

Great American Lives

of Nineteenth Century Missouri

Dred Scott

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Contributing Educator

Known to family and friends as Sam, Dred Scott was born a slave in Southampton County, Va., around 1799. He never learned how to read or write but was **industrious**, working as a farmhand, **stevedore**, craftsman and general handyman. In 1819, his owner, Peter Blow moved his family to Huntsville, Ala., and then to St. Louis, Mo.

In 1832, Peter Blow died and Sam was sold to Dr. John Emerson for \$500. Emerson was a military surgeon stationed south of St. Louis. Over the next 12 years, Sam accompanied him to posts in Illinois and the Wisconsin Territory, where **slavery** was **prohibited** by Congress.

While in Wisconsin Territory, Scott was allowed to marry Harriet Robinson, a slave owned by the local justice of the peace. Her ownership was transferred to Emerson, and Scott and his new wife soon had two daughters.

Scott's extended stay in Illinois, a free state, and the Wisconsin Territory, where slavery was prohibited, gave him the legal standing to make a claim for freedom.

In 1842, the army transferred Emerson and his wife, Irene, back to St. Louis. The following year Emerson died and Irene hired out Sam, Harriet and their two chil-

dren to work for other families in St. Louis. It was then that Scott decided to seek freedom for himself and his family.

He first offered to buy his freedom from Mrs. Emerson for \$300. Not wanting to lose such valuable property, she refused. But Dred Scott did not give up. He took his fight all the way to the United States Supreme Court. Eleven years later the now famous Scott vs. Stanford case was decided with the court ruling Scott must remain a slave.

Five months after the decision, Mrs. Emerson remarried a man who opposed slavery. Some sources say she then decided to return Scott and his family to Peter Blow's sons, childhood friends of Scott,

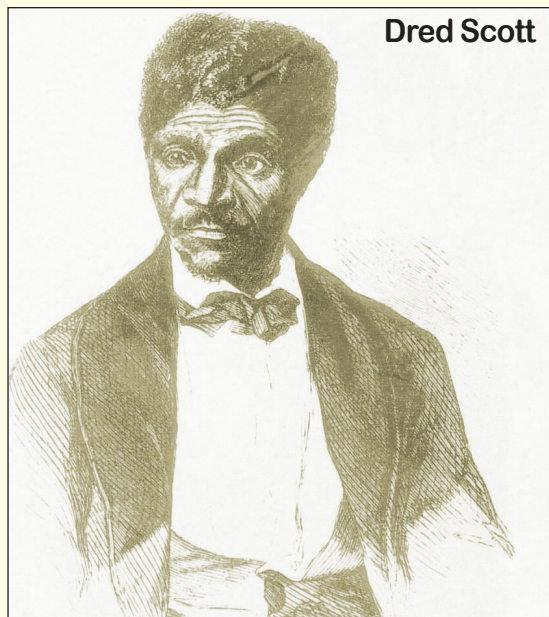
who had helped pay Scott's legal fees through the years. Others, however, say that the Blow sons purchased the Scott family. Whatever the case, Dred Scott and his family were given their freedom by the Blows in January 1858.

Freedom, however, was short-lived. Sam Dred Scott died nine months later of **tuberculosis**.

Although African Americans did not become **citizens** of the United States until the ratification of the 14th Amendment (1868), Scott's bid for freedom remained the most **momentous** judicial event of the century and one of the events that led our nation into the **Civil War**.



Harriet Robinson

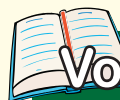


Dred Scott

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Bid For Freedom

- 1846 – Dred Scott files a petition for freedom with the St. Louis Circuit Court. The court rules in favor of his owner, Irene Emerson. The court dismisses Scott's case but allows him to refile his lawsuit.
- 1850 – A jury in a second trial decides the Scotts should be free because of the years they lived in the non-slave territories of Wisconsin and Illinois. Irene Emerson appeals the decision to the Missouri Supreme Court.
- The Missouri Supreme Court overrules the Circuit Court's decision and returns Scott to slavery in 1852.
- Scott files a lawsuit in the U.S. Federal Court in St. Louis. The federal court rules against Scott.
- In 1856, Scott's lawyers appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court, which rules Scott should remain a slave.



Vocabulary

Match the vocabulary word with the correct definition, then write a sentence using each word.

- ___ Citizen
- ___ Civil War
- ___ Industrious
- ___ Momentus
- ___ Prohibit
- ___ Slave
- ___ Stevedore
- ___ Tuberculosis

- A – Hard working, diligent
- B – An infectious disease that affects the lungs and tissues of the body
- C – To forbid an action or activity by authority
- D – A war between political factions or regions within the same country
- E – A native or naturalized member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection.
- F – An individual engaged in loading or unloading the cargo of a ship
- G – One who is the property of and wholly subject to another, a bond servant
- H – Of great or far reaching importance or consequence.