

Boyd, William

The Evening Star, February 14, 1884

Boyd. On February 13, 1884, suddenly of paralysis, Dr. Wm. Boyd, in the 64th year of his age. Funeral from his late residence, 106 Virginia avenue southwest on Friday, at 2 p.m. Friends and relatives invited to attend.

The Evening Star, February 14, 1884, p. 3

Death of an Anti-Slavery Crusader

Wm. Boyd, Former Abolitionist and Worker of the Underground Railroad, Dead

William Boyd, well-known as an earnest anti-slavery man, and before the war one of the most active workers of the underground railroad, by which slaves were secretly taken to the free states, died yesterday at his residence in South Washington, aged 64 years. Dr. Boyd, as he called himself, was a native of the north of Ireland, and was by trade a tailor. He came here over thirty five years ago, and although at that time there was scarcely a thought of freeing the slaves he boldly proclaimed his sentiments, and soon became known as such a friend to the colored race that he would take any chances to aid a slave to obtain his freedom. Holding extreme views as an atheist, and, being radical in the temperance cause as well, he associated himself, about 1856 or 1857, with Wollford Stone, Amon Duvall, Wm. Biddleman, B. Chambers, sr., W.W. Levy, W.P. Wood and W.A. Bargy (all of whom are now dead excepting Messrs. Levy and Wood), and formed a club or association, one of the objects of which was to advance the cause of the freedom of slaves. They met for a long time in Temperance hall (now Marini's), on E street, but they were not united in sentiment, some of them--Chambers, Levy and Wood--being opposed to extreme measures and rather in favor of preventing the spread of slavery than destroying it. Dr. Boyd advocated running off the slaves one by one, and determined to engage in the work himself, and when a runaway arrived he generally was secreted by Boyd till he got his wagon--one with a false bottom, in which the runaway could hide--ready, and then he would start, apparently to buy up country produce, and would make his way to the Pennsylvania line. Other members of the organization knew of this work, and when Dr. Boyd was serving a sentence for kidnapping they aided his family. The inauguration of Mr. Lincoln found Dr. Boyd imprisoned in the penitentiary, and a strong petition having been presented to the President, he was pardoned. His friends had also, through the influence of Hon. Owen Lovejoy, secured the employment of Dr. Boyd's son as a page in the House of Representatives to enable him to support the family--a mother and daughter, besides the father and son. During the John Brown agitation the friends of Brown frequently stopped with Boyd, but they advised against Brown's scheme. When Brown was holding Harper's Ferry one of his men, who had left him there, came here and was kept close by Boyd for some days, and the latter calling Senator Sumner's attention to the fact, the Senator furnished the means for his escape.

During the war Boyd was, as might be expected, an earnest Union man, and was active in organizing the republican ward clubs, particularly the 7th ward club, and under the Bowen regime he served one term in the board of common council. Of late years he has made a business selling herb medicines and dealing in produce. Dr. Boyd, soon after the war, was pointed out to some soldiers as a negro worshiper, and he was badly beaten by them, losing one eye, and he never fully recovered. He was struck with paralysis about ten months ago, since which time he has been more or less an invalid.

One of the First Underground Railroad Exploits of Boyd was in 1848.

(Note: The account that follows does not match that described in the newspaper accounts of the capture and trial of William Boyd in 1858-1859. It is believed that the writer of this obituary incorrectly ascribed the capture of William Chaplin to Dr. Boyd.)

Slaves belonging to citizens of this District and members of Congress had been mysteriously missed for sometime, and considerable uneasiness was felt and people were on the alert. Boyd had been suspected, and on this occasion, Capt. Goddard, of the auxiliary guard, was out in the county looking for the underground railway. The slaves had been missed, and quite a commotion had been raised throughout the city. Capt. Goddard and his posse got on the trail of them in Montgomery county, Md., and came up with Boyd's carriage in the night, and ordered a halt, Boyd giving no attention to the order except to cut his horses with the whip, putting them in a lively trot. Taking advantage of a steep hill, Capt. Goddard took a fence-rail from the side of the road and ran it through the spokes of the hind wheels of the vehicle and locked them. Possession was at once taken of the team and its contents, and all were brought back to the tavern corner 8th and D streets. The slaves were returned to their owners, and Boyd was sent to the penitentiary. The vehicle he used had been built for the purpose--a covered wagon, built very strong for country travel, and made bullet-proof up as high as a person's head would reach while seated. This carriage was an object of much curiosity for some time.

The Evening Star, February 15, 1884

The Funeral of Dr. Boyd

The funeral of the late William Boyd took place at his residence on Virginia avenue at two o'clock this afternoon. The deceased was not a believer in Christianity, and, in accordance with his wishes, the services of a clergyman were dispensed with. Dr. Smith, a spiritualist and friend of the deceased, made a short address to the persons assembled, and at its close the body was removed to its last resting place.