



# THE HISTORIAN'S CORNER

written by Carol Egbo



## Moses Robens: From Farmer to Botanic Doctor

I was recently asked to put together some information about the history of the Oakland County Farmers Market. As is usually the case, my research took twists and turns.... and I ended up on the trail of a man named Moses Robens.

I found out the first county market was built in Pontiac on Mill Street around 1923. In 1952 it was moved to its current site in Waterford Township. I couldn't locate much information on the building itself so I decided to research the land on which the market was built. I decided to begin by finding out the original owner of the land. That took me to the website of the Bureau of Land Management where the original land patents are kept. I learned that a person named Moses Robens bought the land from the federal government on March 6, 1829. He paid about \$1.25 per acre for his 80 acres. But there was a problem. On an old map showing his land he was listed as Moses Robbins. Another historical record listed him as Moses Rubens! These different spellings became a challenge in finding out more about him but I was determined to learn more!

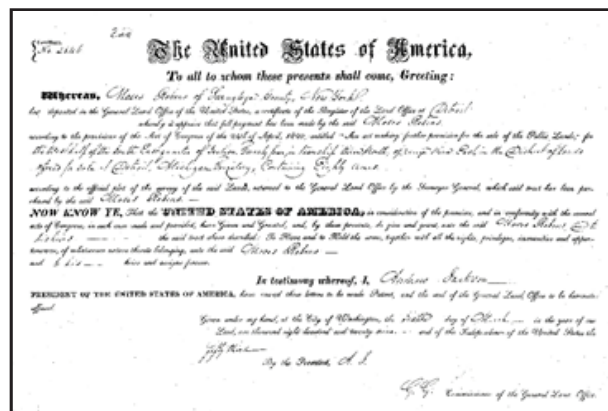


In the 1850 census, I located his family which included his wife Maria and their seven children. He was also listed in the Agricultural Census the same year. This showed he had three horses, three milk cows, two working oxen, six sheep, three pigs and was growing wheat and corn. It appears, however, that his farm was not very successful and sold at public auction

Moses and Maria pop up in the 1860 census in Grand Rapids, quite a big move from Waterford in those days! Moses is not a farmer, however. He is listed as a "botanic doctor." This was a self-proclaimed 'doctor,' also called an 'herbalist', who supposedly cured people with plants. His 'office' was located right where the Devos Place Conference Center is today.

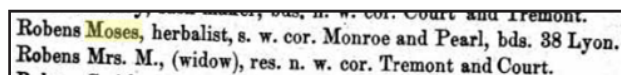
The Grand Rapids City Directory of 1867 lists him as an herbalist. This same document lists Maria as a widow! Census records from 1870 list the two of them as living on opposite sides of town! What happened between Moses and Maria? That remains a mystery!

The last record of Moses Robens that I could locate was the Grand Rapids City Directory of 1878 where he is listed as a physician. It is likely that he died around 1879 since he does not appear in the 1880 census. Maria does show up, however. She is living with her daughter Caroline's family in Walker, Michigan which is now a suburb of Grand Rapids. Maria lived to the ripe old age of 95 and died in Amesbury, Massachusetts where she was living with her daughter Maria's family. She is buried in Union Cemetery in Amesbury.



Moses Robens' land patent of 1829

161	140	Moses Robens	53	"	"	Botanic Doctor
		Maria Robens	42	f	"	



1867 Grand Rapids City Directory



Union Cemetery, Amesbury, MA