

Timeline of the Dred Scott Case

Missouri Circuit Court of St. Louis County

On behalf of himself, his wife, and his two daughters, Dred Scott sued his owner in state court to win his freedom. The circuit court ruled in favor of Mrs. Emerson (the owner), dismissing the Scotts' case but allowing the Scotts to re-file their suit.

Dred Scott v. Emerson (1847)

Missouri Circuit Court of St. Louis County

The jury in a second trial decided that the Scotts deserve to be free, based on their years of residence in the non-slave territories of Wisconsin and Illinois.

Dred Scott v. Emerson (1850)

Missouri Supreme Court

Reversed the decision by the circuit court saying Dred Scott and his family were not free.

Dred Scott v. Emerson (1852)

U.S. Court for the District of Missouri

Sandford (Mrs. Emerson's brother who was now responsible for the estate) had moved to New York, leaving Scott in Missouri. Because of a peculiar turn of events in the Missouri court system and law, Scott was in the unusual position of deciding whether to appeal directly from the Missouri Supreme Court to the U.S. Supreme Court or to start his case over again in federal district court. Scott chose to bring a new suit in federal court on the basis that he and the defendant were now citizens of different states. The jury decided that Dred Scott and his family were not free.

Dred Scott v. Sandford (1854)

Supreme Court of the United States

The Court found in favor of Sandford and stated that Scott should remain a slave, that as a slave he is not a citizen of the U.S. and thus not eligible to bring suit in a federal court, and that as a slave he is personal property and thus has never been free.

The Court further declared unconstitutional the provision in the Missouri Compromise that permitted Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories.

Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857)

