



Fugitive Slave Cases

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

Introduction

Fugitive slave cases resulted from the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850, which guaranteed slaveholders' rights to recover runaway slaves. Under the 1850 act, law enforcement officials were required to arrest any person suspected of being a runaway slave, and the only evidence needed was a sworn affidavit by the slave owner. People arrested under this law were not permitted to testify on their own behalf, and they were denied habeas corpus (the right for a person to be present at his/her own trial) and a jury trial.

Important Dates

- February 1793: Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 passed, allowing slaveholders to recover runaway slaves in any state. This act was often undermined by northern states' personal liberty laws.
- September 18, 1850: Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 passed, declaring that all runaway slaves must be returned to their masters. Those aiding fugitive slaves would be subject to fines/ imprisonment.
- January–March 1856: Margaret Garner's escape from Kentucky and subsequent trial. This was the longest Fugitive Slave Case of this era. The judge needed to determine if she should be tried as property under the Fugitive Slave Law or as a person for the murder of her child.
- September 1858: Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. Former slave John Price is rescued by citizens of Oberlin and Wellington. 37 are indicted for violating the Fugitive Slave Law and are tried in April 1859, but the charges are eventually dropped.
- January 1861: Bagby Fugitive Slave Case is heard in Cleveland's federal court. Sara Lucy Bagby was one of the last fugitive slaves to be returned to the South before the Civil War.
- January 1, 1863: Emancipation Proclamation orders the freeing of all slaves in rebellious states.
- December 6, 1865: The 13th Amendment, which made slavery unconstitutional, is adopted.

Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: fugitive slave case, slave hunting, capture, trial, runaway, habeas corpus.
- For information concerning the politics of these cases, search: fugitive slave law, fugitive slave act.
- Use specific date ranges or include names of fugitive slaves, slaveholders or locations (of trial or where the slave escaped from) if looking for articles about a particular fugitive slave case.
- The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* reports extensively on fugitive slaves and their trials, both in and out of Ohio.
- Look for results in both Republican and Democratic papers to see differing political viewpoints.

Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[The Cincinnati Slave Case](#)" *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (New-Lisbon, OH), February 9, 1856, Image 2, col. 2.
- "[Late Slave Case in Cincinnati](#)" *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (New-Lisbon, OH), November 14, 1857, Image 4, col. 1-3.
- "[Both Sides](#)" *Perrysburg Journal* (Perrysburg, OH), October 7, 1858, Image 1, col. 2.
- "[The Democrat's Old Story](#)" *Fremont Journal* (Fremont, OH), October 7, 1859, Image 1, col. 5-6.
- "[Arrest of an Alleged Fugitive Slave by U.S. Deputy Marshals](#)" *Cleveland Morning Leader*, January 21, 1861, Image 1, col. 2.