

## The Commonwealth of Virginia vs Eliza a Slave

Eliza, a Negro girl that lived in Prince William County in 1830, was confined in the Brentsville jail counting off the days while waiting for her execution. She was tried and convicted at a Special Court of Oyer and Terminer, used in Virginia as well as other southern states to try slaves charged with Treason or Felony. In an adjacent cell confined at the same time was a slave by the name of Charles that had been charged with complicity in the case of the Commonwealth of Virginia vs Eliza. Although not stated in the small amount of records remaining for this case, one could assume that this Charles is the person who intended to flee with Eliza. Charles Grandison Turner better known as Grandison was also in jail awaiting trial. Occupying a third cell or possibly sharing a cell with the slave Charles, was another slave by the name of George. George having been convicted of an unrelated felony was awaiting the same fate as Eliza. Although Eliza's case and the case against George are not related, both will end at the same place on the same day with the worst possible outcome. Neither of the slaves had killed or injured anyone but this was 1830 Virginia, where even minor crimes committed by slaves had the potential of being punished to the extreme.

Eliza had the misfortune of trusting a white man by the name of Grandison Turner. She wanted to escape to a Free State with a slave she was in love with so they could get married. We don't know who approached who but Grandison is reported to have told her for fifty dollars he would take both of them out of Virginia to a safe State.

Eliza was a house servant of Anna Ward and as such knew where she could get the money. Anna Ward, her owner, kept money and other valuables in a small locked trunk inside a large chest. Being a house servant she had observed where a key was hidden for the chest but had no way of getting into the smaller trunk inside. On Tuesday night about midnight the seventh of September 1830 after everyone was asleep, Eliza was able to sneak into the house, find the key, and unlock the chest. She then removed a small trunk and took it out to the stable where Grandison Turner was waiting. Planning her escape she had previously bundled up her clothes and hid them in a shed so she could leave in a hurry. According to her testimony Turner took the trunk to a Mrs. Courtney's where he opened it and returned to tell her it only had forty-two dollars and she would have to go back in the house and get more money because he would not take her out of state for less than fifty dollars. Eliza went back in the house and took a watch and some coins along with other items from the house. Turner told her the watch was worthless and the coins would be missed early tomorrow and he did not want them. Eliza then returned the watch and coins to their place in the house with Turner keeping the trunk and contents.

Two days later on Thursday night Anna Ward wanted something from the trunk but the key to the chest could not be located. After some time she was able to find a second key and opened the chest. Immediately she noticed the trunk missing and some papers scattered about. Anna then called for all her servants to come to the house. Eliza knowing the purpose, or at least presuming the purpose, was the only servant not to go into the house. When later confronted, Eliza said she had took the trunk and

gave it to Grandison Turner but no one would believe her until they discovered that he had left that day for "The Neck" to his Uncle Thomas Turner's house.

An interesting, or maybe the word should be sad, bit of information to come out in the trial was testimony by Anna Ward about the missing items. She testified that in the trunk and missing were bank notes worth ninety dollars, as well as other money and coins that would total one hundred and thirty-nine dollars. All of this money was inside a small red Morocco pocket book, a good deal more than the forty-five dollars Grandison said was in the trunk and much more than the fifty dollars he had agreed to take her out of state.

Eliza was sentenced to "be hanged by the neck until she be dead on the first Friday in January next between the hours of 10 o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon of that day." It must be assumed that this sentence was carried out as there is at this time no evidence of a pardon.

Ron Turner