

Genealogy Corner

The Cooper family of Augusta County, Virginia

Cooper is an occupation that became a last name. Coopers made barrels which were used for storing food, wine, gun powder, and other useful everyday articles for hundreds of years. Cooper were usually also blacksmiths because the metal bands that held the barrel together were heated and bent at a blacksmith shop. Slaves trained in this occupation took the last name of Cooper when they were freed.

In Augusta County, there were several free black families with that name. From Goochland County came the brothers Isham and William Cooper. There was a Richard Cooper from Amherst County who settled in Augusta. There was a large family headed by a Mary Cooper who traveled to Pike County, Ohio by 1850.

Pleasant Cooper was a blacksmith near Waynesboro who owned his own shop. He was born free in 1791, according to the register. Blacksmithing was one of the few occupation open to free blacks. Next door lived Alexander Bowles, a free black from Albemarle County, who was perhaps married to a daughter of Pleasant. He was a carpenter.

Before 1860, oldest son David Cooper migrated to Ross County, Ohio with his nephew, Cyrus Bowles. When the Civil War erupted, David was drafted into the Union Army. He survived the war and traveled to Van Buren County, Michigan with his wife, Kesiah, and his growing family.

Not all of Pleasant Cooper's children left Augusta County for greener pastures and a less restricted life. Joseph Cooper, born 1837, remained in Augusta County and raised a large family. He was a laborer.