

**William McCoslin (1830-1878)** was born in Vandalia, Illinois on July 27, 1830.<sup>1</sup> While the names of his parents are unknown, we do know that he was not born into slavery. Little is known about McCoslin’s life before he moved to Bloomington. We do know that he lived in Alton, Illinois prior to his arrival in Bloomington.<sup>2</sup> Census records also indicate that he was a “mulatto,” an antiquated term for a mixed-race individual.<sup>3</sup> McCoslin’s later military records describe him as light-skinned and five foot, eight inches tall.<sup>4</sup>

It is unclear exactly when McCoslin arrived in Bloomington, but by June 1850, the twenty-year-old barber had established a shop on Front Street.<sup>5</sup> An advertisement in Bloomington’s *Western Whig* newspaper announced that McCoslin “takes pleasure in announcing to the white folks of this city and vicinity, that he has purchased the interest of Rev. Mr. [Philip] Ward, and would be happy to wait upon all favoring him with their patronage.”<sup>6</sup> He offered shaving, shampooing, and hair cutting services and promised his clients “a superior style.”<sup>7</sup> At that time, African American barbers could not serve both Black and white customers. There were instances of barbers having Black and white customers in some northeastern communities where Abolitionism was strong. But the accepted norm was not to “cross the color line.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, with the relatively small population of Black individuals in Bloomington, it was more financially viable to cut white people’s hair.<sup>9</sup>

Later in 1850, McCoslin coordinated with two other partnered Bloomington barbers—J.W. Hill and Edwin Barnett—to create a standard pricing structure for all their clients.<sup>10</sup> The trio agreed that a shave for regular customers would cost five cents (approximately \$1.60 in 2020).<sup>11</sup> That price doubled for transient, or out of town, customers. A standard hair cut would cost 15 cents. They charged 15 cents for sharpening razors, 20 cents for shampooing, and 25 cents for serving “sick persons out of the shop.”<sup>12</sup> The most lucrative offering was shaving the dead in preparation for burial at \$5.00 (approximately \$161.00 in 2020).<sup>13</sup> Significantly, Hill, Barnett, and McCoslin also agreed to eliminate credit accounts and required “cash in hand” at the time of service.<sup>14</sup> It appeared that these three Black barbers commanded the market in downtown Bloomington, the hub of business and government at that time, not to mention the travelers

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<sup>1</sup> 1850 United States Census, Bloomington, McLean, Illinois, digital image s.v. “Wm. McCauslin,” *Ancestry.com*; William McCoslin, death certificate, 27 July 1878, Illinois Department of Public Health; “Mr. McCoslin will give...,” *Pantagraph*, July 27, 1877, 4.

<sup>2</sup> “Wm. McCoslin, whose death in noticed...,” *Pantagraph*, June 24, 1878, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jack Muirhead, “William McCoslin” (unpublished manuscript, 2018), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Hartzold and Hannah Johnson; exhibit text, *A Community in Conflict*, McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, Illinois.

<sup>6</sup> “City Barbering Saloon. William McCoslin,” *Western Whig*, June 22, 1850, 3:2; Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>7</sup> “City Barbering Saloon.”

<sup>8</sup> 1850 United States Census; “City Barbering Saloon”; Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>9</sup> Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>10</sup> “Barber’s Rules,” *Western Whig*, August 31, 1850, 3:1; 1855-1856 *Bloomington City Directory*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> “Barber’s Rules”; Robert C. Sahr, “Consumer Price Index (CPI) Conversion Factors for Dollars of 1774 to estimated 2028 to Convert to Dollars of 2017,” *Oregon State University*, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2017.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> “Barber’s Rules.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*; Sahr, “Consumer Price Index.”

<sup>14</sup> “Barber’s Rules”

staying at hotels and using the stagecoach (as the railroad did not reach town for three more years).<sup>15</sup>

At that time, McCoslin boarded with a white family, that of Goodman Ferre. McCoslin and the Ferre family lived at the corner of Prairie and Jefferson streets, just east of downtown Bloomington. He lived with that family until he married Caroline Allin on September 17, 1850.<sup>16</sup>

In November 1850, McCoslin added laundry services to his barbershop, as well as expanded home services.<sup>17</sup> His wife, Caroline, may have been responsible for assisting with the laundry services for the shop, but there is not information available to confirm that.<sup>18</sup>

Two months later, in January 1851, J.W. Hill and McCoslin partnered together and announced their services, which included laundry “cleansed in the best possible manner, on terms that will give satisfaction.”<sup>19</sup> Hill and Barnett had ended their partnership the previous November.<sup>20</sup>

Hill and McCoslin also continued in-home service to “visit ladies at their residences, and curl and dress hair in the latest and most approved styles.”<sup>21</sup> Since barbering was considered a servile job (even though it was one of the best job opportunities for African Americans at this time), it was not unheard of for a Black, male barber going to a woman’s home to fix her hair for a special occasion. Another local Black barber, Louis Yancey, offered similar services to the women of Bloomington in the early 1860s.<sup>22</sup>

McCoslin’s brief partnership with Hill ended in April 1851 after a little over three months.<sup>23</sup> By November 1852, McCoslin was living in Springfield, Illinois. His name appears on a list of 19 Black residents who opposed the creation of a public school for Black children, preferring their privately funded model. An article published in Springfield’s *Illinois State Journal* newspaper outlined their case:

*We, as a portion of the colored people of this [State] in Springfield, do not desire any such system of common school education, under the name of one distinct sect or denomination. [...] That we deem it an injury to our present established schools, and that it will hinder the energy of those who are willing to aid, and have already aided in the support of our respective schools; and that we do not wish to give our aid in any measure that will hinder our progress that has already begun.*

*That we, as a portion of the colored population, representing its claims, feel a deep, very deep interest in our schools, and think it the only sure way to redeem ourselves from the bondage we are now in, sympathize with our race, and will do*

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<sup>15</sup> Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>16</sup> 1850 United States Census; William McCoslin, marriage certificate, 17 September 1850, McLean County, Vol. B, 254; “Goodman Ferre,” *1855-1856 Bloomington City Directory*.

<sup>17</sup> “City Barbering Saloon.”

<sup>18</sup> Email correspondence between Candace Summers and Jack Muirhead, September 3, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> “Dissolution,” *Western Whig*, November 27, 1850, 4:6.

<sup>21</sup> “City Barbering Saloon,” *Western Whig*, January 29, 1851, 4.

<sup>22</sup> Email correspondence between Candace Summers and Jack Muirhead; “For Ladies and Gentlemen,” *The Pantagraph*, July 23, 1861, 3.

<sup>23</sup> “Dissolution,” *Western Whig*, April 23, 1851, 2:8.

*every thing that is in our power to educate our children by our exertions, and without the boldness to ask aid from the people of the State.*<sup>24</sup>

School funding was a source of much debate at the time. Black Springfield residents paid school taxes but were not allowed to attend public schools. Therefore, some Black locals, like William McCoslin, preferred to be exempt from school taxes and build their own educational system.<sup>25</sup>

McCoslin remained in Springfield for several years, long enough for him to establish a barbering partnership with Spencer and P.L. Donegan by 1854. Spencer left the trio in January 1854, and McCoslin continued working with P.L. at their existing stand, where “No pains or expense has been spared in procuring the most experienced and careful workmen to ‘shave’ our customers.”<sup>26</sup>

By 1860, the McCoslin family had relocated to Clinton, Illinois, in DeWitt County, where William continued to work as a barber. The federal census of that year listed William, Caroline, and two young children, Isabell and Richard. All were listed as mulatto.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, a few weeks later, a census worker also recorded them in Bloomington.<sup>28</sup> On that form, however, the children were listed with a different last name: Bell and Richard Walden. What’s more, a 28-year-old white woman named Mary lived in the household. Her last name was illegible, but she was clearly born in Ireland.<sup>29</sup> It is unclear why the McCoslin family was listed in two places, or why the children’s names changed. Due to these inconsistencies and a lack of additional documentation, it cannot be determined if William and Caroline had children at all. The relocation to Clinton could be explained by the fact that Caroline’s mother had once lived near Clinton, and it is possible that Caroline had lived there as a girl. The move to Bloomington was more understandable. The city’s population had grown fivefold in the 1850s, with the coming of the Illinois Central and Chicago and Alton Railroads being the primary reason for that growth.<sup>30</sup>

Soon the nation would be torn apart by civil war. McCoslin mustered into the Union Army in Quincy, Illinois, on November 30, 1863, not long after African Americans were permitted to join the United States military.<sup>31</sup> He joined Company A of the 29<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry for a three-year term.<sup>32</sup> He mustered in on April 24, 1864 at the rank of sergeant.<sup>33</sup>

McCoslin could read and write quite well, which was not always the case among his fellow Black soldiers. His letters provide a window into the experiences of Black soldiers serving in the Union Army. Writing from Petersburg, Virginia, in late July 1864, McCoslin recounted his

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<sup>24</sup> “Springfield, Nov. 8, 1852,” *Illinois State Journal*, November 11, 1852.

<sup>25</sup> Robert L. McCaul, *The Black Struggle for Public Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> “Dissolution,” *Illinois State Journal*, January 20, 1854.

<sup>27</sup> 1860 United States Census, Clinton, DeWitt, Illinois, digital image s.v. “Wm. McCoslin,” *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>28</sup> Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>29</sup> 1860 United States Census, Bloomington, McLean, Illinois, digital image s.v. “Wm. McCoslin,” *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>30</sup> Muirhead, “William McCoslin,” 1.

<sup>31</sup> *A Community in Conflict*; William McCoslin, Company Descriptive Book, 1863, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>32</sup> National Park Service, “United States Colored Troops, 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment, United States Colored Infantry,” accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=UUS0029R100C>; William McCoslin, Company Descriptive Book, 1863.

<sup>33</sup> William McCoslin, Company Descriptive Book, 1863; Edward A. Miller, Jr., *The Black Civil War Soldiers of Illinois: The Story of the Twenty-ninth U.S. Colored Infantry* (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 18; William McCoslin, Company Muster-in and Descriptive Roll, 1863, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

journey east. The 29<sup>th</sup> left Illinois under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel John A. Bross with orders to rendezvous with the Army of the Potomac commanded by Major-General Ambrose Burnside. From Quincy, they first traveled to Chicago. McCoslin recalled: “We had a pleasant journey, but very tiresome, on account of having to stay on board the cars all the time, until we arrived in the city of Chicago, when we were marched to the Soldiers’ Rest, where a fine breakfast was in waiting for us. We charged on it immediately, and captured it without any loss whatever.” After resting for the day, they continued their journey eastward.<sup>34</sup>

Thirty hours later they had arrived in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania where they were treated to a “splendid supper” and much benevolence by the women of the city.<sup>35</sup> “[E]very kindness was shown us that could be shown on so short a notice.”<sup>36</sup> Only a few hours later, around midnight, they continued on to Baltimore using the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.<sup>37</sup> McCoslin commented that the Black soldiers were “in good spirits, feeling proud of the treatment we have received, being the same if not better than some of the white soldiers received.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, “crossing the mountains was quite an undertaking, especially when we went through the tunnels [...],”<sup>39</sup> which was “a new thing to some of our Western boys, who have never been away from home.”<sup>40</sup>

They arrived in Baltimore, where they spent the day. The populace had previously attacked a white regiment, and there was concern that it could happen to them. “We did not have any arms then; but success ever favors the brave, and so it was with us. We were treated with some respect by all the citizens. [...] During the time we went about the city, and were not molested by any one.” They reached Washington, D.C. by train on the evening of April 30, 1864, marched to the Soldiers’ Rest, and stayed until the evening of May 1. They then marched five miles to Alexandria, Virginia, rested for a day, then marched to Camp Casey, near D.C. There, they officially received instructions, arms, and equipment.<sup>41</sup>

On May 18, 1864, McCoslin became ill with “varioid” (a nineteenth-century term for smallpox) and was transferred to Claremont General Hospital in Alexandria the next day.<sup>42</sup> “Here I was treated kindly, getting the same treatment as white officers and soldiers, and every thing was kept in the neatest possible manner.”<sup>43</sup> He recovered and returned to duty on May 31.<sup>44</sup> By that time, his regiment had been ordered to move from Alexandria to White House Landing, Virginia. The surgeon in charge of the hospital provided McCoslin with new clothing, and he rejoined his regiment before taking a boat to White House Landing. For a few days there, the men constructed earthen barriers and rifle pits.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Edwin S. Redkey, ed., *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 107.

<sup>35</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 107; Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 41.

<sup>36</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 107.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*; Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 107; Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 41.

<sup>40</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 107.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>42</sup> William McCoslin, “Hospital Number 169,” May 18, 1864, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>43</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 108.

<sup>44</sup> William McCoslin, “Hospital Number 518,” May 19, 1864, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>45</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 108.

Around June 7, 1864, they were ordered to escort “a large train of supplies” to the front lines.<sup>46</sup> It was their first true march, and a grueling one at that. In fact, many of the men discarded their packs in order to keep up. Hoping for a rest, they were again disappointed because their superiors ordered them to immediately march to Petersburg. At Old Church Tavern, they were assigned to the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 9<sup>th</sup> Army Corps, serving as the rear guard.<sup>47</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Division was the first Black division to serve the U.S. Army in Virginia.<sup>48</sup> McCoslin recalled, “[W]e had a great deal of hard marching; and being in a very important position, we all felt the responsibility that was resting on us as rear guards.” They proceeded and rested for one day at Dawson Bridge near the Chickahominy River. The next evening, they marched briefly, rested for the evening, and crossed the river in the morning. They then marched to Charles City Point on the James River, where they again stopped for the night. The next day, “learning that a large force of rebels intended to attack us, we crossed the river on a pontoon bridge.” As soon as they had crossed, they were shelled. Fortunately, a Union gunboat monitored the bridge and drove back their attackers. After a day of rest, they were ordered to the front “so as to assist in storming the rebel works that night. So on we went, expecting to have battle very soon.”<sup>49</sup>

Although they were “anxious to give fight to their enemies,” nevertheless the men were glad to receive orders to pause and await further orders. After two days, they finally moved toward the front and took positions in the rifle pits, “which we consider healthier than going into the fight; but, when ordered, we are ready and willing to fight.” Despite their willingness, it appears that the regiment was “not in good fighting trim at present, on account of an insufficiency of officers.”<sup>50</sup> Because of overall reduced numbers, officers were sometimes assigned essential duties, which further reduced the leadership ranks in the company.<sup>51</sup> As a result, McCoslin earned a field promotion to the rank of Sergeant Major on June 30, 1864.<sup>52</sup>

While waiting for direct combat about a mile and a half from Petersburg, the regiment built two forts and about three miles of breastworks (fortifications made of piled materials), “which shows that we are not idle, and that we are learning to make fortifications, whether we learn to fight or not.”<sup>53</sup> Around July 26, 1864, McCoslin appeared bored and wrote, “[T]he laboring work is nearly over, so that we will have nothing to do but watch the rebels. There is heavy firing of artillery and small arms every night from both sides, which sounds most beautiful to us.”<sup>54</sup>

On July 30, McCoslin and his comrades finally saw combat during the Battle of the Crater. Union forces had dug a tunnel under the Confederate line and packed it with four tons of black powder.<sup>55</sup> Black soldiers, including the 29<sup>th</sup>, were supposed to lead the assault and had trained

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.; Scott Wagers, *McLean County Blacks in the Civil War* (McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives, 1992), 12. Wagers’s essay claims that the 29<sup>th</sup> protected a supply train during Grant’s attack at Spotsylvania on May 6. This does not appear to be the case based on McCoslin’s own letter, which states that they did not protect the supply train until June 7.

<sup>47</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 108-109.

<sup>48</sup> Wagers, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 109.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 57.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.; William McCoslin, Company Muster Roll, July & August 1864, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*; William McCoslin, Company Muster-out Roll, November 6, 1865, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>53</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 109-110.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 87; Wagers, 15.

for such a mission throughout July. But at the last minute, General George Meade convinced General Ulysses S. Grant to use a white regiment instead. Meade was concerned about the political fallout if the Black troops were used as fodder in a bloody battle. Burnside, who had planned the assault, disagreed and argued that the Black troops had trained for this mission and were ready to do so. Ultimately, Grant agreed with Meade that white troops should lead the charge.<sup>56</sup>

At 4:45 in the morning on July 30, they ignited the powder.<sup>57</sup> McCoslin recalled that “there was about five or six men buried up when the fort was thrown up, it blowed everything, guns and men into the air and scattered them in every direction.”<sup>58</sup> The explosion left a crater “170 feet long, sixty to eighty feet wide, and thirty feet deep.”<sup>59</sup> Due to the poor leadership of General James Ledlie, whose 1<sup>st</sup> Division was chosen by drawing straws, the ground attack did not commence quickly. This delay allowed the Confederates time to regroup. Multiple regiments of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division rushed into the crater but soon became separated from their officers and unable to move forward because of the rough terrain left by the explosion.<sup>60</sup>

At six o’clock in the morning, Meade ordered all divisions (white and black) into the crater. Tragically, the 29<sup>th</sup> lost their leader, Colonel John A. Bross, who had been with them since Quincy. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division, made up of the Black regiments, sustained the heaviest losses, totaling 1,327 killed, wounded, or missing. The 29<sup>th</sup> specifically suffered losses including 11 officers killed or wounded, 19 enlisted men killed, 47 wounded, and 47 captured or missing—a total loss of 124.<sup>61</sup> McCoslin, himself, injured his left leg and side during this battle.<sup>62</sup> Despite these casualties, rumors spread that the reason for the loss was the incompetence of the Black troops. After the battle, McCoslin wrote home and pleaded: “Give my respects to all my friends, tell them that the colored soldiers can fight and have the honor of being brave.”<sup>63</sup> It appears that McCoslin had the chance to tell them in person. Just a few months after the battle, he took leave and visited Bloomington.<sup>64</sup>

Although the war ended in April 1865, the 29<sup>th</sup> did not immediately return home. Instead, in early June they were stationed at Brownsville, Texas, which they disliked greatly. On September 14, 1865, McCoslin wrote home in a letter published by the *Pantagraph*, in which his frustration finally showed:

*In the name of God and the bloody fields of battle over which we have marched in thirst and hunger, rain and mud, wilderness and darkness, I inquire, why have we not been restored, as volunteer troops to the bosom of our families and friends? Will not our Illinois friends inquire into the condition of one of the regiments that has never dishonored the State from whence she came, and see to it that she fares and be treated as other regiments are treated? As one of her soldiers I beg a hearing, and I know I represent the feelings of almost the entire regiment who*

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<sup>56</sup> Wagers, 15-16.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Redkey, *Grand Army*, 87.

<sup>60</sup> Wagers, 16.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 16; Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Wagers, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Assistant Quartermaster of Railroad Transportation, letter to commanding officer of the 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment, November 12, 1864, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

*have suffered with me, when I make these my humble requests. If we remain in this unhealthy country, disease will finish our decimation.*<sup>65</sup>

McCoslin finally mustered out on November 6, 1865.<sup>66</sup> He was owed \$100.00 (approximately \$1,560 in 2020) for his bounty and back pay for the months of January through April 1864 “for which time he received but seven (\$7.00) dollars per month” (approximately \$109 in 2020).<sup>67</sup> In honor of his military service, and the service of all Black soldiers of the Union Army, McCoslin’s name is listed on the African American Civil War Veterans memorial in Washington, D.C.<sup>68</sup>

A little more than four months after returning home, McCoslin and other members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church helped welcome the famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass back to Bloomington.<sup>69</sup> Douglass first spoke in Bloomington on March 1, 1859. Following this 1866 address, he returned to Bloomington two more times to speak again—in 1868 and 1873. Douglass’s skillful oratory and his personal celebrity drew crowds each time, especially of Black residents, “who always embrace an opportunity of listening to their gifted champion,” according to the *Pantagraph*.<sup>70</sup>

McCoslin served on a three-person committee with Richard Blue (who had served with McCoslin in the 29<sup>th</sup>) and Samuel Witherspoon to draft resolutions for the occasion.<sup>71</sup> The committee drafted the following resolution: “Resolved, That in the present distracted condition of the country it is eminently proper and necessary that all just and constitutional means should be employed quieting popular excitement, the removal of unreasonable prejudice, and the obliteration of all hostile feelings growing out of the late unhappy civil war.”<sup>72</sup> On the day of the lecture, this committee escorted Douglass to the stage.

Douglass’s speech addressed President Abraham Lincoln’s assassination and the state of the Reconstruction project. His “well-timed denunciations of [President Andrew] Johnson met the hearty approval of the large audience.”<sup>73</sup> Johnson’s exuberant use of his veto power to hobble congressional Republican efforts to afford rights to African Americans angered Douglass. During an earlier lecture in Chicago, Douglass denounced Johnson’s actions:

*For a hundred years no king or queen of England has dared to oppose the expressed will of both houses of Parliament; but it has become common in our country, after Congress, in both houses, had determined upon a policy, to put down their expressed will by the veto power of one man. [...] The people of the United States choose to pass a bill for the protection of the freedmen without the assent of their former masters, and it is opposed by the President.*<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Wagers, 19.

<sup>66</sup> William McCoslin, Field and Staff Muster-out Roll, November 6, 1965, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; Sahr, “Consumer Price Index.”

<sup>68</sup> National Park Service, “Search for Soldiers,” accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers.htm#sort=score+desc&q=william+mccoslin>.

<sup>69</sup> “Honor to Fred. Douglas,” *Pantagraph*, March 31, 1866, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Bill Kemp, “Bloomington Welcomed Frederick Douglass,” *Pantagraph*, December 29, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> “Honor to Fred. Douglas”; Miller, *Black Civil War Soldiers*, 139.

<sup>72</sup> “Honor to Fred. Douglas.”

<sup>73</sup> “Fred. Douglas,” *Weekly Pantagraph*, April 11, 1866, 4:1.

<sup>74</sup> “The Assassination and Its Lessons,” *Chicago Tribune*, March 30, 1866, 2.

Douglass was referring to the President's veto of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which Congress overrode three weeks later—just four days after Douglass's Bloomington address.<sup>75</sup> At the close of Douglass's message, the AME Church committee presented him with a "silver headed cane as a token of our highest regards, hoping he will receive it not for its intrinsic value but as a testimonial from true friends."<sup>76</sup>

McCoslin worked as a barber for the rest of his life.<sup>77</sup> From 1868 to 1873, his shop was located below C.D. Swett's Fancy Goods store at 112-114 W. Front St. in Bloomington.<sup>78</sup> He and Caroline resided at 105 S. Main St. from 1868 to 1870, when they moved to 508 S. Water St.<sup>79</sup> At that time, William's mother-in-law, Eliza Allin, also lived in the household. Interestingly, two white children—Alice and Charlott Cox—lived there as well.<sup>80</sup> Two years later, the McCoslin family moved to 510 E. Jefferson St. and finally to 510 E. Washington St. in 1873.<sup>81</sup> That year, McCoslin partnered with Robert C. Allen to run a barbershop (named Allen & McCoslin) located at 108 E. Front St.<sup>82</sup> Around 1874, William and Caroline moved to Normal. For the next three years, the couple lived on the south side of Mason Street, while William ran a shop in the basement of the Normal Hotel on Beaufort Street.<sup>83</sup>

William McCoslin's health began to decline starting in April 1876, when the *Pantagraph* announced that he was "suffering from asthma."<sup>84</sup> Over the course of the next two years, McCoslin's health ebbed and flowed. Occasionally, his poor health forced him to temporarily close his shop.<sup>85</sup> Several fundraisers were held by friends in an attempt to raise money to help replace his lost income.<sup>86</sup>

Throughout this time, McCoslin still found time to enjoy life. On July 27, 1877, he hosted a "moonlight festival" on the occasion of his birthday, serving ice cream and other refreshments.<sup>87</sup> That December, he also hosted an oyster supper and fundraiser at his home.<sup>88</sup> The *Pantagraph* described the event as "a perfect success, as far as oysters were concerned. They were served in almost every shape—stewed, fried, scalloped and raw. The attendance was not as large as we hoped. However, they took in about fifteen or sixteen dollars."<sup>89</sup> Later that month, McCoslin proposed a New Year's supper.<sup>90</sup> The *Pantagraph* again commented that he "seems to be the only one who has any 'git up' about him these holidays."<sup>91</sup> After improving somewhat over the winter, his health took a poor turn in mid-February 1878.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "In Brief on Johnson," researcher notes, unknown source, 2-3.

<sup>76</sup> "Honor to Fred. Douglas; "Fred. Douglas"

<sup>77</sup> *A Community in Conflict*.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*; 1868-1869 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*.

<sup>79</sup> 1868-1869 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*; 1870-1871 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

<sup>80</sup> 1870 United States Census, Bloomington, McLean, Illinois, digital image s.v. "Wm. McCoslin," *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>81</sup> 1872-1873 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*; 1873 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*.

<sup>82</sup> 1873 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*.

<sup>83</sup> "Wm. McCoslin, whose death is noticed..."; 1875-1877 *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*.

<sup>84</sup> "Wm. McCoslin, the barber..." *Pantagraph*, April 1, 1876, 3.

<sup>85</sup> "Mr. Wm. McCoslin, the barber..." *Pantagraph*, July 10, 1877, 3.

<sup>86</sup> "A festival was given..." *Pantagraph*, June 20, 1877, 4.

<sup>87</sup> "Mr. McCoslin will give..."

<sup>88</sup> "The oyster supper..." *Pantagraph*, December 8, 1877, 4.

<sup>89</sup> "The oyster supper..."

<sup>90</sup> "Wm. McCoslin seems to be..." *Pantagraph*, December 24, 1877, 3.

<sup>91</sup> "Wm. McCoslin seems to be..."

<sup>92</sup> "Wm. McCoslin was somewhat better..." *Pantagraph*, January 29, 1878, 3; "The friends of William McCoslin..." *Pantagraph*, February 16, 1878, 3.

Due to his declining health, he began hiring additional help and most likely passed on the barbering work in the last months before his retirement. After he retired, William and Caroline opened a “cigar and notion store.”<sup>93</sup> Caroline supported him throughout this challenging time, and his obituary recognized that she “is entitled to the greatest praise for her devotion and self-sacrifice in [sic] his behalf.”<sup>94</sup>

William McCoslin passed away midday on June 23, 1878 at the age of 47 (almost 48).<sup>95</sup> His death certificate lists his cause of death as “General Dropsy” (or edema, the retention of fluid in the body) and a “Hob-nailed Liver” (or cirrhosis of the liver).<sup>96</sup> Additional complications included uremia, the excessive accumulation of urea in the blood.<sup>97</sup> A notice in the *Pantagraph* read that he had “suffered terribly and has been almost helpless for months. The charitable people of the village have smoothed his trouble as much as possible.”<sup>98</sup> At the time of his death, McCoslin was one of the oldest residents among the Black community in Bloomington-Normal.<sup>99</sup> Burial took place on June 24, 1878 in Bloomington and was performed by the “colored Masons,” of whom he was a member.<sup>100</sup>

Although we do not know with one hundred percent certainty, it is highly probable that he is buried in the Old City section of Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. According to his death certificate, McCoslin is buried in Bloomington, and Old City was the only public burial ground in the city at that time.<sup>101</sup>

By: Anthony Bowman, 2020

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<sup>93</sup> “Wm. McCoslin, whose death is noticed...”

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> William McCoslin, death certificate; “Wm. McCoslin, the colored barber...,” *Pantagraph*, June 24, 1878, 3.

<sup>96</sup> William McCoslin, death certificate.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> “Wm. McCoslin, the colored barber...”

<sup>99</sup> “Wm. McCoslin, whose death is noticed...”

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*; William McCoslin, death certificate; “Wm. McCoslin, the colored barber...”

<sup>101</sup> William McCoslin, death certificate.