

## Simon seeking clemency for Illinois abolitionists

Written by Kara Beach  
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### *First petition aimed at clearing Dr. Richard Eells*

CARBONDALE – July 3, 2013. In celebration of the nation’s anniversary, Lt. Governor Sheila Simon announced today that she is launching an effort to restore the reputations of those who fought for freedom and equality. Simon will file petitions seeking clemency for Illinois abolitionists convicted for their fight against slavery. The first petition filed today seeks to clear central Illinois abolitionist Dr. Richard Eells.

“The men and women who defied the law to help slaves through the Underground Railroad risked their safety and well-being because they believed that all individuals deserve freedom,” said Simon. “It is time that we honor their memories and sacrifices with pardons for their selfless and courageous actions. Abolitionists were on the right side of history, and a pardon vindicates their foresight and heroism.”

Despite Illinois residents voting to abolish slavery in 1824, both Illinois and federal law prohibited the harboring or assisting of runaway slaves in free states. As part of this effort to honor abolitionists who fought for equality, Simon’s office is working with historians and experts around the state to identify men and women around Illinois who were convicted of violating slavery laws.

Simon filed a petition of clemency today for Dr. Richard Eells, who in 1843 was convicted of harboring a runaway slave. Eells, an abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor, did not hesitate to assist a man who is known in court records only as “Charley,” a runaway slave from

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Missouri. While transporting Charley to safety, they were discovered by slave catchers. In April 1843, a jury found Dr. Eells guilty of harboring and secreting a slave, and unlawfully preventing the lawful owner from recovering the slave. His case was later heard by the United States Supreme Court, which upheld the original verdict.

“The Friends of the Dr. Richard Eells House organization is very pleased with the opportunity the Lt. Governor is giving us to provide a pardon to Quincy’s Dr. Richard Eells for his efforts in 1842 to help Charley,” said John Cornell, president of the Friends of the Dr. Richard Eells House. “This pardon will also provide vindication and honor to all the courageous participants in the Underground Railroad. We just wish Charley could have found his freedom at that fateful time.”

Through his involvement in the Underground Railroad, Dr. Eells helped numerous slaves traveling through Quincy toward Chicago, and ultimately, to freedom in Canada. The National Parks Service has declared Dr. Eells home as one of the country’s 42 most important Underground Railroad sites, and the home is currently operated by the Friends of Dr. Richard Eells House.

Simon is also asking the public to contact her office to recommend additional clemency requests for individuals convicted for their abolitionist activities. Please visit [www.ltgov.illinois.gov](http://www.ltgov.illinois.gov) for updates.

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