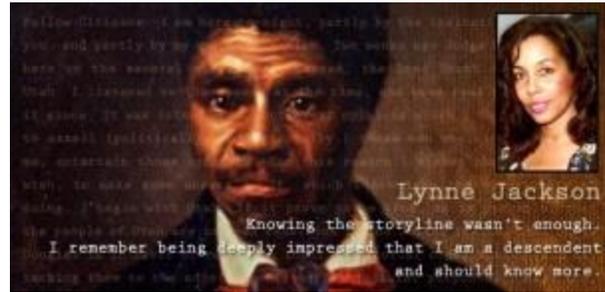


The Dred Scott Fight for Freedom – A National Turning Point

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By **Lisbeth A. Tanz.**



With the bang of the gavel on March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court of the United States sealed the fate of a nation by ruling that Dred Scott, a slave suing for his and his family's freedom, should remain a slave. Almost exactly four years later, seven cotton states seceded from the Union and the war to end slavery in the United States began.

For great, great granddaughter of the Scotts on her father's side, the story of Dred and Harriet Scott is one of perseverance in the face of great adversity, courageous advancement in the face of fear and, most importantly, a deep desire to see their children live their lives free from the threat of enslavement. According to Lynne, "Knowing the storyline wasn't enough. I remember being deeply impressed that I am a descendent and should know more." She also knew it was a story worth preserving and sharing.

The Dred Scott Heritage Foundation

Knowing for years that her family lineage included such a powerful legacy, Jackson's journey to understand the Scott's story didn't actually begin until 1995. Through many years of research, she amassed enough information to fill several 3-ring binders and formulate the germ of an idea: the creation of a foundation to preserve the story of Dred Scott and use it as a vehicle for commemoration, education and reconciliation. That last goal – reconciliation – may be the loftiest and most challenging to meet. "Since it was the U. S. Supreme Court's Dred Scott Decision that divided the nation, it only seemed right that part of our mission be involved in helping heal the wounds."

By 2005, Lynne's vision was nearly complete. With the 150th anniversary of the Dred Scott Decision just two short years away on March 6, 2007, there was a lot of preparation and work to do. In 2006, with the blessing and support of her parents, [The Dred Scott Heritage Foundation](#) became a reality. The foundation ramped up quickly developing the infrastructure, connections and donation base necessary to meet their objectives.

They solicited the support of over 60 organizations – groups that were willing to provide exposure, resources, public relations and their own program activities to get the word out about the commemoration. The concerted effort by all resulted in a dramatic, heartfelt and long overdue year long remembrance of a man who could neither read nor write, but possessed the drive and passion to do what was right no matter what.

Honoring the Legacy of Dred and Harriet Scott

With the 150-years commemoration past, Jackson turned her sights toward fully honoring Dred and Harriet Scott. Missing is a statue noting the contribution this determined couple made to the course of history. The Foundation, after a fiercely competitive artist's competition, selected a design by [Harry Weber](#), former St. Louisan and prominent sculptor whose works have included sports and historical figures nationwide.

Statues, however, take money to build and this one is no exception. [The Dred Scott Statue Campaign Fund drive](#) was launched in October 2010 at the Missouri History Museum where a two-foot scale model of the proposed statue was also unveiled. Complementing the fund drive is the ongoing penny drive, co-sponsored by

M&I Bank, established to help raise the necessary funds as well as serve as an educational tool for youths and adults. Local schools are invited to participate with many having already taken up the challenge. Why a penny drive? Many visitors to Dred Scott's gravesite leave behind pennies, thought to be tributes not only to Scott, but also to Abraham Lincoln, the President who finally abolished slavery. Read more about the penny drive and how to start one in your school or organization [here](#).

Why Dred Scott Still Matters

For Scott, life began as a slave in Virginia around 1799. He subsequently moved with his owner, Peter Blow, to Alabama and eventually settled in St. Louis, Missouri. After Blow's death in 1831, Scott was purchased by John Emerson of the U.S. Army. It was during his time with Emerson that Scott moved to Illinois (a free state) and then the Wisconsin (free) territory in what is now known as Minnesota. It was there that he met and married Harriet Robinson.

Upon Emerson's death in 1843, ownership transferred to his widow, Irene. Scott approached his new owner with a request that she grant his and his family's freedom. She refused. By 1846, Scott initiated the first lawsuit encouraged by anti-slavery friends and financed by the family of his original owner, Peter Blow.

The crux of the suit was based on Scott and his wife having lived in Free states and/or territories. But even though Missouri supported the doctrine, "once free, always free," property rights were the focus of the opposing arguments. The Scotts were seen as property, not as human beings. The first trial, held in St. Louis in 1846, ended with the Scotts losing their case largely because of hearsay testimony. The judge, however, granted them the right to a second trial. It was this trial, also held in St. Louis, which awarded the Scott family their freedom in 1850. The case traveled to the Missouri Supreme Court in 1852. In a surprise decision, the Court reversed the 1850 ruling.

The Scotts changed their focus and sued in Federal Court for their freedom. The case was also heard in St. Louis and again the Scotts left with the verdict decided against them. Upon appeal, the case moved to the U.S. Supreme Court. If the decision went against them here, their journey through the court system would be over with their objective of obtaining freedom for themselves and their children unmet.

Seven of the nine Supreme Court justices agreed that the Scotts should remain slaves. But their opinion didn't stop there. It also stated that as property, they had no right to sue – that in fact they weren't even U.S. citizens. This ruling, considered by many to be the most notorious and divisive Supreme Court ruling in the court's history, set off a firestorm of debate, anger and fear. The decision was a major catalyst, which hastened events that would culminate in the U.S. Civil War.

The Scott's story doesn't end there. By the time the Supreme Court case was complete, Irene Emerson had remarried a northern congressman, Calvin C. Chaffee, who was, ironically, a vocal opponent of slavery. When he learned that his wife owned slaves, he demanded their immediate release. "They received their freedom just six weeks after the [Supreme Court] decision was rendered," Lynne recounts. "While the nation roared at the impact of the case, the quiet process that was playing out to give them their freedom was a drama in itself."

Dred Scott lived only 18 months after becoming a free man, but he died with the knowledge his children would never be subjected to slavery again. While he didn't live to see slavery abolished in the United States, his role in solidifying the opinions, values and direction of the anti-slavery movement has earned him a permanent and special place in history.

Without the interest and drive from Lynne Jackson, the Dred and Harriet Scott legacy may have been relegated to brief mentions in history books. "We were taught our responsibility today – to do what's right," Lynne recalled in a 2007 St. Louis Post-Dispatch article. "Dred and Harriet had the courage to pursue it for 11 years and put their lives on the line. We owe them to see this through." By Lynne's efforts and those of the

foundation, the Scott's bravery, persistence and insistence that what was wrong be made right will continue to serve as a living example for generations to come.

To learn more about how you can support The Dred Scott Heritage Foundation, please visit the website at www.thedredscottfoundation.org.