

## **Slavery History: Some of George Craig's Experience as told to a Leavenworth Times reporter**

Published in The Grinnell Herald on March 29, 1895

(Retyped here as the digital version is hard to read)

George Craig, of Grinnell, Iowa, left Leavenworth recently after a week's visit with relatives and friends whom he has not seen for nearly forty years.

Craig was in the city in the early days when Kansas was going through her great difficulties. He was only here a year, but in that twelve month probably underwent more suffering than has been the misfortune of any one person.

Craig told his story to a Times reporter recently.

He was born a slave, the property of Doc Beaumont, of Platt county, Mo. Lynch & Wise traders of St. Louis and New Orleans, bought him in 1857. He was 19 years of age. The traders took him to St. Louis and later to New Orleans. Craig realized that a southern owner meant perpetual enslavement; he had hopes of escape in the north. He was put on the block and sold. The purchaser had him examined and the physician found defects in both eyes. Craig was returned to the traders. The defects were caused by his own hand; he rubbed tobacco juice in the open eye. The traders sold him again. The buyer returned him. This operation was repeated seven times and no sales could be made to stick. Despairing of disposing of him, he was returned to Missouri. In 1858 he escaped to Leavenworth. Capt. William Matthews took him in charge, and Craig was given refuge in the "tunnel".

### The Tunnel

Opposite the new "Leavenworth" hotel, then the "Planters", was a high toned boarding house operated by Captain Matthews. An old ruin of the foundation now remains there. A.W. Whitney of Adrian, Mich, and H.C. Johnson, then of Leavenworth, owned the property. Matthews paid them \$75 a month for the rent. The boarding house was a "blind." In the rear, concealed by a secret door, was "The Tunnel." It had been dug at the expense of Colonel Anthony, and other abolitionists, and extended about 50 feet to the west. Underground quarters were provided for half a hundred people. As many as 60 slaves had been in hiding there at one time. It was called the "underground railway", "fugitive slaves being kept there until the coast was clear to Lawrence, when they would be smuggled over there by night, thence north to Iowa points, and east through Iowa and other northern states. Wherever an abolitionist could be found who needed help a slave was left. The little band would thus proceed eastward, gradually growing smaller, until all were provided with homes. The leaders would then return to Lawrence."

### Craig's Flight

In the spring of 1858 Craig escaped to Leavenworth. He was considered valuable. Eighteen hundred dollars was offered in reward for him, but he could not be found. The reward was increased to \$2000 to anyone who would tell when Craig was to be started for Lawrence or the north. But he could not be had. About this time several slaves belonging at Ft. Leavenworth were given refuge in the "underground railway." The dragoons then stationed there were ordered out and Matthews' place searched. Colonel Anthony, however, had gotten wind of the proposed search and had Craig removed

to the cellar of the building now occupied by J.W. Crancer & Co., Senator Baker and others, at the corner of Third and Delaware streets.

The Times was also published there. Craig was stowed away in the cellar. The dragoons searched in vain, but persisted and at irregular intervals the tunnel was inspected. Craig was kept in that cellar for three weeks, and off and on for a whole year. (He in company with friends visited the cellar while here.) The slave men maintained such a diligent search for Craig, and so closely patrolled the road to Lawrence, that it was the spring of 1859 before he could be smuggled out. He was taken over there in April, with some twenty odd others, and started east in charge of John Brown. Craig was dropped off near where Grinnell, Iowa, now stands. John Brown went on east to Boston; thence to Canada and a few months later made his famous assault at Harper's Ferry.

It was only a short time ago that Craig learned of his relatives in Leavenworth. He came here and found his mother, Mrs. Jemima Craig, who lives with her grandson, Policeman Craig, in west Leavenworth.

At the Union Station Craig bid his friends goodbye. He insisted on telling his colored brethren of the city and state that Colonel Anthony was the negroes' true friend, and that, although Captain Matthews had aided him and others, he knew it was the money of Colonel Anthony and other abolitionists which backed up the captain.

This is a bit of Leavenworth's early history. The old ruins of Captain Matthews' boarding house, which was patronized by Horace Greeley, can be seen by any passerby just opposite the new "Leavenworth" hotel.