

## **Captain John Atchison House, 608 S. Bench St., c. 1838**

### **Summary**



John and Emily C. Atchison purchased the Amos Farrar House from William Bennett in 1843. Later, they lived at what is now 608 S. Bench St. (no house numbers at the time).

John Atchison was born in 1799 in (probably) Pickaway County, Ohio. He was one of at least 11 children. Five of the brothers, including John, (perhaps more), became riverboat captains.

Emily Caroline Billon was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2 June 1809. Her family moved to St. Louis, Missouri.

John Atchison and Emily C. Billon were early residents of Galena, arriving in 1829.

John and Emily Atchison were enslavers. In the 1830 Jo Daviess County Federal census, John Atchison's enumeration lists 1 female enslaved person under 10 and 1 free colored female 24-35. In the 1840 census, John Atchison's household held 1 male enslaved person under age 10.

John Atchison led a colorful, wide-ranging life in terms of occupations, politics, and geography. He was a major land speculator and merchant as well as riverboat captain along the Mississippi River from Galena to St. Louis and St. Louis to St. Paul.

He owned property in Galena; Dubuque and Burlington, Iowa; and Grant and Lafayette counties in Wisconsin. He was "proprietor" of Belmont, first capital of the Wisconsin Territory.

John Atchison served as quartermaster, provisioned the troops, and also led at least one mission during the Black Hawk War in 1832.

Atchison was appointed territorial marshal of Wisconsin in 1842 by Wisconsin territorial governor James Doty. In that role, Atchison apprehended the man who shot Samuel Southwick at Berry Tavern in Gratiot's Grove, Wisconsin.

At some point, John Atchison underwent a drastic reversal of fortune. Whether this was related to any of the serial recessions in the U.S. in the 1840s is unknown. More research is needed.

In 1850, John Atchison captained his boat to St. Louis. He died there of cholera 2 June 1850. Cholera was rampant up and down the Mississippi River valley that year.

Emily C. Billon Atchison lived a long life after John Atchison's untimely death. She died 28 March 1889 in Chicago.

Captain John Atchison; Caroline Emily Billon Atchison; and son, Charles B. Atchison, are all buried in Old City Cemetery, Galena.