



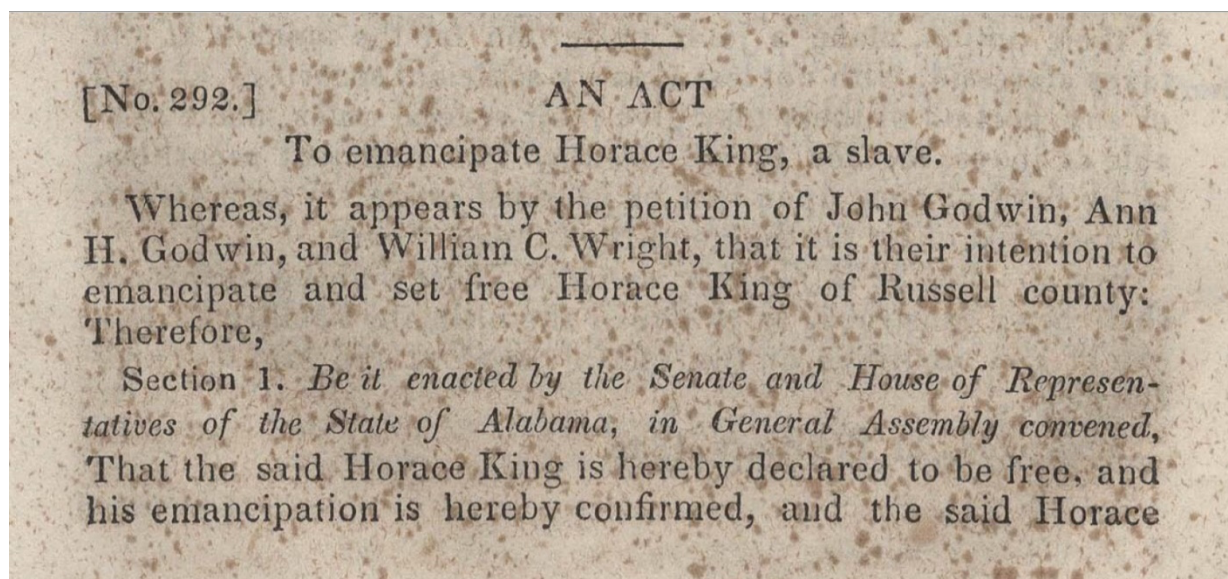
Alabama Public Television Education

## Horace King: Former Slave, Craftsman, Businessman and Statesman

Born in 1807 into slavery in the Chesterfield District of South Carolina, Horace King became one of the most respected bridge builders in Alabama, Georgia, and northeastern Mississippi.

King was purchased by John Godwin, a contractor in Cheraw, South Carolina, in 1830 and moved to what is now Phenix City, Alabama. King and his master traveled throughout the South working as partners on major construction projects. He was particularly talented in the building of covered bridges, which required great construction and engineering skills. King designed and supervised the construction of bridges throughout the state.

On February 3, 1846, an emancipation bill was guided through the Alabama legislature by Robert Jemison, Jr., a state legislator who had invested in Horace King's bridges in Columbus, Mississippi, and Wetumpka, Alabama. King became a free man.



1846.

208

King shall not be required to leave the State of Alabama, upon the condition that the said John Godwin, Ann H. Godwin and William C. Wright, or any one of them, shall enter into bond with approved security, to the Judge of the County Court of Russell, in the sum of one thousand dollars; conditioned that the said Horace King shall never become a charge to this State, or any county or town therein.

Approved, 3d February, 1846.

“Legislative Act Granting the Emancipation of Horace King of Russell County, Alabama.” *Alabama Department of Archives and History*, [digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/voices/id/6460/rec/13](https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/voices/id/6460/rec/13).

During the early 1850s, after the first capitol building in Montgomery had burned, King was hired to perform carpentry work on the new capitol building, which is believed included the twin circular staircases. These staircases required expert design and construction, which were Horace King’s standard of work.





Meripol, Art. "Capitol Staircase." *Alabama Tourism Department*, Alabama Tourism Department, [tourism.alabama.gov/](http://tourism.alabama.gov/).

**Disclaimer:** These images are used to promote the state of Alabama and the tourism industry of Alabama and are not meant for personal and/or commercial use outside of tourism related business without written consent from ATD. Restrictions do apply.

After the Civil War and during *Reconstruction*, King served in the Alabama House of Representatives from 1870 to 1874. Although he was elected to serve, he continued to travel, create, and build wagon and railroad bridges, grist and textile mills, and cotton warehouses. In 1872, King and his family moved to LaGrange, Georgia, where he and his sons continued to build bridges, stores, houses, and college buildings until his death on May 5, 1885.

Lupold, John S. "Horace King." *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, [encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1245](http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1245).



"Horace King." *The Columbus Museum*, [columbusmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/D9FBA117-FFDB-4AD2-86A5-591787370341](http://columbusmuseum.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/D9FBA117-FFDB-4AD2-86A5-591787370341).

## Design and Build!

Can you design and build a stairway like Horace King? Working with a partner use the materials below to create three (3) steps of a staircase.

Each partner will need:

6 marshmallows

3 drinking straws

Scissors

Ruler

## Directions:

- Before beginning, sketch your three stairs. Remember that they must connect, and they must be sturdy enough to stand on their own. How many marshmallows will you need for the highest step? Will you begin on the lowest step and move upward, or will you begin on the highest step and move downward?
- Estimate the length of each of the supports that you will need for your steps. You can use your rulers and cut the drinking straws into the lengths that you need.
- Will your supports be the same lengths? Why or why not?
- Layout your design. Measure the height and width of your stairs. Why are these numbers important to the design of the stairs?

## What do you think?

- Did your sketch help in the design and completion of your project?
- Why was measurement an important part of this project?
- What was the most challenging part of this project?
- If you created these again, what would you do differently?
- Now that you have created your “stairway,” look again at the photograph of Horace King’s circular staircase. How do you think that his experiences as a bridge builder helped him to design and create this staircase? Why or why not?