

THE INFORMATION BUREAU.

A little-known activity of the Minnesota Historical Society is the maintenance of what is in effect a bureau of historical information. Queries, important and unimportant, interesting and uninteresting, are constantly being received from teachers, students, public officials, other historical societies, doctors, merchants, farmers, and business concerns. Most of them come from citizens of Minnesota, but not infrequently questions are received from individuals residing in other states. Information is asked on the Indians of Minnesota and their languages, on topics relating to local Minnesota history, biography, politics, economic development, wars and battles, and other matters too numerous to mention. The society also is often called upon to draw up bibliographies or to indicate whether or not any printed or manuscript material is available in its collections for the study of given subjects. In not a few cases the problems raised call for careful research and can be answered only after an examination of manuscripts or other unique materials in the society's collections.

It is believed that many of the answers which are prepared possess sufficient general interest to merit publication. With this number of the BULLETIN, therefore, a new department is initiated in which will be published some of the typical or more important questions and answers.

SLAVERY IN MINNESOTA

Can you give me information regarding the holding of slaves in Minnesota?

ROE CHASE, Anoka

A number of the officers stationed at Fort Snelling in early days, including Major John Bliss and Major John Garland, were slaveholders. Major Lawrence Taliaferro, who for more than twenty years acted as Indian agent at St. Peter's or Men-

dota, inherited slaves which he brought to Minnesota. Several of these he leased at different times to officers at the fort for specified periods. "Capt. Plympton wishes to purchase my servant girl Eliza," he wrote in his Journal on May 29, 1826. "I informed him that it was my intention to give her her freedom after a limited time but that Mrs. P. could keep her for two years and perhaps three." Eventually he liberated all of his slaves, the value of which he estimated to be between twenty-five and thirty thousand dollars.

Taliaferro maintains in his autobiography that the sale of a negro woman by Major Garland to Alexis Bailly was the only instance of the sale in Minnesota of a colored woman. Both Edward D. Neill and James H. Baker state that it was a man who was sold to Bailly, but neither questions that the transaction took place. Neill asserts that no other negroes were sold in Minnesota, but there is considerable evidence to disprove this statement.

James Thompson was brought to Fort Snelling in 1827 as the property of a sutler named John Culbertson. Thompson was purchased by Captain Day, an officer of the fort, who later sold him to a well-known Methodist Episcopal missionary, Alfred Brunson, at Prairie du Chien. The circumstances of this sale have been related in an article on "Alfred Brunson, Pioneer of Wisconsin Methodism," by Ella C. Brunson, in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History* for December, 1918, as follows: "Mr. Brunson felt the need of an interpreter for his missionary work, and learning of a mulatto slave, named Jim Thompson, who had been converted, had something of the missionary spirit, and was above the average of his race in education and mental ability, he approached the slave's master, a Kentucky officer stationed at Fort Snelling, and ascertained that Jim could be purchased for twelve hundred dollars. The missionary then wrote a letter to the Methodist publications of the time, setting forth his need and the ambition of the slave, and the result was that the money was quickly raised and forwarded. Jim was set free and at once became

a capable and faithful interpreter. He served long and well, settling at the end of his years of usefulness in St. Paul, where he died at an advanced age, in 1884."

In 1836 the famous Dred Scott was brought to Fort Snelling by Dr. John Emerson. Later in the same year Major Taliaferro, acting in the capacity of justice of the peace, officiated at the marriage of Scott to a slave girl, Harriet Robinson. Accounts differ as to the ownership of Harriet at the time of her marriage. Taliaferro claims to have given her to Scott, and this claim is accepted as fact by the historian, J. Fletcher Williams. According to other accounts, however, Harriet previously had been sold by Taliaferro to Dr. Emerson. An examination of the records of the Dred Scott case appears to substantiate the claim that Dr. Emerson owned both Scott and Harriet at the time of the marriage. A statement presented to the United States Supreme Court by both the plaintiff and the defendant in the case related that "in the year 1835, Harriet was the negro slave of Major Taliaferro. In that year, 1835, said Major Taliaferro took said Harriet to said Fort Snelling and kept her there as a slave until the year 1836, and then sold and delivered her as a slave at said Fort Snelling unto the said Dr. Emerson. Said Dr. Emerson held said Harriet in slavery at said Fort Snelling until the year 1838." According to the same statement Scott and Harriet were married "with the consent of said Dr. Emerson, who then claimed to be their master and owner." Taliaferro does not mention the marriage in his Journal for 1836. Not until 1864, nearly thirty years later, did he write his autobiography, and it is possible that when he then wrote about the matter he had forgotten the details.

There are allusions to Taliaferro's slaves in his Journals, in the manuscript collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, under the following dates: March 31 and May 29, 1826; February 23, March 30, April 3, and September 22, 1831; August 30, 1834; and November 28, 1835. His "Autobiography" is published in volume 6 of the *Minnesota Historical*

Collections. References to slaveholding may be found in Edward D. Neill's article on "Occurrences in and Around Fort Snelling from 1819 to 1840" in volume 2 of the same series, and in James H. Baker's "Address at Fort Snelling in Celebration of the Centennial Anniversary of the Treaty of Pike with the Sioux" in volume 12. Other books from which information on slavery in Minnesota may be gleaned are Thomas M. Newson's *Pen Pictures of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Biographical Sketches of Old Settlers* (St. Paul, 1886); J. Fletcher Williams' *History of Saint Paul and of the County of Ramsey, Minnesota* (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 4); and Benjamin C. Howard's *Report of the Decision of the Supreme Court of the United States and the Opinions of the Judges Thereof, in the Case of Dred Scott versus John F. A. Sanford* (New York, 1857).

L. A.

EARLY DRAMA IN MINNEAPOLIS

Can you give me any information relative to the beginnings of dramatic entertainment in the pioneer days in Minneapolis?

CARLTON MILES, Minneapolis

There is little material on the history of the earliest dramatic enterprises in Minneapolis and it is, therefore, difficult to state when the first plays were produced. Musical activities and lyceum lectures probably took the place of drama in the earlier years of the city.

The first place used for theatrical purposes according to Isaac Atwater's *History of the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota*, 1: 326 (New York, 1893) and Horace B. Hudson's *Half Century of Minneapolis*, 115 (Minneapolis, 1908), was Woodman's Hall, owned by Ivory T. Woodman. Neither source gives the date of its erection, but Atwater states that the first attraction here was the "Sally St. Claire troupe."

The second hall used for theatrical entertainment, according to the same accounts, was Harmonia Hall. "Here," says Atwater, "John Templeton, Alice Vane, and little Fay Tem-



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