

Historical Society celebrates 50th year of Highland House Museum

Frederick Douglas Patterson 1871-1932

Born in 1871, Frederick Douglas Patterson was the youngest child of Charles (see article 6, Feb. 13, 2016) and Josephine Utz Patterson. He graduated from Greenfield High School in 1888 and attended the Ohio State University, where he was the first African-American to play on the OSU football team.

Patterson withdrew from college in his senior year but was recruited to Louisville, Ky. to be a high school history teacher.

His father Charles, a former slave, owned a carriage manufacturing company in Greenfield. He became ill, so Fred left his teaching job to return home to assist his father.

After his father's death in 1910, Patterson converted the company to manufacture "horseless carriages," becoming the first African-American to own and operate a car manufacturing company.

His Patterson-Greenfield car, completed in 1915 – considered an even more sophisticated model than Henry Ford's Model T – sold for about \$850.

However, the cost of building these cars and the scarcity of financing caused Patterson to convert the company to manufacturing school buses and trucks, which were in high demand.

In 1920, he changed the name of the company to Greenfield Bus Body Company. The stock market crash and Great Depression badly hurt the company.

After Patterson died in 1932, his son, Postell, closed the business in 1939.

Patterson was a Methodist and a Freemason, rising to the rank of worshipful master of the Greenfield Cedar Grove Masonic Lodge 17. He also was a member of the Third Wind Foraker Club and became the second vice president of the National Negro Business League.

Patterson served as a Greenfield's delegate to the Ohio Republican Party annual caucus.

As a delegate and an African-American businessman, he was important to the Warren G. Harding 1920 campaign in turning out the Ohio black vote.

Patterson was rewarded for this successful work with a position as alternate delegate to the 1924 Republican National Convention.

Note: Pictures of the Pattersons and their carriages, car and buses can be found on the Greenfield Historical Society website. Other sources: BlackPast.org, Wikipedia, The C.R. Patterson and Sons Company by Christopher Nelson, The Highland County Magazine Vol. I No. III published by Leland Pennington and an unsourced article found at the HC museum entitled "Memories of the Patterson-Greenfield Car."

