

Article about George Craig

OLD SLAVE DAYS

Memories of Grinnell's Only Living
Relic of System Long Since
Passed.

**GEORGE CRAIG LIVED IN
SLAVERY TWENTY YEARS**

Has Lived as Slave in Three States,
and Has Been Knocked Off on
Block for \$1,450.

There are few men living who participated in the old slavery days as victims of a system that had its origin in the days when the conquered became the slave of the conqueror and was kept in his household to do the menial labor of the family. A few of these men have lived in Grinnell and all have passed but one. That one, Geo. Craig, was a traveler on the "underground railway" thro Grinnell, when traveling by this route was still dangerous.

Kentucky born, sold in the New Orleans slave market, bought again and returned north to Missouri, an escaped slave when the soil of Kansas was still being fought for, kidnaped and returned to slavery, escaping to the north, bringing up at the Quaker village of Springdale, removing to the Quaker town of Oskaloosa, he has had a history as wonderful and changeful as most men enjoy.

Geo. Craig was born a slave at Lincoln, Ky., in 1840. At the age of five he was taken into Missouri, and lived for a time in Platte Co. When the slave boy was 18 years old, his dislike for his master made him frequently rebel, and his owner decided to sell him in the southern market. He was taken to St. Louis and after a week's stay there, was shipped with several hundred other slaves to New Orleans. He was sold twice on the block, bringing \$1450 of a rich Louisiana planter, the same price being paid for each of two other husky slaves. They were taken to the plantation by the planter's clerk, crossing the river on the ferry and going by rail southward toward the gulf.

When he was a boy at home with his mother who was very religious, she showed him the dangers that beset a slave, and advised him to do his duty, trusting in the Lord and under no circumstances commit suicide. On this new plantation he resolved to work faithfully and hard. Corn meal and salt pork were two articles of diet which made slaves sick. Notwithstanding this he was fed on these articles of diet and was taken sick. He was sick for three weeks after going to the sugar plantation. On this account he had not gone to work. But on the third Saturday morning in his desire to be helpful and serve well his new master, he got up, put on his work clothes, found the overseer and told him he felt like going to work. The overseer told him to go get all his clothes for he was to go back to New Orleans the same day. When Craig was sold at New Orleans by his owners, Wise & Lynch, to this southern owner, he had used tobacco in his eyes to give him a sick appearance. On his return to New Orleans he was met by Lynch's partner, Wise, who treated him well and bought him and took him back to St. Louis. Here he met Lynch who at once turned the vials of his wrath on him and abused him because he had been sick.

He had been shipped south in February, 1859, and in only six weeks he was back in St. Louis. His first owner Wallingford had sold him to Lynch and as he had proved unsatisfactory a law suit ensued between the two parties over the boy Craig. Craig was then bought from Lynch by a man named Wright who lived at St. Joe. This man Wright was afterwards killed while in his buggy by a slave who took his money and escaped. Afterwards Wise came up to St. Joe and bought Craig again and started with him to St. Louis. He was handcuffed to another slave, but found he could slip his hand out of the handcuffs.

When the boat was at a point about five miles north of Leavenworth Craig slipped his hands out, took a run to the stern of the boat and jumped into the river. He escaped to the shore on the Missouri side, and went to his brother's, who was still a slave in Platte Co. His brother didn't dare keep him.

On Sunday morning when the slaves were called to breakfast, Craig scented danger and dropped out of line and cut around a ridge. From there he saw a man drive away in a buggy. He went back to the house and a slave told him that the man in the buggy was after him. He said he would get away, but his brother told him not to try it. He started away however and met a friendly slave who threatened to tell his whereabouts, but Craig kept on till he reached the river across from Leavenworth. He

went on a ferry boat and as he had been in Leavenworth before he was allowed to start without question.

On the way over however the steward asked Craig for a pass, but he did not have any. He had \$2.50 his sister had given him but could not find it. The boat was turned back and Craig was put off on the Missouri side. He went into the woods and hid until eight o'clock at night. He then went again to the boat. He had before noticed a skiff on the bank, but when he went to get the skiff the oars had been carried on the boat. He went on the boat and got them and carried them back to the skiff and jumped into it, and pushed out into the river. The stream was swift and he was soon a good ways from the ferry boat. He was not used to skiffs and was carried down stream pretty fast.

The Captain on the boat heard his oars in the water and called to him to come back. He didn't go back and the captain yelled to the people on the far shore to "catch that runaway nigger." Craig was soon near enough to the Kansas side to call to them and he told them that he wasn't a runaway nigger, that he lived at Leavenworth, in Salt Creek Valley. The crowd didn't molest him and went away letting him alone. Craig at last made his final get away and started for freedom, passing through Grinnell in August 1860, following the line of the under ground railway to Springdale, Iowa. Captain Stewart was in charge of the party on this trip and saw the escaping slaves safely thro.

Craig lived at Springdale four years. He was married to his present wife in April, 1864. She came to Springdale from Ohio with Quakers. He was then 24 years of age. In January, 1865, he went to Oskaloosa where they lived 22 years. He worked at various trades, hauling building material and doing teaming, hauling sand from the Skunk and Des Moines rivers. He had accumulated some money while farming at Springdale.

About 1889 he came to Grinnell where he has engaged in various occupations, part of the time as a barber.

During most of his life Craig has been a republican. He has accumulated some property altho misfortune has befallen him at times and left him in hard lines. He is still a familiar figure in Grinnell altho his 82 years are telling on him.