The Tainted Past

By Jerry Long
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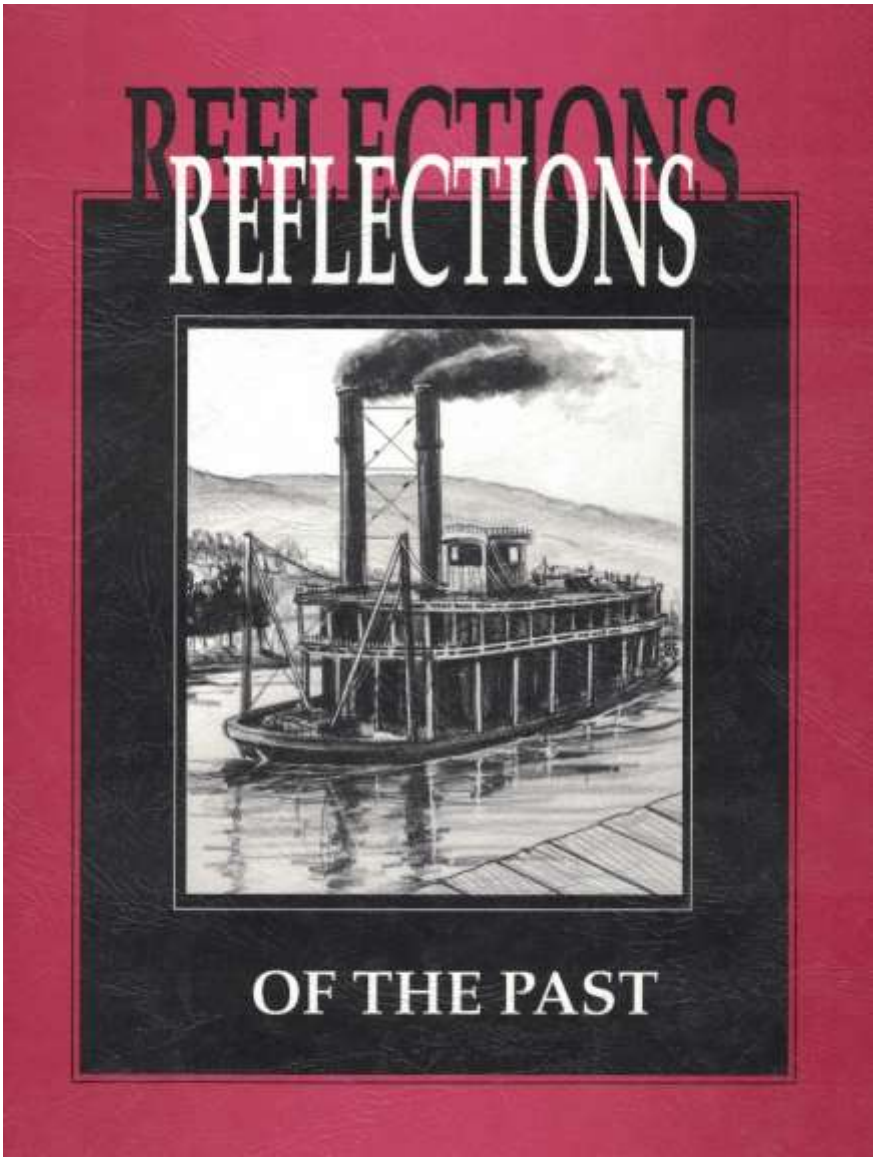

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Chapter Five: The Tainted Past

Slavery and the Civil War in the Maceo-Yelvington Area

By Doris (Eubanks) Estes

There is a part of the history of the United States of which Americans are not proud. Nonetheless, it is history and to understand the present one needs to know about the past.

Slavery was practiced in Virginia during the American Revolution and when the present state of Kentucky became a county of Virginia, the practice moved across the mountains with the pioneers. Travelers who visited Kentucky said that slavery in Kentucky was slavery in its mildest form, better than in any other slave state, with the possible exception of Maryland or Virginia (Cockrium, 1906, p. 30). Slavery usage in Kentucky was not as widespread as in other Southern states, therefore after 1820 "Kentucky became more of a trader in slaves with the Cotton Kingdom of the South, despite the public's unfavorable views toward the trader and his business" (Coleman, 1930, p. 20).

Some pioneers brought slaves with them into Kentucky, but as most farms were medium size there were usually only five or six slaves and the landowner, who also worked the ground. In 1815 when Daviess County became a county, only about 500 out of a possible 280,000 acres of land were cultivated. Farms were generally family farms, and often ownership of a slave or two was shared with a neighboring farm ("Civil War's Influence...," 1983).

Tobacco, a labor intensive crop made slave ownership more feasible and widespread in Daviess County. The 1860 census showed that slaves constituted about one fifth of the total population Daviess County. As many as fifty slaves were owned by some landowners in the Yelvington area with others having one to four. According to the History of Daviess County (p. 853), Yelvington resident, John Lee, born in Virginia, came to Yelvington in 1821, "and formerly owned many slaves".

This log cabin which stood behind the Kendall home for years served as slave quarters. (Photo courtesy of Margie Jones Kendall)

In 1842 when Minnie (Moore) Hector's father, Joseph Christler, died in Hancock County near Adair, his wife, Nancy (Pope) Christler, was left to raise her seven children. Her only helpers were two slaves, a man and a woman (Moore Obit). Clara (Walker) Hawes was left a widow in 1829 when her husband, Richard, died. It was slaves who fired the bricks at Iceland Landing and

carried them to (present) Yelvington to construct the large Hawes home under the direction of Mrs. Hawes. (This house stood south of Kingfisher lake and burned in 1928).

Before the Civil War, Blacks were expected to drive their masters to church in wagons or buggies and if they wished to attend a church, they had to attend that of their master (Poehlin, 1967). There was special seating at the Yelvington Baptist Church for the Negroes and it was not until after the Civil War that churches for former slaves were formed. The Yelvington Baptist Church assisted in at least three such churches: Greens Chapel, First Baptist Church at Maceo and what eventually became the Fourth Street Baptist Church in Owensboro.

Mr. Steve Hawes resided in Yelvington for many years. He was interviewed in the early 1950's by Harvey and Charles Jarvis, his neighbors. Mr. Hawes was believed to be about 110 at the time, and he said he was a grown boy when Abraham Lincoln was shot. He stated that when he was seven years old (about 1849) his master, Webe Hawes, of Hawesville, sold him, his father, Ben Hawes, his mother, Hettie Hawes and his brothers and sisters to Gip Taylor in the Yelvington section (Hawes). Mr. John Berry Duncan said, "I remember Mr. Steve Hawes very well. He would drive his team of oxen to farm down on the river every day. He always wore a red shirt!"

Mr. Hawes had been married twice and had fathered fourteen children. He said that it was true that the marriage ceremony of slaves was jumping over a broom. When asked if slaves were treated kindly, he said that if they didn't mind, the white man would whip them. Slaves, however, were well fed, according to Mr. Hawes.

Mr. Steve Hawes of Yelvington, circa 1950. Mr. Hawes was born into slavery and lived to be 113 years old. (Photo courtesy of Willie Pearl Jarvis)

Some slave owners would tell the slaves that a boat would be coming down the river the next afternoon about 4:00. He would select certain ones to work on the boat. This was apparently a farce to get the slaves to go peacefully to the river. They were being "sold down the river", as none of the so-called boat workers ever came back to their families (Hawes, 1950). Incidents such as this certainly were possible, because Mr. William Zenor, who lived at Rockport, Indiana, was a slave trader up and down the Ohio River. When Mr. Zenor died, his wife, Margaret, continued the business (Smeathers, 1992). Wording in some wills indicate that there were some local families who made a special effort to keep slave families together.

Mrs. Martine (Taylor) Hicks, who was born in Maceo in 1900, was the daughter of Sue Woods Taylor and John Wesley Taylor. Her Mother and Father's parents were both slaves. Her Grandfather, John Taylor lived to be 103 years old. Her Mother's parents were Hettie and Ed Woods. "My Grandfather (Taylor) had belonged to Mr. Penn Taylor's father. Mr. Penn Taylor's family owned land in the Iceland Road area all the way up to present Highway 60. In fact the highway was built on what was part of their land." (Hicks, 1992).

In the 1850's, slaves began to "disappear." Mrs. Thomas Brown kept a "millinery establishment" and made "articles of wearing apparel" in Henderson, Kentucky. Her husband peddled his wife's wares on both sides of the Ohio River. The wagon, drawn by two horses, was fitted with "black oil cloth curtains that could be drawn down tightly." At about this time numerous slaves from the counties along the Ohio – Daviess, Henderson, Hancock, and Union – began to disappear (Cockrium, 1906, p. 215).

Kentucky, as a border slave state, afforded agents of the Underground Railroad ample opportunities to spirit hundreds of slaves northward (Cockrium, 1906, p. 215). Though no documented evidence has been found, there is a possibility that the Maceo-Yelvington area may have been involved in the Underground Railroad. One point for crossing the Ohio River was about midway between Owensboro and Rockport. A fishermen's hut was on the south bank of the river where two men lived and fished. They sold fish to steam boats, flatboats and coal fleets. However, their real business was purported to be the carrying of refugees brought to them at night, across the river. A few miles "east of Rockport," many refugees were crossed over the Ohio (Cockrium. 1906, p. 20).

James B. Ireland described the Civil War, "....the cruel bloody war, in which brother was against brother, son opposed father, neighbor was suspicious and fearful of neighbor and the best of friends became deadly enemies. People were afraid to talk, afraid to give an opinion or express a sentiment. Men were afraid to stay at home and afraid to leave home, and no one felt safe or secure in his rights or liberties. For four long years there was anxiety, trouble, distress and sorrow." (Ireland, 1979, p. 4).

When the war broke out, the general sentiment of Kentuckians was for the Confederacy, although officially Kentucky did not secede from the Union. People in the Maceo-Yelvington area buried their money, guns and valuables. The fight between the blue and the gray was more often battles between the multi-uniformed and the un-uniformed, as not all Union soldiers had blue uniforms, and very few Confederate soldiers had gray uniforms. When soldiers came through the area, the civilians were not sure which side they were. Boys big enough to fight would run and hide when they saw troops until they found what side they were fighting on. Sometimes they would join up. Soldiers from both sides would leave their poor horses and take the landowner's fine horses. Most soldiers were on foot – only generals and other officers rode horses (Hawes, 1950).

There were several men in the area that joined the Confederate army, including: George Boswell, William E. Hoard, Simon Webber, Allen and Robert Estes, sons of William F. Estes (History of Daviess County, 1983, p. 860-867). In reading through tombstones in the community we find others who served in the Confederate Army: Robert Walker Taylor (COE 10 KY CAV CSA), Pvt. Robert E. Hurst (CO D 67 INF), Truman Bivins (KY PVT CO B 10 Regt KY CAV CSA), Joseph Frank Head (KY PVT CO A4 Regt KY CAV CSA), William D. Campbell (CO H 6 IND CAV) and two who died during the war: Ruban Cottrell Lambert (CO A 4 Regt KY VOL CSA) and Johnathan Gibson Taylor who died on January 30, 1864 in a military prison in Rock Island, Illinois.

Mr. Steve Hawes recalled, "One night a group of soldiers stopped at the big house. One soldier was very sick. The next day they found out that he had smallpox. Everyone of Mr. Hawes' family took sick and his little sister died of it".

Susan (Wilhoyte) Foster remembers her grandmother (Hattie Robinson Wilhoyte) telling her that soldiers were hidden in the attic of the family home (Cliff Wilhoyte's home on Highway 405) during the Civil War. The home belonged to her great, great, great grandfather William Robinson at the time.

Freed slaves composed the first settlement in present Maceo. Perhaps there had been a small settlement of slaves there before the war, enabling the labor force to be close to the fields that they worked. Tradition has said that Johnathan G. Taylor gave land for his freed slaves to live, but no documentation to that effect has been found. However, Mr. Taylor's will dated 1885 states, "I have heretofore given to the Negroes of this district a piece of land containing one third of an acres ... for a schoolhouse or church.." (Taylor, 1885). An unused schoolhouse stands on that ground today (1993) as does the First Baptist Church, where services are held once each month.

[Editor's Note: Steve Hawes, former slave, born in Georgia on February 29, 1840; died December 15, 1953, at the age of 113. Mr. Hawes died at the home of his daughter, Eddie Lowery, 1103W. 5th Street. Mr. Hawes resided at Hawesville, then Yelvington and was a member of the Green's Chapel. The Reverend Steve Anderson, pastor of Green's Chapel officiated. He was buried in the Yelvington Cemetery (Obituary, M & I, 1953).

Chapter Six: Josiah Henson

"The dark ages of American History was not so long ago and with each succeeding generation of young people today, there exists an image of the practice of slavery as merely tradition of our past" (Froehlich, 1980).

Josiah Henson was born in 1789 in Maryland and was bought by Isaac Riley when he was about eleven. Riley's brother, Amos, moved to Kentucky, where he bought land near the Ohio River on Blackford Creek. In 1825, Isaac Riley sent Henson and his other slaves to his brother in Kentucky (Coady, 1979). Isaac had gotten into financial trouble and the courts were preparing to sell his slaves to pay his debts. Henson was entrusted to bring his wife, two children and eighteen slaves to Kentucky (Potter, 1974, p. 68).

Henson is described as a "broad-chested, powerfully made man of a full glossy black face whose truly African features were characterized by an expression of benevolence. There was something special about his whole air – self-respecting and dignified yet united with a confiding and humble simplicity" (Potter, 1974, p. 71).

It was the middle of April, 1825, when they arrived at Amos Riley's 4,300 acre plantation in Kentucky. Amos Riley owned eighty to one hundred Negroes. His house was situated five miles south of the Ohio River and fifteen miles above the Yellow Banks on Blackford Creek, in the vicinity of Yelvington. There he remained three years, raising tobacco, pork, corn and producing whiskey (Hager, 1967).

The situation was, in many respects more comfortable than the one he had left. The farm was larger, and more fertile and there was a greater abundance of food. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's book "Uncle Tom" was described by his owner as a good, steady, sensible pious person who was trusted by his owner with everything he had – money, house and horses, just as Josiah Henson was

trusted by Isaac Riley and later Amos Riley. He was also respected by the other slaves and regarded as a sort of patriarch in religious matters in the neighborhood (Hager, 1967).

Between 1825 and 1828, Henson was admitted as a preacher by a Conference of the Methodist Episcopal. In 1828, at the end of the harvest, Isaac Riley sent word to his brother, Amos, to sell all his slaves except Henson, who was to return him the proceeds from the auction (Hager, 1967).

On the way back to Maryland, Henson preached and made appeals for funds with which to buy back his freedom. Since he passed through the free state of Ohio, he could have stayed there a free man, however, it was 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 a suit of clothes, $245, and high hopes of becoming free and pursuing his calling as a minister. Isaac Riley told Henson he would free him, but knowing Henson could not read, gave him a worthless document, leaving Henson a slave. When Henson returned to Kentucky he found that he was still a slave. (Hager, 1967).

A year later in 1829, Henson was ordered to accompany his master's son to New Orleans with a load of hogs. The son had been ordered to sell Henson, but fortunately for Henson, the young man became seriously ill with malaria (Hager, 1967). Although Henson could have escaped, he would have left his wife and children in Kentucky.

Variations on the Josiah Henson story abound. In an article published in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (September 5, 1884) Judge Amos Riley, of New Madrid, Missouri, concurs that Josiah Henson belonged to his uncle, Isaac Riley. Judge Riley described Josiah "Josiah, or, as he was better known, 'Si Henson'. . .had been my uncle's body-servant for years, and being a shrewd, trusty fellow, enjoyed his master's full confidence". "Si' proved himself fully deserving of the character my uncle had given him and soon came to be trusted and indulged..., he was a large, well-built man…. and was powerful, especially in the arms and shoulders." Amos' Uncle Isaac eventually decided not to come to Kentucky and sent word to Amos (Sr.) to sell all of his slaves 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." "Some months afterwards we got another letter from my uncle, asking why 'Si' didn't come." Judge Riley had recently read about Josiah Henson's audience with the Queen in the London Times and was interviewed by a St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter.

Mrs. Sue Riley Hawes, granddaughter of Amos Riley tells a somewhat different version of Josiah Henson's escape in an interview in the article "Uncle Tom Lived Here" published in the Messenger & Inquirer in 1967. Mrs. Hawes recalls stories about Josiah becoming too familiar with the other slaves' wives and Josiah escaped because he was afraid he would be killed by the husbands. Josiah Henson is described as an attractive, intelligent man. He was the overseer of Amos Riley's estate as well as a patriarch within the slave community (Hager, 1967). It is certainly possible that some of the other slaves were jealous of his stature and feared that Henson would be attractive to the wives in the community. It is impossible to know the truth today, but we can only speculate that this might have been an underlying reason that Henson chose to escape to freedom.

Finally, on the night of September 1, 1830, Henson took his family, which included a wife and four children, at night and induced another slave to row them across the Ohio River. They slipped from their cabin near the mouth of the Blackford Creek and rowed a skiff over to Grandview, Indiana. Traveling by night and hiding by day, after two weeks they reached Cincinnati. After six weeks, sometimes fed by Indians, they reached Sandusky, Ohio, where they

found passage on a ship bound for Buffalo. From there he rowed across the river to Canada and freedom on October 28, 1830 (Potter, 1974, p. 69).

Josiah Henson 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, helping slaves at his own risk. Through his religious work, Henson met James C. Fuller, a Quaker, who promised Henson he would try to interest some English friends in a colonization venture (Potter, 1974, p. 69; Hager, 1967).

As a result, funds were raised. With this money Henson formed the British-American Institute and took steps to set up a colony in Dawn near Dresden, Ontario. By this time Henson was already seventy years old. Here on a 200 acre plot, he established a sawmill, a black-smith shop and a carpenter shop – the first vocational school established in Canada (Hager, 1967).

Henson made several trips to England. His first was in 1850 when he took orders for his mills walnut products. The depression of the late fifties forced him to sell the Dawn Institute (Hager, 1967).

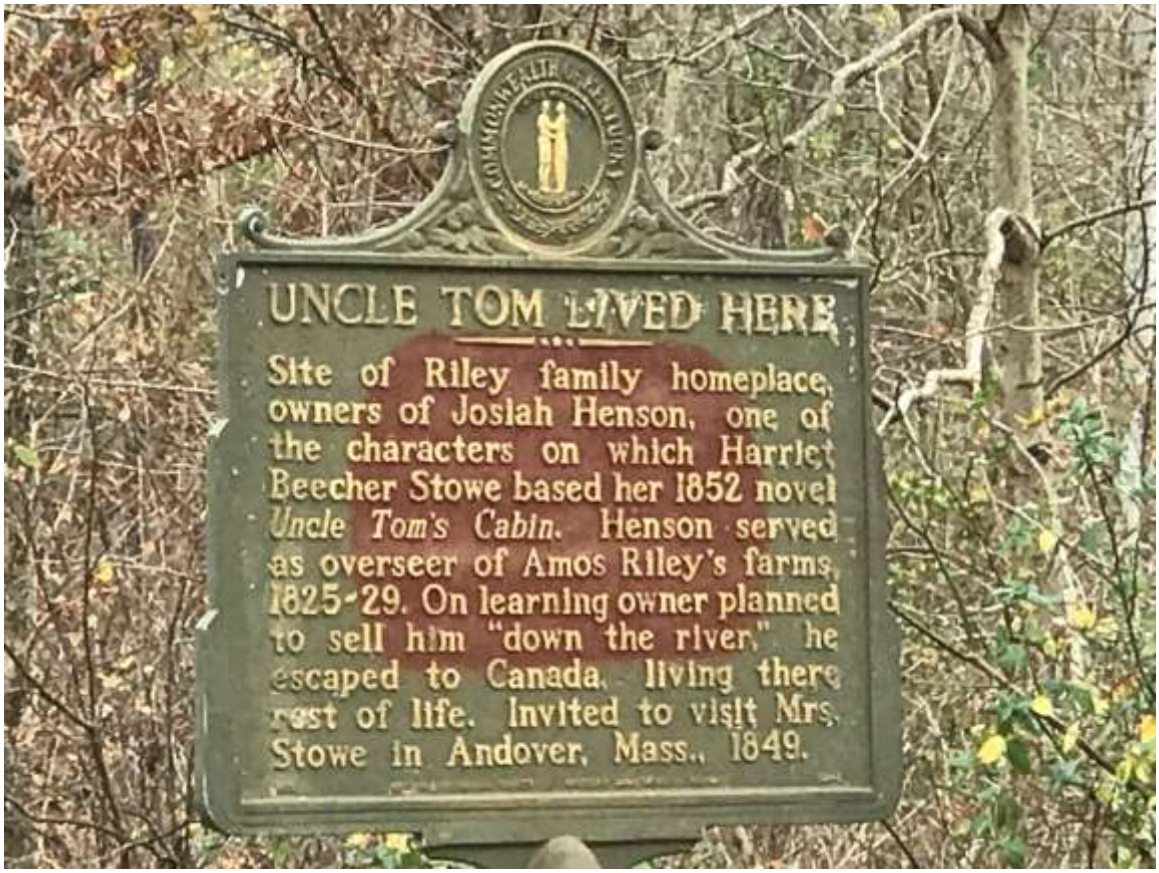
In 1876, the 88 year-old aging ex-slave made his third trip to England, where he was received by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle. The Queen shook his hand, gave him a gold watch and said, "Mr. Henson, I expected to see a very old man, but, I am delighted to see such a well preserved, good-looking man as you." Bowing his head, Josiah replied, "That is what all the ladies say, Your Majesty." He was 88 years old at the time (Coady, 1979).

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 (Potter, 1974, p. 69).

According to his autobiography, Henson met Harriet Beecher Stowe in Andover, Mass. "She sent for me and my traveling companion, Mr. George Clarke, a white gentleman." At her house, Mrs. Stowe became interested in Henson's life. After publication of her book, Uncle Tom's Cabin, many people did not believe the stories she told to be accurate. Mrs. Stowe subsequently published a "Key" which identified Henson as the principal character (Gysin, 1879, p. 216-220).

Henson became famous because he was the character for a famous book which was the precursor to the freedom of slaves. However, Josiah Henson was a great man in his own right as he spent many years of his life helping other freed slaves develop vocational skills which would eventually help them support themselves and their families.

Plantation of Richard W. Hawes – Daviess County, KY 1876 Atlas, p.59



Inscription. "UNCLE TOM LIVED HERE – Site of Riley family homeplace, owners of Josiah Henson, one of the characters on which Harriet Beecher Stowe based her 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Henson served as overseer of Amos Riley's farms, 1825-29. On learning owner planned to sell him "down the river," he escaped to Canada, living there rest of life. Invited to visit Mrs. Stowe in Andover, Mass., 1849."

Historical marker erected by the Kentucky Historical Society and Kentucky Department of Highways (marker number 1241). Marker is near Maceo, in Daviess County, KY. It is on U.S. 60, 1.2 miles east of Kelly Cemetery Road, on the right when traveling east.