

Corrvine Patterson

Businessman and Politician
1848-?

by David Conrads

Although little known today, Corrvine Patterson was an important figure in the early history of Kansas City, Kansas, and a prominent and influential member of the African American community in Wyandotte County. The son of slaves and largely self-educated, Patterson became a successful businessman and political leader. Despite living in an area where only one-quarter of the electorate was black, Patterson was elected to a number of important offices in a remarkable political career.

Corrvine Patterson was born in Howard County, Missouri, in 1848. After serving in the Union Army during the Civil War, he arrived in the town of Wyandotte, Kansas, sometime around 1868. He worked as a laborer for the railroad and opened a grocery store in the early 1870s. He also owned several tracts of land in what is now downtown Kansas City, Kansas. Late in the nineteenth century he established a cesspool and vault cleaning service, which he operated with his son-in-law, Ernst Gayden, Sr.

Patterson was very active in community affairs. He was a member of the First Baptist Church and later became a founding member of the Metropolitan Baptist Church. During the Kansas Fever Exodus—in which tens of thousands of freed slaves fled the South and ended up in Wyandotte and other towns in eastern Kansas—Patterson was one of the main organizers of efforts to assist the destitute refugees. He also took a leading role in preventing the demise of Freedman's University in the neighboring town of Quindaro. (Soon after, Freedman's became affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church and was renamed Western University.)

Patterson's greatest successes were in politics. In 1872 he was elected to the Board of Education and subsequently reelected to a second term. He reportedly gave up his grocery business sometime in the early 1880s to devote full time to politics. He was appointed street commissioner in 1889 and also served as city marshal and deputy sheriff. By the turn of the century, Patterson was the

political elder statesman in the African American community of Wyandotte County.

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