

The Story of Thorton Kinney

Thorton Kinney was born in Charlottesville in 1811, the son of free black Amy Kinney. The Kinneys were descended from a slave and a Pamunkey Indian. They brought suit against Louisa County in 1798 and were awarded their freedom from the Johnson family because descendants of Native Americans could not be enslaved.

Thorton's father had been a slave of the lawyer Chapman Johnson of Staunton. Thorton came to Staunton and was apprenticed to J. J. Kennedy, a shoemaker. When Thorton became twenty-one, he left Virginia and traveled about the country. He lived in Ohio, Michigan, and then Louisville, Kentucky.

Wanting to see more of the world, he left on a ship sailing to Liberia where he stayed for five years and made a living making shoes. He then became a cook, working on a ship that traveled from Salem, Massachusetts to Cuba, and then back to New Orleans. From there, he worked as a cook on various steam boats going up and down the Mississippi. In 1851, he married a woman that had been the slave of William Moore.

While living in Missouri, he was mistakenly captured and accused of being a runaway slave. To clear himself, he made a deposition of his interesting life.