

Reminiscences of Slave Days in Kansas

John Armstrong assisted a slave named Ann Clarke, owned by G. W. Clarke, to escape into Iowa. He described the event in detail, including how she escaped, was captured, and escaped again. He also described slaves owned by a Mr. Bowen who lived on Washington Creek in Douglas. Armstrong lived on Washington Creek and later in Topeka. This item is from information collected by Miss Zu Adams in 1895. She was researching the topic of slaves in Kansas and contacted a number of early Kansas settlers requesting information about slaves brought to Kansas Territory. While all of the information she collected was based on reminiscences, it still provides useful information that is difficult, if not impossible, to find elsewhere. Miss Adams and her father F. G. Adams were employees of the Kansas State Historical Society and the information received was donated to that institution.

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Slavery,
c Armstrong, J.

Reminiscences of Slave Days in Kansas, by John Armstrong.

-----Bowen was a settler in Douglas County, on Washington Creek. His claim joined mine. He came from Kentucky, and brot with him a family of slaves, father, mother, and eight children, the oldest boy about twenty. My sister Sarah taught the children their letters. They came to our house on Sunday for this purpose. Their master did not know this. There were other slaves in the neighborhood, a few grown ones, but this was the largest family.

The first slave I took out of Kansas was a woman. She got away from her masters, and came up to Howard's, who lived about 2 miles s. e. of Topeka, staid there about five or six weeks, when some pro-slavery men from Deer Creek found that she was there and took her back to Lecompton for the reward. One or two of Edwards' boys was with the party that returned her. They lived on the Shunganunga near Frank Dawson's. They were from Missouri, I think. Ike Edwards was hung here for killing Black Hawk a Pottawatomie Indian. He jumped onto him to get his pony. I think this was about 1857. Howard had no off on chance to get the woman onto the Underground railway. Her name was Ann Clarke. She was about forty or ⁴⁵~~fifty~~ years old, weighed about 175 pounds, medium color. When they got her back to Lecompton it was about evening. They sent out in the country for Clarke to come in and pay the reward. Ann went out in the out kitchen to clean herself up. By this time it w as pretty dark, and she was studying how to get away. They had given her some cakes to eat, and she put some of these in her budgett. The men were in a frolic, had been drinking some. The womeⁿ only were watching her, but she kept on the watch

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herself for a chance to escape, and finally seizing an opportunity when they were off guard, ran out of the kitchen and up a ravine which was situated near where the foundations of the state house is in Lecompton. It was a very brushy ravine. She hid in a thick place in the brush, and laid there until most morning. They came out and hunted for, coming very near her. When it became light enough she followed the ravine up, s.e., and came out onto the top of the hill on the edge of the prairie. Being now day break she could see all about, and took her bearings. She finally saw a man coming along the road s-w. of Lecompton and running east towards Lawrence. He had a book under his arm. She thot a man with a book must be free-state, and went out to talk to him. It was Dr. Barker, the father of Senator Barker of Douglas county. She asked him who lived in the different houses. Finally she found that he was Dr. Barker, a neighbor of G:W. Clarke, who owned her jointly with Col. Titus. He had been out to see a sick woman, and was returning home. She asked him to take her to his house, and help her to get free. He told her to go farther south, to walk down the ravine and come up back of his house. He kept her at his house a day or two, hitched up his team, put in several comforts, covered her over and took her down towards Lawrence, to the f house of the father-in-law of Geo. Earle, who brot her up to me at Topeka, to the residence of Mrs. Scales. We kept her there for about six weeks at our house, while I made arrangements to take her to Iowa. We star ted in the very last days of February, 1857, and I was gone 3 weeks. We went to Civil Bend, Iowa, to Dr. Blanchard. From there he sent her on to Chicago. I had severl letters from her afterwards. She lived there several years. She had a daughter living in Lawrence county, Missouri



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and offered me \$500.00 to go and get her.

Mrs. Scales kept her hid for a week before Mr. Scales found it out. Capt. Henry came in on her one morning when she was helping Mrs. Scales wash dishes. He was a strong pro-slavery man, and was boarding at the house. "Mrs Scales said "you can keep a secret." He did, and never gave us away.

Mr. Scales, when he built the house placed a sugar hogshead, an immense barrel which we had shipped things from the east in, down in the cellar. When Ann came, we put some straw, clothes and blankets into the hogshead, and had her stay in it. Mrs. S. kept boarders, and during the day, while they were out, Ann used to come up in the kitchen and do a great deal of house work.

In preparation for our journey to Iowa, I got a close carriage of Rev. Burgess who lives now on the place partially owned by James Harvey, near the Asylum. The span of mules I got from another place. I had to raise money to pay the expenses: From Gov.C:Robinson \$10.00, Maj. Abbott, \$5.00, Col. Ritchie \$5.00. The rest were dollar subscriptions, from various parties, \$70.00 in all. During this journey I looked up the stopping places for the under ground railroad.

I took up one other woman. I dont remember how she came to me. A Mr. Mills, a Topeka man , went with me all the way thro and returned with me. I do not know anything more about him. W:E. Bowker and--- Plummer used to go out with colored men.

The road was about this way: We went first to Rochester, to Bowker' in the night. The next stopping place would be Holton, at--- --- Smith's, or at Reynolds, who lived about a mile west of Holton, on the Creek.

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Creek. Another place was five miles north of Holton, where Brown was caught at the Battle of the Spurs. In crossing that creek I got stuck, and had to get the woman out of the buggy. This was on the Jim Lane road. On my way up that first time I followed the track of Kagi, who had started out three weeks before me to visit his father in Another place where we used to stop, was Geo. Graham's, afterwards state treasurer, on Poney Creek, New Albany. We afterwards sent several women up. Some came from Missouri, some from Kansas.

Ann belonged to Clarke and Col. Titus, and staid with the latter when Clarke was away. Clarke lived on the high ground s-e-of Leocompton, about two miles, in 1856; Titus lived south of L. about two miles

Bowen kept a little grocery store and doggery. Some pro-slavery people lived above me. They would get drunk and come and threaten me. I told the Lawrence boys about it, and one night Capt. Randlet and a party of free-state men in Lawrence came out to my place on Washington Creek. They then went over and cleaned out Bowen's whiskey, and gave him orders to leave. I only lived a quarter of a mile from his house. The oldest colored boy of Bowen's came down to my house that night with the rest of the children, and cried "Master Armstrong." I asked what was the matter. He said "Some men have come to Master Bowen's, and I am afraid they are going to kill us." I let them all in, the whole colored family. I asked who were in the crowd. They did not know whether they were free-state or pro-slavery. They wanted me to run them off. I had talked to them before this about leaving their master. Randlet's men gave Bowen's family three days in which to leave. They took the slaves to Westport with them.

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There were a few slaves who lived up on the head of Washington Creek, in the pro-slavery settlement, where about sixty pro-slavery men lived. The negroes told us that ~~the~~ Bowen was afraid of our Sharpes' rifles. He thot they would shoot a mile.

Blue Jacket entertained travelers at his house near Walkarusa, near what is called Blue B Mound. Fish, another Indian, lived east of Lawrence about ten miles.

Bowen's colored people built his log house, and did general farm work. He brot them there in the spring of 1855, as early as April. He brot his own family at that time too. There might have been 3 or 4 in his family. His son-in-law was a part of his family. The negroes built a little cabbon out about ten rods from the house. All of the buildings were of logs. The house was what is called a double log house, two rooms and an open space between. I think they finally ~~board~~ boarded the space up.

I do not remember to have heard that any slaves in Kansas weæ badly treated. They were dressed comfortably in home made clothing made by themselves. Very few pro-slavery men had brot slaves---a colored man now and then, and a few women.

Charles Kuykendall, whose parents lived at Calhoun with---Kuykendall's family. I think there were two or three slaves there. A ferry was built there in the fall of 1854. Mr. Scales' family waggon was the first that crossed, about the first of April, 1855. C: K. came over with them in the boat.