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Augustus Roberts and Thomas Green:
Baltimore Barbers

This entry was written by a volunteer who has worked remotely on the census transcription project since Dec 2020 for Baltimore City (1860 & 1870), Carroll County (1860 & 1870), and portions of Prince George's County (1870).

How did 40-year-old August Roberts, mulatto barber of Baltimore City, amass \$20,000 of personal property by 1860? Twenty thousand dollars of property was a huge amount in 1860 and an astonishing amount for a person of color. The question was even more puzzling considering that the federal census also listed him as the head of a household that included 12 other people: Elizabeth, age 25 (presumably his wife); six children; four other barbers (including one mulatto female barber, age 55, with \$5,000 of personal property – also unusual); and a 70-year-old man.

He didn't appear to be listed in the 1850 Baltimore City census, but there was an Augustus Roberts, mulatto barber, living in Fredericktown, Frederick County. That household included eight other people: Ann, age 30 (presumably his wife); three children; one other barber; two other women; and another child. The first three children's names and ages corresponded to the three oldest of the six children in the 1860 census so it was fairly certain that this was the same man. His wife, Ann, had apparently died or otherwise departed sometime after 1850 and he had then married Elizabeth. But this man had no property listed in the 1850 census.

So, what happened between 1850 and 1860 to so greatly improve the fortunes of Augustus Roberts?

The key was Rachel Brown, the female barber with \$5,000 of personal property who was a member of his 1860 household.

In 1850, Rachel Brown lived in the household headed by Thomas Green. Thomas Green was listed in that year as a mulatto barber, age 63, born in the West Indies, with \$1,000 of real property. In the city directories of the 1850s his address was 4 Light Street. That was the same address as Augustus Roberts's place of business according to an 1853 city directory.

Looking at earlier censuses and city directories, Thomas Green, barber, was in the city as early as 1819. This was probably the same Thos S. Green who was listed as a passenger on the manifest of the Brig Richmond which departed "Cape Henry, Hayte" and arrived in Philadelphia on 5 April 1819. (Cap-Haitien, Haiti, was known as Cap Henri at that time.)

Thomas Green did not appear in Baltimore city directories after 1859 or in the 1860 census but a search of the Baltimore City records uncovered his will, dated 19 December 1858 and recorded on 27 December 1858. According to the will, he had at least two wives who had predeceased him and he apparently had no (surviving) children.

To Rachel Brown, who was his sister-in-law, he bequeathed furniture, \$500, and a life interest in three houses on Hill Street. In addition, there were gifts to other relatives (including grandnephews in London and Demerara), the Madison Street Presbyterian Church, and other individuals whose relationship was not specified.

And to answer the original question-- he bequeathed to Augustus Roberts

in consideration of his attention to business while in my service, my house and premises No 4 Light Street, where I reside, and where the said Augustus carries on his business; subject, however, to the right hereby given to Rachel Brown of occupying the dwelling portion of the premises for the term of eighteen months from my death, should she desire it, without interference on his part. I also remit what he owes me.

Postscript: And then what happened to Augustus and his family? In 1870, the Roberts household included Augustus, Elizabeth, and ten children, including three sons who were also barbers. The census reported Augustus as having \$12,000 of real property and \$2,000 of personal property. Rachel Brown was still living with the Roberts family and had \$5,000 of real property and \$200 of personal property.

In 1880, Augustus and Elizabeth Roberts, seven of their children, a grandson, and Rachel Brooks (identified as Augustus's mother-in-law) lived at 37 Clay Street. Augustus Roberts was listed in Baltimore city directories sporadically until the mid 1890s. Two of their sons, Henry J. (born c. 1852-1854) and William (born c. 1860), both barbers, appear in the federal censuses and city directories until at least 1900.

Sources:

US Federal Census for Baltimore City, Wards 9 & 10, and for Fredericktown, Frederick County

Baltimore City Directories: <https://msa.maryland.gov/bca/baltimore-city-directories/>

Philadelphia Passenger & Immigration Lists, 1800-1850; National Archives Series 425, Microfilm 28, List 42, pp 114-115: <https://archive.org/details/passengerlistsof0028unit>

Baltimore City Wills, 1857-1859, p360:

<https://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/item.aspx?ID=CM219-6>