

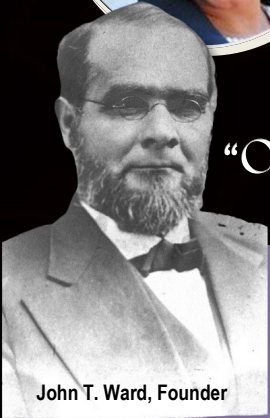
The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

E.E. Ward Moving and Storage Co.

(1881 – Present)

“Oldest Continuously Operating Black-Owned Business in the United States, Founder Aided in Underground Railroad”



John T. Ward, Founder

John T. Ward was a black man that was born free in Fauquier County, Virginia in 1820. His family moved to Columbus, Ohio when he was eight years old. In 1824, at the age of 22, he bought a farm-house with land and worked as a janitor in the old City Hall. Around the same time, John became an active member in the Underground Railroad. He originally belonged to the Second Baptist Church but left there to join the Anti-Slavery Baptist Church that worked more openly against slavery. Eventually the two churches would merge and continue the fight against slavery together. John began working with other anti-slavery advocates, including the Quakers, on the south-eastern side of Columbus. John used his two horses and wagon to transport slaves through the Underground Railroad. Many slaves traveled the long and dangerous corridor of the Underground Railroad, from southern states into Ohio, continuing to Canada in some cases. Slave catchers would also patrol the corridor, stopping and inspecting wagons and drivers. Although he was in constant danger, John would travel inconspicuously with horse and wagon for a half a day or even a full day to help the travelers get further up north to the land of freedom. John also offered his farmhouse, located in what is now known as Whitehall, east of Columbus, as safe refuge for the slaves on their journey.



MR. WARD (in buggy) and view of Wagon Shed.

John continued aiding enslaved people escaping the Confederate states, but his involvement was hindered by the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court in 1858 (which stated that although Scott lived in a free state, he was still a slave). Harsher Federal Laws were passed against anyone caught aiding “fugitive” slaves. During the height of the Civil War to its end in 1865, John worked as a contractor, moving supplies and equipment for the U.S. Army to the Union Army military staging and training camp Camp Chase.

In 1881, John T. Ward, along with his son William, founded the Ward Transfer Line in Columbus, Ohio moving property and goods for locals. “Let Ward Do It” was the common phrase used in the community, noting the reliability of the Ward reputation. Eventually John passed the company along to his son William Ward, who, in 1899, passed it on to his son, Edgar Earl (E.E.) Ward, Esq. The Company name changed to E.E.



Edgar Earl Ward, Esq.
Grandson of the Founder

Ward Moving & Storage Company and grew to include commercial moving and storage facilities. E.E. was an attorney and a great philanthropist. He was a key donor in the building of a Y.M.C.A. for black people in Columbus. They utilized horse teams until 1921 when they introduced trucks as a modern innovation to the business. Eventually, Eldon W. Ward, John T. Wards, great-grandson, would take over the business in 1945. Eldon would be the last Ward family

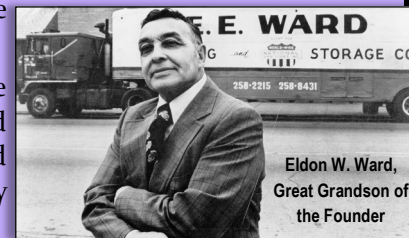


Left to right: James B. Ward, Marie Ward Smith, Delores Smith White
Harold E. Ward and to front: Eldon W. Ward

member to own the company, as he didn't have any children of his own. In 2001, Eldon W. Ward sold the E.E. Ward business to his godson, Brian Brooks. He and his wife continued the business with the same high levels of professional service since John T. Ward was in charge. With their ownership, E.E. Ward Moving & Storage, Co. is the oldest known continuously operating Black-owned business in the United States, as acknowledged by the U.S. Department of Commerce and recorded in the 2003 Congressional Record. In 2021, the E.E. Ward Moving & Storage Co. became the first Black-owned agent to receive the North American Van Lines Agent of the Year Award.



The Ward name and company has survived slavery, the Civil War, the Reconstruction Era, Jim Crow South, the Great Depression, two world wars, the Civil Rights movement, a recession, 27 presidential terms, and a pandemic, and never closed its doors. The company has recently expanded its operation to include Charlotte, North Carolina.



Eldon W. Ward,
Great Grandson of
the Founder