

Magruder, Tom
Marion County, Indiana

Allan M. Stranz
Federal Writers' Project
December 29, 1937

- References: A - William G. Sullivan's writings on the Noble family,
Geneology Section, State Library
B - Copy of the last will of Noah Noble, former Governor
of Indiana, Geneology Section, State Library
C - J. P. Dunn's History of Greater Indianapolis, 1910,
Lewis Publishing Company, pages 242, 243, 244.
D - Allan M. Stranz, Writer, Federal Writers' Project

An interesting Indianapolis Negro was Thomas Magruder, more familiarly known as "Uncle Tom", said to have been the inspiration for the hero in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin. Magruder, his wife Sarah, and their two children, Louisa and Moses, were the slaves of Thomas Noble, father of Noah Noble, one time Governor of Indiana. Thomas Noble lived first in Virginia and later in Boone County, Kentucky (A & C)

When the older Noble died on Feb. 14, 1817, all of his real estate was given to his sons and all his personal property, including a number of slaves, to his daughter, by the terms of the will. The slaves remained the property of the daughters, but apparently by agreement between the members of the family, Thomas and Sarah Magruder were given to the service of one of the sons, Noah Noble. When the widow of Thomas Noble died in 1837, the children agreed among themselves to set the old couple free. (A)

In 1831, Governor Noble brought Tom and Sarah to Indianapolis and built a cabin for them at the corner of Market and Noble streets. Later Louisa was brought here from Lawrenceburg, and Moses, who was a slave of the Noble family in Kentucky also was brought here to live with and take care of the elder Magruders. Another Negro, Peter Durr, who was formerly the slave of Judge Isaac Dunn of Lawrenceburg, Indiana, was brought here

by Dunn, and he lived with the Magruders. Martha, commonly called "Topsy", was the daughter of Louisa, who had been married. Although the aforementioned Negroes were free, as slavery was outlawed in Indiana in 1820 by a court decision, they worked as the servants of Noah Noble (A & C).

It was while these six Negroes, Tom, Sarah, Louisa, Moses, Peter and Topsy lived here that Harriet Beecher Stowe visited her brother (1840-1847) Henry Ward Beecher. The Beechers were friends of the Nobles and it is said that they frequently visited the Magruder cabin. It is believed by many that Mrs. Stowe received her inspiration for the characters in her novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin while visiting old "Uncle Tom" and his group. This supposition is based on the fact that six of the characters in the novel correspond to the members of the Magruder household, namely, Tom, Sarah, Louisa, Moses, Peter, and Topsy. The pious and religious character of Tom Magruder closely resembles the "Uncle Tom" in the novel. (C & D)

Another Negro servant of Governor Noble, mentioned in the novel, was Cuffie, formerly the slave of the governor's father. He was brought here in 1841 and worked for Noah Noble. Little is known about Cuffie, except that he must have been a valuable servant, as a provision was made for him in the will of Noah Noble. Tom and Sarah were likewise provided for in the will of Governor Noble. (A & B)

"Uncle Tom" died here on February 22, 1857, and on February 24, the Indianapolis Journal carried the following news item concerning him:

"To those unacquainted with 'old Tom' the most interesting circumstance connected with him is the probability that he gave the name and the leading features of the character to Mrs. Stowe's celebrated hero, of course no one knows that to be the case, but there are some circumstances which give it an air of probability. The coincidence of the character and the name are not much in themselves, but connected with the fact that Henry Ward Beecher, during his residence here, was a constant visitor of Uncle Tom's, well acquainted with his history, and a sincere admirer of his virtues, the coincidence becomes more suggestive. We have been told that Mrs. Stowe herself sometimes called to see the old man. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' too, was the name of his house among all his acquaintances, and was a familiar phrase here long before Mrs. Stowe immortalized it. At all events, we know that it is the impression with all the friends of Mrs. Stowe and her brother, in this city, that 'Old Uncle Tom' was the original or at least the suggestion of the hero of the cabin". (C)

Although Mrs. Stowe herself says that "Uncle Tom" was a composite character, it is believed by many that her acquaintance with the Magruder family had much to do with the selection of the characters around which her story was woven. (C & D)

Magruder, Tom

Hazel Nixon
District #6
Marion County, Indiana

Reference:

- (A) "Our Town", Indianapolis Times, by Anton Scherer, 5-26-36.
- (B) Philip Clements, Union Title Company, 155 E. Market.
- (C) Mr. Davis, Rm. 238, Historical Room, State House.
- (D) Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana, by WM. Wesley Woolen, Pub. by Hammond and Company, 1883, Page 61, State Library.
- (E) Mr. Myers, Office Mgr. Crown Hill Cemetery.
- (F) Noah Noble, Geneology, State Library.
- (G) Copy of Will of Noah Noble, Book B. Pages 160-161, State Library.
- (H) History of Greater Indianapolis, Vol. 1, Page 242 by Jacob P. Dunn.
- (I) Sketches of Prominent Citizens of 1876, with a few of the Pioneers of the state and county, who have passed away by John H. B. Nowlands, Pub. by Tilford and Carlon, 1877.
- (J) Journal, February 24, 1857.
- (K) Hazel Nixon, Field Writer.
- (L) Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe, compiled with her letters and journals by her son Charles E. Stowe, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, Indianapolis Library.
- (M) Henry Ward Beecher, "An American Portrait" by Paxton, Hibben Pub. by Geo. H. Doran Company, Indianapolis Public Library.
- (N) Old Houses in Indianapolis, by Agnes M. Hanna, State Library.

About 100 years ago an Uncle Tom Magruder (colored) lived at the Northeast corner of Market and Noble Streets. (A) (B) (C) (F) (G) (H)

At the same time Harriet Beecher Stowe came from Cincinnati, Ohio to visit her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, whose home was at Market and New Jersey streets, two blocks removed from Tom's cabin. (M)

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Tom Magruder had been freed by Christian Noble, sister of the late Noah Noble, Indiana's Fourth Governor and brought from Kentucky (Boone County, Bellevue) in 1831, to be supported by Noah, as also was his wife Sarah. Later their daughter Louisa came from Lawrenceburg to take care of them. (H) (F)

The late Governor Noah Noble, a Virginian by birth, also provided for the Magruders, Tom, Sarah, Louisa and Moses in his will, leaving the cabin at Noble and Market Streets, one acre of land there, and the income from the "canal farm", the latter now known as Golden Hill. (B) (F) (E)

There is no record available of the present burial place of Thomas Magruder, but his daughter Louisa, whose last home was at 424 Highland Avenue, is buried at the foot of Catherine Noble Davidson's grave at Crown Hill Cemetery, Lot 13, Section 1. There is another mound near her grave and the ground has the appearance of two sunken graves. Perhaps when the body of the late Governor Noble was removed from Green Lawn, where Tom was formerly buried, that his, Tom's body, was also interred on Lot 13, Section 1 at Crown Hill. (H) (E) (K)

During the latter years of Uncle Tom, both Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe were visitors to his cabin and friends of the Noble family. Henry W. Beecher spent much of his time at the "Governor's Circle" where he engaged in antics as well as serious talks with Uncle Tom. (M) (H) None of Beecher's friends denied the rumor that Uncle Tom was an influence for H. B. Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin". (M)

However, H. B. Stowe said that "Uncle Tom" in her book was a composite character, drawn largely from the experience of Josiah Henson, (H) (L) but that there was an Uncle Tom in Indianapolis that she did know

personally. He was deeply religious and H. W. Beecher referred to him in a sermon. The Noble family said that Mrs. Stowe was a regular visitor at Uncle Tom's. (J) (H)

Mrs. Stowe's brother Edward, of Boston, related so many sad instances of the events caused by the fugitive slave law and urged that she write something to counteract it. After she started Uncle Tom's Cabin in Brunswick, Maine, she wrote a few chapters at Boston while visiting her brother, Edward. (L) However, she related to her children that God wrote the book, that she saw Uncle Tom in a vision while at Communion at Bowdoin Chapel. (L) Her characters were universal types, she said, that her work showed the fundamental principle of the gospel as applied to the question of slavery. (L)

So many states claimed Uncle Tom and knew such a character portrayed that Mrs. Stowe wrote a key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, giving pertaining to specific instances related in her book. (L)

Remarks-: a perusal of Uncle Tom's Cabin, however, shows a strong influence of Indiana characters.

Names used are Indianapolis families - Fletcher (whose wife was a Bullard, cousin to Mrs. H. W. Beecher) (M) Merrills (Sam) St. Claire (Noah Noble's mother was an Elizabeth Claire (D) Sedgwick.

Farm of Hirman Baker, 1/2 mile west of Malott Park, station of Underground Railroad. (Hammonds Park) Beecher preached here some. Baker had a wheat bin where slaves hid. At night he took them to a Quaker settlement, Westfield. Mrs. Baker is mentioned in Uncle Tom's Cabin when Eliza is being helped by Quakers.

P.S. H.B. Stowe's first impression of cruelty to slaves was during a visit from Cincinnati to Kentucky. (L)