

Lucinda Barton (1838-1929)

Lucinda Robinson Barton was born on January 18, 1838, in Washington County, Missouri. When she was four years old, her family moved to Madison County, Illinois. Lucinda's ancestors were believed to have a mix of Irish, African, and Native American roots.

After her parents passed away in the early 1850s, Lucinda moved to Batavia, Illinois, to live with her sister, Mrs. Judah Watts. There, she learned to read and write, even though there were only three African-American families in town. Later, Lucinda returned to Edwardsville, where she married Milton Barton, a man with Cherokee Native American ancestry from North Carolina.

Before moving to Normal, Illinois, in 1862, Milton worked as a farmer and nurseryman in Carlinville, Illinois. He was known for wearing long hair tucked under a sweatband and Native American clothing. Milton and Lucinda later lived near Alton, Illinois, where Milton worked as a nurseryman and may have met Jesse Fell, who hired him to help plant trees for Illinois State Normal University.

Lucinda and Milton had ten children, and nine of them survived to adulthood. Their children's names were inspired by famous people of the time, such as Ulysses, Sherman, and Osceola, who was named after a well-known Seminole fighter.

When the Barton family moved to Normal, the town had not yet been incorporated. They were among the first African American families in the area. Over the next ten years, the number of African Americans in Normal grew to more than 100. Compared to other Illinois towns, African Americans in Normal faced less discrimination, possibly because of the town's location on major railroads, job opportunities at Illinois State Normal University, and support from local leaders who believed in equal rights.

The Bartons lived comfortably, owning a home at 316 School Street and even an automobile. They had a similar lifestyle to their white neighbors. Milton Barton passed away in 1885 at the age of 49. The family held his funeral at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, where they had been long-time members.

Lucinda enjoyed cooking outdoors, often over a campfire, much to the dismay of her daughter Evalina. One day, Evalina found her mother cooking outside and said, "You're not on a reservation now! You're in town with two stoves in the kitchen." Despite her daughter's complaint, Lucinda continued to cook outside secretly because she believed food tasted better that way.

Lucinda was also a strong believer in herbal medicine. She made a remedy called "the bitters," which she believed could cure many illnesses. Every fall, she gathered roots like dandelion and plantain to make it. Her granddaughter, Lucinda Brent Posey, recalled that the bitters tasted terrible, but it was believed to heal anything. Lucinda also used turpentine, carbolic acid, and even a cow manure poltus to treat various ailments.

During her life, Lucinda saw many changes in the community. One important event occurred in 1867 when the people of Normal voted to allow the first African American student to attend the Model School at Illinois State Normal University.

Lucinda lived a long life, passing away at the age of 91 on February 24, 1929, from a stroke. At the time of her death, she was the oldest member of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church. She was buried next to her husband at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.