

# Early Scioto County African American History

## Fugitive Slave Notices

In the early Portsmouth newspapers, the notices were usually listed as “Runaway Slaves” and accompanied by a rough illustration of a young man running, and across his shoulder was a stick with a bundle attached.

Being a border county, Scioto County was overshadowed by the curse of slavery. The first notice in a Portsmouth paper was listed on April 4, 1820 in the Scioto Telegraph. Thomas King advertised for a runaway four miles from Portsmouth. The slave’s name was Gabriel, he was 21 years old, and the reward of \$50 was offered for his return.

On June 22, 1826, Tignal Wommick advertised for a runaway named Daniel and a description was given.

On December 14, 1826, James Bailey and Joseph George advertised for 3 runaways named Jack, Nelson and Peter along with descriptions. A \$300 reward was offered for their return.

In January of 1828, John Ails offered \$20 for Hannah, aged 25 years, and her son; 6 years of age. The newspaper advertisement ran as, “They were at the McCoy’s Tavern, at Portsmouth, last evening.”

August 25, 1831, H. Blake offered \$50 for Edward Ringo, who had escaped from the Greenup Iron Works. He was 18 years old.

December 22, 1832, H. Blake & Co. offered a reward of \$50 for a runaway named Isaac. The following description appeared: “six feet four inches high, a light mulatto, and thirty-five years old.”

On November 18, 1836, a \$50 reward was offered for William Scott by James Martin, of Missouri.

On May 20, 1837, John Todd advertised a reward of \$100 for a runaway named Jim. He was described as, "twenty-five years old, six feet high, and could read and write."

## **Black Friday**

On January 21, 1830, an estimated 80 Black citizens were deported from Portsmouth by the town authorities.

Under the veil of the Ohio Black Laws of 1804, between 100 and 200 households signed a petition to remove any black or mulatto person. The aforementioned law forbade any black or mulatto person to reside within the State unless they had a certificate from the Clerk of Courts stating that they were free. Due to this act, people were forced to leave their homes and belongings.

## **A Slave Coffle**

Reportedly, in 1834, an incident occurred on the public landing in Portsmouth. On a visit to this city, Colonel William Gilmore, of Chillicothe, then a boy of 10 years old, relayed his story.

He was on the river bank and a flatboat had just landed, when loud cursing and a fight caught his attention. With a boy's curiosity, he neared the crowd of people and saw "three Negro men, handcuffed and tied to a rope, one Negro woman and four Negro men, tied to a rope but not handcuffed, and five Negro girls, from twelve to fifteen years of age, following and carrying heavy bundles on their heads."

Three white men were in charge. One carried a double-barreled shotgun and the others carried whips and pistols. One was cruelly beating a slave that was handcuffed and swearing with each hit. One of the other white men cursed and threatened the black

citizens watching, that they may not talk to anyone in the coffle or they would get shot.

The slave coffle was confined to the Portsmouth jail for the night, and until they could be on their way on another boat down the river.