

*The Vashon Family Monument Dedication*  
*Saturday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023*  
*At 1:00 pm*

*A brief introduction to the members of this  
amazing family who are honored here at  
Father Dickson Cemetery  
845 South Sappington Road  
Crestwood, Missouri 63126*

**Vashon Family Monument  
PROGRAM**

<b>Opening Ceremony</b>	<b>American Legion Tom Powell Post #77</b>
<b>Selection render by</b>	<b>Carolyn Yandell</b>
<b>Welcome</b>	<b>Ernest Jordan</b>
<b>Induction of Mistress of Ceremony</b>	
	<b>President, Friends of Father Dickson</b>
<b>Mistress of Ceremony</b>	<b>Andrea Barnett</b>
	<b>George B. Vashon Board Member</b>
<b>Opening Prayer</b>	<b>Richard Buckley</b>
	<b>Lay Redemptorist, St. Alphonsus Rock Church</b>
	<b>George B. Vashon Board Member</b>
<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Paul Thornell</b>
	<b>Great-Great Grandson of George and Susan Vashon</b>
<b>Unveiling of the monument marker</b>	<b>Paul Thornell &amp; Calvin Riley</b>
	<b>Director, George B. Vashon Museum</b>
<b>Selection render by</b>	<b>Carolyn Yandell</b>
<b>Closing Remarks</b>	<b>Brenda Mahr</b>
	<b>George B. Vashon Board Member</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>Karen Mozee</b>
	<b>Vice-President, Friends of Father Dickson</b>



## George Boyer Vashon

1824 - 1878

Educator, Lawyer, Abolitionist

George Boyer Vashon was born on July 25, 1824. He was a Black **educator, lawyer,** and abolitionist.

From Carlisle, Pennsylvania, he was the son of John Baton Vashon, a Mulatto, and Anne Vashon. George's father was a well-respected leader in Pittsburgh's Black community, a businessman, and an abolitionist. Vashon's father was also instrumental in establishing the first school for Blacks students in Pittsburgh. He attended his father's private school until 1837, then a public school where he displayed an aptitude for languages.

By age 16, Vashon could speak Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Persian and was well-versed in Greek and Latin. In 1840, he enrolled in Oberlin Collegiate Institute in Ohio. While at Oberlin, he was a member of Oberlin's prestigious men's literary society, the Union Society. Also, while there, he taught at a Chillicothe, Ohio school.

On August 28, 1844, Vashon became the first Black graduate from Oberlin College, receiving valedictory honors and delivering a commencement address entitled "Liberty of Mind." In his speech, Vashon asserted that "*genius, talent, and learning are not withheld by our common Father from people of color*". In 1849, Vashon got his Master of Arts degree; after graduation, like his father, he wanted to play a central role in advancing the cause of Black people. He felt that pursuing a career in law this would help to achieve his goal.

He studied law under Walter Forward, a judge and prominent figure in Pennsylvania politics. Yet, after Vashon applied for admission to the Allegheny County Bar, his application was rejected because of his race. He then thought of Haitian emigration as a means of developing his potential. But Vashon took and completed the New York Bar examination on January 10, 1848, thus becoming the first Black lawyer in New York.

In 1849, Vashon moved to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, becoming a Latin, Greek, and English professor. He also was a correspondent for Frederick Douglass's newspaper, "The North Star." In 1851, he moved to Syracuse, New York, and joined the New York Central College faculty in McGrawville. After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Vashon became involved in the Underground Railroad and state and national conventions. These forums brought Black people together to discuss critical issues confronting their communities and the means of ending the system of slavery.

In 1857, Vashon married Susan Paul Smith, the granddaughter of the Rev. Thomas Paul, Sr. of Boston. The couple had seven children. In 1863, Vashon became the second Black president of Avery College in Pittsburgh. After the American Civil War, Vashon worked in the Solicitor's Office of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in Washington, D.C. He also became Howard University's first professor and was instrumental in establishing its law school.

When Vashon left Howard, he became a Mathematics and Ancient and Modern Languages professor at Alcorn College in Rodney, Mississippi. His students considered him a good teacher and he was well-respected by his colleagues. George Vashon was a victim of the yellow fever epidemic which swept Alcorn's campus in the fall of 1878. He died on October 5, 1878, and is buried in an unmarked grave somewhere on the college's campus.

Vashon High School, in St. Louis, Missouri is named for George Boyer Vashon and his son, John Boyer Vashon.

In 2010, following extreme efforts by his descents, George Boyer Vashon was posthumously admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar 163 years after he applied.



## **Susan Paul Smith Vashon**

Susan Paul Smith was born in Boston on September 19, 1838. Vashon's father, Elijah W. Smith, was a well-known composer and cornet player. [She was raised by her maternal grandmother after her mother died early in her life. Her grandfather Thomas Paul, and other members of her family were active as abolitionists. Vashon was educated at Miss O'Mears Seminary in Somerville, Massachusetts, where she was the only black student. After graduating as valedictorian, Susan taught school for a short time in Pittsburgh, where she lived with her father. The principal of the school where she taught was George Boyer Vashon, whom she later married on February 17, 1857. They had their first child by September 1859, after which she stopped teaching. The couple had 7 children together.

George Vashon, his father, and Susan Vashon were all involved in aiding the Underground Railroad. Susan Vashon aided wounded soldiers during the Civil War. In 1864 and 1865, she created several fund-raising bazaars to fund medical care and housing for soldiers and refugees in Pittsburgh.

The Vashon family moved to Washington, D.C. in 1872. Vashon started teaching again and eventually was promoted to principal at Thaddeus Stevens School, where she worked until 1880.

Vashon and her family moved to St. Louis in 1882. In St. Louis, she became involved with Missouri State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs and served as its president in 1902. Vashon helped create the St. Louis Association of Colored Women's Clubs and served as its president in 1903. Vashon was instrumental in having the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) hold their national convention in St. Louis in 1904.

Vashon died in her home on November 27, 1912. She was buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery. She was reburied in Father Dickson Cemetery on 11/22/1916 along with her grandson, George Boyer Vashon Gossin.

## **John Boyer Vashon**

1859 – 1924

Son of George and Susan Vashon

John Boyer Vashon, son of African-American abolitionists and educators, George Boyer Vashon and Susan Paul Vashon was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on September 9, 1859. He attended private school in the city of his birth and the Public Schools of Washington, D.C., having left with his parents in the fall of 1868. In 1874, his father became a professor at Alcorn University near Rodney, Mississippi. Young Vashon went with his father, entered the University and graduated in 1878. In the same year his father died, and responsibility for the house fell upon him. For two years he tutored at Alcorn and was an influence for good in the University and the town.

On his twenty first birthday John arrived in St. Louis, Missouri, which was to be the scene of his activities for the rest of his life. He was the principal of Colored School Number 10, the Attucks School, the Delaney School and the first principal of the Vashon Elementary School which was later abolished.

Vashon High School was named for John Boyer Vashon and his father, George Boyer Vashon.

## **George Boyer Vashon**

1862 – 1938

Son of George and Susan

George Boyer Vashon, member of a prominent Negro family, died Tuesday, July 26, 1938 after an illness of several months at Homer G. Phillips Hospital. He was 76 years old and the son of George B and Susan Vashon. Vashon High School, 3026 Laclede Avenue, was named after his father and brother, John B. Vashon.

Born in Pittsburgh and educated in Washington D.C. and Alcorn University, Alcorn Mississippi where his father was a professor. In 1881 he came to St. Louis from Virginia where he taught members of his race and became active in city, state and national Democratic politics. He was considered a gifted poet and writer, and had many articles in the newspapers. In the early 1900's he was Assistant to the Board of Elections Commissioner. He is a widower.

Funeral services will be held at 1:00 pm tomorrow at the Gordon Undertaking Establishment, 2649 Delmar Boulevard, with burial in Father Dickson's Cemetery.

## **Emma Vashon Gossin**

1866 – 1932

Daughter of George and Susan

Emma Vashon was born August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1866 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to George Boyer and Susan Paul Smith Vashon. Although the family moved several times, her education was always of primary importance to her parents. She received her elementary education in Washington D.C. In 1873 her father, George Boyer Vashon became a professor at Alcorn College in Rodney, Mississippi. The family moved again, but her father died in the fall of 1878 from yellow fever. In 1882, she moved to St. Louis with the remaining family members.

Miss Vashon was one of the first graduates of Sumner High School certified by the Board of Education in 1885. Immediately after graduation she began teaching Latin and English at Sumner High School. She was also a graduate of the Moran School of Shorthand, located at 17<sup>th</sup> and Olive Streets in St. Louis. She showed such excellence in her work that the Principal, Mr. Moran, stated that he would be glad to employ her as a teacher in his school.

In 1891, Emma Vashon married Andrew J. Gossin. Their wedding was a social highlight of the time. Throughout her lifetime Mrs. Gossin was active in religious, civic, educational and cultural affairs in the city. For several years she was honored as the president of the Sumner Alumni Association. Both she and Mr. Gossin were devoted parents to their five children. Emma Vashon Gossin died on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1932. Only her husband, Andrew J. Gossin, and one son, John B V Gossin, were surviving at the time of her death.

## **Stillborn Infant Gossin**

1936

Grandchild of Emma Vashon and Andrew Gossin.

Child of John B.V. and Ethel C. Chissell Gossin



## **Andrew J Gossin**

1862 – 1942

Husband of Emma Vashon Gossin

Mr. Andrew Gossin was born in Rodney, Mississippi, about 1862. He received his college training at Alcorn University, graduating in 1882. Before coming to St. Louis, Mr. Gossin was a principal in Hermanville, Mississippi. He moved to St. Louis in 1883. He served four years (1883 – 1887) as an assistant in the elementary schools. From 1887 to 1892, he was principal of colored school #10. While there, he married Emma Vashon in 1891 and they had five children. For thirty-five years, 1892 – 1927 he was a teacher in Sumner High School and Normal Teacher Training School. In 1927, Mr. Gossin became a teacher at the new Vashon High School and retired from teaching while there. He was a member of the Grand Lodge of Knights of Pythias, Lodge #76 and he was a member of the Elleardsville Civic League. On Saturday, May 26, 1934 at the Pine Street Branch YMCA, Educators, Board Members, Colleagues, former students and friends honored Mr. Gossin with a testimonial banquet dinner commemorating his fifty years of service in St. Louis Public Schools. He died November, 28, 1942.

## **Georgianna Vashon Colder**

1849 -1918

Niece of George and Susan Vashon

When Mary Francis Vashon Colder died in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1854 her four bereaved children (three girls and one boy) were adopted by their uncle, George B. Vashon.

The youngest of these children, Georgianna Vashon Colder (5 years old at the time of her mother's death) passed from this life at the residence of her foster brother John B. Vashon, Tuesday morning February 5th, 1918. Her entire life was rich and beautiful with devotion to her uncle, his wife and children. She was, in every sense, an elder daughter in the household, loving, and beloved, with rare intensity.

She was buried from All Saints Church (of which she was a member for thirty-three years) in the Vashon lot in Father Dickson's Cemetery, Thursday at 1:00 pm.

## **Mary C V Gossin Godette (Mazie)**

1899 – 1926

Daughter of Emma Vashon and Andrew Gossin

Funeral services were held Thursday at 1 pm for Mrs. Mazie Gossin-Godette formerly of this city, at the residence of her parents. Prof. and Mrs. A. J. Gossin of 4435 West Belle, St. Louis, Missouri. Rev. Fr. Clarke conducted the service. Mrs. Godette died at her home in Oberlin, Ohio. After giving birth to a daughter, Mary V, both mother and child died on January 10th, 1926.

Mazie was a Sumner graduate in 1917, attended the Illinois University at Champaign, was a graduate of the Columbia Physical Training School in Chicago and taught physical culture for three years at Lincoln High School in Kansas City. She was married September 8, 1924, to Mr. James Oliver Godette of Oberlin, Ohio. Mrs. Godette was also taking a course in physiology at the time of her death. She is survived by her husband who accompanied the remains here, a sister Mrs. Susie Stewart of Washington, D.C., and a brother Bernard Gossin of Chicago who came here, her parents, a brother Jack, who is away at college, two uncles George and Frank Vashon from this city.

## **George Boyer Vashon Gossin**

1894 – 1911

Son of Emma Vashon and Andrew Gossin

(Originally buried in Bellefontaine Cemetery. Reburied in Fr. Dickson Cemetery on 11/22/1916 along with his grandmother Susan Paul Smith Vashon)

George was born in St. Louis on June 30th, 1893. He passed through the district schools of St. Louis and was in his second year at Sumner High School when his parents consented to his taking up a school term residence with his uncle at Peoria, Illinois, where he spent two school years at Bradley Polytechnic Institute and Manual Training High School and made significant progress.

His parents, and other adult relatives decided to have him finish his studies at a Massachusetts school, which he was to enter at the first of the calendar year. Meanwhile, he was employed as an elevator conductor with the J. H. Wolff Clothing Co., where he was a general favorite.

Last Saturday night he had conducted his employer and some others to the basement floor and was standing with them a short distance from his car, when it began to ascent. George ran to the cage, leaped for the floor of the elevator, whose speed was increasing each second, missed the foothold and fell with force onto the floor of the car and, in a second, was crushed between it and the floor above. His death was instantaneous.

The death of George Gossin, so suddenly and violently, struck St. Louisans through the heart. Born, reared and beloved here, each household felt the shock and loss. His alert intelligence, kind heart and natural ever-courteous ways made him the city's gentleman; and, from young children to the old and tottering, he was a pride and favorite—beloved living; lamented, dead.

## **Bernard Vashon Gossin**

1895 – 1926

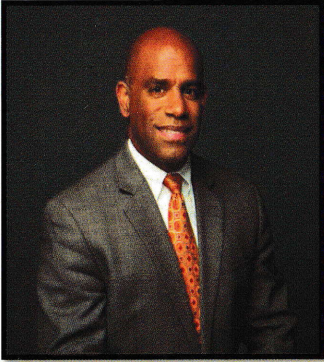
Son of Emma Vashon and Andrew Gossin

Bernie Gossin, 31, chemist and promising actor, died at his rooms in the apartment of Eleanor Wilson, well known vaudeville performer, 3131 Indiana Avenue, Chicago, on March 10th 1926. Deceased was ill but for a few days and was a victim of double pneumonia. Miss Wilson accompanied the remains to his former home, St. Louis, Missouri, where interment was made on Saturday. Among relatives left by Bernie is Mrs. Sue Steward, a teacher of Washington, D. C., a brother, Jack Gossin, who is a student at Boston, Mass. Seminary, and his father, a professor in a St. Louis school. Full military honors were accorded the remains at the time of burial due to his enlistment in the Navy.

Bernie Gossin was connected, as a chemist with the Cameron Manufacturing Company in the Gas building and maintained a small laboratory of his own on 31st. street. He was very popular among the show folk and his last work, as a professional, was a member of the Bishop Lafayette Players in their representation of the Eleventh Commandment at the Grand Theatre.

GOSSIN – Entered into rest on Wednesday, March 10, 1926, at 4:50 p.m., in Chicago. He was 31 yrs. old. Funeral from the residence of his parents Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Gossin, 4433 West Belle Place, Saturday, March 13th to All Saints Episcopal Church, at 2 p.m., thence to Father Dickson Cemetery. Deceased was a member of Tom Powell Post, American Legion.

## Paul Thornell, Great-Great Grandson of George & Susan Vashon



Paul Thornell brings over 20 years of experience serving in leadership roles in the financial services sector, non-profit organizations, trade associations, the White House, Capitol Hill and Presidential campaigns. His work in policy, politics, regulatory, and advocacy arenas has provided him with a distinct variety of perspectives and shows a record of demonstrated results in government, corporate and philanthropic sectors.

In the non-profit sector, Paul Thornell served as Senior Vice President of Public Policy and Field Leadership at United Way of America (now United Way Worldwide), the nation's largest charity.

In government, Paul Thornell served at the White House as Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs for Vice President Al Gore where he was a senior liaison for Vice President Gore with Members of Congress, promoting the Clinton/ Gore Administration's policy policies and directing the Vice President's activities and communication with U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives.

In addition to his formal professional roles, Paul Thornell has served as an informal advisor to Senate and House Democratic leaders and committee chairs in the effort to increase diversity among senior level staff on Capitol Hill. Frequently speaking before top Senate and House staff, convening discussion sessions on the topic with corporate executives and other thought leaders, and consulting with Senators and House Members, Thornell has demonstrated his commitment to creating a more diverse Capitol Hill. Paul Thornell has also volunteered on Presidential, Senate and House campaigns in Pennsylvania, Missouri, Colorado and Massachusetts.

Paul Thornell comes to us from Washington D.C where he lives with his family and works. As you can see, Paul has closely followed in the footsteps of his great-great grandfather, George Boyer Vashon. In the autumn of 1998 Paul Thornell's article, "The Absent Ones and the Providers: A Biography of the Vashons" appeared in the Journal of Negro History, Vol.83, No.4 at 284-301. It was exhibit "A" when Paul and his uncle, Nolan N. Atkinson, Jr., Vashon's great-grandson, were finally able to

have George Boyer Vashon officially admitted to the state bar by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court on Oct. 20th 2010. A quote from The Absent Ones, "It is clear from this story that those earlier Vashons, whom future family members never met, provided each generation of descendants with a legacy in which they took and continue to take pride. In this sense, the absent ones are also the providers."

## **Major Donors for the Vashon Monument**

Carolyn Atkinson Thornell

Paul Thornell

Gregory Robert Rhomberg

**A special Thank You for the design, production  
and installation of the Vashon Monument go to**

Ian and Dustin Damron of Monuments of St. Louis

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**Information compiled for this booklet was sourced from the following**

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Father Dickson Cemetery  
President of Friends of Father Dickson Cemetery, Ernest Jordan  
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and publicly available online sources.

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Volunteer at Father Dickson Cemetery