



Paul R. Petersen

Historians Corner, Paul R. Petersen

Paul is the Author of *Quantrill of Missouri*, *Quantrill in Texas*, *Quantrill at Lawrence* and *Lost Souls of the Lost Township*. Petersen is a retired U.S. Marine Corps master sergeant and a highly decorated infantry combat veteran of the Vietnam War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is a member of the William Clarke Quantrill Society, the James-Younger Gang Association, the Sons of the American Revolution, and the Jackson County and Missouri State Historical Societies.

Slavery along the Border

When the area of the Louisiana Purchase was bought and transferred from France to the United States in 1803, many slaves could be found along the Mississippi Delta working in the sugar cane and cotton fields which proved to be profitable to the economy. A treaty between Britain and France abolishing slavery was signed in 1835. A code of rules established by King Louis XV in 1724 called the Code Noir or the Black Code governing the treatment of slaves which defined the rights of slaves and slave-owners and rights of those freed from slavery was used as the major guideline regarding slavery west of the Mississippi River.

During the Civil War Colonel William Clarke Quantrill's guerrillas found themselves in Texas. While there two of his companies under the commands of Captains John Jarrette and Dave Poole were detached and sent on an important mission into Louisiana as part of the Red River Campaign. During the operation the guerrillas discovered that the condition of slaves in Louisiana were slightly different than they were in Missouri. While slaves along the Missouri border were given a wide latitude of freedom their counterparts in Louisiana were still being governed by the Code Noir. The document had 55 articles and many of its provisions were incorporated into the territorial laws of Louisiana when the Louisiana Purchase passed into American hands.

Under the provisions of the Code Noir, a broad range of liberties were afforded African slaves who worked on Southern plantations. Article 2, of the Code called for all slaves to be instructed in religion and baptized. Continuing with this provision Article 4, made sure that the slaves would not be swayed from their religion by appointing overseers

of the same denomination. Also, Article 5, guaranteed that slaves should not work on Sundays and if the necessity required them to work on the Sabbath they would be guaranteed payment for their labor. Article 6, permitted slaves to marry but they could not be forced to marry against their will. A slave married to a free black was automatically assumed to have been freed although the consent of the owner was necessary for the marriage to be performed.

Article 9, and 10, defined the condition of children born in a marriage of a free black person and a slave. Children followed the condition of the mother, if the mother were free, the children were free. Article 15-16 and 17, allowed slaves to sell at market. Slaves were given free land to raise food in their own gardens and were able to sell what they had grown at market. Many were able to raise chickens and sell eggs.

Article 18, set up a Superior Council to be arbitrators in the feeding of slaves. Decent healthy food was required to be given to slaves twice a day and a set of new clothes were given twice a year. Article 19, said that slave-owners could not hire out their slaves to another unless they provided them with food and clothing. Article 20, made it possible for a slave to report a master for not giving proper food and clothing.

Article 21, dealt with the care of sick, elderly and disabled slaves. They could not be abandoned by their owners. If they were in the care of a hospital, the owner had to pay for that care. Article 26, ordered that slaves would be prosecuted for crimes

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in the same manner as free persons.

Articles 38, and 39, made torture, killing or mutilation of limbs of slaves illegal. Slave-owners and overseers would be prosecuted by the officers of justice according to the severity of the crime. Articles 43 through 49, stated that a husband, wife and any children under the age of puberty were not to be sold separately if they belonged to the same master.

Article 50, gave any owner over the age of 25 permission to grant freedom to his slaves and the Supreme Council would ascertain that the freed slave would have a means of support. Article 51, dealt with the problem of a slave given legal authority over a master's children. Any slave put in such a position would be assumed by the court to have been freed. And Article 54, gave freed slaves all the rights and privileges of free born people in regard to both person and property.

Contrary to the proof and practice of these laws Northern writers unhesitatingly bombarded the country with biased and irresponsible stories concerning the harshness of slave conditions. As proof of humane treatment John H. Randolph, owner of the Nottaway Plantation in Louisiana provided his slaves with hot and cold running water. Even President Andrew Jackson thought so highly of his personal house slave that she was buried between him and his wife in the family cemetery at his home at the Hermitage Plantation in Nashville.

Guerrilla leader William Clarke Quantrill had three black soldiers riding in his ranks during the war: John T. Noland, John Lobb and Henry Wilson. John T. Noland was offered a \$10,000 reward by Union officers for betraying Quantrill but he refused. Henry Wilson bragged about his abilities as a spy for Quantrill. When Union troops invaded Jackson County and were seizing all the Negroes and taking them back to Kansas he recalled how he had run for miles in order to join Quantrill's band. Also in Jackson County, a female slave, named Sophia White, lived on the Rice Plantation. The Rice's son, Benjamin, was one of Quantrill's first recruits guarding his neighborhood against Jayhawker attacks from Kansas. When Benjamin's

father Elihu Coffee Rice and his wife Catherine "Kitty" Stoner White were married in November 1850, Sophia accompanied Kitty to her new home. Sophia attended the births of the couple's five children and became known affectionately as "Aunt" Sophie. She lived in a small cabin near the back door of the Rice home, where she cooked the family's meals in the large hearth. Sophie had a personal fortune of over \$800.00, (comparable to over \$35,000 by today's standard) which she increased by loaning it out at interest.

In another instance of the relationship between slaves and their owners was a case along the Missouri border when Kansas Jayhawkers came looking for guerrilla Cole Younger during the war. They found him hiding out at his mother's home. His faithful black female slave "Suse" hid him at the risk of her own life and aided him in escaping. For her personal loyalty she was strung up with a rope by the neck several times by the Jayhawkers but she remained silent and true. What the Jayhawkers also didn't know was that Susan was entrusted with the family's money which she hid in the hems of her skirts.

Little credit has been given to slaves for their contribution in the early history of our country. Slaves were the skilled craftsmen and mechanics that helped build the rich ornate plantations throughout the South. From the skills taught them slaves were able to provide for themselves when manumitted by their owners. Even the delicate and beautiful carved and molded millwork ornamenting rich homes were done by black workers who learned the trade secrets from master craftsmen from Europe. On one Southern Louisiana plantation in 1850 when inside lighting was only provided by candles or coal oil lamps the plantation owner developed a process for making acetylene gas to light his home. The process was highly complicated but the responsibility was turned over to one of his trusted slaves who then obtained a worthwhile occupation following emancipation.

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