

SLAVERY IN IOWA TERRITORY.

BY A. W. HARLAN.

Having quite recently noticed an article copied from THE ANNALS relative to slavery in Iowa, I beg to furnish my own recollections of the "peculiar institution" in our Territory.

In 1834, Isaac R. Campbell resided on the site of the city of Keokuk. A colored man called "John" was living with him, who was saving money to buy his freedom. I presume he succeeded, as I never heard of any trouble.

In the fall of 1834, Colonel Stephen W. Kearny brought to "Camp Des Moines," now Montrose, a mulatto woman, as a family servant. She remained with them quietly and peaceably, and left with the family. I believe it was customary for officers of the army to take their slaves with them wherever they went.

It must have been about 1837 that a Mr. McCrary came from Indiana and settled near the site of Keosauqua. He brought a slave with him, who I think, stayed as long as the old gentleman lived, and then went back to Indiana. This was a case of pure affection on the part of the colored man for his master.

It was probably in 1838 that Shapley P. Ross brought from Missouri to Bentonsport, Iowa, a negro man and woman. After a year or two he sent the woman back to Missouri, but the man from some cause seemed to desire liberty, and after a short time ran away and went to Illinois. Giles A. Sullivan assisted Ross in the capture of the negro in Illinois. They were on their way to Missouri, when at Carthage, Illinois, they were arrested for kidnapping and had some difficulty in giving security in order to keep out of jail.

I will not pretend to state particulars or facts as to the many quarrels and lawsuits that grew out of this attempt to hold slaves in Iowa. It was to Ross a losing business. As he was just ready to leave, a little lawyer by the name of Buckland from Massachusetts, had Ross arrested on some cause. Ross watched his opportunity and struck Buckland in the face, smashing his gold-bowed spectacles most effectually. He then ran away to Texas. At the first term of court at Keosauqua, Judge Charles Mason presiding, there was a great mass of papers relative to these cases disposed of in various ways, and Sullivan and Ross, and "Ross's Nigger," became bywords for several years.

About 1840 or 1841 the Indian Agency for the Sac and Fox Indians was located at the place still known as Agency City. One Joseph Smart was employed as the blacksmith, and paid by the year for working for the Indians. He brought to that place a negro woman, held her as a slave a year or two, and then sold her to James Jordan, who took her to Missouri, where he also sold her again. This was a fair transaction, such as was common in Missouri at that time.

Then, again, about 1842, Captain William Phelps, a licensed Indian trader, bought of John Billings of Clark county, Missouri, a negro man named "Dick." Billings was owing Phelps and wanted some more money, and hence the sale of the slave. The negro himself being willing, he went with Phelps to his trading house, near where Ottumwa now stands. Within a year or two the trading house got on fire and exploded a keg of powder. "Dick" was knocked down and severely injured. The last I knew of him he seemed crazy, and Captain Phelps was having him doctored. I think Phelps intended to free the slave, for he was a humane man.

Near CROTON, Iowa, December, 1896.

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