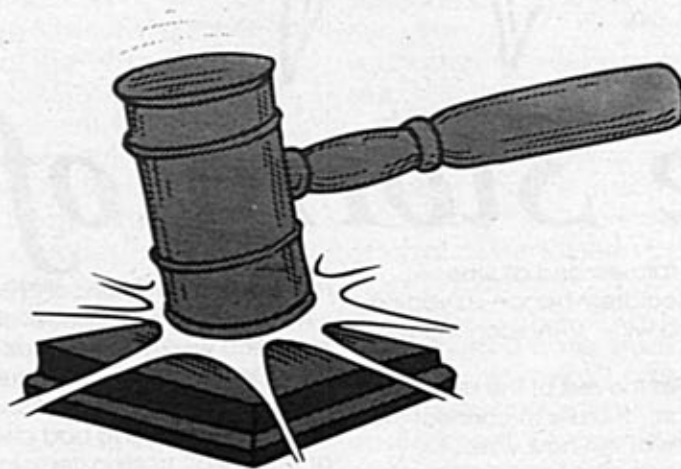




Miller County White Man Sold At Auction In 1859

By Peggy Smith Hake



On September 11, 1859, a charge of vagrancy was brought against a man in Miller County named William Williams, filed by Constable Barnabas Reed of Glaze township. The warrant was presented to John K. Hall, a justice of the peace who lived in the vicinity. The sheriff of Miller County in 1859 was Samuel T. Harrison.

A vagrant was a rover, vagabond, tramp or beggar who wandered around without a regular job, and made it a way of life. By law a vagrant back then could be arrested and jailed.

So, three days later, on September 14, 1859, Williams (about 25 years of age) was found at the home of Samuel Ash in Glaze township. Constable Reed put him under arrest. Samuel Ash was Williams' father-in-law. His young wife was Mary Ann Ash, age about 19 years. They had married in Miller County on March 2, 1856. William and Mary had a young son named Jeremiah, who

was approximately one year old when his father was arrested in 1859.

According to the testimony of Samuel Ash, Reed came to the Ash home "in the middle of the night" demanding Williams to surrender. Ash talked William Williams into giving himself over to the constable; and the two of them (Reed and Ash) escorted Williams to the home of John Hall,

the justice of the peace.

Even though it was after midnight, Justice Hall immediately summoned six jurors to come to his home. They arrived in a short while; and without much pomp or ceremony, they found him guilty of vagrancy. One of the jurors must

have been named Andrew Ulman, because he insisted Williams be untied during his trip to jail. By the next morning, probably only a few hours, Williams was incarcerated

in the county jail at Tusculumbia.

For three days a notice was hand-posted on the courthouse door advertising that a "vagrant" would be hired out for a cash payment for a period of six months to the highest bidder.

On the morning of the fourth day, the sheriff (Samuel T. Harrison) of Tusculumbia, sold William Williams for cash at the auction.

Mary Ann (Ash) Williams began the bidding at a dime and she continued to raise the bid at one cent until she acquired her husband's freedom. The bid reached \$2.55 when Sheriff Harrison yelled, "Going, Going, Gone," to Mrs. Mary Ann Williams for \$2.55."

In 1860, William, Mary Ann and their two-year-old son, Jeremiah, were still living in Glaze township near others mentioned in this article. After the 1860 census, they appear no more in Miller County census records. The Civil War scattered many families in many directions. I do not know what happened to the William Williams family.

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