



## Two Far-Removed Eras of American History Forever Linked

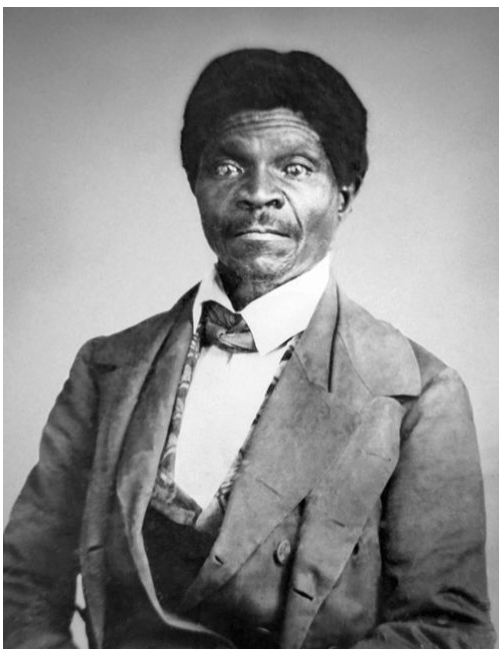
Norman Dasinger, Jr., April 9, 2021

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Oakwood University in its early days | courtesy of [Oakwood University](http://Oakwood University).

Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, was established in 1896 by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to educate African Americans in the South. The church purchased 380 acres of what had been the Peter Blow and Jacob Key Plantations. And this is where this tale of two far-removed people linked by a common place begins.



Dred Scott ca 1857 | public domain

“Boy Sam” or “Sam “Blow” was one of five enslaved African-Americans who worked on the Blow Farm. During this time, his first wife and their two children died. They were buried in the Blow/Key Slave Cemetery.

The Blows were not successful farmers, so they moved to St. Louis in 1830 along with their enslaved people. Soon thereafter, “Boy Sam” or “Sam Blow”—who at one point changed his name to Dred Scott—was sold to Dr. John Emerson, an Army surgeon. Emerson moved frequently due his Army status, traveling to Illinois and Minnesota and then back to St. Louis. Eventually, Dred Scott would sue for his freedom, and perhaps the greatest U.S.

Supreme Court case in history now bears his name.

Fast-forward to 1932, when Richard W Penniman—aka Little Richard—was born in Bibb County, Georgia. His family had deep evangelical Christian roots. At age ten, Richard would go around saying he was a faith healer, singing gospel music to people who were feeling sick. He had aspirations of being a preacher. In 1947, he was overheard singing at the Macon Georgia City Auditorium and was asked to make an appearance in front of a large crowd later that night. This launched his well-known musical career.



Little Richard ca 1957 | public domain

In May 1957, Little Richard recorded the song “Tutti Frutti,” his popularity soared, and he relocated to Los Angeles. While on tour in Australia later that same year, the airplane he was using caught fire, and Richard later wrote that he had a religious awakening that day. He claimed the near disastrous plane incident was a sign from God to repent from performing secular music and his wild lifestyle. Once he got back to the United States, he enrolled at Huntsville’s Oakwood College to study theology. He returned to his rock and roll music in the early 1960s, was ordained a minister in 1970, and sold Bibles and distributed Christian tracks at most of his performances from then forward. He also added many gospel songs to his recordings and his appearances. Little Richard died in 2020 and was buried in the modern Oakwood Memorial Gardens, which is adjacent to the Blow/Key burial ground.

So, two historical eras with two very different historical stories are forever linked by a small cemetery on the grounds of a small Christian school in Huntsville, Alabama.



Entrance to Oakwood Memorial Gardens | Find A Grave



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