

Slavery and the Tragic Story of Two Families - Gaines and Garner Maplewood Farm, Richwood, Kentucky

Ruth Wade Cox Brunings
March 23, 2004

The history of Maplewood Farm on Richwood Road in Richwood, Kentucky is the history of persons in the mid 1800s whose lives were filled with tragedy. The social/political/religious/moral conflicts of that time in history had a profound influence on the surrounding community. As the northern most county in a border state there was no one position on any of these issues. Pre Civil War times have been described as the war before the war. Due to geographic proximity to Cincinnati, there was travel and commerce between the two states. Kentuckians married Ohioans, southerners had northern relatives, anti slavery persons lived in Kentucky and pro slavery persons lived in Ohio. This divided stand on issues led to Kentucky proclaiming neutrality at the onset of the Civil War, with soldiers fighting on both sides.

Historical facts about Maplewood and Boone County include the following. Land was generally referred to as farms as they were smaller and less based in agriculture than the plantations of the South. Maplewood was 221 acres. The primary cash crop in this area was hogs for the Cincinnati pork packing industry. Farms had descriptive names as there were no street addresses. There were toll roads with toll houses to collect fees for usage of these privately owned and maintained roads. There was a toll house at the intersection of Richwood Church Road and Hicks Pike and another one at Richwood. There was no train station at Richwood until 1869 when the railroad first came through Richwood, The Richwood Presbyterian Church was, and still is, located at the east border of Maplewood. The Marshall farm was directly east and across Richwood Road from Richwood Church. The Marshall house was on the hill top to the east of Maplewood and faced Chambers Road. The barn was behind the house to the North and stood in the same location as the new barn that stands there today. The remaining two rooms of the house built by Archibald Gaines, after the John Gaines house burned in 1850, was the one story ell, or wing, of a larger two story house located between these two rooms and the cistern to the West. The underground foundation of the rest of the house is still present and the west wall of the remaining two rooms is an interior wall with windows where doors were originally located. The remaining two rooms are remembered by descendants as the service wing. The kitchen has an outside back door facing north and a built in pantry beside the fireplace. Kitchens, the warmest room in the house, were attached to the house due to the cold northern Kentucky winters. The built in pantry beside the kitchen fireplace was typical of other houses built during this same time period. There were wood burning kitchen stoves, in addition to fireplaces, with chimneys connected above the fireplace. Slave cabins were usually situated behind the kitchen both for observation and availability of the slaves to the owners. The house standing in front of the two remaining rooms of the 1850 house is a Sears and Roebuck prefabricated house built by a descendant of James Matthew Gaines and completed in 1917. Family cemeteries were common in Boone County and used for burial of family members and their slaves. There was no family cemetery at Maplewood. The Gaines family cemetery was in Walton.

The history of Maplewood is replete with tragedy for members of both races. John Pollard Gaines was a well educated, successful attorney. He was an older son of Abner LeGrand Gaines who built the first brick house in Walton between 1790 and 1800 which he later used as a tavern/inn for the stage coach line which operated between Lexington and Cincinnati. John was a soldier in the War of 1812, Major in the Mexican American War, Representative in the Kentucky Legislature, United States Congressman, and Governor of the Territory of Oregon. He bought Maplewood, built a home and raised his family there. When Abner Gaines died in 1839, his widow Elizabeth, John's mother, moved to Maplewood. Margaret, born June 4, 1834, was old Mrs. Gaines's housegirl and raised with John's children. The ownership of Margaret and her parents is unclear. Margaret stated during the trial that Mrs. Gaines was her owner. It is possible that Mrs. Gaines brought some of her slaves with her when she moved to Maplewood. Archibald

showed the court a bill of sale for five slaves, including Margaret and her parents, dated 1849 to support his claim that he bought Margaret from his brother John. Whether or when Archibald became Margaret's owner is a question. What is known is that Margaret and her parents were owned by the Gaines family. Margaret was a mulatto and therefore thought to have had a white father. Her father could have been one of the men at the Gaines tavern, including one of the Gaines men. Margaret was described as five feet tall, "a fine looking woman" and strong willed with a "violent temper" by Archibald's niece who remembers Margaret fighting with Nellie, her grandmother's cook. This visiting relative described her grandmother as a loving "kind old woman" and Nellie as "ferocious". As children she said they were afraid of Nellie and liked Margaret and her children.

Benjamin Franklin Bedinger, MD, was a neighbor and friend of John Gaines and both were members of the WHIG political party. However, they held widely different views. Most of the Gaines were Episcopalians and the Bedingers were Presbyterians. John fought in two wars and his nephews fought in the Confederate Army. Franklin opposed both the Mexican American War and the Civil War, buying substitutes for his son Daniel and for a former slave, Humphrey, whom he had freed, when they were drafted by the Union Army. In contrast to John, Franklin opposed slavery, freed the slaves who came with the farm he purchased, owned no mulatto slaves, and wrote an editorial published in the Covington Journal expressing his anti slavery views in 1849 prior to the convention to revise the Kentucky Constitution. No Bedinger testified in Archibald's behalf at the Margaret Garner trial. Franklin's anti slavery views were those of his father's, George Michael Bedinger, a former U. S. Congressman who chaired the Committee for the Suppression of Slavery which abolished the importation of slaves; his mother's, Heneritta Clay Bedinger, a first cousin of Cassius Clay, renown crusader against slavery; and his wife's, Sarah Everett Wade Bedinger, a devoutly religious daughter of a wealthy Cincinnati businessman, city Alderman and Deacon in the Presbyterian church. Franklin attended Richwood Presbyterian Church with his family and was an Elder. Richwood Church and the Bedingers were committed to the position of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky at that time. This official church position was to consider slavery as morally wrong, to free slaves at the age of thirty after they had been educated and trained to be self supporting, and to provide them with religious instruction. Gradual emancipation was thought to be in the best interest of slaves so they could survive and prosper in a hostile society. The Presbyterian Church was committed to world wide missionary work which included African Americans, both in Africa and in this country as slaves. Slaves were members of the Presbyterian Church, seen as equal before God, educated and encouraged to become ministers and establish their own churches. Berea College in Kentucky was founded for this purpose. Both Major Gaines and Dr. Bedinger were active in politics. John held elected and appointed public office but Franklin had made a promise to his wife to never enter this dangerous world. Franklin met with Lincoln and expressed concern about the dangers Lincoln would face as the presidential candidate for the new Republican party. When the newly elected President from Kentucky, Zachary Taylor, offered Dr. Bedinger the governorship of the Territory of Oregon he declined and suggested Major Gaines instead. Sarah Everett had said they would loose half of their children on such a long and dangerous journey. Franklin hosted a farewell dinner for John prior to his departure.

As John was leaving for Oregon, tragedy struck Archibald Kinkead Gaines, a younger son of Abner Gaines. Archibald was not as well educated or as successful as his older brothers, James and John, who were both attorneys. James Gaines and Franklin Bedinger were the two wealthiest men in Boone County according to the tax rolls at the time. Archibald had married Margaret Dudley in 1843 who, along with her parents, were members of Richwood Church. Their third child lived only a month and was buried in Kentucky. Archibald then moved with his family to a Gaines family plantation in Arkansas. Two years later Margaret had what was documented as an accidental fall down the stairs, delivered a still born child and died several days later. Her death bed wish was to be returned to Kentucky and buried beside her infant son. She also requested that her young daughter be given to her mother to raise, leaving Archibald with his son. Archibald returned to Boone County and married his wife's sister, Elizabeth, who raised both of Margaret's children with her own. John sold Maplewood to Archibald as he was leaving for

Oregon. Archibald was known to have a temper and possibly a drinking problem. He was also described as melancholy. The same year that he moved to Maplewood, the house that John built burned and was rebuilt by Archibald. The Maplewood slaves became so unruly there was correspondence between the Gaines about the possibility of selling them. Hannah, a Maplewood slave and member of Richwood Church, was documented in the church Session Minutes in 1852. An Elder was ordered to "converse with Sister Hannah a colored woman touching on a charge of insubordinate conduct as a servant and for the use of bad language unbefitting her profession". The Elder visited Hannah and recommended against citing her to appear before Session based on "her confession of sin and promise of amendment and her declaration of contrition made to him. Session ordered that no further proceeding be taken in her case". When John returned from Oregon for a visit, he left his youngest daughter, Matilda, called Tilla, at Forest Home with the Bedinger family, not at Maplewood with his brother Archibald.

John left one adult son, Richard, in Kentucky, traveled to New York by land and then sailed around South America and up the Pacific coast to Oregon. Just as Sarah Everett Bedinger predicted, the journey was a dangerous one. Three of John's daughters, Harriet, Florella, and Anna Marie contacted yellow fever en route and were gravely ill. Harriet and Florella died and were buried in Brazil. Anna Marie survived. Within a year of his arrival, John's wife was thrown from her horse and died from a head injury she suffered when she fell between the oxen and the wagon which was beside the horse she was mounted on. The wagon rolled over her without touching her body but she suffered a severe blow to her head on impact with the ground and died three days later. John had lost two of his eight children as well as his wife and was not well received on the West coast. The people of Oregon thought they had qualified men of their own to govern their territory and saw John as a southern gentleman in contrast to their more casual western ways. John was a very moral man, opposed to drinking and gambling. He served one term as Governor, remarried after his wife's death, had another daughter and then died of typhoid fever in 1857.

Meanwhile, back in Kentucky Margaret, called Peggy, married her teenage neighbor, Robert Garner, a slave on the neighboring Marshall farm. They were fifteen years old. Together they had a black son. Robert was hired out all over northern Kentucky and probably saw Margaret only on weekends. As Archibald and his second wife Elizabeth started having children, Margaret started having light skinned mulatto children. Her daughters were described as almost white and Mary as exceptionally beautiful. Margaret was a house slave, possibly the daughter of one of the Gaines brothers, with responsibilities for old Mrs. Gaines and in the kitchen. She was accorded special treatment as such. Archibald's immediate second marriage to his first wife's sister may have been for the purpose of providing a mother for his children and honoring her death bed request that their daughter be raised by her family. The relationship which appears to have developed between Margaret and Archibald is the subject of speculation. There is certainly evidence in the light skin of Margaret's younger children; the absence of her husband; Archibald's plea to the posse to not harm the children; his grief over the death of Mary, the child Margaret killed; and his tenderly bringing the body back to Kentucky for burial, that Archibald was the father of these children. The timing of the births of Margaret's children is not a factor in this speculation when accurate birthdates of the Gaines children are used. It is possible that Margaret was the victim of sexual abuse. It is also possible that such a relationship was not unwilling or without feeling. There is documentation in history as well as in fiction of love relationships between the races. Archibald's second marriage appears to have been one of convenience. We can only speculate.

On the third Sunday in March of 1855 Margaret became a member of Richwood Church on profession of faith. She was examined by the Elders on Session on Saturday, then baptized and accepted as a member, equal before God, on the following Sabbath. Although Archibald's first wife and later some of his children were members of Richwood Church, Archibald was a member of the Episcopal Church in Covington where his second marriage took place. Morality was a major issue of the early Presbyterian Church and defined in puritanical terms. Breaking the Seventh Commandment (Thou shall not commit adultery) was the most serious moral offense at

that time in history. This was vividly described in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*. There is also a documented case of a slave woman confessing to her minister that her master required her to sleep with him on threat of death. The minister's response was that it would be better to die than to live in sin. Margaret evidenced the depth of her religious convictions by joining the church and later by rejoicing that her two daughters were in heaven when they died. She would have been in moral conflict about a presumed adulterous relationship with Archibald. Termination of an adulterous relationship could have been a compelling motivation for Margaret to run away from Maplewood as well as reunification with her husband. Margaret's church membership could have been useful in their escape. Sunday was the slave's day off with their duties resuming on Monday morning. Margaret would have attended Sunday evening church services with all of her children, as was the custom. Afterwards she could have gone with the Garners to their home on the Marshall's farm. Later Sunday night the Garners would have been together and fled through the open fields and farm roads north to avoid the front of the Marshall's house and the toll house near Richwood Church on Richwood Church Road and Hicks Pike as well as the toll house at Richwood. Robert was familiar with the territory having been hired out and was resourceful. He also showed concern for the well being of the hard driven horses by abandoning them at a stable in Covington. It was also risky to drive a heavily loaded sled over ice. Other such sleds had fallen through. The Garners' choice of fleeing to Cincinnati; trusting Margaret's free cousins, the Kites; and remaining after daylight in the free Black part of town was a fateful decision. Robert later accused Margaret's cousin of turning them in to the slave catching authorities and the home of Margaret's cousin was an obvious first place for the posse to look. Slave escapes through the up river town of Ripley, Ohio were more successful due to better organization and closely guarded secrecy.

When Margaret responded to capture by killing her daughter Mary and attempting to kill her other three children it was an act of defiance, as captured in the painting entitled *Modern Media*. Just as Media killed their sons when Jason, her husband, left her for another woman, Margaret killed a presumed child of Archibald's when he prevented her escape from him. The book, *Unruly Women* by Victoria Bynum, documents extreme acts of defiance by both white and black women in the old South where they shared gender issues of powerlessness in a male dominated society. Infanticide by slave mothers, especially of light skinned babies, was a documented practice during this time. Child murders have also been committed by mothers suffering from postpartum depression which increases after multiple pregnancies. Margaret's affect was described as bland, or detached, during the trial which is a symptom of depression. At the age of 22, Margaret was pregnant, had four young children and had experienced a physically exhausting, sleepless night filled with fright and danger. She maintained control of her own destiny through a desperate act of destruction.

The history of the Maplewood Farm is one of tragedy - for Margaret and her family as well as for John and Archibald and their families. It is also the story of persons who displayed heroic qualities of courage and sacrifice when faced with danger. John Gaines survived and escaped through enemy lines from a Mexican prison during the Mexican American War, then honored a promise made to an American businessman in Mexico City to escort his wife and two children back to New England, delaying his arrival in Washington where he had been elected to Congress while a prisoner of war. Margaret did not submit to capture willingly and rejoiced when she was able to prevent the enslavement of her daughters by their deaths. Mary was almost decapitated with a butcher knife. Baby Priscilla was drowned during a steamboat collision as the Garners were being "sold down the river" and her body was not recovered. It is unknown whether this was an accident or a deliberate act. Margaret's contribution to the anti slavery movement was profound as her trial received national press coverage and the attention of the Governor of Ohio and the President of the United States. The war before the war became more intense, more hearts were swayed and more people joined Anti Slavery Societies and the new Republican Party, which had replaced the Liberty Party. Lincoln was elected, the Civil War was fought and slavery ended within a decade of Margaret's escape, trial and death from typhoid fever in 1858 on a southern plantation where she and her family had been sold. Archibald stepped on a rusty nail and died of tetanus in 1871. Archibald's oldest son joined the Confederate Army, was captured

and held as a Union prisoner during the Civil War. Archibald's descendants suffered financial hardship during Reconstruction but went on to become respected, contributing members of society. The freeing of the slaves without compensation to the owners was the greatest confiscation of private property by the federal government in U.S. history. President Lincoln had planned to compensate slave owners as well as provide assistance to the freed slaves but Congress failed to do either after his assassination. Robert joined the Union Army in 1863, returned to Cincinnati as a free man after the Civil War, suffered an industrial accident and died. Margaret's two sons, Thomas and Samuel, remained in the South. They were last known to live on a small farm near Vicksburg, Mississippi. There is no record of Mary's burial place or that Archibald returned her body to Maplewood. There was a Gaines family cemetery in Walton where his first wife and infant son were buried. The fate of Margaret's fifth child, unborn when she left Kentucky, and of Robert's parents is not known.

There has been much speculation as to why the Garners fled slavery and why Margaret killed her daughters. The Garners were described as well fed, well dressed and well mannered. They sang hymns and prayed while in jail. Margaret and Robert were both described as intelligent. The children were described as happy and playful during the trail. Thomas Marshall referred to Robert as his childhood playmate and Robert named his oldest son Thomas. One-third of the members of Richwood Church were slaves. However, during the winter of 1856 almost two hundred slaves from Northern Kentucky fled north and became fugitives. Nine out of the fifteen Maplewood slaves were in this total number. Why? There was opportunity as the Ohio River was frozen which provided a bridge of ice. There was the contagion of hope for freedom which was spread through the slave community both by African Americans and by Abolitionists. For the Garners, there was an organizer, apparently Robert. There was a resource, the Marshall's sled and horses. There was timing - Sunday was their day off. There was motivation, family reunification for Robert and Margaret. There was rebellion against oppression. There was religious conviction about a moral life on earth and a better life in the hereafter. Margaret's possible reasons for killing her daughters and attempting to kill her sons are complex. Her motivation could include her new found religion, her mental status, as well as vengeance toward her owner and the assumed white father of her younger children. It has been speculated that her vengeance was also directed toward the whiteness of her children. Her stated reason was that she would rather kill her children and herself than return to slavery. Implicit in her statement was the universal and enduring quest for freedom.

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