

The Daisey Family Legacy Collection

Lewes, Delaware

Lewes Historical Society – Speakers Series
February 13, 2025

Photographs courtesy of the Daisey Family Legacy Collection



Throughout Much of it's History Lewes had a Large and Active African American Community

- As late as the 1980s the Black population was around 25%
- While segregated (until the mid-1960s) the Black community was able to:
 - Start businesses
 - Find employment (domestics, fish factory, farming, etc.)
 - Buy homes
 - Establish strong churches and community groups
- The self-sufficient Black community contributed greatly to the businesses, industries and development of Lewes.
- A very tight knit community where everyone knew everyone, (many were related) and all looked out for each other.



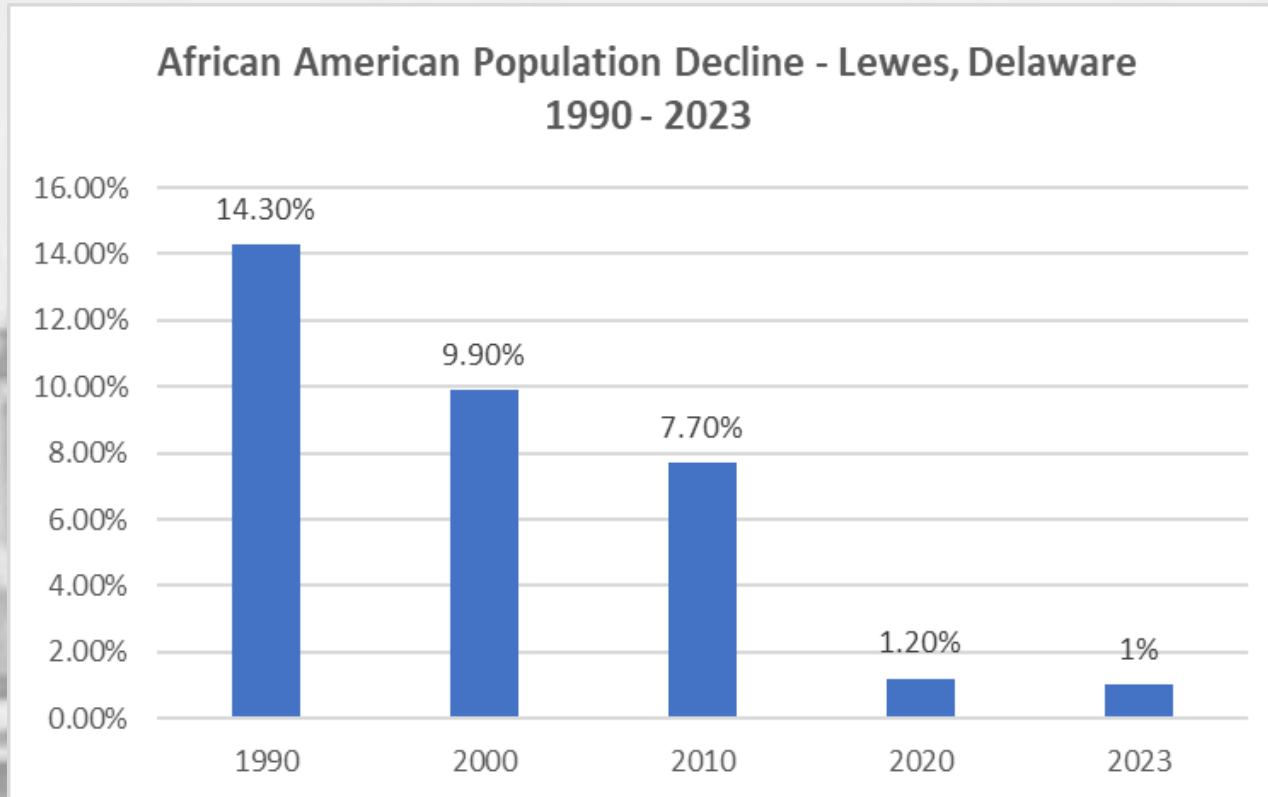
However, Legislated Denial of Access to Some Key Areas Created a Wealth Gap

- Through segregation laws this community was historically hit with major inhibitors to generational wealth in:
 - Education
 - Housing
 - Employment
 - Financing (for housing and business)
- In 1940 about 80% of Blacks in Sussex County were employed as domestics or day laborers (lower paying jobs).
- When historic preservation was made into policy in 1992 and 2004 the African American community had not been able to generate enough wealth to fully participate in it.



“Critics have implicated heritage conservation as a cause of gentrification, stating that conservation programs select an exclusionary historicism separate from an authentic lower-class reality.” Charles W. Lawrence - University of Pennsylvania

While Lewes has grown 24% since 2000, the African American population has shrunk 90% to just over 1% today*



* Source US Census



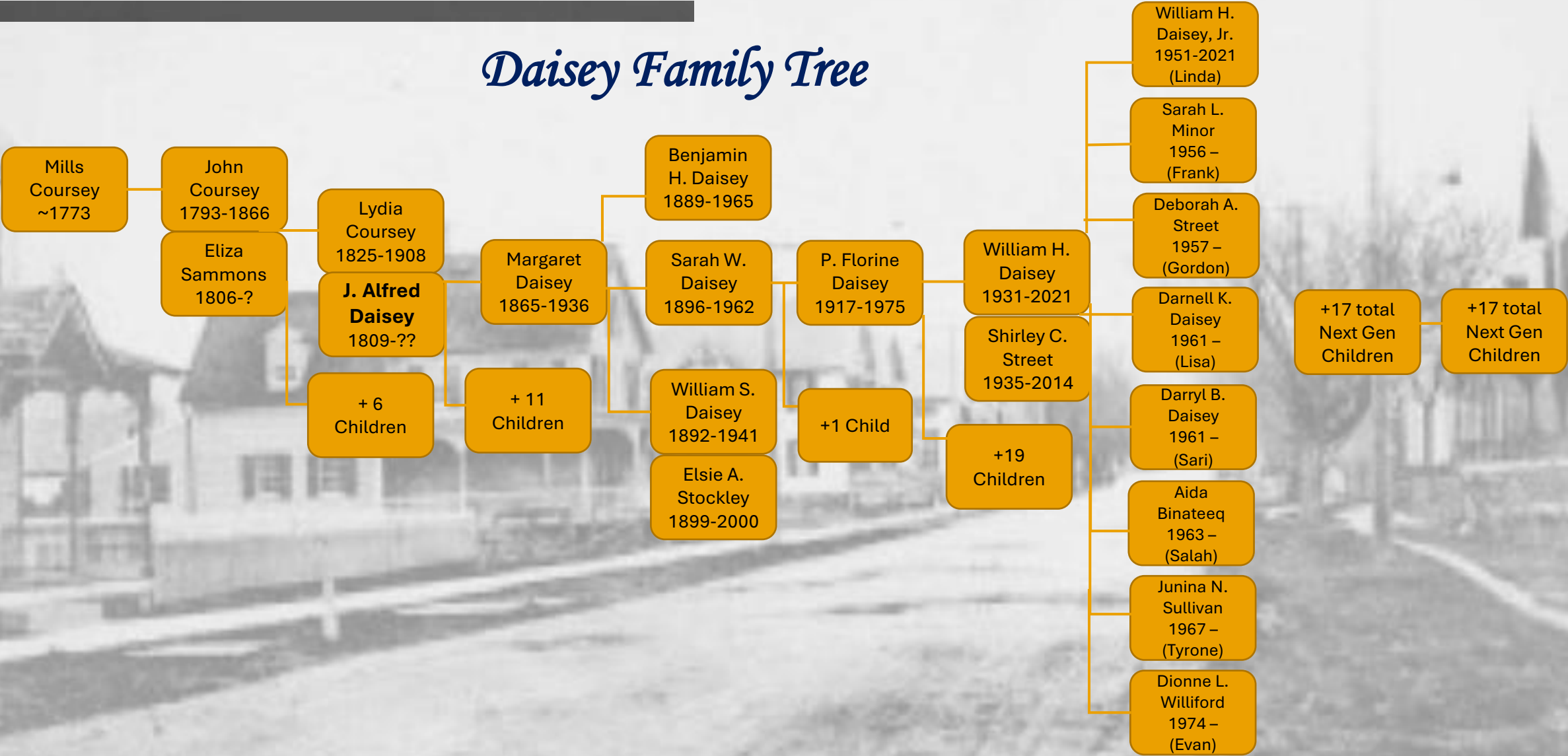
Generally, not being able to afford to renovate, or even maintain their homes in the historic district, most of the African American families opted to sell. This led to a mass exodus since the 1990s

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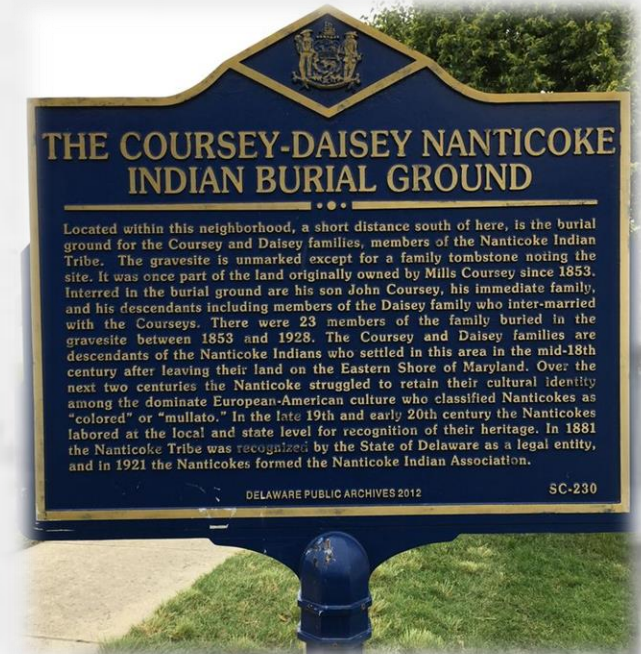
Daisey Family Tree



- Starts with Mills Coursey (~ b 1773) a Nanticoke Indian, and then his son, John Coursey (1793-1866), and wife, Elizabeth Sammons (1806 - ?), our 4x great grandparents. They had 7 children.
- 1850 – Their daughter, Lydia Coursey, (1825 -1908) married James “Alfred” Daisey (1809 – ~1900). Alfred’s origins are unclear.
- Lydia and Alfred, our 3x great grandparents, are noted as a “washer woman,” and as a “laborer.” Neither could read nor write.
- 1880 - Lydia purchases a house at what is now **333 Savannah Road**. The house is still owned by our family.



James Alfred Daisey
~ 1900



Shady Road, near intersection of Route 1



333 Savannah Road

- Lydia and Alfred bore at least 12 children, with only 8 surviving childhood, one of whom, Margaret “Maggie” Emily Daisey (1865-1936), was our 2x great grandmother.

- Maggie would have 3 children, all of whom were raised at 333 Savannah Road. Benjamin Harrison Daisey (1889 - 1965), William S. Daisey (1892-1941), and Sarah “Sallie” Waples Daisey (1896 -1962), our great grand mother.

- Neither Benjamin nor William had children, but Sarah bore 2, including our grandmother, Pearl Florine Daisey (1917-1975).



Benjamin H. Daisey 1920s



Sarah W. Daisey 1930s



William S. Daisey 1918

- **Benjamin Harrison Daisey (1889 – 1965)**, our great, great uncle, lived at 333 Savannah Road his entire life.

- Benjamin had several occupations but was last listed as a “house mover.”

- While he never married, nor had children, he was instrumental in raising both my grandmother, Florine (Daisey) Street, and my father, William Harrison Daisey, Sr.

- While I don't remember him very well, we named my oldest child after him in recognition of the impact he had on our family.



~ 1900



1930



1963

- In 1920 William S. Daisey (1892 – 1941) purchased a 50-year-old home at **111 Coleman Avenue**, shortly after his return from WWI. During the war he was exposed to mustard gas, which led to a lifetime of illness.

- In 1923 he wed Elsie Stockley (1899 – 2000). His occupation was a Chauffer/Driver, while she cleaned houses. They had no children.

- The couple resided at the Coleman Avenue home until William passed away in 1941 (age 49). Elsie would live there until she married Daniel Draine in 1956. In 1985 she sold the house to her twin godsons, Darryl and Darnell Daisey.



~1917



1920s



1920s

- Sarah Waples Daisey (Sewell) (1896 – 1962), our great grandmother, also was raised at 333 Savannah Road, but moved to Wilmington when she married James Sewell in 1921

- Prior to her marriage Sarah gave birth to a son, Aaron Ward, and my grandmother, Pearl “Florine” Daisey in 1917.

- When my father needed to move to Wilmington to complete his final year of high school at Howard High School, in 1948, he was able to move in with Sarah, his grandmother. The local schools for people of color ended at 11th Grade.

- Our oldest sister was named for Sarah.



1920s



1921



1940s



1956

- **Pearl “Florine” Daisey (1917-1975)**, our grandmother, was born and lived at 333 Savannah Road until her marriage to Elmer Street (1893-1971) in 1939.

- Prior to her marriage she bore 3 children, William (our father) in 1931, Vernon in 1935 and Margaret "Tillie" in 1936. Following her marriage, she moved to an Ellendale farm, and the couple had an additional 17 children. Elmer also had 9 children from a previous marriage.

- A warm, caring and loving mother and grandmother, she died in 1975, when she was only 58 years old.



1932



Late 1960s

- **William H. Daisey (1931-2021)** was born in Lewes (333 Savannah Road) and lived there on-and-off for the first 34 years of his life.

- Married Shirley Street (1935-2014), of Millsboro, in 1951 and lived at the Savannah Road house, and at a Lewes Beach house before settling at **331 Chestnut Street** for the first years of their marriage. The Chestnut Street property is still owned by the family.

- The couple had 5 Children prior to moving to Oakland, CA in 1965. They would have 1 more and adopt 2 other children later. The family moved to Paulsboro, NJ in 1969, and back to Delaware (Dover) in 1978.

- William would go on to earn his Master Degree and become a vice-principal in the Lake Forrest School District, a Dover City Councilman, and Chief of the Nanticoke Indian Tribe (Millsboro). Shirley would become a 30-year leader in the Girl Scouts Organization.



William & Shirley Daisey ~1953



Daisey Family 1961



William H. Daisey



Shirley C. Daisey



William H. Daisey, Jr.



Daisey Family 2022

- **Elsie (Stockley) Daisey Draine (1899-2000)**, my godmother and great great aunt was born in Lewes. She lived to 101 years old.

- She had a 6th Grade education, and worked as a domestics her entire life, but had a zest for life that was contagious.

- She loved to travel and apparently take photos. Elsie would outlive 2 husbands and her only child, Mildred (Stockley) Redding. She was also very active at St. Paul's Methodist Church.

- As relatives passed away their possessions seemed to fall to her, and then to my father after she came to live with my parents following her daughter's death in 1992.

- She kept many of her old photographs in a gold colored can, some of which I had the opportunity to speak with her about before her 2000 passing.



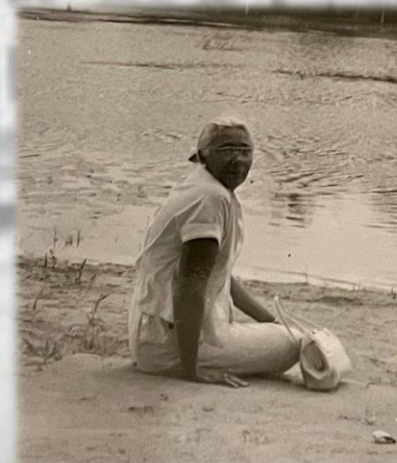
Early 1930s



Early 1940s



1940



1957



1995

The Photos

- In September 2022, following our father's passing, I began to post some of the oldest photos we found in his house on the "Memories of Lewes" Facebook page. We did not know that Lewes had been searching for more past photos of African American life and was surprised when the photos attracted a lot of attention.

- Since September 2022, I have posted about 400 photos to the site, where site members have helped to identify many of the people and events depicted.

- My family was later thrilled to loan the Lewes Historical Society 100+ of the images for the "Voices Heard" documentary, exhibit (April – Dec 2024), traveling exhibit, and other purposes to help tell the story of the areas rich African American Heritage.



Late 1950s - Jolly Jill's Club Parade



1920s - 4 Girls at Lewes Beach 2



1930s or 1940s - Unknown Girl



1920s - Louise Stockley



1958 – Daniel Draine



1920s or 1930s – Unknown Man

Photo Themes: *The Beach*



1920 - Maritime Exchange Station



1920/30s - Little Girl at Beach 2



1920/30s - 4 Girls at Lewes Beach 2



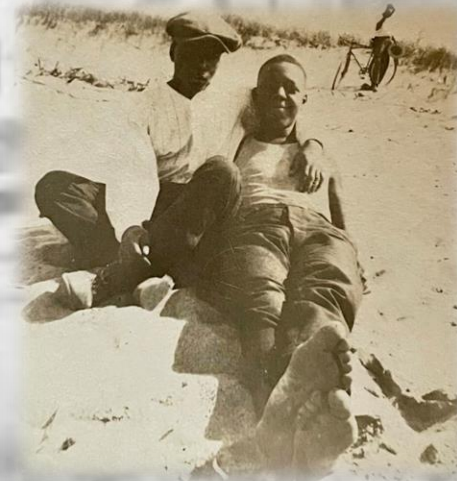
1950s - Pavilion Lewes Beach 2



1961 - Lewes Beach 2



1960s - Boating



1920s - Boys Chillin at Lewes Beach 2



1950s Lewes Beach 2 Baptism

Photo Themes: *The Church*



1960 - St. Paul's Methodist Church



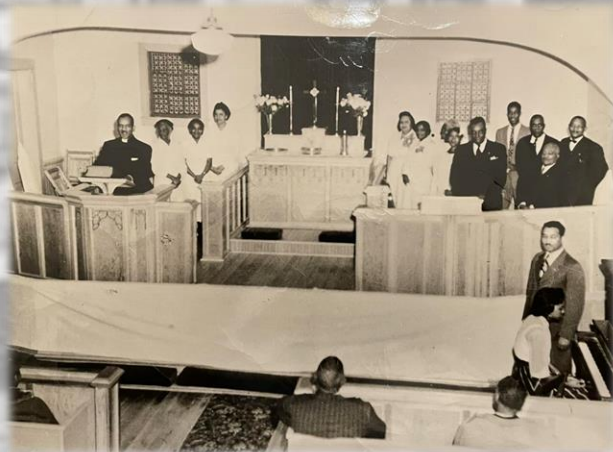
1957 - St. Paul's Methodist Church



1960s The Methodist Ladies



1950s/60s - St. George AME Church



1953 - St. Paul's Methodist Church



1960s - John Wesley UM Church



1940s Cool Spring Presbyterian Church

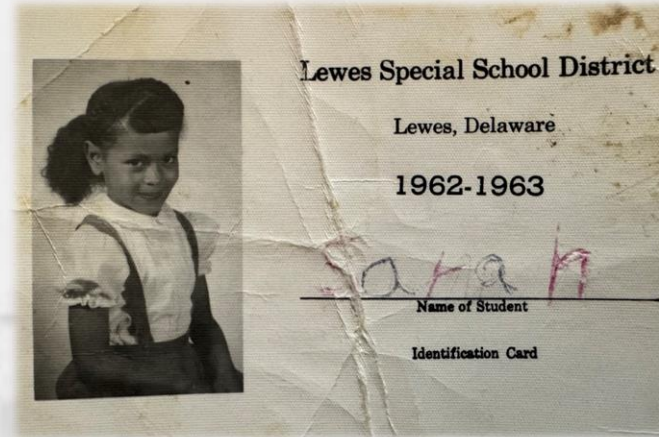


Early 1960s - St. Paul's Methodist Church

Photo Themes: *The Schools*



Lewes Junior High School - Women's Social Club with the PTA



Sarah (Daisey) Minor



Birdie Gooch Banks



Richard Allen School – Mid 1940s



Vernon Daisey



Dorothy "Midge" Gooch



Unknown



Robert Miller

Photo Themes: *Work & Play*



Girl Scouts - 1964



Jolly Jills Parade – mid 1950s



Care-taker – around 1901



Joe's Body Shop – Late 1950s



Fishing – 1930s



The Park - 1959



Beebe Hospital (Rear)



Domestics – 1930s or 40s

Photo Themes: Late 1800s, Early 1900s



1870s or 1880s Mary P. (Miller) Wolfe



Unknown



Arrie Miller and Child



Arrie Miller



Arrie Miller – Born 1876



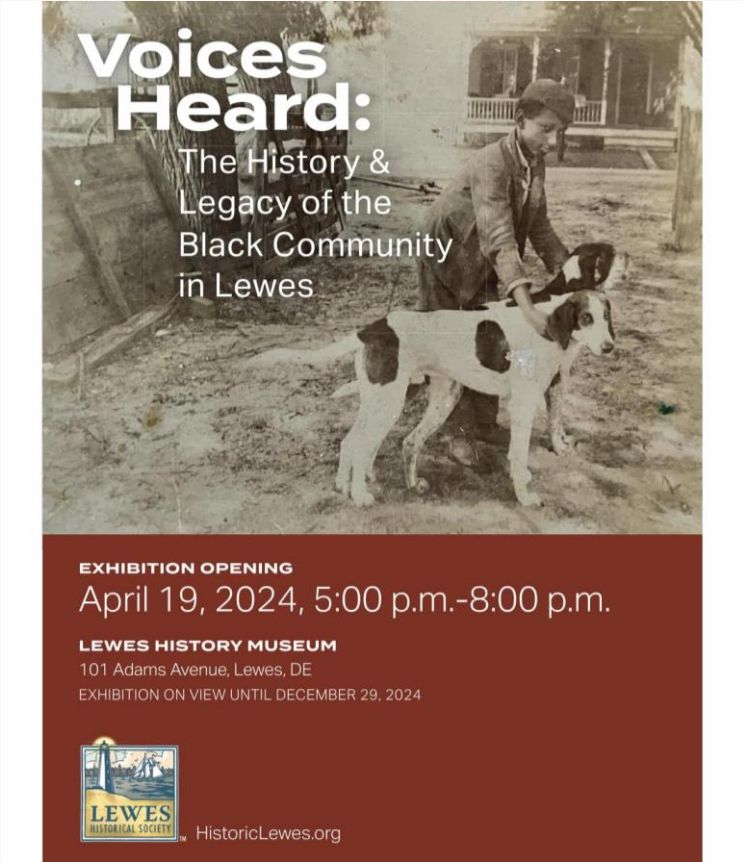
John Shelton – Born 1878



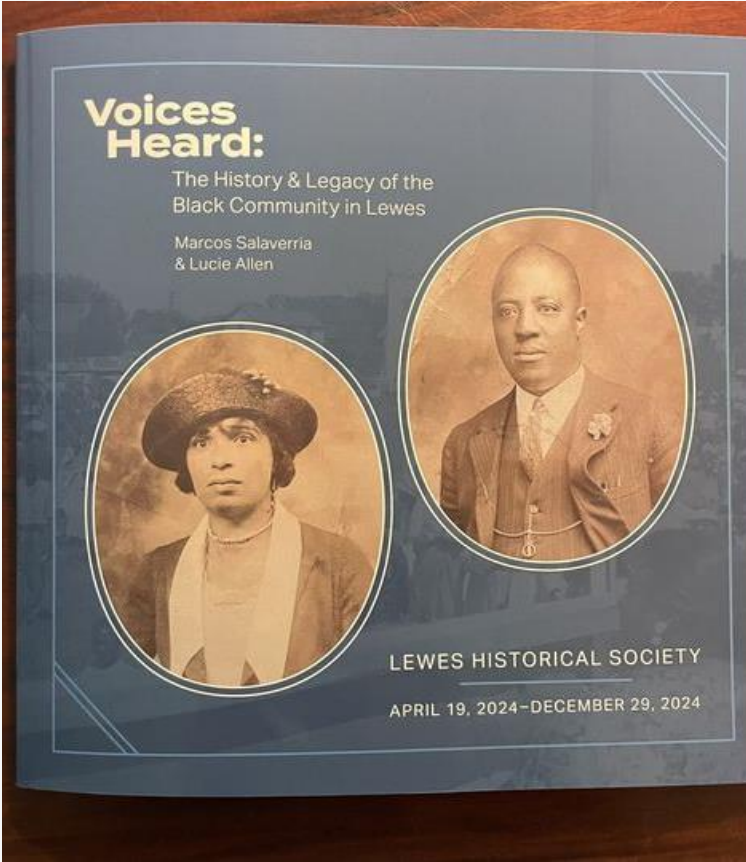
Arrie Miller



Arrie Miller and Child



Voices Hear Exhibit Flyer



Voices Hear Exhibit Catalog



Voices Hear Exhibit Entrance

Voices Heard Exhibit April – December 2024