

The last big slave drive in western Missouri

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In May of 1859 (the exact day cannot be determined) Thompson McDaniel of Kansas City organized what is considered to be the last big slave drive in western Missouri. Buyers, such as McDaniel, would travel through the area and purchase slaves for whom there was likely to be a market elsewhere, and arrange for their transportation and sale.

Jackson County slaveholders, most of whom can be considered small time, were nervous as to the safety of their slave property because of the deteriorating political situation in Kansas Territory, and because of the several violent “slave stealing” expeditions mounted by Kansas “Free Staters.” It was now apparent that Kansas would sooner or later be admitted to the Union as a “Free” state, and slave property would be even more in peril.

McDaniel had been a major speculator in real estate, as well as slaves, for several years in Kansas City. His 40-acre “McDaniel’s Addition” to Kansas City covered much of present day downtown Kansas City, east of Main Street and South of 6th Street. In 1858 McDaniel had erected the three-story Union Hotel on the southeast corner of 6th and Main, and had done a good trade.

This particular slave drive consisted of approximately 100 individuals, mostly male, between the ages of 18 and 35. After their acquisition they were marched down Main Street in handcuffs and chains towards the Union Hotel. They were accompanied by four or five guards with blacksnake whips. The slaves were ordered not to speak, and infractions of any kind were treated most harshly.

The scene at the Union Hotel was said to be something like what you might see at a performance of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” The various onlookers speculated as to the high prices the slaves might bring in the southern market, and the favorable or unfavorable characteristics of each slave were much commented upon. The faces of the slaves were full of dread as they contemplated their likely future on rice or cotton plantations in Mississippi or Louisiana.

From the Union Hotel the slaves were taken to the river landing and loaded onto a steamboat. Nothing further is known of their fate.

Apparently this last big slave drive was a poor speculation for McDaniel. He was broke and bankrupt within a few months and left Kansas City for Atchison, Kansas Territory. It is thought he died several years later in Salina, Kansas and he possibly was returned to Kansas City for burial in Union Cemetery in Kansas City.

Two sons of McDaniel’s were later participants in James-Younger Gang activities and died violent deaths. William “Bud” McDaniel was a suspect in the Muncie, Kansas train robbery of June 1875 and, after arrest in Kansas City (initially for drunken carriage driving), escaped from a Lawrence, Kansas jail and was shot to death on his way back to Missouri. Thomas McDaniel was killed near Pine Hill, Kentucky in September, 1875 in the pursuit after the Huntington, West Virginia bank robbery.