

## Isaac “Ike” Sanders (1878-1929)

Isaac Joshua Beasley Sanders was born in Little Rock, Arkansas on January 17, 1878.<sup>1</sup> He was the son of Lue (or Lewis) and Anna (Hoard) Sanders. He had one known sibling, his sister Lillie.<sup>2</sup> His second wife, Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark, recalled that he was named after the doctor and the others in the room when he was born.<sup>3</sup> His father was born in Massachusetts and his mother was Native American. It is thought that his father was a sheriff in Arkansas and eventually was killed while trying to apprehend a white man.<sup>4</sup> The era of Reconstruction in Arkansas was violent and many black elected officials were murdered.<sup>5</sup> However, no records of his father’s occupation or death have been found. It is thought that Ike (as he was known to most) moved to Massachusetts before moving to Bloomington sometime between the ages of 14 and 19.

When Ike was young, he took up boxing as a hobby. He fought under the names of “Kid Sanders” and “Young Dixon.”<sup>6</sup> An undated newspaper article states that Ike Sanders, known as “Young Dixon,” had recently returned from Little Rock, Arkansas where “he fought a draw of six rounds against Kid Sappho.”<sup>7</sup> According to “Young Dixon’s” final record, he fought several matches during his career from 1899-1908 and had one win (which was a knock out win) six losses, and one draw.<sup>8</sup>

Ike married his first wife, Allie Headley, on the evening of June 10, 1897 at her mother’s home located at 510 W. Clay Street in Bloomington.<sup>9</sup> Allie was born on February 15, 1874 and was the daughter of Isaac and Mary Headley. Ike and Allie had one child, a daughter named Lillian May Sanders. She was born on April 17, 1910 but died before her first birthday on December 30, 1910.<sup>10</sup>

Ike had a variety of occupations throughout his life including that of a successful businessman. In the 1897 *Bloomington City Directory* he was listed as working as a driver for Edgar D. Harber. Harber was one of the owners of the Harber Brothers Co. which was a manufacturer of carriages, wagons, and buggies.<sup>11</sup> By 1899 Ike had changed occupations and was working as a hostler, a person who takes care of horses or mules. By 1902 Ike and his wife Allie were working for the family of Adlai Stevenson I (former Vice-President of the United States under Grover Cleveland). Allie worked as a domestic servant and Ike worked as a servant and driver for the family. Allie and Ike lived with the Stevenson family at their home at 901 N.

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<sup>1</sup> Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)

<sup>2</sup> Research notes compiled by Denise M. Fries-Romack on Isaac J. Sanders

<sup>3</sup> Oral History Interview with Anna Clark, Henry Brown, and Luther Watson, 1985. Bloomington Normal Black History Project Box 7, Book 2, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>4</sup> Research notes compiled by Denise Fries-Romack

<sup>5</sup> *Who Killed John Clayton?: Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893*, Kenneth C. Barnes, 1998

<sup>6</sup> Bloomington Normal Black History Project collection, “Isaac Sanders,” Box 5, Folder 109, McLean County Museum of History

<sup>7</sup> “Two colored Fighters Preparing for Big Doings with well Known Pugs,” unknown newspaper, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project Collection, Box 5, Folder 109, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>8</sup> Boxing Record for Young Dixon 1899-1908, [boxrec.com/prt.php?human\\_id=222679&cat=boxer](http://boxrec.com/prt.php?human_id=222679&cat=boxer)

<sup>9</sup> Wedding Invitation of Allie Headley and Isaac Sanders, Bloomington Normal Black History Project Box 12, Folder 5, McLean County Museum of History Archives; 1897 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

<sup>10</sup> Headstone for Isaac Sanders, Allie Sanders, and Lillian May Sanders at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery

<sup>11</sup> 1899 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

McLean Street and worked for them for a few years.<sup>12</sup> Sometime around 1903 Ike quit working for the Stevenson family. According to Ike's second wife Lue Anna, she stated that one day Letitia Green Stevenson (wife of Adlai Stevenson I) told Ike to get the carriage ready to drive her to downtown Bloomington. After Ike had gotten himself cleaned up and ready to go, Mrs. Stevenson "went upstairs and threw a big rug down and hollered down and told him to beat that rug." That made Ike very mad because he had just gotten cleaned up. Ike went to the Stevenson's, demanded the money that was owed to him for his work, and quit right on the spot. Both Adlai and Letitia pleaded with Ike to stay but that was the final straw. He took the money they paid him and went on to start his own business.<sup>13</sup>

After Ike and Allie quit working for the Stevenson's, Ike opened a restaurant and rooming house located at 306 S. Main Street.<sup>14</sup> It was known as "Ike Sander's Restaurant Short Order House." The restaurant not only provided good meals and courteous service, but provided people with boarding and lodging by the day or the week with clean and well ventilated rooms for reasonable prices.<sup>15</sup> Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark recalled that his restaurant served both blacks and whites and that Ike was well liked by all people in Bloomington which was likely why his business was so successful. Ike and Allie continued to run the restaurant until 1911 when Allie passed away. Shortly after Allie's death Ike sold the restaurant and moved back to Boston, Massachusetts where his sister Lillie was living.<sup>16</sup> It was while living in Boston that Ike got into serious legal trouble.

On the night of Wednesday, December 20, 1911 Ike's sister Lillie showed up at his home at 52 West Canton Street needing his help. According to newspaper accounts, Lillie was living with a man named Frank Williams whom she believed she was married to. She came to find out that Williams had lied to her about them being married. He was also extremely abusive to her.<sup>17</sup> That evening Lillie claimed that Williams had taken her by the neck and threatened to kill her. She fled to Ike's house for protection because she could no longer endure the abuse Williams had inflicted upon her. The next evening (Thursday, December 21) Isaac and Lillie returned to her home to gather her belongings. They then proceeded to go to Williams' laundry store to "effect an understanding" with him. Sanders confronted Williams which resulted in a serious argument between them. Sanders then drew a gun and shot Williams. Sanders took off running and Williams chased after him before finally collapsing and dying in the street. Sanders was caught by two patrolmen a short time later. He tried to resist but was subdued by the two officers. Sanders was then taken back to the police station and held on the charge of murder. Charles Zolla (who owned the business next door to Williams' laundry) was brought to the police station as a witness. Zolla stated that he heard four gun shots fired. This was confirmed when the police officers found the chamber of Sanders' revolver at the scene of the crime. The gun showed evidence that four shots had been fired. When Sanders was searched back at the police station, "plenty of ammunition was found on his person." When Lillie was questioned why her brother "carried a loaded revolver" to Williams' store, she refused to answer.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 1902 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

<sup>13</sup> Oral History Interview with Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark (about Ike Sanders and Black Business), late 1980s, Bloomington Normal Black History Project, Box 7, Book 2, McLean County Museum of History Archives.

<sup>14</sup> 1904 *Bloomington City Directory*

<sup>15</sup> Business card for Ike Sanders Restaurant and Short Order House, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 4, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>16</sup> Oral History Interview with Lue Anna Sanders Brown Clark

<sup>17</sup> "Pled Guilty of Manslaughter: Alleged Murderers Sent to Jail," *Boston Daily Globe*, May 21, 1912

<sup>18</sup> "Slain At His Store: Williams Shot in Dover St.," *Boston Daily Globe*, December 22, 1911

Ike was indicted on a charge of second degree murder. In his defense, several men from Bloomington wrote letters of character reference for him. The letters showed that Ike had no history of breaking the law. This could help Ike receive a fair trial or possibly a reduced sentence. Ike knew many prominent men in Bloomington. He received letters from former employers, patrons of his restaurant in Bloomington, and former and current police officers. The police magistrate of the City of Bloomington, W.B. Hendryx, wrote that he took pleasure in endorsing Ike as a peaceable and honest man.<sup>19</sup> Chief of Police Fred Lang wrote in his letter that he had known the “colored man” Ike Sanders for 10 or 12 years. He said that Ike was never “in any trouble of any kind since I have known him, he was always a hard working young man.” He closed his letter stating that any courtesy shown towards Ike would be greatly appreciated by him and “scores of Ike’s white friends.”<sup>20</sup> Even Illinois State Senator Frank H. Funk wrote a letter to the States Attorney in Boston. Funk felt it was his duty to write a letter on Ike’s behalf as Ike was probably “without any friends in Boston” that would aid in his defense. Senator Funk stated that he knew Ike from when he [Ike] worked for his neighbor, Adlai Stevenson I. He stated that Ike was well known throughout Bloomington to be “an honest colored man” who was respected by citizens. He also said that Ike was never in any trouble and was not of a quarrelsome disposition.<sup>21</sup>

These letters must have helped Ike in his predicament because his case was never brought to trial. Ike pled guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter<sup>22</sup> and on May 20, 1912 Ike was sentenced by the Suffolk County Superior Court to serve three years in the House of Correction.<sup>23</sup> Two years later in May of 1914, Ike’s case was brought up before the pardon committee.<sup>24</sup> It was reported in the *Boston Daily Globe* that the dismissal of Ike’s pardon was held over for one week for the committee to reconsider.<sup>25</sup> However, it does not appear that his pardon was approved and it is believed that he served out the remainder of his three year sentence in Boston.

After his release from jail, Ike returned to Bloomington around 1915 and opened another restaurant. This lunch room was located at 410 South Main Street.<sup>26</sup> In February of 1916 an advertisement appears in *The Weekly Advertiser* (a local African American publication) that lists Ike’s pool room and café at 107 S. Main Street in Bloomington, in the central business district.<sup>27</sup>

A few months later during the summer of 1916, Ike opened the last restaurant he would operate, the Workingman’s Club (also known as the Colored Men’s Club) of the City of Bloomington. The restaurant was first located at 408 S. Main Street. In order to open his restaurant at that location, Ike (because he was African American) had to get permission from the citizens and businessmen in the 400 block of South Main Street. In the statement, the people who lived and worked on that block stated that they were willing to allow Ike’s Workingman’s

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<sup>19</sup> Letter from W.B. Hendryx, January 18, 1912, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 5, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Fred Land, Chief of Police, December 28, 1911, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 5, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>21</sup> Letter to The State’s Attorney, Boston from Senator Frank H. Funk, December 29, 1911, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 5, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>22</sup> Email correspondence from Margaret Sullivan, January 10, 2012

<sup>23</sup> “Pled Guilty to Manslaughter,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 21, 1912

<sup>24</sup> “Hearings on Pardons,” *Boston Daily Globe*, May 26, 1914

<sup>25</sup> “Council Committee Hearing,” *Boston Daily Globe*, June 4, 1914

<sup>26</sup> 1915 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

<sup>27</sup> Advertisement for Ike Sander’s Pool Room and Café, *The Weekly Advertiser*, February 13, 1916

Club to open.<sup>28</sup> The club was at this location for a short time until Ike moved the club to 1101 W. Washington Street around 1917<sup>29</sup> where it remained until he was forced to close in late 1919.

Shortly after he opened the Workingman's Club, he married his second wife, Lue Anna Brown. They were married on May 10, 1917 in Bloomington by Judge James C. Riley.<sup>30</sup> They had no children. Lue Anna was born on January 26, 1892 in Bandana, Kentucky. She was the daughter of William and Laura Brown. Her father William was a slave and the son of his mother's master. Lue Anna came to Bloomington in 1916 for a housekeeping job at the home of Albert M. Kitchell who ran an ice cream parlor. She worked for Kitchell until she married Ike.<sup>31</sup> She and Ike worked as equal partners at the Workingman's Club.

The Workingman's Club was open 7 days a week from 7:00 a.m. to midnight. The Club "provided rooms, recreation, and food for the working man." At first the Club was a "private affair." Men who wished to come in would sign their name in the book and give a \$1.00 per year membership fee.<sup>32</sup> However, Lue Anna recalled that after awhile everybody came in. She said "you know how people are. They just rush in whether it's private or not."<sup>33</sup> Not only did the Workingman's Club have a restaurant, but it also had a pool hall, barbershop, and rooms for working men to stay in overnight. While Ike was the President of the Workingman's Club (managing the pool hall, the barbershop, the drinks, and all of the finances) he gave Lue Anna control over the restaurant. Lue Anna recalled that meals were served whenever anyone came in, including breakfast. She said there were three small tables in the restaurant and she helped cook and serve customers. Lue Anna remembered that they did not serve "fancy foods" such as greens, chitilins, barbeque ribs, or potato pie. Pig feet and pig ears were favorite menu items, but they "served most anything customers wanted including beef stew, hamburgers, neckbones," and fish every Friday.<sup>34</sup> They also served Bohemian, Crown, and Budweiser beers.

Lue Anna recalled that a lot of the men who came to the club worked in the coal mine or the Chicago and Alton railroad shops in Bloomington. She went on to say that most of the men were married men that would come by to buy their food and drinks and then go home. She said that their Club was the only place in town where black men were able to stay overnight for \$1.00 per night. Men could stay by the day or the week. Women were allowed to visit and eat in the restaurant but they were not allowed to stay overnight. Ike's club served both blacks and whites. Since there was a small percentage of blacks in the overall population and there were very few African-American business owners, the majority of Ike's business would have been white.<sup>35</sup> However, Lue Anna said the reason everyone came to their club was because Ike was well liked and highly thought of in the community. She recalled that "we had a lot of white trade. He [Ike] was a friendly type man, and everyone knew him, white and colored, and they came from all over town."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> "Statement of support for Ike Sander's Workingmen's Club," June 13, 1916, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 7, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>29</sup> 1917 *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*

<sup>30</sup> Research notes by Mildred Pratt, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 1, McLean County Museum of History Archives

<sup>31</sup> Emilie Krebs, "Black History in residents' stories," *The Pantagraph*, June 18, 1985

<sup>32</sup> Membership card for The Workingman's Club, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project, Box 12, Folder 7

<sup>33</sup> Oral History Interview with Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark, late 1980s

<sup>34</sup> Krebs, "Black History in residents' stories."

<sup>35</sup> Oral History Interview with Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark, late 1980s

<sup>36</sup> Oral History Interview with Anna Clark, Henry Brown, and Luther Watson, 1985

Lue Anna recalled that Ike worked very hard and was very proud of his Workingman's Club. She said that they did not have a lot of free time while running the club and said that she enjoyed any chance they got for relaxation which usually came in the early morning hours before the restaurant opened. She said that they would take walks early in the morning and would walk all over town sometimes covering two or three miles.<sup>37</sup>

When Ike was forced to close the Workingman's Club in 1919, Lue Anna it was because an African American man by the name of Henry Burton had purchased the building from the previous owner. Burton would not renew Ike's lease because he wanted to subdivide the building and rent out all of the rooms.<sup>38</sup> Lue Anna remembered that the loss of the business saddened Ike a great deal.<sup>39</sup>

After the club closed, Ike and Lue Anna lived at various addresses in downtown Bloomington during the last years of Ike's life. From about 1920 until 1923, they lived at 322 ½ South Main Street.<sup>40</sup> From 1924 until his death in 1929, they rented rooms at 402 ½ South Main Street.<sup>41</sup> It does not appear that Ike continued working after the loss of the Workingman's Club, but Lue Anna continued working becoming employed in the ladies room at Livingston's store where she worked for twelve years.<sup>42</sup>

On January 6, 1929 Isaac Sanders died in Bloomington, IL at the age of 51. It is not known what was the cause of his death. He was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery next to his first wife, Allie Headley Sanders, their daughter Lillie, and his mother-in-law Mary Headley.<sup>43</sup> Lue Anna lived another 63 years after Ike passed away until her own death on April 4, 1992. She was neither buried near Ike nor her second husband Alonzo Clark in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. Throughout all of the letters and interviews conducted about Isaac Sanders, there is nothing but positive feedback about his character. He was held in high regard as an honest, sober, upright, and a law abiding citizen<sup>44</sup> by both whites and blacks in the community.

By: Ken Schmidt, 2012

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<sup>37</sup> Krebs, "Black History in residents' stories."

<sup>38</sup> Oral History Interview with Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark, late 1980s

<sup>39</sup> Oral History Interview with Lue Anna Brown Sanders Clark, late 1980s

<sup>40</sup> 1922 and 1923 *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*

<sup>41</sup> 1923, 1926, 1928 *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*

<sup>42</sup> Krebs, "Black History in residents' stories."

<sup>43</sup> Evergreen Memorial Cemetery Burial Records for Sanders and Headley, [www.evergreen-cemetery.com](http://www.evergreen-cemetery.com)

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Edward Butler, undated, Bloomington-Normal Black History Project Collection, Box 12, Folder 5, McLean County Museum of History Archives.