

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Slavery in Grant County

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Reprinted from the
Grant County Historical Newsletter
Winter, 2003-2004

www.nkyviews.com

SLAVERY IN GRANT COUNTY

Information for the following was obtained from an article written by John B. Conrad for FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST, June 6, 1996

Despite very determined efforts by abolitionists to end slavery in Kentucky, the state Constitution written in the late 1840's went to extreme lengths to protect "the right of property" and it was approved and adopted by the voters in 1849, of whom approximately 85 percent did not own slaves.

The slave schedules of the 1860 census for Grant County identify 698 slaves or about ten percent of the population. There were listed 321 males, 377 females. The slaves were the property of 188 owners. There were also 30 free Blacks in the county.

About one third of the owners kept one slave each, likely for personal service, but the majority belonged to owners actively engaged in farming or business. There were 54 owners of five or more slaves each. Of the 54, only four owned as many as 15 or more, they were **Hayden Kendall, Hannah Henderson, Overton Hogan and Alfred Kendall.**

A few slaves acquired expertise as carpenters, blacksmiths, horse trainers stone masons and bricklayers. Many Grant County slaves were taught simple arithmetic and to read despite fears that they might be contaminated by abolitionist propaganda.

The Civil War brought turbulent and dangerous times to Kentucky. The Federal military, who viewed any slave owner as a southern sympathizer, campaigned against slavery by issuing free passes to slaves, by enticing them to join the Union Army and through various regulations. Most Blacks recognized in the war an opportunity to lessen their burdens and they began taking advantage of the situation almost as soon as the war started. Their initiative was the basis for much of slavery's decline in Kentucky before the end of the war.

We don't know the particulars of how Grant County's newly freed Blacks fared after the war. Certainly many of them remained working as farm laborers for wages. Continuous employment however was a goal not easily attained. A major upset occurred in the summer of 1867 when Blacks in Grant, Boone and Kenton Counties were greatly agitated by a circulating rumor that they were to be re-enslaved. Many left the farms and congregated in Covington for a time.

When the census was taken in 1870, there were 219 fewer Blacks in Grant County, representing a 30 percent decrease in their population. Where did they go? Many Blacks fleeing from Grant County during the war years or immediately following, crossed the Ohio River to Indiana or Ohio.

Black citizens continued to leave the county as indicated in the school census. The earliest census taken in 1894-95 lists 218 Black students, by 1920 there were only 45.

Two examples of families who left Grant County appear in additional articles in the June 6, 1996 issue of FOOTSTEPS OF THE PAST:

Patricia Ann Lafridge Perry has documented the history of the **Oscar Leftridge** family. Oscar was born in 1844 in Grant County a slave of **Jonathan Hedger** of the Dowingville community. Oscar enlisted in the Union Army in 1864. He later married **Cynthia Brinegar**. They made their home in Switzerland County, IN.

The **Webb-Gilmore** family history, written by **Maxine Brown McMichel**, tells of **Nannie Webb** who was born a slave in 1853, owned by **William Webb** of Williamstown. She married **Levi Gilmore** who had been born a slave in Virginia, but became an ordained minister in the C.M.E. Church. They made their home in Williamstown, but their descendants live in other parts of Kentucky, in Ohio, and in Detroit, MI.

The FOOTSTEPS article by John Conrad concludes with many early Newspapers items about Grant County's Black citizens. The complete issue is available for reading at Grant County Library.