



Frank Carter
1856-1907
Enslaved at the Carter House

- 1856 January 2: Born in slavery, to Andrew Jackson “Jack” and Calfurnia “Callie” Parrish Carter in Franklin, Williamson County, Tennessee on the farm of Fountain Branch Carter.

- 1860 June 26: The United States Federal Census-Slave Schedule enumerated in Williamson County, TN showed Fountain Branch Carter owning twenty-eight slaves. There was only one four year old male listed, which was likely Frank.

NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS.	Number of Slaves.			DESCRIPTION.			Deaf & dumb, blind, lame, or idiotic.	No. of slave born.
	Male	Female	Total	Age	Sex	Color		
1								
	1	35	2	B				
	1	12	2	M				
	1	11	2	M				
	1	12	2	B				
	1	9	M	B				
	1	7	M	B				
	1	6	M	B				
	1	5	2	B				
	1	4	M	B				
	1	2	2	B				
	1	2	M	B				

¹Nashville Banner, Nashville, Tennessee, 10 Apr 1907, Wed, Pg. 10

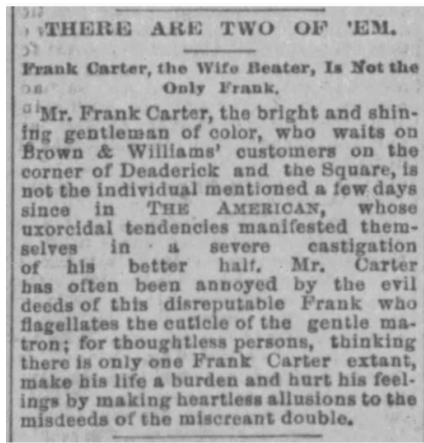
²The 1860 United States Federal Census-Slave Schedule (accessed on ancestry.com)

- 1870 June 21: The United States Federal Census enumerated in Williamson County, TN showed Frank lived with his parents and siblings, Charles, Sarah, Petronella, and Harris. His father's occupation was listed as farmer and had a value of personal estate in the amount of \$500.00.³ Frank's occupation was listed as farmhand.
- 1871 The Common School records for District 9 in Williamson County listed Black parents and how many children they had attending school in the district. Jack Carter was listed as having four children in school. Frank would have been one of those children.⁴
- 1880 June 2: The United States Federal Census enumerated in Davidson County, TN showed Frank living with his wife Martha. His occupation was listed as waiter.
- 1881 The Nashville City Directory showed Frank and his brother Horace worked together as waiters at 11 N Cherry St.
- 1882 November 10: Frank's brother Horace died from Congestive Fever. He was buried at Mt. Arayat.
- 1887 April 6: Frank Carter and Martha Petway had a son, Frank Carter, Jr. in Nashville, Davidson County, TN.
- 1889 Frank Carter was listed in the Nashville City Directory. He worked for A Hemphill & Co. as a waiter.
- 1891 January 1: The Tennessee, U.S., Enumeration of Male Voters listed Frank, thirty-two years old, as a male voter in Davidson County.

³ \$500 in 1870 is equal to abt \$11,000 today.

⁴ Williamson County Historical Society Journal, No. 31 2000, pg. 166

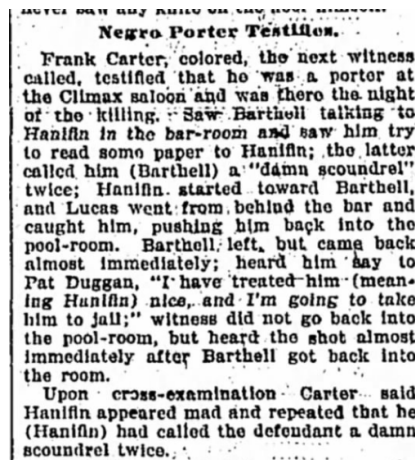
February 16: Frank was mentioned in The Tennessean Newspaper. Apparently, there were two Frank Carter's living in Nashville and the other gentleman seemed to get himself into trouble often.



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- 1892 The Nashville City Directory listed:
Carter, Frank (c), porter, h 417 S Cherry.
- 1893 The Nashville City Directory listed:
Carter, Frank (c), porter, 210 N Cherry, h S Cherry nr Broad.
- 1894 The Nashville City Directory listed:
Carter, Frank (c), wks, 210 114 S Front., h Kirkman nr S Cherry.
- 1895 The Nashville City Directory listed:
Carter, Frank (c), porter, 210 N Cherry, h Kirkman cor S Cherry..

February 17: Frank worked as a Porter at a saloon in Nashville called the Climax. He was a witness in the Murder trail of Tim M. Hanifin vs. Alex Barthell that took place at the saloon.



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⁵ The Tennessean, Nashville, Tennessee, 16 Feb 1891, Mon, Pg. 2

⁶ The Tennessean, Nashville, Tennessee, 17 Feb 1891, Wed, Pg. 5

February 21: Frank became a famous bear fighter under the name of Frank Wilson. His first fight was in Nashville and upon winning was rewarded \$100.00 dollars.⁷

FIGHTS BEARS IN A RING.
**A COLORED GIANT WHO TACKLES
BRUIN HAND TO HAND.**

**Frank Wilson Claims Eighty-six Victories
Over Bears, Including Five Grizzlies—
How He Fights—The Champion in His
Line—Behavior of Bears in the Ring.**

NASHVILLE, Tenn., Feb. 10.—Frank Wilson, a colored man of giant size, is known hereabouts as the bear fighter. He is employed as night porter in the Climax saloon, the rendezvous of the men who follow the circuits of the Southern trotting and running races, which bring them to Nashville four times every year. His appearance is indicative of his profession. Across his nose is a great scar, a reminder of a heavy blow from a big brown bear. There are scars of rips and gashes and scratches on both sides of his face, and his ears, neck, and scalp bear marks of his combats in the arena. His great hands and arms bear scars and marks of teeth on his left shoulder show where a bear tried to bite a chunk out of him. He is a big man physically, being over six feet in height and weighs in fighting condition about 185 pounds. There is not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon him, and though employed in a saloon, he never touches liquor of any sort.

Wilson's first bout with bruin occurred fifteen years ago. A band of Italians came through the city, and, after making the bear dance for the crowd, one of them offered \$100 to any man who would wrestle with or fight the bear, a beast that tipped the scales at 540 pounds. When the bear stood upon his hind feet he was two feet taller than Wilson, who was just 21 years old. A crowd of race-horse men and gamblers induced Wilson to go up against the big bear. The fight came off on a plot of ground beyond Vanderbilt University, where the Tennessee Centennial Exposition now stands. A twenty-four-foot ring was thrown up, and there were nearly 200 spectators. The negro was to fight the bear with his fists until he had aroused the beast into a fighting humor. Then he was to arm himself with a six-inch leaden billy.

⁷ \$100 in 1897 is equal to about \$3,500 today!

It was hard work to get the bear to stand up in the ring at first. Wilson walked up to bruin and struck him a blow on the left side of his head, followed by a punch in the short ribs. The bear roared with surprise and watched the negro cautiously, and it was with difficulty that Wilson found an opportunity to rush up behind him and plant two swift blows upon the back of his head. This put bruin more than ever upon the defensive, and he swung himself around to keep Wilson from a repetition of the rear attack. Wilson rushed at the bear as if to hit him upon the head, and the bear reared to meet the blow. Wilson ducked and delivered a terrific punch upon the bear's breast, but as he leaped backward to save himself the bear struck him upon the neck, cutting several gashes and knocking him forward right under the animal's feet. Instead of following up the attack at once the bear raised his head further and roared. Wilson crawled away and rose to his feet as the bear (now changing tactics), rushed upon him. The negro ducked and punched him again in the abdomen, and the bear howled and ran away. Wilson followed and was beating the bear over the nose and head, and victory seemed in his hands, when bruin's courage arose and he turned upon his tormentor with a roar and struck him full in the face, splitting his nose and knocking him six feet away. The bear again refused to follow up his advantage. Water was hurriedly thrown upon Wilson and a stimulant given him, and again he went at the huge beast.

He beat him viciously over the nose with the short, heavy billy until the bear began to run around the ring, bleating and howling, the negro rushing after him and putting in telling blows when he could reach the lumbering, swinging animal. Suddenly the bear came to a standstill, and, swinging out his terrible right, caught Wilson's head in his claws and slung him heavily against the side of the ring. The negro was picked up in a dazed condition, his head bleeding from the imprint of the great claws. The bear again roared, curiously watching the men as they ministered to Wilson. All the brute nature of the giant negro seemed to come to the fore as he renewed the fight, and before the bear could prepare himself for defence Wilson was beating his nose into a jelly. The bear again ran as best he could, the negro by his side, beating him over the head and nose. Finally bruin lowered himself on all fours and ran around the ring in the attitude of a whipped cur, amidst the shouts of the spectators. Then the referee declared the negro to be the winner of the fight. Wilson whipped the bear in thirty-two minutes.

This first victory of Wilson made a profession for him and has brought him considerable money. Other negroes have tried to fight bears, but have been ingloriously run out of the ring, and Wilson has become widely known as the "bear fighter." Barnum heard of Nashville's bear fighter and sent an agent here to investigate his prowess and ability. The agent was skeptical as to the negro's ability to thrash a bear, and doubted it so much that he bet \$500 that Wilson couldn't whip a grizzly. He had a grizzly shipped South, and the fight ended in twenty minutes. The bear made but a faint show of resistance after receiving a dozen terrific whacks over his ears, and set up such a bleating that he was carried from the ring. Wilson afterward offered to fight any bear in the world for a purse of from \$100 to \$500. His sporting friends backed him heavily, and during the years of his greatest activity won thousands of dollars through him. Once the Sells Brothers' shows came to Nashville, and a fight was arranged between Wilson and one of their big bears, but some one gave the managers a tip that Wilson would whip the bear in thirty minutes, and they took down the \$1,000 they had put up, giving Wilson \$50 forfeit. Wilson then offered to go up against two small bears for the \$1,000, but the managers crawled. So formidable did he become that several men in the mountains, who had captured wild bears to bring down against Wilson, gave their whipped animals away and went home minus the stakes they hoped to win. Country fairs engaged him to enliven their annual shows, and "bear fighting" day was the drawing card of their exhibitions. He charged \$100 and his expenses to appear at fairs.

For the last few years the bear fighter has had only five or six bouts, on account of his reputation, for no bear has ever yet run him from the ring. He has whipped in open combat eighty-six bears of every size, race, and condition. He has also whipped a big English mastiff in the ring, and goats without number. An enraged and disappointed fellow, who had put his money upon a big black bear, challenged Wilson to fight a ferocious mastiff in the ring. Wilson whipped the dog with three vicious blows with the billy, and the animal leaped from the ring and fled, yelping. Wilson said that when he entered the ring with the dog he knew he must not show any sign of fear, and must do his work quickly. He rushed upon the brute and smashed him so violently that fear seized the animal and he ran away, completely routed.

Many a goat has he bested. Any one who has ever witnessed a fight between a goat and a man knows it is a dangerous encounter for the man, though as funny a combat as can be incited. At first Wilson battered goats over the head, but of late years he has acquired the trick of lifting the maddened goat off his feet and slinging him violently on his back at the other side of the ring. A few upheavals of the sort will bring any goat to submission and amiability. It has been often suggested to train Wilson for a bull fighter, and take him to Mexico and Spain, but the colored gladiator will not agree to it.

Every show that comes to Nashville with a bear is challenged for a fight, but the showmen refuse to make a deal. Occasionally a strolling Italian will permit a purse to be made up, provided he gets a share of it, and a royal fight is had. But bears belonging to wandering Italians are not so fierce or full of fight as the caged beasts of the menageries. When a real fighting bear that has never been cowed by the brutal clubbing of his tramp master, is found, the fight affords sport. Wilson has whipped bears in as small space of time as four minutes, but it took him an hour and ten minutes once to whip a little skinny black bear. The bear had been secretly underfed and half starved for two weeks before the fight. This had made him ferocious and ravenous. Wilson mastered him in the longest fight he has ever had, but not until he had been clawed and gashed and knocked down five times. Since that experience he has refused to fight bears that have not been ordinarily fed before the combat. Fights have been so rare lately that Wilson stands ready and willing to whip any bear in the world for \$25 and expenses.

"Bears such as are carried around by Italians through the streets for the pennies they can pick up and the bears of the big circuses, which have been in confinement for a long time, do not expect to find a foe in a man," said Wilson. "They look upon men as their masters to begin with, and there is my advantage. Sometimes when I get in a ring with one it takes time and violent blows to show him that he must fight me. He has to realize that I am his foe. Many a time I have been in the ring with bears that refused to resent the cuffs I laid upon them, so completely cowed had they become by cruel treatment."

"I could not whip a bear with my fists or even with gloves. The nose and ears of a bear are the tenderest and most sensitive parts about the beast. Why, I've beaten them so heavily about their ears that they just quit fighting and spun around to stop the pain. After I've clubbed him until his brain is in a whirl I beat the bear over the nose until he is ready to give up. I have fought five grizzly bears in my time, and I never hit a grizzly anywhere except about the ear. If I beat his nose he would do me up in short order. But the grizzly bear can be whipped easily when you pound him over the ears.

"I'm a better bear fighter now than I ever was, and I'll try anything they bring against me until I get too old to get around. I'll fight two bears this winter, and when the Centennial opens up I'll make a pile of money giving exhibitions. I've learned a heap of things about bears since I went in the ring. The smaller a bear is, the fiercer fight he puts up. A little black bear is worse in a ring than the big brown or grizzly bear."

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1896 The Nashville City Directory listed:
Carter, Frank (c), porter, 210 N Cherry,.

1898 The Nashville City Directory listed:
Carter, Frank (c), waiter, The Climax, bds 321 Spruce.



⁸ The Sun, New York, New York, 21 Feb 1897, Sun, pg. 16

1899 January 29: Married Lizzie Price in Davidson County, TN.

Frank Carter is Married.
Frank Carter and Lizzie Price, colored, were married yesterday morning, Rev. T. M. Harrison officiating. Frank is the night porter at the Climax, and is known by a large number of people in the city. He has achieved considerable reputation as a "bear fighter," and as such has had his picture published in the New York papers. In slavery days he was owned by the Carters, at Franklin, whose house is near the site of the noted battle of Franklin, and still bears the marks of bullets. The couple will live at 609 Cumberland street.

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May 28: Frank went to Franklin to visit his mother. He had not been home in twenty-three years.

JOHN D. LONG, Secretary.
"Bear-Fighter" Frank Carter.
Frank Carter, better known about town as the negro "bear-fighter," leaves this morning to visit his aged mother, near Franklin. Frank belonged to Fountain Carter in the days before the war, whose house is on the battlefield of Franklin, and to-day bears the marks of the bullets of that memorable conflict. Frank has not been home in twenty-three years.

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1900 January 17: Frank's birthday was celebrated by his wife Lizzie.

Frank Carter's Dinner.
Frank Carter, well-known in Cherry-street circles as the renowned, colored "bear fighter," was the honoree of a birthday dinner yesterday, given by his wife, Mrs. Lizzie Carter. The delicacies of the season were served. Frank received the compliments of the day in the style of all great bear chasers.

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⁹ The Tennessean, Nashville, Tennessee, 30 Jan 1899, Mon, pg. 2

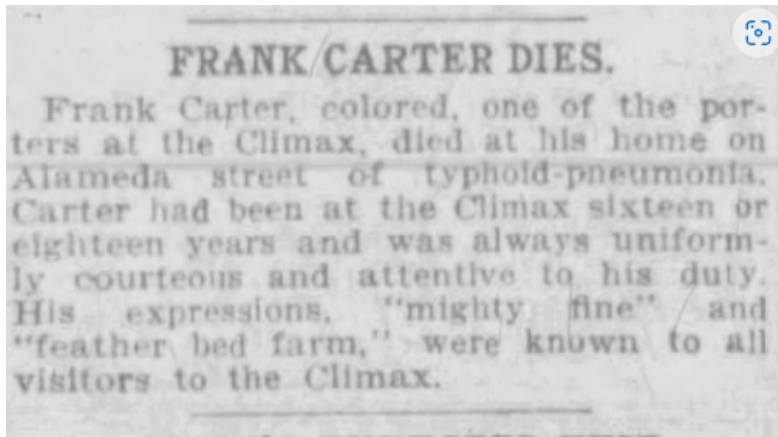
¹⁰ The Tennessean, Nashville, Tennessee, 28 May 1899, Sun, pg. 5

¹¹ The Tennessean, Nashville, Tennessee, 17 Jan 1900, Wed, pg. 2

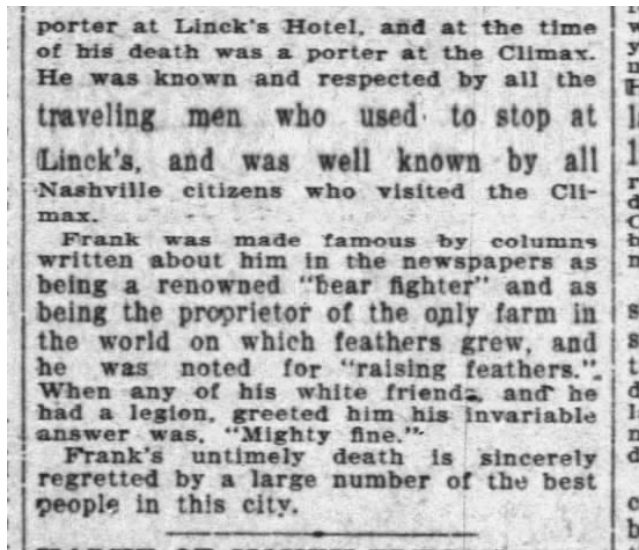
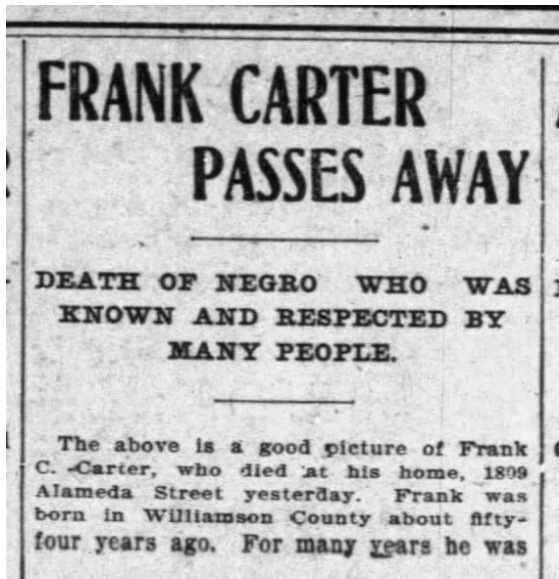
June 2: The United States Federal Census enumerated in Davidson County, TN showed Frank lived with his wife and step-daughter Sam Ella. Frank's occupation was listed as a Porter. Frank owned his home and could read and write by this time.

1902 Frank's mother Calfurnia Carter died. She was buried in Toussaint L'Ouverture Cemetery in Franklin. She was the first member of her family to have a headstone to mark her grave.

1907 April 9: Died in Nashville, Davidson County, TN from typhoid-pneumonia. Buried in Greenwood Cemetery.



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¹²The Tennessean, Nashville, Tennessee, 11 Apr 1907, Thu, Pg. 12

¹³ Nashville Banner, Nashville, Tennessee, 10 Apr 1907, Wed, Pg. 10

April 18: Frank's last will and testament entered probate court.

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✓
FRANK CARTER, deceased. WILL. Probated April 18, 1907.
Minute Book 10 page 67

I, Frank Carter, residing at No. 1809 Alameda Street in the City of Nashville Tennessee make this my last will.

I

I give, devise and bequeath my estate and property, real and personal, as follows, that is to say:- I give to My beloved wife Lizzie Carter all the personal property of which I may die seized and possessed of at the time of my demise.

II

I give, devise and bequeath to my said beloved wife Lizzie Carter for and during her natural life the parcel of land hereinafter described; and after her death to my son, Frank Carter, and Saniella Baltimore my wife's daughter as tenants in common in the remainder interest. Said property being my homestead and is described as follows, to wit

It being situate in the City of Nashville, and being Lot No. 23 in the subdivision of Lot No. 10, in the Harding - Lytle Tract as per plan in Book No. 57, page 159, Register's Office for Davidson County. The said lot fronts 50 feet on the south side of Alameda Street and runs back between parallel lines 162 feet to an alley, and is the same property conveyed to C. L. Ridley Jr. by A. M. Tillman, trustee, by deed of June 17th 1897 as appears of record in Book No. 222, page 72; I appoint my wife, Lizzie Carter, executrix of this will without bond.

In witness whereof, I have signed and sealed and published and declared this instrument as my last will.

Frank Carter.

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¹⁴ Tennessee, Wills and Probate Records, 1779-2008, Vol, 36, pg. 262 (accessed on ancestry.com)