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the Confluence

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COVER IMAGE

Originally McDowell's Medical College, this became the Gratiot Street Prison for Confederates in 1861. For more, see "'To Preserve the Historic Lore for Which St. Louis is Famous': The St. Louis Historic Markers Program and the Construction of Community Historical Memory" by Bryan Jack, starting on page 12.
(Image: Missouri Historical Society)

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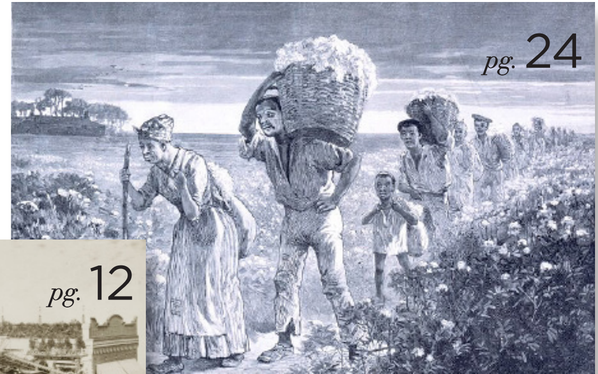

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The Confluence is a regional studies journal published by Lindenwood University, dedicated to the diversity of ideas and disciplines of a liberal arts university. It is commited to the intersection of history, art and architecture, design, science, social science, and public policy. Its articles are diverse by design.

"Hang Him Decently and in Order": Order, Politics, and the 1853 Lynching of Hiram, a Slave

by

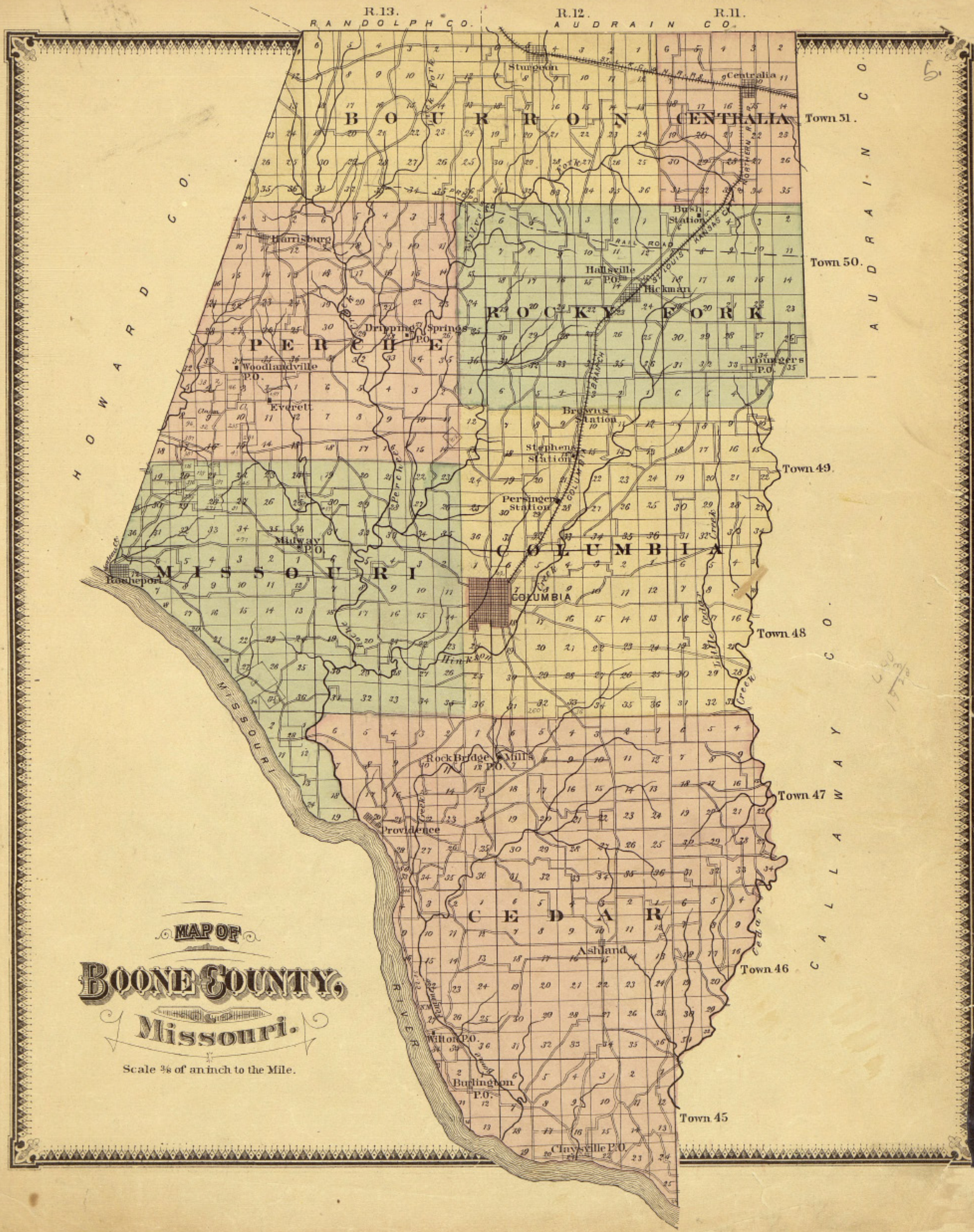
ZACHARY DOWDLE

As the sun set on a wooded pasture in southern Boone County,

bringing the promise of reprieve from the oppressive August heat, 15-year-old Nancy Hubbard traveled home with her sister Mary Jacobs and Amanda, Jacobs' young daughter.

The three had attended the funeral service of Harrison Jacobs and hoped to make it home before the waning light disappeared. Arriving at a fence, Hubbard dismounted her horse to remove the bars. Jacobs and the young girl passed through the barrier and waited while Hubbard guided her horse through the gate and replaced the bars. From a nearby thicket, a man, completely nude except for some leaves stuck in his hair, allegedly seized the teenager and dragged her into the woods. The commotion startled Jacobs' horse, which threw her off, seriously injuring her. The child, witnessing her mother in pain and unsure about her aunt's fate, ran toward the nearest home for help. Meanwhile, Hubbard, being "very stout and pluck to the backbone successfully resisted his assaults" with the assistance of her parasol.[1] Amanda soon returned to the scene with a nearby resident, Joseph Armstrong. The assailant managed to escape just before Armstrong's arrival. Hubbard, quite shaken from the traumatic experience, "preserved her person from tarnish, receiving no injury except on the face, throat and eyes" from the attack.[2]

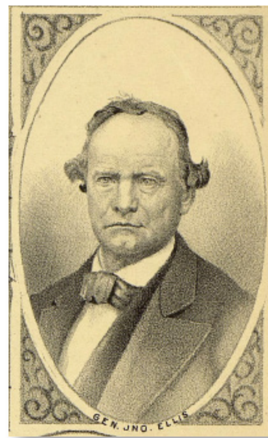
While any attack of this sort on a young white woman would cause considerable disruption in an agrarian community, the fact that Hubbard identified her nude assailant as an enslaved man intensified the anxiety. As night settled on the region on August 12, 1853, a large number of black men were taken before an informal hearing held by Justices of the Peace John Ellis and Walter C. Maupin to determine who might have committed the attempted rape. Many concerned citizens arrived at Edward Young's land, since Young claimed as property several black men. Following a physical examination of Young's enslaved people, the group determined that the likely perpetrator was a man named Hiram. The investigators returned to the justices with Hiram to conduct their impromptu trial. Upon hearing the evidence and testimony of several witnesses, Ellis and Maupin determined that there was insufficient evidence to hold Hiram and let the man return to Young's property. With the justices preventing further action, the collection of citizens dispersed, at least momentarily.



The crime of which Hiram was accused was in the southern part of the county, near the Missouri River. *(Image:* Historical Atlas of Boone County, Missouri, *1875, State Historical Society of Missouri)*

Based on a "proper affidavit made by a brother of the young lady,"
Justice Thomas Porter of Columbia issued a warrant for Hiram's arrest.

As Diane Miller Sommerville points out in her book, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South*, despite the outrage such a case would have inspired in a slaveholding community in the days before the Civil War, Southerners tended to allow legal processes to unfold. Antebellum lynchings of enslaved people were not entirely unheard of, but they were far rarer than those that occurred during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] Since the owners of enslaved people had a financial stake in the prosecution of their "property," an element of class-based conflict sometimes arose when an enslaved person stood accused of a crime. Slave owners, in an attempt to retain the value of their human investment, would hire attorneys to defend the accused, while non-slaveholding whites opted at times to circumvent formal proceedings.[4] As the sectional crisis heated up over the course of the 1850s, anxieties in slave societies, particularly those situated on the border of slave territory, manifested in a marked increase in the number of incidents of mob violence on enslaved people.[5] This incident, taking place before the eruption of violence in the Kansas territory, at least initially conforms more with Sommerville's depiction of legal proceedings for enslaved people in the antebellum South. Within a few days, however, public deference to the legal process deteriorated into a call for mob justice. This incident stands apart from other documented case studies in the community's attempt to ensure the mob conduct itself in an orderly manner. By creating the seeming paradox of an orderly mob, the citizens of Boone County enacted a compromise solution that appealed to the sensibilities of Democrats and Whigs—the former favoring popular justice and majoritarian rule with the latter appealing to law, order, and due process—to reinforce the racial order.[6]



John Ellis lived at a farm southeast of Columbia, Missouri, and was Justice of the Peace from 1844 to 1878. He was a fairly prominent citizen in Boone County, including as one of the first curators of the University of Missouri. *(Image:* Historical Atlas of Boone County, Missouri, *1875, State Historical Society of Missouri)*

Still outraged by the incident and taking to heart the words of Justice of the Peace Ellis, who after freeing Hiram that night stated that he "hoped the matter would not stop here," a group traveled thirteen miles north to the county's seat, Columbia, to push for a continuation of the legal proceedings. On Tuesday, August 16, the concerned citizens got what they wanted. Based on a "proper affidavit made by a brother of the young lady," Justice Thomas Porter of Columbia issued a warrant for Hiram's arrest. The sheriff, warrant in hand, proceeded to Edward Young's property south of Columbia to retrieve the suspect that same night. Arriving at Young's farm late in the evening, the sheriff was unable to locate Hiram. Young assured the sheriff that he would retrieve the man and deliver him to Columbia. Concerned about the well-being of his investment, Young appealed to the sheriff to ensure Hiram would have a fair trial. Young delivered on his promise, bringing Hiram to the Columbia jail before the sun rose Wednesday morning.[7]

With the prisoner secure in the county jail, court officials set his trial to take place just four days later on Saturday, August 20. In the meantime, Young visited the office of a Columbia lawyer named James S. Rollins and secured his services for the defense of the enslaved man. Rollins was a 40-year-old attorney who had, like many others in the region, been born and educated in the upper south state of Kentucky. Unlike the majority of lawyers in the middle of the nineteenth century, Rollins had attended school for formal legal training at Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky, in addition to reading law with the prominent Missouri lawyer Abiel Leonard. Rollins had practiced law in Columbia since 1836 when he was not serving in political office as a Whig in the state capital. Rollins also laid claim to more than two dozen enslaved men, women, and children who produced a variety of agricultural goods on his property on the southern edge of town.[8]

Defense attorney James S. Rollins (1812-1888) was, like the lawyer across from him in Hiram's trial, **a Kentucky product and strong Unionist.**

At the time of the trial, he was living in this house sketched by George Caleb Bingham the same year as the trial, and a year from serving another term in the Missouri legislature. He served two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives during the Civil War. *(Images: State Historical Society of Missouri)*

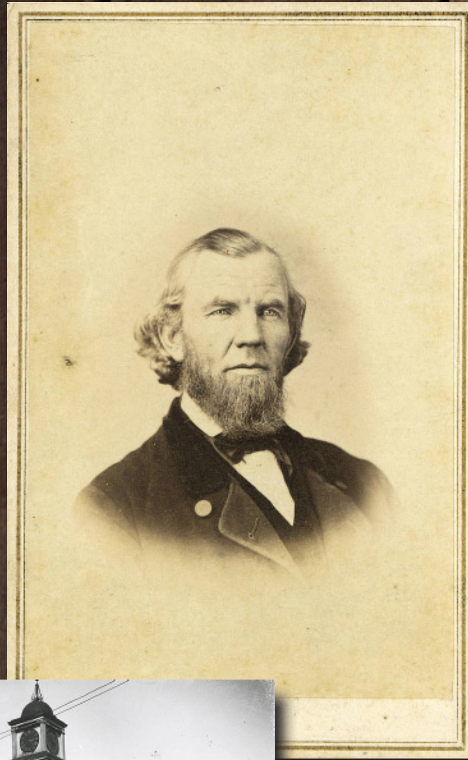
On the appointed day, law enforcement officials brought Hiram to the courtroom, where a third Justice of the Peace, David Gordon, would hear the case. Over the course of the week since the incident had occurred, excitement in the town and surrounding area had grown to a fever pitch. Spectators quickly filled the courtroom to capacity, with many more remaining outside the building in anticipation of the trial. As one in attendance observed, "a portion of [the crowd] were much excited by the daring atrocity of the crime charged and [had] a firm conviction of the negro's guilt."[9] The county prosecutor, Odin Guitar, who had earned a degree from the University of Missouri and then studied law under the presiding judge, began to present the state's case by calling numerous witnesses to the stand. By three o'clock that afternoon, Guitar had only worked his way through around half of his declared witnesses—meaning Hiram's defense had not yet begun—when a mob "entered the courtroom, in a tumultuous, menacing manner" and "overcoming the importunities and efforts of the court, sheriff, counsel, [etcetera] put a rope around the prisoner's neck and forced him into the street."[10]

Once the mob successfully removed Hiram from the shelter of the law, they stripped him of his clothing and forced him through the center of town toward a grove of trees beyond the bridge that crossed the Flat Branch Creek on the western edge of Columbia. In the excitement, a number of bloodthirsty citizens tied Hiram to the trunk of a tree with the idea of burning him alive. Some in the crowd protested to this gruesome mode of punishment, opting instead to hang the accused man. Throwing the rope over a conveniently located tree branch, a group of men pulled the loose end of the rope until Hiram's feet left the ground. Within just a matter of moments, the rope snapped, providing a brief reprieve for the enslaved man. As members of the mob worked to retie the murderous knot, a party of individuals, including Hiram's attorney, Rollins, and the editors of both of Columbia's Whig newspapers, William Switzler and E. Curtis Davis, arrived and appealed to the crowd to let the legal processes run their course. After considerable oratory effort by Rollins and others who opposed the lynching, order prevailed and Hiram was returned to the jail.[11]

Traumatized by his recent brush with a violent mob that first wanted to brutally burn him but changed course and decided to try to hang him instead, Hiram spent Sunday in jail, ruminating on the past week's events and waiting to

By three o'clock that afternoon, Guitar had only worked his way through around half of his declared witnesses—meaning Hiram's defense had not yet begun—when a mob "entered the courtroom..."

Kentucky-born Odon Guitar (1825-1908) left Boone County twice in the decade or so before prosecuting the case against Hiram, once to serve in the Mexican War (so that his degree from the University of Missouri was granted in absentia, the first one granted) and again to try to strike a fortune in the California Gold Rush. In the Civil War, he served in the Union army despite being a slaveholder. His home, pictured here from the 1875 Historical Atlas of Boone County, Missouri, speaks to his financial success. *(Images: Missouri State Historical Society)*



William Switzler (1819-1906) originally studied law under fellow Whig James Rollins before becoming a journalist, including his stint with the ***Weekly Missourian***. Later in life he was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Statistics. *(Image: Missouri State Historical Society)*

Sheriff Douglass warned the group of men that they were breaking the law and called for assistance from the crowd in the street.

No one answered...

Hiram was taken from imprisonment at the Boone County Courthouse, pictured here, for his "orderly" hanging. *(Image: Missouri State Historical Society)*

Hiram had confessed.

However, the confession came only after a religious authority figure explained...his death was just a matter of time.

see what kind of horror the next day in court would bring. While he sat in his cell, a "minister of the Gospel" visited Hiram and explained to the prisoner that the angry people of Columbia "would not permit him to live but a few hours." With the extreme anxiety of the past day's events combined with the minister's stark prediction, Hiram made a full confession to the attempted rape and even named other enslaved men whom he suggested had plans to commit similar acts on young white women in the area. In return for the information, Hiram pleaded with the man of the cloth to ensure he would have a few days to make preparations before his execution. News of the confession reached the court Monday morning, and Judge Gordon decided to move forward with the trial with the prisoner secured in jail for his well-being.[12]

For the second time in just three days, a "crowd of several hundred persons" gathered outside of the Boone County courthouse. Understanding that Hiram had made a full confession, albeit under severe duress, a number of people began to call for another attempt at summary justice. They believed, as did many white Americans in the antebellum South, that legal punishments available to enslaved men like Hiram were not sufficient.[13] Missouri criminal code indicated that any white man who attempted to rape a woman would serve up to seven years in prison; however, if an enslaved man attempted the same crime, he would face castration.[14] For the enraged crowd, castration was not enough. They needed a more lethal resolution. Local planter Eli Bass, considered by contemporaries to be one of Boone County's "most respectable men," addressed the crowd and announced, "I have been a week about this thing and I now want to bring it to a close."[15] Bass called for the assembled group to form an orderly line so they could conduct their business. After settling in, the crowd appointed Bass the chairman of the mob.

Odon Guitar, the prosecuting attorney, along with Samuel Young, who had been assisting Rollins with Hiram's defense, presented to the mob the alleged victim's father's desire that the enslaved man be hanged rather than burned. Guitar added, "if it was their determination to hang him, to go about it coolly and do it decently and in order, and not as demons."[16] With both sides expressing a unified call for hanging, Bass initiated a vote. The majority of those voting agreed to hanging, with around a half a dozen opting for incineration. With the method of lynching decided upon, the mob, under the direction of Bass, established a committee to carry out the "orderly" execution.[17] A man named George N. King, assigned to head the committee, selected nine other men to assist in the committee's tasks. First, they set out to procure the requisite tools for the grisly job—a cart to transport the accused, a coffin to bury him, and of course a rope to hang him. At the assigned time—the mob had agreed to proceed with the lynching at noon that day—the committee of ten, along with Bass and Jefferson Garth, entered the jail to retrieve Hiram. Sheriff Douglass warned the group of men that they were breaking the law and called for assistance from the crowd in the street. No one answered, and Douglass, fearing for his life, left the jail so the committee could do its work. The dozen men forced open the two prison doors that protected the prisoner and dragged Hiram into the street. Placing the accused in the cart along with his coffin, the committee, "followed by a large number of persons, quietly proceeded" to a grove of trees northwest of town to hang and bury Hiram.[18]

Two factors contributed to the circumstances that allowed for a successful mob action the second time, both of which supported a narrative that the lynching was "orderly" and "just." First, in the time between the failed attempt and the successful murder, Hiram had confessed. However, the confession came only after a religious authority figure explained to Hiram that his death was just a matter of time. Sensing the urgency of his impending demise, the prisoner believed that a confession would produce enough public sympathy to allow him sufficient time to say goodbye to his family and friends. Unfortunately for Hiram, the confession only motivated the mob. William Switzler, editor of the *Weekly Missourian*, one of Columbia's Whig newspapers, expressed relief that Hiram's full confession of guilt "reliev[ed] all doubts on that subject." He further editorialized that "all now concede" that the men who protected the prisoner during the first attempt "were most wise and salutary, and all appear gratified

at the result."[19] For Switzler, Hiram's confession provided sufficient justification to proceed with the extralegal action.

The second factor that made mob violence more palatable for adherents of both political parties was the manner in which it was conducted. Switzler's tone shifted significantly when discussing the two incidents. With the first, he emphasized the chaos and lawlessness of the attempted killing. In fact, Switzler worked with Rollins (who was also a Whig politician) to prevent the mob from lynching Hiram on Saturday. In writing about the successful killing, Switzler stressed the "order" and "decency" of the crowd. Prosecutor Odon Guitar's (Whig politician as well) language started the plea for order, and Switzler repeated the phrase again as well as stressing the "order" of the proceedings and the mob's quiet procession. Thomas M. Allen, another Whig partisan and minister, suggested that "all was peace and tranquility" with the lynching, and though he was "opposed to mobocracy," this case suited him sufficiently.[20] E. Curtis Davis, editor of Columbia's other Whig newspaper, the *Missouri Weekly Sentinel*, regretted that the "supremacy of the law" had not prevailed but remarked that lynching had taken place "with nearly as much order as usually attend[ed] *legalized* executions of criminals."[21]

Not everyone in Columbia supported the "orderly" and "decent" mob violence. Judge Warren Woodson penned a scathing letter expressing his opposition to the events surrounding Hiram's death. Woodson could not see past the mob's blatant disregard for legal processes. That said, he took no issue with murdering the enslaved man. In two circumstances, according to Woodson, the lynching could have taken place without being an affront to the legal system. First, the offended family could have sought out the perpetrator and killed him immediately without involving the law. Because they went to the Justice of the Peace seeking a legal remedy, the victim's family and the community needed to allow that process to proceed without interruption. The second circumstance was to let the trial run its course, but after its conclusion and the distribution of legally administered justice, the family and community could take up the matter. Woodson's position did not appear to be popular. Only one man signed on in support to his public letter—the defense attorney Rollins—and the letter was never published in the newspaper.[22]

Boone was one of the few counties in Missouri to have a majority of Whig citizens. The county's Whig partisans took no issue with the institution of slavery. They saw Hiram as any other white citizen in a slaveholding society, as the property of another man. Many Whigs, however, did look to the institutions of government to impart order on society. At the core of this admiration of institutional order was the legal system. In a situation where questions of law and order came into conflict with the perpetuation of racial control within a slave society, the illusion of the former could help secure the latter. By creating a form of "mobocracy" that seemed to adhere to the tenets of order and peacefulness, all of the citizens of Boone County got what they truly wanted, a confirmation of white supremacy.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Columbia Weekly Statesman, August 19, 1853; Columbia *Weekly Missouri Sentinel*, August 25, 1853; Switzler, *History of Boone County*, 371; Thomas M. Allen to John Gano, August 11, 1853. The letter written by Allen to Gano is dated before the incident took place. Allen worked as a traveling minister, with the bulk of this letter describing his experiences in the countryside. Based on the dates included in his account, the actual date that he wrote this letter to Gano was likely September 11, 1853. Allen's account of the incident came secondhand since he was not home when it took place, but as a resident of the neighborhood he knew Nancy Hubbard and the others involved.

[2] Warren Woodson, "To the Public," August 1853, Rollins Papers, SHSMO.

[3] Summerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South*, 4–5.

[4] Ibid, 5–6; Bowman, "Appeals in Civil War Missouri," 351.

[5] Thomas G. Dyer argues that a series of four lynchings within a week's time in Saline County, Missouri, resulted from residents' anxiety and insecurity in the region based in part on their proximity to the violent Kansas border. See Dyer, "A Most Unexampled Exhibition of Madness and Brutality: Judge Lynch in Saline County, Missouri, 1859."

[6] For the use of mob violence in antebellum America see Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 430–39; Adam I. P. Smith's chapter on the Astor Place Riot delineates the difference in partisan perspectives on mob violence, see Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatives and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics*, 1846–1865, 23–42.

[7] Woodson, "To the public"; Switzler, *History of Boone County*, 372; Columbia Weekly Statesman, August 19, 1853; Columbia *Weekly Missouri Sentinel*, August 25, 1853.

[8] James Madison Woods, Jr., "James Sidney Rollins of Missouri: A Political Biography," (Ph.D diss., Stanford University, 1951), 5–13; John Vollmer Mering, "Political Transition of James S. Rollins," *Missouri Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (1959): 217; 1860 Boone County, Missouri, Slave Schedule, 47; Bowman, "Appeals in Civil War Missouri," 351.

[9] Columbia *Weekly Statesman*, August 26, 1853; Columbia *Weekly Missouri Sentinel*, August 25, 1853.

[10] Woodward, "To the public"; Columbia *Weekly Statesman*, August 26, 1853. One of the three contemporary accounts includes as a part of the story that Rollins cut the rope in the courtroom. Two were written by close friends of the attorney. Warren Woodson's account, which includes the rope-cutting, is by far more emotionally charged than the account printed in the newspaper by William Switzler, which claims to "publish the facts attending the whole proceeding." Interestingly, Switzler, in his *History of Boone County*, reproduced nearly verbatim the original newspaper account but included Woodson's assertion about the rope cutting. The third account, published in the Columbia *Weekly Missouri Sentinel*, also omits the rope cutting detail.

[11] Woodson, "To the public"; Columbia *Weekly Statesman,* August 26, 1853.

[12] Woodson, "To the public"; Columbia *Weekly Statesman*, August 26, 1853; Bowman points out that even in antebellum Missouri a forced confession made by an enslaved person was not admissible in court. One wonders, however, if the psychological pressure of the attempted lynching and words of the minister would be construed as forced in the nineteenth century. See Bowman, "Appeals in Civil War Missouri."

[13] Dyer, in "Judge Lynch in Saline County," points out that one of the public defenders of the mob action in his case study argued that the criminal law for enslaved people was weak and not based on white public sentiment. see pp. 93–94.

[14] *Laws of the State of Missouri: Revised and Digested by Authority of the General Assembly Volume 1*, (St. Louis: E. Charless, 1825), 283, 313. Summerville argues that castration of enslaved offenders, either for rape or attempted rape, allowed state and colonial governments to deter slave crime while also saving the state money since in many jurisdictions the slave's owner would be compensated for his financial loss. Missouri never adopted compensation legislation, however, making it more important for slave owners to provide the best legal defense they could to prevent losses.

[15] Switzler, *History of Boone County*, 373; Allen to Gano, August 11, 1853; Woodson, "To the public."

[16] Columbia *Weekly Missourian*, August 26, 1853.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Switzler, *History of Boone County*, 373–74; Columbia Weekly Missourian, August 26, 1853; Woodson, "To the public"; Switzler's history identifies the location of the lynching as the pasture of Mrs. Dr. Arnold, which was immediately west of R. H. Clinkscales's property. Looking at a contemporary (to the writing of Switzler's history) plat map of Columbia (from 1875), Arnold's property corresponds to a four-block area in modern Columbia bounded by Sexton to the north, Worley to the south, Mary Street to the west, and Providence to the east.

[19] Columbia *Weekly Missourian*, August 26, 1853. It is important to note that Switzler stood next to James Rollins to prevent the hanging of Hiram on Saturday night. There is no indication in any of the sources that any resistance took place on Monday.

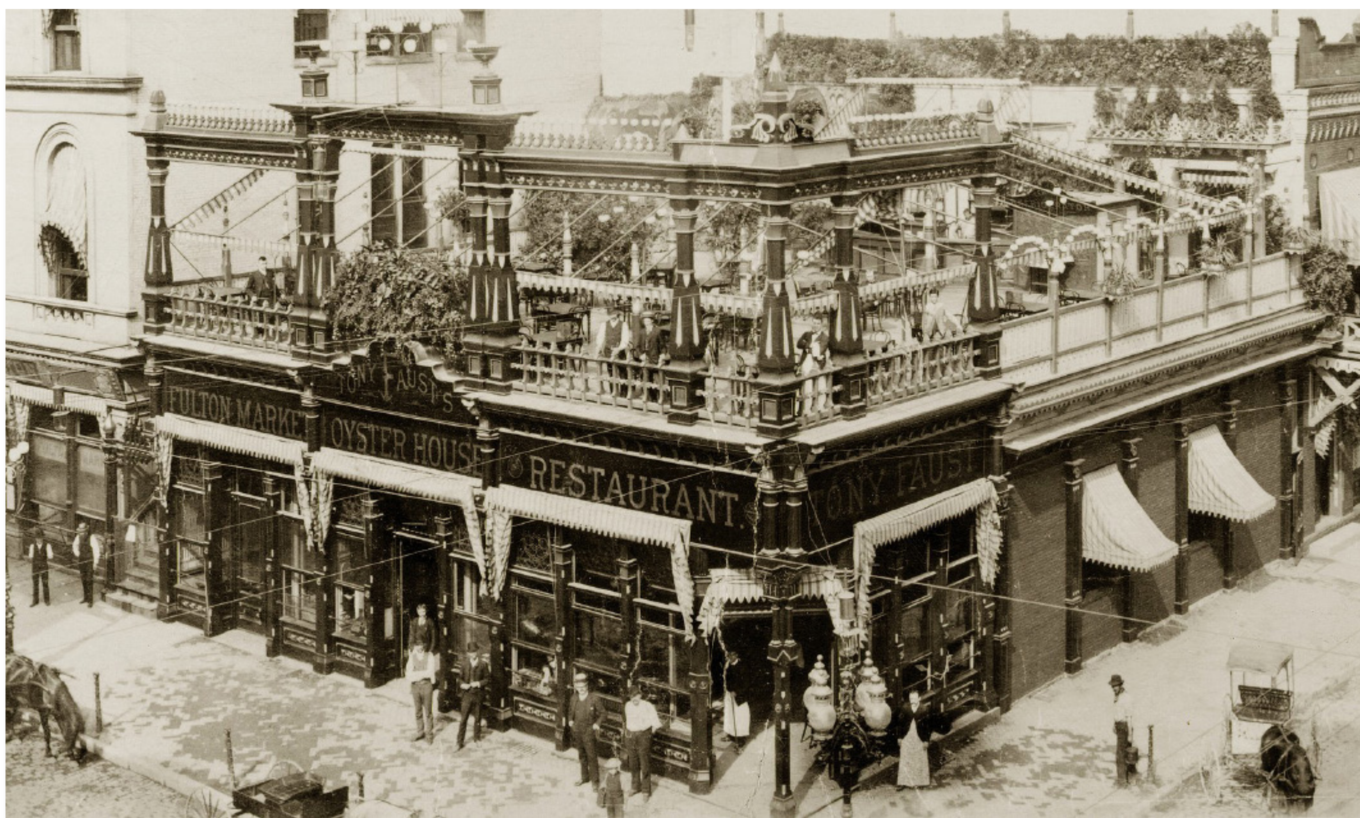
[20] Columbia *Weekly Missourian*, August 26, 1853; Allen to Gano, August 11, 1853.

[21] Columbia *Weekly Missouri Sentinel*, August 25, 1853, emphasis in the original.

[22] Woodson, "To the public."

"To Preserve the Historic Lore for Which St. Louis is Famous": The St. Louis Historic Markers Program and the Construction of Community Historical Memory

by BRYAN JACK



A PERSON WALKING AROUND ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, IN 1944 WOULD HAVE ENCOUNTERED MORE THAN 200 MARKERS DOCUMENTING VARIOUS SITES RELATED TO THE CITY'S HISTORY. Of that number, 126 were erected by the Historic Sites Committee of the Young Men's Division of the Chamber of Commerce, which for over a decade had been conducting a historic markers program.[1] Depending on the site's purported importance, and also the marker sponsor's willingness to pay, four types of markers were used—18″ x 24″ metal or wood shields with a white background and black text were the most common, 24″ x 36″ bronze markers were a step above, and, after 1938, many sites were represented by photographic or painted scenes. The sponsors of the markers were either the business occupying the site, a family member of the person being commemorated, or other interested parties.[2] Generally erected at eye-level for a person walking on

An article about Anthony Faust (1836-1906) in the Post-Dispatch in 1876 said "his name is synonymous with shell-fish," and this restaurant was the reason. German-born Faust came to the United States in 1853 and St. Louis soon thereafter. He was wounded in the spring of 1861 while watching militia march through the streets when a soldier's gun accidentally discharged. He took up bartending, and opened his upscale restaurant, Faust's Oyster House and Restaurant, in 1870 at Broadway and Elm next to the tony Southern Hotel. By the 1880s, when these images were taken, it ranked among the most stylish dining establishments in St. Louis, making it an historic site deserving one of Spreen's signs in the late 1930s. *(Images: Missouri Historical Society)*

the sidewalk and placed on the building at the historic site (or as close as possible to the original site), the markers were designed to educate the general public about the importance of St. Louis' past, "proving St. Louis' outstanding qualifications as a center of historic attraction." [3]

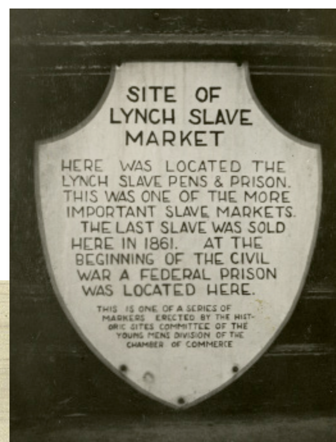
The era most represented in the sites was the early national period, and the sites' historic significance was heavily weighted toward industry and commerce, architectural importance, or individuals of local or national prominence. In "Capitalizing the Rich Traditions of St. Louis," the committee argued "in the Establishment of the Nation Period St. Louis is the equal to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, St. Augustine, etc. in the Founding of the Nation Period. They have made much of their historic possessions and St. Louis is showing ever increasing indications of doing likewise." [4] Examples of what viewers would see include signs marking the sites of the International Fur Exchange; the Alex Bellissime Tavern (described as

Trained as a lawyer, Louis Benoist (1803-1867) made much of his money in St. Louis with a branch office in New Orleans. His home at the northwest corner of 8th and Pine streets in downtown St. Louis. This daguerreotype by Thomas Easterly dates from the 1850s. *(Image: Missouri Historical Society)*

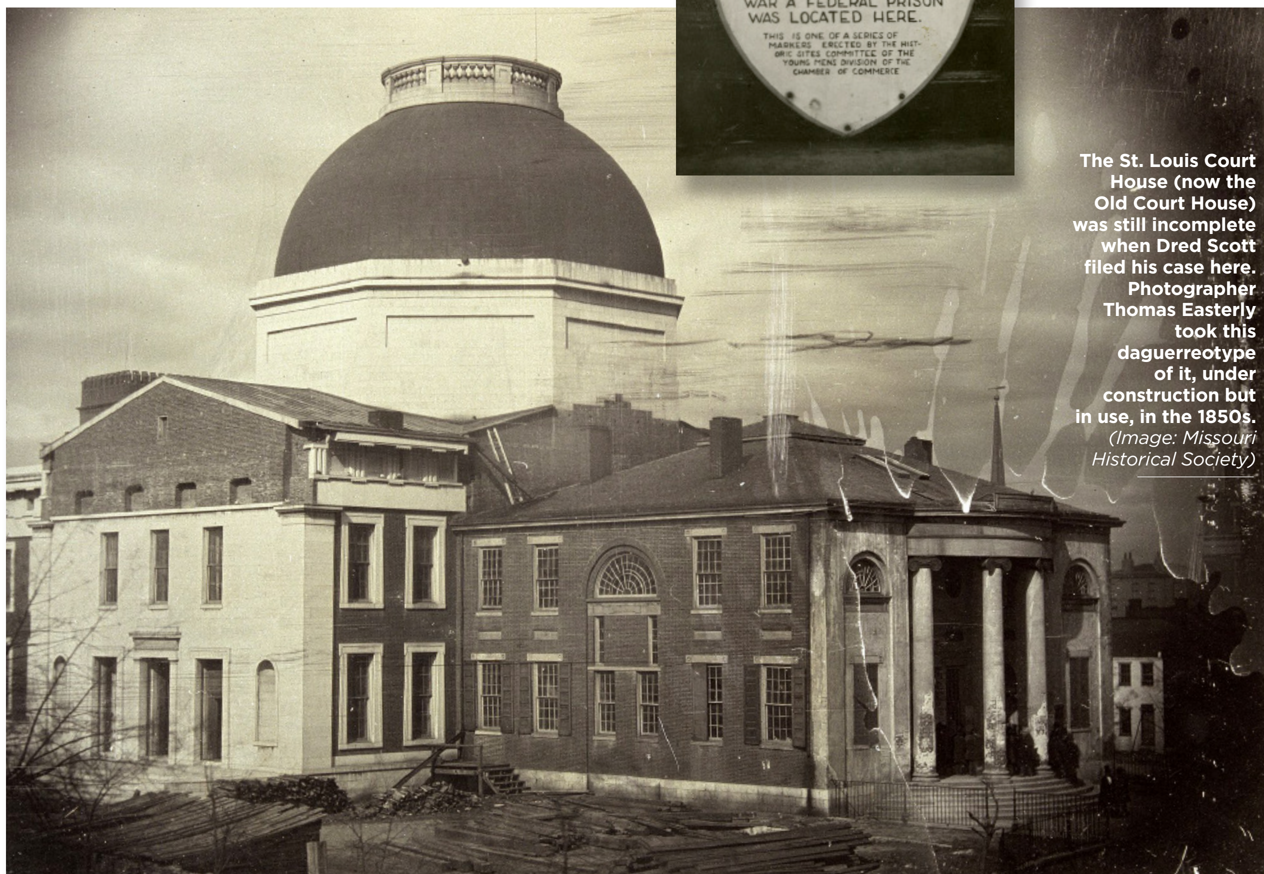
By the time the *St. Louis Star Times* took this photo in 1933, Chris Von der Ahe's saloon at St. Louis Avenue and Grand was past its prime. But it was owned by Von der Ahe (1851-1913) when he owned the St. Louis Brown Stockings starting in the 1880s. The *Star Times* called it "the cradle of St. Louis baseball." *(Image: Missouri Historical Society)*

"a favorite with French boatmen . . . Bellissime one of Gen. Lafayette's soldiers in Revolutionary War"); the birthplace of Francis Guittar, "the founder of Co. Bluffs, Iowa"; the William C. Carr house, which was the "First exclusive brick dwelling in St. Louis"; the Hawken Gun Shop, producer of the "favorite arms of western frontiersmen"; the marriage place of General Winfield Scott Hancock; and and the Glasgow House, where "John J. Audobon, famous artist-naturalist was a guest in 1843."[5] Photographic markers included such scenes as View of Chris Von Der Ahe's Building, the "Cradle of St. Louis Professional Baseball"; a View of Louis A. Benoist Mansion, as "Benoist was a leading banker and financier of the southwest"; and a View of Tony Faust's "World Famous Restaurant Buildings."[6]

The markers placed by the Historic Sites Committee as well as those placed by other organizations were all included in a booklet published by the Historic Sites Committee, the "List of Historic Sites in and Around St. Louis". This booklet was distributed to 500 civic organizations and individuals in an attempt to raise interest in St. Louis' past. In noting the publicity that they had attained, the committee stated they had "awakened the citizens of St. Louis to an appreciation of its historic importance."[7] But whose history was deemed important, and whose stories were valuable enough to mark, tell us a great deal about the work of the committee and



Lynch's slave market was the largest of its kind in St. Louis during the 1850s, despite a shrinking population of both free and enslaved African Americans. *(Image: J. Orville Spreen Papers, Collection S0486, State Historical Society of Missouri Collection)*



The St. Louis Court House (now the Old Court House) was still incomplete when Dred Scott filed his case here. Photographer Thomas Easterly took this daguerreotype of it, under construction but in use, in the 1850s. *(Image: Missouri Historical Society)*

its view of St. Louis history. This article will make extensive use the annual reports of the Historic Sites Committee to examine its work and how members commemorated St. Louis history.

Of the sites marked by the Historic Sites Committee, only four explicitly reference African American history—the site of Lynch Slave Pens and Prison (which was also a Civil War prison for Confederate prisoners), two sites where Dred Scott trials occurred, and the site of the Charles Daniel Drake home. The last site describes Drake as "a lawyer and statesman. Active in Missouri State Constitutional Convention of 1865 which passed ordinance of immediate emancipation. Missouri thus first slave state to emancipate her slaves before adoption of 13th Amendment to U.S. Constitution."[8] Additionally, a marker commemorated Elijah P. Lovejoy's newspaper, "Martyr to Freedom of People, Speech, and the Press." Besides marking sites such as "Indian Traders," "Indian Agents," and "Victim of British-Indian attack," Native American history is not represented in the markers. Women's accomplishments and presence are also virtually non-existent, except as they relate to men: the site of Madame Chouteau home, "Mother of Auguste Choteau, co-founder of St. Louis," and the site of the Grant-Dent House, "Julia T. Dent and U. S. Grant, the great Civil War general and 18th President of the U.S. married here, August 22, 1848."[9]

J. Orville Spreen (1897-1991), pictured here with the members of the Historic Sites Committee at a sign marking the location of Fort Davidson, was something of a rags-to-riches story, starting as an office boy with the Burlington Railroad and working his way up to an executive position with the Wabash. *(Image: J. Orville Spreen Papers, Collection S0486, State Historical Society of Missouri Collection)*

St. Louis is a unique place; geographically, its identity as the "Gateway to the West" means it is not quite the West, though you can see it from there. It is also not prototypically southern, eastern, midwestern, or northern in its culture, but is instead, for good and for ill, a combination of all of the above.

In 1910, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* noted Spreen as a "Boy Aviator" who had built model airplanes; eight years later, Spreen obtained a patent for a "Shoe fastener."

Organized, researched, selected, and erected by the Historic Sites Committee, these markers were an effort to boost St. Louis tourism and help St. Louis claim its place as a great American city. The Historic Sites Committee attempted to combine the aspects of "developing St. Louis as a tourist center and bringing about a larger participation in the tourist industry in our community" with educating the public on St. Louis history."[10] The committee hoped to develop "an appreciation of St. Louis as the center from which the nation was established, expanded and rounded out to the Pacific Coast."[11] Studying this program, noting what sites were included, and also what sites were excluded, we can observe one attempt to construct a city's historical memory, the narrative that those in power wanted to tell about their past. The St. Louis Historic Markers program provides us a real-time example of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's argument that the "differential exercise of power . . . makes some [historical] narratives possible and silences others."[12] While it is clear from their records that the men (and they were all men) behind the program had a sincere dedication to history as they understood it and were meticulous when selecting the sites, researching the text for the markers, placing the markers, and documenting their work, their selections and omissions also reveal their biases, and what and whose history was deemed worthy of commemoration.

St. Louis is a unique place; geographically, its identity as the "Gateway to the West" means it is not quite the West, though you can see it from there. It is also not prototypically southern, eastern, midwestern, or northern in its culture, but is instead, for good and for ill, a combination of all of the above. This hybrid identity is also apparent in how St. Louis understands its past, which echoes its various lives as a French colonial trading post, a Mississippi River steamboat city, and an industrial center fueled by German, Italian, and Irish immigrants as well as an influx of black and white southerners. These factors, combined with racial and economic tensions, and a sometime feeling that St. Louis' best days are behind it, create an environment where past and present exist in an often-uncomfortable proximity. Part of this discomfort comes from who is creating the history, and for what purpose. Revealing how one leading community organization worked to create a historical narrative intended to boost St. Louis' image might aid those in the present day to better understand and face St. Louis' complicated past.

The person most responsible for the work of the Historic Sites Committee historic markers program was J. Orville Spreen, an employee of the Wabash Railroad. Born in 1897 in St. Louis, Spreen began working as an office boy for the railroad at the age of 15, eventually rising in the ranks until 1962, when he retired as an executive after 50 years of service.[13] In 1940, the point when the Historic Sites Committee was at its most active, Spreen was unmarried and living with his mother in the Tower Grove South neighborhood of south St. Louis.[14] A person of many interests and a true booster of St. Louis, Spreen was particularly interested in history and transportation. In 1910, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* noted Spreen as a "Boy Aviator" who had built model airplanes; eight years later, Spreen obtained a patent for a "Shoe fastener."[15] As a member of the St. Louis Railway Enthusiasts Club, in 1951 Spreen published the St. Louis Railroad Enthusiasts Tour of St. Louis, and he was also an officer in the Westerners, an organization dedicated to studying the American West.[16] Spreen took his commitment to the Historic Sites Committee very seriously, writing painstaking reports and taking dozens of photographs of the historic markers. Assisting Spreen in his work was Robert J. (Bob) Pieper, who worked as an office

The work of the Historic Sites Committee began in earnest in the early 1930s, but it hit its stride in the late 1930s—in 1939 alone, 58 markers were erected in the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Area.

manager with the Automobile Travel Club until World War II and who then served during and after the war as an Air Force officer. Spreen did most of the historical research for the sites, and Pieper, as Spreen wrote, "largely accomplished the difficult task of obtaining the consent of property owners, storekeepers and others having ground floor windows to place or erect markers on their premises."[17]

The Historic Sites Committee members began researching sites in the late 1920s and erected their first markers in 1931. The marker program reached its peak during the creation of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, as discussions of the building of the memorial became more serious and the potential razing of buildings for the memorial area became evident.[18] By 1941, "the Committee completed it[s] comprehensive program of erecting metal shield historic markers in the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial area. Something of significance was proven and a marker erected in all but two city blocks of the thirty-eight city blocks and parts of three other city blocks within the Memorial area."[19]

However, while the impending Jefferson Memorial was the impetus, as Spreen noted in the 1939 report, "The Young Men's Division of the Chamber of Commerce have been interested for at least 15 years in making known and obtaining the benefits of St. Louis' rich historic tradition—as early as 1924 we made an effort to raise sufficient finances to recondition the Grant-Dent House at the S.W. Cor. of Fourth and Cerre where Julia Dent and U.S. Grant were married. Subsequently efforts have been made to further historic marking and research was prepared during that period with a view of intelligently accomplishing a realization of historic St. Louis."[20]

In creating markers and marking historic sites, the Historic Sites Committee was continuing work begun by previous organizations. As architectural historian Daniel Bluestone notes, "In 1906 the Civic League's Historic Sites Committee proposed a program to mark several historic sites in St. Louis. The committee's first plaque, commemorating the memory of explorer William Clark, was unveiled in September 1906 on the one hundredth anniversary of the Lewis and Clark expedition's return to St. Louis. The plaque was placed on a bank building that occupied the ground where William Clark had lived for many years. The committee also planned to mark sites associated with the early European settlement of St. Louis, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Civil War."[21] Bluestone argues that in the first two decades of the twentieth century, there was a growing interest in local history in St. Louis, and a belief that St. Louis should claim its place in national history."[22]

Spreen and the others on the Historic Sites Committee certainly believed this, but they also noted that they and their project ran into indifference among some St. Louisans. In the 1939 report, Spreen wrote:

> As the opportunity presented our findings were publicized and the number of historic markers erected have increased more rapidly as time went on. It was necessary to overcome considerable indifference in furthering our program for it was impossible at the start to obtain the interest of St. Louisans. The attitude was that anything historic was on the Atlantic Seaboard and what St. Louis had to offer was comparatively insignificant. It is a pleasure now to state there has developed a realization of St. Louis' important part in the expansion and establishment of the U.S. as a nation. Furthermore, the events which centered in St. Louis which brought about the expansion and establishment of the nation are now being considered equally as important in their period to events in the founding of the nation period which centered in recognized historically important eastern communities. The provisions for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial—the creating of a national park area of Old St. Louis is evidence of this. With the recent issuance of surveys by experts of the National Park Service all that we had claimed for St. Louis historically it appears is being confirmed.[23]

By the time Martin Stadler created this painting of Joseph Nash McDowell's Medical College at the end of the Civil War, it was being used as the Gratiot Street Prison. McDowell's college was a bit notorious in St. Louis as an early proponent of human dissection. For more on McDowell's practices, see "Anatomy, Grave-Robbing, and Spritualism in Antebellum St. Louis" by Luke Ritter in *The Confluence*, spring-summer 2012, available at our website. The Union Army took over the building in late 1861 to use as a prison for Confederate prisoners of war, sympathizers, and others. *(Image: Missouri Historical Society)*

The work of the Historic Sites Committee began in earnest in the early 1930s, but it hit its stride in the late 1930s—in 1939 alone, 58 markers were erected in the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Area.[24] While the program continued during World War II, both a lack of metal for signs, and committee members' military service, hindered progress. In 1945, the committee erected seven markers and reported that vandalism, weather, and time had begun to take their toll on existing markers. Thus, the remaining committee members had to spend considerable time repairing markers.[25] By 1951, the committee was no longer erecting markers. During its heyday, however, the committee was selecting, researching, and marking dozens of sites a year. The sites they selected are an illustration of a community organization highlighting, in the words of the progress report of the Jefferson Memorial, a history "where the memory of the achievements of our heroes will be enshrined." [26]

As mentioned above, the committee members attempted to be meticulous in their research of sites and placement of markers. Spreen described how the process worked: "members of the Committee, through reading and through other sources, receive leads on which to work. Research through directories and titles establish locations. Texts are written from local histories, old newspapers, etc. Permission is secured from building or lot owners to place the markers and the text is prepared. The marker is then placed and publicity is released to the newspapers." [27] Because the markers were often dependent upon sponsorship from businesses connected with the historic site, sometimes conflicts arose between the Historic Sites Committee and the sponsors. In 1939, Spreen described one such occasion:

During the ceremony of unveiling the Site of the Manual Training School bronze marker an offer was made to provide a bronze marker for the site of the McDowell Medical College —Gratiot Street Civil War Prison. Subsequently research was completed and a proposal made for this marker. However, the building of the sponsor, upon which the marker was to be placed, proved to be about a block south of the site of the McDowell College-Gratiot St. Prison and the suggested text for the marker accordingly states 'a block north of this spot was located' etc. to which objection was made by the sponsor and request made that it state the structure being marked was on the site where the sponsor desired the marker placed. A reply was made to this proposal that this would not be in the interest of historical accuracy. Insasmuch as the McDowell College-Gratiot St. Civil War Prison Building was on the N.W. Cor. of Eight and Gratiot, a site upon which a metal shield marker has been placed but undesirable for a permanent bronze marker, there seems ample justification for placing a bronze marker near the spot and so stating. It is still possible that the sponsor will agree to the text as correctly stated and the idea of there being justification for placing the marker near the site, and so stating, probably should be advanced further with the sponsor.[28]

When Spreen and the Committee decided to mark this building, the International Fur Exchange was still among the world's largest fur trading auction houses. Constructed in 1919, it was among the last vestiges of the fur trade that dated to Missouri's colonial era. Drury Inns started restoration of the building in 1997. *(Image: Jeffrey Smith)*

"HISTORIC SITE AND STRUCTURE TOURS HAVE AGAIN BEEN CONDUCTED DURING THE PAST YEAR WITH A TOTAL ATTENDANCE OF APPROXIMATELY 500."

Despite such conflicts, as its work continued, the Historic Sites Committee received a great amount of support from the community, including publicity in local newspapers and even in a national magazine. In 1944, members noted that the committee's work was featured in "18 ½ columns of newspaper publicity . . . as well as about a page of photographic material published during the year. In one case, certain markers were included in the special picture section of a Sunday newspaper."[29] The Historic Sites Committee expanded its offerings to conduct tours of St. Louis historic sites, reporting in 1939, "Historic site and structure tours have again been conducted during the past year with a total attendance of approximately 500. Now that a comprehensive layout of historic markers has been erected the tours activity offers splendid opportunities for an important field of future work."[30] Members of the Historic Sites Committee also spoke on the radio to talk about St. Louis history and gave speeches to various organizations advocating for acknowledgment of St. Louis' history.[31] The occasion of one of these speeches indicates that the committee was not outwardly hostile to the history of underrepresented groups, but it was just rather oblivious to the importance of that history in the selection of sites to commemorate. The 1940 committee report states, "The Chairman reviewed the history of the Old Court House before a gathering of 500 Negroes at the observance of the 77th Anniversary of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in the Old Court House, January 1, 1940 and the daily and Negro press included reference to his part in the program."[32]

Additionally, the Historic Sites Committee formed valuable partnerships to promote its version of St. Louis history, receiving the imprimatur of professional historians. A 1939 issue of the *Missouri Historical Review,* the journal of the State Historical Society of Missouri, included an item describing the work of the Historic Sites Committee, and the Missouri Historical Society featured the work of the Historic Sites Committee in its 1945 *Bulletin*. The Historic Sites Committee members also celebrated that their work was mentioned by Lawrence Vail Coleman, Director of the American Association of Museums, in his book, *Historic House Museums.*[33] Perhaps most importantly, a 1939 textbook, *St. Louis: Child of the River, Parent of the West,* used in St. Louis Public Schools, not only mentioned the markers erected by the Historic Sites Committee, but also made use of the narrative text of the markers themselves. Thus, the Young Men's Chamber of Commerce version of St. Louis history was passed on to the next generation.[34]

The building of the Jefferson Memorial and the razing of historic buildings to clear the area, were a source of some tension at times between the Historic Sites Committee and the National Park Service, but the two groups also learned to work together. The Historic Sites Committee appreciated the prestige of having its work recognized by the National Park Service. Numerous yearly reports note that "The Historic Sites Committee co-operated and contributed in the preparation of the National Park Service map of the location of historic sites and buildings in the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Area and the Committee was the only group to whom individual acknowledgment was given," pointing out that the Senior Landscape Architect of the Jefferson Memorial acknowledged that "the Young Men's Division of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce historic sites marking committee has made valuable suggestions."[35]

The primary tension between the Historic Sites Committee and the National Park Service was over the razing of buildings and what was deemed historically significant. These were fights that the Historic Sites Committee generally lost, but something of a compromise was reached, with Spreen reporting, "The National Park Service have taken into their custody the Young Men's Division metal shield markers on structures

Robert Campbell (1804-1879) arrived from Ireland in 1822 and came to St. Louis the following year. He became a leading part of the fur trade over the next two decades, constructing this house in 1851. Today, it is operated as a historic house museum. *Images: Missouri Historical Society, Jeffrey Smith)*

razed, and according to the plan of Mr. Walter Kerlin, Engineer in charge of clearing the area, they are to be replaced on barricades at the various locations as the sites are cleared. In this way they will continue to serve the interpret to the public the significance of various historic sites, and influence more substantial marking, during the development of the Memorial into permanent form."[36]

Although the Historic Sites Committee was not able to save the buildings razed to make way for the Jefferson Memorial, it did assert its influence in other parts of downtown St. Louis. When St. Louis created a historic landmarks commission, the Historic Sites Committee offered its extensive research to the commission to facilitate the saving of buildings. One of the sites that benefitted from the Historic Sites Committee's work was the Campbell House, which now stands as a valuable museum in downtown St. Louis. A marker placed by the Historic Sites Committee was one of the first steps taken in the house's preservation. Likewise, the Historic Sites Committee claimed to do the "spade work" that led to the preservation of the Eugene Field House, another popular museum in today's St. Louis. The Historic Sites Committee reported that through its efforts, "the house was not torn down along with the others in the row that was razed. As it stood alone after clearing away the others the necessary interest was aroused to preserve it. This is an example of the policy of the Young Men's Division in connection with preservations. To identify that which is available and point the way for specialized interests to complete the job."[37]

For well over a decade, J. Orville Spreen and the Historic Sites Committee did a tremendous amount of work researching, marking, and publicizing historic sites in St. Louis. Their work, while admirable in many ways, is also an example of a boosterism version of history, narratives that are created to build up the esteem of an area, to gloss over difficult questions in the past, and to erase or silence the history of those who do not fit within a certain paradigm. By 1953, because of World War II, difficulty in upkeep of the markers, and waning interest in the program, the Historic Sites Committee of the Young Men's Association of the Chamber of Commerce had erected its final marker. In a 1971 update to a 1951 report, Spreen noted that most of the markers erected by the group had "disappeared from their locations," but that other groups were continuing to place markers. One of the markers he listed was a bronze marker erected in 1966 to commemorate "a Spanish Land Grant to Esther, a free mulato [sic], in 1793." This marker was erected by the St. Louis Association Colored Womens' Clubs, Inc., a group who were now having their own opportunity to construct a new historical narrative for St. Louis.

ENDNOTES

[1] Earlier reports note the committee had erected as many as 194 markers, but by 1944 only 126 were still in existence.

[2] Cultural Projects Contest Application, Historic Sites Committee—Young Men's Division of St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, Orrille Spreen papers, Box 8, Folder 73. Available at the State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

[3] Orville Spreen, *Historic Sites Committee, Young Men's Division of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce Report of Activity for the Year 1944 and Recommendations for Future Activity*, Spreen papers, Box 8, Folder 48. Hereinafter, the reports will be referenced as Historic Sites Committee Report, followed by the report year.

[4] Historic Markers Report (1944), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 48.

[5] Report, List of Historic Sites Structures and Areas Marked in and Around St. Louis, MO, 1944 (revised to 1951).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Cultural Projects Contest Application, Historic Sites Committee—Young Men's Division of St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 73.

[8] Report, List of Historic Sites Structures and Areas Marked in and Around St. Louis, MO, 1944 (revised to 1951).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[11] Historic Sites Report (1943), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 47.

[12] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Hill Press, 1995), 25.

[13] J. Orville Spreen papers overview, the State Historical Society of Missouri.

[14] U.S. Census, 1940.

[15] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 30, 1910. Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1918, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1919, 502.

[16] Midcontinent American Studies Association Bulletin, Spring 1965.

[17] *St. Louis Post-Dispatch,* October 13, 1952, and letter from J. Orville Spreen, Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[18] Report, List of Historic Sites Structures and Areas Marked in and Around St. Louis, MO, 1944 (revised to 1951).

[19] Historic Sites Committee Report (1941), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 45.

[20] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[21] Daniel Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 138.

[22] Bluestone, *Buildings, Landscape, and Memory*, 138.

[23] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[24] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[25] Historic Sites Committee Report (1945), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 48.

[26] Progress Report of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, (1940), Spreen papers, Box 2, F. 7.

[27] Cultural Projects Contest Application, Historic Sites Committee—Young Men's Division of St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 73.

[28] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[29] Historic Sites Committee Report (1942), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 46. Cultural Projects Contest Application, Historic Sites Committee—Young Men's Division of St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 73.

[30] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[31] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[32] Historic Sites Committee Report (1940), Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 44.

[33] Cultural Projects Contest Application, Historic Sites Committee—Young Men's Division of St. Louis Chamber of Commerce, Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 73. Historic Sites Committee Report (1945), Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 49.

[34] Dena Floren Lange and Merlin Ames, *St. Louis: Child of the River, Parent of the West*, Webster, MO: Webster Publishing, Co. 1939.

[35] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[36] Historic Sites Committee Report (1939), Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 43.

[37] Historic Sites Committee Report (1943), Spreen Papers, Box 8, F. 47

"Their Blood has Flown and Mingled with Ours":

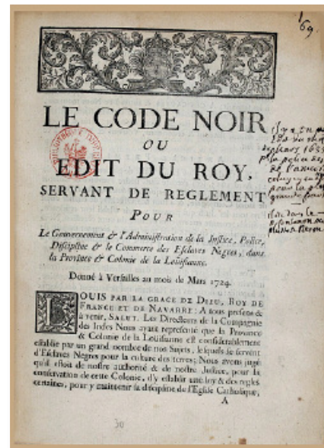
The Politics of Slavery in Illinois and Missouri in the Early Republic

by LAWRENCE CELANI
University of Missouri

Slavery took on many images that highlighted its horrors or, as in this image, sought to suggest that in positive terms. *(Image: New York Public Library)*

In an extract from a letter printed in the *Missouri Gazette* in 1819, a gentleman from St. Charles County, Missouri, wrote, "Notwithstanding the foolish apprehensions which have been entertained by certain *prophets*, that the measures advocated in Congress on the subject of Missouri slavery, would deter emigration from the slave-holding states, never, at this season of the year, has the influx of population . . . been so considerable."[1] The author goes on to say that the "caravans of movers [from Kentucky and Tennessee], were flowing through our town" towards the "lands of promise" in the Boons Lick on the Missouri River or near the Salt River in the northeastern part of the territory. Indeed, the period immediately following the War of 1812 had seen a massive influx of migrants into Missouri, mostly from the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, causing the population to increase from just under 20,000 in 1810 to more than 60,000 on the eve of statehood in 1820.[2] For slaveholders or middling farmers in the Upper South, Missouri was somewhat of a beacon with seemingly unlimited potential for one to start a new life or to grow cash crops, and slavery was the

Article VI of the Northwest Ordinance stated that *"neither slavery or involuntary servitude"* shall be allowed in the territory.



Dating to the late seventeenth century, the Code Noir regulated slavery and and free blacks alike in the French Empire, and became part of race relations in colonial and territorial Louisiana. *(Image: Wikimedia)*

the means by which they would achieve wealth and prosperity. This inflow of settlers portended the Missouri Crisis from 1819–1821, which saw a national debate surrounding not only whether to admit Missouri as a slave state, but also the implications that admission of the state would have for the rest of the Louisiana Purchase.

At the same time, just across the Mississippi River, Illinois saw a similar explosion of population. Though there was some controversy over whether the territory had reached the appropriate number of inhabitants for statehood in 1818, mostly coming from northern congressmen, the population increased more than 300 percent between 1810 and 1820.[3] While some slaveholders ultimately did migrate to Illinois, most avoided the state or passed through it on their way to Missouri. The reason for that, of course, was that slavery was banned by Article VI of the Northwest Ordinance, which stated that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude" shall be allowed in the territory. Still, Illinois residents held a referendum on whether to amend the state constitution to allow slavery, which they did in August 1824. Though the movement failed, the implications would be large.

In trying to comprehend the meaning of these political events, the broader Missouri Crisis, and the Illinois convention movement, it is important to understand them as examples of a much larger attempt by slaveholders and proslavery advocates to make the West safe for slavery, and we must also be aware of how these conflicts came to be understood locally or regionally. Both the Missouri Crisis and the movement to legalize slavery in Illinois were products of national and international developments such as westward expansion, empire, and migration, but these events also helped to generate a political awakening in their respective states by forcing many citizens to choose sides on the issue of slavery for the first time in their lives. This caused divisions within Illinois and Missouri and beyond over slavery's future in the West, and it changed the trajectory of the states' respective outlooks and politics. The short-term results in each place were different—one endorsed slavery while the other rejected it—but the long-term changes these conflicts engendered were immense, altering the states' orientations and paths for the future. This essay will focus on the former.

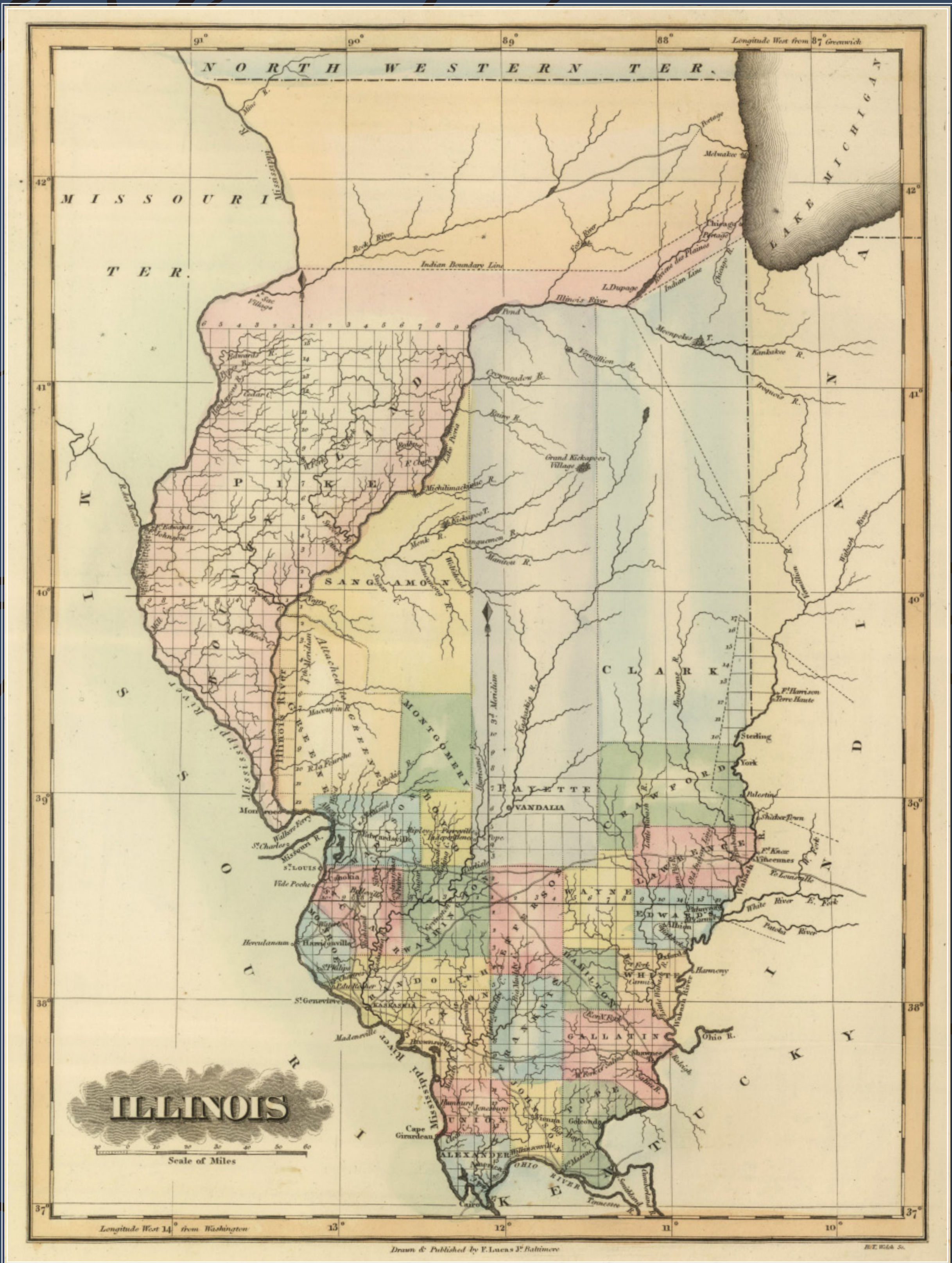
Historians have had various explanations for exactly what the convention movement meant for Illinois and the wider politics of slavery. Some have noted that the movement was a battle between two opposing ideological forces with incompatible visions for the future of Illinois society. They argue that the antislavery forces—led by the likes of Governor Edward Coles, John Mason Peck, and others—were better able to rally their

Article the Sixth. There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted: *Provided always*, that any person escaping into the fame, for whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original states, such fugitive may be lawfully reclaimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service as aforesaid.

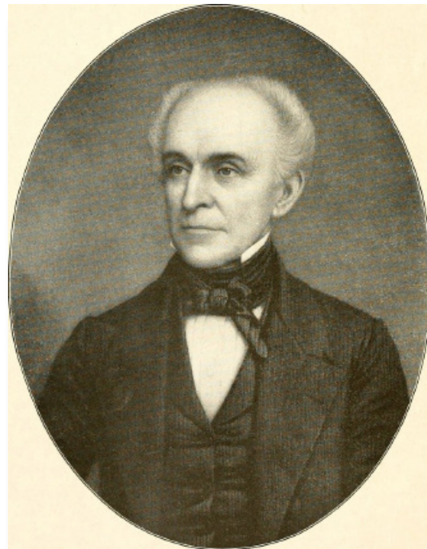
Be it ordained by the authority aforesaid, That the resolutions of the 23rd of April, 1784 relative to the subject of this ordinance, be, and the same are hereby repealed and declared null and void.

DONE by the UNITED STATES in CONGRESS assembled, the 13th day of July, in the year of our Lord 1787, and of their sovereignty and independence the 12th.

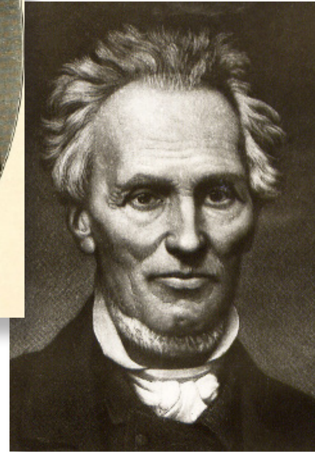
Article 6 of the Northwest Ordinance (above) kept some slaveowners from passing through Illinois when migrating to Missouri, thinking that the Ordinance banned slavery in the territory (present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of northeastern Minnesota). However, the Ordinance also protected them in retaining or capturing enslaved people. *(Image: Library of Congress)*



Illinois at the time of statehood. *(Image: David Ramsay Map Collection)*



Although opposed to slavery his entire life, Virginia-born Edward Coles (1786-1868) knew Thomas Jefferson and James Madison before moving to the Illinois Territory and becoming the state's second governor in 1822. When he moved, he manumitted his slaves he owned in Virginia in 1819 and acquired land for them to farm. *(Image: Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, archive.com)*



Like Coles, John Mason Peck (1789-1858) was a prominent opponent of slavery in Illinois as well as Missouri. Peck arrived in St. Louis in 1817 and co-founded the First Baptist Church of St. Louis. *(Image:* Forty Years of Pioneer Life: A Memoir, *archive.org)*

slavery

...most Missourians could not imagine their state without it.

constituencies around this issue to defeat the measure. The emergence of an antislavery nationalism during the convention movement, most clearly expressed by Governor Coles, would become the foundation of the Republican Party three decades later.[4] Others have emphasized the economic aspects of the struggle, recognizing that the campaign was an attempt by poor whites who sought to destroy the political influence of the bourgeois Yankees and the Southern-born slaveholders who dominated politics in early Illinois. These interpretations recognize either implicitly or explicitly that the event was fundamentally a battle over the future of the state, and whether freedom or slavery would dominate.[5]

Very few studies account for Missouri's role in these developments and their relationship to Illinois, and the ones that do generally highlight the similarities between the two states and the artificiality of the border dividing them. In turn, these accounts tend to collapse all meaningful distinctions that actually did differentiate Illinois from Missouri.[6] While great work on that topic has been written, my larger research goals, only narrowly covered in this essay, stress that Missouri and Illinois *were* different, and that the border between them, while arbitrary, had a large impact on how the states developed from the late-eighteenth century through to the antebellum period. The colonial and territorial institutions put in place in Illinois, most importantly the Northwest Ordinance, laid out the legal and political structures of that territory, and the Ordinance was a key factor, perhaps the most important factor, in Illinois becoming a free state. The same holds true for Missouri, whose lack of these structures or of anything resembling the Northwest Ordinance allowed slavery to grow in the years before statehood—so much so, in fact, that most Missourians could not imagine their state without it.

As historians such as David Waldstreicher and others have argued, politics in the early republic was simultaneously local and national, and how people understood and defined themselves in relationship to the nation was filtered through political practices and ceremonies at the local level.[7] Therefore, I seek to understand the local and national debates that surrounded the Missouri Crisis and the Illinois convention movement, which I argue had the opposite effect. Consequently, this

Illinois and **Missouri** occupied a space that has been termed the **"American Confluence,"**...where the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio rivers converge.

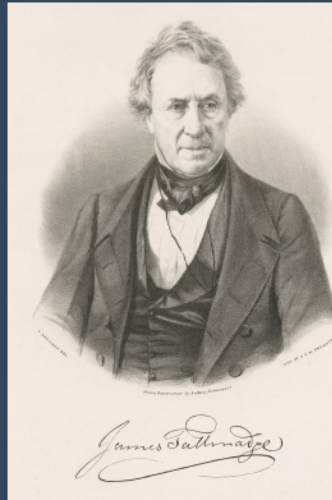
essay attempts to understand how and why Missourians came to see themselves differently from their counterparts in Illinois.

By the Civil War, both Illinois and Missouri looked vastly different culturally, economically, and politically, but those differences had not always been as pronounced as they would come to be by 1860. Both were once part of French Louisiana, occupying what some have termed a borderland, and the connections forged there did not vanish when the French lost their colonies to the British and Spanish in the Seven Years' War, nor did that relationship completely break when the region began to become heavily populated and overrun by Americans in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As stated above, however, we must be careful not to take that too far, and it is in moments like the Missouri Crisis and the Illinois convention movement that the ruptures between these two states, and eventually between the North and South, became manifest.

For nearly a century, Illinois and Missouri occupied a space that has been termed the "American Confluence," a vast region in the North American interior where the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio rivers converge.[8] Despite having a long tradition of slavery, the system had occupied a unique, if imprecise, place within the American Confluence for much of the colonial period and beyond. The French brought slaves to the Illinois Country in the early eighteenth century to work in the lead mines of present-day southeastern Missouri and southern Illinois. Slavery even existed in some form for centuries before European contact, and it functioned as a way for indigenous groups to organize power and to fashion diplomatic ties.[9] A hybrid slave system of Indian and African slavery emerged and would have broad implications into the nineteenth century, when laws began to be passed defining slavery in strictly racial terms. Though plantation slavery on the scale of contemporary colonies in British North America never really took hold in the region, a successful export economy surrounding the trade in cereal grain emerged in the eighteenth century, and the Illinois Country would prove to be a valuable colony in France's Atlantic Empire, providing the provisions for slave colonies in the Caribbean. By the 1750s, around 40 percent of French settlers in the Illinois Country owned slaves, and in Missouri the slave population accounted for around 13 percent of the population by the turn of the nineteenth century.[10]

Slavery in the American Confluence developed into its own discrete and heterogenous system; as a result, it never established the institutional backing that other forms of slavery took in the American South or in the wider Atlantic World. This situation would carry over into the Early Republic. By the 1810s, both Illinois and Missouri were beginning to come to terms with slavery in their respective territories. Despite the Northwest Ordinance's ban on "slavery and involuntary servitude," unfree labor dominated the social and political system of Illinois in the period immediately preceding statehood. Illinois had the largest slave population in the Northwest Territory, with most enslaved people either working in the rich alluvial plain of the American Bottom or in the salt mines near Shawneetown. Aside from this, a system of quasi-slavery existed in the Illinois Territory, where thousands of former slaves were converted to indentured servants with contracts lasting up to 99 years.[11] However, indentured servitude was not slavery, and the fact that slaveholders had to either create or find a way around this loophole suggests that the Northwest Ordinance was a powerful barrier with which slaveholders were forced to contend.

Unfree labor was well integrated in the Illinois economy by the 1810s and had continued to be a political issue for much of the period that immediately preceded statehood in 1818. Proslavery Illinoisans had to carefully navigate a changing regional and national terrain surrounding slavery when



James Tallmadge (1778-1853) is perhaps best known as an antislavery member of the House of Representatives who proposed the "Tallmadge Amendment" to the bill allowing Missouri to become a state by restricting slavery and phasing it out, requiring that "the further introduction of slavery or involuntary servitude be prohibited, except for the punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been fully convicted; and that all children born within the said State [Missouri] after the admission thereof into the Union, shall be free at the age of twenty-five years." The House passed the Amendment but the Senate did not. *(Image: New York Public Library)*

Thomas Hart Benton (1782-1858) ranks among Missouri's most noted senators. When he first moved to the Missouri Territory he became one of the region's most influential opinion-makers as editor of the *Missouri Enquirer.* He was the architect of ideas about Manifest Destiny in the West, and a defender of Jacksonian Democracy and Andrew Jackson, despite his having wounded Jackson earlier in a brawl. *(Image: Library of Congress)*

they submitted their application for statehood in 1818. They faced a challenging dilemma. If the majority proslavery constitutional convention passed a state constitution that was seen as too proslavery, it would likely be rejected by Congress and possibly draw unwanted attention to the system in Illinois. If they passed a constitution similar to Indiana's, with explicit provisions that prevented the further introduction of the practice, then proslavery Illinoisans would not get what they wanted, and they would be forced to either sell their slaves, convert them to indentures, or move.[12] The constitution that was passed ultimately did draw the ire of antislavery congressmen such as James Tallmadge, James Taylor, and Arthur Livermore, but the constitution passed by a wide margin, and slavery was protected in Illinois.

Missourians looked with curiosity on Illinois during this process.[13] That the territory would submit a proslavery constitution was all but a foregone conclusion, as slavery was well-established in Missouri by that time. Petitions for statehood had begun circulating among residents of the territory in 1817, and the first petitions were submitted to Congress in early 1818. For various reasons, they would have to wait nearly a year before a statehood bill would finally be heard.[14] By early 1819, Congress was finally ready to debate the topic of Missouri statehood when an enabling act was submitted that would allow Missourians to form a constitutional convention. The antislavery representative James Tallmadge "tossed a bombshell into the Era of Good Feelings" by proposing that gradual emancipation and the further importation of slaves be prohibited as a condition of Missouri statehood.[15] This single event would set-off a national and regional debate about the future of slavery in the West.

Missourians themselves were deeply committed to the cause of statehood and felt betrayed by the Tallmadge Amendment, which would restrict their freedom to own slaves and potentially not allow them to enter the Union on "equal footing" with the other states. The "anti-restrictionist" crusade in Missouri reached a head in 1820, when the debates in Congress were at their apotheosis. Public meetings were held throughout the territory, the newspapers printed news from Congress on their proceedings, and tensions were known to get quite heated. On the one hand, Joseph Charless, the editor of the *Missouri Gazette and Public Advertiser,* argued that the people of the territory should decide the issue of slavery, which three decades later would come to be known as popular sovereignty. That slavery was even a question was proving to be a controversial position. On the other hand, John Scott and Thomas Hart Benton emerged as the territory's strongest advocates for the admittance of Missouri with slavery intact.[16] The latter's newspaper, the *St. Louis Enquirer,* helped launch Benton's political career, and it was known to publish editorials pushing for statehood and anti-restriction.[17]

A Mr. Daniel Smith of Edwardsville toasted quite humorously, that…

"if *slavery* must be tolerated [in Missouri], let it be on these terms, *that master and slave change positions every seven years!*"

Residents of Missouri and Illinois closely followed the debates in Congress, and they were deeply concerned with the future of their states. Toasts published in the local newspapers indicate not only a striking awareness of the implications of the Missouri Crisis, but also the knowledge of the constitutional questions that the process provoked. Missourians gave tribute to their political leaders, urging them to gain sense and allow their territories to become a state. A number of Irishmen met on St. Patrick's Day 1820 in St. Louis and toasted the Missouri Territory, that it may enter its "entitled rank among the states of the union" and may have "a constitution of her own choice."[18] The meeting of the St. Louis Mechanics Benevolent Society went so far as to toast not only Missouri but Illinois, which at the time was approaching statehood, and whose "blood has flowed and mingled with ours."[19] A Mr. Daniel Smith of Edwardsville toasted, quite humorously, that "if slavery must there be tolerated [in Missouri], let it be on these terms, that master and slave change conditions every seven years!" Many in Missouri and Illinois saw that entering the union on each state's own terms was crucial, and that a sense of kinship was felt by those on either side of the Mississippi. It seems that for at least some inhabitants of Illinois, the Missouri Crisis was theirs as well.

While residents of Missouri were some of the strongest advocates for unconditional statehood, residents of Illinois were somewhat divided over the issue, both at the state constitutional convention and beyond. Admitting slavery in Missouri could make the push for slavery by proslavery advocates in Illinois easier. The contingent at the Illinois state constitutional convention had hoped to revisit the issue of slavery at some point in the future, and the admittance of a proslavery Missouri might make that possible. Conversely, allowing slavery in Missouri could also antagonize the growing antislavery contingent in Illinois, led by the likes of Governor Coles, Daniel P. Cook, and John Mason Peck, among others.[20] In his *History of Illinois,* future governor Thomas Ford reveals a different view, writing that at the time of the Missouri Crisis, "every great road [in Illinois] was crowded and full" of immigrants bound for Missouri, and that the "short-sighted policy of Illinois" prevented slaveholders coming from the east from settling and purchasing lands in Illinois.[21] The fact that slavery was illegal in Illinois caused great anxiety in the early years of statehood for some, and it was clear to many at the time that its illegality was holding the state back and preventing its residents from taking part in the wealth and prosperity that new migrants with slaves could offer.[22] Slaveholders and people on the ground, of course, recognized this, which is why those who migrated with slaves from the Upper South, or those who sought to own slaves, clearly preferred Missouri to Illinois.

After a bitter and protracted struggle that lasted nearly three years, the Missouri Crisis was finally settled with the help of Henry Clay and Jesse Burgess Thomas, the latter a senator from Illinois. Still, it was the antislavery speeches by Cook, himself Illinois' lone representative in the House of Representatives and the only member of the state's delegation to vote against the admission of Missouri that angered Missouri's slaveholders. In an interesting episode of interstate conflict that would further inflame antislavery advocates, the editor of the *Edwardsville Spectator* revealed that he had uncovered a conspiracy by Missourians who were plotting to make Illinois a slave state. Apparently, proslavery Missourians were attempting to purchase the *Illinois Gazette* in Shawneetown and establish another newspaper in Edwardsville, which would serve as a base of their operations.[23] In his memoirs, Peck dedicated several pages to the Illinois convention movement, concluding that "there can be no doubt that a deep-laid plan was formed for securing the consummation of this scheme [to admit slavery in Illinois]."[24] Though there is little evidence of an actual conspiracy by proslavery Missourians and

Missourians became convinced that slavery was central to their progress and prosperity...

Illinoisans working together to legalize slavery, many at the time began to lament the closeness of the two states, and the differences were becoming more pronounced. The borderland was becoming a site of conflict and division, which would become much more evident as the years went on.

The Missouri Crisis and the convention movement in Illinois were crucial events in the politics of slavery that would develop in the antebellum period. Some historians have argued that the Missouri Crisis was in many ways a rehearsal for the conflicts that would arise in the era of the Civil War.[25] While that may be true, it is clear that in the Missouri Crisis, a free labor discourse did emerge, while at the same time Southerners began to articulate a vision of a West with slavery intact.[26] Missourians became convinced that slavery was central to their progress and prosperity as a state, and therefore were the strongest advocates for the admission of their state without restrictions on slavery. Illinoisans were more conflicted over the issue of slavery in Missouri, as well as the future of slavery in their own state. While a large antislavery contingent existed in the former during the early years of statehood, the legislature was dominated by Southern interests, which meant that legalizing slavery was a major concern.

These episodes tell us much about the politics of slavery in the Mississippi River borderland in the years before the Civil War. Connections or kinship between Illinois and Missouri obviously never went away, giving slavery a central role in the politics and culture in the West. Eventually, those connections would come to play a divisive role in the years before the Civil War. As the expansion of slavery became more fraught and contested, the structures and institutions put in place on either side of the border would play a large role in how each place came to understand slavery's role in its future. For Illinois, the Northwest Ordinance, while regularly circumvented, proved too difficult a thing to evade entirely.

Morrow Prize

This article received the 2017 Lynn and Kristen Morrow Missouri History Student Prize, awarded for the best student paper on an aspect of Missouri history presented at the Missouri Conference on History. The annual Missouri Conference on History brings together teachers of history and other professional historians to share in the presentation of the results of research, to exchange information on teaching and curriculum, to consider ways to promote interest in history and the welfare of the profession, and to discuss other concerns common to all historians.

ENDNOTES

[1] *Missouri Gazette and Public Advertiser,* June 3, 1819.

[2] George Dangerfield, *The Awakening of American Nationalism,* 1815–1828 (Prospect Heights, Illinois. Waveland Press, 1994), 109; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005), 223.

[3] Rep. James Tallmadge of New York was suspicious of Illinois' territorial population, and he requested a document be submitted to Congress "showing that the Territory had the population required" to apply for statehood. See Annals of Cong., 2nd Sess., 306.

[4] Suzanne Cooper Guasco, *Confronting Slavery: Edward Coles and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in Nineteenth-Century America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 105–33; Suzanne Cooper Guasco, "'The Deadly Influence of Negro Capitalists': Southern Yeomen and Resistance to the Expansion of Slavery in Illinois," *Civil War History* 47, no. 1 (2001): 7–29. See also Daniel Peart, *Era of Experimentation: American Political Practices in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 47–72, for a different perspective.

[5] James Simeone, *Democracy and Slavery in Frontier Illinois: The Bottomland Republic* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

[6] Historians who are especially guilty of this are Stephen Aron, Christopher Phillips, Matthew Salafia, and Anne Twitty. Stephen Aron, *American Confluence: The Missouri Frontier from Borderland to Border State* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Anne Twitty, *Before Dred Scott: Slavery and Legal Culture in the American Confluence,* 1787–1857 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For a delineation of the problems with borderlands as a framework, see Johann N. Neem, "From Polity to Exchange: The Fate of Democracy in the Changing Fields of Early American Historiography," *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 1–22.

[7] David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997), 10.

[8] Aron, *American Confluence.*

[9] Brett Rushforth, *Bonds of Alliance: Indigenous and Atlantic Slaveries in New France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 29.

[10] Margaret Cross Norton, *Illinois Census Returns,* Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library (Springfield: Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library, 1934), xxi, xxvi; Carl J. Ekberg, *French Roots in the Illinois Country: The Mississippi Frontier in Colonial Times* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 152; Lorenzo J. Greene, Gary R. Kremer, and Antonio Frederick Holland, *Missouri's Black Heritage* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 14; J. Viles, "Population and Extent of Settlement in Missouri before 1804," *Missouri Historical Review* V, no. 4 (n.d.): 189–213.

[11] M. Scott Heerman, "In a State of Slavery: Black Servitude in Illinois, 1800–1830," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14, no. 1 (2016): 114–39, https://doi.org/10.1353/eam.2016.0003; Paul Finkelman, "Evading the Ordinance: The Persistence of Bondage in Indiana and Illinois," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9, no. 1 (1989): 21–51; James Edward Davis, *Frontier Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 165–66.

[12] Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 166; M. Scott Heerman, *The Alchemy of Slavery: Human Bondage and Emancipation in the Illinois Country,* 1730–1865 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 98–99.

[13] See issues of the *Missouri Gazette, Missouri Intelligencer,* and *St. Louis Enquirer* in 1823–24.

[14] "Memorial of the Citizens of the Missouri Territory", http://digital.shsmo.org/cdm/ref/collection/GovColl/id/20762

[15] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 147.

[16] Perry McCandless, "The Rise of Thomas H. Benton in Missouri Politics," *Missouri Historical Review* 50, no. 1 (1955): 18–20.

[17] Harrison Anthony Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri, 1804–1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1914), 100–8; F. C. Shoemaker, *Missouri's Struggle for Statehood,* 1804–1821 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1969), 109–33; Ken Mueller, *Senator Benton and the People: Master Race Democracy on the Early American Frontiers* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2014). See *St. Louis Enquirer,* March 17, 1819, and *St. Louis Enquirer,* June 16, 1819, for the clearest expression of Benton's political ideology, where he articulates his vision of westward expansion, and issues in January 1819 to March 1820, where he expresses his proslavery position for Missouri.

[18] *Missouri Gazette and Public Advertiser,* March 22, 1820.

[19] Ibid., July 10, 1818.

[20] *Memoir of John Mason Peck,* ed. Rufus Babcock (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1864).

[21] Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois, From Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1854), 51.

[22] Matthew W. Hall, *Dividing the Union: Jesse Burgess Thomas and the Making of the Missouri Compromise* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2016), 116–17.

[23] Glover Moore, *The Missouri Controversy, 1819–1821* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 284–87; Norman Dwight Harris, *The History of Negro Servitude in Illinois and of the Slavery Agitation in That State, 1719–1864* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 27–29. See also *Edwardsville Spectator,* August 1, 1820.

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[25] Moore, *The Missouri Controversy, 1819-1821.*

[26] Joshua Michael Zeitz, "The Missouri Compromise Reconsidered: Antislavery Rhetoric and the Emergence of the Free Labor Synthesis," *Journal of the Early Republic* 20, no. 3 (2000): 447–85, https://doi.org/10.2307/3125065; Guasco, *Confronting Slavery.*

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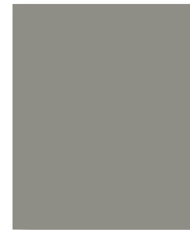

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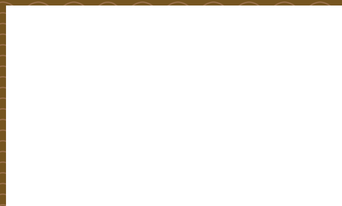

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