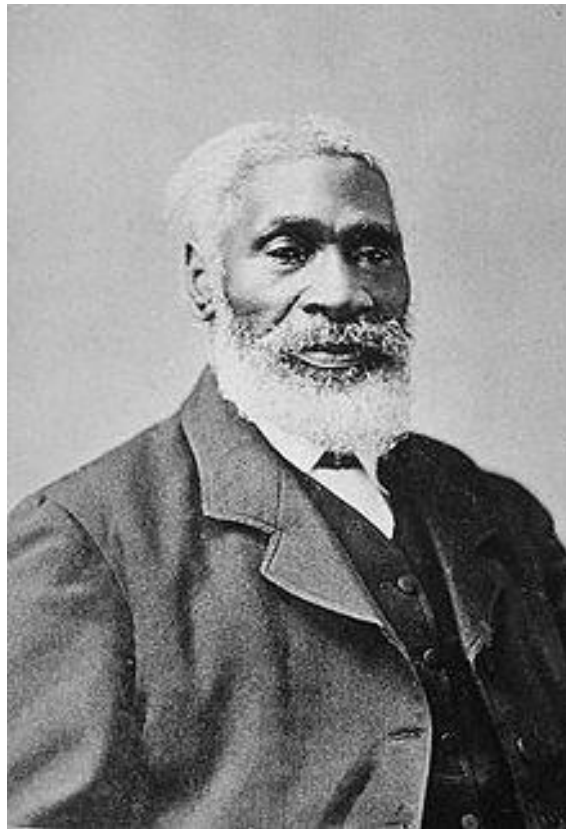


Black Kentucky Pioneers:

Josiah Henson (1789-1883)

By Jerry Long, Owensboro, KY



Articles about Josiah Henson in Owensboro, KY newspapers:

- Owensboro Semi-Weekly Messenger – 5 September 1884 p.2: 'Black'; interview from the "St. Louis Post Dispatch" of Judge Amos Riley, Jr., 75, of New Madrid, MO about Josiah 'Si' Henson, who was 'Uncle Tom' of Harriet Beecher Stowe's great novel - Henson was a slave of my uncle, Isaac Riley of Montgomery County, MD; my father, Amos Riley, came to KY in early life and settled in Daviess County near Owensboro; in 1826 or 1827 Isaac Riley sent a lot of slaves including Si to his brother's plantation in Daviess County, Henson then 28 or 30, had a wife & 2 or 3 children, weighed about 175, he had been his uncle's trusted body servant for years; about 1828 Josiah & Judge Riley took a cargo of hogs to New Orleans; not long after Isaac Riley requested that Josiah &

his family return to Maryland, on the trip Josiah instead decided to seek refuge in Canada, I have been told that he died in Ohio some years ago

- Owensboro Semi-Weekly Messenger & Examiner – 19 April 1881 p.1: A new chapter in the history of the origin of Uncle Tom's Cabin
- Owensboro Messenger & Examiner – 10 September 1884 pp.1 & 3: interview of Amos Riley, same article in Owensboro Semi-Weekly Messenger – 5 September 1884 p.2
- Owensboro Messenger – 9 February 1902 p.10: Kentucky site of Uncle Tom's Cabin
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 22 October 1967 p.1C: "Uncle Tom Lived in Daviess: Freedom Flight Here Uncovered"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 12 November 1967 p.1C: "Little Eva, IN Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' Could Have Been Another Daviess Countian"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 10 October 1968 p.5B: "Markers Point Out Local Historic Sites", historical highway marker honoring Josiah Henson being sought
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 29 January 1970 p.1C: historical marker commemorating Josiah Henson recently erected on U.S. 60
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 12 April 1970 p.1C: "Heritage Commission To Cite 20 Buildings", Josiah Henson resided on the Amos Riley plantation, 1825-1830, it is now owned by Mr. & Mrs. Powhattan Hawes of the Yelvington community;
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 30 April 1970 p.1C: "Roadside Park To Be Developed Along U.S. 60", near Kentucky Historical Society marker honoring Josiah Henson between Maceo & Lewisport 10 miles east of Owensboro
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 4 July 1976, Bicentennial Edition Part 3 p.13: "Original 'Uncle Tom' lived in county from 1825-30"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 15 September 1978 p.1D: "'Uncle Tom's Cabin': Chamber urges re-creation of historic home"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 28 September 1978 p.4A: "Uncle Tom was here"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 17 June 1979 p.3C: "Uncle Tom's Cabin: Daviess County site could receive national historic designation"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 13 September 1979 p.3C: "'Uncle Tom's Cabin' tabled", attempt to nominate "Uncle Tom's Cabin" site in eastern Daviess County for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places fails

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 20 September 1979 p.1C: "Claim about site of "Uncle Tom's cabin disputed", it has been proposed that the cabin was on the Powhatan Hawes property in eastern Daviess County; however, historian Joe Sparks believes it was actually in Hancock County on the east side of Blackford Creek overlooking the Ohio River
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 4 October 1979 p.1C: "Local sleuth tracks site of Uncle Tom's Cabin", Joe Sparks claims he has found the site
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 6 November 1979 p.2D: "Public Notice" of nomination for National Register of Historic Places
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 16 December 1979 p.1C: "'Uncle Tom's site nominated for honor", nominated for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 25 June 1980 p.1C: "Cabin project on hold", money needed
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 17 September 1980 p.1C: Daviess County proclaims day to honor fugitive slave, Josiah Henson
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 7 January 1981 p.1C: "Grant given for restoring 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' site"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 16 January 1981 p.2C: "Tourist panel considers study", to determine feasibility of developing Josiah Henson site as a tourist attraction
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2 September 1981 p.1C: "Old plantation site for tourist plan"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 4 September 1981 p.1A: "Plantation project's cost falls"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 30 May 1982 p.1D: "Plantation development plan on hold"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 8 May 1983 p.3D: "100th anniversary of 'Uncle Tom's' death marked in Canada, but not here"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2 September 1983 p.3C: "Former Daviess resident to be honored with stamp", honored by Canadian stamp
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 7 May 1984 p.1B: "Local group forming to honor Henson"

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 14 May 1986 p1A: “Local movie planned: Drama centers on ‘Uncle Tom’”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 29 March 1987 p1C: “Filming of Henson drama planned for Daviess County”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 16 July 1987 p1D: “Marking history”, there are two historical markers about Uncle Tom’s Cabin in Kentucky, one in Garrard County and the other in Daviess County
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 19 March 1989 p.1B: “Potential seen in 'Uncle Tom'”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 13 June 1989 p.1C: “U.S. 60 will take name of Stowe's inspiration”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 15 June 1989 p.9A: Trail would be focus of tourist attraction”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 9 July 1989 p.1G: “Henson should be honored by bridge”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 26 June 1991 p.1A: “Play based on life of abolitionist to be staged at RiverPark”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 4 July 1991 p.1A: “Outdoor dramas see hit-or-miss record”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2 August 1991 p.1C: “Play aims to show price of freedom”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 7 August 1991 p.5C: “Henson playwright is chosen”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 8 August 1991 p.1C: “Henson playwright signs contract”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 30 September 1991 p.1C: “Yale professor to write music for Henson play”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 7 February 1992 p.1D : “Henson drama debut put off until 1993”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 26 March 1992 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ starting to build momentum”

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 13 June 1992 p.1B: “Party marks 203rd birthday of Henson”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 5 August 1992 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ manager taking the stage”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 24 November 1992 p.1C: “Slavery heritage heartfelt by guest”, Henson relative visits Owensboro
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 18 December 1992 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ delayed until ‘94”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 15 May 1993 p.1A: “History marches on in Maceo Mural”, Josiah Henson portrayed in mural
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 27 May 1993 p.1C: “Louisville native captures title rope in RiverPark’s August musical ‘Josiah!’”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 21 June 1993 p.1B: “Residents honoring Henson, who fled slavery 163 years ago”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 8 July 1993 p.1C: “Davis sends regrets, support for ‘Josiah!’”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 11 July 1993 p.1A: “Mural brings Maceo together”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 26 July 1993 p.1C: “Josiah descendant drops in for a visit”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 6 August 1993 p.1D: “Chicago actor feels ‘closely tied’ to the real Josiah Henson”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 10 August 1993 p.1C: “There's Another Version of Josiah's New Orleans Trip”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 11 August 1993 p.7A: “Businesses can help ensure future runs of ‘Josiah!’”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 12 August 1993 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ marks milestone on long road”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 13 August 1993 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ escapes in limelight: Play’s premier earns long standing ovation at RiverPark”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 24 August 1993 p.1C: “Attendance tops 4,000 for ‘Josiah!’”

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 16 October 1993 p.1B: “‘Josiah!’ back for 6 shows neat year”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 26 November 1993 p.1A: “City’s cards feature ‘Josiah!’”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 12 February 1994 p.1A: “Top ‘Josiah!’ position eliminated”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 18 February 1994 p.4B: “‘Josiah!’ fund-raiser set”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2 March 1994 p.1C: “Ex-manager of ‘Josiah!’ optimistic about play’s future”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 7 May 1994 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ may not turn until ‘95”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 19 May 1994 p.1A: “‘Josiah!’ to be delayed”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 24 May 1994 p.7A: “‘Josiah!’ delay good for everyone”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 20 March 1995 p.1B: “‘Josiah!’ faces uncertain future”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 26 June 1995 p.1C: “‘Josiah!’ scrapped for this year”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 29 June 1995 p.7A: “Josiah’s story: Play about slave’s escape confronts us with our history”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 24 August 2000 p.1B: “Former slave Josiah Henson deserves better recognition”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 3 October 2000 p.1C: “The Way I Live My Life”, Margaret K. Johnson says her family were slaves on the Riley farm and her grandfather Riley was a brother of Josiah Henson
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 9 February 2004 p.1A: “Mystery shrouds freedom’s roads: Underground Railroad routes that ran through county now unmarked”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 13 February 2004 p.1C: “A Slave's Legacy: In dash to freedom, Henson left table, daffodils behind”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 21 September 2004 p.41: “Slave's life inspired 'Uncle Tom's Cabin”

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 20 April 2006 p.1C: “Without Action Henson's Legacy May Escape to Maryland”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 26 July 2007 p.1B: “Lincoln Bicentennial could give ‘Josiah!’ second life”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 28 August 2008 p.1C: "Post office building, landmark demolished: Artist and residents painted mural in 1993", Josiah Henson was a focal feature of the mural
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 1 June 2013 p.1A: "Pioneer papers for sale: Josiah Henson 'slave pass' included", papers of Amos Riley & son, Camden Riley will be auctioned on 21 June 2013 by Cowan's Auctions, Inc. of Cincinnati
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 19 June 2013 p.1A: "Museum raising money to bid on Riley papers"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 20 June 2013 p.1B: "Henson, Riley left accounts of Daviess history"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 22 June 2013 p.1A: "Museum buys Riley documents", the Owensboro Museum of Science and History purchased 75 items on 21 June 2013 from the personal papers of Daviess County pioneer Amos Riley and his son, attorney Camden Riley, at an auction at Cowan's Auctions Inc. in Cincinnati for \$6,500
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 27 June 2013 p.5A: “Preservation of local history vital”
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 22 July 2013 1A: "Pages of the Past: Riley papers to be displayed soon, offering glimpses into 19th-century Owensboro"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 5 January 2014 p.1A: "Museum will display Riley papers", display will open January 18, purchase of documents and seven others were featured in a 26 December 2013 "New York Times" article about the most intriguing auction lots of 2013
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 31 August 2017 p.1B: "Memory of Henson's life is fading in Daviess County", on 1 September 1830, 187 years ago this week — Josiah Henson, a 41-year-old slave on the Amos Riley plantation near the Daviess-Hancock County line, slipped his wife and four children into a small boat and rowed across the Ohio River, landing near Rockport, Indiana; their long journey to freedom would end in Canada, where Henson would become a leading abolitionist, educator and the role model for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel, 'Uncle Tom’s Cabin'; Daviess County has tried a few times to honor Henson and to capitalize on a tourism opportunity associated with him, but both the honor and the tourism have apparently slipped away; in September 1978, the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce announced plans for a

major project including a museum and outdoor drama to honor Henson at the plantation site on US 60 east of Maceo, but the recession of the 1980s put that plan on indefinite hold; in 1991, a playwright was hired to create a drama based on Henson's Daviess County years, 1825 to 1830 & finally, in the summer of 1993, 'Josiah!' made its way to the stage of the RiverPark Center, its six-night run drew more than 4,000 people, there was talk that the play would soon move to a six-week run each summer and draw 28,725 tourists a year to downtown, while pumping \$1.9 million into the local economy and creating 122 jobs, bus tour operators in North Carolina, Michigan and Florida had discussed including the play on their trips; in 1992, the board of directors of Josiah Henson Drama Inc. had projected that a six-week run would cost \$312,000, so, the production was cut to six nights and only the two lead actors were paid, but still, it cost \$87,000 to stage the show; the 1994 budget was set at about \$45,000, but even that proved to be an impossible amount to raise and so, 'Josiah!' was pushed to an unlit back burner where it continues to grow cold, nothing has happened with it in a quarter of a century; it looks like Henson has returned to obscurity in Daviess County and newcomers are left to wonder why US 60 East is called the 'Josiah Henson Trail', 'But his is a powerful story. And maybe we've just aimed too high in trying to honor Henson.'

- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 2 December 2018 p.1F: "Is it time to revisit the idea of a Henson memorial project?"
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 6 January 2019 p.1A & 2A. : travel pass issued by Amos Riley to slave Josiah (Si) Henson, 23 August 1827 at Owensboro Museum of Science & History
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 17 April 2019 p.1A: "Reclaiming Uncle Tom: Screening of Henson documentary planned", on May 13 film, "Redeeming Uncle Tom: The Josiah Henson Story", by Jared Brock, will be screened at Owensboro Community & Technical College, his film has aired more than 1,300 times on PBS
- Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 6 August 2020 p.7A: "Henson salute would be fitting addition to community"

.....

Owensboro Semi-Weekly Messenger – 5 September 1884 p.2:

UNCLE TOM

SI HENSON, THE ORIGINAL OF MRS. STOWE'S GREAT NOVEL

An Interesting Interview With Judge Amos Riley,
to Whose Family Henson Belonged—
The Real Character of Little Eva's Friend

[St. Louis Post-Dispatch.]

“No sir; it isn’t every one who has enjoyed the distinction of being talked about in the most exalted circles of the English nobility—by royalty itself, for that matter. Yet that is what has happened in my time, and no fault of mine, either.”

The speaker was Judge Amos Riley, of New Madrid, Mo., who is sojourning in the city for a few days with his nephew, Mr. A. R. Taylor, the attorney. In response to a suggestion that he explain himself, the judge continued:

“It is some eight or ten years ago that I received by mail a copy of the London Times containing an elaborate story of a negro named Josiah Henson who was the ruling sensation in the metropolis, and had been received by Lord Palmerton, and even the Queen, as an object of the highest interest. The secret of his attractiveness lay in the fact that he was the original of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s world-famous “Uncle Tom.” Henson was talking pretty fluently to every one and every one was listening with the greatest interest to what he said. The Times had a long interview with him made up largely of what purports to be the story of his early life. It told of his rearing in Maryland; of his removal to Kentucky, and of a trip down the river to New Orleans, which formed the nucleus of the famous journey with St. Clair and Little Eva in “Uncle Tom.” The story was told in full detail and made a rather spirited narrative, but you will guess the extent of my interest when I tell you that I at once recognized in Henson a negro who belonged to my uncle, and whom I, myself, had known intimately for years. There could be no possible doubt about it, for my uncle’s name and my own were given in the article; and a number of anecdotes with which I was familiar were told with the greatest particularity. In short, the identification was complete. I will tell you about it:

The Judge’s hearers drew up their chairs in anticipation of a good story.

“My uncle, Isaac Riley, and his fathers before him for generations, lived in Montgomery county, Maryland. His brother Amos, my father, came West in early life, and settled in Daviess county, Kentucky, near Owensboro, or, as it was then called,

YELLOW BANKS,

on the banks of the Ohio. He sent back to his family accounts of his new home so glowing that Isaac was fired with the idea of going West himself. Accordingly, in 1826 or ’27, he got together a lot of his slaves and sent them ahead by way of the river, intending to follow with his family after awhile. He put the negroes in nominal charge of a young friend named Middleton, but the party was really under the command of Josiah, or, as he was better known, ‘Si Hensen, then a strapping fellow of 28 or 30, with a wife and two or three children. Si had been my uncle’s body-servant for years, and, being a shrewd, trusty fellow, enjoyed his master’s full confidence. The party arrived at Owensboro safely and ‘Si and his family went to work on my father’s farm. Si proved himself fully deserving of the character my uncle had given him and soon came to be trusted and indulged as a favorite servant. He was a large, well-built man, who would tip the beam at 175 or so, and was remarkably powerful, especially in the arms and shoulders. Many is the time I have worked with him in the wheat field. I was about 20 years old at the time and pretty stout myself, but when I tried to keep up with Si with a cradle, I invariably got left behind. By reason of his great strength he was able to use a cradle with a blade about a foot longer than mine. He would start out with this and by cutting an enormously wide swath, walk away from me in a way that I despised. ‘Come ‘long boss;” he used to shout back at me, ‘nevah do fo’ you to git lef’ behin’!’ After ‘Si had been with us a year or more (my uncle still postponing his removal to Kentucky) my father came to me one day and said: ‘If you and ‘Si want to take this

cargo of hogs down to New Orleans, I'll give you all you can get for them over \$400.' We both jumped at the proposition, and, loading the hogs into a flatboat, were under way as soon as possible. The trip was a long one and almost without incident. I remember we got off at Memphis, and 'Si, in prowling around the town, got into a trouble with police, out of which he extricated himself by giving leg bail, escaping with no further loss than that of a big white beaver hat of which he was very proud.

"What did New Orleans look like in 1828? Oh, I couldn't begin to tell you. I remember one thing, though. All along the levee there was a row of frame shanties covered in front with a sort of canvas booths. This was the home of 'the tiger' in those days. Here the gamblers most did congregate to lay for the unwary 'up river' man. I was walking along there one day with the proceeds of the sale of the hogs in my pocket (which, by the way, didn't pan out so as to net my father anything to speak of), intending to deposit the money in bank. But it was after banking hours, and I had to take my money back in my pocket. As I was passing in front of one of these booths, a fellow rushed out of the door, grasped my hand and expressed himself as delighted to see me. I was pretty green, but when he asked me to walk in and hold stakes on a bet which he and a friend had made, I suspected that there was something wrong. I found the 'friend' seated at a little table manipulating an apparatus consisting chiefly of three cups and a little ball. I have since heard the game described as 'thimble-rigging.' My friend kept betting and losing a dollar at a time and all the while he was urging me to go in with him to the extent of \$5 or \$10. I kept clear of it, however, and finally bolted out of the door on an urgent call to meet an imaginary friend. Before I got away, though, I am free to say that one of the fellows got me to change a \$10 bill for him, which afterwards proved to be counterfeit.

"SI AND I WENT BACK

home and resumed our duties on the farm. Before long, however, there came a message from Maryland from my uncle, who had finally concluded not to come to Kentucky. He wanted all his negroes sold except 'Si and his family, from whom he was unwilling to part. So my father gave 'Si the money necessary for the trip and packed him off to Maryland with his family, which by this time was swelled by the accession of two or three more wooly heads to five or six. Some months afterwards we got another letter from my uncle, asking why 'Si didn't come. This question remained unanswered for a long time. It came to our ears though, after many years, that when 'Si got as far as Cincinnati and found himself on the upper side of the Ohio river, the idea struck him that Canada was a might pleasant place to live, and, having a sum of money in his hand, he concluded to make the trip. We made inquiry, but neither I nor any member of the family ever saw the fugitive again. Nor would we ever have heard from him, perhaps, except for the article in the London Times."

"When did Mrs. Stowe meet him?" asked one of the audience.

"I can only conjecture as to that. As I have said, 'Si was a keen, sharp fellow, and I don't imagine he stayed in Canada very long. He had a considerable gift of speech, and was much given to exhorting among the negroes. There was very little, as you have seen, in his real history upon which to base Mrs. Stowe's conception of Uncle Tom, but he was sharp enough to tell a story that would sound well, and I don't believe he would scruple to do so. I know that the yarn he told the Times reporter was full of inaccuracies, to say the least. Thus, he said that his master, meaning my uncle, was a wild, passionate man, given tosprees, and that he ('Si) often had to tide the old gentleman over the difficulties incident to a debauch. This was pure fiction. He said, also, that my uncle sold him away, which, of course, was not so, because, if for no other reason, 'Si didn't give him a chance to do so. I think it likely he met Mrs. Stowe somewhere in the

States, probably in Ohio, while she was getting material for her book, and told her just about such a story as she needed for her leading character. He was equal to it.”

“What was he doing in England?”

“Well, as nearly as I can make out, he went over there to lecture and ‘star’ the country with the very laudable purpose of making a living. He knew, doubtless, of the popularity of Mrs. Stowe’s book in England, and that the nature of his association with its history would be enough to bring him into prominence.”

“Where is he now?” was asked.

“I don’t know positively,” the Judge answered, “but I have been told that he died in Ohio some years ago.”

HE WOULD BE VERY OLD

if he were alive now—nearly ninety, I should should.”

The judge pushed back his chair at this point and insisted that his story was over.

Judge Riley, aside from his association with the historic Henson, is himself a character of no ordinary interest. He is a well preserved old man of 75, sharp-featured, gray-bearded and keen-eyed. He talks with fluency and has an unbounded fund of anecdote covering more than a half century of varied experience. He passed through St. Louis in 1837, and after roaming over the State for some years, took up his abode in New Madrid county, where he has lived ever since. The war swept away his slave property and the greater part of a large estate. He is still the owner of 1,500 good acres, the cultivation of which he superintends in person. He sat for one term as Judge of the New Madrid county court.

Of his family, which once numbered thirteen, six still live. Of them four sons are at home on the farm. One, H. C. Riley, was chairman of the Congressional convention in the Fourteenth district, which distinguished itself by balloting 479 times without a choice. Camden Riley, another son, was killed at Mt. Dallas in Northern Georgia, while serving as colonel of the First Missouri—the famous Bowen’s—regiment.

[Ed. Note: Judge Amos Riley, son of Amos Riley & Susan Phillips, was born 10 June 1810 Jefferson County, KY; in 1837 he left Kentucky and moved to southeast Missouri; he died 6 February 1890 New Madrid County, MO, where he was buried in the Riley family cemetery.]

.....

Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer – 22 October 1967 p.1C:

Uncle Tom Lived in Daviess: Freedom Flight Here Uncovered

By Frankie Hager

Uncle Tom, the famous character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" lived for a time in Daviess County. It was also from here that he made his escape to freedom.

These facts were discovered by three local history buffs, Miss Edith Bennett Dr. David Orrahood and Hugh O. Potter. The information was uncovered in Canada by Miss Bennett and in Daviess County by Dr. Orrahood. Potter learned what each had discovered and put the separate pieces together to confirm the 142-year-old story. He had planned to hold the news until he could

publish it in connection with the 30th anniversary of Radio Station WOMI next year. However, when he contacted the curator of Uncle Tom's Cabin and Museum in Canada, and learned he planned to visit the site of Uncle Tom's Kentucky, home, Potter decided the time had arrived to release the information.

Canadians Visit

The curator, J. D. Thomson, was in Owensboro this week. His museum is located in the little town (pop. 2500) of Dresden, Ontario, Canada. Dresden was the terminus of the "underground railway" by which many slaves gained their freedom.

The curator and his wife and another couple, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Spearman, also of Dresden, were in Owensboro specially to visit the Kentucky home of Uncle Tom and gather any other additional information that might shed new light on the Negro Methodist preacher and founder of the British-American Institute, the first vocational school established in Canada.

Was Overseer Here

Between the years of April, 1825, and September, 1830, Uncle Tom, also known as Josiah Henson, was overseer on the plantation of Amos Riley, a 10,000-acre holding located in eastern Daviess County in the vicinity of Yelvington.

Riley is the great-grandfather of Mrs. Samuel Taylor Hawes. Her home on the Toler Bridge Road is located just in front of where the Riley plantation home once stood. According to Mrs. Hawes, her great-grandfather settled there in 1813 and owned numerous slaves. Her son, William A. Hawes now lives on and farms what is left of the original acreage.

The 82-year-old "Miss Sue" thinks that the slave quarters were back of the plantation home near the river. The "darkey" cabins were hidden from the rest of the estate by a hedge of osage orange.

Arrives In Daviess County

According to Uncle Tom in his autobiography, 'The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly A Slave', "I arrived at Daviess County, Kentucky about the middle of April, 1825, and delivered myself and my companions (wife, two children and 18 other slaves) to Mr. Amos R., the brother of my owner, who had a large plantation, with from 80 to 100 Negroes. His house was situated five miles south of the Ohio River, and 15 miles above the Yellow Banks, on Big Blackford's Creek. There I remained three years, expecting my master to follow...

The situation was in many respects more comfortable than I had left. The farm was larger, and more fertile, and there was a greater abundance of food...

"In the course of the three years from 1825 to 1828, I availed myself of all opportunities of improvement which occurred, and was admitted as a preacher by a Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church..."

Ladies' Man

Mrs. Hawes recalled hearing about Uncle Tom. He was "a tall, intelligent, good-looking darkey" with a weakness for dancing and women. He ran away, according to Mrs. Hawes,

because he got a little too familiar with the wives of the other slaves and they were going to kill him."

The local story behind the Uncle Tom Story can be heard on WOMI at 12:35 today.

The Canadian version is another story. It holds that Uncle Tom decided to run away only after being deceived many times in regard to his freedom by his owners. He could no longer hope for release other than by the "underground."

For instance, three years after he arrived in Daviess County, following the harvest of 1828, his former master sent word to his brother to sell all his slaves except Uncle Tom, who was to return to him with the proceeds from the slave auction.

On the way back to Maryland, Uncle Tom preached and made appeals for funds with which to buy his freedom. Since he passed through the free state of Ohio, he could have stayed there a free man, However it was a point of honor with him that he should make all efforts toward buying his freedom.

Just before Christmas he approached the house of Isaac Riley with \$245 and high hopes of becoming free and pursuing his calling as a minister.

Tricked by Riley

But Isaac Riley, while agreeing to give Uncle Tom his freedom, tricked him instead. Knowing the slave could not read, the wiley Riley took Uncle Tom's money and handed him an important looking but worthless document. Thinking he was a free man, he returned to Kentucky only to discover he had been deceived. Riley had inserted twice the stated price. Consequently Uncle Tom was still a slave.

A year later he was ordered to accompany his master's son, Amos Jr., to New Orleans to dispose of their farm produce. The son had been told to sell Henson, but fortunately for Uncle Tom, the young man was taken seriously ill with river fever and was unable to continue the journey. Again Uncle Tom could have escaped but instead he stayed and nursed the boy back to health and returned him to his father.

"For this act of humanity Uncle Tom received no thanks or even a sign that they were grateful," The Canadian version reads, "He was now alert to their true intentions, and started looking for for a chance to escape..."

Escape Comes

"The opportunity came at last on Sept. 1... a fellow slave rowed Uncle Tom, his wife and four children across the Ohio River and landed them on the Indiana shore. By traveling by night and hiding by day, after two weeks they reached Cincinnati." After six weeks, sometimes fed by the Indians, they reached Sandusky, Ohio, where they found passage on a ship bound for Buffalo. From there he was rowed across the river to Canada and freedom on Oct. 28, 1830.

Starts Colony

Uncle Tom spent the next few years in the vicinity of Fort Erie. He became a leader among the fugitive slaves and carried on religious work among them. He also helped slaves to escape, often making trips to slave states at his own risk.

Through his religious work, Uncle Tom met James C. Fuller, a Quaker who promised Henson he would try to interest some English friends in a colonization venture.

As a result, funds amounting to about \$1,500 were raised. With this money Henson formed the British-American Institute and took steps to set up a colony in Dawn, near the present town of Dresden. This was in 1839. He was already 70 years old.

Here on a 200-acre plot, he established a sawmill, a black smith shop and a carpenter shop and the first vocational school established in Canada.

Henson's picture was recently on display in a place of honor at Expo '67 in recognition of his contribution to education.

Meets Miss Stowe

It was on one of his trips to New England on behalf of his settlement that a brief story of his life was published by the Anti-Slavery Society of Boston. This pamphlet, falling into the hands of Harriet Beecher Stowe, moved her greatly, and in 1849, she invited him to her home in Andover, Mass. Here Mrs. Stowe acquired much of her material for her famous story of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Makes Trips To England

Uncle Tom made several trips to England. His first was in 1850, when he gave lectures to raise money for the Institute, and took orders for his mill's walnut products. He was again in England in 1852 and was received by a number of distinguished people including the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Prime Minister.

The depression of the late fifties forced Uncle Tom to sell the Dawn Institute.

Received By Queen

In 1876, Josiah Henson, made his third trip to England, where proceeds from his lectures enabled him to pay his debts and provide for his old age. The following year, while still in England, he was received by Queen Victoria, at Windsor Castle.

She shook his hand, asked him to be seated, and said, "Mr. Henson, I expected to see a very old man, but I am delighted to see such a well preserved, good looking man as you."

Bowing his head, Josiah replied, "That is what all the ladies say." He was 88 at the time.

Negro Bishop At Funeral

Returning to Canada, he lived out his days teaching and preaching. But in his 94th year, after an illness of only three days, he died on May 5, 1883.

Hundreds are said to have attended his funeral which was conducted by Bishop Walter R. Hawkins, head of the British Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada, Hawkins had been a fellow slave on the Kentucky plantation of Amos Riley.

The only conclusion that can be drawn here is only that those who use the name "Uncle Tom" in a derogatory manner couldn't be more wrong. The real Uncle Tom was a credit to his race and to humanity as well.



UNCLE TOM'S LIFE — Looking over a pamphlet telling the story of Josiah Henson, the real Uncle Tom, are three of the principals in the local historical discovery. Left to right are J. D. Thomson, cura-

tor, Uncle Tom's Cabin and Museum, Dresden, Ontario, Canada; Mrs. Samuel Hawes, great-granddaughter of Amos Riley, who owned Uncle Tom when he made his escape; and Hugh Potter, who

with Miss Edith Bennett and Dr. David Orrahood, jointly discovered that Uncle Tom, the character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous novel, actually lived here for a three-to-five year period.

Little Eva, In Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' Could Have Been Another Daviess Countian

By FRANKIE HAGER

The discovery that Uncle Tom of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin", actually lived in Daviess County has led to speculation that other characters in her book may also have their origins here.

Prime candidate for this supposition is the sensitive and beautiful character of Little Eva the epitome of all childhood graces.

In the novel she is introduced to us as a child between five and six years of age... "the perfection of childish beauty... and aerial grace." She has long golden-brown hair, violet blue eyes and a "face remarkable less for its perfect beauty of feature than for a singular and dreamy earnestness of expression." Always dressed in white, she "moved like a shadow on fairy footsteps..."

Had Similar Names

Thomas W. Westerfield, a fireman and history fan who works part-time in the local history and genealogical department of the public library, is convinced that Mrs. Stowe's little Eva is based on the real-life person of Eva Young, daughter of St. Clair Young, who owned a large farm adjoining the Amos Riley plantation, during the years that Uncle Tom lived in Daviess County. Amos Riley owned Uncle Tom, who in real life was Josiah Henson, during the years from 1825 until his escape in 1830.

Westerfield points to the fact that in the novel, little Eva's father is named St. Clare and that St. Clair Young, according to Hancock County tax records, owned 543 acres of land near Amos Riley's farm from 1825 until 1837, when he sold out and moved away. He also had a small daughter, Susan, whom Uncle Tom claimed to have rescued from drowning.

Westerfield spent two days in the Hancock County Courthouse before coming up with this verification. In addition, he consulted records in the Daviess County Courthouse and in the local library.

Book Verifies Belief

He found an additional lead in a book based on the life of Josiah Henson by Brion Gysin. Entitled "To Master A Long Good Night", the biography traces Henson's life from birth in slavery in 1789 to his death in Canada in 1883 at the age of 94. Highpoints in Henson's life included an audience with Queen Victoria of England and a visit to the White House where he was received by President and Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes. Most recently his portrait was displayed in a position of honor at Expo '67 commemorating the fact that he established the first vocational school in 1841 in Canada, just 11 years after he had escaped from the Riley plantation.

In Gysin's book, published in 1946, Henson is quoted as say-

ing: "Mr. St. Clair Young had a sweet little girl who could easily have been the original of precious little Eva. Her real name was Susan, and I really did rescue her from drowning. The accident took place at the mouth of Blackford's Creek where it joins the Ohio River."

The drowning incident is described by Mrs. Stowe as occurring shortly after little Eva and Uncle Tom become friends. Eva, her father, and a maiden aunt were traveling on a riverboat down the Mississippi to their plantation in New Orleans. Uncle Tom was one of a number of slaves in the boat's slavehold who were to be sold at the slave market in New Orleans.

Saved Child From Drowning

"Eva and her father were standing together by the railings to see the boat start from the landing-place, the wheel had made two or three revolutions in the water, when by some sudden movement, the little one suddenly lost her balance, and fell sheer over the side of the boat into the water..."

"Tom was standing just under her on the lower deck, as she fell. He saw her strike the water, and sink, and was after her in a moment. A broad-chested, strong-armed fellow, it was nothing for him to keep afloat in the water, till, in a moment or two, the child rose to the surface, and he caught her in his arms, and swinging

her up, all dripping, to the grasp of hundreds of hands; which, as if they had all belonged to one man, were stretched eagerly out to receive her."

The next day, as the steamer drew near to New Orleans, little Eva prevails upon her father, Augustine St. Clare, a wealthy planter, to buy Uncle Tom.

"What for?" asked St. Clare. "Are you going to use him for a rocking-horse, or what?"

Little Eva replied: "I want to make him happy."

You know the rest of the story. St. Clare could not refuse his little daughter about whom he once declared: "O Evangelist! rightly named, hath not God made thee an evangel to me?"

Other Riley Characters

According to Gysin, "Amos Riley's plantation from 1825 to 1830 was peopled with characters who were to gain a sort of immortality in more than a score of languages.

"In Aunt Chloe of the book Uncle Tom's Cabin, Josiah recognized a picture of his wife, Charlotte, who cooked in the Big House of the master's family, and who sang spirituals so well. In the same house was a personal servant to the mistress, a slave girl who had for years played the fool, although she was in fact sharp and cunning...

...she was never punished and while there must have been more like her, Henson swore that she was the original Topsy.

"Cassy I knew well," Henson said. "Her name was Polly. She was cook at Litton's (Simon Legree's)..."

"Then, too, there was Eliza who crossed the ice with her son Harry. Eliza Harris and George, her husband, who were

white or very nearly so, belonged to Amos Riley. The story of this incident is based upon fact, as one can read in the Reminiscences of Levi Coffin... Coffin was a famous Quaker abolitionist.

Where Eva Lived

But back to Little Eva.

The St. Clair Young home was located at the same site as the unoccupied two-story frame building on the George Allard farm at Lewisport. The Allards lived in the house, which was erected in 1900, until seven years ago when they built their present residence. It is situated about two city blocks from the Allard home.

St. Clair Young sold his property in 1837 to Richard Robertson, who immediately resold it to Thomas Smith, who never lived here, but sold it to his son, Michael Smith, who arrived here in the early part of 1840. The Allards and Mrs. Martha Duncan, of Owensboro, are descendants of Michael

12 November 1967, p1C, continued:

Smith.

Gysin reports Uncle Tom said: "Soon after I left the district (Daviess County), I learned that Mr. St. Clair Young had become a converted man, given his slaves their freedom, sold his land, and moved to Indiana, where he preached as a Methodist minister."

Guilty of Wishful Thinking?

However, Westerfield discounts this as wishful thinking on Uncle Tom's part, since Young's heirs proved the deed of sale to Richard Robertson.

The Young property is recorded in Daviess County Deed Book A. 386 and described as Lot No. 61 in the May and Bannister Survey of Daviess, Breckenridge and Ohio Counties January 1, 1822. (It was not until 1829 that Hancock County formed from a portion of Breckenridge County.)

Daviess County has been positively revealed as the home, during the days of slavery, of the man on whose life Harriet Beecher Stowe based the world famous character, Uncle Tom, of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Now it appears that many other characters in the novel may have also had their beginnings here;

These revelations can only

increase the hopes of those wishing for a state park to be located in Owensboro.

Hugh O. Potter, in a recent editorial over WOMI, said "A tremendous tourist potential appears to await any significant effort which may be made here to capitalize on the fame which a "Uncle Tom" museum and park would bring. If this community will generate as much enthusiasm for this tourist attraction as Bardstown has for its Old Kentucky Home and Harrodsburg has for its pioneer village, a musical version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" could be written and produced in future summers. Hawes Park, where a natural setting could be found for an outdoor theatre, would be an ideal location."

Daviess County has Uncle Tom, and with Little Eva pretty well documented, it appears that all that is lacking is an organization of community-spirited citizens who will join together to make Owensboro and Daviess County more attractive and "an area which tourists from all over the world will want to include in their future travels and vacation plans."

What would you say to that, little Eva?



MARKS SITE — L. Powhatan Hawes of rural Daviess County views a historic marker that was recently put up along U. S. 60, approximately two miles from the overpass, by the Kentucky Highway Department and the Ken-

—Messenger and Inquirer Photo
tucky Historical Society. The sign marks the site of the Riley Family homeplace. The Rileys owned Josiah Henson, who was Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin".

Original 'Uncle Tom' lived in county from 1825-30

In 1967, three Daviess County history buffs — Edith Bennett, Dr. David Orrahood and Hugh O. Potter — confirmed the fact that Josiah Henson, Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom," had lived in Daviess County from 1825-30.

Henson died May 5, 1883.

In September 1884, Judge Amos Riley Jr., then living in New Madrid, Mo., was interviewed by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. He began recounting the Henson story as he recalled it.

"My uncle, Isaac Riley, and his fathers before him for generations, lived in Montgomery County, Md. His brother, Amos, my father, came west in early life and settled in Daviess County," his story began.

"He (Amos Sr.) sent back to his family accounts of his new home so glowing that Isaac was fired with the idea of going west himself. Accordingly, in 1826 or 27, he got together a lot of his slaves and sent them ahead by way of the river.

"He put the Negroes in nominal charge of a young friend named Middleton, but the party was really under the command of Josiah, or, as he was better known, Si Henson."

Henson's autobiography says he arrived here in April 1825 with his wife, two children and 18 other slaves, according to the 1967 findings here. The plantation was located about five miles south of the Ohio River on "Big Blackford's Creek," Henson wrote.

A year or so after Henson came to the Daviess County farm, Riley said, the elder Riley offered his son and Henson "all you can make above \$400" for a load of hogs to be taken to New Orleans by flatboat.

According to the Canadian version of the Henson story as recounted in 1967, Riley was supposed to have sold Henson in New Orleans in 1828 but became ill with river fever and never reached the Crescent City. Henson, according to this version, chose not to escape but remained to nurse Riley

back to health and received no thanks for it.

Riley didn't recall that illness. In fact, he vividly remembered reaching New Orleans and being fleeced out of \$10 by a counterfeiter.

In fact, he could not have sold Henson. The slave was still owned by Isaac Riley in Maryland, he said.

Several months after returning to Kentucky, Riley said, the Henson family was put on a steamboat with Isaac's money and sent to Maryland.

A few months later, Isaac wrote Amos asking why Si hadn't come home.

Riley said the family later heard that Henson decided to go on to Canada after he reached the free port of Cincinnati.

A version of the story recalled locally and reprinted in 1967 said Henson ran away because "he got a little too familiar with the wives of other slaves and they were going to kill him."

The Canadian version gives the Riley story slightly differently.

According to it, Henson reached the Riley plantation shortly before Christmas 1828 with \$425 with which to buy his freedom.

Riley, this version says, tricked Henson by giving him false papers since he could not read. Henson then, the Canadians say, returned to Kentucky where he was enslaved again. This version has the New Orleans trip after he returned to Kentucky.

Henson says he was rowed across the Ohio River to Indiana somewhere near Rockport on Sept. 1, 1830, from which he and his wife and four children made their way to Cincinnati.

In Canada he became a leader of the underground railroad. He met Mrs. Stowe in 1849, three years before her book was published.

Riley had heard the Canadian version and vigorously denied it. "This was pure fiction," he said. "Si didn't give him a chance" to try to sell him.

Uncle Tom's cabin . . .

Daviess County site could receive national historic designation

By KEITH LAWRENCE
Messenger-Inquirer

The Daviess County land on which Josiah Henson toiled in slavery 150 years ago may soon be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

And sometime in the future, a cabin like the one where he and his family lived as well as the plantation on which his owners lived may be restored as a tourist attraction.

If the project envisioned by the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce is successful, it could be one of the first in the South to honor a runaway slave.

But Henson was more than a runaway slave. After escaping from the Daviess County plantation where he toiled in bondage, Henson, an ordained minister, became a leading Canadian educator.

The honors being planned in his memory in Daviess County, however, have little to do with Henson. They're primarily based on a fictional character created from Henson's life.

Harriet Beecher Stowe used the former Daviess County as her model for the title character in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a book which, published in 1852, helped inflame passions that led to the Civil War.

Eldred Melton, executive director of the Kentucky Heritage Commission, calls the "Uncle Tom's Cabin" site in Daviess County "one of the most nationally significant historic sites in the Commonwealth of Kentucky."

Robert M. Polsgrove, survey coordinator of the commission, says the site will be nominated this fall for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

When that is done, the chamber of commerce will ask the Economic Development Administration in

Atlanta for \$15,000 (to be supplemented with \$5,000 in local funds) to hire a firm to conduct a feasibility study for development of the site.

Dave Adkisson, chamber executive vice president, said there has been talk of rebuilding a slave cabin similar to one in which Henson may have lived and in the future restoring the entire plantation of Amos Riley Sr.

Adkisson said there has been interest by local persons involved in theatrical productions in restaging the musical version of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" at the site at some time in the future.

But all plans for the site will have to wait until the feasibility study is completed, he said.

After a survey of the Riley plantation area between Maceo and Yelvington in eastern Daviess County in April, the Kentucky Heritage Commission reported that although it could not determine the actual site of the cabin in which Henson lived, it was able to locate the positions of several slave cabins on the plantation.

In 1814, Amos Riley moved from Maryland to 1,000 acres of land along Blackford Creek in what became Daviess County the following year.

He began the plantation with 16 slaves. By the time of his death in 1838, Riley had expanded his holdings to 3,746 acres.

But while he prospered, his brother, Isaac, a successful planter in Maryland in earlier years, fell on hard times. To avoid losing his slaves, Isaac Riley sent them to his brother's Kentucky plantation in 1825.

Watching after the coffin on the trip was Riley's overseer — Josiah Henson.

Henson, born in Charles County, Md., on June 15, 1789, had been sold at least twice by the time he was acquired by the Riley family in 1800.

He was 35 years old when he reached the Daviess County plantation five miles south of the Ohio River and 15 miles east of Owensboro.

There he served as overseer, responsible for the production, harvesting and marketing of agricultural products as well as supervising 33 other slaves on the plantation.

Because of his elevated position, Henson and his family had their own cabin, an improvement over conditions in Maryland.

While in Daviess County, Henson was ordained as a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church during a religious revival among the county's black citizens.

In 1826, three years after Henson arrived in the county, Isaac Riley wrote asking his brother to sell all the slaves but Henson and his family and send them back to Maryland.

Preaching along the way, Henson managed to earn \$275 with which he tried to buy his freedom. He wrote later. He wrote that Riley offered to give him his freedom for \$400.

The following year, while still trying to raise the money, Henson was returned to Daviess County where he was told that his value had since increased to \$1,000.

He and Amos Riley Jr. were sent to New Orleans to sell the plantation's produce — and Riley was also to sell him there, Henson wrote.

Instead Riley became seriously ill with river fever and was nursed back to health by his slave, Henson wrote. But after they returned to Daviess County, Henson learned that he was still to be sold.

In September 1830, Henson and his wife and four children managed to secure a boat and escaped across the Ohio to a point near Rockport and fled north into Canada.

Amos Riley Jr. always disputed the story of Henson's escape. He said there had never been any plan to sell Henson and that Henson escaped when he was sent back to Maryland.

Riley's version said that after the other slaves were sold, Henson and his family were put on a steamboat and given the money from the sale to take to Isaac Riley. At Cincinnati, Henson took the Riley money and used it to book passage to Canada, he said.

In 1849, Henson published his autobiography and Mrs. Stowe was among those who read it. An abolitionist, she was reportedly "overwhelmed" by the book.

After meeting with Henson, she fictionalized him as "Uncle Tom" in her famous novel, she said later.

The heritage commission study in April found that the Riley plantation house was torn down in the late 19th century. Its location was in the center of where a large garden is now located.

They also found the old family cemetery, the location of the domestic servants' quarters, a log doctrot house and three or four slave houses.

But there is nothing in either tradition or archeological matter to tell which was "Uncle Tom's" cabin, the commission says.

The property is owned by Powhatan Hawes today and most of the building sites were found with his assistance, the commission says.

Adkisson says if everything goes as fast as possible, a feasibility study could be completed by next spring and then the chamber could begin deciding how to develop the site.

Claim about site of 'Uncle Tom's' cabin disputed

By KEITH LAWRENCE
Messenger-Inquirer

"Uncle Tom's" cabin may not have been where the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce thinks it was.

That's what Joe Sparks, an Owensboro expert on Josiah Henson (on whose life the book "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was based) and the Amos Riley plantation, has concluded.

"Although I believe Powhatan Hawes' property should be developed for tourism, it is my opinion that Josiah Henson never lived there," he said Tuesday.

The chamber has proposed that the Hawes property in eastern Daviess County be designated by the National Register of Historic Places as the "Amos Riley Plantation, Home of Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Sparks, who has spent the past 11 years researching Henson and the Riley family, contends that the slave cabin where Henson lived during his first three or four years on the plantation was actually on Blackford Creek about 1.5 miles east of the Hawes property.

The cabin from which Henson fled to freedom in Canada in 1830 was, Sparks said, actually in Hancock County on the east side of Blackford Creek overlooking the Ohio River.

Polsgrove said he expects the review board to approve the recommendation for national recognition of the site at its December meeting.

Robert Polsgrove, survey coordinator of the Kentucky Heritage Commission, said, "We don't really accept his (Sparks') position yet. He has a fairly circumstantial case."

But Polsgrove said Wednesday that a team from his office will meet with Sparks and look at his evidence.

Either way, the Hawes property is likely to be nominated for inclusion in the National Register when the Kentucky Heritage Commission's historical review board meets in December.

The matter was tabled at the Sept. 11 meeting when Sparks appeared before the panel to question the designation of the property.

Sparks said his only concern is in the way the designation is listed. "I just don't want them to imply that it (the Hawes property) is the site of Uncle Tom's Cabin," he said. "I would rather they say, 'Amos Riley Plantation, Owners of Josiah Henson.'"

Polsgrove said "Uncle Tom's Cabin" will not be mentioned in the designation. "Uncle Tom was a fictional character. Josiah Henson was the one who had the cabin," he explained.

Polsgrove said he expects the review board to approve the recommendation for national recognition of the site at its December meeting. "We didn't have a quorum at the Sept. 11 meeting anyway," he said Wednesday. "All the action taken at that meeting will have to be done over."

Sparks said he isn't trying to prevent the chamber from getting its tourism project started.

"Nobody in Daviess County wants to see a tourist attraction developed around Uncle Tom's Cabin more than I do," he said.

In fact, Sparks said he once tried to buy part of the Hawes property to establish a museum and gift shop.

The Hawes property, which all those involved agree was the site of the Riley mansion, deserves national recognition, Sparks agreed. "If Josiah never lived there, it was still the center of the plantation and he would have been over every foot of the land as overseer."

In 1825, when Henson was sent to the Daviess County plantation from the Isaac Riley plantation in Maryland, Amos Riley owned 1,200 acres in what is now Daviess and Hancock counties, Sparks explained.

His research indicates that the Riley mansion

was built about 1829-30. From 1814 until that time, Sparks believes the Rileys lived along Blackford Creek about 1.5 miles to the east. Old records show a school was there at the creek on Riley land, he said.

"Amos Riley had nine children and I believe they all went to the school," Sparks said. He theorized that the Rileys would have built the school close to their house.

Also, he said, Henson's own writings say he lived on Blackford Creek.

After the mansion was built, the slave cabins were moved to the plantation's steamboat landing on the east side of Blackford Creek overlooking the Ohio River, Sparks believes. The move was because Riley wanted the slave cabins out of sight of his new mansion, Sparks theorized.

Henson wrote in one of his three autobiographies that "our cabin (at the time of his escape) was near the landing."

The plantation, Sparks said, extended five miles from the river to the mansion. Although the move to the river made it easy for Henson and his family to escape in September 1830, Sparks said few slaves apparently escaped from the river cabins.

"Amos Riley treated his slaves well. The threat of being sold down river was the only thing they really had to fear," he observed.

And freedom didn't really lie just across the river in Indiana. "There were slave catchers there who would bring runaway slaves back. They had to get to Canada to be really free. And that's a long way to walk."

Little Eva, another character in the novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, may have lived in Hancock County, Sparks said. Henson wrote that he once saved Susan Young, daughter of St. Clair Young, a Hancock County plantation owner, from drowning at the mouth of Blackford Creek.

The fictional Uncle Tom saved Little Eva from drowning in the Mississippi River in Louisiana. Henson wrote that Susan Young could have been Little Eva (whose last name was St. Clare).

Dave Adkisson, executive vice president of the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce, said Sparks' contentions are little more than a matter of semantics.

Plans for developing the site are going ahead regardless of what the heritage commission eventually calls the property. "I don't think there's going to be any problem," Adkisson said Wednesday.

Local sleuth tracks possible site of Uncle Tom's Cabin

By KEITH LAWRENCE
Messenger-Inquirer

Joe Sparks of Owensboro believes he may be nearing discovery of the site of the last cabin in which Josiah Henson lived before his escape from slavery in 1830.

Henson's life was fictionalized in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Sparks, who has spent 10 years researching Henson's life and collecting slavery memorabilia, said the site is on the east bank of Blackford Creek at its confluence with the Ohio River.

Although Sparks hasn't been to the site yet, he said the John Blunk family of Maceo has provided evidence he believes will lead to the discovery of the site.

Brick foundations from four cabins and evidence of early dishes and pottery were exposed in 1964 when swift currents during a spring flood washed away sand that had covered the foundations for years, Sparks said he was told.

Sparks said he and John Phegley, Blunk's grandson, crossed Blackford Creek in a boat

Monday and found that sand from the river had covered the ground on the Hancock County side to a depth of about 18 inches since 1964.

"The area where the foundations were located was not as sandy, but it was covered with a dense undergrowth of horse weeds and wild cucumber vines and it was next to impossible to mount a search of the location," Sparks said.

A team of researchers from the Kentucky Heritage Commission is scheduled to come to Owensboro on Oct. 16 to check Sparks' evidence. But he said he may not be able to get to the Hancock County site by that time.

"We need a good frost to kill some of that undergrowth and make it lay down before we can get in there. It's like a jungle right now," Sparks said.

The heritage commission plans to nominate the Powhatan Hawes property near Maceo for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places in December.

Joe Sparks, who has spent 10 years researching Henson's life and collecting slavery memorabilia, says the site of his cabin is on the east bank of Blackford Creek at the Ohio River.

Brick foundations from four cabins and evidence of early dishes and pottery were exposed in 1964 when swift currents during a spring flood washed away sand.

The Hawes property was the site of the Amos Riley plantation mansion. Henson, a Riley slave, served as overseer of the plantation from 1825 until his escape in September 1830.

Sparks has cautioned against listing the Hawes property as the "site of Josiah Henson's cabin," however. He contends Henson first lived in slave cabins in Daviess County along Blackford Creek about 1 1/2 miles east of the Hawes property.

In 1829, when the mansion was built, Sparks says the slave cabins were moved to the steamboat landing of the Riley plantation. That section of the plantation was in Hancock County, he said.

Sparks said Henson's autobiography says he lived "near the landing."

But whether Henson ever lived in a cabin on the Hawes property, Sparks said he wants the heritage commission to go ahead with its efforts to list the property as the "Amos Riley Plantation, Home of Josiah Henson."

"Whether he lived on this part of the plantation or not, it was his home," Sparks said. "This was the plantation headquarters."

Sparks has hopes of finding the slave cabin sites this fall or winter.

The Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce has applied for a \$15,000 grant from the federal Economic Development Administration to be matched with \$5,000 to be raised locally.

The money will be used to hire a firm to conduct an economic feasibility study and design a master plan for development of the site.

Henson, who became a leading educator in Canada after his escape from slavery in Daviess County, met Harriet Beecher Stowe before she wrote the novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

She later wrote that he was the model for the character "Uncle Tom."

Money needed for study

Cabin project on hold

By KEITH LAWRENCE
Messenger-Inquirer

Uncle Tom's Cabin has run into the same roadblock that many projects face these days — a shortage of money.

The tourism development on the eastern Daviess County site of the old Amos Riley Plantation where Josiah Henson lived as a slave from 1825 to 1830 is still where it was last fall — on hold waiting for federal money for a feasibility study.

David Adkisson, executive vice president of the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce which proposed the development almost two years ago, said Tuesday that he is still optimistic about the project's eventual completion. But, he said, there is no timetable on the development.

Last fall, when the chamber applied for a \$15,000 grant from the Economic Development Administration to fund a feasibility study for the project, Adkisson had said he hoped the study would have been completed by now.

But the Economic Development Administration still hasn't received its budget approval for the fiscal year that began last October — so there is no money for grants like the one being sought for Uncle Tom's Cabin, according to Rick Hiten of the Green River Area Development District.

Henson, who escaped from slavery on the Daviess County plantation 150 years ago this September, became famous as a

leading educator in Canada and was a powerful force in the underground railroad, which provided an escape route for other slaves in the South.

But it was the fictional character "Uncle Tom" who was modeled after Henson's experiences in Daviess County that brought him more lasting fame.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," wrote that Henson's life was the model for her central character.

A historical marker along U.S. 60 in eastern Daviess County was erected in 1967 to tell tourists that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" had once stood here.

Then nothing else happened until 1978 when the chamber of commerce decided to launch a project to develop the site for tourism.

The chamber's original idea was to act as a springboard for the project and then turn it over to another organization. But the Uncle Tom's Cabin project is still being spearheaded by the chamber.

Adkisson said the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has joined the project as a co-applicant for the federal funds.

"The people in (the EDA office in) Atlanta said it would be better if the NAACP were a co-applicant," Hiten said.

He said the application for funds has been in Atlanta for only a couple of weeks. "We were working with the regional level

before," he said. After making the changes suggested by the regional office, the application was forwarded to Atlanta for final action.

There's been quite a bit of interest expressed in the project in Atlanta, Hiten said.

Adkisson said he believes the development project will receive a high priority whenever the EDA gets more money.

The chamber hasn't decided how the site should be developed. That's what the \$15,000 federal grant and a matching \$5,000 grant from the Owensboro-Daviess County Tourist Commission will be used for, Adkisson said.

He said he hopes to hire the Institute for Outdoor Drama in North Carolina to study the feasibility of producing an outdoor drama on "Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Daviess County.

A separate group would be hired to study how the Amos Riley Plantation and Josiah Henson cabin site should be developed, he said.

Adkisson said two summer interns at the chamber office are researching different stage and movie versions of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" to provide an idea of how it could be adapted locally.

The chamber is still awaiting inclusion of the plantation site on the National Register of Historic Places. It was nominated by the Kentucky Heritage Commission in December.

Daviess proclaims day to honor fugitive slave

By KEITH LAWRENCE
Messenger-Inquirer

Somewhere out there in eternity Josiah Henson, on whom the fictional character "Uncle Tom" was based, is probably enjoying a good laugh.

At 9 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 18, 1830, the 41-year-old slave loaded his wife and four children in a small boat and fled Daviess County, a fugitive seeking freedom in Canada.

On Tuesday, the Daviess County Fiscal Court proclaimed Thursday, the 150th anniversary of Henson's flight from bondage, as "Josiah Henson Day" throughout the county.

Joe Sparks of Owensboro, the local authority on Henson, thought up the idea to officially mark the anniversary.

It is ironic for a Southern county to honor the anniversary of a slave's escape, he said. But Henson, who served as the model for Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom," was

no ordinary slave, Sparks noted.

The proclamation he prepared for Judge-executive Bill Froehlich's signature says that Henson "himself a fugitive from slavery, became a leader among fugitive slaves, an abolitionist speaker in defense of his people in churches and halls throughout the northern cities of America wherever the slavery movement was present, was immortalized by the pen of Harriet Beecher Stowe, established the first vocational school in Canada for the training of former slaves and their children, was received by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the prime minister of England and visited President Hayes at the White House."

Sparks said Henson, who died May 5, 1883, without ever returning to Daviess County, "is widely recognized as one of the most nationally significant historical figures to have lived in the commonwealth of Kentucky."

Tuesday's proclamation ties in with efforts of the Owensboro-Daviess County Chamber of Commerce to get a tourist attraction developed around the site of the Amos Riley plantation where Henson lived as overseer from 1825 to 1830.

The chamber is seeking a \$15,000 grant from the federal Economic Development Administration to fund a feasibility study on how the property in eastern Daviess County should be developed.

The Riley plantation covered about 1,300 acres in what is today Daviess and Hancock counties.

In his writings years after his escape from Daviess County, Henson told how he was about to be sold down the river to a southern plantation.

He wrote of his family slipping from its cabin near the mouth of Blackford Creek on the Daviess-Hancock line into a skiff rowed

by another slave.

Henson said they were let off the boat near Grandview, Ind. But it was six weeks more before the family completed the trip to freedom in Canada.

It was from Henson's later writings on his life on the Daviess County plantation that Harriet Beecher Stowe gleaned the information for the central character in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," published in 1852.

Six years later, she wrote that "among all the singular and interesting records to which the institution of American slavery has given rise, we know of none more striking, more characteristic and instructive than that of Josiah Henson."

"Uncle Tom's Cabin," a book that is frequently credited with fueling the emotionalism that eventually led to the Civil War, was unofficially banned in Owensboro until late in the 19th century.



Mural formerly on the entire side of the post office building (80 by 30 foot) at Maceo in Daviess County, KY; it was painted in 1993 and the building was demolished in August 2008; Josiah Henson and other symbols of the community were depicted.