

# Community Focus

Saturday-Sunday, July 21-22, 2012



Alton: Old Rock House apartment building, 2705 College Ave. The house was originally a 1 1/2 story used for rooming for students of Shurtleff College, now the SIUE dental school. Students would hide slaves in the basement by the central chimney. The slaves were most likely hidden during the summer months because the central chimney nook was used as a warming oven in the colder months.



Brighton: Thomas Brown House. Thomas Brown, from Alabama, was the town doctor before the Civil War and was also an Underground Railroad Conductor. Records have shown that there were three buildings in Brighton used to hide slaves along the Underground Railroad. This is the only building left. Dr. Brown would assist slaves along the Underground Railroad, traveling from Upper Alton, by getting them on the stagecoach heading to Jacksonville, some 40 miles away.

## Stops along the Underground Railroad



Otterville: Hamilton Primary School  
Dr. Silas Hamilton moved from Adams County, Miss., bringing slaves with him which he freed upon crossing the Ohio River, all except for a small boy named George Washington, which he raised as a foster son. Dr. Silas Hamilton and George Washington originally met when Dr. Hamilton was riding a horse in Virginia and came across a slave auction where 7 year-old George Washington was crying because his mother had been sold. Upon Dr. Hamilton's death in 1834, he willed funds to erect a monument to George Washington, while Washington was still a young boy, as well as to build a schoolhouse. Part of Dr. Hamilton's estate also set aside funds to be used for the education of "colored children," known as the George Washington Educational Fund.

Photos and research by Mark Polege

I would like to extend a big thank- you to Professor Eric Robinson, an American History instructor at Lewis & Clark Community College. Professor Robinson took his time to give me a personal tour of these historic sites during one hot day in mid June. To learn more about his historic tours, you can reach Professor Robinson via email at: jer1008@yahoo.com.



Otterville: Dr. Silas Hamilton and George Washington Monument  
Inscribed on the Dr. Silas Hamilton and George Washington monument it says, "Erected by George Washington, born in Virginia a Slave. Died at Otterville, ILL. Apr. 18, 1864, A Christian Freeman. To the memory of Dr. Silas Hamilton, his former master. Born at Tinnmouth, VT. May 19, 1775. Died at Otterville, ILL. Nov. 19, 1834. Having in his lifetime given freedom to twenty-eight slaves, and at his death bequeathed four thousand dollars for the erection and endowment of the Hamilton Primary School."



Alton: Enos Apartments, 325 E 3rd St. The Enos Apartments were built in 1858, the same year as the Lincoln-Douglas debates, originally with a basement, a ground floor, and an attic. The third story was added later on in the 1870's, bringing with it the turret originally from the top of the second floor. The building was originally built as a tuberculosis sanatorium. Records indicate that a woman by the name of Priscilla Baltimore, who was a former slave from Burbon County, Ky., was an Underground Railroad Conductor. She was also the founder of Lovejoy, Illinois & and the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the St. Louis area. Upon her death in 1881, she was credited with helping 300 slaves escape to the north. Stories describe a tunnel that was suspected to begin at the Mississippi River, leading up the hill in Alton through the Enos Apartments, and then continued to lead up the hill to Brighton, ending at the Thomas Brown House. When you understand that "tunnel" refers to "path," it begins to make more sense.



Alton: In this house, built in 1820's, the priest from the old Catholic church of St. Mathew's hid slaves in his home in plain view, according to research done by Irene Pittermire. This house has no secret rooms or secret spaces, so what is believed is that this home, like many other religious buildings at the time, was considered above reproach which allowed slaves to be concealed seemingly in plain sight. Other examples of these kinds of buildings which were not searched for slaves were churches and convents.