

A BLACK MAN TRAVELS THE CANAL

Linda Murr, CSI member from Winchester, VA, sent an article printed by the Ohio Genealogical Society 34:4 (1994) entitled "A Black Man Travels The Canal And Ohio River, Circa 1844: An Account of a Journey from Columbus, Ohio to Madison, Indiana and Back Again" by Nancy E. Aiken. Information about A. E. Graham is paraphrased below. Portions of his account of travel on the Ohio River and on the Ohio & Erie Canal are quoted.

A. E. Graham was born in North Carolina in 1819. He moved to Indiana, represented Madison, IN at the state convention for "Colored Men" in 1842, and served as pastor there until 1844. He wrote a 44 page play/book in 1844 that may have been the first book published in Ohio by an African-American. He was a pastor at Union Baptist Church in Cincinnati from 1845-1848. He was a circuit rider for the Salem Baptist Association in Athens, Meigs, and Gallia Counties in Ohio in 1849. He participated in the Underground Railroad. In 1851 he moved to Guysville near Savannah, OH. He housed runaway slaves in the basement of this home where he later died of consumption on June 28, 1852.

Graham writes about the passengers on the river boat, "Once more I leave Cincinnati. "The Ashland" is a pretty little, light draught, fast running Packet Boat from Cincinnati to Portsmouth. Twenty-five passengers, half dandy, the other half loafer, five honest looking sturdy and tolerable intelligent; seven of the regular sort, I mean savage, some three old drunkards - make the cabin smell like the sitting room of a still house—they know all about politics. One inquires of me whether we are running up or down the river. Two more, green ones, right green, but have read abundance of history as well as poetry and so on examination they prove bores. The remaining were very stupid."

About the canal boat he says, "This boat just goes creeping along. I shall be tired enough I dare say. Here are thirty passengers and room about for fifteen, and out of the thirty there is but one man of good manners, and he had liked to lessened himself in my humble opinion, by saying every honest man ought to vote for Henry Clay. I have no words to tell how sick I am of this old boat; then the fare is of the worst. I looked forward to the consummation of this trip as a desirous object."

"Well, here is what is called the side cut up to Columbus, and glad I am of it. We are on an old salt boat, heavy laden, two poor horses;—all savage as before—rain pours down in torrents—no dinner—the ladies very hungry—the cabin is just large enough for us to crowd into—boatswain is in the way—I am very hungry, too—the fellow after agreeing to bring us up at the canal price, gave us nothing to eat—he had our trumpery weighed to skin us as clean as the circumstances would possibly allow of—well here I am safe and sound with my kind and trusty friend, Boatswain, who seemed, with me, to be glad of his journeys end.