

RELIC OF SLAVERY TIMES.

There stands today on the outskirts of Nebraska City, a small, ordinary looking house, which from its present appearance would hardly merit a passing glance. But remove the weather-boarding together with that which goes to make its present veneer of civilization; then would there remain an object of no little interest—a representative log house of fifty years ago. Then, could we restore the little things that half a century has taken away, we would have the home of Mr. Mahew, pioneer, Mormon and ardent abolitionist.

Underground Railroad.

Forty-odd years ago Mahew and the other abolitionists of this vicinity faced a rather difficult situation. The underground railroad, backed by the anti-slavery sentiment, had been organized all over the country. The main western artery, over which the fugitive slaves from Missouri, Kansas and the southwest were carried, passed through Nebraska City by way of Jim Lane's settlement at Falls City. And if time and conditions permitted the slaves were hurried across the river the same night and on to Civil Bend, a collection of houses strung along the road near the present site of Percival. From the Bend the route led to Tabor, and thence on by various stations to Chicago and Canada.

Once in Fremont county the slaves were comparatively safe. But it was not always possible to reach Iowa the night they arrived. The citizens of Nebraska City, while a majority were no doubt opposed to the idea of slavery in Nebraska, were strong in their opposition to "slave stealing." In the young city that stretched along the banks of the river there were few homes where it would be possible to conceal a slave. These few places were the property of men not friendly to the abolition cause. Where could the local station be established?

John Brown Cave.

We find the answer fifty feet west of Mahew's former home, in "John Brown's cave," situated some 300 feet west of 19th street and about twice that distance north of Wyuka cemetery. At the present time it is only a narrow passageway, opening on a draw from a branch of South Table Creek and extending into the bank nearly thirty feet. The early settlers tell us that formerly the cave was in the shape of a Roman cross with a sub cave of two or three rooms some six or eight feet below the cave proper. These lower rooms were used only when the fugitives seemed in danger of recapture. At this time these rooms are entirely caved in and but for the interest taken by H. H. Bartling in the matter we would know all but nothing concerning this relic of the slavery

days. Mr. Bartling is having the cave excavated and explored, which is a very difficult task, because the only means of tracing the outlines of the cave is by the different quality of the soil and a few decayed posts. It is possible that by summer the cave will have resumed its original proportions. However that may be, this much is certain—that the abolitionists selected the cave for their headquarters and maintained an active station during the years preceding the war. Slaves run off by John Brown and others were received from the south, held over for a night or two, then hastened on to the next station.

Citizens Oppose.

Meanwhile the citizens, some of whom held slaves of their own, looked askance upon the operations southwest of town. Yet we find but one record of any attempt to disturb Mahew and his friends. One day in the fall of 1858 it was rumored in the city that the notorious John Brown, with two of his lieutenants, occupied the cave with a squad of negroes that they were helping on to Canada. The situation seemed to demand action. A company of seven banded themselves together in order to capture Brown and his party that evening. Under the leadership of a deputy sheriff, they assembled where the court house now stands. Every man was armed and equipped for the fray, and all started for the cave. On the way some dissention arose as to the means to be employed. One faction was determined to go, cost what it might, while the others were not so eager. When the party reached the ground where the stand pipe is now located it was discovered that their number had dwindled to four. This was serious. A man was quickly dispatched to find and return with the deserting three; but alas for the success of the expedition, he too deemed discretion the better part of valor, and returned to his home. The remaining three disbanded. The task under these conditions was too great. Had the men held together some important history might have been made and the insurrection at Harper's Ferry might have been averted, for it has been ascertained that the rumor was true.

Nuckolls Slaves.

It was not long after this that the Nuckolls negroes were "run off," causing the greatest indignation among the people of this city. The Nebraska City News for Saturday, Nov. 29, 1858, contained this notice: "Quite a sensation was created in town yesterday morning by the fact being known that two female servants had been enticed away from our townsman, Mr. S. F. Nuckolls, by some vile white-livered abolitionist. Many of our citizens are out in search of the runaways. They escaped Thursday evening. Mr. Nuckolls offers a reward of \$200.00 for their apprehension

and delivery to him in Nebraska City. They will doubtless be found in some abolition hole."

Civil Bend Raid.

Everything pointed to Civil Bend as the refuge of the negroes. So the first posse to begin the pursuit headed for that place. There were seventeen men in all, among others: William B. Hail, Grant Hail, Robt. Mason, George Vickroy, Fountain Pearman, W. C. Wyatt and S. F. Nuckolls. The first place to be visited was the home of a Mr. Williams, the foremost anti-slavery man of that section. Williams not only refused to permit his house to be searched, but began such a tirade against the party that a brother of S. F. Nuckolls, becoming angry, struck Williams and effectively silenced him. The men continued the pursuit, despite some attempted resistance on the part of the Bend inhabitants, until the entire party was arrested by a company of abolitionists from Tabor. Trial was quickly arranged for the next day, and all but two of the Nebraska City men were set at liberty; Grant and W. B. Hail remained as hostages for the return of the party.

On the following day the fifteen men prepared to return, and with them some sixty others, all fully armed. About three o'clock in the afternoon the ice became firm enough to cross on, and the entire party marched on to the Bend, where they found the hostages in a school house surrounded by a band of abolitionists. Frightened at the strength of the Nebraska force the Iowa men quickly disbanded, leaving their prisoners free to join their friends.

Williams Case.

The Williams incident was taken into court, where a Fremont county jury awarded Williams a considerable sum for damages. He invested this money in a large barn, and opened a hotel and feed stable for the use of people traveling to and from Nebraska City. One night two strangers sojourned with Mr. Williams. That evening the barn was found on fire. The ropes to the wells were cut and the strangers had vanished.

The route which the "nigger thieves" selected as the best suited for their purpose is thus chronicled by C. N. Karstens, who, while not immediately connected with the abduction, was cognizant of it: "The party, after securing the negroes from the Nuckolls home, went up the river to a point a few hundred yards above the old Wyoming station. Here they were met by a party from Iowa who had been instructed to come over in a skiff and take the refugees away. They took the darkies to Civil Bend. When the pursuit of the negroes was heard of, they were hastily driven on to the next station." There are two stories as to the manner in which the negroes were smuggled past