tuck, *Past and Present of Greene County*, 211-215.

frequently allowed whites to turn the creativity and knowledge of African Americans into wealth, it is quite possible that the reference to Peyton Majors as a laborer may have hidden his mechanical interests and abilities, which he in turn may have passed on to his son. In an oral interview, Harold McPherson has asserted that enslaved African Americans demonstrated considerable mechanical know-how and ingenuity in helping their white owners to succeed in farming and numerous other businesses.⁸ McPherson's observations about Springfield have certainly been noted in other locales.⁹ African American participation in the trades dropped during the 1890s and 1900s as racism worked to exclude African Americans from these highly-skilled jobs, further suggesting that official listings may not accurately record the real skills and work experience of African Americans, such as Peyton Majors.¹⁰ It may have been precisely this cultural climate that, being blind to the mechanical skills of African Americans, eventually caused Walter Majors to assert his own abilities through his inventions and entrepreneurial activities.

The Majors had eight children, although only seven survived to adulthood. For most of Walter's youth, the Majors family lived at 822 Washington Street. During the second half of the nineteenth century, this address was situated in the heart of one of the four African American neighborhoods in Springfield. The family saw the population of Springfield and Greene County explode in the period following the Civil War as both whites and blacks flocked to the area during the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s. One of the results of the shifting demographics was that African Americans constituted a significant percent of the Springfield local population, reaching 15 percent in 1870. Perhaps most significantly, this address stood within a block or two of the first African American school in Springfield. The Afri-



First African American school, constructed in 1871.
Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County.



African American teachers and students, Frederick Douglass School, c. 1900. Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County.

can American residents of Springfield were desperate for education during the post-Civil War era and raised money to get the school built.¹¹ One can infer, given the importance local African Americans placed on this school, that the Majors family of eight children likely chose to live in this location, in part because of its proximity to the school. The paucity of records makes it hard to know whether and how much school Walter Majors attended. However, it is quite clear that Walter could read and write and presented himself as an educated individual.

The family house on Washington also placed the Majors family within the complex web of race relations within Springfield. While the city never passed Jim Crow segregation laws, "long years of practice had established the custom of physical separation." The city's schools, churches, playgrounds, theaters, and billiard halls were segregated, and local hotels, hospitals, and orphanages simply refused to serve African Americans.¹² The Majors family lived in the neighborhood that was probably the primary target of two lynchings, which have received considerably less attention than the more famous 1906 incident. Jonathon Fairbanks and Edwin Clyde Tuck, the first residents who sought to chronicle Springfield and Greene County's past in 1914, noted:

In 1859 occurred the first outbreak of mob violence in Greene County. It was caused by that ever-present menace where there is a large negro population, the assault committed upon a white woman by a black man. Mart Danforth, a negro slave, committed this crime, for which the law

then provided no adequate punishment. He was arrested and promptly indicted, and confessed his guilt without reserve. Before he could be brought to trial a crowd gathered, took him from the custody of his guards, and hung him upon a tree in the Jordan valley, just east of where Benton Avenue now crosses that stream.

In 1871 another negro, Bud Isbell, was hanged by a mob, almost on the same spot, and for the same crime. In neither of these cases were there any arrests or indictments made against any of the mob. This, not because Greene county is a lawless community, but because anywhere in the United States, North as well as South, this crime committed by a black ruffian upon a helpless white woman instantly kindles a flame that nothing short of the quick and merciless death of the guilty one can satisfy, and for which it has so far been impossible to convict one of the indignant slayers of the ravisher.¹³

Both lynchings occurred between Benton and Jefferson on Wilson Creek, a dividing line of sorts between the white downtown and the African American neighborhood in which the Majors came to live.¹⁴ Although these earlier lynchings lack the detailed historical record of the 1906 lynching, Emily and Peyton Majors would have certainly remembered them, especially the later one.

Purrrington and Harter note that, by 1900, lynching in Missouri shifted from "a form of frontier justice" and transformed into "an instrument of racial (and perhaps sexual) suppression."¹⁵ The murder of a white woman and subsequent lynching of three African American men in Pierce City in 1901 caused the African American community to leave Pierce City and altered the racial climate in all of southwest Missouri.¹⁶ In 1903, an unknown African American man killed a police officer in Joplin. This directly led to the lynching of Thomas Gilyard, a recent arrival to the city.¹⁷

Springfield did not escape this racial tension. In 1904, a white policeman, Jesse Brake, learned that his wife had a romantic relationship with John McCracken, an African American man, and had given birth to a bi-racial child.¹⁸ McCracken was tried and convicted for engaging in a sexual relationship with a white woman and was sentenced to thirty years in prison. During the trial, several attempts were made to storm the local jail and lynch McCracken.¹⁹ During late 1905 and early 1906, "two African Americans were arrested for the murder of a white tailor, T. M. McKinney. A second murder in January 1906—the shooting of an aged Confederate C. P. Roark," gave the editor of *The Leader* (a newspaper affiliated with the Democratic Party) the occasion to admonish "the black community to behave or suffer the consequences."²⁰

Despite these racial tensions, Springfield's African American community flourished after the Civil War. These growing numbers of African Americans allowed for some electoral success during this period, when some African Americans were elected to the school board. Another African American, Alfred Adams, was appointed county coroner by the

Greene County court judges.²¹ In 1887, J. H. McCracken (whose exact relation to the John McCracken involved in the 1904 incident is unclear) was apparently elected City Assessor as a Republican, but the City Council later certified the election results with a white man as the winner.²² The vibrancy of the community can also be reflected in the decision by B. F. Adams, later a principal, to start an African American newspaper, the *Springfield American Negro*, in 1890. Although only one issue of the paper remains, that edition reveals how African Americans participated in electoral politics during this era and the vigorous public debate within the African American community, as shown by the editor's response to reader complaints.²³ The paper also indicates, with its listing of five service lodges, the extent to which the African American community engaged in public service. In addition, one black union existed as early as 1886.²⁴ It is precisely this context of a politically and socially active African American community, embedded within a frequently racist and definitely segregated Springfield (albeit segregated by custom, not law) that shaped the upbringing and world-view of Walter Majors.

Walter Majors: "Local" Wagoner, Tinkerer, Inventor, Entrepreneur

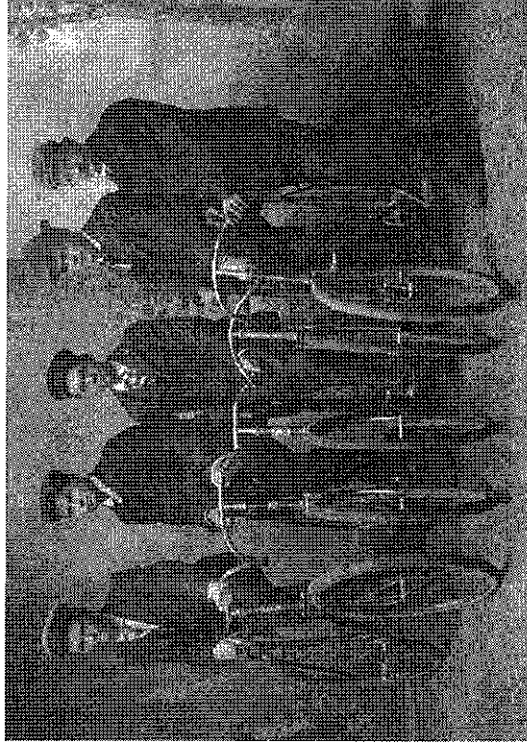
Walter Majors first appears in the existing historical records because he decided to volunteer for service in the Spanish-American War. To much local fanfare, African Americans enlisted in the military to defend their country. The *Springfield Republican* wrote nearly daily updates during the middle of July 1898, informing the public the names of the men who volunteered. In addition to identifying Walter Majors and his brother Harry as volunteers, it also listed Fred Coker, one of the victims of the 1906 lynching. By forming Company "L" in the 7th U. S. Volunteer Infantry, the Springfield African American community sought to demonstrate its patriotism, its intellectual and physical abilities, and its worth to the community. For example, the July 7, 1898, *Springfield Republican* announced that "prophecies to the effect that colored men would not have patriotism or bravery enough to enlist have been proven false."²⁵ The July 16 and 17 editions of the *Springfield Republican* described the celebration, attended by people of all races, to send off the troops. The tenor of these articles, published in a party newspaper that was relatively sympathetic to African Americans, indicates that the war provided an opportunity for the Springfield African American community to prove its mettle, and at least some local whites appeared to share that view.

It is in the July 22, 1898, "Mustering-in Roll" where the historical record first suggests that there was something special or unusual about Walter Majors. With the exceptions of Thomas Campbell, Joseph Armstrong, and Edward Hannah who led the company, African Americans in the unit were identified as privates. Majors, however, was given the duty of "wagoner,"

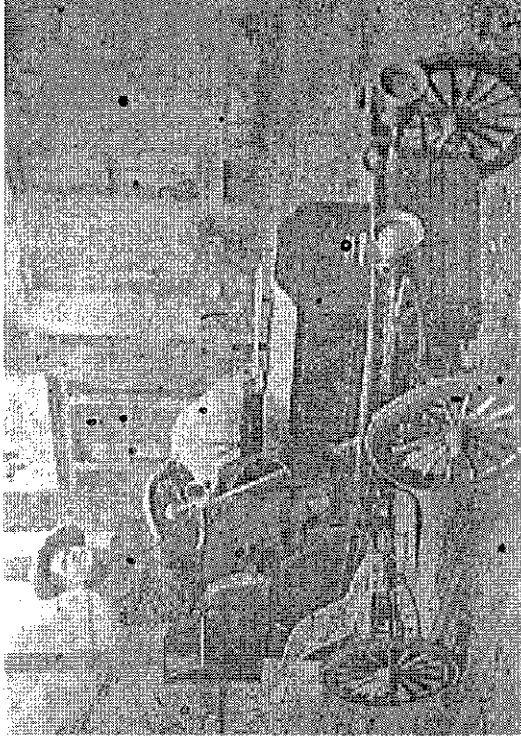
making him responsible for maintaining the company's transportation.²⁶ Upon his discharge from the military on February 28, 1899, Majors held the rank of corporal. While no direct evidence explains why Majors was appointed wagoner, we can infer that his superiors recognized his abilities and interest in things mechanical. Majors in fact lived near the regiment's white Colonel, Drury College faculty member James J. Mayes. Majors may also have been related to Thomas Campbell, a black officer in the regiment, Thomas being the child of another slave formerly owned by the Joseph Campbell family.²⁷

Upon his return to Springfield, Walter Majors married Myrtle Farrier, the daughter of a former slave who worked as a "blow grinder." According to the 1900 census, Majors and Farrier owned a home at 628 Phelps Street, just north of the downtown business district and on the edge of one of the African American sections of Springfield. Despite the residential segregation common in Springfield, Phelps Street appears to have been an integrated street with more white families than black. Moreover, it was unusual for the residents on that street, whether white or black, to own their home, since it appears to have been a working-class neighborhood. Existing historical records indicate that Majors returned from his military experience dedicated to improving himself and becoming a financial success.

According to the city directories of this period, Majors opened his first business—a bicycle repair shop on North Jefferson—in 1899 with another young African American, George Webb. Yet the 1900 census lists Majors as being employed as a bicycle machinist, while the city directories



Springfield bicyclists, c. 1910.
Courtesy of The History Museum for Springfield-Greene County.



Walter Majors in his automobile.
Katherine G. Lederer Ozarks African American History Collection,
courtesy of Missouri State University.

The article continued with a detailed description of the vehicle's appearance and culminated with an account of how it stalled on the return trip, where he passed people returning home from church, and how he had to make some repairs and adjustments by lamplight.

A 1930 account, remembered by A. M. Haswell, stated that the driver was engaged in something like a "circus stunt," designed to capture a crowd's attention on Commercial Street. Majors's car did attract a fair amount of attention and Haswell offers a bevy of details about it:

Then we saw that, which was apparently the sheet iron body of a boy's express wagon of rather larger size than usual and on the axles of this body were four wheels, evidently from some derelict safety bicycles: filling all the space in the wagon box and projecting well beyond the rear was a very small horizontal steam engine: the boiler was an iron cylinder never built to serve as a boiler but it was secured beneath the wagon bed, and underneath it four old flat kerosene lamps supplied the heat to produce steam, the power was conveyed from the engine to one rear wheel by a chain and a sprocket wheel.³²

In addition, Haswell notes with surprise that the driver was "a bright looking negro boy some 16 years of age and [a] curved lever from the front axle to his hand enabled him to steer."³³ He further notes that later cars featured this same curved lever, suggesting the true genius of Majors's first car.

of 1901 and 1902 indicate that Walter worked as a blacksmith at Springfield Wagon Works. The shift in employment status suggests that Majors was forced to hold off on his dreams of becoming an inventor and business owner. Springfield Wagon Works, however, was "the largest manufacturing concern in southwest Missouri" at the time and was the most important wagon-maker in the nation in 1901.²⁸ Most significantly for Majors, Springfield Wagon Works relied on sophisticated blacksmithing techniques and would have provided him an opportunity to improve his own mechanical skills by working alongside some of the best wagon-makers in the country.²⁹ In these records, we begin to see the pattern of Majors working with machines and tinkering with vehicles of all kinds. These same directories suggest that at least one brother and his father shared a passion for tinkering with machines and vehicles. Peyton Majors, his father, is identified as an express man and a teamster in these city directories, while his brother Henry is listed as a blacksmith. In city directories of later years, Walter Majors is also listed as a laborer and a machinist. These directories suggest that mechanical knowledge was transmitted through the Majors family and that these occupations made for a kind of "family" business.

It is also during this period that Walter built his famous car, which he drove around the town square in downtown Springfield on Sunday, April 7, 1901. Contrary to some local stories, this vehicle was not the first one built west of the Mississippi River, since people in St. Louis began building cars in 1893 and many tinkers tried to build cars in their garages during this time period.³⁰ Even though his type of tinkering was common at this time, Majors's automobile nonetheless made quite an impression on Springfield, leading to a front-page story in the *Leader-Democrat*. The article reveals the author's admiration for the vehicle and devotes considerable time to describing it:

There was a strange vehicle on the streets yesterday. People gathered about it to make a close inspection and see how it was made and horses shied at it. It was no more or less than an automobile, propelled by gasoline and made by a young colored man of Springfield. The trip of this first horseless carriage made in Springfield was not entirely successful but the vehicle moved and could be steered and stopped at will. It did get a rapid move on it and there are some glaring faults in its construction [but] the young colored man [sic] has the right principle and he can perfect the machine so it will carry him on smooth streets at a rapid rate.

Walter Majors has a great deal of mechanism [sic] . . . [H]e has been working on this automobile at his home at the corner of Phelps avenue and Broad street. The only automobile he ever saw was the one here with the Billy Kersands minstrel show and he did not get a chance to look at all the mechanisms of that one. But he has worked on it patiently and deserves great credit for what he has done. He has been assisted by his brothers, Frank and Henry. All the boys seem to have a good head for mechanics.³¹

These two versions of his first drive suggest that Majors sought a big audience of both blacks and whites to view this event. The decision to introduce his car to Springfield on a Sunday and in the town square implies that Majors considered this an opportunity to create a buzz that might lead to a business success, to challenge racial stereotypes and white supremacy, and to excite the imaginations of the African American community. Moreover, the generally positive article in the *Leader-Democrat* probably helped increase his reputation in the African American community, establishing him as a colorful and interesting figure.

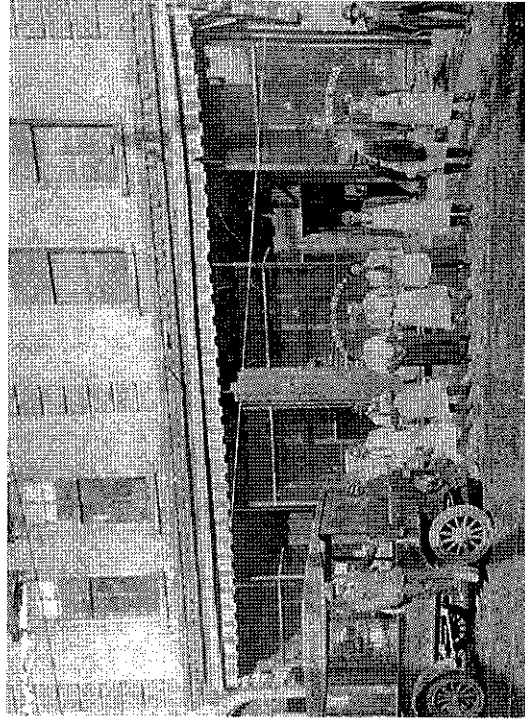
This initial reception of Majors's invention mirrors the reception of Booker T. Washington's famous address at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition, dedicated to showcasing innovations, technology and farming. In that speech, Washington made it clear that African Americans were making social and economic progress and would continue to make such progress through "the invention and production of agricultural implements, buggies, steam-engines, newspapers, statuary, carving, paintings, and the management of drug-stores and banks" rather than by demanding social or political equality.³⁴ Washington found an almost ecstatic reception for this message and later guided President Grover Cleveland, who endorsed this focus on hard-work and technological progress, around the Negro exhibit at the exposition.³⁵ Majors's business endeavors and mechanical inventions could easily be understood as following Booker T. Washington's program of seeking economic success before expecting or demanding political and social equality. It appears that Washington's approach appealed to many of Springfield's African Americans. In a February 1906 letter to the *Springfield Republican*, B. F. Adams implored local African Americans to be "a producer rather than a consumer" and to "contribute to the material development of the community," perhaps relying on Walter Majors and others as a role model.³⁶ As a result, it is not too surprising that Majors found a reading public fairly sympathetic to his automobile in 1901.

During the next few years, Majors become something of an entrepreneur. On October 9, 1903, *The Statesmen*, owned by Walter Majors, managed by A. B. Johnson, and edited by S. L. Majors (Walter's younger sister) published its first issue.³⁷ No issues survive from this venture and this newspaper is not included in the national listings of African American newspapers, but the paper must have existed for a few months, since it is also listed in the 1904 city directory. McPherson frequently heard from older community members, including his parents and grandparents, that Majors had a musical instrument or violin repair business as well.³⁸ In 1906, Majors opened W. L. Majors Bicycle Repairing and Novelty Works on 322 St. Louis Street. In 1907, he created Majors Automobile Company at 214 N. Jefferson, which advertised in the city directory as a combination sales and repair shop. This shift from bicycles to automobiles was fairly common at this time and suggests that Majors was searching for the right

entrepreneurial venture to match his interests and abilities with public demand. While he was not successful in maintaining his automobile sales and repair shop (probably because race affected his business), Majors had identified a burgeoning industry; a number of similar shops opened in the next few years.³⁹ The industry, however, did not flourish until the 1910s, when there were over 20 dealers in Springfield by 1915.⁴⁰ By 1908, Majors is no longer listed in the Springfield City Directory and his car shop, interestingly, had been replaced by another one, called Colonial Motors.

It should be noted that Majors tended to locate his businesses in the main business district of Springfield, just like other successful African American businesses at this time—including the most successful, Hardrick Grocery store. This effort, along with his decision to purchase a home on an integrated street, suggests that he and other African American businessmen tried, especially prior to the lynching, to integrate into the Springfield community. It is quite likely that these business efforts constituted forms of activism, primarily following the Booker T. Washington model, that aimed to challenge prevailing stereotypes about African Americans.

There is a general sense today (perhaps reinforced by Katherine G. Lederer's *Many Thousand Gone*) that African Americans left Springfield immediately following the 1906 lynching, as illustrated by the departure of lawyer and retired captain, Thomas Campbell, for Denver.⁴¹ However, Burton Hardrick continued to operate his grocery store after 1906. In addition, Majors tried one more time to open a business, just a few blocks



Hardrick Bros. Grocery Store.
Katherine G. Lederer Ozarks African American History Collection,
courtesy of Missouri State University.

off the square, even after the lynching. This suggests that Majors possessed at least some optimism for the future of Springfield's African American community. His decision to move to St. Louis in 1907 or 1908 may have been affected as much by his business failures—which cannot be easily separated from racism—and by the deaths of his father, two brothers, and a niece (all due to separate illnesses) as it was by the lynching directly.

Walter Majors: Inventor and Business Owner in St. Louis

If Majors could not quite achieve his dreams of becoming an inventor and business owner in Springfield, the move to St. Louis opened a wealth of opportunities. Like other African American inventors and innovators from the region, it took a move for his true genius to blossom.⁴² In St. Louis, Walter Majors eventually settled in the historically Black district, known as the Ville. While St. Louis was a segregated city, the relatively large percentage of African Americans, with strong structural roots laid before the Civil War, held a key voting block in city elections and enabled St. Louis African Americans to block many segregation laws.⁴³ This created a relatively unique form of segregation in St. Louis reliant more on custom than on official Jim Crow laws. Housing, hospitals, pools, tennis courts were segregated, but public transportation and the library were not. While public schools were segregated, African American and white teachers received relatively similar pay and city expenditures for the two school systems were fairly similar.⁴⁴ In addition, St. Louis possessed a large number of African American professionals, including teachers, ministers, physicians, and business owners, who could and would support African American-owned businesses.⁴⁵ Perhaps having learned from his business failures in Springfield, Majors found a measure of success in this segregated part of the city, where there was a sufficient consumer-base of African Americans to support his businesses.

According to the 1910 census, Majors had found employment as a mechanic in the city. Soon, however, his career took a potentially surprising turn. Between 1912 and 1914, Majors worked at Annie Turnbo Malone's Poro Beauty College. Poro sold beauty and hair-care products for African Americans, and its owner, Annie Malone, had become one of the richest African American women during this time. At Poro, Majors learned about marketing and sales even as the job afforded him time to work on his own inventions.⁴⁶ Malone, clearly embodying both the self-help ethic and a commitment to her community, had created a business aimed at the black community but advertised her beauty products in ways that did not simply reinforce racial stereotypes about appearance.⁴⁷ His work at Poro clearly complemented his own interests in innovation and inventions, since Majors later patented a kind of hot comb and an early hair drier.⁴⁸

Table Two. Patents Owned by Walter Majors

Patents	Patent Date	Patent Number
Coin-controlled taxicab controller	1913	1,069,558
Heater for water coolers in cars	1914	1,121,266
Motor-controlling device for taxis	1915	1,123,906
Hair drier	1915	1,124,235
Oil stove	1920	1,331,102
Anti-skid device for a car	1922	1,422,285
Mineographic attachment	1922	1,422,286
Hair and scalp treatment	1923	1,466,629
Carburetor auxiliary substitute	1926	1,596,885
Heating apparatus	1930	1,783,576
Oil burner	1932	1,862,691

Although the historical record is fairly thin, it appears that Majors took the business knowledge he learned from Annie Turnbo Malone and applied it when he opened his own garage sometime around 1914.⁴⁹ The garage allowed him the opportunity to own a business, earn money by repairing cars and probably taxicabs, and have a space sufficient for him to work on his inventions. Majors's decision to open a garage also illustrates the kind of business (along with grocery stores and cleaners) that African American entrepreneurs were likely to open during the 1910s and 1920s.⁵⁰ In his garage, Majors worked on inventions that spanned a wide range of interests, from hair care to taxi maintenance to home heating. It is unclear how much money, if any, these patents or other inventions earned for Majors. There were a number of patents related to taxicabs and other mechanical systems on cars, including carburetors, water coolers, or brakes. (See Table Two.) These inventions suggest that Majors may have worked quite a bit on taxis, another business that employed many African Americans during this period.

Majors's decision to open a garage and repair cars may also represent a form of activism, albeit in the manner of Booker T. Washington. South-erners, during this period, still wrote books stating that they "saw little economic opportunity for black mechanics and artisans" and doubted that African Americans possessed the intellect to master modern technology.⁵¹ In the early 1920s, Alain Locke, one of the main architects of the New Negro Movement, argued that whites still saw African Americans through the stereotypes developed during slavery, even as African Americans were becoming modern men, involved in the arts, sciences, and politics.⁵² In a sense, Majors's inventions and his business endeavors certainly marked him as part of this new generation, which imagined and created a new place for itself in American society.

Automobiles proved central to this redefinition of African American identity in the public sphere. No longer could African Americans be reduced to rural, illiterate farmhands, since mastery of an automobile—as

both a driver and as a mechanic—represented an embrace of modernity and technology. While purchasing a car might have been out of the reach of many, African Americans embraced cars, Kevin Borg posits, because “black automobility” provided an escape from the racially-segregated geographies imposed by Jim Crow segregation.⁵³ Middle-class blacks during the period also sought to “counter images of black drivers,” showing them to be inventive and respectable.⁵⁴ African American race car driver, Charlie Wiggins, captured the imagination of many African Americans and viewed this success on the track as a form of social activism that challenged racial stereotypes.⁵⁵ From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the automobile may seem ordinary and unremarkable. However, during the life of Walter Majors, automobiles constituted significant symbols of social status, wealth, and even cultural pride. The automobile embodied modernity’s fascination with technology and mobility and, when mastered by an African American, challenged stereotypes and norms. For Springfield’s African American community, automobiles, including the twelve delivery wagons owned by Hardrick’s Grocery Store or the D & B Cab Company, instilled considerable local pride, precisely because they demonstrated how individual business men were succeeding in modern businesses.⁵⁶

Because of a depressed economy and eventually poor health, Walter Majors did not obtain any patents after 1932, although he continued to operate his garage through the late 1930s. Majors died in St. Louis on December 12, 1949. His obituary in the *Saint Louis American* emphasizes his role as an inventor and entrepreneur: “W. L. Majors, holder of 24 Government patents of a mechanical nature and pioneer business expert, died at his home . . .” The obituary continues, describing his genius for creating systems for locating new agents for Poro Beauty College and handling its expanding business. And while “he operated businesses of his own,” the writer emphasized that he “devoted most of his time to invention.”⁵⁷ Moreover, despite the many jobs listed in census records for Majors, his death certificate listed his usual occupation as “inventor—retired.” While no researcher has ever been able to locate twenty-four patents registered to Majors (nor is it clear that his income derived primarily from his inventions), his wife, Myrtle, chose to focus public memory on his inventions. This suggests that being considered an inventor was a key element of his identity and of how others viewed him. His achievements testify to his tremendous talents and his will to succeed, despite the extent of racism in Missouri.

The Symbolic Value of Walter Majors

Even though Majors left Springfield in 1908, members of the African American community remembered him. Despite living in St. Louis, Majors became an important symbol for those who chose to remain in

Springfield. Harold McPherson remembers that his maternal grandparents, who were born in Springfield in 1887 and 1890, told him about Majors during the 1950s and offered up Majors as an example of the talent and ability of African Americans.⁵⁸ Over time, Majors has become more visible within Springfield’s public discourse, the result of newspaper articles that have featured him and archive files about him that have been created. Despite his local “fame,” Majors is not currently included in any of the national listings of African American inventors, probably because his story has remained one connected to the social memory of Springfield’s African American community. As a social memory, Majors symbolizes how knowledge about the past is constructed or cobbled together in museums and archives, and how historians cannot always reconstruct the mental lives of ordinary citizens. Majors is not simply a symbol because he represents the hopes and dreams of many local Springfieldians, but also because a handful of facts and memories produces an image or representation of him. The resulting image may lack some fidelity to Majors’s actual life, even as it adequately represents the symbolic import of his life. In other words, historians can find Majors’s “afterlife” as a cultural symbol, revealing later conflicts and hopes, as significant as his accomplishments for which he is putatively remembered.

There is a curious mention of Walter Majors in a 1920s *News Leader*. In this article, the white author was remembering interesting events from Springfield’s past and acknowledges that Majors was involved with the first car built in Springfield. This account, however, describes him merely as the “operator,” suggesting that someone else built the car. Because the article downplays Majors’s involvement in the events, it illustrates how whites continued to assume that African Americans lacked the ability to master the technology needed to build a car.⁵⁹ This certainly fits the general and historic national pattern framing African Americans, including artists, musicians, and other innovators, as being primitive or merely clever rather than ingenious.⁶⁰ As late as 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. lamented how history textbooks “have virtually overlooked the many Negro scientists and inventors who have enriched American life.”⁶¹ Some scholars argue that early twentieth-century racism caused whites to acknowledge and permit only African American businesses that offered personal services, such as hair care, food preparation, shoe shine and repair, and embalment, to other African Americans.⁶² The writer for the *News Leader* seems to cast doubt about Majors’s technical genius, illustrating how whites had been acculturated to view African Americans through a bevy of racial stereotypes. This effort to distance Majors from his creation also suggests that African Americans may have been deploying Majors as symbol of racial pride and accomplishment and that the *News Leader* article grudgingly acknowledges that Majors had a role in the building of Springfield’s first car.⁶³

Precisely because he demonstrated inventive genius and an entrepreneurial spirit and was undaunted by Springfield's historic racism, Majors symbolized what local African Americans could achieve. The African American community's response to efforts by white Springfieldians to ignore or denigrate Majors can be found in the 1933-1934 "Negro City and County Directory." The last page of the directory printed an article by Louis Smith, entitled "The Part the Negro Played from the Oxcart to the Airplane in Springfield." The impetus for the article was the one-hundred-year celebration of Springfield's birth. Smith emphasizes the growth of African American schools and discusses how African American labor contributed to the growth of the city. The article culminates by mentioning two inventors: Joe Greenstreet and "Duck Majors."⁶⁴ What is most curious about Smith's essay is what it omits. The most obvious omission is that Smith fails to identify the African Americans who were voted to public office following the Civil War, including members of the school board who served until 1906. Neither does Smith discuss the three known lynchings of African Americans. In addition, and potentially most revealing, Smith does not mention the many successful businesses built by African Americans, despite his effort to show how African American labor built the city. This 1933 document makes it clear that Majors is remembered for his car (even if it wrongly identifies the year), perhaps because he returned to Springfield to visit during the 1930s.⁶⁵ The article, following the pattern set down by B. F. Adams's 1906 editorial, "What the Negro Must Do," suggests that publicly acknowledging African American inventiveness was as political as this kind of bourgeois publication could be during the 1930s.

The white community, however, had not forgotten about Majors. In a 1946 column dedicated to sharing stories from Springfield's early days, Docia Karell offered her own memories of Majors's first car. Her account offers a fuller description of the vehicle, emphasizing its "rattling noise that demanded attention," its strange skeletal appearance and its top speed of "seven miles per hour." Although not mentioned in earlier accounts or verified in existing police and sheriff records, this version claims that Majors "was arrested for fast driving. But they could not find any law against his driving of an automobile at seven miles per hour, so they just fined him."⁶⁶ If this is true, Majors could have been one of the earliest known victims of the crime of "driving while black," suggesting that his audacity (and his genius), which enabled him to build the first car in Springfield, might have constituted a violation of racial norms. Whether true or not, Karell's retelling of Majors's story with this added element reveals the ongoing racial tensions within Springfield.⁶⁷ Connecting Majors with criminality has the effect of undermining the symbolic value of his accomplishments and tarnishes him and, by implication, other African Americans.

Some local historians have argued that Lederer "re-discovered" Majors and his contributions during the 1980s when she began her research

into Springfield's African American history. Majors is featured quite prominently in her *Many Thousand Gone*, probably because of the existing photograph of him driving a car and his fairly colorful life.⁶⁸ Although Lederer clearly was a driving force for documenting much African American history in the region, it would be a mistake to conclude that Majors had been completely forgotten. Lederer learned of Majors through her interviews with members of the local African American community, even locating a postcard picture of him. Moreover, his story seems to have grown in importance for the local community among both blacks and whites, even if little information about Majors, beyond his automobile exploits and his patents, was generally known.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of African Americans, most notably Harold McPherson, made efforts to deploy Walter Majors as a central symbol in the effort to write Springfield's African American history. Harold McPherson is an amateur historian of Springfield's African American community and traces his own ancestry back to a group of enslaved peoples, brought to the Ozarks by George Douglass Hayden in 1830. He was raised in the heart of Springfield's African American community during the 1950s and 1960s and remembers hearing his grandparents tell stories about Springfield's earliest days. In the 1980s Abe Clark, an African American of Willard, Missouri, spoke with McPherson about honoring Majors's memory through an automotive club, later creating the Walter Majors Classic Car Club. The club lasted from 1984 until 2003, had several members, printed out its own business cards that featured a picture of Walter Majors, and refurbished a number of vintage cars.⁶⁹

Perhaps the greatest evidence of the increasing symbolic importance of Walter Majors was McPherson's efforts to found the "Walter Majors Cultural Institute of the Ozarks" in the early 1990s.⁷⁰ With Clarence Brewer, Lederer, and others, McPherson created a non-profit organization with the intention to house the Katherine G. Lederer Collection and to promote research and understanding of African American communities in the Ozarks. In their planning documents, they explained their decision to choose Majors as their primary symbol as follows:

In naming this institute after Walter Majors, we are honoring a true hero of Springfield and the World. Majors was an inventor, violin repairman, and bicycle mechanic who worked in Springfield during the turn of the last century and had scores of patents registered with the Library of Congress. He made three automobiles, the first of which was made in Springfield around 1900. . . . The stories of his machine that scared dogs, people and horses alike are part of our rich heritage.⁷¹

This institute was never built and the documents that Lederer collected are currently archived at Missouri State University. However, these plans to create an institution dedicated to preserving Springfield's African Ameri-

can history demonstrate a concern that social and demographic changes had destroyed the informal mechanisms for communicating what had been common knowledge for Springfield's African American community.

The proposed institute also addresses the failure of dominant histories of Springfield to include the experiences and memories of its African American residents. Framing Walter Majors as central to this process of social memory necessarily places technology, innovation, and entrepreneurial activity at the center of the narrative around Springfield's African American community. This vision or revision of Springfield's history encourages us to rethink the role of African Americans, both enslaved and free, in agriculture, animal husbandry, manufacturing, and the railroads—all activities that contributed to Springfield's growth and development. African Americans were not simply bodies that worked, but active agents who fashioned technology to solve local problems and helped build wealth in the region. Focusing on Walter Majors's work also re-conceives African American labor as something more akin to innovation and entrepreneurship than that which is associated with unions and the more formal labor movement. Such a revision remains provocative, precisely because older racial stereotypes continue to color public perceptions and dominate historical narratives. While contemporary knowledge of African Americans' past ingenuity has been lost, the social memory of Walter Majors helps keep that absence alive. The memory of Majors's accomplishments also serves as a reminder that African Americans found power, authority, and self-esteem in their technological achievements, despite slavery and *de facto* segregation.

Memory and symbols are not always bound by historical data or documentation. For example, the planning documents for the Walter Majors Cultural Institute of the Ozarks include references to a number of undocumented claims about Majors. A 1995 *News Leader* article offers another illustration of this. It retells Majors's story under the title "Genius Rolled Out Early Car" and mentions that Majors's car was red, a fact not mentioned elsewhere and perhaps another addition to Majors's legacy.⁷² Most significantly, though, the author explains that whites mocked Majors and his car, even if they could not ignore his creativity and ingenuity. The source for the writer's conclusion is not clear, suggesting that Majors, as memory and symbol, is changing to respond to current conditions. The burgeoning recognition for Majors during the 1990s signals an attempt to demand respect for the local African American community, especially for its creativity, genius, and perseverance. Majors and his car, like the hope for a fuller and richer history of Springfield's African American community, also symbolize modernity and freedom. The automobile allowed individual African Americans across the nation to escape the confines of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation and could almost literally "drive them" into the future. By becoming one of the symbols of Springfield's African

American community, Majors allows us to dream about the possibility of the future as we look to the past for inspiration.

The Historical Importance of Walter Majors

Majors is not merely a colorful figure for local Springfieldians to cherish. His story also reveals important aspects of how social memory operates. The story of Walter Majors uncovers the politics of memory. Pierre Nora astutely notes that history and memory have an antagonistic relationship, because history offers a representation of the past, whereas "memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present."⁷³ Geoffrey Cubitt identifies three processes connected to social memory: (1) how knowledge about the past is transmitted; (2) how social institutions create repositories and events to be remembered; and (3) how memory necessarily implies blind spots and discontinuities.⁷⁴ For many African Americans, social memory, especially as an ongoing process binding one generation to another within the community, offers more hope and possibility than historical accounts because, as Robert O'Meally and Genevieve Fabre argue, African Americans had been pretty much excluded from historical narratives and certainly from museums and other historical repositories before the 1960s.⁷⁵

As an artifact of social memory, Walter Majors can be used by African Americans and others to challenge dominant racial narratives about Springfield, demonstrating the value and perseverance of the local African American community. African American social memories challenge the relative silence in official narratives about how race, racism, and race relations shaped Springfield and the region. More specifically, memorializing Majors's mechanical achievements asserts his agency and his genius against dominant historical narratives, both local and national, that tend to frame African Americans as passive and poorly educated and identify these stereotypes to explain the second-class citizenship experienced by many African Americans. Majors's story has also been used to signal that many members of the local community are ready to leave the city's history of racism and segregation in the past. Although Majors left Springfield around 1908, his life and the local memory of his accomplishments reveal both the possibility for and the limits facing African Americans in the city. The social memory of his mechanical genius and business success, I argue, constitute and create a tradition of activism, even if it is rooted in business and mechanical invention, and reveal how social memory can offer a liberatory space for local residents to imagine a better and more just future.

This chapter has not only sought to explore how processes of social memory shape current knowledge about Walter Majors, but also to examine the nature of African American creativity. Scholars have grown in-

creasingly interested in understanding how African Americans have used technology and how those acts of invention are related to African American creativity in sports and music. Rayvon Fouché, Portia James, Bruce Sinclair, and Patricia Sluby, among others, have all contributed key volumes that examine the role that mechanical invention has played in African American life.⁷⁶ Fouché and more recent critics have shown that, even though race limited some inventors in achieving financial greater success, mechanical innovation is a central aspect of African American life. Fouché has termed this “black vernacular technological creativity.” Some black inventors, but not all, also framed their own inventions as a form of political activism.

Persistent racial stereotypes continue to frame African Americans as gifted primarily in music and sport. Springfield’s African American community’s embrace of Walter Majors and his inventions reflect a subtle but concerted effort to challenge those stereotypes. Despite some uses of the “black inventor,” Majors’s creativity is not idiosyncratic or some isolated genius. Rather, he is part and parcel of a long line of African American laborers, tinkers, and innovators, who engaged their world via technology, frequently seeking to improve the lives of those around them even as they celebrated the possibility of their race. Majors’s efforts to “re-deploy,” “re-conceive,” and “re-create” material artifacts, such as bike wheels and wagon chassis, constitutes a near-perfect illustration of Fouché’s concept of “black vernacular technological creativity.” Rather than disconnecting Springfield’s history from African American culture, viewing Walter Majors as an example of black vernacular technological creativity ties him to a whole host of African Americans, from George Washington Carver and Lewis Latimer to Louis Armstrong and Grandmaster Flash.

Walter Majors’s story is a local one, yet it also reveals something significant about historical debates. Traditional historical methods tend to emphasize the analysis of written documents, the decisions and deliberations of leaders, and the actions of social organizations. Walter Majors did not produce a bevy of documents, start a giant company, amass amazing wealth, invent the car or a key process that pushed forward its development, organize a team of inventors, or lead any formal social protests. Nonetheless, he has become a focal point of memory in the Springfield African American community. He is remembered precisely because he stands at the intersection of technology, race, and social memory. The story of Walter Majors serves as a metaphor for, or a symbol of, Springfield’s African American community and its struggle to achieve social recognition, economic well-being, and ultimately a political voice. Despite the few institutions dedicated to local African American history and the dearth of scholarly writings about Springfield’s African American community, the social memory of Walter Majors demands some recognition that history is not simply located in or transmitted by museums, books, and history

departments. Rather, social memories, cultivated by social networks and community groups, serve as antidotes or responses to dominant histories. They are also reminders that dominant and official histories are necessarily partial, frequently unconsciously privileging certain racial perspectives. The very concept of memory, however, should imply its opposite, forgetting. The recollections of Walter Majors inevitably invoke all those other local tinkers and entrepreneurs, whether enslaved or limited by Springfield’s racism, who left even less of a documentary trail and have been overlooked by history. Majors, thus, serves as a reminder of what historians and the public do not know about the past.

Notes

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1 Lederer donated the items that she gathered from the local African American community to MSUSCA; these materials now form the Katherine G. Lederer Ozarks African American Collection (hereafter Lederer Collection).

2 Katherine G. Lederer, *Many Thousand Gone: Springfield’s Lost Black History* (N.p.: McPherson Humanities Council, 1986), 4.

3 McPherson, who can trace his ancestry in Springfield back to the 1830s, has been a key source for research into Springfield’s African American community. He wanted to create an archive preserving the memory of Springfield’s African American community and has been a tireless advocate for memorializing Walter Majors.

4 For example, the lynching provides the primary impetus for the only significant mention of Springfield in *Missouri’s Black Heritage*, the most authoritative analysis of African American history in Missouri. Lorenzo Greene, Gary Kremer, and Antonio Holland, *Missouri’s Black Heritage* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 109-110. See also Kimberly Harper, *White Man’s Heaven: The Lynching and Expulsion of Blacks in the Southern Ozarks, 1894-1909* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press), 2010.

5 Robert Neumann, *Black Families of the Ozarks*, SGCLS, n.p. <http://thelibrary.org/lochtist/bifamilies/ly%20pages%2031-60.htm> (accessed July 22, 2009).

6 Neumann, *Black Families of the Ozarks*.

7 “Notes from the Greene County Recorder of Deeds Office,” Box 20, File 78, Lederer Collection.

8 Harold McPherson, interview with author, November 14, 2008, Springfield. Notes on file with author.

9 See Colin Davis, *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen’s Strike* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 22-23.

- 10 William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982): 39.
- 11 "Census of Greene Co." 8-9 [Lederer's hand-written notes], Box 19, File 123, Lederer Collection.
- 12 Mary Clary, "Jim Crow and Judge Lynch in Springfield, Missouri: A Study of Segregation and Terror, 1900-1920," 17-18, Mary Clary Collection on the Springfield Square Lynching, Olin Library, Drury University, Springfield, MO.
- 13 Jonathon Fairbanks and Edwin Clyde Tuck, *Past and Present of Greene County, Missouri* (Indianapolis, IN: Bowen, 1915), 222-223. This volume also notes a mob lynched a white man, George Graham, suspected of murder in 1885.
- 14 Neumann, *Black Families of the Ozarks*, 164.
- 15 Burton Purrington and Penny Harter, "The Easter and Tug-of-War Lynchings and the Early Twentieth-Century Black Exodus from Southwest Missouri," in *Sabo and William Schneider: Ethnohistoric Perspectives on Southern Culture*, eds. George and William Schneider (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 62.
- 16 Purrington and Harter, "The Easter and Tug-of-War Lynchings," 70. See also Harper, *White Man's Heaven*, xxi-xxv.
- 17 Purrington and Harter, "The Easter and Tug-of-War Lynchings," 67.
- 18 That child, Clarence Harper, lived into his 90s. For more information about him and his relationship to Jesse Brake, see Katherine G. Lederer, "Where We Go-ing, Mr. Harper?" *Ozarks Watch* 11 (1998): 25-28.
- 19 Mary Clary, "The Easter Offering: A Missouri Lynching, 1906," 6, Mary Clary Collection on the Springfield Square Lynching, Olin Library, Drury University, Springfield, MO.
- 20 Clary, "The Easter Offering," 4.
- 21 Lederer, *Mary Thousand Gone*, 13.
- 22 Stephen L. McIntyre, "The City Belongs to the Local Unions: The Rise of the Springfield Labor Movement, 1871-1912," *Missouri Historical Review* 98 (October 2003): 30-31.
- 23 In an untitled and unsigned editorial, the remaining copy of one of Springfield's two African American newspapers of this period wrote: "We have been accused of running a democratic paper by some 'short-sighted, narrow-minded, crack-brained negro demagogues' simply because we have set forth the interests of the race regardless of what anyone else has to say. Our position has been to defend and protect the material interests of the race and vindicate their claims and rights as American citizens" (*Springfield American Negro*, October 25, 1890).
- 24 McIntyre, "The City Belongs to the Local Unions," 27.
- 25 "Colored Company Will Enlist 40 More," *Springfield Republican*, July 7, 1898. The 7th U.S. Volunteers recruited African Americans from Missouri, Arkansas, and Tennessee, on the theory that southern blacks would be naturally resistant to tropical diseases. The war ended before the unit could be sent to Cuba. Officers above the rank of lieutenant were white. See Marvin Fletcher, "The Black Volunteers in the Spanish-American War," *Military Affairs* 38 (April 1974): 48-53.
- 26 "Company 'I' Muster-in-Roll," July 22, 1898, Box 19, File 76, Lederer Collection.
- 27 "Company 'I' Muster-out-Roll," February 28, 1899, Box 19, File 77, Lederer Collection.
- 28 Steven Stepp, "The Old Reliable: The History of the Springfield Wagon Company, 1872-1952," master's thesis, Southwest Missouri State College (1972), 87, 112.

- 29 Stepp, "The Old Reliable," 77.
- 30 St. Louis Society of Automobile Pioneers, *Four Wheels . . . No Brakes: A History of the Early Development of the Automobile in St. Louis* (St. Louis, MO: St. Louis Society of Automobile Pioneers, 1930), 3.
- 31 "An Automobile," *Leader Democrat*, April 8, 1901.
- 32 "The Waste Basket," *Springfield Leader*, December 26, 1930. Haswell states that he has a "faint recollection" that the driver-inventor of this first car was "Moulton" and that this ride occurred in 1889. These details are probably incorrect, as the problem with this identification and date is that the one Moulton who lived in Springfield was white, he would have been considerably older, and all the other references to the first car in Springfield are dated a decade later.
- 33 "The Waste Basket."
- 34 Pooker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 144.
- 35 Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 146-147.
- 36 B. F. Adams, "What the Negro Must Do," *Springfield Republican*, February 13, 1906.
- 37 "The Statesmen," *Springfield Republican*, October 8, 1903.
- 38 Interview with Harold McPherson, November 15, 2008.
- 39 One 1927 article claims that Walker [sic] Majors was "swamped with work and was unable to handle the trade. Then other garages opened and Springfield was in the automobile business in earnest" ("The Waste Basket," *Springfield Leader*, February 21, 1927).
- 40 Stephen McIntyre, *The Road to Repair: Motorists, Mechanics, and Managers in the Early Automobile Repair Industry*, manuscript on file with author.
- 41 Lederer, *Mary Thousand Gone*, 41-42.
- 42 Other examples of local African American inventors/entrepreneurs include Hiram Young, who was born and raised a slave in Bois D'Arc but made a fortune selling wagons in Independence, Missouri, before and after the Civil War. George Washington Carver had to leave Diamond and Neosho to gain more education and find fame as a research scientist at Tuskegee. Scott Joplin may have invented ragtime in Sedalia, but gained fame only after touring the country. Langston Hughes was born in Joplin and moved around the Midwest before his writing gained notice in Harlem. And this is not including any discussion of the many African American musicians, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals that came from Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Kansas City.
- 43 Lawrence Christensen, "Race Relations in St. Louis, 1865-1916," *Missouri Historical Review* 78 (January 1984): 123-124.
- 44 Christensen, "Race Relations in St. Louis," 127-134.
- 45 Katherine Corbett and Mary Seematter, "Black St. Louis at the Turn of the Century," *Gateway Heritage* 7 (Summer 1986): 40.
- 46 "W. L. Majors Dies at Home," *St. Louis American*, December 15, 1949.
- 47 Nollwe Rocks, *Hair Raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).
- 48 In 1915, Majors received a patent for his hair drier, patent no. 1,124,235. In 1920, he received a patent for his hair and scalp treatment, patent no. 1,466,629.
- 49 "W. L. Majors Dies at Home."
- 50 J. H. Harmon, "The Negro as a Local Business Man," *The Journal of Negro History*, 14.2 (April 1929): 44.

- 51 George Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 269-270.
- 52 Alain Locke, "The New Negro," *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), 4-5.
- 53 Kevin Borg, *Auto Mechanics: Technology and Expertise in Twentieth Century America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 58. For a discussion of this idea in the 1950s, see Cotten Selter, "So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By": African American Automobile and the Cold-War Liberalism," *American Quarterly* 58.4 (December 2006): 1091-1118.
- 54 Kathleen Franz, "The Open Road: Automobile and Racial Uplift in the Interwar Years," *Technology and the African-American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study*, ed. Bruce Sinclair (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 139.
- 55 Todd Gould, *For Gold and Glory: Charlie Wiggins and the African-American Racing Circuit* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 94-95.
- 56 Lederer, *Many Thousand Gone*, 12, 14.
- 57 "W. L. Majors Dies at Home"
- 58 Interview with Harold McPherson, December 5, 2008.
- 59 "The Good Old Days," Box 20, File 128, Lederer Collection.
- 60 Fouché, "Say It Loud," 647.
- 61 Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1968)
- 62 Cecilia Conrad, "Black-Owned Businesses: Trends and Prospects," *African Americans in the U.S. Economy*, ed. Cecilia Conrad (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 237.
- 63 Not all white Springfieldians downplayed Majors's success or genius: see "The Waste Basket," *Springfield Leader*, December 26, 1930.
- 64 Louis Smith, "The Part the Negro Played From the Oxcart to the Airplane in Springfield," 1933-1934, *Negro City Directory*, Box 20, File 160, Lederer Collection. Walter Majors is frequently referenced as "Duck" Majors. This article is the only source from his lifetime that uses this nickname. As a result, it is unclear how frequently used this nickname was.
- 65 Interview with Harold McPherson, November 14, 2008.
- 66 Docia Karel, "The Waste Basket," *Springfield Daily News*, February 6, 1946.
- 67 The author could not find any records at the GCARC substantiating the claim that Majors was arrested in relation to his invention.
- 68 Lederer, *Many Thousand Gone*, 43-44.
- 69 Interview with Harold McPherson, November 14, 2008. See also "Faces and Places from the Past," *Springfield News Leader*, August 7, 1983. See also Neumann, *Black Families of the Ozarks*, 356.
- 70 Harold McPherson, "Walter Majors Institute: The Making of a Dream," *Unite* 5 (October 1994): 7. See also "Walter Majors Cultural Institute of the Ozarks," Box 19, File 169, Lederer Collection.
- 71 "Walter Majors Cultural Institute of the Ozarks," 4, Box 19, File 169, Lederer Collection.
- 72 Tamyla Beasley, "Genius Rolled Out Early Car," *Springfield News Leader*, February 23, 1995.
- 73 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, trans. Marc Roudébusch, ed. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 285.

74 Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 14-17.

75 Robert O'Meally and Genevieve Fabre, "Introduction," *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, 2.

76 See generally Rayvon Fouché, *Black Inventors in the Age of Segregation: Granville I. Woods, Lewis H. Latimer and Shelby J. Davidson* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Bruce Sinclair, *Technology and the African American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Patricia Sluby, *Patented Ingenuity: The Inventive Spirit of African Americans* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Portia James, *The Real McCoy: African-American Invention and Innovation, 1619-1930* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Press, 1989).