

Ashley Shivers (1859-1937)

Ashley Shivers was born enslaved in Crocket County, Tennessee, in 1859. When he and his brother Thomas were 5 and 7 years old, their mother died, and they were fostered by an enslaved woman, Joana Joza. Near the end of the Civil War, the young family met a free Black man, Edmond Harris. Edmond married Joana and adopted Thomas and Ashley. The young family moved north to Revels Valley in Vernon County, Wisconsin.

Revels Valley was home to a variety of cultures and peoples ranging from former slaves, Native Americans, and people of mixed descent. Edmond Harris purchased land to farm. Thomas continued to farm and increased the acreage purchased by his stepfather.

Ashley became a barber and settled in La Crosse. He built a successful business and established himself in the community. Ashley's barber shops were in various locations in downtown and on the north side of La Crosse, but his best-known barber shop and home were at 418 Mill Street (today known as Copeland Avenue).

Many young Black men came to La Crosse to learn the barbering trade from the shops of the Birney, Shivers, and Moss families. Young Black men between the ages of 12 and 18 often dropped out of school to learn the trade at barber shops. Master barbers spent their time teaching their apprentices to read, write, and how to run a business. Master barbers opened their homes to apprentices during their training, and once they were ready to move on and start their own business, the master barbers often sent them on their way with enough funds to begin. At this time, it cost approximately \$20 for a young barber to begin their own business.

Ashley Shivers and Ellen Waldon were married in 1890 in Revels Valley and moved to La Crosse that same year. Ellen Waldon was born in Revels Valley and is the older sister of Emma Waldon, wife of Zachariah H. Moss. Ellen and Ashley Shivers were married in Revels Valley in 1890 and moved to La Crosse the same year. Barber shops often served a small breakfast with morning shaves, and it is likely that Ellen prepared this food. Most wives shampooed hair and did manicures in the barber shop. Later, when it became fashionable for men to have styled hair, women were the stylists. By 1905 Ashley moved his barber shop out of their home, and Ellen opened a small café offering breakfast and lunch. Their home at 418 Mill Street also had a few rooms set aside for boarders.