



Drawing from "History of the Common Pleas Court of Cape Girardeau" by J. Henry Caruthers

Court of Common Pleas

Spanish and Themis Streets

On Monday, December 3, 1855, 24 slaves were auctioned off in front of the Cape Girardeau Court of Common Pleas as part of local slave owner Hiram Sloan's estate that was apportioned upon his death. The slave auction was advertised in a handbill on November 6, 1855 and drew bidders from southern states - being sold "down river" was a fate feared by slaves. The slaves walked the half mile from Sloan Farm, now the Red Star neighborhood bordering Sloan Creek, to the Common Pleas Courthouse, where they waited their turn on the auction block in the hallway of the courthouse. Many of the slaves remained in the area after the auction. While this sale's handbill survives as an archival remnant of another era, the Sloan sale was not unique. Untold numbers of slave sales and annual slave hire-outs on the first day of the new year were conducted on this property until 1865 when slavery was abolished in Missouri. Out-sourcing slaves in these annual contracts alleviated owners from providing food, clothing and medical care for their slaves but could also lead to abuse and overwork on the part of masters who had less incentive to protect slaves they did not own. The Ivers family that you're about to meet suffered from this annual separation until they were reunited as a family, though still enslaved, when they were finally purchased by the same owner.

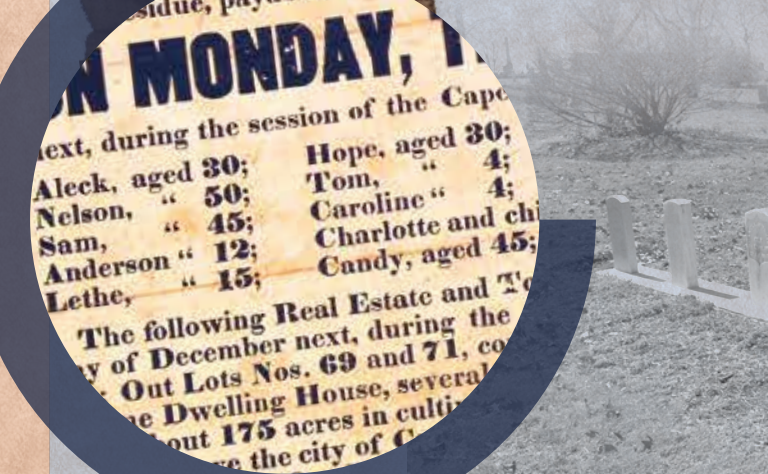
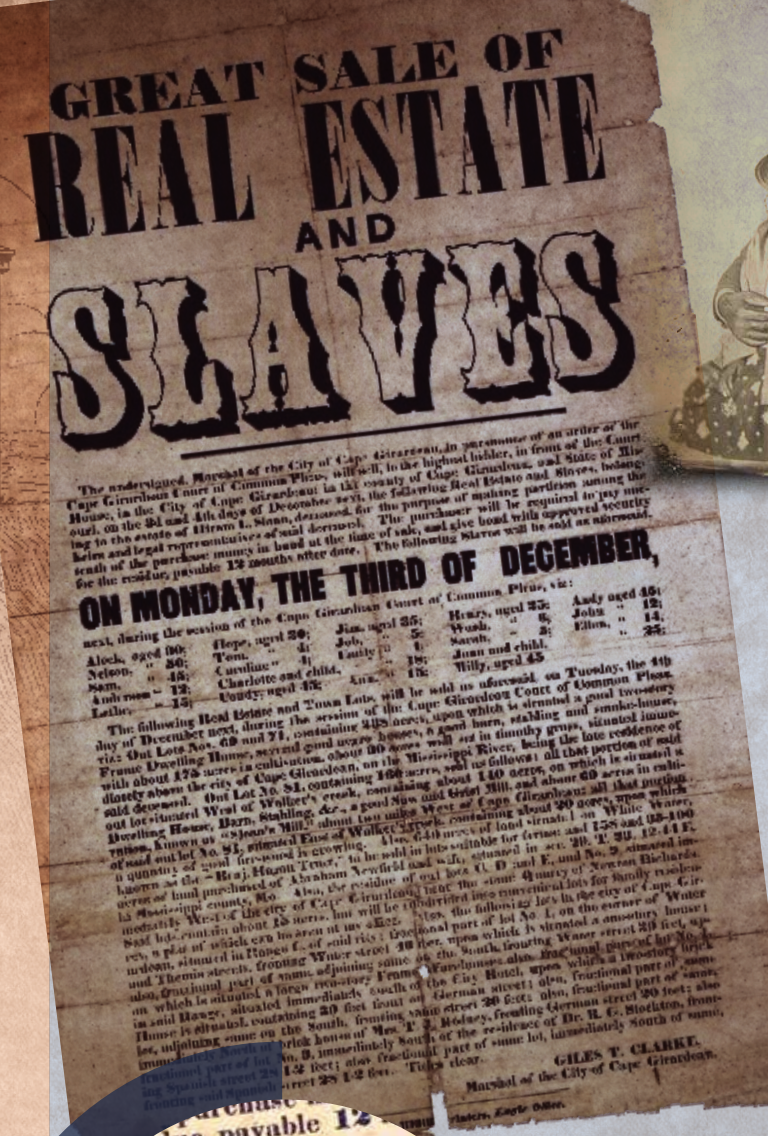
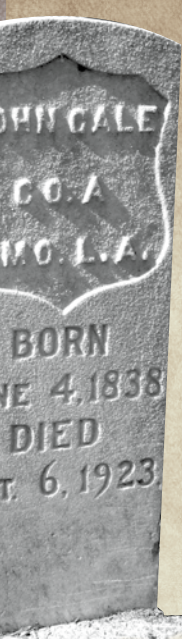


Photo courtesy of Library of Congress

Fairmount Cemetery

835 Caruthers

Some of the U.S. Colored Infantry (USCI) Soldier Veterans, many of whom enlisted in the Union Army in Cape Girardeau at the Common Pleas Courthouse, are buried here at Fairmount Cemetery. Fairmount was opened as the "New City Cemetery" in 1882, and was located on the western outskirts of town. The prejudices of life extended to death, and the USCI veterans are buried in section "C", once known as the "colored section." Headstones of the soldiers were requested by family when the men died and were provided first by the War Department and then the Veterans Administration to honor the military service of the soldiers. Two more recent headstones were requested by citizens and put into place in 2016. Denise Lincoln, a local historian who wrote a booklet with biographical information and a cemetery map of the USCI veteran graves at Fairmount Cemetery that is available for purchase at VisitCape's office at 220 N. Fountain St., says that "Cemetery grave markers are government monuments to the legacy, the courage and the heroism of the USCI soldiers in our midst, therefore our most tangible link to the life stories. It was the experience of finding the life stories of these few men at Fairmount which put me on the path of responsibility to try to embrace the larger story."



Holy Family Catholic Church

1507 South Sprigg Street

In 1940, African American teenagers Alberta and John Spicer and Walter Lee approached a local Catholic priest, Father Darling, about establishing a Catholic Church for neighborhood African Americans. As Darling recalled in the book, *Old St. Vincent Catholic Church*, "they came to me and said, 'Father, if we had a parish or church just for ourselves, we think a lot of people would be converted.'" The name Holy Family was chosen and the church was established as a mission of St. Vincent De Paul Parish. Construction of this building began on May 25, 1940, and the building was dedicated on October 6, of that year. The white frame building originally had green trim with mahogany woodwork inside and seated 120. A basement housed the two-classroom Holy Family School that opened on September 9, 1942 with 43 students enrolled. Mrs. Alberta Spicer Kemp recalled in a 2008 interview published in the book *Old St. Vincent Catholic Church* that "Holy Family had about 120 members, mostly African Americans, with a few whites. Most of the members were converts to the Catholic faith." Holy Family School operated until 1958 when it was ordered closed, and the church held its final service in January 1961 as the practice of segregation was coming to a close. Father Darling said in 1943 that "colored parishes seem to fill the need at the present time. At least many are coming into the church, and we hope, through education of our Catholic people, to see a time when all members of the Mystical Body of Christ will worship side by side without thought of color, and putting aside the inherited prejudices of generations past, or inhibitions acquired from living in certain localities." The crucifix from Holy Family Catholic Church today hangs at Notre Dame Regional High School.



Lincoln / John S. Cobb School

Merriwether and Ellis Streets • 731 Merriwether

Built in 1890, the Lincoln School educated African American children in Cape Girardeau from 1890 until 1953. The school housed elementary and high school students and was renamed the John S. Cobb School in 1925 to honor John S. Cobb, a Tennessee slave born in 1849. While working as the servant of a college professor, Cobb attended Maryville College, a Presbyterian college for black students in Knox County, Tennessee. He moved to Cape Girardeau in the early 1880s and taught and served as principal for 38 years, earning a reputation as one of the top African American educators in the state of Missouri. Cobb school was razed in 1954 after being significantly damaged by a fire in March of 1953. City leaders delayed the rebuilding of the school and months later, in the fall of 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court declared school segregation unconstitutional in Brown v. Board of Education and Cape Girardeau's public schools were integrated. Today you can see the original gymnasium, the only part of the school that survived the fire, which is now incorporated into the Southeast Missouri Regional Crime Lab. Annual class reunions for Cobb School still take place. A memorial sign at the site of the school was dedicated in 2012.



Lincoln School 1914