PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-36

Cass County and Congress, 1850: the citizens' petition for jury trial of fugitives, and Henry Clay's speech that was not made

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SUMMARY

Howard S. Rogers's county history of 1875 says that the Kentucky raid of 1847 into Cass County, Michigan, was "cited by him"—Henry Clay—"in detail in Congress, and proved of great service in securing the passage of the bill" of 1850; Wikipedia and local accounts repeat it. The *Congressional Globe* of 1848 to 1851 records no such speech by Clay; the Michigan cases told in the Senate in 1850 were the Marshall case (William L. Dayton, 22 March) and a Missouri owner's case (Joseph R. Underwood, 3 April). The *Globe* does record Cass County speaking from the other side. In the House on Thursday, 18 April 1850, the petition of "N. B. Blackman, D. H. Ringer, Luther Humphrey, and 40 other citizens of Cass county, Michigan," was presented, "praying that persons arrested as fugitive slaves may be entitled to trial by jury, before delivered up to the claimant." The law passed that September gave no such trial.

THE RECORD

1. ***Congressional Globe*, 31st Congress, 1st Session, issue of 20 April 1850, House of Representatives, Thursday, 18 April 1850, petitions presented under the rule**

   > *"By Mr. NELSON: The petition of N. B. Blackman, D. H. Ringer, Luther Humphrey, and 40 other citizens of Cass county, Michigan, praying that persons arrested as fugitive slaves may be entitled to trial by jury, before delivered up to the claimant."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/sim_united-states-congress-congressional-globe_1850-04-20_21_48)

2. **Howard S. Rogers, *History of Cass County, from 1825 to 1875* (Cassopolis, 1875), p. 129**

   > *"These slaves belonged to personal friends of Henry Clay … The 'Michigan riots' were cited by him in detail in Congress, and proved of great service in securing the passage of the bill."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/historyofcasscou00roge)

WHAT IT CHANGES

A claim repeated since 1875 is not borne out by the record of Congress, and in its place the record shows forty-three Cass County citizens asking Congress, five months before the Fugitive Slave Act, for the jury trial the Cassopolis hearing had turned on.

LIMITS

The *Globe* prints speeches as reported and revised, and its OCR can miss a passing reference; the negative is the result of an issue-by-issue search of 1848–1851 and

covers the record of Congress only. The *Globe* prints only the petition's summary and its first three names.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

Rogers (1875) and the 1882 history; Wikipedia's article on the raid; the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County's pages; the Leader's series of 2018; the *Congressional Globe* and its Appendix, 30th to 32nd Congresses (1848–1852), in Internet Archive full text; web searches for Clay, the Senate and the raid, and for the petitioners' names (October 2026).

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

Project Scroll is independent research and does not speak for the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County. Its name is used here only to identify it; the history on this page is drawn from the published record cited below.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, "The Kentucky Raid of 1847," *Project Scroll* (2026). https://projectscroll.com/news/the-kentucky-raid-of-1847/

2. *Congressional Globe*, Appendix, 31st Congress, 1st Session (1849–1850): Clay, 5–6 February and 13 May; Dayton, 22 March; Underwood, 3 April 1850. https://archive.org/details/sim_united-states-congress-congressional-globe_december-4-1849-june-10-1850_22_appendix

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THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The Kentucky Raid of 1847 (projectscroll.com/news/the-kentucky-raid-of-1847/). In the discoveries register:

- `raid-cass-petition-1850` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#raid-cass-petition-1850)
- `raid-clay-globe` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#raid-clay-globe)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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