

Nov '99

The life of Dred Scott

In about 1795, Virginia, a child named Sam Blow was born into slavery. In 1830 Peter Blow, his owner, moved to Saint Louis. There, Sam was sold to John Emerson, a army surgeon who used Sam as a male servant, a valet.

Four years later, Emerson moved to Fort Armstrong, also known as Illinois, a territory which banned slavery due to the North West Ordinance. In 1836 Emerson and Sam both moved to Fort Snelling, also known as Minnesota, where he married Harriet Robinson, a fellow slave.

In 1837 and 1838 Emerson and the couple moved along to Jefferson Barracks. During some time while in Saint Louis Sam changed his name to Dred Scott, or

"Great Scott" a joke comparing his small height to General Winfield's large size.

In 1840 the Scotts and Emerson returned to Saint Louis. In 1843 Emerson died and left all of his possessions to his wife.

In 1846 Dred Scott sued Mrs. Emerson to prove that due to living at Fort Snelling he and his two children, Lizzie and Eliza, were all free. In 1850 the Saint Louis court decided that Scott's residence in a Free State had proved that he and his family were free.

Mrs. Emerson went straight to the Supreme Court which made a two to one decision which returned the Scotts to slavery around 1852.

In 1854 Scott turned to the US circuit court in Missouri. John FA Sanford, Emerson's brother in law and Scotts present owner, argued that Africans were

not legitimate citizens of America and therefore were unable to sue in the US Courts. Judge Robert Wells issued the decision that Scott was still a slave.

In 1856 Scott went straight to the Supreme Court where his case was known as *Scott Vs Sanford*. George T Curtis, brother of the Supreme Court Justice Benjamin R Curtis, volunteered to defend Dred Scott in his case. Reverdy Johnson and Henry S Geyer, both Politicians, decided to represent John Sanford.

In March 1857 the Supreme Court issued a two to seven decision that Scott was not entitled to sue in Court due to being a slave. Chief Justice Taney claimed that slaves were "so far inferior, they had no rights as to which the white man was bound to respect."

Not everyone agreed with the courts.

Republicans and other various politicians wrote speeches arguing with Taney's statement. But, soon after the Supreme Court's decision, the Scotts were sold to the son of Peter Blow, Dred Scott's original owner. Once he owned them, Taylor Blow let them go, instantly freeing them.

Sadly, Dred Scott was only able to breathe free air for about a year. In 1858, Dred Scott died of tuberculosis, but his view of freedom will live on forever.