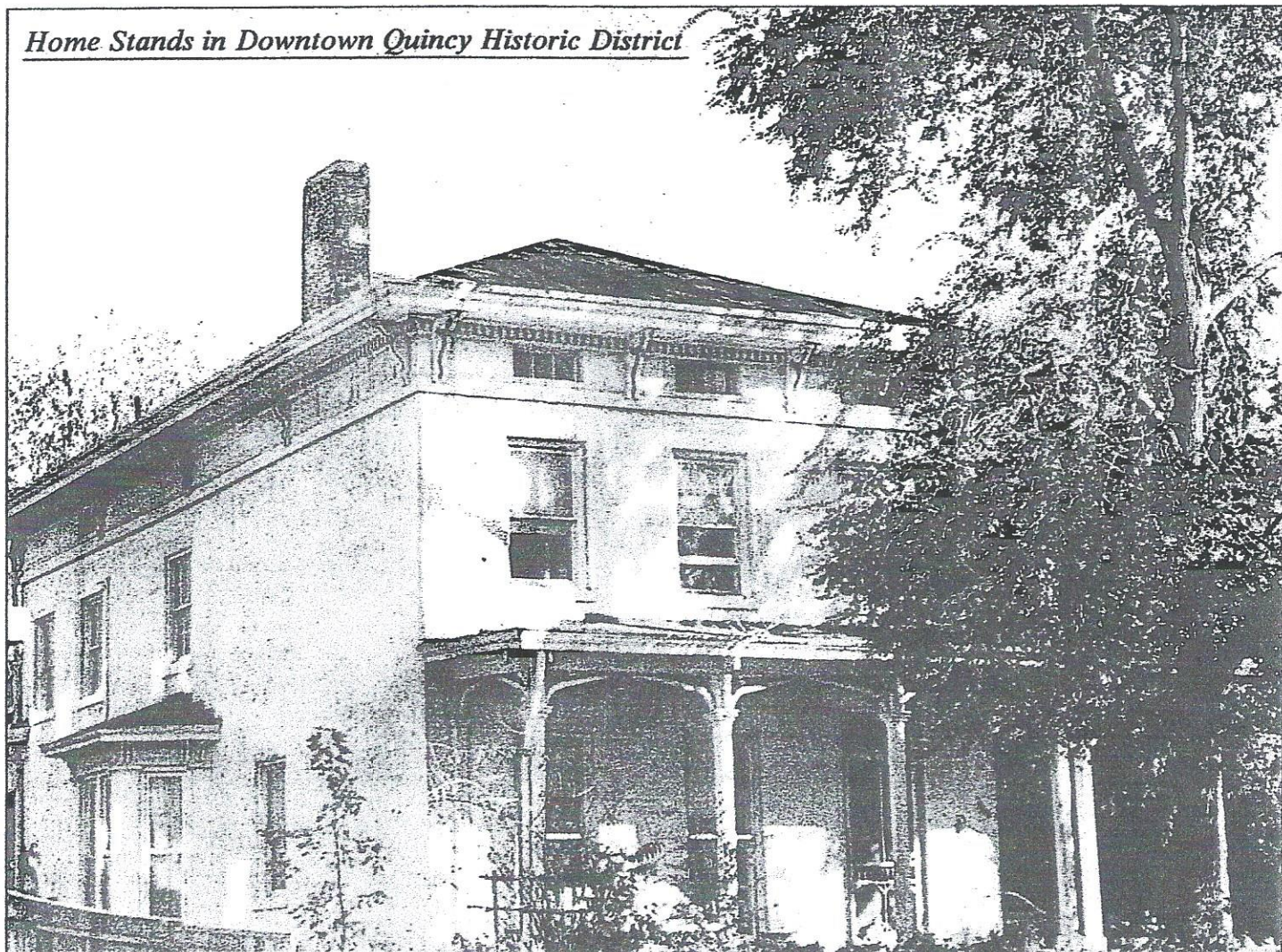




The Richard Eells home in the early 1970s, when it was recorded by the Illinois Historic Sites Survey. The house is located in the Downtown Quincy Historic District.

Richard Eells, Quincy Abolitionist

Harboring slaves in 1842, even in northern states such as Illinois, was against the law. But many opponents of slavery, acting individually and as part of a more organized system, the Underground Railroad, helped fugitive slaves escape to free states and Canada. From his house on Jersey Street (now a part of the city's Downtown Historic District) in Quincy, abolitionist Dr. Richard Eells helped slaves on their way to freedom, risking life and livelihood. Eells was arrested in August 1842 for assisting in the escape of a Missouri slave, and during the last ten years of his life his case moved slowly through appeal to the United States Supreme Court. He died a pauper shortly before the court ruled on his case in 1853.

Sixteen years before the Lincoln-Douglas debates would secure Quincy's place

in history, the Mississippi River city was already well known by blacks (both free and slave), abolitionists, and abolitionist-haters alike. And as the second largest city in Illinois in the 1840s, Quincy was becoming a destination for both Northeasterners and Southerners who were choosing to settle in the West. The New England contingency had many individuals who were aligned with the Congregational Church, which was famous for its anti-slavery stance. One of the deacons of the Quincy Congregational Church was Connecticut native Dr. Richard Eells. It is impossible to know how many times Dr. Eells helped slaves escape through the Underground Railroad network, but it is known how many times he was caught . . . once.

In August 1842 a black male slave

named Charley escaped from a farm near Monticello, Missouri. Heading straight east he came to the Mississippi River across from Quincy, the westernmost city in Illinois. The darkness of night provided the necessary cover for him to swim the wide expanse of the river and rest on Bay Island before swimming across Quincy Bay. Since that was a relatively common jumping-off point, agents of the Underground Railroad often patrolled the riverfront. That day it was a free black man, Barryman Barnett, who came to the aid of the escaped slave.

Barnett took the soaking-wet fugitive to the home of Quincy physician Dr. Richard Eells. The brick house at 415 Jersey Street is situated just a few blocks from the river; thus unimpeded passage was almost assured. Safe cover was important