

“Liberty Brought Us Here: The True Story of American Slaves Who Migrated to Liberia”

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The community of Eureka is rich in history, and included in Eureka’s story is the history of Eureka College. Eureka College is one of only three colleges that opened its doors to both men and women on an equal basis in the 1850s. One of the proponents of that decision was Ben Major. In the spring of 1850 Major proposed the need for a school of higher learning as the next step in expanding the Walnut Grove Academy. But the story of Ben Major starts long before his role as a founding father of the Walnut Grove Academy and Eureka College.

The early history of Ben Major finds him as the owner of a large tobacco farm in Kentucky in the 1830s. Ben’s family had been slave owners for generations, using the labor for household and field help. In 1831 he left his home to travel to Illinois seeking land with the intent of starting a new life with his wife Lucy and their children. He found, and eventually purchased, eighty acres in what was then Tazewell County. At this point Major, who had already been preparing his slaves for freedom, began the colonization process. The Colonization Movement was a movement that attempted to resolve the issue of what should be done to help the previously enslaved black people once they were freed.

In 1816, a group of white men, many of whom owned slaves, met to create the American Colonization Society. Their stated purpose was “to promote and execute a plan for colonizing (with their consent) the free people of color residing in our country, in Africa or such other places as Congress shall deem most expedient” (pg. 12, *Liberty Brought Us Here*). The American Colonization Society continued for nearly one hundred years to support the migration of free black men and women from the US to Liberia. Ultimately this group provided for the passage of 16,000 people, which is considered the largest migration from the United States. Among those migrating to Liberia were former slaves of Ben Major. Correspondence included in the book describes the colonization process, as well as some of the heartbreaking trials experienced in Liberia.

“Liberty Brought Us Here” is a well written, deeply researched story that is still alive in the community of Eureka.