Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

A Brief History of Slavery In Boone County, Kentucky

By

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SLAVERY IN BOONE COUNTY

Slavery in the Ohio valley can be traced to some of the earliest explorations west of the Allegheny mountains. Christopher Gist explored the Ohio valley in 1751. His companion and only companion was a negro slave. (1) Slavery definitely existed in the earliest settlements in this state. (2)

The date of the first appearance of slavery in the three adjacent counties of Boone, Kenton, and Campbell, is very difficult to trace. This is the northermost part of Kentucky that extends into Ohio due to the trend of the Ohio river. These were not among those areas which were settled earliest in Kentucky. By the time the westward migration had reached this region, the Gateway to the Bluegrass, the type of settler had changed. The ones then entering the territory were of classes and station of the slave owning group and brought their slaves with them to their new home. (3)

Kentucky was a land of small slaveholders. The state ranked ninth in slave population but ranked third in the number of slaveholders. Slavery in Kentucky was regarded as a constitutional right rather than its economical aspect. Kentucky produced more slaves than it could use, consequently, a flourishing slave trade with the "Deep South" resulted. Kentucky was reported in 1840 to be supplying 6,000 slaves a year to the South. (4)

An exact date regarding the first slaves in this area cannot be established. "Shortly before 1790", three flat-bottomed boats loaded with cattle, horses, and negroes of the Reverend John Tanner sailed down the Ohio. He was the first settler of Boone County. (4-a) He left a settlement on the Elkhorn in Central Kentucky and settled near the mouth of the Great Miami river. In the summer of 1794, John Tanner ran a Keel-boat from his station to Fort Washington for the purpose of supplying the federal troops at that fort with provisions. While rounding an island in the Great Miami, near the mouth of Whitewater, the Indians fired on his boat from ambush. Tanner's bowman, a colored man, was killed. That island ever since goes by the name of Negro Island. (5)

Captain John Brown, formerly of Somerset County, New Jersey, settled at Sugar Grove (North Bend, Boone County) soon after the Revolutionary War. This location is directly across from the Columbia Gas & Electric Plant on the Great Miami river. Before Captain Brown's death in 1789, he accumulated a good estate with several dozen slaves. Zebulon Montgomery Pike, the western explorer and discoverer of Pike's Peak, made frequent visits to Sugar Grove. He later married Clarissa Brown, daughter of Captain John Brown. (6)

Another reference to the early slavery in this area can be found in the diary of Captain Phillip Buckner who " . . with several of the negroes dropt (sic) down to Parson Tanner's Station for Bacon and cates (sic). This was the site where Petersburg, Boone County, is now located. (7)

The earliest Boone County Court was held on June 17, 1799. At this session, a sheriff, four justices of the peace, a clerk, a coroner, and a surveyor were appointed. It was decided that the "seat of justice" would be established on Woolpert's (sic) Creek at a place called Craig's Camp. Roads were ordered to be surveyed from the seat of justice to the ferry, to Tanner's Station, to Bullittsburgh, and to be reported on the next court session. (8) The first Boone County Court record of slavery appeared soon thereafter. A bargain of sale (or indenture) was recorded in the September, 1799, court session. The sale was from Johnathan and Thomas Markland to Caleb Summers. (9)

The first census of Kentucky, a tax list of 1790, revealed 61,133 whites; 12,430 slaves; and 114 "free black". (10) The chattel of this period probably were not too dissatisfied. They worked in the fields, fought Indians, and were closer to the master and his family than later slaves. One thing in favor of the early slave was the improbability of being sold. There was no one within a reasonable distance to buy him. (11)

There were early laws governing slaves. One of the severest penalties was an act passed in 1798. If any negro, mulatto, or Indian was convicted of any offense within the benefit of the clergy, the death sentence would not be passed but the guilty party was to be "burnt in hand" by the jailer in open court and suffer any other coporal punishment that the court deems necessary. (12)

One of the most interesting points of slavery is to know what the term "slave" included. Every person who had one-fourth or larger part of negro blood was deemed a "mulatto" and the word negro when used in any statute was was to be construed to mean mulatto as well as negro. (13) By 1860, 13% of the negroes were mulattoes. (14) This constitutes a basis for some authors to believe that the institution of slavery was only a harem.

A law was passed in 1833 by the Kentucky legislature prohibiting the importation of slaves into Kentucky. The law was repealed in 1848, allowing a person to purchase slaves and bring them into the state. (15) On February 3, 1849, the House of Representatives of Kentucky passed a resolution by a vote of 93 to 0, "that the people of Kentucky were opposed to the emancipation or abolition of slavery in any form except as currently provided in the state constitution and by-laws of the state" (16) Two years later a law was passed stating who was to be deemed a slave.

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"No persons shall be deemed a slave in this state, except such as are now slaves by the laws of this Commonwealth or some other state or territory of the United States or such free negroes as may be sold into slavery under the laws of this state and future descendents of such female slaves" (17)

The 1800 census of Kentucky revealed 1,194 whites, 325 slaves, and 15 free black in Boone County; Campbell County had 1,612 whites, 279 slaves, and 12 free black. The total population of Kentucky at this time was 179,873 whites, 40,343 slaves, and 739 free negroes. (18)

Kentucky was one of the three states that allowed slaves to be taught to read and write. An educated slave was thought to be a potential leader of insurrection. Most slave states had laws against mistreatment of chattel. Slaves were well fed as far as to quantity and their clothing was usually adequate. (19)

On March 2, 1808, the Boone County Court was called to hear a charge of murder against a slave-owner. The master, Lodick Campfield, admitted beating his colored boy early one morning because the boy had "dirtied" himself. Later in the day, a passer-by found the boy dead. (20)

It is difficult to determine the price of a slave. The price varied according to local, state, and federal laws. The escape attempts had a tendency to reduce the price of a slave. (21) Those living in counties along the Ohio river probably were not too valuable for slave trading purposes. A bill of sale dated March 8, 1811, stated that Dayliss Cloud of Boone County for the sum of $160, "...do hereby (sic) bargain sell and deliver a certain negro girl named Sharlot the girl supposed to be aged five years and six months old" unto Robert Kirtley of Boone County. (22)

The "North Western Spy", a Cincinnati newspaper published in 1813-1814, ran the following articles: "Sam Mosby has a likely negro wench he would trade for horses, cattle, or both" (23) On December 30, 1839, Jacob Crigler of Boone County purchased a negro woman named Tinie for $180. (24) On January 8, 1855, seven slaves were sold to settle the estate of persons who were deceased (in Boone County); low price was $1,015 and the high price was $1,505 at this sale. (25) Reverend William Carpenter was the first pastor of the Hopeful Lutheran Church in Boone County. (26) The Carpenter will was recorded in the county records on September 27, 1831. Upon the event of Rev. Carpenter's death, his servants, Ben and his wife Caroline, were to be freed. They were to be allowed to live on the farm of Carpenter's son so long as they did not entertain or harbor (sic) black people or any suspicious characters. The rest of Rev. William Carpenter's slaves were to be sold among his own

children and not among strangers. Rev. Carpenter had only nine slaves with a total value of less than $2,200.00.(27)

The counties bordering on the Ohio River were most noted as an escape route for runaway slaves. The state law allowed counties, especially those bordered by the Ohio, to establish slave patrols in order to re-capture the runaways. (28) Men from 16 to 60 served on the patrol. They searched negro cabins for guns and poison; set a curfew for negroes; forbade negroes to gather in large numbers and saw that there was a white man in any group of negroes numbering over five. (29) The main purpose of the patrol was to guard the river bank to prevent runaway slaves from escaping across the Ohio River into free states.

The patrols were paid by the order of the county court and received $1.00 for every ten hours of duty. The captains of these patrols had the authority to punish captured slaves by any number of lashes, not exceeding ten. The slave could be taken before a justice of the peace, who could order the slave to be punished by as many as thirty-nine lashes. (30)

For every runaway caught in the county in which the owner of the slave lived, the patrol received twenty-five dollars. If the runaway was caught in another county, the patrol received fifty dollars. The slaveowner had to pay these fees. (31)

The funds established to pay the patrols were created by a poll-tax on each slave in the county. The tax could not exceed $1.00 on each chattel and this fund could not be used by the county for any other purpose. (32)

When a runaway slave was captured, he was put into the county jail. The jailer had to advertise him in a newspaper nearest the slave's residence, giving an accurate description. If the owner failed to claim his slave within six months, the court appointed two men to fix a value on the slave. The community was notified that the runaway was to be sold, the time and place of the sale, and the smallest amount for which the slave would be sold. (33)

Robert Kirtley, Lawrence Sanford, Thomas Tousey, and James Dickens were appointed patrolers by the Boone County Court of September 26, 1808. They patroled an area between Woolperts (sic) Creek and Elijah's Creek (in Boone County). (34)

Once a group of Boone County slaves were operating a trade of stolen merchandise with traders across the river. The goods were stolen from their masters and sold to dealers in Indiana. A patrol caught the slaves in the act. The slaves exposed the ring after being severely whipped. (35)

Boone County patrolers caught Kirtley's negro Ben, without a pass and gave him a severe "cowhiding". (36) The name Kirtley appears frequently in early Boone County Court records.

Col. John J. Flournoy lived in the "big house" in Petersburg. He received a clock from Philadelphia. Mrs. Parker's black man,, Jack, went to see the clock on a Sunday. When Jack returned home he said that "he heard it strike seventeen times and it still kept clocking". (37)

An early Boone County resident, Thomas Allen, sent one of his black boys to the watermill on Woolpert's Creek. A grist of corn was saddled to one side of a horse and a rock on the other side to balance it. The horse became frightened and threw the "nigger, rock, corn, and all off". The rock fell on the colored boy, hurting him badly. (38)

Covington, Kenton County, was settled in 1812 as a ferry crossing. There was only a tavern at this time. Three years later a town was laid out and named in honor of General Leonard Covington (1768-1813). General Covington died of wounds received during a battle at Chrystler's Field. In 1834 Covington was chartered as a city. (39) Countless slaves from this area crossed the Ohio to Cincinnati on this ferry. Some slaves enjoyed many priviledges; among them was a "standing pass" to cross on the ferry-boat to Cincinnati. Occasionally an opportunity was given for slaves to make a little money for themselves. (40)

Newport, Campbell County, was settled late in the 18th century. Newport was laid out in 1791 and incorporated as a town in 1795. The city of Newport was chartered in 1834. Newport Barracks, a Federal garrison, was established in the town in 1804, and remained there for ninety years. The barracks were abandoned in 1894. (41)

A negro man and his wife, slaves of a Newport merchant, had accumulated over $300.00 in twelve years by marketing eggs and other small items in Cincinnati. The money was deposited in a Covington bank. The cashier of bank knew the laws of Kentucky did not allow him to deal with slaves. Being well acquainted with this couple, the cashier gave them his individual note to be cashed on demand. The slave couple learned that they were to be sold in the far South, and decided to escape from their master. After they had successfully escaped from their master, the total amount of their savings was forwarded to them by the bank cashier. (42)

William S. Bailey, of Newport, Kentucky, owned and edited the anti-slavery newssheet, "The Weekly Free South". He was openly attacked for his allegded views on John Brown's Raid. His office was set on fire and destroyed by an angry mob of slaveholding

sympathizers. The presses were smashed and the type was dumped into the Ohio River. (43)

"Hangman's Tree" is located on Burlington Pike, just east of Crosses Farm Store on the same side of the road. There are many versions of the story regarding this tree, and whether or not this is the exact tree. The story most accepted is that a young colored lad was hanged from this tree because of accusations of a white woman. After the boy was dead, the woman was supposed to have admitted that her story was false. (44)

The Ohio River usually constituted a barrier to runaway slave attempts. In severe winter the river would freeze solid and make a convenient footbridge to freedom. (45) During the remainder of the year wooden skiffs were conveniently located in secluded areas along the river bank.

Generally, the farther north a fugitive traveled, the more friends he found. Many runaway slaves thought they were just as safe in Northern Michigan as they were in Canada. A large colony of colored fugitives sprang up in Young's Prairie, Michigan. Several of the families were from Boone County. There were Southerners spying on escaped slaves in the North just as there were Northern abolitionists in the South. Masters of the Boone County slaves learned of the whereabouts of their runaways through the efforts of a spy. A plan was formed to sieze the negroes of Young's Prairie and return them to Kentucky. Thirty men set out from Boone County with wagons,(to transport the negro women and children) to re-capture the runaways. Upon reaching Young's Prairie the group spread out for a simultaneous raid within a pre-designated area. In one party of marauders was a Baptist minister who claimed a negro man and his wife. A child had been born to this negro couple since they had left Kentucky. Upon reaching the negro cabin, the negro was siezed after putting up stiff resistance. His wife escaped during the scuffle and spread the alarm to a nearby town. The minister grabbed the negro child, claiming it as his property and "worth at least $200.00" in Kentucky at this time. Soon, two hundred outraged villagers met the armed Kentuckians. The Kentuckians were greatly outnumbered and released the fugitives without a fight. The Boone Countians were arrested for kidnapping and lodged in the local jail until the negroes were well on their way to Canada. (46)

A young slave girl from Boone County was largely responsible for making the whole community of West Elkton, Indiana, anti-slavery and a prominent station on the Undreground Railroad. She ran away from her home in Boone County after having learned that she was to be sold to the deep South. She hid in a large straw pile near her master's barn. Previous arrangements had

been made for air and a winding passage with a concealed entrance by which her fellow-servants could feed her. She remained here for six-weeks while her master and a large possee of men searched the countryside for her. She heard her master cursing as they returned from the fruitless search. When the hunt was over, she stole out of her hiding placeand made her way safely to the Ohio River. She crossed the river in a skiff and reached the house of a family of abolitionists in Cincinnati. When it was felt safe to leave Cincinnati, she was accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Levi Coffin. The three left Cincinnati and stopped overnight in Hamilton. Except for the Quaker bonnet that Mrs. Coffin wore, the young slave could have passed for Mr. Coffin's wife. The next day, Sunday, the three continued to West Elkton. When the news circulated around that there was a fugitive slave in the area, the townspeople were reluctant. After seeing the beautiful young mulatto runaway from Boone County in a public exposition at West Elkton, the town soon became one of the best Underground Railroad depots. (47)

A group of twenty-eight runaways crossed the Ohio River at Lawrenceburg, Indiana. The conductor of this operation, John Fairfield, was a white man. The slaves all lived in the same neighborhood in Kentucky. Fairfield had been in the neighborhood several weeks "buying poultry for market". His fellow whites assumed him to be pro-slavery and the negroes feared him. The negroes soon found that he was their friend. One night Fairfield conducted a party of twenty-eight to a point on the Ohio River opposite the Great Miami River. There were several skiffs tied to the river bank in a wood-yard. The entire twenty-nine crowded into three skiffs. Several of the negro men had their wives with them and one woman had her child with her only a few months old. The boats were so overloaded that the passage was extremely hazardous. The skiff containing Fairfield sank before reaching the opposite shore. This group had to wade to the shore in waist-high water. After reaching the Indiana shore, the entire party hastened along the river bank to Cincinnati. Daylight came before they reached the city. They could not enter the city during daylight because their appearance would immediately announce that they were fugitives. Fairfield hid the party in ravines at Mill Creek and the negroes were to remain there while he (Fairfield) went to downtown Cincinnati and requested passage on the Underground Railroad from Coffin. Coffin, upon learning of their plight, suggested that coaches be rented and the entire party be led as a funeral procession. The procession was led through Cumminsville to College Hill. The mock funeral was a reality. The infant negro baby had died, having been exposed to too much rain and cold. The infant was buried on the hill overlooking Cincinnati and the runaways continued their flight north. (48)

The area of Kentucky directly across from Madison, Indiana, was very prominent in the operation of the Underground Railroad. Slaves gathered here for their escapes and some traveled fifteen to twenty miles from their Kentucky owners. A poor white man who owned a boat lived on the Kentucky shore of the Ohio River. The runaways trusted him and the man promised for a small sum of money, he would have his boat in waiting at an appropriate spot on a certain night. He would take parties across the Ohio to a point on the Indiana shore some miles above Madison. The next stop for the runaways was in Union County, Indiana. (49)

The most shocking of all fugitive slave cases took place at Richwood Station in Boone County. This case embarrased the South and increased anti-salvery action in the North. The Garner Case had a much greater meaning to the rest of the nation. The deep personal tragedy was brought into the open. On the night of January 27, 1856, eight members of the Garner family and nine friends made their escape from Richwood Station to the Ohio River in a sleigh. The river was frozen and the party stampeded onto "free-soil". Their master, learning of the escape, immediately set out in pursuit. Upon reaching the west end of Cincinnati, the Garner's made several inquiries as to the route of the Underground Railroad. The runaways then sought temporary relief in the home of a friend (the Garner's had been to Cincinnati many times). Someone betrayed them along the way and their master soon learned of their whereabouts. Knowing the master was in the neighborhood, the frightened slaves barred the doors and windows of the house and armed themselves in a futile attempt never to return to slavery. The pursuers soon broke into the house. Mary Garner, rather than see her children return to slavery, grabbed a butcher knife and hacked away at the throat of her youngest child until the infant's head was almost decapitated. She made carving attempts at her other children (she had four) before being subdued by the owner of the house. The U. S. Marshal took the runaways into his custody. The slaveowner, Archibald K. Gaines, of Boone County, demanded the Garners be returned to him under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law. The "nine friends" who accompanied the Garners in the escape were returned as fugitives. Ohio demanded that Mary Garner be tried for murder in a Cincinnati court and the other Garners be tried as accomplices. (Public sentiment would have acquitted the Garners in a "free-state.) Mary Garner preferred the murder charge as compared to slavery. The President of the United States, Pierce, stated that the runaways were to be returned to their Kentucky owners at all costs and Pierce authorized the use of Federal troops at the nearby Newport Garrison to assist the U. S. Marshal in returning the Garners to Kentucky. The Garners were returned to their owner but while Ohio and Kentucky continued negotiations on the murder charge, Mary Garner mysteriously disappeared. (50)

Slavery began to wane in Boone County about the year 1855. Boone County had 1,745 slaves and 48 free colored at this time. There wase a total of 225,483 slaves and 10,011 free colored in Kentucky at the beginning of the Civil War. There were 115 counties in Kentucky in 1860, so Boone County was average in slave population. (51) Petersburg had twenty-six slaves in 1860. (52) By 1864 slavery was completely demoralized in Kentucky although not yet legally abolished. (53)

Negro marriages were not recorded in Kentucky until after the Civil War. (54) The Boone County Negro Marriage Bond Book is dated December 1, 1866. The first negro union recorded was between Philip Coleman and Lucy Duncan on December 8, 1866. Coleman legibly signed his name but the minister performing the rites of matrimony had to use an "X" for his signature. (55)

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Note: Simon Garner, his wife Mary,, and Simon, Jr., were the property of James Marshall of Richwood Station. Margaret Garner, the wife of Simon, Jr., and their four children belonged to Archibald K. Gaines who lived on a nearby plantation.

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