

# Biography

## Dred Scott (1795?-1858)

Dred Scott was born a slave in Virginia about 1795. His owner, Peter Blow, was a cotton planter. Scott probably worked as a field slave. In 1830, the Blow family quit farming and moved to St. Louis, Missouri, taking Dred Scott with them.

As a "city slave," he was hired to work for wages. Scott worked on steamboats traveling up and down the Mississippi River. In 1832, Peter Blow sold Scott to John Emerson, a U.S. Army doctor.

In 1833, the army sent Dr. Emerson to Fort Armstrong in northern Illinois. He took Scott along. Three years later, Emerson was assigned to Fort Snelling in Wisconsin Territory. During the seven years Scott spent there, he married Harriet Robinson, a slave woman. In 1840, Emerson

was transferred to a fort in Florida. On his way south, he left Dred and Harriet Scott with his wife Irene in St. Louis. When Dr. Emerson died in 1843, Scott became Irene Emerson's slave.



In 1846, Dred Scott sued in a Missouri court for his freedom. He claimed that living on free soil in Illinois and Wisconsin Territory made him a free man. He also asked for the freedom of his wife and their children, Eliza and Lizzie. When the

state court ruled in their favor, Irene Emerson appealed to the Missouri Supreme Court. It reversed the lower court's decision. In the meantime, she had sold the Scotts to her brother, John Sanford of New York.

Dred Scott sued again. As residents of two states were now involved, he could sue in a federal court. He lost again. With the help of a St. Louis lawyer, Roswell M. Field, Scott appealed to the United States Supreme Court.

On March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court ruled that the Scotts were still slaves. It also said that as a slave, Dred Scott had no right to sue in the courts. It held, finally, that Congress had no right to ban slavery from a territory.

Although they lost in the courts, the Scotts did gain their freedom. Irene Emerson married Calvin Chaffee, an antislavery congressman who objected to his wife owning slaves. In May 1858, Emerson gave the Scott family to Taylor Blow, the son of Peter Blow, Dred Scott's first owner. He freed the Scotts and helped them pay their legal bills.

Dred Scott died a free man on September 17, 1858.



