

A new beginning for Dred Scott Park in Bloomington

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Oil painting of Dred Scott

Credits:

Courtesy of Missouri Historical Society

Tonight, people came together to celebrate the re-dedication of [Dred Scott](#) Park in Bloomington. The park, located at 10820 Bloomington Ferry Road, is 48 square acres and affords opportunities for least 8 different kinds of sports, as well as a park building and picnic areas.

<http://www.ci.bloomington.mn.us/cityhall/dept/commserv/parkrec/parks/parkin/playfield/playfield.htm>

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Although the park was named after Dred Scott in 1971, human rights activist Frank White brought it to the city's attention that there has never been a plaque to commemorate the story of this brave man who made history by fighting for his freedom and the freedom of his wife.

The public forum at Bloomington Civic Plaza was entitled "Legacy of Courage and Freedom, Dred & Harriet Scott." A short play depicted Dred Scot, Harriet Scot, and Frederick Douglas during the last year of Dred Scot's life, the only time in his life when he was a free man. Actor Bruce A. Young was compelling as Scott, detailing the manner in which he and his wife had finally become free. (Bruce A. Young filmography, see the following link)

<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0949340/filmoyear>

Speakers for the evening included Chief U.S. District Judge Michael J. Davis, the first African American Federal Judge of Minnesota, and Lynne Jackson, the great-great-grand daughter of Dred and Harriet Scott.

Dred Scott and his wife Harriet were slaves who were owned by a man named Peter Blow. When Blow died, the Scotts were bought by an army surgeon named Dr. John Emerson. Emerson took the Scotts with him when was transferred from a military posts in the south to those in the north, including Fort Snelling. When Emerson died, his wife Irene hired him out, despite Scott's attempts to buy his own freedom. Then in 1846, Scott filed a petition against Mrs. Emerson, basically stating that since he had lived in free states, he had become a free man. This was due to a previous history of emancipation of other slaves under the "once free, always free" practice in some of the southern states. 11 years and 6 court cases later, Dred and Harriet Scott were still found to be slaves.

In what Judge Davis has called "The worst decision that the supreme court ever made," (Dred Scott v. Sandford,) it was decided that African Americans could never become citizens of the United States, and as non-citizens, they could not state their case in a federal court. Despite the fact that [slavery](#) was illegal in the North, the judge buckled to political pressures and bowed down to slave owners. The Missouri Compromise Act was declared null and void, and it was

determined that congress did not have the right to prohibit slavery in the northern territories. Many legal analysts say that this decision was pivotal in the strengthening of the abolitionist movement and the beginning of the civil war.

Sadly, freedom came to the Scotts not due to the wisdom of the Supreme Court, but because the last in the succession of owners, Taylor Blow, (the son of the first slave owner,) agreed to emancipate them.

Dred Scott's story is important on many levels. It is interesting as a piece of history for Minnesota, Missouri, and the United States as a whole. It is also a fundamental teaching for anyone who wants to understand the law of the land, and the Dred Scott case is required learning for any law student. (For a more detailed account of this case, see the following link)

<http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=US&vol=60&invol=393>

But perhaps the most poignant aspect of this case is the way in which it has helped us to progress as a country. Lynne Jackson is president and founder of the Dred Scott Heritage Foundation, and one her primary successes has been bringing together descendants of civil rights activists.

Regarding her significant research into the history of Dred and Harriet Scott, Ms. Jackson says, "We have to go back so that we can go forward." <http://thedredscottfoundation.org>

In Jackson's Powerpoint presentation, she shared photos of current members of the Blow family who are working with her to protect the legacy of Dred Scott. To think that the ancestors of Blow and Jackson were once master and slave, and are now working together as equals in an effort to preserve this great story, is awe inspiring, and gives us hope for the future of our country.

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