

Richard Eells

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cated that some justices were siding with an earlier U.S. Supreme Court decision that it was the "moral decision" of each individual to return a runaway slave. Justice Shields gave the opinion of the state court, while Justice Lockwood offered the dissenting opinion. The ruling would stand untested for nearly ten years.

Dr. Eells had long been a prominent figure in state and local abolitionist circles. The 250 people (including 61 from Quincy) who attended Elijah P. Lovejoy's anti-slavery convention in 1837 elected Eells and five other Quincyans to the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society's Board of Managers. Eells served as president of the Adams County Anti-Slavery Society in 1839, and was elected president of the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society a year after his arrest.

The Liberty Party, which had its Illinois beginnings in 1844, took over the political reigns of the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society. The Liberty Party nominated Eells for several public offices, including congressman, governor, and president in 1844. The Liberty Party's following was relatively small, and enjoyed little success in elections. In 1848 the Liberty Party was, practically speaking, absorbed by the Free-Soil Party.

Tensions ran high between pro-slavery and abolitionist groups in Missouri and Illinois. Just as Illinois had parts of the



Italianate detail was added to the Greek Revival-style house during an 1850s remodeling. (Photo courtesy Gardner Museum of Architecture and Design)

state with deep Southern ties (Cairo is farther south than Richmond, Virginia), so did its neighbor slave state Missouri. The area of northeast Missouri, in the region Chauncey Durkee lived, still bears the nickname "Little Dixie" and was the

site of several Civil War encounters.

With Quincy just on the other side of the river, economic and political ties were very important. At one point the leaders of Marion County, Missouri, unanimously resolved to sever all business ties with Quincy. Such actions angered many Quincyans. The *Quincy Herald* in a call for a meeting stated, "the conduct of a few misguided men had destroyed trade between the two communities and made it impossible for residents of Illinois to travel in Missouri without being harassed." However, during the same time period, the city as a whole had offered a helping hand to the Mormons who were fleeing an extermination order in Missouri, and that likely did not help matters either.

Economic sanctions were not punitive enough for some Missouri slaveowners, who resorted to vigilantism. A small gathering of citizens from Lewis and Clark counties posted handbills in the river town of Canton, Missouri, threatening to give one abolitionist living on Long Island in the Mississippi "50 lashes on his bare back, well laid on." And if the abolitionist was found later in either of the two counties, he was "to be hanged by the neck until he is DEAD! DEAD! DEAD!" Dr. Eells had reason to fear that group; they offered a \$200 reward for his deliverance to their "committee of vigilance."

Long-time admirers of Richard Eells and his house began work a year ago on a plan to restore the house and grounds. (Photo courtesy Gardner Museum of Architecture and Design)

