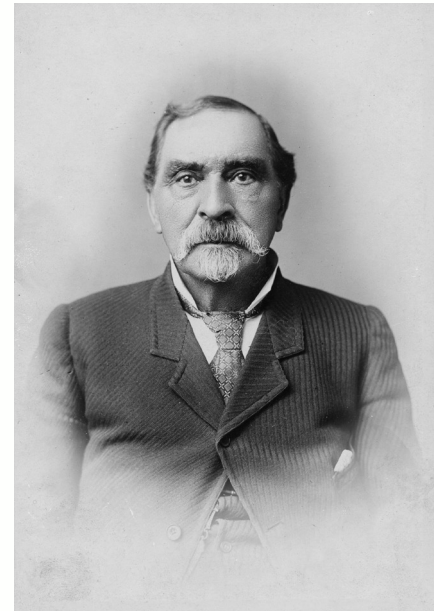


BARNEY L. FORD

When: 1822 - 1902

Where: Born in Virginia. Lived in South Carolina, Chicago, and Central America, settled in Denver, Colorado.

Why Important: Barney Ford escaped from slavery using the Underground Railroad. He became a successful businessman and civil rights activist.



Barney L. Ford. http://www.denvergov.org/AboutDenver/history_char_ford.asp

Inter-Ocean Hotel in Denver. The Inter-Ocean Hotel opened on October 29, 1873, at the corner of 16th (Sixteenth) and Blake Streets in downtown Denver, Colorado, built by Barney L. Ford, a prominent African American businessman. Two horse-drawn wagons are stopped on Blake Street in front of the hotel. Large signs hang on the building adjacent to the hotel: "Brooms and Brushes" and "Wooden and Willow Ware." Other signs advertise Lana Oil Soap, Inter-Ocean Cafe & Restaurant, the Palatine Insurance Company, the Schirmer Insurance & Investment Company, and the general offices for the P. H. Zang Brewing Company. Farther down the block is L.F. Willoughby's printing supply store; bicycles are propped against the side of the building. The building was razed in the early 1970s. 1900? Denver Public Library, Western History Collection. Call Number: C-175.

BARNEY L. FORD

Ford was born on January 22, 1822 in Virginia. He grew up as a slave. Ford's mother, Phoebe, hoped he would one day escape slavery. And he did! At seventeen, he traveled the Underground Railroad to Chicago. Ford taught himself to read and write. He also helped other slaves escape to freedom. In Chicago he married Julia Lyon. She helped Barney pick his last name—as a slave, he wasn't given a last name. He got the idea from a steam engine called the Lancelot Ford.

In 1851 Ford and his wife decided to move to California to find gold. They traveled by ship. The ship stopped in a town in Nicaragua, located in Central America, for a few days to pick up supplies and passengers. Barney and Julia got off the ship and liked the town so much they decided to stay. The couple opened a successful hotel and restaurant.

Ford dreamed of bigger opportunities. He believed he could achieve his dreams in the American West. So, the couple moved to Colorado to mine for gold. However, African Americans faced discrimination in the West. Ford was not allowed to own a mine claim at that time because he was African American. Ford was determined to succeed in the West anyway and moved to Denver. He opened a barbershop. People were impressed by Ford's intelligence and determination. Unfortunately, Ford's barbershop burnt down in a fire.

Not even a fire could stop Barney Ford. He opened three more businesses: the People's Restaurant, the Inter-Ocean Hotel, and the Ford Hotel. One of his buildings is still used today. It is located at 1514 Blake Street in downtown Denver.

Ford fought for the civil rights and voting rights of African Americans in Colorado. He also helped freed slaves get an education. Ford died in 1902 at the age of eighty. He was honored with a stained-glass portrait in the Colorado State Capitol building in Denver.

Sources:

Adapted from "Barney Ford—From Plantation Slave to Denver Leader" by David F. Halaas, Colorado History NOW, October 2000.

"Barney Ford Biography." Denver Public Schools. Barney Ford Elementary School. <http://ford.wikispaces.dpsk12.org/Barney+Ford+Biography>

"Barney Ford House Museum." Summit Historical Society: Historic Sites. <http://www.summithistorical.org/barneyfordhouse.htm>