

**SECTION A: SITES**

In addition to the responses to each question, applications must also include the following attachments:

- 1) Letters of support from all property owners for inclusion in the Network to Freedom
- 2) Text and photographs of all site markers
- 3) Photographs of current condition of site applying for inclusion in the Network

S1. Site type: Building. _____ Structure. _____ District. _____ Object. _____
Landscape or natural feature. _____ Archeological site. _____ Other (describe): _____

S2. If the site is on the National Register of Historic Places, under what name is it listed?

Crenshaw House (a name not of the then-site owner's choosing).

S3. Ownership of site: _____ Private for-profit. _____ Private not-for-profit.
_____ Public-local government. Public-state government. _____ Public-federal government. _____ Multiple
(describe): _____

Reminder: Attach a letter of consent for inclusion in the Network to Freedom from the owner(s) of the site.

S4. Describe the site's association and significance to the Underground Railroad.

The Old Slave House near Equality, Illinois, represents the last of the known sites still standing throughout the entire country that once served as a "stop" on the antebellum kidnapping networks known today as the "Reverse Underground Railroad." Not only is it the only one left, its architecture suggests that it was designed from the ground up for its secret function. The stories long associated with the house since at least the beginning of the 20th Century fit with the architecture of the third floor, John Crenshaw's kidnapping activities, and what it known about the kidnapping rings in Illinois and elsewhere.

John Crenshaw built the house as the centerpiece of his Hickory Hill plantation during a four-year period either side of 1838.¹ From the time of its building up until the Civil War, Crenshaw and his family used the house as one of their multiple residences in Gallatin County. Crenshaw also owned residences in Cypressville (modern-day Junction) and Equality during that time period which the family is known to have used the manor house atop Hickory Hill. He may have also owned others. His real estate holdings totaled over 11,000 acres in Gallatin and three surrounding counties, as well as 4,000 acres in Tennessee at one time. He also controlled another 30,000 acres as the last state lessee of the saltworks.

Nearby residents have long told that Crenshaw kidnapped free blacks or captured runaway slaves and housed them on the third floor in the cells under the eaves of the roof. The presence of 12 cells along the 50-foot long hall, lends credence to the story. Accounts from the 1930s recall that iron rings, or staples, set in the floor for chains. Although the rings have been long gone, the family of a resident of the house who lived there prior to the Sisk family purchasing it before World War I, remembers the rings.² Most of the ironwork on the third floor appears to have been taken out around the war, possibly for a scrap metal drive.

Although some of the stories surrounding the house state that Crenshaw used the third floor as slave quarters, most researchers of antebellum plantations and houses have stated that they have either never heard of attic quarters or that they would have been extremely rare. Most researchers note that slave owners rarely wanted slaves staying in the main house for

¹ The cornerstone visible today provides the date of 1838. However, accounts of the house written in the 1930s referred to an 1834 cornerstone and start date for the house.

² Ed Burtis Interview. May 18, 2002. Conducted by Jon Musgrave at the Saline Creek Pioneer Village and Museum, Harrisburg, Ill. Burtis' mother grew up in the Old Slave House. For more on the Dempsey's stay in the house see Julia Syers. Aug. 6, 1976. Letter to Mrs. [Mary] Clemons. Mary Jo Moore Collection, Paducah, Ky.



fear of uprisings. An 1842 newspaper account about Crenshaw noted that he had fled Cypressville for a house far away from any free blacks. However unlikely Crenshaw would have used his attic for permanent slave quarters, its use does fit for kidnapping victims and captured runaway slaves.

Extremely little has been written about these kidnapping stations or kidnappings in general. Carol Wilson's *Freedom at Risk* is the only major scholarly research conducted on this activity in more than a generation. In the introduction of her 1994 book, she noted:

...the kidnapping of free blacks for sale as slaves was an all-too-common occurrence in the United States during the decades between the Revolution and the Civil War. The ever-present danger of kidnapping and the fact that its victims had little recourse proved a grave threat to the black community.³

In 1818, Jesse Torrey wrote one of the earliest accounts of such a station in Washington, D.C. He actually talked his way to the third floor attic eaves of a house, not realizing where he was at and the owner not realizing that Torrey's role as an abolitionist. While looking for a black woman who had jumped from the third floor window in a failed suicide attempt, he met and talked with a number of other blacks chained up in the attic. Although one or two were slaves awaiting transport South to be sold, the others were victims of kidnappings.⁴

On the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Cannon-Johnson gang of kidnapers utilized the attics in another two houses. The gang also used the basement and hidden rooms in the house to keep prisoners. Peter Hook dictated the details of his kidnapping by the Cannon-Johnson Gang to former Mississippi Gov. David Holmes in 1826 after he had been rescued in Natchez. The *African Observer* printed the details the following year. Following Peter's kidnapping in Philadelphia, he and four other victims were taken to Maryland:

That in about a day's sail afterwards, they landed, and he and the four other boys were chained together in a small oyster house for three days. The five boys were then taken by night in a carryall and gig, passed Lewistown about day light and stopped at Joe Johnson's house, a tavern on the road six miles from Lewistown, saw Abraham F. Johnson, Joe's brother, and his wife there, where all five were chained to a staple in the floor of the garret. Soon after, a black boy, John Jacob's, a cart driver, from Philadelphia, was brought there.—About three or four days after the 4th of July, a black boy, James Bayard, (a sweep), a mulatto, Benjamin Baxter, who lived in Philadelphia, and Little Jack, a black boy, (a sweep,) were brought together to the garret, and soon after, Ephraim Lawrence, a black boy, and Little John, a mulatto, were brought to the garret, and then a black, Henry, a young man grown, was brought there. The 12 were chained to the same staple.

Two girls were brought some time before this, (Lydia Smith, and Sally,) both black. These girls were chained in a different part of the same garret.... Peter thinks they were kept in this garret about six months. One night, twelve boys and two girls were taken down, walked 6 or 7 miles, and were put on board a ship by Joe Johnson and set sail.

Lydia Smith also told her story, which included the various sites in which she had been held. The kidnapers moved her six times between five different locations. In addition to being chained in the Johnson's attic, Lydia had also been chained for around five months at the home of Johnson's mother-in-law, Patty Cannon.⁵ Lydia's story of being transported from house to house is similar to that of a black woman named Lotty kidnapped by John Forrester from her home in Hamilton Co., Illinois. John Lockhart wrote a letter to Shawneetown lawyer Henry Eddy about the kidnapping. Working

³ Carol Wilson. 1994. *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780-1865*. Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky. 6.

⁴ Jesse Torrey. 1817, reprint 1970. *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery, in the United States: With Reflections on the Practicability of Restoring the Moral Rights of a Slave, without Impairing the Legal Privileges of the Possessor, and a Project of a Colonial Asylum for Free Persons of Colour: Including Memoirs of Facts on the Interior Traffic in Slaves, and on Kidnapping*. Philadelphia: Privately published. Reprint, St Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press.

⁵ Carol Wilson. 19-37; and Wm. Kesley; Thomas Shipley; B. Lundy; Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, John Adams. July 1921. "Reports of the American Convention of Abolition Societies on Negroes and on Slavery, their Appeals to Congress, and their Addresses to the Citizens of the United States [Part 1]" *The Journal of Negro History*. 6:3. 326-328.



alongside Lotty's husband in his investigation, Lockhart described a network of houses where the kidnapped woman had been taken and hid across the Ohio River in Kentucky.⁶

Just as pawnshops are often used to fence stolen goods today, slave trading firms and auction houses served the same purpose for kidnapers during in Crenshaw's day. The division between illegal kidnapper and legal slave trader sometimes overlapped. Abolitionists studying the domestic slave trade in the United States made no distinction in their reports.

The principal depots where men, women, and children are collected, frequently kept in irons and exhibited for sale are—Patty Cannon's house, situated on the confines of Delaware and Maryland; a large establishment in the city of Baltimore, the Jail of Baltimore County; one at Saddler's Cross Roads, and the Jail in the city of Washington a public tavern in the same places, and several places in the town of Alexandria; and in most of the towns of Virginia, and in the city of Charleston, S.C.

Those reports also provided detailed accounts of kidnappings on the Eastern Seaboard.

In addition to the evils of legalized Slavery, we may add, as growing out of the trade, acts of kidnapping not less cruel than those committed on the Coast of Africa. Individuals are well known, who have made a business of decoying free people of Color on board their vessels, and of selling them for Slaves; two instances came particularly under observation in one of our principal sea ports, (and we believe they are numerous in other places,) one a boy of about 12 years of age, was decoyed on board a vessel and taken to one of the above places of deposit, from thence sent in their chain of communication to the home of the purchaser. Another instance occurred by the next trip of the vessel, of a woman being taken in the same manner, who on attempting to leave the cabin was knocked down, gagged, and severely whipped, to intimidate, and make her acknowledge herself a slave. She was taken to the same place of deposit, but apprehending it was to be search, they removed her with two others, free persons, (one of them stolen within twelve miles of the place,) to the woods, where they were chained, with but little clothing, and exposed day and night in the open air; one of the persons so confined released himself from the tree to which he was attached and with an axe extricated the others. The woman above alluded to has since arrived and gave the information, and in addition says, they have pits to conceal their captives when close pursuit is apprehended, which they cover with earth and leaves.⁷

Compare those accounts with the earliest account of the Old Slave House published in 1921, which records the stories as heard a century ago in the middle of the first decade of the 1900s.

Stories come to me of an "Underground Railroad" station about four miles southeast of Equality in Gallatin County. Upon a hilltop, stands a large two-story frame house conspicuous for its many large windows. It is a plain rectangular block of a house, with a well pitched roof having a deck something like twelve feet wide running the entire length. Just under the edge of the deck there are windows corresponding to the ventilators of a railway car. The gables have large window. The attic is said to have been reached by a narrow stairway. Along each side of the attic hall just under the sloping part of the roof there are bunks arranged, bunks just as the beds are situated in a Pullman car.

One man relates that apparatus resembling stocks were seen in the rubbish of this attic. The story is that it was built between 1838 and 1844 and was owned by Johnny Crenshaw. Some metal ornaments on the house are said to have come from England. Instead of this being an "underground" station for escaping slaves, so the story goes, this one was once used by a band operating as the automobile thieves of today. A free Negro or one escaping by flight, if found by this gang, was overpowered and conveyed by night under guard from farther north to this station. Another night journey took him to and across the Ohio River where his word was not accepted in court and where undisputed possession was evidence of ownership.

⁶ John Lockhart to Henry Eddy. May 4, 1830. Eddy MSS. Illinois Historical Survey. University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

⁷ Wm. Kesley; Thomas Shipley; B. Lundy; Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, John Adams. July 1921. "Reports of the American Convention of Abolition Societies on Negroes and on Slavery, their Appeals to Congress, and their Addresses to the Citizens of the United States [Part I]" *The Journal of Negro History*. 6:3. 326-328.



The price that Negroes brought in those days was great enough to justify the risk taken by the captors. Some who have owned this house and lived in it tell this story as true. Others who were children in that day and lived only a few miles away claim no knowledge of such use of the property. This is explained on the ground that great secrecy was maintained by the owners. True or untrue, here is a story to stir the imagination.⁸

Joseph Edward Dempsey and his family lived in the house at the time Bonnell first heard the stories. Dempsey and his wife had moved into the house in 1893 just after they married in January. Dempsey ran the local coal mine at the bottom of the hill in front of the house. His descendants have verified the presence of chains on the third floor that Dempsey removed to use in his farming operations.⁹

While a number of Crenshaw family members have passed down various stories of Crenshaw's use of slave labor either on his plantation or the saltworks, a few of the stories note a distinction between the regular slaves or servants and those that could be considered victims of kidnapping or runaway slave capturing.

In 1946, Bonnell described the house, again based in part on what he heard four decades earlier.

The tradition which was current forty years ago was that free Negroes in Illinois were sometimes overpowered and brought here until an opportune time to take them down the nearby Saline River to the Ohio and over to Kentucky where they had no civil rights and could be sold. The other theory then was that the bunks were used by workmen at the salt well, possibly Negroes, for some of them did work there as slaves in the early 1800s.... Other theories of the use of the house have been current since then and even gotten into joint.¹⁰

The *WPA Guide to Illinois* provided another version, again mentioning a role in the Underground Railroad.

The Southern Colonial house has a sinister air heightened by its lonely site. Local opinion is divided as to the building's original use. Some believe that it was a station on the Underground Railroad; others that it was a prison for captured runaway slaves who were resold in the south. Available evidence favors the latter belief; Crenshaw it is said, gave elaborate parties on the lower floors with profits he gained from the terrified slaves he kept imprisoned in the upper part of the building.¹¹

The writer of a faded, brittle newspaper clipping from the 1930s mounted under glass on the third floor of the Old Slave House, tied the two traditions together. In effect, stating that Crenshaw turned his plantation house into a decoy: "It is said that Crenshaw operated the house as a station on the Underground Railroad only to capture the poor unfortunate runaways and resell back into slavery."¹²

As farfetched as that sounds, a letter written by the daughter of one of Crenshaw's nieces who lived at the Old Slave House in the 1840s, mentioned the establishment of an Underground Railroad station at Hickory Hill.¹³ Regrettably, the letter just mentioned it in passing providing no detailed information. Five years earlier the same woman had written, "The cabins were under the hills, at first, that is their own, but the ones that went through the underground R.R., that I cannot say, but many found freedom that way."¹⁴ The cabins are believed to be a reference to slave cabins that were probably used by field hands or even workers at Crenshaw's nearby salt works.¹⁵ Another time, after the woman had typed a copy of a 1937

⁸ Clarence Bonnell. Winter 1921. "The Lore of the Illinois Ozarks." *Transactions of the Illinois State Academy of Science*. Springfield, Ill.: Ill. St. Academy of Sci. 14:1. 56-57.

⁹ Ed Burtis Interview. May 18, 2002. Conducted by Jon Musgrave at the Saline Creek Pioneer Village and Museum, Harrisburg, Ill.

¹⁰ Clarence Bonnell. 1946. *The Illinois Ozarks*. Harrisburg, Ill.: Register Printing Co.

¹¹ Federal Writer's Project of the Works Projects Administration for the State of Illinois. 1939. *Illinois, A Descriptive and Historical Guide*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 437.

¹² Undated newspaper clipping from unknown newspaper displayed on the third floor of the Old Slave House. Contemporary references to writers from the Works Projects Administration indicate the article dates from the late 1930s.

¹³ Elizabeth W. [Mrs. W. F.] Brann. Feb. 11, 1947. Letter to Ivy Christy. Rick Phillips Collection.

¹⁴ Mrs. W. F. Brann. April 22, 1942. Letter to Mrs. A. J. Sisk. George Sisk Collection. Junction, Ill.

¹⁵ We believe the slave cabins were located northwest of the Old Slave House on what is now adjoining property not owned by the state.



article on the Old Slave House for a relative, she made the following handwritten note in the margin beside the article's account of Crenshaw's use of the third floor as a slave jail or holding pen:

He must not have been too hard on his slaves for some of them would not leave him when they were set free, and it is said he used the 3rd story to hide the trusted slaves, who did not choose to leave him, and their families & be sent away.¹⁶

Brann's account doesn't make sense unless you look at it as something Crenshaw might have told his young nieces, including the above author's mother, as a cover story. Descendants of Crenshaw's son also recall a distinction in the classes of the people of color remembered at Hickory Hill.

The story I've heard about Crenshaw's slaves that he owned are that he treated them rather well, they had their own cabins and plots of land assigned to them. I also heard that he abused the captured slaves.

... a few other things that were mentioned in conversations with family were that the captive slaves were kept on the third floor and that dances and Sunday school were held on the second floor of the Slave house.¹⁷

1842 Adams Kidnapping

The best place to start in telling the Old Slave House story as it relates to Crenshaw's activities is with the kidnapping of Maria Adams. Maria¹⁸ worked for John Crenshaw as an indentured servant. In late 1841, or early 1842, he kidnapped her and her children, sold them to a father and son team of slave traders named Lewis and John G. Kuykendall¹⁹ who took them to Texas where they were sold as slaves.²⁰ The Gallatin County Grand Jury indicted Crenshaw, but the petit jury acquitted him after the state's attorney failed to prove that Crenshaw or Kuykendall took the family out of state. Only Crenshaw appeared in court. Kuykendall apparently never did and without him or his men, the prosecutor had no one who could testify against Crenshaw.²¹ In addition to evidence that he had already sold some of his land in Gallatin County to Crenshaw and purchased land in Texas, additional evidence of his absence from Gallatin County shows up in a list of letters remaining at the post office that the Shawneetown postmaster developed on April 1, four days after the kidnapping trial ended.²² The postmaster published these lists quarterly. Kuykendall's name appeared on the list. Kuykendall likely traveled immediately to the Houston, Texas, area where at least one of his sons, Robert H. Kuykendall, set up housekeeping with his family in 1842.²³ The elder Kuykendall is living in Harris County at least by 1846.²⁴

Marshall, without mentioning Maria's name, wrote that she and her children may have "owed some type of service to Crenshaw." Thus, Marshall implied that Crenshaw's based part of his defense in the fact that Maria had been an indentured servant, and as such, her children also owed service to Crenshaw. The gaping hole in the argument is that while the Illinois Supreme Court upheld the state's indenture servitude law seven years earlier in *Choisser v. Hargrave* in 1836, it ruled that any indentures still in force must have followed the strict letter of the law when created.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Brann, trans. [n.d., 1937-1953]. *The Romance of the Old Slave House* by Barbara Burr Hubbs and John Mulcaster. See margin note on page 5. As of 1953, the article was the property of Brann's niece, Daisy (Christy) Phillips. Rick Phillips Collection, Des Moines, Iowa.

¹⁷ Kimbra Spurlin. July 5, 2002. E-mail to Jon Musgrave. Spurlin is a descendant of Crenshaw's son William T., who first made contact with the applicant in late June 2000.

¹⁸ The first name references are not intended as a sign of disrespect, but are used as an aide to keep track of the various family members. In addition, rarely do the contemporary records use Maria's or any other servant's surname.

¹⁹ Crenshaw and Kuykendall had common family ties. The brother-in-law to Crenshaw's wife, Sina (Taylor) Crenshaw, was a first cousin to Kuykendall.

²⁰ Henry Eddy, Benjamin Edwards, Ninian Edwards, George Leviston, and A. G. S. Wight. December 8, 1846. Letters to Gov. Thomas Ford. "Charles Adams and others pardon." Executive Clemency Files, Illinois State Archives.

²¹ Samuel D. Marshall. April 18, 1842. "Negrophobia." (Shawneetown) *Illinois Republican*. 3.

²² Shirley Cummins Shewmake, Shirley Cummins. 1994. *Gallatin County Illinois Newspaper Abstracts, 1841-1843*. 1:38. Reprinted from April 9, 1842. (Shawneetown) *Illinois Republican*.

²³ Bonnie Kuykendall. June 1993. "Kuykendall Folklore and Facts." *Stirpes: Quarterly Publication of the Texas State Genealogical Society*, 33:2. 24-28. Robert H. Kuykendall left Gallatin County in 1832 or 33 along with his younger brother John and became slave traders. By the 1850s following his wife's death he became leader of the Kuykendall Gang that operated in Harris County which among other criminal activities, stole slaves.

²⁴ Lewis Kuykendall. June 6, 1846. Assignment of Power of Attorney to William A. Kuykendall. *Gallatin County (Ill.) Deed Record N*. 602-605.



Because Hargrave's former master failed to properly indenture Barney when they arrived in Illinois, the court allowed his freedom. This information should have been common knowledge in the jury since the case originated in Gallatin County between Barney Hargrave and John Choisser, the named partner in the firm of Guard, Choisser and Co. who had employed Crenshaw at the saltworks prior to 1826. The prosecuting attorney in Crenshaw's trial must not have told the jury about the finer points of the court's ruling. That loose indentures between slaves and masters still had force of law in Gallatin County reflects the reality of the servitude laws in the region, particularly when it should have been easy to show that Crenshaw did not have proper title to Maria's children since he failed to register them with the county. In *Choisser v. Hargrave* the whole point of the court's action was to admit that while the territorial-era indenture laws violated the Northwest Ordinance's prohibition on slavery, the 1818 Illinois Constitution, authorized the indenture system. However, for indentures to be legal, the paperwork had to be in order.²⁵ Crenshaw only filed the paperwork on one of Maria's children, Nancy Jane in 1829.²⁶ He had no legal claim to the other six or seven kidnapped. Marshall's ability to concede Crenshaw still possessed some interest in those children shows the deep gulf between the law of the land and the reality for blacks in Southern Illinois. This is especially significant since Marshall was a lawyer. It also goes against criticism made by one of Crenshaw's descendants against Marshall to Hubbs in which he described Marshall as a "rabid abolitionist and Negro lover".²⁷

Notwithstanding the *Hargrave v. Choisser* decision, Crenshaw did own Maria's indenture contract. Her history starts in 1795. In 1810, at age 15, her master (possibly Territorial Gov. Ninian Edwards) indentured her for 45 years at Kaskaskia, the county seat of Randolph County as well as the territorial capital.²⁸ Maria may have been in Illinois prior to 1810 and not indentured, since her master had an incentive to wait until she turned 15. Females under 15 years of age could only be indentured until age 32, or in Maria's case until 1822. However, once they were 15 or older, they could sign for any length of time. Rather than 1822, Maria's master designed the indenture to last until 1855, an additional 33 years.

Maria's mother-in-law gave birth to her future husband, Charles Adams, in about 1794. An unknown owner brought him to Illinois from Maryland in late 1813 or early 1814. On March 19, 1814, Dr. Conrad Will, a later salt operator on the Big Muddy River, indentured Charles for 20 years. Sometime during the next four years Will sold Charles' contract to Gov. Edwards. During this period Charles and Maria married. Possibly as a wedding present, Edwards filed a statement on March 6, 1818, in Randolph County Court at Kaskaskia pledging that he would let Maria go free when Charles' contract expired. Specifically, Edwards pledged his...

[S]acred vow of Honor to my servant Charles and Maria his wife that if they should continue to conduct themselves as good and dutiful servants that I shall let Maria go free at the time that the said Charles' time of service expires agreeable to his indentures and at a convenient season I will execute such further writings as will effectuate this promise according to the true intent and meaning...

Edwards never did. Although Charles later filed Edwards' statement with the Gallatin County Circuit Clerk, it did not prevent Crenshaw from keeping a claim on Maria.²⁹

While in the service to Gov. Edwards, Maria gave birth to two children, Nelson and Ellen. Since Eddy wrote that Nelson was free at the time of the kidnapping and Illinois law provided that male children of indentured servants be free at age 22, Nelson must have been born in early 1820, or sometime before that (1842 - 22 = 1820). Crenshaw's son-in-law Michael Kelly Lawler filed a certificate of freedom for Ellen Adams on June 2, 1845. The certificate listed her age as 22, making her birth date 1823. Since Illinois law freed female children of indentured servants at age 19, Crenshaw forced Ellen to wait an additional three years before she received her freedom papers.³⁰ He never filed papers for Nelson.

²⁵ *John Choisser v. Barney Hargrave*. 1836. I [Scammon](#) 317-319, and I [Blackwell](#) 336-338. Online at the Choisser Family website at <http://www.choisser.com/family/hargrave.html>; also see

²⁶ Rebecca Schmook, trans. 1994. *Gallatin County, Illinois, Slave Register, 1815-1839* Privately published. 44.

²⁷ William L. Patton. July 13, 1937. Letter to Mrs. Stanley [Barbara] Hubbs. "Old Slave House" vertical file. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill.

²⁸ Helen Cox Tregillis. 1988. *River Road to Freedom*. Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, Inc. 106-107.

²⁹ Schmook, 61-62.

³⁰ John W. Allen, trans.; Jon Musgrave, ed. 2004. *Gallatin County, Illinois, Slave & Emancipation Records, 1839-1849*. Marion, Ill.: IllinoisHistory.com. 101.



During the winter of 1825, Gov. Edwards met with Gallatin County salt maker Col. Augustus G. S. Wight in Vandalia. During the conversation he mentioned that he would take bids on Charles and Maria's contracts. Sometime between the winter meeting and August 7, Wight sent an agent to Edwards to arrange the purchase and delivery. The parents, the children, or both, threw such a fit over being separated that Edwards agreed to send the children with the agent for a short time. The letters reveal that Maria cooked for Edwards for nearly eight years (1818 - 1825) and at least started as a cook in Wight's household.

In a letter dated August 14, 1825, Wight wrote to Edwards stating that he found Charles better than he expected. However, he felt sorry that Maria did not meet his expectations as a first-rate cook or a seamstress. Wight also asked that Edwards transfer Ellen's and Nelson's contracts to him. Edwards responded on August 19, apologizing that Maria did not meet up to Wight's expectations:

You remark that "you are sorry to say also that Maria by no means tallies with the description you had of her, she is not a first-rate cook, neither is she any part of a sempstress [sic]." I have read this part of your letter to several ladies now at my house, all well acquainted with her, who are equally with myself surprised at it. She had been my only cook for seven years before I sold her to you, during which time, I have lived pretty well, and entertained much company, all of whom I believe would agree with me, that she deserves to be considered in this part of the world, at least a first-rate cook. The ladies insist upon it that she is an excellent sempstress [sic], and I know she has made and ruffled my shirts as well as I have ever been able to find any other person capable of doing. I can also prove that she has done almost all kinds of fine work, and that she can cut out and make and make her own dresses as well as any lady in this part of the country. It is true she has not done much sewing for the last seven years, & it is probably her present situation may prevent her from discharging her duties with her usual ability. She is however a faithful and capable servant whom no money could have got from me, if she had chosen to separate from her husband...

Possibly to counter Wight's request for the children, Edwards wrote that Maria had 10 more years on her contract, than he had originally represented to Wight. This may show Edwards' intention of not honoring his agreement about shortening Maria's indenture. However, Edwards offered to return Wight's money in exchange for the family rather than agree to his proposal of transferring Nelson and Ellen to Wight. The governor's reference to Maria in a special condition may imply that she was pregnant at the time.

For the next four years while he served as Illinois' third governor, Edwards continued to write to Wight trying to get the children back or at least some sort of payment for them. He wrote his last known letter to Wight on June 23, 1829:

Sir: You gave to your agent, to whom I delivered the Negroes I sold you, full authority to act for you, and promised that you would comply with any arrangement he might make with me. In consequence of which I permitted him, for reasons which you are apprised of, and approved, to take away my little servants, Nelson and Ellen, upon his explicit engagement that they should be returned to me whenever thereto required. You, yourself, gave me an assurance that they should be returned, and subsequently wrote to me what you had done with that in view, and the reasons for the failure. I have repeatedly demanded their return, and in the most unequivocal and unqualified manner, in the course of the past year, and shall hold you liable for a reasonable compensation for their services up to the receipt of this letter. If however, you choose to keep them at the rate of \$70 per annum for the hire of the boy and \$50 per annum for the hire of the girl, you clothing them, paying doctor's bills and all other necessary expenses, you may keep them till I notify you to the contrary. I shall have to pay more for services which I stand in absolute need of an which they are perfectly capable of performing more to my satisfaction. Your keeping these servants will be considered as assenting to pay me for their services according to the foregoing proposition. I will take nothing less, and therefore nothing more need to be said about it.³¹

When writing the letter, Edwards must not have known that Wight might have already sold the family's contracts to Crenshaw, since Crenshaw recorded the birth of Maria's daughter Nancy Jane in the county slave registry sometime

³¹ Ninian W. Edwards, ed. 1884. *The Edwards Papers*. E. B. Washburne, ed. Chicago: Fergus Printing Co.



between February 17 and April 20, 1830. Charles filed his freedom papers on April 29, 1834.³² By the time of the kidnapping, Charles and Nelson were free, and Ellen probably worked in Lawler's household. Marshall provided the most clues to how the kidnapping took place:

The Negroes were stopped and kept in confinement for several days before being taken away. When Kuykendall comes for them it is late at night. The Negroes with their aged Mother, were handcuffed, or tied and put in the wagon.

Now is there a man in this community so soft as to suppose that Crenshaw did not know where the Negroes were going; and with what intention they were bought. If it had been an honest and legal transaction, would K. have come in the night? Would the Negroes have been tied, for the purpose of taking them a few miles? No, no such thing. The laws have been violated, humanity has been outraged, and all through the act of John Crenshaw.³³

Although neither Marshall nor Henry Eddy, who also wrote about the kidnapper, ever described where Crenshaw took the family, the story matches the folklore surrounding the house at the turn of the century concerning kidnapped victims being held on the third floor. It also matches the mode of operation of kidnappers on the East Coast including the Patty Cannon Gang's use of garrets (attics).

Marshall's reference that Crenshaw's men stopped Maria and her children implies that the kidnapping took place on a road, not at home. The presence of all the children, as many as seven or eight, but not her husband, limits the destinations Maria would have taken. The best argument is that Maria and children were going to, or coming from church or a camp meeting. A free black preacher named Bryant Smith lived in Cypressville (modern day Junction) next door to Crenshaw according to the 1840 Census. Also, association records show a black Emancipation Baptist church operating in Shawneetown during the early 1840s. Ledger pages from Thomas Leavell's grocery in Equality show that Charles drank whiskey. (He's listed as Crenshaws [sic] Charles on the ledgers). While there is no direct evidence that Charles became an alcoholic, papers in Leavell's estate lists Charles as unlikely to pay his debts.³⁴ The black Emancipation Baptists strongly supported the temperance movement during the 1840s. The combination may have kept Charles away from the church, while his wife and children went.

Shawneetown attorney Henry Eddy and others later collaborated Marshall's story in a letter to Gov. Thomas Ford four years after the kidnapping. Eddy and the others made the statements to Ford following an attempt by Wight to get the governor to pardon Charles, Nelson and a third man, Nelson "Fox" Perry (Charles Adams and others pardon, 1846). After the kidnapping, Nelson and Fox stopped Crenshaw on the road leading from the iron works in Hardin County. With Fox holding a rifle, Nelson demanded to know where Crenshaw took his family. None of the letters indicate what, if anything, Crenshaw told, but Crenshaw quickly had Nelson, Fox and Charles, who wasn't even present, arrested. One year later, a Hardin County jury convicted the men of assault with the intent to murder. They were sentenced to four years at the state penitentiary in Alton.

As some point between 1842 and 1846, sympathetic whites such as Eddy and Wight discovered which plantation Maria and the children were at in Texas. They placed in motion a rescue attempt with the first step working to secure the release of the men in the family from the penitentiary. In addition to Eddy and Wight, the two sons of the late Gov. Edwards, Ninian W. Edwards and Benjamin Edwards, also urged Ford to pardon the men. Eddy wrote the following portion:

Without entering into a history of the whole affair, but commencing with their crimes, we would respectfully state, that Charles Adams & his son Nelson made an attack on Mr. John Crenshaw, of Gallatin with the intention as Mr. Crenshaw states to murder him... and one of the signers of this petition who is a practicing lawyer in the circuit has no doubt that if they had been properly defended that they would have been acquitted. There is one thing certain. Mr. Crenshaw was not injured in the

³² Schmook. 61, 62.

³³ Samuel D. Marshall. April 18, 1842. "Negrophobia." (Shawneetown) *Illinois Republican*. 3.

³⁴ Thomas H. Leavell. 1840s. Probate File. Gallatin County Circuit Clerk's Office.



assault, and as the father Charles Adams is quite an aged man, and neither he or his son has been known to be guilty of any crime before, we would respectfully petition to your excellence, to pardon them for their unexpired term of service.

Both Eddy and Wight signed off on the next paragraph of the petition which explained the reasons for the men's attack on Crenshaw:

We would also add that the wife and several [or seven] children of the said Adams, was previous to the assault (and from which the difficulty sprang) was kidnapped and taken to Texas and made slaves of for life, that the friends of this unfortunate family have taken measures to have them brought back, and they are asking on that account for the release of the Father and son in order to assist in their release.

Another Gallatin County man, George Leviston, added a further paragraph stating that he personally knew the men and recommended them for pardon taking the provocation they had. The papers include another letter from Eddy and one from the two Edwards brothers. All are dated December 8, 1846, the day of the pardon and the last day of Ford's administration. Eddy's second letter provides more clues to the kidnapping and secondary assault:

I understand from Col. Wight of Galena that you are disposed to pardon out of the penitentiary, two or three Negro men, sent from Hardin County for the unexpired term of their sentence. Charles Adams, & Nelson his son, were two—the name of the third I do not remember. Charles & Nelson had formerly belonged to old Gov. Edwards of this state, who sold their time, with that of Maria, Charles' wife, to Col. Wight as indentured or registered servants, under the Territorial laws, many years ago, and allowed their two children, Nelson & Catherine, all they had then, to accompany them to Gallatin County, the better to reconcile their parents to go. They had seven or eight children afterwards, who with their mother, Maria were kidnapped & carried to Texas. The prosecution of these men grew out of this circumstance, the charge being, that Charles Nelson & The other (whose name I now call to mind was Fox) had assaulted Mr. John Crenshaw, with intent to kill him. Mr. C. had purchased the family from Col. Wight, some years before, and sold them, (with the exception of Charles & Nelson who had become free) to one Kuykendall, whom ran them off to Texas. Mr. C. was assured & believed, by many, to have connived at this abduction & he was indicted but acquitted on trial. The conviction of these three Negroes was procured by employing all the counsel at the bar there present, except an old school master, who had once been licensed to practice law & whom the court was obliged to appoint as counsel for the Negroes. Of course the defense was weak & inefficient & I know well that the public sentiment in Hardin County, was against the conviction, as being harsh, if not entirely undeserved. They have served some three years or more under the sentence, and I should be gratified to see them pardon, in order that they assist in rescuing the kidnapped family from Texas.

After Ford pardoned the men, the family disappears from the records, and it is unknown if the rescue succeeded.³⁵ Charles shows up in the 1850 Census of Gallatin County, but is living with a white family at the time. A document in the possession of Eddy's grandson at the turn of the century possibly provides one additional clue. Harris included a footnote reference to a document the grandson showed him while he researched the slave history in Gallatin County. The footnote referred to a memorandum of transaction between Kuykendall and John Crenshaw of Shawneetown for \$2,000. A number of slaves or servants were used as collateral.³⁶ The price fits for the Adams family, since the Peter White kidnapping two years later, showed that children brought \$200 a piece. The seven or eight Adams children would bring \$1,400 or \$1,600, leaving Maria valued at \$400 or \$600.

³⁵ Henry Eddy, Benjamin Edwards, Ninian Edwards, George Leviston, and A. G. S. Wight. December 8, 1846. Letters to Gov. Thomas Ford. "Charles Adams and others pardon." Executive Clemency Files, Illinois State Archives.

³⁶ Harris, Norman Dwight. 1904. *The History of Negro Servitude in Illinois and of the slavery agitation in that state, 1719-1864*. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co. 14.



Peter White Kidnapping

According to a turn of the century account based on an interview with the victim himself, a group of men kidnapped 10-year-old Peter White of Equality and three other younger children, and sold them for \$800 into slavery in Arkansas. Walter White, a son of Benjamin White and nephew of Gen. Leonard White rescued the children.³⁷ A history professor from what's now Southern Illinois University at Carbondale interviewed White in 1903. His first mention of White appeared in the following year as part of an article on the history of the saltworks. Later Smith recounted the story in his textbook on Illinois history as well as his multi-volume sets on the history of Southern Illinois and the later the state in general. Smith dated the kidnappings to 1844, or about two years after the Adams case. However he wrote that Peter was 10 at the time, which wouldn't have happened until late 1847 or early 1848, based on White's age in subsequent censuses and his death record. Despite the details given and even the use of his portrait, Smith never mentioned who kidnapped Peter. Mysteriously, Smith also never mentioned Crenshaw in his article on the salines, or any other book about the region he later wrote other than a throwaway reference that listed the Crenshaws as among the prominent early families of Gallatin County. Even worse for his reputation as a thorough historian Smith failed to include the information on Crenshaw's salt making operations found in the five-county history published just 16 years before he arrived in Gallatin County.

Either the college professor was incompetent, or he deliberately left Crenshaw out of the history books. He had spent four days in the county interviewing older residents and looking over records, including those in possession of Eddy's son-in-law, which included letters written on behalf of victims claiming that Crenshaw kidnapped them. Four of Crenshaw's children were still living in the county at the time. He traveled at least within one-quarter mile of the Old Slave House on his way to Shawneetown. So why did he highlight White and blacklist Crenshaw? Probably, because the two were connected.

Nine decades later, one of Smith's former students James Baldwin, an elderly Baptist minister and vice-president of the Saline County Historical Society, recalled that Smith often told stories about the Old Slave House in his classes, but never wrote about them.³⁸ In 1934, when James Lyle Sisk designed the first set of interpretive signs in the Old Slave House, he included one that identified Crenshaw as White's kidnapper. He also wrote that White and the other three children kidnapped at the time were held temporarily on the third floor of the Old Slave House. Sisk, an uncle to the current occupant George Sisk, was an educator and apparently the only family member that took an active interest in recording the home's history. His sign encouraged visitors to go see the White descendants who still lived in Equality and hear the confirmation for themselves.³⁹ The Shawneetown newspaper twice referred to Peter's story in the late 1930s. In the months following the devastating 1937 Flood, the *Gallatin Democrat* practically filled the paper with stories of the proposed plans to move away from the river along with stories of all the history the old town would be leave behind. Being a countywide paper the historical focus spread to Equality's history as well. In May, they ran a 555-word article on White that badly mangled his story. They even gave the readers a heads up that not all would be correct when the headline started out as 'Bob White' rather than Peter. Not only did they use incorrect dates but started the story with Peter's father as the subject and without warning switched to Peter merging the father and son's story. The following two sentences supposedly deal with his father's master named McCalister and Peter and his sister. The interim editor pinch-hitting in the paper office following the flood seemed incapable at times of completing a logical train of thought.

McCalister thus started to Shawneetown with Pete and his sister, where he was detained from crossing the river on the crude boats of that day. To prevent kidnapers from taking the Negroes during the night, McCalister hid them under a wagon bed somewhere between Equality and Shawneetown. Finally McCalister, with his two Negroes, reached New Orleans, in slave territory, where his prisoners were held captives to be sold into slavery.⁴⁰

³⁷ George Washington Smith. 1912. *History of Southern Illinois*. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co. 473.

³⁸ James Baldwin. April 1997. "Letter to the editor." *Springhouse*. 14.

³⁹ Attempts to reach descendants of White have been unsuccessful to date.

⁴⁰ May 13, 1937. "Bob White, Negro, Began Career Under Wagon Bed." (Shawneetown) *The Gallatin Democrat*. 5.



The article is worth using only for the kernels of truth that may be in it, particularly the reference of hiding the children under a wagon bed. That's not something somebody can just do in the middle of an 8 or 10-mile trip from the county seat to the river port. That takes planning, preparation and a wagon custom-built with smuggling in mind. Thus the wagon trick may be a clue to how the kidnappers transported some victims. But the supporting clause at the beginning of the second sentence may be another. "To prevent kidnappers from taking the Negroes... McCalister hid them..." That's a reasonable justification. "Quickly, they're coming. Hide in here," the kidnapper's accomplice told his unwitting victims as they voluntarily packaged themselves for shipment. The use of decoys in kidnappings was common. An 1876 history noted kidnappers often "inveigled their victims" into a trip south" through the use of "fraud and deceit."⁴¹ Though not commonly used today, one definition of inveigle literally means "to persuade through ingenuity." Convincing a kidnapping victim to voluntarily crawl into a box built underneath a wagon bed in order to protect himself from the kidnappers certainly meets that definition.

The 1937 article also provided another possible kernel in its explanation of how Walter White managed to find Peter and the other children.

The sister of Pete happened to be very smart, and told officials they were free Negroes, since their master held them in Illinois one day exceeding the time limit. This time limit McCalister well knew, when he agreed, before leaving Gallatin county, to make Pete and his sister free if Pete would ride the races in the mud. They gave the officers the name of General Leonard White at Equality. The officers wrote General White to confirm the story. On receiving the news from the officers, General White immediately dispatched Walter White to New Orleans, recovered the two Negroes, and returned them to Equality, where the family took the name of White. The kidnappers were convicted on the evidence of Pete and his sister, and sent to prison.

Taken as a whole the story is false if for no other reasons than the kidnappers could never have been convicted on the evidence of Peter and his sister as they could have never testified against a white man in a court of law. Also, the New Orleans story doesn't match what Peter had told Prof. Smith. What could be a clue to what happen was the issue that Peter's sister may have been one of the three other children kidnapped and that it had been her idea to press their status as free blacks to the officials in Arkansas. She or Peter could have referred them to write to Gen. White much as Lucinda asked the commonwealth attorney in Barren Co., Kentucky, to write to a Shawneetown attorney named Eddy in order to verify her story. White then could have easily delegated his nephew to their rescue. The issue of Walter White's rescue isn't questioned, in part because both the newspaper story, as well as Smith's accounts from his 1903 interview, agree to his role. Also, Peter ended up in Walter White's household in the 1850 census.⁴²

As to the story of the horse races the details aren't clear from the newspaper account. The article started named Peter's father as McCalister's jockey, then it abruptly switch to Peter in that role.

In 1941, James Madison White, one of Peter White's sons, died following a car accident. In the son's obituary the newspaper again made reference to the father, but this time, in direct connection to the Old Slave House. However, like the 1937 story, the writer still managed to mangle the basic facts, if not get them completely turned around.

James Madison White, son of the late Peter and Elizabeth Violet White, was born on the McEvoy farm near Equality July 23, 1863, and was past 78 years of age at the time of his death.

⁴¹ Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuvé. 1876. *A Complete History of Illinois from 1867 to 1873; Embracing the Physical Features of the country; its Early Explorations; Aboriginal Inhabitants; French and British Occupation; Conquest by Virginia; Territorial Condition and the Subsequent Civil, Military and Political Events of the State.* Springfield, Ill.: Illinois Journal Company. 318-321.

⁴² 1850 Census of Saline Co., Illinois. Summerset (Somerset) Precinct. 6. Walter White heads up a household that includes him, a miller at Whitesville on the Saline River, a white laborer named Duncan Mattingly, 27; followed by Peter's mother Rhina, 40; Julius, 12; Eliza, 8; and Peter, 14. The last four were also dittoed with the last name Mattingly, though whether that should have been so is unknown. Like the 1937 story that named the master of Peter's father as McCalister, the 1880 census shows Rhina McAlister in Peter White's household and lists her as his mother.



... Mr. White was the son of a slave who was kidnapped from a southern plantation before the Civil War and taken to Equality to the “Old Slave House” then owned by the Crenshaws, where he was freed, and permitted to take up life as a citizen of Gallatin County.

His slave father married an Equality colored woman and the son James Madison, was one of their 24 children who was taught to respect and follow the directions and advice of white citizens of high standing.⁴³

The grand jury is not known to have handed down any indictments in the White case. However, it is probably important to note that Crenshaw, his brother-in-law Jonathan Houston, and his business partner Edgar Bogardus, all served as grand jurors in 1844, if that was the year of the kidnappings.⁴⁴ A similar situation occurred a year earlier when the county commissioners appointed son-in-law Michael K. Lawler as a grand juror for the 1843 court sessions.⁴⁵ No such close relatives can be found on the 1842 grand juror list when the jury indicted Crenshaw.⁴⁶ If it the kidnapping took place closer to 1847 then it might be related to one of the kidnapping indictments handed down or active that year. The problem with those indictments is that the remaining court records don’t give the names of the victims.

Post-Mexican War Kidnappings

After his acquittal in the Adams case Crenshaw continued to make salt even though he gave up his state lease on the saltworks in 1847. He still produced salt at least through 1849. In a letter dated May 27 of that year, Crenshaw's daughter-in-law Adeline Crenshaw updates Crenshaw's daughter Margaret Lanphier who is living in Springfield, Ill., on what is going on at Hickory Hill. Adeline described Crenshaw as “crass and peevish because... the business in which they are now engaged is very perplexing and hard to manage—they are now grinding, sawing, and making [sic] salt rapidly—and by the first of August will be making whiskey.”⁴⁷ Sometime thereafter, Crenshaw closed his saltworks when they became no longer profitable.

Gen. James H. Wilson served as one of the youngest Union generals during the Civil War. In his memoirs he told about how his father dealt with kidnapers in the region of the Old Slave House after Crenshaw closed his saltworks and the Mexican War ended:

The decade after the Mexican War was a turbulent one in southeastern Illinois. The closing of the saltworks had let loose a large number of rough operatives, white and black. Gambling, drinking, horse-racing, and gun-fighting prevailed, the slavery question came to the front as it had done once before, and kidnapping became common along the border of the slave states.

Among the first victims was a colored girl who had belonged to the Wilson family. She was taken to the Red River, but as soon as she could be located my father went for her, and after much legal formality and trouble, brought her home in triumph. After a similar service in another case of the same sort, which aroused the public conscience, under his leadership, he had the satisfaction of seeing all forms of violence vindicated and the rowdies and kidnapers brought to punishment or driven out of the state.⁴⁸

The *History of Gallatin, Saline, Williamson, Franklin and Hamilton Counties, Illinois* agreed with Wilson’s account. It notes that for a number of years centering on 1851, “there were numerous indictments against various parties for kidnapping.” Elsewhere the unknown author of the chapter on Gallatin County made the following cryptic reference:

⁴³ Sept. 25, 1941. “Aged Equality Colored Resident Succumbs.” (Shawneetown, Ill.) *Gallatin Democrat*. 5.

⁴⁴ March 9, 1844. Gallatin County Order Book, 1840-1846. 304-305. Typed copy of a handwritten copy made by the Historical Record Survey. Illinois Regional Archives Depository, Carbondale.

⁴⁵ March 10, 1843. Gallatin County Order Book, 1840-1846. 215. Typed copy of a handwritten copy made by the Historical Record Survey. Illinois Regional Archives Depository, Carbondale.

⁴⁶ March 9, 1842. Gallatin County Order Book, 1840-1846 123. Typed transcript found in John Allen Collection, Morris Library Special Collections Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

⁴⁷ Adaline Crenshaw. May 27, 1849. Letter to Margaret (Crenshaw) Lanphier. May 27, 1849. Charles H. Lanphier MSS. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill.

⁴⁸ James Harrison Wilson. 1912, Reprint 1971. *Under the old flag*. Westport, Conn. Greenwood Press Publishers. 5.



Because of the prejudices of many of the people then against the Negro, and their frequent attempts to steal them and sell them into slavery in the Southern States, great trouble frequently arose; many cruelties and outrages upon their rights were perpetrated by persons, some of whom are still living, who would, with their present enlightened views of justice, crimson to the temples to see their names published in connection with the crimes they once thought it a duty to commit, but which names frequently appear on the records of the circuit court, in indictments for kidnapping.⁴⁹

The neighboring Saline County grand jury indicted one of those Gallatin County men, Jefferson King of Saline Mines in 1851. He never appeared in court; the judge eventually dropped the case years later.⁵⁰ Other kidnappings this decade included cases against David Leech, Alfred Leech and James Dye in Johnson County. The judge dismissed the case during the April 1855 term after the prosecution witness failed to show up in court.⁵¹

Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuvé wrote the first major history of Illinois published after the Civil War. They provided a glimpse of how the kidnappings were carried out:

[I]n the majority of cases the poor ignorant blacks, by fraud and deceit, were inveigled into a trip south on a flatboat, or other errand, and at some pre-arranged point on the river, they would be turned over to confederates, forcibly and rapidly taken to the interior and there sold into slavery... Another mode was to seize a black and forcibly convey him to a rendezvous either on the Ohio or Mississippi, but not out of the State, where a confederate would appear and carry him beyond.⁵²

Although the available evidence on Crenshaw connects him with kidnapping from the 1820s to the 1840s. It is possible he stayed active in the business up through the Civil War. As Gen. Wilson and others later recalled, kidnappings in the 1850s increased following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 which placed free blacks at even greater risk of capture. As late as 1859, the *Illinois State Journal* in Springfield noted the dangers facing free blacks in Southern Illinois: “Southern Illinois is infested with gangs of ruffians, who do nothing else but lie in wait for free negroes, and who, when they catch one, make sale of him and pocket the money.”⁵³ Davidson and Stuvé (1876) agreed, “The crime of seizing free blacks, running them south and selling them into slavery from this State, for a long time was quite common... [P]ortions of southern Illinois for many years afforded a safe retreat to those kidnapping outlaws. We cannot cite the numerous cases of kidnapping.”

‘Sobriquet of Granger’

The extent of Crenshaw’s kidnapping activities remained hidden for over a century because most of the remaining references to him use his alias, John Granger (Musgrave, 1996). Until the second or third decade of the 19th Century, Crenshaws throughout the South pronounced their name in a way that could easily be spelled Granger, or occasionally Granshaw or Cranshaw. The Crenshaws of Gallatin County did the same. Official records such as deeds used the correct spelling, but records written by someone else, such as a census enumerator, used spellings based on whatever the person thought they heard. When the research started in 1996, neither local legends nor 19th Century histories recalled the alias. Only a mistake by Shawneetown lawyer Henry Eddy led to the discovery. While defending Crenshaw in a lawsuit over some debts, Eddy wrote a counterclaim for Crenshaw. He started Crenshaw’s name with John Granger, drew a line through Granger, and continued with Crenshaw. This discovery led to other Granger documents and similarities between Granger’s family and Crenshaw’s family.⁵⁴ Others such as George Flower knew of Crenshaw as Granger when he led off with that

⁴⁹ 1887. *History of Gallatin, Saline, Hamilton, Franklin and Williamson Counties, Illinois*. Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co. 73, 32.

⁵⁰ 1887. *History of Gallatin*... 192.

⁵¹ 1855. *Court Record 7*. Johnson County, Illinois, Circuit Court. 84.

⁵² Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuvé. 1876. *A Complete History of Illinois from 1673 to 1873*. Springfield: Illinois Journal Company. 230, 319-321.

⁵³ It is not known if the editor of the newspaper realized he could have been describing the father-in-law of his competitor, Charles Henry Lanphier, editor of the *Illinois State Register*, the Democratic organ in Springfield. Lanphier married Crenshaw’s daughter Margaret Taylor Crenshaw on Feb. 25, 1846, in a ceremony at Hickory Hill plantation.

⁵⁴ Ronald L. Nelson & Gary DeNeal, comps. February 1997. “John Crenshaw, a mystery solved.” *Springhouse*. 23-25.



name in a list of salt makers at the Gallatin Salines leading public opinion towards legalizing slavery in the state during the debates for a constitutional convention in 1825.⁵⁵

In a missed opportunity, the researchers could have saved months of work had they followed a tip in the Methodist church records. Early in the research, the librarian at the Shawneetown Public Library gave the researchers a photocopy of a page printed in a pamphlet concerning the history of the Shawneetown Methodist Church. The page noted Crenshaw as a leader of the church during the 1830s. Since we already knew Crenshaw's reputation as a "good Methodist" we took the copy but never pursued the original. In the summer of 2001, the librarian, now retired, decided to recheck the original church minutes and found the original source for the information in the pamphlet. In addition to the same paragraph, the church historian also included the following line, not reprinted in the pamphlet: "John Crenshaw, as well known by the sobriquet of Granger..." That phrase written on August 11, 1873, by a contemporary of Crenshaw, could have saved a lot of work. Now it just confirms the connection.

The Case of Frank Granger

The Eddy Manuscripts include two kidnapping references to Granger/Crenshaw: Frank Granger and Lucinda. Robert Green of Covington, Tennessee, wrote to Eddy on May 14, 1828:

Sir,

I have been directed to apply to you for information respecting the situation of a certain Negro man by the name of Frank Granger - whether he is a free man or a Slave — and whether his freedom has even been established, of if not whether or not there are documents or evidence in existence that can show him to be free?

I wait with impatience to hear from.

Respectfully

Robert G. Green

PS If evidence of his freedom does not exist can it be procured, and will you assist in furnishing it.

Eddy made note of what he knew about the case and wrote it in the margin of the letter, presumably in order to write a response to Ellis. Eddy wrote that a man named Milburn brought Frank and others to Illinois. Milburn traded Frank to two men named Davenport and Forrester for recapturing the group. Davenport purchased Forrester's interest in Frank and sold Frank to John Granger, "who removed him to Tennessee." Shawneetown lawyer John McLean mentioned Milburn in the Jan. 1, 1820 issue of the (Shawneetown) *Illinois Gazette* in connection with a counterfeiting ring. Like Eddy, seven years later, McLean listed Milburn's surname without a first name. Eddy knew Forrester, not only as a former Gallatin County official, but also in connection with two other kidnappings. After one of the incidents, the Gallatin County Grand Jury had indicted both Forrester and Crenshaw as codefendants (Musgrave, 1996). Which Davenport in the area Eddy meant is unknown. One served as sheriff; his brother, Adrian Davenport Jr., kidnapped Venus Davenport and took her to New Orleans.⁵⁶

The Kidnapping of Lucinda

The second Granger/Crenshaw kidnapping in the Eddy Manuscripts involved a black woman named Lucinda that took place in 1828. Fifteen years later in 1843, J. H. C. Ellis wrote a letter to the postmaster at Shawneetown. As the commonwealth attorney for Barren County, Kentucky, at the time, Lucinda had approached Ellis telling him that she was a free woman who had been kidnapped and sold into slavery. Ellis wrote to the postmaster at Shawneetown to find someone to confirm Lucinda's story. The postmaster forwarded the letter to Eddy since he had been mentioned in it:

⁵⁵ George Flower. 1882. *History of the English Settlement in Edwards Co. Illinois, founded in 1817 and 1818 by Morris Birkbeck and George Flower*. Chicago Historical Society Collections, vol. 1. Chicago: Fergus Publishing Co. 200.

⁵⁶ Schmook. 50,51, 53.



Dear Sir.

There is a Negro woman in this county who informs me she is entitled to her freedom. She says that some 15 years ago she lived in and around Shawneetown, and was stolen and run off by a man by the name of John Granger and sold into slavery. She tells me that a man by the name of Champ Carr or some such name, and Tim Carr, William Granger, Abraham Granger, who live in or around your town know that she is free, and also a lawyer by the name of Eddy or Ady or some such name, and one by the name of Green also know her to be a free woman.

Her name is Lucinda and at the time she was taken she had two children. She says she worked at saltworks in or near Shawneetown. My object in writing to you is to know if there are any of the above named individuals living in your town or county and if it is not too much trouble to request you to inquire of any of them if you can see them if they know any such woman and if they know any facts which would entitle her to her freedom.

I write to you because I have not the pleasure of an acquaintance with any person in your vicinity. Your attention will perhaps do a favor to humanity and will much oblige.

Yours etceteras,

J. H. C. Ellis

William and Abraham Granger were brothers to Crenshaw. Lucinda's certainty that they would vouch for her appears to exonerate them from complicity with their brother's crimes. In fact, both brothers moved away from Gallatin County after Lucinda's kidnapping. The Champ and Tim Carr could be references to Chalon and Timothy Guard, other salt makers at the salines. Before striking out on his own in the salt business, Crenshaw worked for the firm of Guard, Choisser and Co.⁵⁷

Underground Railroad in Southeastern Illinois

Crenshaw could have used the signs and signals of the Underground Railroad to lure runaway slaves into his lair. Preliminary research has surprisingly found no references to runaway slaves captured in Gallatin County, even though notices of runaways captured in other counties are found in the Shawneetown newspapers. The notices of runaways originating from the saltworks indicate that there were runaways in the county. The lack of notices by the local sheriffs implies that if runaways were captured, they were not turned over to the authorities.

Darrel Dexter, a historical researcher in Union Co., Illinois, recalled Henry Anderson, a slave catcher who lived two bluffs north of Lick Creek.⁵⁸ D. W. Lusk presented a short biographical sketch of one such slave-catcher who lived down river from Crenshaw in Golconda:

Many of our readers will learn with surprise that before the war colored men, attempting to escape into free territory were hunted down by the aid of bloodhounds; but such is the fact. William Belford, of Golconda, was one of many men, in Illinois, who made their living by catching and returning runaway slaves. He kept a favorite blood-hound for this purpose, and was often seen upon the highway, on horseback, with it sitting in his lap. It is said by those who knew him well, that he thought more of this hound than he did of his own children. During the war he was, naturally, a violent rebel, and was often embroiled in quarrels with his neighbors, in regard to the conduct of the war, as waged by the National authorities, and in one of these met his death, at the hands of Wm. Whiteside, of Golconda, in 1864.⁵⁹

No matter how hard Crenshaw may have tried, some runaways slipped through his net, and like any plantation owner he also had to worry about runaways from Hickory Hill. The Underground Railroad did operate in southeastern Illinois, but not nearly as vigorously as it did in western and northern Illinois. Verna Cooley:

⁵⁷ John Crenshaw. Jan. 15, 1825. "The Rogues' Looking Glass." (Shawneetown) *Illinois Gazette*. 5:51. 1.

⁵⁸ Darrel Dexter. 1994. *A house divided: Union County, Illinois 1818-1865*. Anna, Ill.: Reppert Publications. 56-57.

⁵⁹ D. W. Lusk. 1889. *Politics and politicians: Anecdotes and incidents 1809-1889*. Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Register. Reprinted in the December 1996. *Springhouse* (Herod, Illinois). 29.



The Southeast was the enemy's country for the fugitive. Bitter animosity was felt by the people of this region toward any person aiding the slave and also toward any section which distinguished itself in that respect.⁶⁰

The most likely places for stations would be in free black settlements and near whites that opposed slavery. A combination of traditions and 19th Century documents place Underground Railroad activity in the free black settlements of Redwood Point/Grayson, Pond Settlement/Lakeview and South America in Saline County and Africa/Locust Grove in Williamson County. These four settlements are all on roads leading west from the saltworks. Underground Railroad activity occurred in white settlements such as Corinth which is near Africa/Locust Grove and at the Green House three miles south of New Haven in Gallatin County.⁶¹ A network of Emancipation Baptist churches in the area of the saltworks may have provided additional havens.⁶²

Archie Stewart kept alive the traditions of Redwood Point/Grayson established by his ancestor Cornelius Elliott, a mulatto innkeeper, farmer and salt maker. Elliott helped blacks on their way to freedom. Toni Craig serves in the same role for the Africa/Locust Grove settlement. Craig recalls the tales of the settlement's black children having to hide in the fields when slave catchers rode by on their horses.⁶³ Twenty miles west of the Crenshaw's plantation up the Saline River grew the free black community of the Pond Settlement, later known as Lakeview. In a phone interview with the author on Nov. 20, 1996, Jewell Cofield, author of *Memories of Lakeview*, a history of the free black settlement near Carrier Mills, Ill., told of the Underground Railroad line that went through the community and how runaways were sometimes hid under overturned salt kettles:

Down through the years some of the people escaped from there and would come to Lakeview. I know the places where my Dad said they would be hid. There were two houses where they would do that were still standing when he showed me. Riders would come and try to find them. They would come from the old salt mines. He said they were from the Old Slave House.⁶⁴

Often the best tales of the Underground Railroad relate to slave catchers waiting for runaways in the region. Ragsdale tells one story he heard growing up Gallatin County in the early 20th Century. It involves Crenshaw and a small island in the Ohio River near Shawneetown known as Pig Island:

Small boats transporting runaways used the island as a depot. Here slaves waited for other boats to transport them to stations along the underground railroad. John Crenshaw, the patron of virtue and pillar of the religious community, opened this salt wells just five miles inland from town. He was accused of dumping a barge load of wild hogs onto the island, causing the runaways to stay near the shoreline where they could be spotted and easily recaptured by his men. These unfortunate souls provided him with cheap labor to operate his salt works. Many nights Kratzy and I listened to stories of the stillness being shattered by the screams of blacks who ran to the center of the island from the narrow shoreline. As they tried to escape their pursuers, the wild hogs attacked and tried to eat them.⁶⁵

Crenshaw's Character

As much as we know about Crenshaw's business dealings and his kidnappings, we have few contemporary descriptions of what he was like. The letters of Crenshaw's descendants and relatives offer some clues. Particularly, the letters of Mrs.

⁶⁰ Verna Cooley. 1917. "Illinois and the Underground Railroad to Canada." *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 23:76-98.

⁶¹ Jon Musgrave. 2000. "North Star Line." *Egyptian Tales of Southern Illinois*. Vol. 2. Marion, Ill.: IllinoisHistory.com. 78-79.

⁶² Ronald L. Nelson. December 1994, "History of the Saline District, Friends to Humanity Association of Emancipation Baptist churches, principally of southeastern Illinois." *Springhouse*. 36.

⁶³ Toni Craig. June 23, 2004. Phone interview conducted by Jon Musgrave.

⁶⁴ Jewell Cofield. Nov. 20, 1996. Phone interview conducted by Jon Musgrave.

⁶⁵ Fred Peterson Ragsdale. 1993. *The Contract Tree*. Chicago: Adams Press. 184.



Brann to her various relatives and the Sisk family provide a glimpse of one family viewpoint. Her mother and aunt lived with Crenshaw in the house in the 1840s. Brann's side of the family had little contact with Crenshaw's descendants until the 1930s. By this time, Brann lived in Hollywood, Calif. Often, she stated in her letters her fervent wish to return and see the house she had heard so many stories about. For years she tried to reconcile the stories of Crenshaw as told by Hubbs with the bits and pieces passed down from her mother and aunt.

"Oh! I s'pose [sic] John H. Crenshaw was a severe man—he was very wealthy for those times and you have to be hard [underline in original] and self-centered if you ever accumulate lots of money," she wrote in 1951 to Bonnie Sisk.⁶⁶ In that same letter she transcribed a page from a notebook owned by her mother, Maria (Crenshaw) Wallace. At age 81, Mrs. Wallace wrote down the names of the eight house servants or slaves she remembered. She noted, "The darkeys [sic] mentioned here are the house servants. The field hands were too numerous to mention."

Maria listed a small girl named Rach as the last of the servants. She noted that she and Rach often played together. Rach, most likely short for Rachel, may have been the subject of a favorite family story about Maria that occurred on the third floor of the Old Slave House. This is the version Mrs. Brann wrote to the Sisks in 1942:

Once mother, when she was about six years old, took a small darkey to the attic or to an upper room and tried to scrub her white, so she could go to Camp Meeting with the family, Aunt Sinia gave her her first spanking and so it was all through our young lives, and our children's lives, the stories about the old home.

Other descendants who stayed closer to Gallatin County recalled more about Crenshaw. His great-granddaughter Anna Foster Drone provided another clue to his operations in letters to George Sisk:

Great-grandfather Crenshaw operated the salt mines in Gallatin County close to Equality, Illinois. They were operated by the slaves he owned and the ones he rented. Illinois was a free state, so they were taken every 90 days back and forth across the Ohio River to Kentucky which was a slave state.

Another descendent of Crenshaw paints a starker picture of him. Melissa Galloway-Theiss remembers hearing the stories about the Old Slave House from her grandmother, who was another of Crenshaw's great-grandchildren. In a 1997 letter to the author she recalls tales of Crenshaw forcing his children to watch when he whipped slaves, and in general the racism and physical abuse that had passed down the generations. Galloway-Theiss wrote that Crenshaw used the slave women sexually.⁶⁷ Overall, the details in her stories were new compared to the traditions told to visitors of the Old Slave House during the 70 years it had been opened. Galloway-Theiss contradicts Metzger's assumption that "it hardly seems likely that John Crenshaw, who lived at Hickory Hill with his wife, son, daughter and their families, would have allowed such things as slave breeding, kidnapping, and whipping to go on in the same house as everyday living." Galloway-Theiss:

I grew up with stories of the Old Slave House as I told you before. I am not proud of this part of history, but it is truth and it should be told. The house itself is beautiful! The stories passed on are not. The story that affects me the most is how he would kidnap "free" black families and re-enslave them.... I was also told of the whipping post, how Mr. Crenshaw enjoyed beating these dark skinned people. I was told he'd force all to watch, including his own children.... Further I was told Crenshaw would use the women to satisfy his own needs.... I was told... that Crenshaw was a very powerful influence in the area due to his great wealth. No one ever told John Hart Crenshaw now. He was given whatever he wanted and if he could not have it he'd take it!

Not all descendants believe the stories. Some such as the late William T. Lawler strongly denied the stories in correspondence he conducted with Metzger. Yet, the stories Galloway-Theiss remembers came from her grandmother, one

⁶⁶ Mrs. [Elizabeth W.] Brann. July 26, 1951. Letter to Bonnie Sisk. In possession of George Sisk.

⁶⁷ Melissa Galloway-Theiss, Melissa. March 28, 1997. Letter to Jon Musgrave.



of Lawler's older sisters. Metzger did not know of the Brann letters or Drone's letter. Instead he relied on Lawler's account when he wrote the following:

Descendants of the Crenshaw family discount most of the legends as derogatory to the character of John Crenshaw which they say was always of the highest caliber. They speak of his being a good Christian man, and that possibly the stories grew out of jealousy of his power in the area and also out of his trial for kidnapping slaves. Later attempts to capitalize on the "Old Slave House" are just bizarre attempts to lure tourists.⁶⁸

His defenders still often repeat Crenshaw's role as a "good Methodist." The basis of which derives from a report made by an early circuit-riding Methodist preacher named John Fox. When Fox first took the circuit that included Equality in 1834, he reported that Crenshaw served as one of the main supporters of Methodism in the circuit.⁶⁹ A church historian of the Shawneetown Methodist Church writing two years after Crenshaw's death described Crenshaw in the following glowing terms:

... a plain, energetic man, who could neither read nor write, but was a business man, made money, spent it freely, but left considerably property to his family and gave much to the church, resided in this vicinity, afterwards in Equality and closed life in this vicinity something over a year ago; his motto was 'Diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' He had an excellent memory, used to say his head was his ledger.⁷⁰

However, a contemporary account of Crenshaw during the height of his power (and during the same season as the Adams kidnapping) directly challenges the character of the "good Methodist." The (Shawneetown) *Illinois Republican* published an open letter which addressed Crenshaw's religious standing in the community:

Although he is a member of the church, and may be considered a *saint* by those who are in the church, [he] is not considered *very much of a saint* by those who are out of the church.

The newspaper emphasized the "saint" and "very much of a saint" by italicizing the words.⁷¹ Unlike Catholics, Protestants follow New Testament teachings indicating a saint to be synonymous with being a Christian. By questioning his sainthood, the newspaper took the very rare attack of questioning the validity of Crenshaw's Christianity. In other words, was it real or just for show?

Many persons who don't believe the stories about the Old Slave House refer to Crenshaw's role as a good Methodist. They do not see how a religious man can also be a slaveholder or a kidnapper. They don't realize that very few religious denominations took an early stand against slavery. The Covenanters, Quakers and Emancipation Baptists who were active in Southern Illinois were the only ones to take such a stand. The larger, mainstream sects did not take a stand until slavery became a dominant national issue. William Holmes, an abolitionist missionary to Southern Illinois with the American Missionary Association, provided an account in 1859 of a preacher in the region that effectively counters that argument.

After an absence of a few weeks I returned to vicinity of the place where I had been so rudely dealt with, and where the house was closed against me. I learned that a protracted union meeting was in progress. I attended the meeting. Invitations were given to all Christians to unite. I believe there were present Episcopal & Protestant, Methodists, Baptists and Cumberland Presbyterians. Great efforts were made to add new members to the different orders; and I would charitably hope that some were anxious to save souls.

⁶⁸ John Metzger. 1971. "The Gallatin County Saline and Slavery in Illinois." Master's thesis, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. 114-115, 120, 124.

⁶⁹ Barbara Burr Hubbs & John Mulcaster. November 1937. "The Romance of the Old Slave House." *Illinois Journal of Commerce*, 11-14.

⁷⁰ Joy, Ephraim. Aug. 11, 1873. History of the M. E. Shawneetown Church. Found in the church minute book. In possession of Shawneetown Methodist Church.

⁷¹ March 6, 1842. "Gallatin Salines." (Shawneetown) *Illinois Republican*. 2.



The great part of those zealously engaged were negro hunters. “Wicked men, they lay wait as he that setteth snares; they set a trap, they catch men.” Jer. 5:26.

One of the preachers, engaged some time since, apologized for a cold he had caught, while “being out watching for niggers”.

Alas! Alas! It is a subject for mournful humiliation before God, that the professed ambassadors of the Redeemer thus conduct themselves. They are ignorant of the spirit of Christianity, and of the word of God; they worship a Christ without humanity, a God without compassion, wholly indifferent to the groans and shrieks of agony that issue forth continually from the Gehenna of Slavery.

Holmes wrote his letter from Randolph County but as he traveled throughout the region, it’s not clear where the above incident took place.⁷²

In a letter to Hubbs, Crenshaw’s granddaughter Mary Hall Raitt provided another seemingly logical explanation as to why the stories should be false:

As for the old slave house, there is no such house in Gallatin county, and never has been. You know Illinois was not a slave state, and I never heard of slave running there. Grandfather Crenshaw would have been the last man to indulge in such a thing, or allow it on his property.⁷³

Raitt left Shawneetown for Cincinnati in 1886. She based her denial of the stories on the common knowledge that Illinois remained in the Union as a free state during the Civil War. Her assumption that Illinois was a free state ignores the not-well-publicized parts of Illinois’ slave past. Alexander Davidson and Bernard Stuvé (1873) in their *Complete History of Illinois* provide just one example of the early references that detail the fight against slavery and kidnappings in Illinois History. George Flower (1882) provides more details in an area closer to the saltworks in his *History of the English Settlement in Edwards County*. Norman Dwight Harris (1904) has provided the best overall account of the struggle statewide in his *History of Negro Servitude in Illinois*.

⁷² William Holmes. Oct. 31, 1859. Letter to S. S. Jocelyn. A

⁷³ Mary (Hall) Raitt. Sept. 1, 1937. Letter to Barbara Burr Hubbs. Crenshaw vertical file. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Ill.