A Quarter Section of Hancock County

Ricketts v. Kline and the people behind an 1843 land dispute

Revised reading edition • Prepared for David Larsen • 26 October 2026

Highlights

- A deputy's brief return records Ricketts receiving possession of 160 acres in September 1843.
- The people behind the papers lead us from an Augusta land dispute to the Smith family and Carthage Jail.
- Original documents, illustrations, biographies, and a name census preserve the evidence behind the story.

A deputy at work

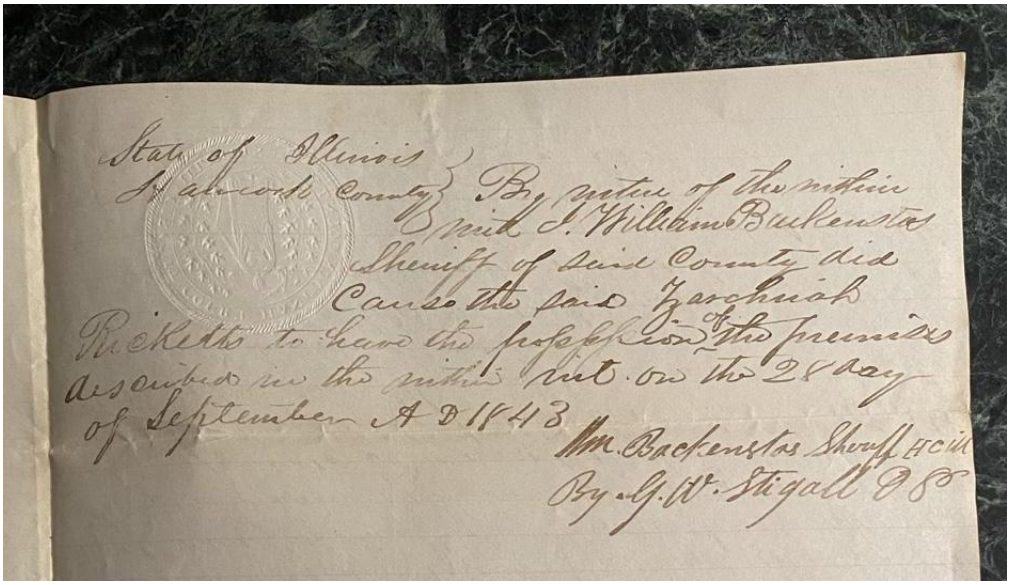
On September 28, 1843, George W. Stigall placed Zachariah Ricketts in possession of a quarter-section of Hancock County land. Acting for the sheriff, he completed the task and recorded it in a few lines on the back of a court order. The paper tells us what he did, but nothing about the people's reactions or what he found when he arrived. [1]

Within a year, Stigall would be the jailer at Carthage, where Joseph and Hyrum Smith spent their final days. Here we meet him earlier, doing the everyday work of a deputy: serving papers and carrying out a judge's orders.

The lawsuit concerned land near Augusta, in southeastern Hancock County. Ricketts had won an order for possession against John G. Fonda and William J. Kline, who had been sued with Giles and Henry D. Fonda. The court had decided who should receive the property; Stigall's job was to put that decision into effect.

Why had these men come into conflict? The surviving papers do not tell the whole story. What they do preserve is a circle of defendants, witnesses, lawyers, and officials whose lives repeatedly crossed those of the Latter-day Saints. Their connections make this small case worth following. There is no evidence in these papers that religious persecution caused the lawsuit.

Stigall records the result


State of Illinois
Hancock County } By virtue of the within writ I William Backenstos Sheriff of said County did Cause the said Zachariah Ricketts to have the possession of the premises described in the within writ on the 28 day of September A D 1843
Wm. Backenstos Sheriff H C Ills
By G. W. Stigall D S

The few lines that settle the outcome. Stigall signed as deputy for Sheriff William Backenstos. This handwritten return is on the possession writ, IMG_3809; the full writ and remaining documents follow the story. David Larsen collection. [1]

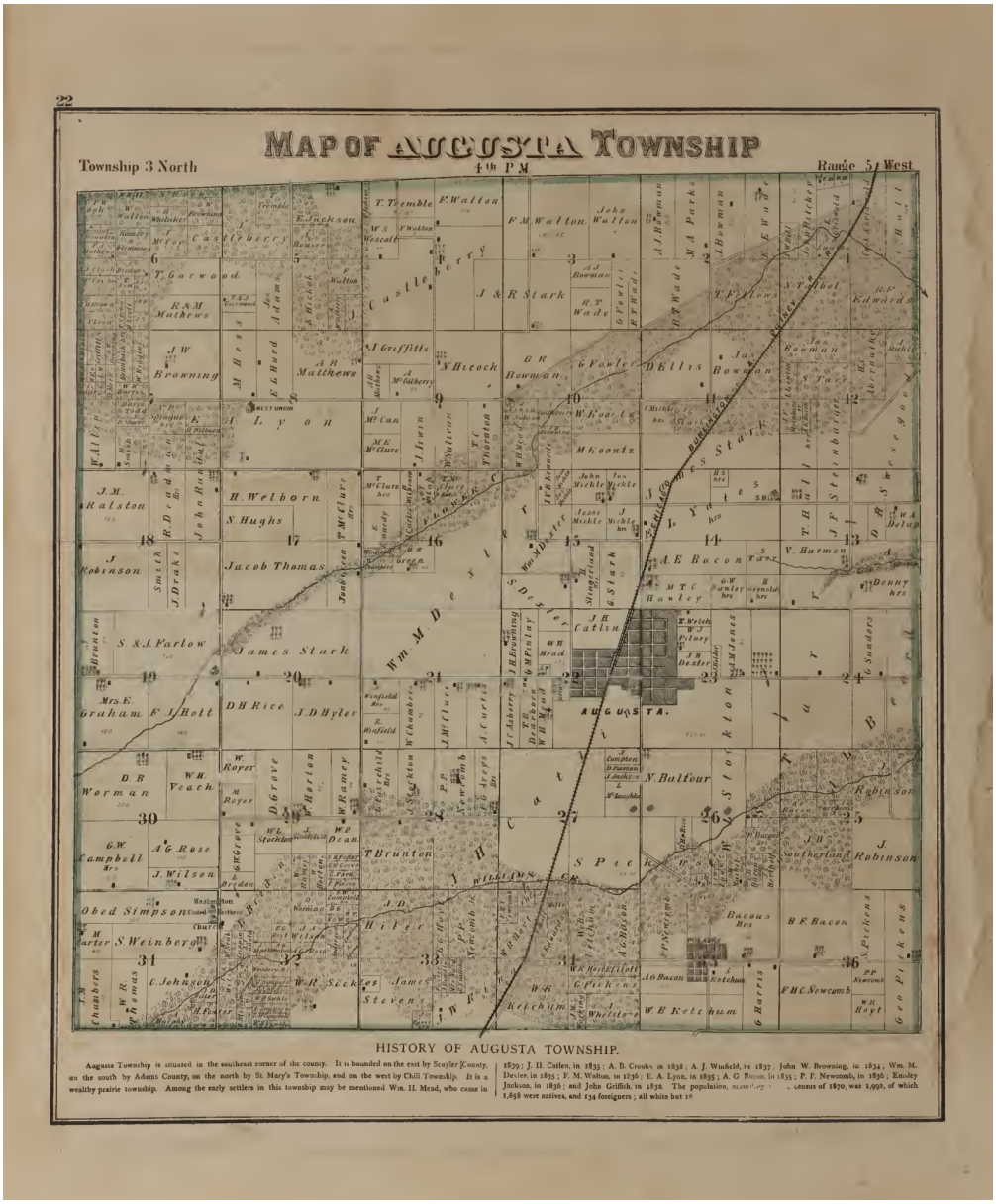
State of Illinois }
Hancock County } By virtue of the within writ I William Backenstos Sheriff of Said County did Cause the Said Zachariah Ricketts to have the possession [of] the premises described in the within writ on the 28 day of September A D 1843

Wm. Backenstos Sheriff H C Ills
By G. W. Stigall D S

Stigall's signature explains the wording: the act is recorded in the sheriff's name, but his deputy carried it out. The clerk marked the writ filed on October 4, six days after possession was delivered. [1]

Transcript conventions throughout: wording and name forms are retained; line breaks are regularized, superscripts placed on the line, and long s rendered as s. Brackets mark editorial descriptions or uncertain readings.

The land and the family

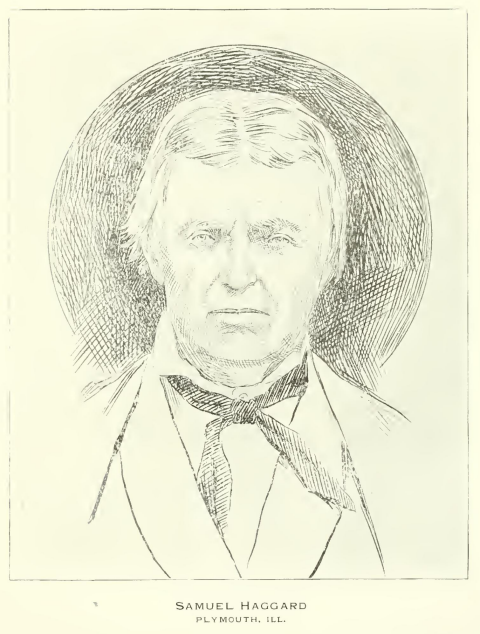


Find section 24 in the rightmost column, fourth row from the top. Its northeast quarter was the disputed land. This 1874 Andreas map places the case near Augusta, but its owners and improvements belong to a later generation. Atlas, p. 22. [2]

A quarter-section ordinarily meant 160 acres. The legal description is precise; the people's rights in it are less clear. The defendants probably belonged to one family: Giles Fonda, his sons Henry and John, and William John Kline, apparently the husband of their sister Angeltie. The marriage and the family's connection to this particular tract still need original-record confirmation. [3]

The Fondas came from New York. John's county biography dates the family's arrival to 1835. By the time of the suit, young John was learning a profession built around land boundaries. He began surveying with J. Wilson Williams in 1840 and served as deputy county surveyor during 1841–1843. His brother Henry also became an engineer and surveyor. [3, 4]

Two witnesses from the neighborhood



Samuel Haggard, the Plymouth settler who is the strong probable match for the defense witness. His earlier home near Augusta gives a reason to ask what he knew about this land. Haggard family history, portrait following p. 108. [5]

The defense called Samuel Haggard and Christopher E. Yates. Haggard had arrived from Tennessee in 1832 with his son-in-law George Saddler. According to the local history, they stayed east of Augusta at the “old Fonda place” before moving toward Plymouth. That remembered name suggests a local connection, although it does not identify the quarter-section in this case. [6]

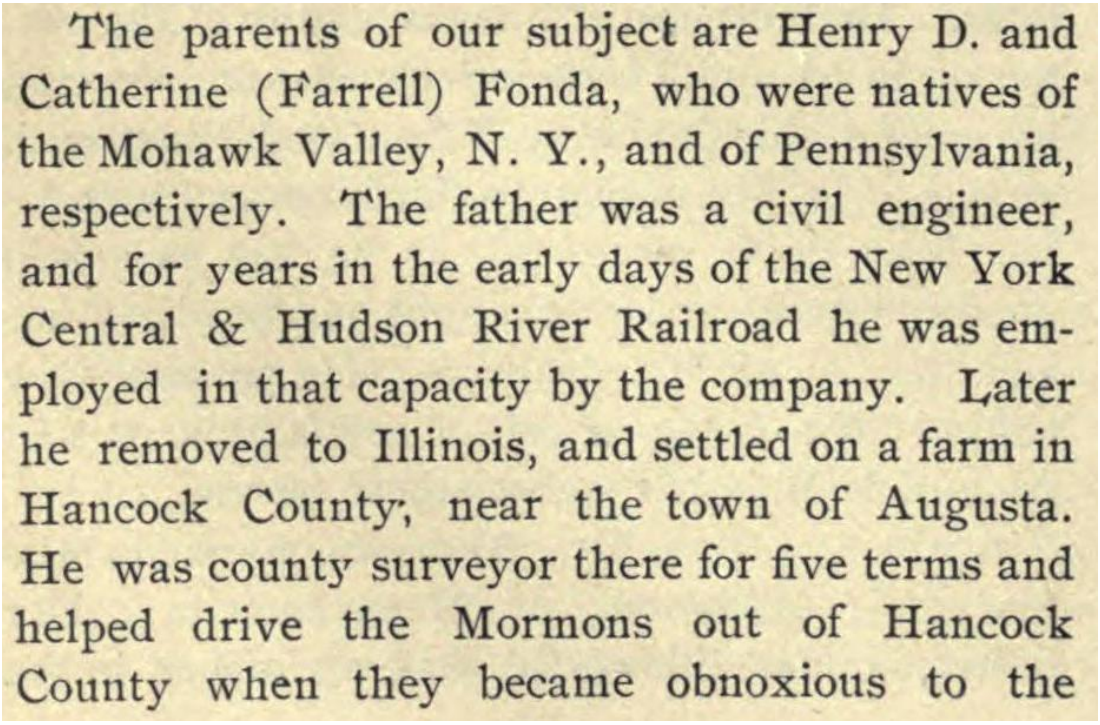
Yates had lived in the Augusta country since 1829. A farmer and land speculator, he had New York roots too. His mother was Catharine Fonda, though her exact relationship to these defendants remains unresolved. On May 23, 1843, he signed a claim for two days spent attending court for the defense. His testimony has not survived in these papers. [1, 2]

Yates’s later choices make him especially interesting. His biography in the Andreas atlas disagreed with Mormon teachings but described his opposition to mob violence and the burning of his property. Joseph Smith III likewise remembered a friend of the Saints whose stand brought the destruction of his barn and its contents. These later accounts portray a man willing to defend neighbors whose religion he did not share. [2, 7]

Henry Fonda in a later family account

One of the men on the other side of the witness relationship was remembered very differently. In 1898, a Colorado biography of George F. Fonda described the Illinois career of his father, Henry D. Fonda, and stated that he had:

“helped drive the Mormons out of Hancock County when they became obnoxious to the citizens.”



The parents of our subject are Henry D. and Catherine (Farrell) Fonda, who were natives of the Mohawk Valley, N. Y., and of Pennsylvania, respectively. The father was a civil engineer, and for years in the early days of the New York Central & Hudson River Railroad he was employed in that capacity by the company. Later he removed to Illinois, and settled on a farm in Hancock County, near the town of Augusta. He was county surveyor there for five terms and helped drive the Mormons out of Hancock County when they became obnoxious to the

The expulsion claim appears amid a family’s account of Henry’s career. The sentence continues in the next column with “citizens.” Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity, Colorado, p. 358. [15]

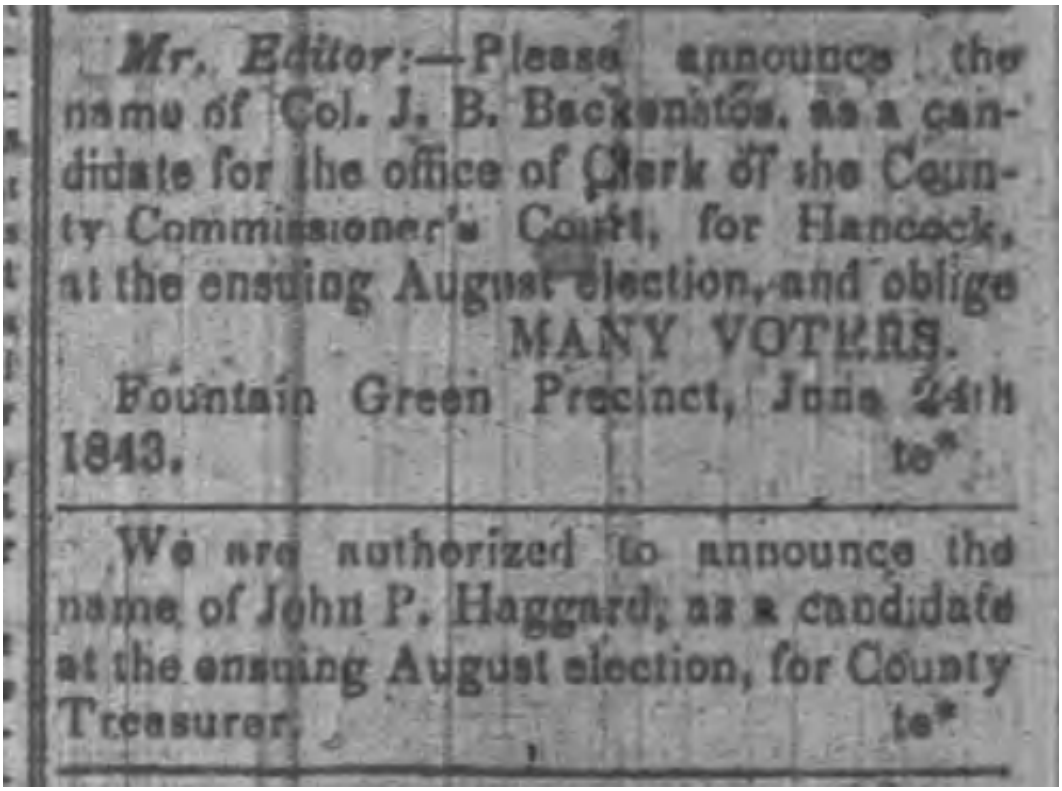
The wording is startling: expulsion appears among the events of a respectable professional life. The entry was published by Chapman Publishing Company more than fifty years after the Nauvoo conflict. No individual author is identified. These are the biography’s words, not a surviving quotation from Henry himself. [15]

The account names no episode, commander, or unit, and contemporary corroboration of a particular act has not been recovered. It does not place Henry at the Carthage murders. Even with those limits, it belongs in his story. Beside the recollections of Yates, it shows how differently men connected with the same lawsuit could be remembered for their response to the Saints.

A sheriff joins the Smith family

The sheriff named in Stigall's return was William Backenstos. Five days after the deputy delivered possession, William married Clara Wasson at Nauvoo. Joseph Smith performed the ceremony on October 3, 1843; Clara was Emma Smith's niece. A name on a routine legal paper thus leads directly into the Smith family. [9]

William's older brother Jacob was circuit clerk, the official responsible for issuing and keeping the court's papers. Later, Jacob became the sheriff remembered for armed efforts to protect the Saints. He belonged to the Nauvoo Masonic Lodge and served in the Nauvoo Legion, the city's militia. The Joseph Smith Papers describes him as a friend of the Saints who never joined their Church. [9]



Mr. Editor:—Please announce the name of Col. J. B. Backenstos, as a candidate for the office of Clerk of the County Commissioner's Court, for Hancock, at the ensuing August election, and oblige

MANY VOTERS.

Fountain Green Precinct, June 24th 1843. te*

We are authorized to announce the name of John P. Haggard, as a candidate at the ensuing August election, for County Treasurer. te*

County politics brought these families into the newspaper. The Nauvoo Neighbor announced Jacob Backenstos for a separate county clerkship and John P. Haggard, Samuel's son, for treasurer. These are candidate notices, not election results. June 28, 1843, p. 3. [11]

Such offices mattered. A sheriff carried out court orders and helped enforce the law; a clerk kept the record on which later claims could depend. Nauvoo's voters had considerable influence in county elections. William won the sheriff's race in 1842, while other men associated with this file sought office on an explicitly Anti-Mormon ticket. The election figures are collected after the documents. [4, 10]

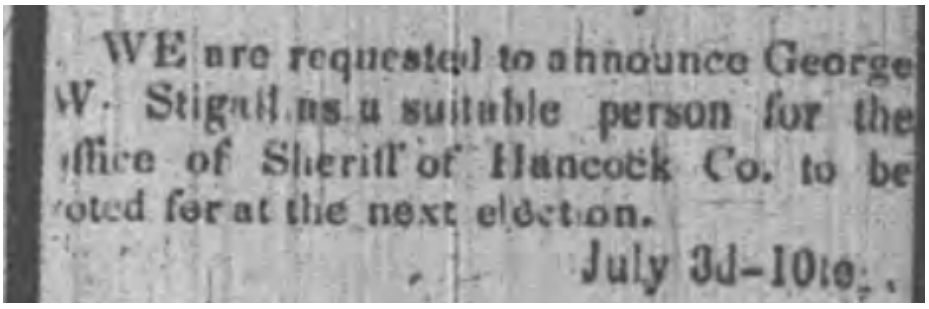
The lawyers and the jailer

The request that set the possession order in motion ended with two short lines: “A Williams atty / By W Williams.” The attorney was Archibald Williams. The man acting for him was probably his older brother Wesley, though the abbreviated handwriting leaves room for doubt. [1, 12]

Archibald had helped defend Joseph Smith against Missouri’s attempt to extradite him in 1841. Four years later, he helped defend men accused of Joseph’s murder. A lawyer’s clients could place him on different sides of events that LDS readers remember as one unfolding tragedy. Those engagements establish his professional roles; they do not by themselves explain his personal feelings. [12]

Wesley’s political position is clearer. He ran unsuccessfully for the legislature on the Anti-Mormon ticket in 1842. Earlier, he had recorded the Nauvoo plat. His work for the community and his political opposition both belong in the account. [4, 12]

Then there is Stigall, the deputy with whom we began. By June 1844, his work as Carthage jailer brought him into the Smith brothers’ final imprisonment. John Taylor later remembered considerate treatment by the jailer and his wife. Accounts of the prisoners’ removal for examination on June 26 differ, and the fuller notes preserve that disagreement. [13]


WE are requested to announce George W. Stigall as a suitable person for the office of Sheriff of Hancock Co. to be voted for at the next election.

July 3d–10t.

Ordinary politics continued alongside terrible news. This notice announcing Stigall for sheriff appeared in the July 3, 1844, Nauvoo Neighbor, the same issue that reported the murders. Deming won that election; Stigall’s later service as sheriff began in June 1845. [4, 13, 14]

Back to the quarter section

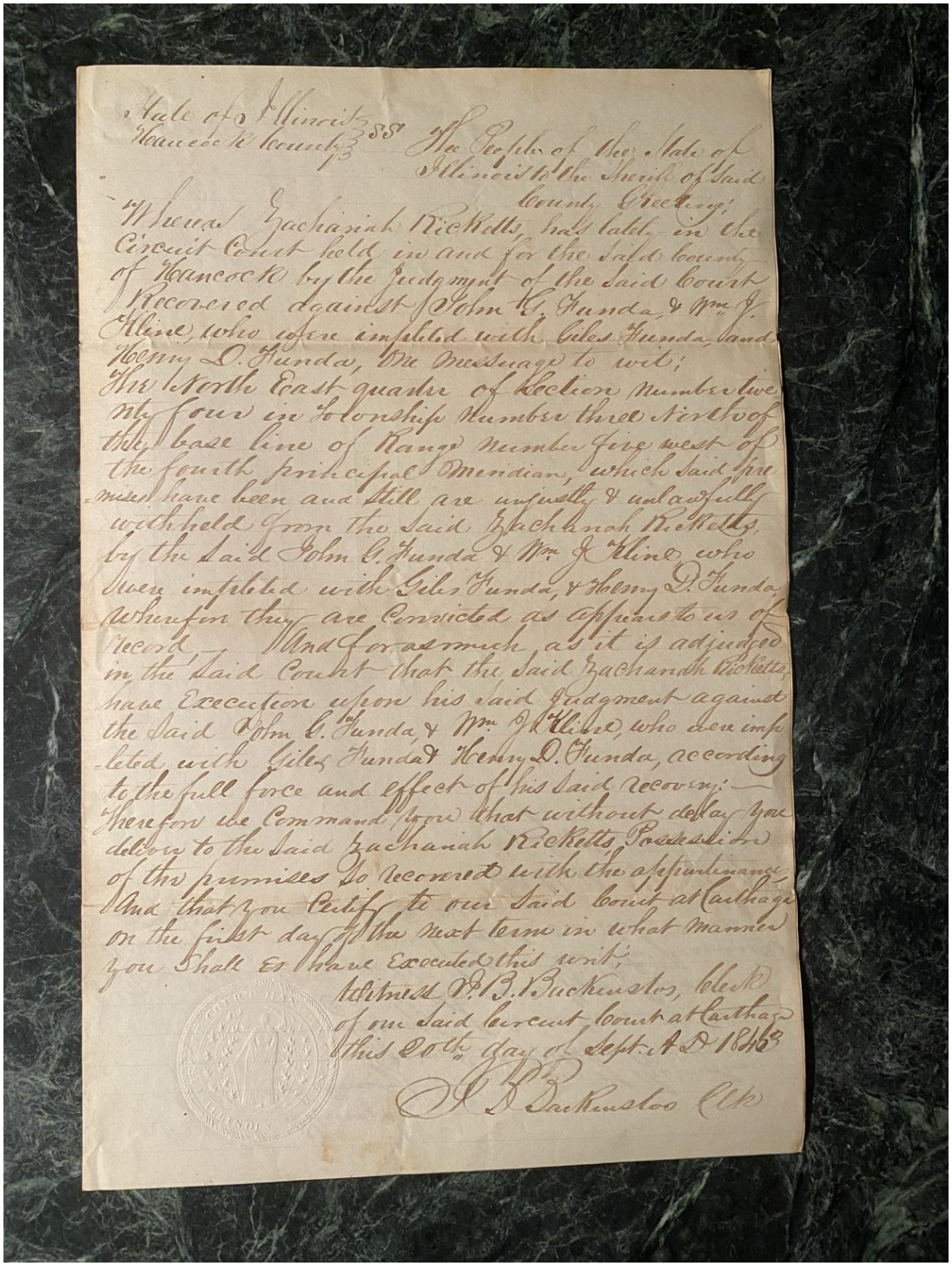
The men’s lives continued beyond the Nauvoo years. John Fonda became a Union officer. Henry went to Colorado and continued engineering. Archibald Williams became a federal prosecutor and later a federal judge in Kansas. Yates moved to Nauvoo in 1846 and remained involved in its property. [2, 3, 4, 12]

Williams and Yates would cross the Smith family’s property history again. As U.S. attorney, Williams pursued the federal proceeding over an old debt associated with the steamboat Nauvoo. In 1851, Yates acquired four lots through that litigation involving Joseph Smith’s estate. Their connections to the Saints continued after most Church members had gone west. [8, 12]

Ricketts himself remains the least familiar figure. We know that he secured possession, but have not securely linked him to a family biography. The deeds or complete court file may yet explain his claim and what brought these defendants together. [1, 3]

For now, return to Stigall’s few lines. On September 28, 1843, he carried out an order concerning a quarter-section near Augusta. The paper records no speech or quarrel. It preserves a completed task—and the names of people who would defend the Saints, oppose them, marry into their families, and take part in the legal affairs of Nauvoo. That wider history begins here with a deputy doing his day’s work.

The court orders possession delivered



State of Illinois } ss The People of the State of
Hancock County } Illinois to the Sheriff of said
County Greeting;
Whereas Zachariah Ricketts has lately in the
Circuit Court held in and for the said County
of Hancock by the judgment of the said Court
Recovered against John C. Funda & Wm J.
Kline who were impleted with Giles Funda and
Henry D. Funda, the Messuage to wit;
The North East quarter of Section Number five
ty four in Township Number three North of
the base line of Range Number five west of
the fourth principal Meridian, which said pre
mises have been and still are unjustly & unlawfully
withheld from the said Zachariah Ricketts
by the said John C. Funda & Wm J. Kline who
were impleted with Giles Funda, & Henry D. Funda,
whereupon they are convicted as appears to us of
Record And for as much as it is adjudged
in the said Court that the said Zachariah Ricketts
have Execution upon his said Judgment against
the said John C. Funda & Wm J. Kline, who were imp
leted with Giles Funda & Henry D. Funda, according
to the full force and effect of his said Recovery:
Therefore we Command you that without delay you
deliver to the said Zachariah Ricketts Possession
of the premises so recovered with the appurtenances
And that you Certify to our said Court at Carthage
on the first day of the next term in what manner
you shall & have Executed this writ;
Witness P. B. Buckmaster, Clerk
of our said Circuit Court at Carthage
this 20th day of Sept. A D 1843
P. B. Buckmaster Clk

Document 1 • Possession writ, 20 September 1843. David Larsen collection, IMG_3808. The complete text follows.

Transcript of the possession writ

Reading conventions: original wording and name forms are retained; long s is rendered as s, superscripts are placed on the line, and line breaks are regularized. Brackets identify editorial descriptions or uncertain readings.

State of Illinois } SS
Hancock County }
The People of the State of Illinois to the Sheriff of Said County Greeting:

Whereas Zachariah Ricketts, hath lately in the Circuit Court held in and for the Said County of Hancock by the Judgment of the Said Court Recovered against John G. Funda & Wm. J. Kline, who were impleaded with Giles Funda and Henry D. Funda, the Messuage to wit;

The North East quarter of Section Number twenty four in Township Number three North of the base line of Range Number five west of the fourth principal Meridian, which Said premises have been and Still are unjustly & unlawfully withholden from the Said Zachariah Ricketts, by the Said John G. Funda & Wm. J. Kline who were impleaded with Giles Funda & Henry D. Funda, whereof they are Convicted as appears to us of Record. And forasmuch as it is adjudged in the Said Court that the Said Zachariah Ricketts have Execution upon his Said Judgment against the Said John G. Funda & Wm. J. Kline who were impleaded with Giles Funda & Henry D. Funda according to the full force and effect of his Said Recovery;

Therefore we Command you that without delay you deliver to the Said Zachariah Ricketts Possession of the premises So Recovered with the appurtenances; And that you Certify to our Said Court at Carthage on the first day of the next term in what manner you Shall So have Executed this writ.

Witness J. B. Backenstos, Clerk of our Said Circuit Court at Carthage this 20th day of Sept. A D 1843

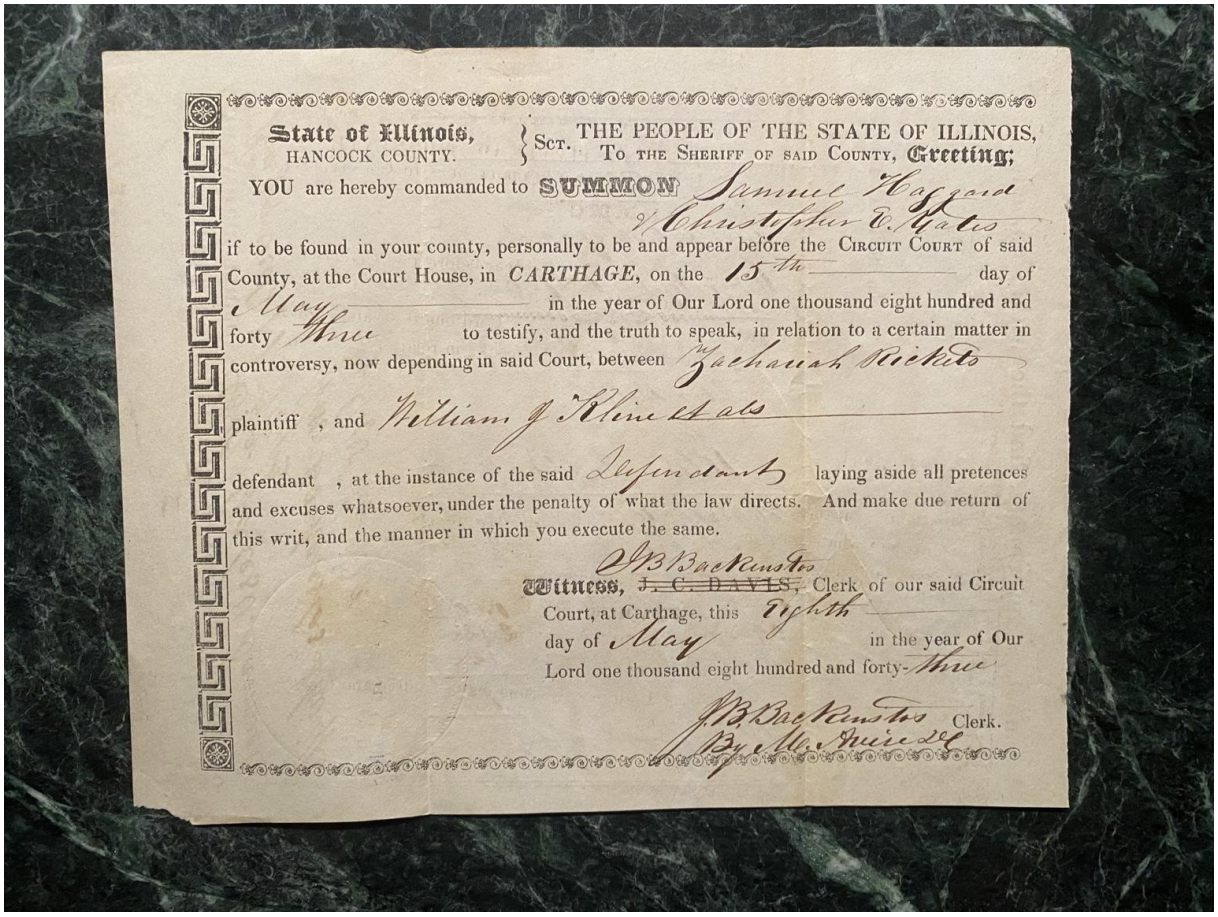
J B Backenstos Clk
[Embossed seal]

What the order tells us

The writ recites a recovery against John G. Funda and William J. Kline, who had been joined in the action with Giles and Henry D. Funda. “Impleaded” means brought into the same suit; it does not tell us that every defendant had the same legal interest. “Messuage” and “appurtenances” are old legal terms associated with real property and its accompanying rights. The operative command is straightforward: deliver possession to Ricketts.

This is an enforcement document, not the court’s explanation of the title dispute. We know that Ricketts prevailed far enough to obtain this writ and that the sheriff’s office acted on it. We do not yet know what deeds, earlier transactions, or testimony supported his claim. The language about unlawful withholding is the writ’s recital of the judgment, not proof of a separate criminal conviction.

The defense calls two witnesses



State of Illinois, HANCOCK COUNTY. } Sct. THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, To the Sheriff of said County, Greeting;

YOU are hereby commanded to SUMMON Samuel Haggard & Christopher E. Yates if to be found in your county, personally to be and appear before the Circuit Court of said County, at the Court House, in CARTHAGE, on the 15th day of May in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty Three to testify, and the truth to speak, in relation to a certain matter in controversy, now depending in said Court, between Zachariah Rickets plaintiff, and William J Kline et als defendant, at the instance of the said Defendants laying aside all pretences and excuses whatsoever, under the penalty of what the law directs. And make due return of this writ, and the manner in which you execute the same.

Witness, ~~J. C. DAVIS~~ J B Backenstos, Clerk of our said Circuit Court, at Carthage, this Eighth day of May in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty-Three

J B Backenstos Clerk.
By [illegible] D.C.

Document 2 • Subpoena, 8 May 1843, IMG_3815. Printed form with manuscript additions. The printed clerk's name J. C. Davis is struck through and replaced by J. B. Backenstos.

Handwritten entries

Handwritten entries on the printed subpoena
Witnesses: Samuel Haggard & Christopher E. Yates
Appearance day: 15th [May 1843]
Plaintiff: Zachariah Rickets
Defendant: William J. Kline et als
Requested for: Defendant
Clerk: [printed J. C. DAVIS struck through; J B Backenstos inserted]
Issue date: Eighth [May 1843]
J B Backenstos Clerk.
By [name uncertain]

The deputy clerk's closing name is not securely deciphered. It appears on both the subpoena and Yates's affidavit; it is left unexpanded rather than assigned to a known official.

The subpoena return and charges



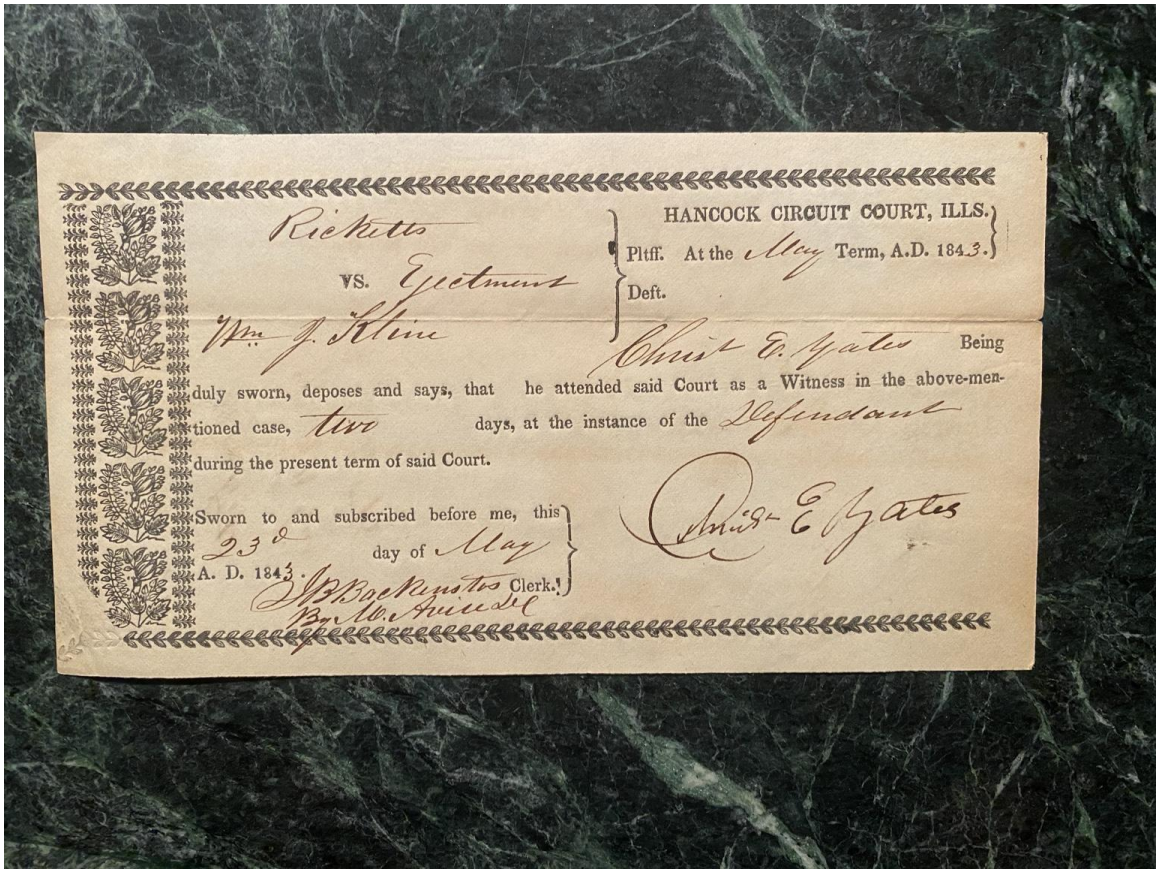
Document 2 reverse • Docket, service return, and fees, IMG_3816. The return at the right runs at right angles to the docket.

Handwritten docket entries
No. 15
Samuel Haggard & Christopher E Yates
Ricketts vs Kline et als
May [term] 1843
2 [services] 0.50
34 [miles] 2.12½
[returning] 12½
$2.75
Wm Backenstos
Sheriff H C Ills.

Handwritten service return
I have served the within writ, by reading the same to the within named C. E. Yates & Samuel Haggard
[9th?] May 1843
Wm. Backenstos Sheriff
By G. W. Stigall D S

The day numeral in the service return remains uncertain; May 9 is the working reading. The fees add correctly to $2.75. The unused nonservice formula is part of the printed form, not evidence that these witnesses could not be found.

Yates accounts for his attendance



HANCOCK CIRCUIT COURT, ILLS.

Ricketts
vs. Ejectment
Wm J. Kline

Pltff. At the May Term, A.D. 1843.
Deft.

Christ E. Yates Being duly sworn, deposes and says, that he attended said Court as a Witness in the above-mentioned case, two days, at the instance of the Defendant during the present term of said Court.

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 23d day of May A. D. 1843.
J B Backenstos Clerk.
By [illegible]

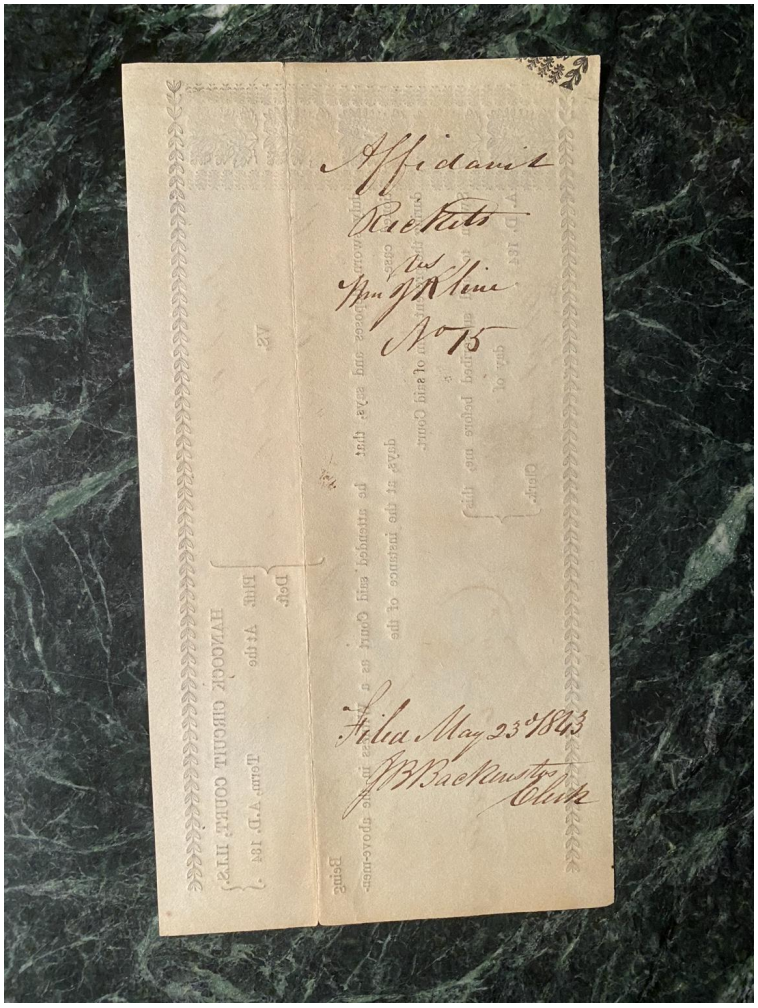
Christ E Yates

Document 3 • Witness-attendance affidavit, 23 May 1843, IMG_3813. Printed form with manuscript additions and Yates's signature.

Handwritten entries on the witness attendance form
Ricketts [plaintiff] vs. Wm. J. Kline [defendant]
Ejectment
Christ E. Yates [witness]
two [days]
Defendant [party requesting attendance]
Christ E Yates [signature]
23d [May 1843]
J B Backenstos [clerk]
By [name uncertain]

"Christ" represents the abbreviated given name as it appears; it is not silently expanded in the transcript. The affidavit documents attendance, not the substance of any testimony. The clerk's deputy is not securely identified.

The affidavit filed



Document 3 reverse • Filing endorsement, IMG_3814. Faint reversed printing is show-through from the front, not a second written entry.

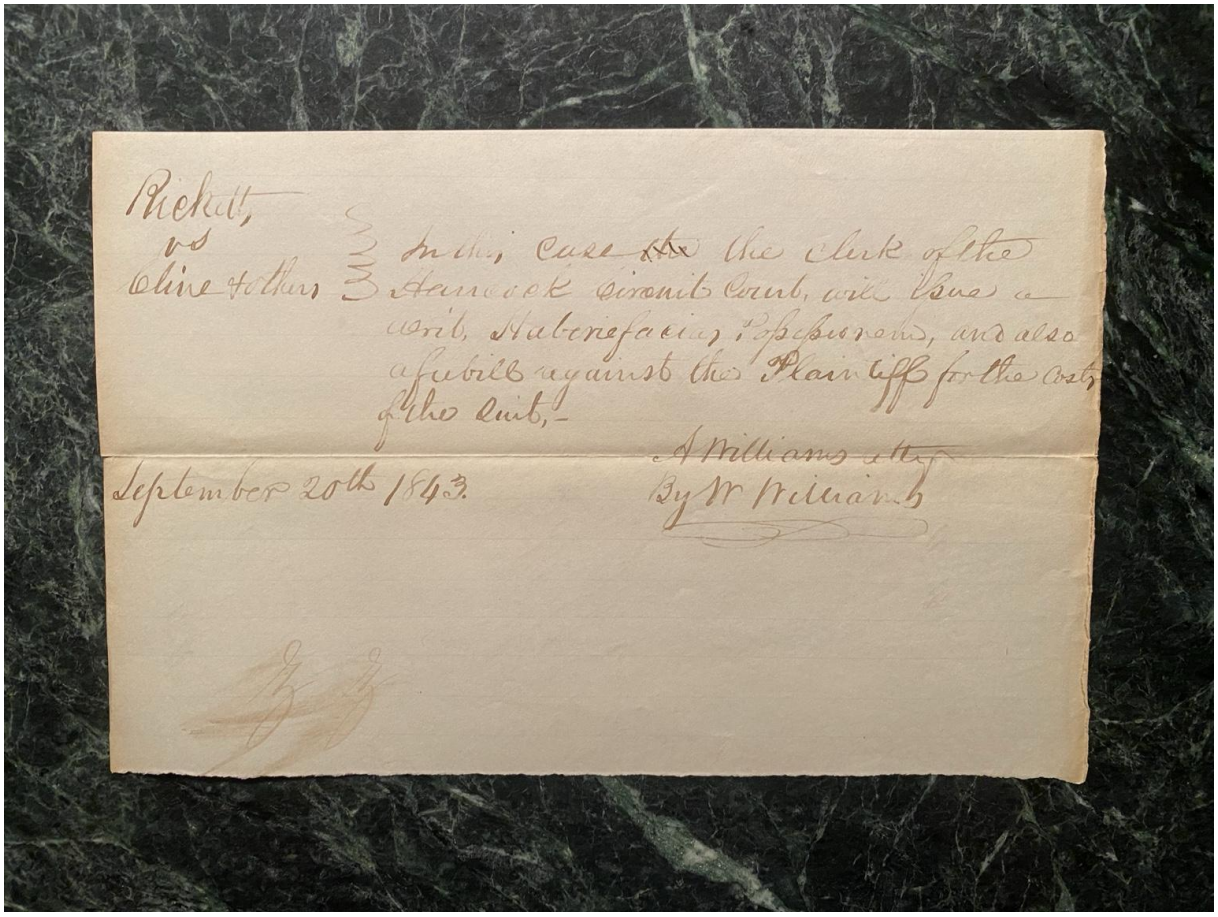
Affidavit
Ricketts vs Wm J Kline
No 15

Filed May 23d 1843
J B Backenstos
Clerk

The matching case number on the subpoena and affidavit helps hold these pieces together. Yates's sworn claim belongs with the same action, even though the docket abbreviates the defendants to Kline's name. Short filing labels were designed for office use; the fuller writ supplies the other defendants.

There is no surviving narrative of the May hearing among these photographs. The reader should resist turning a record of attendance into a reconstruction of what Yates told the court.

The attorney asks for process



Document 4 • Praecipe or request to the clerk, 20 September 1843, IMG_3811. Entirely handwritten.

Ricketts
vs
Kline & others }
In this case let the Clerk of the Hancock Circuit Court, issue a writ, Habere facias Possessionem, and also a fi fa against the Plaintiff[?] for the costs of this suit,—

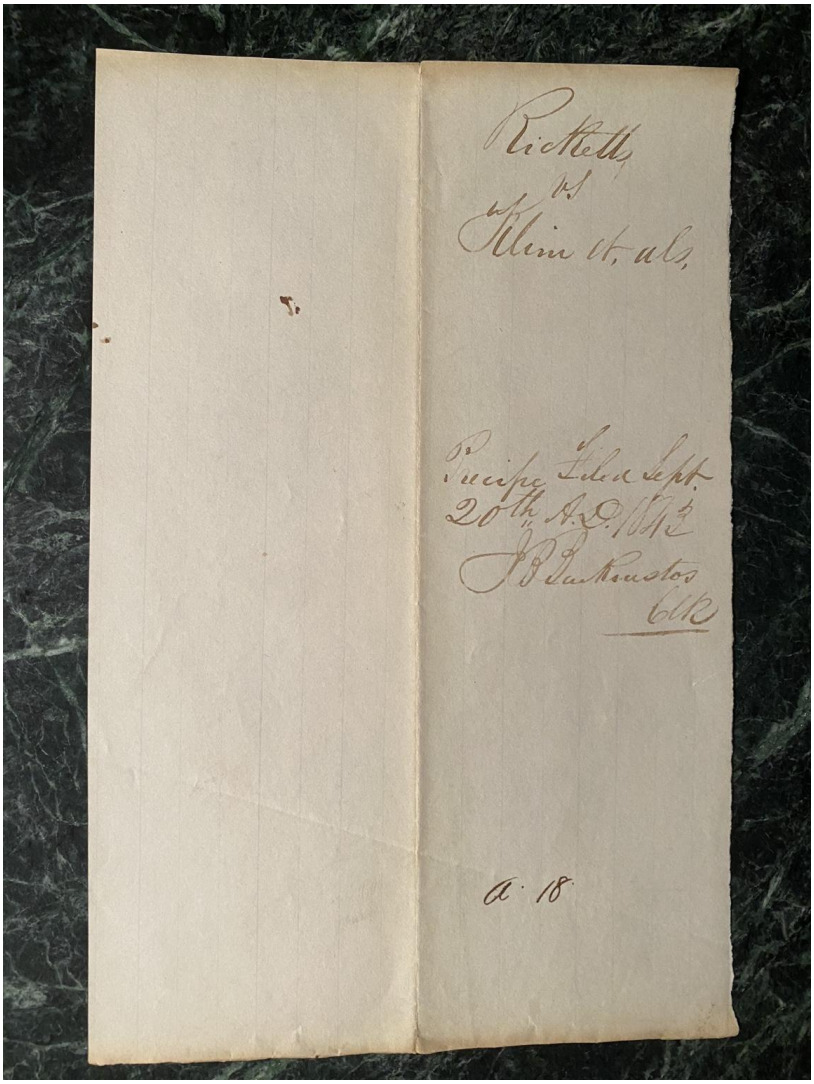
A Williams atty
By W Williams

September 20th 1843.
[Faint pen marks below the text]

A praecipe is a written request directing the clerk to issue process. Habere facias possessionem names the writ that puts the successful party into possession; fieri facias, abbreviated here, concerns execution for money. These terms identify what the paper asks the clerk to do. They should not be confused with habeas corpus, the procedure familiar from Joseph Smith’s efforts to challenge imprisonment.

“Plaintiff” is the apparent manuscript reading, marked uncertain because its legal context requires further checking. “W Williams” is probably Wesley Williams acting for Archibald; the original does not spell out Wesley’s given name. [12]

The request entered in the file



Document 4 reverse • Endorsement, IMG_3812. The final file notation is reproduced as an uncertain reading.

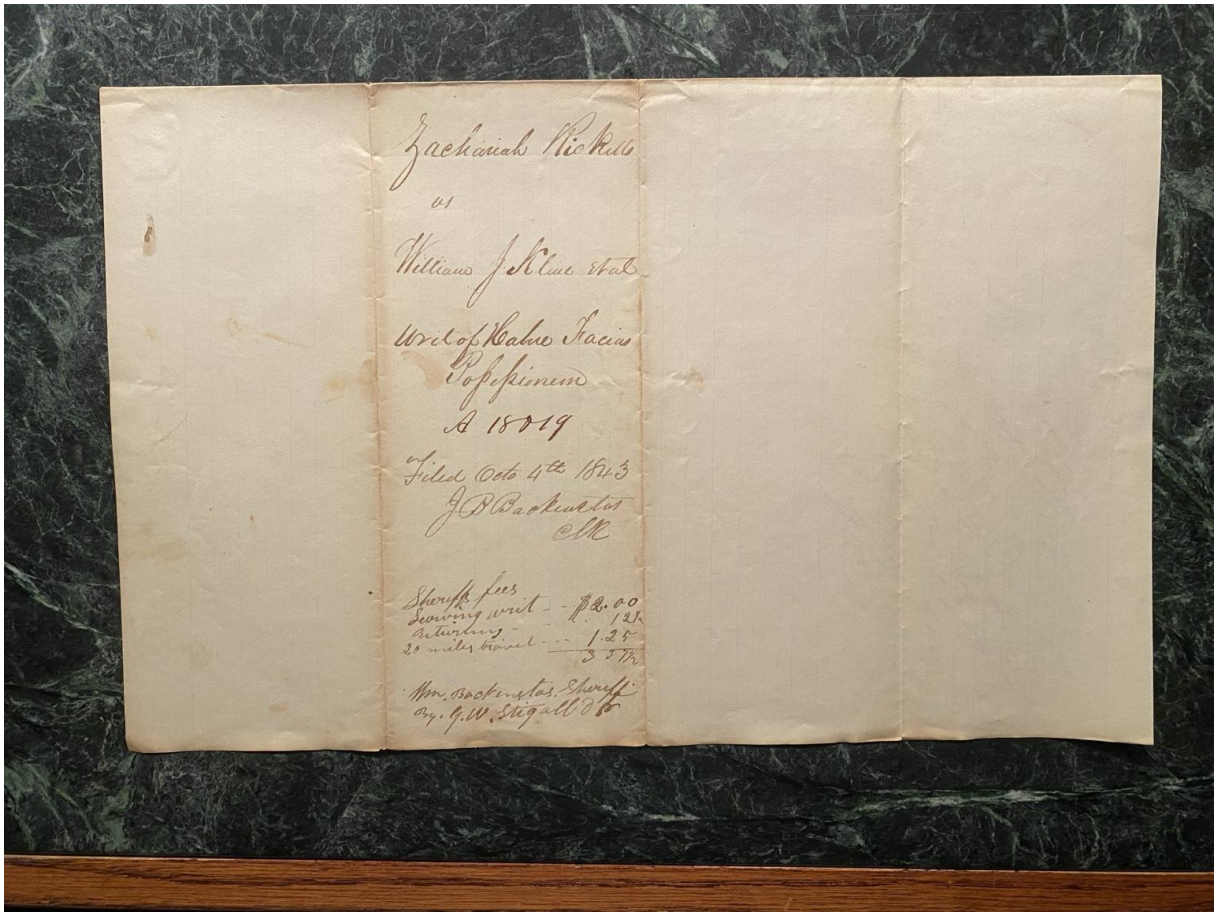
Ricketts
vs
Kline et. als.

Precipe Filed Sept
20th A.D. 1843
J B Backenstos
Clk

[a 18?]

This filing date matches the date of the possession writ. The endorsement does not resolve the costs question or establish which Williams wrote each line of the request.

The possession writ returns to the clerk



Document 1 final endorsement • Docket and sheriff's charges, IMG_3810. The execution return appears near the front; the writ appears at the start of this document section.

Zachariah Ricketts
vs
William J. Kline etals

Writ of Habere Facias
Possessionem
[A 18 & 19?]
Filed Oct 4th 1843
J B Backenstos
Clk

Sheriffs fees
Serving writ — $2.00
returning — 12½
20 miles travel — 1.25
3.37½

Wm. Backenstos Sheriff
By G. W. Stigall D S

The file notation beneath the writ label is uncertain. The fee arithmetic is $2.00 + $0.125 + $1.25 = $3.375. Fractions of a cent are preserved as written, rather than rounded to modern two-decimal currency.

Dates and election results

The case in five dates

Date in 1843	What the surviving papers establish
May 8	Subpoena issued for Samuel Haggard and Christopher E. Yates to attend May 15 for the defendants.
May 23	Yates swore that he had attended two days for the defense.
September 20	Request for process and possession writ dated this day.
September 28	The return records delivery of possession to Ricketts.
October 4	Possession writ filed with the circuit clerk.

Offices won and contests lost

Election	Participant and office	Votes and result in Gregg
1840	Edmund G. Haggard, sheriff	723; defeated by William D. Abernethy, 995.
1842	William Backenstos, sheriff	1,493; elected. Tyler 789; Chittenden 120.
1842	George W. Stigall, coroner	1,595; elected. McCause 281; Avise 221.
1842	Wesley Williams, representative	502; unsuccessful. Owen 1,603 and William Smith 1,459 were elected.
1843	John P. Haggard, treasurer	2,114; elected. James W. Brattle 622.
1844	Jacob B. Backenstos, representative	1,809; elected alongside Almon W. Babbitt, 1,773.
1845 special	Jacob B. Backenstos, sheriff	2,334; elected. John Scott 750.

Source: Gregg (1880), pp. 449–450, checked against page images. These are reported election totals, not commission or oath dates. Gregg's printed margin figures contain apparent arithmetic problems; only candidate totals are used here. [4]

Biographical notes and unresolved readings

Archibald Williams beyond the courtroom

Archibald Williams was born in Montgomery County, Kentucky, on June 10, 1801, to John Williams—called John Wesley Williams in the Joseph Smith Papers—and Amelia Gill. He moved to Quincy in 1829 and built a career that joined local legal practice to state and national politics. His brothers Wesley and Robert made the family name familiar in the legal life of Hancock County as well. [12]

In July 1831 Archibald married Nancy Kemp. The family compilation identifies nine children, five of whom reached adulthood. The list gives a different scale to a life otherwise told through public appointments: John Hamilton, Robert H., Ann Elizabeth, Almira Jane, Archibald Llewellyn, Martha Ann, Henry Clay, Charles Joseph, and Nancy. Several died in infancy. Martha Ann's reported death in October 1843 falls close to the papers in this case, though there is no evidence connecting the bereavement with the litigation.

Nancy Kemp Williams died in childbirth on March 16, 1854. Their infant daughter, also Nancy, survived. Archibald was left with a newborn and older children at different stages of life. The later histories of those children show a family spreading beyond Illinois. Almira Jane attended Christian Female College in Missouri and married Dr. Charles H. Morton in 1860. His wartime service and later illness shaped her life; she eventually worked in government offices, much of that time in Washington. Archibald Llewellyn followed the law to Kansas and became that state's attorney general. These family details come from the established biographical research and its cited family and local histories, not newly inspected vital certificates. [12]

The father remained active after the Saints' departure. His service as U.S. attorney in Illinois during 1849–1853 brought him into the federal litigation over Joseph Smith's old debt. The action drew in Emma, the heirs, and later property holders. The resulting history should be described as legal work undertaken in his official capacity; a religious motive is not established merely by the fact that Smith property was involved.

In March 1861, Abraham Lincoln nominated Williams to the federal district judgeship in Kansas. He was confirmed and commissioned on March 12 and moved to Topeka that summer. He married Ellen M. Parker in September. Sources differ by one day over the marriage date; the Joseph Smith Papers gives September 25 with an original-register citation. The narrative therefore uses the month without pretending that the register image has been checked. [12]

Williams died at Quincy on September 21, 1863, still a federal judge. Ellen survived him for decades. Her original Quincy Daily Journal obituary of May 4, 1910, inspected in the preceding project research, places her death at Blessing Hospital and identifies her as Judge John H. Williams's stepmother. The public career ended in 1863; the household's story continued well into the next century.

For this case, Archibald's value is not simply that he knew famous people. He shows how a working lawyer could appear at several turning points in Mormon history in different professional capacities. Those engagements deserve explanation, while the man's family losses and later career keep him from becoming only a name attached to a controversial trial.

Wesley Williams and the problem of a signature

Wesley Williams, born in 1792, was Archibald's older brother. His career included legal practice and county recording, court, and postal work. He had served in the War of 1812, married Elizabeth Ayers in 1816, moved west, and later married Ruth Scobey in 1831. The established biography places his death in Hancock County in 1870. [12]

His direct dealings with Joseph Smith included recording the Nauvoo plat. A receipt dated September 5, 1839, is attributed by the Joseph Smith Papers to Wesley's handwriting. It provides a useful comparison for the abbreviated "W Williams" in this file, but it is an account heading rather than a conventional closing signature.

The earlier project comparison found compatible slant, letter forms, and flowing strokes. These are not unique features, and an abbreviated byline is not identical in function to a carefully written account heading. The conclusion remains "probably Wesley Williams, acting for Archibald Williams." It does not become a certified handwriting identification.

David Larsen's observation also belongs in the record: in his experience, S. Otho Williams usually identified himself as "S. Otho Williams" or "S. O. Williams" when signing for another person. A July 4, 1840, summons in Singley v. Rigdon independently shows the fuller form "By S Otho Williams D C." This supports the distinction without proving that Otho never used any other form.

Wesley's Anti-Mormon candidacy in 1842 is independently documented. His official dealings with Nauvoo and his political opposition can both be true. Neither fact erases the other. His family connections likewise cannot establish shared conduct with militia figures who bore the Williams surname. Where kinship is mentioned in the broader research, it remains separate from evidence of action.

The University of Illinois holds thirteen items described as Wesley Williams Letters, 1839–1870. The collection description mentions family, Mormonism, Methodism, California prospecting, and a Masonic obituary. These are useful leads for further biography. The holdings are typescripts, however, and are not themselves original handwriting exemplars. They should not be cited as letters personally inspected for this reading edition. [12]

An older clerk's name on a newer form

The subpoena retains the printed name J. C. Davis, struck out in favor of J. B. Backenstos. This small economy—the reuse of an existing form—makes Jacob Cunningham Davis another name physically present in the document. It does not show Davis issuing this subpoena. The alteration is preserved in the transcript and his limited documentary role is identified in the name census.

William Backenstos and the Smith family

William Backenstos was born in Lower Paxton, Pennsylvania, on August 29, 1813. His infant baptism in the Lutheran Reformed tradition is recorded in the Joseph Smith Papers biography. He was in Hancock County by 1842, won election as sheriff that year, and lived at Carthage by 1843. [9]

His marriage to Clara M. Wasson makes him particularly accessible to readers interested in Emma Smith's family. Clara's relationship as Emma's niece and Joseph's performance of the ceremony on October 3, 1843, place the sheriff within a personal circle that the legal papers alone would never reveal. We should allow that family connection to explain his significance without making it determine the outcome or motive of the Ricketts litigation.

The question of William's LDS membership requires care. The Joseph Smith Papers biography records his early baptism but does not establish a later LDS baptism. A scholarly article by Kyle R. Walker reports that William eventually became a Mormon; the supporting evidence has not been fully recovered in this project. The appropriate statement is therefore that a later baptism has been reported, while its date and supporting original record remain unverified here. It would be wrong to assign him Church membership in May or September 1843 on that basis alone. [9, 16]

His later life moved beyond Hancock County. The established chronology places him at Nauvoo by late 1844, Amboy by 1850, Wisconsin by 1853, and Iowa by 1858. His occupations included merchant and painter. He died in Iowa on July 11, 1875. These movements remind us that a county title is only one chapter in a person's life.

Jacob, born in 1811, was the older brother. He married Sarah Lavina Lee in 1835. His circuit clerkship, legislative service, Nauvoo Legion connection, and Masonic membership all belong to his own biography, not William's. After his contentious sheriff's term in 1845–1846 and Mexican War service, Jacob moved to Oregon. He died in the Willamette River in 1857. The brothers' shared surname is a reason to be precise, not to combine their careers. [9]

Why their distinctions matter

In these papers, J. B. Backenstos represents the clerk's office; William Backenstos represents the sheriff's office; Stigall acts as deputy sheriff; and an unidentified deputy clerk writes for Jacob on two documents. The signature formulas preserve an administrative chain of responsibility. They do not prove that every named officeholder personally wrote or carried every paper.

Following the lesser known families

The Fondas and Kline

Giles Hanson Fonda and Maria Bauer Dockstader form the probable parental household behind the defendants. Family sources place Giles's life in 1789–1852 and his burial at Old Carthage Cemetery. The names of his wife and son John, and the move to Hancock County in 1835, are supported by John's county biography. The precise deed connecting Giles to this action remains missing. [3, 4]

Henry's expanded middle name and birth month conflict among compiled sources. "Henry D." is therefore retained. His death is reported as November 8, 1883. The Colorado biography's expulsion claim is preserved above, but its assertion of five terms as county surveyor has not been reconciled with the county office lists. Masonic offices on the same page belong to his son George, not to Henry.

John G. Fonda's later career is better documented. Gregg describes his surveying work, Mexican War service, 1849 marriage to Mary McConnell, railroad engineering, and Civil War service. He became associated with the 118th Illinois Infantry and received brevet brigadier-general rank. These later military activities do not prove participation in an anti-Mormon militia during 1844–1846. A 1921 county history also names him among the first trustees of Carthage's Presbyterian church in 1853. Trusteeship is useful institutional context; it does not establish his earlier religious views or personal conduct during the Nauvoo conflict. [3, 4]

Kline's probable marriage to Angeltie explains his place in this family grouping. His death date remains unresolved. A mortality transcription covering the year ending June 1, 1850, lists a William J. Cline dying in July, which would ordinarily mean July 1849. A family compilation instead gives July 1850. The original schedule and estate record are needed before adopting a precise date. [3]

The Haggards

Samuel Haggard's strong probable identification is the Plymouth-area settler born in 1784 and deceased in 1867. The March 26, 1806, Tennessee marriage reference is a bond for Samuel and Elisabeth Peterson; it should not automatically be called the date of the ceremony. John P. and Edmond Gibson belong to the published reconstruction of this household. Other Haggard branches and younger namesakes remain separate. [3, 5]

Martha A. Haggard's late reminiscence preserves hostility toward the Saints, alongside claims about the Carthage crisis and the safekeeping of county funds at Samuel's home. Its historical errors prevent accepting it wholesale as a reliable eyewitness account. Her words belong to her attributed recollection, not to an inferred collective family opinion. Searches have not established a named anti-Mormon correspondence-committee or militia membership for Samuel or the target Fondas. That is a limited research finding, not proof that no such record can exist. [3, 5]

Further details behind the narrative

The Andreas atlas supplies a substantial profile published while Yates was still alive. It names his parents as Evert Yates and Catharine Fonda, places his birth in Montgomery County, New York, on December 19, 1794, and describes his move to the Augusta country in 1829. He married Catharine Van Horn in 1819. Her father, Abraham Van Horn, was a Dutch Reformed minister. Yates combined farming with land speculation and remained in the Augusta area until moving to Nauvoo in 1846. [2]

After the exodus, Yates's interests became closely entwined with Nauvoo property. A recorded deed dated April 8, 1851, conveyed four lots to him through the federal litigation involving Joseph Smith's estate. The stated purchase prices totaled $31.05. That deed belongs to another legal proceeding; it does not explain his part in the Augusta ejectment. It does show that the local witness of 1843 remained involved in the history of the city after most of the Saints had gone. [8]

The request appears to ask for a costs execution "against the Plaintiff." That is an unexpected reading alongside a possession writ in Ricketts's favor. We preserve it, with a question mark in the transcript, rather than substitute "defendants." The complete judgment and costs record would be needed to explain it. An unusual phrase is a reason to examine the evidence more closely, not to repair the manuscript to fit an expected story.

Accounts of his conduct need to be read individually. John Taylor later remembered considerate treatment by the jailer and his wife. Other evidence concerns Stigall's warnings and the removal of the prisoners for examination on June 26. Stigall's published account of that removal differs from accounts associated with the Smiths. The Joseph Smith Papers discusses those differences. A balanced portrait should preserve them rather than force every recollection into a single seamless version. [13]

Probable family relationship	Person
Parents	Giles Hanson Fonda and Maria Bauer Dockstader
Daughter and probable son-in-law	Angeltie Dockstader Fonda and William John Kline
Sons	Henry D. Fonda and John G. Fonda
Possible wider connection, not established	Christopher E. Yates's mother was Catharine Fonda; her exact relationship to these defendants is unresolved.

Sources and illustration credits

Numbers in the narrative refer to the sources below. The three existing research dossiers and the Williams expansion supplied the established biographical foundation; subsequent corrections in the family continuation take precedence over earlier provisional statements. Transcripts and source findings are carried forward from the illustrated reading edition; this revision changes the narrative and arrangement.

[1] David Larsen collection, manuscript photographs IMG_3808–IMG_3816. All nine photographs are represented in this edition. Uncertain words, file notations, and the deputy clerk's name remain marked.

[2] A. T. Andreas, An Illustrated Historical Atlas of Hancock County, Illinois (Chicago, 1874), pp. 22 and 37. Map image and Yates profile checked in the scan. https://archive.org/details/illustratedhisto00andr

[3] Ricketts_Kline_Family_Search_Continuation.html, updated 26 October 2026; Ricketts_Kline_Biographical_Research.html; Ricketts_Kline_Tax_Land_and_Membership_Followup.txt. Established project research, with citations to family histories, cemetery and tax transcriptions, and original-record finding aids. Fonda family grouping: https://fonda.org/people/giles-hanson-fonda.html

[4] Thomas Gregg, History of Hancock County, Illinois (Chicago, 1880), pp. 283, 449–450, 829–830. Election images on pp. 449–450 checked for this edition; OCR contains several wrong digits. https://archive.org/details/historyofhancock00greg

[5] David D. Haggard, History of the Haggard Family in England and America, 1433–1899 (1899), especially pp. 108–112 and 119–122; Samuel portrait plate following p. 108. https://archive.org/details/historyofhaggard00hagg

[6] E. Horton Young, A History of Round Prairie and Plymouth, 1831–1875 (1876), p. 24, and later property passages. https://archive.org/details/historyofroundpr00youn

[7] History of the Reorganized Church, vol. 3, chapter 12, pp. 256–258, quoting Joseph Smith III's autobiographical recollections. https://www.centerplace.org/history/ch/v3ch12.htm

[8] Joseph Smith Papers, Deed, Charles B. Lawrence to Christopher E. Yates, 8 April 1851, recorded copy, Hancock Deeds 55, pp. 134–137. https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/deed-charles-b-lawrence-to-christopher-e-yates-8-april-1851-united-states-v-joseph-smith-iii-et-al/1

[9] Joseph Smith Papers biographies of William Backenstos, Clara M. Wasson Backenstos, and Jacob B. Backenstos. https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/william-backenstos • https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/clara-m-wasson-backenstos • https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/jacob-b-backenstos

[10] Susan Sessions Rugh, "Conflict in the Countryside: The Mormon Settlement at Macedonia, Illinois," BYU Studies 32, nos. 1–2, table 2, citing "Official Returns," Warsaw Signal, 13 August 1842. Used for selected precinct context; the original Signal image was not recovered. https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/conflict-in-the-countryside-the-mormon-settlement-at-macedonia-illinois

[11] Nauvoo Neighbor, 28 June 1843, p. 3, candidate notices. Both the transcription and original issue image supplied by BYU Studies were checked. https://byustudies.byu.edu/online-book/nauvoo-neighbor/june-28-1843-volume-1-number-9-144

[12] Archibald_Williams_Expanded_Biography_and_Wesley_Comparison.html, updated 26 October 2026, and its source notes; Joseph Smith Papers biographies and 20 November 1843 letter; Robert D. Loevy, Archibald Williams: A Friend of Abraham Lincoln, and Williams Family History; Federal Judicial Center, Archibald Williams; Quincy Daily Journal, 4 May 1910, p. 3. https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/archibald-williams • https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/wesley-williams • https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/receipt-from-wesley-williams-5-september-1839/1

[13] Joseph Smith Papers, George W. Stigall biography; historical introductions to Letter to James W. Woods and Hugh T. Reid, 26 June 1844, and Letter from Miner R. Deming, 26 June 1844; related martyrdom accounts. https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/person/george-w-stigall

[14] Nauvoo Neighbor, 3 July 1844, p. 3, column 4. Stigall notice checked in the original issue scan supplied by BYU Studies. https://byustudies.byu.edu/online-book/nauvoo-neighbor/july-3-1844-volume-2-number-10-144

[15] Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver and Vicinity, Colorado (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1898), p. 358, biography of George F. Fonda, paragraph about Henry D. Fonda. Page image inspected; no individual entry author identified. https://archive.org/details/biographportrait00chaprich/page/n377/mode/1up

[16] Kyle R. Walker, "Clambering to the rugged mountaintop with Aunt Emma": The Hale Family's Ongoing Engagement with Mormonism in Illinois (2017). Baptism statement retained as a reported scholarly claim pending recovery of its supporting evidence. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26614521

Name census

Alphabetical guide to people named substantively in the narrative or case documents. Names appearing only in source citations or incidentally in reproduced plates are excluded. “Document” identifies a role in the original case; “context” identifies a person introduced to explain a participant’s life. Uncertain identifications remain explicit. The entries distinguish case participants from people introduced in the biographical notes.

Abernethy, William D. — Context. Defeated Edmund G. Haggard for sheriff in the 1840 results.

Avise, Benjamin — Context. Coroner candidate in the 1842 election table.

Babbitt, Almon W. — Context. Elected representative alongside Jacob Backenstos in 1844.

Backenstos, Clara M. Wasson — Context. Emma Smith’s niece; married William Backenstos, 3 October 1843.

Backenstos, Jacob B. — Document. Circuit clerk, distinct from his brother William. Later legislator and sheriff; Nauvoo Mason and Legion officer; not an LDS convert according to JSP.

Backenstos, Sarah Lavina Lee — Context. Jacob’s wife, married in 1835.

Backenstos, William — Document. Sheriff in 1843; Stigall acted as his deputy. Husband of Clara Wasson. Later LDS baptism reported but unverified in this project.

Brattle, James W. — Context. Opponent of John P. Haggard for treasurer in 1843.

Chittenden, George A. — Context. Sheriff candidate listed in Gregg’s 1842 returns.

Davis, Jacob Cunningham — Document. Earlier clerk’s printed name, struck through on the subpoena; not its issuing clerk.

Deming, Minor R. — Context. Winner of the 1844 sheriff’s election; also spelled Miner in historical sources.

Fonda, Angeltie Dockstader — Context. Probable wife of William John Kline and daughter of Giles and Maria Fonda.

Fonda, Catharine — Context. Mother of Christopher E. Yates; precise relationship to the defendants unresolved.

Fonda, George F. — Context. Son of Henry D.; subject of the 1898 biography containing the expulsion claim about his father.

Fonda, Giles Hanson — Document. Named as Giles Funda; probable identification with the physician and father of Angeltie, Henry, and John.

Fonda, Henry D. — Document. Named as Henry D. Funda; later engineer in Colorado. Expulsion activity attributed in the 1898 biography, without a specific incident or unit.

Fonda, John G. — Document. Named as John G. Funda; probable identification with the surveyor and later Union officer.

Fonda, Maria Bauer Dockstader — Context. Wife of Giles and mother in the probable Fonda family grouping.

Fonda, Mary McConnell — Context. Wife of John G. Fonda, married in 1849.

Haggard, Edmond Gibson — Context. Published family history identifies him as Samuel’s son. Former sheriff; spelling varies.

Haggard, Elizabeth Peterson — Context. Samuel’s wife; the 1806 Tennessee entry is a marriage bond.

Haggard, John P. — Context. Samuel’s son, Carthage merchant and county treasurer; candidate notice reproduced.

Haggard, Martha A. — Context. Wife of John P.; late recollection contains hostility and historical errors. Her attitudes are not assigned to the whole family.

Haggard, Samuel — Document. Defense witness subpoenaed; strong probable identification with the Plymouth settler, 1784–1867.

Kline, William J. — Document. Defendant; probable William John Kline, husband of Angeltie Fonda. Also searched as Cline and Klein; death date unresolved.

Lincoln, Abraham — Context. Nominated Archibald Williams to the Kansas federal judgeship in 1861.

McCause, James A. — Context. Coroner candidate in the 1842 table.

Morton, Almira Jane Williams — Context. Archibald’s daughter; wife of Dr. Charles H. Morton.

Morton, Charles H. — Context. Husband of Almira Jane; physician and Civil War officer.

Owen, Thomas H. — Context. Elected representative in 1842.

Ricketts, Zachariah — Document. Successful plaintiff for possession; personal identity beyond this case remains unresolved.

Saddler, George — Context. Samuel Haggard’s son-in-law and fellow migrant in Young’s account.

Smith, Emma — Context. Aunt of Clara Wasson; connected with the later federal property litigation.

Smith, Hyrum — Context. Joseph's brother, killed with him at Carthage; not a litigant in this file.

Smith, Joseph — Context. Officiated at William and Clara's wedding; had separate legal dealings with Archibald and Wesley. Not a litigant here.

Smith, Joseph III — Context. Retrospective witness to Yates's friendship and losses; connected with later estate litigation.

Smith, William — Context. Successful 1842 representative; not William Backenstos.

Stigall, George W. — Document. Deputy sheriff who served process and delivered possession; later Carthage jailer and sheriff.

Taylor, John — Context. Survivor of the Carthage attack whose later account described treatment by the jailer.

Tyler, Stephen H. — Context. Sheriff candidate defeated by William Backenstos in 1842.

Van Horn, Abraham — Context. Dutch Reformed minister and father of Yates's wife.

Williams children — Context. Archibald and Nancy's other named children include Robert H., Ann Elizabeth, Martha Ann, Henry Clay, Charles Joseph, and the younger Nancy. Compiled family dates require original-record confirmation.

Williams, Amelia Gill — Context. Mother of Archibald Williams.

Williams, Archibald — Document. Attorney identified with the praecipe; later U.S. attorney and Kansas federal judge.

Williams, Archibald Llewellyn — Context. Archibald's son; later Kansas attorney general.

Williams, Elizabeth Ayers — Context. Wesley's first wife, married in 1816.

Williams, Ellen M. Parker — Context. Archibald's second wife; survived until 1910.

Williams, J. Wilson — Context. Surveyor with whom John G. Fonda worked; not identified with the praecipe's W. Williams.

Williams, John — Context. Archibald's father; given as John Wesley Williams in JSP.

Williams, John Hamilton — Context. Archibald's son; Judge John H. Williams in Ellen's obituary.

Williams, Nancy Kemp — Context. Archibald's first wife, died in childbirth in 1854.

Williams, Robert — Context. Attorney and brother of Archibald and Wesley, deceased in 1841.

Williams, Ruth Scobey — Context. Wesley's later wife, married in 1831.

Williams, S. Otho — Context. Clerk whose known signing practice is compared with the abbreviated W. Williams.

Williams, Wesley — Document, probable. Leading identification of the acting writer in the praecipe; county official and unsuccessful Anti-Mormon legislative candidate in 1842.

Yates, Catharine Van Horn — Context. Christopher's wife, married in 1819.

Yates, Christopher E. — Document. Defense witness and signer of attendance affidavit; Augusta settler and later Nauvoo property holder.

Yates, Evert — Context. Christopher's father.

Unidentified deputy clerk — Document. Signed for Jacob Backenstos on the subpoena and attendance affidavit; name remains unresolved.