

# Milton House

slave being brought to the Milton House by William Anson Goodrich. Pratt was born into slavery in 1838 in Arkansas and was moved to Missouri. He escaped Missouri to Illinois and when he got as far as Milton he came out of hiding to remain in the community for a number of years. He registered to be drafted into the Union army in Janesville in 1863 and worked for a man named David Platts.

In 1865 Pratt unwittingly became embroiled in a race-based controversy. Ezra Goodrich had sponsored Pratt as a member of the Milton Good Templars. This apparently did not sit well with some members of the lodge who, through various machinations, organized the membership to induce Pratt to resign. Goodrich, who was eventually expelled from the lodge because of the incident, published the sixteen-page Negro Imbroglia in which he called out the conspirators and expressed support for Pratt by stating:

"I have approval of my own conscience in all that I have done for Andrew Pratt, nor do I regret at all having been expelled from the Lodge of Good Templars for daring to defend a colored man, who bursting the chains that bound him to slavery, and fleeing to the broad prairies of Illinois, was there imprisoned under the infamous Black Laws of that State for no other crime save his color. But through the assistance of a noble-hearted uncle of mine, Wm. A. Goodrich, he was brought to the quiet and liberty loving little village of Milton, where by honesty and industry he earned a comfortable living, has won the respect of all, and has united with the church and thus become a Christian brother. . ."

Goodrich's dissertation on the matter leaves some open questions about exactly how Pratt came to Milton. The Illinois Black Laws were enforced through 1865 and forbade blacks from entering the state without registering with state authorities and posting a bond. Ezra Goodrich's assertion seems to imply that once in Illinois after fleeing Missouri, Pratt may have been detained under Illinois Black Laws. It is unknown how William Anson Goodrich came upon Pratt. A separate piece of evidence from the museum archives stating that Pratt was hidden and cared for in the "underground passage" suggests the need for secrecy and that Pratt was a fugitive.

A torn parchment of a diary entry located among documents in the Lois Goodrich estate provides written documentation that Pratt was cared for in the tunnel and basement of the Milton House. The parchment reads:

"Andrew Pratt came to J (paper torn off) in 1861 was cared for and . . . the underground passage, him a job with David Platts . . . village where he worked . . . afterwards emigrated to where he proved up on Gov . . ."

It's unclear from whose hand the entry was made but the existence of the written documentation of Pratt

coming to Milton and being cared for in the "underground passage" is a key piece of evidence used to authenticate the Milton House as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Pratt came out of hiding and stayed in Milton for several years. David Platts, referred to in the parchment, is David Rittenhouse Platts, a Seventh Day Baptist living in Milton at the time. Platts, a farmer and cabinet maker, moved to Milton from Berlin, Wis., sometime between 1850 and 1855.

Pratt registered for the Union Army draft in June, 1863. The registration record shows that on the line above Andrew Pratt's name is the name of Lewis Alexander Platts, the son of David Platts. Lewis Platts had two brothers who died as Union soldiers during the Civil War and was enrolled in Milton Academy from 1861 to 1864. Lewis Platts became a well-known Seventh Day Baptist pastor and for ten years was editor of the Sabbath Recorder, the well-known newspaper for the denomination, published in Alfred, N. Y.

Pratt and Platts registered for the draft on the same day but no record exists of either men serving in the Union Army. The obituary for Platts, printed in the Milton Telephone-Journal, Sept. 16, 1915, indicates Platts was rejected from service following medical examinations.

In October 2017, members of the museum staff were made aware of the existence of a letter dated Nov. 22, 1863, from Pratt to Wisconsin Governor Edward Salomon asking that a "colored man" be allowed to enlist in the Union Army. A copy of the letter was brought to the museum by Jeff Kannel, a Wauwatosa author researching a book on Black Civil War soldiers with Wisconsin ties.

Twice in the letter Pratt refers to himself as a fugitive or former slave.

". . . Now will you permit a poor fugetive (sic) from bondage to ask you some questions?"

Pratt wrote in the letter's opening paragraph. At the end of the letter Pratt wrote: "I have served faithfully in the House of Bondage all my life until within 18 months within and I hope you will not blame me for desireing (sic) to be counted a Man."

Pratt remained in Milton until about 1870 when he removed to Wells, Minn. A marriage certificate shows Pratt was married in 1872 in Minnesota. Pratt died in Wells on July 14, 1893 at age 55.

The letter represents a first-hand admission by Pratt that he was a fugitive slave. It also verifies the timeline suggested by the diary entry which notes Pratt's arrival in Milton as 1861. When considered with the parchment and Ezra Goodrich's Negro Imbroglia, the letter represents the third piece of written evidence of Pratt's presence in Milton as a fugitive slave.

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The letter also represents the ways in which new information affects the narrative of a museum's tour. In the letter and Edna Dearborn story, the museum has accessed two valuable pieces of information connected to the role the Milton House played in the Underground Railroad more than 170 years ago. These two stories are being woven into the museum's narrative and will permanently enrich the storyline shared with the more than 12,000 people who visit the Milton House campus annually.

When the museum opened for tours in 1954, little was known about the details of how the building was used to hide and scurry fugitive slaves or how the Milton House fit onto the larger, regional canvass of the Underground Railroad. Tours referenced the early rumors that permeated the village about the activities of Joseph Goodrich but offered little substance.

The story of William Coon Davis was added to the tour in the 1960s and Andrew Pratt in the 1980s. Together those stories were key elements in the Milton House being named a National Historic Landmark in 1998. That designation led to a local fundraising effort that resulted in a museum expansion built upon the original footprint of the fallen Goodrich Block.

The two new stories further strengthen the narrative that has brought about Rock County's only National Historic Landmark and will forever solidify the pedestal of the Milton House as southern Wisconsin's most historically significant site.

*Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, the Milton House Museum (18 S. Janesville St.) is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Guided tours during these hours begin every 30 minutes and typically last 60-75 minutes. Appointments are required for groups larger than eight. For more information, including admission fees, visit www.miltonhouse.org or call 608-868-7772.*

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