

“A GREAT UNEASINESS IN OUR COUNTY”: SLAVERY AND ITS INFLUENCE
ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY STABILITY IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA, 1782-

1860

by

Sheri A. Huerta
A Dissertation
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of
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my children, Christina, Fernando, Elizabeth, and Gabrielle, who listened to endless research stories and cheered me on every step of the way; to my mother, Paula, and the memory of my father, Wally, who fostered my love of books and history and taught me to be resilient; and most especially to my husband, Fernando, who never doubted I could finish. Thank you for having faith in me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Afro-American Historical Association	AAHA
Appraised Slave Values Database	ASVD
Library of Virginia.....	LVA
Loudoun County Historic Archives and Deeds Division, Leesburg, Virginia	LCHAD
Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center	RELIC

ABSTRACT

**“A GREAT UNEASINESS IN OUR COUNTY”: SLAVERY AND ITS INFLUENCE
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1860**

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Adopting a comparative approach, this dissertation examines the dynamics of control, resistance, and adaptation to enslavement along the borderlands of the enslaved South in northern Virginia from 1782 to 1860. The focus on three contiguous counties, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William shows that despite similar political and cultural influences and location, each county developed subtle, yet distinct differences in patterns of slave ownership, flexibility towards emancipation, periods of enslaved resistance, and methods of enforcing racial control. This study investigates these local differences, their effect on the stability of enslaved families and how perceived threats to masterly control shaped community reactions.

Because of its position upon the fringes of the slave South and in proximity to avenues of escape, northern Virginia presents a compelling location for study of the role of enslaved

families and communities on slave societies. This dissertation exposes sources of tension through a close reading of county records such as deeds, wills, patrol accounts, tax records, and criminal case files combined with state documents, legislative petitions, church minutes, private correspondence, Freedmen's Bureau records, newspaper accounts and runaway advertisements. Major questions reveal the particular dynamics of each county's slave society through three main themes of identity, resistance, and perceptions of control. First, how did each county maintain an identity as a slave society in proximity to free states and anti-slavery rhetoric and amidst demographic changes and economic stresses? Second, how did these changes and stresses affect enslaved family stability and lead to acts of resistance? Third, how did communities, churches, and local courts support the rights of masters to hold slaves and how did enslaved persons manipulate these local powers to assert limited control over their lives and paths to freedom?

A confluence of factors created distinct periods of unrest in each county: These arose when enslaved resistance challenged visions of masterly control; when the number of runaways and escape strategies changed; when slave values rose and fell; when options for emancipation crested and diminished; when abolitionist influences seemed to threaten community solidarity; and when public fears that enslaved resistance represented a widespread movement against slaveholders rather than singular transgressions.

Even within a relatively small geographic space of the slave South, the particular location and community composition diversely affected the nature of enslavement. County-wide differences in the level of tolerance shown for manumissions and towards manumitted slaves threatened enslaved family stability. Similarly the decisions of some slaveholders to limit their slaveholdings through slave sales or to seek better opportunities through western migration dismembered enslaved families. Acts of resistance often coincided with these periods of intense enslaved family disruptions or preceded such anticipated crises such as a master's death. Runaways coordinated escapes with work schedules or seasonal (and predictable) movements of people that varied by and within each county. When enslaved families felt most threatened and options for freedom seemed most limited, violent resistance erupted in slaveholding communities. These acts of resistance combined with fears of abolitionist influences threatened the security of slaveholders; local communities then ordered out patrols or created extralegal groups for policing.

Tolerance for manumission, frequency of runaways, fluctuating values of enslaved bodies, and acts of violent resistance not only altered the way that slaveholders perceived the importance of enslaved chattel to personal wealth and community control but also determined how enslaved families recognized and responded to threats to stability and actively resisted forced separation. By tracking these changes over time a more complete picture develops of when, why, and how enslaved persons challenged their subordinate status and when the public perception of these acts of resistance shifted from uneasy fears to wide-spread threats that seemed to require community action.

Discerning the ability of enslaved persons to make even small improvements in their lives in slavery rests firmly at the core of this study through understanding how they cultivated beneficial networks of support and influence, sought out resources to mitigate the deprivations of enslavement, and forged alliances that generated income and local support for self-purchase. Considering these acts of self-affirmation not only in relation to broader changes across the slave South, but more importantly within their context as a borderlands underlines the importance of place in creating subtle, yet telling differences in the stability of a slave society and thus challenges sectional, regional, or even state-wide generalizations of such societies' uniform identity.

INTRODUCTION

The imprint of slavery and enslavement still resonates across the northern Virginia landscape. Stately homes built by enslaved laborers and artisans; fishing shores that once bore the footprints of enslaved fishermen, seine handlers, oysterers, or boatmen; mills that ground locally-grown grains and prepared plaister for reinvigorating exhausted fields; fields groomed, cultivated, and harvested through the toils of enslaved labor; roads built by enslaved labor; roads that felt the weary tread of slaves driven to slave markets to the west, east, or deep South or the frantic steps of runaways seeking freedom to the north and west; court houses where proxies recounted stories of the enslaved while white magistrates determined their fates; and jail cells where their cries echoed.

The social, political, and economic development of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties, a contiguous band of counties located along Virginia's northern border, depended upon slavery, yet residents of each county relied upon enslaved labor or profits from the sales of select laborers to varying degrees over time. The counties shared common state and national political districts and conformed to a common legal outlook transmitted by lawyers and judges who served in multiple county courts.¹ Yet within each

¹ Newspaper advertisements indicate the level of cross-pollination of legal talent across county lines. In 1820 John P. Duval set up a legal practice in Middleburg in order to serve public interest in both Fauquier and Loudoun County and Superior Courts. *Palladium of Liberty*, August 24, 1820. Both Thomas R. Love and Samuel C. Smith practiced law in Fauquier, Prince William, and Fairfax county courts in 1835. *Alexandria Gazette*, February 11, 1835 and April 27, 1835. George W. Hunter, Jr. maintained a law office in Fairfax, yet served the courts of Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William counties. "A Card," *Alexandria*

county, magistrates adjudicated criminal cases based on local perspectives and outlooks, thereby confirming the importance of place and local mores. Residents in each county relied on diversified agricultural production, but also engaged in lumbering, fishing, mining, and mill work, jobs that often employed enslaved laborers. The history of these three counties reveals the importance of place in fostering subtle, yet telling differences in the nature of enslavement, slave resistance, and perceptions of control, yet the location of these borderland counties, in close proximity to non-slaveholding states, created challenges for slaveholders as they presented opportunities for enslaved persons.

These three counties formed part of the state's northern borderlands, an area denoted by its location along the Potomac River, yet part of the band of land extending northward through Maryland to Pennsylvania where the presence of slavery declined following the Revolutionary War. As noted by Max Grivno in his study of northern Maryland, "the crude geography that pointed north to freedom and south to slavery was sometimes unreliable" along the Mason-Dixon Line, creating a borderland area where enslaved persons navigated both figuratively and literally between the two extremes.² As shown in the work of Max Grivno and T. Stephen Whitman, the attempt by slaveholders and employers in northern Maryland and especially in Baltimore to retain enslaved laborers in the face of growing streams of runaways led to adaptations in their concept of enslavement. By creating term slavery contracts that offered manumission at the end of

Gazette, May 6, 1835. William T. French attended "the Superior and Inferior Courts of Prince William and Fauquier." "A Card," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 31, 1836. That same year George Cuthbert Powell practiced law in Loudoun and Fauquier Courts and maintained a law office in Middleburg. "A Card," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 14, 1836.

² Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 13.

peak laboring (and profitable) years of service slaveholders maximized the amount of profitable service while promising freedom at the end of a specified term.³ Evidence, though limited, of the use of term slavery contracts in northern Virginia, most especially in Loudoun County, shows how the infiltration of this management strategy moved through borderland areas. Stanley Harrold argued that “the weakening of unfree labor in the Chesapeake shaped proslavery policy locally and nationally,” and that slaveholders from across the South feared that the retreat of slavery in the Chesapeake served as a harbinger of further decline, rebellion, and racial conflict.⁴ In this context, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties became key indicators for the relative strength of slaveholding not only in Virginia, but also as part of this changing border area between slaveholding and non-slaveholding states.

Northern Virginia’s location as part of a borderlands region, therefore, shaped the nature of resistance and control. Instead of term slavery contracts, slaveholders and county elites increased the presence of local slave patrols, limited options for manumission (especially in Fauquier and Prince William), and used not only threats of sale to the Deep South, but actively supplied the domestic slave trade with slaves just entering the prime ages of labor as well as recalcitrant slaves. In defiance of increased measures of control over mobility, runaways exploited routes and passages to the north by land, rail, and by water. By 1856 Virginia legislators publicly recognized the area

³ See Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011) and T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997).

⁴ Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 5.

located north of Prince William County as a conduit for runaway slaves to reach Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, or even further north, and subsidized additional rewards for the capture of runaway slaves in this area to staunch the outward flow. Studying the dynamics of control and resistance in this borderland area shows the influence of both local conditions and sectional identity.

Deep South slaveholders and politicians grew concerned about Virginia's commitment to slavery following the state-wide debate over emancipation from 1831 to 1832.⁵ At the same time, decreasing numbers of slaves and slaveholdings in northern Virginia reduced the slaveholding class and the presence of enslaved persons in that region. Even so, when maintaining a southern identity tied to slavery became a divisive sectional rally cry, especially in the 1850s, Northern Virginia's commitment to support the rights of slaveholders intensified through restrictions on the freedom of speech when whites opposed slaveholding rights. Neighborhoods rallied to expel both southern-born and transplanted northerners when the danger of their antislavery influence appeared to threaten the stability of the slave society.

Historians have long considered the nature of enslavement especially across broad sections of the slave South, identifying traits that characterize the institution. Studies of the slave trade, manumissions, runaways, resistance, patrols, and enslaved family dynamics tell much about slavery. As historians refine analysis of the slave South to include these factors within a regional, state-wide, or comparative approach that embrace large sections of the South, these large-scale analyses obscure differences found at even

⁵ William Freehling addresses this conflict especially in chapters ten and eleven. William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

the smallest level. Adapting a micro-history perspective, this study recognizes the importance of these factors and places them within the context of the northern reaches of slavery in Virginia. This study demonstrates that even within a relatively small geographical space, the dynamics of control, resistance, and adaptation to a diverse array of local social and economic practices created subtle but important differences in each county's relationship to the South's "peculiar institution."⁶

As historians Philip Morgan and William Freehling have pointed out, when considering the nature and effect of enslavement, there were "many Souths."⁷ Research and interpretations of the history of the cotton South, the non-cotton South, the industrial South, the Lower South and the Upper South are but a few ways that historians have partitioned the region, confirming the diversity of the slave South. Yet analysis of these vast areas often assumed broad trends and patterns across time and space. This study argues that differentiation was evident even within a very defined portion of the Upper South in Virginia.

Local history studies of "plantations, towns, and counties," in the words of Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, allow "those grubby details without which good history

⁶ Slaveholders during the antebellum years would have recognized the euphemism for slavery. In the twentieth century historian Kenneth Stampp popularized the phrase in his ground-breaking study that portrayed the negative effects of enslavement in contrast to the prevailing optimistic interpretations of the Phillips school. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

⁷ Philip Morgan opined that "Too often in history one South has served as proxy for many Souths." Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). William Freehling also recognized that historians tended to "flatten out the rich varieties of southern types" by viewing the South as "a monolith, frozen in its thisness or thatness" rather than recognizing its "growth, movement, profusion of pilgrims, a chaotic kaleidoscope of regions, classes, religions, and ethnic groups." William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), vii.

cannot be written” to come to the fore.⁸ By drilling down deep into the local history of a place – northern Virginia in this case – the analysis of events can be interpreted within the context of a particular neighborhood or cultural community over a long period of time. As seen in the works of Brenda Stevenson, Eva Sheppard Wolf, and A. Glenn Crothers, a focus on very small and defined places within northern Virginia or on communities across the region broadens awareness into the ways that marginalized or elite individuals interacted with the broader community.⁹ These “grubby details,” therefore, provide insights into both the role of place and the influence of community in shaping the nature of enslavement as well as the impact of larger social, legal, political, and economic forces of the antebellum era.

Drawing on these insights, this study takes a comparative approach to exploring the challenges faced by enslaved families in the post-revolutionary and antebellum Upper South. Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties shared a common heritage, but each developed different trends in slave ownership, enslaved family stability, perceived threats to masterly control, and enslaved strategies for resistance, autonomy, and

⁸ Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, eds. *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 2.

⁹ Brenda Stevenson contrasted the constructs of marriage and family among elite whites in Loudoun County, Virginia with those adaptive strategies for family life created among free blacks and enslaved persons. Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Eva Sheppard Wolf focused on the meaning of manumission and freedom to one enslaved man, Samuel Johnson, and his family within the context of the prevailing slave society culture specifically in the urban setting of Warrenton, Virginia and more broadly within legal and social structures in Fauquier County, Virginia. Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Almost Free: A Story about Family and Race in Antebellum Virginia* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2012). A. Glenn Crothers explored how members of the religious community of the Society of Friends (Quakers) navigated between religious mandates and ideals and the restraints of the prevailing culture of enslavement in the broader region extending from Loudoun County through Fairfax County and especially among residents of Alexandria, Virginia. A. Glenn Crothers, *Quakers Living in the Lion’s Mouth: The Society of Friends in Northern Virginia, 1730-1865* (Tallahassee: University Press of Florida, 2012).

freedom. County-wide differences in the free and enslaved populations, topography, and natural resources defined the nature of enslavement. Attitudes, alliances, and perceptions affected the potential for emancipation, and threats to enslaved family instability increased due to slave sales and forced migrations. These differences shaped the options and opportunities for enslaved persons to secure freedom or protect family ties, triggering adaptive forms of resistance to enslavement quite specific to each county over time.

Each of these three counties characterized a type of rural Virginia county, denoted by a majority of rural residences and a dependence upon agriculture. Scattered villages like Aldie and Waterford clustered around neighborhood markets, mills, or crossroads. Haymarket served as a market town, district court, and popular site for horse racing. Centers of industry and commerce developed along the riverfronts like the port of Dumfries along the Potomac River, where area farmers brought tobacco to be inspected, and Occoquan, a merchant mill and industrial village perched in the cliffs above the Occoquan River. Towns like Leesburg, Brentsville, and Warrenton developed as political, market, and artisan centers built around county courthouses and drawing the residence of the legal community, merchants, craftsmen, taverns, and ordinaries. None of the villages or towns in the three counties sustained enough population during the antebellum years to earn the title of city, yet these small communities created relatively “urban” settings in a predominately rural agrarian society. By focusing on three rural agrarian counties with small urban towns and villages, this study minimizes the immediate influence of metropolitan urban life on aspects of enslavement like the hiring strategies, income-earning potential, or options for freedom found in nearby city centers

such as Alexandria, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., and also underscores the important roles these cities offered to enslaved persons able to enjoy their benefits.¹⁰

¹⁰ Noted studies of antebellum slavery in Baltimore include works by Barbara Jeanne Fields, T. Stephen Whitman, and Seth Rockman. Fields, Whitman, and Rockman explored the relationships between slaveholders and employers and their laborers, both free and enslaved, in Baltimore and their effect on negotiating terms for limited periods of enslavement. Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Stanley Harrold analyzes alliances between white, free black, and enslaved blacks in Washington, D.C. that facilitated escapes of runaways. Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).



Figure 1: Map of Northern Virginia including Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties based on Post Office locations circa 1839.
 Drawn by the author.

The system of enslavement generated daily challenges to the stability of enslaved families. This study attempts to recover the lived experiences of enslaved persons in the rural and small town counties of northern Virginia focusing on the threats to familial stability because of the movement of planters away from the region, the divisive effects of the local and long-distance slave trade, and the violence imposed by agents of control in a slave society.¹¹ As public and private documents show, the distinct internal structures of county leadership affected the channels in which enslaved men and women could contract for freedom and maintain legal residence in increasingly hostile social landscapes. The ability of enslaved persons to alter their circumstances, even in the slightest way, created a safety valve against the deprivations of enslavement. Yet social and economic tensions affected slaveholding at different times and in different ways in the three counties, closing off most of these options. Economic considerations and fears of slave uprisings trumped revolutionary ideals of freedom altering the ability to contract for freedom and causing distinct patterns of resistance between the counties. Combined with these factors, the willingness to allow free and freed blacks space for homes declined, further limiting interest in emancipation.

This study considers the effect of enslavement on family life, the pressures that caused special periods of tensions between slaveholders and enslaved, and the responses by members of local neighborhoods and communities to perceived and real threats to

¹¹ I use the term “northern Virginia” to define the three counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William, excluding the adjacent county of Fairfax from this description due to its proximity to urban centers of Alexandria, Georgetown, and Washington, D.C. For a study of the nature of agricultural work and its effects on the stability of enslaved families in Fairfax County, Virginia, see Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010).

family, community, and slave society.¹² The focus identifies the major challenges to enslaved family life in northern Virginia and discusses how these pressures changed over time. The study then explores the responses by enslaved and free blacks to increased pressures on family and community stability, reactions of the white community to imagined and real threats of unrest among the black community, and some apparent differences between events in each county.

Recently, increased scholarly focus on slavery as an institution has taken a regional and comparative approach to differentiating conditions of enslavement across the slave South. Regional studies like those encompassing the broad Chesapeake area differentiated methods of controlling slavery and freedom across a wide swath of land connected by river transport. T. Stephen Whitman compared the types of slave resistance in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia by focusing on legislation at the state level to control movements, promote slaveholder rights, and punish anti-slavery dissenters.¹³ Calvin Schermerhorn also focused on these three states in the Chesapeake region, identifying the role of alliances and types of social networks that enslaved persons

¹² The term “community” referred to so often in historical studies conveys a multi-faceted of uses and interpretations. I use this concept as a mark of solidarity beyond the neighborhood concept. For a well-defined explanation of the differences between constructs of white and black neighborhoods and communities see Anthony Kaye, “Neighborhoods and Nat Turner: The Making of a Slave Rebel and the Unmaking of a Slave Rebellion,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 27, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 705-720. Darrett Rutman and Anita H. Rutman called the community “the place writ small.” Darrett B. Rutman with Anita H. Rutman, *Small Worlds, Large Questions: Explorations in Early American Social History, 1600-1850* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 4. Rutman’s exploration of “little communities” of colonial America sought to identify potential interactions between persons residing in bounded spaces connected by social networks, direct relationships, and reciprocal obligations. Darrett B. Rutman, “Assessing the Little Communities of Early America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 43 (April 1986): 163-178. Drawing upon community studies, this investigation utilizes the term “community” to denote those bound loosely and firmly into groups identified by race, cultural allegiances, social networks, alliances, and family and fictive kin relationships.

¹³ T. Stephen Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775-1865* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007).

established with whites and free blacks while engaged in riverine trades, domestic servants, and urban activities along the Chesapeake Bay. He also clearly differentiated among the state laws governing slavery and freedom and suggested the influence of both the type of enslaved work and state laws in governing movement and freedom affected options for family stability from Delaware through Maryland and southward into coastal Virginia.¹⁴ These studies place Virginia's history of slavery within a regional context by identifying the harsh conditions of enslaved labor, efforts to find freedom, and adaptations by the enslaved to the particular conditions and location of enslavement.

Other comparative studies pressed further to identify the influence of labor conditions and work regimes on family life in enslavement in Virginia. John Schlotterbeck's study of agriculture and enslavement in two contiguous counties in the Piedmont region of Virginia broke new ground in understanding the complex relationships between external markets and social economies and their effect on enslaved labor.¹⁵ Donald Sweig investigated two northern Virginia counties, Loudoun and Fairfax, and the city of Alexandria to gauge the strength of enslaved families under threat of division and concluded that enslavement in these counties represented a relatively mild form of enslavement "conducive to family formation" with "favorable conditions for slave families." Compared to other parts of Virginia and Maryland, Sweig found the patterns of slave ownership, the effects of estate division, and the extent forced migration

¹⁴ Calvin Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery, Family Over Freedom: Slavery in the Antebellum Upper South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ John T. Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm: Social and Economic Change in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1716 to 1860," PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980. ProQuest 8020638.

in the interstate slave trade in Loudoun in Fairfax counties created conditions “less onerous than in other parts of the South or even the Potomac region.”¹⁶

In contrast to Sweig, Damian Alan Pargas compared agricultural work in three distinctly different regions across the South: mixed grain production on farms in Virginia; rice plantations in South Carolina; and sugar plantation in Louisiana. In this comparative study Pargas characterized the family life of enslaved persons in northern Virginia’s Fairfax County as impaired due to the dawn to dusk work regime, prevalence of abroad marriages, limited options for childcare, and lack of time for hired out overwork to earn money.¹⁷ Each of these monographs elucidates the influence of place on the terms and conditions of enslavement.

Other works on the enslaved family have laid the groundwork for localized studies on enslavement and its effects on the slave and free black family. Herbert G. Gutman and Orville Burton forced a re-evaluation of the effects of slavery on the stability, composition, and transmission of slave family values and culture as a response to the controversial 1965 Daniel P. Moynihan study of *The Negro Family in America: The Case for National Action* that directly connected the “deterioration of the Negro family” to conditions of enslavement.¹⁸ This study builds upon the theme of family stability and investigates how slave sales and master migrations threatened this stability while opportunities for manumission and negotiations with allies helped increase

¹⁶ Donald M. Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation,” PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126, 276 (quote).

¹⁷ Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010).

¹⁸ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), xvii. Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

prospects for stability. This study presses further to investigate how and when limited options led to small acts of resistance, acts of crime or violence, and running away.

Two hundred and fifty years ago the northern Virginia counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William began to feel the strain of a shifting agricultural economy. Market forces and ecological pressures caused a gradual shift in land use from cultivating predominately a single crop of tobacco to diversified farming operations.¹⁹ Along with this shift in the production of marketable commodities, the needs for agricultural and domestic labor also changed, altering the economic desirability for utilizing an enslaved workforce. Each county's residents responded to these economic pressures at their own pace, depending on individual levels of market production, truck farming, or subsistence farming.²⁰

¹⁹ David Klingaman found that wheat, bread, and flour exports from Virginia increased eleven-fold from 36,199 bushels, during the period of 1737 to 1742, to 403,328 bushels exported between 1768 and 1772. Even though tobacco exports also increased in value between the two periods of time, the rate of increase for wheat, bread, and flour was significantly greater in comparison to tobacco. The appearance of such large quantities of grain for export by 1772 suggests that Virginia farmers increasingly cultivated large enough quantities of wheat to support both household subsistence needs and a significant quantity of surplus grain for markets. Klingaman argues that grain exports represented "more than accidental residuals above consumption" and a clear indication of "substantial production for the market." David Klingaman, "The Significance of Grain in the Development of the Tobacco Colonies," *Journal of Economic History*, 29, no. 2 (June 1969), 272-273, and 275 (quote). Historian W. A. Low argued that "an increasing number of farmers, more out of necessity than foresight, turned to the cultivation of wheat and other crops as the cultivation of tobacco became less and less profitable" following the Revolutionary War. Static tobacco prices combined with rising wheat prices and depleted lands encouraged adoption of grain culture following the war. W. A. Low, "The Farmer in Post-Revolutionary Virginia, 1783-1789," *Agricultural History*, 25, no. 3 (July 1951): 122-127. These changes also reflected in the descriptions of land advertised for sale in northern Virginia. One tract of land near Goose Creek in Fauquier in 1801 was "well adapted to the culture of wheat, Indian corn and tobacco" and included a mill "capable of manufacturing 150 barrels of flour weekly." The owner boasted that the "country around abounds in wheat of excellent quality" and "a sufficient quantity may be readily procured to keep the mill in work." "Advertisement," *The Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, January 2, 1801.

²⁰ Lorena S. Walsh provides a compelling argument about the relationship between economic forces and health of agricultural lands in shaping individual choices of crop production, implementation of soil improvement techniques, and changes in enslaved holdings. Lorena S. Walsh, "Plantation Management in the Chesapeake, 1620-1820," *Journal of Economic History*, 49, no. 2 (June 1989): 393-406.

Social pressures influenced the region's commitment to a slave society as migration patterns altered the structure of communities and the strength of alliances and social networks. Religious communities grappled with the issue of slavery and societal control causing further strain on membership. Deep doctrinal divides complicated church affiliation as "northern" church conferences pushed for anti-slavery policies while conferences aligned with southern cultures pressed for church structures to echo hierarchies of slave societies. Threats, both real and perceived, of slave insurrection convinced some Virginians to rid themselves of enslaved property.

Members of enslaved communities expressed their dissent with the harsh conditions of enslavement and growing instability of family structures caused by slave sales and forced migrations, both local and long distance. Despite limited options, enslaved persons attempted to shape their own terms of enslavement through good service, alliances, agreements, accommodations, resistance, or flight, as they adapted to local, regional, state-wide and sectional attitudes and racial tensions. In doing so, enslaved persons shaped the contours of master-slave relationships. Reacting to both internal and external forces, the people of northern Virginia served as a barometer for the strength of adherence to the institution of slavery.

This study draws on a wide swath of local records to reconstruct as fully as possible the dimensions of enslavement, power, and resistance in northern Virginia. Personal property tax records and decennial census enumerations chronicle changing patterns of slave ownership and residence at the county level. Deed books recorded the importation of slaves, the gifting of slaves to family or friends, the transfer of slave

ownership through purchase and sales, and in some cases, the granting of freedom to slaves. Slaveowners who wrote wills sometimes included enslaved family genealogies, family histories of slave ownership, directions for transfer of ownership, or in a few cases, options for emancipation. Farm journals, diaries, and letters included information on daily interactions between farmers and enslaved laborers as well as reflections upon social and economic tensions. Local church meeting minutes and class memberships recorded the role of the church discipline in governing interactions between and among white and enslaved members, not only within the church community but also within the slave quarters. Local, regional, and national newspapers provided reportage of court cases, racial conflicts, and advertisements for runaway slaves.²¹ County court minutes and criminal case files provide a record of public accusations, convictions, and acquittals, each an indication of perceived and real threats to social order and stability. Although the survival of and level of detail in these records differed across the region, public and private records offer numerous snapshots into the understanding of the daily experiences of slaveholding and enslavement, each chronicling the time the document was written and whether it was recorded.²² A close reading of these documents uncover contemporary

²¹ In addition to microfilmed copies of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Fairfax county newspapers available at the Library of Virginia and at local historical archives, several online searchable newspaper databases facilitate locating news and advertisements pertinent to the history of enslavement in northern Virginia. Searches via the following databases proved invaluable in locating contemporaneous reportage from local, regional, and sectional perspectives: *America's Historical Newspapers* feature the *Early American Series I* and *II*, *African American Newspapers*, and *19th Century U. S. Newspapers* collections, the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America* website <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>> and the Library of Virginia's *Virginia Chronicle* website <viriniachronicle.com>.

²² Fauquier County Court minutes are available on microfilm for most of the period between 1782 and 1865 at the Warrenton Public Library and at the Library of Virginia. Other Fauquier court records too delicate for public use have been photocopied and are available for research in the collections of the Afro-American Historical Association in The Plains, Virginia. These records include criminal case records and transcripts, bills of sale, unrecorded wills, freedom papers and patrol papers. Loudoun County Court Minutes, patrol

perceptions of the role of slaveowners, agency on the part of the enslaved to make changes in their lives, and attitudes of individuals and of the larger community on enslavement, social order, and freedom.

Understanding the ways in which the stability of enslaved families was threatened by social, political, or economic factors in slaveholding neighborhoods allows for greater understanding of how northern Virginians comprehended and implemented the roles of masters and guardians of the institution of slavery. The changing process of manumission altered and defined constructs of freedom for individuals and families. The domestic slave trade not only shaped awareness of personal value and accumulation of wealth, but also created complex webs of interaction between slaves, owners, and traders, each of whom sought to use whatever advantages were available to make the best bargain. When viewed through the perspective of family stability, the mechanisms of the trade become more complex, more traumatic, and more ubiquitous as part of the lived experiences of enslaved persons. Understanding the importance of family stability places enslaved resistance in a more nuanced framework by showing how resistance to the appropriation of time and labors served as a vital means of maintaining and affirming the importance of family care and kinship ties, relationships that were tested daily.

records, criminal case files, and manumission records are available at the Loudoun County Historic Archives and Deeds Division in the Loudoun County Courthouse in Leesburg, Virginia. Prince William County has been designated a “burned records county” due to the loss of key record books during the Civil War, especially the court minutes books for the period of 1770 to 1803, 1806 to 1812, and 1815 to 1833. Microfilmed deeds, wills, tax records and extant court minutes are available at the Bull Run Library in Manassas, Virginia as part of the local history and genealogy resources of the Ruth E. Lloyd Information Center (RELIC). The efforts of local volunteers to scan and index historical documents and miscellaneous “loose” clerk’s papers have made documents like patrol records, court case transcripts, and bills of sale available to the public at <<https://www3.pwcgov.org/pahax/>>.

Economic pressures from fluctuating commodity markets, state-wide and local definitions of consensus and social pressures from religious beliefs challenged or affirmed individual and community principles. In response to these forces, slaveholders, community leaders, county residents, and enslaved persons acted with conviction or through resistance to perceived and real threats to the culture of enslavement and to family stability.

This study identifies trends and patterns in the destabilization of the master-slave relationship not only across the northern Virginia region, but also within each county. By focusing on individual as well as community acts of power and resistance, the study shows that enslaved persons were very much aware of social mandates for control and reacted to these forces through acts of negotiated power as well as varying degrees of resistance. Enslaved persons recognized and often challenged economic pressures to increase or liquidate enslaved assets. At different times county climates vacillated between relative indifference and heightened interest in maintaining a highly stratified and non-flexible social class order. Enslaved persons could often sense these changes and enlist the support of white allies to assume some, albeit limited power to negotiate or appropriate claims to freedom. Within each of these actions and reactions lay an awareness of the fragility and security of family and a drive to lay claim to control through the prerogatives of race and class or to reclaim labor and time through resistance to these claims. The tensions that developed through these competing impulses frame the nature of enslavement and freedom across northern Virginia.

CHAPTER ONE: ENSLAVEMENT IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Slavery in northern Virginia developed slowly over time from small slaveholdings clustered close to major transportation routes to larger holdings scattered among plantations or governed by absentee slaveholders.¹ By the end of the Revolutionary War, Prince William and Fauquier Counties held more slaves than Loudoun County to the north. The rise of settlements and the diversity of settlers largely created conditions that produced both large plantations and minimal holdings. As settlement expanded, the types of industries that developed in the area and required laborers also grew. Riverine industries like fishing, lumbering, and mill trades required laborers less skilled than those employed in the iron furnaces and works. Agricultural labor depended on strength while employment at health resorts required finesse, charm, and dedicated service. Enslaved persons increasingly filled these labor needs as the number of indentured servants diminished following the Revolutionary War and slaveholders hired out enslaved persons to maximize their earning potential of their enslaved forces.² Yet most slaveholders in this primarily rural area continued to use enslaved persons in domestic and agricultural service. Domestics and household laborers lived and labored primarily under the

¹ For a comprehensive exploration of the European settlement of Virginia see Fairfax Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William: A Study of Origins in Northern Virginia, volumes I and II* (1924, repr., Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 1987). See also Charles Preston Poland, Jr. *From Frontier to Suburbia* (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1976) for a discussion of settlement in Loudoun County.

² On the employment of indentured laborers in northern Virginia see John A. Cantwell, "Imported Indentured White Servitude in Fairfax and Prince William Counties 1750-1800," master's thesis, George Mason University, 1986.

supervision of slaveowners who attempted to maintain a domestic ideal while enslaved men had more opportunities for mobility and labor outside of supervision. Each of these categories of work demanded a slave's time and labors at the expense of the needs of his or her own family.

While laboring for northern Virginia slaveowners or hired employers, enslaved men and women endured often brutal conditions that were exacerbated by economic pressures to commodify enslaved bodies. Understanding the changing structure of values placed on enslaved bodies over time reveals trends in gendered understandings of potential labor capacity, reproductive capacity, survivability, prime work periods, relative values for skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled laborers, and ages when values began to decline. Identifying annual shifts in these values provides starting points for uncovering other factors that influenced perceptions of value that resulted in forced changes in enslaved lives. Sales, hiring patterns, and geographic movements often changed in response to these perceived fluctuations in enslaved people's monetary values.

Fluctuations in demographic patterns suggest that neither slaveholder nor enslaved could depend on or expect a stable and secure family life in one location. Periods of significant increases or decreases in white, enslaved, and free black populations reflected responses to multiple social and economic factors during the period between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. These fluctuations tell a story of increase and decline in slaveholding. This chapter, then, explores these themes of diversified labor, the commodification of labor, and broad population trends that altered each county's relationship to slavery.

Changes in Population

The diversity of ethnic backgrounds in early colonial northern Virginia combined with ownership of vast tracts of land held by absentee landowners led to a slow establishment of enslaved labor. Donald Sweig asserted that the counties of Fairfax and Loudoun could only be considered slave societies once the demographic, residency, and acculturation patterns supported the establishment of stable families. Especially important in this process was a balanced sex ratio and a diminished proportion of native African slaves to American-born slaves.³ Several factors, then, influenced the willingness and ability of the diverse ethnic populations to invest in enslaved property. First, a personal history and understanding of the relationships between elites and laborers guided willingness to prefer indentured, enslaved, or hired out laborers. Second, location in relationship to the Potomac, Occoquan, and Rappahannock Rivers facilitated greater or lesser degrees of access to slave trading ports. Third, financial stability guided decisions to indent, purchase, or hire laborers.

As explained by Kenneth Stampp, a culture of enslavement was not automatically adopted by or imposed upon Virginians after the first landing of enslaved laborers in 1619, “rather, they built it little by little, step by step, choice by choice, over a period of many years; and all the while most of them were more or less blind to the ultimate consequences of the choices they were making.”⁴ By 1760 Loudoun County reported 992

³ Donald M. Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation,” PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126, 17-18.

⁴ Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 6.

slaves held in 132 households with more than half in slaveholdings of one to five slaves.⁵ In 1783 Prince William slaveholders reported 1,703 titheable slaves.⁶ The acquisition of slaves, then, constituted a form of convertible, moveable, inheritable, and marketable wealth.

After a period of increasing slaveholdings, each county experienced fluctuations in populations. County tax and census records clearly indicate the distinct demographic shifts each county experienced between 1790 and 1860. Fauquier County's white population increased during the period until 1800 before declining for the next two decades. A surge in white population occurred by 1830 before another period of decline until 1850 with only moderate gains in 1860. Meanwhile, the enslaved population in Fauquier grew between 1790 and 1830 before the population entered a period of decline (see figure 2).

⁵ See Table VI: Number and Percentage of 1760 Loudoun County Slaves and Holders, by Holding Size, by Residence Status of Owner. Donald M. Sweig, "Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation," PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126, 40.

⁶ "A List of Taxable Property in Prince William County for the Year 1783," trans. by Greg Mason. <<http://eservice.pwcgov.org/library/digitalLibrary/PDF/1783%20PP%20TaxCons.pdf>>

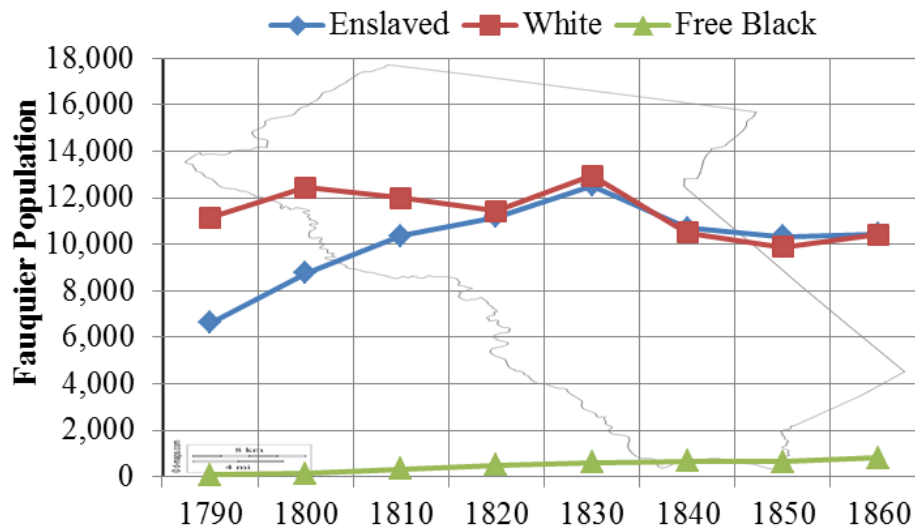


Figure 2. Fauquier County Population, by race and free status, 1790-1860.

Source: Decennial Census Records, Social Explorer.

Loudoun's white population experienced a slight increase until 1820 before gradually declining until 1840 and rebounded slightly before the Civil War. Loudoun's enslaved population fluctuated only slightly with moderate gains until 1820, then remained rather constant until 1860 (see figure 3).

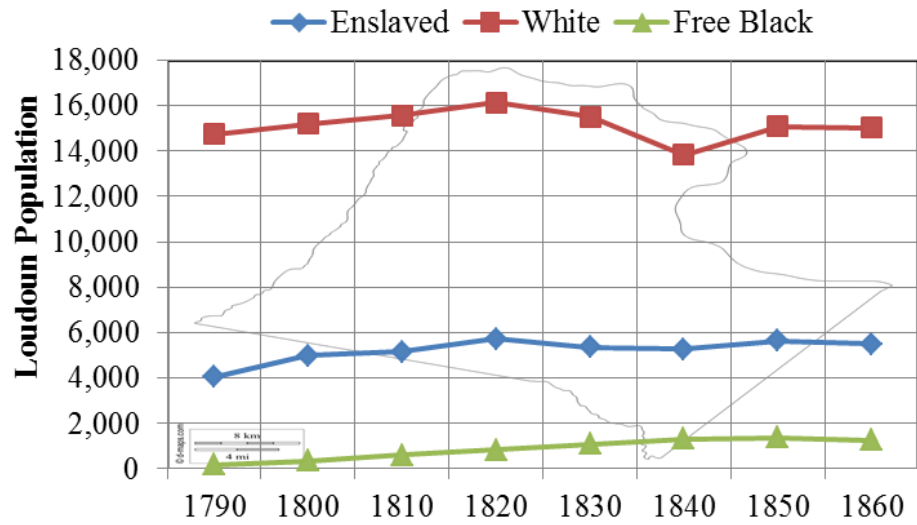


Figure 3. Loudoun County Population, by race and free status, 1790-1860.

Source: Decennial Census Records, Social Explorer.

Prince William County's white population peaked in 1800 before declining until 1820, making only slight gains until 1860. The enslaved population in Prince William experienced an even more dramatic decline after reaching its apex in 1800 (see figure 4).

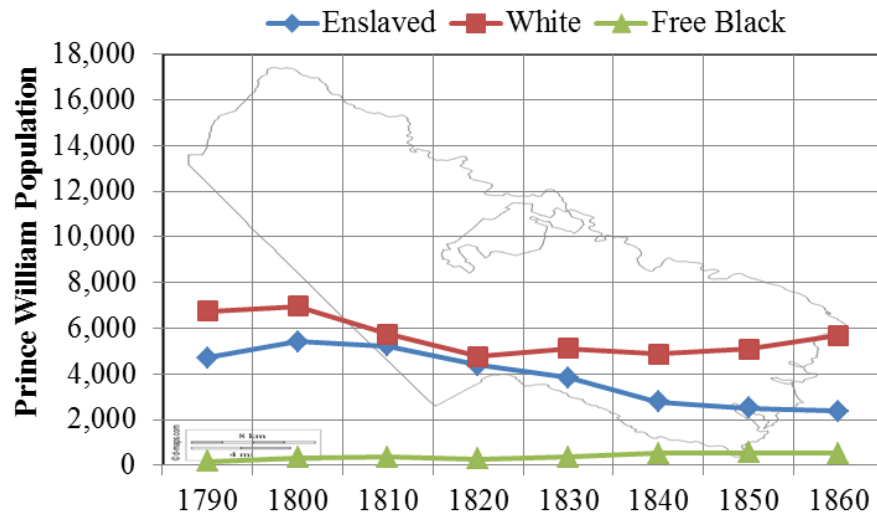


Figure 4. Prince William County Population, by race and free status, 1790-1860.

Source: Decennial Census Records, Social Explorer.

The free black populations never exceeded seven percent of the population (see figure 5). Yet concerns over the growth and influence of free blacks would lead local officials to discourage the growth of this group by encouraging African colonization and enforcing Virginia's residency laws, a topic explored in more depth in chapter three.

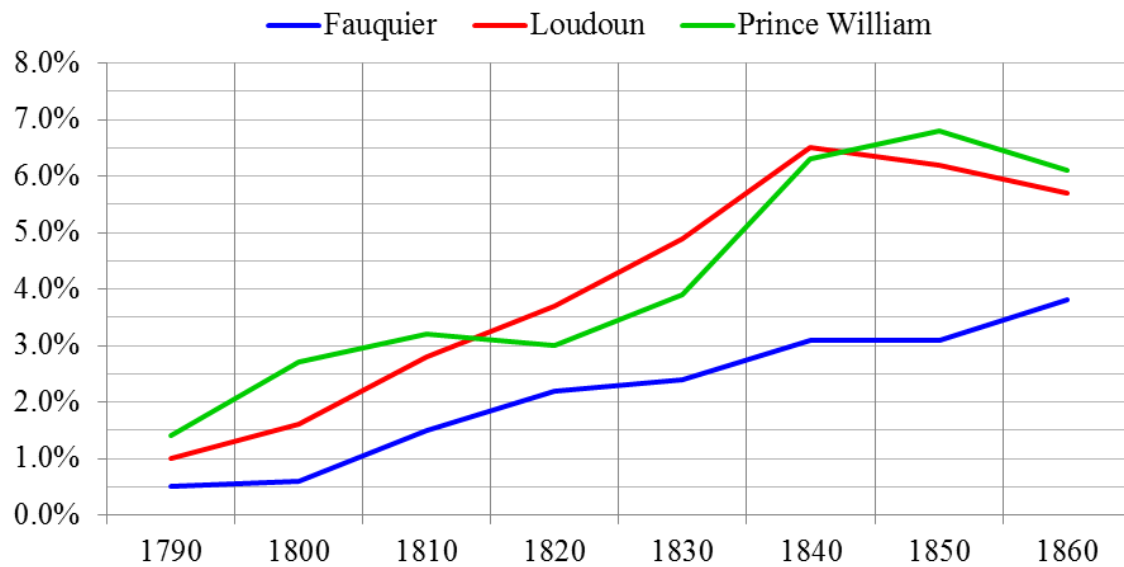


Figure 5. Free Black Population, as a percentage of the total county population.

Source: Decennial Census Records in Social Explorer.

Despite these challenges, the free black population generally increased between 1790 and 1860 with Loudoun County reporting the most free black residents (see figure 6). Fluctuations in the numbers of free people of color in Prince William County suggest a less stable climate for free black communities while the steady increase in the number of free blacks in Fauquier suggests the reverse. Yet as discussed in chapter three, Fauquier and Prince William both took a harsher stance on the residency of free blacks, advocating colonization and removal, especially following the Nat Turner insurrection in 1831.

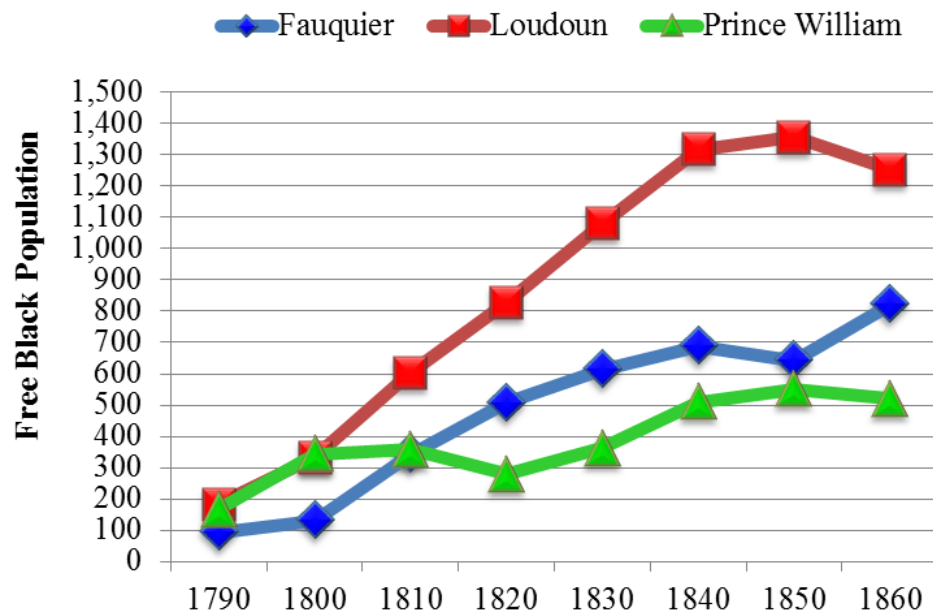


Figure 6. Free Black Population in Northern Virginia, 1790-1860.

Source: Decennial Census Returns, Social Explorer.

Population changed over time in distinct ways in each of the three counties (as shown in figure 2, figure 3, and figure 4). Loudoun County maintained a relatively high percentage of whites in the total population altered by a rapid increase in the free black population and slight increases in the enslaved population. Fauquier County experienced a relative increase in the proportion of blacks to whites, bolstered mainly by an increase in enslaved laborers. Between 1790 and 1810 the population trends in both Fauquier and Prince William counties indicated relatively and slightly higher percentages of whites compared to the enslaved and free black population.

Indeed Prince William, the smallest county by area, boasted a higher percentage of enslaved laborers than either Loudoun or Fauquier during the early 19th century. By

1820 the proportion of white residents was virtually equal to that of enslaved persons in Prince William, yet within a decade the tide had turned. The enslaved population declined over time beginning in 1830 until the county demographic nearly resembled that of Loudoun by 1860 with a far greater number of white residents than enslaved (figure 7).

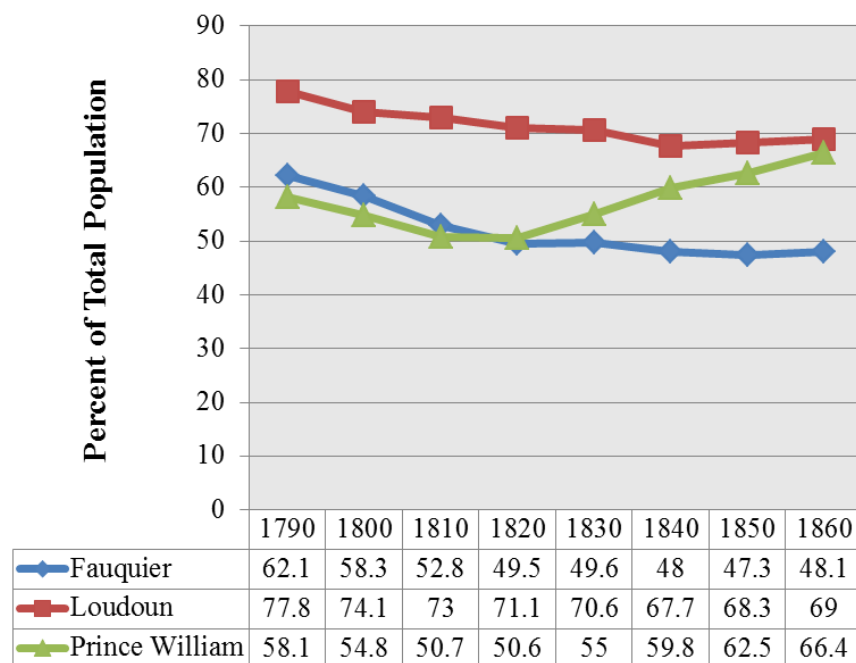


Figure 7. White Population, as a percentage of total population with table data.

Source: Decennial Census records from Social Explorer.

Compiling data from individual county tax records, distinct patterns of slave ownership emerge across the northern Virginia region. As an example, consider the decade that experienced the greatest change in slave populations, 1830-1840. Census enumerators tabulated populations based on the household unit comprised of a head of

household, immediate family, extended family, hired laborers (both free and enslaved) and slaveholdings.⁷ Some heads of household were actually overseers for absentee slaveholders or tenants renting lands and labor. Within the context of these factors, an analysis of slaveholding patterns provides a measure of the economic investment in enslaved and hired enslaved labor – a gauge of reliance upon enslaved labor as opposed to free labor.

The number of slaveholders in Fauquier County decreased slightly from 2,150 to 2,081, yet the patterns of ownership remained fairly constant (see table 1). The number of non-slaveholding households grew slightly from 37 percent of the total number of households to 40 percent of the households. The number of large plantations containing more than fifty slaves decreased from eighteen to eleven and the largest of these plantations also decreased their slaveholdings. In 1830 four households contained more than a hundred slaves: Thomas Turner (101 slaves); G. B. Hitch, an overseer for the Descous Estate (125 slaves); Elizabeth Randolph (137 slaves); and F. Carter (212 slaves).⁸ By 1840 only two households contained more than a hundred slaves: Thomas Fitzhugh with 114 enslaved persons and Jacob Wison with 151.⁹

⁷ As shown in the more detailed census enumeration of 1860, some households that owned slaves also hired slaves. There is no reason to believe that households of earlier periods did not also include hired enslaved laborers, though not identified as such, therefore the total number of slaves reported as residing within each household unit must not be assumed to be “owned” by the head of household for the period of 1790 to 1850.

⁸ 1830 Federal Census, Heritage Quest Online.

⁹ 1840 Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, Heritage Quest Online.

Table 1. Slaveholding households in Fauquier County, 1830 and 1840

	1830		1840	
Fauquier	No.	%	No.	%
0 slaves	796	37%	836	40%
1-5 slaves	662	31%	654	31%
6-10 slaves	322	15%	261	13%
11-15 slaves	147	7%	152	7%
16-20 slaves	88	4%	62	3%
21-30 slaves	73	3%	68	3%
31-40 slaves	30	1%	25	1%
41-50 slaves	14	1%	12	1%
51+ slaves	18	1%	11	1%
total households	2150		2081	

Source: Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, Heritage Quest Online.

Between 1830 and 1840 Loudoun County slaveholding patterns changed only slightly as shown in table 2. Census records indicate fewer households within the county in 1840 than were recorded in 1830. Within these households the proportion of non-slaveholding households decreased slightly and variations within each category of slaveholding showed only minimal changes. This relatively stable pattern suggests few county residents changed their slaveholding or –hiring patterns.

Table 2. Slaveholding households in Loudoun County, 1830 and 1840

	1830		1840	
Loudoun	No.	%	No.	%
0 slaves	1704	61%	1522	59%
1-5 slaves	789	28%	731	29%
6-10 slaves	173	6%	183	7%
11-15 slaves	69	2%	69	3%
16-20 slaves	25	1%	21	1%
21-30 slaves	21	1%	24	1%
31-40 slaves	7	0%	8	0%
41-50 slaves	2	0%	0	0%
51+ slaves	2	0%	2	0%
total households	2792		2560	

Source: Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, Heritage Quest Online.

Prince William County experienced a greater shift in slave ownership between 1830 and 1840 (see table 3). The percentage of non-slaveholding households increased from 48 percent to 61 percent of the total households enumerated, thus the number of slaveholding households decreased from 52 percent to 39 percent. The percentile of small slaveholders of one to five slaves decreased from 31 percent to 24 percent of the total households. Large slaveholding households also decreased from four household containing more than fifty slaves in 1830 to none. For residents of Prince William County, the number of slaveholders decreased, the size of slaveholdings decreased and the total number of slaves decreased. All the factors placed increased pressure on the stability of enslaved families and threatened the ability of enslaved families to maintain their ties.

Table 3. Slaveholding households in Prince William County, 1830 and 1840

	1830		1840	
Prince William	No.	%	No.	%
0 slaves	472	48%	634	61%
1-5 slaves	304	31%	244	24%
6-10 slaves	104	11%	76	7%
11-15 slaves	43	4%	37	4%
16-20 slaves	16	2%	18	2%
21-30 slaves	24	2%	15	1%
31-40 slaves	13	1%	4	0%
41-50 slaves	3	0%	6	1%
51+ slaves	4	0%	0	0%
total households	983		1034	

Source: Federal Census, Prince William County, Virginia

Another measure of the reliance upon enslaved labor comes from annual personal property tax records. Generally, the annual number of taxable slaves reported in tax records provides a more reliable indication of individual slaveholdings than decennial census records. The exception would be those slaveholders who wrote contracts hiring out slaves that included the stipulation that the hirer pay annual taxes, thus adding hired slaves to the tax list without distinguishing between owned or hired slaves.¹⁰ Taxable slaves included those aged sixteen and above deemed fit for work.¹¹

¹⁰ Walter and Lewis Blackwell agreed to “treat said Negro Cyrus with humanity, pay his taxes levies & other charges” when they hired Cyrus from the Barron estate for the year 1814. See the contract for hire of negro Cyrus from Hendly Barron, administrator of Jesse Barron to Walter and Lewis Blackwell, December 27, 1813, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, Box 1154. Joel Jameson and Thomas Hunton likewise agreed to “pay his public dues” when they hired an unnamed “Negro Boy” from the Tyler estate for the year 1822. Sarah Tyler, guardian of James M. Tyler to Joel J. Jameson and Thomas L. Hunton, Contract for Hire, March 23, 1822, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, Box 1078.

¹¹ In her digest of *Black Laws of Virginia*, June Purcell Guild chronicled the variations in Virginia laws regarding taxation of enslaved property over time. In 1680 it was deemed “too hard and severe” to expect persons imported into the colony to pay a titheable tax before they were “capable of working.” The taxable age for blacks then rose to twelve years while the age for Christian (indentured) servants rose to fourteen years. (Guild, 130) In 1705 the taxable age for enslaved men and women increased once again to sixteen years (Guild, 131). In 1787 the tax on “young slaves” was repealed, yet it was thought “reasonable” that

Once a slaveholder deemed a slave incapable of producing income, he or she could file a statement with the county court requesting exemption from paying taxes on the particular slave and the conditions that exempted the slave from taxation.¹² In 1833 John Hooe, Sr. petitioned the Prince William County Court to exempt his slaves Bob and Bathsheba from payment of taxes, a motion that was granted “for reasons appearing to the court.”¹³ Likewise on February 3, 1834 slave mistress Araminta Moxley requested and was granted an exemption to taxation on her enslaved woman Letty.¹⁴ In 1838 the court granted an exemption from taxes on Anna Maria, Lucy, and Rachel due to their condition described as “aged and infirmed.”¹⁵ Typically a female slave aged in the mid-sixties became exempt, men a bit later.¹⁶

slaves above the age of twelve years pay a ten shilling tax. (Guild, 136). The rate of tax increased to 28 cents in 1796 for “every slave above twelve years, except the infirm.” (Guild, 137) For a short period in 1815 the minimum age of taxable enslaved children dropped to nine years old with nine through twelve year olds liable for a tax of fifty cents. (Guild, n.10, 137). June Purcell Guild, LL.M. *Black Laws of Virginia: a Summary of the Legislative Acts of Virginia Concerning Negroes from Earliest Times to the Present* (reprint 1936) (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2011).

¹² Virginia law in 1779 created the provision that “when any slave is through old age or infirmity incapable of labor, the tax may be discontinued.” (Guild, 134). A further provision to raise funds for the war in 1779 also stipulated that a £4 poll tax be levied on all slaves with the exception of “old slaves.” (Guild, 135)

¹³ Minutes from June 3, 1833, Prince William County Court Minute Book 11 (1833-1836): 4, microfilm.

¹⁴ Minutes from February 3, 1834, Prince William County Court Minute Book 11 (1833-1836): 98, microfilm.

¹⁵ Minutes from March 8, 1838, Prince William County Court Minute Book 12 (1836-1839): 210, microfilm. L. G. Alexander gained an exemption for his “Negro woman Sally” and William J. Weir for his “Negro woman Nancy” due to their being “aged and infirm” in 1838. Minutes from April 2, 1838, Prince William County Court Minute Book 12 (1836-1838): 213, microfilm.

¹⁶ A survey of estate appraisals providing the age of the inventoried slave, age, and appraised value suggests that for most slaves older than 60 were valued at \$0.00. Sixty-year-old Chloe on the John Chesley estate was valued at nothing and declared a “charge” upon the estate meaning her age and labors did not produce income or valuable service. Inventory of the estate of John Chesley, (1804) Prince William County Will Book I: 120. Appraisers adjudged Col John Tayloe’s enslaved women Becky (age 54), Milly (age 61), Rose (age 67), and Arabella (age 80) with having no financial value in 1828. (Tayloe Family Papers). Fifty-five year old Janney was listed with no value in the 1844 Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Fitzhugh, (Prince William County Will Book 18: 419) while fifty-seven year olds Anna and Pricilla were appraised with a value of fifty dollars in 1833 suggesting they might have served as midwives or caregivers capable of generating income. Appraisal of the estate of William Foote, Fauquier County Will Book 13: 120.

These annual assessments provide more detail on the year-by-year slaveholdings of men and women in prime working ages.¹⁷ The population of taxable slaves in Fauquier County, the county holding the most enslaved persons, slowly rose until 1815 before entering into several cycles of decreasing and increasing numbers of slaves in their prime working years (see figure 8).

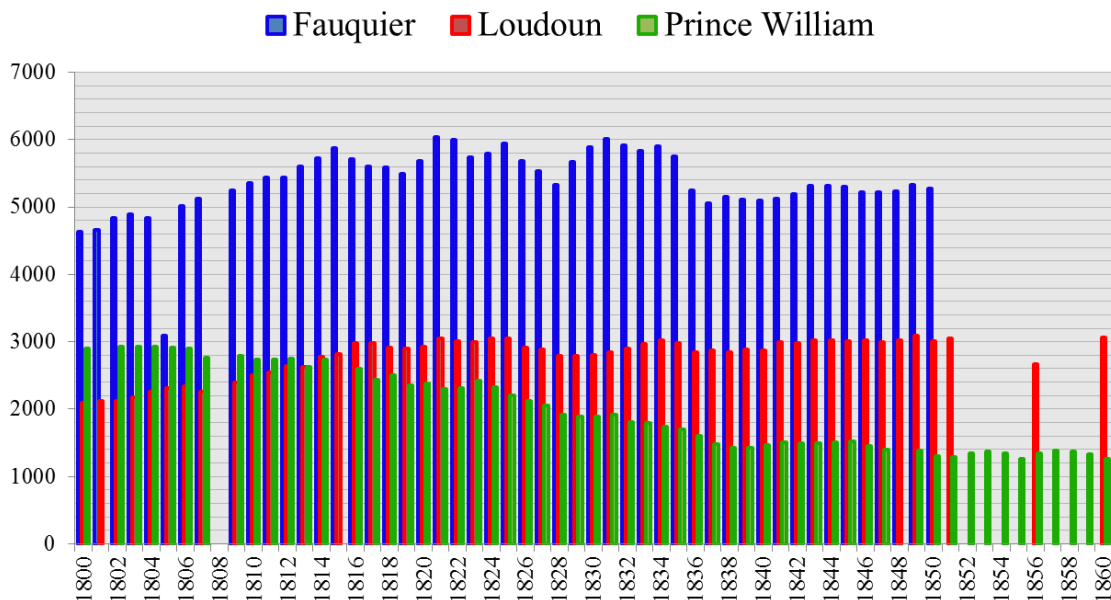


Figure 8: Taxable slaves aged twelve years and older, 1800 to 1860.

¹⁷ No personal property tax was collected for 1808, leaving one common gap in the records. In 1805 records for only one tax district in Fauquier County remain in county and state microfilm collections. Prince William County, contained records for all years between 1800 and 1860 while both Fauquier and Loudoun counties experienced a loss of records for different periods. Fauquier personal property tax records for the period of 1850 to 1860 exist neither in original record books at the county court house in Warrenton, nor in microfilmed collections at either the Warrenton Public Library or the Library of Virginia in Richmond. After 1851 Loudoun County personal property tax records also suffered loss. Original records located in the courthouse archives include the years 1851, 1856, and 1860. Microfilmed records for Loudoun also reflect this loss.

Sources: Fauquier County Personal Property Tax Records, microfilm. Loudoun County Personal Property Tax Records, microfilm and originals found in the Loudoun Historic Archives and Deeds Division, Leesburg, Virginia. Prince William County Personal Property Tax Records, microfilm.

Note: Virginia did not levy a personal property tax in 1808. Records from Fauquier County were incomplete for the year 1805 and missing for the years 1851-1860. Loudoun County personal property tax records were missing for the years 1852 to 1855 and 1857 to 1859. Prince William tax records were nearly complete for this period with the exception of 1801, 1815, and 1848.

Loudoun County experienced an annual rise in the number of prime workers aged 16 and older from 1800 to 1817 before a long period of relative consistent slaveholdings. Prince William County's pool of prime enslaved men and women remained fairly consistent between 1800 and 1806 before a long and steady period of decline with only minor fluctuations.

Economic opportunities, changing agricultural yields, outward migrations, runaways, manumissions, deaths, and births altered the composition of annual county population, yet the timing and degree of these shifts in population tell a story of changes that occurred at different times and at different rates, factors that will be discussed in following chapters. These differences underscore the importance of studying place as a factor in instigating change, even within a relatively small geographic space.

Fluctuations occurred over time in the white, enslaved, and free black populations that altered the requirements for numbers and types of laborers. Having embraced a culture of enslavement during the eighteenth century, by the time of the post-Revolutionary War period, the numbers of indentured servants were rapidly declining, replaced by a culture of enslavement. What did it mean to grow up enslaved in northern

Virginia? Expectations of a lifetime of service, rugged living conditions, and diversified labor opportunities defined some aspects of enslavement in northern Virginia.

Labor from Cradle to Grave

Work for enslaved children began as early as they could be taught simple tasks.

George Jackson, born into enslavement in Loudoun County in the 1850s recalled that he “worked in de garden, hoein’ weeds and den...washed dishes in de kitchen.”¹⁸ As a young boy Francis Fedric was tasked with many jobs “running errands, tending the corn-fields, looking after the cattle, in short, doing anything and everything in turns about the plantation.”¹⁹

Elderly slaves, even when considered a charge upon the estate, still performed tasks on northern Virginia plantations. A visitor to Loudoun and Fauquier counties in 1799 recalled observing “aged men and women grubbing bushes, so feeble and worn, that their limbs trembled as they raised their heavy mattocks; and others were carrying rails on their heads from a distant forest.”²⁰ Other elderly slaves were assigned “lighter” tasks such as tending children or cultivating gardens. Easter, described as “an old lady,”

¹⁸ Interview with George Jackson, July 6, 1937, WPA, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves*, volume XII: Ohio Narratives (Library of Congress: Washington, D.C., 1941), 45.

¹⁹ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky, A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by C. L. Innes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 19.

²⁰ [Henry Hull], “Memoirs of the Life and Religious Labours of Henry Hull, A Minister of the Gospel, in the Society of Friends, Late of Stanford, in the State of New York,” *Friends’ Library*, vol. IV, no. 6 (1840), 260. Hull spoke at meetings in July 1799 at Leesburg, Waterford, and Winchester. These particular recollections were recorded as he travelled past the Crooked Run, a river that runs in part through western Fauquier County.

worked as a gardener on the Gibson plantation along Goose Creek in Fauquier County.²¹ Fauquier slaveholder John A. Lee “constantly employed” an unnamed 92 year old enslaved man “on the farm and in the garden” on his “Green View” plantation.²² By assigning relatively lighter tasks, slaveholders attempted to wrest the every possible aspect of productivity out of enslaved men and women, even when they became physically or mentally incapable of physical labor, thus prolonging their period of contribution to the plantation economic well-being.²³

Few enslaved persons reached advanced ages of more than ninety years old. Yet white people took note of those who did, often remarking on their lives of service and length of memories, especially after the 1830s when slavery increasingly came under attack from outsiders. Assistant Marshal G. Calvert noted in his enumeration of Fauquier County in 1860 that three super-annuated slaves belonging to slaveholder Alexander Chapman had died between 1850 and 1860: Centenarians Uncle Jarratt Biggs, Aunt Linn, and Uncle Dick Fred. Calvert noted on the census form that Biggs was “a faithful &

²¹ “Schedule Marked A shewing the Estate Real & Personal which Sarah S. Gibson widow of William Gibson dec’d is to receive in lieu of Dower & distributable interest which she would by law be entitled to have of the estate of the said William Gibson, dec’d,” *Richard H. Field & wife, etc. v. Sarah Gibson*, Fauquier County 1840-058, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, Library of Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1840-058>. Estate commissioners valued Easter at \$5 for her work in the garden compared to Lydia, an “old lady past service” valued at \$0. *Ibid.*

²² [Death notice of enslaved woman Ailsy], *Alexandria Gazette*, May 1, 1849. The man’s mother, an enslaved woman named Ailsy, died at “Green View” in April, 1849 at the reported age of 120 years. According to the Lee family, Ailsy “retained her mental facilities to the last, furnishing a remarkable of memory – and being a perfect chronicle of past events.” Her son, even at his advanced age, was described as “still active.” *Ibid.*

²³ Historian Stacey K. Close noted that masters often assigned elderly slaves to garden work when they became too slow to keep up with field laborers. In this way, they could still provide a valuable service to the plantation by producing food. Stacey K. Close, *Elderly Slaves of the Plantation South* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 98.

slightly respected servant” and even at the age of 112, had “remembered Braddocks Defeat & Lord Cornwallace & the taking of York Town.”²⁴

Slaveholders expected a lifetime of service and sometimes rewarded faithful servants with special favors. At the time of his death, Prince William slaveholder William Rogers published his “will and desire” that his enslaved man, Hendly, “shall not be sold” and that “he may have the privilege of living with any of my children that he may think proper hoping that none of them will refuse him a home.” Hendly deserved this consideration because “he has been always a faithful servant.”²⁵ Thomas P. Hooe made provisions for his “faithful old servant Stepney” to be supported from the Hooe estate for “the remainder of his life.”²⁶ Other elderly slaves relied on the compassion of the broader community for their support as was the case for “3 OLD SERVANTS” offered to the lowest bidder in a public auction of twenty slaves held in Warrenton in 1852. Agents for the owners required a bond from their purchasers “for their kind treatment” and promising not to remove the elderly slaves from Fauquier County, thus ensuring some small concession in the forced sale.²⁷

In 1843, when Patsey, an enslaved servant of Edward Hall in Fauquier County, died at the age of 39 “after a painful and lingering illness,” a reporter used the occasion to comment on Patsey’s lifetime of service as an example for other enslaved persons. Noting that Patsey had “so faithfully and with such strict integrity discharged her duty in

²⁴ 1860 Federal Slave Schedules, Northeastern District, Fauquier County, Virginia.

²⁵ Will of William Rogers, written February 23, 1828, proved in court May 7, 1832, Prince William County Will Book N: 412-413.

²⁶ Will of Thomas P. Hooe, written August 12, 1836, proved in court September 5, 1836, Prince William County Will Book O: 273.

²⁷ “Public Sale of Negroes,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 10, 1852, microfilm. Emphasis in the original.

the situation in which it pleased her God to place her, that her example is considered worthy of imitation by all of her class in life.”²⁸ This sentimental memorial not only captured a sense of admiration for her fortitude and Christian resignation, but also affirmed the expectations of masters for a slave’s performance of duty as an obligation and a belief that racial slavery was divinely ordained.²⁹

Conditions of Enslavement

Despite the taunts of some, it is pleasing to know that most of us feel interested in and provide for the physical comfort of our servants. Any one who knows any thing of the condition of our slaves, cannot deny that they are better fed, better clothed, better housed, and better provided for both in health and sickness than any other working class in the world. Most of us, it can be truly said, do our duty in this respect.³⁰

One visitor from the North expected to see “every other slave in chains” and persons who were “miserably poor, ragged, half-starved, disconsolate, thievish, lacerated, broken down creature” yet later admitted that he found “neat and comfortable wooden or brick cabins” and encountered enslaved persons “well clothed and fed, and comfortably housed.” This observer reported “songs of merriment” and “loud, happy, and hearty” laughter from the slave quarters in opposition to abolitionist claims of harsh treatment

²⁸ “Died,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 11, 1843.

²⁹ Joseph Priest would expand upon the belief that slavery was grounded in the Scriptures as a natural division of labor and responsibilities. Josiah Priest A. M. *Bible Defence of Slavery; or the Origin, History, and Fortunes of the Negro Race, as deduced from history, both sacred and profane, their natural relations—morals, mental, and physical—to the other races of mankind, compared and illustrated—their future destiny predicted, etc. To which is added a Plan of National Colonization, adequate to the entire removal of the free blacks, and all that may hereafter become free, in a manner harmonizing with the peace and well-being of both races*, By Rev. W. S. Brown, M. D. of Glasgow, KY. Sixth Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: published by J. F. Brennan for Willis A. Bush, Gallatin, Tenn., 1851). Hereafter referred to as Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*. My thanks to Karen Hughes White at the Afro-American Historical Association for calling my attention to this book.

³⁰ “To the Slave-Holders of Warrenton, and its Vicinity,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, March 11, 1858.

and degrading conditions.³¹ The unnamed visitor's experiences, though, were tempered by his admission that he could not deny there occurred "instances of neglect, abuse, nay of severity, perhaps, in the South, on the part of the master towards his domestics," instances he called "rare" since he believed that any persons who "exercise[d] inhumanity...has the same opprobrious and unpopular epithets affixed to his name, which would be attached in any civilized community, to that of a father known to maltreat his children."³² In this observer's opinion, a master castigated an enslaved person only "in which a refractory and rebellious spirit has been manifested, or a crime committed, which in the North, would commit him to the penitentiary."³³

Another Northerner, G. P. R. James, fashioned his impression of Virginia slaves while taking the waters at Fauquier's Sulphur Springs in 1858. James noted that the Virginia slave performed "about one third of the labor which is required of the white man in most counties" in exchange for receiving "food, clothing, house-room, medical attendance, and support in old age." James also opined that the slave "would not perform" it if "he were not compelled." Laws prohibited any "oppression and wrong" perpetrated against the enslaved class, according to James, and he believed the few instances of "cruelty" he observed to be no more oppressive than treatment of a wife or

³¹ A Visitor. *Six Weeks in Fauquier: Being the Substance of a Series of Familiar Letters Illustrating the Scenery, Localities, Medicinal Virtues, and General Characteristics of the White Sulphur Springs At Warrenton, Fauquier County, Virginia* (New York: Published by Samuel Colman, 1839), 49-50, <<https://archive.org/details/sixweeksinfauqui00visi>>. Hereafter referred to as A Visitor, *Six Weeks in Fauquier*.

³² A Visitor. *Six Weeks in Fauquier*, 54.

³³ A Visitor. *Six Weeks in Fauquier*, 55.

child in the North.³⁴ James's observations and opinions on the condition of slavery in Virginia, written during a period of intense sectional agitation over the issue of slavery should be viewed in the context of James's experiences as a Northerner residing in the South and encountering enslaved laborers at a health resort where he expected service but the usual sanctions may have been weaker. James's observation that slaves spent most of their time "singing, dancing, laughing, chattering, and bringing up pigs and chickens" confirmed in his mind the adage "As merry as a negro slave."³⁵

The observations of "A Visitor" and G. P. R. James on the merriment expressed by enslaved persons highlighted the ability of some to create space for joy making the intolerable conditions of enslavement somewhat bearable. Pro-slavery apologists like James and "A Visitor," though northerners, pounced on these behaviors as racial indications of the apparent natural condition of black servitude. In 1851 Joseph Priest published his *Bible Defence of Slavery* in which he described the "negro character" as "fixed, as a kind of antidote or recompense for slavery, a certain disposition to *levity*, peculiar to themselves, which takes off much of the weight of their seeming sorrows. THIS enables them *more* cheerfully to endure, without *thought*, their condition of servitude." According to Henson, blacks "universally indulge" in a "fondness of singing and whistling" even under "circumstances which would make a white man weep...rejoicing in the lightness and levity of their peculiar natures." Henson could only

³⁴ G. P. R. James, "Life in Virginia: Virginia County Life – Plantation Life," from a letter written to A. C. R. from G. P. R. James from Fauquier Springs, Virginia, July 15, 1858, *Knickerbocker: or, New York Monthly Magazine of Life*, 278-279.

³⁵ G. P. R. James, "Life in Virginia: Virginia County Life – Plantation Life," from a letter written to A. C. R. from G. P. R. James from Fauquier Springs, Virginia, July 15, 1858, *Knickerbocker: or, New York Monthly Magazine of Life*, 279.

interpret this levity as a result of the lack of intellect, cares, and responsibilities experienced by white men.³⁶

Even earlier, Thomas Jefferson wrote on the supposed differences between blacks and whites in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* claiming that they “seem to require less sleep” due to his observations that a black “after hard labor through the day, will be induced by the slightest amusements to sit up till midnight, or later, though knowing he must be out with the first dawn of the morning.”³⁷ Historian Stephanie M. H. Camp viewed these nighttime frolics as an important part of the daily resistance enslaved persons, especially women, perpetrated against a master’s control of mobility, bodies, time, and energies. By reclaiming time outside of supervised work periods for dancing and social events, enslaved women could use their bodies for purposes of pleasure rather than objects of control.³⁸

Despite the claims of paternalism, denials by the slaveholding class, and overly optimistic reports from travelers to the region, enslaved persons in northern Virginia lived in harsh conditions. Henry Hull, a Quaker minister from New York, observed and commented upon conditions of enslavement during his visit to Leesburg, Waterford, Winchester, and the Crooked Run Valley (located in western Fauquier County) in 1799. Hull noted that slaves were provided a weekly allotment of one peck of corn that often necessitated pounding “in the night, when they should be asleep” in order to prepare meals, a practice he witnessed when “the noise of the pestle and mortar” aroused him

³⁶ Josiah Priest, *A.M., Bible Defence of Slavery*, 394. Emphasis in the original.

³⁷ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785, repr., Richmond, Virginia: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 150.

³⁸ Stephanie M. H. Camp, “The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861,” *Journal of Southern History*, 68, no. 3 (August 2002): 533-572.

from slumber only to be replaced by “the voice of the driver and the snapping of his whip, urging [the slaves] to the toils of the day, even before the light had fully appeared.” These toils were compounded by the heat of July weather when enslaved laborers “had to endure the broiling heat of the sun, bare-headed, both males and females; the latter with only one garment to cover them, and the cruel drivers following them with a large wagon whip, in order to hasten their speed, using it freely upon those who fell behind, when hoeing the corn or tobacco.”³⁹

German traveler Johann David Schoepf, travelling through Loudoun County around 1784, observed “a considerable difference in the arrangements of the plantations and the character of the people on this side of the Potowmack” compared to living and farm arrangements in Maryland. Plantations near Leesburg often had “the appearance of a small village, by reason of the many separate small buildings” consisting of “badly kept cabins of wood, without glass in the windows, of the structure and solidity of a house of cards.”⁴⁰ Remembrances of former slaves reveal the grim details of experiences under enslavement. William Brown recalled he was always “tired and hungry” and “worn out with hard work.”⁴¹ Austin Steward remarked that “it was no uncommon thing to see the poor slaves with their backs mangled in a most horrible manner” because of the

³⁹ [Henry Hull], “Memoirs of the Life and Religious Labours of Henry Hull, A Minister of the Gospel, in the Society of Friends, Late of Stanford, in the State of New York,” *Friends' Library*, vol. IV, no. 6 (1840), 260.

⁴⁰ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784] from the German of Johann David Schoepf*, Translated and edited by Alfred J. Morrison, vol. II (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911), 32-33, <<https://archive.org/details/intheconfederation02schhrich>>

⁴¹ “William Brown,” Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee; or the narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Conditions of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 280.

whippings they received.⁴² Deprivations of food or clothing, squalid living conditions, sexual abuse, and the ever-present threat of corporal punishment characterized the lives of the enslaved only sometimes made less onerous through slaveholder paternalism or by enslaved persons stealing back their time and labors.

Types of Enslaved Labor

The kinds of work undertaken in northern Virginia influenced the quantity of laborers needed and utility of enslaved labor. From the waterfronts of Prince William and Loudoun across the agricultural plains to the rolling hills and ridges of the Blue Ridge, enslaved labor provided a vital and diverse workforce in the industries, manufactures, and commodity production of northern Virginia. This mix of labor needs created opportunities for slaveowners to reallocate laborers into other segments of the work force through a system of hiring out excess slaves or servants with marketable skills.

Plantation slaves engaged in a variety of tasks. The thirteen enslaved men and women on William Gibson's Fauquier County plantation specialized in many different and gendered tasks. Bill served as an ostler and carriage driver; Willis, a distiller; Daniel Thompson, a wagoner; Jefferson, a wagoner and farm hand; Robert a butcher and foreman; and Washington, a twelve year old, worked as a house servant. Gibson tasked the enslaved women with domestic and household responsibilities. Judy served as cook, Johannah served as a house maid, Jane as a seamstress, Betty washed; and Ann was as a

⁴² *Twenty-Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman; Embracing a Correspondence of Several Years, While President of Wilberforce Colony, London, Canada West* (Rochester, New York: William Alling, Publisher, 1857), 15, <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/steward/steward.html>>. Hereafter referred to as Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*.

milk maid.⁴³ Not all slaveholders tasked their enslaved chattel with gendered roles of outdoor work for men and domestic or household work for women. Enslaved woman Amy planted corn, seeded wheat, harrowed grain, and harvested “at busy seasons” for her master, David Elkins, Sr. and for his son, David Elkins, Jr. She also served as a nurse “when she was small,” spun, washed, and scoured for the Elkins family in addition to bearing at least three children: Mary, Eliza, and John.⁴⁴ As seen in the kinds of work assigned to Amy by the Elkins’ family, women performed both domestic and field work.

This versatility was crucial to extracting as much labor as possible from slaveholdings. Farmers and planters allocated enslaved laborers to tasks based on the seasonality of agricultural production. They also assigned different tasks as needed when weather hindered field work or to meet the extra demands for field laborers at harvest times.

Enslaved Labor During the Agricultural Year

The shift from a tobacco monoculture to mixed farming during the mid- to late-eighteenth century altered the daily rhythms of agricultural life and placed greater demands on farm laborers at particular seasonal periods yet also created periods of less

⁴³ “Schedule Marked A shewing the Estate Real & Personal which Sarah S. Gibson widow of William Gibson dec’d is to receive in lieu of Dower & distributable interest which she would by law be entitled to have of the estate of the said William Gibson, dec’d,” *Richard H. Field & wife, etc. v. Sarah Gibson*, Fauquier County 1840-058, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, Library of Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1840-058>.

⁴⁴ See Depositions of Sally Elkins, James Elkins, and William Woods in *Admr of David Elkins v. Admr of William Kemper, etc.* Fauquier County Chancery Case 1835-043, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, Library of Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1835-043#img>.

intensity.⁴⁵ In his study of slavery in Loudoun and Fairfax counties Donald Sweig argued that the changes in agricultural production created conditions more conducive for establishment and stability of enslaved family groups compared to other parts of the slaveholding South, especially on plantations with more than twenty slaves and a favorable gender ratio.⁴⁶ Damian Alan Pargas disputed this assessment by painting a much bleaker portrait of stunted family life in Fairfax County, which shared borders with Prince William and Loudoun counties), caused by the grueling work routines of diversified grain production and fractured marriages due to patterns of slave ownership, slave sales, and abroad marriages.⁴⁷

Evidence from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties suggests a middle ground between these two viewpoints. Francis Fedric, enslaved during his youth in Fauquier County in the early 1800s, remembered that enslaved laborers “leave their huts quite early in the morning, and work until late at night, especially in the spring and fall.” Sometimes, these heavy seasonal periods of work meant the slaves worked at

⁴⁵ The timing of this shift differed based on each planter’s circumstances. In 1787 more than half of the farms observed by traveler Samuel Vaughn in western Fauquier County still cultivated tobacco, yet the number of tobacco farms diminished “while the number of fields of Indian corn increased” as Vaughn journeyed from the Piedmont eastward to Tidewater Virginia. Traveling from Aquia through Dumfries to Colchester Vaughn appraised the lands as “poor” and tobacco culture all but gone. *Diary of Samuel Vaughn*, 39-49, as described in W. A. Low, “The Farmer in Post-Revolutionary Virginia, 1783-1789,” *Agricultural History*, 25, no. 3 (July 1951), 124, 125 (quote).

⁴⁶ Donald M. Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation,” PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126.

⁴⁷ Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010). While Pargas focuses on the daily advantages or disadvantages of enslaved family life for men and women laboring in the three distinct agricultural regions, my research focuses more on the long-term disruptions to enslaved family life caused by sales, runaways, and planter migrations, factors that influenced family life more than the type of agricultural labor in northern Virginia.

harvesting tasks like “husking Indian corn to put into cribs” all night long.⁴⁸ While harvest seasons demanded intense periods of labor, these periods were offset by days of lighter work with less supervision such as hauling lumber, mending fences, or tending gardens. Communal efforts at harvest time offered opportunities for abroad husbands to hire on at their wives’ farms or earn money to purchase food or supplies for families. Loudoun slaveholder William Hill Gray allocated 25 cents per day for each hired hand to board during harvest time in 1855.⁴⁹ Harvest parties brought together laborers and tasks such as going to mills, markets, or driving slaveholders to social events offered opportunities to exchange information and visit kin. Hired out laborers, though transported away from family, had the chance to form new relationships. Even so, slaveholders tried to maximize the use of enslaved labor on farms by producing multiple crops of grains, investing in livestock, increasing garden produce, and tasking farm maintenance when weather suspended fieldwork.

The New Year on northern Virginia farms began with hog butchering, meat processing, wood hauling, and filling the ice house.⁵⁰ Enslaved hands cleared fields and completed needed tasks for farm improvement. In January 1854, Edmund Berkeley’s slaves hauled stones to pave the kitchen floor and mauled rails to repair fences, tasked

⁴⁸ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky, A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by C. L. Innes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 13.

⁴⁹ William Hill Gray Farm Book, 46, Gray Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

⁵⁰ Unless otherwise noted, accounts of farm activities derive from the farm journal of Prince William County slaveholder Edmund Berkeley during the period 1851-1855. Ronald Ray Turner, transc. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), <<http://pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>>.

that occupied them until mid-February.⁵¹ Fauquier County slaveholder, Richard Bernard Buckner, settling upon a new farm, tasked his slaves with clearing fields and building a meat house in January 1827.⁵² In mid-February Berkeley's slaves sowed clover seed and continued ploughing, despite the snow. In March slaves planted peas and potatoes. Field work kept laborers busy throughout March and April as they cleared fields and repaired fences.⁵³ In April slaves on the Berkeley farm gathered wood, cleared land for crops, sowed timothy and clover, and worked plaister into fields. After Easter, Berkeley hired extra hands to help with ploughing and harrowing fields. Farmers relied upon the rule to "plant corn as soon as the hickory leaves got to be as big as a squirrel's ears,"⁵⁴ and accordingly, Berkeley's slaves planted corn and garden produce such as parsnips, salsify, pumpkins, and cabbage in May.

At the end of May Berkeley's hands sheared sheep and took their turn on county road repairs. At the end of May or beginning of June slaveowners in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties typically gave enslaved laborers one or two days holiday for Whitsuntide, a short break before the grueling summer field work of tending cornfields in June. Slaves hired out by the year often used the Whitsuntide holiday as an opportunity to visit spouses and children.

⁵¹ Ronald Ray Turner, trans. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley's Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), <<http://pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>>.

⁵² "Description of My Plantation," St. Bernard, January 13, 1827. *Diary of Richard Bernard Buckner*, vol. I, *The St. Bernard Diaries, 1827-1862*, trans. Christine Perdue Smith, 2003, 1.

⁵³ John Jay Janney, who grew up in Loudoun County in a Quaker household and neighborhood, noted in his memoirs that spring was the time to repair fences. Janney remembered that farm workers would "go over them all, supply broken rails and re-set stakes." Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney's Virginia: An American Farm Lad's Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 68.

⁵⁴ Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney's Virginia: An American Farm Lad's Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 69.

Loudoun County Quaker, John Jay Janney recalled that “planting and cultivation kept us busy until mowing time,” a fact recorded in Berkeley’s farm journal as well.⁵⁵ Janney described the process of planting corn as very labor intensive, involving clearing, plowing, harrowing, and marking fields into grids. Workers created parallel ridges of earth about three feet apart. A cross furrow created the grid pattern and farm laborers hand planted corn at the intersection of these ridges and furrows.⁵⁶ The wheat harvesting cycle began in July followed by cutting rye and mowing hay.⁵⁷ Berkeley hired additional hands during this period, provided his field hands with shoes and paid harvest wages once the wheat was harvested in mid-July. Farm accounts reveal that both enslaved men and women were tasked with field work, especially during harvests when time was critical.

In August Berkeley’s hands were cutting grass, ploughing potatoes, and threshing wheat. Wheat threshing required all hands and family members. Workers cut wheat, tied bundles into sheaves and placed sheaves together into a mound called a shock to protect the wheat grain from the elements.⁵⁸ After an intense week of threshing wheat, enslaved and hired laborers took five days to separate the chaff from the wheat in preparation for

⁵⁵ Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney’s Virginia: An American Farm Lad’s Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 69.

⁵⁶ Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney’s Virginia: An American Farm Lad’s Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 69.

⁵⁷ Edmund Berkeley noted that the farm had a “holyday” on June 5, 1854 while he hired additional workers to plough corn. Ronald Ray Turner, trans. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), <<http://pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>>.

⁵⁸ Janney could attest to the decision to use all available hands, even the younger laborers to get the wheat in before it suffered weather damage. He wrote that the “children were nearly all, boys and girls, kept from school to carry sheaves for shocking.” Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney’s Virginia: An American Farm Lad’s Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 70.

hauling cleaned wheat to the mill. Once the wheat was ready to be milled, Berkeley again paid his hired laborers. Wagoners then had the task of transporting Berkeley's wheat to vendors at the railroad, at Stage Stables, and at Gainesville. Meanwhile, enslaved laborers performed a variety of needed tasks including enclosing the straw ricks, hauling stone, and grubbing the wheat fields until the end of September.

The next work cycle included hauling logs to the farm, working in the blacksmith shop making repairs, and shoring up blind ditches. The need for wood to fuel kitchen fires, provide heat for homes and quarters, and repair buildings and fences never ceased. Janney judged about thirty to fifty cords of wood was required to "last all winter" for his modest farm home.⁵⁹ Larger plantations, like Dorothea Ashby's in Fauquier, with ten out-buildings, a separate kitchen, and "generally three fires in constant burning in the mansion house during the cold weather," required between an estimated 250 and 300 loads of wood during the year. In Ashby's neighborhood wood was "not very plenty" therefore Ashby's enslaved men hauled wood from Edward Colston's woodlands for use on the Ashby plantation.⁶⁰ Whether harvested from woodlands or purchased from neighbors, the task of acquiring wood required time and energy.

⁵⁹ Janney wrote that "[a]fter the fall seedling was done we went into the woods and, from the down and dead trees, cut and hauled to the wood pile fire wood enough to last all winter, not less than thirty or forty or even fifty cords. We concluded it best to haul it in without cutting it into cord wood, as was customary, thereby saving the time when we had other work to do, and cutting it up as we needed it, and saving the chips." Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney's Virginia: An American Farm Lad's Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 73.

⁶⁰ Deposition of Eli Anderson, *Edward Colston v. Dorothea F. Ashby*, Fauquier County Chancery Case 1846-020, Virginia Memory Chancery Court Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1846-020#img>

Field hands spent most of September ploughing, grubbing, and cleaning up the wheat fields, preparing for the next wheat crop, while also harvesting corn.⁶¹ In October hands worked in multiple fields applying manure and guano as fertilizer, harvesting corn, and planting early Kent wheat. During inclement weather, slaves hauled logs and prepared the fodder house to hold corn stalks for animal feed. In late October, the hogs needed to be penned and fattened for butchering. Wheat drilling and application of guano continued into November until the buckwheat harvest began. By the middle of November Berkeley's enslaved women were put to the task of shelling corn, a task that continued until Berkeley hosted a shucking party on December 9, where fifty hands shucked a total of 100 barrels of corn.⁶²

John Jay Janney described corn husking as a social event where "many farmers 'pulled' their corn, hauled it to a convenient spot, and made a long pile of it, about six feet high and ten or twelve feet wide." The event was typically held on a Saturday when "all the neighbors within two or three miles would meet for a husking." The work force included "white and black, slaves included, [who] worked side by side." The event was congenial and spirits fortified by "a rather free supply of whiskey, the bottle being passed from man to man." The occasion included singing, led by enslaved men who would sing "a 'corn song'" in a call and response manner. Janney remembered "one who had a gift in

⁶¹ John Jay Janney recalled that "[a]fter the harvesting was over, we plowed for next year's wheat crop, and when the ground was ready for sowing we hauled all the manure from the barn yard ('cow yard') and the hog pen, usually a good supply, and scattered it over the poorest part of the field. The farmers knew nothing of any artificial fertilizer except Plaster of Paris, which they sowed on clover." Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney's Virginia: An American Farm Lad's Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 72.

⁶² Ronald Ray Turner, trans. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley's Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), <<http://pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>>.

that line would act as leader. He would mount the pile and improvise; the rest, (and) many of the whites joining in the refrain.”⁶³ A “sumptuous dinner” followed the work party in Janney’s Loudoun County neighborhood. Berkeley failed to provide description of festivities associated with the husking party in his farm journal.

After corn husking, Berkeley celebrated Christmas, killed a beef, and yet waited until December 27 to celebrate a “holyday with the hands.” Enslaved men and women then had a few days to enjoy family before “hiring day” on January 1, when slaveowners with too many laborers would bargain with employers for annual hire contracts.⁶⁴

Evidence of mid-year and end-of-year holidays, opportunities for social events, and the communal nature of farm work provided some relief from the daily grind of agricultural labor for slaves in northern Virginia. Agricultural labor employed a substantial number of enslaved persons in northern Virginia, yet the region also required enslaved laborers for other types of work.

Furnaces and Mining

The natural resources in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William also shaped the types of work performed by enslaved laborers. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Tayloe family operated a furnace on the Neabsco (Neapsco) River in Prince William County. John Ballendine, in partnership with the second John Tayloe and Presley Thornton operated an “iron furnace, a forge, two saw mills and a bolting mill” on the Occoquan

⁶³ Asa Moore Janney and Werner L. Janney, eds. *John Jay Janney’s Virginia: An American Farm Lad’s Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, Inc., 1978), 87.

⁶⁴ Ronald Ray Turner, trans. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), <<http://pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>>.

River by 1759.⁶⁵ Ballendine's iron forge remained in operation only a few years, while Tayloe's Neapsco iron works remained in service much longer.⁶⁶

Deposits of copper ore located in Fauquier County led to the establishment of copper mining operations in the county. In 1783 Johann David Schoepf observed that "Capt. B. H." had discovered "a narrow vein of copper-ore" along a stream. Determined to render some profit from this find, the Captain assigned his slaves to "dig as much as possible" whenever they were "not otherwise busy," a tasking that expanded upon their normal agricultural labors.⁶⁷ When sales opened, twenty-two subscribers scrambled to buy up 2,500 shares in the Phoenix Copper Mine of Fauquier County.⁶⁸ Mining operations like the Franklin Gold Mine which opened in 1837 regularly employed enslaved laborers.⁶⁹ Specimens of gold were found on Thornton Ash's land in Fauquier in 1838.⁷⁰ The lands of Luther Spilman near Warrenton boasted enough coal to develop a coal mine called "Coalfield" conveniently located on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad.⁷¹ Slaveholders hired out enslaved men to work in nearby mining operations.

⁶⁵ Archdeacon Burnaby's description of the Occoquan works as described in Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*, 428. For a detailed description of the Tayloe iron works see Laura Croghan Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire: The Business History of the Tayloe Family and Virginia's Gentry, 1700-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

⁶⁶ Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William*, 429.

⁶⁷ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784] from the German of Johann David Schoepf*, Translated and edited by Alfred J. Morrison, vol. II (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911), 40, <<https://archive.org/details/intheconfederation02schhrich>>

⁶⁸ "Mineral Wealth of Virginia," *Richmond Whig* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 31, 1836.

⁶⁹ Palmer C. Sweet, "Gold Mines and Prospects in Virginia," *Virginia Minerals*, 17, no. 3 (August 1971), 28, <https://www.dmme.virginia.gov/commercedocs/VAMIN_VOL17_NO03.PDF>. For a discussion of enslaved laborers engaged in gold mining in North Carolina see Jeff Forret, "Slave Labor in North Carolina's Antebellum Gold Mines," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 76, no. 2 (April 1999): 135-162. Forret found that gold mine owners primarily hired enslaved laborers for their work force and these work contracts often included provisions for over work options, set wages, or agreements to keep a percentage of any gold mined.

⁷⁰ "More Gold Ore," *New Hampshire Sentinel*, October 3, 1838.

⁷¹ "News of the Day," *Alexandria Gazette*, December 3, 1850.

The Aquia stone quarries hired northern Virginia slaves for work in nearby Stafford County. Proprietor Rouzee Peyton hired laborers from Prince William County in 1820 including enslaved man John Williams.⁷² Slaveholder Thomas B. Hooe of Prince William County routinely hired out his enslaved man Charles Morton to work in the quarries between 1837 and 1840.⁷³ Managers of the marble quarries located along the Potomac River in Montgomery County, Maryland engaged agents in Leesburg and Aldie in Loudoun County to hire out “strong, healthy laboring men” for work. The firm offered as much as \$90 for “strong and healthy negro men” to quarry marble for use in public buildings in Washington, D. C. from April to the first of January in 1817.⁷⁴ Industrial sites such as quarries sought enslaved men as laborers, often across county lines.

Iron furnaces located across the region routinely hired enslaved laborers from northern Virginia. Proprietors of the Taylor Furnace, Penman, Thomson, and Penman, advertised in the *Warrenton Flag of '98* to hire wood choppers at a rate of 37 ½ cents per cord or hire enslaved workers at an annual rate of \$60 to \$80 for their furnace works located west of Winchester.⁷⁵ While iron work was hard and displaced mainly men from family and wives during annual hires, there may have been compensations that facilitated enslaved family life.

Historian Ronald L. Lewis discovered in the company records of many iron works a pattern of enslaved male workers engaged in “overwork” to earn extra money. Often

⁷² Thirty year old John Williams was owned by Prince William slaveholder Alfred Ewell. Ewell’s brother, Jesse, owned Williams’ wife and Williams’ mother lived near Occoquan. In May 1820 Williams fled from his hire at the Aquia stone quarry. “Twenty Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Herald*, November 8, 1820.

⁷³ Morton ran away from the quarries located near Stafford Court House in June 1840. “One Hundred Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 17, 1840.

⁷⁴ “Wanted Immediately,” *Genius of Liberty*, April 1, 1817.

⁷⁵ “Wanted,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, January 5, 1850.

the men spent their money on shoes, foodstuffs, or household supplies for abroad family members or took cash payments in lieu of commodities. Lewis found that owners of slaves hired to work at distant iron works “attempted to limit family separations” by negotiating contracts that allowed men to return home to families once or twice during the year. Some masters planning to migrate even negotiated sales of abroad wives and children to ironworks owners so that they would not be separated from their husbands and arranged transportation for wives and children to the furnaces.⁷⁶ According to Lewis, awareness of the significance of family to hired workers forced ironwork owners in the Chesapeake to alter the terms of enslaved labor to allow for family time, overwork opportunities, or some negotiating power. For slaves hired to iron works, “there was a stable slave family structure,” a stability not readily apparent at other sites of enslavement, especially in the generally small slaveholdings of northern Virginia.⁷⁷

Enslaved Labor at Health Resorts

The presence of mineral waters promoted the development of health resorts located at natural springs. The Fauquier White Sulphur Springs Resort located six miles south of Warrenton gained a reputation as “a very fashionable place of resort” in the 1830s.⁷⁸ Proprietors regularly hired out enslaved persons from the surrounding counties and served as a lucrative employer for both slaveholder and servant. Enslaved men and women hired to work at the Springs gained a reprieve from more grueling field labor and

⁷⁶ Ronald L. Lewis, “Slave Families at Early Chesapeake Ironworks,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 86, no. 2 (April 1978), 173.

⁷⁷ Ronald L. Lewis, “Slave Families at Early Chesapeake Ironworks,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 86, no. 2 (April 1978), 179.

⁷⁸ *Warrenton Register*, as printed in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 12, 1834.

from the ever-present observation of owners and overseers. Instead, they served in many capacities such as cooks or as housemaids in the family quarters or in the dining and ball rooms located in the nearly two hundred foot long and four story high brick Pavilion.⁷⁹

John Turpin contracted a hire of \$15 per month “during the season” for the services of his enslaved woman, Lucy, at the Springs.⁸⁰ John Priest, an enslaved man to the Marshall family of Fauquier County, worked for both the Alexandria tavern keeper Gadsby and at the White Sulphur Springs.⁸¹ George Mason Hooe hoped to contract the hire of his “very likely & most valuable house servant,” an 18 year old “likely mulatto” known to be “particularly brisk & active in a dining room.” Hooe’s unnamed enslaved man had been raised “from childhood to wait on a large family” and to serve as a “body servant” to Hooe from at least the age of twelve.⁸² Knowing the requirements for a service resort, Hooe assured the Springs’ proprietor, Daniel Ward, that his slave had “no bad habits and is proverbial for his honesty,” qualities expected of employees in a dining room large enough to seat 400 guests in a facility filled with wealthy patrons.⁸³ Hired

⁷⁹ A descriptive advertisement for the Fauquier White Sulphur Springs published in 1835 assured guests that the proprietor engaged the “services of some of the best cooks in the State” and featured commodious public and private spaces. Hancock Lee, “Fauquier White Sulphur Springs,” *Alexandria Gazette*, May 25, 1835.

⁸⁰ Letter from John Turpin to Mr. Daniel Ward, May 10, 1843, Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. The “season” at the Springs lasted from June to the first of October. “Fauquier White Sulphur Springs,” *Richmond Whig*, June 27, 1845.

⁸¹ Letter from J[ohn] Marshall to Daniel Ward, Esq., May 27 [no year], Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁸² Hooe explained that his body servant “waited part of one season at the Springs” during the 1836 season when the young man would have been about 12 years old. Letter from George Mason Hooe to Daniel Ward, Esq., April 18, 1842. Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁸³ Letter from George Mason Hooe to Daniel Ward, Esq., April 18, 1842. Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. On the importance of honesty in hired laborers, one visitor noted that “the civility and attentiveness, the deportment, generally so unexceptionable and praiseworthy, of one hundred and fifty slaves, more or less, male and female, in attendance, and that many of the private servants have constantly in possession the keys of their master’s or mistress’s trunks, containing their money as well as their wardrobe!” A Visitor. *Six Weeks in Fauquier*, 14.

slaves extended their circle of potential allies with guests and the range of communication networks by making “enquiries of any gentleman of their acquaintance” upon arrival.⁸⁴ Some evidence indicates that blacks networked to facilitate the hires of friends or family. A “col[ore]d man” named Moses Green employed by the Springs in 1841 contacted slaveholder Hay Battaile Hoomes to suggest that an unnamed “servant man” belonging to Hoomes (possibly a friend or family member of Green’s) would suit as “a Ball room servant” at the Springs.⁸⁵

Hired labor at the Springs offered enslaved persons the opportunity to meet other servants from the hundreds of guests from “the fashionable world” who crowded into the resort or into boarding houses in nearby Warrenton.⁸⁶ In 1837 guests included the Ellis family from Mississippi, the Johnsons from Louisiana, the Nelsons from South Carolina, and the Stanards of Richmond as well as the families of high ranking judicial, military, and congressional leaders from nearby Washington, D. C.⁸⁷ In 1839 the clientele included “ladies and gentlemen from Alabama, Mississippi, New-York, and Georgia, the Carolinas, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts” all “mingling harmoniously in our little community” at the Springs.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ A Visitor. *Six Weeks in Fauquier*, 53.

⁸⁵ Hoomes described his servant as “of a fine character & [of] abilities not surpassed by any.” Letter from H. B. Hoomes to D. Ward, [1842], Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁸⁶ *Warrenton Register* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 18, 1835. The *Alexandria Gazette* reported that “upwards of three hundred visitors” vacationed at the Springs in 1837. *Alexandria Gazette*, August 15, 1837.

⁸⁷ Estimates ranged from 400 to 500 guests in residence in August and September. Another noted guest was Professor Thomas Dew of William and Mary College, the noted defender of slavery during the 1831-1832 legislative debates on slavery in Virginia. “The Springs,” *Richmond Enquirer*, August 25, 1837. For a discussion of Dew’s role in establishing pro-slavery rhetoric, see “The Post-1831 Birth of Evangelical Proslavery” in John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2002): 30-56.

⁸⁸ A Visitor. *Six Weeks in Fauquier*, 33.

Because of their roles as service providers, hired servants at the Springs could leverage their positions to upset the hierarchy of the master-slave relationship. Historian Charlene M. Boyer Lewis found that “[p]lanter men and women always had to negotiate with slaves for their comfort and convenience—and for the comforting illusion of being in control.”⁸⁹ By assessing the relative “importance or unimportance of particular visitors,” hired slaves could “reinforce social distinctions” through more or less attentiveness to dining service or room cleanliness.⁹⁰ Employing this power of selective service was possible when hired slaves worked for persons other than their own masters who had limited ability to discipline or punish these service providers. Honing this ability to manipulate their time and services to their best advantage by providing more superior care to those guests willing to tip or pay for these privileges of rank and class, hired slaves gained an appreciation for understanding social nuances and the desires of clientele to receive preferential treatment. These manipulations and machinations, even on a small scale, earned both financial reward for enslaved staff and recognition of the value of their service in upholding and affirming elite status outside of the plantation.

The Springs resort served as a political venue, providing enslaved staff the opportunity to hear political speeches and disseminate information gleaned to friends and family at the home plantation once the season ended. Special events such as the 4th of July Orations held at the resort in 1839 also provided enslaved servants to hear speeches

⁸⁹ Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 49.

⁹⁰ Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 54.

and a recitation of the Declaration of Independence.⁹¹ In 1848 the grounds of the Fauquier White Sulphur Springs hosted a convention of the Whigs of Virginia's 9th electoral district. Orators included John M. Clayton of Delaware, John Bell of Tennessee, Messers Stephens and Toombs of Georgia, and other prominent speakers from Indiana, New York, Tennessee, and Alabama. Organizers asked if there can be "a single true-hearted Whig in the district, who will neglect so favorable an opportunity of hearing their principles vindicated and the claims of '*The Man of the People*' vindicated?" yet also invited "our Democratic friends" so that "they may weigh our arguments and decide upon their strength."⁹² Proprietor Daniel Ward announced in 1849 that Virginia's Legislature would "assemble at these Springs" in June and their "interesting debates" would "offer extraordinary attractions to all who desire to see and hear this able body of Virginia statesmen."⁹³ Though engaged in domestic duties, enslaved workers at the Springs were not immune to conversations about political issues and such proximity to Virginia's legislative deliberations presented a crucial opportunity to hear first-hand (or second-hand over dinner conversations) the debates over slavery and emancipation.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "Fauquier Springs," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 9, 1839.

⁹² "A Grand Mass Meeting of the Whigs," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 15, 1848. Soon after the publication of the Whig Mass Meeting, Fauquier County Democrats met in Warrenton on July 25, 1848 and decided to hold their own party meeting at the Fauquier White Sulphur Springs. "Democratic Meeting in Fauquier," *Richmond Enquirer*, August 4, 1848.

⁹³ "Fauquier White Sulphur Springs, Virginia," *Richmond Enquirer*, June 19, 1849. The Legislature voted to relocate from Richmond due to the outbreak of cholera in the state capital. On the debate to relocate, see Virginia Legislature, *Richmond Enquirer*, June 5, 1849.

⁹⁴ Legislators meeting at Fauquier Springs in July 1849 debated the power of non-resident slaveholders to emancipate slaves residing in Virginia, laws to coerce free blacks to leave the state, restrictions on free blacks owning slaves, restrictions on movement of free blacks, and prohibitions against slaves trading as free men. The gathered Assembly also discussed rewards for recovering runaways and access to courts for enslaved seeking to file freedom suits, issues that provided vital discussion for enslaved persons, especially those considering options for freedom. See the published comments from the General Assembly of Virginia from July 2 and July 3, 1849. "General Assembly of Virginia (Extra Session)," *Richmond Whig*, July 10, 1849.

This mix of politicians, guests, their personal servants, and hired enslaved laborers from across Virginia generated an atmosphere of political and social exchange among hired laborers.⁹⁵ With each new addition to the group of visitors at the resort, enslaved domestics gained opportunities, even if limited, to glean information about geography, politics, or even news of far-flung family members. Some hired slaves may have used the opportunity to bargain for new owners or meet potential mates. Each interaction enhanced communication networks and increased the likelihood of learning helpful information by expanding their awareness of national and sectional issues through participation in a geographically-broad community of resort guests and employees.

Whether laboring in the fields, furnaces, fisheries, homes, or businesses, enslaved persons represented a source of wealth not only through their labors, but also as partible and moveable capital assets. The diversity of employment options for enslaved laborers meant that slaveowners had options as to how best to turn enslaved bodies into financial gain: putting them to work for the slaveowner; earning wages as a hired out laborer; or exchanging them for cash-in-hand via a local or trader sale. One factor that influenced this choice was the perceived value of enslaved bodies, a dollar amount calculated from the time of birth to advanced age.

⁹⁵ Charlene M. Boyer Lewis explores relationships of power between guests at health resorts and enslaved staff and argues that wealthy guests negotiated with enslaved waiters, maids, and household staff for better service. Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society and the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

Assigning Monetary Value to Enslaved Bodies

Potential labor output, health, trainability, productivity, reproductive ability, income earned through hires, and specialized skills exhibited over time presented some immediate factors that influenced the calculation of value, yet as seen in the appraised values of over 2,140 enslaved persons from 1830 to 1860, the dynamics of appraisals changed in accordance with other factors.⁹⁶ Understanding these dynamics in light of local and long-distance market forces reveals how the commodification of enslaved bodies developed during this time.

Like any tradable commodity, slave values across northern Virginia fluctuated in response to individual factors, local demand, and larger market forces. Individual factors such as age, gender, health, and submissiveness influenced the base measure of value. Access to available credit, labor needs, and financial risk affected local perceptions of relative neighborhood value. Broader factors such as access to slave-trading markets, speed of communication networks, and prices of commodities produced by enslaved labor shaped the perception of relative market value within the larger scope of the vast domestic slave trade. These factors framed measures of the relative monetary value of enslaved children, women and men as laboring bodies and sources of slaveholder wealth.

⁹⁶ Data for values of enslaved persons derives from a survey of estate inventories and divisions recorded in county court will books, records at large, and chancery cases that included appraised values for 2,142 individuals identified by name and age during the period of 1830 to 1860, a timeframe with enough data to form conclusions. This data represents part of the larger surveyed group of appraised values from 1800 to 1860 I collected in my Appraised Slave Values Database (ASVD) from Fauquier and Prince William record books.

Age and Gender

Estate inventories and appraisements provide some sense of the perceived values of enslaved laborers. Following the death of a property holder, the county court selected at least three potential commissioners, typically the near neighbors to the deceased, to appraise the real and personal property. Commissioners evaluated enslaved persons based on individual qualities as well as in light of local and domestic slave trade market expectations. An evaluation of appraisements conducted between 1830 and 1839 show values for enslaved males and females steadily increased from birth until peaking between the ages of fifteen and twenty years old (see figure 9).

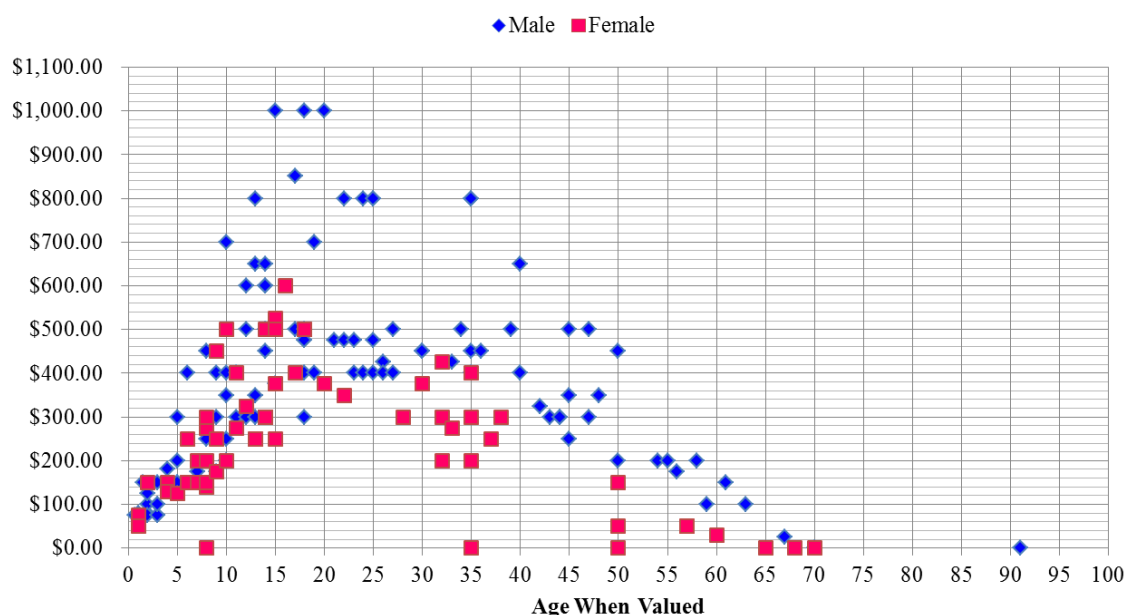


Figure 9. Appraised values of slaves, 1830-1839.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Books 11-17, Fauquier County Records At Large 1821-1881, and Prince William County Will Book N, microfilm.

Note: Values of male and female enslaved persons from thirteen separate estates appraised during estate inventories following the death of a slaveowner. Each county court selected at least three persons, usually from the near neighborhood of the deceased, to serve as commissioners during the inventory and appraisal. Values varied based on age, perceived potential productive and reproductive labor, and physical strength with physical impairments often noted.

Increasing rates of value between birth and the age of 10 indicate a perceived future value of gendered labor and worth during a life cycle often fraught with mortality. By the age of 10, enslaved children had survived the threat of childhood illnesses and injuries, followed families into the fields, demonstrated promise in household or domestic service, and often left their families to work as hired out laborers. Fauquier slaveholder William Skinker recognized the significance of this age when he devised to each of his five nieces an enslaved girl aged about ten years old to be selected from his estate in

1844.⁹⁷ Skinker's gift reflected a belief in the relative present and future value of a ten-year old enslaved girl, each of whom represented an investment, a source of labor, and potential bearers of additional slaves for his nieces. For each of the enslaved girls selected, Skinker's generosity to his nieces represented removal from their homes and kinfolk.

After the age of ten appraised values could then be assessed in terms of skills and productivity as well as the relative worth of these factors on the open market. During the period of 1830 to 1839, for example, disparity appeared between appraised values for males compared to those for female slaves as seen in figure 9. After the age of ten years old, males generally appraised at a higher rate than females of the same age. This gender disparity contrasts with the results of Laurence Kotlikoff's study of prices of enslaved male and female youths sold in the New Orleans market. Kotlikoff found that the prices for young enslaved girls exceeded that of same-aged enslaved male youths up to an age of sixteen years.⁹⁸ Thus, while slave values may compare favorably to the New Orleans in general pricing trends, explored in more detail later, in other ways northern Virginia values reflected local neighborhood expectations.

Appraised values of male slaves continued to exceed those of females during the 1830s, sometimes quite significantly, until slaves reached an age of minimal perceived

⁹⁷ Will of William Skinker, written July 25, 1844, proved in court March 24, 1845, Fauquier County Will Book 19: 108.

⁹⁸ Laurence J. Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804 to 1862," *Economic Inquiry*, 17, (October 1979), 510. Kotlikoff supported his conclusion by citing cotton picking statistics from the Leah plantation from 1841-1860 that indicated female pickers up to the ages of sixteen years were more productive than males of the same age. The importance of even young female laborers in field work could more importantly reflect the expectations of cotton production that differed from the mixed grain agriculture found in northern Virginia. See Damian Alan Pargas, *The Quarters and the Fields: Slave Families in the Non-Cotton South* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2010).

value. Tracking this age of minimal perceived value fluctuated depending on the availability of appraisals for enslaved persons in this older cohort, but generally males reached a null point by age 70 whereas female values declined rapidly after menopause. Women who practiced midwifery proved an exception to this trend because they still contributed a valuable and often wage-earning skill even as they grew older. Yet by the 1840s, appraisals by age subtly changed to reflect less a fear of mortality and more a hope of capital asset gains.

A comparison of appraised values of the enslaved holdings of two Fauquier County men, Thomas Fitzhugh and John Fox, shows how the perceived value of enslaved bodies changed over time. At the time of his death in 1844 Thomas Fitzhugh owned 139 enslaved men, women, and children.⁹⁹ Analysis of the 59 men and 42 women individually identified by age, gender, and value show relatively similar values for boys and girls aged birth to thirteen years old. By the age of fourteen, gender factored more clearly into the valuation of slaves with boys typically valued as much as \$100 to \$125 more than girls between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five. Enslaved male values started to decrease around the age of thirty with the exception of Ephraim, a 35 year old blacksmith, valued at \$500, the highest appraised value on the estate and an indicator of the role that specialized skills played in determining value (see figure 10).

⁹⁹ As seen in Figure 10, Fitzhugh appears to have maintained an unbalanced sex ratio with five women over the age of twenty-five compared to the eighteen men in that same age cohort. Since this table does not include mother-child pairs (who were valued as a pair rather than individually), it must be noted that Fitzhugh's estate also included 40 year old Esther, Patsy (no age given), 25 year old Lydea Ann, 25 year old Helen, 23 year old Lucinda, 23 year old Capa Ann, 43 year old Polly, 23 year old Senna, 22 year old Ann, 17 year old Pressy Jane, and 16 year old Elizabeth, thus bringing the number of women aged 25 or older to nine and potentially another six women aged between 16 and 24 as potential partners for Fitzhugh's older enslaved men. Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Fitzhugh, deceased. Fauquier County Will Book 18: 419.

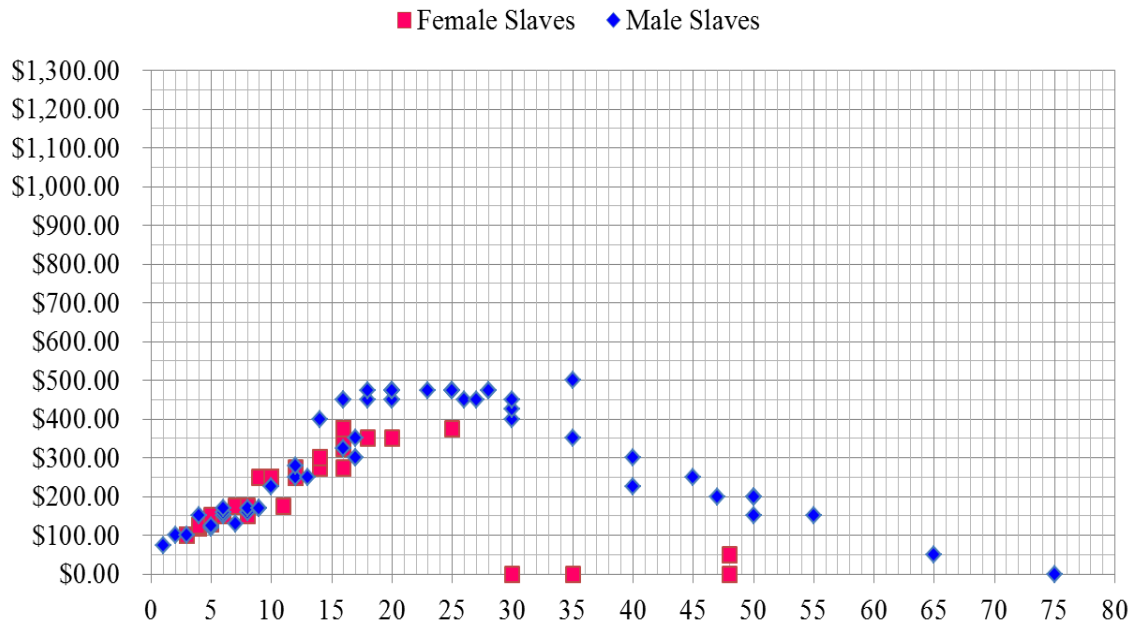


Figure 10. Appraised values of slaves on the Thomas Fitzhugh estate, 1844.

Source: Fauquier County Will Book 18: 417-420.

Note: The chart derives from data from enslaved persons identified by gender and age. This cohort includes 59 males and 42 females. Data points may indicate multiple persons of that same age and appraised value.

Tracking these values across time reveals a gradual increase in overall values, especially for youthful slaves. Compare the appraised values of enslaved persons from the Fitzhugh Estate inventoried in 1844 to the appraised values of enslaved persons on the John Fox Estate, appraised in 1859. Commissioners of the estate of Fauquier slaveholder, John Fox, evaluated the relative values of Fox's enslaved work force based on age, gender, and ability within the context of local values in 1859. Individual appraised values reflected a rapid increase in perceived value of both male and female

slaves up to the age of fifteen years, when values tended to reach their apex, then a gradual reduction in values after the age of twenty years. While the highest value assigned to the Fitzhugh slaves in 1844 was \$500 for a 35 year old blacksmith, in 1859 four boys: James Harrison (16), George (15), John Williams (13), and Larkin Washington (13); and two women: Maria Long (20) and Jane Fox (18) were each valued at \$1,200, indicating the relative desirability of younger slaves between the ages of 13 and 20.¹⁰⁰ In 1844 slave values for non-artisan laborers on the Fitzhugh plantation peaked at the age of 18 years at \$475. By 1859 on the Fox plantation, slave values peaked at 13 years of age, dramatically rising for each year of age (see figure 11).

¹⁰⁰ Inventory of John Fox, deceased, Fauquier County Records At Large, (1821-1881), 433-436. Based on the listing of women and children, conjectural family groups can be determined. Jane Fox at age 18 may have been the mother of 2 year old Mary Fox while Maria Long did not appear to have children.

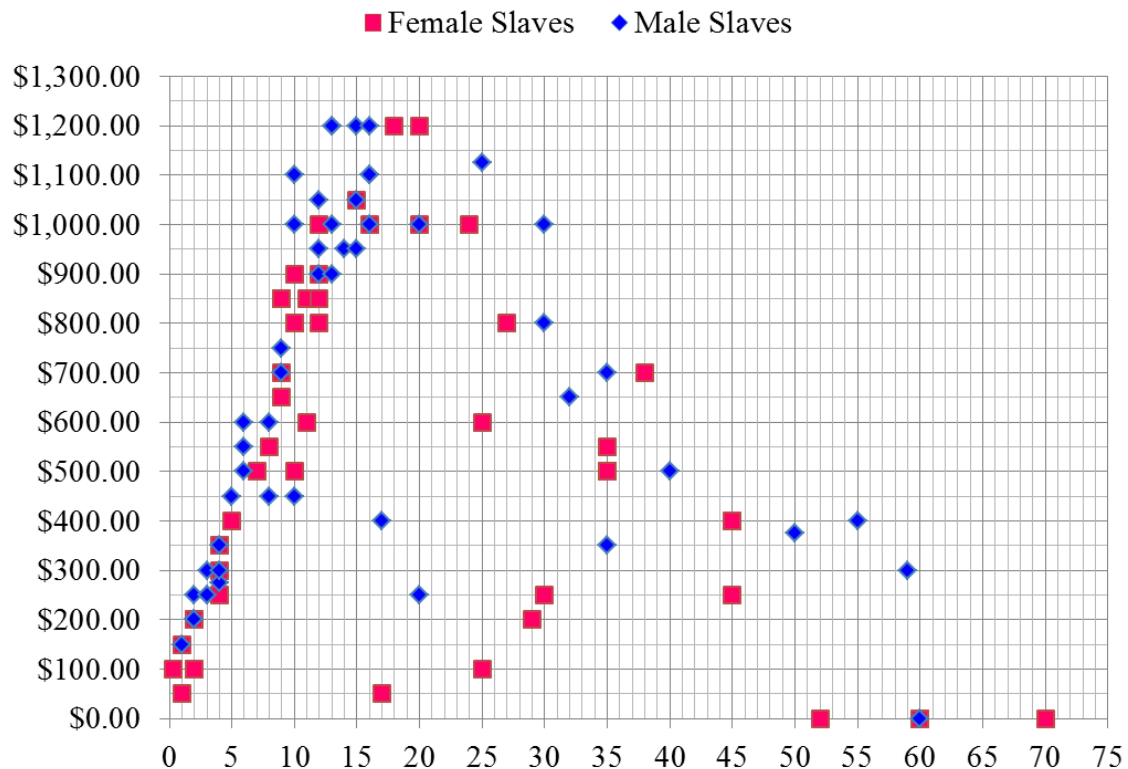


Figure 11. Appraised values of enslaved persons owned by John Fox, 1859.

Source: Appraisal of the Estate of James Fox, deceased, Fauquier County Records At Large, 1821-1881: 433-436, microfilm.

Note: The Fox estate comprised of 108 enslaved persons. Fifty males and fifty-two females identified by gender, age, and appraised value are included in this chart.

The 1859 rates indicate that unlike valuations conducted in the 1830s or 1840s when values for children under the age of ten years grew much more slowly with little variation between values for five year olds and ten year olds, the value of an enslaved child now began to increase for each year of life, reaching a leveling point around the age of 15. Values for ten year olds in 1844 were about half the amount of appraisals for twenty year olds, indicating a gradual climb in rates between the age of survivability to the apex of prime worker rates. By 1859, six year olds on the Fox plantation were valued

at half the rate of a thirteen year old, the age at which one enslaved boy was valued at the highest rate on the plantation. This shift in trend signifies that by the late 1850s slaveholders considered age instead of mortality or demonstrated ability to be the most influential factor in determining value. Another explanation for the increased significance of younger slaves relates to their perceived adaptability, limited potential for resistance, and desirability in the western and Deep South markets. Unlike older slaves who sought (or already had) marriage partners, who had more confidence in attempting escapes, who had developed deeper relationships with family and plantation communities, and who displayed greater distress and more resistance to a sale, younger slaves were less likely to run away and could adapt more easily to training by a new master making them a less risky investment.

Age was not the only factor that initially influenced monetary value or changed over time. In 1844, assessors of the Fitzhugh slaves clearly appraised male laborers older than about eighteen years at higher worth than females. This gender distinction was not so clear on the Fox plantation in 1859, suggesting that over time estate commissioners valued enslaved persons older than twenty years old with less consideration for gender. Even so, gendered expectations for labor, perceptions about female mobility, and value placed on reproductive functions, demands of childcare, and house-keeping influenced slave values. As suggested by the appraisals of the Fitzhugh and Fox estates, enslaved women's values fluctuated based on work capacity, fertility rates, and long-term returns on investment. Consider the effect of physical soundness on values of enslaved women and how physical or mental defects altered the assessed values. On the Fitzhugh Estate,

35 year old Letty, described as “deranged,” was valued at \$0 in 1844 due to her emotional state.¹⁰¹ In 1859 estate commissioners valued Maria James, aged seventeen, at only \$50 because of her “fits.” Compare Maria’s value with other similarly aged females on the Fox estate: Celia Mudd, a fifteen year old valued at \$1,050; Elonova Harrison, a sixteen year old valued at \$1,000; Jane Fox, a copper colored girl aged eighteen years, valued at \$1,200, Maria Long, aged twenty years valued at \$1,200 and Sarah Jane Harrison, aged twenty years old valued at \$1,000 (see table 4).¹⁰²

Table 4. Appraised values of female enslaved girls aged 15 to 20 on the James Fox Estate, 1859

Name	Age	Description	Appraised Value	Known Children
Celia Mudd	15	black	\$1,050.00	
Elonova Harrison	16	mulatto	\$1,000.00	
Maria James	17	dark copper - fits	\$50.00	
Jane Fox	18	copper colored	\$1,200.00	2 yr old Mary
Sarah Jane Harrison	20	mulatto	\$1,000.00	
Maria Long	20	black	\$1,200.00	

Source: Inventory of James Fox Estate, (July 7, 1859), Fauquier County Records At Large, 1821-1881, 433-436.

Consider the appraised values of mother-child pairs compared to individual female slaves on the Fitzhugh plantation and how this influenced the perceived value of fertility (see table 5). Commissioners valued Betsy Scott, a 48 year old enslaved woman at \$0 while they appraised 40 year old Esther, with her infant son, Henry at \$230.

¹⁰¹ Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Fitzhugh, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 417.

¹⁰² Inventory of the Estate of John Fox, deceased, Fauquier County Records At Large, (1821-1881): 433-436.

Compare the values of Betsy and Esther with the appraised values of other enslaved women of a similar age in Fauquier County. Forty-five year old Suky from the Nelson Fishback estate appraised at \$220 in 1843¹⁰³ and 45 year old Charlotte on the Henry Bailey estate appraised at \$150 in 1842.¹⁰⁴ In another case, Lucy, a 30 year old enslaved woman on the Fitzhugh estate appraised at \$0 due to her physical or mental condition while another 30 year old woman named Patsy appraised at \$350 as a mother-child pair with her son, Gus.¹⁰⁵ Sixteen year old enslaved mother Elizabeth and her child, Mary Ellen, appraised at \$350 while other 16 year old enslaved girls on the Fitzhugh plantation, Fanny, Jane, and Virginia each appraised at \$375, Sarah Ellen and Peggy appraised at \$350, Eliza appraised at \$325, and Kitty appraised at \$275.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Inventory of the Estate of Nelson N. Fishback, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 348.

¹⁰⁴ Inventory of the Estate of Henry Bailey, deceased, Fauquier Will Book 17: 575.

¹⁰⁵ Inventory of the Estate of Thomas Fitzhugh, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 417-420.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 418-419.

Table 5. Appraised values of enslaved mother-child pairs, 1844

Presumed Age	Name	Male	Female	gender unknown	Est Value of Mother-Child pairs
43 n/a	Polly Polly's child		Y	Y	\$ 250.00
40 n/a	Esther Esther's child Henry Fitzhugh	Y	Y		\$ 230.00
36 n/a	Eliza Eliza's child Nancy		Y		\$ 300.00
35 n/a	Harriet Harriet's child Daniel	Y	Y		\$ 275.00
30 n/a	Patsy Patsy's child Gus	Y	Y		\$ 350.00
25 n/a	Lydea Ann Lydea Ann's child Patrick Ellis	Y	Y		\$ 425.00
25 n/a	Helen Helen's child Wm Carter	Y	Y		\$ 425.00
24 n/a	Margaret Margaret's child Henry	Y	Y		\$ 375.00
23 n/a	Capa Ann Capa Ann's child Wm Henry	Y	Y		\$ 425.00
23 n/a	Lucinda Lucinda's child Wm Henry	Y	Y		\$ 375.00
23 n/a	Senna Senna's child Charles	Y	Y		\$ 375.00
22 n/a	Ann Ann's child Ann Maria		Y		\$ 300.00
17 n/a	Pressy Jane Pressy Jane's child George Wm	Y	Y		\$ 400.00
16 n/a	Elizabeth Elizabeth's child Mary Ellen		Y		\$ 350.00

Source: Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas Fitzhugh, Fauquier County Will Book 18, 417-420.

Were the values of these enslaved women influenced more by child-bearing or age-related work capacity? As seen in table 5, appraised mother-child pairs did not necessarily follow any discernible trends. Values do not correspond to the general bell-shaped curve found when comparing appraised worth of young females that started with low rates for infants, rapidly rose to the highest rates assigned to prime age females then steadily declined as females aged. Trends in valuations for mother-child pairs do not

appear to clearly favor mothers who produced male over female children or vice versa, yet any differences more likely influenced the value placed on the child. Thus, mother-child pairs were assessed due to individual qualities – most likely their fitness, productivity, and health.

Consider the potential value of enslaved mothers as individuals rather than as part of a mother-child pair. Enslaved children aged 1 to 3 years of age on the Fitzhugh estate appraised individually were valued between \$75 and \$100, so if the value of \$100 was subtracted from the values of mother-child pairs as a maximum proxy value for an infant or very young child, the remaining estimated value for both younger and older child-bearing mothers appraised less than the values of enslaved women appraised as individuals. These examples suggest that while motherhood may have been a desired outcome, mothers with young children were valued relatively less than unencumbered female workers.¹⁰⁷ Clearly, child-bearing negatively influenced appraised values and perceptions of the immediate value of an enslaved mother's labor, a reverse in the eighteenth century emphasis on fecundity as a valued asset in Virginia¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁷ Sharla Fett argued that slaveholders had “a stake in enslaved women’s childbearing” based on the growth of the plantation system and availability of American-born slaves for the domestic slave trade in the wake of the closing of the international slave trade. These economic interests, as Fett points out, did not always protect enslaved mothers “from excessive labor and unhealthy pregnancies or ensured their children’s survival” Rather, they complicated the relationship between labor, childbearing, and economic options. Sharla M. Fett, “Consciousness and Calling: African American Midwives at Work in the Antebellum South,” as found in Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds. *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 67-68.

¹⁰⁸ Steven Deyle asserted that “an increasing number of slaveowners in Virginia started to see the ability to reproduce as a valuable commodity” during the eighteenth century. By mid-century slaveholders “recognized the extra profits that the sale of offspring could bring,” and stressed the importance of acquiring “breeding” women to enhance estate assets. Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 28. While the importance of an enslaved woman’s ability to reproduce and bear children who could be sold enhanced a woman’s economic value, appraised values in the ASVD align more with immediate productivity rather than long-term investment potential.

This relationship bears out when considering records of hired enslaved women. Daniel Conrad advertised his desire to hire an “active and industrious Negro Woman *without children* who understands house work well.”¹⁰⁹ G. W. Ball differentiated between the three enslaved women he offered to hire out as cooks, washers, and ironers. One was “entirely unincumbered” [sic] while the other two would be hired each accompanied by one child.¹¹⁰ L. W. S. Hough advertised for hire a “young woman unencumbered” who was “accustomed to Cooking and Washing.”¹¹¹ Distinguishing between encumbered and unencumbered female laborers (women with or without children) indicates that children were seen as a hindrance against an enslaved mother’s work capacity, despite the future value they added to a slaveholder’s estate.

Slaveholders considered burdensome both mothers with young children as well as very young enslaved children without mothers. After Maria died shortly after giving birth to a son named Littleton, Maria’s owner, Naomi Settle, viewed Littleton “as a burthen” and “despaired of raising it & did not desire the trouble” to attempt to care for the infant. Settle “in vain offered the child to several persons as a gift” before finding a taker.¹¹² Yet virtually immediately after birth slaveholders assigned a monetary value to enslaved children predicting their future value as field laborers, domestic servants, artisans, or mothers.

¹⁰⁹ “Wanted to Hire,” *Genius of Liberty*, December 22, 1818. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁰ “Servants for Hire!!” *Democratic Mirror*, December 8, 1858.

¹¹¹ “For Hire,” *Democratic Mirror*, January 12, 1859.

¹¹² Answer of Robert Cunningham, April 18, 1860, *Mary Towzer v. Heirs of Reuben Settle*, Loudoun County Chancery Case 1878-069, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1878-069#img>.

In 1860 Loudoun County resident Alfred Megeath demonstrated how the commodification of children influenced decisions about sales. Megeath explained that the “increase” of young females would be “more profitable” to the heirs of an estate “than money at interest.” In accordance with this belief he advised legatees to keep enslaved girls as an investment for their future productive and reproductive value (which he expected to increase) rather than selling them during a forced division of the estate.¹¹³ The findings of economic historians Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer seem to confirm Megeath’s predictions.

Conrad and Meyer suggest another indicator of the perceived value of investing in the long-term maintenance of an enslaved female – the added value of any sales arising from children born to them. They asserted that “the bulk of the returns on a female were realized twenty or more years after the investment was made, when the children had grown to marketable ages.”¹¹⁴ This meant that even when immediate returns were negligible or reflected a loss when slaveowners took into consideration the annual costs of supporting child-bearing enslaved women and their newborns through the late stages of pregnancy and through the first months of post-partum and infant care, enslaved women still represented potential wealth in the long-term. This perspective factored in the anticipation of productive work of an unencumbered mother as well as that of her children who were old enough for productive work as well as anticipated returns from the

¹¹³ Deposition of Alfred Megeath, February 20, 1860, *Susan E. Humphrey, etc. v. Exors of Thomas G. Humphrey*, Loudoun County Chancery Case 1860-032, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1860-032#img>.

¹¹⁴ Alfred H. Conrad and John R. Meyer, “The Economics of Slavery in the Ante Bellum South,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 66, no. 2 (April 1958), 110.

sale of her child or children. It was this long-term return on an investment in an enslaved woman and the wealth potential of her progeny that factored into the values of older women.

As suggested by the differences in appraised values for enslaved persons on the Fitzhugh and Fox, values of slaves changed over time. These fluctuations reflected considerations of local conditions of access to credit and demand as well as broader market forces of technology and labor needs. An investigation into periods of relatively low and high slaves values shows how broad market forces influenced perceptions of value in northern Virginia. How this knowledge created periods more beneficial or critical for cashing in on buoyant prices as well as periods when highly valued enslaved laborers might leverage their perceived value into some small opportunities for autonomy or concessions will be discussed further in chapter four.

Market Influences on Northern Virginia Slave Values

Estate inventories from northern Virginia show changing perspectives of the value of enslaved persons over time.¹¹⁵ Values of chattel property fluctuated over time in northern Virginia in response to market demand, transportation and communication networks, and commodity prices with noticeable changes occurring between 1836 and 1842 and again after 1848. Over a thirty year period from 1830 to 1860 changes in the

¹¹⁵ The use of records from primarily Fauquier County is thus: Fauquier commissioners seemed most likely to record ages of appraised enslaved persons during the period of 1800 to 1860, a trend that Prince William County commissioners would not really embrace in the majority of inventories or divisions until the 1850s. Since location and the viewpoints of individual commissioners affected the range of slave valuations, I populated the database primarily by Fauquier County records to reduce the potential for extreme variations in values even across county lines.

calculation of slave values reflected the growing commodification of enslaved bodies. These variations also reflected differences in the changing desirability for male compared to female slaves. A closer investigation of the variable range of appraised values by age during the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, reveal annual fluctuations within prime working ages as well as differences in ranges of values based on gender as seen in figure 12 and figure 13.

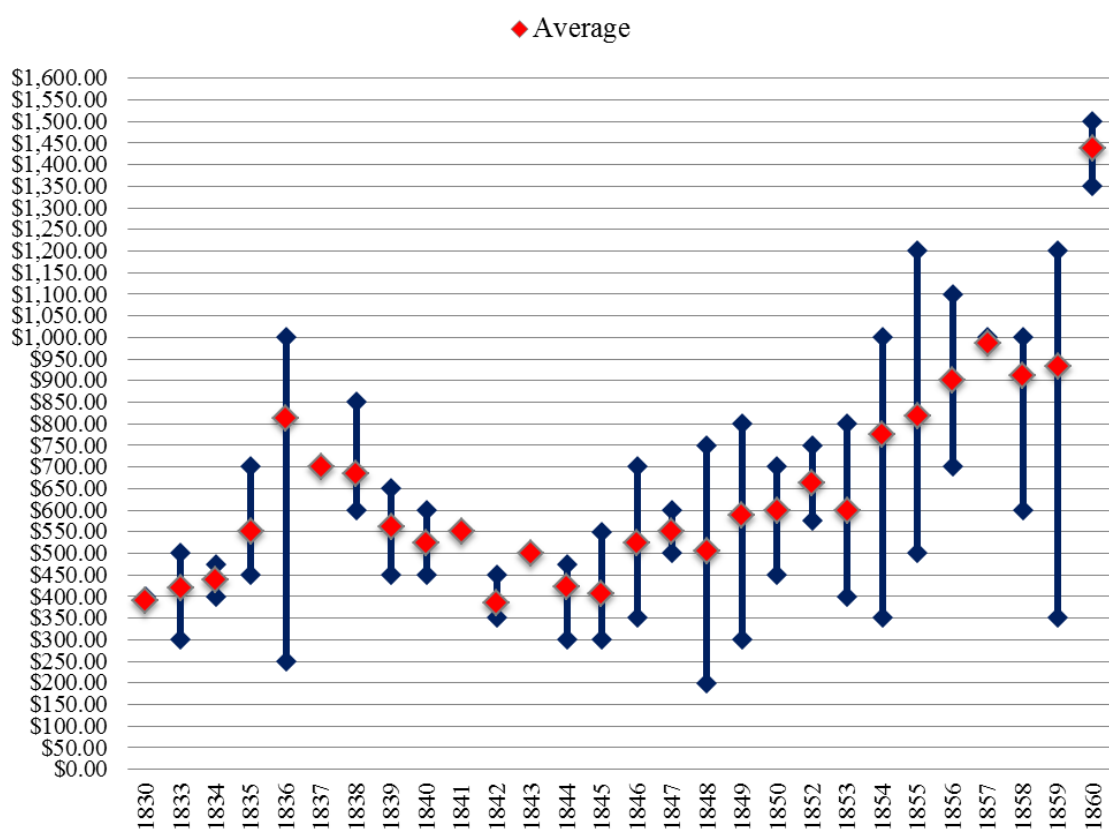


Figure 12. Appraised values of enslaved males, 14 to 20 years old, 1830-1860.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Books and Records at Large.

Note: Figure indicates the highest and lowest appraised values available for enslaved males between the ages of fourteen and twenty years, inclusive. The number of values available for this cohort in inventory records varies by year. Age-specific data were unavailable for 1831, 1832, and 1851.

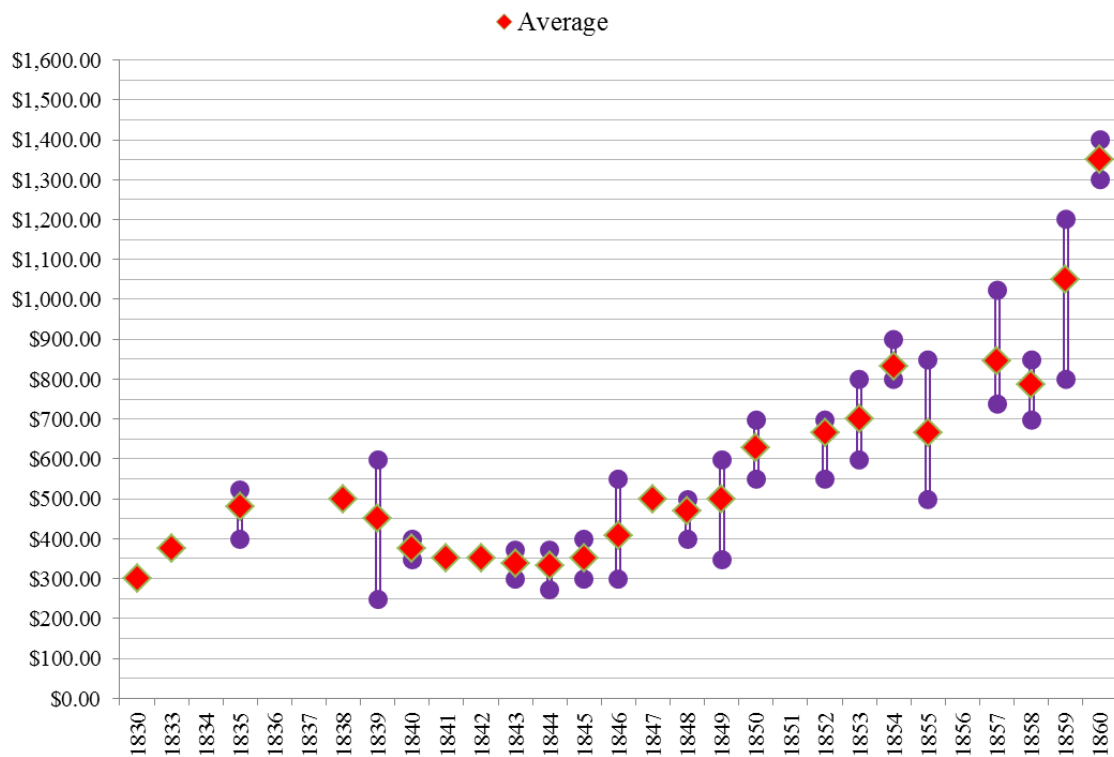


Figure 13. Appraised values of enslaved females, 14 to 20 years old, 1830-1860.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Books and Records at Large.

Note: Data for this figure is limited because of the habit of appraising mothers in this age cohort with their infant children. Only females appraised as individuals are included in this figure.

Economic boom during the early 1830s and the financial Panic of 1837 affected the economy of the South and influenced slave values in northern Virginia.¹¹⁶ Historian Steven Deyle found that the Panic of 1837 had a “devastating impact” on slave prices,

¹¹⁶ For a discussion on the wide-ranging causes and effects of the Panic of 1837 see especially chapter one in Alasdair Roberts, *America's First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder after the Panic of 1837* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 13-47. For a discussion of the impact of the Panic of 1837 on cotton markets, westward migration, and slave prices see chapter four in Tomoko Yagyu, “Slave Traders and Planters in the Expanding South: Entrepreneurial Strategies, Business Networks, and Western Migration in the Atlantic World, 1787-1859,” PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006, 236-259. ProQuest 3221816.

“slashing the value of slave property in half.”¹¹⁷ Appraised slave values in northern Virginia mirrored the pricing trends found across the South in that they rose after 1830 and peaked in 1836 for males and in 1837 for females before falling as seen in figure 12, Figure 13, Figure 14, and Figure 15. Even though some individual values spiked higher than the trend lines shown in figure 14 and figure 15, the overall pattern was one of depressed prices for both males and females. Gender-based differences in values suggests that northern Virginia slaveholders adjusted perceived values based on even slight preferences for either males or females in the slave market (see figure 15).

¹¹⁷ Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64.

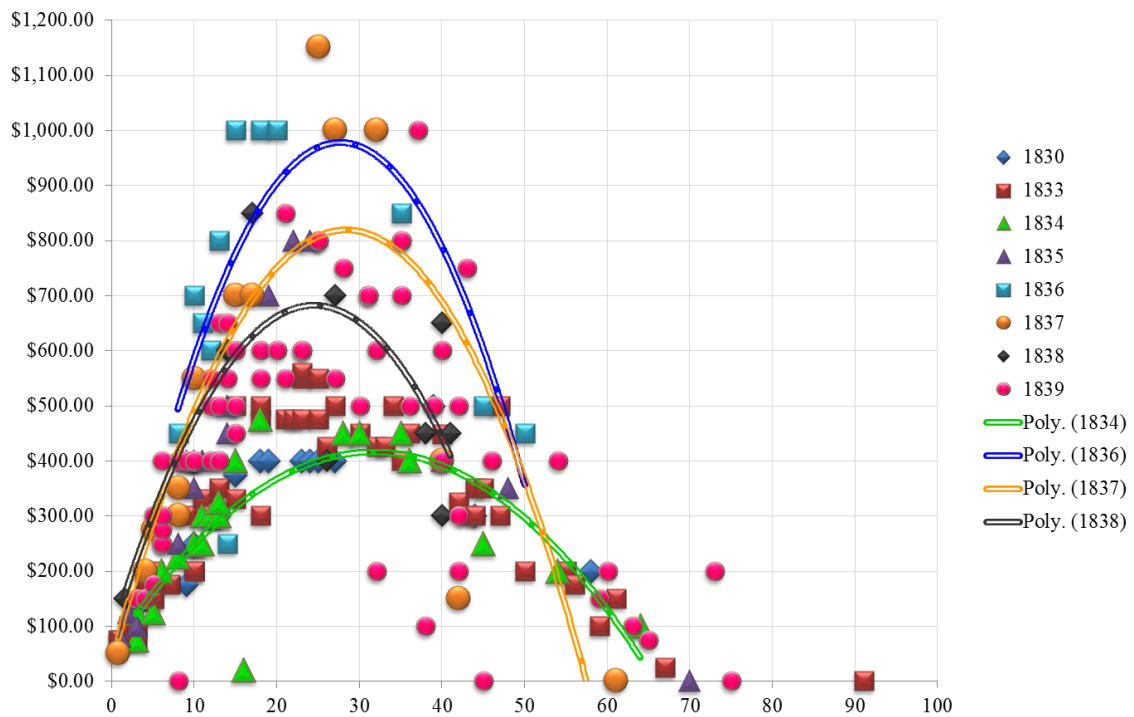


Figure 14. Appraised values of enslaved males, 1830-1839.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 11: 243; Fauquier County Will Book 13: 120, 242, 243, 302, 342, 399; Fauquier County Will Book 14: 7, 92; Fauquier County Will Book 15: 36, 205-206, 239-240, 444; Fauquier County Will Book 16: 92, 267, 328-329, 335; Fauquier County Will Book 17: 139-140; Fauquier County Records At Large; and Prince William County Will Book N: 280.

Note: This figure includes values of 212 male slaves identified by gender and age and indicates trend lines for the years 1834, 1836, 1837, and 1838. Inventories derived from the Fauquier estates of Sarah Tippet (1830), William Foote (1833), Sarah Taylor (1833), Charles Ficklin (1833), Frances Edmonds (1833), Mrs. Mariah Dixon (1834), William Tippet (1834), Alexander Welch (1834), Richard C. Beale (1835), Nelson N. Fishback (1835), Ludwell Diggs (1836), John Crupper (1836), Isaac Foster (1837), Alexander Hutchison (1838), Richardson Feagans (1838), John Car Carter (1839), Peter Routt (1839), and William D. Fitzhugh (1839); and from the Prince William County estate of Judge William A. G. Dade (1830).

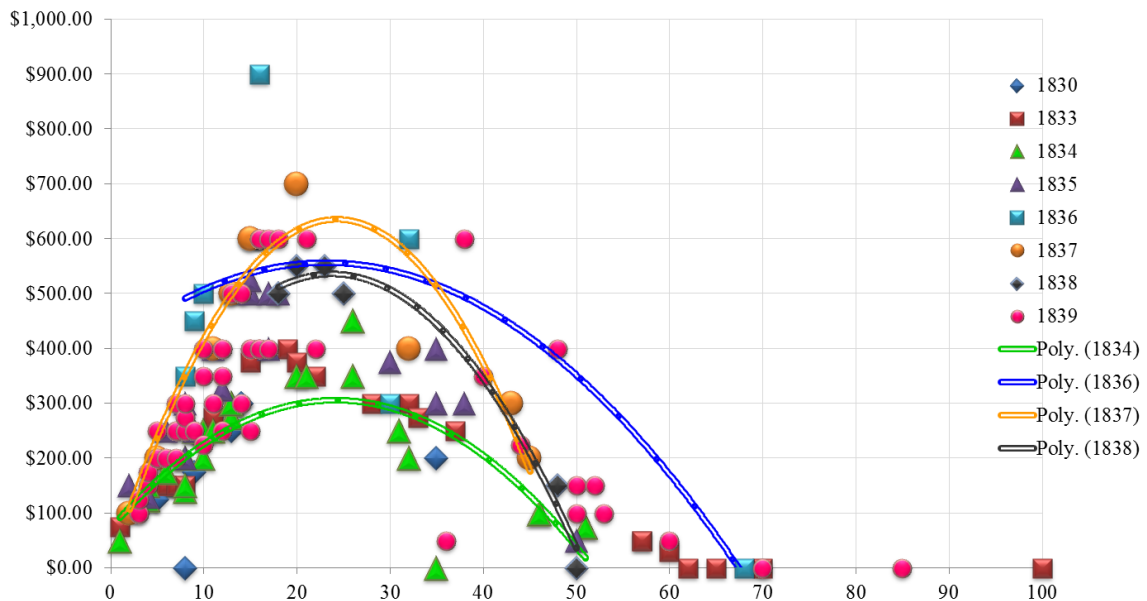


Figure 15. Appraised values of enslaved females, 1830-1839.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 11: 243; Fauquier County Will Book 13: 120, 242, 243, 302, 342, 399; Fauquier County Will Book 14: 7, 92; Fauquier County Will Book 15: 36, 205-206, 239-240, 374, 444; Fauquier County Will Book 16: 92, 267, 328-329, 335; Fauquier County Will Book 17: 139-140; Fauquier County Records At Large; and Prince William County Will Book N: 280.

Note: This figure includes values of 156 female slaves identified individually by gender and age and indicates trend lines for the years 1834, 1836, 1837, and 1838. These values do not include values assigned to mother-child pairs or mother-children groups. Inventories derived from the Fauquier estates of Sarah Tippet (1830), William Foote (1833), Sarah Taylor (1833), Charles Ficklin (1833), Frances Edmonds (1833), Mrs. Mariah Dixon (1834), William Tippet (1834), Alexander Welch (1834), Richard C. Beale (1835), Nelson N. Fishback (1835), Ludwell Diggs (1836), John Crupper (1836), Isaac Foster (1837), Alexander Hutchison (1838), Richardson Feagans (1838), John Car Carter (1839), Peter Routt (1839), and William D. Fitzhugh (1839); and from the Prince William County estate of Judge William A. G. Dade (1830).

Several factors precipitated the financial panic of 1837 and contributed to the sudden drop in values of enslaved persons. Several farmers shifted their agricultural practices, especially in Fauquier County, to limit dependence on grain crops that were subject to assault from weather and pestilence and to accommodate for depleted soil productivity. Grazing and the raising of beef cattle provided one solution to the best use

of poor or depleted soils, yet investment in the cattle markets required access to credit. As early as February 1836 some Fauquier farmers “turned their attention very profitably to grazing as auxiliary to their agricultural pursuits” yet the seasonal cash outflows and incomes of farming restricted the ability of farmers to increase stock “by want of a sufficient cash capital.” Fauquier petitioners requested the General Assembly authorize the chartering of a bank located in Warrenton to provide capital assets “for the purposes of trade.”¹¹⁸

The seasonal nature of agriculture meant that farmers saw profits only after crops were harvested. While crops generally proved successful from 1830 to 1836, droughts in 1837 and 1838 severely affected crop outputs in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties. In 1837 about half the wheat crop was affected by drought.¹¹⁹ The following year another severe drought destroyed hopes for corn crops and greatly limited the number of beef cattle sent to market from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties. In August 1838 the *Warrenton Times* reported that “our corn is irretrievably lost” and estimated crop yields were at best only one-fourth of anticipated returns, at worst “*little or nothing*.” Severe temperatures consistently above 90 degrees also affected grazing which would depress area beef cattle markets. While the newspaper deduced that the weather and state of crops would bring “*extreme*” distress “among the laboring class” due to anticipated high costs of remaining wheat or rye stores, another result would be the limited availability of foodstuffs for enslaved persons who often received cornmeal as

¹¹⁸ Petition of Citizens of Fauquier praying the establishment of a Bank at Warrenton, Fauquier County, March 1, 1836, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

¹¹⁹ For the local perspective on crop conditions see *Alexandria Gazette*, June 14, 1837 and July 1, 1837.

their food rations, raising the cost of maintaining enslaved holdings.¹²⁰ In light of these circumstances, slaveowners who opted to sell slaves out of financial desperation would find reduced demand, reduced cash resources, and decreased incentive to add additional financial burdens to holdings already encumbered in debt.

The sudden decline in enslaved values noted in the appraisals of 1837 and 1838 therefore reflected in part the reduced need for enslaved labor for harvesting and field work due to crop failures. The shift from production of grain to grazing and raising beef cattle further reduced the need for enslaved hands on farm lands. Ruined crops left farmers with even fewer financial resources. The banking crisis that halted cash payments on bank notes and left persons who relied on extended credit with limited access to cash exacerbated the lack of buying power. Limited access to cash or credit combined with rising debts and reduced need for harvest hands affected local values of enslaved persons.

First, the immediate effects depressed prices for enslaved males who could primarily work as field hands, as seen in figure 14. A secondary effect of the financial shocks occurred in 1838 when values for enslaved females began to drop (refer to figure 15). Enslaved females represented potential domestic laborers as well as a long-term investment so the reduction in their appraised values reflected the economic reality of focusing on short-term economic goals rather than long-term investments in a time of limited access to credit and over-extension of personal debt.

Trends in valuations during the 1840s reveal that for males, appraised values continued to drop until 1844 before making some recovery by 1848 (see figure 16).

¹²⁰ “The Drought—Corn Crop,” *Warrenton Times* as reported in the *Richmond Enquirer*, August 28, 1838. Emphasis in the original.

Similar trends appear in the appraised values of enslaved females during the decade when female values fell annually until reaching a low point in 1844. Data suggests that female values rebounded more quickly than male values in 1846 and peak values for twenty year olds nearly doubled by 1849 from values recorded in 1842 and 1845 (see figure 17).

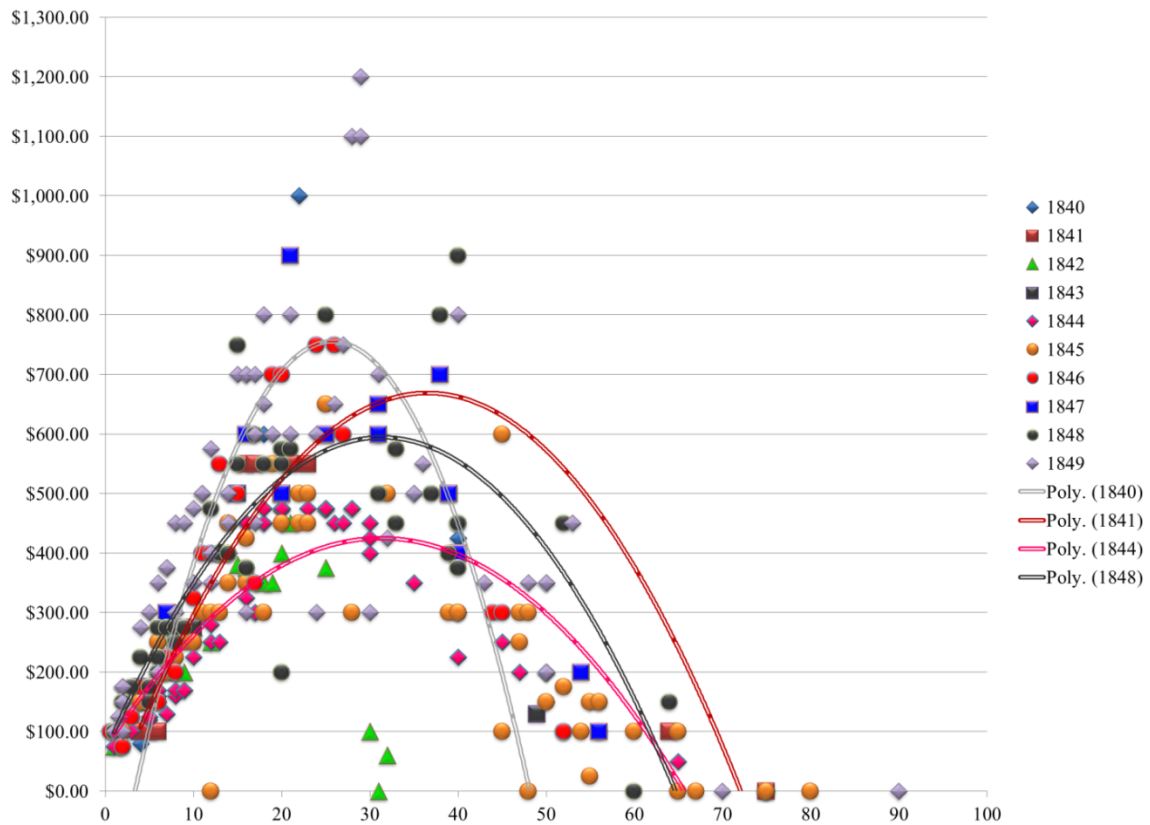


Figure 16. Appraised values of enslaved males, 1840-1849.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 16: 337; Fauquier County Will Book 17: 40, 60, 156, 412, 575, 577; Fauquier County Will Book 18: 227, 348-349, 417-420; Fauquier County Will Book 19: 207-210; Fauquier County Will Book 20: 96; Fauquier County Will Book 21: 48, 93, 124, 131-132, 242, 342, 380-381, 413; Fauquier County Will Book 22: 212, 256-257, 275-276; Fauquier County Records At Large: 226, 231; Prince William County Will Book P: 218, 383-384; and Appraisement of Slaves - A List of the Dower Slaves now living, belonging to the Estate of C. Peyton, dec'd" Peyton v Peyton, Fauquier Chancery 1843-004, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1843-004#img>, image 70 of 81.

Note: Figure includes data for 310 male slaves identified by age in estate inventories and divisions recorded in court documents. Data from the following estates were included: Capt. John Crain (1840), Richard H. Peyton (1840), Thomas Brahan (1840), John Oliver (1841), John White (1841), Chandler Peyton (1842), Presley Johnson (1842), John Garner (1842), Henry Bailey (1842), Nelson N. Fishback (1843), Thomas Fitzhugh (1844), William Skinker (1844), John W. Tyler (1845), Susan Whitley (1846), John Gibson (1846), William Wycoff (1847), Hannah Norris (1848), John Thomas (1847), William Stuart (1848), James Payne (1848), Thomas Helm (1848), Rev. William Williamson (1848), John Ship (1849), John Ogilvie (1849), Ludwell Rector (1849), Janet Henderson (1849), Elijah Hansbrough (1849), and Thomas Embrey (1849).

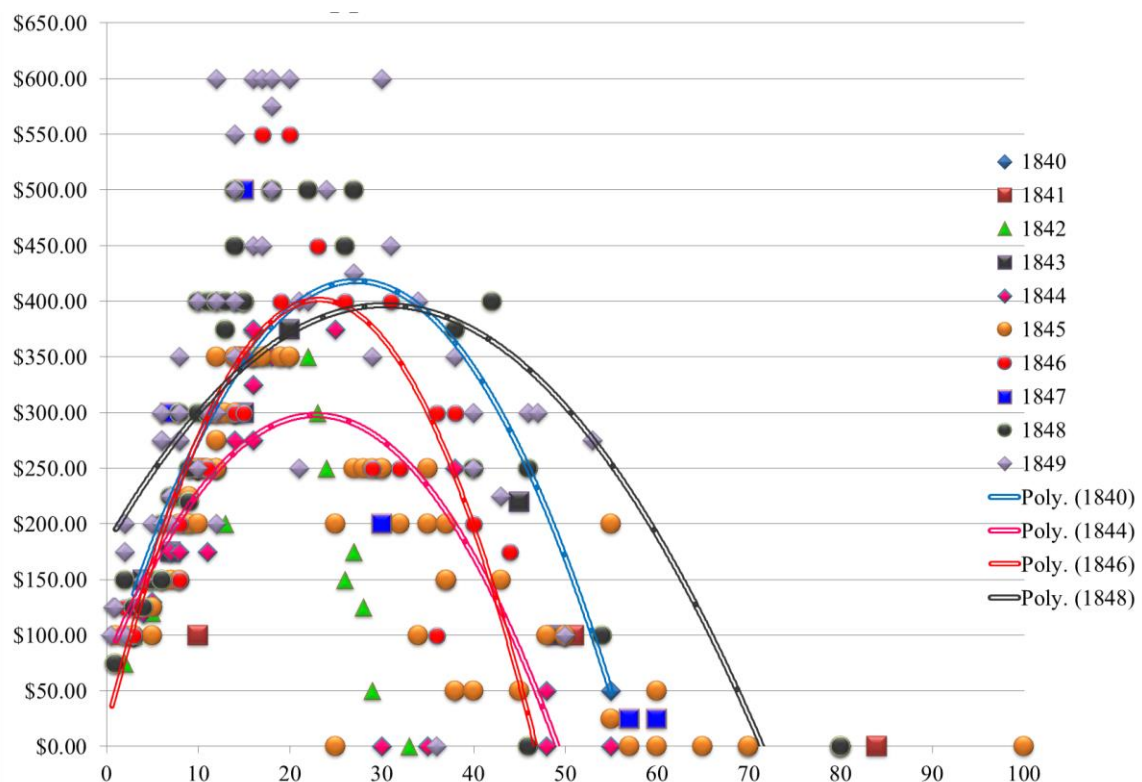


Figure 17. Appraised values of enslaved females, 1840-1849.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 16: 337; Fauquier County Will Book 17: 40, 60, 156, 412, 575, 577; Fauquier County Will Book 18: 227, 348-349, 417-420; Fauquier County Will Book 19: 207-210; Fauquier County Will Book 20: 96; Fauquier County Will Book 21: 48, 93, 124, 131-132, 242, 342, 380-381, 413; Fauquier County Will Book 22: 212, 256-257, 275-276; Fauquier County Records At Large: 226, 231; Prince William County Will Book P: 218, 383-384; and Appraisement of Slaves - A List of the Dower Slaves now living, belonging to the Estate of C. Peyton, dec'd" Peyton v Peyton, Fauquier Chancery 1843-004, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1843-004#img>, image 70 of 81.

Note: Data in the figure based on appraised values of 271 enslaved females. Data from the following estates were included: Capt. John Crain (1840), Richard H. Peyton (1840), Thomas Brahan (1840), John Oliver (1841), John White (1841), Chandler Peyton (1842), Presley Johnson (1842), John Garner (1842), Henry Bailey (1842), Nelson N. Fishback (1843), Thomas Fitzhugh (1844), William Skinker (1844), John W. Tyler (1845), Susan Whitley (1846), John Gibson (1846), William Wycoff (1847), Hannah Norris (1848), John Thomas (1847), William Stuart (1848), James Payne (1848), Thomas Helm (1848), Rev. William Williamson (1848), John Ship (1849), John Ogilvie (1849), Ludwell Rector (1849), Janet Henderson (1849), Elijah Hansbrough (1849), and Thomas Embrey (1849).

As was the case elsewhere in the South, values of slaves rose steadily after 1848 and throughout the 1850s, though as seen in newspaper reports local markets reported

distinct differences in prices. In 1852 the *Fredericksburg News* reported slave sales in the “Valley of Virginia” (Shenandoah Valley) were “much better” than in Richmond while sales in Fredericksburg for “home use” produced prices 25 percent higher than in Richmond. Regional differences also reflected in hiring prices. “Able bodied men” in the Shenandoah Valley earned the lowest wages (between \$75 and \$85), mid-ranged hires were available in Fredericksburg (\$100), while the highest hires could be acquired in Richmond (\$125).¹²¹ The *Lynchburg Virginian* reported hires for black men on the public works between \$120 and \$150 per year while sales of “above ordinary” enslaved persons at an estate sale reached remarkable prices of \$1,028 for an enslaved man “without a trade”; a mother and child went for \$950 and an eleven year old girl brought \$600.¹²²

Appraised values of enslaved persons in northern Virginia also rose annually for both males and females during the first half of the 1850s. The highest appraised values for enslaved males (identified by age) were \$700 in 1850: by 1855 the values for similarly-aged men ascended to \$1,200. Peak values for females grew much less dramatically with highs that peaked around \$750 in 1850 and only grew to a period high of \$900 in 1854 (see figure 18 and figure 19).

¹²¹ “Value of Slaves,” *Fredericksburg News* as reported in the *Richmond Whig*, January 23, 1852.

¹²² “Value of Slaves,” *Lynchburg Virginian* as reported in the *Richmond Whig*, January 23, 1852.

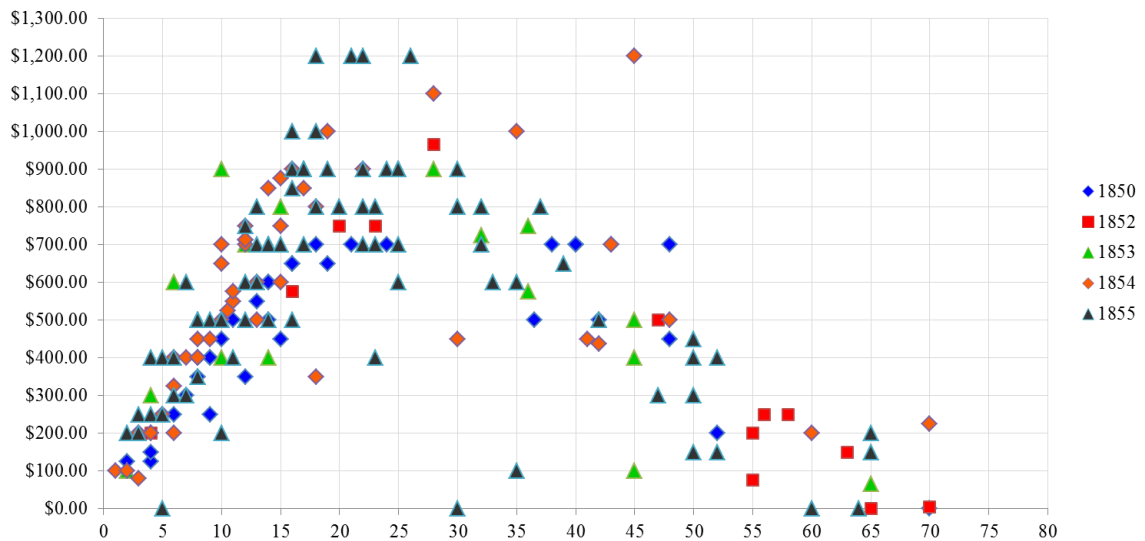


Figure 18. Appraised values of enslaved males, 1850-1855.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 22: 211, 272; Fauquier County Will Book 25: 73, 129-130, 136, 150, 223, 233, 251, 342, 438; Fauquier County Records At Large: 266, 379; Prince William County Will Book Q: 203, 244-245; and *Hoffman, Burneston & Co., v. Alfred Rector & Wife, etc.* Fauquier County Chancery Case 1872-039, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1872-039#img>.

Note: This chart is based on valuations for 200 male slaves provided in 19 estate inventories or divisions in which commissioners supplied age information and gender was clearly indicated. Mother-child or mother-and-children groups, even if containing male children, have not been included as the children were not individually appraised.

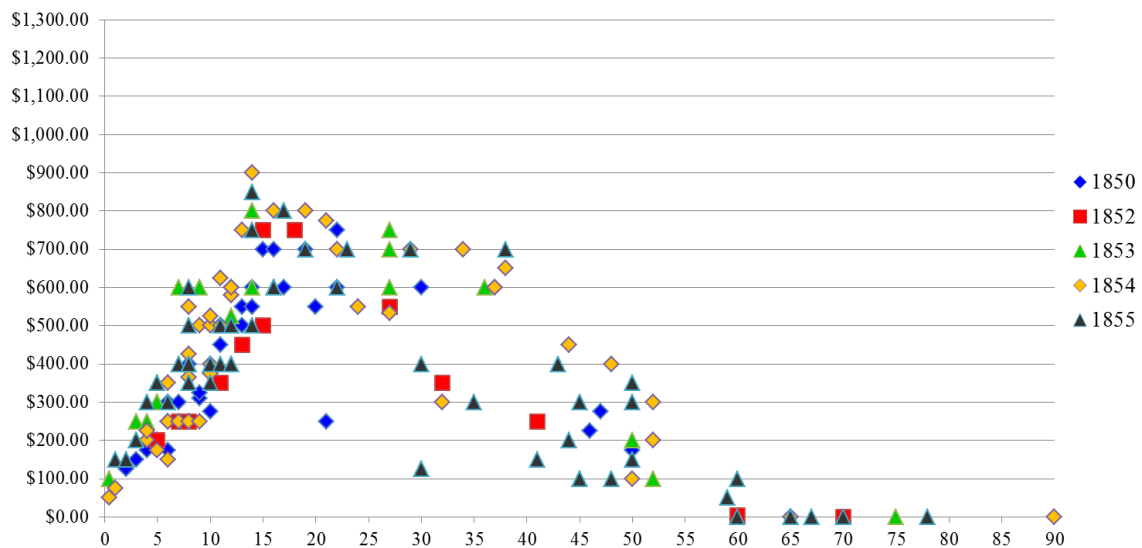


Figure 19. Appraised values of enslaved females, 1850-1855.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 22: 211, 272; Fauquier County Will Book 25: 73, 129-130, 136, 150, 223, 233, 251, 342, 438; Fauquier County Records At Large (1821-1881): 266, 379; Prince William Will Book Q: 203, 244-245; and *Hoffman, Burneston & Co., v. Alfred Rector & Wife, etc.* Fauquier County Chancery Case 1872-039, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1872-039#img>.

Note: This chart is based on valuations for 177 female slaves provided in 19 estate inventories or divisions in which commissioners supplied age information and gender was clearly indicated. Mother-child or mother-and-children groups have not been included.

By 1856 the prices for enslaved persons across Virginia reached new heights. The *Richmond Dispatch* noted that there “has been a greater demand for negroes” in Richmond “during the months of May, June and July, than ever known before.” This increased demand meant that enslaved laborers “commanded better prices during that time,” a noteworthy occurrence because the summer months typically were “the duller in the year.” The newspaper reported that prime female field hands were bringing prices of

\$1,000 to \$1,100 while male field hands were selling from \$1,250 to \$1,500. A “likely” girl, most likely destined for the fancy trade, sold at private auction for \$1,700.¹²³

In early 1857 the editor of the *Warrenton Whig* decided to visit the firm of Dickinson, Hill & Co., slave traders and auctioneers in Richmond, to report to his readers the extent of profits earned through the slave trade. According to the editor’s report, the firm reported gross sales of over \$2 million in 1856. The editor also surveyed other Richmond slave trading firms and estimated the total revenue of earned in the Richmond slave markets exceeded \$4 million. The Warrenton editor predicted that “[i]f this work does not stop in a short time, Virginia will be stript of nearly all her negro population—all owing to the agitation of the infernal negro question by the fanatics of both sections.”¹²⁴ The high prices continued into 1857 when the *Warrenton Whig* reported that “[m]any young negroes were sold here on Monday at enormously high prices” including one enslaved person who sold for over \$1,500.¹²⁵

Newspaper reports of incredible prices across the South communicated to northern Virginia slaveowners the potential wealth that could be acquired through the domestic trade and this information altered the way that enslaved bodies were perceived. Reports that fourteen and fifteen year old enslaved girls described as “common negroes—field hands” sold for around \$1,300 in Oglethorpe County, Georgia while field hands in Abbeville, South Carolina sold for prices ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,300 on terms of a

¹²³ “High Price for Negroes,” *Richmond Dispatch* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, July 23, 1856. On the significance of fancy girls in the domestic slave trade see Edward E. Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men’: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001): 1619-1650.

¹²⁴ “Heavy Sales,” *Warrenton Whig* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, January 10, 1857.

¹²⁵ “Fauquier Items,” *Warrenton Whig* as reported in the *Richmond Whig*, March 3, 1857.

twelve month credit certainly influenced calculations during estate inventories as seen in the rapidly rising appraised values between 1856 and 1860 (see figure 20 and figure 21).¹²⁶ For northern audiences such newspaper reports seemed to flaunt the high regard and demand for enslaved labor across the South during a time of heightened sectional unrest and antagonism over the issue of slavery.¹²⁷

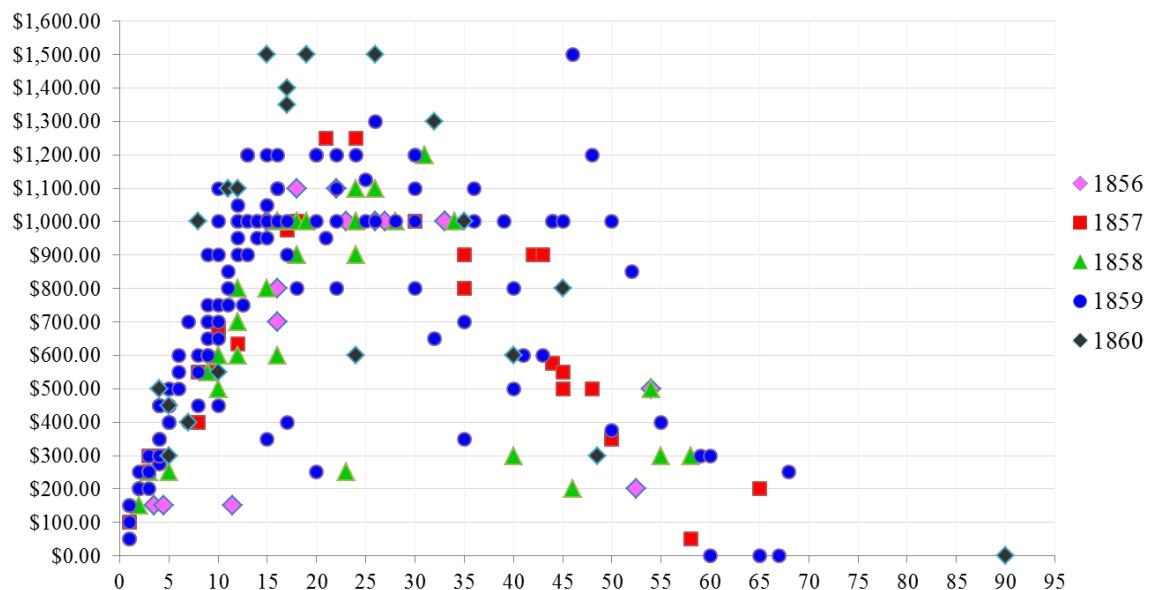


Figure 20. Appraised values of enslaved males, 1856-1860.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 26: 291; Fauquier County Will Book 27: 46, 141, 356, 368; Fauquier County Will Book 28: 134, 187, 192-194, 293, 301, 320, 392; Fauquier County Records At Large: 410-411, 434-436; *Susan E. Humphrey, etc. v. Exors of Thomas G. Humphrey*, Loudoun County Chancery Case 1860-032, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1860-032#img>.

Note: This figure includes data for 220 enslaved men identified by age in sixteen estate inventories.

¹²⁶ “High Prices of Negroes” *Augusta (Georgia) Sentinel* and *Abbeville (South Carolina) Press* as reported in the *Richmond Whig*, December 12, 1856.

¹²⁷

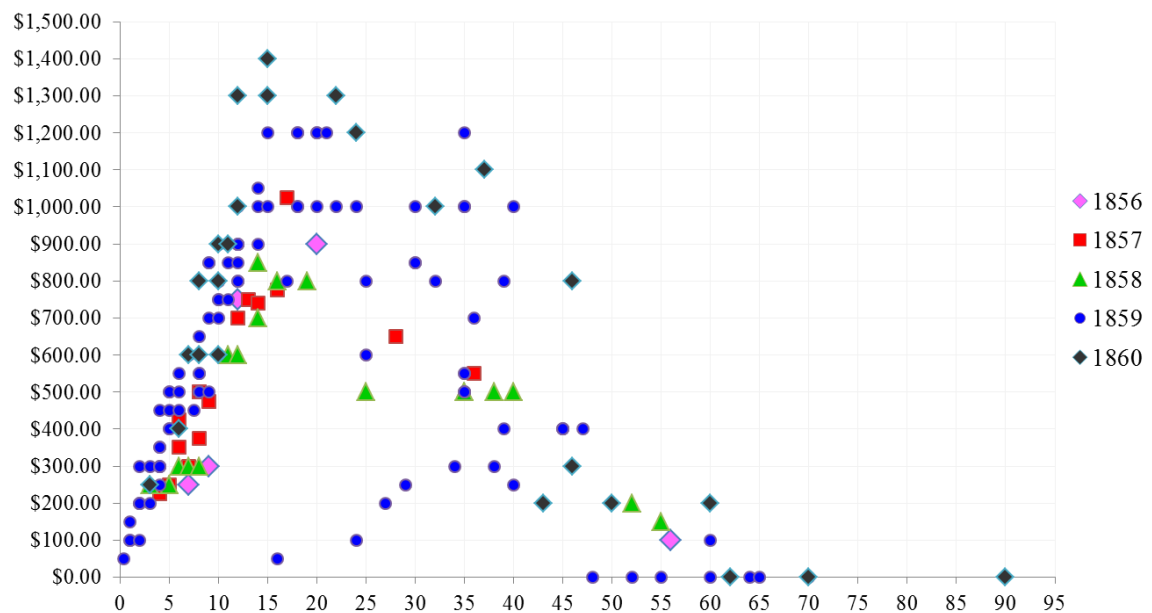


Figure 21. Appraised values of enslaved females, 1856-1860.

Sources: Fauquier County Will Book 26, 291; Fauquier County Will Book 27: 46, 141, 356, 368; Fauquier County Will Book 28: 134, 187, 192-194, 293, 301, 320, 392; Fauquier County Records At Large: 410-411, 434-436; *Susan E. Humphrey, etc. v. Exors of Thomas G. Humphrey*, Loudoun County Chancery Case 1860-032, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1860-032#img>.

Note: This figure includes data for 176 individual enslaved females identified by age from sixteen estate inventories. This figure does not include values for mother-child or mother-and-children appraisals.

The steady rise of prices during the 1850s can be attributed to several local and broad market influences. Across the South the expansion of railroads facilitated access to new agricultural lands, bringing settlers and laborers into sparsely populated areas and providing the mechanism to transport crops, especially cotton, back to market towns. While raising subscriptions funds for stock in the Orange and Alexandria Railroad that would traverse Prince William and Fauquier counties on its way from Alexandria to Gordonsville, a committee of railroad boosters cautioned residents of eight counties across northern Virginia that land, except for subsistence production, was “worthless, till

a way is opened for the exchange of its products.”¹²⁸ Boosters further cited examples of the potential savings of transporting produce via the railroad instead of by the “expensive method of waggoning.” Quick, convenient, and efficient railroad transport increased the profitability of producing agricultural goods, thereby increasing the value and price of agricultural lands. By extension, with an incentive to produce more than subsistence or truck produce that would be sold in nearby markets, railroads encouraged the expansion of agriculture, a move that also expanded the need for enslaved labor.¹²⁹

With greater access to markets and an increased demand for cotton, Deep South cotton production boomed, sparking a need for more field hands and plantation laborers, a need that Upper South slaveholders were all too willing to fill, and a factor that drove up prices for slaves.¹³⁰ A comparison of slave prices in New Orleans and appraised slave values in northern Virginia during the period of 1820 to 1861 reveals similar fluctuations, thus indicating the level of influence far-flung markets and market demands on values of

¹²⁸ “Orange and Alexandria Railroad. To the citizens of Fairfax, Prince William, Fauquier, Culpeper, Rappahannock, Madison, Greene and Orange Counties,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 7, 1849.

¹²⁹ From its depot in Fairfax City the Orange and Alexandria Railroad cut through Prince William County across Bull Run to Tudor Hall (present day Manassas), between Brentsville and Milford towards Weaversville in Fauquier County on to the depot at Culpeper Court House in Culpeper County. See “Map and Profile of the Orange and Alexandria Rail Road with its Warrenton Branch and a portion of the Manasses [sic] Gap Rail Road, to show its point of connection,” Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D. C. < <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3881p.rr005080>>

¹³⁰ Mark A. Yanochik, Mark Thornton, and Bradley T. Ewing found a positive relationship between increasing railroad mileage and slave prices. Since they used slave prices from New Orleans the results may more directly reflect the relationship that existed in the Deep South as opposed to the Upper South generally or more specifically any relationship in Virginia. Still, their overriding argument about the influence of expanding railroad service on the expansion of access to agricultural markets that increased the need for enslaved agricultural laborers as well as the need for railroad construction laborers along rail lines makes sense of the wide-spread relationship between expansion, labor, and slave prices. Mark A. Yanochik, Mark Thornton, and Bradley T. Ewing, “Railroad Construction and Antebellum Slaves Prices,” *Social Science Quarterly*, 84, no. 3 (September 2003): 723-737.

northern Virginia enslaved persons.¹³¹ Laurence J. Kotlikoff's analysis of the New Orleans price for enslaved males aged between 21 and 38 shows a steady climb in prices after 1829 peaking in 1837 before a rapid drop in prices. New Orleans prices began an upturn around 1844, a little earlier than was experienced in northern Virginia, and with few deviations from the upward trend, continued to rise until 1861.¹³² Market trends were not the only influence on northern Virginia slave values after 1845.

In Virginia local expansion of railroads, telegraphs, and increasing land prices affected slave values. Historian William G. Thomas determined that the growth of railroads "were a primary reason for the rise in slave prices" during the 1840s and 1850s.¹³³ Although Loudoun County did not see a railroad within its borders until 1860 when the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad Company laid tracks from Alexandria to Leesburg, other parts of the area directly benefitted from railroad expansion.¹³⁴ By 1852 the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and the Manassas Gap Railroad traversed through both Prince William and Fauquier counties.

The development of railroads across Virginia and the South influenced slave prices in many ways. Railroad companies actively hired and bought enslaved men as railroad construction laborers, driving up the prices of hired enslaved laborers. This demand for labor included the decision of southern railroad boards and presidents to

¹³¹ Although I am comparing appraised values to Kotlikoff's actual sale prices, my comparison considers trends rather than exact dollar figures.

¹³² See Chart I in Laurence J. Kotlikoff, "The Structure of Slave Prices in New Orleans, 1804 to 1862," *Economic Inquiry*, 17, (October 1979), 498.

¹³³ William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 22.

¹³⁴ Rail service in Loudoun began on May 17, 1860 on the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad Company. Charles Preston Poland, Jr., *From Frontier to Suburbia* (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1976), 127.

“sell, finance, and market slaves” as part of their profit schemes.¹³⁵ Another measure of the demand for and lucrative nature of railroad employment for Virginia slaves was the decision to hire out convicts for railroad work. By 1858 Virginia’s Governor John Letcher supported an “Act Providing for the Employment of Negro Convicts on Public Works,” authorizing the State to hire out free black and enslaved convicts held in the state penitentiary.¹³⁶ In 1859 the Covington & Ohio Railroad hired out 77 male and female black convicts, including three convicts from northern Virginia, for a year’s labor at an annual wage ranging from \$75 for women to \$100 for men.¹³⁷

The expansion of the railroad system meant greater access to slave markets across an expanding territory, especially when combined with the extension of telegraph lines. By 1860 approximately 60 percent of Virginians lived within the “railroad access zone” an area defined as located within fifteen miles of a railroad depot.¹³⁸ This access facilitated the slave trade by increasing the speed and convenience with which traders could meet with sellers or deliver enslaved persons to local or long-distance purchasers. Itinerant traders could use the telegraph while on purchasing trips to gain approval for

¹³⁵ Charles Preston Poland, Jr., *From Frontier to Suburbia* (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1976), 127. In Virginia William Thomas found that the “among the directors and corporate officers of the state’s fifteen railroad companies in 1859, 87 out of 112 directors held slaves” and slaveholdings averaged about twenty persons, yet some holdings were as large as 100 persons. *Ibid.*, 24.

¹³⁶ Charles Preston Poland, Jr., *From Frontier to Suburbia* (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 1976), 31.

¹³⁷ “A list of free negroes and slave convicts delivered to Robert F. Bibb and David B. Bibb – contractors on the Covington & Ohio Railroad from the 10th day of October 1859 to the 25th day of June 1860, including those transferred by N. B. French to said Bibbs,” Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, Box #3, Folder 5, Accession #36710, Library of Virginia. Included in the list of 77 free black and enslaved men and women hired by the C & O Railroad were John Miles of Fauquier County, sentenced to eight years imprisonment for house breaking; enslaved man Tom sentenced to transportation by the Loudoun County court for murder; enslaved woman, and Lucy, sentenced by Prince William County court for poisoning. For the hiring contract and rates of annual wages see the contract found in Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, Box #6, Folder #5, Library of Virginia.

¹³⁸ William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 28.

proposed purchases from home offices. Communications via the telegraph expedited these transactions while also conveying real time information about slave prices in more distant markets. The telegraph helped traders, purchasers, and sellers keep in “constant contact” with slave trade offices like those in Richmond.¹³⁹ This exchange of information rapidly influenced the calculation of value of enslaved bodies.

By the end of the decade, slave prices in northern Virginia peaked. Observers at a slave auction in Loudoun County in 1859 noted that a “good many negroes have changed owners” in the county during the week at “pretty high figures.” In one case, the sale of a “family of servants” included a blacksmith who sold for \$1,500 and an enslaved women with two of her children, aged 4 and 2 years old who sold for \$1,590.¹⁴⁰ This rise in prices was noted across Piedmont Virginia. The *Charlottesville* [Virginia] *Advocate* claimed that the demand for slaves “exceed[ed] anything we ever before witnessed in this county” not only among the “professional traders present” but also among local men who “seemed anxious to purchase one or two for his own use.”¹⁴¹

Awareness of slave values not only influenced decisions about limiting or expanding a workforce, but also increasingly represented the commodification of enslaved chattel. In a letter to his son written in 1859, Fauquier resident L. Allan remarked that “people are very sickly in the neighbourhood with the flux” and as one result his neighbor Judy Marshall “lost a likely negro Boy last week worth \$800 and has

¹³⁹ William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 33. William G. Thomas argued that railroads and telegraphs transformed slave trading in the South by providing “time-sensitive information,” connecting “networks of buyers,” offering “rapid transit” of slaves, and by extending the reach of slave trade markets. *Ibid.*, 32-33.

¹⁴⁰ *Democratic Mirror*, January 5, 1859.

¹⁴¹ “Demand for Negroes,” *Charlottesville Advocate* as reported in the *Democratic Mirror*, December 29, 1858.

another down not expected to live.”¹⁴² Allan defined the death of the enslaved boy not in terms of a human loss, but in terms of a loss of important property for Marshall with the expectation that she might incur an additional reduction of wealth should the other infirm boy also succumb. This growing sense of commodification was evident in slave values that translated into meaning of labor, reproduction, skill, and manipulation.

The meaning of enslavement in northern Virginia was a function of labor needs and willingness to labor in a variety of tasks and jobs differentiated by requirements for skill, age, gender, personality, and oftentimes brute strength. Fluctuating demographics meant stability was never guaranteed and that distinct differences appeared between the three counties in this northern Virginia region. These changes affected the availability of enslaved persons for tasks and also hint at the purposeful changes in county composition, a topic discussed in more depth in chapter four. A shifting concept of the relative value of a child, a prime worker, or an “old” slave as well as the different values placed on mothers, males, and females at different points in time indicate that enslavement not only represented labor, but also seemed to generate wealth, either through an immediate return from a sale, or by holding on to an enslaved body for future wealth as a capital investment or speculative commodity that provided a public acknowledgment of a slaveholder’s status within a slave culture. Population trends, diversification of labor, and perceptions of value of enslaved bodies affected and influenced the meaning of slaveholding and being enslaved in northern Virginia’s slave society. How slaveholders

¹⁴² Letter from L. Allan to his [unnamed] son, August 13, 1859, University of Virginia Special Collections.

perceived their role and acted upon community expectations will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: AGENTS OF CONTROL IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA'S SLAVE SOCIETY

White northern Virginians grappled with many challenges in perpetuating the institution of slavery. Runaways, manumitters, indulgent masters, abolitionists, and rebellious slaves all posed a threat to the established hierarchical order of a racially-based slave society. In addition, while minor resistance to enslavement occurred daily, at different periods of time across the region more serious threats to racial control emerged. Historian Drew Gilpin Faust has noted that “slavery’s survival depended less on sweeping dictates of public policy than on tens of thousands of individual acts of personal domination exercised by particular masters over particular slaves.”¹ While “individual acts of personal domination” influenced each slaveholding home and farm, the stability of race relations in the surrounding communities relied more on a multi-layered approach to surveillance and policing elements, not just upon the actions of masters. Slaveowners and overseers bore the immediate responsibility for keeping enslaved persons subordinate, yet when disruptions to this order occurred, churches, patrols, and county courts stepped in to assert community standards.² Over time, heightened perceptions of

¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘Trying to Do a Man’s Business’: Slavery, Violence and Gender in the American Civil War,” *Gender & History*, 4, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 198.

² Jeff Forret termed the trio of master, community and the legal system as the “machinery of the slave society.” This terminology appreciates the systemic control of a slave society while my term “agents of control” reflects the individuality of people who were tasked individually and as a community group to maintain position and order. Jeff Forret, “Slave-Poor White Violence in the Antebellum Carolinas,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 81, no. 2 (April, 2004), 141.

fear and threats to the institution of slavery, both internal and external, challenged the aura of control and unity in the northern Virginia slave society.

The Role of Slave Masters in a Slave Society

Southern communities and newspapers identified the traits of the ideal slaveowner and publicized those persons who served as role models. At his death in 1857 at the age of 74, Prince William County slaveholder Edward D. Fitzhugh was described as the quintessential southern patriarch; a “devoted husband, an affectionate father, indulgent master, a kind neighbor, and an honest man.”³ Relatives described slaveholder George Chapman “affectionate” as a “husband & father...as a master humane & indulgent; as a neighbor he was kind & charitable.” In the estimation of his family Chapman apparently demonstrated “the qualities which adorn & ennoble our nature.”⁴ These qualities of affection, humanity, and indulgence formed only one aspect of the duties and role of a southern patriarch and slaveholder.

The other force valued in society was that of firm control over a work force that at times was deemed willful, disobedient, rebellious, and at worst, dangerous. In his 1825 presidential address before the Agricultural Society of nearby Albemarle County James Barbour affirmed the responsibilities of slaveholders to see to “every mitigation of their

³ “Died,” *Alexandria Gazette*, April 29, 1857. In 1850 Fitzhugh owned seven enslaved persons, perhaps the members of one family with a thirty year old male, thirty year old female, and five children aged eleven, nine, seven, six, and four years old. 1850 U. S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules, Prince William County Virginia, M432, page 785.

⁴ “Died, at his residence, in the County of Prince William on Sunday last, Mr. George Chapman...” *Virginia Gazette*, October 24, [1829], microfilm.

[slaves'] condition, consistent with the end of their existence.” This responsibility was “a solemn obligation” consisting of balancing “good treatment” with “proper discipline.”⁵

Proper discipline and the use of corporal punishment, therefore, provided the key foundation of mastery and control for slaveholders. Edmund Berkeley chronicled in his journal on Saturday, September 10, 1853 that he “had to give Jenny & Jano a severe whipping [sic] for quarreling” in order to keep the peace on his “Evergreen” plantation in Prince William County.⁶ Fauquier slaveholder Richard Buckner noted in his journal that “Tray was whipped for being in bad Company” on February 26, 1827.⁷ Buckner did not record whether he inflicted the punishment or whether his overseer took charge, yet his knowledge of the infraction and punishment indicated his awareness of the behaviors of his enslaved work force and at least a tacit approval of the punishment.

The nature of slave mastery has been extensively reviewed in southern scholarship. Eugene Genovese identified the “reciprocal duties” between master and slave that constituted an obligation and burden for master while they created opportunities for slaves to skillfully negotiate the terms of enslavement.⁸ In northern Virginia newspapers, churches, and the courts set standards for masterly control. The *Southern Planter* advised masters to “assume a manful responsibility;” to do “their duty” with “firmness” and when necessary “punishment, moderate but certain, if deserved,

⁵ James Barbour, “Agriculture,” *The American Farmer*, December 2, 1825.

⁶ Ronald Ray Turner, trans., *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley's Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), 53.

⁷ Entry for Monday, February 26, 1827, *Diary of Richard Bernard Buckner*, vol. 1: January 3, 1827 to December 31, 1827 in *The St. Bernard Diaries, 1827-1862*, transcribed by Christine Perdue Smith (2003), 7. Emphasis in the original.

⁸ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 71.

must be used” to “preserve order among slaves.” In this author’s view, “where it is the *duty* of one set of men to command, and of another to obey, that implicit obedience is absolutely necessary.”⁹

Such was the case when Virginia slaveholder Edward T. Taylor punished an unnamed field hand for resistance to an overseer’s attempt at chastisement for “insolence or idleness.” Upon Taylor’s questioning the enslaved man asserted that the overseer had “attempted to whip him, but that he would not submit to it.” As the enslaved man then resisted Taylor’s attempt to impose discipline by drawing a knife, Taylor drew a pistol and “shot the negro dead at his feet.” The Richmond *Republican* lauded this extreme example of masterly control and in its editorial response stated that Taylor “did just what every man who has the management of negroes should do—enforce obedience or kill them.” The editorialists affirmed “we would rather see every one in the State shot down, than to permit them to rule their masters.”¹⁰ Southern slaveholding combined care with control under the oversight of the neighborhood and community values. Communities observed, discussed, and when deemed appropriate, censured failure to uphold the obligation of a slave master.

Former northern Virginia enslaved man Austin Steward recognized the role of the slave master in both in establishing order and strict control over his enslaved forces and in the expectations of his neighbors when he recalled that

[t]he more tyrannical a master is, the more will he be favorably regarded by his neighboring planters; and from the day that he acquires the reputation of a kind

⁹ “Hiring Negroes,” *Southern Planter* as published in the *Washingtonian*, December 17, 1852. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰ “A Negro Shot,” *Richmond Times* and *Richmond Republican* as printed in the *Liberator*, October 22, 1852.

and indulgent master, he is looked upon with suspicion, and sometimes hatred, and his slaves are watched more closely than before.¹¹

Steward's assessment made clear the perceived relationship between masterly control and communal responsibility.

Loudoun County slaveholder Isaac Piggott understood this aspect of control not only as the duty to maintain discipline among his enslaved forces, but also the pressure to conform to neighborhood standards for slaveholder behavior. In June 1854, one enslaved man "repeatedly and urgently solicited" his master, Isaac Piggott "to permit him ...to have a party or what he termed a picnic upon [Piggott's] land" during the upcoming Whitsunday holiday. Piggott later claimed that he initially refused the request, but "upon further solicitation," even though he was "opposed to the plan," Piggott was "willing to indulge" the (unnamed) enslaved man and therefore gave permission for the picnic. Only later when Piggott was censured by informants who charged Piggott with "permitting an unlawful assembly of negroes on his land" did Piggott account for his decision in an affidavit presented to a justice of the peace.¹²

Piggott denied providing any assistance with the picnic and admitted he was not present at the event. He justified his actions by pointing to the character of the enslaved man (whom he described as "an honest, industrious & well deserving negro") and by explaining his understanding that "other slaveowners in the neighbourhood indulged their slaves in amusements of the same description."¹³ While Piggott admitted responsibility

¹¹ Austin Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 28.

¹² *Commonwealth v. Piggott*, Criminal Case 1854-012, LCHAD.

¹³ *Commonwealth v. Piggott*, Criminal Case 1854-012, LCHAD.

for allowing the event to take place, the role that the unnamed man played in organizing the picnic reveals much about their relationship. The enslaved man believed he could gain his master's permission and even after being rejected, continued to seek it. Perhaps the knowledge that other slaveowners allowed such events (indicating a tacit acceptance in the neighborhood for such "indulgences") encouraged the enslaved man's persistence and Piggott's acquiescence.

On the other hand, Piggott's slaves may have organized the picnic without prior approval, knowing that Piggott would be away for the day; only upon Piggott's indictment in the county court did he portray himself as the benevolent slaveowner who occasionally indulged his slaves in order to use his paternalistic role and reduce his potential financial responsibility for breaking the law.¹⁴ Piggott, perhaps aware of the suspicion or grudge that other slaveholders might hold against him for his indulgence of his slaves, asserted he was "totally unconscious that he was violating any law" and that he had "no intention" of "doing anything that could in any manner injure the morals of the slaves or the rights of their owners" by allowing the picnic. To further proclaim his innocence and possibly remove any lingering suspicions about his motives, Piggott stated he was "no abolitionist and would do nothing whatever to favour the views of abolition either foreign or domestic."¹⁵ These claims of paternalism, governing slaves according to the custom of the neighborhood, and a disavowal of abolitionist intentions signified

¹⁴ Piggott's affirmation, possibly crafted with the assistance of his lawyer, Burr Harrison, was affirmed in open court before Clerk of Court, George K. Fox. The case against Piggott was dismissed on August 14, 1854 on condition that Piggott pay the \$8.26 in court costs, a substantial savings over the typical court-imposed fine of \$20 in addition to court costs. *Commonwealth v. Piggott*, Criminal Case 1854-012, LCHAD.

¹⁵ *Commonwealth v. Piggott*, Criminal Case 1854-012, LCHAD.

Piggot's awareness of his management role as slaveowner and his responsibilities to his neighbors to maintain control. It also affirmed his understanding of the role of community and law in maintaining a slave society in northern Virginia.

Laws regulating the mobility and independence of slaves helped clarify the master's responsibility for controlling the actions of enslaved property. As noted by historian Eva Sheppard Wolf, state laws reflected an "implicit message" that "slaveowning involved responsibilities to the community at large and that society could punish irresponsible slaveholders by depriving them of their slaves."¹⁶ Piggott understood his responsibilities to the community in his role as slaveowner and crafted his comments to appease his neighbors and county magistrates. The role of the master and neighborhood in policing slave activities not only reflected the perceived responsibilities of slave ownership and the dangers of an uncontrolled enslaved population, but also the role of the neighborhood and county courts in determining appropriate limits of mastery and subordination.

Women as Slaveholders

Women also bore responsibility in maintaining control over their enslaved work forces, balancing the gender roles of feminine Christian benevolence and kindness with the more traditionally male role of mastery.¹⁷ In her investigation of the often violent domestic relationships between white mistresses and enslaved black women Thavolia

¹⁶ Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 36.

¹⁷ For more on the gendered roles of slave mastery see especially chapter two in Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Glymph challenged the characterization of the kind, benevolent slave mistress. Glymph charged that “white women’s violence contradicted prevailing conceptions of white womanhood” and that the role of white women’s violence was “integral to the making of slavery, crucial to shaping black and white women’s understanding of what it meant to be female, and no more defensible than masters’ violence.”¹⁸ Female slaveowners in northern Virginia, whether single, married, or widowed, when left with the responsibility of managing field and domestic slaves navigated between cajoling, coercion, and force to create domestic order or profitable production.¹⁹

Memorials and elegies celebrating the lives of slaveowning women reveal the ideals of white society. In the Ewell family, slave mistress Ellen Ewell was described as a “just yet kindly mistress...with a high and quick temper, not ashamed to resent what she considered a wrong” yet combining anger with “the spirit of forgiveness.”²⁰ Upon the death of slave mistress Nancy Gibson, the writer of her obituary observed that “it was...in the domestic circle that Mrs. Gibson’s virtues shone most conspicuously” as an “affectionate wife—the tender mother—the kind mistress and the steady friend” and “by the uniform propriety of her life [she] was a worthy model for her sex.”²¹ Kindness, ability to correct subordinates, and a virtuous sense of domesticity exemplified the public

¹⁸ Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2003), 5.

¹⁹ For the extra pressures placed on slave mistresses managing enslaved forces during the Civil War see Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘Trying to Do a Man’s Business’: Slavery, Violence and Gender in the American Civil War,” *Gender & History*, 4, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 197-214.

²⁰ Alice Maude Ewell, *A Virginia Scene Or, Life in Old Prince William* (1931, repr., Fredericksburg, Virginia: BookCrafters, Inc., 1991), 49.

²¹ “Died,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 21, 1831. In 1830 David Gibson, spouse of Nancy Gibson, reported thirteen slaves in his household: two boys and two girls under the age of 10; five men and one woman aged between ten and twenty-four years; two women aged twenty-four to thirty-six years; and one woman older than fifty-five years. Nancy Gibson surely supervised the domestic work assigned to the four enslaved women in the Gibson household. 1830 Federal Census, Aldie, Loudoun County, Virginia.

persona of the benevolent Christian slave mistress, yet within the private sphere of the home, the pressure to control enslaved behavior and create the orderly domestic space often led to violent confrontations between female slaveowner and slave.²²

Enslaved men and women, however, saw another side of this idealized depiction of elite white femininity. Austin Steward, when reflecting upon the death of his mistress, Mrs. Helm, remarked that although she had been born into affluence, “well educated and highly accomplished” and “possessed of every means to become a useful woman and an ornament to her sex,” her lack of religious upbringing and the influence of slavery turned her into a “tyrannical demon.” Steward affirmed the pervasive nature of slaveholding on a person’s character by stating that “Slavery transforms more than one, otherwise excellent woman, into a feminine monster.”²³

When Margaret Lee wrote to her kinsman, Isham Keith in Fauquier County requesting his assistance in locating and purchasing a dining room servant for another female relative, Maria Mason, Lee clearly expressed the requirements. Mason wanted a

²² Thavolia Glymph argued that to “function and to meet the standards of domesticity, the plantation household required the labor of enslaved women—to beautify, clean, order, and thus civilize it” yet when enslaved women resisted this domestic ideology slave mistresses characterized slaves as “backwards” and incapable of conforming to slaveholders’s “civilizing mission” of domestic instruction. This tension led slave mistresses to employ force to conform to expectations of management of slaves. Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65 (quote) - 66. In contrast, Brenda Stevenson interpreted the mistress-slave relationship in Loudoun County more as an extension of the master-slave relationship cultivated in the home that was articulated through the relationship established by slaveholding husband with his wife. In Stevenson’s view, slaveholding women “did not have the power to challenge the profoundly entrenched institution. Bound by the precepts of their roles as obedient, submissive wives, slaveholding women acted principally as their husbands’ representatives in the lives of slaves, not as independent, rebellious agents out to reconstruct or even to refine the system.” Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 199.

²³ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 86-87. In her study of Texas slaveholder, Lizzie Neblett, Drew Gilpin Faust discovered that when frustrated “by feelings of powerlessness and incompetence as both slave manager and parent, Lizzie turned to brute force” both at her own hands and via the whipping hand of her hired overseers. Drew Gilpin Faust, “‘Trying to Do a Man’s Business’: Slavery, Violence and Gender in the American Civil War,” *Gender & History*, 4, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 209.

man aged between 25 and 35 years old, not necessarily an “accomplished servant” but one “who is docile & teachable” as she was “very willing to teach” to suit her needs. The prospective servant must be willing to “obey her and reward her for the trouble his instructions will give.”²⁴ Maria Mason relied on Lee’s help and Lee demurred to a male relative, Keith, to select a likely candidate, negotiate a deal for a “liberal price,” pay, and then seek reimbursement from Mason’s husband. Family and friendship networks assisted in the acquisition of specific types of enslaved workers. Even as women looked to male relatives to handle the public face of slave-trading, they also revealed much about the private expectations of enslaved labor – an insistence on docility, trainability, and humble gratitude on the part of the servant for gaining the position of dining room servant.

The expectations of female slaveholders like Mason went unmet when enslaved persons resented the lack of control over their time and labor. Balancing punishment with the care of persons valued as income-producing assets complicated the role of slave mistress, especially for women whose sole income derived from the labors of their enslaved forces.²⁵ Depending on the transgression this control could be meted out personally or through a proxy.

When administering punishments female slaveowners often used items that signified their positions in the household. Former Leesburg slave Peyton Lucas remembered that his mistress used “a dairy key about as big as a child’s fist” to beat him

²⁴ Letter from Margaret Gordon (Scott) Lee to Isham Keith, n.d., Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

²⁵ Kirsten Wood recognized that “self-interest dictated that widows not maim their valuable, income-producing property, whether they owned it or held it only for life” thus complicating the rituals of punishment and control. Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 49.

on the head as punishment.²⁶ Former slave Austin Steward remembered his slaveowner's wife as "a great scold" who continually found reasons to punish certain slaves "by striking them over the head with a heavy iron key, until the blood ran; or else whipping them with a cowhide, which she always kept by her side when sitting in her room."²⁷ It is worthy to note that these women used keys, a symbol of domestic authority and source of control over costly provisions, as an instrument for punishment.²⁸

The age and physical strength of a slave often determined whether a slaveholding woman would administer punishment or shift that responsibility to another person. White women punished younger slaves directly while corrections of older or physically threatening slaves were handled by husbands, or in their absence, male relatives, overseers, or hired men. Loudoun County slaveholder Susan Colston delegated the task of punishing a recalcitrant slave to a hired man, Mr. Rector, whom she paid \$1.13 "for whipping negro Jack" in 1847.²⁹ When slaveowner Jane Baylor suspected her enslaved girl Mary of setting fire to Baylor's house, Baylor sent Mary to Baylor's brother, William A. G. Dade, who also served as a county official, to decide what to do with Mary.³⁰ Both

²⁶ "Charles Peyton Lucas," Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery; The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, with an Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Upper Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1856), 105. Hereafter referred to as Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*.

²⁷ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 24-25.

²⁸ Catherine Clinton discussed the importance of keys for management of southern households citing that "almost every slaveholder's wife supervised the supplies and kept the keys to household locks on her person." Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 20.

²⁹ "Susan L. Colston's Guardian Account with Edward Colston," Entry for December 10, 1847, Loudoun County Guardian Account Book D: 174. Edward Colston administered Susan's inherited portion of the Colston estate and in that capacity was probably the one to handle the transaction.

³⁰ "Letter from Wm. A. G. Dade of Dumfries to James E. Heath, Esqr of Richmond for Governor James Patton Preston," August 11, 1819, Executive Papers of Governor James Patton Preston, Accession 41737, Box 8, Folder 4 (1819 August 2-15), Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Austin Steward and Peyton Lucas recalled how their mistresses controlled young, domestic enslaved laborers, while the task of punishing field hands or more truculent slaves was often delegated to an overseer, male relative, or county official.³¹

Enslaved persons who expressed their resistance to slavery through criminal acts threatened a white woman's reputation for mastery in a society predicated on hierarchy and control.³² Women who could not control their enslaved forces faced the intercession of their community and county courts.³³ Miss Charley A. E. Jane Russell of Leesburg relied on her enslaved laborers to generate wages for her financial support, yet over the years Russell's slaves caused her financial loss and public consternation. In 1835 her thirty-year-old enslaved man, Joe Jenkins, ran away while hired to David Carr near Leesburg.³⁴ In 1846 Miss Russell faced a very public trial concerning her enslaved woman, Maria, who had fled Leesburg to meet her newly freed husband, Nelson Talbot

³¹ In her discussion of Texas slave mistress Lizzie Neblett, left to manage a fractious enslaved population of eleven persons plus hired enslaved domestic servants when her husband served in the Civil War, historian Drew Gilpin Faust demonstrated how Lizzie "was not in fact a woman alone, dependent entirely on her own resources," but was in fact bolstered in her control of her enslaved forces by the interventions of her neighbors and her father's overseer, each displaying a different slave management style. Drew Gilpin Faust, "'Trying to Do a Man's Business': Slavery, Violence and Gender in the American Civil War," *Gender & History*, 4, no. 2 (Summer 1992), 203.

³² Historian Kirsten E. Wood noted that slaves "often fared no better or even worse than before" when their management transferred from master to widowed mistress. Wood asserted that the process of debt settlement and estate division especially threatened the stability of enslaved families through the very real possibility of sales. Slave management by widows also might be tempered by less brutality, yet likely intervention by male relatives or officials of the patriarchal state increased the potential for strict or harsh measures of control. Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 37.

³³ Kirsten Wood takes the stance that state laws "made it easy for widows to rely on the state's coercive power. If widows feared to act firmly, or simply thought it incompatible with their gender role, judges, slave patrollers, sheriffs, and others had every reason to suspect, convict, and harshly punish slaves for them." This perspective allows for passivity in the control of enslaved men and women, letting or relying on (male) others to take control. I take the position that the court stepped in to adjudicate punishment and to reassert control in the failure of the slaveholder (male or female). Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 57.

³⁴ "\$50 Reward," *Genius of Liberty*, June 20, 1835. Unlike some other slave mistresses who used agents to handle such business, Russell posted the runaway slave ad herself.

Gant, after Russell refused to sell her to Gant.³⁵ In 1854 Russell's enslaved man, Harrison, was found guilty of arson in the burning of Rev. George Adie's barn and sentenced to hang.³⁶ Each of these incidents indicated to some extent a lack of control over her enslaved forces and the expectations of her neighborhood that the court would intervene if needed to reassert control.

In some cases county courts required slaveowners to post bond for the "good behavior" of slaves accused of criminal behavior. The recognizance served as a legal acknowledgement of personal and financial responsibility on the part of the slaveholder for adhering to specified conditions of behavior or actions. If conditions were not met, the slaveholder must forfeit financial assets to the sum specified in the recognizance. Enslaved resistance, therefore, potentially threatened the financial security of female slaveholders, especially widows who relied upon enslaved labor or hired wages for their livelihoods, when recognizances for future good behavior were forfeited or when crimes resulted in punishments of a court-ordered sale or execution of a criminal.³⁷

In 1844 Loudoun slaveowner Betsy C. Mason entered into separate recognizances with the court for assuring the "good behavior" of seven enslaved men "towards the Commonwealth and all its citizens and especially towards John Matthews." For each of

³⁵ Gant was later acquitted of the charges of stealing a slave when his lawyer asserted that Nelson and Maria had married with the consent of both their owners and as such Maria was his wife and not obligated to testify against her husband, Nelson. Following the trial Gant was able to negotiate the purchase of his wife Maria from Russell. "An Interesting Case and an Important Decision," *Loudoun Chronicle* as reported in the *National Era*, January 1847. See also the discussion of runaway spouses in chapter six in this study.

³⁶ *Commonwealth v. Harrison*, Criminal Case 1854-009, LCHAD.

³⁷ Courts also assessed recognizances to male slaveholders whose enslaved property committed crimes. For example, the Loudoun Court ordered Benjamin White, master of Enoch, to enter into a recognizance with the court in the amount of \$100 to ensure Enoch's "good behavior" for a period of one year after Enoch was found guilty of the crime of stealing a hog from the property of John Downes in 1823. *Commonwealth v. Enoch*, Criminal Case 1823-036, LCHAD. Enoch was sentenced to receive thirty-nine lashes and was committed to the jail until White secured the recognizance.

these men Mason was liable for damages of \$50 to \$100 should they fail to appear in court or cause any further breach of the peace.³⁸ Charley A. E. Jane Russell also agreed to a recognizance for her enslaved man Harrison guaranteeing his future good behavior over the course of the next twelve months in lieu of the court imposing a harsher sentence and punishment on Harrison for arson in 1854. Recognizing Russell's reliance on the income raised through the hires of her slaves, the Loudoun court probably mitigated the punishment imposed on her enslaved man Harrison.³⁹

Russell's sister, Eliza Russell also faced the Loudoun County Court when her enslaved man Armistead assaulted George Lee in 1854. Instead of imposing a sentence of sale and transportation that would have removed Armistead from Russell's control, the court ordered Russell and her security, her sister C. A. E. Jane Russell, to each enter into a recognizance in the substantial amount of \$1,000 for Armistead's future good behavior towards the citizens of Loudoun County for the next twelve months.⁴⁰ Eleven months later the Russell sisters faced a financial disaster that might leave them in penury when Armistead again failed to "keep the peace" and was found guilty of aiding and abetting Charles, an enslaved man, in the felonious theft of bacon from Thomas Berkby.⁴¹ To secure Armistead's good behavior, Russell and her sister again entered into a

³⁸ The seven men were identified as "Negro Slave Joe," "Negro man Daniel," "Negro man Thom," "Negro man Robert," "Negro man Bill otherwise called Bill King," "Negro man Charles," and "Negro Fenton." "Recognizances of Betsy C. Mason," Criminal Case 1844-020, LCHAD. Although not specified, the nature of the recognizance suggests that Matthews felt threatened in some way by the enslaved men, whether through their actions, words, or even their failure to behave submissively.

³⁹ *Commonwealth v. Harrison*, Criminal Case 1854-009, LCHAD.

⁴⁰ "Papers," *Commonwealth v. Armistead*, Criminal Case 1855-015, LCHAD. Armistead received thirty lashes for his part in the theft of \$6 worth of bacon from Thomas Berkley. He was confined to jail until his mistress, Eliza Russell entered into a recognizance in the amount of \$800 to be levied upon her goods and chattels as well as \$500 security secured by another party upon the condition that Armistead "shall keep the peace and be of good behavior for the term of one year from this date."

⁴¹ "Papers," *Commonwealth v. Armistead*, Criminal Case 1855-015, LCHAD.

recognizance (Eliza in the amount of \$800 and C. A. E. Jane in the amount of \$500) to secure Armistead's good behavior for the term of one year.⁴² Russell then chose the extraordinary action of enlisting the assistance of Samuel M. Janney to send Armistead to Zanesville, Ohio, where, due to Russell's faith in Armistead's "integrity," Russell allowed for Armistead to hire himself out for the coming year in that location and send a "reasonable" portion of that hire back to Russell. Russell and Janney apparently believed that Armistead's removal from Virginia to a free state was the best assurance that he would not cause Russell any further legal or financial woes in Loudoun County.⁴³

The Loudoun Court used the legal process of recognizances to force slaveowners to take responsibility for the actions of their enslaved men and women in lieu of assigning harsher punishments especially during the 1850s, perhaps in recognition of the increased values of enslaved property that soared during the decade prior to the Civil War and a hesitation to follow the strict letter of the law in determining punishments for slaves owned by wealthy women.⁴⁴ For the Russell sisters, the court probably recognized the women's reliance on their chattel slaves for their financial well-being, yet the high bonds

⁴² "Russell &c to Commonwealth, Recognizance," Criminal Case 1855-015, LCHAD.

⁴³ *Commonwealth v. Russell &c*. Criminal Case 1855-015, LCHAD. The Loudoun Court did file charges against the Russell sisters to recoup the bond from Armistead's 1854 recognizance (a total bond valued at \$2000). The court found for the Commonwealth and charged the Russell sisters \$10.69 in costs, presumably in addition to collecting \$2,000 from the "several goods and chattels, lands, and tenements" of the Russell sisters. This was not an end to the financial woes faced by Eliza Russell. In April 1855 she and her sister Sally Ann Russell were compelled to enter into a recognizance each in the amount of \$150 for securing the appearance of Eliza's enslaved woman Adaline in court and for her continued good behavior for the term of one year. "Recognizance," *Russell &c. to Commonwealth*, May 31, 1855, Criminal Case 1855-015, LCHAD.

⁴⁴ The Loudoun County Court did not solely use the process of recognizance to aid slaveholding women. Sometimes the option of a recognizance was offered to male slaveowners. See *Commonwealth v. Enoch*, Criminal Case 1823-036, LCHAD. Enoch was convicted of stealing a hog from John Downs. His punishment included receiving thirty-nine lashes and committal in jail until his master, Benjamin White, would enter into a recognizance of \$100 promising Enoch's "good behavior" for the next twelve months.

imposed on the Russell sisters indicated the importance the county court placed on masterly control over enslaved men.

The Role of the Community in Controlling Slaveholders

The southern community played a role in enforcing standards of control, morality, and consensus. Even though slaveowners controlled the correction of their enslaved forces, sometimes the community decided the limits of mastery. Historian Andrew Fede asserted that interference with a master's "right to control his slaves as he saw fit" depended on two factors: the potential threat to other community members' enslaved property values resulting from the master's actions and the "community interest in slave control and order."⁴⁵ A contemporary legal treatise published by Francis Wharton in 1852 differentiated between acceptable punishment meted out to a slave and criminally prosecuted battery upon a white person by explaining

a blow inflicted upon a white man carries with it a feeling of degradation, as well as bodily pain, as well as a sense of injustice: all or either of which, are calculated to excite passion; whereas a blow inflicted upon a slave is not attended with any feeling of degradation, by reason of his lowly condition, and is only calculated to excite passion from bodily pain, and a sense of wrong.⁴⁶

In other words, a master could legally "control" his slaves using measures deemed appropriate to maintain his authority as master as part of his duties to the community.

⁴⁵ Andrew Fede. "Legitimized Violent Slave Abuse in the American South, 1619 – 1865: A Case Study of Law and Social Change in Six Southern States," *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 2 (April 1985), 124-125.

⁴⁶ Francis Wharton, *A Treatise on the Criminal Law of the United States: Comprising a Digest of the Penal Statutes of the General Government, and of Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia; with the Decisions on Cases arising upon those Statutes, and a General View of the Criminal Jurisprudence of the Common and Civil Law*, second edition (Philadelphia: James Kay, Jun. and Brother, Law Booksellers and Publishers, 1852), 408 fn(p). Hereafter referred to as Wharton, *A Treatise*.

Society relied on him to maintain the status quo of master-slave relations. Wharton confirmed the belief that slaves reacted to corporal punishments not out of pain, but out of a sense of wrongdoing.

On February 17, 1815, Charles Hunton led a coroner's inquest after the body of Rachel, an enslaved woman belonging to Richard M. Chichester, was found in Russell's Field on John Kemper's property. After investigation, the inquest determined that Rachel had died "in consequence of the ill treatment" of Chichester "by suffering her to go naked & without food at the inclement season of the year." One month later George Carter, an influential neighbor of Chichester's swore under oath that Chichester had murdered an enslaved man named Joshua. For these crimes Fauquier County officials charged Richard M. Chichester with the deaths of two of his enslaved laborers. Chichester was incarcerated in the county jail until posting bond in the amount of \$5000 and offering two securities who individually posted bonds for \$1000 to guarantee their separate and join appearances at the April County Court. The sheriff summoned fifteen magistrates who represented some of the most wealthy and powerful families in the county including the Chilton, Blackwell, Picket, Hunton, and Smith families to serve at the trial and indicate their judgments on the charges as well as the appropriate punishment conforming to Virginia law, but more importantly to the values and expectations of Chichester's neighborhood and community of peers.⁴⁷ Having performed the public ritual of community oversight, investigation, and public trial, the magistrates found Chichester not

⁴⁷ *Commonwealth v. Richard M. Chichester*, Box #7, 1815-015, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records, AAHA.

guilty in the deaths of Rachel and Joshua, yet affirmed the right of the community to judge a master's control over and care of his enslaved forces.⁴⁸

In Loudoun County in 1821 slaveowner Samuel Frank was charged with “unreasonably and inhumanely” beating his enslaved woman Judy. Justices Thomas Sanders and Samuel M. Edwards apparently examined Judy and claimed she “had been most shockingly beaten” and swore out a warrant for Frank to appear before them for questioning. Frank appeared before the court and was ordered to enter into a recognizance, presumably for his future good behavior towards Judy.⁴⁹

Loudoun County Justice of the Peace William Carr decided that charges “ought to be examined into by the county court” in 1821 to determine Thomas Gregg Jr.’s culpability in the murder of Sanders, an enslaved man belonging to the estate of the late Thomas Leslie, deceased. Sanders had been “mortally wounded by the stroke of some unlawful weapon” upon his head, and Loudoun resident Samuel D. Leslie had “good ground to suspect” that Gregg was the perpetrator.⁵⁰ Carr, despite his opinion that there was “but a slight suspicion of guilt” against Thomas Gregg, Jr., must have realized that the court was responsible for determining guilt in the suspicious death as well as financial responsibility for the loss of property.

After the death of an enslaved woman named Katy on Gerard Mason’s Woodbridge plantation in 1845 in Prince William County, an inquest was performed.

⁴⁸ For the case involving the death of Rachel, see *Commonwealth against Richard W. Chichester*, March 28, 1815, Fauquier County Court Minute Book 21: n.p., microfilm. For the case concerning the death of Joshua see *Commonwealth against Richard W. Chichester*, April 24, 1815, Fauquier County Court Minute Book 21: n.p., microfilm.

⁴⁹ *Commonwealth v. Samuel Frank*, Criminal Case 1821-041, LCHAD.

⁵⁰ *Commonwealth v. Thomas Gregg, Jr.* Criminal Case 1821-034, LCHAD. Gregg was acquitted of the charge of murdering Sanders on August 24, 1821.

Coroner James H. Reid along with twelve “good and lawful men” appointed by the county court visited Mason’s farm and exhumed Katy’s body to determine the cause of death and whether charges should be levied against Mason. Witnesses attested to Mason’s various and frequent beatings of Katy that left her unable to walk or speak and eventually led to her death. Although one witness described Mason’s treatment of Katy as occurring when Mason was “in a violent rage” when he used “any thing he could get hold of” to beat her, none of the witnesses mentioned any interference on their part to stop Mason’s violence. Only after Katy’s death four men related their knowledge of Mason’s violent treatment of her and the debilitating and ultimately deadly results.⁵¹ Following the inquest, James H. Reid issued a warrant for Mason’s arrest and summoned a called court in November to adjudicate Mason’s culpability in the murder of Katy.⁵²

Mason’s standing in the community derived from his connections to the powerful Mason family (he was the grandson of revolutionary patriot George Mason of Gunston Hall, Virginia) and his inherited wealth in land and slaves in Prince William County. Perhaps these factors influenced the decisions of the county court during Mason’s

⁵¹ “Coroner’s Inquest on the Body of Katy,” October 29, 1845, LP (1845) 001095_00322, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. William Johnson noted that Mason was “apparently in a violent rage” when he “threw a stick at a negro boy & a stone at a little negro girl” before turning his attentions to Katy, attacking her in her cabin. Johnson heard “a great noise as if thumping or knocking people about” but Johnson went on his business. After returning that way the next day he “saw negro Katy lying in the yard at the quarter, seemed to be in great pain as if from a beating – just breathing, past talking, not able to turn about.” Likewise, James Foster, Jr. recalled witnessing Mason “stamp Katy in his yard at his dwelling” the previous year. The testimony of Mason’s neighbor Henry Duvall affirmed the frequency of Katy’s beatings at the hands of Mason. William Bates testified that Katy was “unable to walk about” for at least two months before her death.

⁵² “Warrant to Summon Court,” *Commonwealth v. Mason*, LP (1845) 001052_00147, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. In the warrant Reid declares that the jury of inquest found Mason “guilty of the murder of negro woman slave Katy or Kate at the farm of the said Gerard Mason.” According to the arrest warrant issued by magistrate J. H. Reid, Mason was apprehended and committed to jail on October 30, 1845. “Warrant,” LP (1845) 001181_00043, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

incarceration awaiting a trial in the death of Katy. Mason was held in jail for a period of time, perhaps to satisfy the community that some action should be taken, before the charges against him were quashed. The community was cognizant of Mason's dangerous behavior, especially considering that he had been indicted on charges of assaulting a white woman, Eliza Harrison, four years earlier in 1841 in Prince William County.⁵³ Three years after Katy's death Gerard Mason again faced charges, this time for shooting his white neighbor, John Quinsey Duvall with intent to kill.⁵⁴ After court officials conducted an inquiry into the facts of the case, executed warrants for Mason and witnesses to appear in court, and presented the information in court, the case against Mason was continued repeatedly until 1849 when the plaintiff unexpectedly dropped his charges against Mason, probably because he questioned whether the court would rule against Mason or assign punishment because of the status of the Mason family in northern Virginia.

Communities used the court system to sanction slaveholders for their mistreatment of slaves as well as for their inability to control their enslaved forces. These public displays enforced the ritual of community oversight and provided one means of

⁵³ Mason was indicted by a Prince William Grand Jury in March 1841 and summoned to attend the June 1841 county court on charges he assaulted Eliza Harrison. Summons, *Commonwealth v. Mason*, LP (1841) 001088_00724, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

⁵⁴ By the time of Mason's indictment for the assault on Duvall, the court imposed a bond totaling \$20,000 for Mason's appearance in court with Mason securing his appearance with the guarantee of \$10,000 in his goods and chattels combined with Thomas M. Farrow pledging \$5,000, William Brown pledging \$2,500 and Dr. Addison H. Saunders promising \$2,500 of each man's "goods and chattels, lands and tenements" as securities for Mason's appearance in court. This large amount levied against Mason provided one measure of the county's determination that Mason face the court to answer the charges. *Commonwealth v. Mason*, LP (1848) 001099_00275, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. John Duvall may have been the son of Mason's neighbor Henry Duvall who testified against Mason during Katy's trial. "Judgments 1846-1848" Folder 1848. Prince William County Virginia Circuit Court Archives, Manassas, Virginia.

adjudicating along a spectrum of offenses and in some cases represented a real effort to curtail the worst of abuses. Other groups in a slave society provided more day-to-day tasks of enforcing racial hierarchy and maintaining order and control.

Overseers and their role in controlling the enslaved population

The overseer served as another agent of slave control in southern society.

Historian John W. Blassingame described him “[a]s the visible symbol of authority” and “the most frequent target of rebellious slaves disgruntled over their work load, food allotment, or punishment.”⁵⁵ Former enslaved man, Willis Love, born in 1849 as property of the Peters family of Fauquier later recalled that “overseers ran the plantation and we saw the white folks only infrequently.”⁵⁶ Austin Steward, born enslaved in Prince William County in 1794, recalled that the job of the overseer employed to manage the slaves on the Helm plantation was to “look after each slave in the field, and see that he performed his task.” To facilitate control, the overseer “always went around with a whip, about nine feet long, made of the toughest kind of cowhide, the but-end of which was loaded with lead, and was about four or five inches in circumference, running to a point at the opposite extremity.” This “dreadful instrument of torture” when employed by “a cruel overseer,” remembered Steward, “was truly fearful.” Charged with maintaining discipline and ensuring that each slave exhibited a certain level of productivity, the

⁵⁵ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 176-177.

⁵⁶ “Only Slave in Portland,” *Boston Daily Globe*, March 4, 1917.

overseer “was always on hand to attend to all delinquents, who never failed to feel the blows of his heavy ship.”⁵⁷

While enslaved in Fauquier, William Brown remembered the overseer as a man who would “stand in the shade of a tree, where he can see the slaves” during field work. If the overseer sensed the work had slackened, he would call out “to hurry them up.” Even though the overseer apparently didn’t “like to leave the shade of the tree” during the hot weather, he left long enough to administer “some lashes” to any worker who fell behind the pace.⁵⁸

Former Fauquier County enslaved man Francis Fedric explained that many masters “possessing large plantations, and some hundreds of slaves” hired overseers out of a desire to “divest themselves as much as possible of the cares of managing the estate.” According to Fedric, the overseers paid a salary from “1,200 to 1,400 dollars per annum” for “the best and most humane overseers.”⁵⁹ Other slaveholders, “in order to save the cost of an overseer, but chiefly to exact as much work as possible out of the niggers, make a nigger an overseer, who if he does not cruelly work the slaves is threatened with a flogging, which the master cannot give to a white man.” In this type of relationship, the

⁵⁷ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 15-16. Steward identified Helm’s overseer as Barsly Taylor, a married man with five children. *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁸ “William Brown,” Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 280-281.

⁵⁹ Fedric may have exaggerated the sums paid to overseers. In 1793 administrators for the estate of Joseph Smith paid William Reading £2 and gave him £2.19.06 worth of tobacco for his services as overseer. “The Estate of Joseph Smith deceased with Rowley Smith and John Porter,” Fauquier County Will Book 2: 336. Mr. I. Sudduth received 1/3 of 667 pounds of tobacco, a crop worth £03.02.02 “for Overseeing” for the estate of William Harrison, Jr. between 1785 and 1790. “Mr. William Harrison Junr Dec’d in Acc[oun]t with Philip Mallory,” Fauquier County Will Book 2: 187. The practice of making payments of a stipulated proportion of tobacco or other goods continued in northern Virginia into the nineteenth century, incentivizing overseers to encourage abundant crop production. Loudoun County slaveholder William Hill Gray paid William Etcher \$140 for services as an overseer for 1855. From 1857 through 1859 Colvin Coates earned \$160 annually serving at Gray’s overseer. In 1860 Coates’s services cost Gray \$167.50. William Hill Gray Farm Book, Gray Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

enslaved overseer “very often behaves in the most brutal manner to the niggers under him.”⁶⁰ Steward, Brown, and Fedric recalled their overseers as driving, lashing, and ever watchful.

Hiring a capable overseer relieved a slaveholder from the more onerous and unpleasant tasks of farm and labor management and surveillance. Fauquier County slaveholder, Robert E. Peyton of Gordon’s Dale revealed in a letter to his son in 1829 something of the challenge in finding and training a suitable overseer. In a show of family solidarity, Peyton had offered the services of his overseer, Billy Welch, to Peyton’s “Uncle Scott” for the coming year. To replace Welch, Peyton hired a young man from Hampshire County, Virginia, the grandson of an acquaintance. Despite the man’s inexperience as an overseer and the fact he was “unaccustomed to negroes,” Peyton believed the “natural smartness & activity” of the young man combined with his employer’s training and “exertions” would enable the young man to “do very well” in his role.⁶¹ In Peyton’s mind, the job of managing enslaved labor, implementing punishments, securing farm production, ensuring compliance with orders, and maintaining control in his absence were skills and a mentality that could be taught. Providing employment as an overseer to a young relative often served the purpose of teaching the business of slave

⁶⁰ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky, A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by C. L. Innes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 12-13.

⁶¹ “Letter from Robert E. Peyton to his son Richard H. Peyton,” December 21, 1829, Peyton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

management while gaining an opportunity to earn enough money to purchase land or slaves (the perceived path to upward social mobility in the South).⁶²

Other slaveholders did not have the time to train up a new overseer and specifically advertised for an experienced overseer “who has been used to the management of negroes, not cruel, but strictly attentive” and who came complete with references.⁶³ Seeking an overseer for his Prince William plantation, Charles Berkley specified that applicants observe “the *necessity* of being well recommended, as no one that is not can be attended to.”⁶⁴ One employer specified the successful applicant should be “not cruel, but strictly attentive” to the enslaved work force. Prince William county farmer, Thomas Blackburn of Rippon Lodge, stated “[n]one need apply without strong recommendations for ability, honest and sobriety.”⁶⁵ Blackburn required “vouchers for character,” George Mason of Gunston Hall in nearby Fairfax County demanded “[u]ndoubted testimonials of good character and skill,” and Samuel Edwards of Leesburg required “satisfactory testimony respecting his industry and good moral conduct” from applicants, each emphasizing the importance planters placed on moral character.⁶⁶ Most

⁶² Eugene Genovese identified three main groups of persons who served as overseers: first, “either the sons or close kin of planters, who were learning to be planters in their own right;” second, the “floaters” who hailed from the poorer class of Southern whites known as “‘po’ white trash” and generally “created for all overseers a particularly bad reputation;” and third, the “semiprofessional class of men,” the majority of overseers “who expected to spend their lives overseeing or wanted to earn enough money to buy a farm.” Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 13.

⁶³ “An Overseer Wanted,” *Virginia Argus*, July 20, 1803.

⁶⁴ “An Overseer Wanted,” *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, July 20, 1804. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁵ “An Overseer Wanted,” *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, July 30, 1805.

⁶⁶ T. Blackburn, “An Overseer Wanted,” *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, August 26, 1805; George Mason, “Overseer wanted,” *Alexandria Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, October 15, 1817; Samuel M. Edwards, “An Overseer Wanted,” *Genius of Liberty*, February 2, 1819. An advertisement for an overseer for Arlington plantation, located in Fairfax county, specified that the overseer must be “a sober man, hardily bro[ugh]t up, a judge of work, from having worked himself, single or with a small family. He must be both able and willing to keep strict order and discipline. These particulars, embrace all the talents, and all the

employers considered only single men as applicants, yet some hired married men or men with small families.

The “management of negroes” proved to be a major job requirement in job advertisements for overseers, yet sometimes the slaveholder had to step in to reinforce the overseer’s position on a farm. Slaveowner Edmund Berkeley noted in his journal that his enslaved man Jesse “had to be punished for impudence to overseer” in 1854, suggesting the need to enforce the chain of command on the plantation.⁶⁷ Overseers trod a middle ground between serving the management needs of the slaveowner, a task that often resulted in harsh punishments in order to establish the overseer’s authority over enslaved forces, and extracting the most productive labor out of enslaved persons, oftentimes accomplished through softer methods of negotiations with the slaves such as promising less supervision, fewer restrictions, or currying favor in exchange for service. Eugene Genovese pointed out that masters fired overseers as much for harsh treatment of slaves as for a tendency for excessive leniency. Slaves could find an opening for negotiated terms of work conditions, seeking to drive a wedge between the slaveowner’s desire for productivity and the overseer’s ability to create conditions conducive to work productivity and thus ensuring continued employment for an overseer who, though

recommendations necessary.” Arlington, “An Overseer Wanted,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 29, 1822. J. A. Washington, in seeking an overseer for Mount Vernon, advertised for an “industrious man, who is acquainted with farming and the management of negroes.” J. A. Washington, “Overseer Wanted,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 8, 1842. Richard C. Mason, cousin to Gerard Mason of Woodbridge plantation, advertised for “an active, industrious man” who could provide “satisfactory testimonials of sobriety, industry, and capacity” for his Fairfax lands. R. C. Mason, “An Overseer Wanted,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 9, 1855.

⁶⁷ Ronald Ray Turner, trans., *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), 64.

generally on an annual contract, did not wish to seek new employment on a yearly basis.⁶⁸

Scholar William E. Wiethoff identified multiple roles and identities embraced by the southern overseer encompassing personal, professional and public images based on relationships with his employer, with the enslaved work force, and with the community.⁶⁹ Typically, observers of southern plantation management viewed overseers in a negative manner, yet according to Wiethoff, this perception shifted when overseers could serve the role of “spy,” a function that southern legislators legitimized in response to fears of servile insurrection.⁷⁰ Relationships between an overseer and the enslaved were based on power and force, yet also at times relied on negotiation, as an overseer knew that his job depended on how well he could manage the work force and extract all the work possible. These relationships often led to conflicts.

Overseers, as discussed previously, represented a key chain in the link of control. As hired employees of slaveowners, the overseer was tasked with extracting the maximum amount of labor and profit from farms. Attacks against overseers therefore threatened the stability of the institution of slavery on a small scale. These attacks affirmed the intense will of the enslaved to affect in some way the conditions of their lives. In 1823, Tom assaulted Owen Leady, an overseer hired to manage the laborers on

⁶⁸ Genovese claimed that no “sensible slaveholder wanted a man who could not maintain a certain level of morale among the slaves. Thus, the slaves had an opening. They knew it, and they seized it.” See Eugene Genovese’s discussion of this middle ground in Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 14-15.

⁶⁹ Wiethoff’s classification of roles included the taskmaster, scoundrel, and rival as components of the personal image; the subaltern and colleague as framing the professional image; and the public image created through legislative policy and typified by the roles as spy and warrior. William E. Wiethoff, *Crafting the Overseer’s Image* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2006).

⁷⁰ William E. Wiethoff, *Crafting the Overseer’s Image* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 133.

the estate of the deceased Willis Benson in Fauquier County. The court found Tom guilty of the crime.⁷¹

One case from Prince William County demonstrates the perceived potential for violent conflict between overseer and slaves. In 1836 Claiborne Simms worked as overseer on Henry Fairfax's Leesylvania plantation. After Simms' sudden absence "without cause" on the 22nd of April, his wife, Eliza, enquired of friends and neighbors after his whereabouts. Suspicion among whites in the surrounding area quickly devolved upon Fairfax's slaves for "causing his destruction."⁷² After a body resembling Simms's washed up on the Potomac River near Alexandria on June 1, 1836, Fairfax's neighbor, Benjamin Cole, appealed to Jesse E. Weems, one of the county Justices of the peace to swear out a warrant for the arrest of three of Fairfax's enslaved men, Addison, Jarrat, and Gilbert on charges of murder.⁷³ Fairfax expressed doubts that the three men were culpable in Simms' disappearance claiming "the natural conclusion is that the said Claiborne Simms has left this section of country," a claim he publicized in an "information wanted" advertisement placed in the *United States' Telegraph* in July 1836, seeking information about Simms' whereabouts.⁷⁴

Simms's wife, Eliza, when questioned, said she had "no reason to believe that they [Capt. Fairfax's negroes] had any motive to kill him; they agreed as well as negroes usually did with their overseer, he had never whipped any of them except an old man

⁷¹ The brief trial transcript only records a verdict of guilty but does not include the assigned punishment. *Commonwealth v. Thom, a Slave the property of William Ballard admr of Willis Benson*, Box #10, 1823-011, Free Negro and Enslaved Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁷² "Information Wanted," *United States' Telegraph*, July 25, 1836.

⁷³ "Warrant to Arrest Adison, Jarrat & Gilbert the property of Henry Fairfax," July 4, 1836, *Commonwealth v. Gilbert &c.*, LP (1836) 001016_00352, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

⁷⁴ "Information Wanted," *United States' Telegraph*, July 25, 1836.

about Harvest 1835.” Mrs. Simms also told the court that her husband had described Fairfax’s enslaved work force “as good, industrious hands as ever worked under him.”⁷⁵ Mrs. Simms’ response could have been influenced by her precarious position as overseer’s wife whose husband’s annual salary was far less than the value of even one of Capt. Fairfax’s enslaved men. Simms recalled her husband worrying about their financial circumstances prior to his disappearance and any hint of discord between her husband and the slaves might lead to the family’s prompt removal from Fairfax’s lands and a paying position. Slim evidence against Gilbert, Addison, and Jarrat led to an acquittal for all three enslaved men, yet the fact that the court pursued trial proceedings on evidence submitted by Simms’s neighbor (he had noticed blood stains on Gilbert’s pants) revealed some of the mistrust and suspicion exhibited by neighborhood whites against slaves.

Overseers, slaveowners, and the courts exerted control over bodies, labor, and time. Religious faith and its forms of worship, doctrines, and church disciplines supplemented the control of masters over enslaved persons by emphasizing and enforcing rules of godly behavior. These disciplines, while supporting the institution of slavery, also created opportunities for enslaved persons to employ the language of godly behavior to rectify moral wrongs within enslaved communities and between masters and slaves.

Imposing Order within Church Communities

Traveler John Davis, while employed as a tutor in Occoquan around the year 1800 noted that a “*Virginian* church-yard on a Sunday resembles rather a race-ground than a

⁷⁵ “Testimony of Eliza Simms,” *Commonwealth v. Gilbert*, LP (1836) 001016_00352, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

sepulchral-ground.” The “rattling of carriage-wheels, the cracking of whips, and the vociferations of the gentlemen to the negroes who accompanied them” all stunned Davis.⁷⁶ Despite the cacophony of sound outside the “Powheek” (Pohick) Church in nearby Fairfax County, he observed that inside the church, under the guidance of Parson Weems, “many of the negroes” displayed “the most satisfying evidences of sincere piety; an artless simplicity; passionate aspirations after Christ, and an earnest endeavour to know and do the will of God.” In 1800 the congregation of Pohick Church contained “about one half...white people, and the other of negroes” indicating the significance of the free and enslaved presence in local churches. When asked about “the piety of the blacks” Parson Weems told Davis that

no people in this country prize the Sabbath more seriously than the trampled-upon negroes. They are swift to hear; they seem to hear as for their lives. They are wakeful, serious, reverent, and attentive in God’s house; and gladly embrace opportunities of hearing his word. Oh! it is sweet preaching, when people are desirous of hearing!⁷⁷

Weems’s observations, while showing the perceived significance of religion to free and enslaved blacks, raises questions about the role of religion in slave communities.

Evidence from records and recollections of local church congregations exposes the ways in which both slaveowners and enslaved persons used church discipline and sites of worship as both a means of power and a source of solace.

Slaveowners used Scriptures to provide a religious foundation that justified a system of racial slavery. Historians of the Old South noted that religion “enjoyed a

⁷⁶ John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: R. Edwards, Printer, 1803), 305-306.

⁷⁷ John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: R. Edwards, Printer, 1803), 307-308.

privileged place as the cornerstone of shared beliefs” among southerners as the “moral foundation of their social system.”⁷⁸ The use of the pulpit to preach dutiful obedience of servants and Christian obligations of masters towards slaves, therefore, aligned Christianity with the institution of slavery even before a biblical defense of slavery in the 1840s and 1850s bolstered proslavery arguments. Historian Scott Reisinger noted that “[d]aily worship, frequent discussion with slaves about the status of their faith, and a willingness to recommend slaves for admission to the Baptist church were all expected of the Christian master.”⁷⁹ Religion served as a method of control both for congregants within houses of worship and for masters toward slaves within plantation households.

The Bible was used within the plantation household to fulfill the mission of Christian benevolence for slaveholders as well as emphasize the importance of obedience. The women of the Ewell family of Prince William “taught the slaves in a Sunday-afternoon school” near their family chapel.⁸⁰ Francis Fedric’s grandmother learned the “Prayers and Liturgy of the Protestant Church” from her mistress.⁸¹ Religious denominations encouraged religious instruction of the enslaved as a means of inculcating Christian duties and obligations, yet in the aftermath of the Nat Turner insurrection Virginia laws strictly prohibited assemblies of slaves and free blacks, education of blacks,

⁷⁸ Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “The Religious Ideals of Southern Slave Society,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 70, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 3-4.

⁷⁹ Scott R. Reisinger, “Let Justice Be Done to Slavery: The White Virginia Baptist Clergy and the Slaves, 1840-1865,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 33 (1994), 1668.

⁸⁰ Alice Maude Ewell, *A Virginia Scene, Or Life in Old Prince William* (reprint, 1931) (Fredericksburg, Virginia: BookCrafters, Inc, 1991), 47.

⁸¹ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky, A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by C. L. Innes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 12.

and preaching by blacks. Still, religious groups such as the Baptists encouraged oral instruction in the Scriptures.

Religious tracts such as Rev. Robert Ryland's *A Scripture Catechism for the Instruction of Children and Servants* offered a series of questions and answers on the duties of masters and servants. Ryland, a Baptist minister serving in Richmond, advised via his *Catechism* against the use of "harsh language to servants" reminding masters that "do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your master also is in heaven" even while also enjoining "obedience on servants" in accordance to Ephesians Chapter 4:5-6 that ordered servants to "be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling...as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." Such obedience to masters promised enslaved persons a heavenly reward "knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free."⁸² Ryland's *Catechism* also addressed the duties of servants to "unkind" masters advising that "if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."⁸³ Virginia Baptist Associations requested that churches "supply the colored population, so far as they can read, with the Word of God" and sentiments like those found in Ryland's *Catechism* unified the stance on religion and social order.⁸⁴

⁸² Rev. R. Ryland, *A Scripture Catechism, for the Instruction of Children and Servants* (Richmond: Harrold & Murray, 1848), 139. Ryland served as a Baptist minister in Richmond, Virginia.

⁸³ Rev. R. Ryland, *A Scripture Catechism, for the Instruction of Children and Servants* (Richmond: Harrold & Murray, 1848), 140.

⁸⁴ Minutes, Rappahannock Association, 1848, p. 15 as found in Garnett Ryland, *The Baptists of Virginia, 1699-1926* (Richmond: Virginia Board of Missions and Education, 1955), 284.

By 1858 some residents of Warrenton believed that more effectual instruction in the Scriptures across all faiths would bolster the tenuous relationships between masters and enslaved persons. Affirming the “great responsibility” of the slave master to “promote the welfare of our slaves,” the writer of an article in the *Warrenton Flag of '98* asserted that liberation would not be the best future for slaves. Instead, the writer emphasized the “duty of giving our slaves religious instruction,” and asserted that “slaves who are religious, are exceedingly correct in their deportment considering the amount of instruction they receive.” Therefore, if they “received more instruction, they would be still more virtuous.” The writer of the article petitioned for \$3,000 in financial contributions from residents to purchase a building in Warrenton for the purpose of hosting religious instruction for enslaved persons, shared by “the various denominations in our midst.” By providing a space and opportunity for religious instruction “for the permanent benefit of our slaves at so small a cost,” the community could “do our duty, benefit our dependents and promote our own interests,” interests that no doubt included cultivating an orderly, dutiful, and obedient class of laborers.⁸⁵

By the nineteenth century the northern Virginia counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William boasted churches representing many religions, including Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, and Lutheran faiths.⁸⁶ In Prince William County,

⁸⁵ “To the Slave-Holders of Warrenton, and its Vicinity,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, March 11, 1858.

⁸⁶ For information on Loudoun County’s early religious communities see Nan Lin Kincaid, “The First Churches in Loudoun County,” *The Bulletin of the Historical Society of Loudoun County, Virginia, 1957-1976* (Leesburg, Virginia: Goose Creek Productions, 1998): 3-14. Robert Baylor Semple chronicled the history of Baptists in Virginia and in 1810 described the formation of Baptist churches in northern Virginia within the Ketocton Association. The first Baptist church in northern Virginia was the Ketocton Church established in Loudoun County in 1756. By 1766 the Baptist presence in the area encouraged a dismission from the Philadelphia Association and the subsequent formation of the Ketocton Association that in the

Baptists had organized the Occoquan Baptist Church in 1776. Baptist churches established during the early 1800s in Dumfries included the Bacon Race Church west of Occoquan and Antioch Church (1837) in upper Prince William. Methodist societies, encouraged by visits from Bishop Asbury prior to 1800, erected Methodist church buildings in Dumfries in 1801. Later, Methodists built churches at Sudley, in 1847 Ewell's Chapel, and in 1856 at Buckland. Presbyterians held worship at White Hall Church at Nokesville, Greenwood Church, and Greenwich Church, and Episcopalians built a chapel in Brentsville in 1822 when the county seat moved from Dumfries to Brentsville.⁸⁷ Each house of faith provided religious instruction and spiritual guidance to nearby residents and many churches offered membership to free and enslaved blacks.

Francis Fedric recalled the importance his grandmother placed on religion during his childhood in Fauquier County. Fedric noted his grandmother was “always eager to import any religious knowledge she might have acquired to her children and grandchildren” and “anxious to acquire religious knowledge and to attend prayer-meetings as often as she possibly could.” For such a woman, her “sole comfort, in the

next fifty years would grow to encompass thirty-five Baptist churches in Loudoun, Fairfax, Prince William, Stafford, Fauquier, Culpeper, Shenandoah, Berkley, Jefferson, Hampshire and Frederick counties in Virginia and the Nanjemoy Church in Maryland. By 1810 at least fifteen Baptist churches provided a faith community for congregants in Loudoun, Fauquier, and Prince William Counties: Ketocton, Little River, New Valley, Goose Creek, Leesburg, Ebenezer, and North Fork Churches in Loudoun County. Broad Run, Thumb Run, Brent Town, Upper Carter's Run, Long Branch, and Back Lick Churches in Fauquier County. Occoquan Baptist Church was the only Baptist Church in Prince William County before 1810. Robert Baylor Semple, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, 1810), 298-299, <<https://archive.org/details/historyofrisepro00semp>>. Frying Pan Baptist Church was organized on lands provided by the Carter family near the border of Loudoun and Fairfax counties serving congregants in both counties.

⁸⁷ WPA, *Prince William: The Story of Its People and Its Places*, Expanded Edition (1941, repr., Manassas, Virginia: Ref Typesetting, 1988), 38-41, 46. Occoquan Baptist Church affiliated with the Ketocton Association. Dumfries and Sudley Methodist Churches aligned with the Fairfax Circuit, organized in 1775 to oversee Methodism in Prince William, Fauquier, Fairfax, and Loudoun. *Ibid.*

hour of trial” when “any troubles had come to her” was to talk of “her home, far away beyond the clouds, where there would be no whipping, and she would be at rest.”⁸⁸ For such enslaved persons, the presence of houses of faith that accommodated congregants of color provided a pathway to faith and community away from the slave quarters. As each church established and increased membership, the terrain of control held by religious communities expanded. Religious communities in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries – and especially Baptist congregations whose extant minutes elucidate the complex relationships between whites and blacks in the church – offered ritual, fellowship, and a forum for grievances when human failings clashed with divine strictures.⁸⁹

Church leaders exercised some control over church members through application of the church disciplines.⁹⁰ Church records, especially those of Baptist churches in the region, reveal a wide variety of charges levied against enslaved members investigated by members and subject to church oversight. White and black members accused of transgressions such as lying, fighting (both verbally and physically), adultery, fornication, or drunkenness, faced censure and possible excommunication from the church body. Slaves in particular faced censure for upsetting the social order as shown by charges of

⁸⁸ Francis Fedric, *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky, A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave. Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by C. L. Innes* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 15.

⁸⁹ For more on Baptist rituals and discipline in Virginia see Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), especially chapter 4.

⁹⁰ Randolph Scully asserted that Baptist church disciplines held three main purposes: they represented the ideals of fellowship; they “gendered and racialized spiritual and social experience within the churches;” and provided a ritual to shape the “public face” of the Baptist faith in Virginia society. Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 168.

disorderly conduct, disobedience, or impudence.⁹¹ Although complaints against whites for such behavior were also levied and handled through church meetings, the churches gave heightened scrutiny to behaviors by slaves that offended the ideal of docile and obedient servants. In this way, religious communities defined acceptable standards of behavior among and between congregants and within the slave quarters while responding to racialized prejudices. Only through evidence of true repentance given to the church membership or via an intervention by select members designated as intermediaries could excluded members regain membership status. In this regard, white and black members of churches in northern Virginia, especially within the Baptist, Methodist, and Quaker faiths, fell not only under the laws of the Commonwealth, but also under the scrutiny of their church brethren.

Baptist congregants were held to the terms of the church covenant, including requirements for membership. Prospective enslaved members required permission from their masters to seek admission, balancing the control of masters over the time and service of their enslaved workers with the Christian duty to provide religious instruction. Part of the “Rules for Decorum for the Government of the Church, at Upper Goose Creek” near Markham in Fauquier County developed in 1830 stated that the church “shall be governed by the free white male members” but along with the white free men, the

⁹¹ In his exploration of Baptist communities in and surrounding Southampton County, Virginia between 1780 and 1830, Randolph Scully found that 78 percent of offenses levied against black church members consisted of charges of “social offences” such as “theft, drunkenness, and slavery-related charges.” Female black members primarily faced charges of “general unruliness—lying, disputes, and improper disposition” and sexual impropriety. As a result, Scully concluded that these charges reflected “the types of disorder to which Baptists thought black men and women particularly prone, and these ideas conformed with standard white visions of blacks.” Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner’s Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 159. See also Tables 9 and 10, *Ibid.*, 158-159.

women of the church, presumably white women” “shall have right to vote” in “the reception of members and the choice of a Pastor.”⁹² Membership, controlled by voting rights of white members and the requirement to gain permission from the master, affirmed a racial hierarchy and created a second-class status for enslaved and free black church members.

Requests for membership into the Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, as one example, affirmed the power of masters to control lives of enslaved desiring to find a spiritual home. William Smith, noted that “the church requires some authority of the owner of slaves before they are admitted” in his letter granting permission for his enslaved woman, Susanna, to join the Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church.⁹³ When enslaved woman Mary sought membership in 1822, her owner, Thomas M. Smith wrote that Mary had “always supported an honest character and is priveleged [sic] by her mistress to join the church.”⁹⁴ Enslaved persons bargained with masters offering their obedience, honesty, and good behavior in exchange for permission to join a local church. Ben’s “honest, truthfull and Obedient” service since childhood induced slave mistress Hannah Keeble to grant him permission to be baptized.⁹⁵ Alfred had “behaved very well” since coming into the possession of Thornton Ash, and thus earned “liberty to apply to

⁹² Upper Goose Creek Church Minute Book, February 20, 1830, pp. 36-38 as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 1992.

⁹³ Document 28: Letter of Permission for Susanna, November 26, 1831, as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 2005.

⁹⁴ Document 4: Letter of permission for Mary, 1822, as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 1997.

⁹⁵ Document 10: Letter of Permission for Ben, 1828, as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 1998.

the Ba[ptist] Church in the holler.”⁹⁶ John Bowie avowed that his “black Woman Amy” had “for some length of time” been “very obedient to me” and that her request was grounded in Amy “truly seeking religion.”⁹⁷

Once permitted to attend a local church, enslaved persons still needed to convince congregants of their religious experience and gain a unanimous vote of current members before being admitted to baptism and membership. Public baptisms “served as a powerful marker of membership in a godly community” for enslaved members, “symbolically set apart from the larger community.”⁹⁸ Church membership conferred a status upon enslaved members as part of a community of faith, a status that offered some spiritual reprieve from the daily toil of enslavement and hope for freedom if not in this life, then in faith after death.

After gaining admittance, enslaved and free black members fell under the rules of individual church disciplines requiring regular attendance and moral behavior. When one “coloured Sister” named Nancy Smith failed to attend church, she justified her conduct to her church brethren that “her confinement was such at home that she had not [a] chance of coming to meeting but she would try and attend more regularly.”⁹⁹ A year later Nancy Smith was still unable to attend meetings despite multiple visits from church brethren. On

⁹⁶ Document 15: Letter of Permission for Alfred, 1828, as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 1999.

⁹⁷ Document 7: Letter of Permission for Amy, 1827, as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 1998.

⁹⁸ Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner’s Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 51.

⁹⁹ Meeting Minutes from Saturday February 12, 1842, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 121.

February 18, 1843 she was dismissed from membership.¹⁰⁰ The Broad Run church “agreed unanimously” to exclude John for “non attendance at Meeting” and for “other wicked conduct” in 1820.¹⁰¹ Non-attendance constituted an infraction of the Baptist church discipline, and members who failed to regularly attend could expect a visit from a church member to ascertain the cause and encourage renewed attendance. This requirement of obedience to the church, though, could conflict with a slave’s obedience to his or her master, yet in other ways the church supported the master-slave relationship.

The discipline of the Goose Creek (Upperville) Baptist Church in Fauquier County stated that “if any Member or Members shall be found Erronious, or disorderly” in conduct, they “shall be liable to censure.” In case of “obstinate continuance” the member would be “entirely excluded from our Communion.”¹⁰² Members of Loudoun’s Ebenezer Baptist Church agreed to “watch over Each other” and “in case of Faults” would “Reprove or take Reproof in the Spirit of Meekness” as they bore testimony “against Sin either of a Public or Private Nature” discovered in church members.¹⁰³ The vague terms allowed for a broad interpretation of disorderly conduct by church members and also a process for adjudication employed in many Baptist churches.

An unnamed member of the Goose Creek Baptist Church in Fauquier County lodged “a complaint” against Patience, an enslaved woman belonging to church member Brother Singleton. According to protocol, the church appointed two members, Brothers

¹⁰⁰ Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 122, 124.

¹⁰¹ Minutes, May 14, 1820, Broad Run Baptist Church Minutes, 1764-1873, microfilm. John was later restored “to full fellowship” more than ten years later indicating that his interest in church fellowship did not completely fade after his exclusion. Minutes June 11, 1831, Broad Run Baptist Church Minutes, 1764-1873, microfilm.

¹⁰² Church Covenant, Goose Creek (Upperville) Baptist Church Records, Book 1, microfilm.

¹⁰³ Church Covenant, Ebenezer Baptist Church Records, 1804-1896, microfilm.

U. Glasscock and J. Wornal, “to see her” and discuss the charge. Two months later “the case of Patience was call[e]d” before the monthly business meeting and members of the church decided to excommunicate Patience.¹⁰⁴ When John came “under the notice of the Church” for his conduct, the church appointed Brother John Tansil to “talk with him about it and also led him to Come forward to the Church” for repentance, demonstrating the church’s use of intermediaries to first advise members to conform to standards of behavior and second to seek forgiveness from the church body through satisfactory confession and resolve to conform.¹⁰⁵ Reticence to discuss specific details of the case in church minutes could arise from brevity in record-keeping or in accordance with the wish to not “divulge the infirmities of each other to any &c. when it can be lawfully avoided” yet some church clerks provided more information on the types of complaints levied against enslaved church members and the response of church membership.¹⁰⁶

The general charge of “disorderly conduct” included a variety of misdeeds committed by enslaved members of the church either against other enslaved persons, free blacks, or white persons and only rarely were detailed in local extant church minutes. Richard forfeited his church membership after committing “reputed acts of wickedness” yet three years later was “restored to the communion” of the church.¹⁰⁷ Easter was

¹⁰⁴ Church Meeting Minutes, August 1, 1819 and October 4, 1819, Goose Creek Baptist Church Records, Book 2: 1814-1842, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁰⁵ Church Minutes from June 16, 1821, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 57.

¹⁰⁶ Church Covenant, Goose Creek (Upperville) Baptist Church Records, Book 1, microfilm.

¹⁰⁷ Church Meeting Minutes, June 19, 1809 and September 19, 1812, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

excluded from her church due to “irregular Conduct Contrary to the Gospel” in 1813.¹⁰⁸ Dicey Colman, “a coulerd sister” was excluded “for her unruly behavior” in 1815 and Betty lost her membership due to “unruly Conduct not becoming the Gospel.”¹⁰⁹ The Broad Run fellowship excommunicated Lisha “for a number of crimes” but “chiefly owing to her bad temper.”¹¹⁰ Though not specified, such disorderly conduct could be defined as opposition to a master’s control or conflict within the slave quarters or amongst church members. The broader transgression of speaking out constituted an affront to male authority and the master’s authority when expressed by an enslaved female member.

More egregious moral crimes required investigation by appointed members and counseling, if a designated committee deemed the offense pardonable and the parishioner contrite. In cases where an offender presented a lack of sufficient repentance, punishment, if agreed upon by the particular religious community, resulted in excommunication or exclusion from fellowship. A member of the Occoquan Baptist Church brought complaint against black woman “Billender” in 1794 for “slander and falsehood,” a charge serious enough to result in Billender’s exclusion from the church.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Minutes from Saturday, April 24, 1813, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 39.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes from Saturday, September 16, 1815, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 43; Minutes from the 3rd Saturday in June 1819, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 50.

¹¹⁰ Minutes, August 11, 1810, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹¹¹ Minutes from Saturday, December 27, 1794, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 21.

After a member brought an unproven complaint of “immoral conduct” against Scythia, the church cautioned Scythia “to [use] prudence” in her behavior.¹¹²

Baptist records included charges of drunkenness or intemperate use of spirituous liquors against both white and black members. Yet church members proved more lenient towards the misconduct of white offenders than towards black members, who more frequently were excluded from membership for these sins. Enslaved woman Victory was “suspended from Communion” in 1805 after charged with “getting Drunk.”¹¹³ In 1813 Jesse was excluded from the Occoquan Baptist Church for “making to[o] much use of spirituous Liquour.”¹¹⁴ Willis was excluded from fellowship within the Broad Run Baptist Church in 1817 “for Drunkenness & other disorderly conduct,” a charge for which he later “made application to be restored” to fellowship, an application that was granted upon “having given evidence of repentance” in 1825.¹¹⁵

Some parishioners used the power of the church discipline specifically to control slave behavior towards their masters and within the quarters. “Negro Lemon” was excommunicated for “Lying and disobedience to his master” in 1782.¹¹⁶ The church

¹¹² Church Meeting Minutes, March 6, 1830, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹¹³ Meeting held June 22, 1805, Minutes of the Frying Pan Spring Baptist Church, 1791-1879, Balch Library, microfilm.

¹¹⁴ Minutes from Saturday, April 24, 1813, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 39.

¹¹⁵ Minutes, July 6, 1817 and September 10, 1825, Broad Run Baptist Church, 1764 – 1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm. Willis had a long history affiliated with the Broad Run Church. He was first baptized and received into communion on May 8, 1808 when he belonged to Thomas Fitzhugh. It is likely that Willis sought the fellowship of the church again as he grew older and was sold to a new master, Enoch Foley, sometime after 1817 and before 1825. Five years after his restoration to church membership, the church clerk noted that Willis died around October 15, 1830. Minutes, May 8, 1808, July 9, 1825 and October 15, 1830, Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Minutes, August 24, 1782, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1762-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

charged Johnson with and later excluded him for “the crime of stealing some bread from his Master” after Johnson’s owner John Gaskins “complained to a member of the Church.”¹¹⁷ Broad Run congregants excluded “Henderson’s Caesar” for stealing.¹¹⁸ Church members “agreed to Enquire” into the “Conduct of Mrs. Cockerills man Bill relative to his taking apples out of Mr. Donaldson’s orchard without Leave” in October 1811.¹¹⁹ Churches also chastened and censured black congregants for exceeding the acceptable behavior of enslavement. The Frying Pan Baptist congregation agreed to exclude “from our Society” a man named Bill Talbert who the membership reported had “passed in this Neighbourhood for a freeman” despite actually being enslaved. In this case, the church sanctioned Talbert for challenging his status as enslaved.¹²⁰

Churches used the power of exclusion to censure enslaved members who attempted to abscond from masters. Members of Thumb Run Baptist Church excluded Ridge, an enslaved man, for “eloping from his master and going to Pennsylvania and there passing for a free man” in 1815.¹²¹ Thumb Run Baptist Church believed it “proper” to excommunicate Charles after he “left his place of residence [enslaved to ‘Mrs. More’]

¹¹⁷ Minutes, October 13, 1833, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1762-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹¹⁸ Minutes, July 11, 1846, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1762-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹¹⁹ Meeting held October 26, 1811, Minutes of the Frying Pan Spring Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm. The church tasked two church members, Thompson Kitchen and Nathaniel Barker, to investigate the charges against Will on March 28, 1812 and later reported that they were “of Opinion [that] he took them under an Impression of having leave to do so.” Meetings held March 28, 1812 and April 18, 1812, Ibid.

¹²⁰ Meeting held November 22, 1806, Minutes of the Frying Pan Spring Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm.

¹²¹ Meeting Minutes, June 24, 1815, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

for a considerable time without leave.”¹²² In 1828 the Occoquan Baptist Church sent Brother Reid to Richard to “cite” or request Richard attend the next meeting to “answer to the Church” for “leaving his Master for the purpose of obtaining his freedom.” After hearing Richard’s defense, church members “came to the conclusion that they *could not approbate any such conduct*” so decided to “exclude him from our communion.”¹²³

Perhaps the most publicized church censure of an escaped slave was the letter sent to runaway Anthony Burns in 1855. Burns, an escaped slave from Fauquier County whose fugitive slave trial in Boston caused a national sensation, requested a letter of dismissal and recommendation from his former church “in order that he may unite with another church of the same faith and order” near Oberlin College, where Burns was preparing for the ministry. After members of the Baptist Church of Union in Fauquier County met on October 20, 1855 to discuss Burns’s request, church clerk, W. W. West, reported that since Burns had “absconded from the service of his master, and refused to return voluntarily,” Burns was guilty of “*disobeying both the laws of God and man.*” Despite Burns having subsequently purchased his freedom, church members still considered him “a *fugitive from labor*, (as he was before his arrest and restoration to his master)” and unanimously voted to excommunicate him from “the communion and fellowship” of the church.¹²⁴

¹²² Church Meeting Minutes, December 5, 1835, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹²³ Meeting Minutes from Saturday before the 2nd Lords day in March 1828, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 96. Emphasis mine.

¹²⁴ Letter from W. W. West, Clerk of the Church at Union to Anthony Burns, [October 20, 1855] as published in *The Congregationalist*, March 7, 1856. Emphasis in the original. See also Anthony Burns’s response to West’s letter, “Case of Anthony Burns,” *The Liberator*, May 9, 1856.

As evidenced in the reactions of church members to runaways Richard and Anthony Burns, white members of northern Virginia Baptist churches “could not approve any such conduct” that compromised a master’s control over enslaved property.¹²⁵ Nearly thirty years later, church members had adopted a biblical defense of slavery when they asserted that running away defied “*both the laws of God and man.*”¹²⁶ White Baptists in northern Virginia took a stern stance against those who absconded from masters, reflecting the perspectives of slaveholders across the region.¹²⁷ Churches censured those enslaved persons who failed to subordinate themselves to a master’s hegemony, thereby extending a particular layer of control within northern Virginia’s slave society.

Members of churches used the authority of Church Discipline to govern the personal lives and intimate relationships of enslaved members.¹²⁸ On different occasions the fellowship of the Broad Run Baptist Church sanctioned Winney for adultery, excluded “Fitzhugh’s Polly” for “fornication,” and excluded Robin for “being guilty of

¹²⁵ Meeting Minutes from Saturday before the 2nd Lords day in March 1828, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 96.

¹²⁶ Letter from W. W. West, Clerk of the Church at Union to Anthony Burns, [October 20, 1855] as published in *The Congregationalist*, March 7, 1856. Emphasis in the original.

¹²⁷ Runaways apparently did not present a large problem for Baptist congregations in Southampton County, Virginia except for periods when the British presence during the Revolutionary War and again during the War of 1812 offered opportunities for individuals and groups of slaves to abscond to behind British lines and under the protection of British troops. Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner’s Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 99-100.

¹²⁸ Baptist records indicate that the sexual relations of white congregants were also held under scrutiny. White women who bore illegitimate children were typically excluded from fellowship and men accused of improper intercourse with women were also admonished and censured. Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood explore the heightened scrutiny of male Baptists on the sexual morality of female members in Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 189-190.

wicked conduct with women” as well as being “disorderly in other respects.”¹²⁹ William Grigsby’s enslaved woman Charity was charged with the “base crime of taking another woman’s husband” a charge Charity denied, yet the church sent two members “to make legal enquiry in the matter” and report back to church membership.¹³⁰ After a “nice investigation” the brethren determined that the charge against Charity was “a misunderstanding” and that the “disagreeing parties” had reconciled, thus dismissing the charges.¹³¹ Enslaved man Morton was excommunicated due to his acts of “groce emmorality [sic]” including fornication and obstinate impertinence.¹³² An enslaved woman named Mourning was excommunicated “for leaving her husband and taking up with a white man.”¹³³ Sarah and Charles, enslaved property of William Grigsby, were accused of “living disorderly” by fellow church member Mr. Kendall in 1817.¹³⁴ The Broad Run fellowship excluded two enslaved members, William Parker and Sibba, for “being too intimate with each other and unbecoming conduct besides” despite their residences at different plantations.¹³⁵ In 1812, the Ebenezer Baptist Church investigated a complaint brought against Lucy “in respect...to her conduct with her husband” and after

¹²⁹ For the charge of adultery against Winney, see Minutes, July 7, 1805, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm; For Polly’s exclusion see Minutes, September 12, 1840, *Ibid.*; For Robin’s exclusion see Minutes, June 10, 1820, *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Church Meeting Minutes, April 23, 1819, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm. Complaints against Charity first appeared in church records a year previous in April 1818.

¹³¹ Church Meeting Minutes, May 22, 1819, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³² Church Meeting Minutes, April 29, 1799, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³³ Church Meeting Minutes, February 14, 1807, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³⁴ Church Meeting Minutes, July 26, 1817, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³⁵ Minutes, November 11, 1815, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

examination, the charge was dropped only upon “giving her a caution for the future.”¹³⁶

These cases demonstrated that the church discussed intimate relations occurring within the slave quarters and across plantations and brought complaints to the notice of the monthly meetings where the religious community pronounced judgments and imposed sanctions.

The church meeting provided a forum for aggrieved enslaved members to bring charges against fellow slaves for slights, abuses, and crimes, a right to address grievances that did not exist within Virginia’s county court system.¹³⁷ Enslaved congregant Rose objected when the Thumb Run Baptist Church received Reuben for baptism indicating “she would not continue in the church” if Reuben was permitted to join the church. For her “bad behavior towards the church and paster” Rose was censured, yet she had apparently voiced her complaint believing she could influence her fellow members.¹³⁸ In 1841 “Thomas’s Sally” entered a complaint against “Horner’s Joe” for which Joe was requested to attend the next monthly meeting for investigation of the charges.¹³⁹ Enslaved church member Titus “brought a complaint against Joshua,” another member of the

¹³⁶ Minutes, Third Saturday in September 1812, Ebenezer Baptist Church Records, 1804-1904, Library of Virginia, microfilm. In March 1815 Lucy was charged again with “disorderly conduct” and requested to attend the next business meeting to answer the charges. In April, the church body deemed her conduct “unworthy” and excluded her from membership. Minutes, Third Saturday in March and April 1815, Ebenezer Baptist Church Records, 1804-1904, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³⁷ Randolph Scully found that Baptist churches located in southeastern Virginia provided “a degree of institutional support and authority” to their black members for presenting grievances against fellow church members and expecting some relief in the form of sanctions or judgments. Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner’s Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 167.

¹³⁸ Church Meeting Minutes, September 3, 1843, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³⁹ Minutes, December 11, 1841, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, microfilm. More than a year later the church excluded Joe from fellowship on February 10, 1843. Records do not indicate whether his exclusion was related to the complaint brought by Sally or for some other reason. Minutes, February 10, 1843, *Ibid.*

Thumb Run Baptist Church, for “some misconduct.” Church elders requested that both Titus and Joshua attend the next meeting to discuss, repent, and reconcile with each other.¹⁴⁰ Capt. Rixey’s enslaved man Moses was excluded from communion for “disorderly conduct in abusing and beating his fellow servants” and for showing “no signs of repentance” for his actions.¹⁴¹ Moses would later be reinstated to church membership, apparently after he repented and altered his behavior.¹⁴²

In some cases church members levied, investigated and adjudicated more serious charges against enslaved members. Broad Run Baptist Church investigated charges that Moses, who belonged to John Brown, engaged in “disorderly conduct” and attempted to “take the life of one of his fellow servants” in 1825. Due to his “not having given satisfactory evidence of repentance,” church members agreed to exclude Moses from fellowship.¹⁴³ When enslaved woman Lizza was accused by a member of her church for “attempting to poison some of the family” of her slaveowner Phillip Warder in 1828, the church formed a court of public opinion, adjudged the merits of the case, and found the charge disturbing and credible enough to warrant Lizza’s exclusion from fellowship.¹⁴⁴ Yet Warder and her church community apparently believed that their investigation and censure sufficed for punishment. No record of any charges levied against Lizza for the

¹⁴⁰ Church Meeting Minutes, August 25, 1810, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁴¹ Church Meeting Minutes, February 16, 1805, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁴² Church Meeting Minutes, June 18, 1808, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁴³ Minutes, November 12, 1825, Broad Run Baptist Church, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes, October 11, 1828, Broad Run Baptist Church, 1764-1783, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

alleged crime appeared in county court minutes.¹⁴⁵ It is unclear whether more serious crimes supposedly committed by church members and discussed during meetings also were taken up in the county courts.

Enslaved members of the church sometimes tested their standing in the church and the church's commitment to republican ideals and evangelical values by bringing complaints against white members.¹⁴⁶ After enslaved woman Abigail brought charges against her master "Mr. Hunton" before "other Brethren" of the Broad Run Baptist Church, the congregation deemed Abigail's charges false and slanderous during a monthly meeting discussion of the case. Her later repudiation of the charges before the church, probably in an effort to avoid further retribution, led to her excommunication from fellowship.¹⁴⁷

In Broad Run Baptist Church where black members outnumbered white members, opportunities for special positions and concessions were more possible.¹⁴⁸ Enslaved man Edmund served the Broad Run church as a Secretary and for his services was provided a

¹⁴⁵ A search of Fauquier County Court minutes from April 1828 through January 9, 1829 offered no mention of a trial. Fauquier County Minute Book 30 and 31.

¹⁴⁶ Randolph Scully found that the "deeply ingrained privileges of whiteness and masculinity and the enduring restrictions of blackness and femininity in eighteenth-century Virginia influenced Baptist practice from the outset of the movement" yet in the "changing context of the post-Revolutionary era" white male church leaders sought to govern in a way that articulated Baptist doctrine of separateness from worldly hierarchies with already established practices of racial and gender patriarchy. Randolph Ferguson Scully, *Religion and the Making of Nat Turner's Virginia: Baptist Community and Conflict, 1740-1840* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 135.

¹⁴⁷ Minutes, February 12, 1803, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁴⁸ Membership rolls taken in 1817 listed eleven white male members, eighteen white female members, and fifty total "coloured" members, thereby making the black membership slightly more than 63% of the total fellowship of seventy-nine congregants. Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

salary of \$4 per year.¹⁴⁹ The congregation later agreed to pay enslaved member Harry \$2 “for having attended to the meeting house the year past” and then offered the job of maintaining the meeting house for the coming year (1829) to Edmund for a salary of \$3.¹⁵⁰ Within the Frying Pan Church, enslaved man Jupiter rose to a leadership position when he was asked to request that certain enslaved members attend monthly meetings to respond to charges.¹⁵¹ Seven years later in 1826 Jupiter’s request to preach was denied by the congregation who “decided that he should not preach” yet he was granted “the same privileges as other members in singing and prayer.”¹⁵² In 1833 Jupiter was appointed to “try to keep order among the coloured people in the gallery in times of worship,” a position that indicated his standing as a leader among the black members of the church and the faith and confidence of white members in his leadership skills.¹⁵³ Jupiter’s presence as a leader appears long-standing: in 1838 he was requested to attend a meeting “to give information concerning the colored members on our list,” a task that utilized his knowledge and assessment of the standing of enslaved and free black members.¹⁵⁴ Jupiter’s reputation suffered a blow in the church later that year when he was accused by a magistrate of making a false statement during a court trial. When the congregation met

¹⁴⁹ The church appointed Edmund, a slave belonging to Brother Thomas, to the position on July 8, 1826. Minutes, July 8, 1826, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes, February 7, 1829, Broad Run Baptist Church, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm. Harry may have become too infirm to carry out the duties of housekeeping as the clerk noted he died about January 18, 1832. Minutes, January 18, 1832, Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Meeting held October 16, 1819, Minutes of the Frying Pan Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm. Jupiter was asked to give notice to a “black member called Tom” who had been “Guilty of Conduct disgraceful to the Christian profession” to attend the next meeting so the cause could proceed against Tom.

¹⁵² Minutes from the Saturday before the third Lords day in July [1826], Minutes of the Frying Pan Spring Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm.

¹⁵³ Meeting minutes on the Saturday preceding the 2nd Lords day in May 1833, Minutes of the Frying Pan Spring Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm.

¹⁵⁴ Meeting minutes March 10, 1838, Minutes of the Frying Pan Spring Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm.

in December 1838 to discuss Jupiter's case, his church brethren acquitted him of the charges.¹⁵⁵

Black members such as Jupiter who experienced a calling to preach could petition for the privilege of using houses of worship to conduct their own services. Free black John Malvin joined the Baptist Church and later applied to the church for a license to minister. As Malvin later recalled, "that not being permissible under the laws of Virginia, by reason of my color, the church refused to give me a license, but gave me a verbal permission to preach the gospel." Malvin employed his religious calling, preaching "among the slaves" with the approval of the church and masters and in certain cases "solemnized marriages [between enslaved persons] by permission from the owners."¹⁵⁶

The Occoquan Baptist Church granted black members Nat Stepney and John Stewart liberty "to hold meetings in the meeting house (on behaving well) on any Sunday except the 3rd Lords day" in 1822.¹⁵⁷ Three years later, in 1825, Brother Carney reported to the church "an unfavorable account of Brother Nat," and both Carney and Brother Tansil were appointed to investigate the circumstances and report to the church.¹⁵⁸ Apparently there was "some Difficulty or Dispute" between Nat Stepney and John

¹⁵⁵ Minutes from November 10, 1838 and December 8, 1838, Minutes of the Frying Pan Baptist Church, Balch Library, microfilm.

¹⁵⁶ Allan Peskin, intro. *North Into Freedom: The Autobiography of John Malvin, Free Negro, 1795-1880* (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 34. In his autobiography, Malvin did not reveal the name of his church or its location but did claim that his membership with the Virginia Baptist church occurred between 1813 and 1827. During this time, Malvin "continued to live with my parents" and he worked with his father learning the trade of carpenter. Malvin's father was an enslaved man residing in or near Warrenton, Fauquier County and Malvin's mother was a free black woman named Dorcas who lived in Dumfries. Ibid., 29, 34 (quote).

¹⁵⁷ Minutes from Saturday before the 3rd Lords day in November 1822, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 66.

¹⁵⁸ Church Minutes from Saturday, August 20, 1825, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 74.

Chinn's wife Patty and other members. Wanting to quickly settle the issue, the parties involved were ordered to attend a special meeting under the mediation of Brothers Tansil and Reubleman.¹⁵⁹ Reubleman later reported that "Brother Nat Stepney did not conduct himself as well as...he ought" because he "sometimes attempted to preach" a position of authority the church apparently wished to curtail.¹⁶⁰ After returning into the communion with the church, Brother Stepney again requested permission from the church in July 1828 to "hold meetings some times amongst the Black members," a request that was approved provided Stepney go "out of the bounds of this church."¹⁶¹ The experiences of Edmund, Harry, Nat Stepney, and John Stewart showed that some enslaved members used their position in the church as a symbol of authority, a boon to enslaved members usually held in subservient positions, yet a position that challenged white male control of power within the church.¹⁶²

One consequence of the church ordering the lives of its enslaved members was the development of intricate communication procedures between churches coordinating

¹⁵⁹ Minutes from Saturday before the 3rd Lord's day in September 1826, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 82.

¹⁶⁰ Minutes from Saturday before the 3rd Lord's day in March 1827, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 86. By July 1827 the disobedience of Stepney, Chinn, and Chinn's wife Patty and their absence from church led to their exclusion from membership. Two months later John Chinn confessed to the church and satisfied the church that he was "innocent of the charges brought against him." In consequence, Chinn was restored into communion. By December 1827 Nat Stepney "came forward to ask pardon of the Church for this disobedience" and was received again into communion with the church. Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 88, 91, 94.

¹⁶¹ Meeting Minutes from Saturday before the second Lords day in July 1828, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 99. Occoquan Baptist church apparently decided to remove Brother Nathaniel "Nat" Stepney from their communion in March 1829, yet ruled that the dismissal not take place until Stepney became a member of "another Baptist Church of the same faith and order." Meeting Minutes from Saturday before the Second Lords day in March 1829, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 105.

¹⁶² Historian Randolph Scully noted that "evidence of unauthorized black preaching" indicated "not only white efforts to control but also independent black judgments about who deserved 'liberty to preach.'" Scully, *Nat Turner's Virginia*, 137.

the reception, evaluation, and dismissal of members. Toney and Ann, enslaved property of Mr. Tebbs, had been excluded from membership in the Occoquan Baptist Church. When Tebbs transferred membership to the Broad Run Church, the Occoquan church agreed to send a letter to the Broad Run pastor explaining that Toney and Ann had been “disowned by us for their misconduct,” thereby creating a barrier for Toney and Ann to seek membership in the new church.¹⁶³ This communication extended the reach of church censure, but also expanded communication networks of enslaved members. Enslaved man Shadrack used church communication networks to reach out to his home church in Fauquier County after being sold South to Georgia.¹⁶⁴

Despite having to conform to expectations of their conduct under threat of excommunication, some enslaved persons found contentment and a place of some standing within church membership. Moses “applied to the church for counsel how he should conduct [himself]” and in response members of the Ebenezer Church “gave the best counsel she was able to give” in response to his query.¹⁶⁵ Big Billy, an enslaved man belonging to the Dixson estate, “came forward to the Church” and “expressed a great desire to be restored back” to the church after his excommunication. Billy admitted “he

¹⁶³ Minutes from the third Saturday in November 1819, Darlene L. Hunter, *Occoquan Baptist Church Meeting Minutes* (Manassas, Virginia, 2012), 51.

¹⁶⁴ Brother Thomas “presented a Letter which he had rec[eive]d from the Church at Sugar Creek in Georgia respecting a coloured man by the name of Shadrack” to the Broad Run Baptist Church in 1827. The congregation agreed that Brother William Hunton “write a suitable answer to s[ai]d letter & sent it on” completing the communication network. At a minimum, enslaved members in attendance at that monthly meeting would learn of Shadrack’s location and could perhaps entreat Bro. Heaton to include some words of fellowship to Shadrack in Heaton’s return letter. Minutes, July 9, 1827, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm. In March 1828 Hunton was again requested to “write an answer” to a letter from the Sugar Creek Church in Georgia regarding Shadrack, either indicating that additional correspondence had been received or that Hunton had failed to respond promptly to the initial letter. Minutes, March 8, 1828, Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Minutes, Third Saturday in November 1814, Ebenezer Baptist Church Records, 1804-1904, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

had never been satisfied” since he had left the Church, “could not stay away,” and sought readmission into fellowship, a wish that was granted him.¹⁶⁶ Many churches carefully recorded the deaths of enslaved members alongside those of white members, leaving a lasting record of standing, fellowship, and communion until death with a religious community.

Churches created opportunities for enslaved persons to hold positions of limited authority while simultaneously offering spaces for fellowship and contentment in times of joy and sorrow. Nonetheless, church disciplines constituted another avenue of control over the actions of enslaved members in northern Virginia through punishment of behaviors deemed contrary to morality or in opposition to the control of a slaveowner. As such, religious communities and their rituals of communal investigation and adjudication of moral misconduct existed as a middle ground between the instantaneous judgment and corporal punishment meted out by masters, mistresses, or overseers and the legal authority of the southern institutions of patrols and courts.

Northern Virginia Patrols

Patrollers have been vilified in slave narratives as a seemingly lawless element of the slaveholding elite who regularly roamed neighborhoods and towns on weekends and “savored the opportunity to exercise power over black people,” especially in the case of the poorer class of whites who could not afford to purchase enslaved labor, yet relished

¹⁶⁶ Church Meeting Minutes, April 1, 1843, Thumb Run Primitive Baptist Church Records, 1771-1890, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

the opportunity to perform mastery over enslaved and free blacks.¹⁶⁷ As a response to the potential for patrol abuse, enslaved persons developed “preventive mechanisms” to limit violent interactions with patrols such as studying patterns in patrol movements, “setting up a warning system, and playing stupid and innocent when caught.”¹⁶⁸ In an attempt to pit the slaveholding class against patrollers, slaves might seek a master’s protection against a patrol’s often arbitrary punishments. Whether patrols were considered inefficient or overzealous, their continued use over time confirmed their place as agents of control in a slave society.¹⁶⁹

Patrollers served their communities and neighborhoods as guardians against disorder.¹⁷⁰ According to Virginia law, patrollers were responsible for maintaining order

¹⁶⁷ William Dusinger, *Strategies for Survival: Recollections of Bondage in Antebellum Virginia* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 98.

¹⁶⁸ Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 618.

¹⁶⁹ Sally Hadden noted that although “citizens complained of inefficient patrols, it is hardly believable that county after county and city after city would have continued to pay patrollers’ salaries had they been completely inactive or ineffective.” Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 64.

¹⁷⁰ My database of patrollers and patrol service contains more than 2,000 extant claims submitted by patrollers from 1800 to 1860. Extant claims represent only a portion of actual patrol tours as not all years are represented in available records. I constructed my database from extant records located in county court minute books and claims submitted by patrollers to county officials in Loudoun, Fauquier, and Prince William counties. Patrol claims that included tours served during a fiscal year (June to May) were tabulated as one claim per calendar year. Fauquier County records included 1033 claims. Loudoun County records revealed 386 individual claims and Prince William County court and clerk records contained 613 patrol claims for a total of 2032 claims. For records from Loudoun County, consult the “Loudoun County Misc Papers – Patroller Records” collection held at the Loudoun County Court House Historic Archives and Deeds Division in Leesburg, Virginia (LCHAD). For Fauquier County records, consult the “Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records” collection archived at the Afro-American Historical Association (AAHA) in The Plains, Virginia. Prince William County has been designated a Burned Records County due to the loss of county and court documents during the Civil War. Patrol records for this county were derived from claims recorded in extant Prince William County Court Minute Order Books available on microfilm at the Bull Run Library in Manassas, Virginia. Surviving minute order books include records from the years 1804-1806, 1812-1814, 1833-1850, and 1853-1860. A small number of documents pertaining to Prince William County patrol appointments and patroller claims were found in the Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers Collection at the Prince William County Court House Archives in Manassas, Virginia. Some of these loose papers are available online at <<https://www3.pwcgov.org/pahax/>>. I owe a debt of gratitude to Alyssa Markel, Sarah Fisher, and Eric Larson at the Loudoun County Court

within their assigned jurisdictions and for bringing “disorderly persons” or slaves “strolling” without permission before a local magistrate for further processing. Slave patrols developed as a prototypical police force in rural and urban areas of the south as the proportion of slaves to whites increased and by 1727 the Virginia Assembly codified responsibilities (and limits of authority) for patrols. In 1738 the legislature authorized the militia to appoint patrollers to “at such times and seasons as he shall think proper, to patrol, and visit all negro quarters, and other places suspected of entertaining unlawful assemblies of slaves, servants, or other disorderly persons.” Within this capacity appointed patrollers could “take up any such slaves, servants, or disorderly persons,” functioning as a check against mobile slaves and potentially lenient or oblivious masters.¹⁷¹ Historian William Dusiaberre asserted that in the absence of slave masters, patrols “became the principal instruments for regimenting slaves’ off-plantation activities.”¹⁷² Sometimes this charge placed patrols in conflict with the white population who profited from illicit trade with slaves and free blacks or who privately authorized gatherings or nighttime movements.

The purpose of the patrol system in northern Virginia was multi-faceted. The legally mandated authorization augmented the powers of individual slaveholders to contain enslaved forces within their property boundaries and restrain any unauthorized

House Historic Archives and Deeds Division, Karen Hughes White at the Afro-American Historical Association, and Ronald Turner in the Prince William County Archives for their tremendous assistance locating these records and making them available for my use.

¹⁷¹ “An Act, for the better Regulation of the Militia,” William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the year 1619*, vol. 5 (Richmond: W. W. Gray, 1819), Chapter II, Sec. VIII, 19 (1738).

¹⁷² William Dusiaberre, *Strategies for Survival: Recollections of Bondage in Antebellum Virginia* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 98.

mobility or meetings, yet this power manifested itself in many different forms and actions. On March 5, 1820 a patrol comprised of Braxton B. Kendall (captain), Silas Coteney, Hinson Coteney, and Allen Freeman surveilled their district for twelve hours after receiving summons to patrol during a “negroe frolic” in Fauquier County.¹⁷³ While on patrol in 1815, John Ross apprehended a man called Philip Sears, “supposed to be a runaway slave” and conveyed him twenty-four miles to the Fauquier jail.¹⁷⁴ The captain of a Leesburg patrol, William Selden, apprehended Samuel Goings in 1845 for vagrancy and “associating with negroes contrary to law” and brought him before Justice of the Peace James Sinclair for interrogation.¹⁷⁵ Patrol Captain Bernard R. Atwall helped bring suspected arsonist Harrison to magistrates Nixon and Gray in Leesburg following a fire in 1854.¹⁷⁶ Each of these different tasks fell under the purview of patrolling and represented the variety of responsibilities and authority that county officials and residents vested in local patrollers.

Patrol warrants authorized patrollers to search slave cabins or places suspected of hosting unlawful assemblages. This often placed the power of the patrol over that of white property holders, especially when slaves or free blacks congregated in “disorderly houses” or on other property owned by whites. Conflict, therefore, between patrollers, slaves, free blacks, whites, and slaveholders were not uncommon as patrollers carried out

¹⁷³ Patroller Account, Box #9, 1820-009, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from County Levy, AAHA.

¹⁷⁴ Ross received \$2 for “taking up” Sears and 10 cents per mile for delivering him the 24 miles to the jail for a total of \$4.40. “John Ross Claim,” Box #7, 1815-023, Free Negro and Slave Records from the County Levy, AAHA.

¹⁷⁵ “Samuel Goings” Criminal Case 1845-012, LCHAD. In Goings’s petition for a writ of *habeas corpus*, he states he was indeed a resident of Loudoun County, but not Leesburg, hence the failure of the patrol to recognize him. After four days in the Leesburg jail, Goings was released and charges dismissed.

¹⁷⁶ *Commonwealth v. Harrison*, Criminal Case 1854-009, LCHAD.

the variety of duties under their charge. In one case in 1814 Thomas Oxley and Samuel Beale were charged with “maltreating Alexander Munroe, Benjamin Ball, Lunsford & Joseph Putnam in executing their office as patrols within the County of Fauquier.” Court documents reveal no details of the maltreatment the patrollers, yet Oxley and Beale were indicted, found guilty of the charge, and fined.¹⁷⁷

In September 1857 conflict between patroller Garret Hulfish and tailor William Bevier, a white man residing in Haymarket, led to a case of arson in Prince William County. Hulfish, in his capacity as patroller, had been ordered by James Mount to “go down to Bevier’s” because “there was a large collection of Negroes” there and Mount wanted Hulfish to “help him to disperse them.”¹⁷⁸ Bevier operated a tailor shop in Haymarket on the upper floor of a building that also housed a whiskey shop that alternately changed proprietorship between William Bevier and a Mr. Stryker.¹⁷⁹ The site apparently regularly attracted slaves and free blacks to the dismay of other Haymarket residents, including Bevier’s wife, who on the same day as Mount and Hulfish’s patroller visit on September 20, was apparently “utterly astonished to find so many Negroes

¹⁷⁷ *Commonwealth v. Thomas Oxley and Samuel Beale*, Box #7, 1815-025, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

¹⁷⁸ “Testimony of Garret Hulfish,” *Commonwealth v. Bevier*, Box #2, Folder #3, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as found in Ronald Turner, “Governor’s Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863,” (2016), 191.

<<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/pwcvaabookspublishedworks.htm>> My thanks to Ron Turner for suggesting the Bevier case and for sharing his documents with me.

¹⁷⁹ “Testimony of James W. Mount,” *Commonwealth v. Bevier*, Box #2, Folder #3, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as found in Ronald Turner, “Governor’s Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863,” (2016), 191.

<<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/pwcvaabookspublishedworks.htm>>

around the Shop door after returning from church. Mrs. Bevier “requested him [Hulfish] to drive the Negroes away.”¹⁸⁰

Hulfish took charge of one apparently intoxicated enslaved man who, according to Mount, was “impudent,” lodging the miscreant in a nearby store for safe-keeping while Mount tried to locate the local magistrate, Grayson. Due to Grayson’s absence, Mount and Hulfish decided to release the enslaved man and return to the grog shop gathering. Mount testified that upon their attempt to return to the grog shop gathering, Bevier “brought out a pistol and threatened if we came up there [to the assembly] he would shoot us.”¹⁸¹ Hulfish testified he overheard Bevier threaten that “he would have me [Hulfish] yet before the Devil got him.” Hulfish stated that Bevier always seemed “angry” when “we performed our duty as patrol because we interfered with what he called his friends.” Hulfish also reported that he had heard Bevier “speak of the patrol as interfering with his business,” an enterprise that Hulfish believed involved a trade in alcohol with slaves and free blacks.¹⁸² Bevier later took his revenge upon Hulfish’s interference with the grocery

¹⁸⁰ “Testimony of James H. Popkins,” *Commonwealth v. Bevier*, Box #2, Folder #3, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as found in Ronald Turner, “Governor’s Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863,” (2016), 194.

<<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/pwcvaabooksublishedworks.htm>>

¹⁸¹ “Testimony of James W. Mount,” *Commonwealth v. Bevier*, Box #2, Folder #3, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as found in Ronald Turner, “Governor’s Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863,” (2016), 191.

<<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/pwcvaabooksublishedworks.htm>>

¹⁸² “Testimony of Garret Hulfish,” *Commonwealth v. Bevier*, Box #2, Folder #3, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as found in Ronald Turner, “Governor’s Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863,” (2016), 191.

<<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/pwcvaabooksublishedworks.htm>> A newspaper article placed Bevier with the “gang of negroes who were congregated at a low grocery” operating out of the shop located below Bevier’s tailor shop. “Prince William Items,” *Brentsville Journal* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 26, 1857.

assemblies by setting fire to Hulfish's wheat stack worth \$125 and hay stack valued at \$25.¹⁸³

Court documents also offer some insights into the excessive use of violence that patrollers committed upon the enslaved. Some states indemnified patrollers against slaveholder claims of excessive violence against slave property.¹⁸⁴ The few cases that specify the role of patrollers in crimes in northern Virginia indicate that courts were willing to investigate charges against patrollers and assign responsibility for actions. In 1819 Fauquier slaveowner Richard Baker brought charges against John Padget, James Gill, Dulaney Broadbelt, and Alexander Padget for their treatment of an enslaved man on Baker's property. According to Baker's complaint, the four men entered Baker's kitchen on August 15, 1819 and "unmercifully beat a negroe man slave the Property of Joseph Blackwell, without any other provocation than that the said slave was peaceably and quietly in bed with his wife." Baker intervened during their attack, "advising the party to desist" by explaining that the unnamed enslaved man "had long had a wife there and had been permitted for many years to visit her," but Baker's interference caused the four men to turn on him, severely beating and wounding Baker as well with their "sticks and clubs."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ "Indictment," *Commonwealth v. Bevier*, Box #2, Folder #3, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as found in Ronald Turner, "Governor's Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863," (2016), 189. <<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/pwcvaabookspublishedworks.htm>> The Prince William County Court sentenced Bevier to incarceration in the state penitentiary for a period of three years for his act of arson against patroller Hulfish.

¹⁸⁴ Sally Hadden noted that the formal appointment process in North Carolina granted nearly uncontested authority to patrollers acting in an official capacity. Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 77-79.

¹⁸⁵ *Commonwealth v. Padget and Others*, Box # 9, 1819-019, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

Henry Young, a Loudoun resident, was charged, but later acquitted, of “unlawfully aiding and assisting in whipping” Thomas Goings, a free black, while Young was “in his character of Patrole.” According to the warrant, Young “beat, wound[ed], and evilly treat[ed]” Goings while on patrol in May 1830.¹⁸⁶ The fact that John Padget, James Gill, and Henry Young claimed to be patrollers supports the charge that some men used their position as patrollers to enact violence upon slaves and free blacks as a form of extralegal white terrorism, actions that affirm the violent nature of confrontations between patrollers and enslaved persons. That men not appointed as patrols participated alongside patrollers in these affrays suggests groups of white men adopted the guise of a patrol to act as masters over slaves without authority.

Northern Virginia patrollers operated at night and during the day to provide surveillance over free blacks and enslaved persons. Their presence created for some whites a sense of security and protection, while a large portion of the black population saw patrollers at best a nuisance and at worst case a violent threat. The available patrol records from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties also indicate particular times of suspected, perceived, or real unrest among enslaved, free blacks, and white members of neighborhoods, communities, and counties. County militia leaders and then county magistrates employed patrollers to maintain control and order, yet also limited the number of patrols out of necessity due to county fiscal constraints. Between 1800 and 1860, more than 2,000 extant claims from individual patrollers for service submitted to the county courts in Loudoun, Fauquier, and Prince William allude to the real or

¹⁸⁶ *Commonwealth v. Henry Young*, Criminal Case 1831-035, LCHAD.

perceived fears of disorder, open dissent, or insurrection held by slaveholders and whites and the need to establish a policing force capable of restoring order.¹⁸⁷

Virginia's patrol law stipulated that during times of unrest in case "one company of patrollers shall not be sufficient" more companies could be ordered out.¹⁸⁸ Pulling men from militia rosters, a militia captain or colonel could designate a patrol captain or sergeant and up to five privates to serve as a "patrole" for a specified community, neighborhood, or district. Later, this power was also granted to county magistrates, authorizing local justices of the peace to order out patrols as needed, in tune with the fears, needs, and circumstances that arose in their particular locales.

In response to local events, Fauquier County Deputy Sheriff James Metcalfe ordered out a patrol comprised of seven men "to aid and assist in suppressing an assembly of negroes & mulatoes" on the night of June 23, 1821. The patrol served ten hours.¹⁸⁹ In August 1823, H. Gibson, a Loudoun County justice of the peace located near the Aldie neighborhood, had received enough information about the "considerable disorder" occurring "on the Sabbath day and other days" due to "large assemblages of slaves in the Town of Aldie" to appoint Thomas H. Kirby as captain of a patrol in charge of seven men. The duties of Kirby's patrol, according to Gibson, were to "Patroll twice a week according to Law in the Town of Aldie and its vicinity" and especially inspect "all Kitchens in Town and disorderly places suspected of entertaining unlawfull assemblages

¹⁸⁷ Extant court records revealed 1033 claims for individual patrollers serving tours in Fauquier County, 378 claims from Loudoun County, and 613 individual patroller claims from Prince William County.

¹⁸⁸ "An Act, for the better Regulation of the Militia," William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the year 1619*, vol. 5 (Richmond: W. W. Gray, 1819), Chapter II, Sec. VIII, 19 (1738).

¹⁸⁹ Patrol Account, Box #9, 1821-030, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records, AAHA.

of Slaves and disorderly persons there assembled.” The patrollers were responsible for taking “disorderly persons” as well as those slaves “strolling without passes” to the closest justice of the peace “to be dealt with as the Law directs.” Accordingly, Kirby and his men patrolled the Aldie neighborhood from August 16 to September 7 for a combined total of 376 hours, costing the county \$23.50 in patrol claims.¹⁹⁰

During the fall of 1825 Justice of the Peace Thomas Ingram used the power granted by the General Assembly “to order out Patrols when to him it shall appear necessary.” Ingram appointed a four-man patrol under the captainship of Alexander S. Craig believing “from a full impression that a Patrol is absolutely necessary in the Town of Warrenton and the vicinity.”¹⁹¹ Craig’s territory extended one and a half miles beyond the city limits. Craig’s patrol, assigned to serve in Warrenton and an area extending one and a half miles beyond city limits, patrolled at least seventeen days between September 17 and October 23, 1825, each man touring between 71 and 145 total hours.¹⁹² The situations assessed by Metcalfe, Gibson, and Ingram demonstrated how local neighborhood authorities used patrols to respond to perceived crises in slave societies.

The unique distress experienced (or perceived) by Fauquier residents in the fall of 1825 can be seen by the number and frequency of patrol service. Between January 1 and September 16, patrol claims indicated only three specific dates of patrol service: January

¹⁹⁰ Kirby’s men included Thomas Mitchell, Edward Hazel, Nathaniel Taylor, Abraham Fulton, James Daniel and Elijah Moore. The men patrolled on August 16, 17, 23, 24, 28, and 31, and on September 5, 6, and 7, 1823. “Kirby’s Commission or the Patroll,” and “Loudoun County to Aldie Patrole Claim, May 1, 1824,” Loudoun County Misc. Papers, Patroller Records for 1823, LCHAD.

¹⁹¹ Patrol Appointment dated September 16, 1825, Box #11, 1826-013, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records, AAHA.

¹⁹² Individual Patrol Claims for A. S. Craig, John P. Kemper, James Jenkins, and Jeremiah Simons, Box #11, 1826-013, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records, AAHA.

9, May 28, and June 12. Claims submitted by patrollers James Roull and Ambrose McDonald indicated they served ninety-five hours as patrollers between October 1824 and April 1825 but unfortunately did not provide any detailed descriptions of individual dates served. Even so, specific evidence of only two patrollers surveilling between January and April 1825 suggests limited disorder, real or perceived. Capt. John M. Brown's patrollers submitted claims for specific dates served during the period of May 28 to November 12 operating in the county in addition to Capt. Craig's Warrenton patrol. Capt. Thornton Payne's patrol served from November 19 to December 19. Other patrollers not identified as a specific group served from September 24 to November 27 on various dates and from November 30 to December 31. The extent of coverage of patrols during the fall of 1825 can be seen in figure 22.

September						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

October						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

November						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Figure 22. Specific dates Fauquier patrols surveilled in the fall of 1825.

Source: Patroller Claims, Box #11, 1826-013, AAHA.

Note: Patroller claims indicated a heavy period of patrolling beginning on September 17 until the end of the year.

Patrol records provide more discrete information about the patterns and trends in each county's decisions to order out patrols, the level of perceived unrest among slaves and free blacks, and in some cases, the level of fiscal commitment to county-sponsored surveillance. A close reading of extant patrol records shows that patrol captains exercised broad discretion in determining the timing, frequency, and composition of patrol tours

based on local conditions. Patrol records also show that the days of the week most served differed county by county. Patrols, often portrayed as a perennial presence across the slave South, conducted tours infrequently across northern Virginia, yet responded to the needs of local communities or slaveholders when they perceived threats to stability.

Types of Patrol Claims

Patrol claims from county records indicated time served in one of three ways.

Annual claims, the least informative or most basic claims, supplied the names of the patrollers and the total number of hours served over an unidentified period of time during a tax year. These claims typically were presented to county courts annually along with claims for paid county positions (commonwealth attorney, sheriff, jailor, clerk, etc.), county courthouse and jail maintenance work, road repairs and supervisors, and presenting crow or fox scalps in order to receive a share of the annual county levies available from taxes collected from county land and personal property holders.

One example of an annual claim found in Prince William County's list of annual county expenses compiled on June 5, 1838 included payments for twenty separate patroller annual claims. Two of the patrollers, Joseph Moss and Henry Calvert, submitted claims for eighty-five hours of patrolling, the greatest amount of service among the twenty patrollers, for which each man earned \$5.31 out of the county levy. Lawrence Cole, a patrol captain during the year, received \$5.12 for serving eighty-two hours on patrol during the previous tax year while Uriah Fairfax received \$1.06 for his seventeen

hours of service, the fewest hours claimed.¹⁹³ The county paid each claimant the same hourly rate for service at 6¼ cents per hour or 75 cents for every 12 hours of patrol service.

Annual county levy reports offer few clues as to the daily influence of patrollers, but do indicate years of unrest (years with relatively greater numbers of patrol hours served, claimed, and paid) compared to years of relative calm. Payments for annual patrol claims also give a sense of limits of county resources for paying for patrol services (years with relatively fewer number of paid patrol claims) and to some extent the fiscal decisions of county authorities to reduce patrols or defer payments to a more robust tax year (see figure 23).¹⁹⁴ For example, Prince William County paid out \$351.01 for sixty-six separate patrol claims at the county levy on June 7, 1814, presumably submitted for service during the previous tax year (June 1813 to May 1814). Patrol service in Prince William County during this period of unrest and war included at least 5,619.5 hours of patrolling.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, Prince William County levy claims submitted between June 9, 1853 and June 7, 1854 included no payments for patrol services, and the county

¹⁹³ “County Levy, June 5, 1838,” Prince William County Order and Minute Book 12 (1836 – 1839): 225-226, microfilm.

¹⁹⁴ Some patrol claims for the year might be authorized after the annual June levy based on remaining funds available from the taxes collected. For examples see the claims paid to George F. Carney, M. D. Lynn, K. B. Cole, and Roy L. Davis authorized on July 6, 1857 to be “paid out of fraction for the present year.” Prince William County Order and Minute Book 17 (1856-1861): 119. The lack of complete court minutes between the years 1800 to 1860 also presents challenges in calculating patrol service and county payments. For example, while most of the county levy recorded on June 6, 1836 appears in the court minute books, three pages are missing from the microfilmed records. It is highly probable that these pages contained the authorized patrol claims for the period of June 1, 1835 to May 31, 1836. Prince William County Order and Minute Book 12 (1836-1839): 26-31.

¹⁹⁵ “County Levy June 7, 1814,” Prince William County Order and Minute Book 10 (1812 – 1814): 232-234, microfilm.

levy recorded on June 6, 1855 listed only eight patroller claims totaling payments of \$15.05.¹⁹⁶

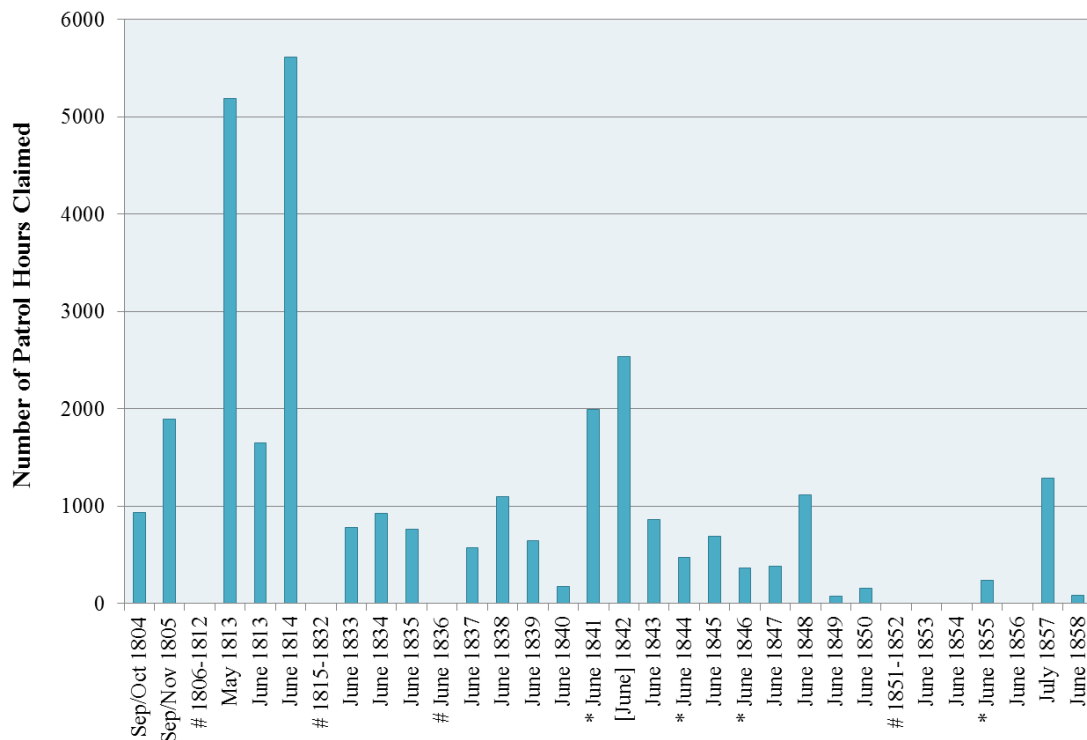


Figure 23. Extant patrol claims from Prince William County annual levies, 1804-1858.

Sources: Prince William County Order and Minute Book 7: 28; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 10: 121 and 244; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 11: 150 and 262; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 12: 38, 141, 232, and 332; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 13: 101, 194, and 301; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 14: 9, 115, 217, and 330; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 15: 104, 221, 306, and 408; Prince William County Order and

¹⁹⁶ For the county levy completed on June 8, 1853 see Prince William County Order and Minute Book 17 (1853 – 1856): 9-12. For the county levy completed on June 7, 1854 see Prince William County Order and Minute Book 17 (1853 – 1856): 116-120. For the county levy completed on June 6, 1855, see Prince William County Order and Minute Book 17 (1853-1856): 228. Budgetary concerns might have been a potential reason why no payments were made to patrollers in 1854. According to the Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, the Virginia General Assembly authorized the county courts of Fairfax and Prince William counties to “allow additional compensation to patrols” on February 11, 1854. This would suggest that patroller service continued during the period. “General Assembly of Virginia,” *Daily Dispatch*, February 13, 1854.

Minute Book 16: 50, 125, and 237; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 17: 115, 234, 368, and 495.

Note: During several periods of time no annual county levies or patrol claims could be found due to incomplete surviving records. These periods are indicated by the symbol “#.” Some claims only listed dollar amount without indicating the number of hours patrolled. For these records, identified by the symbol “*” the number of patrol hours served was calculated by dividing the total payments by the prevailing rate of 6¼ cents per hour.

The second type of claim, a period of service claim, signified a slightly more detailed category of patrol claims that included not only the number of hours served or the payment requested, but specified a defined period of service. The Loudoun County patrol consisting of Barton Lucas, Edward Davis, John Carney and Aaron Divine patrolled in Loudoun County for a period of three months starting on June 5, 1809. While the claim does not include specific dates of service within this three month period, it does indicate that during this period Carney patrolled eight nights, Payne served nine nights, Lucas served ten nights, Divine served eleven nights and Davis patrolled twelve nights.¹⁹⁷ While limited in specific details of service, this type of claim illustrates that within a three month period, this group of patrollers did not patrol every night or even every weekend. It also shows that a set group of patrollers did not always patrol at the same times, suggesting that patrol service was periodic, not regular and the composition of the patrol varied depending on perceived need for surveillance.

Captain Garrison’s Fauquier County patrol comprised of seven men patrolled during the month of November 1855. Garrison’s claim identified the total number of hours each man served during the month (between six and forty-four hours) yet did not

¹⁹⁷ Patroller Records – 1809, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHAD.

specify the dates each patroller toured.¹⁹⁸ This type of patrol claim for short-term service (less than the standard three month appointment) suggests that the patrol was called out during heightened suspicions of unrest, potential rebellion, or unlawful activity among slaves or free blacks. Patrol claims in this second category can be helpful in identifying short-term periods when county or neighborhood residents requested additional patrols to control the movements and potentially dangerous actions of slaves and free blacks.

The most detailed claims included the date and number of hours served that evening and night for each appointed patroller, yet these types of claims represent a little more than half of the patrol claims submitted in both Loudoun (53.7 percent) and Fauquier County (56 percent) while fewer than five percent of extant claims submitted in Prince William County contained specific date information (4.4 percent).¹⁹⁹ Hour and day claims help identify specific days when patrollers believed they could disrupt unlawful assemblies or unauthorized “strolling” or when racial tensions were especially heightened. These claims also indicate the range of time involved in completing a “tour” of patrol service. Prince William County Patrol Sergeant, Spencer C. Byrd, submitted a day and hour claim for the patrolling services of Byrd and patrol members John Disney, Presly Davis, George Godfrey and John Carr for their three-month appointment from

¹⁹⁸ Patrol Claim, 1856-017, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from the County Levy, AAHA.

¹⁹⁹ Out of 1,033 patrol claims located from Fauquier County, only 579 include data for specific patrolling dates. Only 27 of the available 613 patroller claims in Prince William County included specific dates of service. Loudoun patrollers provided the greatest percentage of hour and day patrol records with 203 of the 378 claims containing specific dates.

June 16, 1816 to August 22, 1816. The men patrolled eleven days during the three-month period, about once a week, primarily on Saturdays and Sundays.²⁰⁰

Apparently, Sergeant Byrd felt that the greatest threat to Prince William's security existed on Saturdays and Sundays when enslaved persons typically were allowed more freedom of movement across neighborhoods to visit abroad spouses or travel to towns to attend church services and scheduled his patrols on those days. The length of each tour completed by members of Byrd's patrol varied from six to seventeen hours. This data also indicates that only on certain occasions did all five patrollers serve the same number of hours. Sometimes only two of the patrol members worked together indicating confidence in their ability to confront potential dangers or apprehend strollers or persons engaged in unlawful assemblies.

The claim submitted by Loudoun patrol captain Benjamin Shrever also falls into this category of hour and day claims. Capt. Benjamin Shrever's patrol comprised of eight men served from September 12, 1824 to November 8, 1824. Shrever assigned different combinations of men to patrol on six different nights. On Sunday, September 12, two men patrolled for eight hours. Shrever sent out five men, including himself on Friday, September 17 and six men on Sunday, September 26. On Saturday, October 2 three men, John Wilemon, C. Boss, and a man identified as Donohoe patrolled for six hours while Shrever and M. Colquin patrolled for eight hours. On Monday, November 8 four men in Shrever's patrol completed an eight hour tour while Shrever patrolled for six hours on

²⁰⁰ Patrol members recorded serving on Sunday, June 16; Saturday, June 22; Saturday, June 29; Saturday, July 6; Monday, July 15; Sunday, July 21; Saturday, July 27; Sunday, July 28; Monday, August 5; Sunday, August 11, and Thursday, August 22. "Sergeant Spencer C. Byrd Patrol Claim," May 8, 1817, Box 1153 #134-135, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, Prince William County Court House Archives, Manassas, Virginia. My thanks to Ronald Turner for locating and sharing this patrol claim with me.

Monday, November 8 and another six hours on Tuesday, November 9.²⁰¹ Shrever's patrol, while assigned to serve a three month term patrolled once a week in September and only on one specified night in October and November (discounting Shrever's service as a lone patrolman on November 9). George T. Smith's hour and day claim for patrolling services in Fauquier County between January 12, 1835 and March 18, 1835 included a total of 83 hours served on fifteen identified nights.²⁰² Smith's service during the three-month period included patrolling at a minimum once a week and rotating service between various days of the week, most significantly patrolling on more weekdays than weekend days.

Of these "hour and day" claims, less than a handful specified the actual time of day the patroller conducted his rounds. William Leonard's Fauquier County patrol comprised of Leonard, John Flinn, Jr., and Elijah Williams served as patrollers during a three-month period from August 1805 to October 1805. Leonard's patrol claim included start and finish times for the eleven days they patrolled in the county, beginning sometimes as early as 3 o'clock in the afternoon on a weekend or as late as 11 o'clock on Sunday evenings. For example, Leonard's patrol started out at 7 o'clock in the evening on Saturday, August 17, August 24, and September 21. They began patrolling at 8 o'clock in the evening on Tuesday, October 1 and Saturday October 5. While most of their patrols concluded after midnight, two of the patrols were daytime patrols. Leonard's

²⁰¹ Patroller Records – 1824, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHD.

²⁰² Smith recorded serving as a patrol on Monday, January 12; Tuesday, January 20; Sunday, January 25; Friday, January 30; Friday, February 6, Thursday, February 12; Wednesday, February 18; Tuesday, February 24; Saturday, February 28; Wednesday, March 4; Friday, March 6; Saturday, March 7; Thursday, March 12; Wednesday, March 18; and Thursday, March 26. Patrol Claim 1835-019, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from the County Levy, AAHA.

group patrolled Sunday, October 12 from 11 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the evening and on Sunday, October 19 they started at 9 o'clock in the morning and did not conclude until 6 o'clock in the evening. Most of Leonard's tours lasted between five and nine hours but on August 17 they patrolled for twelve hours and on Saturday September 7 the tour began at 3:00pm and did not conclude until 6:00pm Sunday evening, September 8, a total of 22 hours.²⁰³ Apparently, the patrol reacted to local conditions and tips and extended or shortened their tours accordingly.

In another example, a Loudoun County patrol serving during November and December 1858 began tours between 5pm and 8pm and concluded tours between 3am and 6am, patrolling between eight and eleven hours per tour.²⁰⁴ For this patrol, the evening and early morning hours presented the most suspect (or routine) hours for finding unlawful assemblies or slaves strolling about unsupervised. The Leonard and Loudoun patrol claims cited that listed specific times of day suggest that not all patrols travelled solely after dark or during the hours before and after midnight. They also may have favored Saturdays and Sundays, yet these days were by no means exclusive for patrols.

The more than 2,000 claims submitted by patrollers across Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties identify 1,624 specific calendar dates between 1800 and

²⁰³ Patroller's Accounts, Box 5, 1805-018, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from County Levy, AAHA.

²⁰⁴ On Saturday, November 20, the patrol commenced at 7 o'clock in the evening and concluded eleven hours later at 6 o'clock in the morning. On Tuesday, November 23 the patrol started again at 7 o'clock but ended at 3 o'clock in the morning after eight hours of patrolling. Saturday's patrol on November 27 started also at 7 o'clock in the evening and concluded nine hours later at 4 o'clock in the morning. On Tuesday, November 30, the patrol started at 6 o'clock in the evening and finished nine hours later and on Sunday December 5, 1858 the patrol started at 8 o'clock in the evening and patrolled until 5 o'clock in the morning. Patroller Records – 1858, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHD.

1860 when patrols surveilled neighborhoods and towns.²⁰⁵ This information reveals much about the work of patrollers and periods of heightened perceived fears of slave unrest. Half of all patrol tours identified by date in patrol claims commenced on Saturdays or Sundays, days most commonly associated with more freedom of movement available to slaves and most likely identified as days when patrollers served (see figure 24 and figure 25). Wednesdays were the next most chosen day of the week for patrol tours, while the remaining four days of the week received fairly equal attention from patrols on the aggregate.

²⁰⁵ My constructed patrol database includes 1,386 specific dates patrollers were active in Fauquier County, 199 specific dates in Loudoun County and 43 specific dates patrollers served in Prince William County totaling 1,628 specified dates between May 23, 1801 and January 12, 1861.

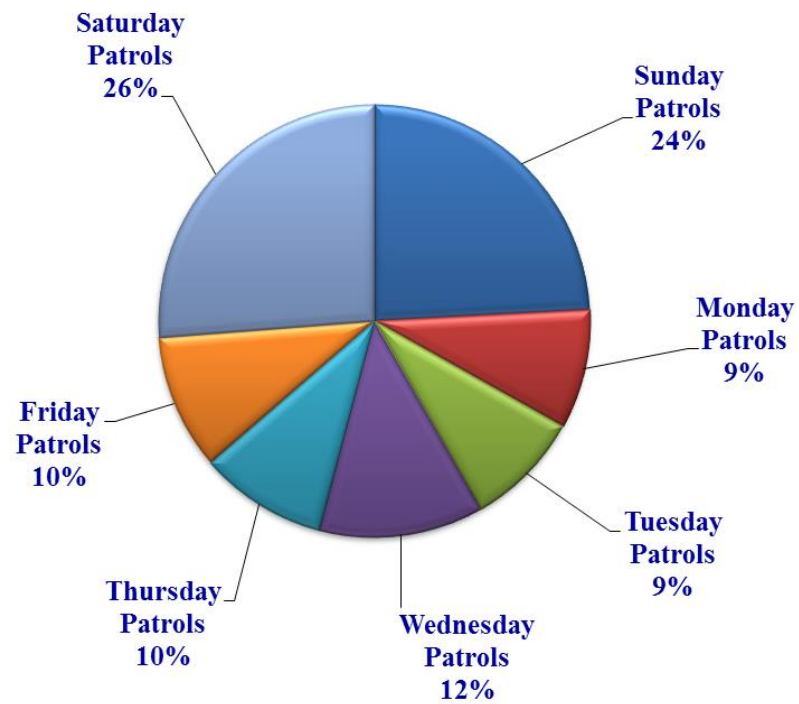


Figure 24. Days of the week in which patrols conducted tours, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties.

Sources: Patrol Records from Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from the County Levy; Patroller Records from the Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers; Prince William County Court Minute and Order Books and Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers.

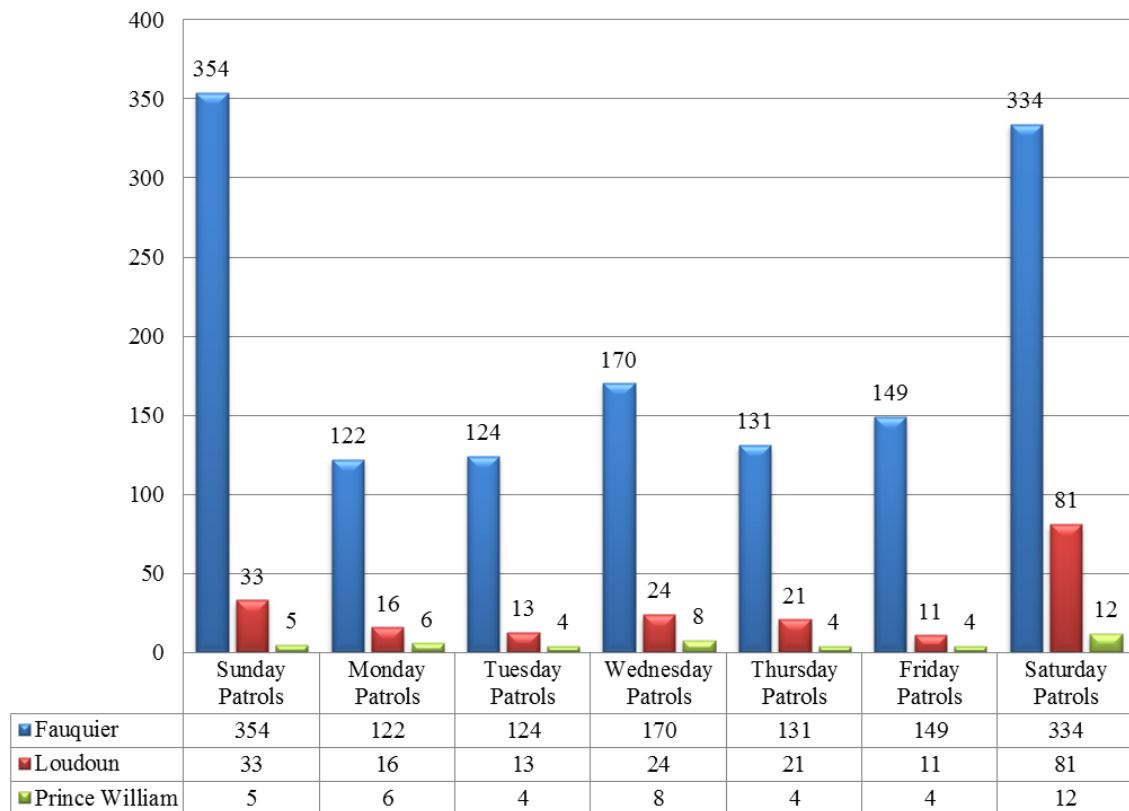


Figure 25. Patrol tours by county, 1800-1860.

Sources: Patrol Records from Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from the County Levy; Patroller Records from the Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers; Prince William County Court Minute and Order Books and Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers.

Data from extant patrol claims shows that northern Virginians neither authorized nor financed a daily or even weekly patrol service.²⁰⁶ Service fluctuated depending on a patrol captain’s decision or in relation to the perceived threat level or the influence of particular communities to demand this extra oversight and protection. Many patrols

²⁰⁶ The 1817 patrol authorization for Briant Stephens’s patrol included the proviso that the patrol “keep an exact account of the time each of them shall so serve” and left the decision to the county court as to whether the patrol’s services were worthy of payment from county funds. The authorization, written on May 23, 1817 stipulated that if the *court* “shall adjudge the said Patrollers have performed their duty” the court would “levy 75 cents for every twelve hours that each of them have so served.” Patroller Accounts, Box #8, 1818-018, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from Ended Causes, AAHA.

selected only one day a week to complete their mandated tour and some patrols served less frequently than authorized by law. Compare these trends of patrol service to trends when runaways fled (see figure 26).²⁰⁷ Proportionately high numbers of patrols on Saturdays and Sundays correspond to proportionately high numbers of runaways departing likewise on Saturdays and Sundays in Fauquier County. This pattern indicated the need for patrols existed to control slave movement on the weekends, yet despite the presence of patrols, Saturdays and Sundays were statistically the very days most Fauquier slaves typically fled from the county. A mid-week spike in Fauquier patrols does not appear to correspond to any increase in number of runaways on Wednesday suggesting that the increased numbers of Wednesday patrols served the function of providing a presence of force and control in neighborhoods, a pattern not lost on local slaves. While Loudoun County patrols favored primarily Saturday nights for tours, runaways from the county favored Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays for escapes.

²⁰⁷ Keep in mind that the date of flight provided in runaway slave advertisements may have referred to when the slave was known to have absconded or when the absence was first noticed. Thus if an owner first reported a slave missing on a Monday, the possibility existed that if the runaway was allowed time off on Saturday night and not expected back to work until Monday morning, there existed potentially more time before an escape was noticed.

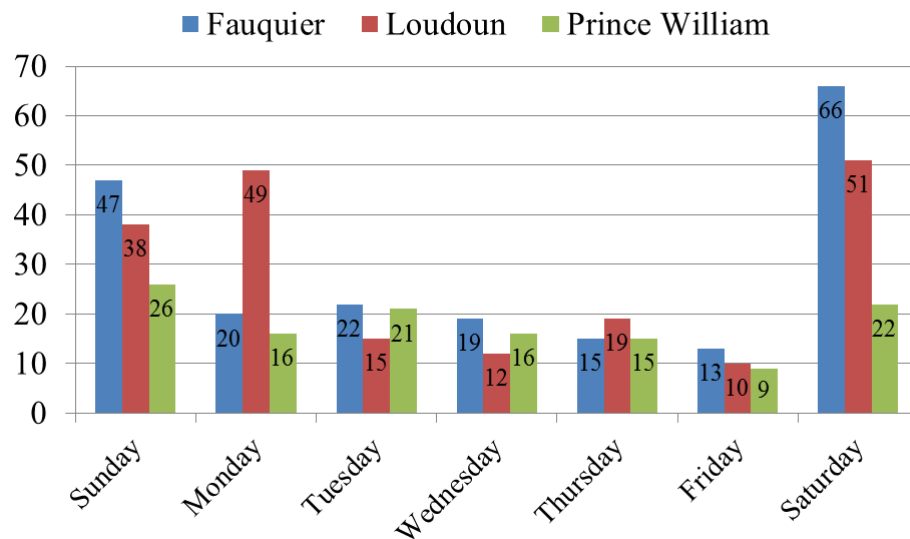


Figure 26. Reported days of the week when runaways absconded, by county, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Due to the limited amount of patrol data for Prince William County any correlation between patrols and runaways can be tentative at best. Former enslaved man Austin Steward recalled that patrols in Prince William County were “always on duty every Sunday, going to each plantation under their supervision, entering every slave cabin, and examining closely the conduct of the slaves; and if they find one slave from another plantation without a pass, he is immediately punished with a severe flogging.”²⁰⁸ Still, by comparing patterns in patrol schedules to times slaves absconded, the distinct differences that existed across northern Virginia appear.

Differences across the counties in patrolling trends also appear in this close reading of the extant records as seen in figure 26 and figure 27. Fauquier sent out

²⁰⁸ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 27.

proportionately more patrols on Sundays than either Loudoun or Prince William.²⁰⁹ More than 41 percent of Loudoun patrols began on Saturdays. Loudoun sent out proportionately less than half the number of Friday patrols as either Fauquier or Prince William. This suggests that Loudoun slaveholders suspected that enslaved persons were more mobile on Saturdays than on either Fridays or Sundays. Loudoun also fielded about the same number of Wednesday and Thursday patrols while both Fauquier and Prince William selected Wednesdays as the best mid-week patrol day with greater preference over Thursday. Limited extant data from Prince William suggests that Saturdays, Mondays, and Wednesdays were the most often chosen days of the week for patrols, even though this conclusion must remain tentative in lieu of further information about county patrols.

²⁰⁹ Bear in mind the vast difference in the data sets for each county as depicted in Figure 27.

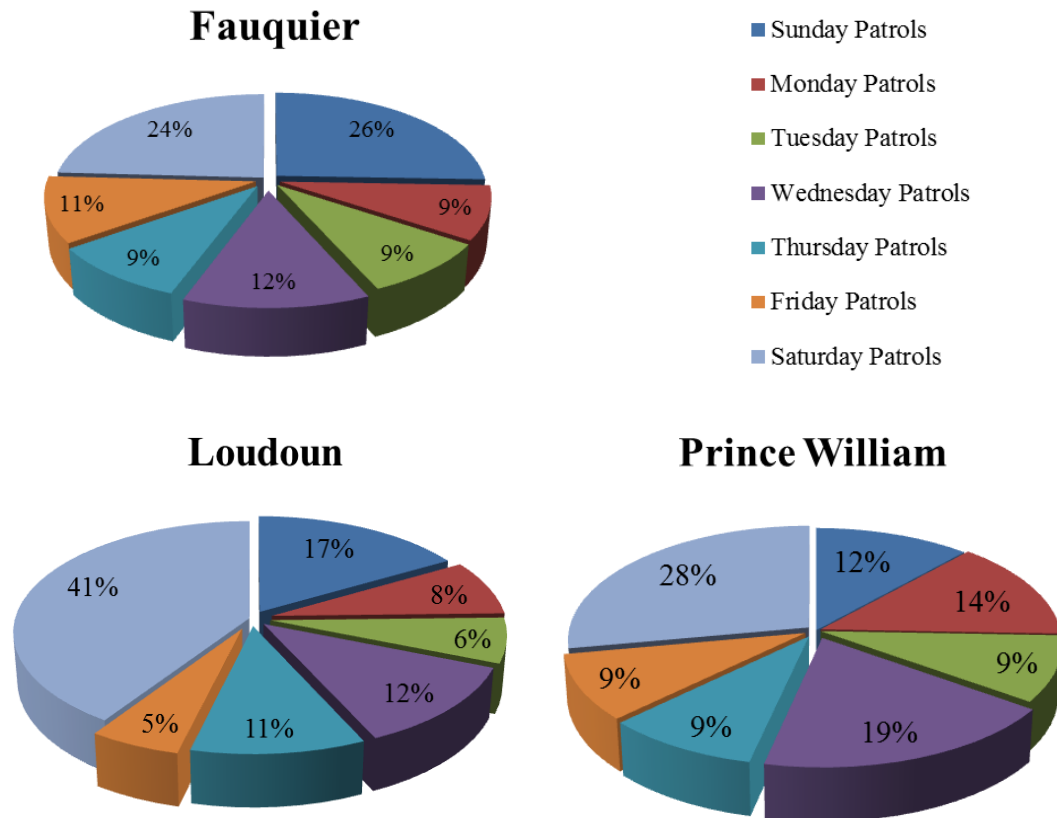


Figure 27. Days of the week patrollers served, by county, 1800-1860.

Sources: Patrol Records from Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from the County Levy; Patroller Records from the Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers; Prince William County Court Minute and Order Books and Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers.

Patrol claims help identify specific times and general periods when communities and neighborhoods deemed a police presence necessary to control the movement and actions of slaves and free blacks. The presence of patrols operating across northern Virginia also reflected fears about disorder resulting from state-wide and national emergencies.

Patrols and the War of 1812

The invasion of the Chesapeake by British forces signified a threat to the order of the slave communities and the control of enslaved persons in northern Virginia. While British ships sailed through the Chesapeake region, some slaveholders feared their enslaved property would take advantage of the opportunity to flee to the British.²¹⁰ Young boys ineligible to serve in the militia served as “videttes” in Prince William County, tasked with watching “the movements of the enemy” along the Potomac River from the highlands by Dumfries and noted the presence of the British fleet “anchored at the mouth of Quantico Creek” a few miles distant from Dumfries on August 22, 1814. According to a witness, “all the women and children had been hastily removed from the town with the most portable and valuable property.”²¹¹ The postmaster at Dumfries reported on August 25, 1814 that “all Dumfries is moving into the Country, expecting the enemy every hour.”²¹² Like other residents who removed “portable and valuable property” from the Dumfries area, Colonel Enoch Mason, executor of John Macrae’s estate, opted to remove “sundry slaves” on September 24, 1814 from the “danger of the enemy” near Macrae’s home in the port town of Dumfries “during the late War during the invasion of the Enemy,” most likely in response to the British presence at nearby Quantico Creek.²¹³

²¹⁰ For a more detailed study of Chesapeake slaveholder fears of enslaved persons aiding the British or escaping behind British lines see Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia 1772-1832* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013).

²¹¹ Remembrances from the *County Journal*, n.d. as found in Alice Maude Ewell, *A Virginia Scene Or Life in Old Prince William*, reprint 1931, (Fredericksburg, Virginia: BookCrafters, Inc., 1991), 28-29.

²¹² “Extract of a letter, to a Gentleman in this City, from the Intelligent Post-Master at Dumfries, dated August 25, 1814,” Richmond *Enquirer*, August 27, 1814.

²¹³ Mason later charged the Macrae estate five dollars for two days of wagon work removing the slaves from Dumfries. “Estate Accounts of John Macrae,” Prince William County Will Book L: 188.

The danger to property was real as the Raleigh, North Carolina *Star* reported that on August 17, the British force comprised of “2 frigates, 2 sloops of War, 2 bomb ships and a schooner” anchored near Aquia “about midway between Potomac and Quantico Creeks.” The fleet was “progressing very leisurely up the river, with great caution sounding the channel.”²¹⁴ To meet the threat about five hundred militia men “from different counties” tracked the British movement.²¹⁵ This charged environment created opportunities for flight from masters either to meet the slow-moving British fleet, or as part of the outward migration from Dumfries.

County levy claims across northern Virginia reflected the increased use of patrols for internal security. Extant county court records for Prince William County show that the war years were busy ones for county militia and patrollers. A county levy completed in May 1813 lists fifty-five patroller claims totaling 5,186 hours and another levy held in June of that same years included claims for an additional 1,651 patrol hours. All totaled, the county paid \$426.97 for patrol services.²¹⁶ The following year in the June 1814 levy sixty-five patrollers claimed a total of more than 5,600 hours of patrol service for the previous fiscal year. These claims represented \$351.01 of the county tax budget, nearly 26 percent of the receipts paid during the annual county levy, another significant financial burden.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ “Another Extract, August 17, near Aquia, Saturday 8 o’clock A.M.,” *The Star*, September 2, 1814.

²¹⁵ “Another Extract, Dumfries, August 27, 1814,” *The Star*, September 2, 1814.

²¹⁶ Prince William County Order and Minute Book 10: 99-100 and 113.

²¹⁷ Claims ranged from 136 hours to 5.25 hours per patroller. County Levy completed on June 7, 1814. Prince William County Order and Minute Book 10: 232-234. The total funds disbursed and recorded on June 9, 1814 were \$1,356 and the county assessed a tax of 40 cents for each of the 3390 titheables registered in the county to pay for expenditures. Prince William County Order and Minute Book 10: 244.

Loudoun County magistrates also used their discretion to call out patrols for specific neighborhoods during the war years. Burr Powell harshly assessed the actions of the militia when he proclaimed the necessity of calling out a patrol in his neighborhood in June 1814. According to Powell, a separate patrol was required “in consequence of a neglect in the Military department wherefore this duty” and Powell’s “full conviction that it [calling out a patrol] ought to be done by some one.” Powell’s authorization for Capt. John McPherson would extend “till superseded by a regular appointment from the proper military authority.”²¹⁸ On August 26, 1814 Justice of the Peace Leven Luckett renewed the warrant for Capt. John McPherson’s patrol “to act as such in their neighbourhood” due to “existing circumstances, it appearing necessary that Patrole should be continued.”²¹⁹ Loudoun’s Justice of the Peace William Bronaugh likewise ordered out Captain Silas Reese’s patrol in August 1814.²²⁰

At least 112 patrollers from Fauquier County submitted claims for patrol service completed between May 1812 and the end of 1814. Patrollers recorded frequent tours May through September 1812, including daily patrols during the first week of August 1812. Loudoun patrollers recorded tours in October 1812 through February 1813 while Fauquier patrollers did not record dates of patrols during this time. Both counties reported heavy use of patrols through September 1813, again reducing patrols over the winter months and resuming service in February 1814. This expanded patrol presence continued

²¹⁸ Capt. John McPherson’s Patrol Appointment, June 27, 1814, Patroller Records – 1814, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHAD.

²¹⁹ Capt. John McPherson’s Patrol Appointment, August 26, 1814, Patroller Records – 1814, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHAD.

²²⁰ Capt. Silas Reese’s Patrol Appointment, August 26, 1814, Patroller Records – 1814, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHAD.

until the end of June 1815, according to records that specifically listed dates and confirms the use of patrols not only as a deterrent to unlawful slave mobility but also as a local police force during times of war.²²¹

Nat Turner and the Tumultuous 1830s

The Southampton uprising catalyzed fear of black insurrection across the state and communities across the state demanded an immediate and enhanced policing force to rout other potential uprisings. Leaders of the local militia in northern Virginia responded immediately to the news by requesting additional armaments. Samuel M. Edwards, Colonel of the 57th Regiment of the Virginia Militia wrote to Governor Floyd to request armaments for Loudoun County's artillery battery and infantry companies in order to "afford to our Community some kind of security or protection in the time of emergency." Edwards explained that Loudoun had a "considerable negroe population among us & if the smallest insurrection were to arise, we have not a public arm nearer than Richmond that could be called into service." From Edwards' perspective, it appeared that "these are times requiring some preparation for such emergencies."²²²

George M. Cooke, Brigadier General of the 5th Brigade, 2nd Division of Virginia Militia serving the counties of Fauquier, Prince William, Stafford and King George reported "a manifest degree of impudence" among the enslaved population employed in

²²¹ Patroller accounts provide evidence of 261 patrol tours served on specific dates between May 1812 and June 1815. In addition to these specific dates, thirty-five patrollers served additional tours in Fauquier County and twelve patrollers from Loudoun County during this time and submitted claims without specific dates. Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records, AAHA and Loudoun County Misc Papers – Patroller Records, LCHAD.

²²² "Letter, Col. Samuel Edwards of Leesburg to Governor John Floyd of Richmond," August 29, 1831, Box 4, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Accession 42665, Library of Virginia.

industries near Aquia Creek in Stafford County and along the Rappahannock River. According to Cooke, slaves “have circulating amongst them a printed paper, styled the African Hym [sic] breathing a high spirit of rebellion” and efforts were “in progress to learn the source from whence it has sprung.” Cooke requested additional arms for “such portion of the militia of these counties [within the jurisdiction of his militia] as the situation of the population may seem to require,” especially for Stafford County “whose particular population and location demands attention.”²²³

Letters to Governor Floyd from Fauquier County revealed the fears of slaveholders and of the militia charged with maintaining control and order. Militia Colonel Daniel Flowerree responded to Governor Floyd’s offer of arms with a decision to prioritize arming Capt. Presley H. O’Bannon’s cavalry company, centrally located in the Salem neighborhood, “with swords & pistols” from the state’s arsenal.²²⁴ William Kemper suggested arming an infantry unit based in the Warrenton neighborhood. According to Kemper, “considerable excitement...(indeed I might say alarm)” existed among Warrenton residents

particularly among the females, as we are situated in a neighbourhood where the black population is perhaps more dense than in any other part of the State; there are within a few miles square several large farms containing a great number of slaves; three of those farms are owned by Batchelors [sic], and have on them no other whites than themselves and managers, and not less than one thousand slaves.

²²³ “Letter from George M. Cooke, Aquia Post Office, Stafford County to Governor John Floyd,” September 15, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

²²⁴ “Letter from Daniel R. Flowerree, Warrenton, to Governor John Floyd,” September 20, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

Kemper advised calling out the militia for a month “subject to all the rules and regulations of war” as a “most effectual means of allaying the present excitement and particularly composing the fears of the females” while presenting “a formidable barrier to any mischievous plans that may possibly be in agitation.”²²⁵ Kemper framed his explanation of the need for militia and arms using the language of the southern honor code that emphasized the protection of women as well as the dangers associated with large groups of minimally supervised slaves.²²⁶

Militia men from Loudoun County expressed the concerns of safety and protection against feared insurrection within their constituencies in letters to the Governor. Lieutenant Colonel Lloyd Noland reported that there was “considerable alarm in our neighbourhood [near Middleburg] in consequence of the insurrection of the blacks in the lower parts of Virginia & North Carolina.” Residents reported overhearing “conversations amongst the blacks upon the subject,” an alarming sign, and feared that “something of the kind might be in agitation here.” Noland claimed the area was “entirely without the means of defence at this time” and upon the entreaties of his “fellow citizens” Noland applied to the Governor to issue “a number of arms” to the 44th Regiment of Virginia Militia.²²⁷

Leesburg resident Benjamin Shreve described the uncertainty of slaveholders of the time that after news reached Loudoun of the Turner insurrection, residents were “very

²²⁵ “Letter from William Kemper, Warrenton, to Governor John Floyd,” September 21, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia. Emphasis in the original.

²²⁶ For a discussion of southern male honor, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²²⁷ “Letter from Lloyd Noland, Loudoun County, to Governor John Floyd,” September 19, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

much alarmed” and “many owners of slaves say that they have seen considerable change in the conduct of their servants for the last six or twelve months & that they are much more insolent than formerly.” To meet this challenge, Shreve stated that a “strong patrol” had been ordered out that day and “the citizens are purchasing every shot gun that is to be found and making every arrangement in their power to ward off an attack.” Shreve explained that despite having a slave population density smaller than that in Southside Virginia “we have many more free blacks who possess much better opportunities of getting arms & making arrangement than slaves, and they receive considerable encouragements from the circumstances of there being many Quakers in the County who take their part.”²²⁸

According to Shreve, white fears of an uprising in Loudoun altered master-slave relationships by reducing dramatically whites’ level of confidence in their ability to control slaves and free blacks. Shreve reported that “many of the citizens are afraid to leave their houses after night & afraid to stay in them two [sic].” A neighbor told Shreve that “he was afraid to correct a slave.” In light of the current tensions and defensive posture of the county, Shreve believed that if need be, he could raise “one hundred men in two hours” provided the Governor could supply the required armaments, but in any case, the “frequent drilling” of armed men would “show to the negroes our force and keep them in their place.”²²⁹

²²⁸ “Letter from B[enjamin] Shreve, Leesburg, to Governor John Floyd,” September 18, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

²²⁹ “Letter from B[enjamin] Shreve, Leesburg, to Governor John Floyd,” September 18, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

Governor Floyd issued to the Fauquier militia 75 rifles for the Infantry company and 75 swords and pistols for a company of cavalry. Floyd supplied a like number of rifles, swords and pistols to one company of cavalry and one company of Infantry posted in Loudoun County.²³⁰ According to newspaper reports, commanding officers from Prince William County also sent requests to Richmond for arms, yet no letters detailing these requests survive in the collections of the executive papers.²³¹

At a local level, county courts moved quickly to secure fears of rebellion spreading to northern Virginia. On September 26, 1831 the Fauquier Court ordered that “all orders heretofore made by this Court, if any, granting free persons of colour [the] privilege of keeping firearms be rescinded.”²³² Despite the perceived threats to the white population, evidence of additional patrol activity in the fall of 1831 is not available for Prince William and Loudoun counties because records are largely missing.²³³ Even so, residents became more aware of potential threats of insurrection and any unauthorized or suspicious contact between slaves and non-slaves. In 1832 the Loudoun court initiated

²³⁰ “Letter from D. Fauntleroy, Alexandria, to Governor John Floyd,” September 25, 1831, Box 4, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

²³¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, September 16, 1831; *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, September 17, 1831; “The Virginia Insurrection,” *The Farmer’s Cabinet*, September 24, 1831.

²³² Fauquier County Court Minute Book 31 (1829-1831): 380.

²³³ Captain Stanton Embrey’s patrol in Fauquier County recorded patrol tours on five days in the fall of 1831: Sunday October 23 (four men serving seven hours); Sunday October 30 (five men on a sixteen hour patrol); Friday November 4 (five men completing a nine hour patrol); Sunday November 6 (five men surveilling for sixteen hours) and Monday November 7 (two men patrolling for four hours and the other three men patrolling for eleven hours). Embrey’s patrol record hints at particular concerns over the long weekend at the beginning of November, 1831, but not a continual threat in October. Embrey’s patrol included himself, William Embrey, Henry Kemper, George W. Stigler, and James Jones. “Patroller Account,” Box #15, 1832-021, Fauquier County Free Negro / Enslaved Records from County Levy, AAHA. Prince William County Court Minute books and their records of the annual county levy that would have detailed the amount of funds spent on patrol tours for the years 1815 to 1832 were lost during the Civil War. While some patrol appointments and claims have been located in the boxes of Clerk’s Loose Papers, none for this period have surfaced. Clerk’s Loose Paper Collection, Prince William County Court House Archives, Manassas, Virginia. In Loudoun County no patrol claims or appointments submitted after June 14, 1826 and before December 14, 1835 have been located. LCHAD.

legal proceedings against shoemaker Frederick W. Morris “in consequence of conversations, &c. with a negro slave” for which Morris could expect “severe punishment.” Morris apparently perceived the danger of a guilty verdict in the tense climate and fled the county.²³⁴

One measure of the effect of the patrols on the enslaved communities was the sudden noticeable decrease in the number of advertised runaways in the year 1832 experienced in all three counties after a relative high point in 1831 (see figure 28). Slaveholders advertised rewards for two runaways following the Nat Turner insurrection: Burr absconded on Friday, September 2, 1831 and Thornton ran away on October 2, 1831, both from Loudoun County.²³⁵ In 1832 only three runaways were reported from northern Virginia in available newspapers: Henry ran from the Thoroughfare neighborhood in Prince William County on January 17, 1832; Harry ran away from Middleburg sometime before March 30; and Eliza absconded from Cub Run in Loudoun County on July 17, 1831.²³⁶ The decrease in numbers of advertised runaways suggests that enslaved persons reacted to the increased patrol presence by delaying or choosing not to run away during a period of intense suspicion and fear.

²³⁴ Frederick W. Morris was described as a 33 or 34 year old shoemaker who had likely fled to Richmond or the District of Columbia. The absence of a racial identification in the news article suggests that Morris was white. *Alexandria Gazette*, May 1, 1832.

²³⁵ “\$10 Reward,” *Genius of Liberty*, September 24, 1831; “\$10 Reward,” *Genius of Liberty*, October 8, 1831.

²³⁶ “Fifty Dollars Reward,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 20, 1832; “One Hundred Dollars Reward,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 28, 1832; “Fifteen Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, July 24, 1832.

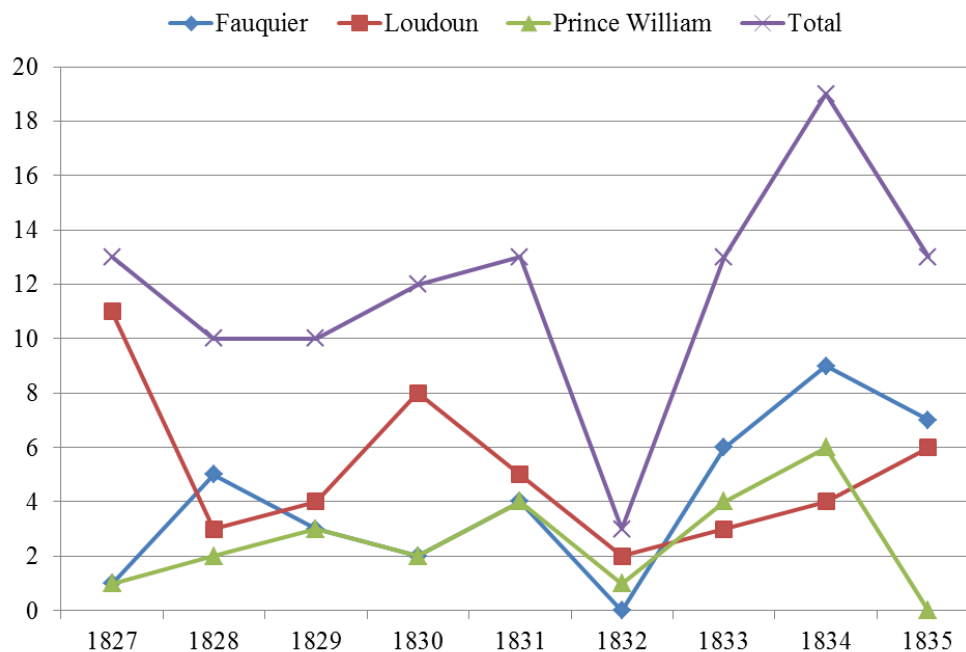


Figure 28. Number of runaways advertised in newspapers, 1827-1835.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Slave Database.

The danger of insurrection sparked panic again in the fall of 1833 when news of a threatened slave rebellion spread from Fairfax County into Prince William County. Centreville resident G. Millan informed Governor John Floyd that “a Suspicious Character” was “endeavouring to Cause the slaves to rebel & make insurrection” among the blacks from Prince William County. The suspect, identified by Millan as a white man named John Windover, a carpenter by trade, had arrived in Fairfax Court House on Thursday, September 5, 1833 “with two other men in company” and travelling with a large box weighing “from 4 to 500 lbs & though by the Citizens at F[airfa]x Court House to Contain Arms.” According to Millan, Windover had been seen “in company with 9 or 10 slaves & heard by white persons to say If you will only be true you can get free.”

Another witness, Mr. Allison, claimed that he heard Windover tell a slave “if you will only be true you can all get free” while at Allison’s tavern and that Windover also claimed he had convinced “the negroes from Prince William County to join him & many others.” The slaves identified by witnesses as having been in company with Windover were taken to Millan and questioned and they claimed Windover provided them with money and arranged to meet them in a few days near Fairfax Court House where he “had plenty of Arms.”²³⁷ Windover was charged in Fairfax County with “having endeavored to incite insurrection or rebellion amongst the blacks.” While awaiting trial, Windover attempted to burn down the Fairfax jail in order to facilitate his (successful) escape on April 26, 1834. Governor Littleton Tazewell offered a \$250 reward for his capture and return, though Windover had apparently disappeared.²³⁸

Unfortunately patrol records or claims do not exist for Prince William County for the period of 1815-1832 to indicate the relative sense of unease and community action following Nat Turner’s insurrection in that county. Surviving patrol claims for the tax years beginning in June 1832 indicate a relatively small stable patrol presence in Prince William County in the 1830s with relatively intense periods occurring in 1834 and 1838 before a sharp increase in the 1841 county levy (see figure 29).²³⁹ The 1834 county levy paid for a combined total of 926 hours of patrol service averaging 44 hours for each of

²³⁷ “Letter from G. Millan, Centerville, Virginia to Governor John Floyd, Richmond, Virginia,” September 9, 1833, Executive Papers of John Floyd Box 10 Folder 11 (1833 Sep 1-15), Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

²³⁸ “By the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, A Proclamation,” *Richmond Enquirer*, May 6, 1834.

²³⁹ Patrol claims paid at the June 1834 county levy totaled 926 hours, the second highest number of patrol hours between 1834 and 1840 county levies after 1,100 hours of patrol service between June 1837 and May 1838. For annual county levy accounts in the 1830s see Prince William County Order and Minute Book 11 (1833-1836): 12-13, 141-142, 254-255 and Prince William County Order and Minute Book 12 (1836-1839): 129, 131, 138, 225-226, 326-327.

the twenty-one patrollers. Claimants submitted affidavits for tours of service ranging from seven hours to as many as 145 hours of patrolling, suggesting that patrollers went on patrol less than nineteen days during the year considering the average hours served during a patrol were between eight and nine hours during this period.²⁴⁰

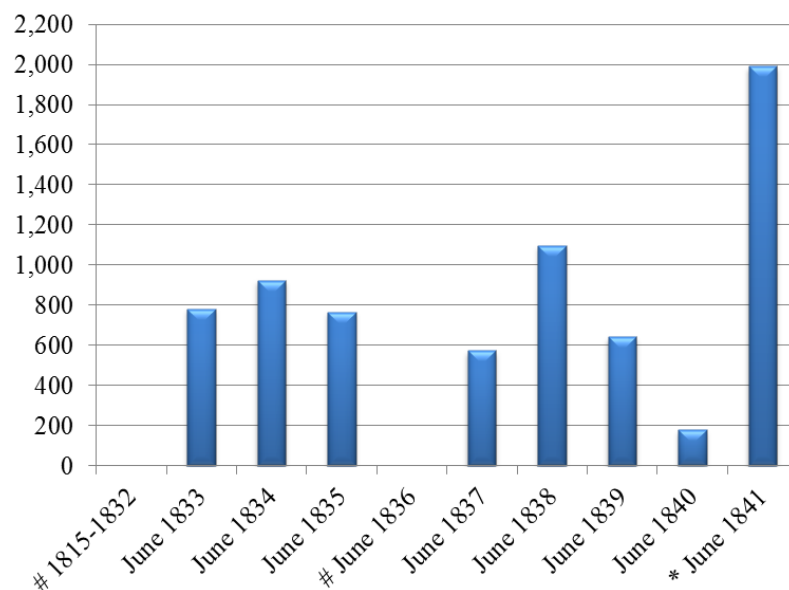


Figure 29. Hours of patrol service claimed by patrollers, Prince William County, 1815-1841.

Source: Prince William County Order and Minute Book 11: 150 and 262; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 12: 38, 141, 232, and 332; Prince William County Order and Minute Book 13: 101 and 194.

Note: Extant records provide no annual patrol claim information for the period 1815-1832 and for the fiscal year ending in June 1836.

While not as alarming as the Nat Turner insurrection, other periods of unrest developed in northern Virginia during the 1830s that led to the appointment of extra

²⁴⁰ "Patrol Claims," June 3, 1834, Prince William County Order and Minute Book 11: 141-142.

patrols. In October 1837 Fauquier County Justice of the Peace John B. Downman appointed an extra patrol upon receiving information “that a patrol is necessary in this neighbourhood.” Downman authorized a five-man patrol led by Jefferson Hefflin to serve for three months and “to perform the same duties, and to receive the same pay as other patrols appointed according to Law.”²⁴¹

Early in 1839 the threat of armed resistance by slaves against the slaveholding class emerged in nearby Fairfax County. George Mason of Hollin Hall ordered out a special patrol in his neighborhood, located “on the very border of the District of Columbia” after learning of the presence of muskets in the hands of slaves and free blacks. Mason reported that within a span of only four days twenty-five guns had been seized or surrendered by slaves and free blacks in Mason’s neighborhood, yet he estimated that twice that number actually existed. Mason feared that “white men, base enough to conceal” the arms had put the weapons in safekeeping. Not wanting to cause “the slightest alarm,” Mason claimed he published this information due to his “duty (after having secured all I could, in my own vicinity) to make it known, for the benefit of the community at large.” Mason blamed “a class of white men” who had “thrown every obstacle in the way of enforcing the laws—but have done everything in their power to evade their provisions—to secrete the guns, and screen the guilty from punishment.” Mason hoped the guilty parties could be held to justice to assuage the harm they created to a “long plundered and insulted community.”²⁴²

²⁴¹ Captain Hefflin’s patrol included Privates Elijah Finks, Robert Finks, Wesley Groves, Fielding Groves and Marshall Taylor. “Appointment of Patrol,” Box #17, 1838-015, AAHA.

²⁴² G[eorge] Mason of Hollin Hall, “To the Editor of the Alexandria Gazette,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 16, 1839.

The unrest in Fairfax may have extended to Prince William County as Capt. Zack Allen and his five-man patrol served tours on fifteen dates between February 5 and March 25 in 1839. Allen's patrol surveilled most frequently between February 5 and February 16, the time that Mason reported the possible plot, and again during the first week of March.²⁴³ Responding to an increasing sense of unrest among slaveholders across Virginia, the General Assembly passed a law authorizing magistrates to issue warrants for patrols to search for "arms or weapons." Under the warrant patrols could force open "the doors of free negroes and mulattoes and of slaves, in the absence of their masters or overseers" when "access is denied."²⁴⁴ Legislating additional authority to magistrates and patrollers gave credence to the widespread fear of armed resistance.

Patrol records in Fauquier County from 1839 indicate a dramatic increase in the number and frequency of patrols not during the apparent threat to order in Fairfax County, but later that year, in the fall months of October and November.²⁴⁵ In Loudoun County the only extant patrol records are those of Capt. George Head's patrol comprised of six men who each served between fifteen and nineteen nights for patrol tours completed before November 12, 1839.²⁴⁶ While extant patrol records from these three

²⁴³ Patrol Claim of Allen's Patrol, LP (1839) 001107_00126, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. Also noted in Prince William County Order and Minute Book 12: 326. Three men in Allen's patrol served seventy-three hours. One man served sixty-three hours, and the fifth patroller served only thirty-seven and a half hours during this period. Prince William County also paid the claims for seven other patrollers submitted on June 4, 1839 each of whom served between twenty-seven and sixty-two hours for unspecified times of patrolling for the previous fiscal year. *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁴⁴ "Sketch of the Acts Passed by the General Assembly of Virginia Session 1839," *Genius of Liberty*, May 11, 1839.

²⁴⁵ See the patrol claims submitted by members of Capt. John Embrey's patrol between April 6, 1839 and December 6, 1839 and of Capt. Frederick Embrey's patrol from September 14 1839 to October 26, 1839. Patroller Claims, 1840-010, AAHA.

²⁴⁶ Capt. George Head Patrol Claim, Patroller Records – 1839, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHAD. Claims submitted by Head's patrol totaled \$84.25, suggesting that on average, each man patrolled

counties cannot be considered a complete record of all patrol activity, remaining records suggest that patrollers in Prince William, while not necessarily in Fauquier and Loudoun, may have reacted to the Fairfax threat.

Another potential reason for the increased patrol presence during the late 1830s was to curb the increase of runaways from northern Virginia. As shown in figure 30, Fauquier slaveholders reported relatively high numbers of runaways in 1838 and Loudoun County experienced a dramatic rise in the number of runaways in 1839 after extra patrols were ordered.²⁴⁷ Increased numbers of runaways signaled the decisions of individuals to alter their circumstances of enslavement, either by hiding out in neighborhoods or by planning for a more permanent escape from slavery. The increase in runaways likely manifested as a result of the increased patrol presence that upset routines in the quarters. In nearby Fairfax County, resistance against the disruptions caused by patrols led to a violent attack on a patrol in 1840.

about ten hours per night, using a pay rate of 6¼ cents per hour for privates and 8⅓ cents per hour for a patrol captain.

²⁴⁷ Advertised runaways comprised only a portion of the actual number of runaways, yet this measure provides some gauge of the occurrence of runaways. For the construction of the Northern Virginia Runaway Slave Database see chapter 5. The relatively high number of 28 runaways from Loudoun in 1840 can be explained in part by the mass absconding of 23 slaves from the Marshall plantation after estate administrators began the process of dividing the estate. “Crop of Runaways,” *Genius of Liberty*, June 20, 1840.

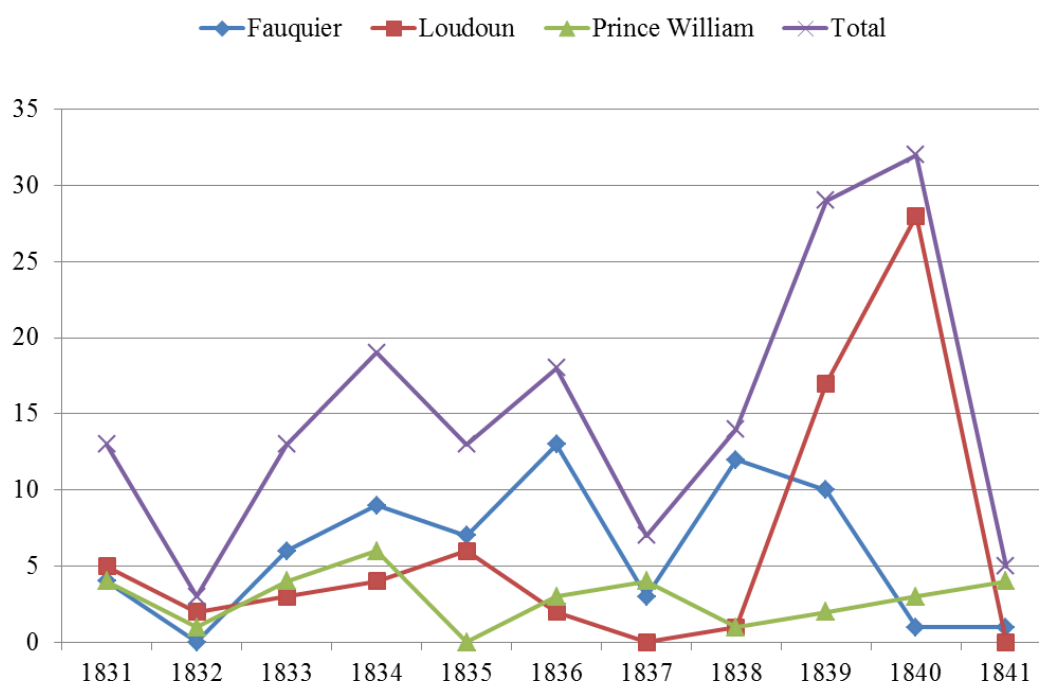


Figure 30. Number of runaways advertised in newspapers, by county, 1831-1841.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Slave Database.

Politics and Patrols: 1840 Under the Shadow of Alfred and Spencer

In the spring of 1840 a group of five enslaved men violently attacked a Fairfax County patrol operating south of Alexandria in the Spring Bank neighborhood on a Saturday night in February. Three patrollers were “dreadfully beaten and left senseless in the road” while the fourth escaped and sounded an alarm.²⁴⁸ The patrollers, “consisting of only three men and a youth,” were “entirely unarmed” and on foot when the attack began. The five enslaved men, four of whom were owned by Fairfax slaveowner Dennis Johnson, attacked the patrol with “heavy clubs” in order to rescue “two prisoners” held in

²⁴⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, March 5, 1840.

the custody of the patrollers.²⁴⁹ Fairfax County magistrates convicted two of the men, Alfred and Spencer, in March on charges of “maliciously assaulting and beating the Patrol, with an intent in so doing to kill” and sentenced them to death.²⁵⁰

Nearly immediately following the trial petitions flooded the office of Governor Gilmer expressing concern about the attack on the patrol and what should be done to clamp down of slave violence. A petition presented by Dr. Richard Chichester Mason and George Mason of Hollin Hall captured the anxiety felt by slaveholders who believed they had a “Duty alike due to our Families, ourselves & posterity” to object to any sort of clemency for Alfred and Spencer or executive order to reduce their sentences to one of transportation outside the United States.²⁵¹ The Masons asserted the attack on the patrol

²⁴⁹ “Communicated,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 6, 1840. For the ownership of the accused slaves, see *Alexandria Gazette*, March 9, 1840.

²⁵⁰ *Alexandria Gazette*, March 16, 1840.

²⁵¹ The Masons objected to any transportation of convict criminals outside of Virginia for several reasons. First, the only likely places to take Virginia’s convicted slaves were the Spanish West Indies where “the supply of Africans there, is so large they will [bring] nothing more than half the price given on the continent,” or to the Southern States where they were sold to men “ignorant of their crimes,” or carried to Texas “among our emigrant Countrymen, to a far more benignant climate & richer Soil – where, in every possible respect their condition will be improved.” By “thus casting out upon our Neighbours, the Evil we feel as too grievous to be borne by ourselves – we shall be directly violating that great maxim of Religion & morality...to do unto others, as we would have them do unto us.” “Petition & Remonstrance of the Citizens of Fairfax County Virginia, in the case of Slaves Alfred & Spencer,” Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 1, Folder 5, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia. Emphasis in the original. Fairfax resident Bernard Hooe shared the Masons’ concern about transportation of Virginia convicts. Hooe discovered that Rudolph Littlejohn, described by Hooe as “gambler in Washington City” acted as agent for William Williams, a “trader in slaves” with “a large establishment in Washington” in the purchase of convict slaves from the Richmond Penitentiary. Hooe believed Williams planned to transport twenty-seven convicts purchased by Littlejohn on the Brig Uncas from Washington, D. C. to New Orleans. Hooe claimed that a “slave in this neighbourhood has told some persons here that he saw and shook hands with Alfred, the slave of Dennis Johnston of Fairfax, who was convicted last spring for an assault and battery on the Patrol.” Hooe asserted that it was “not improbable [the Uncas] may advertise for Texas, as a blind, and still go direct to New Orleans” a move that violated the terms for purchasing convict slaves from the Governor. Letter from B. Hooe to Governor Thomas W. Gilmer, September 24, 1840, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 2, Folder 5, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia. Emphasis in the original. After Hooe alerted Gilmer to Williams’s movements, Governor Gilmer notified officials along the Gulf Coast of Williams’s possible intention to sell the convict slaves. One of the Virginia convict slaves, Arthur from Norfolk, was given to M. W. Garrison, a dealer in Montgomery, Alabama as security for a bank note. After learning that Arthur was one of the Virginia convict slaves, Garrison wrote to

constituted an act of “open rebellion & Insurrection” by “men of bad Character – turbulent & lawless” who had “no claim to mercy.” Any hesitation to set a swift and striking example to the rest of the enslaved population would only encourage a repetition of violence against patrols and slaveholders, especially in “this disturbed Border of Virginia” where “in sight of the Capital of the United States – our Slaves are hearing Abolition Doctrines, & the denial of dominant authority, preached every day from the very Halls of Congress, & where, they can be so easily visited by Incendiaries of every Class and Colour, & where, already from this location & these causes *they have become peculiarly dissatisfied and insubordinate.*”²⁵²

Governor Gilmer with details of Littlejohn and Williams’s business in Alabama while claiming that “Williams is no doubt the principal Mover of all this rascality & Swindling & has shipped those Negroes to Mobile for the purpose of disposing of them there.” Letter from M. W. Garrison to Governor Gilmer, November 2, 1840, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 2, Folder 8, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia. See also the article from the *Mobile Chronicle* that described the financial dealings of Littlejohn and Williams in Mobile, Alabama and the news that the Uncas was “prevented from landing here” and the belief of officials that “the next place where an attempt will probably be made is New Orleans. The authorities there are doubtless on their guard.” *Mobile Chronicle* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, November 12, 1840. Once Williams reached New Orleans, Williams was placed under arrest by the Criminal Court of New Orleans and “the slaves taken from his possession and imprisoned.” Letter from Wheelock S. Upton to Governor Gilmer, December 3, 1840. Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 3, Folder 1, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia. Williams was tried three times before the Louisiana Criminal Court could come to a verdict, fining him \$500 for each of the twenty-four slaves brought to New Orleans. Niles’ National Register calculated that the affair had cost Williams at a minimum \$48,000 for the purchase price of the slaves, the fines imposed by the Louisiana court, and the forfeiture of \$24,000 in bonds due to the Governor of Virginia for not complying with the terms of transporting convict slaves. *Niles’ National Register*, May 22, 1841. Included in the group were Alfred (convicted of the attack on the Fairfax patrol), Landon (a runaway from Fauquier County convicted of arson in the burning of the Prince William County jail), and Henry Burgess (from Loudoun County, convicted of breaking and entering). “A List of Slaves and Free persons of color received into this Penitentiary of Virginia for Sale and transportation from the 25th June 1816 to the 1st February 1842,” Auditor of Public Accounts, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

²⁵² Petition & Remonstrance of the Citizens of Fairfax County Virginia, in the case of Slaves Alfred & Spencer, n.d. Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 1, Folder 5, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia. Emphasis mine. Dr. Mason would use similar arguments in 1850 when he petitioned against executive clemency for Agnes, an enslaved woman convicted of killing Mason’s cousin, Gerard Mason of Woodbridge in Prince William County.

In a letter solicited by Dr. Mason and later forwarded to Governor Gilmer, William Brent, Jr. of Burlington near Centreville offered his general perceptions of the attitudes of local slaves. Brent wrote that “one thing is certain that the obedience of the slave is less implicit than formerly, his value greatly lessened, and his insolence and insubordination greatly increased.” These factors were exacerbated by proximity to the nation’s Capital, “the Pandora’s box of this Union.” Brent perceived that “from all I can see and learn the nearer you approach the district of Columbia the more unwilling the obedience and the smaller real value of the Slave.” Brent did not want to hazard an opinion on the sentences imposed on Alfred and Spencer, claiming he was “not master of the facts,” but he did believe that

when we view the little influence that will be felt from a transportation, it will be a question worthy of the deepest consideration, whether a change of sentence, in this case, may not be fraught with consequences the most serious: whether clemency in this case, may not prove to be savage brutality?²⁵³

Many Fairfax residents feared that a lack of sufficient punishment would lead to reprisals from other slaves and drafted petitions against clemency that emphasized these fears.

Governor Gilmer did amend the sentences of Alfred and Spencer by reducing Alfred’s sentence from death to transportation and postponing the date of Spencer’s execution from April 17 to May 20, 1840.²⁵⁴ Historian Sally Hadden downplayed the

²⁵³ As indicated by Brent, Mason was “at liberty to make any use you please” of his letter and Mason apparently sent Brent’s letter to Governor Gilmer in support of Mason’s petition against reducing Alfred or Spencer’s sentence to transportation. Letter from Wm. Brent, Jr. to Dr. Richard C. Mason, March 4, 1840, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 1, Folder 5, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia.

²⁵⁴ A petition submitted by Fairfax County Magistrates requested a change in date of Spencer and Alfred’s execution since the Court unknowingly appointed Spencer’s execution for Good Friday, a day “held in high veneration in every Christian community.” The Court was “unwilling to do violence to their own feelings,

significance of the attack asserting that the “episodic quality of revenge taken by slaves like Alfred and Spencer seemed minor when compared with events that could turn South race relations upside down.” From Hadden’s perspective, these infrequent attacks could never “provoke the same fears or retribution brought on by rebellions or large-scale revolts.”²⁵⁵ Yet when viewed within the context of the heightened sense of unrest across northern Virginia, the attack revealed the willingness of certain slaves to take violent action against the authority of the patrol. While slaveholders feared open rebellion, they had more experience dealing with these “episodic” explosions of violence in the fields, in the factories, and in the homes. As such, they realized that these “minor” acts represented a much more insidious form of resistance. Subsequent debates over the proper punishment revealed growing divides between the use of punishment as an example to curb resistance and fears that public punishment only inflamed the growing insubordination and agitation expressed by slaves. These issues of control and resistance pervaded through northern Virginia as recorded by slaveholders, members of the militia, and patrol captains.

On July 10, 1840 Fauquier slaveholder Edward Turner noted in his diary that “a meeting of the farmers of the neighborhood is held at the Plains to day to take measures

and to offend the moral sense of the community, by having a public execution under the criminal laws on that which has been inadvertently selected for that purpose.” Petitioners requested a change to the date for the execution and Governor Gilmer agreed. Memorial of Justices of the Peace of Fairfax County, March 30, 1840, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Box 1, Folder 5, Accession #43419, Library of Virginia. The *Alexandria Gazette* later reported that Spencer “one of the slaves lately convicted at Fairfax Court, for an assault on the patrol of the county, with intent to kill,” was hanged at Fairfax Court House on Friday, May 22. *Alexandria Gazette*, May 25, 1840.

²⁵⁵ Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135.

to keep in order the slaves.”²⁵⁶ Apparently local slaveholders in this Fauquier neighborhood sensed the rising discontent and banded together to define and discuss the problem. Things in Prince William County also appeared uneasy. On July 14, 1840 Captain of the Virginia Militia for the Dumfries area, George N. Cockrell, wrote to Governor Thomas Gilmer requesting any muskets “which is no use to the state that mite [sic] be giving to me for distribution” to arm the “80 to 100 men” in his company “for the defence of the county.” Cockrell reported “thair [sic] is a grate uneasiness in our County about the negroes as is in other counties” and his troops required adequate armaments. Cockrell posed a rhetorical question to Gilmer, asking “how would we appear before a Gang of negroes – or other rebellious persons” without proper weaponry?²⁵⁷ Gilmer rejected Cockrell’s request.

In lieu of a fully armed militia, Prince William County officials made other plans for the defense of the county. On August 4, 1840 the county court authorized and requested fourteen justices of the peace to “order out in their respective neighborhoods efficient patrols” and to reappoint as needed.²⁵⁸ By dispersing the authority to order patrols throughout the county, magistrates enabled a system of rapid deployment during times of distress and legitimized the authority of justices of the peace to maintain order as they saw fit within their own neighborhoods.

²⁵⁶ Diary of Edward Turner of Kinloch, Entry for Friday, July 10, 1840. Turner Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

²⁵⁷ “Letter from George N. Cockrell of Dumfries, Virginia to Governor Thomas W. Gilmer,” July 14, 1840, Box 1, Folder 9, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Thomas W. Gilmer, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

²⁵⁸ Court magistrates authorized A. H. Sanders, Basil Brawner, William Cockrell, Thomas Nelson, John Fox, Allen Howison, Robert Williams, John Hooe Jr., Benjamin Johnson, James D. Tennille, Jesse Ewell, Benoni E. Harrison, James W. F. Macrae and Charles Ming to order out patrols. Prince William County Court Order and Minute Book 13: 117.

In another attempt to gain arms for the militia in Fauquier County, the commander of the Virginia militia, Brigadier General R. Wallace, wrote to Governor Gilmer from Warrenton in October 1840 requesting weapons for Captain English's Light Infantry Company. Wallace explained the need for arms writing that the village of Warrenton "contains a population of about 1,200 souls and in the midst of much the largest slave population in the county...much exceeding a thousand slaves confined in a small portion of the county above this place and the lower part." Wallace warned that in "the event of a difficulty, this place, from that and other obvious considerations, must be the point of assault for the slaves, and of resort for the whites." Wallace explained the significance of Warrenton as a site where "all convicts to be executed are executed here" and based on previous unrest during an execution Wallace determined the need for an enhanced armed presence. Wallace explained that

but a few years ago there was an execution of a negro fellow for the murder of his overseer when the sympathies of the slaves ran high in his favor, and on tomorrow a woman is to be executed. On the former as it seems is every where the case, a vast assembly of slaves was present to witness the execution; this will be the case tomorrow. The incident which with occurs tomorrow has reminded the citizens, and the company of volunteers of their illy-armed condition, and has stimulated the application to you to furnish that company with other arms in lieu of such as are now here.²⁵⁹

Wallace based his apprehension that the upcoming execution of enslaved woman Betsy would cause unrest among other enslaved persons in the county on previous experience during the execution of Ben in 1835.²⁶⁰ Patrols had been ordered out in force

²⁵⁹ "Letter from R. Wallace of Warrenton to Governor Gilmer," October 22, 1840, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas W. Gilmer, Library of Virginia.

²⁶⁰ The upcoming scheduled execution referred to by Wallace was the scheduled hanging of Betsy, an enslaved woman convicted of murdering the infant son of Joseph C. Wilson by "throwing or forcing" the

during the week of Ben's scheduled execution on Thursday, March 5, 1835. Records show that Fauquier patrollers conducted tours on the following dates immediately before and after Ben's execution: March 2, 4, 6, 7, and 12, 1835.²⁶¹ During the period immediately prior to and after the scheduled execution of Betsy, George Rabbitt and Samuel E. Douglass spent about 300 hours patrolling in Fauquier, indicating the use of patrols as a preemptive force during times of anticipated unrest.²⁶²

The growing unrest during the 1830s and into 1840 affected political debates during the Presidential election cycle. In October 1840 Thomas B. Hooe articulated the connections between the Nat Turner insurrection and growing fears of rebellion when he wrote :

These awful anticipations and fears are but too fully warranted by mournful experience. Such an insurrection has broken upon us in our own time and in our own State in its most frightful horrors, and slaked its spirit in the indiscriminate butchery of men, women and children. It may come again. The danger is too great for patriotism to slumber at its post, and the consequences too fearful for philanthropy to be still.²⁶³

Hooe's political statement further showed his support for presidential candidate Martin Van Buren, signaling Hooe's departure "from among the whig ranks" to join the

child "into a well of water." *Commonwealth v. Betsy*, County Record, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas W. Gilmer, Library of Virginia. The enslaved man who killed his overseer most likely referred to enslaved man Ben, who felled his overseer, Samuel Woodall, with an axe before the man could punish Ben for killing Woodall's dog while felling a tree. *Commonwealth v. Ben*, Box #17, 1835-004, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, AAHA.

²⁶¹ See Capt. Jones's patrol account and George T. Smith's patrol claim, 1835-019, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records, AAHA.

²⁶² Both Rabbit and Douglass submitted claims for patrol service on unspecified dates between October 15, 1840 and January 26, 1841. Patrol Claims, 1841-014 and 1841-015, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records, AAHA.

²⁶³ "Circular of Thomas B. Hooe, Esq. of Prince William County," *Columbus (Mississippi) Democrat*, October 17, 1840.

Democrats.²⁶⁴ In Hooe's mind, support for the presidential candidacy of Van Buren hinged upon Van Buren's pledge to "*veto any bill interfering with slavery in the States, Territories, and Districts*" while the opposing candidate, Harrison, who encouraged "assurances to the Abolitionists of the North" privately while publicly "denouncing them [Abolitionists] and their fiend like schemes."²⁶⁵ Hooe's views mirrored the opinions of others in northern Virginia who feared the potential for rebellion based on the recent experiences in Southampton, Virginia, in Fairfax County and on individual farms and plantations across northern Virginia. Slaveholders looked not only to national leaders for support, but increasingly to their own communities to combat the growing rumbling of threats to the institution of slavery.

Patrols in the 1850s

By the 1850s, the length of daily tours served by patrollers decreased from an average of 8.79 hours per tour in the 1840s (144 tour dates) to 4.43 hours per tour during the 1850s (235 tour dates) indicating the shift towards calling out patrols to address and suppress an immediate perceived threat as well as limitations in the ability of each county to pay for patrol service from annual levies. In exchange for serving shorter patrol tours in the 1850s, patrollers then served much more regularly as shown in the detailed patrol records from Fauquier County. Patrollers in that county were out daily from September

²⁶⁴ "Circular of Thomas B. Hooe, Esq. of Prince William County," *Columbus (Mississippi) Democrat*, October 17, 1840.

²⁶⁵ "Circular of Thomas B. Hooe, Esq. of Prince William County," *Columbus Democrat*, October 17, 1840.

10, 1851 through January 7, 1852.²⁶⁶ Patrols surveilled in the Fauquier neighborhood of White Ridge during the month of September 1852, Bristerburg in October 1852, and three different patrols surveilled in overlapping tours in Warrenton May through July 1853.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, in Prince William County, the county levy paid out no monies for patrollers in either 1853 or 1854, indicating either that funds were not available to pay patrol claims or patrols were suspended during that period, leaving safekeeping either to individual slaveowners or informal neighborhood watch groups. By the mid-1850s, patrols across northern Virginia sprang back into action as fears of unrest and possible insurrections grew, a topic explored in more detail in chapters nine and ten.

Control over the enslaved population of northern Virginia remained an elusive illusion, bolstered at times by the punitive laws and punishments enacted against resistance and crime, enforced by neighborhood and religious community standards for behavior, and supported by the actions of individuals and groups legitimized as agents of control in a slave society. While slaveowners, overseers, and churches maintained a fairly constant presence of oversight over enslaved persons, patrols served more as a reactionary force in response to local fears. Despite the presence of these agents of control and perhaps because of their presence, enslaved persons resorted to various methods of resistance to create possibilities for personal mobility, family security, and bodily control.

²⁶⁶ See the Patrol Claim of Capt. Dudley M. Pattie submitted on July 27, 1852 to the Fauquier County Court for services rendered between September 10, 1851 and January 7, 1852, Patrol Claim 1852-015, AAHA.

²⁶⁷ See Patrol Claims, 1853-035, 1853-037, and 1853-038, AAHA.

CHAPTER THREE: “IF THE LAWS OF THE LAND ALLOW IT”: ADAPTING TO VIRGINIA’S MANUMISSION AND RESIDENCY LAWS AND CREATING SPACE FOR NEGOTIATED FREEDOMS

A survey of deeds of manumissions and wills recorded and proved in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties after the first law authorizing private manumission in 1782 until the end of the Civil War in 1865 reveals local reactions and adaptations to state, awareness of community support for freedom, negotiations between owners and slaves, and pressure from religious communities to slaveholders to ameliorate the condition of the enslaved.¹ These negotiated freedoms, whether by direct emancipation, conditional freedom, or removal from the state, differed in frequency and absolute numbers across the three northern Virginia counties and reveal distinct trends in each county. A close survey of primary documents from northern Virginia reveals a gap between legislative mandates and lived experiences but also show the impact of local beliefs and behavior.

¹ This chapter draws upon certificates of freedom, deeds of manumission, and wills from extant county records written between 1782 and 1865. Abstract books for Fauquier and Loudoun deeds and wills helped identify documents containing instructions for manumission. Specified deeds and wills were then located either from the original deed or will books or from available microfilmed records and transcribed. I found applicable acts of manumission in Prince William County deeds and wills through a close reading of microfilmed court documents recorded during this period.

From Enslavement to Freedom: George and Winney Rivers and the Loudoun Community

George Rivers was born late in the eighteenth century, after 1795, into the Humphrey family located at Rock Hill farm near present day Bluemont in Loudoun County.² By 1820 Abner Humphrey's Loudoun County property holdings included ten enslaved persons, most engaged in agriculture.³ At some point before he was thirty, George started a relationship with a fellow enslaved woman on the Humphrey plantation, Winney, leading to their identification as husband and wife. Abner Humphrey's death in 1824 jeopardized the security of George's growing family as Humphrey ordered that his slaves be divided between all his children.⁴ During the division of the estate, Humphrey's son, Thomas, claimed George while George's wife Winney became the property of Humphrey's other son, John. George's daughter, "one black girl named Dinah" went to Humphrey's daughter, Mary (Humphrey) Settle, wife of Isaac Settle.⁵

² Abner Humphrey a "local farmer and non-Quaker slaveholder" built his home, Rock Hill Farm, in 1797 on land he purchased from Thomas Drake in 1796. For a history of Rock Hill farm see Rock Hill Farm, VDHR File No. 053-1057, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/register/Countries/Loudoun/053-1057_Rock_Hill_Farm_2009_NR_FINAL.pdf>

³ Humphrey's slaveholdings included two boys under the age of fourteen, one man aged twenty-six to forty-four (probably George), one man older than forty-five years, five girls under the age of fourteen and one woman aged between twenty-six and forty-five years old (probably Winney). 1820 U.S. Federal Census, Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, page 128, NARA roll M33_137, Ancestry.com. 1820 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Images reproduced by FamilySearch.

⁴ Abner Humphrey died December 17, 1824 according to his gravestone located in the old Ebenezer Baptist cemetery. His wife, Mary preceded Abner in death, dying on March 11, 1824 and Abner's son, Abner G. Humphrey also passed away that same year on October 28, 1824. <http://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/loudoun-county-cemetery-database>.

⁵ Will of Abner Humphrey, 1824, Loudoun County Will Book P: 57-59. No record of the division of Humphrey's slaves has been located, yet Humphrey's daughter Hanna (Humphrey) Beans possibly received another member of the Rivers family. Her husband, Isaiah B. Beans manumitted his "servant man" Jacob Rivers in exchange for \$390 on November 12, 1850. Loudoun Deed Book 5E: 72. Evidence that the Humphrey children were amenable to manumitting members of the Rivers family perhaps derived from the strong connection of the Humphreys to the Baptist Church. In 1804 Abner and Mary Humphrey,

Trying to maintain control over their family's security, both George and Winney negotiated terms for gaining their freedom with their new respective owners. John Humphrey agreed to free Winney and her child Rebecca upon receipt of \$75, and Thomas Humphrey set the price for George's freedom at \$100.⁶ Through the combined efforts of George and Winney, they finalized the purchase of Winney and daughter Rebecca by 1829, in time to secure the freedom of another child born to Winney before the enumeration of the 1830 census.⁷

To purchase their family's independence from enslavement, George and Winney relied on members of the white and black community to locate, negotiate, and engage in hired-out labor to accumulate the funds needed to first secure Winney and Rebecca's freedom and then purchase George's emancipation. Knowledge of the local hiring out networks and potential employers willing to accommodate a family man or mother with small children enabled the Rivers to earn income. George gained a reputation as "an excellent hireling, a good Cradler, Mower, and Stone fence maker" among Loudoun's

and their daughter, Mary Humphrey Settle, were among the founding members of the Ebenezer Baptist Church located near the Humphrey farm. The church nominated Abner Humphrey as deacon until his exclusion in 1824 for "indulging too freely in the use of spirituous liquors." Minutes of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1804-1896, entry for May 19, 1804 and for the Saturday before the fourth Lords day in January 1824, microfilm. Mary (Humphrey) Settle applied for a letter of dismissal from the church in 1825. Minutes of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1804-1896, for Saturday before the fourth Lords day in April 1825, n.p., microfilm. Members of the Rivers family may also have joined the Ebenezer Church. A "coloured" woman named Dinah joined the congregation in 1820 followed shortly thereafter by a "coloured" woman named Winney in 1821. Another black woman named Winney was dismissed in 1824. Records indicate that a black woman named Dinah was dismissed and died in 1830. List of Members, Minutes of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, 1804-1896, n.p. microfilm.

⁶ John G. Humphrey to Winney, written January 1, 1829, proved in court February 16, 1829, Loudoun County Deed Book 3R: 355. Thomas G. Humphrey to George Rivers, written December 31, 1830, proved in court May 31, 1831, Loudoun County Deed Book 3V: 358.

⁷ Any children born to Winney during her enslavement became the property of her then owner, so securing her freedom would be paramount to the stability of the Rivers' family, especially if Winney were pregnant or worried about future pregnancies and the status of future children. Winney's age at emancipation, an estimated thirty-nine years old, suggests that in addition to her two known children, Rebecca and the unnamed infant in the census records, she may have been the mother of additional older children.

whites, jobs that provided him a modest if seasonal income and with careful management allowed for the accumulation of savings.⁸ A reputation for good work or strong community connections increased the likelihood of gaining an agricultural tenancy which enabled the Rivers to live separately as a household.

The purchase prices totaling \$175 represented a significant accumulation of wages for day laborers or seasonal work, yet these amounts signified only a fraction of George's market value as a thirty-year old enslaved male laborer, or the value assessed to the productive and reproductive labor of Winney, or the future value of Rebecca. Brokering an agreement for this substantial amount, while only a fraction of each slave's value in the domestic slave market, required some negotiation from George and Winney Rivers and concessions from the Humphreys.

By 1830 the Loudoun community acknowledged George Rivers as a free black man. Loudoun's census enumerator, Jonah Hood, listed George Rivers as the head of the Rivers' (free) household.⁹ Yet it was not until the end of that year on the 31st of December 1830, months after Hood's enumeration, that George's owner, Thomas G. Humphrey, officially "set his hand & seal" to "manumit, emancipate and set at liberty" his "negro man slave...who calls himself George Rivers." Another five months passed before Humphrey confirmed George's deed of emancipation and recorded it with the

⁸ "Certificate of Character of George Rivers a free man of Colour," September 5, 1832, Petition of George & Winney Rivers, Loudoun County, Virginia, February 24, 1838, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

⁹ The Rivers' household included three other free persons of color: Winney, George's wife born sometime between 1790 and 1798; Winney's then three year old daughter, Rebecca, and another daughter under the age of ten years. 1830 U.S. Federal Census Population, Loudoun County, Virginia, 96.

Loudoun County Court clerk's office in the presence of clerk Charles Binns on May 30, 1831.¹⁰

The willingness of the Humphrey heirs to help preserve the familial bonds between George and Winney and some of their children meant also that they declined their rights to hold George, Winney, and some of their children. Their transfer of all rights and claims to the Rivers, and in the case of George, to "warrant and forever defend...the liberty and freedom of the said negro man called George Rivers" before the broader Loudoun community illustrated the complex legal and social ties formed through acts of manumission and emancipation, acts that expanded the concept of community, property rights, and freedom. Yet this story also reveals the tenacity of the Rivers family to broker negotiated terms of freedom with owners, establish community ties with both black and white residents, and negotiate legal challenges to maintain free status and residency in northern Virginia.

George was also plagued by the loss of his daughter Dinah in the division of Humphrey's estate. To cling to his family, George maintained his social and kinship networks beyond Loudoun County to Fauquier County, the home of Isaac and Mary (Humphrey) Settle who gained George's elder daughter, Dinah as a special bequest from Mary's father, Abner. In 1831, when Isaac Settle decided to sell Dinah and her then seven month old son, Rudolph, to G. W. Malone, the news reached Dinah's father George who already possibly knew of the Settle family's financial difficulties. While apparently unable to prevent Dinah's sale and presumed removal to Malone's home in Tuscumbia,

¹⁰ Thomas G. Humphrey to George Rivers, written December 31, 1830, proved in court May 30, 1831, LCDB 3V: 358-359.

Alabama, George, as a free person, could negotiate a transfer of ownership of his grandson, Rudolph.¹¹

Dinah was probably a young teen when she gave birth to Rudolph on November 22, 1830, only seven months prior to her sale. A young female slave proven capable of bearing children would be a financial asset to Malone, yet the presence of a young infant would be an encumbrance during the exhausting cross-country journey from Virginia to Alabama. Whether out of benevolence or, more likely, to remove the burden of traveling with an infant, Malone “made a present” of Rudolph “to his Grand Father George Rivers (a free man of colour) of the County of Loudoun” on the 20th of June 1831.¹²

Malone’s use of language similar to deeds in which slaveholders gifted ownership of slaves to family members hints at Malone’s acknowledgment of George’s change in status from a state of property to recognition as a person, capable of receiving gifts of property. Upon receiving Rudolph, George declared he was “willing & desirous of liberating his Grandson” adding “as far as it is in his [George’s] power to do so” perhaps realizing his newly acquired status as a free person of color still held many civil limitations or prompted by Malone or the legal clerk to include this caveat. Perhaps at the request of Loudoun Clerk of Court Charles Binns, an official well-versed in the language of the law and witness to the deed, George vowed he would “support & keep him [Rudolph] from becoming chargeable to the County of Loudoun or elsewhere until he arrives at the age capable of supporting himself by labour” in obedience to the

¹¹ George Rivers to Rudolph, written September 5, 1832, proved in court September 11, 1832, Loudoun County Deed Book 3Y: 338-339.

¹² George Rivers to Rudolph, written September 5, 1832, proved in court September 11, 1832, Loudoun County Deed Book 3Y: 338-339.

Manumission Act of 1782's stipulations regarding financial responsibility of the owner for manumitted slaves.¹³

Like white slaveowners who bestowed gifts of property upon family members, George's deed detailed only two requirements in making this gift of freedom: "one dollar in hand paid at & before the ensealing & delivery of these presents," a common nominal price, and "in consideration of the natural love & affection" which George felt towards his grandson. By including this last phrase, "in consideration of the natural love & affection" George again affirmed his status as a free property holder, capable of bestowing the gift of emancipation, and also as a doting parent and grandparent. Rudolph joined the Rivers family first as a gift of property, then as an emancipated free person.

The experience of the Rivers family moving from a state of enslavement to status as free persons of color illustrates that the legal process of a slaveowner vesting "as full and ample a manner" of liberty as was in his or her power depended on the specific time and place of manumission. In 1830 Thomas G. Humphrey could only declare George "free from the claim of me the said Thomas G Humphrey" or from the claim of Humphrey's heirs, executors, or administrators and a promise to defend George "against the claim or claims of all and every person or persons whatsoever." This represented the

¹³ George Rivers to Rudolph, written September 5, 1832, proved in court September 11, 1832, Loudoun County Deed Book 3Y: 338. The 1782 Virginia Act stipulated that manumitted slaves be "of sound mind and body, or being above the age of forty-five years, or being males under the age of twenty-one, or females under the age of eighteen years, shall respectively be supported and maintained by the person so liberating them, or by his or her estate; and upon neglect or refusal so to do, the court of the county, where such neglect or refusal may be, is hereby empowered and required, upon application to them made, to order the sheriff, to distrain and sell so much of the person's estate as shall be sufficient for that purpose." Ch. XXI, 11 Laws of Va. 39 (Hening 1823) enacted 1782 as cited and discussed in A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. and F. Michael Higginbotham, "'Yearning to Breathe Free': Legal Barriers Against and Options in Favor of Liberty in Antebellum Virginia," *New York University Law Review*, 68, no. 6 (December 1993), 1257.

legal language of “the liberty and freedom” granted to George Rivers in December of 1830.¹⁴

The Rivers’ ability to break free from the bonds of slavery and remain in Loudoun despite legal challenges to their residency gives credence to the existence of community support networks for certain Loudoun slaves and freed persons of color.¹⁵ Yet their history also reveals the opposing forces present in the county who sought to remove the freed family and others like them from the county. The question remains: how did the experience of the Rivers and Humphreys families compare to the experiences of other slaveholding families, enslaved chattel, and freed persons in northern Virginia? How did manumission destabilize slavery, and what did the process of freeing slaves mean to slaveholders, slaves, and non-slaveholders?

The Process of Manumission

Community and private sentiments towards reducing the presence of slavery, ameliorating the condition of the enslaved, or rewarding faithful service appeared publicly in manumission, the legal process of conveying free status to human chattel. Historian Eva Sheppard Wolf described this process of turning a legal “nonperson” into a party capable of entering a contract “so profound that it could only exist as a matter of

¹⁴ Thomas G. Humphrey to George Rivers, written December 31, 1830, proved in court May 30, 1831, Loudoun County Deed Book 3V: 358.

¹⁵ In his exploration of the free black community of Israel Hill, Melvin Patrick Ely contended that the ambivalence of the local white community “created openings” for freed slaves to live in a space between slavery and freedom. Free blacks’ acquisition of land and property, access to the courts for adjudication of claims and grievances, and mixed race marriages occurred in Prince Edward County, Virginia more so within a climate of flexible white-black relations than in open defiance of Virginia laws. Melvin Patrick Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 440.

legal fiction.”¹⁶ Wolf asserted that “most manumitters did not see emancipation as restoring slaves to their original state of Liberty but as altering their natal status,” therefore deeds and wills of emancipation “generally turned rather than *returned* slaves into free people.”¹⁷ Manumission reduced the numbers of enslaved persons while increasing the presence of freed persons, yet as Wolf astutely recognized, for most manumitters the process did not signal a disbelief in the legitimacy of slavery.

As historian Sumner Eliot Matison noted, the legal right to manumit developed “out of the inherent right of a property holder to abandon title to his property.”¹⁸ Manumission created a legal avenue to divest a slaveholder of enslaved chattel, whether out of financial, religious, or moral principles. Prior to 1782 northern Virginians who questioned the holding of human chattel or who wanted more control over title to enslaved property had few legal options for freeing their slaves. The first Virginia law detailing a process for altering a slave’s “natal status” developed in 1723 and further asserted in 1748 that “no Negro, Mulatto, or *Indian* Slave, shall be set free upon and Pretence whatsoever, except for some meritorious Services, to be adjudged and allowed by the Governour and Council for the Time being.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner’s Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 48.

¹⁷ Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner’s Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 51. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ Sumner Eliot Matison, “Manumission by Purchase,” *Journal of Negro History*, 33, no. 2 (April 1948), 146.

¹⁹ *The Acts of Assembly, Now in Force in the Colony of Virginia. With an exact Table to the Whole*. Section 31, Chapter 26, (Williamsburg: Printed by W. Rind, A. Purdie, and J. Dixon, 1769), 262. Any alteration to an enslaved person’s status also affected the claims of third parties to the value and labor of the slave, especially heirs and creditors to a slaveholder’s estate. Since protecting property rights was a key tenet of Virginia law, so manumission was never an absolute right.

Under pressure from Quaker and Methodist petitioners, and amidst the drive to further extend and protect the rights of property holders, the Virginia legislature passed a new manumission law in 1782 that clarified the responsibilities and rights of slaveholders.²⁰ The law granted slaveholders the right to privately manumit by “his or her last will and testament, or by any other instrument in writing, under his or her hand and seal, attested and proved in the county court by two witnesses or acknowledged by the party in the court of the county where he or she resides.”²¹

The 1782 law established a process of private manumission rather than emancipations through the vetting committee of the Governor and his council but only under certain conditions. The manumission must occur after the age of eighteen for females and twenty-one for males yet before the age of forty-five. The reason for age-specific manumissions revolved around financial responsibility for the maintenance and care of the manumitted slave and the fear of allowing freed slaves becoming a charge upon the public finances or Overseers of the Poor. As such, a manumitter (and his family as inheritors of the manumitter’s estate) acknowledged financial responsibility for any freed slave during his or her lifetime.²² Manumissions could not remove any obligations of debt due from the manumitter’s estate and the statute stipulated that emancipated slaves “shall be liable to be taken by execution, to satisfy any debt contracted by the

²⁰ Richard K. MacMaster, “Liberty or Property? The Methodists Petition for Emancipation in Virginia, 1785,” *Methodist History* (October 1971), 47.

²¹ William W. Hening, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, vol. XI (Richmond, 1823), 39.

²² For a comparison of manumission laws and slaveholder responsibilities in slaveholding states see Benjamin Joseph Klebaner, “American Manumission Laws and the Responsibility for Supporting Slaves,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 63, no. 4 (October 1955): 443-453.

person emancipating them, before such emancipation is made.”²³ Freed slaves also remained liable to be hired out or sold to recover any tax debt accrued for failure to pay taxes.²⁴ Another provision of the 1782 Act required the act of manumission to be recorded with the county court and for freed slaves to carry documentation of their status at all times.

After the passage of the 1782 Act, three methods of securing emancipation existed: manumission by legislative act; manumission by personal deed; and manumission as a bequest in a will. Pursuing freedom through legislative act required the support of community members who provided or signed certificates of character, pressed assemblymen to read the petitions in the Legislature, and pushed the petition forward to the courts of justice, thus placing the responsibility and authority for granting freedom outside of a slave’s immediate surroundings and community influence. These acts were also subject to more stringent review from state authorities.

Manumissions recorded as deeds represented a local and public decision to emancipate a slave that took effect when properly witnessed and recorded with the county court. Typically deeds of manumission involved freeing individuals, yet some cases of both mother-child or mother-and-family manumissions existed. Emancipating a

²³ The 1782 Acts regarding manumission were rearticulated in the 1792 Acts of Assembly. An Act to reduce into one, the several Acts concerning Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes (passed the 17th of December, 1792) Chapter 103, Section 37, *A Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, of a Public and Permanent Nature, as Are Now in Force; with a New and Complete Index to which are prefixed the Declaration of Rights, and Constitution, or Form of Government. Published Pursuant to an Act of the General Assembly, Passed on the twenty-sixty day of January, one thousand eight hundred and two* (Richmond: Printed by Samuel Pleasants, Jun. and Henry Page, 1803), 191.

²⁴ Section 41, *Ibid*, 191. Eva Shepperd Wolf discusses the impetus and influence of the changing manumission laws especially in chapter one. Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner’s Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

slave during the owner's lifetime signified a resolve by the owner to forego the services of the slave from the date of manumission and acknowledgment of the loss of wealth tied to ownership of that particular chattel. Deeds often included affirmation that the owner would defend the manumitted person's title to freedom against any future claims made by his heirs. These deeds generally represented the culmination of a long-term negotiated process exchanging service or cash for freedom rather than an immediate or hasty decision to manumit. This was not the case in manumissions effected through a will when owners waited to write an instrument of manumission to take effect either at their own death or at the death of a spouse or children, thus delaying the onset of freedom.

Wills written during good health promising future freedom to slaves guaranteed no specific date when an end to enslavement would take effect. Deathbed wills which promised future emancipation potentially reduced the wait time for an enslaved person. A slaveholder desiring to manumit a large group of enslaved persons typically signified this desire as a bequest in a will. A bequest of freedom, though, could be compromised if laws and community spirit would not support the provisions. Unlike writers of deeds of manumission, writers of wills placed the burden of implementing the legal process of emancipation upon the executor, executrix, or administrator, thereby leaving room for legal loopholes and discontented heirs to contest the bequest or for a creditor to legally cancel the manumission in order to recover a debt. Still, these documents reveal a rich history of the ways in which both slaveholders and slaves negotiated the terms of freedom during changing legal and social constructs of slavery and freedom.

The immediate repercussions of the 1782 manumission law differed across Virginia. John H. Russell in his 1913 study of the *Free Negro in Virginia* concluded that the 1782 law combined with republican ideals of the freedom and liberty created an immediate outpouring of manumissions in Virginia.²⁵ Ira Berlin distinguished between patterns of manumission in both the Upper South and Lower South finding each broad region reacted differently due to pressures of idealism, agriculture, and risk of flight. According to Berlin, “equalitarian ideals motivated most manumitters in the years following the Revolution” because “they were deeply troubled by the contradiction between slaveholding and the sanctity of the family, the inalienable rights of men, and the lessons of the gospel.”²⁶ Responding to idealistic, religious, and economic pressures, Berlin’s slaveholders in the Upper South acted upon anti-slavery beliefs and responded to changes in agricultural needs by embracing post-revolutionary emancipation laws with a “surge” of manumissions. The decline of tobacco culture in the Upper South decreased the need for enslaved laborers in the region while the rise of the cotton kingdom in the Lower South shifted the need for enslaved workers to the south and west. Unlike Berlin’s broad depiction of manumission among slaveholders across multiple states, this study considers a much smaller social, economic, and political region: the northern-most rural areas of Virginia where large scale manumissions were rare, yet sensational, and hardly confined to the immediate post-revolutionary period.

²⁵ John H. Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865* (1913, repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 63.

²⁶ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (1974, repr., New York: The Free Press, 2007), 30.

Early extant deeds of manumission filed across southern Virginia under the 1782 law employed the language of liberty and natural rights as motivation for emancipating enslaved persons. Campbell County's David Terrell was "fully Persuaded that freedom is the natural right of all mankind" and affirmed it was his "duty to do unto others as I wou[l]d be done by in the Like Situation" when he wrote a deed of manumission for Nan, Polley, Dick and Lucy on September 5, 1782.²⁷ The deed of manumission for Lewis recorded by Thomas Draper of Nansemond County on the "27th day of 9th Month" in 1782 used the same language as did many other deeds shortly written after the passage of the 1782 Act.²⁸ The style of dating on these early documents suggests that members of the Quaker faith in southern Virginia were early emancipators under the 1782 Manumission Act, yet Quakers in Loudoun County in northern Virginia apparently did not use the authority of this Manumission Act until others in the region established a precedent.

Northern Virginia scholar Donald Sweig challenged Russell's findings by asserting that "there was no great rush to free slaves" after the passage of the 1782 manumission act in the northern Virginia counties of Fairfax and Loudoun as slaveholders first recorded manumissions seven and eight *years* respectively after the passage of the 1782 law rather than immediately following the passage of the act.²⁹

Deeds of manumission under the Manumission Act first appeared in northern Virginia in

²⁷ Nan: Deed of Manumission, Campbell County, 1782, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*, Virginia Memory, <<http://virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>>.

²⁸ Lewis: Deed of Emancipation, Nansemond County, 1782, *Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative*, Virginia Memory, <<http://virginiamemory.com/collections/aan/>>.

²⁹ Donald M. Sweig, "Free Negroes in Northern Virginia: An Investigation of the Growth and Status of Free Negroes in the Counties of Alexandria, Fairfax and Loudoun, 1770-1860," Master's Thesis, George Mason University, 1975, 24.

1785 in Prince William County, in 1789 in Loudoun County, and not until 1793 in Fauquier County (see figure 31).³⁰ Unlike Russell's and Berlin's broad assertions that slaveholders in Virginia and the Upper South acted upon republican ideals of freedom and quickly embraced the opportunity for private emancipation, a close reading of deeds and wills from northern Virginia shows that slaveholders in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties entered the era of manumission more cautiously. In addition, deeds recorded in northern Virginia utilized a language quite different than the earlier "natural rights" form found in southern and eastern Virginia, suggesting early manumitters across northern Virginia used legal rather than moral language to justify emancipation.

³⁰ DeBernoux to Hector, written January 17, 1785, proved in court August 5, 1785, Prince William Deed Book W: 220-222. Binns to Harry, written September 15, 1789, proved in court September 14, 1789 [sic], Loudoun County Deed Book R: 288-289; Grace to Hywarden, written May 6, 1793, proved September 24, 1793, Fauquier County Deed Book 11: 413. An earlier deed of manumission written in 1779 in Loudoun County by William Hatcher prior to the 1782 law permitting private manumissions freed twenty-five year old Rose. Rose's deed of manumission was not officially presented, affirmed, and recorded in the Loudoun County Court until 1806 suggesting that Hatcher and Rose entered into an agreement for her freedom and she maintained a nominal relationship with Hatcher until the Removal Act of 1806 forced the issue of recording Rose's freedom to enable her to claim rights of residency. Hatcher's use of Quaker dating patterns ("this seventeenth day of the seventh month") suggests that Hatcher was a Quaker attempting to follow custom by divesting himself of enslaved property. William Hatcher to Rose, written July 17, 1779, proved in court April 15, 1806, Loudoun County Deed Book 2G: 203.

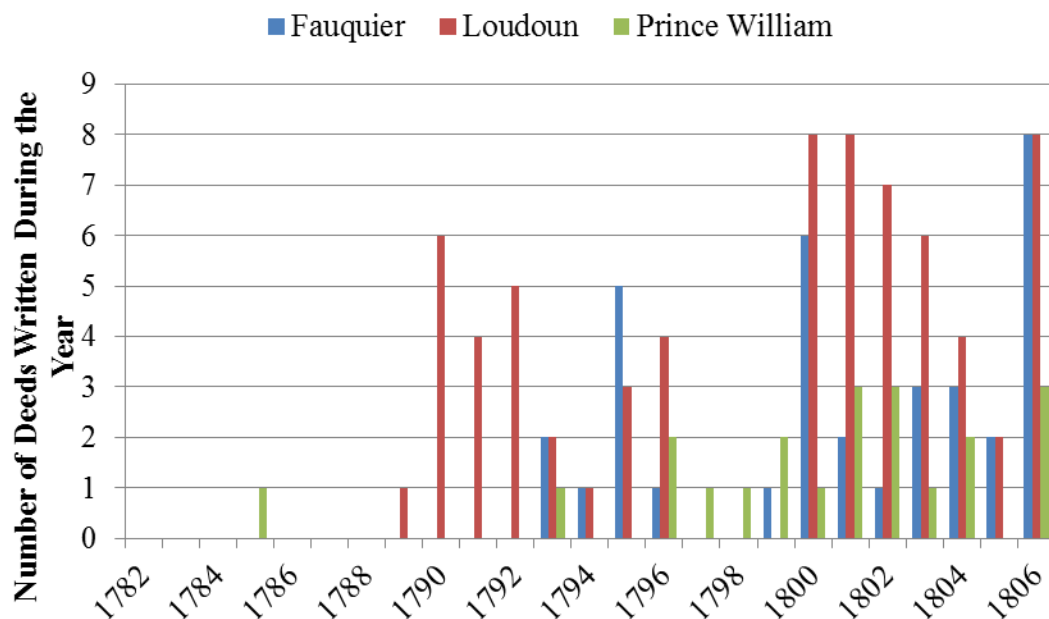


Figure 31. Number of private deeds of manumission written between 1782 and 1806.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 11-17, Loudoun County Deed Books R-Z and 2A-2O, Prince William County Deed Books W-Z and 1-3, microfilm.

Hector's manumission in 1785 was the first recorded manumission by deed in Prince William County following the 1782 Manumission Act and was hardly an act committed out of a belief in natural rights. Francis Galvan DeBernoux of Dumfries drafted and recorded the deed in accordance with the "certain Writing" left by his brother, Hector's master, Major William Galvan at the time of his death. DeBernoux, determined to fulfill his brother's wishes, paid off some of Galvan's debts exceeded his assets, and took possession of Hector, who had his own ideas about how to gain freedom. DeBernoux noted that Hector "from Evil Counsel since the Death of my said Brother" had been "seduced to leave my service" and due to this reason DeBernoux admitted "I do not Chuse to keep him about my person." Despite Hector's misbehavior, DeBernoux

acted upon the “tender and affectionate Regard” he felt for his brother, William, and “emancipated liberated and Discharged from Slavery” Hector on January 17, 1785.³¹

Hector’s freedom, though, was conditioned upon the following terms: that within ten days of his manumission he depart from Virginia and “never after return therein.” DeBernoux also stipulated that Hector was not allowed to “Voluntarily Reside” in Philadelphia for longer than three days for any reason.³² If Hector failed to adhere to these conditions he would immediately and forever return to “a state of Bondage” and become DeBernoux’s “absolute property.”³³ DeBernoux’s stated reasons for banishing Hector from Virginia and Philadelphia was Hector’s absconding, perhaps upon the advice or from DeBernoux’s perspective “Evil Counsel” from other slaves who doubted that DeBernoux would adhere to Galvan’s wishes when faced with settling the later’s debts. By law Hector could have been sold to pay off his master’s debts regardless of any agreement that Hector would receive his freedom, a consequence that Hector would avoid by running away.

DeBernoux’s experience with Hector did not totally disabuse him of the utility of manumission. Eight years later he took part in the emancipation of Sall, alias Sally or

³¹ DeBernoux to Hector, Deed of Freedom, written January 17, 1785, proved in court August 5, 1785, Prince William County Deed Book W: 220-222.

³² One possible clue to the hesitation of DeBernoux to allow Hector to reside in Philadelphia might be found in an anonymous letter published in the *Salem Gazette* in 1785 penned by “an officer in Philadelphia” apparently shortly before the officer’s “putting a period to his existence” due to some affair of the heart. The officer requested that his friends “have me buried decently—pay all my debts, and if what I leave is not sufficient, draw on my brother at Bayonne” – the brother’s and mother’s name only indicated by the letter B. The officer requested his brother “take care of Hector.” While the connection between Galvan’s Hector and this Hector is tenuous at best, the DeBernoux family must have had reservations about allowing Hector to return to Philadelphia. “Copy of an original LETTER, written by an officer in PHILADELPHIA, some time since, a few minutes previous to his putting a period to his existence,” *Salem Gazette*, February 8, 1785.

³³ DeBernoux to Hector, Deed of Freedom, written January 17, 1785, proved in court August 5, 1785, Prince William County Deed Book W: 220-222.

Sarah, enslaved property held in trust for his wife, Elizabeth Ewell Murray Galvan DeBernoux.³⁴ Sall's manumission was unique in that during the crafting of a marriage contract between Elizabeth and her future second husband, Francis Galvan DeBernoux, Elizabeth included the provision that she be allowed to "enfranchise her s[ai]d molatto wench Sall" either during DeBernoux's life or after his decease. This proviso did not extend to Sall's "increase" as the contract stated that any children born to Sall while Galvan was alive were "to remain slaves" regardless of Sall's status.³⁵ The DeBernoux did not stipulate any residency requirements for Sall and indeed believed that she would reside in or near Dumfries. As such, and to fully comply with the 1782 law's proviso regarding responsibility for preventing manumitted slaves from becoming a public charge, Elizabeth and Francis entered into a bond with four gentlemen justices of the county court stipulating that either Francis or Elizabeth's father Bertrand Ewell or their representative "shall well and sufficiently maintain and support the said mulattoe woman Sarah" from becoming a public charge under penalty of fifty pounds current money.³⁶ Sall's deed of manumission appears to be the only one in Prince William, Fauquier, or Loudoun accompanied by a bond promising financial security for an emancipated slave, even though this provision was written into the manumission laws.

³⁴ Prior to her marriage to DeBernoux, Elizabeth Ewell Murray had already gained possession to lands near Dumfries, livestock, and household goods from her father, Bertrand Ewell. She also inherited land after the decease of her first husband, John Murray. Her properties were protected and held for her lifetime use by relatives in the Ewell family as stipulated in her 1784 marriage contract to Francis Galvan DeBernoux. Sall and her child were two of the thirteen enslaved persons owned by Elizabeth at the time the marriage contract was crafted in 1784. Marriage Contract between Galvan DeBernoux and Elizabeth Murray, written August 9, 1784, proved in court September 7, 1784, Prince William County Deed Book U: 541-544.

³⁵ DeBernoux &c to Sally, Deed of Freedom, written March 5, 1793, proved in court October 7, 1793, Prince William County Deed Book Y: 288-289.

³⁶ Bond, written November 4, 1793, proved in court November 4, 1793, Prince William County Deed Book Y: 293.

Slaveholders in Loudoun County did not file bonds with the county court to secure financial liability for a manumitted slave during the early period of private manumissions. Instead, the sitting county court first adjudged the “health and ability” of prospective manumitted persons and only if satisfied with these qualities, ordered the deed to be recorded.³⁷ This process of assessing the “health and ability” began with the first manumission of Harry in 1789 and continued in the language of Loudoun deeds until February 1791 when the clerk noted that manumission deeds were recorded “with the Consent of the Court.”³⁸ Early deeds of manumission in Loudoun utilized a legal format that focused more on the slaveowner’s relinquishment of title and claim to “person or to any Estate” the former slave had acquired than on any disavowal of the institution of slavery or idealistic belief in natural rights.

The first deed of manumission recorded in Fauquier County following the 1782 Manumission Act was the act of Phebe Grace to liberate “one negro man Slave called and known by the name of Abraham Hywarden” in 1793, a full nine years after the passage of the Act.³⁹ Fauquier deeds of manumission during this early period neither were accompanied by bonds securing financial liability for freed slaves nor did they use language of natural rights. Instead, these early deeds focused on motivations for manumissions, either from financial compensation, in accordance with a will, from

³⁷ See deeds of manumission in Loudoun County Deed Book R: 288-289, 475, 476, and 489; Loudoun County Deed Book S: 202-203 and 266-268.

³⁸ See Wren to Negroes, written February 15, 1791, proved in court February 15, 1791, Loudoun County Deed Book S: 274.

³⁹ Grace to Hywarden, written May 6, 1793, proved in court September 24, 1793, Fauquier County Deed Book 11: 413.

laudable characteristics of the manumitted person, or the more ambiguous phrase “divers good causes and considerations me thereunto moving.”⁴⁰

As time passed, public sentiment across Virginia toward the expanded ability of slaveowners to manumit slaves waned because of the growing number of freed blacks in Virginia and a series of global events that challenged the security of slaveholders and their ties to their slaveholding property. The effects of the Haitian revolution, the shift in agricultural production from tobacco to mixed grains across much of the Tidewater, Gabriel’s Rebellion and growing numbers of freed blacks, all factored into a spreading caution toward manumission.⁴¹ In a calculated move to reduce the presence of freed blacks in Virginia the Virginia state legislature responded by limiting the privilege of manumission through restrictions in the residency of manumitted slaves.⁴²

The 1806 Removal Act stipulated that any slave emancipated after May 1, 1806 who remained in Virginia more than twelve months “shall forfeit such right” of freedom

⁴⁰ Fauquier County slaveholders employed language citing “divers other causes and considerations” or variations thereof in sixteen deeds of manumission written from 1793 to 1857 indicating the importance of this phrasing in justifying manumissions. For examples see Fauquier County Deed Book 11: 413; Fauquier County Deed Book 12: 11; 14, 705; Fauquier County Deed Book 16: 210; Fauquier County Deed Book 39: 204; Fauquier County Deed Book 51: 496; Fauquier County Deed Book 52: 98; and Fauquier County Deed Book 56: 217. In Loudoun County, the use of “diverse other causes” language appeared in 29 deeds of manumission between 1795 and 1856, indicating the importance of this language in Loudoun County. For examples, see Loudoun County Deed Book W: 316; Loudoun County Deed Book 2B: 250-251; Loudoun County Deed Book 2C: 159; Loudoun County Deed Book 2E: 178; and Loudoun County Deed Book 2R: 312. The phrase appeared only twice in Prince William County Deed Books in 1807 and 1809 suggesting its use was not part of the legal rhetoric to justify manumission in the county. See Prince William County Deed Book 3: 305 and Prince William County Deed Book 4: 276.

⁴¹ This process developed over more than twenty years following the expanded rights of manumission embodied in the 1782 Act. For a more detailed analysis of the factors and process see Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner’s Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), especially chapter two.

⁴² For a detailed discussion of the efforts to repeal the 1782 manumission act leading to the Removal Act of 1806 see Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), especially 110-117.

and “may be sold by the overseers for the benefit of the poor.”⁴³ Manumitted children could legally remain in Virginia only until the age of twenty-one, when they then were required to leave.⁴⁴ This condition limited owners’ rights over the disposition of property while also imposing a cruel dilemma for slaves to choose between bondage and kinship networks. The Removal Act hindered slaveowners’ ability to reward faithful service through manumission or to negotiate term freedom contracts to ensure continued service. Most importantly, the Act compromised the stability of the freed slaves like the Rivers family and their continued residency among family, employers, and patrons in northern Virginia. For the manumitted slave the new restrictions mandated permanent removal from the state, a clause that would force newly freed slaves away from children, spouses, or other relatives still enslaved and eliminated the right of residency for future generations of manumitted slaves.

Local Effects of the 1806 Removal Act

The immediate effect of the Removal Act appears when considering the number of deeds of manumission presented prior to and immediately following the passage of the 1806 law. In the twenty-four years prior to the passage of the Removal Act (between 1782 and 1806), Loudoun slaveholders wrote and registered sixty-nine deeds of

⁴³ “An Act to amend the several Laws concerning Slaves (Passed January 25, 1806),” Chapter 69 Section 10, *Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia of a Public and Permanent Nature as have Passed Since the Session of 1801... Vol. II* (Richmond: Printed by Samuel Pleasants, Junior, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1808), 97; Virginia Acts of the Assembly, 1806, Chapter 63 as cited in June Purcell Guild, *Black Laws of Virginia* (1936, repr., Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc., 2011), 72.

⁴⁴ Ch. 63, § 10, 1805 Va. Acts 36. See also A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. and F. Michael Higginbotham, “‘Yearning to Breathe Free’: Legal Barriers Against and Options in Favor of Liberty in Antebellum Virginia,” *New York University Law Review*, 68, no. 6 (December 1993), 1266.

manumission, Fauquier residents wrote and recorded thirty-five deeds, and Prince William court records contain twenty-one deeds of manumission for a total of 125 deeds.⁴⁵ In the twenty-four years after the Removal Act (1807 to 1831) only eighty deeds were recorded: ten in Fauquier; sixty in Loudoun; and ten in Prince William. Clearly, the passage of the Act affected slaves and slaveholders in Fauquier and Prince William more significantly than in Loudoun County. The evidence of more deeds written and recorded in early 1806, especially during the month of April, prior to the May first deadline than after May 1st suggests that both slaveholders and slaves were aware of the changing laws and some acted quickly to manumit and secure rights of residency.

When Obed Calvert wrote his will in September of 1804, it is doubtful he could predict manumission laws would change in the near future, yet the actions of his executors reflected their awareness of the residency restrictions and acted accordingly. According to Calvert's wishes, his executors were to keep his enslaved man Frank upon Calvert's estate "to keep things together for the purpose of Preasment [appraisement] and sale of the same." Calvert explained that his Executors "may not be so well acquainted as to the number of Stock" and he believed Frank would be "of peculiar use to them in the management thereof" during the estate inventory and sale of assets, indicating a high level of trust placed in Frank. Once Frank had proved "servisable and trusty till the settlement of all my worldly affairs," Calvert advised that his executors "may bestow a small acknowledgement to him and pronounce Frank free at their own discretion."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See Fauquier County Deed Books 14-16, Loudoun County Deed Books 2A-2G, and Prince William County Deed Books 1-3.

⁴⁶ Will of Obed Calvert, written September 20, 1804, proved in court, May 6, 1805, Prince William County Will Book I: 53.

Eleven months after Calvert's will was proved in 1805, Calvert's executives recorded a deed of manumission for the then forty-six year old Frank on April 2, 1806, just days before the Removal Act took effect.⁴⁷ Apparently Calvert's executors Obed Calvert, Jr. and James Peake agreed that the "faithful services" of Frank in settling the elder Calvert's estate justified the timely emancipation of Frank before the restrictions of the 1806 Removal Act took effect.

Other slaveholders and estate executors similarly acted to beat the deadline. Between January first and April 30th 1806, Prince William County slaveholders freed three persons in three separate deeds of manumission. Loudoun County slaveholders freed ten people in six deeds and Fauquier owners granted freedom to seventeen enslaved persons in eight deeds of manumission (see figure 32).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Calvert's Exors to Negro Frank, written April 2, 1806, proved in court April 7, 1806, Prince William County Deed Book 3: 125-126.

⁴⁸ Prince William County Deed Book 3; Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2G; and Fauquier County Deed Books 16 and 17.

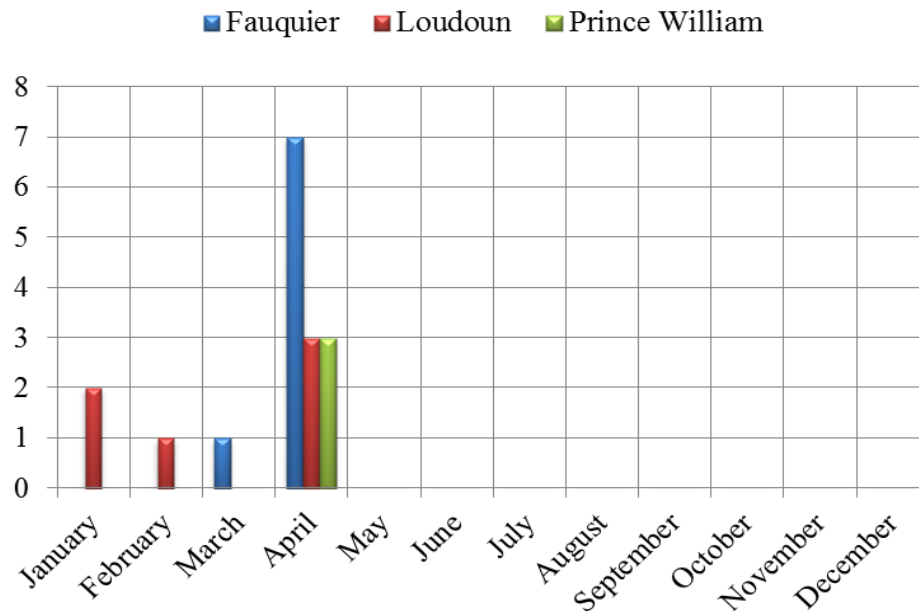


Figure 32. Recorded deeds of manumission written during 1806.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 16 and 17; Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2G; and Prince William County Deed Book 3.

Knowledge of the impending May 1st deadline and its repercussions prompted some freed slaves or their owners to assert rights to residence in Virginia. Grace's owner, Peter Dow, in his 1802 will, granted Grace her freedom following an additional three years of enslaved service after his death. Because his will was not proven in court until July of 1804, and no deed of manumission was filed prior to May 1st, Grace's residency status fell in jeopardy following the 1806 Removal Act.⁴⁹ Whether Grace requested some additional evidence of her status or Dow's son, Alexander, felt obligated to speak on her behalf is unclear, yet on January 12th, 1807 Alexander Dow provided Grace with an important document for the Loudoun County Court. Alexander affirmed that Grace had

⁴⁹ Will of Peter Dow, written November 19, 1802, proved in court July 9, 1804, Loudoun County Will Book G: 237.

been freed by the will of the deceased Peter Dow and provided his own interpretation of the provisions of the 1806 Removal Act. The younger Dow asserted that “as that will is dated previous to the passing of the late Law respecting Slaves I presume it will not apply in this case” and bade the court with the instructions that “[i]f you should be of this opinion be pleased to direct her [Grace] how to proceed” with securing her free papers. Dow assured the court that “the Heirs or Exors [executors] of P. Dow” would make no objection to Grace’s freedom and right to reside in Loudoun County. Dow further assured the legal community that “if the Court should require it I will give security that she shall not [become] chargeable to the Parish” demonstrating his understanding of the 1782 manumission requirements and his willingness to guarantee Grace’s freedom and residency in Loudoun County.⁵⁰

Rose, a free person of color since 1779 in Loudoun County also worried that her status was uncertain. She either independently located persons willing to attest to her free status or convinced persons to affirm her right to residency. On April 15, 1806, two of the original witnesses to Rose’s 1779 deed of emancipation from William Hatcher proved its authenticity before the Loudoun County Court thereby affirming Rose’s status as a freed person prior to the May 1st residency restrictions.⁵¹

⁵⁰ “Alexander Dow’s Letter to Charles Binns, Esq.,” dated January 12, 1807 as transcribed by Townsend M. Lucas in *Records of Free Negroes, 1778-1838*, Leesburg, Virginia: Thomas Balch Library, 1988.

⁵¹ William Hatcher to Rose, Loudoun County Deed Book 2G: 203. This was not the first time that Hatcher recorded a deed of manumission many years after the apparent manumission. Hatcher drafted a deed of manumission for Susa on the same day as Rose’s manumission, “the seventeenth day of the seventh month” in 1779. While Rose was to be immediately freed, Susa’s term of servitude would extend until January 8, 1797, concluding on her eighteenth birthday. Susa’s deed of manumission was formally recorded with the Loudoun court on October 10, 1803. William Hatcher to Susa, Loudoun County Deed Book 2D: 161-162.

Adam Munrow, a freed slave living in Fairfax County, also felt the need to affirm his status and remove any obstacle to his residency in Virginia. Munrow had secured his freedom from his master, William Mathews of Prince William County, in 1796, yet his deed of emancipation could not be affirmed in Fairfax County until “acknowledged in Court by the master, or proved by two witnesses.” Munrow apparently felt the need to confirm his deed of manumission and secure right to residency prior to the deadline because he arranged for Mark Norris, an original witness to Munrow’s deed, and another unnamed person who could confirm the handwriting of the second original witness (who had since died) to appear before the Prince William County Court on April 30, 1806 to prove his deed as required by law.⁵²

Grace, Rose, and Munrow were not the only freed slaves eager to secure residency rights. Former Fauquier County slave Patience produced her April 1806 deed of manumission for the courts in 1816, most likely to avoid possible prosecution for remaining in the Commonwealth. Thornton Buckner, acting as attorney for Patience’s former owner, Kentucky resident Aylett Buckner, affirmed that he had indeed freed Patience on the 30th day of April, 1806, thereby asserting Patience’s right to remain in Virginia as a freed person of color.⁵³

The 1806 Removal Act affected both slaveholders and enslaved, stifling the potential for manumissions across northern Virginia for decades. Even as late as 1865 the effect of the Removal Act influenced provisions articulated in wills. Slaveowner Thomas

⁵² Memorandum of Agreement between William Mathews and Adam Munrow, written October 31, 1796, proved in court November 3, 1806, Prince William County Deed Book 3: 210.

⁵³ Thornton Buckner to Patience, Fauquier County Deed Book 20: 282-283.

T. Withers' provisions for his enslaved servants Eliza Pleasants, Lucy Jackson, and Major reflected an awareness of the laws of manumission and the tenuous position of freed slaves in his Fauquier community.⁵⁴ In his will written in 1865 Withers freed Eliza Pleasants "and such of her children and grand children as belong to me" and bequeathed a sum of \$1,000 "for her own use." In addition, Pleasants would receive a brick house on Culpeper Street in Warrenton.⁵⁵ Despite writing the will in January 1865 after a long protracted war over slavery, Withers still apparently believed that the legal statute restricting freed slaves to only one year residence would still remain in effect in Virginia. To provide some measure of financial and family security, Withers included an additional bequest to both Pleasants' family and to the family of Lucy Jackson to receive "an additional sum sufficient to remove them beyond the State of Virginia."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Withers had already manumitted eighteen year old Henry Pleasants in 1836 upon receiving the sum of \$500 from Daniel Webster. Thomas T. Withers to Henry Pleasants, Fauquier County Deed Book 36: 214. Withers, along with Henry Fitzhugh and Berkeley Ward was charged with the task of providing "as much liberty and to be as free as the laws of Virginia will suffer" to certain slaves of fellow Fauquier resident Thomas Fitzhugh in Fitzhugh's 1847 will, so he would have been familiar with options for freed slaves. Will of Thomas Fitzhugh, written March 29, 1842, proved in court December 1, 1848, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 252.

⁵⁵ By 1872 Eliza Pleasants' family consisted of Robert, Mary, Betsy, Ellen, Jane, Catharine and Maria Pleasants. Summons, December 30, 1874, as found in *Exor of Thomas T. Withers v. Robert M. Withers, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Records 1897-039, Library of Virginia Chancery Records. <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1897-039#img>

⁵⁶ Will of Thomas T. Withers, written January 2, 1865, proved March 29, 1865, Fauquier County Will Book 29: 393. By 1872 Eliza Pleasants's family consisted of Robert, Mary, Betsy, Ellen, Jane, Catharine and Maria Pleasants and Lucy Jackson's family, identified in a court summons as "Johnson" included Lucy, Betsy, Frederick, John, Henry, and George Johnson. Summons, December 30, 1874 as found in *Exor of Thomas T. Withers v. Robert M. Withers, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Records 1897-039, Library of Virginia Chancery Records. <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1897-039#img>. Eliza Pleasants had to wait awhile to receive the full \$1,000 legacy from the estate of Thomas T. Withers. Executor paid Pleasants \$1,575 to cover the principal due Pleasants plus interest accrued from March 1866 to April 1875. Commissioner Report on the Estate of Thomas T. Withers, dec'd In account with Jno: A. Spilman the Exor, page 11 as found in *Exor of Thomas T. Withers v. Robert M. Withers, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Records 1897-039, Library of Virginia Chancery Records <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1897-039#img>. According to another report submitted by estate executor John Spilman, Eliza Pleasants received \$1,275.67 on March 1, 1871 as an advance on her legacy and \$60 to pay for accrued interest. Report of the Estate of Thomas T.

The evidence of fairly steady rates of manumitting slaves prior to the Removal Act followed by a precipitous drop in the number of deeds of manumission after April of 1806 strongly affirms the local influence of the residency restrictions on conferring freedom to enslaved persons. Between 1807 and 1810 Fauquier and Loudoun deed books included no recorded manumissions. Four slaveholders in Prince William manumitted slaves by deed during this period before a long lull in manumissions by deed of slaves in Prince William that lasted until 1822.⁵⁷ The sporadic examples of deeds of manumission in Fauquier after 1810 until 1820 show a continued, if albeit limited, interest in freeing enslaved persons despite the new residency restrictions. Loudoun's rise in deeds of manumissions after 1815 suggests that while the Removal Act severely reduced manumissions, other factors later encouraged a rise in manumission rates in 1815 (see figure 33).

Withers dec'd in account with John A. Spilman, his Executor, Statement of Advanced to the Legatees, as found in *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Joseph Hale to Dorcas, Jacob & Dorcas, written July 18, 1807, proved in court October 5, 1807, Prince William Deed Book 3: 305; Samuel Davis to Thomas Bowles, written August 26, 1809, proved in court September 4, 1809, Prince William Deed Book 4: 18-19; Philip Harrison to Sarah Montgomery, written November 24, 1810, proved in court February 4, 1811, Prince William Deed Book 4: 259; Thomas A. Smith to Fanny West, written October 22, 1809, proved in court March 5, 1811, Prince William Deed Book 4: 276-277.

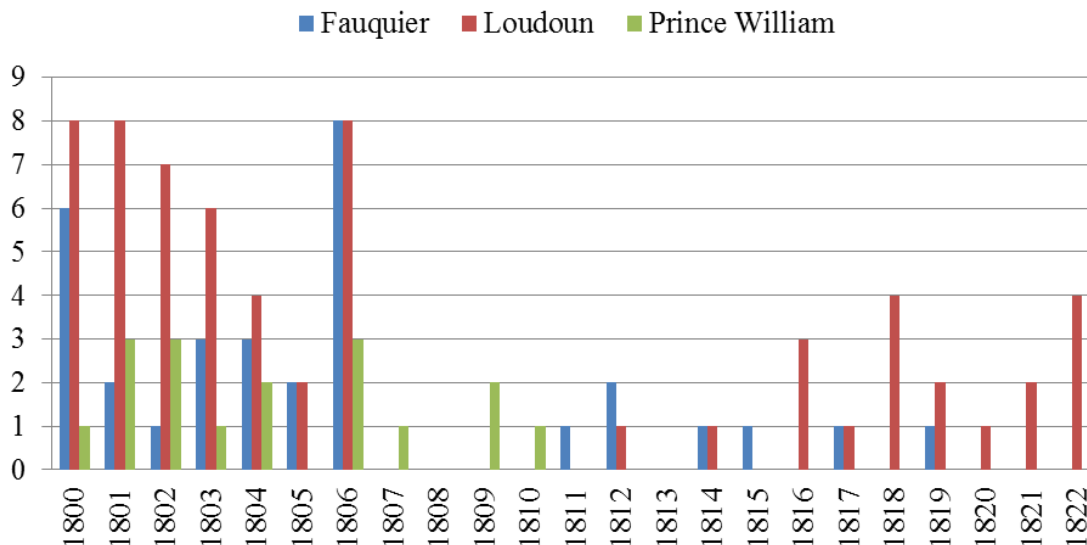


Figure 33. Recorded deeds of manumissions written between 1800 and 1822.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 14-23; Loudoun County Deed Books 2A-3H; and Prince William County Deed Books 1-4.

The Removal Act limited the rights of slaveholders to control their enslaved property and reduced options for enslaved seeking to negotiate freedom contracts, yet some owners or slaves crafted their own vision of freedom. Aware of the impending changes in Virginia laws, John King decided against offering his slave, Kitt, a deed of manumission and instead crafted a generous free pass in February of 1806. King granted thirty-nine year old Kitt “free liberty to visit his friends in Alexandria, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Newyork [sic] or elsewhere; for any length of time (to recover his health) – until he Chuses to return home Voluntarily.” King felt satisfied that Kitt’s “faithfull discharge of the duty Incumbent on him as a Slave...in point of Integrity, Sobriety & unremitting attention to my Interest, in every department in which he was intrusted” justified this unusual privilege of unrestricted mobility and in lieu of a restricted freedom

in Virginia, John King crafted an indenture with unrestricted mobility that also served as character reference.⁵⁸

Prince William slaveholder Richard Brent, in his 1813 will, identified the difficulty in transferring rights through manumission following the Removal Act when he considered the future of his “diligent[,] faithful and affectionate waiting man Peter.” Brent desired to grant Peter his freedom yet recognized the dilemma that freed persons faced in choosing between freedom and family. Brent averred that “it may be his [Peter’s] wish to reside in Virginia among his friends and relations, in which instance the laws of Virginia will not permit him to be free, but should Peter be disposed to leave the State of Virginia and reside elsewhere, in that instance I hereby bestow upon him his freedom...” In the event that Peter chose family over freedom, Brent hoped to create a semi-free state for Peter by stipulating that Peter’s nominal owner, Brent’s brother, Daniel Carroll Brent of nearby Stafford County, demand “no services” from him. Brent further stipulated that from his estate Peter receive “a comfortable house...furnished him during his life time, with comfortable clothing and provisions for his support” and an annual annuity of eighty dollars.⁵⁹

Brent articulated the tremulous nature of his bequests and Peter’s lack of civil rights, acknowledging that “a slave can have no legal rights, that is as respects the rights of property” or to secure those rights through legal action. To secure his bequests as best he could, Brent affirmed that “any declaration of my intention, whether legal or

⁵⁸ Free Pass from John King to Negro Kitt, written February 11, 1806, proved in court April 10, 1806, Prince William Deed Book 3: 132.

⁵⁹ Will of Richard Brent, written December 26, 1813, proved in court June 5, 1815, Prince William Will Book K: 411-412.

otherways, will be considered sacred by the person, to whom I mean to confide the execution of this act” and appointed a trusted executor. Brent’s will and supporting documents reached the highest authorities, secured by the affirmation of acting Secretary of State James Monroe.

John Alexander Binns alluded to the difficulty slaveholders faced in nominating an executor or administrator to secure manumissions for favored slaves after the Removal Act. In his 1813 will, Binns bequeathed five hundred dollars to his brother Thomas Nelson Binns “provided he will be at the trouble of taking to Maryland or any other state all my Negroes so that they obtain their freedom at the within time mentioned in my will.” If Thomas refused, then any of the relatives willing to perform the service would receive the funds. In the case that neither brother nor family was willing to serve, Binns decreed that “any other person stepping forward to bring about the emancipation of my negroes” would receive the designated funds.⁶⁰ At least one of Binns’ slaves, Nancy, preferred to stay in Loudoun with her children rather than seeking her freedom outside of Virginia.⁶¹

Realizing that changing Virginia laws and community sentiments had altered legal rights to manumission and residency King, Brent, and Binns sought to create a middle ground between enslavement and freedom. Their creative efforts speak to their efforts to create space for freedom in northern Virginia.

⁶⁰ Will of John Alexander Binns, written January 11, 1813, proved in court November 10, 1813, Loudoun County Will Book K: 343.

⁶¹ Petition of Nancy, Loudoun County, Virginia, December 6, 1815, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

1815 Law: Manumission, Merit, and Petitions

In addition to carefully wording court documents, employing executors to mitigate the terms of enslavement, and securing terms of freedom through financial bonds, northern Virginia slaves and owners drafted legislative petitions to appeal for redress against restrictive laws. Community-supported petitions, authorized by legislative act, reveal the nature of community support for establishing rights to individual freed slaves. Legislative petitions also described the fears of African Americans wary of leaving known communities and employment. They also faced the uncertainties of another type of forced migration through unfamiliar landscapes, and expressed their deep abiding commitment to family.

Manumitted slaves claimed rights of citizenship by petitioning the Virginia legislature for redress to the privations caused by the Removal Act. Daniel Webster, born about 1754, grew up enslaved in Prince William County. While enslaved he “connected himself with a Mulatto Woman as his wife by whom he has several children and who is nearly as old as himself.”⁶² After Webster gained his freedom, he worked to purchase his wife Lucy and one of their children, James, a feat he accomplished in October 1810.⁶³ As Webster grew older, he faced the terrible dilemma of determining whether and when to manumit his family, knowing residency laws restricted the residency of manumitted slaves to twelve months following emancipation, or until the age of twenty-one for

⁶² Petition of Daniel Webster, Prince William County, December 11, 1812, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online..

⁶³ Webster was able to accomplish the purchase of his wife “Lucinda” through a note for \$60.55 secured by Betsy Tebbs and Thomas Chapman of Dumfries. Webster affirmed that even though the sale was completed, Lucy would not “leave the service of s[ai]d Macrae until Xmas next.” Macrae to Webster Bill of Sale, Prince William County Deed Book 4: 258-259.

children, could force their removal from Virginia. He therefore employed the only legal recourse for averting a forced removal of his family.

Webster articulated the human cost of the 1806 Removal Act when he petitioned the “Honorable...Speaker and House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia” in 1812. Webster expressed his fears for Lucy when he wrote he was “unwilling to hold in bondage one thus connected with him and the mother of his children.” Webster also feared “the consequences of dying she still remaining a Slave” and her fate as intestate property. Though “exceedingly solicitous to emancipate her” he feared the repercussions of the Removal Act and preferred to remain in Prince William County where “they are known.” Addressing concerns about his family becoming a public charge Webster averred they “have made some patrons” and “they are able to live in comfort” in the county as opposed to if they were “turned out into another and Strange State where they are unknown – at their time of life would be to cloud their last days with misery and want and perhaps to throw them in their old ages upon the Charity of the World.”⁶⁴

Webster’s petition detailed the terrible choice between freedom and family and the role of community and alliances in aiding financial security of freed black families. The Virginia Courts of Justice found Webster’s request “reasonable” and forwarded it to the Legislature for the first of its two required readings.⁶⁵ Webster, perhaps fearing their removal from Virginia, kept Lucy and James enslaved and under his protection until he devised their emancipation in his will written late in 1815, shortly before his death. Still

⁶⁴ Petition of Daniel Webster, Prince William County, December 11, 1812, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online.

⁶⁵ Petition of Daniel Webster, Prince William County, December 11, 1812, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online.

concerned for their well-being, Webster directed that Lucy receive “everything I have claim to or possess in this world, property of every description, Real, personal, or mixed” and prayed that “some friendly citizen should aid and assist her” with his estate.⁶⁶

Petitions like that of Daniel Webster seeking exceptions to the 1806 Removal Act using the language of industry, family, and community flooded the State legislature. The Legislature responded by amending Virginia’s manumission policy in 1815.

In 1815 legislators granted some concessions for masters wishing to manumit their slaves by allowing emancipation due to “an act, or acts of extraordinary merit” thereby expanding the rights of masters to dispose of their “property” and further codifying “merit” as a path to emancipation.⁶⁷ These changes provided a method, albeit limited, for slaves hoping to negotiate terms for freedom and residency. Slaves manumitted under the merit clause “shall be at liberty to apply to the court of any county or corporation within this Commonwealth for permission to reside within such county or corporation.” The county court, with the approval of a majority of the acting magistrates and upon proof of the character and conduct of the applicant, could award the privilege of residency in the county to a freed slave, spouse, or children.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Will of Daniel Webster, written November 23, 1815, proved in court February 5, 1816, Prince William County Will Book K: 502-503.

⁶⁷ Act of 1815, c. 24 §1 as cited in *The Revised Code of the Laws of Virginia: Being a Collection of all Such Acts of the General Assembly, of a Public and Permanent Nature, as are now in force* c. 111.

⁶⁸ “An Act reducing into one, the several acts concerning Slaves, Free Negroes and Mulattoes, (Passed March 2, 1819),” Chapter 111, Section 62, *The Revised Code of the Laws of Virginia: Being a Collection of all such acts of the General Assembly, of a Public and Permanent Nature, as are now in Force: with a General Index Vol. I* (Richmond: Printed by Thomas Ritchie, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1819), 436. See also Act of January 24, 1816, Ch. 24, 1815 VA Acts 51. Henning, *The Statutes at Large*, 4: 126-134; A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. and F. Michael Higginbotham, “‘Yearning to Breathe Free’: Legal Barriers Against and Options in Favor of Liberty in Antebellum Virginia,” *New York University Law Review*, 68, no. 6 (December 1993), 1228; and John Randolph Barden, “‘Flushed with Notions of Freedom’: The

After 1815, slaves freed because of their demonstrated extraordinary merit could apply directly to local courts for permission to remain in the Commonwealth. This provision expanded the power of local courts to determine on an individual basis those freed slaves deemed worthy of remaining a part of local society as well as the local limits of community inclusion.⁶⁹ While this did not stop petitioners from appealing to the General Assembly for a legislative act permitting residency in Virginia, it allowed for greater community control over determining the free black population.

During the transition when the 1815 provisions became law, some slaveowners continued to petition the Legislature for approval of exemptions to the residency statute. Before freeing Lunza, Loudoun County slaveholder James Saunders petitioned the legislature requesting that Lunza “may be permitted to remain within the commonwealth” after Saunders fulfilled his father’s wish that Lunza be freed “as a reward for his fidelity and good conduct.” Saunders addressed the question of whether Lunza was likely to become a charge of the community by asserting that due to Lunza’s age and “good constitution” he was “not likely to become a burthen upon the community in which he lives.”⁷⁰ Saunders’s petition was referred to the Courts of Justice in December of 1815. While the Courts of Justice did not record the outcome of their deliberations on the

Growth and Emancipation of a Virginia Slave Community, 1732-1812” (PhD diss., Duke University, 1993), 333-334.

⁶⁹ See Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (reprint 1974) (New York: The New Press, 2007), 147.

⁷⁰ Petition of James Saunders, Loudoun County, Virginia, December 18, 1815, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

petition wrapper, Saunders did manumit Lunza five months later in May of 1816 because of Lunza's "extraordinary merit."⁷¹

As mentioned previously, not all of the slaves manumitted in the will of John A. Binns elected to leave Virginia. Nancy opted to stay, perhaps to remain near an abroad husband or children. After her manumission at the age of twenty-five in accordance with the will of John A. Binns, Nancy petitioned the legislature to allow her to remain in Loudoun County with her three enslaved children. For Nancy, her forced removal would be "almost as severe as the loss of life" and begged the legislature show "pity to a Mother altho of Sable hue who has all the feelings of an affectionate Mother towards her Children" by passing a law allowing her to continue residence in Virginia. The petition does not indicate who assisted Nancy in framing her request yet the text asserts that Nancy was "informed under the Existing laws she will...be compelled to leave the Commonwealth." In exchange for the privilege of residing in Virginia, Nancy averred "that if allowed to stay with her children & place where she [Nancy] was raised she should find a double inducement to prompt her to Industry and good behavior" while subscribers to her petition vowed they had "no doubt that if she is permitted to Remain that she will behave herself with equal Rectitude and Industry and maintain herself in a respectable manner." Nancy's petition employed tropes of motherly affection, industry, and community approval as reasons for allowing an exception to the Removal Act and

⁷¹ James Saunders to Lunza, Loudoun Deed Book 2T: 375-376. Tracking the outcome of Courts of Justice deliberations on petitions regarding manumission of enslaved persons remains a difficult task. The petition process required two readings to the Assembly, potential transfer to the Courts of Justice for deliberation, and a final vote on the question. At any point in this process, the petition could be laid upon the table and left without further action.

revealed local expectations for her good behavior, industry, and respectability as a member of the community.⁷²

Similarly, Richard Williams's petition stressed the importance of family attachments as reason for an exemption to the Removal Act while pointing out the benefits gained by allowing particular freed slaves to remain in Virginia. Williams, manumitted by Stephens Thomson Mason in 1800, petitioned the legislature for permission for his son, Evan Williams, to remain in Virginia past the legal twelve month limit. Richard Williams, through "great diligence and economy[,] acquired a sufficient sum of money to purchase his son," Evan. The aging Richard prayed a special law could be passed to allow his son, Evan, to stay in Virginia and contribute to his father's "support & comfort in his old age" and "discharge the duties of a son, and make some return for the great obligations, which in addition to those that nature has imposed, he owes his father." The petition's themes of servant duty (Richard earned his freedom through "good conduct and fidelity to his master") and filial duty (Evan's responsibility to "support & comfort in his old age" an aging parent) contrasted the incredible change in status from enslaved to free: from expectations of submitting all duty to a master to expectations of owing fidelity and duty to family.

Williams's petition revealed other motives for allowing his family permission to remain in Loudoun County. A letter of character from the family of Richard's emancipator, the Mason family, noted Richard's "truth, integrity, fidelity & devotion to his master" and affirmed he was "entitled to the character of a perfectly honest man & a

⁷² Petition of Nancy, Loudoun County, Virginia, December 6, 1815, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

good citizen.” The Mason family admitted they were “not so well acquainted” with Evan, but had “heard a good character of him, & we believe he deserves it,” which casts some doubt on Richard being the sole beneficiary of permission for Evan to remain in Loudoun County. With Evan present to provide for Richard’s support and comfort, the Mason family (as heirs of Richard’s emancipator, Stephens T. Mason) would be relieved from the financial burden of ensuring that the aging and infirm Richard remained off the county indigent rolls as required by the manumission law. The petition was received by the Courts of Justice, deemed “reasonable” and the courts ordered that a bill be drawn granting Evan permission to remain in Virginia.⁷³

It is unclear why Nancy and Richard opted to petition to the legislature rather than applying directly to the Loudoun courts. Both were supported by well-known families in Loudoun, the Binns and the Masons, each of whom hoped the family name would carry weight in Richmond. The petitions arrived as the legislature just as laws regarding such petitions were changing and perhaps Nancy and Richard had greater hope that a legislative bill could preserve their right to freedom more effectively (and permanently) than a local court decree. Loudoun slaveholders took advantage of the changes in manumission laws not only to support petitions to permit certain freed slaves to remain but also to resume manumission of slaves. The number of deeds of manumission written in the county rose once again after a decade-long virtual silence.

Loudoun County slaveholders made the most use of the “extraordinary merit” clause in the 1815 Act. Henry Saunders manumitted Thomas Venie “in consideration of

⁷³ Petition of Richard and Evan Williams, Loudoun County, Virginia, December 12, 1815, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

the faithful and extraordinary Meritorious Services” in 1818.⁷⁴ Frederick Beltz noted that he manumitted James West in 1819 because of West’s merit.⁷⁵ Between 1816 and 1825 Loudoun County slaveholders cited “extraordinary merit” as the reason for manumitting seven out of the forty-eight enslaved persons freed during this time period. While the 1815 Act expanded some rights of slaveholders (and opportunities for slaves), it does not appear to be a major factor in influencing the overall rate of manumissions in Loudoun during this period, despite the proximity in time of three of these manumissions to the passage of the Act.⁷⁶

In comparison, few slaveholders in Prince William or Fauquier counties used this particular provision of “extraordinary merit” as justification in freeing slaves after 1815. No extant deeds filed in Prince William specified extraordinary merit as the cause for granting freedom. Only three Fauquier enslaved persons were manumitted through deeds that expressly stated the cause of their freedom was due to extraordinary merit.

Fauquier resident Alice Corban Hawkins wrote in her 1817 will that she wished to emancipate her servants Easter and Isaac “under the humane provision of our Laws for long and faithful services and what I conceive extraordinary merit” and hoped that they “may be permitted to remain in the State of Virginia.” The inclusion of the particular

⁷⁴ Henry Saunders to Tom (alias Thomas Venie), written January 1, 1818, proved in court November 11, 1818, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2X: 150-151. Thomas Venie (also written as Veaney) continued to live in Loudoun County as a free black, dying in 1858 of pneumonia at the reported age of 77 years, 1 month and 3 days. Transcriptions of Loudoun County Death Records 1853-1866, LCHAD.

⁷⁵ Frederick Beltz to James West, written October 11, 1819, proved in court October 11, 1819, Loudoun County Deed Book 2Z: 91.

⁷⁶ In addition to the three aforementioned deeds, the other four deeds were Henry Claggett to Philip Nelson, written January 16, 1819, proved in court January 1820, Loudoun County Deed Book 2Z: 341-342; Lewis French to George, written January 19, 1820, proved in court August 14, 1820, Loudoun County Deed Book 3B: 136; Abiel Jenners to Thomas Turner, written August 6, 1822, proved in court August 7, 1822, Loudoun County Deed Book 3E: 391-392; and Charles Stoven to Edward Riley, written May 9, 1825, proved in court May 9, 1825, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 3K: 184.

conditions of both the 1806 Removal Act and the 1815 Act extending the rights of owners to manumit under particular circumstances indicates Hawkins' (or her attorney's) awareness of the changes in Virginia law and restrictions placed on her property rights and the rights of freed slaves.⁷⁷ Elizabeth Chilton was "induced by the extraordinary merit and Services of [her] man Moses commonly called Moses Butler Slave for Life" to write and record a deed of emancipation for Moses in 1819. Chilton granted Butler a condition of freedom "as fully and effectually as if [she] had never had control over him."⁷⁸ Chilton's act of manumission contributed to Butler's ability in 1823 to purchase his enslaved wife, Hannah, from her Loudoun County slaveowner and acquire ownership of his daughter, Malvinia Butler.⁷⁹

Some slaveholders expanded the definition of "extraordinary merit" to include "faithful service" as criteria for manumission. Samuel Middleton earned his freedom from Deborah Jenners out of "consideration of the faithful services" he provided.⁸⁰ Likewise, George Edmonds, Phebe and her five children, Easter and Isaac, and Aga

⁷⁷ Hawkins' will was written in June of 1817, shortly after the 1816 merit clause took effect, yet the will was not proved and deeds of manumission executed until 1829. Alice Corban Hawkins to Esther and Isaac, proved in court July 28, 1829, Fauquier County Deed Book 30: 408-409.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Chilton to Moses, written April 23, 1819, proved in court April 26, 1819, Fauquier County Deed Book 23: 181.

⁷⁹ Moses Butler paid William Chilton \$300 to purchase his wife, Hannah. This payment was applied by Chilton "to a payment of a debt due by said Wm Chilton to Sam[ue]l and Isaac Nichols to secure which the woman and other property was conveyed in Trust to Lloyd Noland." William Chilton, in a statement included in the deed book, advised Butler to "convey her in any manner he may think proper either by Deed of emancipation or in any other advisable manner so that she never may be liable to his debts as his property but may enjoy all the rights of a free person." Burr Powell, executor for Leven Powell to Moses Butler, Bill of Sale, written January 4, 1823, proved in court March 3, 1827, Loudoun County Deed Book 3N: 226-227. Moses later freed his wife in his will written May 5, 1837 and conveyed ownership of his daughter, Malvina to her mother, Hannah Butler. Will of Moses Butler, written May 5, 1837, proved in court May 8, 1837, Loudoun Will Book X: 278.

⁸⁰ Jenners to Middleton, written November 24, 1825, recorded in court November 24, 1825, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 3L: 110.

Burwell all earned freedom through faithful service from their respective owners.⁸¹

Enslaved man Abner and his sister Milly earned their freedom from slaveholder Francis Cannon due to faithful service. According to Cannon's will, written four years before his death in 1827, Cannon stated his "will and desire that at my death my faithful waiting man Abner & his sister Milly shall be free." Cannon also made provisions for his executor to "cause each of them [Abner and Milly] to be furnished with the necessary papers to serve as evidences of their freedom whenever they may require them" out of the estate accounts, leaving open the possibility for Abner and Milly to remain nominally enslaved until such time as they wanted their freedom papers.⁸²

The inclusion of merit-based factors in manumission deeds possibly was meant to gather community support for the freed slave since a merit-based manumission was ostensibly authorized under Virginia law. The use of the petitions and manumissions by extraordinary merit suggests that at least some northern Virginia slaveholders and court officials watched events in the legislature in Richmond closely for new opportunities for managing their slaves and freed blacks, yet the personal and court approval for deeds of manumissions that did not specifically comply with the provisions of the 1815 Act indicates a climate of tolerance for freeing slaves especially within Loudoun County.

⁸¹ Charles Hamilton to George Edmonds, written November 11, 1825, recorded in court November 14, 1825, Loudoun County Deed Book 3L: 117-118; William Hough to Phebe, written September 8, 1803, recorded in court September 13, 1803, Loudoun County Deed Book 3D: 96-97; Alice C. Hawkins to Easter & Isaac, written June 23, 1817, proved in court July 28, 1829, Fauquier County Deed Book 30: 408; Thomas Moran to Aga Burwell, written November 3, 1836, proved November 30, 1836, Fauquier County Deed Book 37: 13-14.

⁸² Will of Francis Cannon, written October 25, 1823 and proved November 6, 1827, Prince William County Will Book M: 504-506.

The 1820s and Alternate Plans for Living in Freedom

Both Fauquier and Prince William counties experienced sluggish interest and limited ability to manumit slaves between 1822 and 1832 while Loudoun slaveholders regularly wrote deeds of manumission during this period (see figure 34). Recognizing the difficulties inherent in freeing slaves in Fauquier and Prince William, some owners opted to offer freedom conditioned upon removal from Virginia.

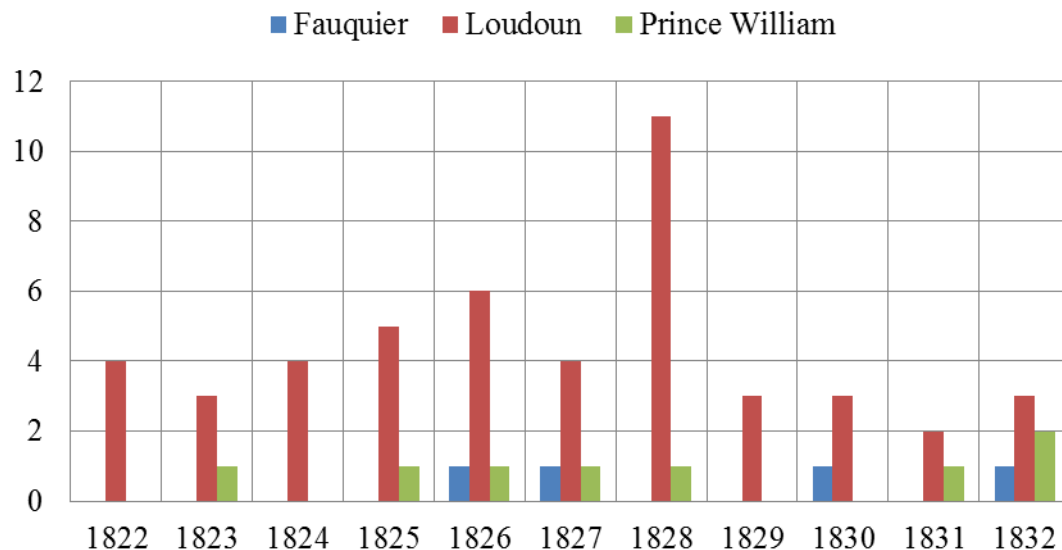


Figure 34. Recorded deeds of manumission written between 1822 and 1832.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 29-32; Loudoun County Deed Books 3E-3Y; Prince William County Deed Books 10-13; and Prince William County Land Records Book.

The experience of Moses Barnard in the late 1820s gives some sense of the uncertain status of freed persons of color in Prince William County during this time. Sometime after his manumission in 1825 by George Boyd, an Indian Agent for the

United States working in Michilimackinac, Michigan Territory, Barnard opted to return to his family who were living in Prince William. By 1829 some Prince William residents cautioned Barnard that his certificate of freedom from Boyd was “not witnessed and that it may not be [considered] genuine” in the eyes of the law. Barnard used his connections to locate two witnesses in Washington City who certified the veracity of Boyd’s handwriting on the certificate, one, a woman, Louisa Catharine, and the other witness, William Stuart, Esquire. Barnard approached Stuart requesting “something to strengthen” his freedom certificate and Stuart obliged by confirming Boyd’s handwriting in a notarized statement. Stuart alluded to the legal adversities faced by emancipated slaves when describing the situation of Moses Barnard in particular explaining that “it would be extremely hard upon Moses if from his ignorance of the necessity of recording the said Certificate, or of any other proceedings in relation thereto, [that] he should be subjected to further difficultys [sic] in relation to his free[dom], of which there ought not, in my opinion, to be a doubt.” Washington City Justice of the Peace, John N. Moulder witnessed Stuart’s statement, yet in addition to these two statements authenticating Barnard’s Certificate of Freedom, Moses or persons acting on his behalf procured a third document from then Secretary of State, Martin Van Buren, proving Moulder’s commission as a Justice of the Peace and credentials for authenticating his Certificate of Freedom.

Armed with his documents, Moses Barnard submitted his certificate and witness statements to the Prince William County Court who recorded his deed of emancipation

on November 2, 1829, conferring legal affirmation of his freed status.⁸³ Whether through Barnard's tenacity or through the kindness and assistance of Boyd's friends Louisa Catharine and William Stuart, Barnard's ability to command the time and interest of Secretary of State Van Buren for authenticating his manumission documents demonstrates the lengths he was willing to go to secure his freedom amidst growing racial tensions.

Barnard's experiences show that he chose to apply to authorities outside of the county for verification of his manumission. Loudoun residents relied upon an already well-established network of county court officials to verify and support manumission rights. Yet the tensions that developed across Virginia because of increasing numbers of free blacks were also apparent across northern Virginia and the seemingly sporadic enforcement of the 1806 Removal Act in the area came under scrutiny. Starting in the mid-1820s Loudoun County residents and officials more stringently enforced the 1806 residency requirement by tracking freed slaves who had remained in the county "contrary to law" and submitting their names annually to the county court, yet the number of actual removals remained low.⁸⁴ Fauquier County residents also began a campaign against freed slaves who were in violation of the Removal Act. By the mid-1820s, citizens across Virginia collected and forwarded information about free blacks who had overstayed the limits of legal residence to their local courts prompting legislative action.

⁸³ George Boyd to Moses Barnard, written June 20, 1825, proved in court November 2, 1829, Prince William County Deed Book 12: 33-34.

⁸⁴ See Grand Jury Presentments and "lists of free Negroes" in Loudoun's collection of Free Black Papers, LCHAD.

Even though Prince William County Court records for the period 1815 to 1832 are lost, a note left among the pages of the county personal property tax books by County Tax Commissioner, James Foster, indicates concern.⁸⁵ On July 30, 1831, in compliance with Virginia law, Foster listed the names of only four persons, all men, who, in his opinion, “violated the Laws of this Commonwealth by remaining more than twelve [months] therein since they were liberated.” Foster then submitted the “very few names” to the Grand Jury on August 2, 1831 for further consideration.⁸⁶

In response to the growing numbers of freed slaves living contrary to the provisions of the 1806 Removal Act in Virginia, the Virginia legislature, in 1827, authorized county Grand Juries to “inquire into the cases of Negroes or mulattoes remaining without leave more than twelve months after emancipation;” moreover, lists of free blacks were submitted annually by county tax collectors to the county court.⁸⁷ This new law further complicated the security of manumitted individuals and families like the Rivers. Acutely aware of the growing animosity towards free blacks in the 1820s and especially following the 1831 Nat Turner uprising in Southampton, and his own tenuous position as a freed slave who had exceeded the allowable twelve months residency, George Rivers was eager to secure community support for continuing his residence in Loudoun County. His story illustrates the fragile thread of a fictive freedom that bound former slaves to place yet pulled them away to satisfy laws and local fears.

⁸⁵ The Library of Virginia includes Prince William County in its list of Lost Records Localities which suffered “catastrophic loss” due to the Civil War. Library of Virginia, “Lost Records Localities: Counties and Cities with Missing Records,” Research Notes Number 30.

⁸⁶ Prince William County Personal Property Tax Book for the year 1831, n.p.

⁸⁷ June Purcell Guild, *Black Laws of Virginia* (1936) reprint Afro-American Historical Association (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2011), 105.

In August of 1832 Loudoun Commissioner of the Revenue, Jesse McVeigh, submitted a list of seventy-three “free Negroes & Mulattoes in the 2^d District” to the county court and for the first time included George Rivers’s name.⁸⁸ Knowing they were now under heightened scrutiny and hoping to avoid or evade prosecution for remaining in Virginia contrary to law, freed man George Rivers secured a certificate of character in September of 1832 signed by twenty-six Loudoun men. Signatories included two members of the Humphrey family, although curiously enough George’s emancipator, Thomas Humphrey, did not sign his name to the certificate of character. Signers to the certificate attested that George had “conducted himself with strict honest & propriety, that he was a faithful servant to his master” and “[f]rom such conduct he became free,” characteristics that described slaveholders’ highest commendations for an enslaved person who merited freedom from good and faithful service. Rivers and his supporters affirmed to both community and state that he would not be a public charge, a key factor in evaluating a free person of color’s value and community status by certifying that George was “faithful at all work that he may undertake” indicating George’s value to the community as a hired laborer.⁸⁹ This certificate, while gathering community support for George, apparently did not stop a Loudoun Grand Jury from indicting Rivers for violating the 1806 residency statute.

⁸⁸ Tax collectors were in a position to canvas neighborhoods and identify freed slaves and free blacks. Jesse McVeigh, Commissioner of Revenue, “A List of free Negroes & Mulattoes in the 2nd District L[oudoun] C[oun]ty for the year 1832,” Loudoun County Free Black Papers #3 (1832-10), Loudoun County Clerk of the Circuit Court, Historic Records and Archives Division, Leesburg, Virginia.

⁸⁹ Certificate of Character of George Rivers a free man of Colour, dated September 5, 1832, Petition of George & Winney Rivers, Loudoun County, Virginia, February 24, 1838, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online.

By 1833 McVeigh's list of "free Negroes as I Suppose Emancipated since the year 1806" included only twenty-seven names, indicating not necessarily a sudden decrease in the free black population but an ability to avoid detection. First on the list, however, were "George Rivers & Winney his wife liberated by Jno G Humphrey & Thos G Humphrey."⁹⁰ McVeigh's list included the freed slaves' names, the name of their liberator, familial relationships and in a few instances, other information deemed important for identification.⁹¹ McVeigh submitted his list to the Loudoun County Grand Jury at the August 1833 presentments, and in each case the Grand Jury pressed for an indictment for violating the twelve month residency limit. Summons issued ordered each identified person to appear at the next quarterly court in November. George and Winney must have been known to at least some of the Grand Jury as its report included the Rivers's residence as located "near Union."⁹²

In response to an 1836 order from the county's legislative delegates to transmit "a list of the free negroes under prosecution for remaining in the State contrary to law with such representation on the subject as he may think be useful,"⁹³ Loudoun County's Attorney General, Richard H. Henderson cited at least thirty-six freed slaves who since 1833 had been indicted multiple times for "remaining in the Commonwealth contrary to

⁹⁰ Jesse McVeigh, Commissioner for the 2nd District, Loudoun County, "A List of free Negroes as I Suppose Emancipated since the year 1806," Loudoun County Free Black Papers, 1833-01, LCHAD.

⁹¹ McVeigh described Henry Thomas as a blacksmith and characterized Elijah Mason and his wife Louisa as "a Nusense to Society as I am informed."

⁹² Grand Jury Presentments, August 12, 1833, Loudoun County Free Black Papers 1833-01, LCHAD. While summons for the other persons indicted are still located in the archives of the Loudoun County Court, papers for Winney and George Rivers for 1833 are not included.

⁹³ "R[ichard] H Henderson to have cert[ified] the list of prosecutions ag[ainst] free negroes," dated November 15, 1836 in "List of Free Blacks 1835," Loudoun County Free Blacks #4 (1835-01), LCHAD.

law.”⁹⁴ Henderson’s list indicated that since 1833 George Rivers had been granted nine extensions for removal, having been indicted multiple times under the 1806 residency law.⁹⁵

Henderson articulated the sentiment of many in the county when he claimed that “while our free white population is moving Westward, and our slaves are removed to the South & South West, this population, & especially the most mischievous part of it, clings to the bosom of society, and injuriously affects its best interests.” Henderson demonstrated the legal and financial conundrum experienced by many freed blacks in Virginia by claiming it was

a curious fact that this unfortunate and degraded population, unwilling to leave the State; and placing itself in a condition to elude the officers of justice, by flying from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and from County to County, is restrained from making permanent settlements; and is, thus actually legislated into poverty, vagrancy, and crime.

Henderson predicted that “the evil complained of is of much and growing magnitude” and asked that the Legislature design a “simple, summary, and efficient mode of Dealing with such offences” such as “transporting emancipated slaves to the now flourishing colonies on the Western coast of Africa.”⁹⁶ Worried about the stability of their family, George and Winney sought legislative protection against removal from the county and state by petitioning the Legislature shortly after Henderson’s November petition “to pass

⁹⁴ County Court Petition, Loudoun County, Virginia, December 17, 1836, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online. The list does not include Winney, but does mention “Hannah Rivers” who had received six renewals of her indictment for remaining in the state.

⁹⁵ Brenda Stevenson discusses Henderson’s report and the sentiment of white elites in Loudoun on the question of free black residency in the county. Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 268-270.

⁹⁶ County Court Petition, Loudoun County, Virginia, December 17, 1836, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online.

a law” allowing the Rivers to remain in Loudoun, “the place of their Nativity where their children now live.”⁹⁷

Those signing the petition asserted that the Rivers were “peaceable honest Industrious good citizens worthy of [legislative] clemency” to counter Henderson’s negative assessment of free persons of color. The Rivers sought the support of the white community in their December 1836 petition that would allow George and Winney to remain a part of Loudoun’s free black society, a statement that contradicted Henderson’s fears of free blacks as vagrants, criminals, and impoverished charges upon the public weal.⁹⁸ The Rivers’ petition along with George’s certificate of character was submitted to the House of Delegates by T. Taylor on February 24, 1838 and referred to the House Courts of Justice. Three days later, committee member Mr. May presented the Rivers’

⁹⁷ Petition of George & Winney Rivers, Loudoun County, Virginia, February 24, 1838, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online.

⁹⁸ Richard H. Henderson was not absolutely averse to the manumission of slaves. Henderson had posted a bond of \$500 to secure the future freedom of Tom in 1808. Loudoun County Deed Book 2K: 66. In the 1820s, enslaved woman Alse Williams was conveyed to Henderson as a nominal owner “until she paid for herself,” an achievement marked by Henderson’s manumission of Williams on December 30, 1828. Whether Henderson performed this function of nominal owner out of personal convictions or as part of his law practice is unclear from the deed, yet by the mid-1830s, Henderson’s role as Commonwealth Attorney for Loudoun County required him to take a stronger stance against free blacks remaining in Virginia contrary to law. Richard H. Henderson to Alse Williams, written December 30, 1828, proved in court January 13, 1829, Loudoun Deed Book 3R: 219-220. Henderson purchased twelve year old term slave Jim, son of Jenny Miller, from Janet Henderson in 1835 with the stipulation that he would free Jim after Jim served twenty-three years. Fauquier Deed Book 35: 251. Jim’s freedom was recorded in 1859 in the Loudoun Free Register entry #2272 dated February 16, 1859. Patricia B. Duncan, *Abstracts of Loudoun County Virginia Register of Free Negroes 1844-1861* (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2010), 199. In October of 1836 Henderson manumitted his slave Leeds, further adding to the free black population. Richard H. Henderson to Leeds, written October 20, 1836, proved in court October 20, 1836, Loudoun Deed Book 4G: 213.

petition and it was “laid upon the table” for consideration.⁹⁹ By March 20, the committee for Courts of Justice had met, considered, and rejected George and Winney’s petition.¹⁰⁰

Despite this legal setback, the Rivers apparently felt confident enough in their status as valued and accepted community members in their neighborhood to continue to live in Loudoun County, despite the risks of imprisonment or re-enslavement for failure to abide by the 1806 Removal Act.¹⁰¹ They probably knew how many fellow free persons had been indicted and not prosecuted, either by leaving Loudoun or by evading the sheriff when he attempted to deliver court summons. They also knew that in some cases the county deputy sheriff or sheriff was ordered to place freed slaves in jail to “keep them safely” until their court date. The limited ability of the county court to successfully locate, secure, prosecute, convict, and evict free Negroes in violation of the 1806 Removal Act worked in favor of the Rivers family. The Rivers’ family maintained their status as a separate household with five members in 1840: George, Winney, Rebecca, another daughter, and grandson Rudolph.¹⁰² After Rebecca died in 1846,¹⁰³ only grandson

⁹⁹ *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia, begun and held at the Capitol, in the City of Richmond, on Monday, the First day of January, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight* (Richmond: Printed by Thomas Ritchie, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1838), 150.

¹⁰⁰ *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia, begun and held at the Capitol, in the City of Richmond, on Monday, the First day of January, one thousand eight hundred and thirty-eight* (Richmond: Printed by Thomas Ritchie, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1838), 206-207.

¹⁰¹ Starting in 1832, George consistently appeared on Loudoun’s tax rolls. His personal taxable property fluctuated between owning one and two horses during the 1830s. By 1840 he owned three horses, a substantial holding for any Loudoun farmer although this boon lasted only for two years, decreasing to two horses in 1842 and then only one until 1850. *Loudoun County Virginia Personal Property Tax List 1782-1850*, transcribed by Patricia B. Duncan, cd-rom.

¹⁰² 1840 Federal Census, Jonah Hood District, Loudoun County, Virginia, Roll 564, page 180, ancestry.com.

¹⁰³ Rebecca S. Rivers was buried in a small cemetery at Rock Hill, the family farm of the Humphreys who manumitted George and Winney Rivers. Tombstone information indicates she was born Saturday, June 2, 1827 and died Sunday, April 30, 1843 “aged 15 years, 10 months, 22 days.” The cemetery, located “northwest of the main house” included Rebecca’s “marble-slave marker” and at least “three unmarked fieldstone markers with two fieldstone footstones” as identified in the National Register of Historic Places

Rudolph remained with George and Winney in the Rivers household by the time of the 1850 census.¹⁰⁴

By 1860 the only readily identifiable member of the Rivers family in census records was grandson Rudolph, enumerated as James Rivers, a laborer for the Filler family, white landholders living near Hoysville in Loudoun County.¹⁰⁵ Sometime between 1850 and 1860 both George and Winney disappeared from official county records.¹⁰⁶ Apparently James could no longer afford to maintain a separate household by 1860. James was not left without some financial assets after the loss of his grandparents as he reported a rather significant personal estate of \$1,200 to the census enumerator.¹⁰⁷ Despite the rise and ebb of family fortunes, the Rivers seem to have had a sense of

Registration Form documentation created in 2009. Rock Hill Farm, VDHR File No. 053-1057, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/register/Counties/Loudoun/053-1057_Rock_Hill_Farm_2009_NR_FINAL.pdf>. *Loudoun County Cemetery Database*, <<http://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/loudoun-county-cemetery-database>>, accessed 19 August 2015.

¹⁰⁴ 1850 Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, series M432, roll 957, page 335A, ancestry.com. The Rivers family consisting of George (born circa 1795), Winny (born circa 1796) and James (born circa 1832) were identified as family number 340 residing in dwelling 340. *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ 1860 Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, Roll: M653_1359, p.111, Ancestry.com. At some point prior to 1846 Rudolph identified himself as James Rivers. From 1846 to 1850, personal property tax records list George Rivers “and son James.” *Loudoun County Virginia Personal Property Tax List 1782-1850*, transcribed by Patricia B. Duncan, cd-rom. In obedience to the requirement for free persons of color to register with the county court, James registered shortly before his 21st birthday, identifying himself James Robert Rudolph Rivers, the “son of Dinah Rivers,” a heritage and memory the Rivers family wanted to perpetuate. Patricia B. Duncan, *Abstracts of Loudoun County Virginia Register of Free Negroes, 1844-1861* (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2010), 93.

¹⁰⁶ Neither George, Winney, James nor Rudolph Rivers were listed in extant lists of free Negroes compiled in 1851, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858 or 1859 in Loudoun County. Townsend M. Lucas, trans. *Loudoun County, Virginia Lists of Free Negroes 1851, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858, 1859*. [Leesburg, Virginia: Thomas Balch Library], 1988. A search of extant personal property tax records for Loudoun County between 1850 and 1860 only include assessments for 1851, 1856 and 1860. Neither George, Winney, nor James Robert Rudolph Rivers were included in these documents. Loudoun County Personal Property Tax Records, LCHAD. George, Winney and James Rivers are not listed in Loudoun County Death Records collected between 1853 and 1866. Transcriptions of Loudoun County Death Records, 1853-1866, LCHAD.

¹⁰⁷ 1860 Federal Census, Loudoun County, Virginia, Roll: M653_1359, p.111, Ancestry.com. There is no record of George or Winney Rivers leaving a written will in the Loudoun County will books nor of any estate accounts or record of an estate administrator.

security residing in the county. They persisted in spite of their tenuous financial and legal position that accompanied freedom for persons of color in the early to mid-nineteenth century in northern Virginia.

Nat Turner and the Virginia Debate Over General Emancipation

On January 22, 1831, Fauquier County free black Betty Parker decided upon her future death to emancipate her daughter, Fanny, and Fanny's children. Being fully aware of the complications and dangers of remaining in Virginia after manumission she advised her daughter "to remove with her children to one of the western States".¹⁰⁸ Two years later Fauquier slaveholder Battalie Fitzhugh realized the limited options for freedom for enslaved persons. Rather than providing for the emancipation of some of his enslaved force, Fitzhugh devised that five of his enslaved men and women be allowed to "live in a State as near to one of Freedom as the laws of the Land will permit" and not be held liable for the debts of their trustee.¹⁰⁹ After the death of the trustee, Fitzhugh's slaves should be transferred to someone who would "extend the greatest possible degree of indulgence to them, [compatible] with the Laws of the Land."¹¹⁰ Both Fitzhugh, a white slaveowner, and Parker, a freed black mother, understood well that the laws of Virginia in the 1830s and the sentiments of county residents altered the options for emancipation and post-manumission life for enslaved persons in Virginia.

¹⁰⁸ Will of Betty Parker, written January 22, 1831, proved in court May 28, 1838, Fauquier County Will Book 15: 400.

¹⁰⁹ Will of Battaille Fitzhugh, written May 20, 1833, proved in court May 29, 1833, Fauquier County Will Book 13: 73.

¹¹⁰ Will of Battaille Fitzhugh, written May 20, 1833, proved in court May 29, 1833, Fauquier County Will Book 13: 74.

The rebellion led by free black Nat Turner in August 1831 altered feelings towards emancipation and freed persons of color in Virginia. Turner's insurrection against white families in Southampton County generated additional fear and panic over the continued residency of slaves and free blacks alike in Virginia and their potentially harmful influence on the enslaved population and possible militant actions against slaveholding whites. Debates in a special session of the Legislature revealed the contentious nature of enslavement, manumission, and free black residency in Virginia by the 1830s.

Speaking in the House of Delegates in January 1832, Thomas Marshall of Fauquier addressed the issues of gradual emancipation and free black residency in Virginia. In light of the Turner insurrection Marshall concluded that the legislature could intervene in the right to hold enslaved property

[w]henever the tranquility and security of society shall imperiously demand this sacrifice, the rights of property must yield to the preservation of happiness and life; but still it is a sacrifice, and one for which compensation should be made, if within the competency of the state.

According to Marshall, this "sacrifice of private right for public good" should be initiated not when "some dire and disastrous insurrection shall occur—bursting with sudden fury, like the eruption of a volcano, and desolating the country to a wide extent" but instead during a period of tranquility when "a clear majority of this people shall say their happiness and security require a gradual emancipation."¹¹¹ Marshall denied that

¹¹¹ *The Speech of Thomas Marshall, in the House of Delegates of Virginia, on the Abolition of Slavery. Delivered Friday, January 20, 1832.* (Richmond: Thomas W. White, 1832), 4. Hereafter referred to as *Marshall Speech*.

slaveholding presented a moral failure, but instead called it a “practical evil,” justified by his great confidence that

the negro there [in Fauquier County] is perfectly happy—he is treated with the most indulgent kindness—he is require to do the same work, and no more, that is performed by the white man—he is clothes with the best fabrics of the factories, and he is fed literally with the fat of the land.

Marshall’s objection to a system of slavery, then, derived not from a moral indignation towards slaveholding, but from the “ruinous” effects of enslaved labor on white yeoman laborers. The use of enslaved labor decreased opportunities for employment of white artisans, discouraged any incentive to innovate labor-saving methods or improve technology, and created a “wasteful, idle, reckless population” unwilling to engage in work deemed “disreputable” because of its association with the labor undertaken by slaves.¹¹² His solution was to gradually check the growth of the black population through a process of gradual removal of free blacks, an option he felt could be accomplished through voluntary emigration. This plan also proposed to gradually emancipate slaves upon condition they, too, be removed from the state. Marshall did not expect slaveholders to voluntarily emancipate without some form of compensation, but he espoused a belief that slaveholders “would be content to sell them [enslaved people] at a very reduced rate; perhaps at half price, for the benefit of the slaves themselves.” In Marshall’s view, slaveholders were bound to the system of enslavement because they could not profitably divest themselves of slaves in order to switch to the employment of free labor. Since “[h]umanity restrains them from selling to the traders who purchase for the southern markets...they continue to hold a property of

¹¹² *Marshall Speech*, 6.

which they would gladly divest themselves.” Without a mechanism for exchanging enslaved labor for the financial compensation that would allow them to employ free labor, the system of slavery was perpetuated. Marshall proposed ending this cycle through financial compensation from the state or from Congress, who could authorize the sale of public lands to create a fund for such a purpose.¹¹³ Marshall’s 1832 perspective never questioned the moral right to slavery, but placed the financial interests and well-being of both slaveholders and yeoman whites at its core.

Northern Virginians also debated the issues of emancipation and deportation of free-born and manumitted blacks, with recommendations that differed, albeit slightly, across the region. Loudoun County leaders met in Leesburg in December 1831 for the purpose of “taking into consideration the subject of petitioning the Legislature relative to the colored population of the State.” Commonwealth Attorney Richard H. Henderson addressed the assembled group and “illustrated the necessity of adopting measures suited to the crisis” of the enslaved and free black population. Henderson proposed six resolutions and expressed sympathy to the citizens of Southampton. Saying that “to complain of public evils, which are remediable, is the part of children; to remove them, that of men,” he advocated a “gradual emancipation of the slaves of the Commonwealth and the removal of the entire colored population.” Henderson also declared that “the continuation of slavery is forbidden by the true policy of Virginia, repugnant to her political theory and christian professions, and an approbrium to our ancient and renowned dominion.” Henderson’s resolutions were “unanimously adopted” and a committee of

¹¹³ *Marshall Speech*, 11.

nine appointed to compose a memorial expressing these sentiments on the behalf of Loudoun residents to be sent to the General Assembly.¹¹⁴

The appointed memorial committee, consisting of Richard H. Henderson, Joshua Osburn, William B. Tyler, Fayette Ball, George M. Chichester, John Janney, John A. Carter, Henry Clagett and Wilson C. Selden, Jr., represented the interests of mainly small slaveholders with some experience with manumission. The committee hailed mainly from the southern half of the county with members from Leesburg, Hillsborough, Middleburg, and western Loudoun. Each of these men had an intimate connection to slavery, manumission, or to the free black population of Loudoun County. Four of the nine men had manumitted enslaved persons by the time of the Leesburg meeting (Clagett, Osburn, Selden, and Henderson), and two would manumit in the future (Henderson and Janney).¹¹⁵ Both Henderson and Janney served as lawyers in the Loudoun court, defending enslaved persons in court, witnessing deeds of manumission, and manumitting

¹¹⁴ “Public Meeting,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 2, 1832. “Citizens of Leesburg: Proceedings,” Loudoun County, n.d. Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

¹¹⁵ Doctor Henry Clagett had manumitted Philip Nelson around 1819 after Nelson purchased himself. Henry Claggett to Philip Nelson, written January 16, 1819, proved in court January 1820, Loudoun County Deed Book 2Z: 341-342; Philip Nelson to Minty Nelson, etc., written November 11, 1839, proved in court November 13, 1839, Loudoun County Deed Book 4N: 112-113. Osburn manumitted Dennis Buckney, a thirty-three year old enslaved man in 1827. Joshua Osburne to Dennis Buckney, written February 24, 1827, proved in March 28, 1827, Loudoun County Deed Book 3N: 304. In 1828 Henderson, along with Seldon and Osburn, each separately manumitted an enslaved person. Seldon wrote his deed of emancipation on March 24, 1828, Osburn on July 19, 1828, and Henderson on December 30, 1828, each recording their deeds at the next scheduled county court session. Wilson C. Seldon to Frank, written March 24, 1828, proved in court June 13, 1828, Loudoun County Deed Book 3Q: 342-343; Joshua Osburn to Resin Williams, written July 19, 1828, proved in court August 15, 1828, Loudoun County Deed Book 3Q: 449; Richard H. Henderson to Alse Williams, written December 30, 1828, proved in court January 13, 1829, Loudoun County Deed Book 3R: 219-220. Henderson would later manumit enslaved man Leeds in October 1836. Richard H. Henderson to Leeds, written October 20, 1836, proved in court October 20, 1836, Loudoun County Deed Book 4G: 213. John Janney would serve as a nominal owner of an enslaved woman named Dorcas purchasing her in 1842 and manumitting her (possibly after she repaid her purchase price) in 1844. John Janney to Dorcas, written November 13, 1844, proved in court November 14, 1844, Loudoun County Deed Book 4U: 213.

slaves. Henderson also prosecuted enslaved and free blacks in his capacity as Commonwealth Attorney for Loudoun County. By 1830 at least six of the nine committee members owned slaves (Ball – 36, Clagett – 10, Henderson – 7, Chichester – 6, Tyler – 5, and Seldon – 2).¹¹⁶ Neither Janney nor Osburn owned slaves at the time and Janney was the only member with free blacks residing in his household in 1830, two free black females aged between 10 and 23 years old.¹¹⁷

The Loudoun Committee's Memorial, sent to the General Assembly explained that "in their immediate neighborhood" there was only "a comparatively... small ratio of this unhappy description of persons" yet the men decided to act under encouragement from "the uplifted voices of those whose concerns and firesides are most sorely pressed by the evil which they deprecate." The committee articulated three deleterious effects of enslavement on the white population of Loudoun. First, "the labor of slaves...is the most expensive that can be used." Second, that "slavery tends to lay waste [to] the region in which it subsists" and finally, slavery "fills with apprehension & inquietude the bosoms

¹¹⁶ It is highly likely that John A. Carter also owned slaves, yet due to the many Carters in the county, identifying the slaveholdings of this specific person remains problematic. For the slaveholdings of the other men see: Fayette Ball, 1830 Federal Census, Middleburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 20, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016); Henry Clagett, 1830 Federal Census, Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 32, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016); Richard H. Henderson, 1830 Census, Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 29, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016); George Chichester, 1830 Federal Census, Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 30, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016); William B. Tyler, 1830 Federal Census, Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, M19, roll 193, page 30, Ancestry.com, (6 Sep 2016). Tyler's enslaved force consisted of one male aged 10-23, one male aged 36-54, one female under 10 years old, one female aged 10-23, and one female aged 36-54, quite possibly a family group of father-mother and children; Wilson C. Seldon, 1830 Federal Census, Cameron Parish, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 10, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016). Two entries existed for "Wilson C. Seldon" in Loudoun County. One household with a white male aged 30 to 39 and one household with a white male aged 60 to 69. The number of slaves given here is based on the assumption that the younger Seldon was the "Junior" Seldon residing in the county in 1830.

¹¹⁷ John Janney, 1830 Federal Census, Leesburg, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 30, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016). Joshua Osburn, a bachelor in his fifties residing in Hillborough did not own any slaves in 1830. Joshua Osburne, 1830 Federal Census, Hillsboro, Loudoun County, Virginia, Series M19, Roll 193, Page 76, Ancestry.com (6 Sep 2016).

of those who employ it.” Desiring to create a sense of security among white residents, the committee recommended the remedy of “ultimate extinction of involuntary servitude, and the removal of the race which is irreconcilably [sic] antagonist to ours” by utilizing enough state expenditures “equal to its execution.”¹¹⁸ The committee urged that emancipation and removal of all blacks presented the best plan of action for securing the state against violence.

Prince William County, represented in the Legislature by Charles Shirley Carter, presented a different solution to the problem of race and enslavement in Virginia. While both Loudoun and Prince William counties agreed to a removal of free blacks, their motivations for a solution to slavery differed. The Loudoun committee focused on the “ultimate extinction of involuntary servitude,” a system deemed detrimental the morality of slaveholders, while memorials from Prince William County focused on paid compensation to slaveholders willing to manumit and remove slaves from the county.

Stating his view that “he was ready to go as far as any man for the great object of ridding the State of its colored population, by all safe and proper means,” Carter also recognized the three main concerns of Virginians to be rights of property, state resources, and “the comfort of those beings who were to be placed in a new condition.”¹¹⁹

Predominantly at stake were the futures of the 361 free blacks in the county, comprising less than 5 percent of the county population in 1830, and the future lives of slaves hoping

¹¹⁸ “Memorial to the Hon. the Senate and House of Delegates of the State of Virginia,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 2, 1832. “Citizens’ Petition,” Loudoun County, Virginia, December 23, 1831, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, online.

¹¹⁹ “Slaves and Free Negroes,” *Richmond Enquirer*, January 3, 1832.

to be manumitted.¹²⁰ Especially at risk were freed slaves who violated the 1806 Removal Act, though county Tax Commissioner James Foster reported only four persons in violation of the removal requirements as of July 30, 1831, a seemingly minor proportion of freed blacks.¹²¹ Considering the Prince William petition in this light suggests that county residents sought an immediate and permanent solution to ridding the county of both slaves and free blacks.

Prince William petitioners focused not on a program of gradual emancipation, but instead, a fully funded process of purchasing, emancipating, and transporting freed and free blacks out of Virginia. To do this they asked the state to “raise and appropriate money to transport free persons of Colour to the Coast of Africa” and also to “purchase slaves and transport them likewise.” Recognizing the cost of such an endeavor, the petitioners took the approach that Virginia should “procure an amendment to the Constitution of the United States which will give the Congress of the Union power to pass the necessary Laws to carry into effect the above stated object,” thereby pushing the cost of removal onto the Congress (and all the states) rather than Virginia alone.¹²² Noteworthy is the absence of any acknowledgement that individual slaveholders might hold financial responsibility for removal or purchase-to-manumit costs in the Prince William plan.

¹²⁰ 1830 Federal Census, Social Explorer.

¹²¹ James Foster, Commissioner of the Revenue for Prince William County, “Report of Free Blacks Remaining in Virginia Contrary to Law,” July 30, 1831, Prince William County Personal Property Tax Book for 1831, microfilm. Foster reported only four persons who, in his opinion, violated the Removal Act: John Parker, Lewis Lilburn, Henry Coffey, and Mark Fields.

¹²² “Inhabitants: Petition,” Prince William County, December 29, 1831, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Prince William petitioner Mason L. Weems apparently worried that the views of Prince William Delegate Charles S. Carter did not reflect the interests of a significant proportion of his constituents so Weems decided to send the petition directly to Dinwiddie County Delegate William H. Brodnax, chairman of the special committee. In his private, introductory letter to Brodnax accompanying the petition, Weems noted that despite gathering a substantial 115 signatures, the petition had only circulated through one-quarter of the county's population in "consequence of the inclemency of the weather" and could have gathered more support, indicating Weems's assessment of the county's wish for immediate action.¹²³ Weems asserted that petitioners were "anxious to get rid of that burthen" of slaves and free blacks and claimed that their presence and influence kept a certain "class of our citizens...in a degraded condition by having...by necessity to labor & associate with slaves." The effects of the free black population also meant that a "larger number [were] scorning to stoop so low ... [by] spending their lives in idleness" and "with ardent spirits." Weems pressed the need for timely action stating "there is no time to lose" and suggested that in return for the free states agreeing to foot the bill for purchased emancipation, removal, and colonization, Virginia would be supportive of protective tariffs. Weems claimed that "if we could get rid of our coloured population we would not be opposed to a protection system, for the capital now invested

¹²³ Petitioners apparently felt that Carter might not be totally in agreement with their petition and plan, so instead sent the Prince William petition to Delegate William H. Brodnax from Virginia's Dinwiddie County and the chairman of the special committee for investigating solutions to slavery and the free black population during the 1831-1832 session. For Carter's explanation for his constituents' decision to forward their petition directly to Brodnax see "Slaves and Free Negroes," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 3, 1832 and "Communicated," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 2, 1832. For Brodnax's role in the 1831-1832 special committee see Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), especially 140-145.

in slaves not producing half interest, should be transferred to Manufactures & public improvements.”¹²⁴ These Prince William petitioners turned the “problem” of removing free blacks and slaves into a national, constitutional issue while wholly ignoring any financial stake that Prince William slaveholders held for this plan.

In this regard, Fauquier and Prince William residents seemed like-minded in determining a solution to their respective black populations. Multiple petitions from Fauquier sent to the Virginia Legislature in December 1831 and January 1832 asked for a constitutional amendment authorizing Congress “power to pass the necessary Laws” to “raise and appropriate money to transport free persons of Colour to the coast of Africa, and also, the power to purchase slaves and transport them likewise.”¹²⁵ Failing to see this measure come to pass, Fauquier residents submitted a secondary plan for controlling the free black population in February 1832 that emphasized the negative effects of the free black population on their enslaved laborers.

Petitioners affirmed they had “long witness[ed] the corruption of the slave, by the free negroes of the Commonwealth.” Due to their experiences, they were “convinced that the interest and perhaps the safety and peace of slaveholders if not of the whole white

¹²⁴ “Letter from Mason L. Weems to Hon. William H. Brodnax, House of Delegates,” December 29, 1831, in “Inhabitants: Petition,” Prince William County, December 29, 1831, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Weems’ decision to post the petition directly Delegate Brodnax instead of to Prince William County Delegate Charles S. Carter was not met with complete approval and apparently was a private decision made by Weems. See DUMFRIES, “To the Editors of the Enquirer,” *Richmond Enquirer*, January 19, 1832.

¹²⁵ Petitions from Loudoun and Prince William were hand-written while Fauquier residents used a combination of pre-printed forms and hand-written petitions most likely to more expediently and efficiently canvas the county. Fauquier petitions included only the basic request for the Constitutional amendment. Fauquier residents contributed 225 signatures in petitions sent on four occasions: December 7, 1831, December 28, 1831, December 30, 1831, and January 24, 1832. “Inhabitants: Petition,” Fauquier County, December 7, 1831, December 28, 1831, December 30, 1831, and January 24, 1832, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

population and the welfare of the slaves themselves call loudly for the passage of a law excluding free persons of colour from the state.” Exceptions could be made for those free blacks already permitted “by a special act of assembly” to remain in Virginia, but otherwise, those remaining in Virginia after January 1, 1834 without such permission “shall be subject to public sale for the benefit of the literary fund of our State.” Realizing that such a measure might be “unconstitutional or unwise” an alternate solution would be for free blacks to post a bond with security “on a heavy penalty” conditioned “that they will be of good behaviour” during their residence in Virginia. In this case, “good behaviour” consisted of “not keeping a disorderly house,” not dealing with slaves, and not allowing or participating in unlawful assemblages of slaves. In this modified plan, any free black who violated these codes of behavior would be subject to public sale with the proceeds going to the state. This petition gathered 123 signatories, many of whom had signed earlier petitions.¹²⁶ Fauquier petitioners sought to evict free blacks or induce compliant behavior by the threat of forced sale.

The Virginia General Assembly passed a law on March 4, 1833 authorizing “appropriations for the removal of free persons of colour” to the amount of \$18,000 paid annually for a period of five years. These funds paid for transportation via the American Colonization Society to Africa and allowed \$30 per person for colonists age ten years and older and \$20 for those under ten years old for provisions during the first months in Liberia. The Assembly recognized that removal was not a popular option for blacks and

¹²⁶ “Inhabitants: Petition,” Fauquier County, February 20, 1832, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

included in the act provisions for unspent funds due to “their unwillingness to emigrate.”¹²⁷

In 1833 officials across Virginia had the task of canvassing free blacks in their counties to determine interest in funded transportation to Africa. The Loudoun County Clerk of Court reported that only eleven persons were “willing to emigrate to the western coast of Africa.” This list included an elderly man emancipated in 1809, a family emancipated in 1814, a free-born mother and her children, and a free-born woman.¹²⁸ The slim total of eleven persons out of a county population of 1,079 free blacks (who comprised roughly 5 percent of the county population) clearly reflected the tension between white plans for removal from Virginia and blacks’ desire for continued residency.¹²⁹ Reports from Prince William and Fauquier have not survived.¹³⁰

Little evidence exists in the wills and deeds written in northern Virginia following the Turner insurrection that fear of slave rebellion prompted slaveholders to manumit. In November 1832 Loudoun slaveowner Samuel Palmer wrote a will that granted “unto every black man woman and child of which I die seized and possessed his or her entire freedom” at the time of his death, an event that did not occur for nearly six more years. Nevertheless, in 1832 Palmer was ready to grant freedom to all his enslaved persons, either to remove responsibility for them from the management of his estate or to

¹²⁷ “An Act making appropriations for the removal of free persons of colour passed March 4, 1833,” Reports of Free Negroes & Mulattoes, 1833, Auditor of Public Accounts, Library of Virginia misc microfilm reel 1322.

¹²⁸ Clerk of Court Report, Loudoun County, June 12, 1833, Reports of Free Negroes & Mulattoes, 1833, I-N, Auditor of Public Accounts, Library of Virginia misc microfilm reel 1322.

¹²⁹ 1830 Federal Census, Social Explorer.

¹³⁰ Few reports from county commissioners were kept in the Reports of Free Negroes & Mulattoes (1833) files in the Auditor of Public Account records. A further search of tax records and extant court documents from Prince William and Fauquier did not reveal extant copies of the 1833 commissioner reports.

encourage good behavior until the time of his (future) decease.¹³¹ Six wills written in Loudoun County in the two years following the Turner insurrection devised either term slavery or immediate emancipation. Only one of the six wills specified removal to a free state or to Liberia as the condition for emancipation.¹³² In Fauquier County no slaveholders emancipated any slaves by testamentary will in the two years following the Southampton Insurrection; only three deeds of manumission were written during that time.¹³³ On September 25, 1835, four years after the Southampton crisis, Fauquier slaveholder Maria Willis wrote a will in Fauquier that granted emancipation. This paucity of manumissions suggests that Fauquier slaveholders hesitated at that time to add to the free black population through testamentary will or deed.

The Virginia debates of 1831-1832 over emancipation, removal, and colonization schemes as well as issues of property rights, financial resources, responsibilities, and public safety guided the decisions of some northern Virginia slaveholders whether or not to manumit (see figure 35). The slight increase in numbers of deeds of manumission in Fauquier and Loudoun in the decade following Nat Turner's Rebellion may have been a result of a suspicious slaveholder's desire to remove a potentially disgruntled enslaved persons from the household or farm, yet a sale would just as easily (and perhaps more permanently) remove truculent slaves from the area. Even more likely is the influence of

¹³¹ Will of Samuel Palmer, written November 1, 1832, proved in court May 14, 1838, Loudoun County Will Book Y: 208-209. Palmer left a legacy of \$100 to his "black man Lewis" and bequests of land, money, or a portion of his estate to his own children.

¹³² Loudoun County Will Book T: 399-400; Loudoun County Will Book U: 300-301 and 371; Loudoun County Will Book V: 346-347; Loudoun County Will Book Y: 208-209; and Loudoun County Will Book 2D: 109.

¹³³ Wills considered had to have been written between September 1831 and September 1833 regardless of date proved in court.

the economy that corresponded to the timing of the increase in deeds of manumission between 1836 and 1841 as discussed in chapter one. More likely deed and will writers in these counties considered their peculiar financial circumstances and gauged the level of county sentiment towards manumission and free black residency when deciding to manumit in the 1830s rather than respond to the Southampton crisis.

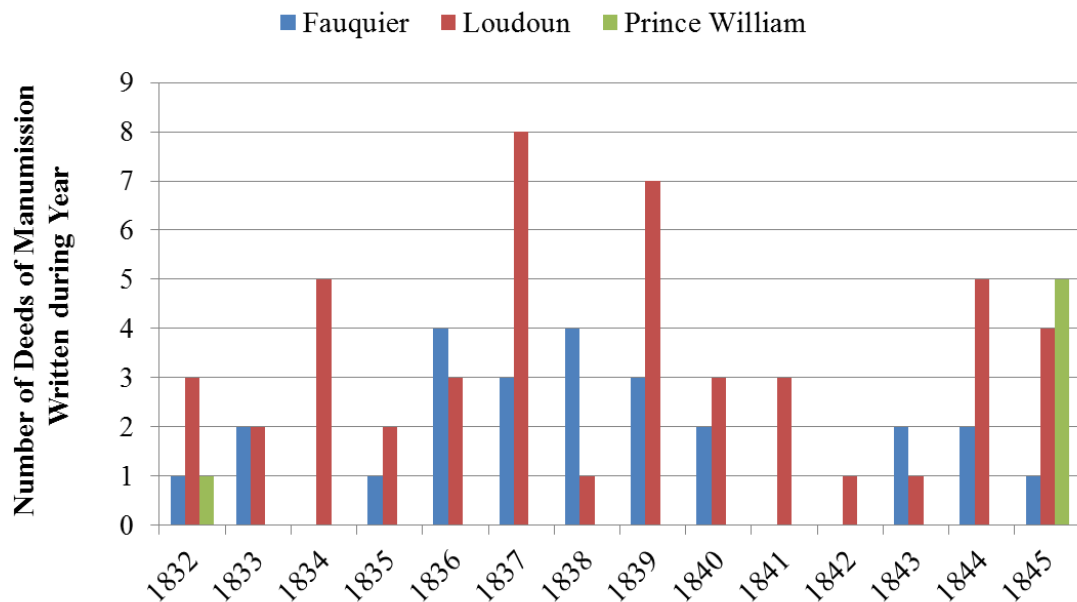


Figure 35. Recorded deeds of manumission written between 1832 and 1845.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 33-45; Loudoun County Deed Books 4B-4V; Prince William County Land Record Book; and Prince William County Deed Book 19.

Between 1832 and 1845 Loudoun County slaveholders continued to regularly manumit by deed as did Fauquier County slaveholders, though at proportionately lower rates. In Prince William slaveholders recorded no deeds of manumission between 1833

and 1844 and refrained from including any sort of provision for manumission in wills written between 1834 and 1843, suggesting a lack of support for manumission for an extended period of time in that county.¹³⁴ Instead, slaveholders in Prince William County used other means of limiting their enslaved forces such as sales and migration outside Virginia's borders.

The Southampton insurrection and the Virginia debates hardened neighborhood and county sentiment against manumission. Will writers increasingly allowed manumission only contingent upon age restrictions, forced removal from Virginia, or participation in the colonization of Liberia. Fauquier slaveholders seemed hesitant about offering unconditional freedom during this period.¹³⁵ Thirteen wills written between 1832 and 1845 offered some form of conditional freedom but only two offered direct and immediate emancipation.¹³⁶ Nine offered manumission contingent upon removal from

¹³⁴ In Prince William County, only two wills written between 1832 and 1845 offered manumission in any form to enslaved forces. Margaret Hooe of Prince William County, had already written out a deed of manumission for Moses Lee "some years past" to take place at her death, yet "[o]n consideration" Hooe decided "to give up his services during [her] life," and authorized Lee to obtain his free papers in August of 1832. Though not specified in her will, Hooe might have hastened the time of Lee's manumission either out of fear that Lee would take action to seize his freedom sooner or she might have hoped for some state-wide plan to remove any freed blacks to conform with removal sentiments circulating through the county, either of which fears she did not specifically relate in her written will. "Margaret Hooe to Moses (alias Moses Lee)," (1832) Prince William County Deed Book 13: 28. Elizabeth Tebbs of Dumfries devised emancipation for Davy, Alice, Cetty, Elizabeth, and Ceanna in her will written in 1833 and added a codicil in 1835 freeing her enslaved man Jesse. Tebbs's will was recorded in Fauquier County in 1852 after her death. Will of Elizabeth Tebbs, written July 6, 1833, proved in court July 26, 1852, Fauquier Will Book 24, 125-128.

¹³⁵ In determining the sentiments of northern Virginia slaveholders following the debates of 1831-1832, only wills written during the period of 1832 to 1845 were considered, regardless of whether those wills were proved in court during that time. This decision is based on the reasoning that the sentiment *at the time of the writing of the will* remained in force unless a later will or codicil was crafted.

¹³⁶ The two women who offered direct and immediate freedom following their deaths were a white slave owning woman, Laurinda Griffin, and a free black woman, Betty Parker, who owned her children. Laurinda Griffin freed her six enslaved laborers "immediately after my decease" and made provisions to free her former slave Anna and Anna's two children with the consent of their new owner. Will of Laurinda Griffin, written October 2, 1840, proved in court November 27, 1841, Fauquier County Will Book 17: 417-418. Betty Parker, a "free colored person residing in the town of Warrenton" devised her daughter Fanny

Virginia, two slaveholders mandated term slavery and removal before freedom, one ordered term slavery before manumission, and one slaveholder offered a choice of either freedom conditioned upon transportation to Liberia or enslavement to masters of their choosing.¹³⁷ Clearly, many Fauquier slaveholders in the wake of Southampton and the Debates of 1832-1833 were not willing to give freedom to African Americans who would remain in the county.

In Loudoun County, slaveholders writing wills between 1832 and 1845 echoed the sentiments proposed in the 1832 Loudoun memorial for a combination of gradual emancipation and removal by choice. Eleven of twenty-three slaveholders who granted some form of freedom in wills written in Loudoun during this period granted immediate freedom, while twelve mandated a period of enslavement following the death of the

Warner, purchased by Parker following her own manumission, “to possess and enjoy her freedom in as full and ample a manner as the same can be conferred by the owner of the like kind of property.” Will of Betty Parker, written January 22, 1831, proved in court May 28, 1838, Fauquier County Will Book 15: 400-401.¹³⁷ Maria Willis granted her “servants Venus, Malvina and children and Maria and children their liberty if they will conform to the laws on that subject or remove from the state, if they wish to remain in the State to choose their master or mistress, and have their freedom whenever they wish. Willis required that her other slaves, Elias and Henry, raise funds through their hires for a period of two years to support Willis’s niece before they too would be granted freedom on the same terms as her female slaves. Will of Maria Willis, written September 25, 1835, proved in court March 28, 1836, Fauquier County Will Book 14: 352-353. Armistead Blackwell requested that his wife at the time of her death emancipate his slaveholdings and provide part of his estate to allow them to emigrate to Africa or to “any other place of refuge which may be provided for the coloured part of our population.” Will of Armistead Blackwell, written April 1835, proved in court October 24, 1836, Fauquier County Deed Book 15: 65-66. For other wills requiring removal see Will of Susannah Rector, written April 7, 1838, proved in court May 28, 1838, Fauquier County Will Book 15: 401-402; Will of William Hunton, written June 6, 1838, proved in court August 27, 1838, Fauquier County Will Book 15: 430-433; Will of Susan Madison, written November 30, 1840, proved in court December 28, 1840, Fauquier County Will Book 17: 66-67; Will of Thomas Otway Byrd Carter, written October 28, 1840, proved in court January 25, 1841, Fauquier County Will Book 17: 80-81; Will of Dolly Farrow, written January 30, 1838, proved in court January 23, 1843, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 68-70; Will of Peyton Taylor, written April 22, 1843, proved in court June 26, 1843, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 142-143; Will of Reuben Murray, written December 28, 1844, proved in court June 23, 1845, Fauquier County Will Book 19: 217-218. For wills granting freedom conditioned upon the death of heirs see the Will of Peggy Smith Kerr, written May 11, 1838, proved in court May 11, 1839, Fauquier County Records at Large, 1821-1881, microfilm.

testator (term slavery).¹³⁸ Four of these wills recommended removal from Virginia or made emancipation contingent upon colonization to Liberia, the coast of Africa, or to “some place” where they might reside as freed blacks.¹³⁹

Slaveholders determined the best course for manumitting slaves based on personal conviction, prevailing community support for manumissions, and in some cases a desire to provide for an advantageous future for their bondspersons. In her will, written in 1840, Loudoun County slaveholder, Anne Cecilia McKenna ordered her administrator to manumit Betsy and her children and then send them to Liberia with a colonization society. McKenna later changed her mind claiming that “on further reflection I do not think their happiness would be best promoted” by going to Liberia. Instead she ordered that Betsy and her family serve McKenna’s husband for five years when Betsy’s family

¹³⁸ For wills granting immediate freedom see the Will of Samuel Palmer, Loudoun County Will Book Y: 208-209; Will of Hannah Parker, Loudoun County Will Book Z: 126-127; Will of John W. Coe, Loudoun County Will Book Z: 311; Will of Nancy Wright, Loudoun County Will Book 2B: 39; Will of Betsy G. Beatty, Loudoun County Will Book 2B: 103-104; Will of Sarah Humphrey, Loudoun County Will Book 2B: 105-106; Will of John Nixon, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 24-26; Codicil of Susannah C. Saunders, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 189-190; Will of Lydia Ramey, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 217 (later contested by her nephew and set aside by the county court); Will of Margaret Hepburn, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 328; Will of John Hawling, Loudoun County Will Book 2D: 109. Wills offering term slavery, either for a specified period or until the death of an heir see the Will of Elizabeth Noland, Loudoun County Will Book T: 399-400; Will of Hamilton Rogers, Jr., Loudoun County Will Book Y: 310; Will of Joseph Clowes, Loudoun County Will Book U: 300-301; Will of John Carr, Loudoun County Will Book U: 371; Will of Eleanor Peers, Loudoun County Will Book V: 346-347; Will of Ann Sanders, Loudoun County Will Book Z: 180-181; Will of Robert Fulton, Loudoun County Will Book Z: 414-416; Will of Mary Clowes (wife of Joseph Clowes), Loudoun County Will Book 2A: 320-321; Will of John Rose, Loudoun County Will Book 2A: 419-420; Will of Mary Vandevanter, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 191; Will of John Braden, Loudoun County Will Book 2D: 56; and Codicil of Philip Vansickler, Loudoun County Will Book 2D: 114.

¹³⁹ Wills either suggesting or mandating removal from Virginia include the Will of John Carr, Loudoun County Will Book U: 371; Will of Robert Fulton, Loudoun County Will Book Z: 414-416; Will of John Nixon, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 24-26; and Will of Mary Vandevanter, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 191.

would then be divided among members of McKenna's family.¹⁴⁰ After considering the benefits of colonization and freedom outside of Virginia, McKenna determined her slaves should remain enslaved in Virginia, even as a dismembered family.

The period of 1836 to 1839 in Fauquier County marked a relatively high point in both the number of deeds of manumission as well as the numbers of persons manumitted after the relative lull from 1807 to 1832 following the passage of the residency restrictions in the 1806 law. Fauquier slaveholders wrote fourteen deeds of manumission during the four years from 1836 to 1839 and freed twenty seven people, an increase in manumissions that would not be replicated until the mid-1850s in Fauquier County (see figure 36). Manumissions in Loudoun County also experienced a noticeable increase in the number of persons manumitted between 1836 and 1842 starting with eight deeds that freed twenty-five persons in 1837 (see figure 37). In contrast, no deeds of manumission were recorded in Prince William County court records between 1833 and 1844 as seen in figure 35.

¹⁴⁰ Betsy and McKenna shared a long relationship. McKenna, as a child, had been given Betsy, yet she was unwilling to preserve Betsy's family, dividing the family as any other personal property. Will of Anne Cecelia McKenna, Loudoun County Will Book 2A: 131.

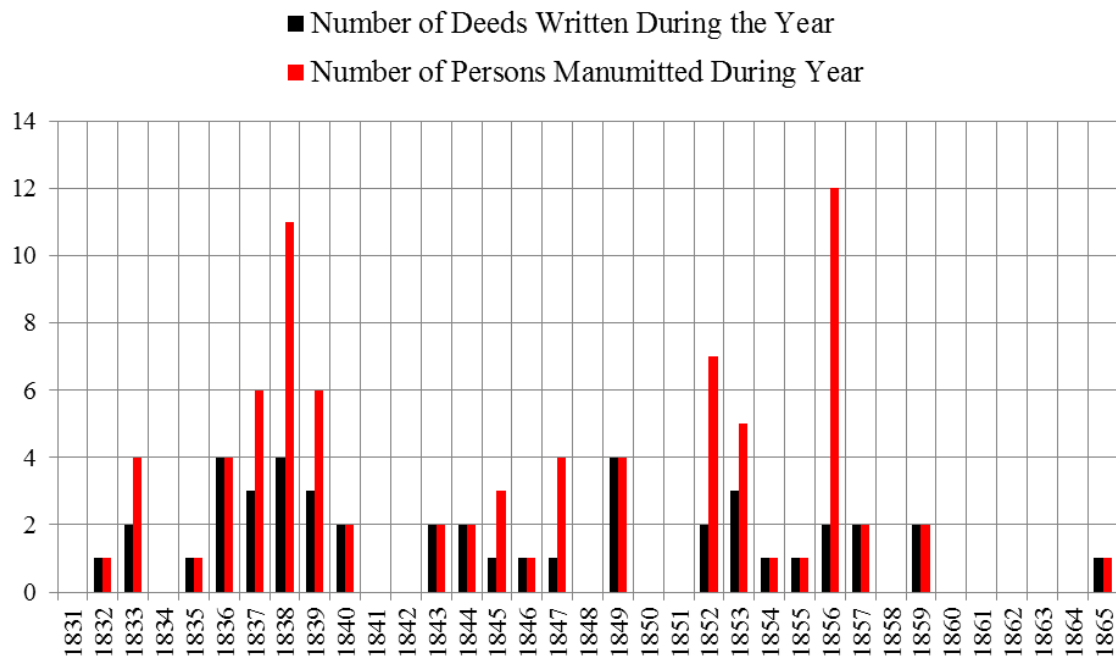


Figure 36. Fauquier County Manumissions by Deed, 1831-1865.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 33-59.

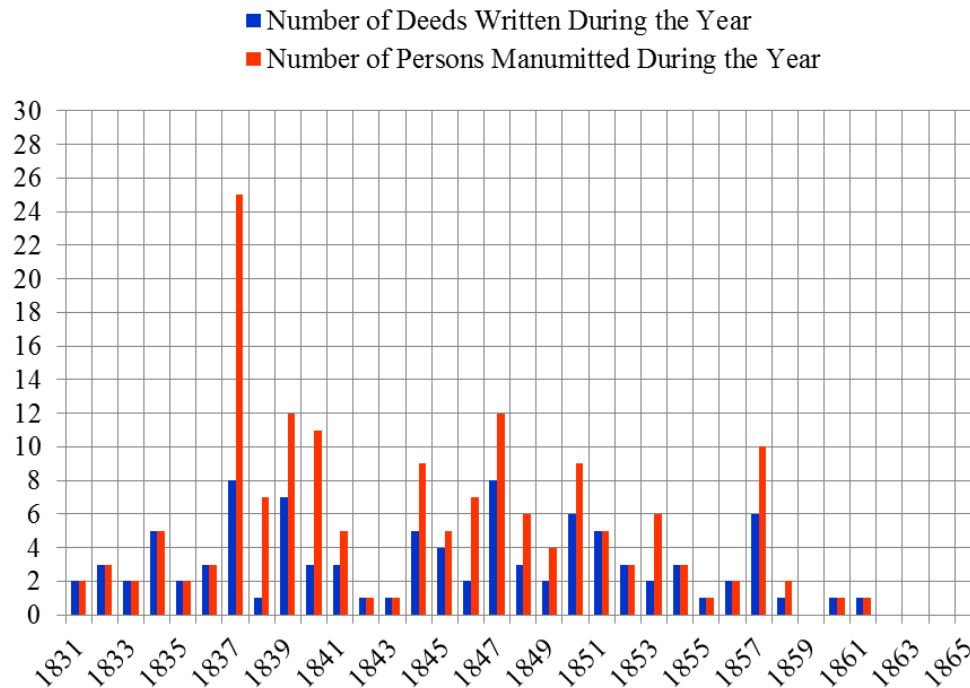


Figure 37. Loudoun County manumissions, 1831-1865.

Sources: Loudoun County Deed Books 3V-5T.

This rise in manumissions in Fauquier and Loudoun corresponded to the period influenced by the financial crisis of the Panic of 1837 when appraised slave values dropped as shown in figure 14 and figure 15. As discussed in chapter one, the financial crisis, shift in land use from labor-intensive agriculture to grazing, and two years of crop failures both reduced the need for field hands and affected long-term investments in enslaved property.

Slaveowner debt placed enslaved persons at risk for a sale. In such precarious financial times, enslaved persons may have negotiated contracts for manumission to take advantage of a slaveholder's need for cash or to act before a sale could be transacted. Enslaved persons in the best position to negotiate were older slaves past prime working

years¹⁴¹ or slaves who already were saving funds for self-purchase and were eager to complete the terms before slaveholder debt resulted in court-ordered debt collection.¹⁴²

Likewise, free persons of color who owned family members may have decided to manumit them in order to prevent them from being claimed as assets in debt collection.¹⁴³

The long-term decrease in enslaved holdings in Prince William and the lack of deeds of manumission meant that enslaved persons faced a greater chance of being sold or moved away with a slaveholder than options to bargain for freedom. Another factor that influenced manumissions was the wish of many residents to “get rid of our coloured population” without losing any financial investment.¹⁴⁴ While Fauquier and Loudoun county enslaved families could benefit from the financial crisis during the 1830s and negotiate for freedom, even in a limited way, this option was denied in Prince William County.

¹⁴¹ Loudoun County slaveholders manumitted five men aged 40 to 57 years old in 1839. Forest Griffith was 42 when he secured a deed of manumission from Mortimer McIlhany in January 1839. Loudoun County Deed Book 4L: 254. Billy Day was 50 years old when he was emancipated by Trueman Gore in March 1839. Loudoun County Deed Book 4L: 378-379. John Statler manumitted 42 year old Aaron Davis and Ned Davis aged about 40 years in June 1839. Loudoun County Deed Book 4M: 211-212. John Simpson emancipated Ben Johnson in May 1839 when Johnson was about 57 years old. Loudoun County Deed Book 4M: 220.

¹⁴² To secure his freedom James Mitchell paid William Burchitt two hundred dollars, a transaction Burchitt recorded in Loudoun court records in December 1837. Loudoun County Deed Book 4I: 399. Enslaved man Patrick Hogan negotiated the purchase of his enslaved daughter, Cornelia Elizabeth for two hundred dollars in May 1837. Loudoun County Deed book 4I: 65. Gabriel Green paid the exorbitant sum of one thousand dollars for freedom from James Deshields in September 1838. Fauquier County Deed Book 38: 247. Richard Davis likewise paid one thousand dollars to secure a deed of manumission from Samuel Chilton in September 1839. Fauquier County Deed Book 39: 204.

¹⁴³ Free black Jeffrey Lynn manumitted his children George Henry Lynn and Catharine Lynn in October 1836. Fauquier County Deed Book 36: 406. Henry Thomas, a “free Man of Color,” freed his wife, Nancy Thomas in February 1837. Loudoun County Deed Book 4H: 110. Warrenton free black, Samuel Johnston, manumitted his daughter, Lucy, and his three grandchildren in July 1837. Fauquier County Deed Book 37: 263.

¹⁴⁴ “Letter from Mason L. Weems to Hon. William H. Brodnax, House of Delegates,” December 29, 1831, in “Inhabitants: Petition,” Prince William County, December 29, 1831, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Masters and Manumission

Manumitters included married, widowed, and single men and women described as owners, nominal masters, spouses, parents and grandparents. While most deeds of manumission followed a formulaic framework of scripted elements, a close reading of deeds of manumission exposes a variety of reasons for manumitting a slave. Common formulaic elements included the names of the grantor and grantee, the date, and at least two witnesses. Sometimes deeds included reasons for manumission such as an enslaved person's merit or loyal service or the fact that the slaveholder granted emancipation for "divers goods" and valuable considerations. Other considerations for initiating a deed of manumission or devising emancipation in a will sprang from a slaveowner's personal relationship with the enslaved, religious mandates, and financial compensation. This section explores how masters and mistresses determined who to manumit, why they offered manumissions, and how they crafted visions of a "free" future within the constraints of family, law and community expectations.

Slaveholders employed a construct of personalism, the "tendency to respond to the particular needs and merits of individuals" when selecting slaves eligible for emancipation.¹⁴⁵ Susannah C. Saunders wrote in a codicil to her will that she granted immediate emancipation to her enslaved man, Charles Bentley, yet kept the girl Catharine enslaved. Saunders reasoned that since Catharine had "always been a faithful child to me and to all the family in their afflictions" and that "the burden of the family has been and is still upon her hands." Saunders remained confident that Catharine would "take good

¹⁴⁵ Suzanne Lebsock identified the term in her work on women in Petersburg, Virginia. Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), xix.

care of all that is left her, but at all times contribute to the wants of such as may need her aid.” Justifying the decision to free Charles yet retain Catharine’s lifetime of service to her family, Saunders hoped that she “shall not be thought to have been actuated by feelings of *impartiality*” in the construction of her will.¹⁴⁶

In his will, written in 1841, Fauquier County slaveholder William Horner expressed his decision to “give” his slaves Sam, William, and Jacob their freedom at specified times following Horner’s death. Horner’s bequest of freedom was fleeting, however, as only five days later Horner revoked the clauses providing for Sam, William, and Jacob’s freedom. Horner explained his change of heart and the new future for the enslaved men: “I direct them to be disposed of with the residue of my Estate & divided in the same manner [as his other slaves] *because I do not wish to distinguish among my servants.*”¹⁴⁷

Nearly all deeds of manumission and testamentary emancipations singled out specific enslaved persons to be granted freedom, suggesting the very personal and individual nature of acquiring freedom from enslavement in northern Virginia.¹⁴⁸ Yet as

¹⁴⁶ Susannah must have intended to disavow her *partiality* in granting freedom to Charles and not to Catharine. Codicil to the Will of Susannah C. Saunders, Loudoun County Will Book 2C: 189-190. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁴⁷ Will of William Horner, written March 11, 1841, proved in court May 5, 1841, Fauquier County Records At Large, 1821-1881: n.p., microfilm. Emphasis mine. There must have been some suspicion that someone had influenced Horner’s decision to revoke Sam, William, and Jesse’s freedom because the magistrates sitting on the Fauquier County Court investigated the matter before coming to the opinion that at the time of writing the codicil, Horner was “of sound & disposing mind [and] memory & that he was under no undue influence.” *Ibid.* Estate accounts reveal that Horner’s relatives Mary Horner purchased Sam for \$500, B. F. Horner purchased William for \$600, and Joseph Horner purchased Jacob for \$450. “The Estate of William Horner deceased in account with Inman Horner one of the Executors,” Fauquier County Records at Large, 1821-1881: n.p., microfilm.

¹⁴⁸ Suzanne Lebsock found this type of personalism common among property-holding women in Petersburg, Virginia, yet my study shows this trait was less gendered in northern Virginia because both male and female slaveholders demonstrated this type of individualized selection. Lebsock, *Free Women*.

slaveowners Susannah Saunders and William Horner demonstrated in their wills, impartiality also played a role in some cases in determining eligibility for freedom. While in the cases of enslaved persons Charles Bentley, Catharine, Sam, William, and Jacob, the willingness of a slaveholder to distinguish or not distinguish between an owner's chattel property meant restrictions on the few, in other cases a master's decision to manumit all enslaved laborers indicated that individuality was not the most important factor in all cases.

Some slaveholders manumitted enslaved persons based on demonstrated qualities that justified entrance into a free society. While these stated motivations obscure the negotiations between enslaved and slaveowner, in a possible exchange of freedom for loyal service, they do create an image of the worthy slave advanced by slaveowners and slaveholding communities. George proved to be "an honest sober and well disposed person" while Minor Pinn was described as "an Honest Industrious well behaved fellow," qualities that enhanced a person's contribution to society.¹⁴⁹ John H. Gaskins believed his servant Lemoine was "of sound mind & able to work & gain sufficient livelihood & maintenance," attributes that made him a financial asset rather than financial drain on community resources.¹⁵⁰ According to Stevens Thomson Mason, his slave Richard Williams displayed "honesty, integrity, gratitude, Honor and other estimable qualities that would ornament and give true dignity to any condition in society" despite Williams

¹⁴⁹ William Chilton to George, written April 24, 1804, proved in court May 28, 1804, Fauquier County Deed Book 15: 599; John Kemper to Minor Pinn, written September 24, 1805, proved in court September 24, 1805, Fauquier County Deed Book 16: 246.

¹⁵⁰ John H. Gaskins to Lemoine, written October 8, 1814, proved in court October 24, 1814, Fauquier County Deed Book 19: 292.

being “born to the humble and abject condition of a slave.”¹⁵¹ Claiming he was “fully satisfied that the mental and moral condition” of his servant Sandy Shumate “is such that his freedom would be of service to him,” John Penn Philips accordingly freed him in 1844.¹⁵²

Enumerating these qualities of sobriety, industriousness, honesty, ability to gain employment, and demonstrated morality reveals as much about the attributes desired in an enslaved servant as the desired values of members of a southern community. It also provided a means of recognizing individual performance as well as created an example for other enslaved persons who aspired to gain their freedom. Describing manumitted slaves in these terms also served the manumitter by employing the language of society, suggesting that these characteristics applied only to the truly remarkable individual, distinguishing him or her from the enslaved in general. Recognizing admirable qualities also confirmed the role of the benevolent master who could identify and reward enslaved persons in special cases. Still, the relatively few examples indicate that manumission due to positive qualities remained more of an aspiration than a realistic path to freedom for the vast majority of the enslaved.

Some motivations for manumission were less benevolent and more pragmatic in nature. Slaveholders incentivized a slave’s submissiveness and loyalty by offering

¹⁵¹ Stevens Thomson Mason to Richard Williams, written December 8, 1800, proved in court December 9, 1800, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2A: 241.

¹⁵² John P. Philips to Sandy Shumate, written August 20, 1844, proved in court August 26, 1844, Fauquier County Deed Book 44: 157.

freedom as a reward for good behavior.¹⁵³ George Nixon provided in his will for the future emancipation of Peter at age thirty, only upon certain conditions. Nixon decreed that if Peter “should estimate the blessings of Liberty & freedom at so low a rate as to intail [sic] slavery on his own Children by taking a wife that is a slave, he shall then remain a slave himself until he is thirty five years of age.” The reality of Nixon’s caution to Peter against fathering children with an enslaved woman (thereby rendering his children the property of his wife’s owner) illustrated the conflict that enslaved men faced when forming familial relationships. This also suggests that Nixon believed that continued enslavement would be necessary to offset the cost a female slave incurred while pregnant or caring for young children. Nixon’s provision encouraged Peter to delay finding a wife until he achieved his own freedom or seek a freed woman as a partner. Nixon further warned Peter that if during his period of enslavement Peter “shall be so ungrateful as to depart from that good behavior and faithful conduct which he has hitherto observed he shall then remain a slave until he is forty years old,” affirming that “good behavior and faithful conduct” would lead to freedom.¹⁵⁴

Ninian Magruder also considered time served and good conduct as requisites for freedom when he promised his slave Joseph “that if he behaves correctly till he arrives at the age of thirty one” Magruder would “free him at that time,” a conditional term of enslavement that Magruder requested that his daughter would observe after Magruder’s

¹⁵³ For a thoughtful discussion of the use of term slavery as an inducement for good behavior, see Max Grivno’s *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁴ Will of George Nixon, written July 24, 1797, proved in court December 8, 1800, Loudoun County Will Book F: 224.

death.¹⁵⁵ Fauquier slave mistress Josephine Denham devised possession of Henry, William, and Harriet to her husband, David Denham prior to her death in 1859. Her written instructions stated that “only upon strict obedience and good behavior” towards their master might Henry, William, and Harriet gain their freedom following her husband’s death. On the other hand, should Henry, William, or Harriet show any “faults or misconduct” Denham could “dispose of either” through sale. Mrs. Denham’s insistence on obedience set the terms and expectations for enslavement, yet it also held out a fragile hope that freedom could be acquired through “strict obedience and good behavior.”¹⁵⁶

Another pragmatic use of manumission was to retain enslaved persons during their most productive years of labor while negotiating terms of self-purchase that filled the slaveholder’s coffers. Many deeds indicate that a small fee of one dollar or a few shillings was delivered to an owner to gain title to freedom, but these token amounts merely reflected the required costs to file the deed or the tradition of providing a minimal exchange of currency for property. Other deeds reflect the changing standards for payment and differences in perceived values for securing freedom.

¹⁵⁵ Will of Ninian Magruder, written June 19, 1821, proved in court March 7, 1823, Fauquier County Will Book 9: 38-39.

¹⁵⁶ Instructions of Josephine Denham, written November 24, 1858 and proved in court March 28, 1859, Fauquier County Will Book 28: 93. Historian T. Stephen Whitman argued that slaves in urban Baltimore used the threat of running away or misbehavior as bargaining chips to negotiate contracts of conditional manumission in an environment where the labor market favored hired free workers over enslaved laborers. In these contracts Whitman contends slaveholders could demand service during the most productive years of a slave’s life to maximize return on their investment. Slaveholders with limited numbers of slaves heeded these threats in some cases to avoid a total loss of their investment should the slave run away. Whitman noted, “the promised freeing of an individual, rather than weakening the social fabric of slavery, may in fact have reinforced it by providing an outlet for the resistant or potentially troublesome slave.” T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 66-67 (quote).

There were many examples of self-purchase recorded in county records. Anthony earned his freedom after his master's death by paying his master's son £50 in 1794.¹⁵⁷

Enslaved man Peter negotiated his sale from John Churchill to Nathaniel Gray for £50.11 whereupon Gray promptly manumitted Peter in 1795, thereby rescuing Peter from his position as mortgaged property and any future claims to Churchill's creditors.¹⁵⁸

Enslaved man James earned his freedom from John Rector in 1796 "for value received" suggesting an exchange of either money or past services prior to manumission.

In 1803 Thomas Kirk "paid the said Hancock Eustace Sixty pounds Virginia Currancy [sic] in full for his freedom."¹⁵⁹ In addition to "the many good Services rendered" by Hannah to her master, Joseph Hale required an additional fifty dollars from his servant, Hannah, before manumitting her in 1800.¹⁶⁰ Seven years later in 1807 Hale accepted six hundred dollars "lawful money of the United States" for releasing his three slaves Dorcas, Jacob and Dorcas from his "right title and interest as well [as] to their persons [and] services & estates."¹⁶¹ Negroe Priss, Amey Grayson, and Admiral each paid their respective owners \$200 to secure their freedom.¹⁶² Like the payments made by

¹⁵⁷ Ashby's receipt, Fauquier Deed Book 11: 488. Ashby heir John Ashby considered Anthony's payment "a full compensation for his freedom" in the receipt recorded with the Fauquier County Clerk. Another enslaved man belonging to the Ashby estate, Will Ashby, was purchased from the Ashby heirs by Rachael Alford who manumitted Will "for and in consideration of the regard" which she bore to Will and for the "further consideration" of the token fee of five shillings paid to Alford. Alford to Ashby, written February 21, 1795, proved in court February 23, 1795, Fauquier County Deed Book 12: 151.

¹⁵⁸ Churchill to Gray, written January 10, 1795, proved in court January 26, 1795, Fauquier County Deed Book 12: 108.

¹⁵⁹ Ann Eustace and Hancock Eustace to Thomas Kirk, written January 14, 1803, proved in court March 1, 1803, Fauquier County Deed Book 15: 291.

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Hale to Hannah, written May 24, 1800, proved in court September 23, 1805, Fauquier County Deed Book 16: 210.

¹⁶¹ Joseph Hale to Dorcas, Jacob, & Dorcas, written July 18, 1807, recorded in court October 5, 1807, Prince William County Deed Book 3: 305.

¹⁶² Casper Johnson to Negroe Priss, written March 12, 1804, recorded in court March 12, 1804, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2D: 385; Presley Cordell to Amey Grayson, written January 9, 1826, proved in

George and Winney Rivers to secure their freedom, these amounts likely represented a fraction of the market value that owners could realize if they merely wanted to liquidate property, so in cases where slaves paid less than market value to redeem their freedom, other considerations must have played a role in negotiating freedom. Some owners purposely hid the true financial terms of the contract by merely acknowledging they received a “valuable consideration,” a phrase that often appears in deeds, rather than a specific sum.

In other cases, the contracted price for freedom reflected other financial considerations. As discussed previously, two Fauquier County slaveholders, James Deshields and Samuel Chilton, each demanded and received one thousand dollars from their respective slaves, Gabriel Green and Richard Davis, in 1838 and 1839 in exchange for their deeds of emancipation.¹⁶³ One thousand dollars represented much more than the market value for a typical field hand at that time so some speculation can be made regarding these singular transactions. Green or Davis might have been skilled artisans, especially in the blacksmith trade, an occupation that typically generated a significant income for owners or for slaves able to hire out their own time.¹⁶⁴ Another possibility was that Deshields and Chilton considered the exorbitant fee ample compensation for the loss of future service or financial gain, and this consideration trumped any altruistic motives. It is noteworthy that these two deeds represented the highest sums reported in transferring freedom to enslaved persons among these three counties from 1800 to 1865.

court January 9, 1826, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 3L: 279; Charles Shepherd to Admiral, written February 19, 1829, proved in court June 27, 1831, Loudoun County Deed Book 3W: 134.

¹⁶³ Fauquier County Deed Book 38: 247; and Fauquier County Deed Book 39: 204.

¹⁶⁴ Reuben French’s blacksmith Andrew was valued at \$500 in Fauquier County in 1826. Fauquier County Will Book 9: 383. Blacksmith Billy was valued at \$500 in 1830. Prince William County Will Book N: 280.

The appearance of these deeds almost one year apart could be a coincidence or might suggest that the owners wanted to set a different sort of example that freedom could be possible, only at great financial sacrifice.

Slaveholders wishing to manumit slaves had to reconcile legal restrictions with more pecuniary considerations in estate planning. In 1833 Benjamin Hitt was moved “from Motives of humanity” to manumit his slave, Henry Payne, yet this act proved to be a singular deed. When writing his will in 1836, Hitt neglected to express any further “motives of humanity” towards the rest of his enslaved force (three persons by 1840). Instead, he required that the fruits of their labor be reserved for the use and support of his elderly wife and niece, a decision that may have been prompted by the rising financial crisis that led to the Panic of 1837.¹⁶⁵

Responsibility to pay debts owed by the estate superseded any wishes to turn enslaved property (valued as an estate asset) into a freed person. Susan Whitley wanted to free her enslaved people and believed her estate free from debt yet acknowledged the possibility that a debt could be presented to her estate after her death. Whitley ordered that her servants “may be hired out until there is a sufficient sum raised to discharge the debts proved against me and to clothe them well, then I desire that they may be free.”

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin Hitt to Henry Payne, written September 23, 1833, proved in court September 24, 1833, Fauquier County Deed Book 34: 4. Hitt’s will written in 1836 and proved in 1844 included a \$500 bequest to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church and lenient terms for repayment of debts owed to his estate. Hitt left the income generated by his estate to his wife and the residue of his estate, minus specific monetary legacies, to a female relation. Hitt’s will includes no mention of his enslaved workforce. Will of Benjamin Hitt, Fauquier County Will Book 19: 116-8. Census records indicate that in 1830 seven slaves resided with Benjamin Hitt. By 1840 this number had diminished to three enslaved persons. 1830 U.S. Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, microfilm series: M19; Roll: 194; Page: 427, via Ancestry.com. 1830 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. 1840 U.S. Federal Census, Leeds Parish, Fauquier County, Virginia, microfilm roll 558, page 204, image 418; via Ancestry.com. 1840 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

Whitley further stipulated that her enslaved servants “may not be hired out more than one year if possible,” thus indicating Whitley’s wish that termination of enslavement occur relatively soon after her death.¹⁶⁶

Slaveholders not guided by pecuniary concerns sometimes articulated more personal motivations when manumitting slaves. White fathers who acknowledged their biracial enslaved offspring sometimes used bequests of manumission to provide for their children. Other slaveholders were moved by benevolence, humanity, or religious mandates to divest themselves of enslaved property. Because these motivations often conflicted with community standards, such legal devices were at risk.

White fathers of biracial enslaved children sometimes used manumission to acknowledge their offspring and provide a future free from enslavement. It may never been known how many men showed favor for their biological, yet enslaved children through manumission, as few men acknowledged outright that connection in public documents even when these relationships were often common public knowledge. Richard McCarty Chichester might have created a second family with his enslaved servant Peg Morin. In 1806 Chichester manumitted Peg Morin (also spelled Moran) and her seven enslaved children just days before the restrictive residency requirements of the 1806 Removal Act took effect.¹⁶⁷ Twelve years later, when Chichester wrote his will in 1818, he left only token sums to “lawful children” stating he had “already provided amply for them” most likely in the settlement created when he separated from his wife. Chichester

¹⁶⁶ Will of Susan Whitley, written November 11, 1845, proved in court January 26, 1846, Fauquier County Will Book 19: 418.

¹⁶⁷ Richard McCarty Chichester to Peggy & her children, written April 29, 1806, proved in court April 29, 1806, Fauquier County Deed Book 16: 412.

then divided his remaining estate into ten equal shares, one share to his “natural daughter Sarah Mason,” two shares to William Morin, son of Peggy, and one share each to Peggy Morin and her other six children. In an attempt to protect the inheritance he bestowed upon Peg’s children, Chichester placed his will into the care of Peg’s sons William and John Moran who delivered the will to the Fauquier County Court for recording on November 24, 1829.¹⁶⁸ Chichester’s white children immediately contested the will, and relations between the Chichesters and the Morans remained acrimonious for years. These events suggest that Chichester, even if not the biological father of Peg Moran’s children, maintained a special relationship with them.

In other cases, a slaveholder acknowledged paternity in manumission documents. In 1828 Charles Curtis freed six of his slaves, Henry, Nancy, Charles, John, Betsy, and James, “they all being his children” as well as Lizzy and Judith, as he had “reason to believe” they were his natural granddaughters.¹⁶⁹ White fathers who devised large bequests or emancipation to biracial children and enslaved women faced public backlash and often harsh reprisals from family members. In 1817 the *Washington City Weekly Gazette* noted examples of such cases in Maryland of white men cohabitating with “black hussies” and devising large estates to the women. The editor opined that while he found

¹⁶⁸ Will of Richard McCarty Chichester, written September 16, 1818, proved in court March 24, 1830, Fauquier County Will Book 11: 165-166. William and John Moran first presented Chichester’s will in court on November 24, 1829 and George J. M. Chichester quickly contested its legitimacy. Finally, upon testimony of two of the three surviving witnesses, the Superior Court of Fauquier County affirmed Chichester’s will. *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Charles Curtis to Henry Curtis &c., written October 6, 1828, proved in court October 6, 1828, Prince William County Deed Book 11: 341, microfilm. According to the Curtis family history, after freeing his children, Charles Curtis decided to take them to Ohio but the group opted to remain in Wheeling, (West) Virginia. Three of Curtis’s sons remained in Wheeling when the rest of the family returned to the Sudley Springs neighborhood in Prince William County, Virginia. Curtis Family History, Curtis Family File, RELIC, Bull Run Library, Manassas, Virginia.

no impropriety in bequeathing property to “*deserving negroes*” he did object to the practice of cohabitation, believing it “more injurious to the *morals* of society than devising large estates to them.”¹⁷⁰ Clearly, wills gathered both public and private interest and legacies to enslaved persons garnered particular scrutiny.

Only rarely did expressions of benevolence and anti-slavery sentiments enter into legal documents, thus making the following documents more critical to understanding how personal convictions outweighed society’s expectations. Andrew Graham manumitted forty-four year old Henson Smith “from Motives of benevolence” in 1854.¹⁷¹ Steven Thomson Mason wrote that he “considered it a duty to rescue [his slave Richard Williams] from that state in which accident has so improperly placed him” and availed himself “of the power which the Laws of this Commonwealth give” to emancipate and set free Williams.¹⁷² Frances Blackwell was moved “out of [her] regard for, and earnest desire to improve the condition of [her] slave Maria, sometimes called Maria Parker and her five children” and hoped that they “shall from henceforth enjoy as full freedom as if they had been born free, under the laws of this Commonwealth, hoping and trusting that they may so use the gift I now make them, that it may be to them a real benefit.”¹⁷³

Some owners expressed the view that slavery was wrong or should not be continued. Martha E. Peyton included the provision in her will, written shortly before her

¹⁷⁰ “Negro Devises,” from the *Washington City Weekly Gazette* as printed in the *Genius of Liberty*, May 27, 1817. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷¹ Andrew Graham to Henson Smith, written January 16, 1854, proved in court January 27, 1854, Loudoun Deed Book 5H: 201.

¹⁷² Mason to Williams, written December 8, 1800, proved in court December 9, 1800, Loudoun County Deed Book 2A: 241.

¹⁷³ Frances Blackwell to Maria Parker and her children, written December 18, 1838, proved in court February 25, 1839, Fauquier County Deed Book 38: 391.

death in 1831, that “all my Negroes, without exception, shall be emancipated and have their freedom.” Peyton expressed her reasons for the manumission writing that her enslaved servants had “served me during my life and as I am unwilling for them to be kept in slavery or owned by any person after my death.”¹⁷⁴ Sarah Tasker freed her servant Clarry upon her death, declaring to her witnesses “I do not wish you or my children to try to enslave her as you know that I never intended that she was to serve any one.”¹⁷⁵ Fauquier slaveholder Peyton Taylor freed his enslaved man Thom in his will written shortly before his death in 1843. Taylor justified this move, either to himself or to his family and executors by asserting that he had “always been conscious in the belief that slavery, in its broad terms is wrong.”¹⁷⁶

John H. Pettit took a stronger position against slavery in his will written in 1830 and probated in 1831. Pettit stated it had “long been my firm opinion that all human beings have a right to their freedom (unless they have forfeited it by crimes)” and that he could not “reconcile it to my conscience not to do something to ameliorate the condition of the slaves I possess.” Pettit decided that all the slaves he owned at the time would be freed when his wife died. Pettit stipulated that if the 1806 Residency Act was still in force his estate should pay for transporting his freed slaves “to a place where they may better

¹⁷⁴ Will of Martha E. Peyton, written June 30, 1831, proved in court October 3, 1831, Prince William County Will Book N: 383.

¹⁷⁵ Will of Sarah Tasker, proved in court April 6, 1846, Prince William County Will Book P: 254.

¹⁷⁶ Will of Peyton Taylor, written April 22, 1843, proved in court June 26, 1843. Fauquier County Will Book 18: 142. Taylor realized that Thom would not be able to find freedom in Virginia and directed that Thom be hired out until accruing a sum of at least \$90 or until “his earnings shall be sufficient to remove him from this State to some part of America or of the world where he may choose to go, so that he may enjoy his freedom.” *Ibid.*

enjoy their liberty,” but if the freed slaves “remain in this neighbourhood” Pettit requested that

all my neighbours and friends, and all persons who shall become acquainted with the contents of this will, for the sake of Humanity or for any regard they may have had for the Testator, to suffer them the said negroes to remain undisturbed and enjoy their freedom so long as they continue to behave well.

Pettit added a provision that his nephew, John Walden, a resident of Bloomfield in Jefferson County, Ohio, come to Fauquier County after the death of Pettit’s wife to “assist my negroes (if any of them can be persuaded to go) to the State of Ohio or other place where they can enjoy their Liberty.”¹⁷⁷ Moved by his convictions, yet cognizant of legal restrictions and potential antagonism towards freed slaves in his neighborhood, John Pettit attempted to ameliorate the complications following manumission.

Some owners might have been moved by religious convictions to manumit their slaves. Determining religious affiliations of manumitters is difficult considering the limits of extant records of churches and meeting houses, yet some identification can be ascertained.¹⁷⁸ Reverend James Craig liberated and set free all his slaves in his 1792 Fauquier County will and included further financial bequests of “stocks, implements of Husbandry and Haushold furniture” for the families of Old Tom and Winny and their six children as well as for Bob and his three children.¹⁷⁹ Methodist itinerant preacher John Littlejohn freed Charles Gibson symbolically on the 4th of July in 1800 and Rachel the

¹⁷⁷ Will of John H. Pettit, written July 24, 1830, proved in court February 28, 1831, Fauquier County Will Book 12: 21. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁷⁸ A limited number of connections between manumitters and church membership could be identified due to the small number of extant records of churches and meeting houses.

¹⁷⁹ Will of Rev. James Craig, written July 2, 1792, proved in court, June 22, 1801, Fauquier County Will Book 3: 303-304.

following year.¹⁸⁰ Nimrod Farrow deeded land “for the object of building a house of public Worship on, for all religious denominations of Christians; with the reserve, that the Baptist society should have the advantage” in 1829 and allowed his enslaved woman, Milly, permission to join the Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church in 1830.¹⁸¹ After Nimrod’s death, his wife, Dorothea joined the Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church in 1830.¹⁸² In her 1838 will, proved in court in 1843, Dorothea “Dolly” Farrow provided for lifetime support of three elderly slaves and manumitted the rest of her enslaved laborers immediately upon her death, or if the Removal Act were still in place, Farrow devised that those old enough would be hired out to “humane and kind masters” in order to raise funds for their transport “to some country where they can enjoy their freedom” or be sold to a master of their choice if they elected not to leave Virginia.¹⁸³

The Roszell family of Loudoun County held a long connection with the Methodist faith. Matriarch Sarah Roszell was a Methodist class leader.¹⁸⁴ After the death of her husband, Sarah and her children individually and jointly manumitted Cyrus, Nancy,

¹⁸⁰ John Littlejohn to Charles Gibson, written July 4, 1800, recorded January 13, 1801, Loudoun County Deed Book 2A: 257; John Littlejohn to Rachel, written January 1, 1804, proved in court January 13, 1801, Loudoun County Deed Book 2A: 259.

¹⁸¹ Document 17: Letter of Nimrod Farrow, March 16, 1829, as found in E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 2001. Document 21: Letter of Permission or Milly, January 15, 1830, *Ibid.*, 2003.

¹⁸² E. Lee Shepard, ed. “Records of Upper Goose Creek Baptist Church, 1801-1859,” *Virginia Baptist Register*, no. 40 (2001), 2015, fn15.

¹⁸³ Will of Dolly Farrow, written January 30, 1838, proved in court January 23, 1843, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 68-70. In 1830, Dolly Farrow had seventy-one enslaved laborers in her household. 1830 U.S. Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, p.459. In 1840 Farrow reported twenty-six enslaved persons in her household. 1840 U. S. Federal Census, Leeds Manor, Fauquier County, Virginia.

¹⁸⁴ James Edward Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference from the Planting of Methodism in 1773 to the Division of the Conference in 1857* (Baltimore: King Bros. Printers, 1907), 32, <<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008922517/Home>>

Suckey, Betsey, Milly, Kuzziah, and Susan.¹⁸⁵ Her son, Stephen G. Roszell, served as a minister of the Methodist faith from 1789-1841.¹⁸⁶ When he manumitted Kuzziah and Susan, Stephen Roszell cited both religious reasons and republican ideals as motivations for limiting the term of enslavement that Kuzziah and Susan must serve. Roszell believed “that Slavery is inconsistent with Christian scriptures” and “contrary to the bill of rights which declares that all men are made free and equal [and] incompatiable [sic] with true Republican principals subversive of every principal of humanity Benevolence Justice & religion.” Roszell’s religious beliefs prompted his assertion that “no man can do unto others as he would they should do unto him agreeable to the doctrines of Jesus Christ and be a slave holder.” Nonetheless these beliefs did not initiate an immediate emancipation of sixteen year old Kuzziah and fourteen year old Susan. Instead, the girls would have to wait until they respectively turned twenty-one to be freed; any of their future male children would also serve until age twenty-five and female children until age twenty-one.¹⁸⁷ While these conditions for freedom seem contrary to Roszell’s asserted religious beliefs and ideals, retaining ownership of the girls and their future children offered them protection against county Overseers of the Poor, who by law could bind out impoverished free children, both white and black, until they reached their age of majority.

¹⁸⁵ Anna Roszel to Cyrus, Nancy, Suckey, Betsey, & Milly, written December 31, 1823, proved in court December 31, 1823, Loudoun County Deed Book 3G: 300-301; Stephen C. Roszel to Kuzziah & Susan, written January 13, 1824, proved in court January 12, 1824, Loudoun County Deed Book 3G: 360.

¹⁸⁶ Stephen G. Roszell, son of Stephen and Sarah Roszell, (1770-1841) began service as an itinerant Methodist minister as early as 1789. Over the years, he served as a Methodist minister in Piedmont Virginia, northern Virginia, Georgetown, Baltimore, his last circuit in Loudoun County. William B. Sprague, D. D. *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit; or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished Clergymen of the Methodist Denomination in the United States, From its Commencement to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-five with an Historical Introduction*, Vol. VII (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1861), 179-180.

¹⁸⁷ Stephen G. Roszel to Kuzziah & Susan, written January 12, 1824, proved in court January 12, 1824, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 3G: 360.

Religious fervor did not always lead to emancipation. Fauquier resident Thomas Skinker used the deed process for two very different purposes. On two occasions Skinker gifted slaves to favored local Baptist ministers. In 1795 Skinker gave the enslaved boy Charles to John Hickerson of Culpeper County “for and in consideration of the Love and affection which he hath and beareth unto the said John Hickerson as a Baptist minister.”¹⁸⁸ Five months later Skinker transferred ownership of “one Negro boy named Aaron” to William Tristoe, a Baptist Minister of the Gospel in Stafford County also citing his “love and affection” for Tristoe as the motivating factor.¹⁸⁹ Yet Skinker also proved capable of granting freedom. In 1800 Skinker manumitted Edward Morton both “in consideration of Natural Affection” that he bore to Morton as well as the payment of one hundred pounds paid by Morton.¹⁹⁰

At various times church discipline played a role in governing the actions of slaveholders. Leesburg Methodist minister John Littlejohn noted in 1818 that the conference’s rules prevented “our Members & Preechers, Local and Travelling” from “buying & selling a Man, Woman or Child with a view to their own personal emolument and advantage.” The Methodist rule further required that those “who buy a Slave or Slaves, where the civil Laws admits [should] emancipate them when remuneration shall

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Skinker to John Hickerson, written March 1, 1795, proved in court September 28, 1795, Fauquier County Deed Book 12: 291.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas Skinker to William Tristoe, written August 1, 1795, proved in court September 28, 1795, Fauquier County Deed Book 12: 352.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Skinker to Edward Morton, written February 20, 1800, proved in court April 28, 1800, Fauquier County Deed Book 14: 787.

have been made, Provided the Member or Preecher can do so, without involving themselves or others in future obligation.”¹⁹¹

Church discipline further affected northern Virginia slaveholders following the split of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the mid-1840s. The Baltimore Conference, connected to the Methodist Episcopal Church North, claimed most of the church parishes in Prince William, Loudoun, and Fauquier counties, though allowed the churches located along its southern border some autonomy in deciding conference allegiance.¹⁹² Sparked by the new rules governing slave ownership in the Methodist Episcopal Church that prohibited its ministers from owning slaves, Prince William minister John Towles manumitted his slaves, a trend not readily apparent among the clergy in the other two counties.¹⁹³

In October of 1845 Reverend John Towles of Prince William County manumitted Violet Peachy; Anna Pinckard and her three children Mary, Violet, and Eliza; Mary Taylor; Emily Sanders and Emily’s two children Maria and Christianna during the crisis

¹⁹¹ “Journal of [Rev.] John Littlejohn,” transcribed by Annie L. Winstead, *Northern Virginia Genealogy* 5:1-4 (2000), 508.

¹⁹² The *Loudoun Chronicle* reported that those “who choose to belong to the Baltimore Conference, and those who prefer the Virginia Conference, form two parties in Leesburg, and a contest has commenced evincing the most ardent feelings on both sides.” “M. E. Church,” *The Loudoun Chronicle*, March 10, 1848, microfilm. One result of the split in the Methodist Church was a contest over rights to Methodist properties in territory claimed by both the Baltimore Conference (Methodist Episcopal North) and the Virginia Conference (Methodist Episcopal South). The Wesley Chapel, located within the Warrenton Circuit, became part of litigation in this conflict and Judge Tyler’s ruling left the possession of the Wesley Chapel as well as the Sudley Methodist Chapel and parsonage in Prince William County under the control of the Methodist Episcopal North Church and the Baltimore Conference. “Church Case Decided,” *The Loudoun Chronicle*, October 18, 1850, microfilm. See also the publication of the Wesley Chapel Court case in Jacob Hume, et al., *The Northern Methodist Church vs the Southern Methodist Church* ([United States]: J. & G. S. Gideon, printers, [1849?]), Library of Virginia.

¹⁹³ Members of Fauquier County congregations held to the rules of the Baltimore Conference challenged the conference to alter conference boundaries claiming that non-slaveholding clergy did not have the cultural capacity or understanding to minister to slaveholding congregations. Hume, Jacob, et al., *The Northern Methodist Church vs the Southern Methodist Church* ([United States]: J. & G. S. Gideon, printers, [1849?]).

over slaveholding in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the first recorded deeds of manumission in Prince William County since 1831.¹⁹⁴ Later touted by his descendants as acts of benevolence, the manumission of Towles' slaves in fact preceded their permanent removal from Virginia as Towles arranged for his freed slaves to be taken by the American Colonization Society to Liberia. They sailed on the ship *Roanoke*, in November of 1845.¹⁹⁵ Towles' deeds of manumission sparked only a minor revival in owners emancipating slaves in Prince William after a long hiatus since 1833. Besides Towles in 1845, only Lucien Dade in 1846, Robert Alexander in 1850, and Joseph Janney in 1856 emancipated slaves through deeds of manumission between 1833 and 1865 indicating the very limited ability of enslaved persons to acquire freedom by deed of manumission in Prince William County compared to Fauquier and Loudoun counties (see figure 38).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Towles must have acquired most of these women and children after 1840 as he reported only five slaves in his household on the 1840 census, two of whom were adult males. By 1850 Towles did not report any slaves and he and his family lived with Prince William's Clerk of Superior Court, Philip D. Lipscomb in Brentsville. 1840 Federal Census, Eastern District, Prince William County, Virginia, Roll 574, page 298, Ancestry.com accessed 10 July 2015; 1850 Federal Census, Prince William County, Virginia, Roll M432_970, page 158B, Ancestry.com accessed 10 July 2015. Towles did not entirely give up slaveholding. By 1860 John Towles held four slaves in trust (a 44 year old woman, a 10 and 8 year old girls and a 4 year old boy) for S. E. Towles and her seven children and maintained charge of one 18 year old enslaved woman, owned by Anna C. Chilton of Lancaster County, Virginia. 1860 Federal Slave Schedules, Prince William County, Virginia Ancestry.com. 1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Keith Kehlbeck, *Gone to God: A Civil War Family's Ultimate Sacrifice* (Rolling Meadows, Illinois: Windy City Publishers, 2013), 13-14. The *Virginia Emigrants to Liberia* website includes emigration notes for Sylva Jackson, Violet Peachey, Anna Pinkard, Eliza Pinkard, Mary Pinkard, Violet Pinkard, Christiana Sanders, Emily Sanders, Maria Sanders, and Polly Taylor, all emancipated by John Towles and all included in the ship's manifest for the *Roanoke*. *Virginia Emigrants to Liberia*, website, citing manuscript ship's list for *Roanoke*, Microfilm reel 314, Rolls of the American Colonization Society as found in the Library of Congress. <<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/liberia>>. Ten persons liberated by the Rev. John Towles sailed on the ship *Roanoke* from Norfolk on November 5, 1845. "Our Late Expedition for Liberia," *African Repository*, December 1, 1845.

¹⁹⁶ John Towles to Sylva Jackson, written October 28, 1845, proved in court October 29, 1845, Prince William County Deed Book 19: 77; John Towles to Violet Peachy, written October 28, 1845, proved in court October 29, 1845, Prince William County Deed Book 19: 78; John Towles to Anna Pinckard, &c.,

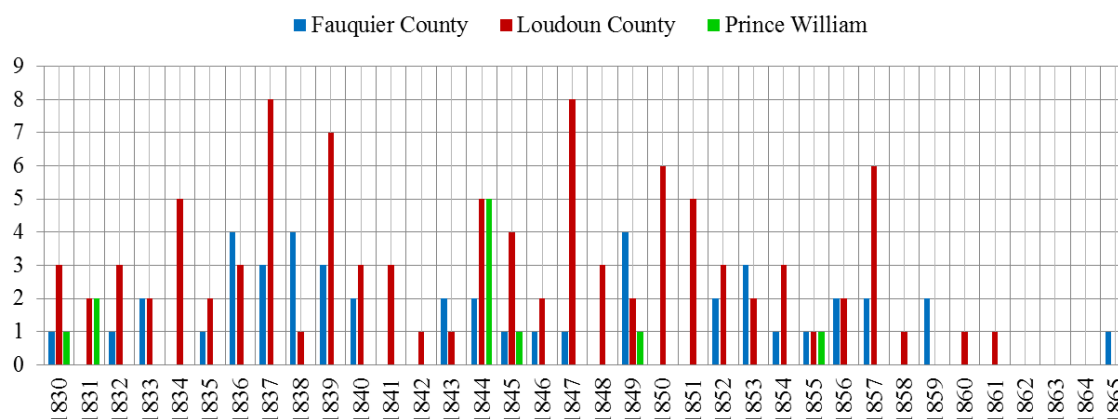


Figure 38. Deeds of manumission written 1830 to 1865.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 33-59; Loudoun County Deed Books 3T-5T; Prince William County Land Record Book; and Prince William County Deed Books 12-23.

The decision to manumit was not taken lightly. Some slaveholders who expressed in interest in manumitting changed their minds and wills. Enslaved woman Dafny was to be given an annuity of 30 shillings per year and her freedom after the death of her master, James White, but shortly before his death White changed the conditions, annulled the annuity, and devised that Dafny “during her life be a Slave in the family” to be equally divided with White’s other property among his heirs. White did not provide any explanation for his change of heart, or indicate whether Dafny had displeased him.

written October 28, 1845, proved in court October 29, 1845, Prince William County Deed Book 19: 78; John Towles to Mary Taylor, written October 28, 1845, proved in court October 29, 1845, Prince William County Deed Book 19: 79; John Towles to Emily Sanders &c, written October 28, 1845, proved in court October 29, 1845, Prince William County Deed Book 19: 79; Robert Alexander to James Hayes, written June 29, 1850, proved in court June 29, 1850, Prince William County Deed Book 21: 67-68; Joseph Janney emancipated Rachel Carter and Rachel’s children Thomas, Sarah, Mary, Louisa, Addison, and Cornelius Carter. Joseph Janney to Rachel Carter, etc., written September 13, 1856, proved in court September 2, 1856, Prince William County Deed Book 23: 416.

Considering that Dafny's potential freedom in 1803 (at the time White wrote the codicil) was not bound by residency restrictions, it is doubtful she would have given up her opportunity for freedom unless if she was of advanced age and desired to remain with her children, even under the threat of being separated through a division of the estate.¹⁹⁷

Slaveholders faced the decision of how to conform manumissions with Virginia's laws on free black residency, community sentiments towards the presence of free blacks, and the knowledge that these two factors might compel emancipated slaves to leave behind enslaved families in Virginia. In these cases, masters might stipulate that manumission was contingent upon agreement to move to Liberia under the guidance of the American Colonization Society or settle in a state friendly to free black settlement. Slaveholders might offer financial support to enable freed slaves to travel and settle outside Virginia. In rare cases, slaveholders created their own version of quasi-freedom for select enslaved persons and hoped that family, estate administrators, and the broader community would respect their wishes to enforce these extra-legal enclaves.

Alfred Murray decided to manumit his sixteen slaves when he wrote his will in 1846. The emancipated slaves would be sent to Liberia via the American Colonization Society "provided the laws of Virginia shall prohibit them from remaining in that state." Murray allowed for possible change in Virginia's residency laws. He set aside the money arising from a sale of his entire estate "for the use and comfort of them, the aforesaid slaves in transporting them to Africa," and left a small legacy for his sister, Alice N.

¹⁹⁷ Will of James White, written October 27, 1801, proved in court April 3, 1809 and Codicil to James White's will, written February 21, 1803, Prince William County Will Book I: 425.

Luckett.¹⁹⁸ By 1853 when Murray revised his will, he merely directed his former slaves be sent to “the free colony of Liberia in Africa” and that his entire estate “be turned into money by sale thereof for the use comfort & behoof of my said slaves.” Apparently Murray had given up on the possibility that Virginia residency laws would open the door to unrestricted free black residency or that attitudes towards freed blacks would soften in Fauquier County.¹⁹⁹

Baptist Minister Rev. George Love of Fauquier left the power of determining the future of his enslaved force with his son-in-law, Rev. Traverse D. Herndon when he wrote his will in 1853. Rev. Herndon could “make any change” with the slaves either for their comfort or to protect “the relation of husband & wife.” Yet Love also indicated that “any act of outrage or disobedience on the part of any of them” would authorize Herndon to take any action he deemed proper to maintain control. Herndon apparently believed that colonization to Liberia provided the best future for Love’s slaves. When writing his own will only a year later in 1854, Rev. Herndon devised that “the servants formerly the property of Col. George Love...shall be sent to Liberia.”

At that time, the number of enslaved persons left to the Love-Herndon estate totaled nearly fifty and state funding for the colonization of free and freed blacks had been exhausted. Herndon also realized that the expenses for the enslaved people to travel to Baltimore to meet with a representative of the American Colonization Society for

¹⁹⁸ Will of Alfred Murray, written January 8, 1846, proved in court May 28, 1860, Fauquier County Will Book 28: 398.

¹⁹⁹ Will of Alfred Murray, written October 28, 1853, proved in court June 25, 1860, Fauquier County Will Book 29: 12. Murray apparently wrote multiple wills as at least eight were presented to the Fauquier Court on June 25, 1860.

transport to Africa exceeded his means.²⁰⁰ The Colonization Society publicized the emancipation of Love's slaves and solicited donations to fund their transport to Liberia and cited Virginia laws that provided no funding for masters wishing to send manumitted slaves to Liberia. *The Virginian Colonizationist* appealed to the public's generosity by forecasting that failure to receive enough donations meant that "this promising company of emigrants must be disappointed in obtaining their freedom and a home in Liberia."²⁰¹

A similar appeal for funding publicized in the *African Repository* noted that the forty-eight Herndon slaves comprised "one family" connected by marriage to eight free blacks and to "seven slaves belonging to other persons." If funding were made available through private donations, these abroad spouses would also accompany the Love-Herndon slaves to Liberia. The group included several literate slaves. At least "one-third of them" were "professors of religion" and the funding appeal described the extended family as "industrious, intelligent, and anxious to go to Liberia."²⁰² In addition, the minister's brother, Thaddeus Herndon, also desired to send an enslaved family comprised of man and wife and six children with the group.²⁰³ Subscribers from eight states and the District of Columbia responded with contributions, though only two of the listed donors hailed from Virginia while the bulk resided in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New

²⁰⁰ Will of Traverse D. Herndon, written September 2, 1854, proved in court September 25, 1854, Fauquier County Will Book 25: 274-275.

²⁰¹ *The Virginian Colonizationist*, Richmond, Virginia, August 1854.

²⁰² "Special Appeal for Funds – Liberal Responses from our Friends," *African Repository*, Vol. 30, September 1854, 274

²⁰³ "Special Appeal for Funds – Liberal Responses from our Friends," *African Repository*, Vol. 30, September 1854, 274.

York.²⁰⁴ Freedom for the Love-Herndon slaves only came with their removal from Virginia, a move finalized in December 1854 when at least fifty-seven men, women, and children formerly owned by the Love estate sailed on the ship *Euphrasia* to Liberia.²⁰⁵

Slaveholders wishing to manumit but also desirous to either reduce the free black population through colonization or provide an option to leave Virginia for some location more tolerant of free black settlement decided to finance resettlement plans. In October 1832 Prince William mistress Catharine Hancock devised a process of gradual emancipation for her enslaved laborers that freed her slaves older than twenty-five years. Hancock's executors could hire out the older slaves and use the profits from their hires to "aid them in commencing upon what will be to them a new Theatre of life." Slaves younger than twenty-five years would remain under the care of Hancock's estate executors, to be "used by them or hired out at their discretion." One-third of their hires would go towards a fund to care for the slaves after freedom, the other two-thirds devised to two of Hancock's relatives.²⁰⁶ Realizing the hazards of free status in Virginia after the

²⁰⁴ "Special Appeal for Funds – Liberal Responses from our Friends," *African Repository*, Vol. 30, September 1854, 278-280.

²⁰⁵ *Euphrasia* ship list, *Virginia Emigrants to Liberia* <<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/liberia/index.php?page=Virginia%20Emigrants%20To%20Liberia>>. Other freed persons with the same surnames as the Love-Herndon group left Fauquier County for Liberia on the *Euphrasia* suggesting that some abroad wives and families were able to leave together. One of the Love-Herndon slaves, a man named Madison Gaskins, returned to the United States in 1855 in order to raise the funds necessary to purchase his abroad wife and their four children, aged 19, 8, 5, and 1 year old, citing that he could "neither be useful nor happy in a strange land, while [the fate of his family] is left in uncertainty." Gaskins appealed to potential subscribers for the costs of purchase, transport, and settlement in Liberia estimated at \$2,500 in a broadly published *New York Daily Times* article. In the article, written with the assistance and approval of colonization society leaders from Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New York, Gaskins was described as "an intelligent and upright man, about 38 years of age, and...acquainted with farming and the carpenter's trade." "To the Benevolent," *New York Daily Times*, June 30, 1855.

²⁰⁶ Will of Catharine Hancock, written October 4, 1832, proved November 4, 1832, Prince William County Deed Book O: 119-121. Hancock's executors offered at a public sale in Brentsville in January 1849 the remaining enslaved children aged between three and eight years for sale for the "unexpired term...to serve until 25 years of age" from the Hancock estate, demonstrating the span of time that Hancock's slaves

1806 Removal act and the post-Nat Turner discussion of forced removal, Hancock provided that Lucy and Kate could either take emancipation or serve Hancock's close female friends, leaving them the choice to accept freedom or a modified form of enslavement. Hancock correctly realized that granting freedom was not enough and created some form of initial financial security and choice for a post-emancipation future.

Mary Sullivan willed that after her death two of her slaves, Leah and Melinda, be manumitted. She also specified that they should be hired out "three or more years to raise a sufficient fund to defray the expense of manumission and pay their way to whatever place, state or country that they may choose to go to."²⁰⁷ Margaret Smoot made particular arrangements for three of her slaves in her will. She freed her "two old Slaves" identified as George and Eve and requested the court "appoint some person to be guardian for them and to see to the supporting of them out of the proceeds of my Estate after my debts are paid." For her enslaved man, Jack, Smoot devised that Jack be freed and sent to Walter McCoy of Fauquier County to "Stand as master and guardian for said Jack and hire him out for wages or to keep him, himself." Smoot requested that if Jack could not "remain free in this Commonwealth," then McCoy or the Fauquier Court should "pursue the course the legislature has adopted for the Emancipation of slaves" by

continued to bear children before they reached the age of twenty-five and that each of the children born prior to that time remained under the control of Hancock's administrators. "Negroes for Sale," *Alexandria Gazette*, December 19, 1848. Some of Hancock's slaves did take freedom like Leanah Flood who registered with the Prince William County Court on April 6, 1840.

²⁰⁷ Will of Mary Sullivan, written July 11, 1859, proved October 22, 1860, Fauquier County Will Book 29: 102. Sullivan also provided that if Leah and Melinda opted to "remain in bondage" they would be accorded "the privilege of selecting as their owner"- either Sullivan's daughter or one of the children of Sullivan's deceased son.

hiring out Jack until sufficient funds accrued to pay for Jack's emigration to "some of the Colonies."²⁰⁸

Slaveholders who wished to enable their manumitted slaves to resettle outside of Virginia devised plans for raising funds for this purpose. Samuel W. Christian ordered that "my girl Minerva," hired out to James V. Brooke "for a term of years," shall be manumitted "and sent to a free State" upon the expiration of her term of hired service. Christian also directed that "a sufficiency be reserved by my executor" to cover the costs of her travel. Having neither wife nor children, Christian could liquidate his assets, including the labor of his enslaved girl Minerva without obligation to support immediate family after his death.²⁰⁹ Lawrence Butler, in his 1819 will, emancipated "Lucy and Ginny with their respective children and their future increase together with my negroes Tom and Peter" provided they first earned fifteen hundred dollars for the estate through their hires. Out of moneys earned, one hundred dollars would be reserved to enable the freed slaves "to travel to the State of Ohio, or Some other State or Territory where they can enjoy the privileges of free persons." Butler's agreement included only a select portion of his enslaved force as Butler also decreed three other slaves be sold to pay debts and to provide a legacy for his niece.²¹⁰

When William Glascock wrote his will on August 14, 1856 shortly before his death, he bequeathed certain slaves to his relatives but decided to grant his servant

²⁰⁸ Will of Margaret Smoot, written June 7, 1842, proved in court October 24, 1842, Fauquier County Will Book 18: 66.

²⁰⁹ Will of Samuel W. Christian, written February 22, 1859, proved in court April 26, 1859, Fauquier County Will Book 28: 115.

²¹⁰ Will of Lawrence Butler, written August 1819, proved in court November 22, 1819, Fauquier County Will Book 7: 340.

Catharine and her two children \$3,000 “to be held or managed by” his executor “for their use and benefit and after their deaths to go absolutely to their respective heirs.”

Understanding the inherent difficulties for Catharine, Glascock ordered that expenses for removing them “out of the Commonwealth of Virginia to some place they deem suitable to settle said Catharine and her two children as free People” be deducted from his estate.²¹¹ Glascock’s executor, his brother French Glascock, did not file deeds of manumission for Catharine and her children in Fauquier County, but estate accounts show that on June 5, 1857, the executor paid \$70.37 for the “expense of moving Cath & family”²¹² and on September 1, 1857 Glascock paid \$45.77 for “expenses to Ohio & while there settling Catharine & family.” Executor Glascock paid Catharine \$1,000 and paid Elizabeth and Martha, Catharine’s children, \$2,000 to be spent for land on September 1, 1857. For his services, French Glascock received \$50 “for trouble going twice to Ohio to settle negroes.”²¹³

Josephine M. E. Morgan wished to free her slaves at her death and apparently thought that colonization to Liberia would offer the best future for them and perhaps even for the Fauquier community. She devised that her slaves by “hired to lenient masters, until a sum sufficient to take them Liberia under the regulations of the American Colonization Society shall have been received.” Once this sum was reached, she directed that her executor transmit the funds to the American Colonization Society and the slaves be “colonized some where on the Continent of Africa.” Morgan did give an alternative:

²¹¹ Will of William Glascock, written August 14, 1856, proved in court February 23, 1857, Fauquier County Will Book 26: 411.

²¹² Accounts of the Estate of William Glascock, Fauquier County Will Book 27: 218.

²¹³ Accounts of the Estate of William Glascock, Fauquier County Will Book 27: 220.

each slave could elect whether to go to Africa or to choose a master and “remain in a state of slavery.”²¹⁴

Masters hemmed in by the provisions of the Removal Act and the growing push towards colonization and removal of freed blacks navigated between law, county sentiment, and personal belief to create a status of quasi-freedom for select enslaved persons. The kinds of provisions for manumitted slaves in wills reflected the long-term effect of the 1806 Removal Act that restricted residency of freed slaves, yet also put into practice a vision of freedom with some financial and residential security. Devises of quasi-freedom often relied upon the agreement of administrators or local officials to carry out the master’s wishes and offer some form of protection to the specified enslaved persons.

Sarah Humphrey appointed a proxy owner to carry out her wishes to provide for the future welfare future of her slaves. In 1844 Humphrey devised that her slaves “be emancipated in such way as may be deemed most likely to promote their comfort.” To oversee the emancipation, Humphrey requested that “a committee...be appointed for the purpose by the nearest meeting of record, of either society of the people called Quakers (orthodox or Hixite).²¹⁵

In his will, written in 1865, Fauquier slaveholder Lewis Tracey directed that his slaves “be free, should the laws of the land permit the same at the time of my death.” Tracey realized that manumission would not guarantee security so he further directed that

²¹⁴ Will of Josephine M. E. Morgan, written August 28, 1851, proved in court October 26, 1852, Fauquier County Will Book 24: 231.

²¹⁵ Will of Sarah Humphrey, written June 1844, proved in court August 12, 1844, Loudoun County Will Book 2B: 105-106.

his enslaved woman Maria and her family should receive “the residue that may be left of my Estate” after his executors settled Tracey’s debts. Should the laws not permit Maria and her family to be freed, Tracey charged his executor with the obligation of ensuring that “they get good homes and do all in his power to see that they be treated with kindness and humanity as a reward for the faithfulness and fidelity with which they have served me as their master.” Tracey implored his executor to see to the welfare of his slaves “untrammelled by the interests of any person or persons whatsoever” perhaps foreseeing that a disgruntled heir might claim title to them.²¹⁶

Aware of the limitations of manumission and the potential for forced removal or re-enslavement, some slaveholders crafted their own version of quasi-freedom for favored servants. Fauquier slaveholder Battalie Fitzhugh desired that his slaves “shall live in a State as near to one of Freedom as the laws of the Land will permit” after his decease and live “always...in the hands of those who will extend the greatest possible degree of indulgence to them...[compatible] with the Laws of the Land.” This “indulgence” applied only to certain slaves, Betsey, Scott, Henry, Mary, and William. That it did not extend to any future children of Betsey or Mary, though, indicates Fitzhugh’s limited scope of benevolence.²¹⁷ Fitzhugh expressed “great confidence in [his] relations Henry Fitzhugh

²¹⁶ Will of Lewis Tracey, written February 10, 1865, proved in court March 29, 1865, Fauquier County Will Book 29: 395. To ensure that his wishes regarding his slaves and estate would be carried out, Tracey carefully selected and appointed William M. Hume to execute his estate. In his will Tracey affirmed this trust by asserting that he had “confidence in him [Hume] and that he understanding my desires and intentions as expressed will faithfully execute the same.” *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ The inventory of Battaille Fitzhugh’s estate included thirteen enslaved persons of whom Fitzhugh granted these concessions to only five specified persons. Will of Battalie Fitzhugh, written May 20, 1833, proved in court May 29, 1833, Fauquier Will Book 13: 73-74.

and Thomas L. Fitzhugh” to carry out his wishes in his will, written and proved in May of 1833.

Prince William resident Prudence Gwatin attempted to subvert the provisions of the 1806 Removal Act by freeing Lewis, Sarah, and Charlotte and stipulating in her will that at her request “they be permitted to remain within the county.” Gwatin devised to Lewis, Sarah & Charlotte livestock including a horse, cow, and sow with pigs as well as “four barrels of corn and three bushels of wheat to be delivered to them by my Executors” thus providing some means of subsistence for Lewis, Sarah, and Charlotte for the immediate, if uncertain, future.²¹⁸

Enslaved men Jesse, Sam, and Jim created alliances in their Prince William County neighborhood as demonstrated by the decision of their white neighbor, Charles Cannon, to leave his “wearing apparel” to “Wandsford Evan’s servants, Jesse, Jim, and Sam” in the provisions of Cannon’s will, written just before his death in 1854.²¹⁹ The three men may have discussed their hopes for their futures with their owner, Wandsford Evans. Prior to his death, Evans identified the bitter choice faced by enslaved persons when the “laws of this state will not permit manumitted slaves to remain therein.” Evans understood his enslaved laborers were “unwilling to leave the Commonwealth,” but nevertheless was “desirous to secure to them [Jesse, Jim, and Sam] a kind master who will allow them such privileges as the laws of this state will admit” he selected a nominal master, his friend, John W. Davis, to take possession of the estate. The conditions were

²¹⁸ Will of Prudence Gwatin, written August 29, 1816, proved in court March 3, 1817, Prince William County Will Book L: 30-31.

²¹⁹ Will of Charles B. Cannon, written July 9, 1854, proved in court August 7, 1854, Prince William County Will Book Q: 212.

that Evans's enslaved man, Jesse, be permitted "to remain upon the farm upon which I now reside, together with the stock and farming utensils," and presumably be the beneficiary of Evans's stock, "grain, provender, farming utensils, Household & kitchen furniture",²²⁰

The particular provisions for a quasi-free existence as described by slaveowners Humphrey, Fitzhugh, Gwatkin, and Evans could only be implemented with the approbation of the white social and legal community. Yet if provisions were contested in the courts, Virginia's higher courts upon review tended to view manumission "as an all-or-nothing proposition." Ambiguous wills (neither declaring a bondsperson to be enslaved nor free) contested in the court system more often denied free status than upheld a quasi-free existence. By not vesting explicit emancipation, a dying slaveowner left a legal door open to future enslavement.²²¹

When confronted with laws that limited power of slavery, slaveholders created their own conditions for a semi-freedom for faithful servants and carefully appointed executors they believed would carry out their wishes despite a potential risk of renewed bondage. While these individual measures did not undermine the role of slavery or change the status of slaves across the region, these singular attempts illustrate the measures that a few slaveholders took to subvert state laws and allow favored slaves a

²²⁰ Deed of Trust from Evans to Davis, written August 15, 1859, proved in court August 29, 1859, LP 01197_00321, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

²²¹ See *Rucker v. Gilbert*, 30 VA. (3 Leigh) 8 (1831) where Rucker granted land in lieu of freedom citing the attendant difficulties imposed upon owner and slave alike when granting emancipation. The Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals concluded that since Rucker did not specifically manumit Gilbert, it must not have been his true intention to manumit, therefore Gilbert was denied his freedom. See A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr. and F. Michael Higginbotham, "'Yearning to Breathe Free': Legal Barriers Against and Options in Favor of Liberty in Antebellum Virginia," *New York University Law Review*, 68, no. 6 (December 1993), 1260.

more comfortable life between slavery and freedom, a painful example for other slaves and an uncomfortable precedent for neighboring slaveholders.

Agents For Their Own Future: The Role of Enslaved Persons in Emancipation

While it is tempting to attribute the full responsibility for initiating a deed of manumission upon the benevolence, religious convictions, or financial pragmatism of slaveholders for negotiating grants of manumission, this narrow perspective obscures the role that enslaved persons played in securing their own freedom. Enslaved persons negotiated, bargained, and contracted with slaveholders for their time, labor, and future service. They negotiated contracts to purchase family members while enslaved and also after acquiring their own release from enslavement. Raising funds through a variety of hired and market jobs, enslaved and free blacks entered the labor market as agents for their own future. Along the way, they created strategic alliances to protect their limited hold over families. Unfortunately, accepting manumission also meant accepting the potential for family breakup and forced removal from Virginia because of the provisions of the 1806 Removal Act, an act enforced sporadically yet quite cruelly upon freed slaves whose spouses, parents, children, and extended kin were still enslaved. Deciding whether to accept freedom and forego family, freed blacks relied on community support and alliances. Their stories demonstrate the complicated and innovative ways that enslaved persons acted on their own behalf to alter their futures.

Enslaved persons realized that influential whites held some power to ensure family stability. Alliances with whites enabled enslaved persons to negotiate contracts for

purchase of family members, support petitions for permitting continued residency in the county, or serve as trusted executors in administering estates and protecting families.²²²

In some cases, whites helped enslaved persons to reconstitute their families. At some point Richards Payne purchased Daniel Hackley from Frances Payne. He also bought Daniel's wife Fanny and their two children, Fanny and Hedgeman, from the estate of John Payne, Jr. and served the role of proxy for Hackley in completing the transfer of ownership of his family. In October 1839 Richards Payne manumitted the four members of the Hackley family, an action that helped retain the family unit.²²³

Enslaved persons who found a proxy to negotiate a transfer of ownership sought an ally who could create legal documents that would secure the transactions. Enslaved man Shadrach negotiated a deal to gain his freedom from his Fauquier County owner Sarah Pope through the use of a proxy or nominal owner. Fauquier resident Mary Thomlin Craig and her trustee, Thomas Norris agreed to act as securities for Shadrach to ensure payment of the \$300 that Pope required for Shadrach's freedom. Shadrach initially paid \$66.66 to Pope to transfer title to Norris (as trustee of Mrs. Craig) until such time as Shadrach could pay off the debt. The deed transferring ownership of Shadrach to Craig and Gaines, as nominal owners, specified that "it was understood at the time of said purchase that the said above Shadrach was himself the real purchaser." Although the

²²² In her study of Loudoun County, Brenda Stevenson called such alliances between free blacks and elite whites "mutually beneficial or cordially dependent associations," yet found as I do that most support from whites was aimed at one "exceptional" free black, "not the entire community." Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 270. I would further argue that whites used "exceptional" as a coded term that justified their support of free and enslaved blacks to the slaveholding community.

²²³ Fauquier County Deed Book 39: 226. Payne did not indicate in the deed of manumission when he purchased each Hackley family member but the names of sellers indicates that Payne may have negotiated with family members to bring Daniel's family together.

records do not reveal how long Shadrach negotiated between Pope and Craig, his bill of sale from Pope to Craig was not recorded until 1837 when Shadrach was about forty-five years old.²²⁴ Two years later, in 1839, Shadrach had finally acquired enough money to pay off his debt and interest.²²⁵

Perhaps one reason to negotiate a deal with Mary Craig was the fact that she owned Shadrach's abroad wife, Letty. After gaining his freedom, Shadrach, now known as Shadrach Palmer, worked to raise enough money to purchase or support Letty and their children, probably through job opportunities in Warrenton.²²⁶ By October 1850, Palmer, fearing the approach of death, declared his will that he had saved "between four & five hundred dollars" to help support Letty and directed that the interest of the money be paid to his enslaved wife, Letty. Apparently Craig's willingness to help Palmer in his quest for freedom did not extend to Letty as Palmer only directed that his funds be used to purchase Letty upon the condition that Mrs. Mary Craig had died upon which time Palmer's executor, William H. Gaines should draw from the principle of Palmer's estate to purchase Letty "and secure her emancipation." If Letty died before her mistress, Palmer's money would be divided equally among Letty's living children.²²⁷

²²⁴ Bill of Sale and Deed of Manumission to Shadrach, written May 25, 1839, proved in court August 8, 1840, Fauquier County Deed Book 40: 27.

²²⁵ Bill of Sale and Deed of Manumission to Shadrach, written May 25, 1839, proved in court August 8, 1840, Fauquier County Deed Book 40: 27-28.

²²⁶ In the list of "Free People of Colour within the district of Andrew Turner" for the year 1841, Turner noted that "Shadrack Parmer" resided in Warrenton. 1841 Tax Records, Fauquier County Personal Property Tax Lists, microfilm. Shadrach Palmer resided in Warrenton in the 1840s but moved to the residence of Mary Craig's husband, Alexander S. Craig in 1849. Fauquier County Tax Records, 1843-1849, microfilm.

²²⁷ Will of Shadrach Palmer, written October 23, 1850, proved in court June 1, 1855, Fauquier County Will Book 25: 434. William H. Gaines served as a trustee for Mary Craig replacing Thomas Norris and also served as a nominal owner of Palmer, despite Palmer's free status, perhaps to deflect attention on Palmer's continued residency in Virginia. Palmer must have had great faith in Gaines's commitment to him writing that Gaines "has been my friend in life" and that Palmer hoped "he will be so after my death." Gaines

Unfortunately, the fate of Letty and her children was not contingent solely upon the wishes of Mary Craig or Shadrach Palmer. Mary Craig's father, William Norris, had devised Letty and her mother, Vina, and their "increase" to Mary upon his death under the terms that Mary keep the this inheritance not in absolute title, but only as a limited and qualified estate during her lifetime, to pass on to her legitimate heirs or to the remaining heirs of the Norris estate.²²⁸ As such, under the law Mary could not sell, manumit, or otherwise "dispose" of Vina, Letty, and their children.

Shadrach Palmer would not live to see his wife and child liberated from slavery, as he died some time before June 1855. The following year, shortly before her own death, Mary Craig decided to write her will and directed that Letty and Letty's youngest child Mary should receive their freedom at her death provided that they could be "permitted to remain and live in Virginia." Craig may have made this condition hoping to keep Letty close to other family members in the area or nudging her executor and community to allow them to remain.²²⁹ Again, signaling the awareness of Virginia's residency laws,

affirmed via a court document that he had received Palmer's money on October 23, 1850 and upon oath Gaines promised to execute Palmer's wishes "to the best of my ability." Memorandum, *Ibid*.

²²⁸ Distant relatives of Mary Norris Tomlin Craig contested her will and brought charges against the estate of her second husband, Alexander S. Craig for rights to the descendants of Vina, including Letty and her children. Craig's executor contested the charges claiming that the sole heir of the Norris estate, Mary's sister Catherine Norris Johnson, a widow by 1860, had sold her rights to the Norris estate to Mary, leaving Mary with sole title to her inherited share. The petitioners to Mary Craig's title in the children of Vina sold Letty's children Eliza, Sandy (who had since died), Shadrach, Henry (who also died) and Adolphus in the year after her death. Letty's nephew, Horace, (the son of Letty's sister Charlotte) "made an arrangement" for purchasing his freedom and though having paid the agreed upon price, the heirs had not yet recorded his deed of manumission. "Answer," *Tomlin's Admr v. Alexander S. Craig and Wm. H. Gaines, Exor*, Fauquier County Chancery Case 1860-022, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1860-022#img>.

²²⁹ Letty's mother, Levina (also known as Vina) was owned by Mary Craig's father, William Norris, and at his death Mary Craig received Vina and daughter Letty as her portion of the Norris estate (see the "Copy of the Report of division & allotment of the estate of Wm. Norris, dec'd" recorded January 24, 1803, Exhibit H) devised to her for her life and then to pass to her children or if she died without issue, to the surviving Norris siblings. Once Mary married John Tomlin, Vina, Letty, and their offspring came under the control of

Craig further stipulated that if Letty and Mary could not gain permission to stay in Virginia, they should fall under the trusteeship of William H. Gaines and their potential hires or worth as assets be transferred to Craig's husband, Alexander S. Craig, during his life. Craig further granted Alexander Craig authority "to devise and dispose of the said Letty and her child Mary" in his will, a provision that could once again put them at risk. Craig did order that Mary "shall be permitted to wait on and attend on the said Letty" during Letty's lifetime, a small concession for an elderly enslaved woman.²³⁰ By negotiating their own terms for freedom, some enslaved persons in northern Virginia demonstrated how carefully crafted social networks and connections to respected white members of the social and legal community created some opportunities to frame the conditions of enslavement and nominal freedom, yet at times fell short of their hopes.

Enslaved man Peter Knight negotiated terms for his emancipation in 1810 with his owner, Elizabeth Elliott, arrangements documented in a deed of trust contracted between Elliott and trustee Benjamin Dawson. Dawson held ownership of Knight and

Tomlin. At the time of Tomlin's death in 1830, Vina (born circa 1781) and ten members of her three-generation family including Vina's three children Letty (born about 1800), Nelson (born about 1802) and Charlotte and the children of the girls were given to Mary to be held in trust. At the time, Letty's children included Margaret, twins Jerry and Shadrach (born circa 1823), and Ellen (born circa 1826). Letty later had at least seven more children: sons Henry (born circa 1830), Sandy (born circa 1832), Doctor (born circa 1837) and Dolphus (born circa 1840); and daughters Eliza (born circa 1835) and Mary (born circa 1843). Mary Tomlin Craig sold Letty's sister Charlotte and her infant son Inman in May 1833 to Henry Sisson to pay for Tomlin's debts, leaving two of Charlotte's children under the care of Vina, Horace and Elmina. Mary Tomlin Craig also sold Letty's daughter Margaret at some point after Tomlin's death. *Admr of William Tomlin Etc. v. Alexander S. Craig, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Case 1860-022, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1860-022#img>. For a listing of the family members of Vina still living in 1856 see "Appraisal of the Estate of Mary Craig, dec'd," Fauquier County Will Book 26: 291.

²³⁰ Will of Mary Craig, written February 8, 1856, proved March 24, 1856, Fauquier County Will Book 26: 269. At the time of Craig's estate appraisal in April 1856 following her death Letty was described as "56 years old & infirm" and assessed with a value of \$100. Mary, aged twelve years old was valued at \$750. Appraisal of the Estate of Mary Craig, dec'd, Fauquier Will Book 26: 291.

authority to hire out Knight “by the year” until “the sum of Two hundred & thirty seven Dollars is raised.” Dawson then would transfer the funds raised to Elliott. Once the payment was completed, Dawson was “expressly authorized to Emancipate the said Peter Knight and set him free from slavery forever.”²³¹

Enslaved persons played a significant role in determining an emancipated future by creating practical and beneficial alliances with white men who would protect their interests. By 1808 Loudoun enslaved man Tom had cultivated a strong enough personal or business relationship with Richard Henderson and Nathan King that Henderson and King contracted a deal with Tom’s owner, John Alexander, to free Tom after ten years. Yet with the changing laws regarding manumitted slaves, each expressed concern in crafting the terms of the agreement. Tom’s future freedom “if the laws of the Land allow it” was secured by a total of one thousand dollars bond equally secured by Henderson and King. Henderson’s bond secured Tom’s right to return to Henderson “unless he dies or runs away” after ten years “to receive the completion of his title to freedom” while King’s bond secured the condition that Tom not be removed from Loudoun County without Tom’s permission.²³² In this case, because Henderson and King were aware of the limitations of the 1806 Removal Act and growing state-wide discontent against the presence of free Negroes, they offered their own money as security to guarantee Tom’s future manumission.

²³¹ Elliott to Dawson, Deed of Trust, Box #6, 1810-013, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records, AAHA. A deed of manumission to Peter Knight has not been located in Fauquier County records.

²³² “Agreement between Richard H. Henderson and Nathan King,” (1808) Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2K: 66. Loudoun deed books do not include a final deed of manumission for Tom.

Community networks were especially crucial when enslaved persons desired to manumit family members while still enslaved. Like George Rivers, at least three other enslaved men arranged to purchase family members while they were still enslaved. While still a slave belonging to Martin Pickett, Sancho purchased his wife Moll (or Molly) at the estate sale of her owner, Peter Beverly Whiting before June 6, 1792. In 1799 Sancho convinced Pickett to free him for fifty dollars plus an additional fifteen pounds by the end of the year. Court documents reveal that Sancho paid fifty dollars while Molly paid the rest of the money in two installments in January and July to secure Sancho's freedom.²³³ Perhaps because of Sancho's enslaved status at the time of his purchase of "Moll," her certificate of purchase was not recorded in the county until after his emancipation, yet his enslaved status apparently did not prevent Sancho from bidding on his enslaved wife when she came up for sale and acquiring at least a provisional title until his own freedom was secured.²³⁴ By taking advantage of the timing of the death of an owner, both spouses' abilities to earn money, and the willingness of white owners or administrators to bargain and affirm title, Sancho and Moll moved out of slavery and into free status.

John Digges, slave property of Leesburg resident Eleanor Peers, must have known her intentions to free her slaves through her last will and testament written in 1832.²³⁵

²³³ Martin Pickett to Sancho, Agreement, written January 12, 1799, proved in court July 24, 1799, Fauquier County Deed Book 14: 553-554.

²³⁴ Moll's Certificate, written June 6, 1792, proved in court December 22, 1800, Fauquier County Deed Book 14: 874.

²³⁵ Eleanor's last will was dated September 17, 1832, one day after the death of her daughter Ann. The will was proved in court December 8, 1834, indicating Eleanor Peers died between September 17 1832 and December 8, 1834. In her will Eleanor declared "I set my man John Diggs free" while assigning additional periods of servitude before eventual emancipation for her female slaves. Peers also directed that "if it be necessary to the freedom of my Servants, my real Estate [should] be sold." "Will of Eleanor Peers," Loudoun County Will Book V: 346-347. According to her gravestone, Ann Peers died September 16, 1832 at the age of 36 years and was buried in the Leesburg Presbyterian Church graveyard. *Loudoun County*

Even if he could not predict the future date of his freedom, Digges felt secure enough in its eventuality that he decided to contract a deal to purchase his family. Digges was able to convince his wife's mistress, Mrs. Francis Armistead, also of Loudoun County, to negotiate a contract for ownership of Digges' wife, Sarah, his son, George, and any "future increase" Sarah might bear before the terms of the contract could be completed. Digges' desire to negotiate a deal and secure his family's well-being was surely motivated by learning that Armistead planned to leave Loudoun County and move to Alabama. Like Sancho, Digges and Armistead arranged for a proxy or nominal owner, Thomas Beatty of Caroline County, to hold ownership of Sarah and the children in exchange for "a valuable consideration by the said John Digges to said Francis Armistead paid...at the time said John Digges was a Slave with a view to the ultimate emancipation of said Sarah and her children through the means of said John Digges."²³⁶

Beatty apparently served as a nominal owner not from personal benefit, but rather "having simply permitted his name to be used from benevolent and friendly motives to said John Digges." The necessity of including this disclaimer and the further declaration that Beatty's family "declines making any warranty or incurring any responsibility in the premises" stemmed back to Virginia law that compelled owners to guarantee future care and financial support of manumitted slaves. Whether Sarah and the children actually

Cemetery Database, <<http://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/loudoun-county-cemetery-database>>, accessed October 12, 2015. Eleanor Peers left a bequest of two hundred dollars to the Protestant Episcopal Church in Leesburg, twenty-five dollars "for the purchase of Books for the Sunday School in the Church to which my beloved Daughter was so much devoted," and fifty dollars to the Reverend George Adie "as a mark of my regard." Will of Eleanor Peers, written September 17, 1832, proved in court December 8, 1834, Loudoun County Will Book V: 346.

²³⁶ Thomas Beatty to John Diggs, written March 1, 1836, proved in court March 25, 1836, Loudoun County Deed Book 4F: 174.

lived with Beatty in Caroline County or whether they remained with Digges is unclear. By the time John was freed by testamentary manumission from Eleanor Peers and claimed his family by deed of purchase, Sarah had born two additional sons, Robert and William. Beatty recorded the bill of sale in Caroline County on the first of March 1836 and then on March 25th John Digges ensured his bill of sale and title to his wife and three sons was also certified by the Loudoun Clerk of Court. Diggs did not immediately emancipate his family, but waited until late in his life, on January 15, 1850 to write a deed of emancipation for Sarah, Robert and William granting them freedom “to enjoy all the liberty and freedom guaranteed to free people of Colour.”²³⁷ The deed was not recorded until October 14, 1851, perhaps after Diggs’ death, and Sarah and William were immediately recorded in the county’s Register of Free Negroes.²³⁸ Curiously, a free Negro register entry for Diggs’ son Robert, proved by the oath of P. Saunders, was recorded on the tenth of December 1849 but this entry was later crossed out and a later entry filed on November 12, 1851, also proved by the oath of Presley Saunders.²³⁹ Saunders did witness Diggs’ deed of emancipation for Sarah, Robert, and William, so perhaps some sense of urgency attended Robert’s free status.

²³⁷ Sarah Diggs’ elder son, George, mentioned in the 1836 bill of sale was not included in the 1850 emancipation of the Diggs family. It is unclear what happened to George. A grave stone for a John Diggs who died May 31, 1851 at the presumed age of 65 years is located in the Old Episcopal Cemetery in Loudoun County. *Loudoun County Cemetery Database* <<http://www.leesburgva.gov/government/departments/thomas-balch-library/loudoun-county-cemetery-database>>, accessed October 12, 2015. According to the 1850 Census for Loudoun, John Diggs, age 70 years, and Sarah Diggs, age 65 years, lived in Leesburg with their son, William, age 15 years. 1850 Federal Census, Virginia, Loudoun County, Leesburg, series M432, roll 957, page 691(346), courtesy of familysearch.org. Any further county documentation for John Diggs has not been located thus far.

²³⁸ Both Sarah and William’s freedom was proved by the oath of Joseph Hilliard, giving Sarah’s age as 50 years and William’s as 19 years old. Patricia B. Duncan, *Abstracts of Loudoun County Virginia Register of Free Negroes 1844-1861* (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2010), 104.

²³⁹ Patricia B. Duncan, *Abstracts of Loudoun County Virginia Register of Free Negroes 1844-1861* (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2010), 82, 104.

Like Sancho and John Digges, Loudoun slave Patrick Hogan used his connections with white members of the community to secure his claim to his daughter, Cornelia Elizabeth. In 1837 Hogan arranged with Loudoun magistrate James McIlhane to serve as Hogan's trustee in purchasing nine-year-old Cornelia Elizabeth from Jesse Silcott.²⁴⁰ Their written arrangement stated that "it is understood between said Silcott and said McIlhane that said negro girl is to be and remain forever hereafter free from the service and claim of him the said Silcott and all other persons whatever" and Cornelia Elizabeth would "remain under the control of said McIlhane until the age of eighteen years as trustee of said Hogan the father of said child or until said Hogan is fully emancipated himself."²⁴¹ Hogan secured his own freedom eight months later from his owner Mahlon Morris due to his "long & faithful Services" yet Hogan did not file a deed of manumission for his daughter immediately upon gaining his own freedom. Perhaps he preferred the nominal ownership of McIlhane for Cornelia Elizabeth over an uncertain life as a freed slave in the 1830s.²⁴² Hogan's relationship with Morris continued: through Morris's aid Patrick Hogan was able to purchase land.²⁴³

Working diligently to acquire property and title to his other children, also owned by the Silcott family, Hogan purchased his son James for two hundred dollars at the sale

²⁴⁰ This was not the first time that a McIlhane assisted a slave. James McIlhane Senior helped secure Butler's freedom in 1802 by negotiating with Butler's owner, James Griffith to gain title to Butler and then immediately emancipate Butler. James McIlhane to Butler, written February 8, 1802, proved in court February 8, 1802, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2B: 227.

²⁴¹ Jesse Silcott to James McIlhane on behalf of Patrick Hogan, written May 3, 1837, proved in court August 14, 1837, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 4I: 65.

²⁴² Mahlon Morris to Patrick Hogan, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 4K: 134.

²⁴³ In 1847 Mahlon and Nancy Morris sold Patrick Hogan 10 acres of land on the east side of the Short Hill for \$152. Loudoun County Deed Book 4Y: 286-287. In 1853 Patrick Hogan and his wife Mahala sold 11¼ acres of land to Mahlon Morris located on the east side of the Short Hill for \$600, quite possibly the same tract that the Morris's sold to Hogan in 1847. Loudoun County Deed Book 5H: 114-115.

of Jesse Silcott's estate on November 20, 1843 and acquiring title to his daughters Sarah Virginia and Ann Maria at some later point.²⁴⁴ The ability of Hogan to successfully bid on and win ownership of his son, James, at a public sale suggests that some sort of understanding between the Silcott family, Hogan, and the broader community of auction bidders to allow Hogan to purchase his son for the exact value estimated by the commissioners who inventoried Silcott's estate. While no details of Hogan's purchase exist, he likely heard or inquired about the 1842 inventory and then had eleven months to acquire enough funds for the purchase price. Since none of Silcott's female slaves were sold at the estate auction, it can be surmised that Hogan contracted some sort of understanding with the Silcott heirs to also gain title to Sarah Virginia and Ann Maria. It is unclear whether the "woman and child" valued at \$75 in Silcott's estate inventory were Hogan's wife and another child. Hogan did not free his children until August 9, 1853 when he wrote a deed of manumission for his five children: Craven Armistead (born around February, 1823), Cornelia Elizabeth (born about 1830), Sarah Virginia (born April 11, 1833), Ann Maria (born September 9, 1835) and James Henry (born September 19, 1838).²⁴⁵ Interestingly, the 1850 census enumerator for Loudoun County recorded

²⁴⁴ At the time of the inventory taken of Jesse Silcott's estate on December 5, 1842, Silcott owned seven slaves: Heaton, Rodney, James, Sarah Virginia, Ann Maria, and a "woman & child." Loudoun County Will Book 2A: 273. Three slaves were sold from Silcott's property during the November 1843 sale. Silcott's son, Meshech bought Heaton for \$400, James Silcott purchased Rodney for \$275 and Pat Hogan purchased James for \$200. Silcott's female slaves, including Hogan's daughters Sarah Virginia (valued at \$200) and Ann Maria (valued at \$175) were apparently not sold at the public sale. Pat Hogan also purchased a matlock for 13¢, a draw knife for 21¢, a shaving horse for 22¢, a bed, bedstead and bedding for \$8.75, and two chairs for 84¢ at Silcott's sale, an unusual feat when scant evidence of freed blacks purchasing items from white estates exists. Account of Sales of Jesse Silcott, deceased, (November 20, 1843) Loudoun Will Book 2B: 178. Silcott's will mandated his estate remain intact for five years following his death, then be sold and divided.

²⁴⁵ "Patrick Hogans [sic] to his children," Loudoun County Deed Book 5G: 410. All five children registered their free status on the same day their father manumitted them and information regarding their ages and

Hogan's three children still living in his household as free rather than listing them separately under Hogan's ownership in the slave schedule. This suggests a general agreement that the Hogans were accepted as free blacks within the community.

The decision of both John Diggs and Pat Hogan to keep family members as enslaved property rather than manumitting them immediately after purchase suggests that the decision to manumit family members was carefully calculated. Like other slaveholding free blacks, Diggs and Hogan must have considered several factors when deciding whether and when to manumit family members. They considered the age of the children and the potential threat of county Overseers of the Poor binding out underage children. The fear of dying intestate without having made provisions for the freedom and security of family prompted some free blacks to act. Fear of being indicted for remaining in Virginia after the allowable period of time affected the timing of manumissions, and the difficulty of maintaining a household while living one step from poverty prompted some to manumit rather than allow courts to take enslaved family members as "assets" to settle debts. Despite having arranged to purchase family members while still enslaved, Sancho, Diggs, and Hogan, still treaded carefully while living in northern Virginia,

birthdays comes from these free registers. Cornelia had already married and was registered as Cornelia E. Gant, "late Cornelia E. Hogan." See free register numbers 2010 – 2014 in Patricia B. Duncan, *Abstracts of Loudoun County Virginia Register of Free Negroes, 1844-1861* (Westminster, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2010), 123-124. According to Cornelia Hogan Gant's obituary, she died on October 2, 1916 in Zanesville, Ohio and for many years was a member of the A. M. E. church. Obituary of Cornelia Elizabeth Gant, *The Times Recorder* (Zanesville, Ohio) October 4, 1916 posted on ancestry.com message board <<http://boards.ancestry.com/localities.northam.usa.states.virginia.counties.loudoun/6506/mb.ashx>>, accessed September 17, 2016. According to her death certificate, Cornelia Elizabeth Gant was born in "Lowden County" Virginia on January 18, 1830 to Patrick Hogan and Mahala King. Death Certificate for Cornelia Elizabeth Gant, Certificates of Death (Ohio), 1908-1953, familysearch.org, accessed September 17, 2016.

straddling the line between freed slave and property owner in determining the safest course.

Prior to February, 1849, Peter Brannum brokered a deal with respected Fauquier County lawyer, John Penn Philips, to purchase his freedom from his owner, Thomas Y. Johnson. As Philips later acknowledged, the required three hundred dollars purchase price “was in fact paid by said Peter himself and the said bill of sale made to me [Philips] as a nominal master for said Peter.”²⁴⁶ Accordingly, Philips drafted a deed of manumission for Peter Brannum a day after becoming Brannum’s nominal owner, but failed to file the manumission document with the Fauquier County Court Clerk for more than four years, leaving Brannum, at least in the eyes of Fauquier whites, ostensibly under the control of John P. Philips.²⁴⁷ By asking Philips to be a party to the transaction,

²⁴⁶ “John P. Philips to Peter Brannum,” Fauquier County Deed Book 52: 263.

²⁴⁷ One interpretation of Philips’ decision to postpone certifying Peter Brannum’s manumission might be that both Brannum and Philips knew all too well the legal ramifications of freedom on the ability of Brannum to reside in Fauquier County post-manumission. Philips’ “ownership” of Brannum, even as a nominal owner, allowed Brannum some legal and social protection, a critical consideration especially if Brannum desired to remain close to family still enslaved in the county. After Brannum’s transfer of ownership to Philips, he apparently contracted out for his labor, a common practice for free blacks, yet one that came under increased scrutiny when conducted by enslaved persons forming hiring contracts without the supervision of owners. On March 28, 1853, the Fauquier County Court found John P. Philips guilty of the charge of permitting Peter Brannum “a Slave under his control” to “go at large contrary to law” and fined Philips \$10 plus court costs. After four years of nominal freedom, Brannum’s private enterprise came under the scrutiny of the Fauquier County Court. Notably, on the same day that Philips was tried and convicted of letting Brannum go at large, Philips produced his 1849 draft of Brannum’s manumission before the court clerk and officially certified the document, thereby recognizing formally and legally Brannum’s free status. The Court’s legal action against Philips apparently forced the hand of Philips and Brannum to officially recognize Brannum’s free status, even if to prevent further fines as Brannum negotiated work contracts without the role or interference of an owner. The Court did not focus its attentions solely on Brannum and Philips’ lack of control over Brannum’s enterprising activities, because at the same March Court in 1853 eleven other slaveholders were similarly charged for permitting a slave under their control to “go at large.” In each case the Court warned that if the slaveholder failed to pay the court ordered fine of \$10 per charge and associated court costs that each enslaved person found going at large would “be sold therefore by the Sheriff of this County in the same manner as if said Slave had been taken under execution.” For Brannum’s deed of manumission see two sources, “John P. Philips to Peter Brannum,” Fauquier County Deed Book 52: 262-263 and Court Minutes for March 28, 1853, Fauquier County Minute Book 40: 241. For records of the ten cases involving slaveholders charged and found guilty

Brannum arranged for a trusted intermediary who held high standing in the county courts to complete the sale, oversee the transfer of ownership, and affirm Brannum's manumission.

Sancho, John Diggs, Patrick Hogan, and Peter Brannum all allied with high ranking county officials to contract a negotiated manumission of self or family members or to serve as witnesses for the court. County officials who supported efforts of enslaved and free blacks to acquire freedom or title to family members included James McIlhany, a Fauquier County magistrate; Charles Binns, Loudoun County's Clerk of Court; and John Penn Philips, a practicing lawyer in both Fauquier and Prince William County Courts.

Deeds of manumission and their accompanying records describe the agreements often made between owners and free blacks to secure the freedom of family members, yet to protect these arrangements, slaves and free blacks continued to form alliances with county officials to bolster these agreements. John Young, a free person of color in Loudoun, entered into an agreement with Culpeper County slaveholder, Aaron Arden in May of 1832 to purchase Young's wife, Jude her children for \$350. Arden reiterated the contract in his will and Young was able to complete the terms of the agreement with Arden's executors. By 1840 Loudoun county census enumerator Jonah Hood listed Young's family as free persons, yet Young did not record his manumission of his

of permitting a slave under their control to go at large, see *Commonwealth v. John P. Philips*; *Commonwealth v. Henry T. Fant*, *William H. Gaines*, *John B. Hunton*, and *Braggans Beckha*; *Commonwealth v. Joseph Cross*; *Commonwealth v. Richard E. Carter*; *Commonwealth v. Henry T. Fant*; *Commonwealth v. Daniel Anderson*; *Commonwealth v. John L. Fant*; *Commonwealth v. John G. Bickham*; *Commonwealth v. Hamden A. White*; and *Commonwealth v. Madison J. Tollen* (charges in this case were dismissed); Fauquier County Court Minute Book 40: 241-243.

children until 1845. Perhaps part of the hesitation on Young's part was the timing of his youngest child's birth. Young's contract with Arden specified only the purchase of Jude and her two children, Margaret and Franklin, and after the contract was signed, Jude bore another son, named Leven Burr. Before manumitting his children, Young consulted with lawyer Burr W. Harrison to confirm whether he held uncontested rights to ownership of Leven Burr Young. Harrison's legal opinion that "the said Margaret[,] the said Franklin[,] and also a younger child of said Jude named Leven Burr Young are in fact and in law the property of the said John Young and he the said John Young has full power and authority to manumit or to hold them" established a local legal opinion to support Young's claim to all three children. Accordingly, John Young manumitted his three children, Margaret, then sixteen years old, Franklin, about fourteen years old, and Burr Leven Young, aged about eleven years old, but not until 1845 despite previous residence of his family in Loudoun County.²⁴⁸ By establishing residency in Loudoun and ties to a well-known member of Loudoun's legal community, Burr W. Harrison (who appropriately enough had a namesake in Young's son), Young secured his right to own and free family members with support of the legal community.

Some enslaved persons negotiated contracts for freedom with slaveowners. Matthew Salafia wrote that self-purchase "functioned like a free labor contract, putting a time limit on servitude and creating a mutual obligation between enslaved and slaveholder."²⁴⁹ Such a contract often served as a deterrent to running away, holding the

²⁴⁸ John Young to Margaret, Franklin, and Leven Burr Young, recorded in court November 12, 1845, Loudoun Deed Book 4V: 310-311.

²⁴⁹ Matthew Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 173.

promise of future freedom after a specified period of time or accumulation of money. Little is known about the actual process of self-purchase, yet some documents provide glimpses into the methods and means employed by enslaved persons to create a future outside of enslavement.

Often the completion of a self-purchase contract required years to complete. In 1804 a man known as Black Tom achieved his freedom at the relatively elderly age of fifty-six years “having paid the amount of the sum he was sold for at the sale of the effects of his late Master, John Wager Senior” according to papers signed and certified by Wage’s son, John Wager Jr. in Loudoun County. Tom had worked “for upwards of twenty years [as] a ferry man at Harpers ferry” to raise the money for his sale price.²⁵⁰

Sometimes members of an enslaved family consolidated earnings in a strategic effort to purchase the most valuable or vulnerable family member before acquiring other family members. The experiences of the Hulls-Mason family illustrate the ways in which free and enslaved members of a family worked together to acquire freedom. Catharine Hull (also called Kate or Cate) grew up as a favored slave to the family of Frances Elgin, and entered into a marriage with a free man John Hulls and bore at least one child, a girl named Mary. The marriage, though not considered legal was still accepted in the neighborhood as a binding relationship. In 1790 John Hulls (also known as John Robinson) entered into an agreement with Charles Binns, Jr. for Binns to purchase “his wife Cate a yellow woman” for \$200 from the estate of Francis Elgin. The bill of sale

²⁵⁰ “Wager’s Admin. To Negroe Tom – Manumission,” *Loudoun County, Virginia Records of Free Negroes 1778-1838*, transcribed by Townsend M. Lucas (Leesburg, Virginia: Thomas Balch Library, 1988), 16.

was contracted too late to precede the birth of Cate's daughter, Mary, who fell under the control of Samuel Donohoe (son-in-law of Francis Elgin) in the estate division. Nine years later, in 1799, Hulls repaid his debt to Binns, and Binns manumitted Catharine.²⁵¹ The Hulls worked together to acquire farmland and livestock, through the financial assistance, once again, of the Binns family who held ownership of Hull's property through a deed of trust. Meanwhile, Catharine saved her earnings and over a period of thirty years accumulated part of the \$250 required to purchase from Samuel Donohoe in 1821 her daughter Mary (by then thirty years old) and Mary's three children shortly before Donohoe's death in 1822.²⁵² To raise money to purchase her daughter Mary and grandchildren, Kate "was in the habit of weaving for people in the neighborhood." She also sold butter, eggs, soap, bacon, "and many other things" in the local market, raised geese and sold the feathers. Mary hired out her extra time to the Elgin family to earn money at a rate of fifty cents a day. John Hulls cut and sold wood and included his relative, Lewis Robinson, and Mary's enslaved husband, Charles Mason, in the household to labor on the farm, thus creating a multi-generational household comprised

²⁵¹ Charles Binns, Jr. to Cate, written March 12, 1799, proved in court February 10, 1801, Loudoun County Deed Book 2A: 294.

²⁵² *Mary Mason v. Harrison etc.*, Slave Issue 1831-004, LCHAD. Catharine's common-law husband, John Hulls entered into a deed of trust for the remaining funds to purchase Mary, a financial decision that risked the security of Mary and her children and the scant resources of the Hull family. Perhaps sensing the tenuous financial situation of the combined Hull family resources, Catharine manumitted Mary and Mary's three children in 1830, yet not soon enough as Mary and the children were taken by the sheriff to pay for John Hull's debts. Mary and her children sued for her freedom in court in 1831 claiming they were rightfully property of Catharine and not of John Hulls, therefore not liable to be taken to pay for the debts of John Hulls. They won their freedom in May 1831. *Ibid.*

of both free and enslaved members of the family, all working towards the family's financial freedom.²⁵³

The ability of free blacks to purchase and manumit enslaved family members comprised a small minority of emancipations in Fauquier, Loudoun and Prince William counties, yet their timing and language lay bare the conditions of enslavement as well as the instability of freedom in their respective counties. Joseph Lewis purchased his wife, Polly, from Henrietta Williams of nearby Fairfax County in August of 1823 and immediately returned to Loudoun County Court to submit a deed of manumission for her in front of three witnesses.²⁵⁴ William Norris freed his fifteen-year-old daughter Elizabeth in 1826. Presumably Norris had enough income to support Elizabeth or perhaps had secured a job for her to prevent county Overseers of the Poor from binding her out as an indigent child until she reached her majority at eighteen years old.²⁵⁵ Despite an apparent restrictive climate towards manumissions in Fauquier County during the 1820s or perhaps in reaction to the dearth in manumissions, the “most prominent of Warrenton’s free black residents,” Samuel Johnson, attempted to secure freedom for his daughter, Lucy, by manumitting her in September 1826 after several legislative petitions failed to secure her freedom and right to retain residence in Fauquier County.²⁵⁶

²⁵³ *Mary Mason v. Harrison etc.*, Slave Issue 1831-004, LCHAD. John Hulls was known as John Robinson in 1790 and the presence of a titheable man named Lewis Robinson in the Hull household from 1827 to at least 1829 suggests that some relationship existed between John and Lewis. Charles Mason joined the household in 1829. See Loudoun County tax records for John Hulls as listed in *Mary Mason v. Harrison etc.*, Slave Issue 1831-004, LCHAD.

²⁵⁴ “Joseph Lewis to wife Polly,” written August 12, 1823, proved in court December 31, 1825, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 3L: 284-285.

²⁵⁵ “William Norris to Elizabeth,” written February 13, 1826, proved in court February 16, 1826, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 3L: 348-349.

²⁵⁶ Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Almost Free: A Story about Family and Race in Antebellum Virginia* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2012), 56- 68. Quote on page 56. Samuel Johnston [sic] to Lucy

Joseph Cartwright, a “free man of color” purchased his wife, Suckey Cartwright, and his three year old son, Alfred, from Mary Saunders for a sum of \$290 in 1828.²⁵⁷

John Thomas Rust finalized the purchase of his wife and four children in June of 1857 by paying their owner, Isaac G. Nichols of Loudoun County, five hundred dollars.²⁵⁸ The amounts paid for acquiring possession of family members from white owners speaks to the difficulty of preserving family as well as the relative investment the slaveholder was willing to part with before negotiating a sale to a spouse or parent.

While deeds of manumission seem to suggest that the decision to manumit was spontaneous, a few documents reveal the length of time required and the means of acquiring funds to complete the purchase of self or family members. Loudoun County free black Peter Warrick worked for years to secure the freedom of his family. By 1789 Warrick, along with his daughter Sarah, entered into an arrangement with Sarah’s owner Thomas Gore to pay a total of “one hundred pounds, current money of Virginia” over the course of the next decade to secure Sarah’s freedom and presumably the freedom of at least two of her three children.²⁵⁹ Warrick made regular payments to Thomas Gore earned

Johnston (his daughter), written September 27, 1826, proved in court October 23, 1826, Fauquier County Deed Book 29: 105. For an extended discussion of the attempts of Samuel Johnson to establish freedom and rights of residency for himself and his enslaved family in Fauquier County, refer to Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Almost Free: A Story about Family and Race in Antebellum Virginia* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2012).

²⁵⁷ Samuel Edwards, trustee, to Cartwright, etc., written January 7, 1828, proved in court November 13, 1840, Loudoun County Will Book 40: 283.

²⁵⁸ Deed of Manumission to Patsy Rust and her children, written June 9, 1857, recorded in court June 9, 1857, Loudoun County Deed Book 5P: 87-88.

²⁵⁹ Abner Osburn, acting as executor for the Gore family, identified “Marcus, Cortney, & Peper” as the names of Sarah’s children in 1789, yet the agreement reached between the Warricks and Thomas Gore only specified that ownership of Sarah would be transferred to Peter. Peter Warrick to Thomas Gore, (Bond for Sarah Warrick), written in 1789, recorded in court April 12, 1806, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2G: 223-224. Peter Warrick later freed his grandchildren, Marquis and Courtney, in an 1803 deed of manumission. Peter Warrick to Nancy, &c., written September 17, 1803, proved in court October 10, 1803, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2D: 133.

in part by “the making of 800 Shingles that are on Mrs. Gores House” in 1791; for making shoes for Joshua Gore in 1793; for “hewing and framing two barracks” of a barn for Robert Yates in June of 1794; for “the making two pair of shews, one for the widow herself [Mrs. Gore] and one for her Girl Mrs. Runs” in November of 1794; for shoe repair and in exchange for leather and pork provided by Warrick to the Gore family in 1796 along with other cash payments made until at least 1799.²⁶⁰ Osburn and Gore affirmed Sarah’s transfer of ownership from the Gore family to Peter Warrick in April of 1806 and two weeks later Peter Warrick filed a deed of manumission for his daughter, Sarah, with the Loudoun Court, witnessed by three prominent Loudoun residents.²⁶¹ Warrick had by then already freed his wife, Nancy, daughter Betsey, and two of his grandchildren, Marquis and Courtney (two of Sarah’s three known children) in a deed of manumission recorded in 1803.²⁶² The Warrick family’s experience proved that Loudoun’s social, legal, and financial climate was receptive to self-emancipation following the Revolutionary War in that it allowed for employment opportunities for blacks and accepted the willingness of some owners to negotiate contracts for freedom for enslaved family members.

Enslaved woman Fanny utilized a subscription process to raise funds towards her manumission. By the time enslaved woman Fanny was twenty-one years old in 1808, she was mother to a daughter named Ellen, had entered into an abroad marriage with an

²⁶⁰ Peter Warrick to Thomas Gore, (Bond for Sarah Warrick), written in 1789, recorded in court April 12, 1806, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2G: 223-224.

²⁶¹ Peter Warrick to Sarah Warrick, written April 15, 1806, recorded in court April 15, 1806, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2G: 224.

²⁶² Peter Warrick to Nancy, &c, written September 17, 1803, recorded October 10, 1803, Loudoun County Land Deed Book 2D: 133.

enslaved man belonging to Thomas Chapel, and was eager to acquire her freedom and end the cycle of perpetual enslavement. While working as a hired out laborer to raise income for the estate of her deceased owner, Robert Whiteford, she met Thomas Chapel and most likely through this connection discovered a path to freedom. Chapel had discovered that Whiteford failed to register Fanny with a Certificate of Importation as was required when Whiteford brought her from Maryland to Virginia in 1797, a failure that could have resulted in a successful application for freedom in the county court for Fanny. Yet due to the 1806 Removal Act, Fanny would have to leave her husband should she be freed.²⁶³ Instead, she negotiated a deal with Chapel for him to become her nominal owner until a successful petition to the General Assembly could legislate her freedom and right to remain in Virginia.

To earn enough funds to pay Chapel to buy her from the Whiteford heirs, Fanny used a combination of subscriptions from community members and her earnings through hired out work. Fanny's "remarkably steady & industrious" work ethic and her moral conduct (she maintained a long-term husband-wife relationship with an enslaved man belonging to Chapel) enhanced her reputation in her neighborhood and helped her secure subscribers in her quest to purchase her freedom. With these funds, Fanny was able to secure a transfer of ownership from the Whitford heirs to Thomas Chapel around 1808. Two years later Chapel successfully petitioned for a legislative act authorizing him to

²⁶³ Chapel realized his claim to Fanny's servitude could be contested in court due to her previous owner's failure to register Fanny with the Fauquier County court when she was first brought from Maryland to Virginia in 1797. Virginia law stipulated that slaveowners bringing enslaved chattel into Virginia were required to submit a Certificate of Importation attesting that the slave(s) were family property, were not from the West Indies or Haiti, and were not brought into the state for purposes of sale. Fanny's previous owners, the Whiteford family, failed to register her arrival, grounds for Fanny to sue for her freedom.

manumit Fanny and her two daughters (since she had had another child since becoming Chapel's property).²⁶⁴ Fanny's ability to cultivate alliances among prominent white members of the Loudoun community provided the connections she needed to raise money in a unique manner and successfully gain freedom for herself and for her children.

Family or Freedom

As seen in the majority of deeds of manumission and testamentary wills devising emancipation, manumission was most often an act that changed the status of individuals. Yet the impact of this act created repercussions across extended families and communities. The fear of enforcement of the Removal Act combined with stipulations of freedom that mandated departure from Virginia placed many enslaved persons in the difficult position of choosing freedom over family or family over freedom. Some slaveowners consulted with select slaves to offer a choice: emancipation conditional upon removal from Virginia or enslavement to an owner of his or her choice. The desire of enslaved persons to remain with family greatly influenced the provisions made by slaveholders in wills, as many slaves, when faced with the prospect of freedom conditioned upon removal from Virginia, opted to forego freedom in favor of remaining enslaved with family.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Petition of Thomas Chapel, Loudoun County, December 6, 1815, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

²⁶⁵ Ted Maris-Wolf investigated the role of African Americans in the creation of the 1856 Voluntary Enslavement Law in Virginia. This harsh measure created one source of relief for manumitted slaves who opted for emancipation, yet when faced with local pressure to leave Virginia, opted to return to enslavement rather than leave families in Virginia. Ted Maris-Wolf, *Family Bonds: Free Blacks and Re-enslavement Law in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

Reuben Murray offered his servant Clara emancipation due to her “good conduct & faithfull services” only upon the condition that “she desires to leave the Commonwealth.” If she chose to stay enslaved in Virginia, Murray granted Clara “the privilege of selecting what person she will serve.” Murray specified that “in no event is she to be sold or delivered over to any person to whom she is unwilling to serve,” granting Clara some power over the terms of her freedom or enslavement.²⁶⁶

Susan G. Dagg recognized the importance of family to her enslaved woman, Maria. Dagg devised that after her death Maria be hired out, preferably to the owner of Maria’s enslaved husband, Ury Grady. Dagg also implied that Maria be offered freedom if her husband was “set at liberty” and Maria be given her wages from the hire “to take her to some country where free negroes are tolerated.” If Maria’s husband could not be freed, and Maria “refuses to go without him” then Dagg transferred ownership of Maria to Ury Grady, allowing Maria and her husband to remain together, either free in another country or enslaved in Grady’s possession.²⁶⁷

Slaveowner Susan Madison devised that Lucy and Emily could be freed upon certain conditions. First, they were to serve Madison’s daughter, Nelly Sinclair, until the later’s death. If at that time the younger of the two women had reached the age of forty, they could elect to either choose their next master from Madison’s granddaughters or “go to a non-slaveholding state and be free.” If Sinclair died before the enslaved women

²⁶⁶ Will of Reuben Murray, written December 28, 1844, proved in court June 23, 1845, as found in *James E. Murray v. Alfred Murray*, Fauquier County Chancery Record 1854-042, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, Library of Virginia, http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1854-042#img.

²⁶⁷ Will of Susan G. Dagg, written March 4, 1841, proved in court July 11, 1842, Loudoun County Will Book 2A: 217.

reached the age of forty, then both would become property of one of Madison's unmarried granddaughters until they reached the age of forty when they would choose between freedom outside of Virginia and enslavement within Virginia.²⁶⁸

It may never be unknown the number of potentially manumitted persons who elected not to take emancipation under such conditions of removal.²⁶⁹ As seen in the determination of enslaved mothers and fathers to acquire freedom for themselves and their children, the ties of family remained strong despite the incredible challenges to family stability, and manumitted slaves sought to preserve them. Manumission created an option for constructing a family outside of enslavement, yet the process of self-purchase, as seen, required intense sacrifice and often years of labor and negotiations.

Extant documents do reveal trends in manumissions, factors that encouraged manumissions, and factors that either discouraged plans for self-emancipation or limited options as well as how these factors affected the number of persons manumitted and the timing of these events (see figure 39).

²⁶⁸ Will of Susan Madison, written November 30, 1840, proved in court December 28, 1840, Fauquier County Will Book 17: 66-67.

²⁶⁹ Ted Maris-Wolf investigated this dilemma in his study of manumissions, freed blacks, and the choice to return to enslavement under the nominal ownership of a master willing to protect to some extent the stability of enslaved families. Maris-Wolf, Ted. *Family Bonds: Free Blacks and Re-enslavement Law in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

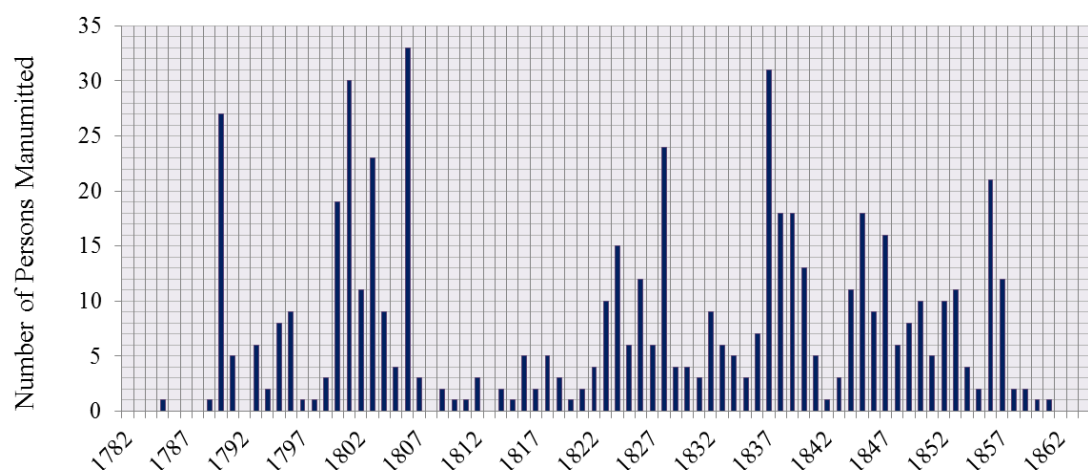


Figure 39. Number of persons manumitted by deed, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties, 1782-1865.

Note: Data based on the year in which the deed was written, not recorded in court as a measure of county and individual sentiment towards manumission as well as the ability of enslaved persons to negotiate terms for emancipation.

Data from each county also demonstrates that even within a small geographic area, local communities played a crucial role in encouraging or discouraging emancipations (see figure 40 and figure 41). Loudoun slaveholders tended to manumit the greatest number of enslaved persons and Prince William the fewest persons. Loudoun slaveholders also manumitted slaves at a fairly consistent rate over the sixty-five year period while both Prince William and Fauquier experienced more frequent and longer periods of time without any recorded manumissions. This suggests that slaveholders in Fauquier and Prince William lived in areas less amenable to an increased presence of free blacks. This also hints that changes in the enslaved population in these two counties came primarily from the movements of masters out of the area, from slave sales, and to some

extent, from the numbers of runaways, factors that will be discussed in following chapters.

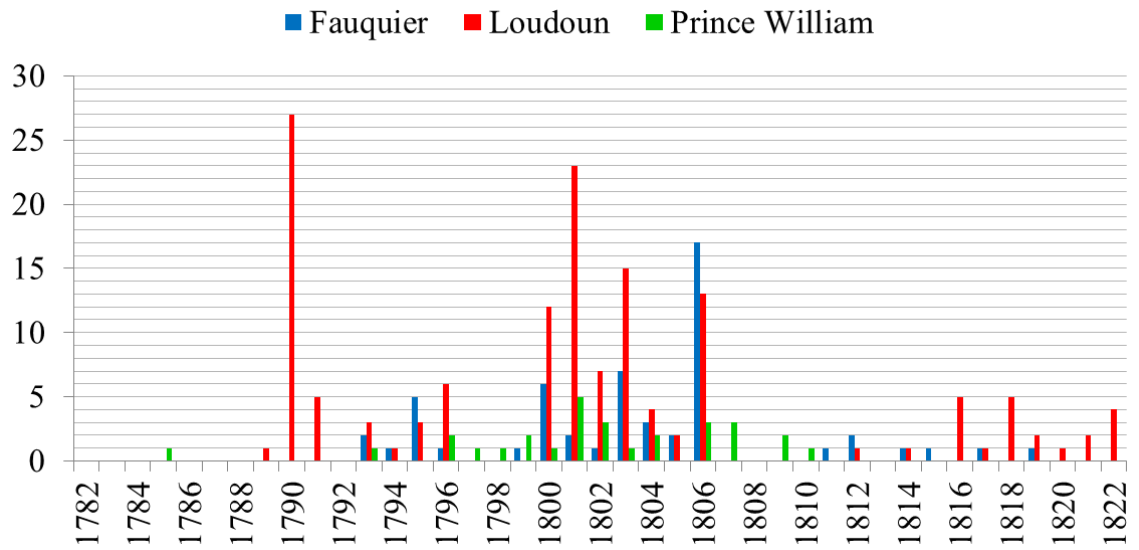


Figure 40. Number of persons manumitted by deed, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties, 1782-1822.

Note: For analysis, the year indicated is the year in which the deed was written, not recorded in court.

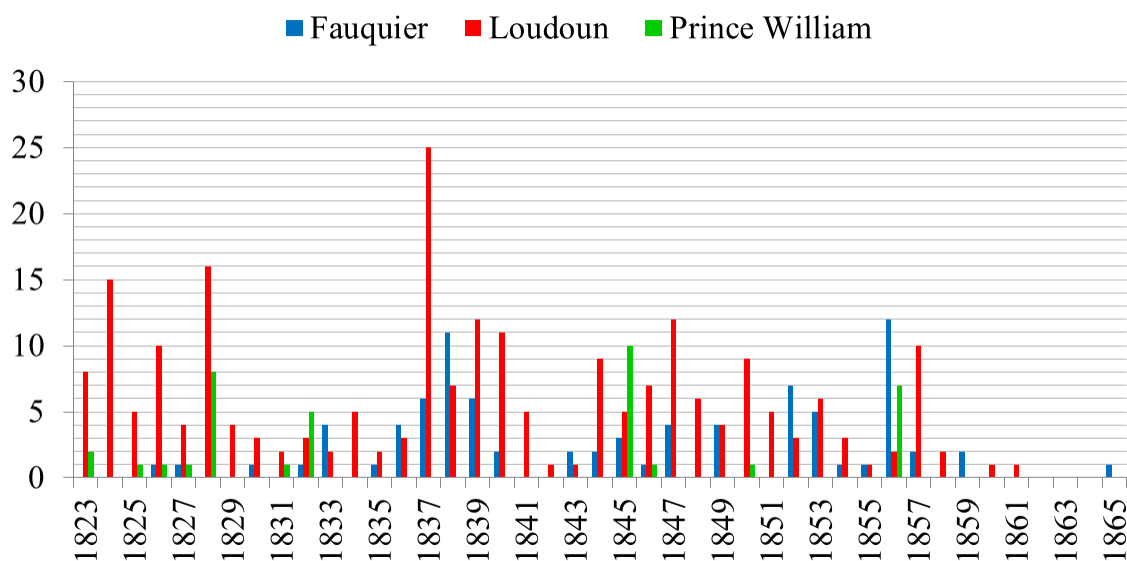


Figure 41. Number of persons manumitted by deed, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties, 1823-1865.

Note: For analysis, the year indicated is the year in which the deed was written, not recorded in court.

Freedom for individuals rather than any widespread diminution of the institution of slavery remained acceptable across northern Virginia, yet increasingly differences appeared in the process and language of freedom between Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties. The process of manumission challenged, confirmed, and broadened the concept of community. Deeds revealed the determination of certain enslaved persons to achieve liberty within a society that equated race with enslavement. Wills and deeds of manumission also articulated the constraints of liberty under the laws of Virginia and within each of the three counties. Over time each county developed its own particular language for communicating and delineating the rights of enslaved and freed persons.

The process of manumission and its effect on Virginia society resulted in competing meanings of freedom. Slaveholders considered service, slave values, and

community support when deciding whether to emancipate. Free blacks viewed manumission as a process to acquire and free enslaved spouses or children. For enslaved persons, manumission offered a safety-valve against a lifetime of enslavement by giving some sense of hope for freedom, if terms could be negotiated with slaveowners. Yet manumission in Virginia also illuminated the complications to family stability in a state with residency laws that forced difficult choices between family and freedom. Guided by personal convictions or religious affiliation, the decision to manumit changed over time due to Virginia law, community support (or lack thereof), and deliberations over the best options for family stability. Despite challenges, enslaved persons and families in northern Virginia leveraged opportunities for negotiated freedoms.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE AND THE EFFECTS ON NORTHERN VIRGINIA FREE AND ENSLAVED COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES

The structure and cohesiveness of northern Virginia counties, communities and families changed over time as some residents chose or were compelled to move out of the region. Likewise, the gaps left by migrants left space for incoming migrants to alter social and economic networks with their own interpretation of labor theory, agricultural management, and religion. Some residents made the decision to move as individuals, as a family or as part of a social or economic network while other residents were forcibly removed from their homes and families. This chapter seeks to explain the causes of demographic shifts, the consequences for families and communities, and the effect on enslaved persons by exploring the following questions: How did the shifting populations alter pre-existing community demographics? What was the effect of forced migrations on enslaved family stability? How did newcomers change the prevailing cultural landscape of the region?

There could never be one static identity in the slave society of northern Virginia because of the regular outward and inward movement of free and enslaved persons. These movements both in and out of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties shaped the climate for change, dissent, resistance, and tolerance within each county. These demographic changes forced northern Virginia societies to contend with the

economic needs and the social demands of many different groups of people, not just the most visible clusters of Quakers, religious communities, or northerners who were perceived to promote anti-slavery influences. Forced disruptions in enslaved communities signaled the potential for upheaval and the reality of family dismemberment that triggered increased and varied acts of resistance and negotiation. The loss of these outward migrants altered community structures and family networks by removing potential slaveholders or landowners, decreasing the presence and economic influence of free blacks, and confirming the fragility of slave-owner control over enslaved property.

Other relocations that altered local demographics involved white migrants who moved into Virginia from other states, especially emigrants from northern states who sought inexpensive land and opportunities for personal advancement. The influx of merchants, artisans, professional classes, and farmers accustomed to non-slave societies and their acceptance or rejection of the institution of slavery proved to be a gauge of the social pressures of conformity and the strength of communities based on a slave economy.

These migration patterns and trends changed over time both from economic incentives and social pressures. Underlying some decisions and the pressures relating to migratory movement was the personal relationship with slavery and enslavement. Studying this relationship between migration and slavery provides a more nuanced understanding of how the institution of slavery interacted with individual goals for advancement, acquisition, and community cohesiveness.

Individual and family movements contributed to the fluctuation of population among the free white residents of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties from 1790 to 1860 (see figure 42). Prince William's white population declined steadily in absolute numbers between 1800 and 1820 while Fauquier and Loudoun counties experienced a particularly significant decline in white population between 1830 and 1840. These declines support the conclusion that residents in these counties left in noticeable numbers, yet these trickles and streams of migration away from each county occurred at different times. Evaluating information from multiple sources, from county deed books, land and personal property tax records, newspaper advertisements, letters, family biographies, and personal accounts, in addition to census records reveal more details about the outward migration from these three counties in northern Virginia.¹

¹ Rising and falling population rates are one, albeit imprecise, measure of the changes to local demographic identity. Fluctuations in white population could reflect many factors and calculations and should reflect an awareness of the effects of mortality, short-term removal, and census error. Mortality influenced county population, yet calculating a precise mortality rate would be hypothetical at best without a solid source for death notices for all segments of the population and Virginia did not require state-wide reports of births and deaths until 1853. While a portion of each county's deaths could be tabulated from cemetery records or obituary notices, incomplete records of all burials during any period presents a problem. The tendency for wealthier families to post obituaries, an expense not often born by less affluent residents, means that published obituaries represented only a fragment of the deaths occurring in this area. Likewise, short-term removal for education or temporary employment also affected decennial census enumerations. A third factor for questioning absolute numbers of residents derives from the problems of conducting census enumeration at the local level. Manuscript census records offer a snapshot of population, household size, agricultural output, and slaveholdings, yet there are caveats in using these manuscripts to determine the number of outward-migrating individuals. Incomplete records, faulty tabulation, or misidentification of residents skewed census enumerations. Donald F. Schaefer suggests that using census population statistics can create errors in calculations as population rates "give no direct measure of migration but rather represent the inability to locate a family in the census," a consequence of the human faults in tabulating shifting populations. Donald F. Schaefer, "A Statistical Profile of Frontier and New South Migration: 1850—1860," *Agricultural History*, 59, no. 4 (October 1985), 564. Census enumerators then and today based their tabulations on reported residents while touring known habitations in the county over a period of time. The possibility of human error in under- or over-counting residents, therefore, must be taken into consideration when using these sources of data. For a discussion of the problems with federal census tabulations, see Opal G. Regan, "Statistical Reforms Accelerated by Sixth Census Error," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 68, no. 343 (September 1973): 540-546.

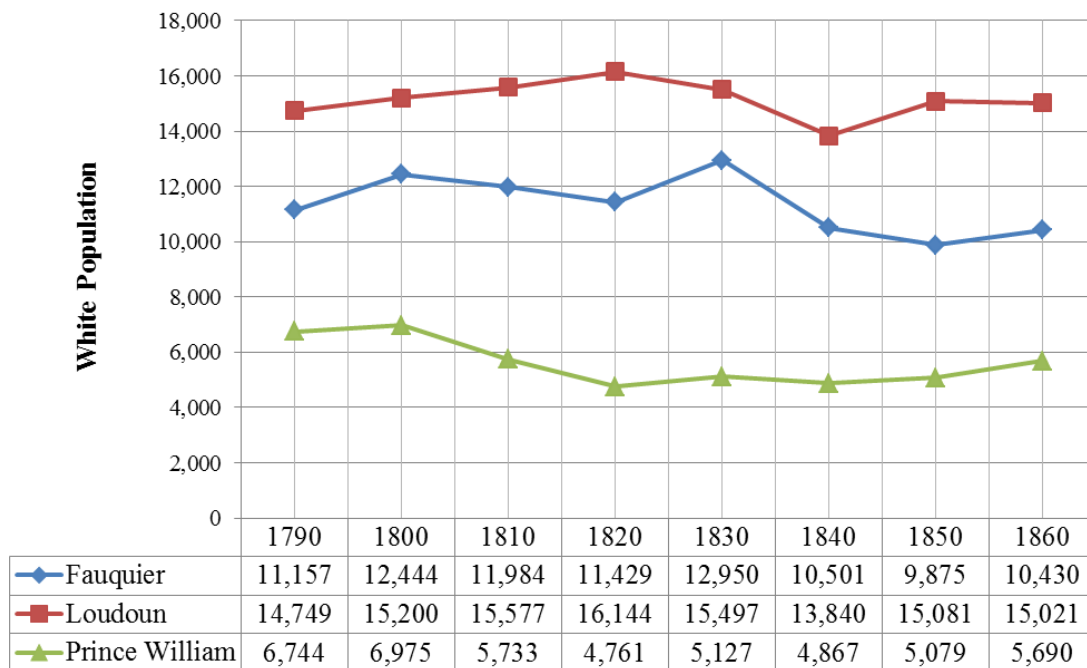


Figure 42. Changes in white population, 1790-1860.

Source: Social Explorer, Decennial Census Records.

Types of migrations

Often migration movements are grouped into two basic types, voluntary and forced, yet this binary categorization obscures the influence and effect of multiple factors. Within the northern Virginia region free and enslaved persons participated in migration movements as both agents and as reluctant parties. Debt, the influence of chain migration, residency laws, or a desire for self-advancement through economic opportunity (self-making) influenced outward migrations of white residents, free persons of color, and runaway slaves. A more nuanced approach is to consider the role of both internal and

external forces on the decision-making process and the resulting justifications for movement.

A free white person might face economic difficulties, yet would his migration be forced or voluntary if he opted to sell and leave the county rather than face mounting debt and creditors? A free person of color might be unwilling to leave kinship networks, yet local enforcement of state residency laws might blur the distinction between personal choice in relocating and the effect of community pressure and even force to evict certain residents. Enslaved persons experienced fewer opportunities for charting their own course of movement. Slave sales forcibly relocated thousands of individuals and small family groups away from northern Virginia without their consent or participation in the decision-making process. Enslaved migrations as a part of an entire household (white and black members) rested on the decision of the head of household rather than on the desires of all the rest of the participants and left few options for the enslaved to “voluntarily” remove. Therefore, enslaved people experienced most migration movements as forced or coerced, yet this terminology obscures the role of choice and agency in their lives.

Negotiated terms between slave and master for local rather than interstate sales, gaining a choice in the selection of a master, or manipulating a sale to one’s advantages offered some choice when faced with the prospect of removal. Running away offered an alternative to coerced removals, yet even this type of movement involved both outside pressures and internal decisions. Therefore, the distinction between forced and voluntary becomes muddled unless some parameters are attached. Migrants experienced both push and pull factors, both choice and pressure, that shaped courses of action. The level of

individual participation in the decision compared to the level of outside forces created a distinction between movements that were deemed “forced” and relocations that were justified as “voluntary.”

Reasons for white migrations out of northern Virginia

Contemporary observers and recent scholars alike ponder the circumstances that led to a surge in outward migration from Virginia. Scholars argue that a variety of reasons, including both external and internal factors fueled outward migration. The productivity of western land, cost-effectiveness of slave labor, opportunities for advancement outside the region, and positive reports from neighbors and kin already settled in new locations were some of the most important factors that affected the decision to remove from the counties.

Land owners in and visitors to northern Virginia noted decreasing productivity of land from soil exhaustion or soil erosion. During his travels from Alexandria to Warrenton in April 1834 British traveler Edward Abdy noted that Prince William and Fauquier counties “exhibited the effects of slavery.” Abdy noticed the “exhausted soil, miserable hovels, thinly peopled villages, half ploughed fields and spontaneous vegetation in rank fertility” as a stark contrast to the “activity and enterprize every where visible in the Northern States.”² Abdy theorized that the use of enslaved laborers rather than free labor de-incentivized land owners and tenant farmers from employing restorative methods of husbandry on the land. Landowners too poor to invest in plaister

² Edward Strutt Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States of North America, from April, 1833 to October, 1834*. Volume 2 (London: John Murray, 1835), 182.

or guano or who believed that relocation served them better than restoration often decided to sell up and move to lands of opportunity.³

Not every outward bound migrant was a significant land owner, so land sale advertisements constitute a limited means of gauging outward movement. Since private sales or renting out land comprised other means of liquidating assets, published land sales do not necessarily reflect the true number of outgoing residents.⁴ Land owners anxious to leave their northern Virginia farms and relocate to better lands carefully crafted land advertisements that boasted of the qualities of their landed holdings. While some residents across the region broadcast a desire to relocate when selling land and properties, this appears to be the case in only a minority of land sale advertisements.

Loudoun County landowners who expressed intentions to migrate included Alexander Young who advertised in 1815 he was “intending to remove to the Western

³ The application of plaster (commonly called plaister, plaister of Paris or gypsum) was one method of restoring soil worn out by exhaustive tobacco cultivation. In his 1803 *Practical Treatise on Farming*, Loudoun County farmer, John A. Binns advocated the application of “plaister of Paris” as well as manures, the cultivation of clover, and deep plowing strategies to revitalize exhausted soils, techniques that gained wide recognition as the “Loudoun System” and adoption across northern Virginia. See the advertisement for Binn’s treatise in the *Virginia Express*, November 17, 1803. Historian A. Glen Crothers found that reforms like those advocated by Binns did influence agricultural practices in northern Virginia claiming that “a significant portion of the region’s farmers adopted at least some agricultural innovations after the shift to wheat.” Alexandria merchants offered imported gypsum for sale in the 1780s, indicating the interest of northern Virginia farmers in soil recovery. A. Glen Crothers, “Agricultural Improvement and Technological Innovation in a Slave Society: The Case of Early National Northern Virginia,” *Agricultural History*, 75, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 154-157. A survey of newspaper land sale advertisements indicates the extent of plaister application or at least the belief that lands could be restored with tenets of Binn’s “Loudoun System” of soil restoration. In his advertisement for the sale of a 2,000 acre tract of land ten miles from Leesburg, Judge Jones claimed that 200 acres of his lands have been seeded in clover and “the plaister of Paris has been strewed on several hundreds of acres with the best effect.” “Land for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 16, 1814.

⁴ A survey of newspapers available online through the 19th Century U.S. Newspapers database for the period of 1800 to 1859 using the terms “intending to remove,” “desiring to remove,” and “determined to move” produced the handful of ads discussed here.

country.”⁵ Charles Tutt desired to “remove to the South” in 1823 and David James of “Evergreen” had already “made a purchase in the far West” by 1836.⁶ Charles Fenton Mercer had already “removed to Tallahassee, Florida” by the time he offered his home in Aldie along with 1,300 acres of land for sale in 1841.⁷ By 1856 E. J. Hamilton was “determined to leave the country” and offered his 653 acres of Loudoun farmland for sale.⁸

Periodically Prince William County landowners expressed intentions to move away from Virginia. By 1817 G. R. A. Brown planned to “remove to the western country” and offered his “desirable farm” consisting of between 500 and 600 acres of land known as Launville. Brown hoped Launville’s “contiguity to market, salubrity of air,” and the “agreeable and genteel society” of the neighborhood would entice a buyer.⁹ In 1820 Gerard Alexander, Sr. intended to “remove to the western country” and offered his plantation “Clover Hill” for sale.¹⁰ Henry Barron of “Rose Hill” in Prince William claimed he was “determined to move to the Southern or Western Country” in 1829.¹¹

Fauquier landowners also reacted to push and pull factors of outward migration. In 1826 Whiting Digges put up for sale his 900 to 1,000 acre plantation known as “Pageland” located a few miles east of Warrenton because Digges wished “to remove to

⁵ “Land for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 3, 1815.

⁶ “Locust Hill For Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 30, 1823; “Loudoun Land for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 1, 1836.

⁷ “For Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 29, 1841.

⁸ “Loudoun Farm At Private Sale,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 20, 1856.

⁹ “Launville for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 15, 1817.

¹⁰ “Clover Hill for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 6, 1820.

¹¹ “Real Estate for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, 24 March 1829.

the West.”¹² James French announced he was “wishing to remove to the West” and put his 933 acre farm up for sale in 1848.¹³ Both A. M. Payne and James Rogers were “determined to move to the West” and advertised their respective farms for sale: Payne’s “Clifton,” a nearly 800 acre farm in Fauquier County, went on the market in 1851 and Rogers offered “Waveland,” an 866 acre farm in Upper Fauquier, for sale in 1857.¹⁴ Fauquier landowner, Henry Fitzhugh, announced his intention to “remove to a non-slaveholding State” in 1833 when he offered large tracts of land and a tavern for sale, a decision that suggests other factors influenced movements out of Virginia.¹⁵

Announcing a desire to move out of the county might hinder a land sale if potential buyers questioned factors that might prompt a sale such as the quality of the soil, the salubrity of the air and water, or the availability of “good society,” so sellers usually took care to include glowing reports of these factors when advertising lands. Viewed in another way, landowners who indicated a desire to migrate also were willing to auction lands to the highest bidder rather than wait an undetermined amount of time for a buyer to appear. To encourage a quick sale, migrating landowners specified lands could be had on reasonable terms. David James informed buyers “a bargain may be had, for I am determined to sell,” while Charles Tutt indicated all factors would induce “a ready sale at a moderate price,” and Henry Barron offered to sell his property “on

¹² *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 17, 1826.

¹³ “Valuable Real Estate for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 9, 1848.

¹⁴ “Sale of Clifton Farm,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 9, 1851; “Waveland for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 2, 1857.

¹⁵ “Real Estate for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 29, 1833.

accommodating terms.” to draw buyers to northern Virginia.¹⁶ These sales tactics and concerns over the quality of soil explain the relative scarcity of advertisements specifically indicating migration as a motivation for sale.

The desire for upward social mobility or economic independence from parents contributed to the push factors that encouraged northern Virginians to move.¹⁷ James Oakes argued that “[m]assive dislocation was inevitable in a slaveholding culture that glorified movement, viewed westward migration as inextricably linked to upward mobility, and made material success the nearly universal pursuit” of southern migrants.¹⁸ Another prominent migration scholar, Joan E. Cashin, argued that migrants to the Southwest intended to “establish their independence and reject the all-encompassing seaboard family” while achieving status through “traits such as wealth rather than by being a member of a particular family.” For Cashin, achieving independence from oppressive family expectations was the key motivating factor for young southern male emigrants.¹⁹

In 1783 a visitor to northern Virginia, Johann David Schoepf, remarked that his Loudoun County host “had a numerous family” and “in order to provide for them, he wished to find a purchaser for his land, which was in good order, with much clean

¹⁶ “Loudoun Land for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 1, 1836; “Locust Hill For Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 30, 1823; “Real Estate for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 24, 1829.

¹⁷ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1991. James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (1982, repr., New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), especially pp. 69-95. David Hackett Fisher and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), especially chapter three.

¹⁸ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (1982; repr., New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 80.

¹⁹ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 120.

meadow.” Schoepf learned that with the potential proceeds from a land sale, the farmer could “remove over the mountains to Kentucky,” where he could “buy as much land as would give each of his children a sufficient portion.” The Loudoun father acknowledged his desire to establish his children in “land-estates” was a dream that was “difficult to manage in the older parts” of Virginia and thus necessitated “the incessant migrations to the farther regions.”²⁰

Fauquier landowner, Robert Beale, offered his land, farm buildings and furniture for sale in 1818 at “a sacrifice...in order to do something for my young brats (which are numerous).” Beale considered his options and decided the best future for his “numerous” children lay in “removing to the Big Bend of Tennessee or the Alabama territory” rather than continue farming in Fauquier.²¹ The motivation towards social mobility, not only for one’s self, but more especially for one’s children, led to an understanding of movement as part of the process of self-improvement, a desire experienced and expressed by the near constant trickle and often stream of emigrants moving out of Virginia.

Former Loudoun resident William McIntosh corresponded with the editor of the Leesburg *Washingtonian* in 1854 about his experiences moving to Brazos County, Texas. McIntosh claimed “[e]migration to this State during the past fall and winter has been enormous beyond precedent” and it was “no unusual thing to meet, in the Eastern counties, trains of one hundred and fifty wagons, with a family in each, all pressing forward to find their homes within the borders of the Lone Star State.” McIntosh

²⁰ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784] from the German of Johann David Schoepf*, Translated and edited by Alfred J. Morrison, vol. II (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911), 36, <<https://archive.org/details/intheconfederation02schhrich>>

²¹ “Oak Land Farm for Sale,” *Genius of Liberty*, February 24, 1818.

predicted the southwestern “tide of emigration” would not diminish, but would increase “every season...for years to come.” Affordable land and minimal labor needed to improve, enclose, and cultivate lands were “all that a man with a small family need desire to insure him a handsome fortune in ten years in Texas.” Though seeming to encourage non-slaveholding yeoman, McIntosh’s reports also offered inducements for slaveholders to bring Upper South slaves to Texas to sell citing reports that “young and likely negro fellows” could be purchased “from 1200 to \$2000” and enslaved women “from 1000 to \$1200.” Slaveholders seeking immediate profits could hire out enslaved men “from \$150 to \$200 per annum” and women “from 100 to \$150.” Non-slaveholding laboring emigrants also could prosper. McIntosh calculated that “white men who labor on farms” could earn “from 15 to \$25 per month” and overseers “from 250 to \$1000 per year.”²² Such inducements certainly influenced northern Virginians to take their slaveholdings south to sell or hire. As demonstrated by McIntosh’s boosterism, emigration away from Virginia offered potential financial promise not only for laborers and non-slaveholding yeoman farmers, but also for slaveholders wishing to profit from their slaveholdings.

Broad internal motivations for migrations, according to scholars, included the quest for upward mobility and material success; and the desire for manly independence and status based more on individual accomplishment than family connections. The timing of movements, individual traits of migrants, and personal wealth all shaped decisions to leave the Old Dominion and influenced the directions of movement.²³ Other northern

²² “How to Make a Fortune,” [Leesburg] *Washingtonian*, extracts published in the *Daily Evening Star*, June 16, 1854.

²³ See also the discussion of these factors and a useful research methodology based on tracking the migration movements of elite North Carolinian families and their progeny as found in Jane Turner Censer,

Virginians, encouraged by friends or family members who had previously moved away from Virginia, decided to follow the streams of migration.

The Geographic Dispersal of Northern Virginia's White Population

Encouraged by dreams of productive lands and opportunities for upward mobility, northern Virginians packed their households and headed north, west, south, and southwest. Census records provide one indication of the fluctuations experienced in the free, enslaved, and free black populations of northern Virginia, yet these numbers provide little information about directions of outward movements. County histories written during the 1870s and 1880s provide additional information about the geographic dispersal of migrants away from northern Virginia and the extent of chain migration that drew several families from the same home county to new residences in Arkansas, Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, or Indiana.²⁴

Early migrants left northern Virginia to settle in lands available in Ohio and Kentucky. The McCormicks left Prince William around 1803 for Ohio County, Kentucky.²⁵ Two years later the Dye family left Prince William for Washington County, Ohio.²⁶ In 1805, the Harris family left Loudoun County settled near Chatham, in Licking

“Southwestern Migration among North Carolina Planter Families: ‘The Disposition to Emigrate’,” *Journal of Southern History*, 57, no. 3 (August 1991): 407-426.

²⁴ County histories relied on contributing sponsors to finance their publication and first families were often willing to include a family history to capture their place. As such, memories of migrations that occurred decades prior could have been flawed, yet they provide information about the origins of incoming residents that otherwise might have been lost. These stories are included here as a guide to the extent of outward migration from northern Virginia.

²⁵ *History of Daviess County, Kentucky* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883), 697.

²⁶ *History of Washington County, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* (Cleveland, Ohio: H. Z. Williams & Bro., Publishers, 1881), 444.

County, Ohio.²⁷ Three years later Joseph Conard joined the Harris family in Licking County.²⁸ Charles and Hannah (Williams) Parker left Fauquier County in 1811, first settling in Kentucky, then in 1830 moving further westward to Marion County, Missouri.²⁹

The Lawrence family of Fauquier County experienced multiple moves. Rodham and Elizabeth Lawrence left Fauquier County in 1810 and settled in Kentucky. Their son, Woodford Lawrence (who was born in Fauquier County in 1800), returned to Fauquier County in 1823 where he taught for three years and married. Five days after the nuptials, Woodford and his bride “started with one horse to carry them and their effects upon his back to Crawford County, Ind., where they arrived January 21.” The journey apparently lasted for a month, and because of the cold weather the newlyweds were “obliged to walk much of the way.” Woodford farmed and taught until 1831 when they further migrated to Adams County, Illinois.³⁰

In 1815 Alexander Young intended to “remove to the Western country” and offered for sale his 308 acre plantation along the Horsepen Run in Loudoun County that included “comfortable buildings to accommodate a family.”³¹ In 1815 the Cummings moved from Fauquier and the Idens left Loudoun to settle in Ohio, while the Mobberlys

²⁷ *History of Licking County, O[hio]. Its Past and Present*, compiled by N. N. Hill, Jr. (Newark, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Co., Publishers, 1881), 693.

²⁸ *History of Licking County, O[hio]. Its Past and Present*, compiled by N. N. Hill, Jr. (Newark, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Co., Publishers, 1881), 251.

²⁹ *History of Marion County, Missouri*, volume 2 (St. Louis: E. F. Perkins, 1884), 762.

³⁰ *The History of Adams County, Illinois* (Chicago: Murray, Williamson & Phelps, 1879), 830.

³¹ “Land for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 3, 1815.

migrated from Prince William to Kentucky.³² Three years later George and Susanna Burson left Loudoun with at least seven children to make a new home in Columbiana County, Ohio while Philip McDermith, his wife and child also moved away from Loudoun to Ohio in 1818.³³ Also that year Fauquier natives Baily and Nancy Bell moved to Clarke County, Kentucky while Spencer Lake migrated to Coshocton County, Ohio.³⁴ In 1826 nineteen year old B. F. Ball migrated from Loudoun County to Arkansas.³⁵ Individuals and families like these were often the lead element in a series of migrations away from northern Virginia. Reports sent home from previous migrants or a desire to travel in a group for protection and to maintain some sense of community gave rise to chain migrations.

Chain Migration

Joseph Dearing, born and raised in Fauquier County, decided to emigrate to Missouri in 1833, “believing that there were better opportunities for young men of industry and intelligence in the West than were to be had in Virginia.” While in Marion County, Missouri, Dearing met and married another emigrant from Fauquier County, Nancy Wine, whose family had also emigrated west. Dearing’s skills as a wagon-maker made him a valuable addition to the new communities springing up in Missouri and most

³² *History of Coshocton County, Ohio: Its Past and Present, 1740-1881*, compiled by N. N. Hill, Jr. (Newark, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Co., Publishers, 1881), 596 and 812; *History of Daviess County, Kentucky* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Co., 1883), 700.

³³ *History of Hancock County, Ohio* (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Co., 1886), 700; *Combined History of Shelby and Moultrie Counties, Illinois* (Philadelphia: Brink, McDonough & Co., 1881), 293.

³⁴ *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois* (Springfield, Illinois: Edwin A. Wilson & Co., 1876), 109; *History of Coshocton County, Ohio: Its Past and Present, 1740-1881*, compiled by N. N. Hill, Jr. (Newark, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Co., Publishers, 1881), 588.

³⁵ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889), 638.

likely increased his income potential – a future he could not foresee had he stayed in Fauquier County.³⁶ Dearing’s migration may have influenced another Dearing family to migrate westward. In 1837, Mary Dearing, a widow from Fauquier County, left Virginia with her children and settled in Marion County, Missouri.³⁷

Several near neighbors of Lydia Ramey relocated from Loudoun County to Muskingum County, Ohio during the 1830s and 1840s. Adam Winegardner “removed to Ohio in the fall of 1832” after having lived on Lucky Hill farm, a property owned by the Ramey family, from 1828 to 1832. Patrick McGavack recalled he “was raised on my father’s farm, my father’s house being about half a mile from the house of Sanford Ramey, dec’d husband of Mrs. Ramey” before removing to Ohio in September of 1844. Itinerant farm laborer Armistead J. Wine threshed wheat for the Lydia Ramey from 1838 to 1845. Wine’s occupation of itinerant laborer who arrived at farms for the seasonal harvest and boarding with farm owners like Ramey may have contributed to his decision to leave Loudoun and find better opportunities for land ownership. By 1850 he also had left Loudoun County and relocated near Winegardner and McGavack in Ohio.³⁸ The continuing contact between Wine, McGavack, and Winegardner with Mrs. Ramey and her family indicates that despite moving away, these migrants remained connected to kinship and social networks back in Virginia. Wine and McGavack’s respective decisions

³⁶ *History of Audrain County, Missouri, Written and Compiled from the Most Authentic Official and Private Sources, including a History of its Townships, Towns and Villages* (St. Louis: National Historical Company, 1884), 726-727.

³⁷ *History of Marion County, Missouri*, volume 2 (St. Louis: E. F. Perkins, 1884), 617.

³⁸ “Deposition of Sundry Witnesses taken at the dwelling house of Patrick McGavack in the County of Muskingum and State of Ohio [December 1850],” *Leslie v. Ramey* as filed with *Ramey v. Ramey*, (1855) Loudoun County Chancery Case 1855-033 (original case number M847) Virginia Memory Library of Virginia Online Chancery Records. Hereafter referred to as *Ramey v. Ramey* (1855).

to resettle near other former Loudoun residents like Winegardner indicates the importance of established community and kinship ties in shaping migration patterns and destinations.

Sometimes friends or families decided to move away from Virginia as a group. Around 1827, when John W. Priest was but one year old, his father died, leaving his mother, Sarah (Smoot) Priest, to raise her six children in Fauquier County. Eleven years later, in 1838, Sarah Priest migrated with her six children to Marion County, Missouri.³⁹ Most likely Sarah travelled with other members of her extended Smoot family who moved away from Fauquier County in 1838. Edward and Harriet Smoot settled near West Jefferson in Scotland County, Missouri and Thomas and Annie Smoot settled near Palmyra in Marion County, Missouri.⁴⁰

Positive reports sent back home from family, former neighbors, or friends of available lands, favorable stock or commodity prices, or opportunities for increasing wealth influenced a pattern of chain migration. W. H. Marshall, born in Prince William County in 1814, migrated to Ohio with his wife in 1834, perhaps upon the recommendation of Mrs. Marshall's brother, F. A. Perry, who had already emigrated to Ohio in 1828.⁴¹ Prince William County native, Albert Wright left Virginia in 1848 and settled in Adams County, Illinois when he was about twenty-three years old. Four years

³⁹ *History of Lewis, Clark, Knox and Scotland Counties, Missouri* (1887, repr., Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, n.d.), 1200-1201.

⁴⁰ *History of Lewis, Clark, Knox and Scotland Counties, Missouri* (1887, repr., Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, n.d.), 1217; *History of Marion County, Missouri*, volume 2 (St. Louis: E. F. Perkins, 1884), 873. The Thomas Smoot family maintained their ties with southern culture noting later in the family biography that their son, T. P. Smoot "enlisted in the Southern cause under Capt. Richardson in the Missouri State Guards." Ibid.

⁴¹ *A. E. Caffee's Muscatine County History and Directory, 1876-'77* (Muscatine, Iowa: A. E. Caffee, Publisher, 1876), 145. The Marshalls continued their westward migration, arriving in Muscatine County, Iowa in 1852 where they farmed and raised fruit. *Ibid.*

later, his younger brother, John also left Prince William County to join Albert in Illinois on a nearby farm.⁴²

In 1834 Loudoun farmer George Slater wrote to his brother, Anthony Slater in Muskingum County Ohio informing Anthony of the “hard times” he was experiencing, that “money [was] not to be had and produce wont sell for any thing.” George noted the local prices of flour, wheat, and corn and asked Anthony to “give me the prices of grain and what land sells for” as he was “still thinking of coming to Ohio.” The decision to emigrate extended also to George and Anthony’s brother, William, who likewise considered relocating to Ohio yet William felt, however, that the opportunity to find a good place to settle might be “better farther out than your neighborhood.”⁴³

Fauquier resident James A. Tritt left Fauquier County and his extended family network to establish a new home in Henry County, Missouri in the 1840s. James and his sister, Mary E. Smith, maintained a steady correspondence over the next few years and discussed the benefits of removing to Missouri. By 1848 Mary and her husband Dr. Smith, “had been speaking very strongly lately of emigrating to M[issouri]...or some other State,” yet the Smiths hesitated in making the decision to migrate.⁴⁴ Mary supposed, “if Dr. Smith could get his price” for his land, the Smiths “should certainly do so,” thus

⁴² *The History of Adams County, Illinois* (Chicago: Murray, Williamson & Phelps, 1879), 799.

⁴³ Letter from George Slater, Loudoun County, Virginia, to Anthony Slater, Muskingum County, Ohio, April 2, 1834, Miscellaneous Virginia Letters, 1827-1867, Accession #11176, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

⁴⁴ Mary E. Tutt married John F. Smith on October 12, 1841 in Rappahannock County, Virginia. Virginia Marriages, 1785-1940, database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XRHC-3ZJ> : 5 December 2014), John F. Smith and Mary E. Tutt, 12 Oct 1841; citing Rappahannock County, Virginia, reference 59; FHL microfilm 33,674

indicating a family's ability to finance a large-scale movement influenced the timing of migration.⁴⁵

Mary's decision to make a break with her Fauquier community and join her brother's family in Missouri was based on several reasons. The high costs of farming expenses in Fauquier, according to Mary, were "3 times what [it] is worth" to continue farming. When the Smiths first decided to go into farming, they used profits from the sale of Mary's slaves to purchase land in Fauquier. Mary regretted that they had been forced to sell her slaves "at a sacrifice" to complete the transaction. Mary then questioned the rationale of paying for "six worthless servants at high wages who do not work half their time when he is away," a management decision that apparently left the family in some financial straits. Smith explained to her brother that "after all that expense" of paying for servants, they still had to buy "nearly every thing...that we eat," indicating that farm production was not diversified enough for subsistence living much less for reliable income. In the Smith's experience, the decision to go to farming drained the family finances while Dr. Smith's lucrative dental practice paid the wages of hired farm laborers.

Not only did the disappointment with Fauquier farming and the costs of maintaining an enslaved turn Mary's attentions to the west, but she also seemed to be disillusioned with the social life of Warrenton, the nearby county seat and hoped to find more enjoyable company in a new place. She was "determined...to sell out at any

⁴⁵ Mary E. Smith of Warrenton, Virginia Letter to James A. Tritt of Calhoun, Missouri, 1 July 1848, Accession #3896, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

sacrifice” and requested her brother send her newspapers from Missouri and to describe “the size of the place and what kind of society you have &c” to learn more about life in the west.⁴⁶ Mary Smith apparently relied on information provided by her brother to consider the benefits of migrating out of Virginia and into new lands further west. The weight of financial burden from farming and hiring enslaved labor threatened the family’s financial stability. For Mary, the desire to relocate was founded on a desire to change her circumstances through both economic and social factors: increasing wealth by focusing efforts on establishing a profitable dental practice; improving social connections by entering into a new and more agreeable society; and relieving the threat of debt by abandoning farming and the frustrations of hiring temperamental enslaved laborers.⁴⁷

For some northern Virginia residents, the lure of land, potential wealth, new society or improved status was not enough to recommend outward migration. The Smiths had some assets that could finance a long-distance migration. Over time the Winegardners, Wines, and McGavacks also were able to finance their exodus. Other potential migrants faced not only economic factors, but personal factors when considering whether to undertake such a change. Correspondent Sarah Buckner of

⁴⁶ Mary E. Smith of Warrenton, Virginia Letter to James A. Tritt of Calhoun, Missouri, 1 July 1848, Accession #3896, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

⁴⁷ By 1850, the Smith’s, dentist John F. Smith, Mary (listed as Ellen), and son Charles, had moved to Cooper County, Missouri and were living with the family of Mary’s sister Susan and husband Zephania Turner. 1850 U.S. Federal Census, District 23, Cooper County, Missouri, Roll M432_397, page 98B, heritagequest.org. Mary’s dreams of Missouri were realized nearly too late for her to profit. In December 1851 while relatively young at the approximate age of 37 years, Mary E. Smith wrote her will from Cooper County, Missouri, shortly before her death. Smith mentions her son, Charles Edward Smith, and siblings Susan Turner, Sarah Hill, James A. Tutt, Lewis C. Tutt and Henry Tutt, but no mention of her husband, suggesting that he may have already died. Will of Mary E. Smith, written December 1851, proved in Cooper County, Missouri, February 13, 1852, Circuit Superior Court Fauquier County, Fauquier County Records At Large, (1821-1881): 271, microfilm.

Cooper County, Missouri advised her elder cousin Elizabeth Blackwell of Upperville, Fauquier County, in 1841 that

[i]n this New Country immigrants have to encounter many hardships & undergo many privations that you could not stand[.] I think, all who are well situated in Virginia had best stay. Young people who can conform to circumstances, or those with large families would do well to come...⁴⁸

Apparently, Buckner felt that emigrations were best suited for younger persons who had health and energy to dedicate to the demands of movement and settlement or suited to established households (perhaps with combined white and enslaved laborers) large enough to handle the required workload.

Buckner's admonishment that "all who are well situated in Virginia had best stay" applied to many, yet that did not mean some residents could not participate in the financial gains offered by migration. Prominent Fauquier residents, Judge John Scott and Dr. Helm, hired William McCoy from Fauquier County to survey and purchase lands for them in Missouri and Illinois on a speculative basis in 1836.⁴⁹ McCoy's choice as an employee rested not only on his expertise in surveying and assessing land, but also on the fact that his brothers already had recently settled in Missouri and who could assist in the land selection and purchase process.

⁴⁸ Letter from Sarah Buckner of Cooper County, Missouri to Elizabeth Blackwell of Upperville, Fauquier County, Virginia, 5 April 1841. Blackwell Family Papers, Accession 5764-D, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

⁴⁹ McCoy refers to Judge John Scott and [Erasmus] Helm of Fauquier County. Both were prominent men in the county with extensive land and slaveholdings. In 1830, John Scott owned 70 slaves. Erasmus Helm is not listed in the 1830 census for Fauquier County but married Virginia Aisquith, daughter of Richard H. Henderson on September 20, 1832 in Fauquier County, Virginia. "Virginia Marriages, 1785-1940," database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XR8C-5LX> : 5 December 2014), Erasmus Helm and Virginia Aisquith, 20 Sep 1832; citing Fauquier, Virginia, reference r4 p386/r5 p41; FHL microfilm 31,634.

Corresponding from Missouri to his wife, Ann, back home in Warrenton, McCoy indicated he had located “only a little upwards of 2000 acres” for Judge Scott and “a little more than half that quantity for Dr. Helm” during his days assessing and surveying lands. McCoy reported that there were still lands “in small quantities,” yet the land rush was evident:

as soon as a surveyor is seen with compass in hand, and chain carriers heard [shouting] ‘Stick’ – Stuck’ then every fellow’s eyes are wide open – as the moment I find a piece of land that is desirable, I must lose no time in getting to the land office, or some one will be ahead of me.⁵⁰

Since both Judge Scott and Dr. Helm remained in Fauquier County, the purchase of these lands were most likely a speculative venture – lands that could be resold to fellow Fauquier residents headed west or to other Missouri-bound emigrants. In this way, Scott and Helm could encourage outward migration to northern Virginia residents who sought to acquire more or better lands.

The end result of the migration was to reshape the constituent components of northern Virginia and create openings for northern migrants to buy land and settle. As seen in the experiences of these northern Virginians, the decision to move was based on many interrelated factors: frustration with limited opportunities for wealth; decreasing productivity of soil and increasing costs to make land more productive; a desire to form new communities with friends or family. Yet some of these aspiring migrants held enslaved property, so the decision to leave the Old Dominion affected not only white

⁵⁰ William McCoy to his wife Sally Ann McCoy, November 26, 1836. McCoy Family Papers, 1836-1856, Accession #4488 and 44888-a, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

families, but also the black families tied by kinship and enslavement to these migratory household.

“Misourie Feavour,” Cotton Fever, and Movements of the 1830s

In 1838 Fauquier farmer, Ariss Buckner wrote that “the ‘cotton fever,’ which raged so intensely a few years since, to the south, not only carried off some of our most active and enterprising people, but deprived us to a very injurious extent of our negroes.”⁵¹ In 1839 Octavia Edmonds Blackwell Chilton wrote to her sister Francis “Jane” Blackwell in Fauquier County reporting that family friends “have [all] got the Misourie feavour.”⁵² Both Buckner and Chilton noted what others were beginning to realize: that outward migration affected a broad swath of Virginia’s population during the 1830s including residents of Fauquier and Loudoun counties. From his post as President of Washington College in Lexington, Henry Ruffner commented that in “the ten years from 1830 to 1840, Virginia lost by emigration no fewer than 375,000 of her people, of whom East Virginia lost 304,000 and West Virginia 71,000.”⁵³ Local observers in northern Virginia also noted outward migration in the 1830s. Preacher Nicholas J. Brown

⁵¹ R. B. Buckner, “Agriculture of Upper Fauquier,” From the *Farmers’ Register* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, November 28, 1838.

⁵² Letter from Octavia [Edmonds Blackwell Chilton] to Francis Jane Blackwell, July 8, 1839. Papers of the Blackwell Family, Accession 5764-d, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia.

⁵³ Henry Ruffner, *Address to the People of West Virginia* (Lexington, Va., 1847) as quoted in David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville, Va: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 137.

Morgan remarked in 1836 that the “tide of emigration bore away a number of our most useful members” from the Sudley Methodist Church in Prince William.⁵⁴

Ruffner’s comments and Morgan’s parish observations reflected the reality of outward migration for the northern Virginia region during this particular decade. Loudoun County’s white population fell in absolute numbers from 15,497 to 13,840, an 11 percent decrease. The number of white Fauquier County residents declined from 12,950 in 1830 to 10,501 in 1840, a decrease of 19 percent. Prince William’s population decreased by only 260 free white persons, a mere five percent drop in number of residents representing a slight hiccup in population from 1820 to 1840 after a steady decline from 1800 to 1820.⁵⁵ Loudoun and Prince William would rebound from this particular decennial decrease in white population by 1850 while Fauquier County would not rise above its 1840 population level until after the Civil War. This dramatic shift in population of approximately 13 percent or 4,366 white inhabitants during one decade, prompts questions about the nature of white migrations and their effect during this decade.

Land sale records offer one means of measuring demographic movements when land sales were initiated due to outward migration and incoming migrants purchased those vacated lands. A survey of sixty tracts of Prince William County lands offered for sale in the *Alexandria Gazette* from 1830 to 1840 reveals that only three landholders

⁵⁴ Nicholas J. B. Morgan, “One Circuit Rider’s Record,” *Virginia United Methodist Heritage*, Bulletin of the Virginia Conference Historical Society, United Methodist Church, 6, no. 1 (Spring 1978): 10-16 as quoted in Elizabeth Harrover, E. R. Conner III, and Mary Harrover Ferguson, *History in a Horseshoe Curve: The Story of Sudley Methodist Church and Its Community* (Princeton, New Jersey: Pennywitt Press, 1982), 53.

⁵⁵ *Social Explorer*, Decennial Census Records for Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties.

specifically identified relocating out of the county as a motivation for selling lands.⁵⁶ In 1835 a land agent from the George Johnson & Company agency offered 604 acres of land in Prince William County “for sale or exchange” as “the owner desires to locate himself in the District [of Columbia]” or to exchange his lands “for improved property in Washington or Alexandria.”⁵⁷ Landowner William Waite was anxious to sell his 500 acre-tract known as “Neabsco” in 1836 as he was “intending to remove to his Farm in Illinois.”⁵⁸ In 1832 Waite paid taxes on three slaves over sixteen years of age, two white males and seven horses, a considerable investment in horses, yet an average slaveholding for the county.⁵⁹ By 1838 Benjamin Dyer was “determined of removing to the west” and offered 700 acres of mainly wooded lands along with “a good grist and saw mill in good repair” for sale. Apparently, his publicized deadline to sell his property by September 8, 1838 was not met as he advertised again in the spring of 1839.⁶⁰ With such a large estate, it might be speculated that Dyer was a planter who also ran a milling business and possibly employed or owned enslaved laborers to work his farm or his mill. Dyer reported four slaves residing in his household in the 1830 census enumeration along with

⁵⁶ The data used for Prince William land sales derives from Ronald Ray Turner’s transcripts of *Alexandria Gazette* advertisements pertaining to Prince William County. Specific examples were consulted from microfilmed copies of issues of the *Alexandria Gazette* on file at the Bull Run Regional Library in Manassas, Virginia. Turner’s compilation includes the first available publication of each specific advertisement. Ronald Ray Turner, *Prince William County Virginia 1784-1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (United States of America, 2000).

⁵⁷ “Farm for Sale or Exchange,” *Alexandria Gazette*, 9 June 1835 as recorded in Ronald Ray Turner’s *Prince William County Virginia 1784-1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (United States of America, 2000), 165.

⁵⁸ “Public Sale,” *Alexandria Gazette*, 16 August 1836 as recorded in Ronald Ray Turner’s *Prince William County Virginia 1784-1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (United States of America, 2000), 170.

⁵⁹ Prince William County Clerk, *Prince William County Personal Property Tax Book*, 1832, page 12, microfilm.

⁶⁰ “Land and Mills for Sale,” *Alexandria Gazette*, 19 August 1838 and 5 April 1839 as recorded in Ronald Ray Turner’s *Prince William County Virginia 1784-1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (United States of America, 2000), 173 and 176.

four white males of working age, indicating that some of his white laborers boarded with him.⁶¹ In 1832 Dyer paid taxes on two adult slaves and five horses. William Tylor, a non-slaveholding white man also resided on Dyer's property in 1832, perhaps as a supplemental farm laborer.⁶² Yet Dyer's removal to the west would only have removed a handful of Prince William County residents or enslaved persons.

One-third of the Prince William lands for sale in the *Alexandria Gazette* during the 1830s, or twenty-one of the sixty parcels of land, resulted from chancery court decrees. These court-ordered sales generally arose to recover debts owed, to divide estates of deceased persons, or to generate funds from sales of such estates to benefit widows or orphans. The second most cited cause for land sales comprising nine of the sixty properties for sale in Prince William County arose from forfeited deeds of trust. Deeds of trust served both as a protection of property from creditors as well as a form of mortgage on property or line of credit using specified property as collateral. Cash-strapped property holders often used these conveyances to borrow money from wealthier residents who effectually secured the debts of the grantor. Should the deed grantor fail to reimburse the trustee within a specified period of time, the trustee could legally execute the deed of trust and sell the specified properties (most commonly land, slaves, or household items) to recoup the debt.⁶³

Considering that Prince William experienced a net loss of 260 white persons during this period with relatively few landed estates offered for sale, either the majority

⁶¹ 1830 Federal Census, Prince William County, Virginia.

⁶² Prince William County Clerk, *Prince William County Personal Property Tax Book*, 1832, pp 4 and 12, microfilm.

⁶³ Compiled data includes only tracts of land. Houses or town lots were not considered as a measure of large slaveholding property owners.

did not have landed estates to sell, or they consigned the lands to an agent or trustee to sell. These migrants might not have publicized their intention to move in local advertisements, or, if they held any property at all, they might have sold to local residents or family in private sales. Since neither Waite nor Dyer could be considered a significant slaveholder, and many of the other property sales appear to be used to cover debts or living expenses through court-ordered deed of trust or chancery sales, property owners in Prince William who sold lands during this decade by and large do not appear to have voluntarily sold assets in order to move, but merely to meet immediate needs. These Prince William County land advertisements from the *Alexandria Gazette* suggest that debt and the resulting loss of lands might have incentivized some county residents to move out of the county: quite a different circumstance than when wealthier land-owning or slaveholding residents voluntarily chose to migrate to fresh lands and took entire households, white and black.

Local and regional newspapers tell a story of outward migration from northern Virginia in the 1830s. By 1839 John Carr was “determined to remove to the West” and offered his 413 acre farm located “one mile north of Waterford” for sale.⁶⁴ Richard B. Merchant, who planned to “remove to the South,” advertised the sale of his part-ownership in a fishing company and shoreline property near Dumfries in 1836 in the *Intelligencer*.⁶⁵ Likewise, after David James “made a purchase in the far West,” he advertised the sale of his Loudoun property in the *Intelligencer* in 1836.⁶⁶ J. A.

⁶⁴ “Sale of Land,” *Washingtonian*, February 9, 1839.

⁶⁵ “For Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 12, 1836.

⁶⁶ “Loudoun Land for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 1, 1836.

Williamson used the *Intelligencer* to publicize the sale of his home, out-buildings, and 210 acre farm located “one mile south of Warrenton.” Despite his plans to “remove [only] to an adjacent county,” Williamson like other northern Virginia land-owners believed the broader circulation of Washington, D.C.’s *Daily National Intelligencer* increased his chances of locating a willing buyer.

Other migrants left traces of their journeys in the family biographies contributed to county histories. In 1831 Samuel and Mary Richards and Stacy and Mahala Lacey moved away from Loudoun County and settled in Ohio, in Muskingum County and Licking County respectively.⁶⁷ The next year Isaac and Christina Brown left Loudoun and moved to Zanesville, Ohio.⁶⁸ The year 1833 saw even more migrants away from northern Virginia: the Glascocks leaving Loudoun for Illinois; Samuel Singleton leaving Fauquier for Marion County, Missouri; the Reed family departing Fauquier and settling in Coshocton County, Ohio; two of Sampson Windsor’s sons leaving Prince William County for new homes in Missouri; and Charlie Skinner leaving Loudoun for Missouri.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *History of Lewis, Clark, Knox and Scotland Counties, Missouri* (1887, repr., Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, n.d.), 819; *History of Licking County, O[hio]. Its Past and Present*, compiled by N. N. Hill, Jr. (Newark, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Co., Publishers, 1881), 707.

⁶⁸ *History of Washington County, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* (Cleveland, Ohio: H. Z. Williams & Bro., Publishers, 1881), 555.

⁶⁹ John Carroll Power with Mrs. S. A. Power, *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois* (Springfield, Illinois: Edwin A. Wilson & Co., 1876), 331; *History of Marion County, Missouri*, volume 2 (St. Louis: E. F. Perkins, 1884), 995; *History of Coshocton County, Ohio: Its Past and Present, 1740-1881*, compiled by N. N. Hill, Jr. (Newark, Ohio: A. A. Graham & Co., Publishers, 1881), 771; Wm. S. Bryan and Robert Rose, *A History of the Pioneer Families of Missouri, with Numerous Sketches, Anecdotes, Adventures, etc., Relating to Early Days in Missouri* (1876, repr., Columbia, Missouri: Lucas Brothers, publishers, 1935), 298; *The History of Grundy County, Missouri* (Kansas City, Missouri: Birdsall & Dean, 1881), 687.

The Dillon family followed the Glascocks to Sangamon County, Illinois, leaving Fauquier County in 1834.⁷⁰

The year 1835 saw the departure of many northern Virginia families including the Randall family from Loudoun County who moved to Ohio.⁷¹ Both the Cookseys and the Moreheads left Fauquier and settled in Missouri, and James Green migrated to Alabama from Fauquier County.⁷² Loudoun natives Walter Braham and Joseph Reese both left Virginia and moved to different locations in Ohio in 1835.⁷³ Vincent Rector emigrated with his wife and children from Fauquier County to Morgan County, Illinois in 1835. Two years later Rector moved his family from Illinois to Pike County, Missouri, perhaps at the recommendation of other Fauquier families who had emigrated to Missouri in the 1830s. Rector's son, James, though, chose to return to Morgan County from Missouri where he "made life a success."⁷⁴

In 1837 a group of "about 200 persons" comprised of "no less than twenty families" arrived in Cooper County, Missouri. This group included ten families who emigrated from Fauquier County. According to news from the *Boonville Herald* republished in the *Alexandria Gazette* an additional twenty families from Fauquier were

⁷⁰ *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois* (Springfield, Illinois: Edwin A. Wilson & Co., 1876), 251.

⁷¹ *Atlas of Shelby Co. Indiana To Which are Added Various General Maps, History Statistics, Illustrations* (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1880), 36.

⁷² *History of Lewis, Clark, Knox and Scotland Counties, Missouri* (1887, repr., Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, n.d.), 732, 750, and 941-942.

⁷³ *History of Washington County, Ohio, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches* (Cleveland, Ohio: H. Z. Williams & Bro., Publishers, 1881), 128-129 and 702.

⁷⁴ "James S. Rector," "1894 Plat Book of Morgan County Illinois" transcribed by Shirley Aleguas from *Plat Book of Morgan County, Illinois* (American Atlas Company, 1894), 63 as found at <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ilmaga/morgan/1894/1894_4.html>

“expected...next fall” confirming the influence of group planning and chain migration.⁷⁵

In 1838 James P. and Elizabeth Carter moved their family from their home in Prince William County to the Batesville vicinity in Independence County, Arkansas where James worked as a carpenter and house-joiner while farming.⁷⁶ Clearly, Virginians from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties moved in all directions away from northern Virginia during the 1830s.

Newspaper accounts confirm that outward migration was not limited to a few periods of time, but instead occurred throughout the settlement and resettlement of northern Virginia. In November 1849 the *Kanawha Republican* noted that “a very large number of emigrants” from Virginia had passed through Charleston, [West] Virginia “nearly all bound for the free States, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin.” The observer reported a total of twenty-three wagons “numbering 150 persons...from Franklin, Giles, Carroll, Nelson, Loudoun, and Greenbrier” counties. In his description, he noted the emigrants “bore an appearance of respectability” that marked them “of the bone and sinew of the State.”⁷⁷

Another news-worthy migration occurred in the fall of 1857 when “[m]any of our most valuable citizens” from Fauquier County put their property up for sale and prepared to depart “for the west.” This group included the Hugh Rogers family of Piedmont and

⁷⁵ “Emigration from Virginia to Missouri,” *Boonville Herald*, December 1, 1837 as republished in the *Alexandria Gazette*, December 27, 1837. The *Alexandria Gazette* also published news about the emigrants including the death notice of former Fauquier resident, William Stewart, a ploughmaker, who had emigrated to Boon County, Missouri who died in August 1839 at the age of about fifty. Known as a “proverb of industry and integrity” Stewart “let numerous friends and relations in the county who will appreciate his loss.” “Died,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 3, 1839.

⁷⁶ *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas* (Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1889), 648.

⁷⁷ *Kanawha Republican*, as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, November 16, 1849.

James Rogers of Waveland, located near Salem [now Marshall]. To prepare for the move James Rogers planned to sell “his splendid farm” and “all his perishable property, except his servants.”⁷⁸ The decision to liquidate land and “perishable property” yet retain enslaved holdings represented in many ways a calculated decision to bring workers and potential sources of quick cash in the rapidly developing and financially lucrative slave markets of the west, southwest, and Deep South during the antebellum nineteenth century.

By the time of the 1850 census records when enumerators first recorded places of birth, more than “388,000 native Virginians” were living in states other than Virginia, an indication the scope of state-wide outward migration over time.⁷⁹ The scope of Virginian outward migration suggests that northern Virginians participated in this movement. From northern Virginia they headed both towards the free states of the northwest and to states firmly entrenched in the institution of slavery (see table 6). As seen in land sale advertisements, newspaper reports, and personal accounts, former northern Virginia residents fueled this outward migration by relocating across a vast geographical territory. This demographic shift affected localities in Virginia changing community and family structures.

⁷⁸ “Warrenton Items,” from the *Whig* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 21, 1857. “Waveland for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, 2 April 1857.

⁷⁹ Fischer, David Hackett and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 137.

Table 6. Residences of migrants from Virginia, 1850

State	Virginia-born Residents in 1850
Mississippi	8,357
Alabama	10,387
Pennsylvania	10,410
North Carolina	10,838
Illinois	24,697
Missouri	40,777
Indiana	41,819
Tennessee	46,631
Kentucky	54,694
Ohio	85,762

Source: “Virginians in Other States, 1850,” David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 139.

Migrations with Enslaved Force

Northern Virginia slaveholders who grew weary of trying to produce sufficient crops from worn out lands envisioned lands to the west and southwest as a new hope for creating wealth. Rather than selling off enslaved persons, these slaveholders chose to move entire slaveholdings to new lands. These planter migrations affected not only the white family members of a household, but also the enslaved men, women, and children whose labor and value as moveable commodities enabled the creation of future wealth. The forced removal of enslaved forces, whether with large or small households, rendered asunder “broad” marriages and kinship ties across multiple slaveholding farms and left lasting emotional scars.

During a conversation in 1835 with a northern Virginia clergyman, traveler Ethan Allen Andrews learned that the “land-holders in some parts of Virginia are becoming poorer nearly in direct proportion to the number of their slaves and the extent of their

plantations, while those of Mississippi and Louisiana are growing rich with unexampled rapidity.” The result of these circumstances led Virginia planters or their grown children to sell their lands “as fast as possible” and begin “removing with their slaves.”⁸⁰

According to the information provided by the clergyman, Andrews believed that the “increasing poverty of the planters in Virginia, and their consequent inability to furnish a comfortable support for their slaves, increase the desire on the part of both master and slave to remove to a land of greater abundance.”⁸¹

The twin effects of soil exhaustion and erosion influenced Fauquier slaveholder Thomas Brown to move away from northern Virginia. Brown later recalled that despite several years of improvements, his Fauquier land at “Mt. Ephraim” along the Rappahannock River was “naturally too sterile and too subject to devastating freshets” to continue working.⁸² In November 1827 Brown “left two or three old negroes to take care of the buildings” at Mt. Ephraim and headed south towards Florida with the rest of his household in a company comprised of “twenty odd young men, 144 negroes, 5 four-horse wagons, two carryalls, and my family carriage and five saddle horses.”⁸³ Brown sought

⁸⁰ “Letter XVIII, Washington, July 22, 1835,” Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 117.

⁸¹ “Letter XVIII, Washington, July 22, 1835,” Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 119.

⁸² Thomas Brown, “An Account of the Lineage of the Brown Family. Written by Hon. Thomas Brown, of Tallahassee, Governor of Florida. Copied by Rebecca Kearsley, March, 1899. Re-copied by Lucy J. Ambler, December 1936. Written by Thomas Brown of Belair, Florida, February 23, 1865,” Ambler-Brown Family Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, 59.

⁸³ Thomas Brown, “An Account of the Lineage of the Brown Family. Written by Hon. Thomas Brown, of Tallahassee, Governor of Florida. Copied by Rebecca Kearsley, March, 1899. Re-copied by Lucy J. Ambler, December 1936. Written by Thomas Brown of Belair, Florida, February 23, 1865,” Ambler-Brown Family Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, 60. According to a deed filed in Fauquier County, Brown’s enslaved men James, Spencer, and Ben remained at Mount Ephraim when Brown left with the rest of his enslaved force for Florida. Fauquier County Deed Book 29, 509.

new opportunities not in the traditional cotton south, but in the “wilderness” of Florida where he might turn to cotton or sugar cane production and left Virginia with nearly his entire enslaved work force.

When the Macrae, Wallace and Dade families departed from northern Virginia in 1849 “to seek new homes in Tennessee,” they traveled in a company of one hundred-forty “white and colored” persons, an indication that these planter families took their enslaved forces or newly purchased slaves with them.⁸⁴ A year later, these three families and their enslaved work forces were still together, living in proximity to each other along the Tennessee-Kentucky border in Montgomery County, Tennessee. Lucien Dade and Bagley Macrae settled upon adjoining farm lands with their families.⁸⁵ William W. Wallace, a lawyer, set up residency in a hotel with his wife and six young children, probably in the county seat of Clarksburg where he could re-establish his law practice.⁸⁶ In 1850 Wallace owned three enslaved women who he apparently hired out or loaned to his friend Lucien Dade, to join Dade’s enslaved force of twenty-six male and female slaves, aged sixty-five to one years old. Considering the proximity of Wallace’s enslaved force to Dade’s in the slave schedules along with Wallace’s residence in town, it seems most likely that Wallace preferred Dade take charge of his enslaved women, a beneficial

⁸⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 18, 1849. The families of William W. Wallace and Bagley W. Macrae migrated away from Fauquier County while Lucien Dade and his family left Prince William County. Ibid.

⁸⁵ 1850 Federal Census records for Montgomery County, Tennessee include 37 year old Lucien Dade, a plasterer, his wife, six children ranging in age from 11 to 1 year old, and 60 year old Elizabeth Dade, possibly Lucien’s mother. Dade’s neighbor in Tennessee was Bagley W. Macrae, a fifty-year old farmer whose family comprised of his wife and six sons ranging in age from 23 years to 10 years old. The oldest three sons held jobs as a sawyer, physician, and clerk respectively. Dade and Macrae had settled into a neighborhood populated by Virginia-born farmers. 1850 Federal Census Free Population Schedules, Districts 1-4, Montgomery County, Tennessee, 13.

⁸⁶ In 1850, W. W. Wallace, a 44 year old lawyer, resided with his wife and six children aged 13 to 2 years old in A. M. Lyle’s hotel, possibly in Clarksburg, the county seat and site of the county courthouse. 1850 Federal Census Free Population, Montgomery County, Tennessee, 56.

decision for any of the Wallace – Dade slaves involved in kinship or social networks that had developed back in Fauquier County.⁸⁷ The ability to maintain some extended kinship ties when whole households moved together mitigated to some degree the emotional loss caused by removal from Virginia. Keeping enslaved communities together probably aided in adjustments to the new location while slaveholders surely hoped the proximity to friends and relatives would reduce the impulse for individuals to run away.

Other slaveholders maintained separate properties and divided their enslaved holdings between farms in northern Virginia and plantations in the Deep South. This type of migration often kept some members of enslaved families together while sundering ties between extended family members. The Peyton family split their slaves between Fauquier County and a plantation in Brandon, Mississippi yet intrepid slaves kept in communication with the “old Folks” through letters addressed to their “Dear Old Master,” Robert Peyton.⁸⁸ Peyton relocated his enslaved man Solomon Hudnall, his wife, and other slaves to Mississippi at some point prior to 1860. In a letter addressed to Peyton, Hudnall enquired about Peyton’s white family and described the status of crops on the Mississippi plantation, yet devoted most of his letter to enquiries about his own family left behind in Virginia. Hudnall wanted to know “how many of the old Folks are

⁸⁷ Lucien Dade and W. W. Wallace were listed next to each other in the slave schedules for Montgomery County. The census enumerator tallied three enslaved females belonging to Wallace, aged 40, 16, and 10 years old. No enslaved persons owned by Macrae were listed in the readable portions of the Montgomery County slave schedule. Since some census pages for this county are quite faded, including the page with Dade and Wallace’s enslaved persons, information on Macrae’s slaveholdings might be obscured. 1850 Federal Census, Slave Schedule, Districts 1, 2, 3, & 4, Montgomery County, Tennessee, 13.

⁸⁸ For the division of the slaves belonging to Chandler Peyton, Robert’s father, between Peyton family members in Virginia and Mississippi see “Appraisement of Slaves - A List of the Dower Slaves now living, belonging to the Estate of C. Peyton, dec'd" *Robert E. Peyton v. Eliza B. Peyton, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Case 1843-004, Virginia Memory Chancery Records Online, Library of Virginia <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1843-004#img>

still living – who is alive & who is dead” and especially asked whether Lucy and Jim were “still alive” and whether his wife’s mother was still living and also “where does she live?” Solomon reported his wife, Milly, “has had 13 children and only lost 2 since we have been here.” He also conveyed the information that “old sister Mary is still living and does nothing but mind the children” and that the Filton servants “all send their love to you all.” Hudnall asked Peyton to tell Jim, Lucy, “all the family” and “all enquiring Friends” “howdy for me and Milly.”⁸⁹

Solomon Hudnall’s letter captured the sense of loss experienced at the forced separation of family and friends. He expressed the desire to learn whether family in Virginia still lived and also requested his former master transmit information about the health, well-being, and status of his own family to friends and family in Fauquier County. Hudnall’s letter demonstrated the importance of enslaved family ties and the eagerness of enslaved persons to maintain networks of communication with former masters and residences. Hudnall adopted a positive tone on the migration that separated the families while emphasizing his station as dutiful servant: Hudnall addressed Peyton as “My Dear Old Master,” enquired first about the white Peyton family, and closed the letter as “your old Friend & Servant.”⁹⁰ Most significantly, Hudnall included in his letter the poignant message that “*if I never see any of you again on Earth May we all meet in heaven where parting will be no more,*” alluding to his recognition of the permanent effects of forced

⁸⁹ Letter from Solomon Hudnall of Brandon, Mississippi to Robert Peyton of Fauquier County, Virginia, June 24, 1860. Peyton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁹⁰ Hudnall wrote that “we have every thing we can ask for so you see I am satisfied I have as good a home as any body.” Letter from Solomon Hudnall of Brandon, Mississippi to Robert Peyton of Fauquier County, Virginia, June 24, 1860. Peyton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

removal on enslaved families and to the importance of his religious faith in dealing with loss.⁹¹

From their first appearance in Virginia, enslaved laborers became part of forced migrations away from coastal ports, up rivers, over mountains into the interior of Virginia and then further southward and westward. Allan Kulikoff estimated that between 1790 and 1820 white slaveholders took “nearly a quarter million” slaves “hundreds of miles from their families and friends” to cultivate tobacco or cotton on frontier plantations” in Kentucky, Tennessee, the Carolinas and Georgia. This disruption shattered “the fragile security of the slave community” while initiating the next great wave of forced migrations.⁹²

Enslaved persons who were forced to move with white households long remembered the emotional toll of these movements. Former enslaved man, William Brown, recalled that when his “master got all broke up at last,” he “started with his slaves for Missouri.” Although the master of Brown’s wife and children offered to purchase Brown in a gesture to keep that family together in Fauquier County, Brown’s master “cared nothing for that” and claimed that he could realize the proffered sale price of \$250 “out of him [Brown] in Missouri in three years.”⁹³ Brown, along with the rest of that enslaved work force had to leave family and friends behind in Virginia when his master migrated to Missouri.

⁹¹ Letter from Solomon Hudnall of Brandon, Mississippi to Robert Peyton of Fauquier County, Virginia, June 24, 1860. Peyton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. Emphasis mine.

⁹² Allan Kulikoff, “Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790-1820,” in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, edited by Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 143.

⁹³ “William Brown,” Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 281.

Some scholars have argued that planter migrations limited the potential distress to slave families because the relocated cohort maintained some semblance of a community to support the displaced slaves.⁹⁴ While this perspective may mitigate the sense of loss in some large planter households that already had an established plantation community, it downplays or ignores the destruction of extended kinship relationships and broad marriages like that of Thomas Brown and fails to consider the loss experienced by individuals and small groups of enslaved persons forced to leave as part of a household migration.

Consider the experience of eight year old Harriet, the sole slave inherited by David and Mary Warford from the Settle estate. David and Mary Warford lived an “honest but very plain” way of life in Loudoun County with Mary’s widowed mother, Naomi Settle, and Mary’s siblings. The extended Settle family derived their livelihood “principally by cultivating the farm” and by hiring out an enslaved woman, Sarah. Failing to see many prospects for future upward mobility, the Warfords decided to move away from Virginia and seek their fortune in Kentucky in 1818, taking with them the young enslaved girl, Harriet. While the Warfords considered Harriet “inherited property,” Harriet knew she was Sarah’s daughter and the Warford relocation forced Harriet to leave mother and home. Harriet had already experienced the annual loss of her mother, Sarah, when she was hired out to generate income, yet Harriet’s removal from Loudoun represented a different and more permanent kind of loss. This parting from her mother

⁹⁴ Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 143.

was made all the more significant and emotionally traumatic in light of Harriet's young age and her mother's death five years later in 1823 in Loudoun County.⁹⁵

Some slaveholders recognized the potential emotional distress caused by transporting slaves away from abroad families. Prior to Robert Douthat's planned move to "Iowa country" with his enslaved laborers in 1848, the slaves on his Fauquier plantation planned a dance in order to say good-bye to their Virginia friends and family.⁹⁶ According to enslaved man Sam Hunton, a "parcel of folks came to see us before we went away" including free blacks and enslaved persons from as far as seven miles away.⁹⁷ Hunton may have already come to terms with the move that would separate him from his abroad wife, Jenny Priest, who was enslaved to the Willis Smith family and resided about seven or eight miles from Hunton, by planning a marriage with one of Douthat's slaves, Harriet, who, unlike his then wife Jenny, would accompany Hunton when Douthat migrated to the west.⁹⁸

Jenny was apparently not resigned to losing her husband to another woman despite the imminent migration, so she arranged to meet with Hunton, scolded him for "not coming to see her" and cut him with a knife, telling Hunton that she "would not have

⁹⁵ Harriet's owner, Mary Settle Warford apparently did not maintain much contact with her family after leaving for Kentucky, but forty years later Mary Settle Warford Towzer, (she had remarried following the death of David Warford) reappeared in Loudoun County to claim her share of the Settle estate. Answer of Thomas, Susan and Nelson Settle, *Mary Towzer v. Heirs of Reuben Settle*, Loudoun County Chancery Case 1878-069, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1878-069#img>.

⁹⁶ See testimony of Sandy Pollard and Burrell Lee in *Commonwealth v. Jenny Priest*, 1848-022, Box #20, AAHA.

⁹⁷ See testimony of Sam Hunton and Burrell Lee in *Commonwealth v. Jenny Priest*, 1848-022, Box #20, AAHA.

⁹⁸ Sandy Pollard, a slave residing at the James K. Marshall plantation about two miles from the Douthat farm, understood that Hunton was "going to marry Harriet, a slave belonging to Mr. Douthat, when they went to the Iowa country." Testimony of Sandy Pollard

done it [hurt him], but that she had been persuaded that if she had done so, [Hunton] would stay with her after that.”⁹⁹ The events at the Douthat dance portray the variety of complex emotions experienced by slaves involved in forced migrations: a public event to come to grips with imminent departure; abroad spouses facing forever separation; and often desperate measures taken to continue family ties.

Francis Fedric remembered his traumatic departure from Fauquier County around 1816 when his master, Mr. Parker, decided to move the family holdings to Mason County, Kentucky.¹⁰⁰ Enslaved men and women who had abroad marriages went “down on their knees begging to be purchased to go with their wives or husbands who worked for my master, children crying and imploring not to have their parents sent away from them,” yet despite all this pleading, families were “ruthlessly separated.” Fedric admitted their “wailings and lamentations and piercing cries sound in my ears whenever I think of Virginia.”¹⁰¹ Fedric noted that his master feared that some of his enslaved work force would run away during their forced migration from Virginia to Kentucky. Fedric recalled that “[t]wo or three times during the night, when we were encamped and fast asleep, one of the overseers would call our names over, every one being obliged to wake up and

⁹⁹ Deposition of Sam Hunton, *Commonwealth v. Jenny Priest*, 1848-022, Box #20, AAHA. Hunton’s wounds proved to be fatal and before his death, James K. Marshall, a neighbor of Hunton’s owner, Robert Douthat, wrote down Hunton’s statement “in his own words.”

¹⁰⁰ C. L. Innes, ed. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), x. Editor C. L. Innes believed Fedric the property of Dr. Alexander Parker of Fauquier County. After Parker’s death, ownership of Fedric turned to Parker’s wife, Amy, and sons, William and Richard. According to Innes, these Parker heirs moved from Fauquier County, Virginia to Mason County, Kentucky “[s]ometime between 1815 and 1820.” (x) Innes further qualifies this timeline when he states that Fauquier Court records from 1816 indicated that the Parker family “had moved to Kentucky” and were trying to sell their Fauquier lands. *Ibid.*, 11 n13.

¹⁰¹ C. L. Innes, ed. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 19.

answer.” The reason for this, according to Fedric, was that “masters are ever feverishly anxious about the slaves running away” especially on such long mass migrations.¹⁰²

Perhaps recognizing the difficulty moving a large enslaved force that might be unwilling to leave Virginia, some slaveowners left the decision up to their slaves whether to go to new lands in the west, south, or southwest or remain in Virginia with new masters. Fauquier slaveholder John H. Moffett considered the financial security of his family when he wrote his will shortly before his death in 1813. Perhaps he believed that his wife would want to take the family westward to seek their fortunes in new lands after his death. In that case provided that if his wife Sarah Smith Moffett remained on their Fauquier farm she should “keep my negroes together and work them during her widowhood until the said children become of age or marry.” If Sarah chose to move to Kentucky where Moffet owned land, she should “carry my negroes, *if they are willing to go*.” If they were unwilling to leave Virginia, “they must be sold and have the liberty to choose their masters.” Sarah Moffett could then use the profits from their sale to purchase other slaves agreeable to the move.¹⁰³ Moffett’s decision to leave the decision to travel to Kentucky to “his negroes” suggests either that he was sensitive to their family community in Fauquier County or he feared if unwilling to leave, his enslaved people might resist removal by running away or by retaliating – perhaps lethally – against Moffet’s wife and children.

¹⁰² C. L. Innes, ed. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 20.

¹⁰³ Will of John H. Moffett, written July 6, 1813, proved in court October 1813, Fauquier County Will Book 6: 22-23. Emphasis mine.

When David Elkins, Jr. decided to migrate from Fauquier County to Kentucky, he clothed his slaves in preparation for the move and apparently encountered “no difficulty about moving the negroes” with one exception. One enslaved woman “had a husband in the neighborhood who was unwilling to be parted from his wife.” According to a neighbor of Elkins, William Wood, it was this reason and “at the persuasion of some of his family” that Elkins changed his mind about migrating.¹⁰⁴ Elkins realized (or feared) that sundered enslaved family ties could affect the future work output of his enslaved woman and limit his potential success in the west. Even though a questionable title to possession of Amy was another compelling reason for Elkins’s apparent hesitation to take her with his household to Kentucky, the testimony given by Wood offers a deeper insight into the perceived problems of migrating with slaves. As a neighbor of Elkins, William Wood knew about Amy’s broad marriage and was aware of the resistance expressed by her husband to her leaving Virginia. The fact that this resistance was used to justify Elkins’s decision to abort the planned move speaks volumes to the difficulty that some slaveholders expected when separating enslaved spouses married abroad.

In his research on the domestic slave trade, Michael Tadman argued that planter migration accounted for no more than 30 percent of slave movements out of the Upper South, yet even this proportion represented a forced disruption to enslaved family life.¹⁰⁵ The fact that most northern Virginia slaveholders held relatively small numbers of enslaved persons meant that few of their moves could be characterized as planter

¹⁰⁴ Deposition of William Wood, November 24, 1827, *Admr of David Elkins v. Admr of William Kemper, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Case 1835-043, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, Library of Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1835-043#img>.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (reprint 1989) (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 31.

migrations (slaveholders with more than twenty slaves) (see table 1, table 2, and table 3). Most whole household migrations, therefore, displaced small numbers of slaves, removing them from spouses and extended kin and leaving them with few friends or family members to build a new sense of community. The disruption of community and sense of displacement and loss experienced by these household migrations, therefore, was more akin to the bereavement and isolation encountered when slaves were sold to long-distance traders, a subject examined next.

Slave Sales in Northern Virginia

When his master, Captain Lewis Edmunds died in 1858, Turner Montgomery was a ten-year-old enslaved boy in Fauquier County. To pay debts, Edmunds' estate was "broken up" by the sheriff.¹⁰⁶ Edmunds' daughter, Amanda recorded in her journal that "Diggar, Turner, Rufus, Marshall, Shirley and Mary Jane ...[were]...all part up to be sold" from Belle Grove plantation. Amanda, a young white girl from a privileged elite family, reacted to the sale of slaves as an emotional event, explaining that "...to see another crowd assemble at Bell Grove and one by one [the slaves] are cried off" was "frightful." The sale progressed and "[p]oor Turner [went] to the trader's." After the sale, Turner went to Amanda to say goodbye, so devastated that he was "crying fit to break his

¹⁰⁶ "After Forty Years A Reunion of Mother and Son Who were Slaves," *The Evening Star*, Washington, D.C., April 3, 1897. Hereinafter referred to as "Forty Years." The administrators for Lewis Edmunds advertised the public auction of "several LIKELY SERVANTS, mostly boys" from the Edmunds's estate scheduled for Thursday, April 22, at 11 a.m. "Negroes for Sale," *Alexandria Gazette*, April 15, 1858. Emphasis in the original.

heart.”¹⁰⁷ Forced to leave his mother in Fauquier County, Turner went with the trader to Winchester where Turner was secured in the jail “according to custom” until he was sold again and again “as an article of speculation.” Turner later recalled a series of sales that relocated him to Harper’s Ferry, Baltimore, and Richmond before an interregional broker shipped him further south to the trading hub in Mobile. A Mississippi planter bought Turner from Mobile, Alabama and transported him near Macon, Georgia where he was sold yet again. It was not until emancipation at the end of the Civil War that young Turner finally escaped from the trader’s block.¹⁰⁸

Turner’s experiences of his sale at a young age, his use by slaveholders and traders as an object of speculation, and his involuntary journeys between multiple slave trade markets before a more seemingly permanent relocation in the Deep South exemplified the harsh reality of enslavement and a peripatetic life suffered by northern Virginia slaves, especially by children and young adults. Historian Michael Tadman theorized based on research in traders’ records and slaving ship manifests, that a slave born in the Upper South between 1820 and 1860 had at least a thirty percent chance of being sold during his or her life.¹⁰⁹ Tadman’s forecast suggested a grim outlook for

¹⁰⁷ “Journal of Amanda Virginia Edmonds,” April 22, 1858, Amanda Virginia Edmonds Chappellear Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰⁸ “Forty Years.” The newspaper account of Turner Montgomery’s sales and relocations differs from Amanda Edmonds’ diary entry in that Amanda wrote that Turner was going to a trader bound for Washington [DC] while the later author of the newspaper article reported the trader first took Turner to Winchester [Virginia]. Despite the variations in the two accounts, the main point was that Turner experienced multiple sales between regional brokers and hub traders on his journey to the Deep South.

¹⁰⁹ Tadman argued that “from 1820 to 1860, teenagers from this area would have faced rather more than a 10 percent chance of being traded, and those in their twenties perhaps an 8-10 percent chance. By their thirties, the danger of falling into the grasp of interregional speculators would have eased to about 5 percent; and for older slaves the danger would have been dramatically reduced to perhaps 2 percent or less. For slave children living in the Upper South in 1820, the cumulative chance of being ‘sold South’ by 1860

enslaved children during this period. A close reading of slave sale documents, personal accounts, newspapers, and slave trader accounts shows the extent of the trade, the periods of most intense trading activity, and the age cohorts most likely to be swallowed up by the slave trade. More personal effects of the forced movement of enslaved persons resonated deeply in the lasting emotional trauma experienced by individuals, families and slave communities.

Effect of Slave Sales on the Enslaved

In 1860, when Fauquier County Census Marshall G. Calvert visited the Alexander Gordon home to compile data for the federal slave schedules, he recorded the biography of centenarian Aunt Suckey Hempstead in the margins of the slave schedule page:¹¹⁰

Aunt Suckey Hempstead belonged first to the Crumps, then passed to the Hempstead family and in the times of Braddocks War with the Indians belonged to Capt John Ashby living near Elk Run Church Fauq[ui]e[r] Co. Va & remembers the troops passing Elk Run Church with Hessian Prisoners & their gathering Persimmons and bringing them into Camp. They were on their way to the Barracks at Winchester Va J[ohn] Ashby moved to the West & left her with Joseph Smith who also went west and left her on Mr. Gordons hands who furnishes her a good house & supports her. She embraced Religion and was to Baptised in Sept last & seems well & happy, conversed very well & not more feeble than persons I have seen at 80 years of age.¹¹¹

As Hempstead's biography shows, she lived under the control of at least four slaveowners during her 107 years. As two of those men migrated westward, she was "left" with a new master, though it is unclear whether any of her family were able to

might have been something like 30 percent." Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 45.

¹¹⁰ Calvert did not indicate whether Sucky Hempstead or Alexander Gordon provided the information.

Based on the information provided, Calvert may have asked both for information.

¹¹¹ 1860 Federal Slave Schedules, Fauquier County, Virginia.

remain with her. By the time she came under the ownership of Alexander Gordon, her active laboring days had passed. Calvert pointedly observed that Gordon “furnishes her a good house & supports her.” Hempstead’s desire to embrace religion may have offered her some comfort in a life characterized by dislocations and successive owners.¹¹²

Historians have described the effects of the slave trade in various ways. Edward Baptist characterized the slave trade as “a process that belied any myths about paternalistic planters and kindly masters, a history both stolen and of being stole.”¹¹³ In her study of childhood during enslavement, Wilma King likened the effect of the separation of children from their parents by the slave trade to the displacement caused by war because of the near impossibility of maintaining contact. In King’s estimation, these “mournful partings were worse than death because the parents did not know what lay ahead for their children.” Death, at least, “erased uncertainties and provided hope that beyond the temporal world a family would have a joyful reunion.”¹¹⁴ These tropes of stolen lives and war-like dislocations hint at the traumatic experiences caused by the slave trade, most especially for the long-distance trade.

In her study of WPA interviews of former slaves from South Carolina, Emily West determined that enslaved families were “flexible enough” to adapt to changes wrought by local sales. It was the slave trader and long-distance forced separations that

¹¹² 1860 Federal Slave Schedules, Fauquier County, Virginia.

¹¹³ Edward E. Baptist, “‘Stole’ and Fetched Here’: Enslaved Migrations, Ex-slave Narratives, and Vernacular History,” in Edward E. Baptist and Stephanie M. H. Camp, eds., *New Studies in the History of American Slavery* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 243.

¹¹⁴ Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*. Second Edition. (1995, repr., Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 242.

created the “dominating fear” within enslaved communities.¹¹⁵ This fear bore out in the case of a family of slaves sold by their master from the Hillsborough neighborhood in Loudoun County. Two of the enslaved men, warned of their sale, fled before the traders could secure them, yet the rest of the family, “about eight or ten” women and children, were taken by the traders and transported away to secured lodgings for the night. In the morning, the traders discovered a “middle aged woman” had “taken something by which she put a period to her existence, choosing death rather than be dragged off by these tyrants.”¹¹⁶

The enslaved mother’s ultimate resistance to separation from her family speaks to the deep and abiding connection to place and family and often profound fear at the prospect of being lost to the domestic slave trade. Even as the females were taken from Loudoun County by traders, the two enslaved men “found persons to purchase them to remain in this county,” an indication of the strong attachments to place and family as well as the ability of enslaved persons to cultivate relationships with whites in their neighborhoods and thus secure owners willing (at least for the present) to keep them in familiar and familial territory.¹¹⁷

The emotional upheaval created by slave sales was truly devastating. Former enslaved man, Francis Federic recalled one enslaved woman exclaim that “selling is worse than flogging. My husband was sold six years ago. My heart has bled ever since,

¹¹⁵ Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 143.

¹¹⁶ “Black List: Extract of a letter from a Gentleman in Loudon County, Virginia, dated 10th inst.,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (Baltimore, MD), March 29, 1828.

¹¹⁷ “Black List: Extract of a letter from a Gentleman in Loudon County, Virginia, dated 10th inst.,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (Baltimore, MD), March 29, 1828.

and is not well yet. I have been flogged many times, since he was torn from me, but my back has healed in time.”¹¹⁸ Forced separations forever sundered intensely deep relationships among enslaved persons.

Enslaved woman Harriet Newby wrote to her free husband Dangerfield from northern Virginia in 1859 that she feared her imminent sale. Having heard that her owner, Mr. Jennings, was “in want of money,” Newby worried that because of the efforts of the other slaves to “set [her] mistress against me,” she would likely be sold to raise those needed funds. Newby pleaded with Dangerfield to “buy me as soon as possible, for if you do not get me some body else will.” Harriet, a mother of young enslaved children, felt that her sale away from Virginia and away from her husband meant that all her “bright hop[e]s of the futer [sic] are blasted.”¹¹⁹

Some historians have attempted to distinguish between the emotional effects of a local sale compared to a long distance sale.¹²⁰ In this perspective a local sale, meaning one within travelling distance of the former residence, enabled an enslaved person to retain family connections. Local sales included those brokered privately between residents and public sales such as court-ordered sales and estate divisions that shifted enslaved within the neighborhood or local area. The 1815 sale of Enoch Foley’s enslaved

¹¹⁸ C. L. Innes, ed. *Slave Life in Virginia and Kentucky: A Narrative by Francis Fedric, Escaped Slave* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 15.

¹¹⁹ “Letter from Harriet Newby of Brent[s]ville, Virginia to Dangerfield Newby,” August 16, 1859, *Governor’s Message and Reports of the Public Officers of the State, of the Boards of Directors, and of the Visitors, Superintendents, and other Agents of Public Institutions or Interests of Virginia* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1859), 117, <https://books.google.com/books?id=xDsUAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

¹²⁰ Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 143.

work force depicts how local sales, as opposed to trader sales, offered some hope to the enslaved for remaining within proximity of family and friends.

At the time of his death, Fauquier resident Enoch Foley held at least sixteen persons in bondage. After emancipating four slaves, Barnett Taliaferro (also written as Toliver), Elizabeth Davis, and Elizabeth's two children Mason and Hulder, Foley devised in his will that the remaining slaves should be sold: the proceeds from the sale go to the daughters of his brother, William.¹²¹ At the estate sale, William Foley, Enoch's brother, purchased John, Henry, Sally and Mariah to add to his substantial enslaved holdings.¹²² Other Foley relatives purchased David, Daniel, and Kitty.¹²³ Fellow Fauquier resident William Lawler purchased Patience to add to his holdings of three male and two female slaves, all under the age of fourteen.¹²⁴ Foley's emancipated slave, Barnett Taliaferro / Toliver purchased Bridget and her child Richard who possibly were Barnett's own wife and child (although neither Foley nor the estate auctioneers indicated such a relationship existed between Barnett and Bridget).¹²⁵ The other mother-child pair, Nancy and her

¹²¹ Foley left substantial property to Barnett and Elizabeth Davis including land, a dwelling house, and clothes. Will of Enoch Foley, Senior of Fauquier County, written 11 June 1814, proved 28 November 1815, Fauquier County Will Book 6: 179-180, microfilm.

¹²² By 1820 William Foley owned 44 slaves. 1820 Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, 240-241.

¹²³ Enoch Foley [the younger] purchased Daniel. John Foley purchased Kitty, and Susanna Foley purchased David. Account of Sales for the Estate of Enoch Foley, dec'd. Fauquier County Will Book 6: 242.

¹²⁴ In addition to the five young slaves, William Lawler's white family included two boys under the age of ten, one man aged 27 to 45 (presumably Lawler), four girls under the age of ten, a girl aged ten to sixteen, a girl aged 16 to 26, and a woman aged 26 to 45 to the combined household. 1820 Federal Census: Fauquier County, Virginia, 272-273.

¹²⁵ Barnett also purchased a significant amount of farm goods, livestock, and consumables from the sale of Foley's estate including furniture, farm implements, corn, hay, a wagon and necessary rigging, a horse, cow, and two hogs, property totaling \$467.78. He paid \$300 for Bridget and her child Richard. Account of Sales of Enoch Foley's Estate, Fauquier County Will Book 6: 242. By 1820 Barnett's free African-American family had expanded to include nine people: three boys under fourteen years of age, one man (Barnett) aged between 26 and 45 years, four girls under fourteen years old and one woman aged between 26 and 45 (possibly Bridget). "Barney Taliaferro," 1820 Federal Census, Fauquier County, Virginia, 310-311. Barnett's tax record for 1820 indicates he lived "at John Foleys" and paid one tithe for one free man

daughter, Gurta, were purchased by Hezekiah Cockrell, another Fauquier resident. Foley's slaves, at least for the present, escaped the terror of being sold out of the county or state. Instead, they took up residence with near neighbors, relatives of their former master, or in the case of Barnett, Bridget, and Richard, could look toward freedom with kin or friends, thus preserving to some extent their family and kinship ties.

Contrast the Foley sale with the sale of the slaves belonging to the estate of Joseph Morgan in 1852. Three well-known slave traders, Thomas Golding, Alexander S. Grigsby, and Joseph Bruin attended Morgan's estate sale.¹²⁶ Thomas Golding purchased an enslaved man named Alfred Carter and "negro girl" Lucy. A. S. Grigsby purchased Edmond, and Joseph Bruin purchased Isaac, Gabriel, Lavinia and Susan.¹²⁷ Most likely most of Morgan's slaves were bound for separate and distant owners, a bleak example of the vast diaspora of enslaved persons resulting from a public sale of the chattel holdings of just one northern Virginia slaveholder.

While "local" sales appear to offer a relatively mild geographical disruption to family connections, some slaves endured a lifetime of movements, even within a bounded territory, that pulled them time and time again from kin and friends. Enslaved man, Ned Thomson, was born about 1796 in Frederick County, Virginia as property of the Peyton family. After Peyton's death, Ned's fate was determined by the division of Peyton's estate when he was allotted to Peyton's daughter and her husband, Dr. Greyson. The Greysons sold Ned to a former neighbor, Mr. Helm, who operated a public house along

over the age of sixteen and also paid tax on four horses. "A List of Free Negroes within the district of Nimrod Ashby," Fauquier Personal Property Tax, 1820, 34.

¹²⁶ Golding, Grigsby, and Bruin traded in local markets and in the long-distance trade to the Deep South through hubs in Alexandria.

¹²⁷ Estate Accounts of Joseph Morgan, Fauquier County Will Book 25: 241.

the Little River Turnpike in Loudoun County. Helm sold Ned to Dr. Lewis of Jefferson County, Virginia who transferred Ned to James Lewis who lived near Leesburg in Loudoun County. Ned's movement between Frederick, Loudoun, and Jefferson counties occurred over a period of twenty-eight years, yet even the comparatively proximate movement occasioned by a local sale or property division still meant Ned was uprooted multiple times from family and social networks. Perhaps this constant shuffling of residences and owners influenced Ned to make his own move when he absconded from Lewis's service on August 12, 1824.¹²⁸

The fractured geography of the enslaved family of bondsman Richard Washington reveals the divisiveness of estate and local sales. Richard, who was property of the estate of Deborah Chunn of Charles County, Maryland, was hired out to work in Georgetown in the District of Columbia. His relatives were scattered across the broader Chesapeake region from Fauquier County in Virginia to the counties of Charles and Montgomery in Maryland.¹²⁹ Members of Fauquier bondsman Richard Gant's family were likewise scattered across northern Virginia and the District of Columbia. His wife was owned by a farmer in adjacent Loudoun county, a brother in Georgetown, a sister "on the Little River Turnpike, near Flatlick or Cub Run," an aunt located "over the Ridge" and other various relations living in Alexandria and Washington D.C.¹³⁰

George Henry Denna, born enslaved in Fauquier County on the "plantation of Josiah Lidbaugh," was sold away as a youth to an owner in Clarke County, Virginia.

¹²⁸ "200 Dollars Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 27, 1825.

¹²⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 13, 1826.

¹³⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 11, 1828.

Able to maintain some contact with his family still in Fauquier, he eventually lost track of them in 1849 when parents Carolina and Isaac Denna and his six siblings (Fanny, Jane, Betsy, Robert, Hugh Henry and Pilander) were “carried to Winchester to be sold.” Denna submitted an ad to the *Christian Recorder* while living in Galva, Henry County, Illinois in 1865 that requested that the “different ministers of Christian churches will do a favor by announcing the above,” in hopes that a member of the congregation recognized the places or names or family relationships mentioned. In hopes of recovering his family, Denna ended with the simple plea that “any information [of his family] will be gladly received.”¹³¹

Local church records hint at the abruptness of separation through sales when enslaved members suddenly disappeared from monthly church meetings. In 1823 the clerk of the Broad Run Baptist Church in Fauquier County noted that “information was received that Robin who belonged to William F. Carter at the time he [Robin] was baptized had been sold & *hurried off* to the Western County *where he was not expected to return*.”¹³² In 1835 Malinda was “sold to the Traders & taken off without a dismissal” indicating that the sale occurred so quickly that she had no time to apply to her church for a letter to take with her to her new home for admission into a church.¹³³ Dick “was some

¹³¹ “Information Wanted,” *Christian Recorder*, November 18, 1865 as printed in Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 162.

¹³² Minutes, June 7, 1823, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm. Emphasis mine.

¹³³ Minutes, April 11, 1835, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm. Malinda belonged to the Estate of William Sanders, dec’d and apparently the administrator or heirs opted for a quick cash sale. Ibid.

time past sold” from the estate of Eppa Hunton and was “taken off to the South” in 1837.¹³⁴

Some enslaved persons either had time to request letters of dismissal from their church following a sale or sent word from their new homes requesting such letters to facilitate gaining membership into a local church of the same faith and order.¹³⁵ In 1833 slaveowner Fitzhugh Carter sold Isaac and James. Before their departure from Fauquier County, they requested and received letters of dismissal from the Broad Run Church stating they left in full fellowship with the church.¹³⁶ Two years later when Carter sold George, Gorden, Nelly, and Lydia, the four were officially dismissed from Broad Run church, leaving in good standing with time to request letters of dismissal.¹³⁷

Long-lasting effects of sales

Thomas Jefferson, in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* described the emotional attachments of blacks as less refined than those of whites. Jefferson asserted that they were

more ardent after their female; but love seems with them to be more an eager desire than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. Their griefs are transient. Those numberless afflictions, which render it doubtful whether Heaven has given life to use in mercy or in wrath, are less felt, and sooner forgotten with

¹³⁴ Minutes, February 11, 1837, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³⁵ Communication networks maintained by white church members helped convey information about the whereabouts of slaves after their removal from northern Virginia.

¹³⁶ Minutes, August 10, 1833, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

¹³⁷ Minutes, July 11, 1835, Broad Run Baptist Church Records, 1764-1873, Library of Virginia, microfilm. The four were later “dismissed by letter” in September 1835, but church records do not indicate if letters were given to them or sent to their new residence.

them. In general, their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection.¹³⁸

The cries of parents in the wake of forced separation from children or kinsmen contradicted Jefferson's claims that blacks exhibited less emotional attachment to family. Pro-slavery apologists sought to disprove the existence of familial sentiments in enslaved persons in order to assuage guilt when economics or circumstances "necessitated" the separation of enslaved families. One popular book countered abolitionist arguments that upon "the circumstance of separating the families of slaves by their being sometimes sold to other masters" that "negro parents" could "acutely" or "as sentimentally" feel pain as white families might. Instead, the argument continued,

But this is a mistake, as we believe, and does not apply to the negro's case, as it would to that of the whites, on account of a want of the higher intellectual faculties of the mind of the blacks. On occasions of severe bereavement, the feelings of negro parents seem to be of shorter duration; as it is well known that the bond of marriage and family obligation with that race, is of but secondary considerations, or of slight influence, as a knowledge of, and a participation in, high intellectual love and elevated affections, is not reached by the black man's soul.¹³⁹

This racially-inspired reasoning offered slaveholders the means, even if flawed to modern ears, to justify separations and sales, and failed to take into account the grief expressed at partings or the long-held desire held by separated family members to reconnect. Yet by adopting such racial arguments against the capacity or presence of deep

¹³⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785, repr., Richmond, Virginia: J. W. Randolph, 1853), 150.

¹³⁹ Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 382-383.

and binding affection, slaveholders faced with the choice to retain or sever enslaved families could downplay their culpability in causing emotional distress.

Enslaved persons knew that these rhetorical arguments based on pseudo-science could never assuage their pain of separation from loved ones. Sales affected the enslaved population by tearing mothers from children, husbands from wives, and brothers from sisters. Through the fragmented information supplied in newspapers, biographies, and public documents, former slaves described the extent of the diaspora and its emotional toll as well as the lifelong hope, especially after emancipation, of reconstructing family and kinship connections.¹⁴⁰

Jackson Addison, born about 1817 in Leesburg, Virginia, remembered that his father, John, had been “taken from him” when he was a child. His family dismemberment continued when at the age of thirteen Addison’s mother, Lena, was also “taken from him.”¹⁴¹ Daniel Oakes recalled the fragmenting of his enslaved family. His father, Abraham, was owned by Joab Oakes “living near Bulls Run, Va” in Prince William County while his mother, Jane, belonged to a man in Franklin County, Virginia. When but eight years old, Daniel “was taken to Missouri by one George Lawes,” a rather tender age for a trader’s purchase, yet apparently within the desired age group for establishing or augmenting an enslaved work force along the frontier.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Historian Heather Andrea Williams explores the emotional costs of forced separations. Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

¹⁴¹ Record No. 128 for Jackson Addison, United States Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874, Memphis, Tennessee, Roll 24, familysearch.org.

¹⁴² “Information Wanted,” *The Christian Recorder*, March 15, 1877.

Nancy Fitzhugh, born about 1836, was only thirteen years old in Loudoun County when she was sent to Alabama sometime in 1849. She told a bank official in 1869 that it had been twenty years since she “saw any of her people.”¹⁴³ George Smith’s family was enslaved to the Jennings family on “Mary Hill Plantation” in Fauquier County. Around the year 1850 when George was about twenty years old, he was taken from his parents, Nellie and Paul Smith, and from his sisters, Mary, Esther and Elizabeth, to labor in New Orleans.¹⁴⁴

Many former slaves expressed a strong desire to find missing family members following emancipation and their advertisements for information in locating lost relatives demonstrate the enduring hope of reconstructing family ties. Twenty-one years after Thornton Copeland was sold away from Fauquier County and taken to the Richmond market in 1844, he still yearned to reconnect with his mother Betty. Copeland recalled that he had belonged to Robert Rogers of Fauquier County until taken to Richmond and sold to Samuel Copeland. Thornton also knew that his mother had been sold by her owner, Col. Briggs, to James French.¹⁴⁵ From even at an early age Thornton experienced the loss of his mother by a local sale and then another loss as his removal away from northern Virginia severed all ties to his kinship networks, yet he still attempted to reconnect with family members.

¹⁴³ Record No. 310 for Nancy Fitzhugh, July 22, 1869, United States Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874, St. Louis, Missouri, Roll 16, familysearch.org.

¹⁴⁴ Record No. 413 for George Smith, August 7, 1867, United States Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874, New Orleans, Louisiana, Roll 12, familysearch.org.

¹⁴⁵ “Information Wanted,” *The Colored Tennessean*, October 7, 1865. Betty may have been part of the westward migration of the French family in the late 1840s. James French put his Fauquier lands up for sale in 1848. “Valuable Real Estate for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 9, 1848.

Patty Varner, formerly enslaved in Washington, D. C. but residing in Augusta, Georgia in 1868, placed an advertisement seeking information about her son, Vincent Varner, who worked as a blacksmith in Middleburg “when last heard from.”¹⁴⁶ Likewise, Robert E. West placed an ad in the New Orleans, Louisiana *Black Republican* in 1865 in an attempt to contact his siblings who, to the best of his knowledge, still lived in Loudoun County in relative proximity to each other. West’s sisters, Mrs. Sarah Carter and Mrs. Emily Thompson “belonged to a Mr. Grubbs, near Waterford, Virginia” and brothers, George West and John Williams “lived in Lovettsville, Loudon county” while Robert had ended up in the bustling New Orleans market.¹⁴⁷

Nearly thirty years after the Civil War, Harry Conway of Chattanooga, Tennessee wondered what happened to former fellow slaves Bob Burrell and Juno Dade and decided to attempt to make contact with them through a “Lost Relatives” advertisement. Bob, Juno, and Harry had been enslaved to “Edward Burkley” of Prince William County (most likely Edmund Berkeley of “Evergreen”) until about 1857 when Berkeley sold Bob and Juno to a man named Daniel F. Cox. Conway apparently never forgot his fellow slaves, even long after their separation, and attempted through newspapers and informal communication networks to find them.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ “Information Wanted,” *Augusta (Ga.) Constitutionalist* as reprinted in the *Richmond Whig*, June 5, 1868.

¹⁴⁷ “Information Wanted,” *Black Republican*, April 22, 1865.

¹⁴⁸ “Lost Relatives,” *The Freeman*, May 26, 1894. Conway probably refers to an enslaved man named “Bob” and an enslaved woman named “Juno,” owned by Edmund Berkeley of “Evergreen” plantation in Prince William County. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia, 2003).

<<http://pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>> Hereafter referred to as *Evergreen*. Conway himself may have been enslaved to Berkeley during the 1850s as Berkeley chronicled on September 11, 1854 that he “had to have Harry whiped [sic] for impudence to the overseer.” *Evergreen*, 77. Like Harry, Bob seemed to have experienced a contentious relationship with Berkeley. On January 30, 1854, Berkeley

The efforts of Thornton Copeland, Patty Varner, Robert E. West, and Harry Conway to recover “stolen” family and friends from the diaspora of the domestic slave trade indicates the enduring resilience despite experiences of forced removal and the depth of human bonds that enslaved persons cultivated even when granted only short periods of time to form attachments. The trade that initiated these painful and traumatic separations represented a vast network of sellers, traders, purchasers, and unwilling participants across northern Virginia. The development of a professional class of traders greatly expanded the reach of the trade and the extent of the diaspora of northern Virginia slaves. Yet within this process of purchases and sales, other forces guided the engagement of slaveholders with the trade and the most desired participants in the trade, the subject of the next section.

Slave Trade Markets Utilized by Northern Virginia Slaveholders

In 1835 northern businessman George Rodgers committed his first experience attending a slave auction in Warrenton to his memorandum book.¹⁴⁹ According to Rodgers, the auction proceeded in the following manner:

The auctioneer called them upon a stage, bid them turn about and show themselves to the best advantage and after crying them for some time stating their

wrote that “Bob was impudent and ran off.” Soon captured, Berkeley brought Bob back to “Evergreen” only upon “his begging forgiveness & promising never to [do] so again.” *Ibid.*, 63. Berkeley noted in his farm journal that on January 23, 1854 he “paid Juno \$1 on hog.” *Ibid.*, 63. Later that year, on Sunday, May 7, 1854, Berkeley recorded that “Juno had a daughter.” *Ibid.*, 69. Juno may have been a namesake for another enslaved woman on the farm identified as “Old Aunt Juno” who died on April 18, 1855. *Ibid.*, 91. Though not clear in any of these diary entries, there may have existed some form of familial relationship between Harry, Bob, and Juno.

¹⁴⁹ On January 15, 1835 Rodgers recorded that he “passed through Elkton a small ville in Maryland near the PA line. Here was the first time I stopped in a Slave State and saw the first slave. Heard them talk about bying [sic] and selling the same.” George Rodgers, “Travel diary and commonplace book,” University of Virginia Special Collections, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1.

good qualities shewing how well they were made &c. They were struck off to the highest bidder at different prices from \$350 to \$500. They appeared to be very well pleased with the recommend[ation] the auctioneer gave them and the price they brought which was considered a good one.¹⁵⁰

Rodgers, who only days before encountered his first enslaved person, described the event as “a sight degrading to civilized man,” yet free and enslaved residents of Fauquier County viewed the sight of a slave auction as a commonplace event. The trade offered non-slaveholders a process for acquiring enslaved property while established slaveholders increased or decreased their enslaved workforces, according to need. In some cases slave sales provided free blacks opportunities to take possession of enslaved children or spouses. Yet despite the benefits of the trade to buyers, the devastating and permanent social and psychological effects of the trade on the enslaved altered the master-slave relationship in northern Virginia.

The omnipresent transactions between traders, buyers, and slaveholders undergirded a basic aspect of life in slaveholding areas – that the commerce in enslaved chattel was ever present and always threatened families in slave societies.¹⁵¹ Sites of sales were evident and ubiquitous across northern Virginia. Courthouses, public taverns, stores, farms, and homes served as venues for the exchange of enslaved lives and labors for cash or credit. An exploration of the complex slave markets in northern Virginia sheds light on the consequences of local sales, patterns of buying and selling within the intraregional

¹⁵⁰ George Rodgers, “Travel diary and commonplace book,” Entry for January 26, 1835, University of Virginia Special Collections, Charlottesville, Virginia, 4.

¹⁵¹ Steven Deyle asserted that the domestic slave trade “made the buying and selling of men, women, and children a regular part of everyday life” whether by experiencing public sales, by observing slave coffles trudging south, or by participating in local sales, the most prevalent type of sale. Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 144.

trade, and the human cost of the forced diaspora of enslaved persons away from northern Virginia.

In August 1818 the editor of the *Genius of Liberty* observed that Leesburg's streets had again been "darkened by a hoarde [sic] of manacled slaves, under the cruel lash of the savage soul driver, weeping their last adieu to their dear, their native home, their relatives & their friends."¹⁵² Historian Steven Deyle declared that whether "on the roads or on the waterways, in the country or in towns, some aspect of the slave trade could always be seen in the antebellum South." Sales were "performed in full public view" and "few were those who did not encounter its presence."¹⁵³

Sales at Fauquier's county courthouse were a frequent and public event, especially when timed to coincide with monthly court days like that on January 22, 1798 when the executors of James Mercer offered at public auction about "15 or 20 NEGROES, all of them Virginia-born SLAVES, consisting chiefly of Young Fellows, as likely as any that are to be met with."¹⁵⁴ Slaves were also cried off at sales "before the door of Thomson Ashby in the Town of Warrenton."¹⁵⁵ In Prince William County the tavern of George Williams in Dumfries regularly hosted public sales of slaves as did shops and ordinaries in Hay Market, Groveton, and Brentsville.¹⁵⁶ The courthouse in

¹⁵² "Slave Traders," *Genius of Liberty*, August 11, 1818.

¹⁵³ Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 145.

¹⁵⁴ "To Be Sold," *Virginia Herald*, January 17, 1798.

¹⁵⁵ "At Public Auction," *Palladium of Liberty*, July 21, 1820.

¹⁵⁶ "An Excellent Cook for Sale," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 24, 1808. Estate administrators John Spence and James Reid offered thirty-five "very likely NEGROES, consisting of men, women, and children" belonging to the estate of John Gibson for sale at "the house of Captain George Williams in Dumfries." "Negro For Sale on Monday," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 11, 1811. Two years later Spence and Reid offered fifty slaves from the Gibson estate at "the Tavern of Captain George Williams." "Slaves," *Alexandria Gazette*, March 14, 1813. "Negroes For Sale," *Alexandria Gazette*, December 16, 1815.

Leesburg drew crowds to observe or participate in the sale of human chattel especially on court days.¹⁵⁷ Private homes became sites of public sales to reduce expenses of transporting to and securing slaves at more central public spaces. After the death of G. Deneale, his administrator offered for sale “about twenty likely Virginia born SLAVES” at “the dwelling of Mrs. Elizabeth Deneale in Fauquier county.”¹⁵⁸ Estate executrix Mary Vandevanter offered a thirty year old enslaved man named Charles Paine for sale at her home in Leesburg in 1839.¹⁵⁹

Advertised slave sales drew potential buyers from across northern Virginia and in some cases from great distances. William Shedd and William Dabney travelled from Louisa County, Virginia to purchase slaves offered at a public sale in Dumfries in 1821. Shedd purchased Tom from Dr. Bronaugh of Dumfries and Dabney purchased brothers Peter, Fielding, and Cuddy from the estate of the deceased Col. Tyler.¹⁶⁰ Abner Wilborn and John Brown of Wilkes County, North Carolina each purchased at least one enslaved man from slaveholders residing in Dumfries.¹⁶¹

Northern Virginia slaveowners sometimes sought larger venues for sales of their enslaved laborers such as Fredericksburg, an urban center with convenient access to river transport. In 1811, Fauquier slaveholder B. M. Carter offered for public sale “one

“Commissioner’s Sale of Slaves,” *Alexandria Gazette*, November 12, 1849. Commissioner William H. Dogan offered “the Slaves belonging to the estate of Francis M. Lewis, deceased, consisting of Women, Boys, and Girls” for sale in Groveton. After the county court moved to Brentsville, that village became a frequent location for sales. For example see “Sale of Land and Slaves,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 2, 1843 and “Negroes for Sale,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 24, 1850.

¹⁵⁷ The public auction of six enslaved persons consisting of “1 man, 1 boy, 2 women and 2 children” were advertised for the “first day of May court next,” “Negroes for Sale,” *Washingtonian*, May 7, 1811.

¹⁵⁸ “Notice,” *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, January 10, 1816.

¹⁵⁹ “Negro Man for Sale,” *Washingtonian*, February 9, 1839.

¹⁶⁰ “One Hundred Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, December 27, 1821.

¹⁶¹ “Sixty Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, June 1, 1805.

hundred Virginia Slaves, in families” including “one or two valuable Tradesmen.”

Carter’s decision to hold the sale in Fredericksburg hinged on three important factors: the large number of slaves for sale, a wish to find buyers willing to purchase family groups, and an insistence on terms of cash rather than credit for purchases.¹⁶² Fredericksburg boasted a larger population than any town in Fauquier and a location convenient for buyers traveling along the Rappahannock River or via the Chesapeake.

As slaveholder interest in selling slaves from northern Virginia increased, enterprising men found pecuniary promise in serving as intermediaries, brokers, and traders in human flesh, reducing the pressure of slaveowners to conduct public sales and providing the mechanism for transporting chattel from owners to ever larger regional markets.¹⁶³ Privately brokered sales relied upon a trader’s knowledge about local owners and potential buyers and options for sale in the broader domestic market.

By the 1850s the number of traders operating in northern Virginia ballooned. Local traders included Robert Brashear of Middleburg who, in 1851, notified the public that he wanted to purchase “for a friend in the South, for his own use, 25 LIKELY NEGROES for which he will pay the highest price.”¹⁶⁴ Thomas W. Hunt traded out of Salem (Marshall) in Fauquier County in the early 1850s and advertised his interest in

¹⁶² “Sale of Negroes,” *Richmond Enquirer*, March 19, 1811.

¹⁶³ Allan Kulikoff noted that slave traders stepped in to fill the large demand for enslaved laborers in the Southwest, purchasing Chesapeake slaves and transporting them to Georgia and Carolina planters. Allan Kulikoff, “Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the American Revolution, 1790-1820,” in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, edited by Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 147.

¹⁶⁴ “A Lot of Servants Wanted,” *Alexandria Gazette*, November 25, 1851, microfilm.

buying “any number of NEGROES that may be offered for sale.”¹⁶⁵ Fauquier residents Albert Hudnall and Tholemiah Wilson each reported their occupation as “Negro trader[s]” to census enumerators in 1850.¹⁶⁶ D. M. Pattie traded out of Warrenton as an agent for the Baltimore firm of B. M. and W. L. Campbell, negotiating sales for the New Orleans market.¹⁶⁷

The market for slaves in Warrenton and its proximity to slaveholders in the adjacent counties made it an attractive site for slave traders. In 1849 Culpeper County trader, Richard Cooper, advertised that he regularly travelled to Warrenton “during court weeks” to purchase slaves “between the age of 8 to 25 years of age.”¹⁶⁸ By 1853 Cooper apparently found better opportunities for business in Fauquier County than in Culpeper County, so he notified the public that he had “permanently located himself in the town of Warrenton” and was “prepared to pay the highest cash prices for likely young negroes.”¹⁶⁹ Cooper joined W. R. Millan, a trader “for the New Orleans market” who already had established himself in Warrenton by 1853. Like Cooper, Millan advertised his services to a regional clientele and regularly attended court days in Culpeper, Rappahannock and Prince William Counties. Unlike Cooper, however, Millan advertised a need for “200 Likely Young Negroes” specifically for “the New Orleans market,” an enticement for slaveowners who wished to rid themselves of recalcitrant slaves or who

¹⁶⁵ Hunt’s advertisement ran at least from April 19, 1851 to April 16, 1853 in Warrenton’s *Piedmont Whig*. “Negroes Wanted,” *Piedmont Whig*, April 16, 1853. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁶⁶ 1850 Federal Census, Ashby’s District, Fauquier County, Virginia, series M432, roll 943, page 242 and 203, microfilm.

¹⁶⁷ “Wanted,” *Warrenton Flag of ’98*, February 16, 1860.

¹⁶⁸ “Cash for Negroes,” *Flag of ’98*, January 5, 1850.

¹⁶⁹ Cooper did not limit himself to Fauquier sales, but advertised that he also would handle the business of slaveholders “from any of the adjoining counties.” “Notice,” *Flag of ’98*, June 18, 1853.

had an immediate need for “the highest cash price.”¹⁷⁰ Agent John Edward Robey operated out of Leesburg in 1854, purchasing “any number of Likely Negroes, of both sexes.”¹⁷¹

In 1852 Elijah McDowell advertised his services to persons “wishing to dispose of Slaves” from his office at the Taylor Hotel in Winchester. McDowell expressed his interest in purchasing “a large number of SLAVES of both sexes, for which he will give the highest price in CASH.” As an agent for the Campbell trading firm of Baltimore, Maryland, McDowell destined any slaves he purchased for the markets of the Deep South.¹⁷² Traders operating out of larger communities advertised their services in area newspapers. The Alexandria firm of Bruin & Hill promised to pay “Richmond prices” for “any number of NEGROES.”¹⁷³

These regional traders specializing in the northern Virginia slave trade comprised one of the driving forces in the geographical disbursement of purchased chattel. Historian Michael Tadman, in his exhaustive research of the domestic slave trade concluded that regionally-based, semi-itinerant traders more often frequented local court, estate or private sales than long distance traders. These “grassroots traders” cultivated more personal business relationships with local residents by trading within a specific bounded geographical territory.¹⁷⁴ They also paid for purchases with cash instead of relying on

¹⁷⁰ “Negroes Wanted,” *Flag of '98*, June 18, 1853.

¹⁷¹ “Servants Wanted,” *Washingtonian*, January 6, 1854. Even after 1856 when Robey moved his office to Washington, D.C., he maintained his connections to Leesburg slaveholders. *Washingtonian*, April 4, 1856.

¹⁷² “Negroes Wanted,” *Washingtonian*, August 13, 1852, microfilm.

¹⁷³ “Negroes Wanted,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 20, 1850.

¹⁷⁴ Michael Tadman describes these traders as “roving speculators who toured villages and the countryside in pursuit of clients.” Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 42 (quote) and 49-52. For

credit sales that would require payments over a long period of time. Slaves gathered by these regional traders would be taken to smaller Virginia hubs such as Winchester, Charles Town, or Front Royal or directly to larger regional hubs such as Alexandria, Baltimore, or Richmond. From these regional hubs, other slave traders collected chattel to fill the pens of larger trading firms that catered to specific markets such as the sugar district that relied on trade through New Orleans or the cotton trade in Mobile.¹⁷⁵

The accounts of the “notorious” slave trader, Joseph Bruin of Alexandria, detail the geography of traveling slave agents and the cooperation with local slaveowners or agents in brokering sales.¹⁷⁶ During the late 1830s and early 1840s Bruin operated as a grassroots agent for George Kephart’s slave trading firm headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, becoming well-known in the upper Piedmont region.¹⁷⁷ Bruin cultivated his

an example of the territory covered by one Virginia trader, John B. Prentis, who established his base of operations in Richmond, but who travelled and purchased extensively through Virginia and Maryland and sold across the slaveholding South, see Kari J. Winter, *The American Dreams of John B. Prentis, Slave Trader* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2011), especially chapter four.

¹⁷⁵ See especially chapter three in Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

¹⁷⁶ Historian Frederic Bancroft called Bruin “[o]ne of the most notorious” Virginia slave traders. Frederic Bancroft, *Slave Trading in the Old South* (1931, repr., New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1959), 91.

¹⁷⁷ Bruin was a well-known grassroots slave trader in the northern Piedmont counties of Virginia before becoming a figure of national notoriety. Michael Tadman has identified three key characteristics of the grassroots trader as one who purchased primarily specific individuals, paid in cash rather than on credit, and conducted business within an identifiable or predictable territory. Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 52-55. See also *Kephart v. Bruin*. For examples of Kephart’s business see slave trader ads placed especially in the *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 26, 1838, August 11, 1838, and August 23, 1842. Kephart quite possibly began his career in the firm of George Kephart & Co. of Fredericktown, Maryland, working as a regional agent for the Alexandria trading firm of Franklin & Armfield. By 1838 Kephart had bought out the Franklin & Armfield building and took over the trade. *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 2, 1833 and July 26, 1838. Joseph Bruin progressed from a grassroots trader to the manager of his own firm, Bruin & Hill, founded in 1844 and lasting until 1852. Josephine F. Pacheco, *The Pearl: A Failed Slave Escape on the Potomac* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 120. Bruin is perhaps best known for his connection with the sales of the Edmonson sisters, part of the group of slaves who attempted escape on the *Pearl*. See Josephine F. Pacheco, *The Pearl: A Failed Slave Escape on the Potomac* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

business trade with owners and brokers across northern Virginia, especially in Prince William, Fauquier, and Loudoun counties.¹⁷⁸

Bruin's purchasing territory extended included not only privately brokered acquisitions of select slaves but also purchases of slaves jailed as runaways or held in local jails for public sale. In July of 1841 he travelled to Brentsville in Prince William and discovered "5 negroes now in Jail to be sold on munday and several more that is to be here on munday." Bruin requested an advance of \$1000 from his trading agent, Mr. Windsor of Alexandria, to purchase the Brentsville slaves that he described as "likely."¹⁷⁹ Bruin negotiated with Fairfax County Deputy Sheriff and jailor, Walter Powell for the purchase of "negro boy" Len, a "slave for life" in 1841.¹⁸⁰

By communicating with slaveholders and court officials across northern Virginia and carefully reading sale notices in local newspapers, Bruin was available to conduct private sales or would be notified of upcoming estate sales or court-ordered sales. In this way, he probably was able to purchase John Ball from the administrators of the estate of Nelson Fishback in The Plains in Fauquier County.¹⁸¹ Bruin's use of cash payments

¹⁷⁸ Joseph Bruin's accounts working for George Kephart are found in the 1846 Fairfax County chancery case of *Kephart v. Bruin*. George Kephart accused Bruin of not repaying a loan of \$1,425.88 in a court case begun in July of 1842. Bruin's bills of sales for the period 1839-1841 were presented as evidence in this case. *George Kephart v. Joseph Bruin*, (1846) Fairfax County Virginia Chancery Case 1846-003 (CFF5 L), Library of Virginia online. <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/case_detail.asp?CFN=059-1846-033> Hereinafter referred to as *Kephart v. Bruin*.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Joseph Bruin in Brentsville, VA to Mr. Windsor of Alexandria, VA, July 1, 1841, *Kephart v. Bruin*. Robert N. Windsor served as agent and bookkeeper for George Kephart's slave trade business in Alexandria. *Ibid.* (image 9 of 290).

¹⁸⁰ Bill of Sale, May 17, 1841, *Kephart v. Bruin*.

¹⁸¹ Bill of Sale, June 30, 1840, *Kephart v. Bruin*.

rather than purchasing on extended credit marked him as a professional trader and a potential source of ready cash for slaveholders eager to liquidate their enslaved assets.¹⁸²

Bruin also conducted business directly with slaveholders. By maintaining a reputation as a slave trader with regular visits to Prince William, Fauquier, and Loudoun, Bruin was able to cultivate a broad clientele base from whom he could view prospective enslaved purchases and determine the investment potential before buying them. Bruin also maintained a close communication network with several local slave brokers such as William K. Ish who received a commission for the sale of L. Berkeley's slave, Phillip, to Bruin on February 27, 1841. Thomas P. Nolen helped broker the sale of Ned to Bruin from Ned's owner William Davis on October 3, 1840. William Linthicum received a commission for his part in Bruin's purchase of Walker from John Hooe in April of 1841. William Binn of Upperville helped broker the purchase of Robert from James Lufborough, and Moses Flemming aided in Bruin's acquisition of Charles from John D. Dogan of Groveton.¹⁸³ These slaveholders used intermediaries to conduct business with Bruin, indicating perhaps a hesitation to conduct the business themselves. Another explanation is that these slaveholders could afford to employ an agent to transact such business.

Other potential clients negotiated slave sales through an agent or male relative or male friend because of social custom or legal proscriptions of coverture that prevented many women from conducting business directly as individuals. Bruin's clientele included both male and female slaveholders, and he negotiated deals directly with sellers or

¹⁸² See also Tadman's discussion of cash versus credit sales in Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves*, 52-55.

¹⁸³ *Kephart v. Bruin*.

through brokers, personal agents, or legal representatives. Richard Rixey served as an intermediary for female slave-owners Ann Wilehite, Ann Welch, and Ceciley Faley who each sold slaves to Joseph Bruin, yet Elizabeth E. Wallace of Warrenton herself transferred ownership of “a negroe girl named Anna Maria” to Bruin in 1841 for \$456.¹⁸⁴

A closer investigation of the patterns of slave-buying and selling as found in Bruin’s records offers insights into the role of slave trading in northern during the late 1830s and early 1840s. Bruin tended to purchase individual slaves specifically selected rather than families, mixed age groups, or entire estates. Bruin’s purchases were also specifically selected rather than purchases of large groups or entire slaveholding estates.

John Hutchinson of Prince William County sold Bob Daniel in September of 1840 to Joseph Bruin. At the time Hutchinson was one of the wealthier slaveholders in Prince William County and owned seventeen bondspersons in 1840.¹⁸⁵ It is possible that some family relationships existed among Hutchison’s slaves as some of the seven women were within child-bearing ages and likely mothers of the four young girls and four young men. It is also possible that some familial relationship existed between either or both of the elderly men and others on the Hutchison farm.

The sale of Bob Daniel did not deplete Hutchinson’s enslaved work force but provided him with \$650 ready cash from Bruin’s coffers. Perhaps the ready cash offered

¹⁸⁴ *Kephart v. Bruin*.

¹⁸⁵ According to census records, the Hutchinson household included four young men between ten and twenty-four years old, two men over fifty-five, four girls under the age of ten, one girl between ten and twenty-four, and six women aged thirty-five to fifty-five. 1840 Federal Census, Prince William County, Virginia, 292. Out of this group ten were considered “taxable” including one slave aged between twelve and sixteen years and nine capable of working aged sixteen years or older. In addition to his enslaved holdings, Hutchinson and his family owned twelve horses and a barouche valued at \$200. Prince William County, Virginia Personal Property Tax, 1840, microfilm.

by Bruin incentivized Hutchinson to make the sale or Hutchinson realized that the prevailing slave prices suggested that this might be an optimal time to cash in his investment in this moveable property.

In 1841 Joseph Bruin purchased a mother and her three children from Benjamin Hixson of Loudoun County. This business arrangement stands out as an atypical purchase for Bruin because it represented a large cash-outlay for a family group rather than for individually selected slaves. Sales of complete family groups were often more difficult than sales of “unencumbered” individuals. Maria and her three children, Sally Ann, Charles and Albert, represented four of the nine total enslaved persons owned by Benjamin Hixson in 1840.¹⁸⁶ After Hixson sold Maria and her three children to Bruin, Hixson still held one male slave under the age of ten, two men aged between thirty-six to fifty-four years, and one woman aged thirty-six to fifty-four years old. By selling Maria and her family Hixson parted with his youngest slaves and a mother who could have potentially produced more children for Hixson’s holdings.¹⁸⁷ Even so, Maria’s age may have made her the highest valued slave and selling her with her children likely reduced any censure (had Hixson divided her family). Another possibility was that Maria may have proved to be a troublesome servant and Hixson decided to remove her from his farm. Yet another theory is that Maria and her children were sold as a consequence of the actions of enslaved man, Dade, a 25 year old man who had run away from Hixson in May 1839, though this connection is tenuous at best.¹⁸⁸ Even after Maria’s sale the remaining

¹⁸⁶ Bill of Sale, June 12, 1841, (image 97 of 290) *Kephart v. Bruin*.

¹⁸⁷ Household of Benjamin Hixson, 1840 Federal Census, Eastern Section, Loudoun County, Virginia, 148.

¹⁸⁸ Benjamin Hixson characterized Dade, as “a keen, sprightly, artful fellow,” who, because of his skills, had “no doubt...obtained free papers, and [was] making for the north.” *Genius of Liberty*, May 25, 1839.

enslaved work force might have been productive enough for Hixson's immediate agricultural labor needs.¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, the sale of three young children whose values would only increase with age and ability would be a financial loss for Hixson in the long-run.

Hixson's motive for selling Maria might not necessarily have been to reduce his slaveholdings since by 1850 Hixson owned a larger number of slaves, holding eight female slaves whose ages ranged from two years old to forty-five years old and three male slaves aged ten, sixteen, and twenty-five.¹⁹⁰ The ages of these enslaved persons indicate that most of them had not resided with Hixson in 1840 but were acquired at some point after 1840 and before 1850. In this case, Hixson relieved himself of specific property, Maria and her three children, and gained in exchange a large sum of ready cash (Bruin paid \$1000 for the family).

The decision of Bruin to purchase Maria and her family also raises questions. Extant receipts from Bruin's sales conducted specifically in the three-county region of Fauquier, Prince William and Loudoun revealed Bruin's preference for the purchase of individuals. The trader purchased both Thomas and Nancy at the same time from Prince William resident Samuel Tansill, yet the receipt does not indicate the relationship between the two subjects.¹⁹¹ That Bruin also acquired "Lucy and her son Henry" from Tansill in June of 1841 and "Harriet and her child" from Thomson Ashby of Paris,

¹⁸⁹ Lorena Walsh asserted that the most successful Chesapeake planters "were the ones who retained their prime adult male slaves and who disposed of now 'surplus' women and children through some combination of selective sales, and increased slave hiring." Lorena S. Walsh, "Plantation Management in the Chesapeake, 1620-1820," *Journal of Economic History*, 49, no. 2 (June 1989), 405.

¹⁹⁰ 1850 Federal Census, Slave Schedules, Loudoun County, Virginia, 308.

¹⁹¹ Bill of Sale, June 17, 1841, (image 255 of 290) *Kephart v. Bruin*.

Fauquier County in 1839, shows that the trader did make mother-child purchases, especially from repeat customers such as Tansill and Ashby.¹⁹²

While most of the sales receipts do not indicate age other than vague references to “negro man,” “negro girl,” or “negro boy,” the ones that include age show a great range in ages selected by Bruin. In 1841 a ten year old “yellow girl named Siah” was purchased for \$310 as a result of a sheriff’s sale in a debt case; later that same month Bruin bought fourteen-month-old Harriet from W. T. T. Mason’s agent R. G. Saunders for \$25. Considering Bruin’s proclivity for acquiring single or selected pairs of enslaved persons, the instance of the Hixson sale prompts some questions. Possibly Bruin had cultivated a good enough business relationship with Hixson to offer Hixson the \$1000 ready cash paid for Maria and her family despite his hesitation to purchase family groups. Alternatively, Bruin selected Maria and her three children on speculation for resale in a particular Alexandria market or for a future sale further south with an interregional broker. In any case, Maria’s family disappeared from records in northern Virginia.

Another possibility was that Bruin responded to social and economic forces. Under pressure from the public over the issue of separating young enslaved children from their mothers, Louisiana created the Act of 1829 that placed restrictions on the importation of enslaved children younger than ten years old.¹⁹³ These youngsters either

¹⁹² Bill of Sale, September 4, 1839, (image 251 of 290) *Kephart v. Bruin*. Thomson Ashby also served as an agent for Elizabeth Strother in the 1839 sale of Ann from Paris, Fauquier County. “Bill of Sale,” September 4, 1839 (Image 58 of 290), *Kephart v. Bruin*.

¹⁹³ The statute decrees that “[n]o slave child or children, ten years of age, or under, shall be introduced into this State, unaccompanied by his, her, or their mother, if living, under the penalty, on conviction thereof, of a fine, not less than one thousand dollars, nor more than two thousand dollars, and of imprisonment not less than six months nor more than one year...” and includes provisions for the forfeiture and state sale of the illegally introduced slaves. *The Consolidation and Revision of the Statutes of the State, of a General*

needed to arrive accompanied by his or her mother or with a certificate attesting to the death of the mother. The increasing activism of abolitionists during the 1830s forced public attention on the trade in enslaved children and altered the nature of sales for the domestic trade.¹⁹⁴ Historian Donald Sweig found that the Alexandria firm of Franklin and Armfield began purchasing more family units after 1834 “based mainly on public pressure” to limit separation of young children from mothers.¹⁹⁵

Trader sales removed slaves out of northern Virginia and shuffled them into a non-ceasing migration towards destinations into western and southwestern states and territories. This movement formed a vital and vibrant link in the interregional slave trade and for slaves proved to be a constant threat to family and kinship stability. Donald M. Sweig, in his study of slavery in Loudoun and Fairfax counties argued that the slave trade “was a real and present danger” which by 1830 slaves of the Upper South “surely understood all too well...[as] the most serious threat to their family and community life, far worse than the separations of local transfer or being hired out.”¹⁹⁶ Northern Virginia enslaved residents and slaveholders framed this understanding into a language of removal and separation which, although generalized, spoke to larger truths of the interregional slave trade.

Nature...February 5, 1852 [Louisiana], (New Orleans, 1852), §59, 534. For a thoughtful analysis of the effects of this act on the slave trade in Virginia see Donald M. Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation,” PhD. diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126, 211-217.

¹⁹⁴ Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, “The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21, no. 3 (Winter 1991), 454-455.

¹⁹⁵ Donald M. Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation,” PhD. diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126, 220-221.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

Another avenue to move slaves out of northern Virginia and into southern slave markets was to broker sales directly with southern buyers. W. S. Chichester contracted with Judge Joshua Baker of Franklin, Louisiana to send fifteen slaves there via the schooner *Ophie* directly from Norfolk, Virginia. Although working through an agent, Francis A. Watkins, Chichester showed intimate knowledge of the contract, travel route, and purchaser that indicates that large-scale selling could occur without the assistance of grassroots or hub traders.¹⁹⁷

Diaspora

The geographic disbursement of northern Virginia slaves via the domestic slave trade created a diaspora across the slaveholding South. Former enslaved man Josiah Henson remembered the sight of multiple coffles of slaves traveling westward through “Alexandria, Culpepper, Fauquier, Harper’s Ferry, Cumberland” and “over the mountains on the National Turnpike to Wheeling.” Henson encountered “negro-drivers with their droves, who were almost uniformly kept chained to prevent them from running away.” At the numerous “taverns along the road” Henson was fully aware of the “droves of negroes continually passing along under the system of the internal slave trade.”¹⁹⁸

Enslaved people from northern Virginia participated unwillingly in this diaspora. Enslaved man Willis was purchased by local slave trader William B. Brawner from Fauquier County and transported to Richmond, Virginia to serve the firm of Jones &

¹⁹⁷ Papers of the Chichester and related Taliaferro family, 1716-1897, Accession #11047, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

¹⁹⁸ Josiah Henson, *Father Henson’s Story of His Own Life. With an Introduction by Mrs. H. B. Stowe* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1858), 49-50.

Slater.¹⁹⁹ Prince William enslaved man Ned became the property of Thomas Lewis of Guilford County, North Carolina after a sale by the administrator of his deceased mistress's estate.²⁰⁰ Thornton was purchased from a slaveholder living near Warrenton and removed to Caswell County, North Carolina.²⁰¹ Enslaved man, James Brent, was sold by Mrs. Sarah Rosch of Thoroughfare in Prince William County to trader A. S. Grigsby of Alexandria. Grigsby transported Brent to Richmond a few months later where he was purchased by Thomas J. Wooldridge of Hanover County, Virginia.²⁰²

Abram, a blacksmith "raised by William White, near Grinage" in Fauquier County, endured multiple sales and relocations farther and farther away from northern Virginia. Abrams' first sale was to a local man, then a second sale meant movement to a new master in Lynchburg, Virginia, followed by a sale to Iredell County, North Carolina.²⁰³ Though born in Fauquier County about 1842, Matt Berrill recalled that he spent a memorable portion of his childhood in Issaquena County, Mississippi, indicating a forcible move to the Deep South as a child.²⁰⁴ Fragmentary records of the lives of northern Virginia's enslaved persons reveals that though born in Fauquier, Loudoun, or

¹⁹⁹ "700 Dollars Reward," *The Daily Dispatch*, October 30, 1855.

²⁰⁰ Ned ran away from his new owner and was taken up and committed to the jail in Amherst County, Virginia on October 3, 1831. At the time of his capture, Jailor Robert Coleman judged his age to be between 45 and 50 years old. The committal notice provides no further clues as to whether Ned had fled from North Carolina, seeking to return to Prince William, or had escaped in transit after his sale. "Notice," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 28, 1832.

²⁰¹ Thornton was 26 years old when he fled from Henry Cobb's farm near Blackwell, Caswell County, North Carolina. Cobb advertised for Thornton in northern Virginia newspapers assuming Thornton would return to family either in Fauquier County or in nearby Winchester, Virginia. "\$150 Reward," *Flag of '98*, January 5, 1850.

²⁰² James Brent was about 40 years old when he ran away from Wooldridge. "Runaways – Fifty Dollars Reward," *The Daily Dispatch*, August 23, 1858.

²⁰³ "100 Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Herald*, March 23, 1818.

²⁰⁴ Record No. 2249 for Matt Berrill, United States Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1871, Mississippi, 1869, Registers of Signature of Depositors in Branches of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, National Archives Records Administration series M816, heritagequest.org.

Prince William counties, many unwillingly participated in the domestic slave trade and were dispatched to all corners of the slaveholding South.

“Strong Enough to Handle Hoe”: Ages most affected by slave trade

While the trade affected all ages, enslaved persons aged between eight and twenty-five years old became the prime target for local traders operating in northern Virginia. Records of sales hint at the extent of dislocation experienced by enslaved children. Loudoun slaveholder John J. Harding sold Gary, a young boy aged between eight and nine, to Rhodom Rogers of Hampshire County in Virginia in 1816. Harding gained \$350 in the exchange and Gary lost his family.²⁰⁵

Slave trader advertisements add credence to a select-age slave trade market in the area. In 1838 George Kephart of Alexandria sought “likely Negroes from 10 to 25 years of age.”²⁰⁶ In 1850 trader Richard Cooper sought to purchase slaves aged between eight and twenty-five years old.²⁰⁷ Ten years later, Cooper adapted his strategy when he advertised his desire to purchase “ONE HUNDRED LIKELY NEGROES, between the ages of twelve and twenty-five years” in 1860 in the *Warrenton Weekly Whig*.²⁰⁸ Also in 1860 William B. Brawner advertised out of Warrenton that he was seeking “a number of LIKELY YOUNG NEGROES, between the ages of twelve and twenty-five.”²⁰⁹ J. R.

²⁰⁵ John J. Harding to Rhodom Rogers, Deed, Slave Papers, 1819-13, LCHAD.

²⁰⁶ “Cash for Negroes,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 26, 1838.

²⁰⁷ “Cash for Negroes,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, January 5, 1850.

²⁰⁸ “100 Negroes Wanted,” *Warrenton Weekly Whig*, May 5, 1860. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰⁹ “Negroes Wanted,” *Warrenton Weekly Whig*, May 5, 1860. When published in the *Warrenton Flag of '98* on February 16, 1860, Brawner’s advertisement indicated he sought “likely young negroes” between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. This was probably less a factor than a change in strategy and more likely a misprint. “Negroes Wanted,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, February 16, 1860. Emphasis in the original.

Shirley specifically sought both male and female slaves “from 12 to 20 years of age” while trading out of his office in Warrenton in 1860.²¹⁰

Other traders such as Thomas Golding and D. M. Pattie specified they were purchasing “for the New Orleans market.” Trading as an agent of B.M. & W.L. Campbell, Pattie assured customers that “all communications directed to me will receive prompt attention.”²¹¹ Golding informed potential clients that he handled business “but not as agent for Joseph Bruin” while offering “strictly confidential” services.²¹² The inclusion of confidentiality agreements alludes to the growing wariness felt by slaveholders of being publicly perceived as instigators of family division rather than honorable paternalists. This age-specific trade altered slightly from the prime ages of 11 to 30 years imported to New Orleans from other states, suggesting that local traders in northern Virginia focused on a somewhat smaller target age cohort and carefully selected slaves for local versus the long distance trade.²¹³ The growth of slave trader advertising and multiple agents working in Fauquier County suggests a thriving business potential for negotiating slave sales that grew over time.²¹⁴

Evidence of the sale of young children abound in the public records of the South, especially in county deed books of the late 1700s and early 1800s. Even enslaved

²¹⁰ “Wanted,” *Flag of '98*, February 16, 1860.

²¹¹ “Wanted,” *Warrenton Flag of '98*, February 16, 1860; “Wanted,” *Warrenton Weekly Whig*, May 6, 1860.

²¹² *Warrenton Weekly Whig*, May 5, 1860.

²¹³ Freudenberger and Pritchett surveyed certificates of good character provided for 2,289 slaves sold in New Orleans markets in 1830 and estimated “93.3 percent of imported slaves were ages 11 to 30 years.” Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, “The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21, no. 3 (Winter 1991), 454.

²¹⁴ Emphasis in the original advertisements. Cooper, Pattie and Brawner contracted for advertising these particular ads on December 9, 1858 and apparently continued through 1860. Golding started the contract for the current ad on January 28, 1860. *Warrenton Weekly Whig*, May 5, 1860.

children younger than two years old were torn from mothers, fathers, siblings, and other kin. Recall that Joseph Bruin purchased a fourteen-month old toddler named Harriet for \$25 in 1841.²¹⁵ Two-year old Harry was sold by William Drone and Joseph Everard to Joshua Hutchison in March 1791.²¹⁶ Six year old Oscar was sold for \$200 in 1850.²¹⁷ Richard Thompson “exposed for sale several Likely Negro Girls” aged between twelve and eighteen years of age for cash at the Warrenton Court House in 1819.²¹⁸ Ann Banks, a pensioner living in Memphis, Tennessee in 1869, remembered “nothing about her father” other than his name, William Reed, yet Banks could remember that she had been sold away from Prince William County and her mother Sally when only three years old.²¹⁹ In 1848 Loudoun County slaveholder George Beatty sold three enslaved children to James Higdon. Even though Higdon also lived in Loudoun County, reducing the immediate threat of relocation out of Loudoun County, this was surely no consolation to the children: ten year old Julia, six year old Robert, and four year old Sucky.²²⁰

Enslaved man Dick who was the father of twelve children and “was left to the management of my children” after the death of his wife Yet Dick’s master, Squire Fielding, had other plans for Dick’s family. As soon as they were “strong enough to

²¹⁵ *Kephart v. Bruin*.

²¹⁶ Drone & Everard to Hutchison, Loudoun County Deed Book T: 52.

²¹⁷ Bill of Sale for Negro Boy Oscar, LP (1850) LP 0001190_00289, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

²¹⁸ “For Sale,” *Palladium of Liberty*, January 22, 1819.

²¹⁹ Record No. 1245 for Ann Banks, Pensioner, November 2, 1869, United States Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874, Memphis, Tennessee, Roll 24, familysearch.org. Banks must have been sold with her sister, Lucy Ida, as she recalled last seeing Lucy Ida in Lincoln, Missouri about 1846, twenty-three years before applying for a bank account in Memphis. Ibid.

²²⁰ Higdon paid Beatty \$300 for the three children. Bill of Sale, dated January 26, 1848, Beatty Family Papers, Accession #10771, Papers and Genealogical Notes on more than fifty Loudoun and Prince William Counties, Va., Families, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, VA.

handle hoe,” Squire Fielding “sold the boys to Mr. Randolph of Fairfax, and the girls to ‘Squire Barclay of Port Tobacco’ Maryland.”²²¹ Dick’s experience hints at the age that slaveholders deemed children old enough to be sold as valued workers. Dick mourned the loss of his children, calling it “a hard trial to part with my little ones, for I loved them like a father; but there was no help for it, and it was the case of thousands besides myself.”²²²

In Loudoun County one unnamed slaveholder offered three enslaved girls for sale for cash in 1820, two “about 12 or 13 years of age and the other...about 10 or 11.”²²³ Washington Jackson was about eleven years old in 1823 when he was taken from Loudoun County and away from his parents, Andrew and Peggy, and his brother Henry, to a new home in Tallahassee, Florida.²²⁴ Lizzie Balthrope recalled she left Loudoun County when she was twelve years old and was taken to Memphis, Tennessee.²²⁵ George Smoot, Sr., born in Prince William County, was taken to New Orleans in 1841 when he was about twenty-four years old.²²⁶ These experiences reveal that youngsters were not only sold, but often transported great distances from family and familiar settings.

Historian Donald Sweig analyzed twenty-eight manifests of slave shipments from October 1828 to November 1836 filed by the Alexandria trading firm of Armfield and Franklin and found that 75 percent of the 1,670 single males and 90 percent of the 1,015 single enslaved women without children conveyed from the Alexandria slave pen were

²²¹ John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: R. Edwards, Printer, 1803), 383.

²²² John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: R. Edwards, Printer, 1803), 383.

²²³ “Three Negro Girls,” *Genius of Liberty*, May 23, 1820.

²²⁴ Record No. 508 for Washington Jackson, August 21, 1868, United States Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874, Tallahassee, Florida, Roll 5, familysearch.org.

²²⁵ Record No. 1518 for Lizzie Balthrope, April 7, 1870, Ibid.

²²⁶ Record No. 7464 for George Smoot, Sr., April 10, 1873, Ibid.

twenty-four years old or younger.²²⁷ Nearly 82 percent of the enslaved women shipped by Armfield and Franklin had birthed a child by the time they were twenty-five years old and in all likelihood, females shipped without children had likely been separated from their children.²²⁸ Sweig found that 40 percent of the transported slaves were younger than sixteen years and 23 percent of this group were younger than thirteen years old. Forty percent consisted of slaves aged seventeen through twenty-five years old, the ages considered “prime” years in terms of productive and reproductive labor.²²⁹ The high percentage of slaves within this age cohort destined for the domestic slave trade confirms its marketability as well as the selectivity of owners selling and traders purchasing slaves without spouses or children.

As seen in figure 8 in chapter one, fluctuations in the number of taxable slaves aged twelve years and older between 1800 and 1860 reveal different trends of increases and declines occurring over different periods of time in each county. Personal property tax records allude to the relative strength and changing demographics of the 12 to 16 year old (taxable) age cohort among northern Virginia slaves. Based on extant records, the numbers of 12 to 16 year old slaves in Fauquier experienced the most dramatic increases and losses, yet this cohort of teenaged slaves also experienced steady decreases in Prince William County (see figure 43). Available data shows periods of extreme decreases of these “prime” candidates for sale occurred between 1825 and 1827 and then again between 1835 and 1840 in Fauquier County. Fragmented tax information suggests that

²²⁷ Donald Sweig, “Northern Virginia Slavery: A Statistical and Demographic Investigation,” PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1982. ProQuest 8303126, 208.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid., 209.

there may have also been declines in the 12-16 year old age cohort between 1815 and 1819.²³⁰

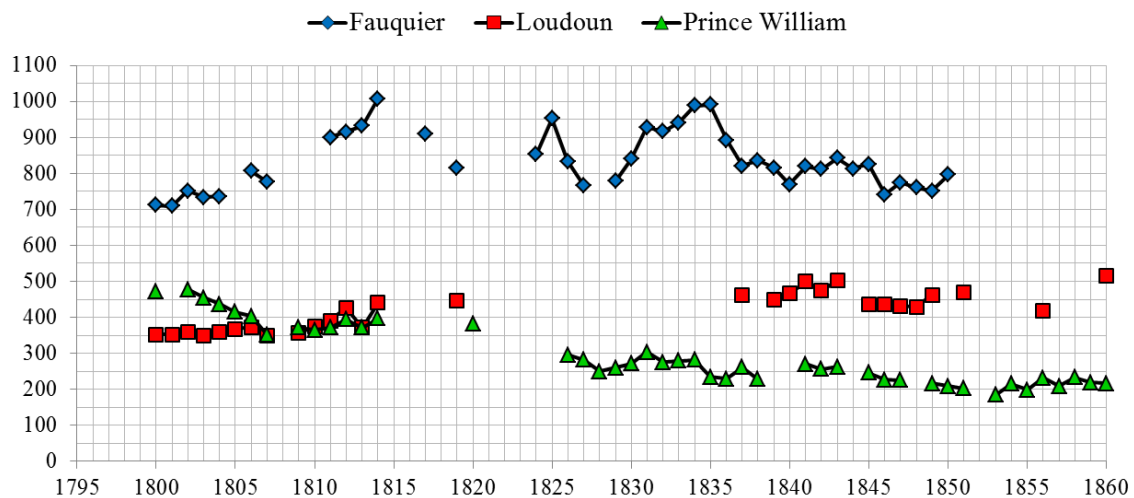


Figure 43. Taxable slaves between the ages of 12 and 16 in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties.

Sources: County personal property tax records.

Note: A null value represents the fact that for many years tax commissioners did not include complete data on this age cohort from all tax districts. In addition, extant tax records fail to account for all years or all tax districts for all years between 1800 and 1860. For those years in which tax records were incomplete or missing no value was assigned for that particular year.

In Prince William the decreases experienced in the entire cohort of taxable slaves also reflected in the losses of the 12 to 16 age cohort. Between 1802 and 1807 and again between 1820 and 1827 the number of Prince William slaves in this cohort noticeably

²³⁰ According to Charles H. Wesley's survey of coastwise manifests of trader ships, the number of manifest records including slaves decreased during the period of 1808-1812. Manifest records were "small" again in 1817 and 1818. Charles H. Wesley, "Manifests of Slave Shipments Along the Waterways, 1808-1864," *Journal of Negro History*, 27, no. 2 (April 1942), 160. Even so, evidence from personal property tax records in Fauquier County suggests that the 12-16 year old cohort experienced a noticeable decline during these years. This may indicate that Fauquier slaves were removed via the overland trade rather than by ships out of Fredericksburg or Alexandria.

declined. The relatively stable cohort population in Loudoun suggests that factors such as household movements and sales into the long-distance trade had minimal effect on the enslaved population until about 1844, when the trend of rising numbers ceased. The appearance of a decline and limited growth in Loudoun following 1844 suggests that Loudoun County slaveholders only minimally participated in the long-distance slave trade until the mid-1840s (refer to figure 43).

While some losses across the entire period could be attributed to mortality, runaways, household migrations, or even manumissions, the trends noted in the three counties suggests that slave sales in the long-distance trade contributed to the rapid or continued reduction in this particular group of slaves. Combined with evidence of the increased interest in traders purchasing younger slaves, the domestic slave trade affected young slaves especially hard in Fauquier and Prince William counties and between the ages of twelve and twenty-five.

Motivations for Sale

Enslaved persons fully knew that sale into the Deep South was a possible consequence for misbehavior, owner caprice, or financial distress. Slave sales in northern Virginia provided the means for slaveholders to reduce, remove, or exchange property for other assets. Walter Johnson stated that “slaveholders always had some reason for selling a slave—an estate to divide, a debt to pay, a transgression to punish, a threat to abate”

while they rarely acknowledged personal responsibility for the sale.²³¹ Michael Tadman likewise concurred on the importance of pecuniary gains as a stimulus for sales when he declared that “the great traffic in slaves stemmed, not from special emergencies, but instead from the fundamental racist insensitivity of most masters, and from their receptiveness to the temptation of making extra profits through sales.”²³² In her study of slave sales in Washington, D. C., Mary Beth Corrigan theorized that sales enabled slaveowners to reduce financial responsibilities to feed, clothe, and shelter “excess” slaves.²³³

Slave-owners over-supplied with household or field slaves could sell the excess, thereby reducing household expenses. Three major economic and management motivations influenced the decision to sell slaves. Selling troublesome slaves who ran away or disobeyed white authorities removed a threat to planter hegemony, mitigated the threat of future financial loss, and at least in the eyes of slaveholder, reduced the threat of insurrection. Based on prevailing slave prices, slaveholders might also choose to cash in on buoyant trade prices, using enslaved forces merely as a speculative investment tool, or in harsh economic times might choose to sell select slaves to pay off debts. Northern Virginian slaveholders privately acknowledged these factors while enslaved persons kept wary of signs that financial inducements or behaviors perceived as troublesome might lead to a sale.

²³¹ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 28.

²³² Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 111.

²³³ Mary Beth Corrigan, “Imaginary Cruelties? A History of the Slave Trade in Washington, D. C.” *Washington History* 13, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2001/2002), 6.

Economic Motivations

Former enslaved man Austin Steward remembered that when his master, Capt. Helm, “began to sell off his slaves to different persons, as he could find opportunity, and sometimes at a great sacrifice,” it became clear that Helm, “instead of prospering in business, was getting poorer every day.”²³⁴ Steward expressed the awareness of slaves that a pressing need for cash motivated a slaveholder to turn enslaved chattel into quick cash. The ability to gauge the financial security or insecurity of masters proved to be an important indication of potential for slave sales. Financial distress may have motivated one unnamed slaveowner to offer a “young and able bodied Negro Woman who can do any kind of work” and her child, “a smart girl about 12 years of age” for sale in 1820. The owner hoped to entice a buyer by stipulating that he would sell the two “very low for cash,” an indication of the desire or need to complete the transaction quickly.²³⁵

The death of a slaveholder often prompted quick sales of enslaved chattel if the estate was burdened by outstanding debts. Commissioners for the estate of John Gibson, after multiple sales of estate property in the 1810s offered “25 or 30 likely young slaves, men, women and children” as well as “a parcel of most valuable house servants, male and female” and “valuable plantation Slaves” for sale in 1816.²³⁶ In another case, Charles L. Carter, executor of the estate of John T. Carter offered “several likely *Virginia-born*

²³⁴ Steward, *Twenty-Two Years a Slave*, 83.

²³⁵ “For Sale,” *Genius of Liberty*, March 14, 1820.

²³⁶ “Sale of Negroes,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 11, 1816.

Slaves of different descriptions to satisfy claims against the [Carter] estate” at a public sale in 1810 in Middleburg.²³⁷

The slaves held by Prince William County slaveholder John Hooe, Jr. keenly bore the burden of their master’s fiscal imprudence. After Hooe’s death, estate administrator James H. Reid offered Reuben and Nancy, an enslaved husband and wife, for public sale at Brentsville in 1846 to offset estate debts. Reid touted Reuben’s skill as “an excellent manager and waggoner” and Nancy’s value as a “seamstress and dairy hand.”²³⁸ Yet underlying these qualities was the more significant assumption that Reid considered the two as *individual* (and separable) assets of the Hooe estate rather than a spousal pair. Three years prior to his death Hooe mortgaged land and slaves into a deed of trust, the conditions of which he failed to fulfill so in addition to Reuben and Nancy, enslaved persons Lucinda, Thornton, Paris, Mary Ann, Bill, Sally, Laurinda, Betsy, Horace, Davy, and Richard went on the auction block.²³⁹ The distress for Reuben, aged between fifty and sixty years of age, his wife Nancy, and the other eleven enslaved persons at potential separation resulting from a master’s financial woes exemplified the uncertainty of enslaved life.

The threat of a sale increased into the 1850s when demand and prices made a sale a lucrative option for owners. By the end of 1858 the Leesburg newspaper observed that demand in nearby Albemarle County has exceeded beyond “any we ever before witnessed in this county.” The occurrence of “several large sales” in Charlottesville

²³⁷ “Negroes,” *Washingtonian*, Leesburg, Virginia July 24, 1810. Emphasis in the original.

²³⁸ “Public Sale of Negroes,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 19, 1846.

²³⁹ “Trustee’s Sale,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 12, 1846.

during a span of only ten days brought eager buyers including both “the professional traders” and “other men...anxious to purchase one or two [enslaved persons] for his own use.” Describing the sale prices as “enormous” with quotes of between \$1,200 to \$1,500 for men and \$1,000 to \$1,300 for women, the reports from Charlottesville were intended to induce prospective sellers to exchange chattel for cash or potential buyers to speculate in slaves as an investment.²⁴⁰ According to information published in Leesburg’s *Democratic Mirror* in 1858, the slaveowners could fairly accurately estimate price of enslaved laborers by using the price of cotton:

For every cent a pound for cotton, a field hand will bring one hundred dollars; for instance the present price of cotton is 10 to 12 cents, and the price of a negro man is from one thousand to twelve hundred dollars. The price of the latter may not fluctuate as rapidly as cotton, but is not the less certain to follow an advance or decline of any duration.²⁴¹

Rising prices were reflected in sales conducted in Loudoun. The *Democratic Mirror* reported early in January 1859 that a “good many negroes have changed owners in Loudoun county this week.” At one estate sale a “family of servants” sold for “pretty high figures” with an enslaved blacksmith bringing a price of \$1,500 and a woman with two children (aged four and two years old) sold for \$1,590.²⁴² The reporter failed to note whether the “family of servants” were purchased by the same or different owners and whether the buyer was local and thus offered the hope of some stability in family

²⁴⁰ “Demand for Negroes,” *Charlottesville Advocate* as republished in the *Democratic Mirror*, December 29, 1858.

²⁴¹ “The Value of Negroes,” *Savannah Republican*, December 11, 1858, as republished in the *Democratic Mirror*, December 29, 1858.

²⁴² *Democratic Mirror*, January 5, 1859.

relations or was a trader who would divide and disburse the family across a vast slaveholding South.

Periods of economic crisis such as the years immediately in the wake of the 1819 and 1837 panics caused an increase in sales as owners liquidated assets to pay debts. Yet slaveholders also responded to market forces by taking advantage of increasing slave prices to cash in on flush times.²⁴³ Michael Tadman argued that the “vast majority of Upper South sales were not involuntary debt or probate sales, but private transactions directly undertaken between owner and trader” that destabilized enslaved family relationships.²⁴⁴ Enslaved persons could be aware of a slaveholder’s debts and alert to potential sale, yet a more insidious circumstance was a sale when a slaveholder was increasing wealth and chose to sell a slave to take advantage of high prices.²⁴⁵

The Threat of Georgia and Georgia Men: Sales as a Management Strategy

Another motivation for selling enslaved property sprang from a need to maintain control over a labor force. Enslaved man Dick recalled that after he bit off the toe of a field slave named Cuffy during a fight over the attentions of an enslaved woman, Dick’s

²⁴³ Michael Tadman deduced that “When slave price trends were favorable (times when profits from the Upper South’s crop production would also have been building up), typical Upper South slaveholders seem to have found it more attractive to sell surplus slaves in return for dramatic profits than to accept a more gradual access of profits by using those slaves to expand crop production at home.” Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 117.

²⁴⁴ Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (1989, repr., Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 129.

²⁴⁵ James Oakes asserted that young slaveholders were both “deeply religious” and “obsessed with their own economic advancement.” This obsession with upward mobility meant they were “imbued with a materialistic ethos that ruled their lives, pushing them from their homes in search of prosperity, causing many to live in a style that belied their own wealth.” James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (1982, repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 69.

master “heard of my battle with Cuffy...and sold me to a *Georgia* man for two hundred dollars.” The “Georgia man” kept Dick hand-cuffed all the way to Savannah “where he disposed of [Dick] to a tavern-keeper for three hundred dollars.”²⁴⁶ Former enslaved man George Johnson could not forget that some slaves were “sold from [his] master’s farm, and many from the neighborhood.” Johnson explained that if an enslaved man “did any thing out of the way, he was in more danger of being sold than of being whipped” and the slaves “were always afraid of being sold South.”²⁴⁷

By the early years of the nineteenth century northern Virginia slaves identified sale to “Georgia” as a threat to permanently remove a slave from family. During an interview conducted in 1818 with a young slave, the editor of the Leesburg *Genius of Liberty* asked where the boy’s father had gone. The boy replied “some of these [slave trading] d[evi]ls took him away” and their destination was “Georgia and that’s the same as hell.” The editor postulated that “[s]uch is the idea that prevails among these afflicted sons of oppression, with respect to slave drivers and their place of deposit” to equate Georgia with all long distance trade. The prospect of being traded “to a land of strangers,” according to the editor, was apparently a fate “perhaps more cruel than the grave,” hence the boy’s terrifying description.²⁴⁸ In 1817 Henry was bought from the estate of William Randall of Fauquier County by “some Georgiaman,” a generic title for a southern trader who specialized in the long-distance trade.²⁴⁹ Contemporary traveler

²⁴⁶ John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: R. Edwards, Printer, 1803), 382.

²⁴⁷ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 52.

²⁴⁸ “Slave Traders,” *Genius of Liberty*, August 11, 1818.

²⁴⁹ *Alexandria Herald*, November 5, 1817.

and author Jesse Torrey noted that by 1817 in the Chesapeake region “the general title applied to slave traders, indiscriminately, ...[was] ‘Georgia-men’.”²⁵⁰

Thomas L. Johnson, born enslaved in Virginia in 1836, recalled during his childhood in Alexandria, Virginia that often enslaved children were “missed from the company of little slaves.” Johnson described the forced departure of his playmate, John, who stood “with a small bundle in his hand, saying good-bye to his mother, while a white man stood waiting in the hall for him.” Johnson later learned that the man who took John was a “Georgia Trader” and thereafter he and the other enslaved children would “run and hide, sometimes getting near our mothers” whenever they saw “a white man looking over the fence as we were at play.” The belief that their mothers could protect them proved untrue when “soon another, and in time another, would be taken away.”²⁵¹ What these youngsters were coming to realize was that the slave trade forever fractured families. Johnson also recalled that his master, Mr. Brent, employed the threat of sale to Georgia, a “place we dreaded above all others on earth” as incentive to be “good.”²⁵²

In 1858 the young, white diarist Amanda Edmonds, daughter of a slaveholder, voiced the opinion that “servants are very aggravating sometimes...and [I] wish they were in Georgia.” In her mind, Amanda identified the symbolic place of “Georgia” as a place to send truculent bondsmen and slave traders as the vehicle to accomplish such

²⁵⁰ Jesse Torrey, *American Slave Trade; Or, An Account of the Manner in which the Slave Dealers take Free People from some of the United States of America, and carry them away, and sell them as Slaves in other of the States; and of the horrible Cruelties practiced in the carrying on of this most infamous Traffic* (1817, repr., London: J. M. Cobbett, 1822), 54. Hereafter referred to as *American Slave Trade*.

²⁵¹ Rev. Thomas L. Johnson, *Africa For Christ: Twenty-Eight Years a Slave* (London: Alexander and Shephard, 1892), 10, <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/johnsontl/johnsontl.html>>

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.

removal.²⁵³ This tendency to generalize “Georgia” as the ultimate destination for sold-away slaves and slave traders as “Georgia-men” apparently was pervasive in northern Virginia long before the intense increase in the domestic trade in the 1830s.

A slave master’s use of the threat of sale to encourage slave submissiveness and productivity often extended long past his death. Slaveholders crafted wills stipulating consequences for slave misbehavior that included sale away from the family, the county, or even the state. Hugh Rogers directed in his will that “none of my slaves shall be sold out of the State unless for misconduct” indicating the importance of using the threat of a potential sale to encourage “good” behavior.²⁵⁴ Arminta Moxley, serving as executor for her husband’s estate, sold James “on account of his bad qualities.”²⁵⁵ In 1823 Mary Pickett was “compelled to dispose” of her enslaved woman Dinah “in consequence of [her] misbehavior.”²⁵⁶ Ann Kincheloe sold enslaved man Nelson in 1814 “because he had become disobedient and ungovernable.” Kincheloe rationalized that it was better to sell a troublesome slave and use the profit and interest from the sale to support her daughters’ education than deal with the frustration (or fear) of governing a recalcitrant and potentially dangerous man.²⁵⁷

Enoch Jeffries stipulated that after his death his executors had the power to sell “at any time” any of his slaves “who shall behave them Selves badly, or

²⁵³ “Diary of Amanda Virginia Edmonds,” 22 April 1858.

²⁵⁴ Will of Hugh Rogers of Loudoun County, written December 9, 1845, proved in court on September 12, 1853, Fauquier County Will Book 25: 360.

²⁵⁵ Account of Gilbert J. Moxley’s Estate, Prince William County Will Book M: 186.

²⁵⁶ Bill & Answers, *William H. Jennings & Wife v. Mary Ashby, etc.*, Fauquier County Chancery Case 1835-051, Virginia Memory Chancery Records Online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1835-051#img>.

²⁵⁷ “Bill of Complaint,” *Ann Kincheloe vs. Ann Hammett and Catharine Hammett*, Prince William County Court of Law and Chancery, 1826-001, http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=153-1826-001#img.

disobediently.”²⁵⁸ Christian Nyswanger advised his executors in 1850 that if his “Negro Slave Monica Jackson” demonstrated “pore misconduct or crime” they were authorized to sell her if they thought it “prudent & proper.”²⁵⁹ Maryann Thornton advised her daughter Susan “should either of my Slaves displease my said Daughter she is at full liberty to sell or dispose of them or either of them” and reserve the profit from the sale as inheritance for Thornton’s granddaughter.²⁶⁰ An enslaved family consisting of “a man named Henry, Tabby his wife and their two children” owned by the Turner family in Fauquier County were sold because Mrs. Turner decided they were “troublesome & unproductive.” Turner’s son drew up a contract for a sale price with the new owner, a local man, of \$1,225 for the family, payable in five years.²⁶¹

This power to remove “troublesome” slaves required prudent consideration, as articulated by Francis Cannon in his advice to his niece, Ann Sowden. Cannon wrote “I think it proper to stipulate that in the Event of any of the Negroes left [to Sowden] becoming refractory and disobedient...as to make it either necessary or desirable to her to sell or exchange them for other Property of the same Kind...” she should do so with the consent of Cannon’s trustees but “to exercise this power cautiously and with a sound

²⁵⁸ Will of Enoch Jeffries, written February 6, 1834, proved in court February 25, 1834, Fauquier County Will Book 13: 237.

²⁵⁹ Will of Christian Nyswanger, written January 3, 1850, proved in court September 9, 1850, Loudoun County Will Book 2E: 233-225.

²⁶⁰ Will of Maryann Thornton, proved in court March 3, 1813, Prince William County Will Book K: 204.

²⁶¹ Turner’s son who managed the enslaved family and their sale for his mother recorded the sale twice in his diary, first on February 19, 1850 and again on March 13, 1850 suggesting that the negotiations occurred in February but the transfer of ownership began in March. The Martins paid \$25 “in hand” and were given until the end of the year to secure a bond for the remaining \$1,200. Diary of Edward Carter Turner (1839-1850), entries for February 19, 1850 and March 13, 1850, Turner Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia. The fact that Tabby had recently given birth to a boy on January 21, 1850, an infant child who died a week later, may make some sense of Mrs. Turner’s depiction of Tabby as “unproductive,” both during her pregnancy and as an enslaved woman with two young children. Ibid., entries for January 21, 1850 and January 29, 1850.

discretion.”²⁶² Slaveholder William Hudnall considered the merits of each of his enslaved chattel, opting to manumit most in his 1851 will, yet deciding to sell “Mary Henry & her child & old Ginna” because “both of them have greatly offended me.”²⁶³

Sometimes a slaveholder’s decision to sell a slave outside of the region developed out of underlying tensions in the particular master-slave relationship. In his will crafted shortly before his death John Kincheloe directed his executors to “sell my negro Girl Ellen and send her out of this State as soon as possible” following Kincheloe’s demise.²⁶⁴ In his will written shortly before his death in 1833, Fauquier slaveholder James W. M. Wallace ordered his executors to sell Anthony, Lot, and Robert with the proviso that Anthony be “sold out of the County with a condition not to return to it.” Wallace must have had reasons to remove these particular slaves, as he further directed that his executors could purchase additional slaves for the cultivation of his lands to support his wife and infant children.²⁶⁵ Loudoun slaveholder, George Carter of Oatlands wrote to Alexandria slave trader George Kephart that he had “a mulatto female servant, twenty years old, a first-rate seamstress, capable of cutting out both men’s and women’s apparel, hearty, robust.” Carter included the information that the enslaved female’s mistress had

²⁶² Will of Francis Cannon, written 25 October 1823, proved in court November 6, 1827, Prince William County Will Book M: 505.

²⁶³ Will of William Hudnall, written July 22, 1851, proved in court April 6, 1858, Circuit Superior Court of Fauquier County, Fauquier County Records At Large, (1821-1881): 407, microfilm. Hudnall must have made good on his threat to sell Mary Henry as she was not listed in the inventory of Hudnall’s estate. Ginna, (also called Jenny) did stay with Hudnall until his death, though at her age, estimated at 80 years in 1858, meant she was “chargeable” to Hudnall’s estate. “Inventory and appraisement of the personal estate of William Hudnall, dec’d made this 29th day of April 1858,” Circuit Superior Court of Fauquier County, Fauquier County Records At Large, (1821-1881): 410.

²⁶⁴ Will of John Kincheloe, written August 6, 1826, proved September 11, 1826, Loudoun County Will Book Q: 160.

²⁶⁵ Will of James W. M. Wallace, written October 31, 1833, proved in court January 28, 1834, Fauquier County Will Book 13: 216.

“taken great pains in learning her to sew” and the girl was “an excellent ladies’ chambermaid.” Despite these positive traits, Carter told Kephart if he bought her he must “*stipulate to send her to New Orleans or to the South*” leading a later observer of the letter to wonder “what this girl had done to make it necessary that she should go so far away can only be conjectured” and that it was “possible that she was too near to some young scion of Oatlands.”²⁶⁶ Numerous traders willing to remove troublesome or problematic slaves from northern Virginia operated out of offices in Baltimore, Washington D.C. and Alexandria.²⁶⁷

Slaveholders faced with managing belligerent slaves used the slave trade to dispose of slaves accused of crimes. In 1827 Prince William slaveholder James Payne admitted that after horses and bacon were stolen from a nearby farm, “one of his negroe men was suspected of being concerned in the Robbery.” Payne “suspected him so strongly that he sold him,” an act that probably saved Payne the costs associated with a court trial. Two other enslaved men, Robert and Lewis, admitted that Payne’s man had assisted in the theft and had helped divide the spoils of the crime.²⁶⁸ Payne apparently

²⁶⁶ M.D. Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1864), 25. Emphasis in the original. M. D. Conway was the later observer and holder of the letter by 1861. According to Conway, after Federal troops began their occupation of Alexandria during the Civil War, a friend of Conway’s among the soldiers “filled his pockets with letters and papers which were found strewn about the floor of the office adjoining [Kephart and Company’s pen]. These [papers] fell into my hands. They consist of bills of sale, lists of Negroes on various estates ready for purchase, and others who would be ready the next year. The letters show that the firm was in correspondence with the most eminent families of that region.” Ibid., 22. Conway noted that the dates of the letters he quoted “range between 1837 and 1857.” Ibid., 26.

²⁶⁷ Trader William H. Williams advertised to purchase slaves for “the Louisiana and Mississippi markets.” “Cash for Negroes,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 10, 1839.

²⁶⁸ Payne believed his unnamed enslaved man was culpable in the theft of meat from the store house of Frances and Lucy Phillips. “Testimony of James Payne,” *Commonwealth v. Robert and Lewis*, Box 1, Folder 10, Accession #42310, Executive Papers of Governor William B. Giles, Library of Virginia. Two other enslaved men, Robert and Lewis were apprehended for the crime. The Fauquier County court sentenced Robert and Lewis to be hanged, a ruling amended by Governor Giles to the lesser punishment of sale and transportation. *Commonwealth v. Robert and Lewis*, Ibid. After their apprehension, Robert and

sold his unnamed enslaved man prior to the trial, a move that enabled Payne to select the buyer, negotiate a price without the stain of a court conviction, and influence the potential future residence of the troublesome servant.²⁶⁹

Another slaveholder, William A. G. Dade recognized the ability of slaveholders to quickly sell troublesome or potentially dangerous slaves rather than holding them accountable to the county court's administration of justice. In 1819 when an enslaved girl Mary owned by Dade's sister, Mrs. Jane Baylor, was accused of setting fire to Baylor's residence, Dade told Governor James Patton Preston that the option existed that Mary "might have been sold" rather than be charged with the crime of arson and "not a word would have been said against it by anybody." Dade admitted having considered this remedy, yet explained that selling a slave rather than initiating court proceedings was "inconsistent with the law and strict propriety" especially when "the same end might be obtained in strict conformity with both through the means of the Executive," alluding to the power of the Governor to exercise executive clemency towards convicted enslaved

Lewis confessed to jailor Robert Kemp that "Payne's man was with them" when the theft took place and that the three men "divided the meat" stolen from the Philips sisters' meat house. This confession apparently took place at Payne's request as Payne "was desirous of knowing whether his man was concerned or not" with the theft. "Testimony of Robt. Kemper, Jailor," Ibid. Testimony included in the court records does not indicate the timeline of when Payne sold his enslaved man.

²⁶⁹ Lewis was enslaved to the estate of Beverly Waggoner and hired by estate trustee John Gibson to Russell Harrison of Fauquier County. Robert was enslaved to Isaac Bridwell of Prince William County. Robert and Lewis were sentenced to hang for the crime, a sentence that Governor Giles later overturned, thus entitling their owners to a refund from the state of Virginia for their court-adjudged value. Both Robert and Lewis were valued at \$400 by the Fauquier County Court during their trial. *Commonwealth v. Robert and Lewis*, Box 1, Folder 10, Accession #42310, Executive Papers of Governor William B. Giles, Library of Virginia.

criminals by reducing the sentence from death to one of sale and transportation outside the bounds of the United States, a topic discussed further in chapter eight.²⁷⁰

In 1855 Fauquier slaveholder Rice Hooe felt no such duty to allow the court to decide the fate of his enslaved man, Jim, indicted on charges of committing a larceny. Hooe convinced the magistrates to discharge Jim after convincing the court that he intended to “send [Jim] out of the limits of the Commonwealth,” presumably through a sale to southern traders.²⁷¹ Quite possibly Hooe weighed the outcome of a court-imposed sentence against Jim’s value in the domestic slave trade market and determined a quick sale would add cash to Hooe’s pocket, avoid a public trial, and relieve himself of a troublesome chattel.

County magistrates sometimes effectually brought about the sale of slaves accused of crimes. Enslaved man Henry Lacy, owned by the heirs of Lewis M. Smith, faced the Loudoun court in 1840 on charges of theft of bank notes. Guardian accounts indicate that Henry had committed another crime besides the theft of the bank notes – the theft of “goods” from John Cullen, perhaps settled out of court when the Smith estate administrator paid Cullen \$1.25 in 1839 “for goods stolen by Henry.” Henry might also have been a risk for flight as he had been apprehended by the Town Sergeant at some point and spent a couple days in jail, probably in October 1839.²⁷² Most likely members of the court considered his earlier crimes when they imposed a punishment of twenty-five

²⁷⁰ “Letter from Wm. A. G. Dade of Dumfries to James E. Heath, Esqr of Richmond for Governor James Patton Preston,” August 11, 1819, Executive Papers of Governor James Patton Preston, Accession 41737, Box 8, Folder (1819 August 2-15), Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

²⁷¹ *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Fauquier County Minute Book 41 (1854-1855): 299.

²⁷² “The Heirs of Lewis M. Smith dec’d In Account with Sampson Hutchison their Guardian,” Loudoun County Guardian Account Book C: 130.

lashes “on his bare back at the public whipping post” along with incarceration until such time as Henry’s owner either posted a \$500 bond for Henry’s future good behavior or until Henry was “sold to be taken out of this County.”²⁷³

The public whipping served as a painful warning to other potential slaves, yet the court’s decision to hold the Smith Estate accountable for Henry’s good behavior placed the responsibility on estate administrators for the “good” behavior of a slave. While Henry was in the Fauquier jail, the Smith heirs accrued fees totaling \$32.67 before they sold Henry to Mr. Norvall for \$600 sometime before March 17, 1840.²⁷⁴ In this case, the county court gave Henry’s administrator the option of accepting financial responsibility for Henry’s future good behavior or selling him away from the county. As time passed, county courts would be bound by stricter laws that no longer left the choice to owners but mandated sale and transportation for theft.

Motivations to Buy

Along with some motivations to sell slaves, other northern Virginians desired to purchase slaves as fungible assets and disposable wealth. When P. Harrison offered “Douglas Hill” located near Dumfries for sale in 1817, he agreed to accept a broad range of capital in exchange: District of Columbia bank-held land stock, lots in Washington or

²⁷³ Patricia B. Duncan, *Loudoun County Virginia Criminal Indictments 1801-1843* (Berwyn Heights, Maryland: Heritage Books, 2013), 194.

²⁷⁴ Administrator Sampson Hutchison paid Loudoun jailor Edward Hammett \$32.67 on April 9, 1840 for Henry’s accrued jail fees. Hutchison later recorded that he received \$600 from Norvall for sale of Henry on March 17, 1840. “The Heirs of Lewis M. Smith dec’d In Account with Sampson Hutchison their Guardian,” Loudoun County Guardian Account Book C: 83-84. Henry’s purchaser identified only as “Norvall” might have been William H. Norville, a local trader with connections to slave traders in Washington, D. C.

Georgetown, or slaves “such only as breeding women and their children.”²⁷⁵ When Henry Barron advertised his Prince William land for sale, he stated his interest in accepting “negroes or bank stock, at a fair valuation” in exchange for his land. Barron’s willingness to exchange land for slaves demonstrated his belief that slaves served as a fungible asset, one he could cash in, hire out, or employ on his own property.²⁷⁶ John Kincheloe offered to take “likely young Negroes” as payment for the 700 acres of land in Fauquier and Prince William he put up for sale in 1787.²⁷⁷

Historian Walter Johnson focused on the influences of the market in slave sales. Johnson noted that “[e]veryday all over the antebellum South, slaveholders’ relations to one another—their promises, obligations, and settlements—were backed by the idea of a market in slaves, the idea that people had a value that could be abstracted from their bodies and cashed in when the occasion arose.”²⁷⁸

Southerners recognized the importance of enslaved bodies as a source of moveable and transferable wealth, and this speculation increased the chances of removal and transplantation for enslaved persons. Nonetheless, public pressure sometimes influenced slaveholders to soften the potential pain of familial separations. On the subject of “separating of negro parents from their children,” Josiah Priest’s *Bible Defence of Slavery* enjoined slaveholders to “discourage occurrences of the kind” as a compliment to the “ameliorating genius of the age” since keeping enslaved parents with their children

²⁷⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 21, 1817.

²⁷⁶ “Real Estate for Sale,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 24, 1829.

²⁷⁷ *Virginia Journal*, October 11, 1787.

²⁷⁸ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 26.

would be “more patriarchal and fatherly.”²⁷⁹ Public displays of paternalism, intended to deflect abolitionist charges of the inhumanity of slavery, often were sacrificed to pecuniary obligations, yet for some slaveholders these accommodations represented a genuine desire to ameliorate the condition of favored enslaved persons.

Slave Sales and Paternalism

Historian Damian Alan Pargus asserted that an “important tenet of southerners’ paternalist ideology required benevolent masters to make a genuine effort to protect slave families from dissolution.”²⁸⁰ Slaveowners wishing to appear benevolent often softened the potential disruption to family ties by trying to arrange the sale of family units rather than single slaves. Slaveholder Julia A. Wilson of Leesburg devised in her will that her slave Maria and Maria’s children “be sold to some humane person resident in the state of Virginia who will keep her for his own use & not part with her or her children unless they are sold altogether to some one who will retain them for his or her own use.” Wilson explained her reasoning: “my object being to secure them a good home, and to prevent their separation from one another.”²⁸¹

Tench Ringgold advertised in 1818 the upcoming sale of “about forty valuable slaves” in Leesburg on the 24th of July. Ringgold explained that “[a]s these servants have all been brought up in one family, it is desirable to the owners to sell them to one master.” Understanding this might not be possible or feasible, Ringgold added “they will,

²⁷⁹ Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 385. Emphasis in the original.

²⁸⁰ Damian Alan Pargus, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 62.

²⁸¹ Will of Julia A. Wilson, written May 30, 1842, proved in court June 16, 1842, Loudoun County Will Book 2A: 158.

however, be sold in families, or separately as far as is practicable, if this wish cannot be gratified.”²⁸² Ringgold probably wondered if the Loudoun community could provide a buyer for such a large enslaved force so he also included a note requesting the editors of the *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, *Republican Constellation* of Winchester, *Alexandria Gazette* and *Fredericksburg Herald* also publish his advertisement and thereby increase the potential geographical boundaries for prospective buyers. If Ringgold could not ensure a sale of the entire group as a unit, then perhaps he could limit the sales of smaller family units or individuals to northern Virginia or Maryland. Other slaveholders hid behind the anonymity of a newspaper advertisement to offer slaves for sale using the newspaper office as an intermediary for negotiating sales. One slaveholder offered three “likely negro women, one with a male child” for sale in 1820 and stipulated that “[n]o objection will be made to traders purchasing.”²⁸³

Despite claims of paternalism, some northern Virginia slaveholders admitted the relative ease of consigning enslaved chattel to sale away from family and kin. Mary Smith indicated she did not mind selling her “worthless” servants Margaret and Julia, yet she “disliked exceedingly...parting with Elsey but...was compelled to do so.”²⁸⁴ Smith could justify the removal of persons who did not contribute to her family’s well-being, yet at least with one select servant, she apparently had a much more favorable

²⁸² *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, July 16, 1818. Ringgold noted that the group of enslaved included “excellent house servants, blacksmiths, carpenters, an excellent Virginia bred cook, and coachman, as well as plantation hands, women, girls and boys, all of whom are likely and valuable” to mitigate the expense of buying in family groups with the perceived benefits of having trained servants. Ibid.

²⁸³ “Negroes for Sale,” *Palladium of Liberty*, February 4, 1820.

²⁸⁴ Mary E. Smith of Warrenton, Virginia Letter to James A. Tritt of Calhoun, Missouri, 1 July 1848, Accession #3896, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.

relationship. Like Smith, slaveowner Virginia T. Sinclair felt no qualms about selling a particular enslaved woman, Kate. According to Sinclair, Kate provided little value to Sinclair because she had no children and also exhibited “an obstinate perverse disposition, impatient of restraint, ungrateful, rebellious and ungovernable,” traits that made her “not likely to be of much value” for personal service to Sinclair as an inheritable investment for Sinclair’s heirs.²⁸⁵ For Sinclair, an ungovernable slave made a poor long-term investment, and in her estimation, the more prudent option would be to sell Kate and purchase a more tractable and biddable servant.

Slaveholders like Mary Smith and Virginia Sinclair who felt some anxiety about parting with certain slaves typified the paternalistic nature of the master-slave relationship as outlined by Eugene Genovese.²⁸⁶ Slaveholders who felt a twinge of guilt at the prospect of dividing enslaved families could attempt to find a buyer willing to purchase in family units. An anonymous advertisement seeking to purchase fifty slaves “for his own use exclusively,” as opposed to accumulating investments for the slave trade, assured northern Virginia slave-owners that he “wishes to purchase in families, & will not be accessory to the separation of the individuals of a family” in his quest to

²⁸⁵ Because Sinclair held Kate as part of a legal trust benefitting Sinclair and her heirs, permission of the court was required before any sale could be initiated. Sinclair explained to the court that the enslaved woman, Kate, had been given to Sinclair as an infant by Sinclair’s grandmother, Jane Williams, on March 3, 1842 and held in trust for Sinclair’s use and benefit. Mrs. Sinclair wanted the permission of the court to sell Kate in order to invest “in other slave or slaves” whose future value would grow and could be better conveyed to Sinclair’s heirs. “Bill of Complaint,” *Sinclair v. Lipscomb*, Prince William County Chancery Court (1860), LP (1871) 01122_00677, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

²⁸⁶ Genovese argued that paternalism “defined the involuntary labor of the slaves as a legitimate return to their masters for protection and direction” and that the paternalistic relationship implied “mutual obligations” of “duties, responsibilities, and ultimately even rights.” Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 5.

employ purchased slaves for his farm in “the South.”²⁸⁷ The Washington, D.C. firm of Simpson & Neal offered to purchase “likely young negroes, of both sexes, families included, house servants, field hands, and mechanics of every description” and offered slaveholders the option to sell family groups and thus assuage paternalistic guilt. Yet once purchased, families had no guarantee that they would remain intact.²⁸⁸

The “Banner Decade”: Slave sales between 1830 and 1840

Historian Damian Alan Pargas described the 1830s as a “banner decade” for interstate migration of enslaved persons as shown by a “68 percent” increase in the enslaved populations of Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Louisiana.²⁸⁹ Transplanted Virginia-born slaves contributed to the growth of these states, yet how much did the domestic slave trade affect overall slaveholdings in the northern Virginia region? Federal census records compiled for these three counties reveal distinct changes in the absolute numbers of enslaved persons for each of the three counties over time, yet the decade between 1830 and 1840 generated the most dramatic drop in the enslaved population across the region (see figure 44).

²⁸⁷ The purchaser requested prospective sellers should provide the respective ages of slaves to be sold for the farmer’s consideration. The advertiser offered “a liberal cash price” for the transfer of property. “Slaves Wanted,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 30, 1832. It is unclear whether the purchaser actually intended to maintain families or even to purchase the slaves for his own use, or whether this was merely a ruse to satisfy concerns of slaveholders not eager to be seen as responsible for dividing families.

²⁸⁸ “Cash in Market,” *United States’ Telegraph*, November 22, 1832.

²⁸⁹ Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19.

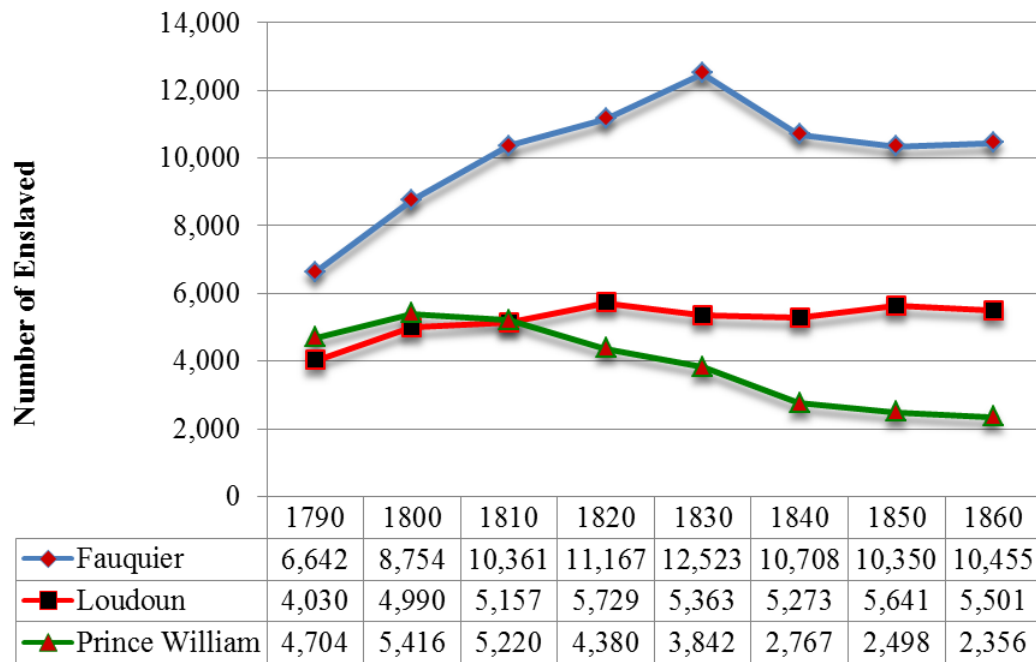


Figure 44. Enslaved population in northern Virginia, 1790 – 1860.

Source: Social Explorer Decennial Census Records.

Loudoun County reported an absolute decrease of only ninety enslaved persons from 5,363 to 5,273 persons between 1830 and 1840, a mere 1.7 percent decrease while Fauquier and Prince William experienced a more significant decrease in enslaved holdings between 1830 and 1840. Fauquier slave-owners decreased their slaveholdings from 12,523 persons in 1830 to 10,708 persons in 1840, a net loss of 1,815. Prince William's enslaved workforce decreased from 3,842 to 2,767 persons, a net loss of 1,075.²⁹⁰ Fauquier's loss represented a 14.5 percent decrease while the reduction in Prince Williams slaveholdings represented a 28 percent decrease in population, nearly a third of all its enslaved persons removed over a period of ten years. While some loss can be attributed to mortality, runaways (see the next section), manumission (see chapter three)

²⁹⁰ Social Explorer Decennial Census Records, 1830 Federal Census; 1840 Federal Census.

and planter/household migration with enslaved forces, these factors do not fully explain causes for the vast majority of these statistical losses and the significant decreases within specific age cohorts of the enslaved population.

A closer look at census records provides some vital information about the age cohorts removed from the region during this decade and how this affected birth rates and the expected natural increase of this segment of the population.²⁹¹ Enumerators tabulated slaveholdings of interviewed households into specific gender and age cohorts for both the 1830 and 1840 federal census.²⁹² By comparing these age cohorts from one decade to the next, reductions in specific age cohorts become apparent indicating a targeted reduction in slaves aged younger than to twenty-four, specifically those aged ten to twenty-four.

In 1830 Loudoun County slaveowners reported 3,493 enslaved persons aged up to twenty-three years old. Ten years later, at the time of the 1840 federal census, only 2,573 slaves were in the ten to thirty-five age cohort, an absolute decrease of 920 persons, or 26 percent drop. This decrease occurred at the same rate for both males and females, suggesting that both were equally affected by the dislocations (see table 7). The significant decline among this particular age group tells much more about demographic changes than comparing changes in the total enslaved population.

²⁹¹ Census records, while flawed in their production, still present a snapshot of enslaved holdings over time. On the problems with using census data see Opal G. Regan, "Statistical Reforms Accelerated by Sixth Census Error," *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 68, no. 343 (September 1973): 540-546.

²⁹² Enumerators tabulated the number of enslaved persons in the following age categories: slaves under the age of ten, slaves aged ten to twenty-three, slaves aged twenty-four to fifty-four, slaves aged fifty-five to ninety-nine, and slaves one hundred years or older.

Table 7. Decrease in age-specific cohort of enslaved persons in Loudoun County, 1830-1840

Loudoun	Aged 0-23 in 1830	Aged 10-35 in 1840	Absolute Decrease	Percent Decrease
male	1,753	1,291	462	26%
female	1,740	1,282	458	26%
Total	3,493	2,573	920	26%

Source: Social Explorer Decennial Census Records.

Another measure of the changes in the enslaved population derives from annual personal property tax records that tabulated taxable slaves aged twelve years and older. This annual measure highlights shifts in the enslaved population more readily and indicates a decided drop in the number of taxable slaves aged twelve or older occurred between 1834 and 1836 in Loudoun County (see figure 45).

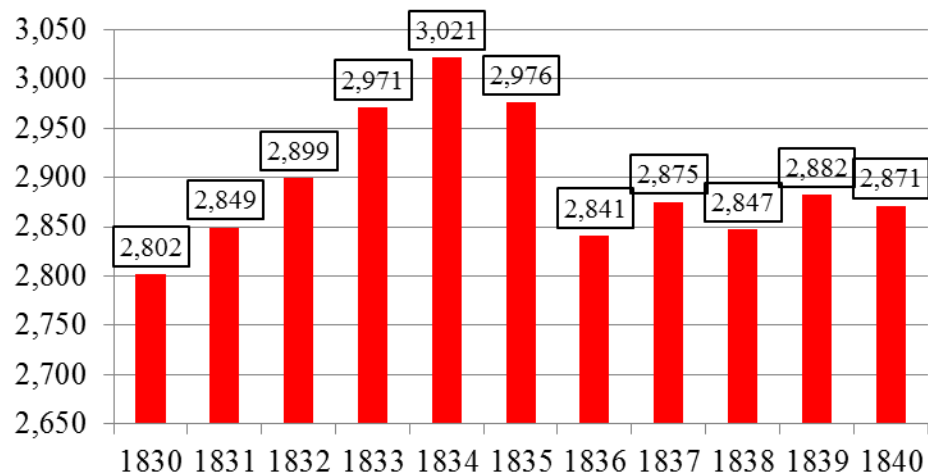


Figure 45. Loudoun County taxable slaves (aged 12 and older) during the 1830s.

Source: Loudoun County Tax Records, microfilm.

In Fauquier County the reduction in the 0-23 year old cohort was proportionately even greater as seen in table 8. The cohort of enslaved male workers aged birth to twenty-three years in 1830 decreased by nearly 44 percent before tallied again in 1840. Enslaved females within this age range decreased by nearly 43 percent between 1830 and 1840. Enslaved males and females in this age cohort declined by a rate of 43 percent, a significant loss among enslaved people in Fauquier County.

Table 8. Decrease in age-specific cohort of enslaved persons in Fauquier County, 1830-1840

Fauquier	Aged 0-23 in 1830	Aged 10-35 in 1840	Absolute Decrease	Percent Decrease
male	4,226	2,387	1,839	44%
female	4,133	2,348	1,775	43%
Total	8,359	4,735	3,614	43%

Source: Social Explorer Decennial Census Records.

Comparing these results with the number of taxable slave aged twelve years and older between 1830 and 1840 reveals a drop in the number of slaves similar to the trend encountered in Loudoun County, beginning in 1834 but extending until 1837 (see figure 46).

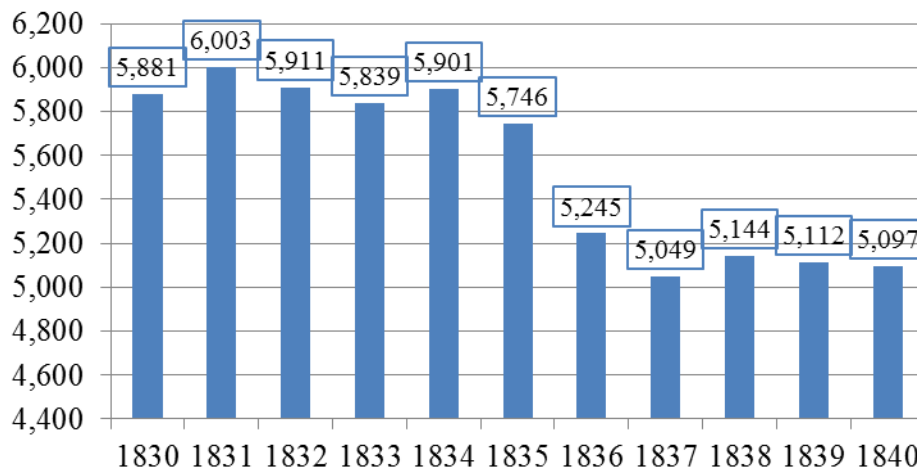


Figure 46. Fauquier County taxable slaves (aged twelve years and older) during the 1830s.

Source: Fauquier County Tax Records, microfilm.

Prince William's net decrease of 1,075 slaves between 1830 and 1840 flattens out more specific losses and gains within selected age cohorts (see table 9). Between 1830 and 1840 the county experienced a loss of more than 50 percent of the enslaved girls and boys and young men and women who were infants through aged twenty-three years in 1830.

Table 9. Decrease in age-specific cohort of enslaved persons in Prince William County, 1830-1840

Prince William	Aged 0-23 in 1830	Aged 10-35 in 1840	Absolute Decrease	Percent Decrease
male	1,276	620	656	51%
female	1,222	601	621	51%
Total	2,498	1,221	1,277	51%

Source: Social Explorer Decennial Census Records.

Prince William, unlike Loudoun or Fauquier, exhibited a steady decline in the enslaved population beginning in 1831 and continuing to 1838 suggesting that the impetus for a diminishing enslaved population preceded the drop in Fauquier or Loudoun, yet also occurred more gradually and steadily over the decade (see figure 47).

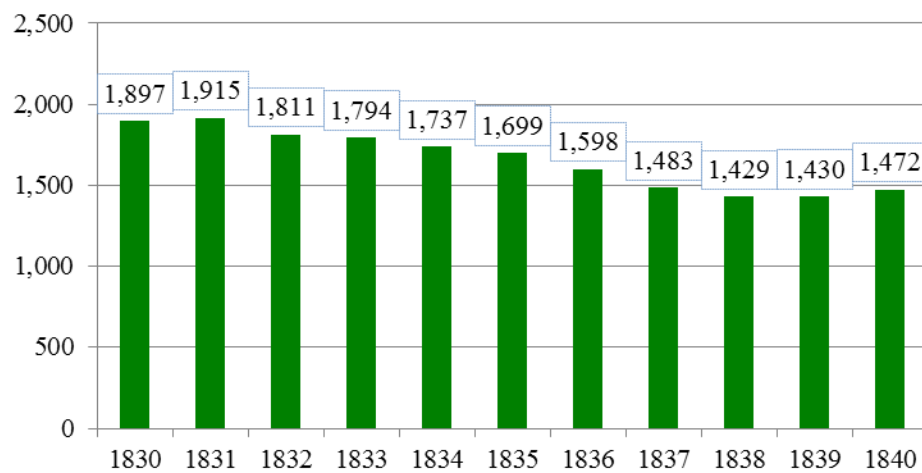


Figure 47. Prince William County taxable slaves aged twelve years and older, 1830-1840.

Source: Prince William County Tax Records, microfilm.

Personal property tax records from Prince William County provide an additional yearly measure of the steady and significant decrease in enslaved holdings in Prince William. Unlike Fauquier and Loudoun County tax commissioners for this period, Prince William records clearly distinguished tabulations for two age groups of taxable slaves: those aged between twelve and sixteen years and those taxable slaves aged sixteen years

and older (see figure 48).²⁹³ From this perspective, decreases in enslaved property affected more of the older prime workers (16 years of age and older) than younger slaves aged between twelve and sixteen years in Prince William County, and thus placed even greater stress on slaves aged 16 to 24 years old. In following chapters it will be shown this pressure had a positive relationship on the number of runaways during peak sale periods and for this age cohort in Prince William County.

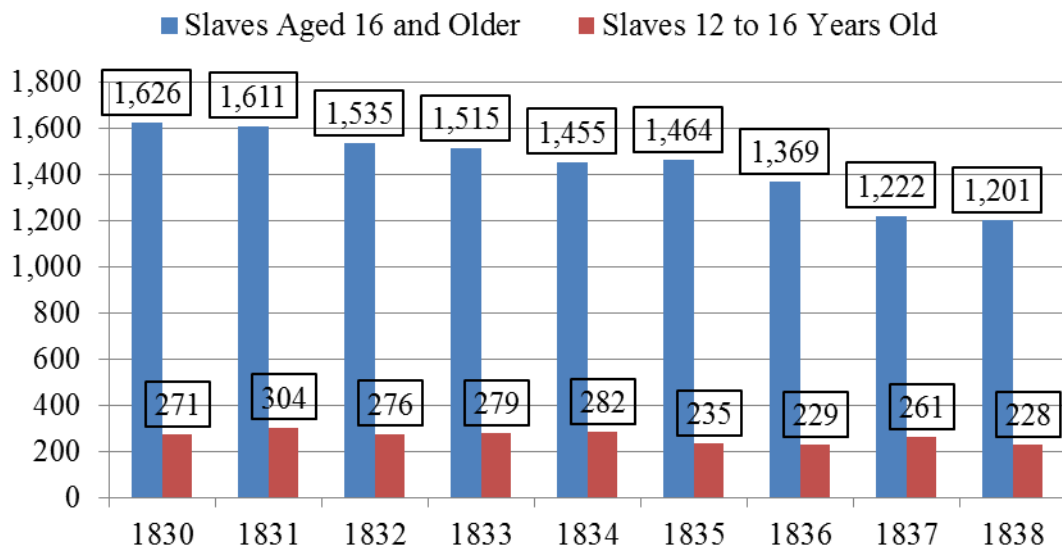


Figure 48. Taxable slaves in Prince William County. 1830 – 1840.

Source: Prince William County Tax Records, microfilm.

Some portion of these losses within the birth to age twenty-three year old age cohort can be credited to death, runaways, or slaves who migrated out of the county as part of planter or household movements. Yet if accepting Tadman's predictions that

²⁹³ Extant data for the twelve to sixteen year age cohort is fragmented for Loudoun and Fauquier counties.

nearly seventy percent of slave movements could be accounted for by interregional sales, then approximately 2,530 slaves from this prime worker cohort were sold away from Fauquier County during the decade, 644 slaves from Loudoun, and 894 from Prince William County (see table 10).²⁹⁴ Notably, the data signifies that both males and females were removed from each county in nearly equal proportions, indicating that slave traders demonstrated gender parity in selecting and purchasing slaves for the long-distance trade. Even if fewer slaves in this cohort (and especially if more) were subjected to the dislocation of the long-distance, these numbers represented a traumatic loss to parents, spouses, siblings, children, and extended family separated by the trade.

Table 10. Decreases of prime enslaved workers

Age Cohort Birth to 23 Years in 1830	Absolute Decrease Between 1830 and 1840	Possible Number Attributed to the Domestic Slave Trade (70 Percent)
Fauquier	3,614	2,530
Loudoun	920	644
Prince William	1,277	894
TOTAL	5,811	4,068

²⁹⁴ Michael Tadman asserted in his analysis of slave migrations in 1820 and 1850 that approximately 70 percent of slave movements in the 1820s were the result of the domestic slave trade. By 1850 this rate had dropped slightly to a range of 60 to 70 percent. Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (1989, repr., Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 31.

Source: Decennial Census Records, Social Explorer.

Note: The numbers of slaves affected by the long-distance slave trade 1830 to 1840, based on the suggestion of Michael Tadman that 70 percent of losses could be attributed to the domestic slave trade.

Correspondingly, with such a large cohort removed, the potential for natural increase across northern Virginia also decreased with Prince William birthrates suffering the most among the three counties (see table 11).

Table 11. Decrease in birth rates comparing 1830 and 1840 census records

	Aged 0-10 in 1830	Aged 0-10 in 1840	Absolute Decrease	Percent Decrease
Fauquier	4,892	3,947	945	19%
Loudoun	1,841	1,742	99	5%
Prince William	1,465	946	519	35%

Source: Social Explorer Decennial Census Records.

Such age selectivity as a factor for both Fauquier and Prince William's declines in enslaved populations fits with Tadman's models of regional slave trading that selected younger slaves for the interregional slave trade. Age specific selection distinguishes this type of migration from a planter migration that shifted entire households of slaves regardless of age.

Memories of former enslaved persons from northern Virginia bears witness to the extent that the domestic slave trade bore them away from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William during the 1830s. Rachel Jones, born enslaved in Loudoun County around 1798,

recalled that around the year 1835 she “removed from V[irgini]a to Greenup Co. Ky” and “from there to Louisville [Kentucky].”²⁹⁵ Isaac Merriweather recalled being sold when he was seven years old from his family in Loudoun County to a new owner in Fauquier County in 1827. Eight years later in 1835, during the height of the interregional domestic trade away from the Upper South, Merriweather, then about fifteen years old was taken to the Deep South to near Augusta, Georgia. He remained there only about seven months before being taken to DeSoto County, Mississippi where he lived for twenty-three years and “had a wife Sinah” before he again relocated in 1859 to Memphis, Tennessee. Though records do not indicate whether Isaac Merriweather left Mississippi voluntarily or due to a forced sale, his other relocations tell a story of both local and interstate sales beginning at a young age.²⁹⁶

To see how individual slaveholder actions influenced these changes in slave population, consider the enslaved holdings of the Tayloe family in Prince William County at Deep Hole plantation. In the 1760s, the Tayloes held as many as 170 enslaved persons on the Neabsco and Occoquan plantations, yet over time their holdings in Prince William steadily declined.²⁹⁷ Once options for expansion in northern Virginia dwindled and the natural resources needed to support the iron work, shipbuilding, and fishing industries in Prince William diminished, members of the Tayloe family migrated south,

²⁹⁵ Record for Rachel Jones, January 2, 1867, United States Freedman’s Bureau Bank Records, 1865-1874, Louisville, Kentucky, Roll 11, familysearch.org. By 1867 Rachel’s children were also scattered. Her son, John, lived nearby in Louisville. Daughter Mary June Edwards Jackson resided in Michigan and daughter Lucy Elliott lived on “some Plantation in Louisiana.” Jones listed a third daughter on her bank application, Lettie A. Jones, but provided no place of residence. Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Record 665 for Isaac Merriweather, United States Freedman’s Bank Records, 1865-1874, Memphis, Tennessee, Roll 24, familysearch.org.

²⁹⁷ Laura Croghan Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire: The Business History of the Tayloe Family and Virginia’s Gentry, 1700-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 85.

setting up new plantations in Alabama and taking select portions of their Virginia slaves with them.

Laura Croghan Kamoie asserted that over time the Tayloe family had “readily created new enterprises or found new tasks to which they assigned their slaves” rather than relying on hiring out to employ ostensibly surplus slaves.²⁹⁸ This entrepreneurial spirit, though, was not an option for most slaveholders, and in fact, by the 1830s no longer was an option for the Tayloes in Virginia. Successive heirs to the Tayloe estates shuffled enslaved laborers between various sites in the family holdings across the northern neck and northern piedmont of Virginia to maximize the use of their labor to maximize potential profits. Tax and census records make clear the results of the Tayloe family’s decisions to reduce their Prince William County slaveholdings either by sale or by relocation to other Tayloe holdings in Virginia and Alabama.

A closer look at Tayloe slaveholdings between 1830 and 1840 shows how the Tayloe family managed their work force and which particular age groups were most likely to be reallocated to other Tayloe holdings in Virginia and Alabama (see table 12). Between 1830 and 1840 the age cohort most likely to be removed were those between the ages of ten and twenty-four – those most saleable and also most likely to run away. One explanation for the targeted removal of men in their prime years was a perceived threat of runaways. In a letter to his brother William in 1836, Benjamin Ogle Tayloe believed it “desirable to send all the active hands from the Potomac” as “they are too near the

²⁹⁸ Laura Croghan Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire: The Business History of the Tayloe Family and Virginia’s Gentry, 1700-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 50.

Abolitionists...that are daily becoming more dangerous.”²⁹⁹ The threat of abolitionist interference during the late 1830s as perceived by the Tayloes likely affected other riverine plantation slaveholders.

Table 12. Enslaved holdings on Tayloe’s Deep Hole Plantation, Prince William County, 1830-1840

Age Cohort	1830			1838			1840		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
< 10	9	11	20	7	8	15	7	7	14
10 to <24	11	10	21	5	1	6	6	4	10
24 to <35	3	7	10	0	1	1	0	0	0
35 to <55	5	4	9	6	5	11	6	5	11
55 to <100	4	8	12	1	5	6	4	7	11
Subtotal	32	40	72	19	20	39	23	23	46
Total	72			39			46		

Sources: 1830 and 1840 Federal Census Prince William County, Virginia; “A List of Servants of Deephole Estate,” January 1838, John B. Burchell Account Book, 1838-1839, Tayloe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

Cultivating Networks and Negotiating Conditions of Enslavement

The decision of a slave-owner to alter the terms of a slave sale to create conditions more favorable to the enslaved has been interpreted by historians in different ways. Such a sale could reflect a paternalistic desire to demonstrate affective bonds with enslaved families by acquiescing to specific terms negotiated by the enslaved.³⁰⁰ An equally likely perspective emphasizes the role of the enslaved in shaping the conditions

²⁹⁹ Benjamin Ogle Tayloe to William Henry Tayloe, February 1, 1836, Tayloe Family Papers d 1287-1351 as cited in Richard S. Dunn, *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 284.

³⁰⁰ Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 33.

of future enslavement. Sometimes the enslaved might request a sale within the neighborhood or negotiate with relatives of the owner or of a spouse's owner to encourage a sale to keep kinship networks intact.³⁰¹ The ability of enslaved persons to carefully craft networks of influence among persons of power in southern society also might shape the outcome of a sale.

Enslaved persons prepared for a future sale by integrating themselves into “webs of strategic associations” with church members, owners, employers, and sympathetic persons in position of economic and community power, for use when needed.³⁰² An unnamed enslaved man appealed to his master, Richard H. Carter of Rectortown, for help in keeping his family intact. The enslaved man's abroad wife, Mima, and her child were sold by Mima's owner, Mr. Sherman, to a slave trader, Mr. Bashears.³⁰³ Though too late to stop the sale from Sherman to Bashears, Carter wrote to Bashears' employer, Kephart, explaining that the “husband of Mima lives with me; and such appears to be the distress of both parties on account of the separation, that I am induced to make an appeal to your humanity in their behalf.” Carter, either to reduce the chance of his enslaved man running

³⁰¹ Daina Ramey Berry explores how enslaved persons were very much aware of their values and used this knowledge to leverage for better opportunities with masters or during sales to trade promises of faithful service for an agreement to purchase an entire family. Daina Ramey Berry, “‘We’m Fus’ Rate Bargain’: Value, Labor, and Price in a Georgia Slave Community,” as found in Walter Johnson, ed. *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004): 55-71.

³⁰² Calvin Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery, Family Over Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 23.

³⁰³ Bashears advertised his services throughout northern Virginia, worked for Alexandria slavetrader, George Kephart, and specialized in the Natchez slave market.

away or engaging in some other act of resistance, or out of some genuine concern for the man's family, offered a price to purchase Mima and the child from Brashear.³⁰⁴

Enslaved woman Betsy, a "servant woman" to Mary J. Carter keenly felt the effects of family dislocation after her owner, James Carver, transferred Betsy to Carter's possession at Cedar Hill. Yet Betsy cultivated strategic networks to assist her in retaining ties with her husband after that sale. After Betsy endured a "sever [sic] time in giving Birth" to twins combined with a two month period without receiving a visit from her abroad husband, John Marlowe (Morloe), she implored Carter to deliver a message to Marlowe's master, Dr. Robert Peyton in Salem, Fauquier County. Carter, serving as amanuensis, wrote to Peyton that Betsy was "very anxious to see John" and that Betsy "cant imagine why he treats her so she says she has given him no cause." Betsy had heard that that another of Peyton's enslaved woman, Rosa Burrel, had "been doing his washing" and that Burrel's "mother & Father are trying to get John to marry her" and feared that her marital connection to Marlowe was in jeopardy. Betsy's prior acquaintance with Peyton as a former patient, her previous visit to Peyton's residence, and the fact that all Peyton's servants "know her & know that John is her husband" gave Betsy courage to assert her interlocking social webs of business, mastery, and kinship to seek Peyton's help in preserving her marital ties. Betsy asked that Peyton "not allow it [a

³⁰⁴ M. D. Conway, *Testimonies Concerning Slavery* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1864), 24-25. The information provided by Richard Carter was found in one of the letters acquired by Conway. *Ibid.*, 22. Conway noted that the dates of the letters he quoted "range between 1837 and 1857." *Ibid.*, 26.

recognition of John and Rosa as husband and wife]” and to tell John that “he must certainly come down next Saturday” to visit Betsy and her newborns.³⁰⁵

Networks and “webs of association” assisted another enslaved woman, Betty, in securing some proximity to her husband when she faced a possible sale. Knowledge that the forthcoming death of her master, Noah Maddox, jeopardized her future, enslaved woman Betty or her husband probably negotiated with him for some concession. Maddox granted permission for his wife to sell Betty and her two children but only under the condition that “said woman [Betty] may not be taken a remote distance from her husband.”³⁰⁶ Enslaved man Jesse was able to gain the concession from his slaveowner, Jesse Scott, that he “never...be sold out of the family” without his consent to the transaction. Scott legitimized this “express condition” in his will.³⁰⁷ In his 1828 will, Loudoun slaveowner Jacob Wirts desired that his “coloured woman” Agg “not be sold but remain with any of my children that she may choose to live with at whatever price she may be appraised at” and thus kept Agg within his family. Wirt further directed that his other slaves “shall not be sold to negro traders or drovers” and thus limited the potential geographic dispersion of his enslaved work force.³⁰⁸ In some way, Jesse, Betty, and Agg each altered the conditions of their future enslavement by requesting terms that would keep them in close contact with their families and kin.

³⁰⁵ Letter from Mary J. Carter of Cedar Hill to Dr. [Robert] Peyton, December 13, 1857, Peyton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

³⁰⁶ “Will of Noah Maddox,” written July 23, 1832, proved in court November 6, 1832. Prince William County Will Book N: 512.

³⁰⁷ “Will of Jesse Scott,” written November 6, 1822 and recorded August 7, 1826. Prince William County Will Book M: 427.

³⁰⁸ Will of Jacob Wirts, written March 23, 1828, proved in court April 13, 1829, Loudoun County Will Book R: 375.

Some favored slaves negotiated for their sale to a new master. George and Emily requested their owner, William Hill Gray of Locust Hill, Loudoun County, sell them and their three children to Joseph Mead, another Loudoun County farmer. The transfer of ownership was completed on January 1, 1853 at a cost of \$2,200. Gray also noted that he sold Lizzy, another enslaved worker, for \$1,000, presumably also to Mead and that these sales had been instigated “all at their [George, Emily, and Lizzy’s] own request.”³⁰⁹ Negotiations of this type had to be carefully considered. In 1852, enslaved woman Juno “requested to be sold to Richmond” yet when her master, Edmund Berkeley prepared to take her from his Prince William farm to Richmond, Juno “begged off at the last moment.” Berkeley’s response to Juno’s sudden change of heart hardened his heart against future such requests. He noted afterwards that “I shall always have anyone flogged who says anything about being sold.”³¹⁰

Some slaves negotiated the purchase of spouses or children. An enslaved man owned by “a gentleman of Fredericksburg” apparently approached a white man named Charles Tobin while at a lumberyard in Alexandria. Local constable Officer Chipley noticed Tobin “busily employed in writing” a letter for the enslaved man, an activity that aroused the suspicions of the constable. Upon questioning, Chipley learned Tobin was writing a letter “enquiring the price of the woman Henrietta,” whom the enslaved man “wished to purchase” from her owner, Mr. Phillips of Warrenton.³¹¹ By networking and locating potential allies, the enslaved man ascertained that Tobin would act as

³⁰⁹ Entry for January 1, 1853. Arthur Powell Gray, transcriber, (1931) *William Hill Gray Diary, 1846-1869*, Gray Family Papers, VHS.

³¹⁰ Journal Record for September 7, 1852. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book 1851-1855*, transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 31.

³¹¹ “Police Reports,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 7, 1852, microfilm.

amanuensis and intermediary in initiating negotiations with Phillips. Whether the enslaved man had prior approval from his owner to contact Phillips or had fled from his owner and hoped to broker the purchase of his wife, the power of networking facilitated his goals.

Enslaved persons might mitigate their circumstances by appealing to owners to sell to a local buyer rather than to a trader. After the death of Dumfries merchant, Alexander Henderson, in 1816, his executor published notice of a public sale of Henderson's personal and enslaved property including five slaves. The ad stipulated that the executor "does not deal with foreign purchasers or their agents" and cautioned such buyers that they "need not call and are asked not to do so." Prospective local buyers were invited to view the five slaves in Dumfries, yet the enslaved group would not be "publicly exposed." The executor also stipulated that both of the farmhands, one, a man about twenty-five years old, was "to be sold as near Fauquier courthouse as may be, to be near his wife," and the other man about thirty-five years old would be sold to an owner near Leesburg, also to relocate near his abroad wife.³¹²

³¹² "Public Sale," *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, December 19, 1816. In his will, Alexander Henderson specified that his property (slaves and real property) should be sold to pay his debts or to provide a legacy of \$5,000 for each of his daughters. Henderson did not stipulate in his will who should be sold or how the sales should be conducted, suggesting that the conditions of sale as indicated in the "Public Sale" advertisement were established by Henderson's family or in an attempt to mitigate the potential dislocation of the five slaves. Henderson did specify that particular members of an enslaved family remain together as part of the labor force for his Pignut farm devising that: "I allot Jack the Carpenter with his wife Dorcas and their youngest child and shoemaker Ben with his wife Clara and her child James [to the force at Pignut farm] thus providing for that valuable farm the necessary tradesmen." Will of Alexander Henderson, written February 24, 1815, proved in court December 4, 1815, Prince William County Will Book K: 475. Henderson's family was probably sympathetic towards some members of their enslaved force. Acting executor, Richard H. Henderson noted that "Simon & his wife Sal are removed from the Reedy place to the Pignut" on April 26, 1817, preserving their spousal relationship, although not guaranteeing the security of their entire family. Prince William County Will Book L: 42. Unfortunately the pages recording the executive account (and any slave sales) have been torn from Will Book L thus preventing any analysis of the outcome of the advertised sale. The sale of five enslaved

In 1819 Loudoun County court commissioners Sanford Ramey and John Braden advertised a chancery sale of “two valuable Negro Men” named Jacob and Emanuel but cautioned prospective buyers that “[t]hose persons, who buy negroes to speculate upon and to remove and carry out of the commonwealth, are requested not to trouble themselves by attending said sale.” They clearly warned roving slave traders away from the sale and apparently preferred a local sale.³¹³ That same year John Rose, administrator for the estate of George Killgore, in his advertisement for the public sale of “[f]our likely young Negro Men and two young Negro Women” warned that “[n]o foreign purchasers need attend to purchase the negroes, as they will not be sold out of the adjoining counties”³¹⁴ In these cases, a prejudice for known local buyers and against “foreign” or unknown buyers altered the conditions for sale.

In 1817 a Loudoun County slaveholder stated his “negro woman and three children” would not be sold outside the counties of Loudoun, Fairfax, Prince William, or Fauquier, thus limiting the geographic boundaries for their transplantation.³¹⁵ In her 1822 will, Elizabeth Carter of Prince William County requested commissioners to “divide the families in such a way as will occasion the least distress” following her anticipated death.³¹⁶ Fauquier slaveowner Mary Strother requested that her executor sell her entire estate, yet out of some consideration for her enslaved force, to sell them “at [a] private

persons represented only a small portion of the total enslaved force owned by Henderson. Commissioners identified eighty-seven enslaved persons residing on Henderson’s property at Reedy and at Cow Creek. Inventory of the Estate of Alexander Henderson, Prince William County Will Book L: 37-39.

³¹³ *Genius of Liberty*, January 26, 1819.

³¹⁴ *Genius of Liberty*, March 23, 1819.

³¹⁵ *Genius of Liberty*, February 11, 1817.

³¹⁶ Elizabeth Carter wrote her will on August 5, 1822 and less than one month later, on September 2, 1822, the will went to probate. Prince William Will Book L: 477, microfilm.

sale if it can be done and to persons residing in the neighbourhood” as she wished her servants “shall not be carried out of the neighbourhood without their consent.”³¹⁷ In his 1844 will, Reuben Murray devised that “none of my slaves...should be sold out of this state.”³¹⁸

A correspondent to the *Washingtonian* in Leesburg offered “a Negro Woman about 27 years old, and her two children, one about four and the other about two years old” for private sale negotiated through the newspaper office in 1849. Wanting to appear the “good master,” the seller noted that the woman and her children were offered for sale “without any fault” and that he “would prefer selling them in the county of Loudoun.” The owner further touted the desirable characteristics of the woman describing her as “a good house servant, healthy, honest, [and] of good disposition” a tactic that presumably both master and enslaved woman were willing to prove in order for the woman to find a new owner among local residents.³¹⁹

One enslaved woman negotiated the geographic boundaries of her future sale. The woman, described as forty-five years old, “active, strong and healthy,” and skilled as an “an uncommonly good washer and ironer” and “a very good cook,” hoped to find a new owner near her current home. Her seller explained in his advertisement that her “numerous connexions in town, induces a wish to sell her into the country” meaning the near neighborhood of Leesburg where she was currently employed. Even so, the seller

³¹⁷ Will of Mary Strother, written September 9, 1836, proved in court May 25, 1847. Fauquier County Will Book 20: 331, microfilm.

³¹⁸ Will of Reuben Murray, written December 28, 1844, proved in court June 23, 1845, as found in *James E. Murray v. Alfred Murray*, Fauquier County Chancery Record 1854-042, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, Library of Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1854-042#img>.

³¹⁹ “Negro Woman for Sale,” *Washingtonian*, October 19, 1849.

realized the possibility of a more distant removal as terms for payment by a purchaser “in the county” were “bond and security for 300 dollars” while “cash will be demanded” from a buyer “out of the county.”³²⁰ The owner broadcast his intent to acquiesce to the affective needs of his bondsperson, yet the proffered terms of sale also more clearly reveal the pragmatic concerns for completing a sale and liquidating a property investment.

Presumably, these bondspersons held family and kinship connections in the northern Virginia region and communicated their wish to remain as near to them as possible in the case of future sale. By bargaining their acquiescence for more favorable conditions of sale, enslaved persons realized their value as productive workers while slaveowners balanced future profits from sales against “small” concessions. By limiting the distance from present domicile to future domicile, the slaveowner reasoned that enslaved family members could maintain contact.

Keeping members of an enslaved family located near each other also reduced the potential for running away. Some slaveowners recognized the potential distress for enslaved families during a forced estate division. This distress made real by the fervent entreaties of enslaved husbands, wives, fathers, or mothers meant that those owners, either through a sense of responsibility or a pragmatic realization that broken families fomented resistance, attempted to ameliorate potential familial fractures.³²¹ Damian Alan Pargas suggested these stipulations for local-only sales could indicate slaveholders were

³²⁰ *Genius of Liberty*, 13 July 1819.

³²¹ See the discussion on networking skills of enslaved persons in Calvin Schermerhorn, *Money Over Mastery, Family Over Freedom* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), especially chapter one.

“sensitive to the idea of their slaves being forcibly separated from friends and family members.” Nonetheless, Pargas contended that more likely the decision to sell sprang less from a sense of benevolence than a motivation driven by financial concerns.³²²

Cultivating positive relationships with their masters or mistresses offered enslaved persons some, albeit limited, power to alter their conditions of enslavement. Yet as the demand for slaves grew and increased numbers of slaves disappeared from the tax rolls and census records of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William, a deeper look at the effects of these two factors on the enslaved of northern Virginia reveals that the decade between 1830 and 1840 proved especially disastrous for enslaved families.

Resistance to Sale

Stress experienced by slaves living under the cruel threat of sale and a determination to shape their futures in any manner possible led to resistance in the form of networking (as discussed earlier), disobedience, and running away. Masters often realized the potential for resistance and used force to retain slaves until they could be transferred to new owners. Former Loudoun slave George Jackson remembered that “fore de slaves were sold dey were put in a cell place til next day when dey would be sold.” When Jackson’s Uncle Marshall and a man named Douglas were sold, Jackson remembered “dem handcuffed” yet Jackson “never saw dem on de auction block” suggesting that his owner, Thomas Humphrey, had already negotiated a private sale before taking the men into custody. Humphreys probably used the precautionary tactic as

³²² Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 33.

defense against losing other enslaved men. Jackson's uncle, Bill "heard dey were goin' to sell him and he run away" to the north, not returning to Virginia until after the Civil War.³²³

The enslaved force at the Peyton family's "Old Place" realized the death of a Peyton family member in 1827, the family's inherited debt, and Robert Peyton's intention to divide the property the following year "agreeably to the last request" of his father meant certain dispersal of the Peyton slave community and the families therein. In response to the very real threat of imminent sale, Peyton's enslaved laborers became uneasy. Robert informed his brother that "at the Old Place they [the slaves] have been somewhat troublesome." Robert's remedy was "a little well timed correction" that "subdued them," yet fears of potential sale were not dispelled. The Peyton family was "compelled from pecuniary engagements to sell a couple of negroes." Robert decided to sell John & Eli, "who were selected for misconduct," to recoup some funds.³²⁴ Three years later, the Peyton family applied to the Fauquier Court of Chancery, "desirous of a division of the real estate and slaves of the said Chandler Peyton" in order to reduce the debt on the estate by selling additional slaves.³²⁵ The slaves' response to threatened sale, becoming "somewhat troublesome," represented one form of resistance and protest.

³²³ Testimony of George Jackson, July 6, 1937, Works Projects Administration, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves, Volume XII: Ohio Narratives* (Washington: Work Projects Administration, 1941), 47, <<https://memory.loc.gov/mss/mesn/120/120.pdf>>.

³²⁴ Robert E. Peyton of Gordonsdale to Richard H[enry]. Peyton, August 19, 1827. Peyton Family Papers, VHS. Peyton wrote, "We have inherited amongst other things a debt of five thousand dollars, or upwards, without which we should be at ease. It may serve to teach us in the commencement of life a lesson of economy & care." Ibid.

³²⁵ *John S. Peyton, etc. v. Eliza B. Peyton*, Fauquier County Court of Chancery, 1832-036, Library of Virginia Chancery Records online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1832-036#img>.

Peyton's perception of the conduct and his "well timed correction" indicates his awareness of the connection between threatened sale and acts of resistance.

Resistance to the forced fragmentation of enslaved families through the slave trade took various forms, most noticeably by slaves running away from potential sales or in the immediate wake of a long-distance sale. William Harris was "raised by John Walkman" in Loudoun County, yet he sold Harris to William Conrad. Harris did not remain with Conrad long as he, too, sold Harris but this time to "a Southern Trader." Deciding that he would not submit to the relocation, William Harris ran away.³²⁶ Another enslaved man named Henry, who had served as a race rider for William Randall of Fauquier County, was "sold to some Georgiaman" after the death of Randall. Rather than consigning himself to a future in the Deep South, Henry ran away from the trader at Fredericksburg, Virginia, "on his way out" of northern Virginia.³²⁷

Charles Morton, a twenty-five year old enslaved man experienced at least three sales during his twenty-five years in Prince William County. Morton was able to gain a geographical appreciation for the landscape through annual hires in Prince William, Fauquier, and Loudoun as well as during at least three years hire to a stone quarry in Stafford County, Virginia. Morton experienced the lash as evidenced by the "several scars on his right shoulder occasioned by being whipped by a constable," and the multiple hires and sales signified a life of perpetual transition. By 1825 he decided to end

³²⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 22, 1825. Harris used his network connections to obtain a pass authorized by Charles Binns, Clerk of Loudoun County Court and believed to be a forgery. Harris was later captured in Washington County, Maryland with the pass. Ibid.

³²⁷ *Alexandria Herald*, November 5, 1817. Henry was later captured and sent to the jail in Alexandria, Virginia. Ibid.

the cycle of enslavement and ran away.³²⁸ James Brent endured a similar pattern of sales away from northern Virginia. Sold at age forty by his owner Mrs. Sarah Rosch of Thoroughfare in Prince William County to trader A. S. Grigsby of Alexandria and then resold to Thomas Wooldridge of Hanover County, Virginia, Brent showed his objection to his forcible removal from family and friends in Prince William by running away from Wooldridge.³²⁹

Enslaved people resisted to the geographic dispersal of their families through misconduct or absconding and thus altered the conditions of enslavement. Buyers made clear the terms for purchase, when seeking to limit potential unrest caused by a forced removal of a slave to a new residence. One prospective buyer who sought to purchase “a good Farm hand” from Loudoun County in 1842 outlined his required characteristics in a new acquisition: “healthy, home-staying, and of good deportment.” In exchange, the buyer offered to pay “the *present cash price*” and promised the seller that the farm hand who displayed those traits “will not be removed from Loudoun, without cause.”³³⁰ By recognizing the importance of preserving kinship connections by keeping enslaved persons geographically near family, the buyer hoped to entice a servant willing to barter “good deportment” and “home-staying” for a different owner. This might appeal to an enslaved person who feared an imminent sale and preferred to take a chance on a “guaranteed” local sale rather than the caprice of an indebted owner seeking to quickly liquidate chattel for cash from a trader. The new master’s paternalism, though, was never

³²⁸ “One Hundred Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 17, 1840, microfilm.

³²⁹ “Runaways – Fifty Dollars Reward,” *The [Richmond] Daily Dispatch*, August 23, 1858, <virginiachronicle.com>.

³³⁰ *Washingtonian*, August 27, 1842, microfilm.

truly guaranteed, as the buyer clearly announced that future removal (by sale) was ever a possibility if he could claim “due cause.” The fact that the buyer realized the connection between removal and resistance speaks to larger truths about the changing relationship between masters and slaves, changes apparent in the growing number of runaways and acts of passive and violent resistance, topics covered in more depth in following chapters.

The depth and breadth of the local and interregional slave trade across northern Virginia permanently altered the composition of the enslaved population and caused significant and long-lasting trauma for all involved. Data indicates that this trade sprang not only from financial desires to acquire quick cash or to reinvest inherited wealth, but also from motivations to manage enslaved laborers and the size of slaveholdings. Over time, certain age cohorts became the prime targets for the slave trade and experienced significant declines, but more importantly, these periods of noticeable demographic decline occurred at different times in each county. As will be seen in later chapters, slaves responded to these periods of intense trading within each county with varying degrees of individual and group resistance. Understanding the extent and emotional toll of the slave trade in this region provides one measure of the changing relationships between masters, non-slaveholders, and the enslaved within northern Virginia’s slave society.

Migrants into Virginia – The Newcomers and their Adjustment to a Slave Culture

The departure of land- and slaveholding residents, tenant farmers, and free and enslaved laborers freed lands and jobs for newcomers. Emigrants from northern states

and border states joined with immigrants to partially fill this gap. Some Virginia landowners recognized the potential for an economic boon heralded by the arrival of northern migrants seeking land and jobs. Emboldened by the arrival of fifty-six New York families to settle in nearby Fairfax County in 1840, northern Virginia boosters embarked on a campaign to entice further migration by northern farmers to Loudoun, Fauquier, and especially Prince William counties.³³¹ By the 1840s, land agents appealed directly to northerners. In his advertisement offering land for sale near Brentsville, Henry Barron included a postscript “[f]or the information of Northern farmers” that “two or three other farms containing nearly 1,000 acres, adjoining mine, could be purchased on reasonable terms” making a large parcel that could be easily subdivided “into as many farms as would be desired.”³³² In 1845 Gwynnetta W. Dade offered her farm Brenton for sale and included a note inviting “Northern men, who desire a small farm, in a neighborhood remarkable for health, good society, convenience to mills, post office, and places of religious worship” to “examine for themselves” Brenton farm.³³³ A Loudoun farmer also called the attention of “persons from the north looking for land” to his 250 acre farm located near Leesburg.³³⁴ Land brokers David A. Hall and Robert A. Parrish notified potential clients that their “extensive acquaintance with citizens and farmers of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Eastward” enabled their land brokerage to divide and sell local estates. Their practice of advertising extensively in “Eastern papers” promised to

³³¹ On the effect of the settlement by New Yorkers in Fairfax see Richard H. Abbott, “Yankee Farmers in Northern Virginia, 1840-1860,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 76, no. 1 (January 1968): 56-63.

³³² *Alexandria Gazette*, August 15, 1843, microfilm.

³³³ “A Small Farm in Prince William for Sale,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 7, 1845.

³³⁴ “For Sale or Exchange,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 10, 1846.

inform and encourage northern emigrants to lands in Virginia and Maryland, a marketing shift that became increasingly prevalent during the 1840s.³³⁵

Northerners apparently heeded the call to come to northern Virginia. James H. Robbins moved from Southampton, Suffolk County, New York and bought land near Occoquan in 1847.³³⁶ The Henry Holland family emigrated to Prince William County from Saratoga County, New York, at some point between 1842 and 1848.³³⁷ The Hollands settled in the lower part of Prince William: an area populated by “northerners” such as the Witbacks from New York and the Tibbles from Connecticut.³³⁸

In 1848, Henry Dane “late of the city of Troy, New York” purchased 211 acres near the Neabsco Run in Prince William County along the Dumfries-Occoquan Road.³³⁹ An emigrant from Berkshire County, Massachusetts, writing to his hometown newspaper in 1854, less than a month after arriving at his new residence at “Maple Valley” (located

³³⁵ “Farms in Virginia and Maryland,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 4, 1847.

³³⁶ Prince William County Deed Book 19: 299-300.

³³⁷ Henry’s son, Henry Holland, born in Saratoga, New York on August 1, 1833 “came to Prince William county with his parents in 1848 and had since resided in the vicinity of Manassas.” Obituary of Henry Holland, *Prince William County Virginia 1900-1930 Obituaries* transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (1996), 158 <<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/documents/OBITTotal.pdf>>. Henry Holland’s daughter, Mrs. Henrietta (Holland) Lipscomb, was born in Saratoga County, New York on May 27, 1841 and “[a]t a very young age she moved with her family to Virginia, residing for a time at Alexandria later moving to the lower part of this county [Prince William] and to Brentsville.” “Old Resident Passes Away,” *Manassas Journal*, May 26, 1922 as reprinted in *Brentsville Neighbors* May, 2015, 9. <<http://www.historicprincewilliam.org/brentsvilleneighbors/116%20May%202015.pdf>> The 1840 census for Milton in Saratoga County, New York includes Henry Holland, his wife, an older female aged between 30 and 40 years and seven children under the age of 20 years. 1840 Federal Census, Milton, Saratoga County, New York, 71.

³³⁸ 1850 Federal Census Free Population, Prince William County, Virginia, 99 and 102 (of 135 pages). The 1850 Federal Census for Prince William County lists Henry Holland, farmer, his wife Mary F. Holland, and five children. The enumerator apparently mistakenly recorded the birthplaces of each child as “Virginia” yet he correctly identified the birthplace of Henry and Mary F. as “England.” *Ibid.* Henry’s gravestone in the Holland Family cemetery indicates that Henry Holland was born in 1806 in Exeter, Devonshire, England. Survey of Holland Cemetery, Prince William County, by Ronald Turner, 1999 <<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/Cemeteries1.htm>>

³³⁹ WPA, *Prince William: The Story of Its People and Its Places* (1941) Expanded Edition (Manassas, Virginia: Ref Typesetting, 1988), 103.

twenty miles south of Alexandria in Prince William County) declared that “[t]hree years ago, in the place where I now reside, there was but one Northern man; now there are *forty-eight* Northern families within three miles of my farm.”³⁴⁰ Another neighborhood located west of Dumfries (now known as Minnieville) became a haven for “Northern dairymen” by the mid-1850s.³⁴¹ Oliver Chamberlin, a resident “of the City of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania” purchased two tracts of land totaling 189 acres for \$1,600 in 1855.³⁴² Chamberlin, along with Northerners Abram Waldon and Thomas Clark founded a Presbyterian church in the area in 1855³⁴³ and in 1859 Oliver and his wife Mary deeded an acre of their land for “the sole use of the Congregation of Old School Presbyterians as a place of worship.”³⁴⁴

Daniel Amidon and his family moved from Onondaga County, New York to Prince William County, Virginia prior to 1855 and eventually gained title to 168 acres one mile south of Dumfries.³⁴⁵ Amidon was part of a group of New Yorkers who left Onondaga County in the 1850s to settle in northern Virginia. Frances Bailey recalled that

³⁴⁰ “Letter from Virginia,” *Pittsfield [Massachusetts] Sun*, May 4, 1854. See also Patricia P. Hickin, “Antislavery in Virginia, 1831-1861,” PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1968. ProQuest 6818206, 632.

³⁴¹ In 1855 three “Northern dairymen” named Abram Waldon, Oliver Chamberlin, and Thomas Clark founded the Greenwood Presbyterian Church near present-day Minnieville and Cardinal roads in Dale City in Prince William County. WPA, *Prince William: The Story of Its People and Its Places*, Expanded Edition (1941, repr., Manassas, Virginia: Ref Typesetting, 1988), 103.

³⁴² Prince William County Deed Book 24: 23-24.

³⁴³ WPA, *Prince William: The Story of Its People and Its Places*, (1941, repr., Manassas, Virginia: Ref Typesetting: 1988), 103.

³⁴⁴ Prince William County Deed Book 25: 91-92.

³⁴⁵ Case of Daniel Amidon, No. 11293, Prince William County, Virginia, Southern Claims Commission, microfilm. Daniel Amidon, his wife Rhoda, and sons Jacob J. and James M. resided in the town of Onondaga in Onondaga County, New York in 1850 yet by 1855 they disappeared from the New York State Census. 1850 Federal Census Free Population, Onondaga, Onondaga County, New York; 1855 New York State Census. In 1860 the Amidon family resided in the Evansport neighborhood of Prince William County. 1860 Federal Census Free Population, Evansport, Prince William, Virginia. For purchases of land see Prince William County Deed Book 24: 50-51. The Prince William County Court paid Daniel Amidon fifty cents for surveying a road and two dollars for the use of his plough and two horses for road repair in 1856. “County Levy,” LP (1856) 001038_00345, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

he and Amidon had been “raised on adjoining farms in Onondagua [County]” and “came to Virginia together and settled near each other here.”³⁴⁶ William J. Emmit and his wife Julia “of the City, County, and State of New York” purchased land in Prince William County in 1853 from Wilmer and Virginia B. McLean.³⁴⁷

During an interview with a white man near Gainesville in 1853, James Redpath, “the Roving Editor,” asked “are there many northern people settled round here?” to which the man replied, “No, sir. Lots down at Brentsville, though.”³⁴⁸ The settlement of northerners near Brentsville had long been known locally as “Jersey Settlement.”³⁴⁹ By the time of the enumeration of the 1850 census, fifty-two heads of households born in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, or Massachusetts lived with their families in Prince William County. Other single men from these states resided as laborers in Prince William County households. This number increased during the 1850s.

The effect of this northern migration on southern society was not lost on local residents. In 1846 an unidentified correspondent to the *Alexandria Gazette* remarked that the “continual tide of emigration which is sweeping the planters away to the South [and]

³⁴⁶ “Testimony of Frances Bailey,” Case of Daniel Amidon, No. 11293, Prince William County, Virginia, Southern Claims Commission, microfilm.

³⁴⁷ Prince William County Deed Book 22: 253. See also a deed of trust on 150 acres known as Yorkshire and/or Bloomsgrrove contracted by Emmit in 1856. Prince William County Deed Book 24: 24-25.

³⁴⁸ John R. McKivigan, ed., *The Roving Editor, or Talks with Slaves in the Southern States*, by James Redpath (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 209.

³⁴⁹ One measure of the long-held association of the area near Brentsville as the “Jersey Settlement” is found in a military report from Major Michael Kerwin of the 13th Regiment of Pennsylvania Cavalry dated February 14, 1864, in which Kerwin reported he had “scouted the country in the direction of Brentsville, Broad Run, and by Jersey Settlement and found no enemy nor any directions of their presence in the vicinity of the localities above named.” “Dispatch from Major M. Kerwin, 13th Regt PA Cavalry to Major Robert A. McCoy, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General,” Bristoe, VA., February 14, 1864, as transcribed by Morgan Breedon in *Brentsville Neighbors*, No. 113 (February 2015), 7, <<http://www.historicprincewilliam.org/brentsvilleneighbors/113%20February%202015.pdf>>. Morgan Breedon, local historian of Brentsville, Virginia, identified the location of Jersey Settlement as approximately in the area now known as Aden located near Brentsville. Email from Morgan Breedon to Sheri Huerta, March 14, 2015.

taking with them their slaves” resulted in the vacated lands being “sold among a class of purchasers having already more than they can cultivate to advantage.” This would then initiate “a beautiful revolution in our social organization” whereby the enslaved population, described as “the blight of our land” would be “gradually drained off to the sparse regions of the South” replaced by a “race of freemen from the North, bringing with them their habits of industry and morality and their zeal for the promotion of education and general improvement.”³⁵⁰

In 1857, a correspondent to the *New York Herald* identified as “A Virginian” argued against Eli Thayer’s proposed scheme to “colonize” southern lands, including Virginia, by injecting free soil laborers and landowners. Virginian characterized Thayer’s American Emigrant Aid and Homestead Company as a “flank movement to head back the negro slave population and their masters by pre-occupying the county.” While warning that the poor, cheap soils provided a poor exchange for emigrants’ cash, Virginian more importantly cautioned potential emigrants against settling near lands worked by slave labor because emigrants would then “toil and labor alongside of them [slaves] until (as every body knows) the poor white man has lost all self respect, and becomes despised even by the slave.” Even further, Virginian warned that northern emigrants “with perhaps few exceptions” would be “looked on as intruders, and every man’s hand raised against them.”³⁵¹ This animosity towards northern settlers taking over

³⁵⁰ “Inducements to Emigrate to Eastern Virginia,” *Alexandria Gazette*, August 18, 1846.

³⁵¹ A Virginian, “The Re-Colonization of Virginia—The Other Side of the Question,” *New York Herald*, May 24, 1857.

southern lands and concerns that their potential voting strength would alter long-held southern institutions had been brewing for more than a decade.

By the time of the divisive presidential battles of the 1850s the presence of northerners on southern soil seemed to challenge the long-held political hegemony of the slaveholding class. As early as 1843 a correspondent identified as “Viator” discussed the flood of northern emigrants to the northern counties of Virginia. Since the arrival of the Duchess County, New York emigrants in Fairfax in 1840, “Viator’s” attention was

fixed upon a movement...which would drive slavery from the central garden of the United States, by the simple process of buying up the worn out lands of Maryland and Virginia, dividing the plantations into farms, and subjecting them to the renovating touch of skill and industry, under the hand of FREE LABOUR.³⁵²

Noting that “a good many farmers from New York and New England” had already settled in northern Virginia, “Viator” remarked this trend would continue, especially with the concerted effort of land agents like Bernard Hooe to attract northern land purchasers through advertisements aimed specifically for “the Northern demand” and to “Northern purchasers.”³⁵³

“Viator” referred to a speech given by Virginia Senator William C. Rives in 1842 before the Albemarle Agricultural Society in which Rives discussed the settlement of New Yorkers in Fairfax County. Rives apparently determined that it was “impossible to prize too highly such an accession of industry, capital and intelligence to our agricultural community, or to estimate the full extent of the good effects, direct and consequential,

³⁵² Viator, “Old Virginia Selling Out,” *Alexandria Gazette*, April 11, 1843. Emphasis in the original.

³⁵³ Ibid. Viator republished information regarding lands offered for sale by Hooe near Brentsville and Occoquan in Prince William County and in Fairfax County.

which it may bring in its train.” While Rives had focused on the potential improvements to Virginia’s agriculture, “Viator” perceived a more ominous outcome of the settlement of northerners. Noting that in the 1840 Presidential election Fairfax delivered “only 687 votes” and Prince William counted only “560 votes,” “Viator” predicted that “in a short time, the free labour voters will control the county representation.” Consider the “strong feeling which is known to exist in Western Virginia,” “Viator” believed “It would not be strange” if “a rush of Northern immigrants should be sufficient not only to equalize the political power of the free citizens in the two sections of the State, but in ten years to control the vote of the State, at the Presidential election in 1852.”³⁵⁴

Historian Richard Abbott perceived that while “some Virginia editors indicated a willingness to admit Northern capital and labor, they would do so only if Virginia institutions were safeguarded.” Over time, Abbot noted, any northern plans to “regenerate the Upper South” were “met with the cry of ‘Black Republicanism.’”³⁵⁵ Clearly, emigration from northern states could and did alter county demographics. From the viewpoint of some observers, this shift in population represented a clear threat to the structure of “southern” society in northern Virginia. The pushback against northerners and free soil culture in northern Virginia, a complex topic, will be examined in more depth in chapter nine.

The outward flow of Virginians, both enslaved and free, and the inward tide of northern and foreign emigrants altered the structure and stability of northern Virginia’s

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Richard H. Abbott, “Yankee Farmers in Northern Virginia, 1840-1860,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 76, no. 1 (January 1968), 63.

slave society. Each county experienced different rates of loss in its white populations which were replaced increasingly by investors and farmers from “northern” states and overseas. Local observers perceived these shifts to portend a rise in abolitionist or free soil sentiment opposed to southern institutions. Another influential movement was the outward migration of enslaved men, women, and children caused by the machinations of the long-distance slave trade and forced removal in planter or household migrations. The emotional effects of forced separations created by planter migrations and by the domestic slave trade left a legacy of pain. Enslaved persons reacted to these forced migrations and intense periods of population changes in different ways: by cultivating beneficial networks to alter conditions of enslavement, by increasingly engaging acts of resistance, and by leaving enslaved service as a runaway (topics more fully explored in following chapters).

CHAPTER FIVE: NORTHERN VIRGINIA RUNAWAYS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR FLIGHT

Anatomy of an Escape - Landon Phillips

Free black, Landon Phillips, planned the escape as best he could. After sending his clothing to be washed and mended by Nancy Jennings, he acquired a pistol, gathered information about the route to Pennsylvania, and created new identities for himself and his two fellow travelers. About two months before embarking on the journey he tried to acquire a pass from a white acquaintance, Daniel Baker, for one of his female traveling companions to authorize travel to Harper's Ferry. Baker might have known Phillips, but had his doubts about writing a pass for Phillips's companion, someone he did not know, and Phillips did not ask him again. On Saturday evening, the fourth of October in 1845, Landon put his plans into action. Early that morning, he walked to Nancy Jennings' place and retrieved the mended and washed clothing. That evening, under the cover of darkness, Landon Phillips met with two young enslaved women, Hannah and Ann, at the Dowell plantation near Purcel's Store in Loudoun County and the three started their journey westward.¹

The trio, headed by twenty-six year old Landon, raced northwest across Loudoun County and after a period of time reached the Shenandoah River and their river crossing point near Bolivar, located slightly south and west of Harper's Ferry and southwest of the

¹ *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips*, Loudoun County Free Blacks 1845-012, LCHAD.

confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers. North of the Potomac lay Maryland. West of the Shenandoah lay Jefferson County, Virginia (now West Virginia) and the group crossed the Shenandoah and travelled north to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad line. Following the tracks westward, after five days they reached the Licking Water Station in Morgan County, Virginia, when they encountered local residents James Doughham and Zebechy Barford. Doughham and Barford became suspicious of the trio wandering so close to the railroad and took them captive while asking questions to ascertain their identities. Exhausted and hungry, Landon told Doughham and Barford that they were Philip Curtis, Ruth Curtis, and Jane Curtis, (aliases they had assumed), and their owners were John Hooe and James Richard who resided near Waterford, Loudoun County, a claim later disproved. Doughham and Barford considered their options – whether to claim the three as their own and sell them as slaves to a trader who would carry them far from northern Virginia and any potential owner seeking reclamation of property, or to deliver the three to a local magistrate as presumed runaways and hope that a reward for their capture would prove sufficient for their time and trouble.

Deciding to take the risk of earning a reward, the captors marched their prisoners thirteen miles northeast towards Bath, the county seat (present day Berkley Springs). Fortuitously for Doughham and Barford, the county court was in session the next day so they brought the captives into the courthouse to wait their turn to present the three as runaways before a justice of the peace.

While waiting for the warrant, Col. William Harmeian approached the group thinking he was not accustomed to seeing the two white men from the “lower part of the

County” in the courthouse, so asked about their business. After hearing Doughham and Barford’s account of noticing the three “coloured people,” their interrogation, and decision to bring them to the court, Harmerian noted the supposed runaways “seemed to be very much fatigued, having walked so far” from the point of capture twelve or thirteen miles “below Bath” to the courthouse during the previous day. Harmerian, a local store owner, offered Doughham and Barford the use of his wagon to transport the group to his store in Bath. Once there, Harmerian gave the blacks “some crackers & cheese to eat & some liquour to the boy & some wine to the women.” Harmerian noted the three captives “seemed to be much exhausted;” hence his offer of a place to rest and eat rather than waiting at the courthouse. While there, two justices of the peace, Aaron Harlon and Mr. Orrick, arrived to take statements and information. Doughham and Barford swore before Harlon that they had “just grounds to believe the said slaves are the property of John Hoes [and] James Recker of the County of Loudoun.” Having heard the information, the justices began to write out the warrants for the Morgan County sheriff to place the three captives under arrest at the county jail.²

Meanwhile, one of the store clerks notified Harmerian that “these men who had the negroes in custody desired to sell them and sell out their chance for a reward.” Harmerian told the clerk to “agree to give them a hundred dollars for the chance provided they were all slaves” and then Harmerian interrogated the prisoners to ascertain their identities and their owners. Based on information gathered during the various interrogations, the sheriff posted ads for the trio’s potential owner or owners to contact

² “Order of Aaron Harlan, Justice of the Peace, Morgan County, Virginia,” *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips*, Loudoun County Free Blacks 1845-012, LCHAD.

him to claim their property. Morgan County authorities received correspondence from Conrad R. Dowell of Loudoun identifying the two women as his enslaved property known by the names of Hannah and Ann. By the 22nd of October the Morgan County sheriff received a warrant for the return of the Landon Phillips, a free person of color, to Loudoun County, wanted on charges that he did “entice, advise & persuade” Hannah and Ann to abscond from their owner, a crime that constituted a theft of property.

The fate of the enslaved women after their return to Loudoun is unknown, but presumably their owner, Conrad R. Dowell, carried out his intention of selling the pair. Meanwhile, Landon Phillips stood trial for feloniously carrying the slaves out of the county without the consent of their master “with the intention to defraud or deprive him, said Dowell, of said slaves,” a charge for which he was found guilty and sentenced to incarceration in the state penitentiary in Richmond.³

The failed freedom attempt of Landon Phillips and slave fugitives Hannah and Ann offers insights into the experiences of runaways from northern Virginia – the preparations made, routes taken, identities created, and problems encountered – as well as the revealing structures on which slaveowners and fugitive slave catchers relied to reclaim lost property. This study devotes the next three chapters to the process and meaning of running away and its effect on northern Virginia slaveholders. This chapter focuses on characteristics of runaways, basic preparations, and motivations for either short term absences or more permanent self-emancipation. As time progressed, runaway patterns and trends evolved from primarily solo attempts to more runaways leaving in

³ *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips*, Loudoun County Free Blacks 1845-012, LCHAD.

groups, encouraged by the spread of information networks and knowledge of routes of escape, the subject of chapter six. Chapter seven investigates evidence that both whites and blacks aided the escape plans of slaves and that slaveholders adapted strategies for capture while runaways increased their resistance to enslavement and capture. These structural changes combined with tensions over the fugitive slave law tested the stability of master-slave relationships in northern Virginia.

The exploits of fugitive slaves played out not only under the watchful eyes of northern Virginia's slaveholding community, but also in the discussions held within slave quarters, the free black community, and non-slaveholding whites. The effect of these voluntary and clandestine movements damaged not only the perception of control experienced by slaveholders, but also concerned other slaveholders in the area and region. Far from being isolated events, the impact of runaway slaves from northern Virginia became part of the national debate over slavery, property rights, and fugitive laws.

Studying runaway slave advertisements from a specific geographical region provides invaluable insights into their world of enslavement and acts of resistance. Unlike large studies of runaways across very broad geographic spaces that emphasize numbers and statistical analysis, a survey of runaways from a well-defined terrain allows for more in-depth analysis of social networks and connections on a local level. Descriptive ads revealed noticeable characteristics of runaways from northern Virginia such as age or timing of departure as well as less easily defined attributes as the type of preparation involved or motivating factors that led to flight. Runaway ads provide

evidence of patterns of active resistance against the slaveholding regime in very distinct locations. Tracking notices of absconding slaves from a particular geographic region illuminates the potential financial loss for specific slaveholders: identifying patterns of elopement from identifiable neighborhoods suggests the instability of a master's possession of enslaved persons and the determination of enslaved persons to resist this control.⁴

Scholars who study absconding slaves have concentrated on flight as a form of resistance or rebellion, the restrictions placed on potential runaways due to gender, and whether running away served a goal of temporary respite from punishment or permanent escape from bondage. John Blassingame characterized running away as one form of rebellion on southern plantations.⁵ Like Blassingame, Stephanie M. H. Camp also depicted running away as a form of resistance but viewed it through the perspective of enslaved women's experiences countering the geospatial control imposed by slave-owners. Within this "geography of containment," familial obligations and primarily

⁴ For this study, I located and transcribed extant broadsides, runaway advertisements, and committal notices from fifty-three newspapers available online or as microfilm. Committal notices were advertisements from jailors from across the region who advertised the capture and incarceration of presumed runaways who claimed their masters resided in Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties. The sources for the ads were extant local newspapers from Fauquier and Loudoun counties (no newspapers published in Prince William County of the period were located) and from Alexandria, Virginia available on microfilm as well as searches through numerous historical newspaper databases. The following online databases were used: *America's Historical Newspapers (Early American Series I and II)*, *African-American Newspapers*, *Nineteenth Century United States Newspapers*, the Library of Congress's *Chronicling America*, The Library of Virginia's *Virginia Chronicle*, and Bronwen C. Souder's "Genius of Liberty Runaway Slave Advertisements: Research Tool for Loudoun County, Virginia and Beyond" a database that has since been taken offline. The advertisements, published committal notices, and broadsides formed a unique database of northern Virginia runaways that includes 557 advertisements describing 762 runaways identified as property of slaveowners from Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties or who departed from these three counties or runaways from hired out work who belonged to slaveholders residing in these locations between 1800 to 1860. This created database is hereinafter cited as *Northern Virginia Runaways Database*.

⁵ John W. Blassingame. *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 114-116.

plantation-centered tasks prevented most enslaved women from seeking freedom.⁶ This gendered approach emphasized the heart-wrenching decisions that women as mothers and caregivers faced in choosing to resist enslavement, and also has resonance for enslaved fathers and extended kin as seen in the experiences of northern Virginia runaways.

John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger viewed running away as an act of resistance against the harsh regime of masters and overseers. According to their research, most runaways fled to escape daily punishments.⁷ Their short-term absences created a period of temporary reprieve rather than a permanent escape from enslavement, yet even this resistance generated harsh response from slaveholders. Franklin and Schweninger based their analysis on petitions to southern legislatures and courts as well as information gathered from over two thousand runaway slave ads compiled from newspapers published in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Louisiana. Their research served as ground-breaking analysis of the many methods, reasons, locations, and responses to runaways experienced across both the Upper and Lower South, yet the broad geographical perspective did not reflect characteristics of some more specifically bounded areas of the South.⁸

With a focus on Virginia, William Dusinger, Brenda Stevenson, and Philip J. Schwarz analyzed the effect of runaways on the enslaved family and community in Virginia. Dusinger drew upon the memories of former Virginian slaves recorded in

⁶ Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 16.

⁷ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Hereafter referred to as Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*.

⁸ Franklin and Schweninger's survey included only one Virginia newspaper, the *Richmond Enquirer*, and only for the years 1804 – 1809 and 1849 – 1860. Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 330.

Works Progress Administration interviews and concluded that “although the great majority of fugitives remained in the local woods, a substantial number sought total escape.”⁹ Stevenson’s critical analysis of family, community life, and slavery in Loudoun County, Virginia framed a brief discussion of runaways based on a few familiar experiences drawn from WPA interviews and William Still’s accounts of the Underground Railroad.¹⁰ She concluded the “primary reason that many Loudoun slaves initiated escape plans” was the “[p]ersistent pressure on marital relations and family life” that slaveholders exerted upon the enslaved.¹¹

Philip J. Schwarz found black and white migrants who left Virginia to be a sign of opposition to slavery.¹² Schwarz identified proximity to “free” states and evidence of multiple escape routes as factors that increased the potential for successful escapes, especially for those leaving from northern Virginia.¹³ He also traced the effect of outward migration from Virginia “on the rest of the county’s perception of slavery and actions concerning it” and linked runaway slaves from Virginia to broader national debates over slavery. He sought to recover the importance of African Americans to the antislavery

⁹ As cited in William Dusinger, *Strategies for Survival: Recollections of Bondage in Antebellum Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 147.

¹⁰ Stevenson relied on William Still’s accounts of the experiences of the Grigsby / Wanzer family group, the Bennet family, and Robert Stewart; the WPA interview conducted with George Jackson and Moses Bell; and one runaway advertisement from the *Washingtonian* that specified either family ties of the group or ties to family and community in Loudoun County. See Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 252 – 254. Hereafter referred to as Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*.

¹¹ Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 252.

¹² Philip J. Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

¹³ Schwarz stated that “[g]eography could be a Virginia fugitive’s friend: sheer courage and luck could be important as well.” Philip J. Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 26.

cause believing that historical attention had mistakenly prioritized white antislavery actions.¹⁴

This study seeks to provide a more nuanced analysis of runaways and their effect on enslavement in the particular region of three counties in northern Virginia, an area located in the borderlands of the far Upper South by identifying their characteristics, by highlighting the relative frequency of runaways from northern Virginia, by exploring the relationship between proximity and plans for permanent escape, and by considering motivations, and the process of running and its effect on slavery.

Runaways From Northern Virginia

Analysis of runaway slave advertisements provide valuable perspectives on the problem of runaways and their influence in destabilizing slavery in northern Virginia despite inherent biases in relying on limited extant newspapers and broadside collections.¹⁵ Extant ads represent only a fraction of the potential number of runaways, as some slaveholders circulated news of runaways through channels other than newspaper ads. Even so, these resources are valuable for indicating the geographical range of coverage in published ads, revealing otherwise unknown details of the lives of runaways, and the significance of escape for both enslaved and property owners.

During the period of 1800 to 1860, the greatest number of reported runaways in Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties occurred in 1840 due to the mass departure of twenty-three men, women, and children from the Loudoun estate of John

¹⁴ Philip J. Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 41.

¹⁵

Marshall that bloated the totals for the year (see figure 49). Otherwise, the years with the most reported runaways occurred in 1819, 1839, and 1856, years of particular economic strain and in the case of 1856, a year of heightened fears of racial violence as will be discussed in chapter ten. Based on this collection of advertisements for northern Virginia runaways, the nature and frequency of elopements fluctuated over time in response to individual and local conditions.

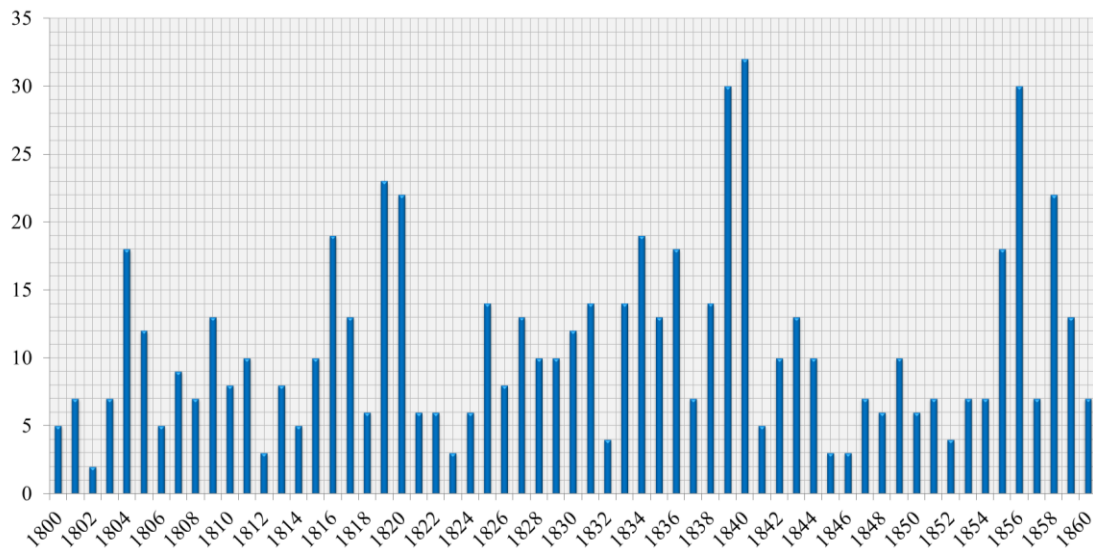


Figure 49. Number of runaways advertised per year.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: The reported year of elopement for 660 runaways from northern Virginia based on reported year of elopement provided in 556 extant newspaper advertisements and broadsides. These include only those runaways for whom information on the date of absconding was included in the advertisement or broadside.

Comparing this data by county reveals distinct differences in the number of reported runaways from each of the northern Virginia counties (see figure 50). Each

county experienced different periods when the number of advertised runaways significantly increased or decreased. For example, in 1804 both Loudoun and Prince William counties experienced relatively high numbers of runaways advertised in newspapers (each had eight advertised runaways), yet Fauquier County only reported two runaways that year. During another peak time, starting in 1819, twelve Fauquier slaves ran away compared to six from Loudoun and four from Prince William counties. In 1820, six Fauquier slaves eloped while thirteen slaves from Loudoun absconded and only three from Prince William County fled, according to advertisements. In 1827, ads recorded the flight of eleven Loudoun slaves while only one slaveholder from both Fauquier and Prince William reported runaways in extant published advertisements. In 1839, ten runaways were known to have fled Fauquier while seventeen left Loudoun slave masters and only two Prince William County slaveholders reported a runaway in newspapers. In 1858, at least fifteen slaves were reported missing in Loudoun compared to three in Fauquier and two in Prince William.

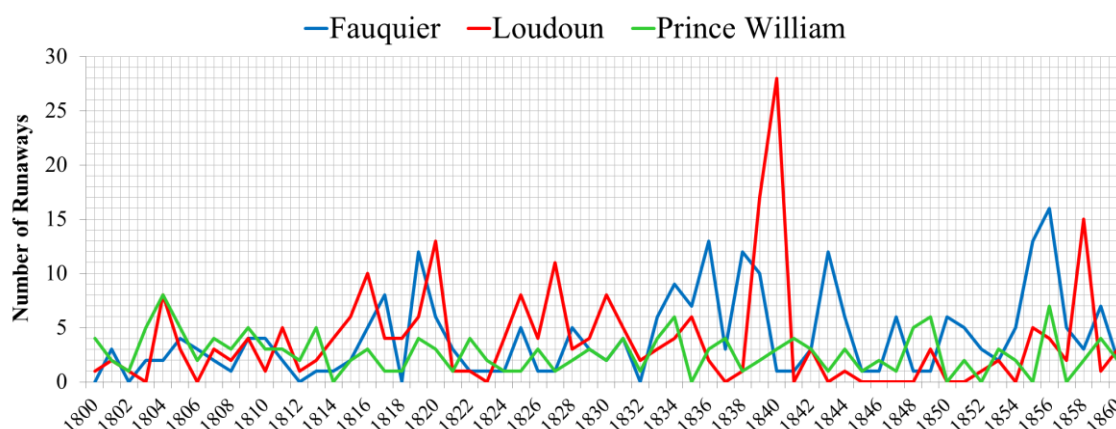


Figure 50. Number of advertised runaways per year by county, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Data derived from 557 advertisements and broadsides. Of the 762 runaways listed, 643 were identified by place and year of departure and included in this table.

These results suggest two conclusions about trends in the patterns of runaways. First, each county experienced peaks and ebbs in the number of advertised runaways at different times. Therefore, individual and community pressures affected enslaved persons likely to run away in different measures and at different times. For example, during the economic panic of 1819, Fauquier had the most reported runaways, yet the following year Loudoun County slaveowners reported more runaways. According to the number of advertised runaways (an imperfect measure, yet an indicator of general trends) tensions in Loudoun County began to increase in 1815 and 1816, yet experienced a relative period of calm between 1817 and 1819. The number of Fauquier runaways gradually increased between 1815 and 1817, yet no Fauquier slaveholders reported runaways who left specifically in 1818. In Prince William County, between 1816 and 1821 the years with the greatest number of advertisements occurred in 1816, 1819, and 1820. These small, yet

significant changes only become visible when considering patterns of runaways and slaveholder advertisements on a small, county-by-county scale.

The second conclusion that can be drawn was that Loudoun County slaveholders consistently reported more missing slaves than the other two counties in peak years of elopements and that these results call into question Loudoun's relatively soft stance on slavery based on the number of manumissions (as discussed previously) and the relatively gentler handling of crimes involving enslaved property (as will be discussed in following chapters). Loudoun slaveholders regarded the loss of enslaved property seriously enough to invest in published ads and feared elopements represented attempts at permanent escapes. Smaller numbers of reported runaways from Fauquier, the county with the highest population of enslaved persons among the three, possibly indicated heightened security and control of enslaved mobility across the county that decreased opportunities for escape. Prince William's lower numbers of runaways corresponds to its relatively smaller enslaved population size.

Spreading the Word: Publishing Runaway Advertisements

Aware of the growing networks of information and support that encouraged or enabled slaves to abscond, northern Virginia slaveholders employed various methods to locate and secure runaway slaves. Spreading news by word-of-mouth helped reach important local members of the community: people who possibly knew most about runaway movements or were in a position to provide greater surveillance. Slaveholders also published broadsides and posted them in public places to inform the public of their

search for lost “property” or paid for newspaper advertisements. Each of these methods was designed to alert public officials and citizens to notice and report any possible sighting of escaped slaves.

A traveler through Loudoun County in 1783 noted that taverns in the area were “easily to be identified by the great number of miscellaneous papers and advertisements with which the walls and door of these publick houses are plaistered.” Among these advertisements could be found broadsides noting rewards for runaway slaves.¹⁶

Broadsides such as those printed for Sally Smith offering a reward of \$200 for her escaped slaves Daniel and Charles were posted at local taverns and establishments located along possible escape routes.¹⁷

In 1817 Loudoun County slaveholder George Hale personally posted broadsides in public places to facilitate the search for two runaways. Hale had agreed to deliver and post ads for both his enslaved man, Aaron Weaver, and for John Cook, a servant of fellow Loudoun County resident, James Seaton, believed to have run away together in September 1816, about five months previous. Rather than publishing an advertisement in local papers, Hale opted to travel through suspected routes and leave copies of the advertisement in “most public places” while searching for the runaway slaves, an alternative to paying for costly newspaper ads.¹⁸ Hale “posted advertisements from Sinclairsville through Wheeling – Greensburg, Pittsburg, at most public places & passing

¹⁶ Johann David Schoepf, translated and edited by Alfred J. Morrison, *Travels in the Confederation [1783-1784]*, vol. II, (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911), 30.

<<https://archive.org/details/intheconfederation02schhrich>>

¹⁷ “\$200 Reward,” Broadside Collection, (September 17, 1856), AAHA.

¹⁸ George Hale “travelled in searching for the af’d runaway slaves through the State of Pennsylvania and other places” at the “request of Seaton” according to John Upp’s Bill in chancery court. *Upp v. Seaton*, Frederick County 1821-216, Library of Virginia Chancery Records, microfilm.

on through Bedford, Hancocktown, Shepherdstown and Charles town in Jefferson [County, Virginia] and had but one left when he got home” to Loudoun County. In March John Cook was apprehended and placed in the Alexandria jail.¹⁹

After broadcasting news of runaways through various channels of communication, slaveowners relied upon observant patrols and citizens, county constables and jailors to apprehend “suspicious” blacks in neighborhoods and alert slaveowners upon identification of presumed runaway servants. Shortly after Ludwell Lee’s enslaved man, Jerry, ran away from Lee’s plantation located near the Broad Run in Loudoun County in 1802, Sheriff Thomas MacGill published a notice alerting the public of Jerry’s capture and incarceration in Prince George’s County, Maryland. MacGill most likely notified Lee of the capture after Jerry told MacGill he was Lee’s property.²⁰ Ten days after noting that his enslaved man, Nelson, “ran off” on Monday, February 2, 1852, Prince William slaveowner, Edmund Berkeley made another notation in his journal regarding Nelson’s apprehension.²¹ On Tuesday, February 10, 1852, Berkeley recorded that he “heard of Nelson in the Fairfax Jail” and the next day we “went to Fairfax Court House and brought Nelson home.” Nelson’s gambit cost Berkeley ten dollars in recovery fees.²² The wintertime flight may have resulted in Nelson contracting an infectious rheumatism, a condition for which he received medical care during the end of February

¹⁹ Deposition of George Hale (Middleburg, April 3, 1820), *Upp v. Seaton*, Frederick County 1821-216, Library of Virginia Chancery Records, microfilm.

²⁰ “Fifteen Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, September 17, 1802. For Jerry’s capture and commitment in jail see the *Maryland Gazette*, September 23, 1802.

²¹ Journal Record for February 2, 1852. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book 1851-1855*, transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 18.

²² Journal Record for February 10 and 11, 1852. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book 1851-1855*, transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 19.

and early March.²³ Warrenton jailor Cyrus Cross notified Dr. Robert Peyton of Fauquier that his “boy Jack” had “been committed to Jail as a runaway” in April of 1857.²⁴

Loudoun slaveowner, Robert Brown, was notified by an informant that his escaped enslaved man, Daniel, had been located in Alexandria, causing Brown to publish an advertisement in the *Alexandria Gazette* offering a reward for Daniel’s apprehension and return.²⁵

Those with time and financial means tracked fugitive slaves over miles of terrain or paid professional slave catchers to locate, apprehend, and return absconding slaves. Barton Carrico, an overseer hired to manage the Prince William County estate of George G. Tyler earned five dollars for expenses incurred while traveling to and from Alexandria to reclaim “negro Osman” after he fled from service.²⁶ When enslaved woman Pegg ran from the Tyler sisters in 1820, Jarvis Shaw found her and returned her to Prince William County. For this service, Shaw was paid two dollars, and no costs for advertising were required.²⁷ After Peter and Sam fled from Charles Hunton’s residence near New Baltimore, Hunton first sent D. M. Pattie, W. O. Grayson, and Mr. Trone to Pennsylvania “in search of runaways Peter & Sam,” a service for which Hunton paid each man \$30. Hunton then paid Pattie, Trone, and Grayson \$150 for “expenses & charges trying to

²³ See Journal Records for February 27, March 1, March 3, and March 4, 1852. On March 25, 1852, Berkeley noted that “Nelson [was] better.” *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book 1851-1855*, transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 20-21. Nelson and Berkeley must have come to an agreement about not running away as Berkeley mentioned Nelson in his journal through 1854, including payments for harvest work and for chickens sold to Berkeley. *Ibid.*, 28, 42, 45, 52, 59, and 65.

²⁴ Letter from Cyrus Cross to Dr. R. E. Payton, April 29, 1857, Peyton Family Papers.

²⁵ “Ranaway,” *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial & Political*, July 7, 1813.

²⁶ Entry for August 3, 1815, Account Book of John Augustine Elliot Linton (1810-1822), Virginia Historical Society.

²⁷ Entry for May 20, 1820, John Augustine Elliot Linton Account Book (1810-1822), Virginia Historical Society.

arrest runaways Peter & Sam in Pennsylv[ani]a.”²⁸ In 1858 James M. Button received \$6.20 for his services in “apprehending Negro” from the estate of deceased Fauquier County slaveowner, Joseph Thompson.²⁹

Surveying local newspapers provides another view of the experiences of slaveholders attempting to locate, capture, and have returned enslaved runaways. Expanding the range of newspapers to those published outside of Virginia reveals even more information about suspected routes and methods of tracking.³⁰ Slaveholders learned that publishing runaway ads in both local and distant presses increased the potential range of circulation of information. Local papers like Leesburg’s *Genius of Liberty*, the Loudoun *Chronicle*, *Democratic Mirror*, and *Washingtonian* along with Warrenton’s *Palladium of Liberty*, *Piedmont Whig*, *Warrenton Weekly Whig*, and *Flag of ’98* disseminated county and global news and alerted local residents about fleeing slaves.³¹ Nearby publications like the *Spirit of Jefferson* from Charles Town, Virginia, the *Alexandria Gazette* and *Alexandria Herald* pushed local boundaries for requesting help in recovering fugitive slaves from neighborhoods located even further west, north, and east

²⁸ “The Estate of Charles Hunton dec’d in account with John P. Philips the Administrator,” Report filed April 19, 1854, *John P. Philips v. Charles H. Hunton, etc.*, Prince William County, 1877-011, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=153-1877-011#img>. My thanks to Marilyn and Ron Turner for showing me this case file. For the runaway advertisement for 34 year old Sam and 25 year old Peter published by Hunton see “Two Hundred Dollars Reward,” *The (Baltimore) Sun*, April 26, 1853.

²⁹ “Charles E. Hume & Mary E. his wife In account with John P. Phillips adr of Joseph Thompson, dec’d,” Fauquier County Will Book 28: 162.

³⁰ Franklin and Schweninger’s study surveyed only one Virginia newspaper, the *Richmond Enquirer*, during the periods of 1804 to 1809 and 1849 to 1860. Franklin and Schweninger. *Runaway Slaves*, 330-331.

³¹ Leesburg was the site for several newspapers between 1800 and 1861 including the *True American* (1798), *The Washingtonian* (1808), *Leesburg Spectator* (1826), *Democratic Mirror*, and Loudoun *Chronicle*. For information on the role of the McIntyre family in Leesburg’s publishing history see Penelope M. Osburn, “A Hometown Newspaper: *The True American*,” (1958) in John T. Phillips, II, Ed., *The Bulletin of the Historical Society of Loudoun County, Virginia, 1957-1976* (Leesburg, Virginia: Historical Society of Loudoun County, Virginia, 1997): 97-109.

of northern Virginia. Tellingly, few advertisements from northern Virginia were published in newspapers located south of the Rappahannock River.³²

Slaveholders also relied on more distant publications such as newspapers published in Washington, D.C. such as the *Daily National Intelligencer*, the *Globe*, and *United States' Telegraph*; and Maryland publications such as Baltimore's *Patriot & Evening Advertiser* or *Daily Exchange* or Easton's *Republican Star and General Advertiser* to request assistance in returning fleeing slaves. The publication of advertisements for northern Virginia slaves in as distant locations as Bedford, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania demonstrated the lengths slaveholders would take to recover lost property as well as the growing apprehension that slaves migrated towards "free" states.

Slaveholders frequently requested that newspaper editors located along or near presumed routes of escape copy and circulate runaway information from published

³² During the 1790s northern Virginia slaveholders sometimes published runaway advertisements in the *Virginia Herald*, published in Fredericksburg, Virginia, just south of the Rappahannock River. This may be due to the limited number of newspapers available during that period in northern Virginia (besides the various titles published in Alexandria). For example see Ezekiel Mount's advertisement for John Lindsay, who fled from a neighborhood near Middleburg in "Twenty Dollars Reward," *Virginia Herald*, September 6, 1796; and Francis Whiting's ad for runaway Willis from Fauquier County in "Fifty Dollars Reward," *Virginia Herald*, September 16, 1796. Newspapers south of the Rappahannock did publish numerous committal notices from county jailors seeking identification of presumed runaways held in county jails, a process required by Virginia law. Two newspapers included such notices: the *Richmond Enquirer* and the *Wilmington Journal* (from North Carolina). In 1860 the jailor of Hanover County, North Carolina published a committal notice in the *Wilmington (North Carolina) Journal* for "a deaf and dumb negro man" supposedly from the plantation of Samuel A. Marsteller of Prince William County. The unnamed man had been captured in March 1859. "Notice," *Wilmington Journal*, September 6, 1860. Two committal notices published in the *Richmond Enquirer* incorporated into the *Northern Virginia Runaway Database* were from jailors notifying of the capture of runaways from northern Virginia. In 1832 Prince William County jailor Basil Brawner advertised for the owner of George Car to identify and claim property. Car claimed he had run away from Loudoun County. *Richmond Enquirer*, April 24, 1832. The jailor from Rockingham County, Virginia posted an ad in 1837 in the *Richmond Enquirer* seeking the owner of Jim, a roughly fifty year old man who claimed to come from the Fauquier estate of the deceased John Ashby. *Richmond Enquirer*, April 11, 1837. Therefore, relying on major newspapers published south of the Rappahannock, despite the availability of many issues over a long period of time, severely limits understanding of the extent and patterns of running away from northern Virginia.

reports. Westwood Mason requested that the editors of the *Winchester Constellation*, the *Alexandria Herald*, and “the Cumberland papers...publish the above advertisement 4 times in their papers and forward their accounts to this office for adjustment” to increase the likelihood of Mason reacquiring his escaped enslaved man, James.³³ George Gulick asked editors of Fredericktown’s *Political Examiner* and Winchester’s *Virginia Reformer* to republish his ads for fugitive Ned Buyes (also spelled Biayes).³⁴ William Cook of Loudoun requested that the editors of Hagerstown, Maryland’s *Torch Light*, Pennsylvania’s *Bedford Gazette*, and the *Chambersburg* (Pennsylvania) *Republican* insert his ad for fugitive John Owens three times in their respective papers after Owens broke out of and escaped from the Loudoun County jail.³⁵ Despite believing that his enslaved man Minor might be “lurking about the neighbourhood of Union” in Loudoun County, Hugh Smith, administrator for the estate of Samuel Singleton also requested that the Hagerstown *Torch Light* and Bedford, Pennsylvania’s *Democratic Enquirer* copy and re-publish his ad placed in the *Genius of Liberty*.³⁶ Slaveholder Gerard Mason specifically requested that the *United States Gazette of Philadelphia* and the Harrisburg *Intelligencer* post his runaway slave advertisement for George.³⁷ Both Hagerstown, located in Washington County, Maryland, and Bedford, Pennsylvania were sites where runaway slaves from northern Virginia had been captured, thus they represented known routes utilized by runaways.

³³ *Genius of Liberty*, May 20, 1817.

³⁴ *Genius of Liberty*, September 7, 1819.

³⁵ *Genius of Liberty*, October 26, 1819.

³⁶ *Genius of Liberty*, December 8, 1827.

³⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 1, 1839.

When new information about runaways became available, slaveholders refined their search and published additional advertisements. One month after the departure and after receiving information from “a gentleman in Strasburg, Lancaster county,” Fauquier slaveholders Sylvester Welch, John Fishback, and John Thomas turned their search for William, Thomas, and Lewis from potential water routes towards Philadelphia, originally thought to be the escape route, to land routes across Lancaster and Chester counties in Pennsylvania and published a revised ad in the Lancaster Free Press that featured an increased reward.³⁸ Loudoun slaveholder, Edmund Jenings, sent his runaway advertisement for escaped slave Joseph to the *Oracle of Dauphin and Harrisburgh Advertiser* based in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, while another Loudoun slaveowner, Leven Luckett, opted to publish his advertisement for an escaped forty-year-old “negro man” in Philadelphia’s *United States Gazette*.³⁹ Suspecting that Adam, Ephraim, and Merryman would travel from Middleburg in Loudoun through central Pennsylvania, slaveowners John Craine and John Beveridge advertised for their capture and return in *Kline’s Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, the local news agent for Carlisle, Pennsylvania, over a period of six weeks. The choice to employ a Pennsylvania newspaper in their search combined with a reward of \$120, a significant amount in 1804, signified Craine and Beveridge’s belief the trio had crossed into Pennsylvania and a determination to reacquire their fugitive property.⁴⁰

³⁸ *The Free Press*, September 30, 1820.

³⁹ *The Oracle of Dauphin and Harrisburgh Advertiser*, January 18, 1802; *United States Gazette*, July 16, 1806.

⁴⁰ Extant ads for Adam, Ephraim, and Merryman are available from September 28, 1804 until November 9, 1804 in *Kline’s Carlisle (Pennsylvania) Weekly Gazette*. *Kline’s Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, September 28, 1804.

Slaveholders also requested assistance from certain members of the public in retaking fugitive slaves. In 1798 Prince William County Justice of the Peace, Alexander Lithgow, issued a “Hue and Cry” to “all Sheriffs, Mayors, Bailiffs, Constables, and Headboroughs, within the Commonwealth of Virginia” and “in your respective Counties, Cities, Towns, and Precincts” to “make diligent search, by way of hue and cry” for a runaway known as “White Negro Tom” who escaped from the Prince William County jail.⁴¹ Fauquier County slaveholder, George Love asked “[g]atekeepers on turnpike roads, ferrymen, masters of steam and other boats, tavern keepers, and all others on the public highways, constables, and police officers” to “keep a look out” for his fugitive from service, Daniel Weaver.⁴² In his runaway advertisement, slaveowner William Primm “particularly thank[ed] all constables and patrollers under whose notice this advertisement comes, to be very strict in examining all negroes who are going about without notes or passes from their masters” in order to apprehend or secure his runaway, James.⁴³

When slaveholders believed that runaways had fled from the immediate neighborhood, the likelihood of deciding to post a newspaper ad increased. Among the runaway advertisements culled from more than fifty newspapers, 763 runaways can be tied to northern Virginia: 287 slaveholders or runaways fled from Fauquier County slaveholders, 275 fled Loudoun County slaveowners, and 201 left Prince William County slaveholders.⁴⁴ This data leads to some tentative conclusions.

⁴¹ “Hue and Cry,” *Alexandria Times*, June 16, 1798.

⁴² *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 24, 1826.

⁴³ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, October 27, 1806.

⁴⁴ Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Despite having an enslaved population less than half the size of that in Fauquier, Loudoun County slaveholders published advertisements or broadsides for nearly the same number of runaways as Fauquier slaveholders. This suggests that Fauquier slaveholders felt more secure (at least during some periods of time) that runaways merely engaged in “lurking about” or that runaways only had a slim chance of passing through the dragnet of slaveholders, patrols, or concerned citizens. Thus the threat of permanent loss was not strong enough to warrant the expense of a published advertisement. The high number of runaways advertised by Loudoun slaveholders may have stemmed from its location along the Blue Ridge and Potomac River providing better access to Ohio or Pennsylvania than Fauquier, which lay south of Loudoun, further from Virginia’s borders. The proximity of Loudoun to abolitionists and free states (at least in the minds of slaveholders) created a need to more widely disseminate information about runaways. Prince William slaveholders also posted or published a significant number of advertisements for runaways, indicating their concern that runaways sought a permanent escape and could evade local friends or patrols.

The tenacity shown by some slaveholders to reclaim property can be found in the length of time masters posted advertisements for missing slaves. For almost two years Prince William County slaveholder James B. Ewell advertised for runaways Stepney and Elias, who left the Buckland neighborhood “about the 1st of July” in 1834. Ewell increased the amount of reward at various times from \$100 per man to up to \$250 per

man.⁴⁵ Loudoun County slaveholder George Noble continued to publish advertisements for his enslaved man Charles more than three years after his disappearance in September 1825.⁴⁶ Former enslaved man David Johnson left Loudoun County in the early 1820s and upon reaching a city found employment as a waiter in a boarding house. He remained employed in that capacity for more than six years until his slaveowner, Mr. Douglass, found and claimed him in 1829 as his runaway slave. Douglass's persistence in trying to locate his escaped chattel property reveals in some measure the determination some masters exhibited in the hunt for fugitives.⁴⁷

Slaveowners relied upon neighbors, patrols, constables, and observant residents to identify and report persons presumed to be runaway slaves. To increase the likelihood of identification, slaveholders provided information regarding appearance, age, and possible destinations in published runaway ads. This information paints a picture of who decided to run, when in life, what motivations, and which times seemed opportune for escape.

⁴⁵ "\$200 Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 20, 1834; "\$200 Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 12, 1835; "Four Hundred Dollars Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 7, 1835; "500 Dollars Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 13, 1836.

⁴⁶ "Look Sharp! To the Jailors, Constables and others of the State of Ohio, and elsewhere," *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, February 26, 1829.

⁴⁷ "Liberality," *New York Courier & Enquirer* as reported in the *Richmond Enquirer*, December 5, 1829. The *New York Courier & Enquirer* did not reveal the location of Johnson's long employment nor site of Douglass's recovery of Johnson, yet it may be suggested that the boarding house on Pearl Street was in New York City. Upon learning of Johnson's rendition, the boarders "in consideration of [David Johnson's] attention and good conduct in the house" immediately pooled contributions towards Johnson's purchase from Douglass in the amount of \$550. Douglass had initially requested \$600 for Johnson, yet the newspaper noted that "with commendable liberality" Douglass "reduced the price from \$600 to 550" enabling Johnson to finally be free from his Loudoun master. Ibid.

Characteristics of the Northern Virginia Runaway – Gender, Age, and Ability

Historian Robert McColley described the runaway, and “especially the successful runaway” as “likely to be an unusually clever slave, sometimes literate, and usually skilled in one or more crafts” with some knowledge about the world outside his or her quarters and confident enough to attempt forging a life beyond enslavement.⁴⁸ Based on information provided by owners in runaway slave ads, runaways from northern Virginia did not always meet McColley’s criteria, though slaveholders may have hesitated to acknowledge such traits. Yet some owners noted special characteristics deemed important for recognition, identification, capture, and return of escaped slaves.

By far the majority of enslaved runaways were male. Studies of runaways from various locations across the South confirm that enslaved males ran away in greater numbers than enslaved females. Historian Daniel Meaders found that only 8 percent of enslaved runaways advertised in Virginia newspapers between 1736 and 1780 were women.⁴⁹ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger found in their seminal study of runaways across the Lower and Upper South, that only 19 percent of the more than two thousand runaway advertisements consulted concerned women.⁵⁰ Franklin and Schweninger argued that in Virginia the proportion of female to male runaways decreased over time. Between 1790 and 1816, the “early period,” females comprised 15 percent of Virginia runaways. By the later period of the study, from 1838 to 1860,

⁴⁸ Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), 92.

⁴⁹ Daniel Meaders, *Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1830* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 33. For a listing of Meaders’ sources for Virginia runaways, consult pages 307-308.

⁵⁰ The study included advertisements from Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Louisiana. Franklin and Schweninger. *Runaway Slaves*, 211, 212.

Franklin and Schweninger found female runaways had decreased to only 9 percent.⁵¹

Compared to other southern states, Franklin and Schweninger determined that between 1838 and 1860 Virginia experienced the lowest proportion of female runaways.⁵²

A survey of runaway advertisements and committal notices for enslaved persons running away from Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties between 1800 and 1860 shows enslaved women comprised a full 15 percent of the total number of runaways identified by gender. The proportion of female runaways in northern Virginia was greater than state-wide statistics for women. Basing their perceptions on the determination of enslaved persons to secure rather than destroy family ties, most slaveholders believed that they rarely encountered enslaved mothers willing to leave children. Even in 1860 Loudoun County slaveholder Robert G. Humphrey opined that “the character of the [female] slaves” was such that made “them safe from loss by running away as comparatively few females escape.”⁵³ Yet particular circumstances in northern Virginia created conditions slightly more favorable for runaway women. The proximity of these counties to non-slaveholding areas as well as the changes in information dissemination over time created at best more favorable conditions for women and mothers with children to escape and at worst a greater necessity for freedom from enslavement.

⁵¹ Franklin and Schweninger. *Runaway Slaves*, 211, 212.

⁵² Females comprised 29 percent of runaways in Louisiana, 19 percent in South Carolina, 14 percent in North Carolina, and 12 percent in Tennessee. Franklin and Schweninger. *Runaway Slaves*, 212. Stephanie Camp used these figures in her analysis of why women did not runaway more frequently citing both “family responsibilities” and “gender ideals” as key factors for enslaved women’s decisions to stay. Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 37 (quote), see also 36-59.

⁵³ Humphrey made this statement in his deposition as he considered whether to sell the slaves of his father’s estate or hold them until their value increased. “Deposition of Robert G. Humphrey, February 10, 1860,” *Susan E. Humphrey, etc. v. Exors of Thomas G. Humphrey*, Loudoun County Chancery Case 1860-032, Virginia Memory Chancery Records, online, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1860-032#img>.

According to Franklin and Schweninger, the typical runaway slave was a youthful enslaved male in his teens or early twenties. In that study, males between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine comprised 78 percent of advertised runaways.⁵⁴ In my survey of more than 760 runaways specifically identified as hailing from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William county slaveholders, 85 percent of all the runaways identified by gender were male.⁵⁵ Within the northern Virginia male cohort, 568 were identified by age. Of these, only 66 percent were identified as being between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine. This suggests that male runaways from northern Virginia included a noticeable cohort of older or elderly slaves compared to runaways from across the Upper and Lower South.⁵⁶

In fact, among the northern Virginia cohort, the most often reported age of runaways from northern Virginia was thirty years old with fifty-seven runaways identified as this age (see figure 51).⁵⁷ Slaveholders and agents described fifty-seven of the 667 runaways identified by gender and age as being either twenty-five or thirty years old, with only six females in the cohort of thirty-year olds. Yet, the significance of this age must be weighed against the prevalence of slaveholders using benchmark ages as a

⁵⁴ Franklin and Schweninger determined that “the great majority of runaways were young men in their teens and twenties” with males comprising 81 percent of runaways. Within the male cohort 78 percent “were between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine.” Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 210.

⁵⁵ Out of 764 runaways identified by gender, 648 were male (84.82 percent) and 116 were female (15.18 percent).

⁵⁶ Of the 556 males identified by age, only 15 were younger than 13 years old, so even if all men younger than 30 years old were considered (382), this cohort comprised only 68.7 percent of male runaways from northern Virginia, a much smaller cohort than identified by Franklin and Schweninger among male runaways across the Upper and Lower South, creating an atypical runaway pattern in northern Virginia. Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

⁵⁷ Although fifty-seven runaways are included in the tally for 25 year olds, this number actually includes only fifty-two specifically identified as age 25 (forty-four males and eight females) and five described as between 25 and 26 years old. When averaged, these five were tallied as being 25.5 years old and included in the 25 year old cohort. Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

descriptive characteristic. As suggested by figure 51, slaveholders probably used generalized ages of 25, 30, 35, 40, or 45 as approximate ages rather than more specific ages. Such estimations reflected the lack of awareness of birthdays and ages among the mostly illiterate enslaved persons as well as the lack of concern of slaveholders took in tracking ages after establishing when the enslaved child became taxable (at twelve years of age).⁵⁸ In addition, these generalized ages conveyed more symbolism as a recognizable trait for observers.

⁵⁸ Ages up to 25 years old appear to have been more definite and closely accounted for in slaveholder records, probably because of the need to establish slave ages when claiming taxable slaves.

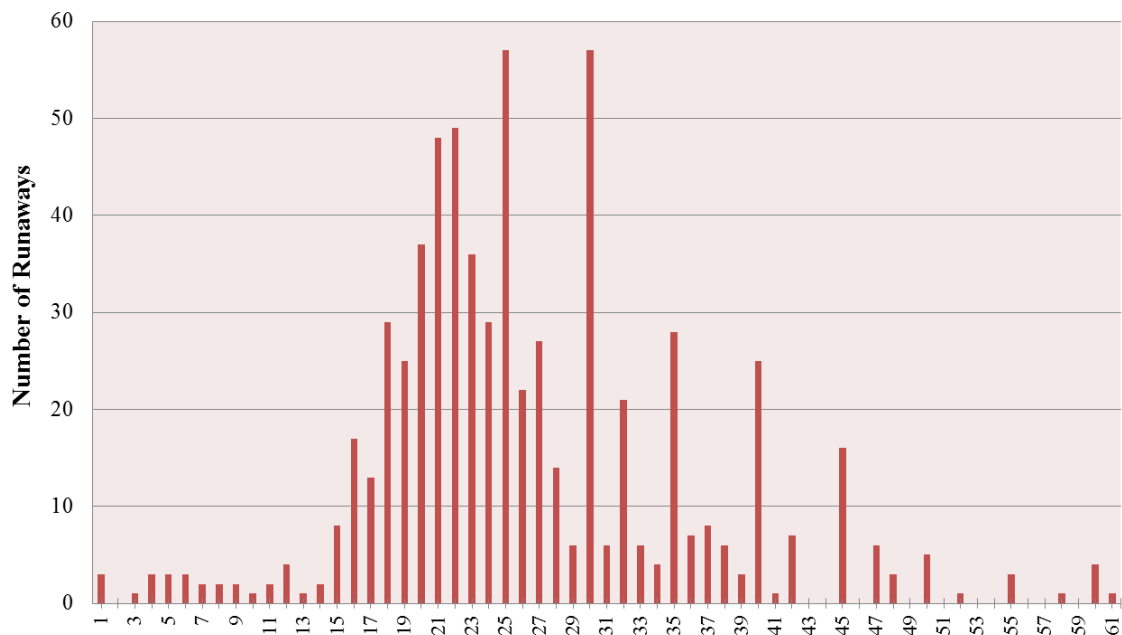


Figure 51. Ages of advertised runaways, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Out of the 763 runaways advertised, 661 were identified by age. Note: when an age range for an enslaved person was provided, the median age within the range was used for statistical purposes.

As shown in figure 52, 85 percent of runaways were between the ages of 12 and 40 years. The median age for northern Virginia runaways was 26.44 years old, a little older than Franklin and Schweninger’s “youthful teen” runaways prevalent across the southern slaveholding states, yet slightly younger than the average age of 27 years old among Virginia runaways during the eighteenth century as determined by scholar Lathan Algerna Windley.⁵⁹ When the entire group of northern Virginian runaways from 1800 to 1860 are considered, nearly one-third (31.6 percent) was thirty years old or older, a

⁵⁹ Lathan Algerna Windley analyzed data from 876 slaves whose ages were provided in runaway advertisements. Lathan Algerna Windley, *A Profile of Runaway Slaves in Virginia and South Carolina from 1730 through 1787* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995), 61, 163.

proportion significantly greater than the 22 percent of runaways Franklin and Schweninger identified as being thirty years old or older across all the South, yet less than the 37 percent of eighteenth century counterparts (in this age cohort) found in Windley's study of Virginia.⁶⁰ The ability of older enslaved persons to consider and execute an escape, whether successful or not, demonstrates that age was not a significant deterrent to seeking freedom. The close proximity to areas of freedom combined with established networks of assistance and communication among the enslaved, free blacks, and whites created conditions favorable for escape attempts among older slaves, circumstances not generally found in other parts of the slave South.

⁶⁰ Franklin and Schweninger separated age data by gender and also considered two distinct time periods in their analysis of runaways. During the Early Period from 1790 to 1816, seventeen of the eighty-one females and seventy-seven of the 424 males were thirty years old or older comprising just less than 19 percent of the 505 total runaways identified for that period. In the Late Period from 1838 to 1860, fifty-four women and 192 men were aged thirty years or older out of the 1,047 total runaways, slightly more than 23 percent of the runaways during this time period. In total, then, out of Franklin and Schweninger's 1,552 runaways, 340 were thirty years or older, only 22 percent of the total. Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 331-332. In comparison, the average reported age of northern Virginia runaways was 26.44 years. Slaveholders reported ages for 648 runaways departing from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties including enslaved persons running from hires outside of northern Virginia, yet identified as having masters residing in these three counties. Northern Virginia Runaways Database.

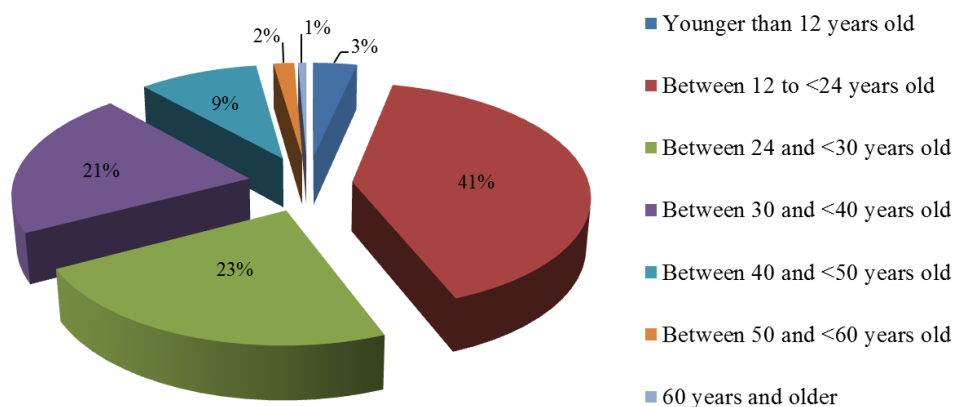


Figure 52. Reported ages of advertised runaways from northern Virginia, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Runaway advertisements provided ages for 664 individuals.

Differences in the ages of runaways, though subtle, appear when comparing statistics from each county (see figure 53). Loudoun County slaveholders reported the most infant and child runaways in proportion to the total number of advertised runaways across the county, suggesting that mothers or families located closer to free states or with greater access to Alexandria or Washington D.C. perceived a higher likelihood of a successful escape. Fauquier County reported proportionately slightly more 40 to 50 year olds than the other two counties suggesting the desire for self-emancipation was not limited to slaves in their prime working years. Prince William County and Fauquier experienced proportionally more runaways in the 12 to nearly 24 year old cohort than Loudoun as nearly half the reported runaways fell in this category. These statistics are significant when considering the prime age for slave sales also fell between 12 and 24 years old and suggest that enslaved persons from Prince William and Fauquier ran away

specifically during this period of life. All three counties noted more runaways older than 24 years old than younger than 24 years old indicating youth was not the only factor involved in elopements.

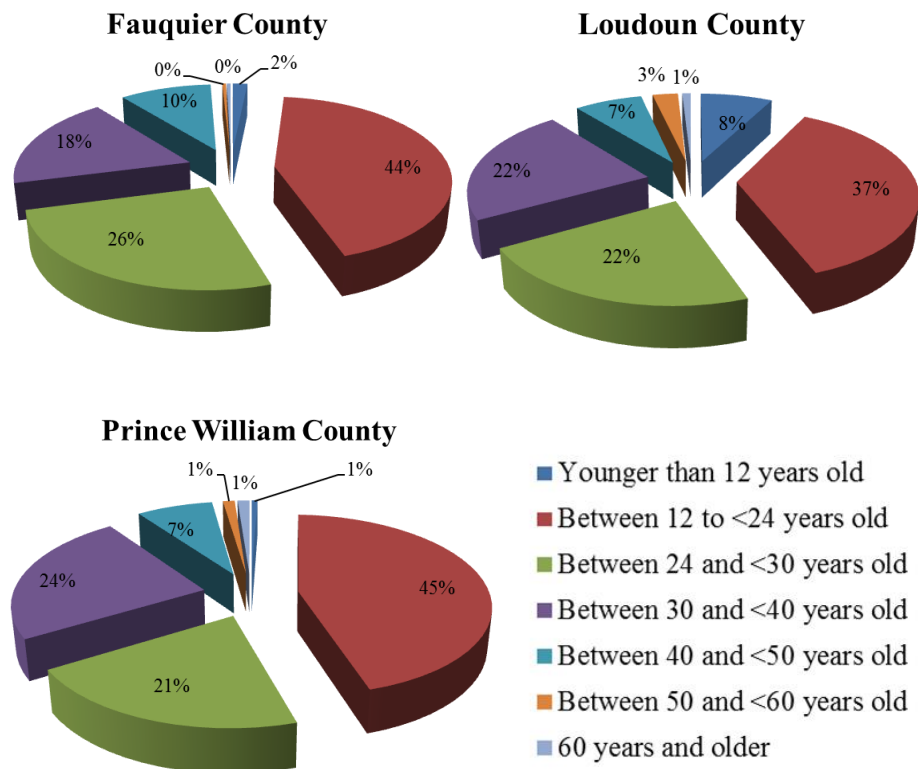


Figure 53. Percentages of runaways by age cohorts, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Within the combined northern Virginia cohort, reported ages for runaways varied from infants to the elderly. Sam, judged to be “about 65 years of age” according to his owner, Philip S. Johnson, fled from Warrenton in Fauquier County on July 27, 1828 with

thirty-year-old Tom.⁶¹ Prince William slaveowner, Benoni E. Harrison judged runaway Sam Ball to be between fifty and sixty years old. Sam's tendency to stoop when he walked and "particularly when fatigued" gave him "an old appearance." Instead of attempting an escape solo, Sam Ball fled with another enslaved man from a neighboring plantation.⁶²

For some older runaways, the decision to elope with children created favorable circumstances. Older or elderly parents who fled with adult children or joined adult children who already escaped enslavement affirmed the power of affective maternal or paternal ties, while providing each other with protection, care, and resources. Jim Burns, described as "an old man," left northern Prince William County on a Saturday night in 1846 accompanied by his son, Luke Burns. Father and son must have coordinated their escape or one prompted the other to flee spontaneously as son, Luke, left from the Brentsville neighborhood and father Jim absconded from Mrs. Sarah Ann Trone's residence located "nine miles above Occoquan."⁶³ In another case, six months after his twenty-year-old son, Moses, left William Skinker's plantation near Warrenton, Moses' forty-five year old enslaved father, Willis, escaped Skinker's control on June 4, 1842. Skinker had reason to believe Moses was "lurking in the District of Columbia" and that Willis had joined him there.⁶⁴ Willis's flight was short-lived. Shortly after slaveowner Skinker's death, appraisers listed forty-seven year old Willis as residing once again on Skinker's Pignut Estate on April 2, 1845. Skinker's 1845 inventory did not include

⁶¹ *Genius of Liberty*, August 2, 1828. Though not specified, Sam was quite probably Tom's father or they shared some other familial relationship.

⁶² *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 19, 1841.

⁶³ *Alexandria Gazette*, August 28, 1846.

⁶⁴ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, June 28, 1842.

Moses, suggesting he might have escaped recapture or, in a worst case scenario feared by many potential runaways, was taken up and sold away from Fauquier County and his father.⁶⁵

Other elderly runaways apparently fled unaccompanied like George, Sampson, Sopha, and Betty. George, though nearly sixty years of age projected “a very youthful appearance for one of his age.”⁶⁶ While fifty-eight years old, Sampson escaped multiple times after his sale in 1812 in Loudoun County.⁶⁷ Sopha, an enslaved woman from Loudoun County reportedly was between fifty and fifty-five years old when she fled during the night from Leesburg and slaveowner Thomas Littleton in 1831.⁶⁸ Betty, a fifty-five year old enslaved woman ran away in 1835 from her owners, James and William Hoey who lived in Lovettsville.⁶⁹ The group of twenty-three runaways from the John Marshall estate in Fauquier County included two sixty-year-old men, Henson and Lewis, fifty-five year old Ellen, and fifty year old Letty.⁷⁰ While some of these relatively elderly enslaved men and women travelled with younger people during their escape, evidence of other older slaves traveling alone suggests that age did not deter implementing an escape so proximal to free states. Elderly slaves from all three counties took the risk of fleeing or even temporarily leaving the service of their masters. Quite possibly, older slaves fled once all other family ties had been severed, or they engaged in

⁶⁵ “Appraisement of the Estate of William Skinker, dec’d,” Fauquier County Will Book 19: 210.

⁶⁶ George ran from Prince William County near Brentsville. *Alexandria Gazette*, September 19, 1826.

⁶⁷ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, August 7, 1812.

⁶⁸ *Genius of Liberty*, March 5, 1831.

⁶⁹ *Genius of Liberty*, June 6, 1835.

⁷⁰ *Genius of Liberty*, June 20, 1840.

a form of chain migration, following in the hurried footsteps of children or grandchildren who had already fled.

The youngest reported single runaways were Cambridge and Charles. Cambridge was taken up in Loudoun County as a runaway and placed under the watch of jailor Edward Hammat in 1834. According to Hammat's estimation, Cambridge appeared to be about twelve years old. Based on Hammat's questioning of Cambridge, he apparently fled the service of John Kincheloe of Prince William County to whom he was hired by his owner Alfred Hooe.⁷¹ Twelve-year-old Charles absconded from Jonathan Carter's house near Middleburg in April of 1835, presumably with the help of local free blacks.⁷² While Cambridge and Charles apparently attempted solo flights, most children under the age of twelve or thirteen fled with others, either under the protection of a group or with a parent or parents. It is significant that these youngsters absconded during the 1830s when slaves across northern Virginia were especially under threat of sale into the long-distance slave trade.⁷³

Other youngsters ran away as part of a group. Ben, an enslaved boy described as being between twelve and thirteen years of age, ran away from Carter's Run in Fauquier County in the company of twenty-five year old John and twenty-year old Jim. John and Jim were identified as brothers, yet the advertisement did not state the relationship between Ben and the brothers.⁷⁴ The Marshall slaves who ran away in 1840 included all age groups including two infants carried by their mothers, Milly and Stacy, as well as

⁷¹ *Genius of Liberty*, June 14, 1834.

⁷² *Genius of Liberty*, April 25, 1835.

⁷³ See chapter four.

⁷⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 25, 1839.

three girls under the age of twelve (Mariah, Fanny, and Patience) and four boys under the age of ten (John, Vincent, Harrison, and Henry), who fled with at least one parent.⁷⁵

Some enslaved mothers or fathers refused to leave without taking along one or more of their dependent children. When Margery fled from Middleburg in 1811, she took her five year old daughter, Lucy, with her.⁷⁶ Clary took her four-month-old baby boy with her when she ran from Prince William County. Clary's owner believed Clary would seek refuge with her freed sister living in Alexandria. Five months after her reported absence Clary and her infant son continued to avoid recapture.⁷⁷ Loudoun County enslaved mother, Sucky, aged forty-five, absconded from Charles Crim in 1814 taking with her daughters Sidney and Pathena.⁷⁸ After multiple sales, Sarah Bowman fled from Fauquier County with her four year old daughter in 1855.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *Genius of Liberty*, June 20, 1840. The fate of the Marshall slaves was not recorded in the accounts submitted by Marshall's executor in Loudoun County Will Books. Deputy Sheriff Newton Keene testified that he delivered the slaves allotted to Nancy Starke, one of the legatees, to William T. Starke and before Starke left for the west, "he sold them all to a trader or traders except two old ones that he traded to David Keene for a young girl and then sold her to a trader." "Deposition of Newton Keene," February 20, 1851, *Albert Price and Byrd P. Smith, etc. v. William T. Starke, G[uar]d[i]a[n]*, Loudoun County Court of Law and Chancery Case 1860-021, Library of Virginia online Chancery Records, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1860-021#img>. In another chancery case regarding inheritance from the Marshall estate, the commissioner's report of estate accounts includes payment of \$74 for "jail fees of slaves" on May 17, 1840 to Loudoun County jailor, Edward Hammatt. Apparently the estate administrator committed the Marshall slaves to the jail for safe-keeping prior to their flight on Monday, June 15, 1840. Also noted was a payment of \$40 made on July 13, 1840 to R. McIntyre, attorney for Addison Keene as a "reward for apprehending 2 runaways" and a payment of \$6 on June 14, 1841 to W. Jenkins "for taking negro to jail." A total of \$31.10 was due to Edward Hammatt, Loudoun County jailor, from the account of the heirs of Thompson Simpson (another Marshall legatee) for "jail fees of Vincent & Rachel" due May 18, 1840. Vincent was probably the eight year old boy who ran away in June. "Commissioner's Report," September 25, 1845, *Keene vs. Carr, Sheriff*, as found in *David Keene & wife, etc. v. Assignees of John Marshall, etc.* Loudoun County Court of Law and Chancery, 1846-008, original case number M119, Library of Virginia, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1846-008>.

⁷⁶ *Alexandria Daily Gazette*, July 29, 1811.

⁷⁷ *Alexandria Daily Gazette*, August 14, 1811; *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, December 27, 1811.

⁷⁸ *Alexandria Gazette Commercial and Political*, October 3, 1814.

⁷⁹ "\$50 Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 18, 1856.

The family group consisting of father, Peter, wife, Barb, and children Rose, George, Harriot and Maria, fled together from Loudoun County slaveowner, William Dodd in 1816. Peter, aged forty-five, and Barb, aged thirty, were assisted during their flight in caring for the three young children under the age of six by eighteen-year-old Rose. Barb's advanced pregnancy made the journey even more dangerous, yet slaveowner Dodd apparently had reason to believe the group could travel as far as Pennsylvania as he published an advertisement for their capture and return in the Chambersburg, Pennsylvania newspaper, the *Democratic Republican*, three weeks after their escape.⁸⁰

On September 11, 1828, an enslaved family was apprehended and committed to the jail in Alexandria. The family, consisting of “negroes Lewis, his wife Polly, their two children Robert and Elizabeth, and Sandy” claimed to be the property of Richard Slade of Prince William County.⁸¹ For this family, maintaining family ties outweighed the risks of capture. The Bennett family successfully escaped from Loudoun County in the summer of 1855. Husband David Bennett fled from Captain James Taylor, and his abroad wife, Martha, and their two children escaped from George Carter. Despite the distance separating husband and wife, they were able to coordinate and execute an escape with two of their children, “a little boy named George, and a nameless babe one month old” as far as Philadelphia.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Democratic Republican*, September 9, 1816.

⁸¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 16, 1828.

⁸² William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 260. The ages of the pair, David was thirty-two and Martha was twenty-seven, suggest that Martha may have given birth to other children, yet only was able to take the two youngest with her. Still described the pair as destitute and noted that Martha was “poorly clad.” *Ibid.*, 308-309.

The successful escape of Patty Douglass and their six children in 1839 from slavery was due to the coordinated efforts of Patty and her recently manumitted husband, Vincent Douglass, to locate someone willing to help transport Patty and her six children out of Loudoun County.⁸³ When Vincent and Patty Douglass decided she should leave the service of her Loudoun County master, Joseph Mead, in 1839, they arranged with Leonard Grimes to provide transportation capable of quickly carrying their six children, ranging in age from sixteen to three years old, away from Loudoun County.⁸⁴ The Douglass family might have known Grimes, a free black residing in Washington D.C., from his early years growing up in Loudoun County. Vincent and Patty also could have become acquainted with Leonard Grimes during one of his many trips through Loudoun County as a hired hack driver or heard through information networks of Grimes's sentiments against slavery. The ability of the Douglass parents to identify a potential ally in their plans for self-emancipation indicates they employed a critical strategy that tapped into social networks that linked slaves with free blacks. The Loudoun Court convicted Grimes for his role in transporting Patty and the six children to Washington DC to facilitate their escape. For his actions he was sentenced to two years imprisonment by the Loudoun County Court.⁸⁵

⁸³ Vincent Douglass purchased his freedom from Elizabeth Potter and Lucy T. Ball of Loudoun County by September 27, 1834 for \$300. Douglass' deed of emancipation was signed December 27, 1834 but not recorded in the Loudoun County Court until August 13, 1839, two months before his family escaped from their owner, Joseph Mead. Loudoun County Deed Book 4M: 361.

⁸⁴ *Washington Globe* as cited in *The Emancipator*, December 5, 1839. For information about the Douglass family after leaving Loudoun County, see the letter published by Hiram Wilson, describing a dinner held on August 26, 1847 in the Queen's Bush Settlement in Canada with Vincent Douglass, Patty's husband, who "about eight years ago left the 'patriarchal institutions' and the service of one Dorsey, and brought his numerous family over to Toronto." *The Liberator* (Boston, Massachusetts) October 15, 1847.

⁸⁵ Grimes was convicted of the felony crime of "unlawfully carrying away the slaves of Joseph Mead" and sentenced to two years in the Richmond Penitentiary. *Commonwealth v. Leonard Grimes, a free Mulatto*,

The ability of mothers to take children while fleeing appears to have weakened between 1841 and 1854, as extant advertisements do not mention young children or infants during this time period.⁸⁶ A short notice in the *Alexandria Gazette* indicated that Charles Douglas had lost “one woman and her children” over the weekend of September 13 to 14, 1856 in a large exodus of nine reported runaways from Loudoun County.⁸⁷ According to Loudoun County court records, slave catcher Luther B. Kurtz apprehended Charles Douglas’s escaped slaves Eliza, Phillis, and Fanny on September 24, 1856 in Franklin County.⁸⁸ Most likely Eliza, Phillis, and Fanny were the mother and children listed in the news article.

After 1854 three known runaway ads for mother-child groups from northern Virginia appeared in area newspapers or printed broadsides. The appearance of Gabriel Roger’s ad for enslaved woman Sarah Bowman and her four-year-old daughter who fled in November 1855, Beverly Hutchison’s newspaper ad for runaway Jenney and her toddler son in 1857, and Charles F. Fadeley’s broadside advertising a reward for the return of twenty-four year old Louisa and her five-year-old son in 1860 suggests that only a few enslaved mothers or slaveholders believed that a successful flight with children was

Loudoun County Free Black Issues, 1839-003, LCHAD. Grimes arrived at the Richmond Penitentiary on March 26, 1840 to serve his two year sentence. “Annual Report of the Board of Directors of the Penitentiary Institution,” Document 17, Section E “The Number of Free Persons of Colour received into the Penitentiary from the 1st January 1839 to 30th November 1844, who were sentenced contrary to law, viz:” *Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia. Session 1844-45* (Richmond: Printed by Samuel Shepherd, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1844), 23. Letters for Grimes reprieve flooded the office of Governor Smith.

⁸⁶ It should also be taken into consideration that the overall reduction in available published ads after 1841 also reflected a growing unease about public acknowledgment of problems maintaining control within the institution of slavery.

⁸⁷ “Escape of Slaves from Loudoun,” *Richmond Dispatch* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 18, 1856.

⁸⁸ “Agreement Between Charles Douglas and Luther B. Kurtz,” Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1857-02, LCHAD.

possible, even in close proximity to large free black enclaves or established escape routes and during a period of greater numbers of group escapes.⁸⁹

Running away required physical strength, cunning, and stealth, attributes difficult for young children to acquire, and finding available transportation remained a problem. Another factor that may explain the relatively few advertisements for mothers traveling with children was the belief that these runaways would be quickly recaptured or would return of their own volition. In those cases slaveholders most likely decided not to spend funds in advertising for mother-child runaways. This relative lack of advertised mother-child elopements reflected a more determined effort by northern Virginia slaveowners to rally support from the general public for halting runaways, a tightening of control over enslaved mobility, a call for stricter enforcement of fugitive slave laws, and the realization on the part of enslaved parents that youngsters added an incredible burden when flight depended on secrecy, stealth, and stamina. Yet by 1855 the number of parent-child runaway groups appeared to be on the rise with the appearance of five ads for parents who fled with a child or children as seen in table 13. The decisions of these parents to flee with children may have been in response to increased racial tensions and assaults upon the stability of enslaved families via the slave trade.

⁸⁹ Broadside, printed at the office of the Washingtonian, Leesburg, Virginia, August 20, 1860. Collection OM012 – “Runaway Slave Advertisement, Leesburg, VA, August 1860.” Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Virginia.

Table 13. Parent-child, parent-children, and family elopements as indicated in runaway advertisements

Year	Mother with one child	Mother with more than one child	Father with child	Father and Mother with children	Departed From		
					Fauquier County	Loudoun County	Prince William County
1811	2					1	1
1814		1				1	
1816				1		1	
1817	1				1		
1820	1					1	
1825	1					1	
1828	1			1	1		1
1839		1				1	
1840	2					2	
1842			1		1		
1846			1				1
1855	1			1	1	1	
1856		1				1	
1857	1					1	
1860	1					1	
TOTAL	11	3	2	3	4	12	3

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Only the years in which parent-child runaway groups were identified are included in this table for clarity.

Evidence exists of forty-seven runaways in nineteen distinct and identifiable groups comprised of a parent(s) and child or children from 1800 to 1860. Eleven mothers fled with a single young child. Two mothers ran away, each with two daughters. One mother took her six children. Two older fathers ran with a single adult child each as previously discussed. Two of the three family groups consisting of both enslaved parents fleeing with their children were recorded in slave advertisements. William Still, in his

Underground Railroad journals, recorded the flight of another family group, the Bennetts. For these parent-child or parent with children groups, the powerful desire to secure a family unit and reclaim parenting roles free from the control of a slave master overrode the added burdens of traveling with and caring for young children in potentially dangerous circumstances. Careful planning increased the chances of success, yet as suggested by the extant runaway ads, home location also played a role in whether parents left with children or not. As seen in table 13, twelve of the nineteen parent-child/children elopements originated in Loudoun County, while four such groups originated in Fauquier and Prince William reported three parent-child groups.

At least twenty-six children under the age of thirteen left northern Virginia in groups or with a parent or parents. Most occurred before 1840, yet with so few cases (less than 4 percent of the 762 total runaways from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William), any analysis remains tentative until substantiated by further information. While this number does not seem significant over the course of sixty years, it does signify the determination of some mothers, parents, and siblings to stay together despite the heavy odds against escape. Aware of the risks and physical fatigue of travelling with and caring for infants and young children, some parents faced the unimaginable, if practical decision to leave children behind when electing to run from enslavement.

Matilda, a thirty-seven year old woman, admitted she had left two children behind in Loudoun County after her escape from George Noble in 1818.⁹⁰ Noble also reported

⁹⁰ Matilda had been captured and taken to the Alexandria County jail on November 5, 1818. She told her jailor, Andrew Rounsavell, that she was “the property of George Noble.” She also said she had left her two children, twenty year old John and nine year old Eliza, behind in Loudoun County. She did not indicate

the disappearance of thirty-eight year old Frederick about the same time as Matilda and noted that Frederick had left “in company with his wife, who has since been detected in Alexandria.”⁹¹ It is likely that Frederick and Matilda were husband and wife and that the two had left Loudoun County together without their children. An unnamed enslaved woman from the estate of Lewis M. Smith left her three children when she ran away sometime before 1841.⁹² In another case, Susan, a thirty-year old enslaved mother, apparently “ran off” sometime shortly before April 2, 1845, leaving at least four children behind on William Skinker’s Pignut Estate: twelve year old Betty, nine year old Charles, six year old Nat, and three year old Thornton.⁹³

Slaveowner, Isaiah B. Beans claimed his man, Jacob Monday “went off without any known provocation” and had “left his wife and five children” when he ran away in May 1833 from the neighborhood near Woodgrove in Loudoun County.⁹⁴ In December 1843, Christian, a forty-five year old enslaved woman and mother, ran away from John W. Patterson’s farm near Middleburg. Patterson believed she had received assistance in fleeing either to a man named Elijah King, her husband in Washington, D.C., or to the Upperville neighborhood where she had been raised by the Carter family and where she had “children and other relations.” Christian planned for a long separation rather than a

whether her children were also owned by George Noble. *Alexandria Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1818.

⁹¹ Frederick ran away on September 2, 1818. “Look Here!” *Alexandria Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, January 6, 1819.

⁹² “The Heirs of Lewis M. Smith dec’d In Account with Sampson Hutchison their Guardian,” Loudoun County Guardian Account Book C: 131. Estate administrator Sampson Hutchison noted in his accounts that he paid Maria Hutchison \$9 on April 19, 1841 for the “board of three Negroe children while their mother was run away.”

⁹³ “Appraisement of Estate of William Skinker, dec’d,” Fauquier County Will Book 19: 210. Appraisers listed most children in family groups headed by mothers.

⁹⁴ *Virginia Free Press & Farmers’ Repository*, May 2, 1833.

short respite as she “took off with her a feather bed, &c., and all her clothes of every kind, and many things of household furniture, which she had, of her own,” and may have gone to friends and family in Upperville first to say her good-byes before seeking a more long term escape from enslavement, perhaps with her husband in Washington.⁹⁵

Landon Phillips, when questioned by Morgan County jailor, William Armstrong, after his capture, told Armstrong that he and his wife had left behind two children. When asked “how could they run away & leave their children behind” Phillips replied that while his wife “did not wish to go,” they realized “it was no use to stop on their account [as] they [the children] were all to be sold.”⁹⁶ When Landon, a free black with an abroad wife and children, was faced with the realization that his wife and children would be sold, he put the escape plan into action. Yet the fact that Landon asked for a pass months prior to their attempted escape might mean the parents feared a sale, created a plan, then acted when they could or when the sale was imminent. Driven by a sense of protectiveness over kin, a determination to reassert parental rights over the claims of masters, or banding together because of a shared sense of trust, groups of family members did attempt escape from enslavement in northern Virginia, albeit infrequently.

Planning for an Escape: Acquiring money, clothing, transportation, or a new identity

The decision to escape with or without a child, solo, or in a group required planning and serious consideration. Runaways prepared for an escape by saving money,

⁹⁵ “Ten Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, December 28, 1843.

⁹⁶ *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips*, 1845, Loudoun County Free Black Issues, 1845-12, LCHAD.

gathering clothes, procuring weapons, finding options for transportation, and looking for opportune moments to run away undetected. George Johnson recalled that prior to his successful escape from northern Virginia he prepared by “getting cakes, etc.”⁹⁷ After Landon ran away from Fauquier County in 1838, he was seen by an acquaintance “with all the preparations for a long trip” indicating his flight had been planned and he had procured items to facilitate a “long trip.”⁹⁸ James Wyatt, Senior suspected Windsor would “change his clothes” when he fled in 1807. According to Wyatt, Windsor “had money when he went away” and to aid in the transformation Wyatt believed Windsor might “perhaps change his name.”⁹⁹ For Windsor, preparations included altering his appearance and identity, facilitated by the accumulation of at least some funds.

Whether acquired illicitly or otherwise, certain items seemed to be helpful for flight. Fugitive John apparently had opportunities to acquire money while serving as a house servant to John Scott. Scott remembered that John was “pretty well supplied with cash” and assumed those funds would enable John to “venture to travel in the stages and steamboats” while making his escape.¹⁰⁰ John’s preparations of accumulating cash, whether through overwork, hired labor, or theft, matched the preparations made by other hopeful fugitives. After Anderson Patterson and Jerry Sinclair left, their Leesburg owner Joseph Mead claimed it was “known that they have some money, from twenty to forty dollars, or more, in silver.” Mead described the pair as “pretty crafty” and as part of their

⁹⁷ Johnson fled from the Harper’s Ferry neighborhood about 1855. “George Johnson,” Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 53.

⁹⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 10, 1838.

⁹⁹ *Alexandria Gazette*, February 24, 1807.

¹⁰⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 28, 1834.

plan he assumed they were “likely to change both names and clothing” in addition to procuring forged papers or passes.¹⁰¹

To facilitate travel during an escape, some runaways resorted to theft. According to allegations made by store owner William Gibson, seven of his slaves broke into his store, taking “70 or 80 dollars in silver.” Gibson believed the theft “was the cause of their running off” a week later in 1835, yet equally likely was that the theft was part of preparations in advance of a planned escape rather than the later escape a means to avoid punishment. Their acquired funds could finance an escape and waiting for a week helped the group choose an optimal time to get away. Gibson warned patrols and slave catchers that “the above negroes are all strong, active fellows, and may be hard to manage by a weak force.”¹⁰²

When Sanford fled from Upperville and James Lake in 1829, he “left most of his clothes behind” either by circumstance of a hasty exit or by design in order to reduce means of identification. According to his master, Sanford availed himself of an opportunity to take \$73 “of the subscribers money” and one of Lake’s wagon horses which he later abandoned. The later reclamation of Lake’s horse in the Battletown neighborhood led Lake to conjecture that Sanford was making his way towards Pennsylvania, most likely “through the neighborhood of Fredericktown or Hagerstown.”¹⁰³ Before Lewis ran away from his hire to Thomas Marshall in September 1854, he apparently “entered a mill and committed a larceny of a considerable sum of

¹⁰¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 18, 1826.

¹⁰² *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 12, 1835.

¹⁰³ *United States’ Telegraph*, February 16, 1830.

money,” funds that enabled him to avoid detection despite the handbills posted offering a reward for his apprehension and return.¹⁰⁴

Enslaved man, Frederick, a forty-seven year old wagoner, held a position of trust in the household of George Noble in Loudoun County. Yet on Christmas Day, 1828, after Frederick had transported and sold a load of flour in Alexandria, he “eloped with the proceeds, leaving his wagon about two miles from town.”¹⁰⁵ About two weeks later Noble learned that Frederick had been seen “near Alexandria, with a black man from Philadelphia, a school master...who perhaps may have forged him a pass.” Frederick’s daring plan to take the profits from the sale of Noble’s flour left him with “plenty of money,” according to Noble, with which Frederick would “no doubt change his clothes and obtain a free pass.”¹⁰⁶ In Frederick’s case, the funds he appropriated provided options for implementing an escape.

One of the most easily identifiable aspects of a runaway was his clothing. Some slaveowners paid close attention to clothing worn by their enslaved chattel, especially when they allotted few articles of clothing to enslaved persons, and used this information in runaway advertisements as a means of identification. Slaveholder Jacob Smith recalled

¹⁰⁴ The administrator in charge of Lewis, John P. Philips, believed that Lewis was “either dead or has escaped to a free state” when questioned on April 5, 1856 in a chancery case determining the ownership of Lewis in Fauquier County Chancery Court. “The Answer of John P. Philips, administrator of Joseph Thompson, dec’d, to a bill of complaint exhibited, against him and another, in the Circuit Court of Fauquier County by Alice Stigler,” *Alice Stigler v. Admr of Joseph Thompson, etc.* Fauquier County, 1857-006, Library of Virginia Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1857-006#img>. See also the handbill Philips circulated offering a \$100 reward for Lewis. Broadside 1854:2, Broadside Collection, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁰⁵ “Attention!” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 1, 1829.

¹⁰⁶ “Attention—\$50 Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 15, 1829.

his enslaved man, John, carried particular items of clothing when he left the German Settlement in Loudoun County in 1829. According to Smith, John's wardrobe included

two pair of pantaloons, one of fine blue cloth, the other of homemade linsey, filled in with pale red; a red vest, of homemade linsey, with a narrow white stripe; and a green cloth tight-bodied coat; an old round about jacket, of domestic cloth; also, two odd stockings, not fellows, one of black wool, the other a grey mixture.¹⁰⁷

Smith probably hoped that a detailed account of John's wardrobe would facilitate identification and apprehension.

Several advertisements indicated that runaways had left their familiar clothing and would procure new items to avoid detection. Since most runaway ads described the clothing taken by runaways as a distinctive feature for identification, some runaways realized that it would be safer to change their garments to reduce the chance of recognition. James Boles stated there was "no doubt" his runaway enslaved man, Joshua, would "change his name and clothing" when running away in 1824.¹⁰⁸ After Harry ran away from Prince William County, his master, Thomas Harrison provided a detailed list of his clothing, yet Harrison also opined that "as [Harry] is a fellow of considerable smartness he may change his clothing."¹⁰⁹ Loudoun slaveowner Benjamin Hixson admitted that he could not describe the clothing worn by runaway Dade because Dade had "left all his usual clothing at home, and obtained an unknown suit elsewhere."¹¹⁰ When his enslaved woman, Mima, ran away from Thomas Rector near Middleburg in the summer of 1820, he could not describe her numerous articles of clothing and he assumed

¹⁰⁷ *Genius of Liberty*, March 28, 1829. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 18, 1824.

¹⁰⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 6, 1813.

¹¹⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 2, 1839.

she would exchange at least part of her wardrobe “to prevent description” of her appearance.¹¹¹ Slaveowner Verlinda Perry reported in 1849 that she did not know what articles of clothing her enslaved man Bill Lazenbury wore when he left her service, but she believed that since he had “some money in his possession” it was “probable he has purchased new ones.”¹¹² Runaway Burr “took with him sundry other clothing, a pair of boots, a quilt, and some bedding, which did not belong to him” when he left Richard Osburn’s plantation in Loudoun County in 1831.¹¹³

As time passed, the dangers associated with running away influenced the type of preparations. Some runaways procured weapons as a measure of defense against patrols, constables, or concerned citizens. Henry took a broad ax and drawing knife when he left Prince William County in March of 1804.¹¹⁴ Lun took both money and weapons when he left from Loudoun County in company with Kearsley. According to his owner, Lun had between \$18 and \$20 in cash and “a brass pistol and dirk knife.” Lun had reason to bring some form of defense as he and Kearsley were “attacked near the Chain Bridge, Maryland” three days after they left Loudoun, yet the men managed to escape.¹¹⁵ Frank Wanzer’s group brandished “revolvers and bowie knives” to keep “their assailants at bay” during a partially successful escape attempt from a neighborhood patrol near Hood’s Mill, Maryland. Four of the six runaways were able to escape and later reach Canada.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ *Alexandria Herald*, June 14, 1820.

¹¹² *Loudoun Chronicle*, August 10, 1849, microfilm.

¹¹³ *Genius of Liberty*, September 24, 1831.

¹¹⁴ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, March 21, 1804.

¹¹⁵ *The (Washington) Globe*, July 29, 1839, online <<http://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/606567>>.

¹¹⁶ *The Daily Dispatch*, January 4, 1856. See also William Still’s account of the Wanzer party escape. William Still, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886).

Runaways hoping to make a quick exit from the immediate neighborhood sometimes took advantage of available transportation. In Joe Clark's second escape attempt from the Mason plantation at Woodbridge, he "took away with him a canoe, which probably he may have set adrift."¹¹⁷ Mason's land was located along the Occoquan River and his enslaved work force had access to watercraft. Enslaved persons located inland used another available source of quick transportation, horses.

Sanford, a twenty-four year old wagoner, prepared for his escape by taking seventy-three dollars belonging to his owner, James Lake. To further aid in a speedy escape, Sanford also "left most of his clothes behind" removing potential means of identification, and then "rode off [on] one of the wagon horses" which was later "reclaimed in the neighborhood of Battletown, beyond the Blue Ridge."¹¹⁸ Like Sanford, when Temple and Maria left their master in Prince William County they took two horses to aid in their escape.¹¹⁹ Blacksmith Tom Burditt took a bay mare, saddle, and bridle from his master, Henry D. Hooe, when he fled from Prince William County in 1804.¹²⁰ Billy Jackson took a "handsome chesnut sorrel horse...saddle about half worn...and a plated snaffle bridle" when he escaped from Fleet Smith's residence in Loudoun County in 1813.¹²¹ Enslaved brothers Isaac and Dennis stole a black pony and small bay horse from Zachariah Ward's residence in Occoquan when they fled the night of September 28, 1816 presumably on their way "to the northern states."¹²² Enslaved man Toby had been placed

¹¹⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, August 25, 1825.

¹¹⁸ *United States Telegraph*, February 16, 1830.

¹¹⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 31, 1829.

¹²⁰ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, June 2, 1804.

¹²¹ *The True American*, September 29, 1813.

¹²² *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, October 4, 1816.

in the care of Griffin Stith “for safe keeping” while awaiting the outcome of a chancery court case. Rather than letting the court determine his future, Toby opted to flee quickly during an opportune moment. Stith noted that “[o]n the night of his [Toby’s] absconding a chestnut sorrel mare belonging to the overseer was also taken off, supposed by him.”¹²³

In 1856 when Nat ran away from Fauquier County, he made use of his owner’s “small Bay Pacing Mare, with a new saddle, with heavy brass stirrups.” Aware that he presented a more easily identifiable target while riding a stolen horse, Nat probably let the horse go at some point.¹²⁴ After four enslaved men left from John Walden’s farm near Warrenton, he noticed that two work horses had gone missing “about the time they went off.” Walden assumed the runaways made use of the horses to speed their escape.¹²⁵ Nat’s decision to take a horse, saddle, and bridle from his owner, Robert Fletcher, was not a spontaneous act. Fletcher learned that after Nat first went missing on August 8, 1838, yet apparently Nat was “lurking about the neighborhood until Sunday, the 19th” when Nat opted to take Fletcher’s horse and riding gear.¹²⁶ Fletcher later reported he had recovered the horse, saddle, and bridle, yet Nat, a year after his disappearance, remained at large.¹²⁷

An unnamed “bright mulatto boy” aged about eighteen years old “took off [on] a fine bay horse, six years old, with an old saddle and bridle, horse 16 hands high” from the property of George H. Grigsby. Interestingly, Grigsby could offer more information about the horse than about his escaped chattel noting that “the horse has been at work,

¹²³ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 5, 1821.

¹²⁴ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, August 8, 1856.

¹²⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 5, 1836.

¹²⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 6, 1838.

¹²⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 30, 1839.

and has a scar on one of his shoulders,” yet Grigsby did not choose to include the name of his missing servant. Grigsby’s reward of \$12.50 compared to the reward of \$50 also juxtaposes the relative value Grigsby placed on his two types of “property.”¹²⁸ Grigsby’s inclusion of a detailed description of the stolen horse was designed to catch the notice of the broader newspaper readership as additional means of detecting his escaped slave.

Slaveowners across northern Virginia reported the theft of horses, saddles, and bridles and some of these may very well have been at the hands of runaway slaves seeking to make a quicker escape. Prince William resident, Warren Crosson reported the theft of his sorrel mare who apparently had “been taken off by two Negro fellows who ran away on the same evening from the adjoining plantation” on Saturday night, May 27, 1815.¹²⁹ A bay mare belonging to William Nichols was “stolen out of the subscriber’s pasture in Loudon county in the night of the 26th June” in 1806. Nichols’s close description of the horse’s face, hooves, height, and gait along with a reward of \$50 for apprehending the thief and the horse, was sure to draw attention.¹³⁰ Loudoun residents Israel Janney and Stephen Wilson both reported the theft of horses from their residences north of Leesburg in 1811.¹³¹ On September 22, 1844, Fauquier County resident Samuel G. Francis reported the theft of a bay mare from his father’s pasture. Francis guessed the horse “was taken by some negro and probably rode a distance.”¹³² Thomas Adams reported the theft of a sorrel mare, saddle, and bridle shortly before Christmas, 1851 from his plantation, Oak Hill. Adams noted that this was “the second horse that has been stolen

¹²⁸ *Genius of Liberty*, September 17, 1831.

¹²⁹ *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, June 6, 1815.

¹³⁰ *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, October 10, 1806.

¹³¹ *National Intelligencer*, September 12, 1811.

¹³² *Warrenton Flag of '98*, November 30, 1844.

from this house in the last nine months.”¹³³ Runaways acquired money, material goods, and in some cases, horses to facilitate their flight away from enslavement, yet another aspect of preparation was developing a new identity.

Whether by changing identifiable traits such as clothing or mannerisms or creating a new name, altering outward appearance and persona helped some slaves evade recognition. Slaveowner William Byrne articulated the problem of using such outward appearances as identifiers when he wrote that his escaped man, John, had “no particular mark or characteristic about him, by which the attention of strangers would be attracted.” John did have a habit of taking pride in his “genteel appearance” yet Byrne believed John would alter that characteristic “in order to escape detection,” showing the awareness of some runaways of the importance of adopting new habits or mannerisms during flight.¹³⁴

When Jack, Bob, and Lew escaped from Fauquier County, they each adopted new names. Jack became known as William Tucker, Bob choose Henry Thomas as his new identity, and Lew selected the name Sam Johnson to celebrate their new status away from enslavement.¹³⁵ Loudoun County slaveowner, Lewis Ellzey, had reason to believe that his enslaved man Henry had acquired free papers and adopted the new name of Sam Jackson to facilitate his flight away from the Hillsborough neighborhood in 1820.¹³⁶ William Digges thought his “active and shrewd” house servant, David, “probably may have

¹³³ *Alexandria Gazette*, December 24, 1851, microfilm.

¹³⁴ *The Globe*, July 28, 1836.

¹³⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 2, 1820.

¹³⁶ *Farmer's Repository*, August 30, 1820.

changed his name” and acquired a free pass when escaping from Warrenton during the Christmas holidays in 1819.¹³⁷

Slaveowner B. E. Harrison described runaway Sam Ball as “a sensible and well behaved negro,” yet Harrison was quite sure these traits would enable Ball to “tell a plausible story if interrogated.”¹³⁸ Harrison’s knowledge of Sam’s ability to “tell a plausible story” could either have derived from past experiences with Sam or might be a skill that Harrison believed enabled a runaway to extricate himself from capture. Richard Chilton presumed his runaway enslaved man, Willis, would craft a particular new identity in addition to changing his name and adopting the persona of a free person to help him escape from Waterford in Loudoun County in 1813. Chilton explained, “I also am apprehensive this fellow will undertake to pass as a Methodist, in order to deceive the public & to make his way through the country.”¹³⁹ The fear that enslaved persons could easily throw off the shackles of enslavement as easily as changing an outfit, altering a name, or adopting new mannerisms or personas threatened the stability of the master-slave relationship.

Such tactics helped runaways negotiate the terrain of interrogation in order to gauge when and how to reveal information. Prince George’s County, Maryland Sheriff, Thomas H. Osbourn, posted a Notice of Committal for an unnamed “Negro man” committed to the county jail. Osbourn was apparently unable to elicit the man’s name, described as “dumb, yet [able to] hear tolerably well.” Most significant was Osbourn’s

¹³⁷ *Genius of Liberty*, January 18, 1820.

¹³⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 19, 1841.

¹³⁹ “Forty Dollars Reward,” *Republican Constellation*, February 5, 1814.

news that “[s]everal persons who have seen him think he is from Virginia” and Osbourne noted that when committed the presumed runaway had in his possession a copy of the Warrenton newspaper, the *Flag of '98*, “with the name of a Mr. Leech written on it.”¹⁴⁰ Whether or not the presumed runaway could actually speak or his silence was calculated, Sheriff Osbourn used other clues and a physical description to attempt to create an identifiable likeness in his published committal notice.

When seventeen year old Jim Philips was taken up, jailed, and interrogated by Jailor James Campbell in July 1817, Philips claimed he was free born in Culpeper County, the son of Armstead Phillips, and was employed by Mrs. Withers as a wagoner.¹⁴¹ After ten months incarceration, Philips changed his tune and told another story to his jailor. In his revised story Philips claimed his real name was Edmund and that he had been sold to a trader away from Fauquier County, taken to Kentucky, sold again, and transported “down the river for New Orleans” from whence he ran away.¹⁴²

In another case of appropriating a false identity, Loudoun County runaway Sam told the jailor in Woodstock, Virginia, during his interrogation following a failed escape attempt that his name was Thompson and that he was a free man. Sam’s master, Matthew Adam, alerted the public following Sam’s next escape attempt that he might again “change his name and deny his master” upon questioning.¹⁴³ Edmund and Sam, like many runaways, fabricated multiple identities in order to further their escape.

¹⁴⁰ *Alexandria Gazette*, July 28, 1854, microfilm.

¹⁴¹ *Alexandria Herald*, September 15, 1817.

¹⁴² *Alexandria Herald*, May 22, 1812.

¹⁴³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 12, 1815.

When to Escape

Identifying a likely time for escape represented another aspect of the planning process when seasonal rather than circumstantial considerations could take priority.

Historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger noted seasonal trends in the elopements of slaves across the Upper and Lower South during the later period of 1838 – 1860 with similar percentages of slaves running away in winter, spring, and summer and fewer slaves departing during the autumn period of late September, October, and November as shown in figure 54.¹⁴⁴ In his study of eighteenth century Virginia runaways, Gerald Mullin found that “winter months, because of the severity of the weather, were unpopular” among runaways.¹⁴⁵ Surveying a smaller geographical area, in comparison, illuminates finer regional variations in runaway trends not apparent in surveys of broad areas across the South.

¹⁴⁴ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 231.

¹⁴⁵ Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 192 fn 84.

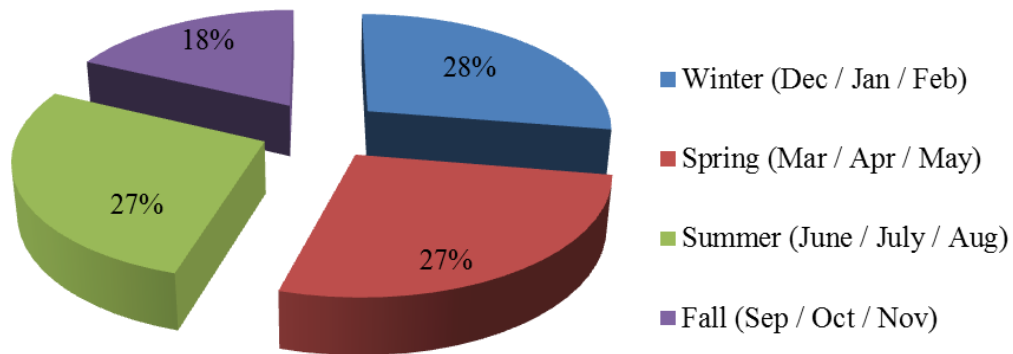


Figure 54. Seasonality of runaways across the Upper and Lower South, 1838 – 1860.

Source: John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231.

In comparison, seasonal consideration affected the rates of runaways across northern Virginia. Runaways from this region clearly favored warmer seasons of the year for running away as shown in figure 55. Only 7 percent of northern Virginia runaways reportedly fled during the winter months of December, January, and February despite the opportunities for flight provided during the Christmas holidays. One reason for such a dramatic difference between rates of winter runaways from northern Virginia and the rest of the South was the weather. Frozen Potomac and Occoquan Rivers suspended river traffic and options for illicit travel during winter, and snow storms and freezing temperatures restricted movement.

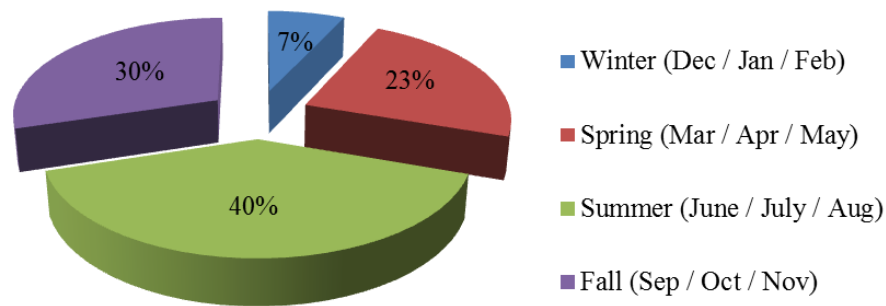


Figure 55. Seasonality of running away in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties, 1838-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

According to Yardley Taylor, Loudoun County experienced nearly eighteen inches of snow at the end of December 1834 and by January 5th, “the thermometer fell to 20 below zero in many places.” In February 1835 temperatures dropped again below zero and through the winter “the rivers were three times frozen up and navigation entire interrupted.”¹⁴⁶ The cold temperatures and disruption of navigation could explain why runaways would avoid this particular time. These circumstances make curious the decision of enslaved man, Tom MacMillion, to run away from Fauquier County on January 17, 1835 wearing only a “dark coloured domestic coat, and domestic pants—and no hat.”¹⁴⁷ Tom’s decision to leave during such a cold spell may have been based more upon his circumstances – fear of punishment, fear of sale, as a response to family separation, or even an overwhelming desire for freedom – than on the state of the weather.

¹⁴⁶ Yardley Taylor, *Memoir of Loudo[u]n County, Virginia* (Leesburg, Virginia: Thomas Reynolds, Publisher, 1853), 31, University of Virginia Special Collections, Charlottesville, Virginia.

¹⁴⁷ “\$100 Reward,” *Genius of Liberty*, January 31, 1835.

Edmund Berkeley noted in his journal “snow all day” on February 20, 1854, “the deepest I ever remember seeing, being 3 feet deep on a level,” a condition that would severely hinder flight.¹⁴⁸ Yet ten days later Fauquier slaveholder John G. Beale reported his enslaved man Tom had fled from Bealeton, located along the Orange & Alexandria railroad line. Tom’s flight could have been aided by following the railroad tracks until he could reach the Potomac River bridges to Georgetown or Washington, a possibility Beale disclosed in his advertisement.¹⁴⁹ Runaways typically possessed and carried away minimal outer garments during flight, and slaveholders noted the poor condition of footwear in descriptive advertisements.

Regardless of the proximity to Pennsylvania or Ohio, weather conditions greatly affected the decision of northern Virginia slaves to run away as seen in the sharp decrease in the reported number of runaways during December, January, and February. Yet if weather affected rates of runaways trying to navigate out of northern Virginia across frozen rivers, how did it influence runaways fleeing across the nearby Ohio River from the neighboring border state of Kentucky? In a study of runaway ads, jail notices, and court documents, J. Blaine Hudson found that the winter months (December through February) were the most popular months for escape for runaways from Kentucky, yet overall runaways fled in nearly equal proportions each season throughout the year (see figure 56).¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Ronald Ray Turner, trans., *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), 64.

¹⁴⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 4, 1854.

¹⁵⁰ J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 38.

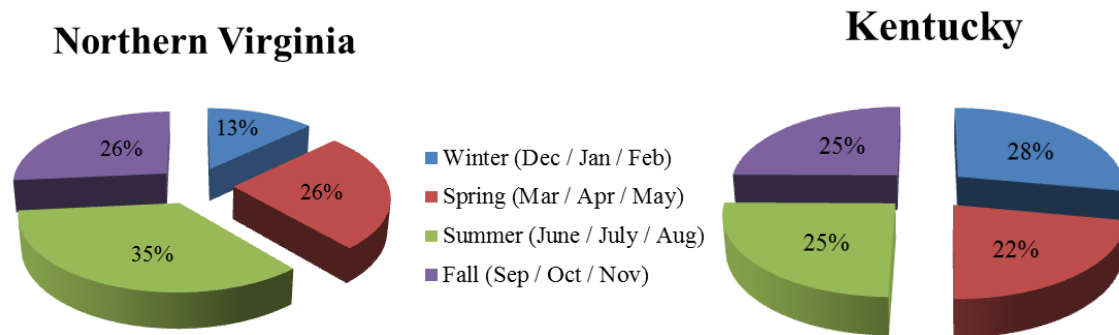


Figure 56. Frequency of runaways by season in Northern Virginia and Kentucky.

Sources: Northern Virginia Runaway Database and J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 38.

Hudson’s results must be understood as a database composed from slave advertisements, jail notices, news articles and court documents “from and through Kentucky to the earliest years of settlement,” a period longer than the database created of northern Virginia runaways.¹⁵¹ Hudson’s collection also included advertisements posted in Kentucky newspapers for runaways who “originated in Tennessee or points south” and this group comprised “roughly 20 percent of the fugitives examined” in Hudson’s study, while the northern Virginia database includes only those runaways who fled from locations or slaveholders from Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties.¹⁵² The origins of a significant portion of Hudson’s runaways from “Tennessee or points south”

¹⁵¹ J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 159. Hudson included information pertaining to runaways from 1788 to 1863. Ibid., 32.

¹⁵² J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 156.

could very well have affected the timing of departures with slaves from areas south of Kentucky who would have been less affected by the season before reaching Kentucky.

Ads for northern Virginia runaways indicate that opportune moments varied not only from the trends noted across the Upper and Lower South as well as from the borderland state of Kentucky, but also among the different counties within northern Virginia. Despite these variances, certain seasons and holiday times were popular or at least opportune moments for escape across the South, including the Christmas holidays in December and Whitsuntide holidays in May and June. Advertisements reveal that some enslaved persons utilized the extra time away from supervision afforded by a holiday pass to slip away undetected. Hired out servants, slaves with abroad spouses or children, or favored servants were often granted passes to visit family members at the end of December during the Christmas holidays and during Whitsuntide, a Christian holiday celebrated after Easter, generally between mid-May and mid-June. Franklin and Schweninger's study of runaways across the South concurred with the importance of Whitsuntide and Christmas as opportune moments for escape, yet as noted, winter holiday flight had to be weighed against weather conditions for northern Virginia enslaved persons.¹⁵³

Andrew and James ran from their hire at Freestone Point near Dumfries when both received "a pass for three days, it being Whitsuntide holiday."¹⁵⁴ Enslaved men Plummer and James acquired passes from their owner living near the Little Falls of the Potomac River in Fairfax County to visit their respective abroad wives during the

¹⁵³ Franklin and Schweninger. *Runaway Slaves*, 231.

¹⁵⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, June 12, 1807.

Whitsuntide holidays in June, 1824. Plummer had requested the pass to visit his wife “living with Mr. Willis Adams, near Oak Hill” in Fauquier County while James received permission to visit his wife residing in Leesburg, yet “from information received they crossed the Potomac at the Falls Bridge” and their owner suspected Plummer and James were “probably on their way to Pennsylvania.”¹⁵⁵ These men utilized holiday passes to facilitate escape; yet in doing so, they left behind broad wives and possibly children as well.

Despite the threat of cold winter weather, some runaways took advantage of the festivities and decreased oversight during the Christmas holidays to abscond. William H. Leach reported his servant Ephraim ran away while hired to Benjamin Dean in Prince William County “a few days before Christmas.” Leach suggested that Ephraim may be “lurking about” the Goose Creek area in Loudoun County where his enslaved father lived with the Carter family. Ephraim had not been granted a pass, but since he could “write tolerably well” Leach assumed Ephraim had “probably forged a pass” for himself to journey to Loudoun.¹⁵⁶ Rachel, a forty-year old enslaved woman claimed by Thomas Osborn, made her escape from Osborn’s home located near the Blue Ridge in Loudoun County sometime between Christmas 1825 and New Year’s Day 1826. Osborn noted only that she wore “a dark striped linsey dress” when “she went away,” certainly sparse apparel for the cold winter time. Yet, Osborn learned that she “was in the neighborhood of Waterford” since her absence, perhaps a place where she hoped to find help.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 30, 1824.

¹⁵⁶ *Genius of Liberty*, January 20, 1817.

¹⁵⁷ “Ten Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 20, 1826.

Enslaved men Mason and Spencer ran away from their owner while working near Buckland in Prince William County on Christmas Eve, 1834. They apparently left “without any cause whatever” and while their owner, N. Tyler stated it was “impossible to imagine what route they have taken,” the assumption was they were “making their way to Pennsylvania.” Later, it was determined that another enslaved man, Parker, from William Stuart’s farm in nearby Fauquier County had joined the pair in their pre-Christmas flight.¹⁵⁸ Ben Parker made use of the Christmas holidays in 1841 to run away from Brentsville. When he left, he took with him “a dark grey cloth overcoat” and “a black close bodied coat with a velvet collar” described as being a “good deal worn” as well as “purple domestic pantaloons, hair cap, and a black fur hat nearly new” to protect him from the winter weather.¹⁵⁹

The recorded experiences of Loudoun fugitives Frank Wanzer, Emily Foster, Barnaby Grigby, and his wife, Mary Elizabeth described some of the conditions faced when absconding during winter. The group encountered “biting frost and snow” that “rendered their travel anything but agreeable” during their flight from Loudoun County on Christmas Eve, 1855.¹⁶⁰ The men attempted to protect the women’s feet from freezing in the snow by covering them at night as they travelled, but, as Underground Railroad conductor, William Still, later noted, “the frost was merciless and bit them severely, as their feet very plainly showed.”¹⁶¹ For this group, capitalizing on the relative freedoms

¹⁵⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 6, 1835.

¹⁵⁹ *Alexandria Gazette*, January 19, 1842.

¹⁶⁰ William Still, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 124.

¹⁶¹ William Still, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 125-126.

granted servants during the Christmas holidays outweighed the potential dangers of winter weather.

For enslaved northern Virginians, though, the holidays were not the only times favorable for elopements, nor were they the times most often selected for absconding. In his study of eighteenth century Virginia runaways, Gerald Mullin also noted monthly differences in slaveholder reporting runaway slaves. Mullin found that the first January runaway “was not reported until 1768, thirty-two years after the first *Gazette* went to press.” Mullin determined that since “most of the runaways were in non-field positions, their work schedule would not necessarily depend on the harvest seasons: thus prolonged stretches of little or no crop work, or pending ‘holidays,’ which were important to the crop laborer, would not necessarily influence the artisan’s decision to run off.”¹⁶² Even so, Mullin’s data suggests the timing of an attempted escape varied during the year as seen in figure 57.

¹⁶² Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 192 fn 84.

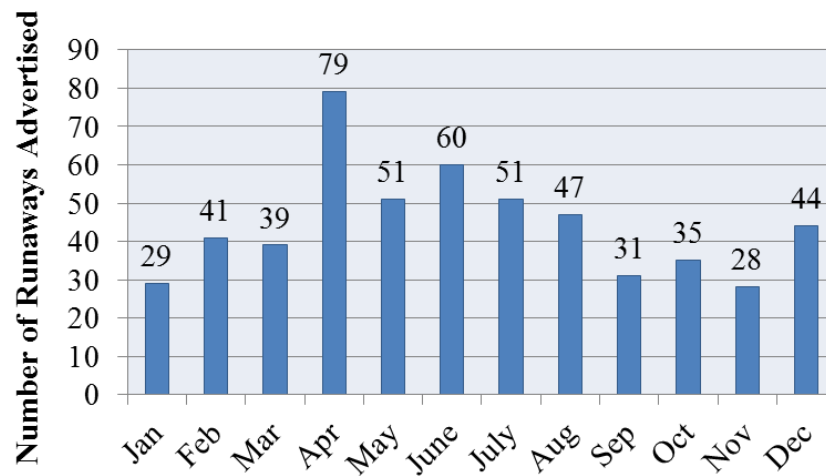


Figure 57. Number of runaways by month advertised in Virginia newspapers during the 18th Century.

Source: Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 192 fn84.

Note: Mullin noted that this calculation was incomplete due to the delay in advertising and the lack of reporting the date, month, or season the runaway fled.

During the nineteenth century northern Virginia runaways took advantage of flight opportunities throughout the year with the most runaways recorded as leaving in September (see figure 58). Only during the months of January, February, March, when winter weather hindered flight and November, when servants faced closer attention from masters and overseers during crucial harvest time did numbers of runaways precipitously drop. As shown, there was a decided difference in Mullin's findings for the eighteenth century and data compiled from nineteenth century advertisements. Mullin found that April was the most often selected month for absconding from Virginia during the eighteenth century while nineteenth century runaways from northern Virginia most often absconded during the month of September.

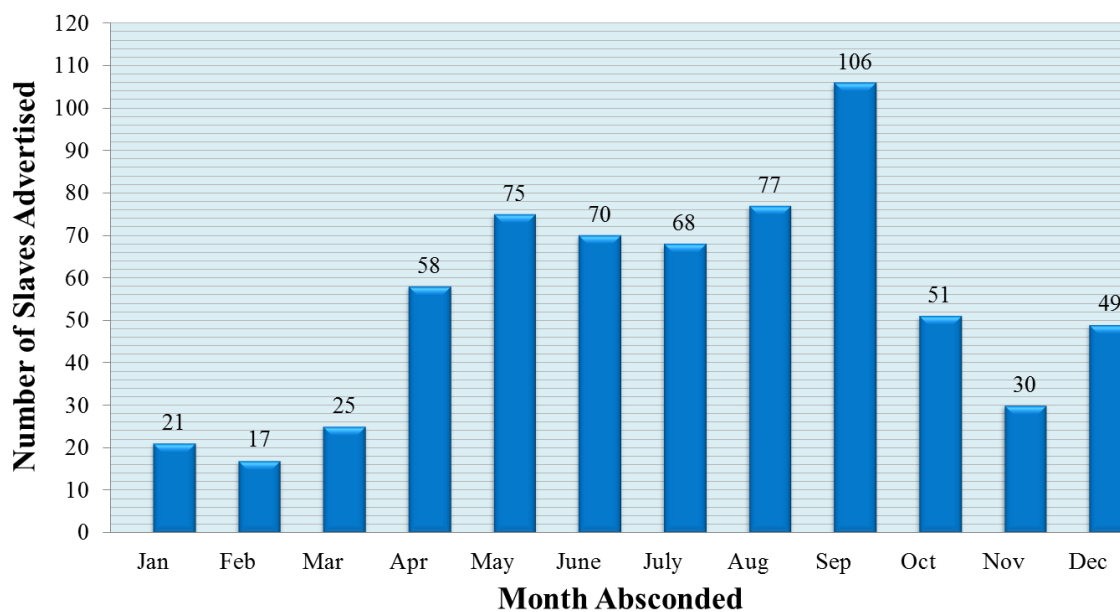


Figure 58. Months slaves ran away as reported in runaway advertisements, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Month during the year that slaves fled as reported for 645 runaways in newspaper advertisements posted between 1800 and 1860.

Between 1800 and 1860, the months of May, August, and September proved to be the most popular months overall for absconding from slavery in northern Virginia. When the totals for each county are compared, all three counties experienced similar fluctuations in the frequency of runaways compared on a month-by-month basis, yet some remarkable deviations are evident during particular months (see figure 59). Fauquier slaves found September the most opportune (or necessary) time for an escape, while Loudoun slaves appeared to prefer May and June. Keeping in mind that Loudoun's June total was bloated due to the mass flight of twenty-two slaves from the estate of John Marshall in 1840, the months of May and August were probably more representative of

the most likely elected time for an escape from Loudoun County. Likewise, more Prince William slaves fled during May and August than during any other month. So making an allowance for the June escape of the Marshall slaves in Loudoun, both Loudoun and Prince William experienced a gradual increase in runaways starting in January, reaching a high point in May. After a dip in June, the frequency of runaways would increase until a second high point in August before making the gradual descent to a low point in November with a rebound in December, due to the Christmas holidays. These trends can be explained in part by the nature of enslaved work, annual cycles of mobility, and fluctuating levels of supervision in each of these locations.

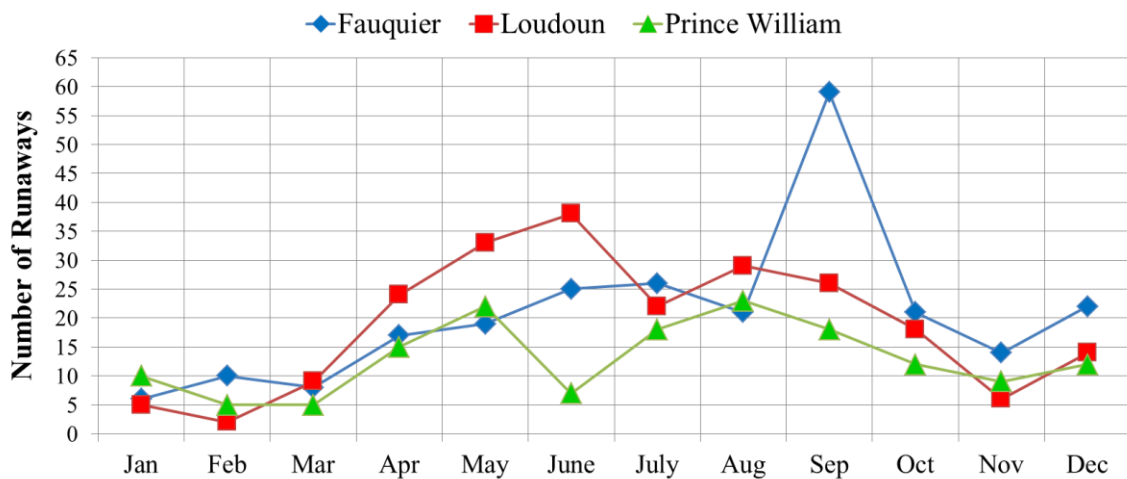


Figure 59. Months slaves reportedly fled by county, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaways Database.

Note: Data compiled from month of flight information provided for 628 runaways in published advertisements.

The primarily agricultural labor provided by enslaved persons in Fauquier also created constraints in freedom of movement. September appears to be the most popular month for Fauquier slaves to flee, perhaps due to timing of the end of harvest, payment of harvest wages to hired laborers, opportunities to plan with others during harvesting, or the occasion of religious camp meetings typically held in mid-August to early September in Fauquier.¹⁶³

Enslaved persons leaving Prince William in the month of May tended to live in or near Dumfries or along the Potomac River where fishing, lumber harvesting, millworks and artisanal trades tended to utilize or hire enslaved labor. The springtime flights of Prince William County slaves generally corresponded with fishing seasons along the Potomac.¹⁶⁴ John, an enslaved carpenter from Thomas Mason's estate, was hired to work for Thomas Harrison in 1813, yet in May, mid-way through his hire, he left from near Dumfries.¹⁶⁵ Alfred, chattel property of the estate of the deceased William Tyler left Prince William County in April of 1823. According to reports, he "was lurking about in Alexandria during the fishing season, and from his being seen frequently upon the wharf, it is supposed he has passed over into Maryland or gone in some vessel to Baltimore."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ In 1843 the Warrenton religious circuit held a camp meeting on Capt. Thomas Fisher's land, located three miles outside of Warrenton starting on August 18. *Alexandria Gazette*, August 1, 1843, microfilm.

¹⁶⁴ In 1851 the *Alexandria Gazette* reported the Potomac River fishing season had commenced in March. *Alexandria Gazette* as reported in the *Richmond Enquirer*, March 25, 1851. In 1854 the spring fisheries opened in late February. *Daily Dispatch*, February 17, 1854. In 1852 fisheries along the Potomac anticipated closing the season between the 10th and 15th of May. *Alexandria Gazette*, May 6, 1852, microfilm. On March 9, 1859, *The Democratic Mirror* of Leesburg reported that "[f]ishing season is near at hand...Fishtown begins to show signs of awakening from its nine months slumber." *The Democratic Mirror*, March 9, 1859, microfilm.

¹⁶⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 6, 1813.

¹⁶⁶ *Alexandria Herald*, September 1, 1823.

Slaveholders were suspicious of blacks hired to work in watercraft during the fishing season and considered them potential accomplices to runaways. In 1839, Prince William County residents presented a petition to the Virginia General Assembly countering a proposal from “Sundry Fishermen & Salt importers of Alexandria and its neighbourhood on Potomack river” that would permit “Free negroes from the North” to work the fishing seines during the spring fishing season. Among the many reasons articulated by Prince William residents for denying entry of “the species of labor” into the area, petitioners claimed that

the present crisis, when abolition has boldly presented its brazen front to our very doors, to introduce perhaps more than 1000 free negroes from the mouth of Potomack to Alexandria into a country as thinly populated with white inhabitants as our section and where we have not a single company armed with muskets (as we are informed) the undersigned consider such a proposition monstrous & preposterous and beg your honorable body to repel it with indignation...¹⁶⁷

Runaways who left Prince William in August tended to flee from the more agricultural areas in the mid- to western parts of the county, including Brentsville, Haymarket, and Thoroughfare. August in that area was a time of harvest followed by farm clean-up tasks. Slaves hired out for harvest work received wages during this time, supplying them with a source of money, and hired farm laborers moved from farm to

¹⁶⁷ More than sixty Prince William County residents signed the petition citing four other reasons for denying the request of the Alexandria fishermen and salt importers. First, their large seines created a scarcity of fish and a monopoly for the Alexandria fishermen. Second, imported labor would deprive local free blacks of employment. Third, petitioners believed that particular group of laborers were “in all respects obnoxious to this section of country” as, at least from their perspective, came from the work houses, jails, and poor houses of large cities. Fourth, that the proposed laborers would bring diseases like small pox into the county due to “their filthy corrupt & mendicant manner of life.” “Citizens: Remonstrance, Prince William County,” March 2, 1839, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia.

farm, creating a known movement of workers across counties.¹⁶⁸ The combination of harvest celebrations, extra funds, and reduction in supervision created opportunities for escape for slaves in that area.

Historian John W. Blassingame noted that “[w]eekends, Christmas holidays, and the months when corn was still standing in the fields were their favorite times for running away.”¹⁶⁹ Analysis of the timing of flights during the week shows that nearly half of the runaways fled from Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties on a Saturday or Sunday. Yet this also means that more than half (52 percent) of runaways fled during on days other than Saturdays or Sundays, indicating that opportunity and necessity trumped a perceived advantage to weekend flight (see figure 60).

¹⁶⁸ Prince William County planter Edmund Berkeley noted in his journal in 1853 that his hands were busy “hauling in hay, wood &c.” at the beginning of August and then threshing wheat until the middle of August. After harvest, Berkeley paid the hands hired for harvest. The later part of August was spent “housing chaff” and hauling wheat to mills. Ronald Ray Turner, trans. *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), 1, 2, available online at <<http://www.pwcvirginia.com/documents/Evergreen1853NEW.pdf>>.

¹⁶⁹ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 112.

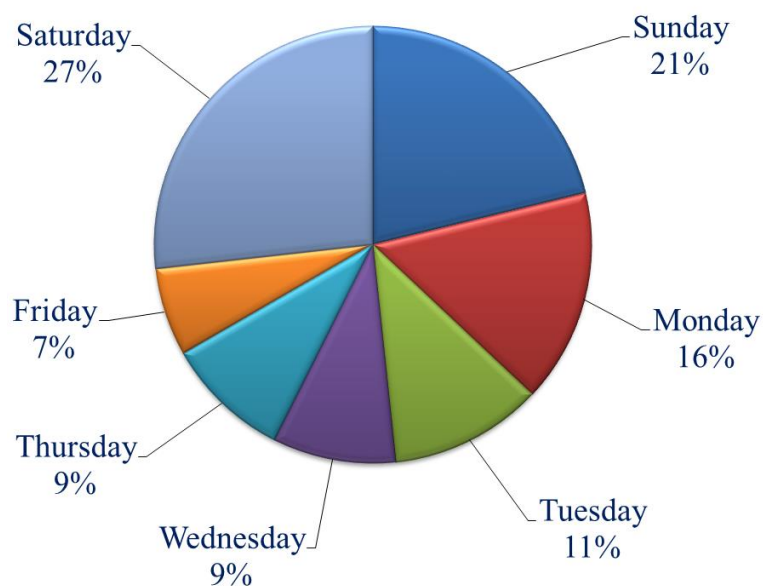


Figure 60. Days of the week runaways fled from northern Virginia, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Slave runaway advertisements provide specific dates of flight for 538 of the 763 runaways.

A closer look at the advertisements shows slight, yet noticeable differences in the data trends for each county (see figure 61). In Loudoun County most runaways apparently fled on Saturdays and Mondays while in Fauquier and Prince William the most frequently cited departures were on Saturdays and Sundays. This could result from the type of supervision provided and whether an absence was noted during the evening or at night or not until the following morning. Fridays typically appeared the least for runaways, perhaps due to heightened surveillance of masters or overseers. As was discussed in chapter two, county patrol activity increased on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays, yet there appears to be no inverse correlation between the number of runaways and the numbers of patrols serving tours as would be expected (if more patrols

were out in force, then fewer runaways would be able to escape their detection).

Knowledge of patrol activity could alter escape plans or routes or the decision to move away quickly versus the decision to stay hidden locally.

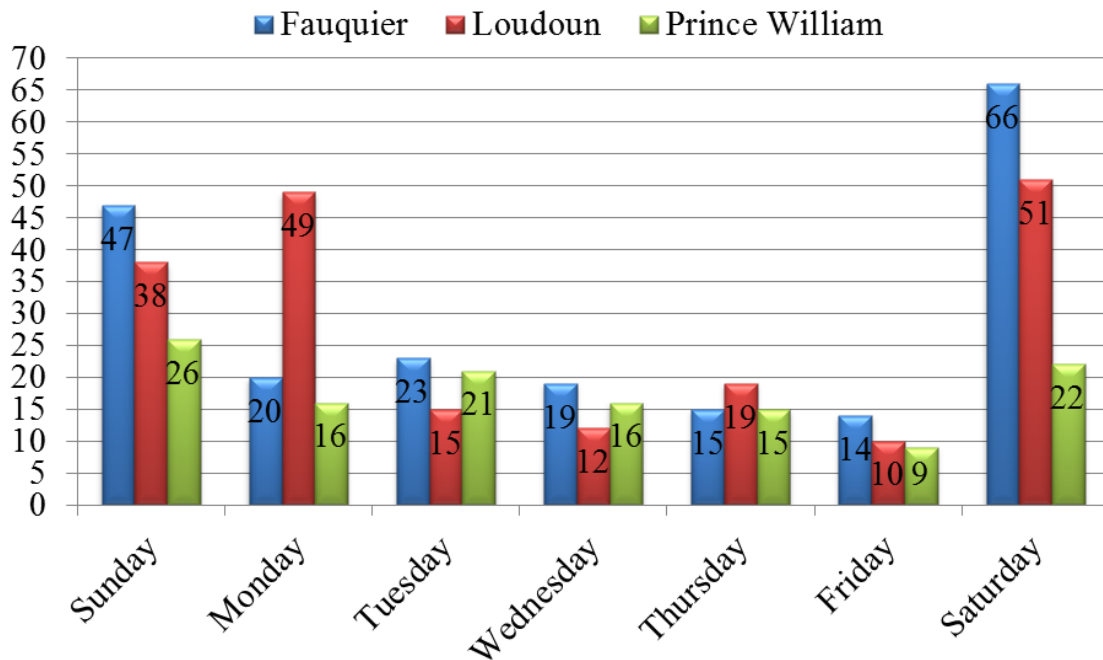


Figure 61. Days of the week runaways reportedly fled, by county, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Days of the week runaways reportedly fled from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties based on information for 521 runaways that specified county of departure and date of departure.

Temporary Respite or Permanent Escape

Lorenzo Ivy, formerly enslaved in Virginia, recalled two responses to the brutal conditions of enslavement. There were “dem what hid in de woods an’ dem what ran

away to free land.”¹⁷⁰ Ivy alluded to two types of motivations for flight: seeking temporary respite or permanent freedom from enslavement. What was apparent to Ivy remained a source of contention among slaveholders.

In 1851 Josiah Priest published his *Bible Defence of Slavery* and in it he declared the viewpoints of presumably a large segment of the slaveholding South and non-abolitionist North:

In the bosom of a negro man, the idea of liberty, freedom and independence, does not give rise to the same sensations, hopes, and expectations, that it does in the bosom of the whites. To the mind of a slave, or even of a free black man, with but small exception, the idea of liberty is but the idea of a holyday, in which they are to be let loose from all restraint or control; they are to play, work, or sleep, as may suit their inclination, following out, to the utmost, the perfect indulgence of indolence, stupidity, and the animal passions.¹⁷¹

Priest’s pro-slavery rhetoric fastened on temporary absence as a respite from enslaved labor while downplaying an ability of the enslaved to cultivate a desire for a release from enslavement. Yet historians of the South affirm the role of both absconding for temporary respite and running away to seek permanent escape.

Scholars John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger claimed that the “most common form of absconding was not actually running away at all, but what might be termed ‘truancy,’ ‘absenteeism,’ and in some cases, ‘lying out.’” These “not quite runaways” absconded to escape punishment, to secure a temporary reprieve from the hardships of enslavement, or even chose to remain with displaced or abroad families for

¹⁷⁰ Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips, eds., *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 153.

¹⁷¹ Priest, *Bible Defence of Slavery*, 387-388.

short periods of time.¹⁷² Historian Larry Gara asserted that “temporary relief from the daily toil was a type of ‘freedom’ in itself, and the great majority of fugitive slaves were seeking such temporary relief.”¹⁷³ Stephanie Camp distinguished between “fugitives” who sought escape to the North and “truants” who “sought temporary escapes” from oppression.¹⁷⁴ Evidence of slaves seeking such a temporary respite is slim within the extant runaway advertisements for northern Virginia slaves suggesting that freedom, at least among slaves in Loudoun, Fauquier, and Prince William counties remained a viable goal with a perceived expectation for successful permanent escape. Examples of runaways seeking reprieves or who absconded only to “lurk” among family or within Virginia borders do exist, though rarely in written records. For these slaves, the decision to remain in close proximity to a particular place underpins the importance of kinship and friendship ties (community) and a familiar terrain (neighborhood) in seeking asylum.¹⁷⁵

For at least seven months in 1820 after William Stonestreet had absconded from Henrietta Williams’s home near Lanesville, Loudoun he was “frequently seen” in the neighborhood of Hillsborough and then near Noland’s Ferry in Loudoun.¹⁷⁶ Williams did not indicate the cause for Stonestreet’s flight or potential reasons for his staying in Loudoun County. He might simply have hidden out to avoid punishment or stayed near

¹⁷² Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 98.

¹⁷³ Larry Gara. *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (1961, repr., Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 21.

¹⁷⁴ Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 36.

¹⁷⁵ Historian Anthony Kaye emphasized the importance of neighborhoods as a marker of identity for runaways, distinguishing between “people inside and outside the place.” Kaye argued that slaves “often captured fugitive strangers who ventured into their neighborhood, and runaways lay out in their own neighborhood because here they could expect to find allies.” Anthony Kaye, “Neighborhoods and Nat Turner: The Making of a Slave Rebel and the Unmaking of a Slave Rebellion,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 27, No. 4 (Winter 2007), 706.

¹⁷⁶ *Genius of Liberty*, September 12, 1820.

Hillsborough to be near family and the provisions they might supply him. Maybe Stonestreet hoped to find freedom in the North, but waited for family members or friends to join his flight. For whatever reason, Stonestreet remained concealed close to home for an extended period of time. The quick capture and return of most of the twenty-three Marshall slaves to the possession of Marshall's heirs in 1840 suggests that their escape plan was not meant for permanent removal but rather a temporary reprieve from the estate division. It further revealed such a massive group of runaways could not easily blend into the surrounding countryside or evade capture.

Other masters assumed skilled servants remained secreted in Virginia or the District of Columbia in order to hire out their own time as presumed free persons. Fauquier County slaveowner William Page suspected his twenty-one year old enslaved man, John, "may seek employment at some public house in some of the adjacent towns" and specifically noted Alexandria and Washington.¹⁷⁷ John's training as a house servant and as a miller made him a likely candidate for hired work, yet the question remains why Page would believe that John merely sought employment among the anonymity of a nearby large city rather than traveling further north in hopes of permanent freedom. Bertrand Ewell had reason to believe his enslaved man Harry would "forge a pass and go off, and hire himself." According to Ewell, Harry had "worked frequently at the House-joyner's[,], ship carpenter's[,], & mill right's business." Indeed, Ewell averred that Harry's "understanding and ingenuity" made him "capable of doing good work at either [trade], when attended to." In this case, Harry's special trade skills made him a candidate for

¹⁷⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, August 3, 1852, microfilm.

escape in order to hire himself out as a free man, yet Ewell did not go so far as to suggest that Harry actually sought freedom, only the ability to hire his own time.¹⁷⁸

Slaveholder Charles L. Carter learned that Harry, a seventeen year old runaway from Carter's plantation described as a "musical genius on the fiddle," had found employment after his flight "acting in the capacity of fiddler to Messrs. Hackley and Landy, slight of hand performers" entertaining at the Red House races (later called Haymarket in Prince William County). Carter asserted he had "no doubt" that Harry had "gone for Maryland or Pennsylvania with a forged certificate of his freedom."¹⁷⁹ After Henry Moller ran away from Warrenton in 1853, his master learned that he had recently been seen "in Alexandria, in the neighborhood of the Railroad Depot" and had been employed as a blacksmith since making his escape.¹⁸⁰

Slaveholders who assumed their runaways were "lurking" in the neighborhood or who believed their relative distinctiveness would make them easier to identify may have hesitated to publish an advertisement right away. Cuthbert Owens assumed his missing enslaved man, Jim, after running away from Upperville, "may be lurking in the neighborhood of Middleburg" where he had lived for several years. As such, Owens offered only a minimal reward of \$10 if Jim was caught in Loudoun or Fauquier counties.¹⁸¹ About the same time Middleburg slaveowner, Samuel Rector offered a \$10 reward for his enslaved man Harrison who was also believed to be "lurking about the

¹⁷⁸ *The Times; and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, May 31, 1800.

¹⁷⁹ *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, August 17, 1801.

¹⁸⁰ "\$10 Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 13, 1853.

¹⁸¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, June 23, 1840, microfilm.

neighborhood” of Middleburg.¹⁸² Rector’s small reward and no mention of other potential locations for capture indicated he had more reason to suspect Harrison’s elopement was temporary and local than distant and permanent.

Andrew Graham suspected that his newly acquired enslaved man, Daniel, had returned to his former neighborhood after leaving Graham’s home near Hillsborough in Loudoun County and was “lurking about Alexandria” instead of traveling further north.¹⁸³ Enslaved man Ned Biays had already attempted a local escape in August 1819 from George Gulick yet apparently remained in his Aldie neighborhood more than two months until he was retaken and returned to Gulick. Undeterred, Biays tried another escape on the very night he was reclaimed by Gulick. Biays must have had compelling and known reasons for remaining near Aldie as Gulick reported he expected Biays was “lurking about Fairfax court-house and Aldie” yet probably not in the same hide-out near Aldie where he was found.¹⁸⁴

Enslaved woman, Rachael, left William Saffer’s residence in October 1835 and remained at large for about a year. During that time Saffer suspected Rachael was lurking near Fitzhugh Carter’s plantation, the residence of her former owner in nearby Fairfax County. Saffer also learned she had been seen in Washington on Capitol Hill. In early October 1836 Saffer received news that Rachael had been captured “near Daniel Janney’s mill by Mr. Milton and Mr. Stribling,” yet when Milton and Stribling attempted to take Rachael to the jail in Leesburg, the twenty-five year old fugitive from enslaved service

¹⁸² *Alexandria Gazette*, July 2, 1840, microfilm.

¹⁸³ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, July 7, 1817.

¹⁸⁴ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, November 30, 1819.

managed to escape yet again.¹⁸⁵ By November 1836 Saffer believed that Rachael sought shelter and assistance either in Leesburg or with her relations or friends among the enslaved population at George Carter's plantation at Oatlands in Loudoun County. Saffer assumed that Rachael would stay hidden among friends or family rather than attempt to find a more secure freedom in the north. Enslaved man, George, left his master's property located near the Fauquier-Loudoun line in mid-July 1852 and had been "lurking ever since, in the counties of Loudoun and Fauquier." After more than seven months "lurking," George was seen near Aldie. After unsuccessfully attempting to locate George through word-of-mouth, George's owner, Charles Smarr [Marr?] finally resorted to advertising a reward for George's capture nine months after his disappearance.¹⁸⁶ Most slaveowners, especially by the late 1820s, presumed runaways would head for freedom north of Maryland or provided some sort of rationale for runaways leaving their service.

Reasons for Running

Like runaways from other regions of the slaveholding south, enslaved persons from Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties ran from enslavement for various individual and personal reasons. A close reading of runaway slave advertisements offers clues as to some of the reasons enslaved persons set out for other locations either as a short-term measure or as a long-term solution to escape bondage. A desire to reconstruct fractured kinship ties, especially due to potential sale or estate division, to escape

¹⁸⁵ "\$100 Reward," *The Washingtonian*, November 12, 1836, microfilm.

¹⁸⁶ "\$300 Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, April 19, 1853.

immediate punishment, or to find freedom north of Virginia comprised the vast majority of enumerated reasons enslaved men and women opted to run.

One reason for running was to escape before an owner could carry out a threat to sell a slave. A fugitive slave from northern Virginia who was interviewed while he was passing through Bangor, Maine on the way to Canada in 1855 claimed he ran away because “his master intended selling him to a Florida planter.”¹⁸⁷ The story of Fauquier County runaway, David Green, later reported by William Still, was that Green “had suffered many hardships at the hands of his master, but when the auction-block was held up to him, that was the worst cut of all. He became a thinker right away...[and] decided to flee for his freedom at all hazards” despite having a wife and child in Virginia.¹⁸⁸

Peyton Lucas had already lived through the sale of a brother, sister, and his sister’s two children away to Georgia and had watched his brother escape to the north through Baltimore. He knew all too well the potential for forced separation. In 1841 Peyton Lucas learned from his sister that the stranger who visited Lucas’s master and saw Lucas working in his blacksmith shop discussed terms of a sale of a blacksmith over dinner. Lucas realized that the proposed sale involved him and within a week’s time he “started for the North with two companions.” The threesome reached the Potomac River by “cock-crowing” so they “went on a hill, and hid until the next (Sunday) night.” As Lucas later recalled, the three men tied their provisions

on our backs, and started for Potomac river,--whether to wade it, swim it, or get drowned, we knew not. We waded and swam, changing our ground as the water

¹⁸⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, January 13, 1855.

¹⁸⁸ William Still. *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition, Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886, 320.

deepened. At last we reached the opposite bank in Maryland: we merely stopped to pour the water out of our boots, and then travelled on all wet, until morning: then we hid in the bushes. We travelled by night and concealed ourselves by day, for ten days and night, suffering greatly from hunger and from rain, without shelter.¹⁸⁹

Instead of perceiving the river as a barrier, Lucas and his companions used the Potomac River as a conduit towards freedom. Lucas's experiences underscore the connection between family dismemberment and running away. Having already lost many members of his immediate and extended family to the slave trade, Lucas decided to leave and make his own future.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the fracturing of families by slave sales induced some enslaved persons to run from new masters and mistresses in order to reclaim kinship ties. Some masters realized the fragmentation of enslaved families caused many slaves to seek out family members, especially after a sale removed the enslaved from family or familiar neighborhoods. In these cases, slaveholders noted locations of family members when gathering information prior to a purchase. After Ben's flight from his new Fairfax County owner, William Rogers, in 1803, Rogers suspected Ben was "lurking about" the neighborhood of Dumfries "being related to the Negroes at Neabsco Furnace, as well as those at Mr. Lee's quarters" at Leesylvania.¹⁹⁰ Enslaved woman, Molly, had been sold by her owner Patrick H. Douglas of Leesburg to Richard H. Love, who in turn sold Molly to Mr. Thompson of Rockingham County, Virginia. After this sale, Molly fled from Thompson and returned to Douglas's residence before Christmas

¹⁸⁹ Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 107.

¹⁹⁰ *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, August 9, 1803.

1819. Molly's desire to return to family after multiple sales away from kin apparently prompted her return to Leesburg.¹⁹¹ Enslaved man, Manuel, left Martin Porter's residence near Thompson's Ford in Fauquier County in 1819. Porter consulted with Manuel's former owner, French Floweree, probably to ascertain Manuel's possible destination, and learned that Floweree had purchased Manuel from a Mr. Feagans living on Bull Run.¹⁹² Ben, Molly, and Manuel independently chose to reclaim kinship connections after multiple sales took them further and further away from family.

Enslaved man, Joe, absconded from John A. Washington's farm near Salem in Fauquier County "a short time" after Washington purchased him from Clarke County, Virginia slaveholder, John Richardson. Washington assumed that Joe would either return to Clarke County or head north towards the Point of Rocks, located along the Potomac River at the border between Loudoun County, Virginia and Maryland.¹⁹³ After their sale away from Charles County, Maryland to Fauquier County, twenty-two year old Betsey and eighteen year old Arabella fled from the service of Samuel Hunter. Apparently angered by their elopement, Hunter requested that anyone apprehending the women "please inform Mr. Elias P. Legg, of Alexandria," a negro trader, whom Hunter authorized to "attend to the business" of retrieving the pair once secured in jail.¹⁹⁴

Despite having been punished with a whipping for a previous runaway attempt nearly seventeen years prior, thirty-two year old Abner was determined to find his mother

¹⁹¹ *Genius of Liberty*, December 21, 1819.

¹⁹² "Ten Dollars Reward," *Palladium of Liberty*, August 13, 1819, microfilm.

¹⁹³ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, January 25, 1859.

¹⁹⁴ *Phenix Gazette* (Alexandria, VA), February 26, 1825, microfilm. See also Legg's advertisement offering to "pay the highest price in cash for slaves, either single or in families" from his Alexandria, Virginia office, *Phenix Gazette*, March 9, 1825, microfilm.

who apparently lived in Fauquier as the property of John Bronaugh. Abner left Alexandria on July 28, 1805 and “was seen on the road enquiring for said place.” The strength of family ties influenced Abner’s decision to run and the presumed direction of his flight.¹⁹⁵ When “Negro Joe” left Sydnor Baily’s residence near Middleburg, Baily had reason to believe Joe was “lurking about Alexandria for the purpose of obtaining a passage down the Potomac, as far as Westmoreland county, Virginia, where he was raised and where his mother now lives.”¹⁹⁶ Despite being nearly sixty years of age, shoemaker and wagoner, George, left the Hooe property in Brentsville in June 1826. Slaveowner John Hooe Jr. strongly suspected George had left Brentsville to return to his relations still living with Mrs. Elizabeth Blackburn of Jefferson County, Virginia and claimed “no doubt [George] is harbored by them either on her farm or in that neighborhood” near the Blackburn property.¹⁹⁷ Hooe apparently believed that George’s attachment to family superseded a desire to go north to find freedom.

The administrator of George Chapman’s estate hired out forty-two year old Abraham to Horatio Ward of Charles County, Maryland, and during his hire, Abraham ran away from Ward and was taken up and jailed as a runaway in Leesburg. Quite possibly Abraham had returned undetected to the Chapman lands to see family or friends in Fauquier County after leaving Maryland before deciding to make for the North through Loudoun County.¹⁹⁸ After Thornton had been sold by his Fauquier County owner, George Nelson, to Henry W. Cobb of Caswell County, North Carolina, Cobb published a

¹⁹⁵ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, August 19, 1805.

¹⁹⁶ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, May 7, 1805.

¹⁹⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 19, 1826.

¹⁹⁸ *Genius of Liberty*, June 12, 1830.

runaway ad in Warrenton, Virginia's *Flag of '98* newspaper seeking the capture and secure incarceration of Thornton. Nelson had reason to believe that Thornton had returned to family in northern Virginia and was "lurking in that neighborhood" of Warrenton or possibly near Winchester in nearby Frederick County, Virginia. Cobb was so sure of Thornton's course towards his previous home in Fauquier County that he sent reward funds in advance to Warrenton in anticipation of Thornton's capture and secure incarceration in jail.¹⁹⁹

The period shortly after a slave sale or during transport to a new site of enslavement provided an opportunity for some enslaved persons to claim control of their future. Brothers Peter, Fielding, and Cuddy ran away after being sold at a public sale in Dumfries from the estate of the deceased Col. Tyler. They were accompanied by Tom, who had also been recently purchased from his master in Dumfries. During an overnight respite at Taylor's Tavern in Hartwood, the four men fled from their new owners while enroute to new homes near Pottersville, in Louisa County, Virginia. The group was later captured and secured in the Fairfax County jail, apparently having made their way back north through Prince William County and traveling northward through adjoining Fairfax County.²⁰⁰ Six weeks after Daniel was sold by Jonathan Swift of Alexandria to Andrew Graham in Hillsborough, Loudoun County, Graham reported that Daniel ran away; he suspected Daniel would be "lurking about Alexandria."²⁰¹ Running away after a sale combined the desires to maintain family ties, to avoid control by a new (and potentially

¹⁹⁹ *Flag of '98*, (Warrenton, Virginia), January 5, 1850.

²⁰⁰ *Alexandria Gazette*, December 27, 1821, as cited in Ronald R. Turner, *Prince William County Virginia 1784 – 1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (Manassas, Va, 2000).

²⁰¹ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, July 7, 1817.

unknown) master, and to seize an opportunity to escape before or during removal from familiar places. In doing so, runaway slaves proclaimed their resistance to forced sales and to the displacement of family members.

Death of an owner and the resulting fear of a division of an estate and sundering of kinship and friendship ties hastened a decision by some slaves to leave before sold or reallocated to other masters. Runaway advertisements published by estate administrators or executors suggest that the escape occurred during a period of transition from owner to caretaker of a deceased owner's estate. Seven slaves escaped from the estate of the deceased William Gibson while under the administration of Gibson's wife, Sarah.²⁰² Twenty year old Moses ran away during the time of Amy Clagett's administration of Samuel Clagett's estate.²⁰³ Jim was arrested and committed to the Rockingham County jail, claiming he had fled from the estate of the deceased John Ashby.²⁰⁴ Toby had been placed in Griffin Stith's care "for safe keeping" while awaiting the outcome of a suit in chancery court. While Stith averred Toby left "without any cause, far as is known or believed," Toby's decision to take a horse and flee from Stith in Prince William County was probably based on Toby's trepidations about the outcome of the suit.²⁰⁵

Some slaves opted to attempt an escape when they feared the death of a slave master or mistress was imminent. John W. Jones, born enslaved in 1817 to the Ellzey

²⁰² *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 18, 1835.

²⁰³ *Genius of Liberty*, August 6, 1836.

²⁰⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, April 11, 1837. Warrenton resident R. Wallace advertised a reward for his recently purchased enslaved man, Jim, also known as James, who fled from Fauquier County before July 16, 1836. Wallace's Jim formerly belonged to John Ashby, deceased, and was probably the same Jim captured and held in Rockingham County, Virginia, southwest of Fauquier County. *The Jeffersonian* (Warrenton, Virginia) August 13, 1836, microfilm.

²⁰⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 5, 1821, as cited in Ronald R. Turner, *Prince William County Virginia 1784 – 1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (Manassas, Va, 2000).

family near Leesburg, grew up under the management of Miss Sally Ellzey, who reportedly “never allowed her slaves to be abused.”²⁰⁶ Yet as Miss Ellzey grew closer to death, Jones worried for his future knowing that he would fall into “the hands of the [Ellzey] heirs, whom he disliked.”²⁰⁷ This fear drove him to discuss running away with his step-brothers and two close friends from another plantation, a plan they put into action in June 1844. Jones took with him a small amount of money he had earned through overwork at a nearby farm. In addition, each of the fugitives were “supplied with one change of clothing and food for four days” along with a pistol and knife, weapons they used to evade slave catchers in Maryland. By July 1844 the group reached Elmira, New York where Jones later became an active participant in Underground Railroad activities, assisting other fugitives to reach safety in Canada.²⁰⁸

As stated previously, the largest mass exodus in the region following a master’s death occurred on Monday, June 15, 1840, when twenty-three of the twenty-nine slaves belonging to the estate of John Marshall absconded after the appraisalment of their values by county commissioners.²⁰⁹ Commissioners had divided the slaves ranging in age from infants to about sixty years old into three lots the day prior to their mass departure.

According to the commissioner’s accounts, at least some of the fugitives were recaptured

²⁰⁶ Clay W. Holmes, A.M. *The Elmira Prison Camp: A History of the Military Prison at Elmira, N.Y. July 6, 1864 to July 10, 1865* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 140.

<<https://archive.org/stream/elmiraprisoncam00holmgoog#page/n9/mode/2up.140>>.

²⁰⁷ Clay W. Holmes, A.M. *The Elmira Prison Camp: A History of the Military Prison at Elmira, N.Y. July 6, 1864 to July 10, 1865* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 141.

<<https://archive.org/stream/elmiraprisoncam00holmgoog#page/n9/mode/2up>>.

²⁰⁸ Clay W. Holmes, A.M. *The Elmira Prison Camp: A History of the Military Prison at Elmira, N.Y. July 6, 1864 to July 10, 1865* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), 142-144.

<<https://archive.org/stream/elmiraprisoncam00holmgoog#page/n9/mode/2up.140>>. Jones learned of the death of his mother and his former mistress, Miss Ellzey when another party of runaways from Loudoun reached Jones in Elmira, New York.

²⁰⁹ *Genius of Liberty*, June 20, 1840; Loudoun Will Book Z: 383-384.

and sent on to their new masters or sold.²¹⁰ The Marshall slaves demonstrated the limited power of enslaved persons to protest or forestall an undesirable fragmentation of families.

In three noted cases, runaways possibly fled to join family members who had already escaped from bondage. After Tom ran away from the Marshall estate at Oak Hill in Fauquier County in 1821, his master noted that Tom's father "escaped many years past to Philadelphia, and has never been recovered." Based on this information, Marshall believed Tom "may be attempting to reach the same place" of Philadelphia.²¹¹ Marshall confirmed his prediction a year later in another runaway slave ad posted by the extended Marshall family. According to Marshall by July 1822, Tom "was lately apprehended in Philadelphia, brought to Warrenton, Fauquier; lodged in jail, and sold to a trader" and escaped from the Warrenton jail before he could be taken away by the trader.²¹² Tom apparently used his experience of the terrain gained in his previous escape attempt to lead five men: two brothers claimed by Thomas Marshall, two enslaved men belonging to John Marshall, Jr., and Anthony, an enslaved man property of James K. Marshall, away from Fauquier County and presumably towards freedom in Philadelphia.

In another case of chain migration, Thomas Turner's enslaved man, Wellington ran away from Fauquier County in April 1843. One month later, his sister, Maria, also fled from Turner.²¹³ Leesburg slaveowner, Stevens T. Mason noted that one of his runaways, John Watson, who fled in 1844, escaped several years after his mother had left Mason accompanied by several of her children and her abroad husband, William Weims.

²¹⁰ Loudoun County Will Book Z: 422-425.

²¹¹ "\$100 Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 18, 1821.

²¹² "Five Hundred Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Herald*, July 24, 1822.

²¹³ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 19, 1843, microfilm.

Mason also knew that John's family had since been "heard of in New York," indicating a possible destination for John in a modified form of chain migration.²¹⁴ The small number of ads that specifically mention examples of family following runaways does not imply that others did not engage in chain migration via running away, merely that such information rarely was included in advertisements.²¹⁵

Slaves also ran away to escape immediate punishment. Peter, enslaved to the Turner family of Fauquier County, ran away from Robert Beverley, to whom Peter was hired. Edward Carter Turner noted in his journal that he went to Middleburg "to see after him" and "bring him back." Turner found Peter "complaining to his Mistress" but did not note the cause for Peter's complaints. Presumably Peter was returned to Beverley to continue his hire.²¹⁶ Bob ran away from the Berkley Ward plantation in Fauquier County due to fear of punishment after his former master suspected Bob of breaking into his meat house and stealing valuable cuts of beef and bacon. Bob "disappeared and was absent for a week" before he decided to return to Ward. It was then Bob was arrested as a suspected runaway and shortly thereafter faced trial for the theft.²¹⁷ Tenny ran away from Fauquier County and owner Tumpson Lynn in November 1805. While a specific reason for her flight was not included in Lynn's runaway advertisement, Lynn did inform the public that

²¹⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 25, 1844.

²¹⁵ In one notable case, after another one of George Noble's enslaved men, Frederick, fled from enslavement in Loudoun County in September 1828, Noble believed Frederick had "gone to the State of Ohio to see his old messmate Charles" who had fled from Loudoun in September 1825 and remained at large. "Look Sharp! To the Jailors, Constables and other of the State of Ohio, and elsewhere," *Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, February 26, 1829. See also Noble's advertisement for George, "Look Sharp!" *Alexandria Gazette*, September 27, 1825.

²¹⁶ Diary of Edward Carter Turner, entry for April 4, 1850, Turner Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

²¹⁷ Bob was convicted of the theft on May 25, 1824.

Tenny bore a “large scar” on her left arm above her elbow “occasioned by the stroke of a hickory” indicating the eighteen year old had received corporal punishment.²¹⁸

Habitual Runaways

Evidence is also slim regarding the number of enslaved who attempted multiple escapes from enslavement, yet the known cases demonstrate the tenacity employed to find family or find freedom. Jeffery, a thirty year old shoemaker by trade, made one escape attempt from his Prince William slaveowner, Luke Cannon on May 4, 1810. Cannon did not alert newspapers until six weeks later, probably due to a belief that Jeffrey would return voluntarily or be quickly returned by a patrol or constable despite receiving information that Jeffery had been seen “a few weeks ago” across the county “on the road about two miles from Haymarket”.²¹⁹ Cannon was able to reclaim Jeffery, apparently, yet not for long as Cannon posted another runaway advertisement for Jeffery in 1812 after Jeffery absconded from Dumfries in the company of a white indentured apprentice to the shoemaking business named James Curry.²²⁰

Ned Buyes (also identified as Ned Biays and Ned Burges) fled from the Aldie neighborhood in Loudoun County on April 13, 1819. Gulick believed Ned would return to the area near Dye’s Mill close to Centerville in Fairfax where “he was raised.”²²¹ Ned’s flight did not last long, and his next escape attempt took place in August. Buyes, described as a thirty year old “shrewd, intelligent negro” again ran away from the Aldie

²¹⁸ “Twenty Dollars Reward,” *Winchester Gazette*, January 14, 1806.

²¹⁹ *Washingtonian*, July 24, 1810.

²²⁰ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, September 18, 1812.

²²¹ *Genius of Liberty*, April 27, 1819.

neighborhood on August 25, 1819. Taken up on November 11th, he apparently had remained in hiding in the Aldie area. After Ned was returned to slaveowner, George Gulick, Gulick attempted to secure him in the kitchen, yet Ned, when left unattended that same night, was able to use a kitchen pan to pry open “the staple to which he was fastened” and escaped once again from Gulick’s control. Gulick suspected that Ned had “obtained papers of freedom or a free pass or something of that kind” but would still remain close to Loudoun or Fairfax counties.²²² Ned’s attachment to people and place might explain his willingness to remain so close to Aldie. Also important was Ned’s ingenuity and perhaps the likely the assistance proffered by the enslaved community.

Wellington, an enslaved man from Thomas B. Turner’s Fauquier farm, had run away three times by the time he was twenty-six years old. During his first escape attempt probably early in 1842 Wellington was apprehended that summer near Baltimore. Turner reported that Wellington ran away for a second time on December 10, 1842.²²³ During a third attempt in 1843, Turner was “inclined to think” Wellington sought refuge in Washington near his free relatives. A month after Wellington’s flight, his younger sister, Maria, also absconded from Turner’s control and was “seen on the following day on the road to the District,” probably emboldened by information Wellington gathered during previous escapes.²²⁴

The experiences of spouses Alfred and Ariadne (who called herself Ann Taylor) to find freedom demonstrated a tenacity over a long period of time. Their first known

²²² *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, November 22, 1819.

²²³ *Alexandria Gazette*, January 2, 1843, microfilm.

²²⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 19, 1843, microfilm.

escape attempt occurred in November 1836 when Alfred, a blacksmith owned by Henry Haislip, fled with his wife, Ann, even though they coordinated plans from different points in Prince William County. Ann's experience as a hired cook in Washington, D.C. may have emboldened the pair to journey towards acquaintances and possible allies in the District.²²⁵ Their flight must have ended quickly as their runaway ads ceased to be published after only three publications in the *Daily National Intelligencer*.²²⁶ This act of resistance apparently did not lead to the sale of either, since five years later Alfred was still in the possession of Henry Hazelips when Ann tried again to leave enslavement.²²⁷ After that also short-lived attempt, Ann and Alfred undertook another escape from the Buckland neighborhood of Prince William County on May 14, 1842. This time they were joined in their efforts by Washington Hayes, a half-brother of Ann's who was hired out as a drayman in Alexandria. All three were described as "very intelligent" and their owners, Henry Hazelip and the Washington family, noted that the couple "will undoubtedly use every means to escape to the North by railroad or shipping." Since Hayes worked along Alexandria's wharves, he could be quite familiar with transport options and most likely made helpful alliances in Alexandria. This third known attempt may have been cut short

²²⁵ The ad for Alfred and Ann only ran in the *Daily National Intelligencer* until December 22, 1836. According to publishing instructions coded the article, the paper was to publish once a week for two weeks, so it is difficult to discern whether Alfred and Ann were apprehended before the time specified by the ad ran out on the 22nd. "Fifty Dollars Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 13, 1836 and *Virginia Free Press*, December 15, 1836.

²²⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 13, 1836, December 19, 1836, and December 22, 1836. Alfred and Ann's owners must have thought they would return shortly after their disappearance as notification was not sent to the presses until more than two weeks had passed after their elopement. Their owners also advertised in the *Virginia Free Press* of Charlestown, Virginia (now West Virginia) as early as December 15, 1836. Advertising in two different directions – both northeast and northwest of Prince William further suggests that owners could not be certain of their path of flight. *Virginia Free Press*, December 15, 1836,

²²⁷ When she attempted escape in 1841, Ann Taylor was owned by T. Washington of Prince William County. "Thirty Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 6, 1841.

as their runaway advertisement was only published for a week in the *Daily National Intelligencer*.²²⁸

The experiences of Alfred and Ann Taylor demonstrate an unexpected story in the efforts of abroad spouses to find freedom. Despite their multiple escape attempts, neither Alfred nor Ann's owners sold them for her misbehavior following their return, yet it is unknown what happened to Alfred, Ann, and Washington following the 1842 escape attempt. Alfred's occupation as blacksmith, a highly valued trade, could have provided Alfred with some leverage in negotiating less onerous conditions of enslavement. Ann must also have been able to convince her slaveowner to keep her following her multiple attempts at escape. One explanation for the fact that their first escape that took place in 1836 could have been the growing trend among Prince William slaveowners of actively reducing their slaveholdings during the decade, a critical time for slave sales. Nevertheless, their ages that year, described as between 30 and 36 for Alfred and about 32 for Ann would make them beyond the prime work ages (and prime ages for sale into the interregional market).²²⁹

With or Without Provocation

In rare cases, runaway ads provided information from the owner's perspective on the reasons for flight. Some owners pointed to fears of justly deserved punishment for

²²⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 21, 1842.

²²⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, December 13, 1836; *Alexandria Gazette*, August 6, 1841; *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 21, 1842. A closer look at the advertisements reveals that in 1841 Ann's owner claimed her age was only 25 and in 1842 he described her as a 26 year old. This leads to the possibility that the 1836 advertisement may have had a misprint and Ann was only 22 years old in 1836 making her a prime age for the domestic slave trade market. This would constitute a powerful push factor to run away as well as making a strong case for her owner to sell her and realize maximum profits.

misdeeds (at least from the owner's perspective) while some owners adopted the trope of paternalism, assuring the public that they could not identify any known "provocation" or flaw in their mastery that caused a slave to abscond or owners. As time progressed, masters in northern Virginia tended to assure the public that the fugitive left service without any just cause or reason rather than suggesting that inefficient mastery proved the cause for the loss of enslaved property.

The inclusion of particular details about an enslaved person's misbehavior, criminal activity, or altercations with authority figures suggested that owners believed the runaway fled due to fear of punishment. Prince William slaveowner, Moses Daulton, did not hazard a guess as to the reason for his enslaved man, Natt's, flight in August 1800, but did mention that Natt had been "castrated last July, by order of the Court of Prince William County" a state indicating that Natt had been charged and convicted of serious criminal activity, most likely a sexual crime.²³⁰ Daulton apparently felt that Natt's past history was crucial either as a physical characteristic or a sign of his malcontent. Nelly Williams's new owner, John D. Brown, claimed Nelly "left home for fear of a whipping," and gave the cause as Nelly's "thieving, an unfortunate propensity she has."²³¹ Also contained in the ad was the information that Williams had been sold from her previous mistress, the Widow Hughey of Dumfries – a change in circumstances that might also have led to Nelly leaving her new owner.

Some slaves fled after an altercation with a master, mistress, or overseer. Cuthbert Powell admitted his enslaved man Crispin "ran off in consequence of a sudden battle

²³⁰ *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, September 23, 1800.

²³¹ *Alexandria Herald*, October 16, 1822.

made with his Overseer” from Powell’s farm near Upperville, Loudoun County and presumably feared additional punishment for failing to comply with orders.²³² Like Crispin, Daniel Weaver “eloped in consequence of a very slight provocation from a person under whose direction he was placed,” according to Loudoun County slaveowner George Love. Yet Weaver’s elopement, rather than a spontaneous response had been preceded by a “train of other circumstances” as determined by Love. These circumstances surrounding Weaver’s behavior induced “a belief that his [Weaver’s] elopement was premeditated, and it is highly probably that he has obtained a free pass, or some spurious or counterfeit papers, and will pass himself for a freeman.” Daniel Weaver had planned to escape, yet did not put his plan into effect until the “slight provocation” with his overseer forced the issue.²³³

Escaped slave William Robinson told Underground Railroad Conductor, William Still, that “a few days” before Robinson left Fauquier County “the overseer on the plantation attempted [unsuccessfully] to flog him.” Robinson averred he “flogged the overseer soundly” in retaliation and then apparently decided it was time to leave John G. Beale’s plantation and head for Philadelphia.²³⁴ After Jo Long fled on June 12, 1859 from his hired employment to Mr. J. A. Chappalier near Paris in Fauquier County, A. H. Settle reported that Chappalier “had some difficulty” with Long. Settle believed Jo Long was “still lurking about the neighborhood” seeking a temporary reprieve from enslaved labor

²³² *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 27, 1828.

²³³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 24, 1826.

²³⁴ William Still, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 225.

instead of a permanent escape.²³⁵ Even though slaveowner Leven Luckett did not specifically mention past crimes or imminent punishment in his advertisement for an unnamed “negro man,” he included information that the runaway’s back had been “severely marked at the publick whipping post,” an indication that the enslaved man suffered extreme punishments and probably fled to escape further “correction.”²³⁶

By publicly announcing tensions between master and enslaved in newspapers, these northern Virginia slaveholders subjected their peculiar institution to potential scrutiny of the benefits of slavery. Yet the vast majority of advertisement writers declined suggesting in print that their mastery over enslaved forces had been compromised or that ineffective management caused conflict between enslaved and overseer. Instead, some owners suggested that runaways used conflict or the indulgence displayed by a previous owner as an excuse to abscond from service.

Enslaved woman Jenny (alias Jane Scott) “eloped from the service” of her mistress, A.A. Macrae on Christmas Day, 1828 along with her daughter, Elizabeth “after a series of gross misconduct aggravated by indulgence.”²³⁷ Fauquier slaveowner James Stigler believed his man Travis was “a pretty good carpenter, and has been so much indulged for a few years past, that he is now unmindful of his duty.”²³⁸ H. S. Turner admitted his recently purchased slave, Harry, had “received uncommon indulgences, and absconded through a pretended aversion to going to my farm in Jefferson [County]” from

²³⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, August 4, 1859.

²³⁶ *United States Gazette*, July 16, 1806.

²³⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 4, 1829.

²³⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 24, 1823.

his home in Dumfries.²³⁹ Charles L. Carter informed the public that his escaped servant Harry's "great ingratitude for my uniform kindness to him has induced me to offer the above extravagant reward" of \$100 for his return. The sum of \$100 was a veritable fortune when offered by Carter in 1801, yet Carter placed the fault on Harry's "ingratitude" rather than on his perpetuation of enslaved labor.²⁴⁰

Jefferson County slaveowner Henry Turner likewise expressed a sense of betrayal when his enslaved man Tom Barnet ran away. Barnet had negotiated with Turner for his purchase from Mr. Edmonds of Fauquier County. According to Turner, he "was induced to purchase this ungrateful being...at his own solicitation" and after the sale removed Barnet from Fauquier County to Turner's home in Charles Town, Jefferson County, Virginia. While serving the Turners, Barnet worked as a carriage driver and when the chance arose "embraced the opportunity of eloping at a time when I and my family were absent for some days from home." Barnet used the opportunity of his owner's plans to sell him to negotiate with a buyer for an advantageous sale closer to "free" states rather than further away in the cotton south. Turner, betrayed by Barnet's lack of gratitude for his purchase, asserted that "there can be no doubt that his object was to obtain his freedom by escaping to the North."²⁴¹

These slaveholders advertised for the return of recalcitrant slaves due to a belief that conflict prompted an escape that had probably been planned or considered for some time. Other slaveholders decline to post an advertisement when they suspected the cause

²³⁹ *Alexandria Gazette*, March 7, 1804 as cited in Ronald R. Turner, *Prince William County Virginia 1784 – 1860 Newspaper Transcripts* (Manassas, Va, 2000).

²⁴⁰ *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, August 17, 1801.

²⁴¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 28, 1826.

of elopement was to seek a temporary reprieve from imminent punishment and believed that the runaway would not wander too far. Edmund Berkeley noted in his farm journal that on Monday, January 30, 1854 his enslaved man Bob was “impudent” and as a consequence he “ran off” from Berkeley’s plantation.²⁴² No extant runaway advertisement has been located for Bob, probably because by Wednesday Berkeley had “heard of Bob in Fairfax jail” and therefore had no need to post an advertisement.²⁴³ Berkeley let Bob wait in jail for nearly a week and only collected him on Monday, February 6. Even then, Berkeley did not immediately have Bob released, but instead decided to test Bob’s resolve to acquiesce to Berkeley’s control. After some discussion between master and slave that most likely included a threat of sale in the nearby Alexandria markets, Bob weighed his options and opted to return with Berkeley. Berkeley noted that “upon his [Bob] begging forgiveness & promising never to [do] so again” he consented to take Bob home and accordingly paid the jailer the accrued fees of \$8.40 for Bob’s capture and lodging.²⁴⁴ In this case, Berkeley gambled on the assumption that Bob could not go far without detection and had not planned to seek permanent freedom. As such, Berkeley could save himself the expense of publishing an ad and offering a reward by relying on word of mouth to discover Bob’s whereabouts.

This was not the first time that an enslaved man attempted to leave Berkeley’s plantation. Nelson absconded in February 1852 as mentioned previously. In 1853 Harry

²⁴² See entry from January 30, 1854. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Farm Day Book 1851 – 1855* transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 63.

²⁴³ See entry from February 1, 1854. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Farm Day Book 1851 – 1855* transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 63.

²⁴⁴ See entry from February 6, 1854. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Farm Day Book 1851 – 1855* transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 63.

“ran off” from Berkeley’s plantation when the overseer “was trying to whip him.” Harry’s flight, even if to evade punishment, ended the same day when “a Mr. Harley” returned Harry to Evergreen, Berkeley’s plantation.²⁴⁵ Since Nelson, Harry, and Bob were quickly identified and taken into custody relatively near to Berkeley’s plantation, Berkeley probably decided there was little need in paying for advertising. It is very possible that other slaveholders declined publishing ads when they believed a runaway was merely “lurking” about the neighborhood waiting for tempers to cool or would be easily identified and returned.

While some masters believed a slave’s bad character, ingratitude in response to excess leniency on the part of the master (or a previous master), or spontaneous altercation prompted escape, other masters were quick to assure newspaper readers that their property eloped without provocation and at no fault of the slaveholder. According to their respective masters, Charles Minor “absconded from the subscriber, (without the least provocation)”²⁴⁶ and Amos Norris “went away without any offence.”²⁴⁷ N. Tyler claimed that Mason and Spencer left his farm near Buckland “without any cause whatever.” Tyler presumed the pair were “making their way to Pennsylvania” yet continued to gather information about the pair and their whereabouts. Later, Tyler “had

²⁴⁵ Harry absconded Monday, July 18, 1853 and was found in the nearby neighborhood of Buckland in Prince William County. Berkeley paid Harley, presumably a stranger to Berkeley based on his description of him as “a Mr. Harley,” the fee of \$2.50 for his part in recovering Harry. July 18, 1853. *Prince William County Virginia: Edmund Berkeley’s Farm Day Book 1851 – 1855* transcribed by Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: 2003), 49.

²⁴⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 1, 1825.

²⁴⁷ *Genius of Liberty*, September 8, 1827.

reason to believe” that another enslaved man, Parker, belonging to William Stuart of Fauquier County had joined Mason and Spencer.²⁴⁸

Henry M. Lewis believed slaves Thomas Jackson and Spencer “went off without any known provocation, and will probably make an effort to reach some free State.”²⁴⁹ Fauquier County slaveholders G. W. Carlyle Whiting and John A. Carter claimed that their enslaved men, Travers and Warren, “ran off without cause” and advised newspaper readers that the pair were “doubtless...trying to get to a free State.”²⁵⁰ Thomas B. Turner averred that Wellington “went off without provocation” in 1842 leading Turner to believe Wellington would “no doubt endeavor to get to a free State.”²⁵¹

In 1827 John Stuart “went off” from the Haymarket neighborhood in 1827 “without any known cause” causing his owner, William Linton to assume that “some villain may have furnished [Stuart] with free papers.”²⁵² In Linton’s mind the cause of Stuart’s flight was not Linton’s treatment as a master, but rather the influence of “some villain” whose offer of free papers enticed Stuart away from Linton’s care. In Linton’s opinion, the acquisition of free papers meant that the purpose of a slave’s elopement was to seek freedom, not merely safe passage. Despite claiming these enslaved men had run away without provocation or cause, the inclusion of presumed destinations beyond slave states indicates that slaveowners realized that at least an underlying reason for slaves leaving their service was the desire to gain freedom.

²⁴⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 6, 1835.

²⁴⁹ *Genius of Liberty*, November 9, 1839.

²⁵⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 28, 1844.

²⁵¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, January 2, 1843, microfilm.

²⁵² *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 25, 1827.

Persons fleeing from slavery sometimes testified to sympathetic ears, and listed a host of grievances as to the nature of enslavement in northern Virginia and the reasons for absconding to the north. David Bennett fled from Loudoun County with his abroad wife, Martha and their two children to escape the brutal punishments Martha endured. Upon reaching Philadelphia on June 11, 1855, Martha related stories of being “stripped and flogged” by her owner, George Carter to Underground Railroad conductor, William Still.²⁵³ Bennett, who “never dared under penalty of the laws to protect her or her little ones,” took his family north in order to claim his husbandly rights of protection and care.²⁵⁴ In the fall of 1856, Sauney Pry “passed over” the Underground Railroad after leaving Loudoun County and a master Pry described as “very mean, swearing, blustering man, as hard as any that could be started.”²⁵⁵

Historians John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger claimed that the majority of runaways from across the south fled to seek a temporary reprieve from work, punishment, or sale, yet most of the ads for northern Virginia runaways indicated that finding family or freedom motivated flight. Evidence of flight following altercations suggests that some runaways did seek temporary respite from immediate punishment, yet these examples do not offer conclusive evidence that temporary elopements comprised the majority of runaway cases in northern Virginia. And the temporary cases seemed far less likely to turn up in newspapers.

²⁵³ David Bennett was owned by the Taylor family while his wife and children lived at the Carter plantation. William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, 1886), 259 – 260.

²⁵⁴ William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, 1886), 308.

²⁵⁵ William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, 1886), 382.

Especially after the abolitionist agitation of the 1830s, northern Virginia slaveholders declined to include causes of slave elopement in runaway advertisements. Instead, silence on the issue or an expressed denial that any known cause existed to prompt slave flight were the more common approaches in crafting runaway ads in order to diminish potential negative public outcry from antislavery advocates. In contrast, publication of accounts of slaveholder mistreatment in the antislavery presses blossomed in order to sway public opinion against slavery as will be discussed in the following chapters.

Runaways from the northern Virginia counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William tended to be older than their counterparts from across the Upper and Lower South, yet variations in the ages and composition existed across these three counties as well. More family groups left from Loudoun so Loudoun County experienced proportionately more children and infant runaways than the other two counties. Nearly half of Prince William County runaways were in the same age cohort as slaves most likely to be purchased by slave traders or sold for quick cash. Potential runaways often planned for a future escape by gathering clothing, money, food, or noting options for transportation. Preparations also included developing new personas, mannerisms, or names to confuse identification. Location also determined the most opportune months and seasons for escape with much fewer escape attempts during the cold winter months and the most favorable months varying by county. While most slaves across the South ran away to escape punishment or seek a temporary respite from enslavement, runaways in the northern Virginia borderlands used escape as a path towards permanent freedom.

As time went by, communication networks developed across northern Virginia for sharing information about routes, safe havens, acquiring forged passes or papers and identifying persons willing to assist runaways. Multiple escape routes developed and changes in the composition of runaway groups led more slaveholders to presume passage to “free” states as the most likely cause of elopements. These changes and their effect on enslavement in northern Virginia will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CHANGING NATURE OF FLIGHT

In 1866, the *Statistics of the United States* generated from the 1860 Census reported that the “greatest increase of escapes appears to have occurred in Mississippi, Missouri, and Virginia” yet overall “the number of escapes has been gradually diminishing.” Comparing rates of escapes between those reported in 1850 to escapes reported in 1860, the statistical digest asserted that

the fact becomes evident that the escape of this class of persons, while rapidly decreasing in the ratio in the border slave States, occurs independent of proximity to a free population, being the nature of things incident to the relation of master and slave.”¹

Looking deeper at census slave schedules, Virginia slaveholders reported eighty-three fugitive slaves in 1850 and one hundred seventeen fugitive slaves in 1860, an increase in absolute numbers. When considering the ratio of runaways compared to enslaved persons, in 1850 one out of every 5,693 Virginia slaves was reported as a fugitive (0.0175 percent) while ten years later one out of 4,194 or 0.0238 percent of Virginia slaves was considered a fugitive, a slight increase.² Slaveholders along Virginia’s northern border with Maryland might be quick to point out that proximity to

¹ *Statistics of the United States, (Including Mortality, Property, &c.,) in 1860; Compiled from the original returns and being the final exhibit of the Eight Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), 337. Hereafter referred to as *Statistics of the United States (1860)*.

² *Statistics of the United States (1860)*, 338.

free states did matter as the nineteenth century progressed, especially during the turbulent decade preceding the Civil War.

Virginia's proximity to "free" states along its northern border created an advantage for its enslaved persons over those enslaved in the Deep South or emerging cotton regions of the southwest. The proximity of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties to waterways, urban communities populated by free blacks, antislavery enclaves, and to the free states of the north played a significant role in the ability of local slaves to seek freedom. Evidence suggests multiple networks developed across northern Virginia among the enslaved that enabled dissemination of information about routes, assistance, and safe havens to potential runaways. These informal, yet sophisticated communication networks led to an increase in the number and size as well as changes in the composition of groups who fled together in coordinated movements.

The experience of runaways from northern Virginia differed from most other areas across the slave South. Analyzing runaway slave advertisements and related court documents reveals particular changes in the process of running away from northern Virginia from the types of groups working together to the preparations made prior to flight to the distances and routes travelled. This chapter explores the development of runaway groups that grew beyond family units to the "stampedes" of the 1850s and travelled across ever greater distances. How did groups form and what bonds enabled their formation? When did changes occur in group formation? How did runaways prepare for flight and what items were most advantageous to an escape? Did runaways from northern Virginia utilize particular avenues of escape? A close reading of advertisements

pertaining to northern Virginia runaways indicates slaves took advantage of their proximity to multiple avenues of escape and created networks to share information, resources, and assistance.

Characteristics of Northern Virginia Runaways – Solos and Groups

While most runaways departing from northern Virginia reportedly left individually, according to information provided in slave advertisements, more than 43 percent of known runaways fled in groups of two or more persons.³ Groups of hopeful runaways banded together for protection and to share supplies and knowledge of the terrain, or in some cases they fled with family members to preserve kinship ties. Runaway groups from northern Virginia comprised combinations of family members, co-laborers from a single plantation, and members of the extended enslaved community across multiple plantations, indicating both opportunities for communication and coordination among family members as well as within and across bounded work spaces.⁴

Kinship Duos and Groups

Detecting familial relationships among runaways proves difficult unless the advertisement provided explicit information, yet evidence exists that some runaways

³ Out of 762 distinct individuals identified as runaways, slaveholders indicated in published runaway advertisements that 331 or 43.4 percent fled in groups of two or more. Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

⁴ This classification is similar to that used by Michael Johnson. Johnson classified groups of runaways from South Carolina into three categories: those comprised of family members, those formed by enslaved workers from the same plantation, and groups formed from slaves connected by acquaintance or kinship in the greater enslaved community beyond a single plantation. Michael P. Johnson, "Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830." *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 (July 1981): 418-441.

chose to flee with family members other than children or parents. In 1803, Simon, a nearly sixteen year old enslaved wagon-maker fled from the Haymarket neighborhood in Prince William county accompanied by a sixteen year old enslaved girl named Frances. Frances had been hired to work for Simon's master, Thomas Mount, bringing the two in proximity.⁵ Their flight together suggests that some sort of relationship existed between the pair, whether a kinship bond or more recent attachment, and this bond encouraged both to run away together.

Groups comprised of siblings formed through a sense of trust, kinship, and similar goals for freedom or flight. Brothers Bob and Clem fled together from Fauquier County slaveholder, William Phillips on December 12, 1805. Phillips probably intended to sell the brothers as a consequence of their elopement, if caught, as instead of a set reward, Phillips offered to pay "one tenth part of what they will sell for" to anyone who captured and secured the pair.⁶ When siblings Jack and Bob decided to run from Fauquier County in 1820, they were joined by another enslaved man named Lew also part of the slaveholdings of William Gibson.⁷

Three enslaved brothers from Dumfries ran away while being transported from Prince William County to new homes and masters in Louisa County, Virginia. Brothers Peter, Fielding, and Cuddy, purchased from the estate of Col. Tyler, collaborated with another recently purchased enslaved man, Tom, also from Dumfries, to escape en route to their new homes. The four fled while they and their new owners stopped overnight at a

⁵ *Republican Advocate* (Frederick, MD) November 18, 1803.

⁶ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, January 2, 1806.

⁷ "300 Dollars Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 2, 1820.

tavern along the route to Louisa County. Tom had previous experience with flight, albeit a failed attempt. Six months earlier he had escaped after his sale to the Louisa County men but was apprehended in Fairfax. Louisa County slaveowners William Shedd and William Dabney must have traveled together to Fairfax and Dumfries to reclaim Tom and then purchase the three brothers.⁸ Brothers Charles and Joe Cook ran away together from J. L. McKenna's farm located along Broad Run and later were seen "in company with three others who had also absconded" in June of 1834.⁹ Thirty-one year old twin brothers Jesse Murphy and David Murphy left together from the Cedar Run in Prince William County and the service of George Sweeny in March of 1813.¹⁰ Twenty-one year old Isaac and his eighteen year old brother Dennis took a black pony and a small bay horse as they left Zachariah Ward's residence at Occoquan, presumably "endeavor[ing] to get to the northern states."¹¹

When sisters Phillis and Alce ran away from Middleburg, they were accompanied by two enslaved men, Frank and George, whose relationship to the sisters was not described. The foursome fled from two different slaveowners who lived in and near Middleburg, indicating that they had coordinated their escape plan from two different, yet nearby sites.¹² In 1858, a group of seven enslaved men ran away from the Loudoun County estate of Mrs. Mason. Out of this group of seven, four were brothers: Robert, Wilson, Clapham, and Dolphus. Robert and Wilson were described as "very light mulattoes" who "may attempt to pass as white men," while their siblings, Clapham and

⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, December 27, 1821.

⁹ *The Globe*, October 2, 1834.

¹⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 25, 1813.

¹¹ *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, October 4, 1816.

¹² *Alexandria Gazette*, September 10, 1839, microfilm.

Dolphus, were described as “black.” All seven worked as farm hands. Relationships formed through kinship and labor created the trust necessary for this group to embark on their escape, presumably “through the adjacent State of Maryland into Pennsylvania.”¹³ According to information provided by slaveholders in runaway ads, thirty-one runaways fled with a sibling, cousin, or member of an extended kinship network.¹⁴ This signifies the importance of the level of trust between kin as well as the importance of maintaining family ties, even in flight.

Marriage formed another bond that spouses hoped to preserve when husband and wife fled from enslavement together or in coordinated efforts. Eleven known enslaved spousal pairs ran away together from northern Virginia. Tom, a forty-five year old “stout chunky black fellow” and his forty-eight year old wife, Phillis, escaped from the Rectortown neighborhood and the service of Joshua Fletcher in 1806. Their history of having been removed first from “the lower part of this state, near where Counsellor [sic] Carter lived” then to the ownership of George Newman of Centerville who sold them to Valentine Peers in Prince William before Joshua Fletcher took possession of them suggests that at their ages, they could no longer stand the condition of enslavement. Their connections to Carter’s manumitted slaves located across northern Virginia, according to Fletcher, afforded Tom and Phillis an opportunity to attempt to “procure passes and mix with Carter’s freed negroes.” Tom and Phillis’s lived experiences on different plantations and knowledge of the local terrain made it plausible for their master to assume they

¹³ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, April 9, 1858.

¹⁴ This figure does not include siblings who fled under the protection of a parent.

would “make for Fredericksburg or Alexandria” for assistance or shelter, “having some knowledge of both these places.”¹⁵

The sale of Levinah away from her husband Lewis and her desire to preserve what little she could of her family prompted her flight in September 1816, probably to take refuge somewhere near Lewis, who was enslaved near the Manassas Gap in Fauquier County. Lewis’s elopement two months later in November caused speculation that he had both sheltered the pregnant Levinah during the interim and had made preparations for their flight. Lewis’s owner, Benjamin John, speculated that “they may have obtained from some of the free Negroes in the neighbourhood their papers of freedom, or obtained a free pass, and will probably endeavor to pass for free people.”¹⁶ For Levinah and Lewis, the preservation of their marital ties after Levinah’s sale, especially considering her pregnant state and the coming winter weather, created a sense of urgency to flee from enslavement. Yet Lewis’s delay in departing suggests that he might have been under greater scrutiny after his wife’s disappearance; he probably felt the need to take greater care in making preparations and selecting an optimal time for his departure.

Spouses Jacob Wilson and Archy Coleman fled from the Blue Ridge in Loudoun in November 1816.¹⁷ One week after twenty-two year old Moses left from the hired service to Major William Noland in Aldie, an eighteen year old enslaved girl named Ann fled from the Middleburg area and her new owner, Peter Graham. Considering that Ann

¹⁵ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, May 3, 1806.

¹⁶ “100 Dollars Reward,” *Winchester Gazette*, December 7, 1816.

¹⁷ “100 Dollars Reward,” *Winchester Gazette*, December 7, 1816.

has been recently purchased from Noland, it can be speculated that Ann and Moses had some sort of relationship and both decided to run away after Ann's removal.¹⁸ In 1818, after Frederick and his wife absconded from George Noble, a Loudoun County slaveholder, she was "detected in Alexandria" suggesting the pair sought temporary refuge in the busy port town.¹⁹ Spouses Simon and Cely absconded from the Dumfries neighborhood when Cely was "pretty far advanced in pregnancy." Such a bold move would deny slaveholder, Isaac Bridwell, two prime workers (both Simon and Cely were about twenty-one years old) and the future investment and service of their forthcoming child.²⁰

Some spousal pairs coordinated escape plans. After Moses left from the Groveton neighborhood, his abroad wife, Penny, also disappeared from the service of her mistress, Mrs. B. Newman.²¹ Two months after forty year old Emmanuel left the service of Frederick A. Chapman in Fauquier County, his wife also made her escape. Chapman assumed the pair would "attempt to escape to some distant place, perhaps Pennsylvania."²² Thomson Mason's sixteen year old enslaved woman Silvia coordinated

¹⁸ Neither Isabella Hislop (Moses's owner) or Graham mentioned any connection between Moses and Ann, yet the circumstance that both had recently been enslaved at Noland's residence in Aldie and the disappearance of Ann one week after Moses eloped provides some evidence that their escapes were planned or coordinated and signified a bond between the two. For Hislop's runaway advertisement for Moses see "Twenty Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, March 27, 1817. For Graham's advertisement for Ann see "20 Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, April 11, 1817.

¹⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 12, 1819.

²⁰ *Alexandria Herald*, October 27, 1819.

²¹ Elizabeth L. Carter offered a reward of \$50 for the return of Moses and Mrs. B. Newman posted a reward of \$25 for Penny. *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 23, 1837.

²² *Federal Republican*, May 26, 1815.

an escape with her husband, John Jackson, claimed as the property of Mr. Johannah Stark of Charles County, Maryland.²³

After Nelson Talbot Gant, a manumitted man from Loudoun County unsuccessfully attempted to purchase his wife from her owner residing in Leesburg, Gant arranged to meet his wife, Maria, in Washington, D.C. in 1847. From that location Gant planned to take her through Pennsylvania to Ohio where he had established friendly relations with a Quaker family.²⁴ As discussed previously, though enslaved by different slaveholders in Prince William County, husband and wife, Alfred and Ariadne (also known as Ann Taylor), decided to leave Virginia together multiple times between 1836 and 1842.²⁵ Although the ads did not mention children, Ann's age during this period of multiple escape attempts (she was between twenty-two and thirty years old) would suggest that she had possibly borne children and was faced with the prospect of leaving them.

The relatively small number of identifiable spousal pairs or groups formed by kinship were not the only type of alliance that formed among hopeful runaways. As time passed, bonds that facilitated escape developed among seemingly unrelated enslaved

²³ *Genius of Liberty*, June 13, 1820.

²⁴ Nelson Gant later wrote that he had travelled from Ohio via Chambersburg "and from thence directly to Loudoun my old home, and from there to Washington where I met my wife." Letter Nelson T. Gant to F. Julius LeMoyne, June 7, 1847, image, Papers of F. J. LeMoyne, Box A24, Folder 1, Washington County Historical Society, Washington, PA. My thanks to VICJOROB [Victoria Robinson] for identifying the letter in the online article "Registered in the Chancery of Heaven: The Marriage of Nelson Talbot Gant and Anna Maria Hughes," posted on November 27, 2009 and accessed on January 11, 2016 at <<http://vicjorob.blogspot.com/>>. My appreciation and thanks to Washington County (Pennsylvania) Historical Society Curator, Katie West, for providing a copy of the Gant-LeMoyne letter.

²⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 19 December 1836; "Thirty Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 6, 1841; *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 1842.

persons. The growth of these types of groups altered the patterns of runaways across northern Virginia.

Leaving in Unrelated Groups

Runaway advertisements supply evidence of collaboration among enslaved laborers and of the communication networks established throughout the extended enslaved community. Enslaved men formed relationships through the gendered nature of work in the fields and in industrial labor. They also bonded through male subculture rituals of drinking, gambling, and wrestling, according to historian Sergio Lussana, that tested the mettle, comradeship, and exclusivity of the group bonds.²⁶ Lussana found that through homosocial friendship, “enslaved men felt confident enough to trust one another and relay subversive thoughts and information that challenged the system of slavery.”²⁷

Former enslaved man Frederick Douglass recalled his collaboration with co-laborers when he contemplated planning an escape from Maryland in 1835. Although Douglass’s determination to runaway was resolved, he also realized his “fellow-slaves were dear” to him, so Douglass wanted to give them an opportunity to join him. To do so, Douglass “commenced early to ascertain their views and feelings in regard to their condition, and to imbue their minds with thoughts of freedom.”²⁸ After first approaching

²⁶ Sergio Lussana, “No Band of Brothers Could Be More Loving”: Enslaved Male Homosociality, Friendship, and Resistance in the Antebellum American South, *Journal of Social History*, 46, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 872-895.

²⁷ Sergio A. Lussana. *My Brother Slaves: Friendship, Masculinity, and Resistance in the Antebellum South* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 114-115.

²⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*, (1845), 83. Electronic Edition, <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>>. Hereafter referred to as Douglass, *Narrative*.

his co-laborer, Henry, Douglass then went to John and “then to the others” where he found “warm hearts and noble spirits.” Douglass discovered they “were ready to hear, and ready to act when a feasible plan should be proposed” so they “recounted the difficulties, real and imagined, which we should be called on to meet” including the terrible knowledge that “at every gate through which we were to pass, we saw a watchman—at every ferry a guard—on every bridge a sentinel—and in every wood a patrol.”²⁹ Douglass’s motives to collaborate with other enslaved men resulted from the close bonds they had developed working together, yet Douglass decided to approach the men individually to determine their interest and most likely evaluate their willingness to keep plans secret. Still, out of the group of five men, two were kin to Douglass, an uncle by blood and an uncle by marriage, indicating the strength of family ties when contemplating potential running groups.³⁰

Likewise, enslaved men in northern Virginia connected through work or possibly kinship contemplated, planned, and initiated escape attempts. Ned and Andrew joined forces to abscond from their respective Loudoun County owners in 1804.³¹ Gerrard, John Steward, and Jerry combined their resources and talents to run from Turner Dixon and Samuel Adams just after Christmas, 1809.³² Three enslaved men, George, Willis, and Aaron, fled together from the control of Fauquier slaveholder, George Grant in October

²⁹ Douglass, *Narrative*, 84-85.

³⁰ Douglass wrote “[o]ur company then consisted of Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Baily, Charles Roberts, and myself. Henry Baily was my uncle, and belonged to my master. Charles married my aunt: he belonged to my master’s father-in-law, Mr. William Hamilton.” The group was betrayed, though, and John, Henry, and Frederick were taken into custody. Douglass, *Narrative*, 86.

³¹ Thomas Blincoe’s advertisement for Ned, *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, July 11, 1804; William S. Belt’s advertisement for Andrew, *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, July 17, 1804.

³² *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, January 21, 1810.

1810.³³ Aldie slaveowner, Jacob Ish, suspected that his enslaved man, David Wilkins, fled along with a “negro man of Dr. Little’s” late in September, 1819.³⁴ In 1827 Matthew Elgin’s enslaved man Samuel Jackson ran from Loudoun “in company with a negro belonging to John Moss” named Amos Norris.³⁵

After Mary Vandeventer’s enslaved man, Jeremiah Hill, left her residence near Waterford on June 1, 1839, she learned that another runaway, “Capt. Rose’s Peter” had been “lurking about Mr. Braden’s farm, during the past week; and these two men have gone together.” Vandeventer believed that Jeremiah and Peter would “doubtless travel together” and warned the public that “if they should show free papers, they are borrowed or forged.”³⁶ Capt. Rose discovered Peter had run from his hire to William D. Drish in Leesburg on May 26, 1839, so presumably, Peter hid out between Leesburg and Waterford while preparing for further flight and perhaps to convince other slaves like Jeremiah Hill to travel with him. Rose suspected Peter would head towards Belmont County, Ohio, where his newly manumitted wife had been resettled according to the terms of her late master’s will.³⁷

William Lee demonstrated the ability of some enslaved persons to quickly form alliances with other hopeful runaways. Lee had been hired by his owner, William H. Gunnell of Fairfax County, to work in both Fauquier and Loudoun counties during his life and while there Lee had apparently established an “extensive” acquaintance with

³³ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, October 10, 1810.

³⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 11, 1819.

³⁵ For Matthew Elgin’s advertisement for Samuel Jackson see the *Genius of Liberty*, September 8, 1827; For John Moss’s advertisement for Amos Norris see *Genius of Liberty*, September 8, 1827.

³⁶ *Genius of Liberty*, 15 June 1839.

³⁷ *Genius of Liberty*, 15 June 1839.

other bondsmen. In the summer of 1819, during an annual hire to Nelson Hutchison in Warrenton, Lee decided to flee from bondage. Relying on friendships cultivated during previous hires, Lee, described as a “smart, sensible, and very plausible fellow” who “generally smiles,” met up with another unnamed enslaved man near Leesburg in August and the pair headed north. Both were captured a month later, having reached as far north as Bedford, Pennsylvania. By mid-October William Lee was back in Virginia, lodged in the Leesburg jail, yet with the help of three other prisoners, he broke out of jail three days later.³⁸

Afterwards, Lee’s owner, William Gunnell “heard of him making his way towards the back part of Pennsylvania or Ohio in company with a black man of Mr. Cook’s near Leesburg.” Whether or not Lee knew Cook’s man, John Owens, prior to the escape, Lee chose his running companion well, as Owens could read and write.³⁹ The other two escapees from jail followed the pair, “taking the same route.” Gunnell advised potential slave catchers that William Lee would “probably go in the neighborhood of Bedford, Penn. to get his clothes and free papers, which he left in that neighborhood.” Through contacts with others, Lee and his traveling partners had learned that Bedford, Pennsylvania afforded runaways a relatively safe haven. Lee’s first escape attempts were planned as he had acquired forged free papers and adopted a new identity, “John Johnston,” yet his subsequent flight during a prison break appeared to be more opportunistic.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 1, 1820.

³⁹ See also William Cook’s advertisement for John Owens. *Genius of Liberty*, October 26, 1819.

⁴⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 1, 1820.

As time passed, more runaways partnered with others to abscond in groups, perhaps because of a greater sense of security or comradeship developed while traveling with others or under the influence of a leader to join in flight or perhaps for fear of leaving kin behind. This shift did not equate to a steady increase in the number or size of groups. Instead, sudden changes occurred during distinct periods of time, probably from particular conditions of enslavement on a plantation or relative ease or tension between whites and blacks within a neighborhood or possibly from larger forces like political discussions of anti-slavery threats. Analysis of runaway advertisements, newspaper articles, and court documents indicates noticeable periods when groups of two, three, four or more formed and chose to leave northern Virginia (whether due to individual circumstances, favorable opportunities, or a general climate of unease among the enslaved).

Groups of two runaways were fairly common throughout the period from 1800 to 1860.⁴¹ Three duos fled from northern Virginia slaveholders in 1804, 1807, 1809, 1825, and 1834 and four duos fled in 1816, representing high points in the frequency of partner escapes. Known trios were reported irregularly between 1804 and 1820 until a high point of three distinct trios fled in 1830. During the 1830s at least seven trios absconded from northern Virginia.⁴² Other trios left in the 1840s and 50s.⁴³ Out of the twenty-seven trios, eight trios formed as parents absconded with children or when siblings banded together to

⁴¹ Seventy-four duos were identified between 1800 and 1860. Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

⁴² Three trios were indicated in 1830 and one each in 1834, 1836, 1838, and 1839. Over the whole period, advertisements and documents identify twenty-nine trios, fourteen between 1800 and 1830 and fifteen between 1831 and 1860. Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

⁴³ The number of trios reported during this time were one in 1842, two in 1843, one in 1847, 1 in 1849, two in 1855, two in 1856, one in both 1859 and 1860.

escape. The other nineteen were comprised of runaways seemingly unrelated through either marital or kinship ties. The trios formed between persons with unknown relationships (those not identified as spouses, children, siblings, or extended kin) first developed among co-laborers residing or working on the same farm or plantation. After 1819 escape trios formed across two or three neighboring plantations or farms or through chance meetings in camp meetings or in jails.

Groups of four or more runaways were first reported in the early part of the century in 1816 (a family of six), again in 1819 (a group formed when four individual slaves broke out of the Loudoun County jail), in 1822 (a group consisting in part of siblings and extended kin) and in 1828 (a family of four with another individual not identified by relationship). During the 1830s, a decade noted for its increased slave sales, eight companies of four or more runaways traveling together absconded, and five of these groups were comprised of persons with unknown relationships. In November 1834 two enslaved men from the Torbert farm and an enslaved man from the McCormick farm near Warrenton joined with “three or four other negroes” in an escape attempt from Fauquier County.⁴⁴ The following year another large group comprised of seven enslaved men fled from the control of William Gibson near Farrowville, Fauquier County in September 1835.⁴⁵ This change in group composition and size meant that by the 1830s groups of

⁴⁴ Fauquier slaveowners Samuel Torbert and William McCormick advertised jointly for the apprehension of Lee Volentine, Voll Hill, and Charles from the Warrenton neighborhood. They claimed there were “three or four other negroes in company with those above named” when the group fled on Saturday, November 29, 1834. *Winchester Virginian*, January 6, 1835.

⁴⁵ The group included two brothers, Elleck (also identified as Alex) and Robroy. The men fled after breaking into Gibson’s store and taking between \$70 and \$80 in silver suggesting that the timing of the theft and escape had been planned. “700 Dollars Reward,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 12, 1835.

four or more laborers were not only organizing escapes, but also coordinating efforts and movements from across separate and possibly greater distant locations.

The atypical group of twenty-three enslaved persons who fled from the Marshall estate in 1840, as discussed previously, was the largest mass exodus of slaves, consisting presumably of family groups and co-laborers from one plantation, incited by the threat of separation during an estate division. After the Marshall flight, roughly fifteen years passed before slaveholders again reported mass escape attempts in 1855, 1856, and 1858. These so-called “stampedes” of slaves leaving at one time were characterized by slaves with no apparent relationships coordinating escape efforts across multiple plantations.⁴⁶

This data on group composition and size provides evidence that runaways from northern Virginia collaborated, traded knowledge, and shared the risks of elopement first among one trusted co-laborer, with one trusted family member, or with a spouse. The next change in trends occurred when whole families escaped in the 1810s and when extended kin became part of escape plans. Evidence of larger-sized groups escaping during the period of 1816 to 1822 corresponds to the increased forced movements of slaves through sales and household migrations. The increased number of large group escapes during the 1830s reflected the insecurity felt by slaves during a time when slave sales dramatically increased and enslaved populations declined significantly. Therefore, high numbers of group escapes corresponded with periods of more intense sales.

⁴⁶ See “Escape of Slaves from Loudoun,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 18, 1856; “Negro Stampede,” *Leesburg Washingtonian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856; “A Stampede,” in *Baltimore’s Daily Exchange*, April 19, 1858; “Stampede of Slaves,” in *Steubenville, Ohio’s True American*, April 21, 1858; and *The Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*, (Madison, WI) April 24, 1858.

Besides changes in the number of groups, documents also indicate changes in the size and composition of runaway groups and in the ability of enslaved persons to communicate and connect with other slaves across greater distances. Groups of four or more first formed in the 1830s among co-laborers from a single plantation. By the mid-1850s enslaved persons across multiple plantations were coordinating plans for larger scale neighborhood elopements.

When Ludwell ran away from Warrenton and Fauquier slaveowner John W. Tyler in 1854, he “left in company with a slave of Mr. Parr’s of Culpeper County.”⁴⁷ The ability of Ludwell to form a relationship of trust with a slave in another county shows the increasing level of communication across plantations. Six enslaved men left together from the control of Fauquier County slaveholders J. K. Marshall, E. L. S. Marshall and Dr. R. M. Stribling in September of 1856. The owners must have had reason to believe these escapees would travel westward as a particular reward was offered if any of the group were captured in Hampshire County.⁴⁸

That same month a correspondent from Richmond’s *Daily Dispatch* reported that a “stampede of negroes took place” in Loudoun County over a weekend in mid-September with seven enslaved men, a woman, and her three children fleeing from three separate slaveholders, General Rust, Gabriel Vandeventer, and Charles Douglass. The correspondent ventured that “[m]ore may be gone, but it is too early in the day to

⁴⁷ John W. Tyler’s Runaway Broadside, 1854. Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, <<http://smallnotes.library.virginia.edu/2013/12/16/r-is-for/>>.

⁴⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 16, 1856. The *National Era* noted that in early October 1856 “eight runaway slaves from Fauquier county, Va., were arrested in Hampshire County, Va.,” quite possibly the men who left the service of the Marshalls and Dr. Stribling. The article also noted that they were captured “after a stout resistance by one of them, who had a gun and a butcher’s knife.” *National Era*, October 9, 1856.

ascertain the fact.”⁴⁹ The Leesburg *Washingtonian* provided additional information about the mass escape, reporting that on a Saturday night in mid-September, 1856,

a party of negroes, numbering from fifteen to twenty [made] their escape from this town and neighborhood. The plan of escape must have been carefully arranged, as we learn that a common point of meeting was agreed upon. Large rewards have been offered, and we trust that they maybe speedily apprehended.⁵⁰

County records indicated that some of the large group had been apprehended shortly after the escape. The *Washingtonian* also noted that since the publication of the first notice of the mass escape, “we learn that a negro, the property of Gen. Rust, was captured near Martinsburg [in nearby Berkeley County, Virginia], he having gone estray from the rest of the party.”⁵¹ Slave catcher, Luther B. Kurtz, affirmed he arrested “certain negro slaves named Eliza, Phillis and Fanny fugitives from labor” on September 24, 1856 in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, less than two weeks after the mass exodus and delivered them to the jail in Washington County, Maryland.⁵²

Despite the limited success of the escape attempt, such a mass exodus that was “carefully arranged” and included agreement on “a common point of meeting” indicated

⁴⁹ *The Daily Dispatch*, September 17, 1856.

⁵⁰ The Leesburg *Washingtonian*, as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

⁵¹ The Leesburg *Washingtonian*, as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

⁵² Kurtz then must have publicized his find and learned that Loudoun County slaveholder, Charles Douglas, claimed the three females as his property. Kurtz then transported Eliza, Phillis, and Fanny back to Douglas and appeared in the Loudoun County Court along with slaveholder, Douglas, who identified Eliza, Phillis, and Fanny. Kurtz’s testimony in the Loudoun Court affirmed his part in the reclamation, thus entitling him to claim his reward from the State of Virginia. “Agreement between Charles Douglas and Luther B. Kurtz,” Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1857-02, LCHAD. Kurtz also apprehended Austin, an enslaved man belonging to Susan R. Saunders of Frederick County, Virginia in Franklin County, Pennsylvania on the same day as he captured Eliza, Phillis, and Fanny, suggesting some connection between Austin and Eliza and the girls. “Agreement Between J. H. Carson, agent, and Luther B. Kurtz,” Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1857-01, LCHAD.

much more than a spontaneous decision to flee.⁵³ The fact that some group members were later located in Pennsylvania, directly north of Loudoun County proved that they did not plan a temporary reprieve, but a desire to seek permanent freedom. This coordinated effort across multiple plantations in Loudoun County involved many individuals and at least one known family group, each entrusted with the secret of the escape plan.

Reports of stampedes continued as the decade progressed. Seven men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years old, including four brothers, left together from the Mason plantation located near the Potomac River opposite Point of Rocks, Maryland in April of 1858.⁵⁴ The *True American* newspaper of Steubenville, Ohio picked up the advertisement and other news from the *Baltimore Sun*, and commented that a “stampede of slaves” had fled “from the border valley counties of Virginia” including the seven from the Mason plantation and “two from Berkley county” with the supposition “that others have also gone” from the region.⁵⁵ Baltimore’s *The Daily Exchange* reported in April of 1858 that “seven negro men in Loudoun county, Va., belonging to Dr. J. F. West, decamped one night last week, since which time nothing has been heard of them” hinting also to the crescendo of unrest experienced among the enslaved in northern Virginia in the late 1850s.⁵⁶

In affidavits later submitted to the County Court, five Loudoun slaveholders complained that at least five men ran from Loudoun County on the same day, June 19,

⁵³ The Leesburg *Washingtonian*, as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

⁵⁴ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, April 9, 1858.

⁵⁵ *True American*, April 21, 1858.

⁵⁶ *The Daily Exchange*, April 19, 1858.

1858. Charles, approximately twenty-three years old, escaped from the estate of George Rust located in Loudoun County.⁵⁷ John Jackson, a twenty-year old enslaved man described as “rather pleasant when spoken to” fled from his service to Loudoun slaveholder, William Wenner.⁵⁸ Catherine Hickman, a Loudoun County slave mistress, appeared in court to report her twenty-three year old enslaved man, James Downey had also left on the nineteenth of June.⁵⁹ Robert L. Wright claimed his twenty-eight year old enslaved man named Arch escaped on June 19, 1858 from Loudoun County.⁶⁰ Fairfax County slaveowner, James Coleman, affirmed that while hired to Loudoun resident James Adams, Coleman’s thirty-two year old enslaved man, Jim, also fled from service and labor on June 19, 1858.⁶¹ Despite the length of time between elopement in June of 1858 and court testimony provided by the five owners in January and February, 1860, each owner cited the same date as the time of departure suggesting that the five enslaved men coordinated their escape efforts from across multiple plantations. In fact they were so successful that nearly two years later they still remained free.

The growth of unrelated runaways coordinating escapes across the region cannot alone reveal how potential runaways identified, met, or communicated with other enslaved persons considering escape from bondage. Family connections across plantations, short term hires, social or religious gatherings, and even incarceration brought slaves from disparate locations into contact with others. As shown in the next

⁵⁷ “Promiscuous orders of January Term 1860,” Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1860-02, LCHAD.

⁵⁸ “Catherine Hickman & Wm Wenner, Application,” Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1860-03, LCHAD.

⁵⁹ Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1860-05, LCHAD.

⁶⁰ “Promiscuous Orders of January Term, 1860 [Arch],” Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1860-04, LCHAD.

⁶¹ “James Coleman’s Application,” Loudoun County Court Slave Papers, Box 14, 1860-07, LCHAD.

section, some runaways took advantage of these opportunities to cultivate bonds, exchange information, or make plans for escape.

Camp Meetings

Local religious camp meetings introduced some enslaved persons to other diverse, often distant locations. Camp meetings generally occurred for four to five days between the middle of August and the early part of September in various locations across northern Virginia, though some actually lasted a week or more. Annual meetings held near Warrenton, Salem, Rectortown, Waterford, Leesburg, Middleburg, Dumfries, or Centerville in nearby Fairfax County drew large crowds from across the region and as far away as Maryland or the District of Columbia with special transports conveying attendees to the event and back home.⁶² Congregants could exchange information, plan escapes, or offer assistance to hopeful runaways.

⁶² See various newspaper articles for dates and locations of local camp meetings. For example, the Warrenton Circuit held its meeting starting on September 2, 1836 four miles north of Warrenton while the Loudoun Circuit began its summer meeting on August 18, 1836 “between Rectortown and Cool Spring” on Mr. Buckner’s land. The Culpeper Baptist Camp Meeting was scheduled for August 23, 1836 at a location three miles west of Jeffersonton. Another Baptist Camp Meeting was planned for “the Friday before the second Sunday in September” that year located four miles from Salem “on the road to Middleburg.” *The Jeffersonian*, August 13, 1836, microfilm. A camp meeting near Waterford was held starting August 20, 1840. *Virginia Free Press*, August 12, 1841. In 1846 a camp meeting was held three miles south west of Leesburg at the end of August. *The Washingtonian*, July 25, 1846, microfilm. The Loudoun Circuit held a camp meeting just north of Middleburg beginning the 20th of August, 1847. *Spirit of Jefferson*, August 13, 1847. In 1852 camp meetings were held near Harmony and Middleburg during the latter part of August. Members of the Middleburg committee noted that “the encampment will consist of several hundred tents” giving some indication of the size of the gatherings. *The Washingtonian*, August 20, 1852, microfilm. Meetings were also held in September as a “Religious Meeting” scheduled to last four to five days took place near Hillsborough starting September 25, 1840. *Virginia Free Press*, September 17, 1840. An advertisement for the camp meeting held on Brawner’s land in Prince William County near Dumfries informed potential congregants that the location was “about twenty miles down the river” from Alexandria and “one mile from the landing.” Organizers provided “conveyances...at the landing to convey passengers and their baggage to the campground.” *Alexandria Gazette*, August 9, 1852, microfilm. To accommodate anticipated crowds attending the Dumfries camp meeting, the steamer *G. W. P. Custis* offered direct service

Describing the camp meeting held in Fauquier in summer 1859, L. Allan stated “the meeting house has been crowded all the time, last Sunday it was thought there was 800 persons.”⁶³ An observer at a Methodist Church South camp meeting in Fauquier in 1857 estimated that there “could not have been less than 2000 present.”⁶⁴ Mingling amongst such a crowd, slaves could use the opportunity afforded by the religious fervor of camp meetings to engage with other enslaved persons, exchange information about terrain, make connections, and escape. Enslaved men Isaac Burwell and Charles “eloped in the time of the Camp Meeting in Loudoun county” from their residences near Upperville around the 12th of September, 1825, according to their respective owners, Elizabeth Baker and her “near neighbor,” George Noble. Charles, at age thirty, had already attempted an unsuccessful escape three years prior but had been apprehended in Cumberland, Maryland. This experience made him a valuable companion for twenty-seven year old Isaac and their owners believed that both would attempt to disguise their appearances to escape detection.⁶⁵ Charles and Isaac used the opportunity of the crowds gathering at a local a camp meeting to escape from enslavement.⁶⁶

to and from Washington DC with a stopover in Alexandria for the duration of the camp meeting. Fare was fifty cents. *Alexandria Gazette*, August 16, 1852, microfilm.

⁶³ Letter from L. Allan, Oakley, Fauquier County, to his son,” August 13, 1859, Accession #4072, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Virginia, photostat.

⁶⁴ “Camp Meeting,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 14, 1857.

⁶⁵ One of Charles’s distinctive features were his “tolerable large whiskers” yet in his previous escape, Charles shaved off his whiskers and Noble assumed he would do the same again during this escape. The owners also admitted a “description of the clothes of the above named servants is thought unnecessary, as it is probable they will change them, as well as that of their names,” recognizing the use of false identities and altered appearances to reduce notice. *Alexandria Gazette*, September 27, 1825.

⁶⁶ Noble continued searching for the men. Nearly four years after their disappearance Noble turned his attention towards Ohio where he believed the pair had settled and where he believed another runaway, Frederick, would find asylum. “Look Sharp! To the Jailors, Constables, and other of the State of Ohio, and elsewhere,” *The Ohio State Journal and Columbus Gazette*, February 26, 1829. See also two ads for Frederick, “Attention!” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 1, 1829; and “Attention! - \$50 Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 15, 1829.

Robert Richards eloped from Daniel Payne's residence in Fauquier County in August 1830 supposedly "in company with several others who made their escape at the same time," including Frank, an enslaved man from a neighborhood along the border of Prince William and Fauquier counties.⁶⁷ Thomas Foster, agent for Frank's owner, believed the three had "made for Pennsylvania, either by Winchester or Leesburg" and requested residents along that route to "be vigilant."⁶⁸ Shortly after their disappearance, Richards was spotted at the Camp Meeting held in Warrenton. Richards' appearance at a Camp Meeting suggests that some escapes were timed in conjunction with these large scale gatherings. Such was the case when Caesar, a twenty-two year old, fled from Brenton in Prince William County on August 11, 1809. Caesar blended into "a crowd of negroes returning [to Washington DC] from the camp meeting held in Fairfax County" and took advantage of the large group to travel virtually unnoticed.⁶⁹

The relative lack of supervision at camp meetings, throngs of people, and multiple groups arriving and departing made camp meetings an opportune time for gathering information or running away.⁷⁰ Evidence of slaves using these events to coordinate plans and seek assistance demonstrates their initiative in establishing and developing communication networks across northern Virginia. Yet cultivating partnerships and exchanging information comprised only one aspect of preparation for an escape. Many

⁶⁷ Daniel Payne reported the elopement of his servant, Robert Richards. *United States' Telegraph*, September 8, 1830; Pearson Chapman's agent, Thomas Foster advertised for the capture and return of Frank. *United States' Telegraph*, September 10, 1830.

⁶⁸ *United States' Telegraph*, September 10, 1830.

⁶⁹ *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, November 6, 1809.

⁷⁰ In at least one case, a camp meeting proved an opportunity for abolitionist activity. In 1843 an Englishman, William Wall, was arrested on charges that he was "disseminating incendiary publications an inflaming and exciting the slaves against heir masters" among camp meeting congregants in Allegany County, Maryland. *Alexandria Gazette*, August 26, 1843, microfilm.

future runaways also gathered particular supplies and documents to aid in their attempt at self-emancipation.

Preparations for Long-Term Escape: acquiring passes or free papers

Evidence from runaway advertisements indicates that many runaways prepared in advance for a future escape by gathering necessary supplies and constructing a plausible new identity as discussed in the previous chapter. More challenging preparations included acquiring important documents. To facilitate movement across a terrain monitored by slave patrols, observant residents, or local constabularies, some slaves crafted forged passes or freedom certificates (also called free papers) or acquired them through purchase or by borrowing them from acquaintances, friends, family, or entrepreneurs in the illicit document trade. A growing network of communication and assistance provided by area slaves, free blacks, and sympathetic (or business-minded) whites facilitated these preparations. Over time, forged passes and free papers enabled many northern Virginia slaves to pass through patrols and the scrutiny of concerned citizens.

Some slaveholders feared literate slaves manufactured their own passes or free papers. John Chinn believed his “excellent blacksmith,” Tom Macmillion (sic) possessed forged free papers as Chinn thought Macmillion could read and write and therefore could produce a fairly respectable facsimile of free papers.⁷¹ Runaway George Posey was “capable of writing” and his owner, Thomas Golding recalled Posey had “endeavored to get a piece of paper from some of [his owner’s] family” so Golding assumed it was

⁷¹ *Genius of Liberty*, January 31, 1835.

“possible that he may have written a pass for himself” to assist in Posey’s escape from Golding’s mill located near Dumfries.⁷² According to slaveowner, George Hosselbeck, fugitive Sam Smith of Loudoun “reads and writes a good hand, and will no doubt forge himself a pass.”⁷³ Admitting that his escaped slave Ephraim could “write tolerably well,” Loudoun slaveholder William H. Leach believed that Ephraim had “probably forged a pass” to help in his escape.⁷⁴

Despite Virginia laws prohibiting the education of slaves and free blacks, these runaways demonstrated the ability of enslaved persons to acquire literacy skills. Free black John Malvin recalled how he learned to read despite the legal restrictions. Malvin, son of a free black woman from Dumfries and an enslaved man residing in Warrenton, became acquainted with “an old slave who was past labor” who lived only three miles from Malvin. Malvin noted that the enslaved man “could read the Bible quite readily” and had “by some means” learned how to read. Fearing the potential punishment if caught, both men “did not dare to talk loud” and commenced teaching and learning late at night via hushed whispers.⁷⁵

Literacy enabled some slaves to create passes or papers plausible enough to convince patrols, slave catchers, constables, or concerned citizens to allow unmolested passage. Even slaves without literacy skills were believed capable of procuring documents from literate, sympathetic, entrepreneurial, or gullible whites or free blacks to

⁷² *Alexandria Gazette*, August 22, 1851.

⁷³ *Alexandria Herald*, September 18, 1815.

⁷⁴ *Genius of Liberty*, January 20, 1817.

⁷⁵ Allan Peskin, intro. *North Into Freedom: The Autobiography of John Malvin, Free Negro, 1795-1880* (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 34.

assist in their escape.⁷⁶ The ability of enslaved persons to acquire counterfeit papers came as no surprise to some slaveholders who included information about forged papers and passes in their advertisements.

Even more alarming for slaveholders was the possibility that forged passes could be acquired by hopeful runaways in the neighborhood or local area. An “artful fellow” named Henson acquired a forged pass during his first escape attempt in the spring of 1800. When he attempted another escape one month later, his owner assumed Henson would try again to “pass as a free man” after leaving the Dumfries neighborhood.⁷⁷ After Moses and Eve ran from Occoquan and their owner, William Davis, in 1813, Davis presumed that “the said Negroes will attempt to go to one of the northern states, for which purpose I have been informed Moses has procured a pass.”⁷⁸ Warrenton area resident Armistead Utterback asserted that it was “very likely” his escaped enslaved man, Alfred, had “obtained free papers” and was “trying to force his way into a free State.”⁷⁹ Loudoun slaveowner Jacob Ish admitted he was “apprehensive” his escaped enslaved man David Wilkins had “obtained a pass in the neighborhood, and [had] made for some of the northern states.”⁸⁰ Fauquier slaveowner, John Scott, believed his escaped slave John had “provided himself with forged papers attesting his freedom, and will endeavor

⁷⁶ Landon Phillips, a free black who helped two slaves escape, attempted to acquire a pass from his white neighbor, Daniel Baker, for one of his enslaved traveling companions. By relying on an acquaintance cultivated with a white man Landon Phillips hoped he could obtain the desired papers thinking it would enable the group to move unmolested as far as possible. *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips*, Loudoun County Free Blacks 1845-012, LCHAD.

⁷⁷ *The Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, (Alexandria, VA) July 5, 1800.

⁷⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, July 1, 1813

⁷⁹ *The Globe*, August 2, 1836.

⁸⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 11, 1819.

to reach one of the States North of Maryland.”⁸¹ Runaway Sandy Elgin probably “procured free papers of some slave answering his description” in order to “get to some of the Northern States” according to his Fauquier owner, John L. Fant.⁸² After Sam and Peter left from the service of Charles Hunton in April of 1853 and did not return, Hunton admitted “the presumption is that they are traveling with free papers, obtained from free negroes in this county or have forged ones.” Apparently, Hunton believed that forged papers enabled Sam and Peter to avoid detection and requested “any person disposed to take them up” to carefully scrutinize and detect the counterfeit nature of any papers Sam and Peter might produce.⁸³

This aspect of the runaway’s flight has received little scholarly attention except in descriptions of singular cases, but one major study concluded that “it was not easy to obtain forged papers” and that while field hands “occasionally” could acquire forged free papers or passes, it was more likely for urban slaves to procure such papers and use them to locate hired-out work.⁸⁴ Information gathered from northern Virginia advertisements shows that slaveholders suspected only sixty-four of the 763 advertised runaways fled with forged or acquired freedom certificates or passes; twelve departing specifically from villages or towns – Occoquan, Dumfries, Warrenton, and Leesburg.⁸⁵ Out of the ads that included information about passes or free papers, servants eloping from masters living

⁸¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 28, 1834.

⁸² *The (Washington) Globe*, July 1, 1833.

⁸³ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, April 26, 1853.

⁸⁴ Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 230.

⁸⁵ Isaac left from Occoquan, *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 13, 1817. David, Isham, and Sandy Elgin ran from Warrenton, *Genius of Liberty*, December 19, 1819; *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 2, 1829; and *The (Washington) Globe*, July 1, 1833. Matilda and Maria eloped from Leesburg, *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 22, 1827.

near the villages of Aldie, Brentsville, Haymarket, Hillsborough, Rectortown, and Thoroughfare or from the vicinity of the larger towns of Leesburg, Warrenton, or Waterford comprised the largest group of runaways considered to have obtained such papers compared to those who fled from residences *in* these locations or from rural areas located *away from* relatively urban areas (see figure 62). Location of residence, therefore, did influence the perception of slaveholders about how a slave might contrive an escape, yet rural residence did not absolutely hinder the ability of potential runaways to acquire forged documents.

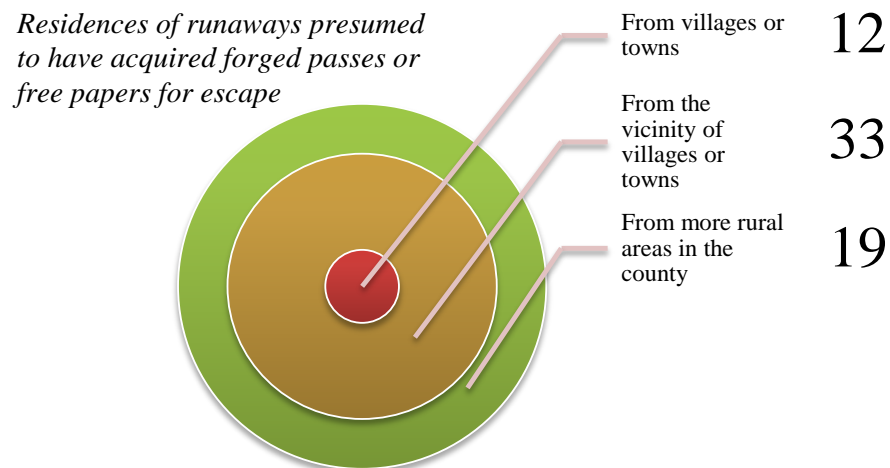


Figure 62. Number of enslaved persons likely to obtain free papers or passes compared to proximity to villages or towns.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Unlike the findings from Franklin and Schweninger, the presumed purpose of the papers, as stated by northern Virginia slaveholders in advertisements, was not to obtain

work as a free person, but rather to facilitate movement to a free state.⁸⁶ This further confirms that northern Virginia runaways tended to seek a more permanent escape from enslavement rather than a temporary respite from punishment. This information also suggests that proximity to greater concentrations of enslaved persons or access to larger cities facilitated procurement of passes or freedom certificates, enabling slaves not only residing in urban or town areas, but also those located close to cities access to papers and passes.

Both enslaved and slaveowners understood an underground market for producing, selling, or “borrowing” forged or actual free papers flourished in northern Virginia, handled on an individual basis and made possible by the cautious sharing of information between the enslaved, free blacks, and sympathetic whites. Captured fugitive William Harris had in his possession a pass from Charles Binns, Clerk of Loudoun County, but jailor Alexander Neill of Washington County, Maryland suspected the pass was “no doubt” a forgery.⁸⁷ Loudoun slaveowner John Hutchison reported that his runaway slave woman, Eliza, had “by some means, procured a pass to go about and get work where she thinks proper,” during her escape in July 1832. The pass appeared to be a forgery “with

⁸⁶ Franklin and Schweninger stated “it was usually city slaves who obtained papers and attempted to pose either as self-hired slaves or free blacks.” Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 230. For examples of proximal residence and likelihood of acquiring passes or free papers see runaway slave advertisements in *Genius of Liberty*, August 5, 1820; *Genius of Liberty*, May 25, 1839. *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 9, 1825; *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 18, 1826; *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 24, 1826; *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 28, 1834; *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 29, 1841. *The Emancipator*, April 4, 1839; *The Emancipator*, December 5, 1839. *Alexandria Gazette*, November 19, 1841.

⁸⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 22, 1825.

no name signed to it, which is said to be poorly executed” yet it enabled Eliza to reach Alexandria a few days later.⁸⁸

Enslaved servant Mark acquired free papers for his first attempt at escape from enslavement in Prince William County, papers that facilitated his flight as far northeast as Bel Air, Maryland where he was apprehended and “brought home.” Shortly after his return to the Old Dominion, Mark fled again and his owner, Jacob Weaver, theorized that it was “very probable” that Mark had “obtained other free papers” and for this second attempt would be “making his way to Pennsylvania or Ohio.”⁸⁹ By the age of twenty-seven, Mark apparently knew contacts to acquire forged freedom certificates from his residence along the Cedar Run and he had the freedom of mobility to connect with suppliers.

Enslaved man, Anthony Williams, made his escape while using a pass to move to and from his neighborhood near Upperville in Loudoun County to Fairfax Court House that his owner, Charles L. Powell, granted. Powell later received information that induced him to believe Williams had “procured a pass intended for another slave named Daniel, authorizing his passage to and return from Baltimore,” and valid for six to eight days after April 2, 1831 from a start point of White Chimneys in Loudoun County. From this information and “from Anthony’s former habits, (having been a sailor),” Powell surmised that Anthony intended to go to Baltimore “or some other seaport” where he might find “employment on the wharf or on board of some ship...[or] that he may be employed on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.” Powell did not doubt the existence of an illicit trade in

⁸⁸ “Fifteen Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, July 24, 1843.

⁸⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer* May 30, 1836.

slave passes. To hinder Williams's or some other slave's chances of using the described passes, Powell noted that he "expected that any passes in his [Williams's] possession [upon] his apprehension will be promptly secured."⁹⁰

In 1809 slaveholder Samuel Ashby accused Fauquier County physician, George Leitch, of providing Ashby's enslaved man, Will, with forged free papers. The language of the charges indicates the legal sentiment towards the crime during the early part of the century as it claimed Leitch did "wickedly, maliciously, unlawfully, and knowingly" forge a certificate "without the consent or approbation of the said Ashby" that purported Ashby's servant Will had been manumitted by Patty and Andrew Chunn.⁹¹ Will used the counterfeit free papers to pass as a free man before his apparent capture. Will's relationship with Leitch was not specified in court documents but it could have resulted from Leitch's anti-slavery sentiments or merely the outcome of a financial arrangement to provide papers in exchange for payment.

Sometime before his capture in Berkeley County, Virginia in 1798, Will, a man enslaved to Samuel Porter, claimed he purchased a freedom certificate from Benjamin Pierce. In 1793 Pierce had received a paper attesting he had "served his time" with George Gordain and had "behaved himself throughout the whole of his servitude as an honest industrious trusty servant," suggesting that Pierce had been indented to Gordain or perhaps had been manumitted. The severity of the charges Pierce faced for providing Will with his pass were described as a "malicious and fraudulent intention to deprive

⁹⁰ "\$30 Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 28, 1831.

⁹¹ *Commonwealth v. George Leitch (or Leach)*, Fauquier County Free and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #6, 1809-012, AAHA.

Samuel Porter of the services of one Negro Slave” while Pierce’s actions constituted an “evil example of all slaves.” Pierce was found guilty and ordered to pay damages in the suit.⁹²

Friends and kin comprised another source for forged or borrowed papers. After Henry ran away from the Hillsborough neighborhood in 1820, his slaveowner, Lewis Ellzey, suspected that Henry would

probably pass by the name of SAM JACKSON, and shew papers from the county court of Loudoun, proving his freedom; as his brother of that name who is suspected of having persuaded him away, has lately obtained his freedom in that court.⁹³

Clearly Ellzey distrusted the influence of Henry’s freed brother and opined a strong possibility that Sam would loan his pass to help his brother find freedom.

An 1837 court case from nearby Alexandria offers some clarity about the process potential runaways employed in acquiring forged court papers and confirmed Hunton’s suspicions that runaways could acquire free papers “from free negroes.” The United States Circuit Court for the District of Columbia found Joseph Farrell, a free black who for “many years” acted as “a preacher and the keeper of a school in the town of Alexandria for the instruction of colored children,” guilty of two different counts of “forging a certificate of freedom purporting to have been issued by the County Court of Prince William.”⁹⁴ For the first offense of providing a forged freedom certificate to Sandy, a slave belonging to Thomson Mason of Fairfax County, Farrell was sentenced on

⁹² *Commonwealth v. Ben Pierce*, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Ended Causes, Box #4, 1799-008, AAHA.

⁹³ *Genius of Liberty*, September 5, 1820.

⁹⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, October 17, 1837, microfilm.

May 13, 1837 to four years in prison.⁹⁵ After Farrell was convicted, a second slave from Mason's plantation named Sam was also found carrying a similarly forged certificate. The handwriting was proved to be that of Farrell's "by the oath of a gentleman residing in town who had seen him write." After Sam's capture, the runaway told prosecutors that Farrell had apparently sold him the forged document "for the consideration of four dollars."⁹⁶ Farrell's second conviction added an additional three years to his imprisonment.⁹⁷

According to descriptions of the forged document, the seal of Prince William and document heading were "tolerably well executed," yet the "stiff and labored" handwriting, even though deemed "perfectly distinct" featured a crucial error – "the name of the presiding justice, Mr. Ewell, was spelled Uile." Farrell's particular knowledge of the form and style of Prince William County free papers as well as his knowledge of at least one currently-serving court magistrate (Charles Ewell) enabled him to assist slaves in their quest for freedom. Information about Farrell's illicit skills apparently traveled among enslaved persons living nearby, perhaps during opportune moments when Farrell served as minister to the black community. Obviously the forger had seen such papers in the past and was skillful enough in typography to recreate the detailed county seal and formulaic wording of a legal document.

⁹⁵ Hilary Russell, "Underground Railroad Activists in Washington, D.C.," *Washington History*, 13, no. 2 (Fall / Winter, 2001/2002), 44, 46.

⁹⁶ *Alexandria Gazette*, October 17, 1837, microfilm.

⁹⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, October 17, 1837, microfilm; *United States v. Negro Joseph Farrell*, William Cranch, *Reports of Cases Civil and Criminal in the United States Circuit Court of the District of Columbia, from 1801 to 1841 in Six Volumes, Volume V* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1853), 311-312. See also Hilary Russell, "Underground Railroad Activists in Washington, D.C.," *Washington History*, 13, no. 2 (Fall / Winter, 2001/2002): 28-49, especially 44-46.

Dr. Leitch, Benjamin Pierce, and Joseph Farrell were not the only ones capable or suspected of creating plausible forged documents. In 1834 a free black laborer named Hendley Besick (also known as Hendley Jones) was charged with the crime of “having feloniously delivered to some slave a copy of the register, or certificate of his freedom signed by the clerk of the county court of Loudoun.” Besick was required to post \$400 bond for his appearance in court, which signified the importance the court placed on this trial and Besick’s appearance to answer charges. He was later acquitted of the charges.⁹⁸ In 1849 one newspaper article noted that “quite a number of slaves have lately fled from Loudo[u]n county” and “when some of them were arrested they produced well executed free papers, which proved to be forged.”⁹⁹ As time went by, northern Virginians grew more and more suspicious of the free blacks residing in the area, not only for their example of living as free persons of color, but also for their culpability in assisting enslaved persons to escape.

In 1847 citizens of Fauquier and Loudoun counties submitted a petition to the Virginia Legislature asking for revisions to the “defective and inadequate” laws regarding the residence of free Negroes in Virginia. In particular, petitioners noted that

their [free blacks’] intercourse (generally) with the slave, is at once destructive of his comfort & happiness, and eminently injurious to the Interest of his master— That in many instances, the privilege of residence has been abused, by their lending their aid, in the escape of slaves...¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Besick was assisted in posting bond by John Simpson, a farrower also residing in Loudoun County. Loudoun County Clerk of Court, *Commonwealth v. Hendley Besick, also called Hendley Jones*, Loudoun County Criminal Cases 1834-011, LCHAD.

⁹⁹ “Absconding Slaves,” from the *Baltimore Clipper* as cited in *The North Star*, June 22, 1849.

¹⁰⁰ While only eight signatures remain in the petition documents, the clerk noted a total of twenty-eight petitioners on the petition wrapper. “Citizens of Loudoun & Fauquier: Petition,” Loudoun County, Virginia, 1847 December 10, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. Emphasis in the original.

In this petition, white citizens equated black residency as a privilege that any interference with enslaved property abrogated. While it is tempting to believe that free persons of color would not hesitate to assist the enslaved in their efforts to gain freedom, this cannot be assumed.

Aware of the risks to reputation and residence, the decision for a free black to lend or acquire forged papers on behalf of an escaping slave was not taken lightly. Harriet Johnson, a free woman of color in Prince William County, accused Tacey, an enslaved woman owned by Col. John Gibson, of stealing the free papers of Johnson and her daughter, Margaret. Rather than keeping the valuable free papers on her person, as was expected, Johnson had secured them in a trunk in her home along with her other prized possessions including “3 letters & fifty cents in small change, 3 callico dresses, 1 shirt, 1 white flannel petticoat belonging to another person sent to wash, 2 yds domestic cotton & 1 apron.” Tacey knew that Johnson’s trunk contained valuable documents and clothing that would be helpful in disguising a runaway.

Johnson elected to press charges against Tacey thereby removing Johnson from suspicion of collusion should Tacey attempt an escape and make use of Harriet’s free papers. Johnson reported the theft to Prince William Justice of the Peace, W. S. Colquhoun, who swore out a warrant for Tacey’s arrest. Clearly, Johnson valued her standing in the community as a free person and the fragile freedom guaranteed to her and

her daughter by the precious free papers more than any loyalty to Tacey.¹⁰¹ If potential runaways could not acquire papers through forgery or via an amanuensis, a possibility existed of gaining papers by theft.

Navigating familiar and unfamiliar terrain

Besides carrying documents, changing clothes, and acquiring speedy transportation as discussed in the previous chapter, runaways also collected information about routes and hazards prior to an escape attempt. The level of mobility experienced by some slaves created opportunities for learning about the byways north and potential points of refuge, whether through personal experience or from other better traveled slaves.

Experience on the roadways enabled some fugitives to navigate terrain outside of the usual neighborhood. Jack, an enslaved man claimed by William Hampton of Loudoun County, was described by Hampton as “not very sprightly,” but his experiences “having driven a team to Alexandria frequently” made him “well acquainted in that place and on the road.” These factors induced Hampton to believe that after Jack’s escape before Christmas 1830 Jack would “not want for facilities in secreting himself.”¹⁰² Jack’s

¹⁰¹ Colquhoun sent Constable W. H. Norville to take the accused slave into custody, but instead of placing Tacey in the jail, Norville “told her to go & get the stolen goods.” Tacey apparently agreed to Norville’s command and said “she would go along with him in the woods & look for them” not denying nor admitting to the charge of theft, but giving the impression that she knew the location of the trunk, papers, and clothing. Norville decided to let Tacey “go by herself & get them & bring them to town,” a plan agreed to by Tacey. Norville then “left her to go & look but she failed to come as promised.” The court case proceeded and then was dismissed at the next monthly court without any further explanation in the clerk of court’s records of Tacey’s disappearance or the fate of the free papers. Prince William County Clerk of Court, *Commonwealth v. Tacey*, Clerk’s Loose Papers LP 01181_00475 (online).

¹⁰² “Seventy-five Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 25, 1831.

experiences as a driver across Loudoun County to Alexandria afforded him opportunities to network with other persons who could potentially aid him in his escape.

Enslaved man Essex gained knowledge of roadways and thruways as a “wagoneer on the road to Alexandria” from his home at Mont Blanc in Fauquier County. After his escape in 1831, owner J. Marshall guessed Essex would “probably make for that place [Alexandria],” although Marshall could not discount the possibility that Essex had headed in a northwesterly route towards “the counties in the Valley” as he “may be making his way to Maryland or Pennsylvania” through a westerly route rather than eastward via Alexandria.¹⁰³ Escaped slave Sanford had also served as a wagoneer and from his direction of travel, owner James Lake asserted it was “probable that he made his way [from Upperville in Fauquier County] to Pennsylvania, through the neighborhood of Fredericktown, or Hagerstown.”¹⁰⁴ Essex and Sanford could draw upon their experiences as wagoners meeting and trading information with other mobile slaves or free blacks, identifying potential routes, persons willing to provide assistance, and noting heavily scrutinized areas in order to analyze potential escape options.

The nature of enslavement in northern Virginia created opportunities for some slaves to learn and transmit knowledge about the terrain. Bob & Harry travelled often from their residence at Evergreen in Prince William to nearby Aldie in Loudoun on business for their slaveowner, Edmund Berkeley. Such experiences may have encouraged

¹⁰³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 5, 1831.

¹⁰⁴ *United States Telegraph*, February 16, 1830.

Bob to run away.¹⁰⁵ Enslaved sailors working from John Tayloe III's "Neabsco" plantation in Prince William could travel up and down the Potomac to Norfolk, Alexandria, Baltimore or Port Tobacco, Maryland on Tayloe's fleet of ships, gathering information about the cities and wharf areas.¹⁰⁶ Trusted enslaved servants could travel to distant locations on business for their slaveowners. Slaves belonging to the estate of Thomas Colston were sent northward from Loudoun to Berkeley County (West) Virginia to deliver clothing to Colston's daughters away at school.¹⁰⁷

The ability of enslaved persons, especially men, to gain positions of trust from their slaveowners increased their mobility. As seen, this mobility could be parlayed into strategic opportunities for reconnoitering passages and potential avenues of escape. The knowledge gained from these ventures aided when seeking self-emancipation or when assisting other runaways.

Many potential land and water routes existed for escaping slaves to flee from northern Virginia. Masters based their suspicions of potential escape routes on information gathered about slaves' families and social networks as well as information collected from patrols, slave catchers, and observant citizens. Main routes of escape out of northern Virginia according to slaveholders lay in northeasterly, northward, and northwestwardly directions.

¹⁰⁵ *Prince William County, Virginia: Edmund Berkeley's Evergreen Farm Day Book, 1851-1855* trans. Ronald Ray Turner (Manassas, Virginia: Ronald Ray Turner, 2003), 61, 63. Bob ran away on January 30, 1854, probably to escape punishment and was captured in nearby Fairfax County within a day.

¹⁰⁶ Laura Croghan Kamoie, *Irons in the Fire: The Business History of the Tayloe Family and Virginia's Gentry, 1700-1860* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 116.

¹⁰⁷ The estate administrator paid \$3.00 for the expenses associated with the trip "to Berkeley to take dresses to girls." "The Heirs of Thomas M. Colston dec'd In Account with Edward Colston Guardian," Entry dated December 16, 1841, Loudoun County Guardian Account Book D: 164.

Slaveholders who believed their runaways fled to the northeast suspected routes through Alexandria and the District of Columbia before moving towards Baltimore and Philadelphia. John G. Beale had reason to believe his man Tom, being “an artful fellow” was making his way north “by Washington or Georgetown, and will cross at one of the bridges leading to those places.”¹⁰⁸ Slaveholder Joseph Brown reported that two of his slaves, Jess and Sam, had fled from his Prince William residence and Brown “presume[d] that both have passes and expect they will be making for Baltimore.”¹⁰⁹ Another Prince William slaveowner, Henry A. Barron, suspected that his man Phill, described as a “great trader and very artful,” would “endeavor to get to Alexandria or Baltimore, in order to pass for a free man, and may have false free papers.” If Phill sought aid from family members along the way, he might find assistance from either his enslaved Aunt Cecelia or his freed Aunt Esther living in Fairfax County, information his owner may have learned from Phill’s previous owner.¹¹⁰ After Jack, Bob, and Lew left the farm of William Gibson in Fauquier County on September 28, 1819, they were “seen in the neighborhood of Bell Air, Md. on the 16th of October last, making towards the Susquehannah bridge, at Port Deposit.”¹¹¹ Apparently Gibson heard nothing further about the men after October as he was still advertising for their return seven months later.

Newspaper notices from jailors along this northeast corridor provides ample evidence that runaways from northern Virginia travelled towards the northeast seeking freedom in eastern Pennsylvania as either an end destination or as a location to seek

¹⁰⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 4, 1854.

¹⁰⁹ *Alexandria Herald*, June 5, 1815.

¹¹⁰ *Alexandria Herald*, February 19, 1823.

¹¹¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 2, 1820.

further guidance northwards towards New York or Canada. Granted, an imprisoned African American, presumed to be a runaway, faced the dilemma whether to maintain an alias when questioned about his or her owner and place of residence or admit the truth to identity. Yet the consequences of having no one claim a runaway or prove free status could be worse than being reclaimed by a known master, as southern traders frequented county jails hoping for a bargain. To pay for costs of imprisonment and dieting, sheriffs in Virginia and Maryland offered for public sale any unclaimed runaway and the prospect of a potential forced migration even further south.¹¹² Tracking these advertisements reveals a trail of dashed dreams as patrols and suspicious citizens captured fleeing fugitives from northern Virginia and committed them to jail.

The keeper of the jail in the District of Columbia, R. R. Burr, advertised that he had in his custody a slave claiming to be James Dyson, who “says he belongs to Thomas Cannon, living at Dumfries.”¹¹³ In 1809, “Negro Giles” was “committed to the jail of Washington county, in the district of Columbia” along with John from Stafford County.

¹¹² By 1834 the Virginia Assembly amended the acts concerning the sale of runaways to limit the time a fugitive might be held in a county jail and the methods of advertising for an owner of a presumed runaway. The law “prescribes that whenever a runaway shall be committed to jail, the jailor shall forthwith post up an advertisement at the courthouse door, describing his person and apparel, and if the owner claim not within one month thereafter, the jailor shall advertise the said negro in some newspaper printed in Richmond, and some other paper near the jail, for six weeks, the expense to be paid by the owner, or out of the proceeds of the sale, if the negro be sold; and if no claim be made within four months thereafter, the jailor is required to report to court, and the court shall order sale to be made at the succeeding court; the sheriff to advertise the time and place of sale, and return a certificate thereof to the clerk of the court, and account in manner now prescribed; and on failure therein, to receive no fees for committing, releasing, keeping, or clothing such runaway; exonerates the jailor from liability to the taker-up of the runaway for any other reward than that prescribed by law, unless he shall have received notice that a great reward has been advertised, or unless the owner shall have made oath that no other reward has been offered.” “Virginia Legislature: Sketch of the Acts passed by the General Assembly of Virginia, at the session 1834-35,” *Richmond Enquirer*, March 20, 1835.

¹¹³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 20, 1830.

Giles claimed “he is the property of Dr. Stephen Cook, of Loudon county.”¹¹⁴ After twelve months absence from his Loudoun County owner, forty-seven year old Davy was “committed to [the] custody [of Sheriff Thomas Price] as a runaway” in Charles County, Maryland.¹¹⁵ Ludwell Lee’s “negro fellow by the name of Jerry” was “committed to the gaol of Prince George’s county” after absconding from his Loudoun County residence.¹¹⁶ Isaac, a “stout black fellow” claimed he had fled from Samuel Marshall of Loudoun County when taken by the Sheriff of Anne Arundal County, Maryland.¹¹⁷

Fauquier County resident, Inman Horner, advertised that his enslaved man, Willis, had attempted to break into Erasmus Helm’s store in Warrenton before taking flight in May of 1824, presumably to acquire provisions or money for the flight. Willis’ experiences driving a wagon between Warrenton and Alexandria probably had taught him some routes to escape detection, yet on March 31, 1824 he was “taken up” near Baltimore, having travelled quite a distance from Warrenton.¹¹⁸ Sheriff S. C. Leakin alerted the public that he had confined one of Inman Horner’s runaway slaves in the Baltimore County jail, who called himself Lewis, but was most likely Horner’s man, Willis.¹¹⁹ The capture of two Prince William County runaways in Beltsville, Maryland in

¹¹⁴ *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, May 10, 1809.

¹¹⁵ *Maryland Gazette*, August 27, 1801.

¹¹⁶ *Maryland Gazette*, September 23, 1802.

¹¹⁷ *Maryland Gazette*, August 26, 1802.

¹¹⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 19, 1824.

¹¹⁹ Sheriff Leakin disclosed that a runaway claiming to be Lewis “who says he belongs to Inman Horner, esq. attorney at law, at Warrenton Court House, Virginia, in Fauquier county.” According to Leakin, Lewis was about thirty-five years of age and his clothing was similar to the clothing of Horner’s slave, Willis, advertised in the *Daily National Intelligencer* on April 19, 1824. *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, April 23, 1824; *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 19, 1824.

1859 apparently “making their way to Baltimore” gave further credence to slaveowner suspicions that fugitive slaves from northern Virginia sought sanctuary in Baltimore.¹²⁰

Some slaveholders believed that Baltimore was merely a stopping point for runaways trying to reach points further north like Philadelphia, New York, or Canada. After William, Thomas, and Lewis ran away from Salem and their respective Fauquier County owners during the night of August 19, 1820, the three owners distributed handbills advertising rewards for their return. By gathering information the owners had “ascertained that their plan was to proceed to Alexandria, from thence to Baltimore, and take water (if they could) to Philadelphia, and should they like that place to remain there, otherwise to go on to Boston.” After two weeks’ time, their owners Sylvester Welch, John Fishback, and John Thomas were “now sure” the fugitives were “endeavoring to execute their plan.” Two weeks after the escape, the owners joined forces and “followed them on to Baltimore” where they lost track of William, Thomas, and Lewis’s trail. The slaveowners must have highly valued the labor of the three runaways as the cumulative reward for the trio escalated from \$300 to \$500.¹²¹ By mid-September, the trio’s course had apparently changed as the owners received information “from a gentleman” in Strasburg, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania that the men had been there and by the end of September were either in Lancaster or Chester County.¹²²

¹²⁰ *The Constitution*, October 17, 1859. Historian T. Stephen Whitman described Baltimore as a “haven for runaways.” See especially chapter one in T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 62.

¹²¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 6, 1820.

¹²² *The Free Press*, (Lancaster, PA) September 30, 1820.

Jesse Whitman, a fugitive slave “said to belong to John Conrad, Esq., of Loudoun county, Va.,” was arrested in 1851 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, after having travelled further north than Baltimore or Philadelphia.¹²³ Slaveowner, Mary A.B. Hereford presumed her slave William Greenage, hired out to Payton Davice, near Snickersville, Loudoun County had “obtained a free pass and will endeavor to get to Canada” after Greenage’s escape in August of 1853.¹²⁴ The northeast route capitalized upon bridges into Washington D.C. and roads leading to urban areas where runaways might benefit from assistance of thriving free black enclaves. Over time, this corridor expanded further northward as eastern ports not only attracted fugitive slaves, but also slave-owning masters or their emissaries who were able to identify neighborhood runaways and carry this information (or the captured slaves) back to Virginia.

Some runaways elected to travel north using Loudoun County as the departure point from Virginia and entry point to Maryland; they then northward towards Pennsylvania. Hannah, John Pride, Jack Gardiner and Elijah Stiller were separately arrested and jailed in Frederick County, Maryland while running north from bondage in Loudoun and Prince William counties between 1813 and 1824.¹²⁵ Northern Virginia runaways were also captured in the Pennsylvania town of Carlisle. Slave catcher James

¹²³ *The National Era*, July 3, 1851.

¹²⁴ *Spirit of Jefferson*, August 23, 1853.

¹²⁵ A slave calling herself Hannah who said she belonged to Capt. John Rose of Leesburg was committed to the Frederick County, Maryland jail on April 25, 1814. *Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser*, June 20, 1814; John Pride and Jack Gardiner were incarcerated on November 18, 1813 and claimed they belonged to Mr. Thomas Turner of Prince William County. *Baltimore Patriot & Evening Advertiser*, December 6, 1813; Elijah Stiller claimed he had been manumitted by Samuel Murray of Leesburg when taken into custody September 16, 1824. *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 6, 1824.

Adams apprehended Henry, property of the Loudoun firm of Rust & Trundle in Carlisle in September 1856.¹²⁶

Another point of capture for northern Virginia runaways was in Bedford, Pennsylvania. Bedford County court documents record that in 1825 Fauquier and Loudoun county slaveholders or their agents identified and reclaimed four presumed runaways. John Boyd of Middleburg appeared before John Tod, the President Judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Bedford County and upon his oath and that of his two witnesses, John B. Hereford and John Adams from Fauquier County, claimed Abner Reiley as “the runaway slave and the property of the said John Boyd.”¹²⁷ The trio of northern Virginia owners and agents also “seized and arrested two Negroes” identified and claimed George and Henry, “charged to be fugitives from labour & the slaves & the property of the said John Adam’s” and upon the oaths of these three white men, Judge John Tod allowed Adams to take George and Henry back to Virginia.¹²⁸ Also appearing

¹²⁶ “James Adams,” File 4133, Fugitive Slave Fund Claims for Payments: Bounties and Reward (1857-1860), Accession APA 689, Auditor of Public Accounts, Library of Virginia.

¹²⁷ Bedford County Pennsylvania Prothonotary, “Certificate of Claim for Abner Reiley (a Negro man),” Record of Negro and Mulatto Children and Miscellaneous Slave Records, [ca. 1780 – 1834], RG-47 Records of the County Governments, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r47-SlaveRecords/r47-SlaveRecords-Bedford/bedford%20153.pdf>>.

¹²⁸ Bedford County Pennsylvania Prothonotary, “Certificate of Claim for George & Henry (Negro men),” Record of Negro and Mulatto Children and Miscellaneous Slave Records, [ca. 1780 – 1834], RG-47 Records of the County Governments, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r47-SlaveRecords/r47-SlaveRecords-Bedford/bedford%20156.pdf>>. In his 1825 runaway slave advertisement for George and Henry, John Adams described George as “about 21 years of age, 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high, light complexion; had on and took with him a black broad cloth coat, stuff pantaloons and blue striped cotton waistcoat; one of his ancles is larger than the other, occasioned by a fall from a horse.” Henry was “very black, between 17 and 18 years of age, five feet seven inches high—had on and took with him a snuff colored cloth coat, black corded stuff waistcoat, white dimity roundabout, one white Marseilles waistcoat and thread and cotton pantaloons.” George and Henry left Fauquier County on Saturday night, October 15, 1825 and by November 5, 1825 had been apprehended in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. “Twenty Dollars Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 27, 1825.

before Judge Tod was David M. Sheffield, an agent for Middleburg slaveowner, Noble Beveridge, claiming Charles Peters as a “fugitive from labour” and “property of the said Noble Beveridge.” Corroborating Sheffield’s claim were John B. Hereford and John Boyd. The four men, David Sheffield and John Boyd from Middleburg in Loudoun County, and John B. Hereford and John Adams from nearby Fauquier County travelled together to Pennsylvania to corroborate identification of fugitive slaves in Bedford’s Court of Common Pleas.

Bedford County attracted other runaway slaves from northern Virginia. Loudoun slaveowner Fleet Smith advertised in Bedford’s *True American* for the capture and return of his enslaved man, Billy Jackson, who “performs well on the tambourine and drum...[and] plays a little on the fiddle.”¹²⁹ In 1819, William Lee and an enslaved man from Thomas Swann’s Leesburg farm were captured in Bedford, Pennsylvania one month after fleeing from northern Virginia.¹³⁰ While William Lee was incarcerated, he, along with John Owens and two other enslaved men, escaped from the Leesburg jail. Owens’s owner, William Cook, advertised in the local Loudoun newspaper and also requested the publisher of the *Bedford Gazette* to “give the above three insertions...and to forward their bills” to the *Genius of Liberty* office.¹³¹ Cook apparently believed Owens would travel towards Pennsylvania in Lee’s company and in particular to the region near Bedford. After Minor fled “from the service of Mr. Robert Singleton” of Loudoun County in 1827, Singleton’s agent, Hugh Smith advertised for Minor’s apprehension not only in the local

¹²⁹ *The True American*, (Bedford, PA), September 29, 1813.

¹³⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 1, 1820.

¹³¹ *Genius of Liberty*, October 26, 1819.

newspaper, but also requested the editor of Hagerstown's *Torch Light* and the editor of the *Democratic Enquirer* of Bedford to insert the ad four times and "forward their bills to this office, for collection."¹³² In 1835, one of the seven men who absconded from William Gibson was apprehended in Bedford eleven days after leaving Fauquier County.¹³³

Whether because of the popularity of Bedford County as a gateway to the North or perhaps due to the ease of travelling there, the administrator of Thomas Otway Byrd Carter's estate in Fauquier County helped to establish Carter's manumitted slaves on lands in Bedford County, Pennsylvania in the late 1840s and early 1850s.¹³⁴ The presence of a large freed black community might well have attracted other runaways from Fauquier County as information about their settlements would have filtered back to Fauquier County.¹³⁵ Yet committal notices and court records show that some Bedford County residents also vigilantly watched for potential runaways and thus limited the security of this corridor for runaways.

¹³² *Genius of Liberty*, December 8, 1827.

¹³³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 3, 1835.

¹³⁴ See in particular the 1850 federal census records for George and Rosetta Payne (Paine) and their extended family in Hopewell Township, Bedford County, Pennsylvania; the 1860 federal census records for Preston and Maria Briles family in Hopewell Township, Bedford County, Pennsylvania, 1860 Census, Pennsylvania, Bedford County, Hopewell Twsp, Series M653, Roll 1072, Page 237; and the John Love family in Bedford Township, Bedford County, Pennsylvania, 1860; Census Place: Bedford, Bedford, Pennsylvania; Roll: M653_1072; Page: 74; Image: 80; Ancestry.com. 1860 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images reproduced by FamilySearch. p. 40.

¹³⁵ In 1820 federal census takers enumerated 20,248 persons in Bedford County, PA including 19,902 free whites, 341 free blacks, and 5 slaves. In 1830 total population increased to 24,076 persons including 425 free blacks and only 1 slave. The total reported population for 1840 increased to 29,335 with 470 free blacks and no reported slaves. By 1850 the total population decreased to 23,052 with 415 free blacks and no reported slaves. Census marshals enumerated two Friends or Quaker Churches in Bedford County in 1850. Population rebounded during the decade and by 1860 census marshals reported a total population of 26,736 with 494 free blacks and no reported slaves. University of Virginia Library Historical Census Browser, <<http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/index.html>>.

Northern Virginia slaves also utilized escape routes moving west and north towards Ohio and western Pennsylvania through Leesburg and Harper's Ferry. Sally, Tom, and Cambridge, were all arrested in Loudoun County as fugitive slaves, and claimed to have run from Prince William County.¹³⁶ A fugitive calling himself Pete Carter, probably the "bright mulatto boy" who absconded from the Grigsby family of Fauquier County on August 27, 1831, was apprehended and jailed in Allegheny County, Maryland the second of September.¹³⁷ Presumably, neither Loudoun County nor Allegheny County in western Maryland were the intended destinations but rather unfortunate points of capture along northwesterly routes for absconding slaves. Suspicion and evidence of runaways fleeing to "free" states through this direction later was manifest in a Virginia law in 1856 that provided for a specialized reward of "fifteen per centum on the value of such fugitive slave" for runaways arrested in Alleghany, Washington, and Frederick counties in Maryland who were "escaping to a non-slaveholding state."¹³⁸

Other routes took a more westerly path through Harper's Ferry enroute to Ohio or western Pennsylvania. Free black Landon Phillips followed a railroad line westward

¹³⁶ Loudoun County Jailor's notice for Sally, *Genius of Liberty*, September 8, 1818; Loudoun County Jailor's notice for Tom, *Genius of Liberty*, July 4, 1826; Loudoun County Jailor's notice for Cambridge, *Genius of Liberty*, June 14, 1834.

¹³⁷ Allegheny County, Maryland sheriff, Moses Rawlings, advertised the apprehension of Pete Carter on September 2, 1831 who claimed to be the property of "William Gressby" of Fauquier County. *The Globe*, September 17, 1831. George H. Grigsby advertised that a "BRIGHT MULATTO BOY, about 18 years old" absconded on August 27, 1831 from his residence near Warrenton. The boy took a horse, saddle, and bridle from Grigsby. "\$125 Reward," *Genius of Liberty*, September 17, 1831. Emphasis in the original.

¹³⁸ "An Act to amend the 4th section of chapter 105 of the Code so as to increase the rewards for the arrest of runaway slaves, passed March 17, 1856." *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed in 1855-6, in the Eightieth Year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1856), 43.

while leading enslaved women Hannah and Ann towards Ohio.¹³⁹ Thomas Muse of Loudoun guessed his man James Tate “has shaped his course towards the western part of Pennsylvania, where he will probably endeavor to pass for a free man.”¹⁴⁰ Slaveowner Samuel Bayley asserted there was “little doubt” that his escaped man Sam, accompanied by his black dog, had “endeavored to make his way into Pennsylvania.”¹⁴¹

In late August, 1835, Fauquier County enslaved men Elias, Ephraim, Daniel, Doctor, Elleck (also called Alex), Robroy (Elleck’s brother), and Robert appropriated an estimated seventy to eighty dollars from their owner’s store and employed the guide services of a free black man in their attempt to find freedom in western Pennsylvania. Runaway ads for William Gibson’s seven enslaved men described a wealthy slaveholder’s protracted efforts taken to track, apprehend, and return fugitive slaves as well as the determined efforts of the men to avoid capture. Gibson’s reward of up to seven hundred dollars reward for the return of his enslaved men provided incentive to maintain the pursuit of the “strong, active fellows” whom Gibson warned “may be hard to manage by a weak force.”¹⁴² Eleven days after the escape, Doctor was apprehended in Bedford, Pennsylvania. After a failed attempt to capture five of the fugitives in Young’s Town, about twenty miles distant from Bedford and along the way to Pittsburgh, the

¹³⁹ *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips*, Loudoun County Free Blacks 1845-012, LCHAD.

¹⁴⁰ *Genius of Liberty*, September 12, 1820.

¹⁴¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 26, 1842.

¹⁴² *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 12, 1835.

pursuers reported to Gibson the group had “changed their direction and returned to Virginia” towards Romney, where Elleck was later apprehended.¹⁴³

After Elleck’s capture, the fugitives fled to Harper’s Ferry, where they were spotted on the 21st or 22nd of September, but “finding they could not cross at that place,” they turned and followed the Shenandoah River and hid for nearly five days near the Shannondale Springs before the slave catchers made another failed attempt to capture the runaways. After that fiasco, the pursuers believed the five would “cross the Potomac below Harper’s Ferry with a view of reaching Pennsylvania by the most direct route.” Gibson’s agent, John Walden, believed that the group was aided in their plan to escape to Pennsylvania by John Edwards, a free man of color. By October Gibson’s agent increased the reward for one of the runaways, Elias, by an additional fifty dollars if taken in Maryland and an extra one hundred dollars if taken in Pennsylvania.¹⁴⁴ By November 18, 1835 William Gibson was dead, and control of his estate devolved upon his executrix, Sarah Gibson who continued placing ads for the return of the remaining fugitives.¹⁴⁵ It is unclear whether the remaining four escaped slaves claimed their freedom or were returned to Fauquier County as Sarah Gibson did not record estate administration records with the Fauquier County Court.

Several kinship and friendship ties connected northern Virginia slaves with residents in Belmont County, Ohio, located along the northwest escape route. Within three years after enslaved man Resin Williams gained his freedom through manumission

¹⁴³ The updated runaway ad posted by Gibson’s agent, John Walden, does not indicate the fate of the sixth fugitive after the capture of Doctor, only counting five remaining after Doctor’s capture, then four remaining after Alex (Elleck) was apprehended. *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 3, 1835.

¹⁴⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 3, 1835.

¹⁴⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 18, 1835.

from Joshua Osburn in 1828, Williams had left Loudoun County and migrated to Belmont County, Ohio.¹⁴⁶ Williams joined other former slaves from northern Virginia residing in the county. In 1813 free black Daniel Smith relocated from Loudoun County to Belmont County.¹⁴⁷ In 1828, former slave Billy Kasper registered with the Belmont County court after relocating from Fauquier County.¹⁴⁸ That same year Moses Williams settled in Belmont County after being manumitted from his Loudoun County mistress, Elizabeth Love.¹⁴⁹ When twenty-four year old Peter ran away from Leesburg in 1839, his owner, William Drish, suspected that Peter would find shelter with his wife, who had “recently been set free by the will of her master the late Archibald Mains, and removed to Belmont county, Ohio.”¹⁵⁰ Belmont County residents included Quakers and abolitionists sympathetic to the plight of the enslaved and through rumor or experience became known as a haven for northern Virginia slaves and freed blacks.¹⁵¹

Another potential route to freedom in Ohio might have resembled the course pursued by free black John Malvin who “concluded to leave Virginia and go to Ohio” in 1827. After securing his free papers, Malvin followed the Winchester Road through

¹⁴⁶ Joshua Osburn manumitted Resin Williams on July 19, 1828. Loudoun County Deed Book 3Q: 449. On July 28, 1831 Resin Williams presented his freedom papers to Belmont County Deputy Clerk of Court, John Tallman, to be recorded. Belmont County, Ohio Clerk of Courts, “Black and Mulatto Records, 1808 – 1854,” [State Archives Series 6786] Ohio History Center, 25. My thanks to Tish Como at RELIC for alerting me to this resource and to Tutti Jackson and the Research Services Department of the Ohio History Connection for providing access to this resource.

¹⁴⁷ Belmont County, Ohio Clerk of Courts, “Black and Mulatto Records, 1808 – 1854,” [State Archives Series 6786] Ohio History Center, 8.

¹⁴⁸ Kasper had been manumitted by the will of Alexander Logee in Fauquier County by 1822. Belmont County, Ohio Clerk of Courts, “Black and Mulatto Records, 1808 – 1854,” [State Archives Series 6786] Ohio History Center, 17.

¹⁴⁹ Belmont County, Ohio Clerk of Courts, “Black and Mulatto Records, 1808 – 1854,” [State Archives Series 6786] Ohio History Center, 20.

¹⁵⁰ *Genius of Liberty*, June 15, 1839.

¹⁵¹ See especially chapter XII, “Some Recollections of the Underground Railroad.” Hon. A. T. McKelvey, ed., *Centennial History of Belmont County, Ohio, and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1903).

Brentsville, Hay Market, the Thoroughfare Gap in the Bull Run Mountains, until arriving at Oak Hill (home of Chief Justice John Marshall) in Fauquier County. From there Malvin crossed the Blue Ridge at Ashby's Gap and followed the Shenandoah River to a crossing point known as Berry's Ferry near Millwood and Whitepost and proceeded to Winchester. After crossing the Potomac at Rumley, Malvin headed towards Clarksburg in Harrison County, through Wood County (where he had been apprenticed as a youth to the Henderson family), fording streams to arrive at Marietta, Ohio from where he could take a ferry to Cincinnati. Malvin noted that the distance of 300 miles from Prince William County to Marietta, Ohio took him six days to navigate, perhaps made easier by the fact that as a boy more than twenty years prior he had travelled from Dumfries to Wood County (now West Virginia), thus somewhat familiarizing him with the route. During that time Malvin noted he was only approached three times by people questioning whether he had free papers.¹⁵²

Runaways who fled northward ran the risk of capture in Loudoun County, a frequent outcome. By setting their sights towards the northwest, hopeful runaways sought havens by crossing rivers, following railroad tracks, and searching for shelter offered by friends, relatives, or sympathetic persons in western Pennsylvania or eastern Ohio. For these travelers, water courses serves as markers or landmarks along the way to northern havens. They also represented important border crossing between slave states and free states. No longer serving as a barrier, waterways enabled runaways to travel great distances.

¹⁵² Allan Peskin, intro. *North Into Freedom: The Autobiography of John Malvin, Free Negro, 1795-1880* (Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 37-38.

Some masters believed their fugitive slaves utilized water routes to escape. A frequent caution slaveholders included in runaway ads from 1800 to 1822 read “masters of vessels and others are forewarned, at their peril, not to harbor or take [the runaway] away.”¹⁵³ Virtually all runaway ads from this period for slaves absconding from Dumfries or the surrounding neighborhood in Prince William County included such a warning to masters of watercraft against assisting in the escape of runaway slaves and indicated the level of fear and suspicion slaveholders held against water escapes.¹⁵⁴ By 1805 a few Loudoun County slaveholders residing in Leesburg or north of Leesburg began warning watercraft masters against harboring or transporting runaway slaves.¹⁵⁵

By 1817 this caution extended southwards in Loudoun when Isabella Hislop advertised for her runaway enslaved man, Moses, who had been hired out to Major William Noland in Aldie, Loudoun, located near the Prince William County border. Hislop included a warning to “[a]ll persons, and masters of vessels” against “harboring or employing said negro, as the law will be enforced against such offenders.”¹⁵⁶ This warning faded from advertisement vernacular after 1822, yet over time, slaveholders

¹⁵³ See various iterations of this warning in runaway ads in the *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, July 27, 1801; *Washington Federalist*, May 26, 1802; *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, March 21, 1804. After 1806 such warnings altered to include persons “harboring or taking off” runaways as in *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, October 27, 1806 or to “forewarn all persons from hiring or harbouring said Negro under the penalty of the law” as in John Sutton’s ad for runaway Cato in *Washington Federalist*, January 31, 1807.

¹⁵⁴ Between 1800 and 1810 only four ads for runaways from the Dumfries area did not include the warning. Capt Evans in 1805, *Washington Federalist*, May 29, 1805; Thomas T. Page, agent for John Tayloe, *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial & Political*, October 26, 1809 and September 6, 1810; and Luke Cannon, *Washingtonian*, July 24, 1810.

¹⁵⁵ In 1805 William Taylor cautioned “masters of vessels and others” against “carrying...off” Lewis, a runaway from Leesburg. *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, May 25, 1805.

¹⁵⁶ *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, March 27, 1817.

from other parts of northern Virginia also expressed concerns over the ability of runaways to utilize waterways and watercraft for escape.

Someone who knew first-hand the opportunities for enslaved persons to find transportation on the Potomac River posted a letter to the *Alexandria Gazette* in October 1822 that warned masters of ferry boats and small craft against engaging in the local custom of transporting enslaved persons across the river. Identified only as “A. B.,” the letter writer described the local practice of masters of ferry boats “receiving on board their boats, people of color, including free as well as slaves.” The author noted that ferry boat captains often facilitated the local custom of slaves taking day trips “particularly on Sundays” across the river “under pretence of going to Church or meeting,” but claimed in certain cases “some [slaves] return not at all.” Having experienced “not a little inconvenience” from this practice, A. B. warned that he intended to “enforce the penalty of the law against the owner or master of any vessel or ferry boat, without regard to persons, who may take in his boat, any of his servants across the river without proper authority.”¹⁵⁷ An 1792 Virginia law had made masters of ships or vessels transporting slaves without consent of the owner liable to a fine of \$150.

Loudoun County slaveowner, Charles Binns was “induced to believe” his escaped enslaved man, Isaac, also known as Isaac Blue Foot, would “endeavor to get on board of some vessel” during his escape. Thus, Binns forewarned “all masters and captains of vessels from harboring said negro.”¹⁵⁸ Alexander Brown suspected his slave Joseph

¹⁵⁷ A. B. “Caution: To Masters and Owners of Vessels & Ferry Boats,” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 17, 1822.

¹⁵⁸ *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser*, September 24, 1810.

O'Barnwell, a long-time waiter at the Dumfries Tavern would travel towards Boston via "a passage by water from Baltimore or Philadelphia" after he fled from Prince William County in 1804.¹⁵⁹ In 1826 Robert Fletcher of Upperville, Fauquier County believed his escaped enslaved man Daniel Eskridge had "probably shaped his course towards Pennsylvania, or some of the seaports, where he expects to be free."¹⁶⁰ After William Taylor learned his escaped mulatto slave, Lewis, had been "seen at the fish wharf, in Alexandria" five days after Lewis left Leesburg in April 1805, Taylor warned all "masters of vessels and others" from transporting Lewis.¹⁶¹

While hired out to work in Northumberland away from her new home in Fauquier County, Violet, was spotted "in a vessel, bound for Alexandria."¹⁶² Her Fauquier County owner, E. H. Henry, asserted there was "no doubt" Violet was returning to "the neighborhood of Middleburg" since she only recently had been purchased away from Loudoun County.¹⁶³ Henry assumed Violet would return to northern Virginia to her family and familiar surroundings and she took advantage of waterway traffic that connected northern Virginia to both slave and "free" states. After Alfred absconded from Prince William County in 1823 he was seen "lurking about in Alexandria during the fishing season." Alfred was "seen frequently upon the wharf" giving rise to the suspicion that Alfred had "passed over into Maryland or gone in some vessel to Baltimore," perhaps with the assistance of free black or enslaved mariners.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, February 9, 1804.

¹⁶⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 18, 1825.

¹⁶¹ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, May 25, 1805.

¹⁶² *Alexandria Gazette*, September 3, 1839, microfilm.

¹⁶³ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 3, 1839, microfilm.

¹⁶⁴ *Alexandria Herald*, September 1, 1823.

The particular work experiences of George, a thirty year old man enslaved to Gerard Mason, transporting wood from Woodbridge to Washington, D.C. along the Occoquan and Potomac Rivers offered opportunities to make useful acquaintances and scout out potential escape routes away from Prince William County. Mason believed George would utilize a water route during his escape in 1839 from Woodbridge plantation located along the Occoquan River in Prince William County due to George's experience navigating the Potomac River. Mason noted that George worked "generally on the river and with the craftsmen" and was "well known" in Washington.¹⁶⁵ The lived experiences of enslaved persons and opportunities for making useful acquaintances often determined the mode and direction of travel during escape attempts.

Slaveholders recognized that interactions with persons employed along the waterfront or navigating rivers such as craftsmen, sailors, shipmasters, fishermen, or even small craft operators like George from Mason's Woodbridge plantation presented a threat to enslaved property. Apprehension about potential water escape manifested in the nature of hired slave work contracts. When Margaret Luttrell hired Sandfred to Enoch Orear for the year 1823, she specified that Sandfred was "not to be employed on the fishing shores."¹⁶⁶ When Elizabeth Cannon created a hire contract with Edward Shepherd for the services of her enslaved man John, she stipulated that Shepherd could not "work him on a quarry, railroad, fishing, or in a long boat" during his 1844 hire.¹⁶⁷ Henry Love agreed

¹⁶⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 1, 1839.

¹⁶⁶ Orear & Luttrell, slave hire contract, LP (1822) 001080_00036, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, online.

¹⁶⁷ Edward Shepherd & Elizabeth Cannon, slave hire contract, LP (1845) 001216_00441, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, online. These stipulations also reflected the physically dangerous nature of the work and a slaveholder's desire to limit potential risks to life or limb.

that he would not allow enslaved man Jesse Bruce to “go in long boats” or haul fishing seine when Love contracted for Bruce’s services for the year 1845 with slaveholder Samuel J. Tebbs.¹⁶⁸ Slaveowner Jane Luttrell arranged to hire her “negro man Henry” to John N. Johnson on the condition that Henry would work on Johnson’s farm and not employed “on or near the Neck, Rivers, or creeks.”¹⁶⁹ John C. Weedon conditioned the hire of Lundz to C. Goods on the promise Goods would not “employ him on fishing shore[s] or long boats” during Lundz’s hire for the year 1852.¹⁷⁰ Weedon negotiated a similarly conditioned hire contract with James V. Nash for the hires of Ludwell and Prudence. Nash agreed not to employ either Ludwell or Prudence on the fishing shores or in long boats for the year 1853.¹⁷¹

A survey of slave contracts dating from 1797 to 1863 for 124 enslaved persons preserved in the Prince William Clerks Loose Papers collection include six contracts containing specific provisions prohibiting employment on long boats or in the fishing industry.¹⁷² Such conditions in slave hire contracts were designed to prevent the loss or injury of enslaved persons but the appearance of such restrictions against working along or on Prince William County’s waterways also indicates the level of concern slaveholders felt about their slaves coming into contact with workers and craft along the waterways,

¹⁶⁸ *Tebbs v. Love*, slave hire contract, LP (1846) 001121_00467, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, online.

¹⁶⁹ *Luttrell v. Johnson*, slave hire contract, LP (1841) 001088_00753, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, online.

¹⁷⁰ John C. Weedon negotiated the hire contract in his capacity as administrator of Thomas Nelson’s estate. Goods &c to Weedon, Bond, LP (1853) 001052_00032, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, online.

¹⁷¹ James V. Nash Bond to Weedon, LP (1855) 001117_00371, Prince William County Clerks Loose Papers, online.

¹⁷² These hire contracts became part of the public record when hirers defaulted on payment and a suit to recover the debt was initiated by the slaveholder in the county court. Therefore, they represent only a portion of all slave hire contracts negotiated by Prince William slaveholders during this period.

especially during the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁷³ The proximity of slave hires to waterways and the likelihood that particular enslaved persons would seek out escape routes via waterways concerned slaveholders.

Northern Virginia slaveholders had good reason to suspect northern-bound vessels of harboring fugitives. The *Alexandria Gazette* reported that “a runaway slave” returned to his owner at Arlington Estate had claimed he had been conveyed from the District of Columbia to Georgetown by the captain of the *Down Easter* schooner.¹⁷⁴ Fugitive Frederick Locus from neighboring Fairfax County “had been found on board the schooner Thaddeus” enroute to New York after bad weather forced the vessel to return to port. The newspaper editor commented that the “secretion of slaves on board of Northern vessels is becoming a very common offence, and it is desirable that the present case should be [investigated] with the strictest scrutiny.”¹⁷⁵

By 1840 concern over the use of waterways as an escape route, especially along Potomac River, the northern border of Loudoun County, was evident in a Senate amendment to a bill that increased the reward for runaway slaves. The amendment would have prohibited “the keepers of public ferries on the Ohio river and that part of the Potomac river lying above tide-water, from employing slaves, free negroes and mulattoes

¹⁷³ Slave contracts for 124 enslaved persons from Prince William County dating from 1797 to 1863 were surveyed with provisions against work on long boats or in the fishing industry stipulated for seven slaves.

¹⁷⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 3, 1839.

¹⁷⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 9, 1839, microfilm. For a notable discussion of escape by watercraft see Josephine F. Pacheco, *The Pearl: A Failed Slave Escape on the Potomac* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

on ferry boats at their ferries, and requiring the owners of canoes and other boats on said river to keep the same secured at night.”¹⁷⁶

Proponents advocated tightening control over the waterways while opponents like Sanford Ramey of Loudoun declared such a measure would not hinder runaways from Loudoun who “would cross over the Blue Ridge and the Shenandoah river and escape from the county of Jefferson across the Potomac River.”¹⁷⁷ Ramey presented a petition to the General Assembly signed by eighty-three residents of Loudoun County, including many prominent county court members and slaveholders. The group petitioned the State Legislature to pass an act “requiring Ferrymen on the Potomac River, and all persons on the said river having boats, canoes &c to keep them secured during night in such manner as to prevent ... absconding Slaves from obtaining and crossing the said river in them.” The petitioners believed this measure would be “a great benefit” to both Loudoun County residents “as well as to the citizens of several of the adjacent Counties.”¹⁷⁸ The Loudoun petition was read, sent to the Courts of Justice, and rejected, while the Senate amendment about rewards passed and was sent to the House of Delegates.

Distance Presumed to Escape and When Changes Became Apparent

Information contained in runaway slave advertisements show a decided shift over time in the presumed distances runaways were likely to travel. The first shift occurred when slaveholders looked to Pennsylvania instead of Virginia neighborhoods or

¹⁷⁶ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 17, 1840.

¹⁷⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 17, 1840.

¹⁷⁸ Citizen’s Petition, Loudoun County, Virginia, January 11, 1804, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

residences of enslaved kin as a likely destination for runaway slaves. Six years after his first escape attempt ended in the Hagerstown, Maryland jail, enslaved man Joseph attempted another escape from the Waterford neighborhood in 1802. Joseph's owner, Edmund Jennings suspected he had acquired free papers from some source and would "endeavor to get into Pennsylvania." Joseph probably built upon his acquired knowledge of the terrain from his first attempt at escape to the north.¹⁷⁹

A survey of available runaway slave ads indicates that during the first decade of the nineteenth century northern Virginia slaveholders seldom mentioned presumed destinations. Exceptions concerned runaways returning to family members in northern Virginia or Maryland or possibly seeking employment in Alexandria, Georgetown, or the District of Columbia.

Few ads in the first decade of the nineteenth century offered tiered rewards based on distance from the slaveholder's residence and those that did typically distinguished rewards by the distance from the place of elopement or whether the runaway was apprehended in the county of residence or beyond county borders. By 1808 a few advertisements differentiated rewards offered for those found within Virginia from rewards offered for those captured outside of the state. One of the tiered rewards that appeared towards the end of this decade and became fairly typical over the next few decades offered differentiated rewards based on capture in Virginia, Maryland, or Pennsylvania. In 1809 Prince William slaveholders Henry Dogan and Philleman Chapman offered "twenty dollars if taken in Virginia, thirty if taken in Maryland, and

¹⁷⁹ *Oracle of Dauphin and Harrisburgh Advertiser*, January 18, 1802.

fifty if in Pennsylvania, and all reasonable charges” to the person apprehending either Bob or Jim, runaways from the Haymarket area.¹⁸⁰

By the second decade of the century a few slaveholders publicly announced their belief that runaways were headed towards “the northern states” as indicated by newspaper advertisements. Three ads specifically mentioned Pennsylvania as a destination. After the elopement of Moses and Eve from Occoquan in 1813, slaveowner William Davis reasoned it was “probable the said Negroes will attempt to go to one of the northern states.”¹⁸¹ Zachariah Ward believed his servants Isaac and Isaac’s brother Dennis stole two horses in order to “endeavor to get to the northern states” after their departure from the Occoquan neighborhood in 1816.¹⁸² In 1815, Fauquier slaveowner, Frederick A. Chapman stated that his two escaped slaves, enslaved spouses Emmanuel and Winney, would “doubtless attempt to escape to *some distant place*, perhaps Pennsylvania.”¹⁸³ Likewise, early in 1817 when Ephraim and Polly fled from Salem in Fauquier County, their owner stated he was “satisfied [they] are endeavoring to escape to Pennsylvania.”¹⁸⁴ William Cundiff guessed that his enslaved man, Cesar, would travel to Millwood in Frederick County, Virginia to see his father before heading north. Cundiff was “informed that his intention is to get on from there to the state of Pennsylvania to obtain his freedom.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, October 26, 1809.

¹⁸¹ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, July 1, 1813.

¹⁸² *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, October 4, 1816.

¹⁸³ *Federal Republican* (Georgetown D.C.), May 26, 1815. Emphasis mine.

¹⁸⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 13, 1817.

¹⁸⁵ “Sixty Dollars Reward,” *Republican Constellation*, October 10, 1818.

In one case, slaveholder Peter Graham had “reason to believe” his enslaved girl, Ann had travelled to Philadelphia or New York after her escape from the Middleburg neighborhood on March 25, 1817.¹⁸⁶ The fact Graham was still advertising for Ann’s capture and return in January of 1818 meant she had escaped detection for some time, yet Graham was still seeking and receiving information concerning her possible whereabouts. Graham’s suspicions about Ann’s ability to navigate towards major port towns and free black enclaves stands out among the runaway ads as the first mention of such distant locations as presumed destinations for northern Virginia runaways. Isaac Bridwell’s tiered rewards for husband and wife Wallace and Cely also indicated a belief that the pair would seek shelter and a measure of freedom in eastern cities with significant black populations. Bridwell offered twenty dollars “for their apprehension and commitment in the jail of Alexandria, 30 in Georgetown, 40 in Baltimore, and 50 if at a greater distance” after Wallace and Cely’s escape from the Dumfries neighborhood in 1819.¹⁸⁷

During the 1820s six ads specified Pennsylvania as a destination, and Ohio was first mentioned in two ads. In 1825 after enslaved man Daniel Eskridge left the Upperville neighborhood, his owner, Robert Fletcher had reason to believe Eskridge “probably shaped his course towards Pennsylvania, or some of the seaports, where he expects to be free.” In Fletcher’s mind, Eskridge’s flight was a bid for permanent freedom, not a temporary respite from enslavement. Likewise, when Isham fled from Warrenton in 1829, his owner John Walden averred he was “strongly induced to believe”

¹⁸⁶ *Alexandria Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, January 2, 1818.

¹⁸⁷ *Alexandria Herald*, October 27, 1819.

that Isham had either “obtained free papers and is making his way to Pennsylvania or Ohio” or that Isham was “in company with white or colored men going to Ohio.”¹⁸⁸ Like Eskridge, Isham’s motivation in leave Fauquier County appeared to be a permanent escape. Loudoun slaveholder Theodorick M. Hereford expected his enslaved man, Moses Tapico, had “made his way either to the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, or Ohio” after Tapico’s escape from the Bloomfield neighborhood on August 7, 1824.¹⁸⁹ Slaveowners Sarah Ellzey and John Bayly believed their enslaved men, George Lee and James Parker, were “probably in one of the large cities and perhaps as far as Boston, or the State of Ohio” after leaving the Leesburg neighborhood in October 1828. Eighteen months after their flight, Ellzey and Bayly still advertised a reward for the apprehension and return of Lee and Parker.¹⁹⁰

Tiered rewards towards the end of the decade still differentiated mainly between payments for runaways apprehended within the state and outside of Virginia. Joseph Mead’s 1826 advertisement for runaways Anderson Patterson and Jerry Sinclair offered the following tiered reward:

The reward of one hundred dollars will be given for each, if taken in Pennsylvania, Ohio, or any other free State, and fifty dollars each if taken in the State of Maryland; ten dollars if taken in the county of Loudoun, Va. and thirty dollars if taken in the State of Virginia, and out of the county of Loudoun; in each case they are to be secured so that I get them again.¹⁹¹

Mead’s reward was the first to mention Ohio and “free” states in the tier structure, so even if slaveholders did not specifically claim that runaways were traveling towards these

¹⁸⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 2, 1829.

¹⁸⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 4, 1824.

¹⁹⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 20, 1830.

¹⁹¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 18, 1826.

areas, by specifying these locations in the terms of the reward, slaveholders implied that such a destination was possible and likely.

By the 1830s few slaveholders included descriptions of routes as well as presumed destinations. James Lake revealed that after his enslaved man, Sanford, absconded in June 1829 taking one of Lake's horses for transport, Lake discovered that the horse had been recovered "in the neighborhood of Battletown, beyond the Blue Ridge." From this information, included in a subsequent amended advertisement published after February 1830, Lake surmised that Sanford had "made his way to Pennsylvania, through the neighborhood of Fredericktown, or Hagerstown."¹⁹² After Nero Carter, Gim Jennings, and Rippen Hawley ran away from enslavement in Loudoun County in 1830, their owner, W. C. Selden, Jr., stated he had "every reason to believe that they set out with the intention to get to Pennsylvania."¹⁹³ After Frank's disappearance following attendance at a camp meeting near Warrenton, Frank's owner averred it was "probably he has made for Pennsylvania, either by Winchester or Leesburg."¹⁹⁴ John Scott believed his house servant, John, had acquired "forged papers attesting his freedom" and would use them to "reach one of the States North of Maryland" after leaving the Warrenton neighborhood in 1834.¹⁹⁵

More likely was the advertisement format that omitted destination information while still offering tiered rewards for in-state versus out-of-state apprehensions. One tiered reward offered during the 1830s first distinguished between payments for

¹⁹² *United States' Telegraph*, February 16, 1830.

¹⁹³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 31, 1830.

¹⁹⁴ *United States' Telegraph*, September 10, 1830.

¹⁹⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, October 28, 1834.

apprehensions within slaveholding compared to non-slaveholding states. Henry T.

Garnett of Middleburg offered the following tiered rewards for his missing enslaved man in 1832:

ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD will be given, for the apprehension and confinement in jail, of my negro man HARRY, (or Henry Winters, as he calls himself,) provided he is taken north of the Potomac, out of the District of Columbia; if taken in the District aforesaid, or south of the Potomac, seventy five dollars will be given...If he is apprehended in a non-slave-holding State and confined in any jail in the District of Columbia, I will give \$250, or if secured in any jail, in any such State, \$200 will be given.¹⁹⁶

Another ad posted by John P. H. Short and Jessee McVeigh offered \$500 for the “apprehension and safe keeping” of runaways Frank, George, Phillis, and Alce “if taken north of Pennsylvania; 400 dollars if taken and secured in Pennsylvania; three hundred if taken in Maryland—and two hundred [if] taken in Virginia” that reflected the owner’s belief the quartet had “made towards the Northern States” after their escape on Whitsunday 1839.¹⁹⁷ These slaveholders believed their escaped slaves travelled north, and tiered rewards encouraged continued searches both near and far from Virginia. River boundaries between Virginia and access points to “free” states proved to be an important boundary for Virginia slaveholders. In 1856 the Virginia Assembly enacted a law that authorized “a reward of ten per centum on the value of such slave” captured and delivered to his owner or agent for “any runaway slave seeking to escape to a non-slaveholding state” who was arrested in any Virginia county bounded by the Potomac and Ohio River or “above the division line between the counties of Fairfax and Prince

¹⁹⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 28, 1832.

¹⁹⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, September 10, 1839, microfilm.

William” affirming the importance of rivers in escape routes, emphasizing the northern Virginia region as a conduit to free states, and incentivizing patrols and slave catchers to prevent further hemorrhaging of enslaved persons out of Virginia.¹⁹⁸

During the 1840s, the amount of information included in runaway slave ads decreased as slaveholders all but omitted suspicions about presumed destinations while retaining the tiered reward structure. Dr. Alexander Chapman had reason to believe Josiah was traveling “in the direction of Harper’s Ferry” in order to reach Pennsylvania after absconding from James Whiting’s farm near Hopewell, Fauquier County where he was hired out. Chapman offered a reward of \$50 if Josiah was apprehended outside the borders of Fauquier, Prince William, or Fairfax counties.¹⁹⁹

Perhaps one reason for slaveholders’ decision to omit destination information in runaway slave advertisements was to remove clues that could alert runaways to the presence of hired slave catchers. Another possibility was that the many options for destinations, towards the urban areas to the northeast, northward towards Bedford County and the river cities of Harrisburg or Wilkes-Barre in Pennsylvania, or westward towards Harper’s Ferry and then northward into western Pennsylvania or Ohio meant that slaveholders could not be certain of any destination without further information provided by observant members of the public.

A close reading of the runaway advertisements and related county court documents reveals that runaways from northern Virginia created partnerships across ever-

¹⁹⁸ “An Act to amend the 4th section of chapter 105 of the Code so as to increase the rewards for the arrest of runaway slaves, passed March 17, 1856.” *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed in 1855-6, in the Eightieth Year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1856), 43-44.

¹⁹⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 3, 1848.

widening geographical space to facilitate escape in response to personal motivations, local conditions, or socio-political climate in the region. Slaves extended communication networks to gather information about routes, dangers, and potential allies. They also utilized an underground market in forged and borrowed passes or free papers, believed to be a helpful tool in passing through slave patrols and slaveowner dragnets. As time passed, runaways from the region utilized a variety of escape routes. As these routes became known to slaveholders over time, slaveowners included that information in runaway advertisements and altered rewards to reflect the potential distances involved in apprehension of runaways. Over time slaveholders suspected and identified potential runaway destinations located farther and farther from Virginia. Such evidence indicates not only the fear that fugitive slaves could navigate to such distant locations, but also the reality of the reach of slave catchers and surveillance. Knowledge of the growing extent of slaveholder influence also shaped the directions taken and the distances travelled by runaways in order to find safe havens. These factors led to an increased fear among white northern Virginians that the process of running away presented a growing threat to the master-slave relationship.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE RIGHT TO SEEK FREEDOM: RUNAWAYS AND THE DESTABILIZATION OF SLAVERY IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

A slave boy 17 years of age owned by Mr. Robert E. Scott of Fauquier, was arrested in this place on Tuesday night last. He had a pass representing him as free, and signed by John W. Golden, and dated “Waterloo, 19th September, 1852” He was lodged in jail, but made his escape through a window of our admirable jail last night. After getting out without any difficulty, he went to the house of Nancy Sale (a free woman of color,) where were his clothes, which he demanded; she refused, a fight ensued, the noise of which, attracted the neighbors. George W. Proctor living in the neighborhood, went to suppress the riot, and seeing the boy run off, pursued him and arrested him near Falmouth bridge.—He is now in one of the cells of the jail. The impression is that he intended to go off in a Yankee vessel which sailed from this port yesterday morning. A free negro by the name of Douglas (with some half dozen aliases) accompanied this boy and passed him off as free. Douglas made his escape. Our friends about Waterloo should look out for him. He is a boatman, we learn, on the canal.—*Fredericksburg News*.¹

The experience of Scott’s enslaved youth as recorded in the *Fredericksburg News* seems to confirm slaveholder fears that runaways received assistance from multiple persons in an underground network of alliances. The young man’s ability to procure a pass, escape from jail, and possibly arrange northbound transportation with a “Yankee vessel,” all under the guidance of a free black man (and with the possible assistance of a free black woman as well) exemplified the networks that worried slaveholders because they emboldened runaways to abscond and potentially make successful escapes.

¹ “Runaway,” *Fredericksburg News* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 25, 1852.

Historian Larry Gara asserted that the “relatively few slaves who did escape were primarily dependent on their own resources.”² Relatively few runaway slaves found or relied upon the assistance of an organized system for conveying slaves north. Despite slaveholder claims, runaways received little assistance from abolitionists prior to reaching “free” states. Information from northern Virginia runaways suggests a more likely assessment is that assistance came from all quarters, including enslaved persons, free blacks, and whites. This assistance came not from a tightly organized enterprise, but instead through a series of negotiated individual acts.

While the overall number of successful runaways comprised only a small portion of the total enslaved population, slaveholder fears that a network of people, white and black, willing and able to assist in escape attempts, expanded and infiltrated across the region. Published slave advertisements put such fears on public display and broadcast presumptions about persons likely to assist runaways and types of assistance that could be acquired from willing blacks and whites. When county courts adjudicated trials of blacks and whites accused of aiding and abetting runaway slaves, the public became part of the dissemination of presumptions and suspicions held by slaveholders.

Enslaved persons reacted to growing racial tensions, brutal conditions of enslavement, threats of sale into the interregional market, and assaults upon family integrity by altering and adapting escape strategies. These adaptations included seeking protection within runaway groups, outfitting themselves with weapons, and steeling themselves for violent encounters with patrollers or citizens who hoped to cash in on

² Larry Gara. *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (1961, repr., Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 18.

buoyant rewards. Asserting a right to seek freedom and embracing a determination to fight for their freedom changed the dynamic between runaway and would-be captor.

In response to a perceived and often real threat of clandestine assistance provided to runaways, slaveholders increased rewards to encourage more assistance with controlling the runaway problem. Slaveholders sold captured runaways as a visible demonstration of their power to remove threats and restore an aura of control. They also increasingly targeted and threatened persons suspected of providing assistance to runaways.

While these measures attempted to bring some sense of control, especially during periods of increased attempts at escape, slaveholders also faced increasing criticism and censure from abolitionist audiences for their treatment of slaves. The effect of abolitionist critique can be seen in the changing runaway advertisements that shifted focus from intolerable conditions to the character defects in enslaved laborers and former masters. Public distaste with the institution of slavery as expressed in northern newspapers increased following the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law when high-profile returns of runaways from northern Virginia illustrated the power of slaveholders and the plight of the enslaved. This chapter investigates the fear and reality of the assistance provided to runaways, the initiative enslaved persons used to plan an escape, and the measures slaveholders took to quell these threats to slaveholder control. The chapter continues by exploring the impact of abolitionist critiques on slaveholder strategies and the heightened scrutiny placed on northern Virginia slaveholders following the passage of

the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. Finally, the chapter concludes with an analysis of the significance of runaways and escape attempts on slaveholders and slaves.

Assistance Provided and the Persons Suspected of Aiding Runaways

Prince William County slaveholder Reuben Rogers expressed mixed feelings about the nature and effectiveness of interactions between slaves and potential allies. While Rogers stated that it was probable that his escaped man, Vincent Jackson had procured a free pass due to his “considerable acquaintance,” Rogers downplayed the effect of Jackson’s supposed allies as people “none too good in aiding him in making his escape.”³ Apparently Rogers credited Jackson with the ability to acquire a forged pass, yet doubt at least indicated in the ability of his allies to provide effectual aid in Jackson’s flight. Rogers’s skepticism placed him in the minority among slaveholders who advertised for the return of runaway slaves. Many white southerners believed that runaways could only accomplish their mission through the assistance of other slaves, former slaves, free blacks, and unscrupulous or abolitionist whites. Slaveholders included information on potential allies of runaways in advertisements ostensibly to enable identification and location of runaways.

Yet these assumptions about the nature of assistance also broadcast slaveholder suspicions about the extent and type of assistance that whites and blacks were willing and able to provide and those people most likely to offer assistance. When thirty-six year old enslaved woman Nancy went missing from her owner’s residence near Snicker’s Gap in

³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 15, 1828.

Loudoun County, her owner, George Marks believed Nancy's free husband, Henry Thomas, a blacksmith, would "try to convey her to some of his acquaintances in Jefferson and Fauquier."⁴ In 1825, after Charles Minor escaped from bondage in Fairfax County, Minor's owner, Thomas Lindsay believed Minor had received assistance from his brother, Jerry Minor, a free black living near Waterford in Loudoun County. According to Lindsay, Jerry Minor "writes a good hand" and probably provided his brother, Charles, with either a forged pass or free papers and instructions for traveling to Pennsylvania where Jerry Minor was "well acquainted."⁵ William E. Glassell of Millview suspected that his enslaved man, Rob, "may be secreted" with his sister living in Alexandria after leaving the neighborhood of Rappahannock Station in Fauquier County with another enslaved man named Sandy.⁶ William's disappearance from James McDonald's control in 1815 caused suspicion that he might seek refuge with relatives of his free wife, Nelly Cole in the Colchester and Dumfries neighborhoods or with his son, who resided "at Geo. Evans's, at Chicawamme," in Maryland.⁷

Daniel Fisher absconded from the service of Jane Love in Middleburg during Christmas time in 1816 after telling her he planned to hire himself out on a boat out of Harper's Ferry. Since Love had granted Fisher permission to hire himself out in the past, she gave her permission for this venture. Yet when he did not contact her or return to Loudoun after three months, Love had reason to believe Fisher had fled. Previous to leaving, Fisher had worked for hire in Waterford and while there "lived in the house of a

⁴ *Palladium of Liberty*, June 30, 1820.

⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 1, 1825.

⁶ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, August 6, 1858.

⁷ *Alexandria Gazette, Commercial and Political*, November 2, 1815. *Alexandria Gazette*, January 5, 1816.

free negro.” Love believed it was “highly probable” Fisher procured a pass “to suit his purpose” from one of the unidentified free blacks at the Waterford house.⁸

Daniel Fisher experienced an unusual level of mobility in traveling distances to contract his own hired-out work. During his time in at least one location, Waterford, Fisher cultivated alliances with potentially literate free blacks who could provide forged passes. While it may never be clarified whether Fisher actually obtained forged papers from the Waterford men, the fact that Fisher’s mistress feared that contact between enslaved persons and free blacks led to illegal procurement of passes and information that would enable chattel property to abscond from servitude reveals the fears slaveholders experienced.

Freed slaves comprised another group potentially engaged in helping fleeing slaves to escape. Enslaved husband and wife, Tom and Phillis, lived at least part of their lives near Counsellor Carter’s slaves before being sold to Major Peers in Prince William County, then to George Newman in Centerville and then to Joshua Fletcher of Fauquier County. Fletcher believed Tom and Phillis, despite their multiple moves around northern Virginia would “mix with Carter’s freed negroes” because of their long-standing acquaintance with Carter’s former slaves and could procure passes from some of them.⁹ James Currell of Snicker’s Gap in Loudoun County suspected that twenty-five year old Alice after absconding in 1814 from Currell would be “lurking about with her husband, an ill looking old free negro who calls himself Jim Buck.” Alice might also seek shelter

⁸ *Alexandria Gazette Commercial and Political*, May 5, 1817.

⁹ *Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, May 3, 1806.

with her free brother “by the name of Jim, who has for some time past lived with Mr. Forrest in Georgetown.”¹⁰

Slaveholders also suspected that unscrupulous whites provided assistance to runaways. Fauquier slaveowners Jacquelin A. Marshall and Robert Douthat “strongly suspected” that enslaved husband and wife, Tom and Judy had escaped “under the charge of white men” when the pair absconded late in April of 1844.¹¹ In 1851 after Marshall ran away from the neighborhood near the Plains in Fauquier County, his owner, William Byrne noted it was “quite probable [Marshall] has been advised off by some white person.”¹² T. B. Robertson believed his enslaved man Henry and Henry’s wife, Betsy might be “under the guidance of some infamous white man” after they eloped from his Dumfries farm in June 1856.¹³

Fears of free black assistance in the escape of enslaved persons grew during the 1830s, a decade heavily influenced by the Southampton insurrection, the Virginia debates over removal of free blacks, continued growth in the free black population, and the rise of public antislavery critique of slavery. Free black Spencer Malvin of Warrenton was accused by slaveholder John Fant and by Malvin’s father-in-law of being a “black abolitionist” and culpable in the escape of Fant’s servant in 1835.¹⁴ After Dumfries

¹⁰ *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 4, 1814.

¹¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 28, 1844.

¹² *The (Baltimore) Sun*, June 6, 1851.

¹³ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, July 1, 1856.

¹⁴ Malvin’s father-in-law, a free black man named Samuel Johnson, included information about Malvin in a petition to the Virginia Legislature seeking permission for Johnson’s daughter (and Malvin’s wife), Lucy, to remain in Virginia. Johnson attempted to affirm his role as father-provider for Lucy in the absence of her husband. Samuel Johnson Petition, Fauquier County, January 19, 1835, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. Malvin’s activities were also described in John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford

slaveholder William Smith manumitted at least some of his slaves, they relocated to Baltimore, yet presumably the freed blacks kept in contact with Prince William County enslaved friends living at Leesylvania plantation. Leesylvania's master, Henry Fairfax, believed his unnamed fugitive "bright mulatto boy" was "lurking about" among Smith's former slaves in Baltimore. Believing that the freed slaves offered aid and shelter to their enslaved friends journeying northward, Fairfax posted a reward for his servant's capture in the *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser* in 1835.¹⁵

After twelve-year-old Charles escaped from his Middleburg master, Jonathan Carter, in 1835, Carter thought it was "highly probable" that Charles was "harboured by some black family" who aided his escape. Carter believed a sympathetic family could spirit Charles "out of the immediate neighbourhood" by claiming him as a child, or might transport Charles by wagon into Frederick, Maryland. If one family could not accomplish this plan, Carter proposed that multiple families of free blacks may have "conducted [him] from family to family into Maryland."¹⁶ When William "went off without provocation" from nearby Jefferson County, Virginia in August 1838, his owner, Thomas B. Turner noted that William was probably "making his way either to the State of Pennsylvania or Ohio." Turner also recalled that a recently manumitted family had "left this neighborhood on the same day" as William's elopement traveling "for the State of Ohio" and Turner believed it was "highly probable that [William] went off in company

University Press, 1999), 192; and in Eva Shepherd Wolf, *Almost Free: A Story about Family and Race in Antebellum Virginia* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2012).

¹⁵ *Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, December 6, 1830.

¹⁶ *Genius of Liberty*, April 25, 1835.

with them.”¹⁷ By traveling with emigrants who had already secured their free papers and who were known in the neighborhood as manumitted slaves, William may have hoped that they could provide him shelter and a cover during their journey to a free state.

Slaveholders put stock in the ability of blacks and whites to provide assistance to runaways. The type of aid that might be provided ranged from limited or one-time assistance to long-term partnerships. The most frequently cited examples of limited or one-time aid included providing food or provisions, hiding slaves from patrols, and giving information about routes or dangers. Examples of more extended partnerships involved activities such as guiding runaways to the North and providing transportation.

Some people assisted hopeful runaways by offering temporary shelter. Slaveholders identified potential allies in runaway advertisements in order to draw attention to those most likely to offer assistance thereby facilitating a quick capture. Escaped slave, Bob, might have found refuge in Georgetown after leaving slaveowner Elias B. Martin’s residence near Haymarket on September 1, 1840. Six months later, Martin noted in a revised runaway advertisement that Bob was “supposed to be in the District of Columbia,” passing as a free man. Martin also had learned that Bob had “been seen” in Georgetown at the residences of free blacks Jack White and Spencer Hall.¹⁸ Absentee slaveowner Francis C. Fitzhugh suspected his enslaved man, John Mathews, was “concealed” by Mathews’ free parents living in Washington, DC after Mathews ran away from Dumfries in October 1844.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 26, 1838.

¹⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, April 28, 1841.

¹⁹ Fitzhugh listed his address as Hampstead Post Office, King George County, Virginia in the runaway ad he posted for John Mathews. *Alexandria Gazette*, November 24, 1844.

Providing information about escape routes and safe havens constituted another form of limited assistance. Enslaved persons gained critical knowledge of the terrain and byways by accompanying a slaveowner on his travels, through master-sanctioned travel as waggoner, or via experience moving clandestinely at night to meet a broad family, attend a social event, seek temporary respite from work, or during an escape attempt. Slaveholders suspected these mobile slaves of sharing with potential runaways knowledge useful for furtive movements.

Enslaved man, Sampson, gained valuable experience in clandestine movements during his escape. After his sale away from the estate of Loudoun County's Daniel McCarty, Sampson eloped and was apprehended in Fairfax County. Not to be deterred, the fifty-eight year old Sampson "made his escape from those who guarded him at night" and was later spotted in Alexandria. Apparently he had been frequently seen "passing from Prince George County in Maryland by Sheppard's Mills into Loudo[u]n" and was "believed to be generally concealed in Kean's Neck" in Fairfax County.²⁰ During Sampson's travels from Maryland to Virginia, he may well have noted routes, safe havens, or patrol activities. The potential for Sampson to share this information with other hopeful runaways made slaveholders in the region uneasy.

Runaways who navigated north towards freedom posed a threat to northern Virginia slaveholders when they shared knowledge of the routes and havens with other potential runaways. An enslaved man named Tom, claimed by Fauquier slaveholder Thomas Marshall, escaped from northern Virginia and traveled as far north as

²⁰ *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, August 7, 1812.

Philadelphia before he was apprehended and returned to the jail in Warrenton by July 1822. After Tom's capture Marshall opted to sell Tom "to a trader, name unknown." Yet before Tom could be moved from the jail he escaped from custody. Rather than immediately fleeing north, Tom apparently hid out in the neighborhood near the Marshall family seat at Oak Hill in Fauquier County, and recruited family members for another escape attempt. On Saturday, July 20, Tom left Fauquier County again, this time taking his cousins, Bob and Joe Baker from slaveowner Thomas Marshall, and enslaved men Essex and Ananias, belonging to John Marshall, Jr., and Anthony, who belonged to James K. Marshall. The three Marshall slaveowners claimed there was "no doubt" the group, led by Tom, were "all endeavoring to get to Philadelphia." Tom's daring escape from jail bespoke a determination to find freedom. His prior experience navigating northward made him a valuable guide for the other Marshall slaves and this experience made him a threat to slaveholders trying to maintain control over enslaved property.²¹

After Frank Wanzer successfully led a group of runaways from Loudoun County to Canada during the winter of 1855-1856, he returned to Loudoun County and led three more persons out of enslavement and towards freedom in Canada in August 1856.²²

Wanzer's experience traversing through patrols and across hundreds of miles combined

²¹ *Alexandria Herald*, July 24, 1822.

²² Frank Wanzer traveled for two weeks from Canada before returning to Aldie where he convinced Robert Stewart and Betsey Smith to run away from the Widow Hutchinson and Betsey's husband, Vincent Smith to leave slaveholder Nathan Skinner. William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition. (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 128-129.

with his desire to free his family from enslavement emboldened him to help others find freedom²³.

James Curry, a formerly enslaved man, recalled the type of personal and shared knowledge that enabled him to evade detection during his flight from North Carolina to Canada in 1839. Curry's work as a teamster allowed him to gather useful information about routes; his ability to quickly detect potential allies enabled him to find food and shelter.²⁴ Prior to reaching Dumfries in Prince William County, he "had been warned by a colored man, a few nights before, to beware of Dumfries" so instead of trying to walk through the area, he appropriated an obliging horse and rode through town, evading the bull-dogs that "lay along the street, ready to seize the poor night traveler, but being on horse-back, they did not molest me." After successfully navigating past Dumfries, Curry released the horse and continued on through Alexandria and on to Washington, D.C. where he "made friends with a colored family, with whom I rested eight days."²⁵ Curry's experience demonstrates that it was never just one person who provided assistance, but many individuals. To find assistance runaways required an ability to network to identify

²³ For a detailed explanation of Wanzer's routes, see the map and discussion in Deborah Brower, "'...Frank Having Subsequently Run Away': A Fresh Look at the Frank Wanzer Escape" *The Historical Society of Frederick County Journal* (Fall 2011), 43-46.

²⁴ Curry gained information about routes during his travels from North Carolina to as far north as Petersburg, Virginia "having been several times sent there by my master with a team." During his escape one slave pointed out a house owned by Quakers near Petersburg and informed Curry that the property "belongs to a Friend; they never hold slaves," information beneficial to locating potential allies. Though hungry during most of the escape, Curry only asked slaves or free blacks for food and was "never refused, if they had food to give." "Narrative of James Curry," John W. Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 142.

²⁵ John W. Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 143.

allies, an ability to think and move quickly, and intuition to identify danger along the way.

Other people provided more long-term assistance or extended partnerships such as serving as guides or providing transportation. As discussed previously, Landon Phillips organized and guided Hannah and Ann during their (unsuccessful) escape from Loudoun County. Frank Wanzer returned from Canada to not only share information about routes, but also to lead other family members North to freedom. The actions Landon Phillips and Frank Wanzer demonstrated the leadership role some free blacks played in actively assisting enslaved persons to escape from servitude.²⁶

Providing transportation was another form of extended assistance. Free black waggoners, hack drivers, or carriers were especially suspect due to their mobility across neighborhoods and from rural to urban areas. Thomas Hampton believed his forty-eight year old enslaved woman, Delia, had received help during her escape in 1839. Hampton recalled Delia had been seen in the company of a “negro wagoner” nearly a year before her escape, shortly before Hampton took her to Washington D.C. from her previous homes in Fauquier County. Hampton assumed the wagoner had transported Delia to “some of the numerous hiding places of Alexandria, Georgetown, or Washington.”²⁷ This willingness to connect Delia’s disappearance with an event that occurred nearly a year prior to her flight hints at the distrust and suspicion some slaveholders exhibited at any contact between mobile free blacks or slaves.²⁸

²⁶ *Commonwealth v. Landon Phillips* (1845).

²⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 31, 1838.

²⁸ Hampton did not indicate whether the wagoner was free or enslaved.

An enslaved trader known as Bartlett or Bartley assisted runaways by providing transportation to Maryland. Bartlett, though technically still enslaved to Amos Debbam, resided in Loudoun County on Edward Carter's plantation, carted goods to Alexandria, and traded "pretty much as a free man" according to local residents.²⁹ In 1833 Bartlett was charged along with Abner Carter, a member of the influential Carter family, with "feloniously stealing taking and carrying away" four slaves from Fauquier County slaveowners John W. Violett and Edmund B. Cavalier.³⁰ According to witness testimony, on or about the 17th of May, 1833, Bartlett transported four enslaved children in his blue cart drawn by Carter's roan horse. The group, comprised of Bartlett; 18 year old Letitia; Jesse, aged between 15 and 16 years old; 15 year old John; and 9 year old Jerry; travelled from Fauquier County through Washington, D.C., stopping at Vansville, Maryland before continuing onward to Bladensburg, Maryland. Tavern keeper, Hugh W. Drummond noted the appearance of Bartlett, the horse, and "several negroes with the cart" after midnight that evening. Drummond's enslaved stable boy informed the tavern keeper that "a negro

²⁹ Deposition of Norman Cummers, *Commonwealth v. Abner Carter*, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1833-008, AAHA.

³⁰ *Commonwealth v. Abner Carter*, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1833-008, AAHA, (quote). Abner Carter knew the Violett family, having visited the home of James and Sarah Violett on several occasions and testifying on behalf of Sarah Violett in her suit to reclaim alimony from her husband, James. To deprive Sarah of any financial support in her 1832 chancery suit to recover alimony payments, James sold his land, home, possessions, and slaves (presumably including Letitia, Jesse, John and Jerry) to his nephews John W. Violett and Edmund Cavalier (husband of James Violett's niece) shortly before May 4, 1833. According to information provided by John W. Patterson who served John Violett and Edmund Cavalier with a summons, John Violett claimed he was a resident of the state of Indiana and Cavillier resided in the state of Ohio. Deposition of Abner Carter (March 30, 1833) and John W. Patterson (May 4, 1833), *Violett v. Violett*, Fauquier County, 1834-001, Library of Virginia Online Chancery Records, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=061-1834-001#img>.

man & a parcel of negroes [were] going to Balto[more]” and the group departed before morning.³¹

Coincidentally, Fauquier resident William Gibson encountered Bartlett and the four slaves on the road to Bladensburgh and later notified Cavalier.³² In the runaway slave ad posted on June 1st, Violet and Cavalier posited that the four runaways had been “decoyed or persuaded from the premises of the subscribers, by some designing person” and secreted in Fauquier or an adjoining county. Then Violet and Cavalier reported that the “negroes were seen in a cart, or part in, and part on foot, crossing the bridge near Bladensburgh” apparently on their way to see their mistress in Baltimore. Gibson recognized the four runaways, “conversed with them” on the road, “but mistrusted nothing” of the incident.³³

After Bartlett deposited his passengers in some unknown location, possibly in Baltimore, he returned to the tavern in Vansville that evening where he met Abner Carter who had travelled as far as Vansville on the stage. According to witness testimony, Carter met Bartlett at Drummond’s tavern and told Bartlett to sell the cart and horse. In addition, Carter handed Bartlett five dollars to cover his expenses returning to Loudoun County, further implicating both men in the disappearance of the four enslaved children.³⁴ During Carter’s trial, key witnesses from Maryland failed to attend causing the court to dismiss

³¹ *Commonwealth v. Abner Carter*, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1833-008, AAHA.

³² Testimony of Edward B. Cavalier, *Commonwealth v. Abner Carter*, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1833-008, AAHA.

³³ “Fifty Dollars Reward,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, June 1, 1833.

³⁴ Testimony of John W. Brown, *Commonwealth v. Abner Carter*, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1833-008, AAHA.

charges against Carter.³⁵ Bartlett pled guilty to the charge of stealing sundry slaves on June 19, 1833 and was committed to further trial. Unfortunately, court documents did not include any further information about his case.³⁶

Bartlett's connections to runaways apparently did not end in 1833, but continued even after his manumission in 1836.³⁷ Shortly before February, 1839, Bartlett, then aged forty-five, was captured in Maryland piloting a slave to Pennsylvania, yet he was able to escape, leaving behind the stolen horse used in the escape and his own free papers.³⁸ Shortly thereafter residents of the Upperville neighborhood in Fauquier County posted an advertisement seeking Bartlett's apprehension on charges he enticed and aided "several slaves" in their escape to Pennsylvania. Bartlett, who grew up in the Upperville area, apparently retained connections to slaves in that area after moving to Salem in Loudoun County. Bartlett chose to use his mobility as a local trader and his habits of making trips to cities like Alexandria to assist other slaves to find freedom north of the Potomac River.

In 1856, news circulated in Pennsylvania and in Richmond, Virginia of a "singular affair" involving three people from Loudoun County, "a negro...with a white

³⁵ Carter's reputation did suffer, but not necessarily from his actions with the Violett / Cavalier slaves. His 1830 marriage to Martha E. Carter, daughter of Edward Carter, led to a chancery suit in 1840 when she accused him of cruelty, abuse, and infidelity. According to neighbors, in the mid-1830s Carter turned his home on Edward Carter's lands into a tipling house and gaming establishment catering to the lowest orders despite Abner's earlier connections to the Methodist Church. *Martha E. Carter v. Abner Carter*, Loudoun County 1840-043, Library of Virginia Chancery Records, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1840-043>.

³⁶ *Commonwealth v. Bartlett* (otherwise called Bartley), negro slave of Amos Denham, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1833-006, AAHA.

³⁷ Amey Ellen Denham, surviving widow of Amos Denham, manumitted Bartley in a deed written on February 6, 1836 and recorded February 8, 1836. One of the witnesses was Landon L. Carter, son of Edward Carter who had granted Bartlett / Bartley permission to live on his property at the time of the Violett / Cavalier escape. Amey Ellen Denham to Bartley, deed of manumission, Loudoun Deed Book 4F: 58.

³⁸ "\$200 Reward," *The Washingtonian*, February 9, 1839, microfilm.

woman and a little boy,” who had arrived in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania via horse and buggy. According to a newspaper report, the following day the black man apparently left town leaving behind the horse, buggy, woman and the boy, though later reports indicate the three left together. A few days later Loudoun County resident Noble S. Braden arrived in Chambersburg and claimed that both the horse and the missing black man belonged to his father-in-law. He identified the buggy as property of another Loudoun County resident and “obliged himself to restore [horse and buggy] to their owners.” Apparently Braden “exhibited some feeling against the woman,” for her role in helping the enslaved man escape and for her culpability in the theft of the horse and buggy, but he “did not seem inclined to give much information concerning her” to the press.³⁹

The publication of this account confirmed slaveholder fears that antislavery proponents capable of assisting in brazen and daring escapes resided in northern Virginia, yet the details of this escape, as related later to two Underground Railroad conductors revealed more complex relationships had formed between the man and woman. The above mentioned enslaved man, David Lewis, in his determination to make a bid for freedom, used his standing with his master, Joshua Pusey, to gain permission to “take his master’s horse to visit his mother.” Meanwhile, his accomplice, a white woman named Emily Ann Mahoney, hired a carriage.⁴⁰ To create a credible ruse, Lewis decided to play the part of a coachman, traveling in service to Mahoney and her ten year old child. After

³⁹ The article cited the Chambersburg, Pennsylvania *Spirit* as the source of information. *The Daily Dispatch*, June 27, 1856.

⁴⁰ Sydney Howard Gay, “Underground Railroad Journal,” June 5, 1856, as transcribed in Don Papson and Tom Calarco, *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City: Sydney Howard Gay, Louis Napoleon and the Record of Fugitives* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015), 183.

locating overnight accommodations in Chambersburg, the proprietor grew suspicious and believed their presence was part of “an Underground Rail Road movement” but “being an obliging hotel-keeper,” he assured Mahoney that he “would not betray them.” Lewis and Mahoney, fearful of capture, decided to leave the horse and buggy and take the train to Harrisburg where they found directions to conductor William Still in Philadelphia.⁴¹

While Still did not speculate on the precise nature of their relationship, he later commented in his published work that since “the sole aim apparent in this case was freedom for the slave the Committee received these travelers as Underground Rail Road passengers,” and the trio were sent together to Sydney Howard Gay in Albany and then further north, implying the two had formed a close, possibly sexual relationship.⁴² This risky venture of a white woman and child traveling allegedly with a servant served as a ruse to enable the trio to reach Pennsylvania and continue the journey north from Chambersburg, yet their experience reveals the complex level of preparations made for their escape. Coordinating plans, developing new personas, acquiring appropriate transportation, saving money to fund the trip required time and trust. The fact that a white woman assisted an enslaved man generated additional cause for concern about antislavery influences infiltrating northern Virginia.

Evidence that persons, especially whites, either through motives of profit or personal convictions, actively assisted runaways, escape proved disconcerting to

⁴¹ William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised edition. (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 217.

⁴² William Still, *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised edition. (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 217. Authors Papson and Calarco surmised that the “implication of it is that they [Lewis and Mahoney] were a biracial couple.” Don Papson and Tom Calarco. *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City: Sydney Howard Gay, Louis Napoleon and the Record of Fugitives* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015), 183.

slaveholders. The experiences of northern Virginia enslaved persons show that they utilized individual initiative, took advantage of fortuitous circumstances, and sought and accepted assistance from others in order to facilitate escape. Sometimes seemingly unrelated community actions created an opportunity for enslaved persons to escape.

When a local slaveowner, Mr. Lee, publicly shamed John Davis, a British man hired to tutor in Occoquan by calling the latter “a schoolmaster that could not write,” Davis decided to gain his revenge through the assistance of a local enslaved man named Dick. Dick used his dog to lure away from the schoolhouse the annoying canines that Lee’s son regularly brought to school. Dick then disposed of the curs. Davis’s plan resulted in Lee losing “the guards to his plantation.” Once the dogs were gone, Davis learned that “the negroes broke open his [Lee’s] barn, pilfered his sacks of Indian corn, [and] rode his horses in the night.”⁴³ Davis’s act of revenge on the boastful Mr. Lee (with the assistance of an enslaved man) provided the impetus for the slaves’ appropriation of food and transport for an escape. The ability to take advantage of circumstances and alliances generated opportunities to regain some control over enslaved lives.

Runaway George Johnson related the story of the events leading up to the escape of a fellow slave named Thomas and how Thomas took the initiative to alter his future. Thomas grew suspicious of his owner’s intentions when the man asked Thomas to deliver a letter to a “soul-driver.” Thomas used his knowledge of neighborhood resources to locate a man able to read the letter, thereby learning of the proposed sale. Thomas then arranged for a free black to deliver the letter to the trader in his stead, again suggesting

⁴³ John Davis, *Travels of Four Years and a Half in the United States of America; During 1798, 1799, 1800, 1801, and 1802* (London: R. Edwards, Printer, 1803), 392.

the importance of neighborhood connections. The ruse proved the master's intent to sell Thomas because the trader took the free black into custody at the local jail to "safe-keep" the man (presumed to be the slave, Thomas). Johnson recalled that Thomas had hidden from the driver, then "came to us," his fellow slaves from the neighborhood, and they "made up a purse, and sent him on his way."⁴⁴

Thomas's actions reveal the critical networks created within enslaved neighborhoods. He asked for help from a free black, chosen not only for his literacy skills, but also assuming that his well-known free status would deter a trader being able to leave the area with him. When Thomas learned his master intended to sell him, he hid out until he could seek the assistance of his fellow slaves. His enslaved friends pooled financial resources (confirming the ability of slaves to acquire money) to facilitate Thomas's hasty escape. Thomas's ability to cultivate helpful associations proved crucial for Thomas to evade his master's plans to sell him.

Thirty-nine year old Buckner and forty year old James, claimed by slaveholder Uriah Byrne may have negotiated a deal with Washington Shumway, a white "harvest hand," to assist them in their plans to escape from Fauquier County in 1827. Shumway's employer in Fauquier County, Jonah Reid, recalled observing James and Shumway conversing on several occasions, including the Saturday night Samuel Smith's horse went missing from Smith's pasture. Part of the plan included the theft of a horse, a mode of transportation that enabled each of the men to ride part of the way along their westward route. Buckner, James, Shumway and the missing horse were observed passing through

⁴⁴ "George Johnson," Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery*, 53.

the town of Paris on Sunday. Later that day at the Ashby's Gap Turnpike toll gate, the toll keeper remembered James and Buckner rode on the black horse together while a "dirty & shabbily dressed" white man "without a coat" followed on foot about two hundred yards behind the two black men. The three men then proceeded to Daniel Ferro's house near the city of Bath in Morgan County, Virginia where they stopped for breakfast Monday morning.⁴⁵

As with other runaways, the three men developed a story to explain their movements together. Shumway told Ferro that he was taking James and Buckner to New York under his authority as the son of their supposedly deceased owner. Due to the suspicious nature of their story, James, Buckner, and Shumway were arrested and taken to the Morgan County jail and upon identification of the stolen horse, were returned to Fauquier County on charges of horse stealing.⁴⁶

In August 1856 a white man named Charles Spinks was arrested in Middleburg on charges that he was involved in the escape of at least three enslaved men from the possession of Townsend McVeigh, Sandford Rogers, and Stretchly Chinn. According to a newspaper report, Spinks purchased two carpet bags and attempted to purchase pistols from a Middleburg store owner. Later, after the disappearance and subsequent capture of the three enslaved men who had the carpet bags in their possession, suspicion devolved upon Spinks as an accomplice in the failed escape plot.⁴⁷ Even though the case against

⁴⁵ *Commonwealth v. James & Buckner*, Box 2, Folder 4, Accession #42310, Executive Papers of Governor William B. Giles, Library of Virginia.

⁴⁶ *Commonwealth v. James & Buckner*, Box 2, Folder 4, Accession #42310, Executive Papers of Governor William B. Giles, Library of Virginia. James and Buckner were sentenced to be hanged, a sentence that Governor Giles later commuted to sale and transportation outside the bounds of the United States.

⁴⁷ "An Arrest," *Warrenton Whig* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 18, 1856.

Spinks was later dismissed, his purchase of the identifiable carpet bags from a local shopkeeper and his questions about purchasing pistols were observed and noted and led to a strong enough suspicion to place Spinks under arrest.⁴⁸

In each of these examples, enslaved persons utilized established networks or formed new information channels to quickly take advantage of opportunities that helped shape their futures. Awareness of potential threats and a willingness to make the most of limited opportunities were vital skills that slaves needed to alter conditions of enslavement. Yet despite evidence of the ability of enslaved to take advantage of and shape their circumstances, slaveholders still looked outward to identify white persons willing and able to assist in escape attempts.

An even more disturbing type of loss for slaveowners was theft, the taking of slave property by abolitionists. In 1814 Fauquier County slaveowner, Lucy Marshall claimed that her enslaved man, George, had been “induced to believe that he [was] entitled to his freedom” though she offered no further information as to the cause of this belief. Marshall also averred George had obtained “a certificate from an unauthorized person to that effect” that would enable George to “endeavor to pass as a free man.”⁴⁹ Charles Tyler, Junior of Sudley Mill in Prince William County heard reports that his fifteen year old enslaved youth, Giles, had been “carried into Alexandria by one *William A. Adams*.”⁵⁰ In 1845 Baltimore’s *American Republican and Baltimore Daily Clipper* reported that three individuals had been arrested near Flint Hill in Rappahannock County

⁴⁸ *Commonwealth v. Charles Spinks*, Loudoun County Criminal Case 1866-038, LCHAD.

⁴⁹ *Alexandria Gazette Commercial and Political*, January 13, 1814.

⁵⁰ *Alexandria Gazette Commercial and Political*, October 24, 1808. Emphasis in the original.

in Virginia, just south of Fauquier County, “upon the charge of being engaged in an attempt to carry off slaves.” The newspaper identified three “supposed abolitionists” as Elijah Holmes, [Mr.?] Tate from the Goose Creek neighborhood in Loudoun County, and Silas Grist from Pennsylvania. While no further details of the arrest or supposed crime were provided, the news certainly raised unease at the possibility of local residents acting against slaveholders and threatening control over enslaved persons.⁵¹

In his memoirs written long after the days of slavery, Dr. Mason Graham Ellzey, a Loudoun native, recalled events from 1855 when his father hired skilled brick burners from the vicinity of Sharpsburg, Maryland, to make bricks for a new family home. As Ellzey related, “this contract gave us our first actual experience of the existence of the so-called ‘underground railroad,’ which was a route over which fugitive slaves were secretly conveyed to the ‘Panhandle,’ and thence into the state of Pennsylvania, where all trace of them was lost.”⁵² As Ellzey later related the events, “some of my father’s slaves revealed to him the fact that, ever since these brick burners had been there, they had been urging the slaves to let them pilot as many as cared to go, over the underground railroad.” Yet in true patriarchal form, Ellzey’s father apparently reported, “they had all refused to listen to the proposals, and now thought proper to inform him [Ellzey’s father] of the facts.”⁵³

Despite sending for the sheriff immediately upon hearing the account of the supposed loyal slaves, the Maryland men, “fearing the negroes might inform on them,” left Loudoun and “no trace of them could be found.” Ellzey took as evidence of their

⁵¹ *American Republican and Baltimore Daily Clipper*, September 1, 1845.

⁵² Mason Graham Ellzey, M.D. “The Cause We Lost and the Land We Love.” [ca. 1910], 6. Virginia Historical Society. Hereafter referred to as Ellzey, “Cause We Lost.”

⁵³ Ellzey remembered these details from his father’s correspondence. Ellzey, “Cause We Lost,” 6.

guilt in enticing slaves “the fact that they abandoned a portion of their wages, and no application for it was ever made, nor anything further heard of them.” Investigation into the matter continued and at some unspecified point it “came to be known that the ferryman at Edward’s Ferry, on the Potomac, was the underground agent of these organized thieves, at the ferry, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal was a part of the route which received, on certain boats, fugitives brought over the river by the ferryman.”⁵⁴

Due to the constant threat of abolitionist intervention and the proximity to “free” states, Ellzey’s father, Thomas Louis Ellzey, hazarded the opinion “that the institution of slavery along the border line of the slave and free states could; in no event, survive another generation.” Faced with what he perceived as “the utter insecurity of slave property, right on the border line, and within four miles of the underground railroad at Edward’s Ferry,” Thomas Ellzey planned to relocate a portion of his enslaved forces to Louisiana.⁵⁵

The borderlands presented a particular problem for slaveholders. Runaways as well as enslaved persons traveling with masters who reached as far as the Ohio River were advised by free blacks living in Cincinnati to stay on the Ohio side of the river. Formerly enslaved man Josiah Henson recalled that while “passing along the Ohio shore” he and the group of enslaved persons he was escorting to their new master in Kentucky “were repeatedly told” by blacks in Cincinnati that they “were no longer slaves, but free

⁵⁴ Ellzey, “Cause We Lost,” 6.

⁵⁵ As stated by his son, Mason Graham Ellzey referring to correspondence between Thomas and Mason Ellzey. Ellzey, “Cause We Lost,” 7-8.

men.” Henson said the “crowds of colored people” gathered around the travelers and “insisted on our remaining with them;” that by doing so they could be their “own masters” and “out of all reach of pursuit.”⁵⁶

Such advice must have reached the ears of three enslaved persons, a man and two young girls, traveling with Fauquier County master Thornton Withers in 1857 along the Ohio River. While their steamboat was berthed at the wharf, the man and two girls were “seized...by a writ of habeas corpus” and placed under the guardianship of the Hamilton County Court in Cincinnati.⁵⁷ Apparently a free black “made an affidavit” initiating the writ of habeas corpus in an attempt to legally free the man and girls from their master. The case made headlines in Virginia because in the minds of southern slaveholders, the slaves “had not been on the soil of Ohio; they were on the common highway, and where the owner had a perfect right to be with and hold them” so any interference constituted a legal infringement upon slaveholder rights and costly expense to retrieve.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Josiah Henson, *Father Henson's Story of His Own Life. With an Introduction by Mrs. H. B. Stowe* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1858), 51.

⁵⁷ “Result of the Slave Case in Cincinnati,” *Daily Dispatch*, November 6, 1857.

⁵⁸ “The Late Slave Case,” from the *Cincinnati Enquirer* as published in the *Richmond Enquirer*, November 10, 1857. When interviewed by a man named Conway, the three slaves revealed something of their lives in enslavement. The enslaved man desired to return with Withers to Fauquier County because he “had a wife and five children in the family of Jordan Saunders of Warrenton.” The two girls, aged nine and eleven, were described as “orphans” with no ties to Virginia yet also too young to appreciate the gravity of their situation. Withers sent a lawyer who challenged the writ and established himself as the guardian of the three enslaved persons and then quickly moved them across the river into Kentucky. The reported mournfully that the girls had been “returned to the most corrupt hole of a village to be found in all Northern Virginia, a place where it is known that not one colored woman in a hundred ever reaches maturity undefiled.” Thus, the decision of the Cincinnati judge “turned two intelligent and likely little girls to be irretrievably lost.” “The Cincinnati Slave Case,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 13, 1857. See also *The Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*, November 7, 1857; “The Slave Case at Cincinnati,” *Ohio State Journal*, November 11, 1857, (pages 1 and 2); *The Georgia Telegraph*, November 17, 1857; *The Weekly San Joaquin Republican*, December 5, 1857. Upon their return to Fauquier County, nearly one hundred citizens of Warrenton “gave a complimentary supper” for Lawyer Dennis for “rescuing” Withers’ slaves from the “possession of the abolitionists in Cincinnati.” One speaker, A. J. Marshall, thanked Dennis “for his many

Slaveholders' suspicions about the nature and extent of assistance networks often became public when they speculated about potential allies and possible forms of assistance provided to runaways. Identifying the type of assistance available to absconding slaves reveals much about the process of running away, the places where slaves might seek shelter, the supplies they could acquire, information helpful to navigating unfamiliar terrain, and transportation options.

Kidnappers and Profiteers

Sometimes the process of seeking helpful alliances worked against enslaved persons when profiteering whites took advantage of desperate slaves hoping to escape. In Prince William County in 1830, enslaved woman Eliza entered into an agreement with a white man, Charles Grandison Turner, to "carry" her and another slave "to a free State to get married" for a fee of \$50. According to testimony gathered during the trial, slave mistress, Anna Ward related that her enslaved girl, Eliza, claimed she had taken a trunk and morocco purse containing money from her mistress and had given it to Turner to pay for his services. Despite the later claims of Eliza's mistress that the purloined trunk contained \$130, Turner reported back to Eliza that the trunk only held \$42.50 and enjoined Eliza to return to her mistress's things to take additional money or items of value to meet his price.⁵⁹ County officials brought charges against Eliza for felony theft

efforts in defence of the constitution and the law, when about to be trampled upon by a lawless mob." *Alexandria Gazette*, January 6, 1858.

⁵⁹ *Commonwealth v. Eliza, Trial Testimony*, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia.

of property and a misdemeanor charge against Charles Grandison Turner for receipt of stolen goods (though apparently not for the greater charge of aiding a slave to escape).⁶⁰

While Eliza was condemned to hang for the crime of felony theft of \$130, (Governor Floyd later reprieved Eliza by reducing the sentence to sale and transportation beyond the limits of the United States), Turner's fate after his incarceration in the Brentsville jail is unknown.⁶¹ One reason why Eliza, an eighteen year old enslaved girl, might have taken the lead in the theft was that at the time of the proposed escape, her fiancé, George, aged about nineteen years old, was in the hired service of a Mrs. Courtney.⁶² Perhaps the two determined that Eliza, as a household servant, had greater knowledge of the household valuables as well as access to keys and locked trunks, therefore making her more likely to acquire the money to pay Turner for his services. As

⁶⁰ For the charges laid against Turner, see "Commonwealth to Jackson &c., Account" LP (1831) 1001085_00376, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

⁶¹ Court minute books from Prince William County for the years 1815 to 1832 were lost during the Civil War and any transcript for Turner's trial has yet to be found, if indeed it still exists. Testimony taken from Eliza included the information that "Grandison Turner was gone to his uncle Thomas Turner in the neck." *Commonwealth v. Eliza, Trial Testimony*, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia. Prince William County Constables, James S. Jackson, Mason French, and John Tansill charged the county fees for executing the warrant on Turner on September 9 at his (unidentified) location 33 miles from Brentsville and transporting Turner across the Potomac River. Constable Jackson hired the use of a horse as well as an added guard of two men to pursue Turner to serve the warrant, apprehend him, and escort Turner to the jail in Brentsville. According to claims submitted by Prince William jailor, R. Lipscomb, C. G. Turner was committed for a misdemeanor and spent sixty-seven days in jail until January 3, 1831, accruing fees of \$20.34. "Commonwealth to Lipscomb, Account" LP (1831)1001103_00003, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. See also *Commonwealth to Jackson &c, Account*" LP (1831) 001085_00376, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

⁶² See the warrants executed by the Prince William County Court found in *Commonwealth v. Eliza*. See also Prince William County Jailor's accounts submitted by R. Lipscomb for committing and dieting "Negro George the property of David Jamerson charged with felony." George spent 47 days in jail from October 5, 1830 to November 21, 1830. Eliza spent only 28 days in jail from the 3rd to the 29th of November. "Commonwealth to Lipscomb, Account" LP (1831) 1001103_00003, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. On November 23, 1830 eighteen year old Eliza and nineteen year old George arrived at the state penitentiary in Richmond. "A List of Slaves and Free Persons of color received in the Penitentiary of Virginia for Sale and transportation from the 25th June 1816 to the 1st February 1842," Auditor of Public Accounts Records, image 993, miscellaneous microfilm reel 2555, Library of Virginia.

for Turner, his actions could be interpreted as an entrepreneurial effort to play upon the desires of freedom among enslaved persons rather than any overt abolitionist action.

Equally unscrupulous were kidnappers who took both enslaved and free blacks to distant markets for sale. One need only look to the courts or newspapers for confirmation of whites luring or kidnapping northern Virginia enslaved persons from their owners. Fauquier resident William Greer accused James M. Welch, alias Patrick Welch, a white man and blacksmith by trade, of kidnapping one of Greer's enslaved boys in 1833 and selling him in the District of Columbia for \$275. In lieu of a constabulary force to handle the crime, Greer contracted with the Alexandria slave trading firm of Franklin & Armfield to post an ad offering a reward for the apprehension of Welch and return of the stolen profits from the sale.⁶³ In 1843 "a man named Vermillion" appeared before Justice Goddard in the Criminal Court accused of kidnapping "a negro belonging to a gentleman in the State of Virginia." Apparently, while in the upper part of Loudoun County, Vermillion promised an enslaved man "that he should be free" if he accompanied Vermillion to a fishery. The enslaved man belonged to a Fairfax County slaveholder, but at the time of his kidnapping was hired out to work on Mr. Thomas Heaton's farm in Loudoun.⁶⁴

A possible case of kidnapping occurred around 1819 when Westley, the son of Jim and Milly, claimed he was "seduced away by some slave trader" either from the Loudoun estate of Charles Carter or while hired to work for the firm of Seaton and Love on "the Iron Works in the upper part of Virginia." After four year's absence from the

⁶³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 3, 1834.

⁶⁴ *National Intelligencer* as cited in the *Alexandria Gazette*, March 28, 1843, microfilm.

Leesburg neighborhood, Westley apparently escaped from his captor, was taken up in Franklin County, North Carolina and placed in the Louisburg Jail. The limited information in Sheriff Parsons's notice raises questions about Westley's story. Was he hired from Carter's estate to work in Seaton & Love's Iron Works and then "seduced away" and while escorted south by the unscrupulous slave trader was then able to escape? If so, his capture in Franklin County, North Carolina possibly meant he was on his way into the Lower South with the trader and in his attempt to return to Virginia was apprehended in North Carolina. Or had some other enslaved man become acquainted with the real Westley in Virginia, in a slave coffle, or somewhere in the Lower South and appropriated Westley's story as his own, gambling on the chance that a Carter representative would bring him out of North Carolina and further north to Virginia? Did a runaway use a story of kidnapping in hopes that a master might place blame on an unscrupulous profiteer rather than on the slave? If so, this ploy might reduce potential punishments. Westley's story raises questions about the appropriation of "luring" or "kidnapping" in accounts provided by incarcerated slaves. The examples of Greer, Vermillion, and Westley illustrate the threat of loss of enslaved property through kidnapping-for-profit schemes. While the danger of kidnapping affected the slave more personally than the slaveholder, slaveowners still worried about losing laborers and financial assets.

Resistance to capture

One measure of the desperation and determination that drove escaped slaves to seek freedom was the escalating level of violent resistance to recapture reported in news accounts, especially in the 1840s and 1850s. It appeared that by the 1840s escape plans included weapons for self-defense. The growing number of escape attempts that included more than two people and who carried weapons reflected an adaptive strategy by enslaved persons to flee from enslavement in groups and with weapons for protection.

Newspapers publicized reports of these desperate runaways and the sometimes lethal consequences for whites who interfered with their escape plans. In 1841 Fauquier resident Robert Dawson, was found dead “at a spring on the land of Daniel Payne, his head having been crushed and his brains knocked out whilst he was in the act of drinking.” Dawson had apparently apprehended a runaway female slave and was escorting her to the county jail before his untimely death. According to news reports published in Warrenton, Alexandria, and Richmond, there was “no doubt that the woman struck the fatal blow as he stooped to drink.” Ten days later, Joseph George’s enslaved woman Lucinda was charged with the murder of Dawson upon information provided by Benjamin Farrow of Prince William County.⁶⁵ Lucinda was later acquitted of the charges, yet that was no consolation to Dawson’s wife and six children who were left “in poverty.”⁶⁶ While Lucinda’s role was unclear in Dawson’s demise (or at least not proven

⁶⁵ *Commonwealth v. Lucinda, slave of Joseph George*, Box #18, 1841-020, Fauquier County Free Negro and Enslaved Records from Commonwealth Causes, AAHA.

⁶⁶ *Warrenton Times* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 21, 1841; *Richmond Whig*, September 24, 1841.

in court), the death of Robert Dawson demonstrated the dangers associated with apprehending runaway slaves.

In 1845 Fairfax County Attorney for the Commonwealth, H. W. Thomas, reported the news that Fairfax County resident, James T. Vermillion, was “most inhumanly [sic] murdered by a *Negro Man*, whom he had apprehended as a runaway.” Vermillion, near his home, had apparently captured the presumed runaway. As Vermillion was escorting the runaway to a county magistrate, as required by law for investigation and identification, the unnamed runaway took lethal action to prevent his return to William Brawner of Prince William County, identified as the enslaved man’s owner. Most likely the runaway acted in desperation at the thought of apprehension and return to the possession of Brawner, known as a slave trader as well as a slaveowner.⁶⁷ Attorney Thomas did not include details on how the act was committed, yet it was clear that the runaway was prepared to use whatever force needed to evade capture.⁶⁸

The attempted capture of ten runaway slaves from Loudoun in 1845 near Smithsburg in Washington County, Maryland also demonstrated the fierce will to evade a return to enslavement. Facing a group of eight citizens of Smithburg, the enslaved men “armed with hatchets, clubs and pistols refused to be taken peaceably.” In the desperate fight that followed, about half of the fugitives and would-be captors were “severely

⁶⁷ H. W. Thomas, “Stop the Murderer!” *Alexandria Gazette*, October 10, 1845. Emphasis in the original. Thomas’s notification also appeared in the *Richmond Enquirer* on October 13, 1845 and in the *Richmond Whig* on October 14, 1845.

⁶⁸ It is not known whether James Vermillion was related to the Vermillion accused of kidnapping an enslaved man in 1843 using a ruse of offering work in a fishery. *National Intelligencer* as cited in the *Alexandria Gazette*, March 28, 1843, microfilm.

wounded.” Of the ten fugitives, only two were captured.⁶⁹ Based on the types of weapons they had assembled for their defense, this group had prepared for violent encounters. Their desperation to not “be taken peaceably” alludes to the level of force they were willing to use.

In 1856 the *New York Times* reported that an attempted apprehension of “a party of ten negroes” hailing from Fauquier County by a Frederick County patrol turned violent when the “negroes showed fight.” The patrol claimed the slaves were “well armed with guns, &c.” One “desperate fellow” drew a weapon, aiming for one of the Frederick men, Mr. Cookus, “the muzzle nearly touching Mr. C’s breast” but the gun misfired, giving Cookus a chance to pull his own pistol and aim at the fugitive. Uncowed, the enslaved man “dropped his gun” and “drew a butcher’s knife,” and prepared to attack Cookus directly but was struck down when another of the Frederick men hit the enslaved man with a stone. By the end of the fracas the Frederick men had apprehended eight of the ten enslaved men and secured them in the Romney, Virginia jail while two slaves avoided capture.⁷⁰ In response to this event, the *Times*’s editor commented that the “peculiar institution don’t seem to flourish in the Old Dominion,” a thinly veiled critique of both enslavement and the methods of control employed by Virginians.

News accounts from the perspective of a patrol or slave-catching party portrayed the violence employed by fugitives to resist capture, while accounts from the runaways tell of their perceived rights to claim freedom. In 1855, when the Wanzer group of

⁶⁹ “Runaway Negroes by the Whole Sale,” *Hagerstown Herald* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, May 30, 1845.

⁷⁰ “Desperate Runaway Slaves,” *New York Times*, September 23, 1856.

escapees left Loudoun County, they travelled north into Maryland with two other absconding slaves, Joe, a man enslaved in Loudoun County to John Adams, and an unnamed man running from Fauquier County slaveholder, Charles W. Simpson.⁷¹ After journeying nearly one hundred miles, they were “attacked” by “six white men, and a boy” who, in the opinion of Underground Railroad conductor, William Still, “felt it to be their duty in kindness to their masters, if not to the travelers to demand of them an account of themselves.” The white group commanded the black men and women to “‘show what right’ they possessed” to be traveling together in a wagon and then ordered “the fugitives to surrender without further parley.”⁷² The fleeing group, determined to defend themselves and their right to seek freedom, produced pistols and knives.

Despite threats from the white men that they would shoot any who resisted capture, the fugitives displayed “unflinching determination...to stand their ground” and spill blood “rather than be ‘taken’.” One of the runaway men was shot, another captured, yet Grigsby and his wife, Mary Elizabeth, Mary’s sister, Emily (also known as Ann Wood) and the leader, Frank Wanzer, successfully evaded capture and were sheltered and transported by the antislavery Vigilance Committee to Syracuse, New York and then on to Toronto, Canada.

⁷¹ Barnaby Grigsby, his wife, Mary Elizabeth, Elizabeth’s sister, Emily Foster, and Emily’s fiancé, Frank Wanzer fled from the service of Loudoun County slaveholders, William Rogers and Townshend McVeigh. William Still, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition (William Still, Publisher: Philadelphia, 1886), 124, 125.

⁷² William Still, *Still’s Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition (William Still, Publisher: Philadelphia, 1886), 124, 125. See also William Rogers and Townshend McVeigh’s broadside advertising a \$300 reward for the secure capture of Barney Grigsby, Elizabeth, and Emily as found in John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 58.

News of the daring escape by the Wanzer party and its fight with the Maryland men reached the presses, and an article published in the Frederick, Maryland *Examiner* and republished in Richmond's *Daily Dispatch* recounted the arrest attempt. In this account, a certain Mr. Dixon first noticed the group while caring for their horses along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad "near the dividing line between Frederick and Carroll counties" in Maryland. Dixon, "believing them to be fugitives...spread the alarm, and some eight or ten persons gathered round to arrest them." Meanwhile, "the negroes, drawing revolvers and bowie knives, kept their assailants at bay, until five of the party succeeded in escaping in one of the wagons" while the sixth member of the group surrendered after he "was fired at, the load taking effect in the small of the back." The following evening, another of the fleeing slaves was taken in Carroll county "by Mr. Wm. Mitten, who arrested him in Westminster."⁷³ The two captured fugitives, Joe and an unnamed man, were identified as having absconded respectively from the service of Loudoun County slaveholder Mr. Adams and from Fauquier County slaveholder, Charles W. Simpson. Such publicity regarding first the loss of enslaved persons from a supposedly patriarchal institution and then the violent response by the men and women to evade recapture questioned the benign or beneficial master-slave relationship. Despite trumpeting the "skillful surgical aid" provided to the wounded slave, and the rescue of Joe who was "badly injured from frost-bite," readers still might question the process of capturing and returning fugitive slaves.⁷⁴

⁷³ Frederick (MD) *Examiner*, as published in the *Daily Dispatch*, Richmond, Virginia, January 4, 1856.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

These events were not singular or isolated events. The determination to use deadly force to prevent capture as well as implementing a strategy of forming groups for protection allude to the growing discontent with enslavement, the limitations of slave-owner control, and the determination to use force, if necessary, to live free from the shackles of bondage.

Antislavery Critique

Besides facing periods of relatively high numbers of runaways, evidence of a growing and expanding clandestine network of assistance, and more violent encounters between runaways and would-be captors, slaveholders also had to bear increased public critique of the institution of slavery and the methods of masterly control. Henry Clay proclaimed:

The slaveholder is held up and represented as the most atrocious of human beings. Advertisements of fugitive slaves and of slaves to be sold are carefully collected and blazoned forth, to infuse a spirit of detestation, and hatred against one entire and the largest section of the Union.⁷⁵

This public scrutiny affected northern Virginia particularly hard in 1839.

Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery As It Is: A Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, a publication of testimony relating to enslavement for the American Anti-Slavery Society published in 1839, criticized several northern Virginia slaveholders, including Mrs. Elizabeth L. Carter and Mrs. B. Newman of Groveton, Prince William

⁷⁵ Quote from Henry Clay's speech as cited in *The Emancipator*, April 4, 1839.

County.⁷⁶ Weld opined that it was “no difficult matter to get at the ‘public opinion’ of a community, when *ladies* ‘of property and standing’ publish, under their own names” runaway advertisements.⁷⁷ Citing an advertisement posted in the *National Intelligencer*, Weld’s book highlighted a private issue of slave ownership and made it a public attack on the character of two southern women.⁷⁸ While the ban on anti-slavery tracts in Southern post offices may have limited its reach to Southern audiences, a circulation of over 100,000 copies its first year of publication extended the reach of *American Slavery As It Is* across the nation and to international readers.⁷⁹

Culling information from runaway advertisements, the antislavery newspaper, *The Emancipator*, not only provided more notice to the numbers of enslaved fleeing from northern Virginia slaveholders, but in its editorial comments, the paper spotlighted the discrepancies between pro- and antislavery arguments. By offering large rewards for fugitive slaves in local or regional newspapers, slaveholders exposed themselves to public scrutiny from antislavery presses. *The Emancipator* frequently re-published advertisements for runaways while also providing scathing commentary on the South’s peculiar institution. Robert Fletcher and Edward Marshall’s advertisement offering up to

⁷⁶ Scholar Stephen Browne stated that Weld’s anti-slavery work was “part of a more general campaign to make slavery meaningful, to make vivid and compelling an evil to which most Northerners had never born witness.” By employing a “rhetoric of sentimentality” Weld offered a format for Northerners to “define the public moral commitment” to anti-slavery in a way that affirmed “class identity” and satisfied the “imperatives of enlightened reform.” Stephen Browne, “‘Like Gory Spectres’: Representing Evil in Theodore Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 80, (August 1994), 277.

⁷⁷ [Theodore Dwight Weld], *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 172.

⁷⁸ Carter and Newman’s advertisement was originally published in the *Daily National Intelligencer* on June 10, 1837. A critique of the women’s role in slaveholding was also published in *The Emancipator* on May 2, 1839.

⁷⁹ Stephen Browne, “‘Like Gory Spectres’: Representing Evil in Theodore Weld’s *American Slavery As It Is*,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 80, (August 1994), 277.

\$700 for the apprehension and return of enslaved men Nat, Sam, and Essex, to Fauquier County became fodder for gossip and scorn when republished in the April 4, 1839 edition of *The Emancipator*.⁸⁰ After Loudoun slaveholders, John Short and Jesse McVeigh, posted an advertisement for the “apprehension and safekeeping” of Frank, George, Phillis, and Alce, an article in *The Emancipator* opined:

That ‘democracy’ which can advertise, for the benefit of human flesh-mongers, those who have broken the galling chains of slavery, in order that they may be returned to interminable bondage, would, under favorable circumstances, sacrifice the country to its selfishness, and sell the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. That ‘democracy’ which can officially declare of those who have escaped from abject degradation and cruel servitude, that they ‘all went off without the slightest provocation’ proves that it knows nothing of the inestimable value of liberty, and deserves to be scouted from the republic.⁸¹

Also that year, slaveholder James Lake of Fauquier County came under the notice of the antislavery newspaper after Lake publicly claiming in an article in the Leesburg *Washingtonian* that he received from a letter from two of his fugitive slaves, brothers Noah and Reuben Brooks, then residing in Toronto, Canada. Lake averred that since their departure, the brothers expressed “their regret at having left me, and a desire to return home.” To enable the Brooks brothers to return to Virginia, Lake published a notice that he “will not pay any reward for their apprehension” and requested “that they may not be molested on their way home” to Fauquier County.⁸² Lake’s letter was re-published by several newspapers including the *Globe* of Washington, DC, the New York *Evening Star*, and the *Albany* (New York) *Argus* where it reached the attention of “the Friend of Man,”

⁸⁰ *The Emancipator*, April 4, 1839.

⁸¹ *The Emancipator*, November 7, 1839.

⁸² *The Washingtonian*, February 9, 1839, microfilm.

Hiram Wilson, from Toronto who wrote to noted abolitionist Gerrit Smith. Smith promptly republished Wilson's letter in *The Emancipator*.⁸³

Wilson claimed to know both Noah and Reuben Brooks, their residences, and something of their present work and economic situation. Because of this acquaintance, Wilson clarified that the letter to Lake was written by Reuben who "from a benevolent regard for their friends in Virginia, thought best to write a kind affectionate letter to their master." According to Wilson, Reuben later told his brother that the letter to Lake "was so affectionate that [Lake] put confidence in it, and he thinks that we shall return again [so] he had every advertisement taken down!" As Wilson noted, Reuben's letter "had the effect to deceive both the Argus and the argus-eyed James C. Lake, as facts shew; for neither the attractions of the Old Dominion, nor the patriarchal institution, nor the flatteries of the master have allured them from their asylum." With tongue in cheek, Wilson suggested that the "wonderful migratory tendency of human chattels northward is truly unfortunate to Mr. Lake and others" and he suggested "as a remedy" that "an ANTI-LOCOMOTIVE CHATTELSHIP INSURANCE COMPANY be organized for the purpose of insuring this curious kind of property against migratory destruction, or in other words, against running away."⁸⁴

Loudoun County slaveholder, Joseph Mead, earned the scorn of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* because of his 1839 Washington *Globe* advertisement seeking the apprehension and return of "a woman and six children" from his residence near Leesburg. *The Emancipator* picked up the story and published Mead's runaway ad and accompanying

⁸³ *The Emancipator*, May 16, 1839.

⁸⁴ *The Emancipator*, May 16, 1839. Emphasis in the original.

details about Mead and his enslaved workforce in a December, 1839 article. Mead presumed the enslaved family had been “carried off by a free man who calls himself Vincent Douglass, and who is the father of most of the children” and the group was “most likely...making to the North...travelling in a hack or carryall, as much concealed as possible.”⁸⁵

Perhaps the amount of the reward, totally up to seven hundred dollars, caught the eye of the editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, or the circumstances of a family escaping bondage under the care of a husband and father, or knowledge of Joseph Mead’s religious background made him a target for antislavery scorn. The editor assessed Vincent Douglass’s supposed role in the absconding of the family by asserting the “free colored man in the North is becoming ‘saucy’ enough to claim his rights, as a man and citizen; and in the slave states, he has the audacity to steal his own wife, and six children, from their ‘lawful owner.’”⁸⁶

Yet the *Freeman* claimed “this bereavement of Joseph Mead [in the loss of this enslaved family], touches our sensibilities.” Mead, described as “a Pennsylvanian by birth—the son of honest Quaker parents” who, despite his upbringing, went “down South, and there became ‘one of our southern brethren,’ and slavery became ‘entailed’ upon him.” Denouncing the former Quaker’s appropriation of the peculiar institution, *Freeman* stated that “this slaveholding is one thing for a native Virginian, who has from

⁸⁵ From the *Washington Globe* as republished in *The Emancipator*, December 5, 1839. Mead suspected Vincent Douglass was the instigator of the escape and in some respects, he was right as Douglass probably contacted Washington D.C. free black, Leonard Grimes, to help transport his family to freedom. Later court documents indicated that Grimes was accused of carrying the Douglass family from Loudoun to Washington D.C. and sentenced to the relatively light term of two years imprisonment.

⁸⁶ *The Emancipator*, December 5, 1839.

his youth up been taught to believe that raising slaves for the South and South West is the great end and aim of life” yet Mead’s adoption of the mantle of slaveholding especially as “a man who has just slipped out of his Quaker coat, and who still retains a dim recollection of the good old ‘testimony’ of Friends about this human merchandise business” deserved especial scrutiny and scorn.⁸⁷

Surely, Mead faced “a sore trial” by “accommodating himself” to slaveholding. Now, the irony was that once Mead had “laid the ghost of all his Quakerly reminiscences” and was “beginning to fancy himself a veritable Patriarch, with ‘servants born in his house,’” Mead found himself “deserted by a whole family—mother and six children: not stealing away one by one as if ashamed of their ingratitude, but riding off in a body, as if they were doing the most laudable thing in the world.” The *Emancipator* included a copy of the valuation prepared by Loudoun commissioner William K. Ish a month prior to the flight of the family in the editorial lampooning. Ish appraised the seven enslaved persons ranging in age from thirty-six years old to three years old at \$2,775, suggesting that the *Pennsylvania Freeman* had access to Mead’s financial records and had personal knowledge of Mead’s family history. In its relentless attack on Joseph Mead’s character in the loss of the family, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* criticized that “[t]o feel that one has sold himself to the enemy is no pleasant matter; but to mourn over the loss of the purchase money is still worse.”

Slave catchers also received the scorn of the *Emancipator*’s editor when he wrote that Mead’s offer of a reward “set that amiable class of our fellow citizens, who follow

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the laudable occupation of negro catching, in full howl after them all a long the line from Washington to Philadelphia.” To further rankle the pride of Mead, the *Freeman* offered “some consolation to the bereaved gentleman” by reporting that “a family which answered very well to his [Mead’s] graphic description” had been seen in the city, “preparing to make the fashionable tour of the Canadas,” and that residents of the city had furnished the family “with a good store of warm clothing for their northern journey.” To ensure that Joseph Mead received the message, the *Freeman* requested that the Washington *Globe* republish a portion of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*’s article or at a minimum, inform Mead that “the whole family had safely arrived in Canada.”⁸⁸

While it is uncertain whether Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, Mrs. B. Newman, Robert Fletcher, Edward Marshall, John Short, Jesse McVeigh, James Lake or Joseph Mead personally read *The Emancipator*, such public venom against specific slaveholders might well have discouraged northern Virginia slaveowners from further public acknowledgement about problems in the relationships between slaveowners and enslaved persons.

Slaveholders used runaway slave advertisements to enlist the assistance of the public in identifying, apprehending, and returning their chattel property, yet over time the messages and information changed as northern Virginia slaveholders faced increasing levels of public censure. The increased focus on slavery influenced the type of

⁸⁸ *The Emancipator*, December 5, 1839. Some facts about the Douglass family were not included in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* editorial. While Vincent Douglass most certainly held a role in the elopement of his family, a free black man from Washington, D.C., Leonard Grimes, was held accountable for their disappearance. See the discussion of the Douglass family escape in chapter five and *Commonwealth v. Leonard Grimes, a free Mulatto*, Loudoun County Free Black Issues, 1839-003, LCHAD.

information included in runaway ads, although this change may have already been underway.

During his travels through Virginia Ethan Allen Andrews observed that runaway slave advertisements indicated “a change in public sentiment” and presented a “good index of the state of feeling” towards enslaved persons. Andrews noted a changing trend by 1835 among Virginia advertisements that differed from those of the lower South. Virginia ads began to include a clause “stating, or implying, that the slave has run away, notwithstanding he has always been treated with the greatest indulgence.”⁸⁹ Slaveowners could use these adapted advertisements as a form of propaganda to focus on the negative characteristics of the runaway or the poor or indulgent treatment of a previous master.⁹⁰

Adaptations in slaveholder strategies

With the addition of each form of pressure on slaveholders: increased numbers of runaways, financial loss, fears of extended support networks, abolitionist agitation, and increasing violent resistance by runaways to capture and re-enslavement, slaveholders adapted their responses. Greater rewards for runaways, heightened threats of punishment for those willing to assist runaways, sale of runaways as a management tool, and alterations in the information provided in runaway advertisements signified actions slaveholders took to counter threats and resistance to slaveholder control. Slaveholders

⁸⁹ “Letter XXIV, Fredericksburg, July 26, 1835,” Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 169.

⁹⁰ Historian Daniel Meaders posed the pertinent question: “Was the fugitive advertisement an objective description of the fugitive or was it a form of propaganda designed to justify the publication of the advertisement in the first place?” Daniel Meaders, *Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1830* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1993), 11.

suspected the groundswell of persons willing and capable of assisting enslaved persons in their plans for self-emancipation was expanding not only across the region, but also across class and racial divides.

The steps taken by slaveholders, both individually and collectively, to prevent aid to enslaved laborers illustrated the level of anxiety that existed across northern Virginia. Loudoun slaveholder, John A. Binns, hoped an unusual arrangement with his enslaved man, George, would curtail George's apparent influence over the resistance activities of Binns's enslaved laborers. In 1806, Binns contracted an agreement with his formerly enslaved man, George, and George's wife, Moll. Binns agreed to let George "have Moll his wife and such Child she now has and all the Issue of both that may arise hereafter forever" upon the condition that George and Moll must take their current child, presumably an infant, leave Loudoun County and reside "some distance out of this State." Binns allowed George and Moll the privilege of visiting their friends and other children in Virginia "two or three times a year" only if George and Moll agreed to "behave themselves and do not breed disorder or Anarchy with said Family of Negroes." Binns wanted the court and the community to understand George and Moll must be prevented from entering into "any kind of communication" with his enslaved workforce, specifically forbidding them from "harbouring my negroes" or instigating "any kind of dealing that may take place."⁹¹

Binns apparently felt threatened by George's potential influence over his other slaves and feared that if he and Moll took up residence too close to Loudoun County,

⁹¹ "Agreement Between John A. Binns and George," Loudoun County Deed Book 2G: 233.

they might render aid or encourage “disorder or anarchy” among those yet enslaved by Binns. To force George’s compliance, Binns decreed that if George and Moll “should attempt to make their residence in the State of Virginia or in a neighbourhood near said States,” Binns would have full power to seize Moll and her child and return them to enslavement. Compliance with the terms was secured upon each party acknowledging the legally-binding agreement in court and each party’s responsibility for payment of a \$1,000 penalty in case he defaulted upon the terms.

Fear that free blacks actively assisted in the escape of runaway slaves became evident in actions against the free black population. In 1858 freed black George Henry Turner was indicted for remaining in Loudoun County beyond the authorized one year after manumission. Despite gathering fifty-four signatures of residents in support of his petition to remain in the state of Virginia, forty-eight residents including members of the wealthy Berkeley, Carter, and Skinner families opposed Turner’s petition. In their petition to the Loudoun Court, the opposition claimed that Turner was “strongly suspected of aiding & abetting in the escape of slaves from the county at a time like this when the most reliable portion of our slave population are without any apparent difficulty making their escape.” The petitioners argued that “none against whom there is a well grounded suspicion [sic] should be encouraged or even permitted to remain in our midst.”⁹²

⁹² *Commonwealth v. Turner*, Loudoun County Misc. Papers – Free Blacks, 1858-06, LCHAD. George Henry Turner was indicted by the Loudoun Court for remaining in the state on March 8, 1858 and Turner petitioned to remain in the state later that year. When the Loudoun Court issued a warrant for Turner to appear at the June 1859 court to answer the charge of remaining in the Commonwealth, Deputy Sheriff Jonah Tavenner reported that George Henry Turner was “not found in my Bailiwick” and had “removed to

The case of George and Moll and of George Henry Turner's veritable expulsion from Loudoun County demonstrate the suspicions that slaveholders were willing to voice towards the growing number of free blacks or manumitted slaves residing in northern Virginia and their supposed willingness and ability to aid in the escape of fugitive slaves. For some slaveholders, enslaved and free blacks seemed to pose a real and credible threat to enslaved property ownership, even as early as 1806, when Binns placed restrictions on George and the year that manumission and residency laws for freed blacks changed.

To quell the growing tide of runaways across northern Virginia, slaveholders used threats or sold habitual runaways to deter others from seeking passage north. The example of enslaved man John tells of the immediate costs of attempting to run away from enslavement. After John fled from the administrator of his owner's estate in Prince William County sometime in 1818, Nathan Moore apprehended him, earning a \$20 reward for John's capture and secure placement in the Washington City jail, where John began accruing daily fees for provisions and board totaling \$4.74. Meanwhile, estate agent John Linton hired the services of Jesse Patterson with his horse to accompany Linton to reclaim John, a cost of \$4.00 added to the \$11.25 expended by the duo on the trip to and from Washington. Linton also charged the Nesbitt estate \$9.00 for three days of service performed regarding John's reclamation. All totaled, John's escape cost the Nesbitt estate nearly \$50.00, an expense Linton deemed too costly should John try another escape attempt. At some point Linton consulted P. Harrison, an attorney at law, probably to determine his authority to liquidate an asset of the estate and incurred yet

the State of Ohio as I am informed and believe." On November 17, 1859, the court dismissed the case against Turner under a decree of "nolle prosequi."

another expense of \$5.00. While in Washington, Linton negotiated John's sale to trader Yarberry B. Nicks for \$575.00.⁹³ In the end, John's flight, capture and sale eliminated a known flight risk and realized an immediate profit of \$521 for the estate, minus the costs of reclamation. John's sale served as a warning to other potential runaways that severe consequences awaited those who fled from enslavement.

The threat of runaways, especially during the War of 1812 when British forces actively recruited enslaved scouts and sheltered fugitives behind their lines, led to a particular need for slaveholders to take a strong stance against runaways, thus setting an example for other potential runaways. Moses, a nineteen year old enslaved man, and Eve, "a stout woman, upwards of forty years of age" ran away together from Occoquan on June 21, 1813, shortly before the death of their master, William Davis, perhaps to avoid an estate sale.⁹⁴ Their flight apparently was halted when Moses landed in the Washington, D.C. jail. The administrator of Davis's estate, William Byrne, paid jailor C. Tippetts \$11.94 for the costs of Moses's apprehension and confinement. Byrne charged the estate \$18.16 for the expenses involved in traveling to Washington, proving Moses's identity and conveying him to the Fauquier County jail. The estate incurred an additional charge of \$8.14 for holding Moses in jail possibly until Byrne held a sale of Davis's property, including the sale of both Moses and Eve, in Fauquier County on May 10, 1815.⁹⁵ The enumerated expenses incurred for advertising, locating, claiming, and confining runaway Moses (Byrne did not submit receipts for any charges associated with

⁹³ Entry for May 4, 1818 regarding the estate of Ann L[inton] Nesbitt, John Augustine Elliot Linton Account Book (1810-1822), Virginia Historical Society.

⁹⁴ "Thirty Dollars Reward," *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, July 1, 1813.

⁹⁵ Moses was sold for \$400 and Eve for \$71 at the Davis estate sale in Fauquier County on May 10, 1815. "Account of the Estate of William Davis," Prince William County Will Book L: 139, 141, microfilm.

Eve's apprehension) were recouped through the sale of Moses and Eve, a fate that they tried to avoid through flight.

Enslaved man John Tebbs ran away in 1813 while hired to John Carr in Loudoun County and the administrator for his owners, the misses Elizabeth and Mary Armistead, paid Major Hunt \$50 on December 22, 1813 "for apprehending their negro man John Tebbs." Tebbs had apparently been incarcerated in a jail for some period of time, accruing fees of \$34.44 as well as a blacksmith fee of \$3.75 for "ironing" Tebbs, a procedure that attached restraints and limited his mobility.⁹⁶ The costs of recovering Tebbs combined with the suspicion that he would again try to escape prompted his sale to Eli Offutt for \$385.⁹⁷ By selling Tebbs, the Armistead sisters retained some of his value as an enslaved laborer.

Comfort's unsuccessful attempt to escape from the estate of John Macrae in 1830 shortly after Macrae's death was chronicled in the listing of accounts paid and received by Macrae's executrix, Mrs. Euphan W. Macrae. Mrs. Macrae paid Noah McIntire \$8.00 for apprehending Comfort and \$20.42 for Comfort's jail fees.⁹⁸ Whether irritated by the trouble of returning Comfort to enslavement or apprehensive that this escape attempt would influence other slaves, Mrs. Macrae opted to quickly sell Comfort to Peyton Norvill for \$150.⁹⁹ The sale of a runaway slave removed a potential threat of further loss

⁹⁶ "Miss Elizabeth & Mary Armistead, in act with Armistead T. Mason their Trustee," Mason Family Manuscript Account Book, 1792-1820, George Mason University Special Collections, 153A.

⁹⁷ "Miss Elizabeth & Mary Armistead, in act with Armistead T. Mason their Trustee," Mason Family Manuscript Account Book, 1792-1820, George Mason University Special Collections, 153B.

⁹⁸ "Mrs. Euphan W. Macrae Executrix of John Macrae, dec'd In account with James W. F. Macrae her agent," Fauquier County Will Book 15: 225.

⁹⁹ Fauquier County Will Book 15: 226.

of assets and sent a clear message to others enslaved on the Macrae plantation that runaways would be punished severely if caught.

Some owners incurred heavy expenses in recovering runaway slaves. After John fled from the ownership of William Fairfax while hired out in 1838, John was quickly apprehended. Fairfax's agent, Samuel Tansill, submitted a bill in the amount of \$200 "for taking John up" and another bill for \$97.26 for "expenses attending the taking John up." These hefty expenses were offset by Fairfax's decision to sell John after he was recaptured, less than twelve days after he absconded. Tansill sold John for \$800 and Fairfax noted a credit of \$502.74 in his account books.¹⁰⁰ Compare these costs to the \$2.92 paid to J. W. Savage for "taking up George" a runaway from the estate of Lewis M. Smith in 1840,¹⁰¹ or the \$5.72 paid to John Patterson for "taking up boy George" in 1841,¹⁰² or the \$5.00 paid by the heirs of Thomas M. Colston for "apprehending negro woman Alley" in 1844.¹⁰³

The failed escape experiences of John from the Nesbitt estate, John Tebbs from the Armistead estate, Moses and Eve from Occoquan, Comfort from the Macrae estate, and John from his hire from the Fairfax family show that when runaways fled from varying conditions of enslavement, masters or agents sometimes incurred heavy financial

¹⁰⁰ Tansill sold John on September 12, 1838, twelve days after John absconded. "Document B: Statement of the sale of slave John..." *Administrator of Hezekiah Fairfax, etc. v. Margaret Fairfax, widow, etc.* Prince William County Chancery Case 1858-001, online.

¹⁰¹ "The Heirs of Lewis M. Smith, dec'd In Account with Sampson Hutchison their Guardian," December 31, 1840, Loudoun County Guardian Account Book C: 130.

¹⁰² "The Heirs of Lewis M. Smith, dec'd In Account with Sampson Hutchison their Guardian," July 14, 1841, Loudoun County Guardian Account Book C: 215.

¹⁰³ "The Heirs of Thomas M. Colston dec'd In account with Edward Colston Guardian," December 5, 1844, Loudoun County Guardian Account Book D: 167.

expenses in securing their return. A sale recouped these losses and also made it clear the consequences for runaway attempts.

In 1839, slaveowner William R. Swart took a different tactic to capture his runaway slaves Abram Lee, Abram's wife Lydia Lee, and their son, John Lee. Swart swore out a complaint against the three, charging them with horse theft, a serious crime in antebellum Virginia. In the absence of the Lee family, Swart took his complaint to the Fauquier County magistrates and on November 25, 1839, the court formally indicted in absentia the Lee family for the theft. Armed with copies of the court indictment and a warrant for the arrest of the Lees, Swart appealed to Governor David Campbell for a commission and "a demand to be made by the Executive authority of Virginia" to apprehend and extradite the three whom Swart had "reason to believe" were in New York.¹⁰⁴ In this case, Swart wanted to use the long arm of Virginia justice to authorize him to capture horse thieves (rather than focus on their status as runaway slaves) who had escaped to New York. This attempt to obfuscate his claims to Abram, Lydia, and John Lee as chattel property demonstrated a new tactic in the efforts by slaveholders to retrieve and maintain claim over their enslaved persons.

Another tactic to assist in recapture of runaways was to increase the reward offered to those who apprehended escaped slaves. Slaveowners offered a wide range of rewards for the return of runaways based on perceived financial or work value, owner resources, or sale price. During the early part of the nineteenth century, slaveowners typically offered between \$10 and \$30 reward for runaways. One exception was

¹⁰⁴ "Letter from William R. Swart to Governor David Campbell," November 27, 1839, Executive Papers of David Campbell, Accession #43151, Box 7, Folder 3, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

Thomson Mason's reward of up to \$150 for 21 year old George in 1816. Mason did not indicate George's occupation but did mention his "intelligent countenance" and that he was a "slender delicate person," probably not tasked with hard field labor.¹⁰⁵ The next year C. Peyton offered between \$50 and \$100 each for Ephraim, a 36 year old "good waggoner, ploughman and coarse shoemaker" and 18 year old Polly, an "excellent weaver, spinner, and washer" who left Peyton's service in December 1817.¹⁰⁶ Fauquier slaveholder William H. Digges offered up to \$200 in 1820 for the return of his "excellent house servant" David who Digges described as "very active and shrewd."¹⁰⁷ William Gibson's offer of a \$100 reward each for Jack, Bob, and Lew perhaps was in proportion to their worth as a distiller, wagoner, and farm laborer for Gibson.¹⁰⁸ Despite a few offers of rewards of \$100 for skilled or favored slaves, rewards of \$10 to \$40 remained common.

Trends in rewards changed during the 1830s in response to changing values of enslaved laborers and their relative value in the domestic slave trade. More lucrative rewards emphasized both the perceived worth of enslaved property as well as the desire to reclaim valued property. In 1830 James Lake offered a reward of \$500 "for the thief [his wagoner Sanford] and his pass." To assist in his escape plans, Sanford had taken \$73 of Lake's money and one of Lake's horses and presumably a forged or stolen pass.¹⁰⁹ William Byrne apparently had good cause, though not stated in his advertisement, to

¹⁰⁵ *Alexandria Herald*, May 22, 1816.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 13, 1817.

¹⁰⁷ *Genius of Liberty*, January 18, 1820.

¹⁰⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, May 2, 1820.

¹⁰⁹ *United States' Telegraph*, February 16, 1830.

offer \$300 for the return of John Redmond in 1836.¹¹⁰ Arthur Payne offered \$300 for the capture of his “first-rate cook and house servant,” a 45-50 year old man named Joseph Burk if apprehended beyond the borders of Virginia.¹¹¹ During the decade, most rewards offered for northern Virginia runaways were \$50 or greater, with Fauquier slaveholders consistently offering larger rewards than those offered by Loudoun or Prince William slaveholders. Starting in 1840 rewards returned to more modest amounts of \$10 to \$40 again and after 1851 they slowly began to rise again, especially for apprehensions outside of Virginia and north of Maryland, reaching a high point of \$500 offered by Enoch Foley for each of his three enslaved men, Gabriel, Minor, and Jim, who absconded from his farm near Haymarket in August 1859, “if taken in a free State.”¹¹² Slaveowner wealth, relative value of the runaway as an asset or laborer, or perceived ease in locating a fugitive slave influenced the rise and fall of rewards offered yet also hinted at the willingness of slaveholders to incentivize patrols or slave catchers to act on their behalf.

As the numbers and frequency of runaways escalated, owners increased rewards and slaveholders lobbied for increased state compensation for capturing and returning escaped bondsmen. These financial incentives proved to be a boon to slave catchers. In September 1856 in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, Luther Kurtz apprehended Eliza, Philips, and Fanny, claimed as property by Charles Douglass of Loudoun County. For his service Kurtz received \$310 for each captured fugitive, based on their assessed values as well as an additional \$50 per fugitive bounty paid by the state of Virginia. At the same

¹¹⁰ *The Globe*, July 28, 1836.

¹¹¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, February 16, 1838.

¹¹² *Daily National Intelligencer*, August 29, 1859.

time Kurtz also apprehended Mary, claimed property of Loudoun County slave mistress Isabella L. Gray. For Mary's apprehension and delivery to Gray, Kurtz earned \$200 from Gray and the \$50 bounty from the state of Virginia. In total, Kurtz was entitled to payment of \$1,330 for his service as slave catcher from Loudoun County slaveholders and the state of Virginia.¹¹³

Slaveholders publicly warned those inclined to assist runaways in their advertisements. Alexander Brown cautioned "[t]hose secreting or assisting" his runaway servant would be "prosecuted to the utmost severity of the law."¹¹⁴ In 1856 slaveowner T. B. Robertson advised the public that he would pay \$500 in addition to the \$500 Robertson claimed would be paid by the State of Virginia "for the conviction of any person who shall have been engaged in harboring or otherwise assisting" runaways Henry and Betsy.¹¹⁵

If the threat of prosecution or heavy fines such as these could not dissuade antislavery sympathizers from aiding or abetting runaways, then the publication of court cases, sentences of imprisonment, and steep fines levied against those who offered aid served as warnings. Local newspapers published reports of court cases involving residents accused of offering assistance to runaways, informing potential collaborators of the legal consequences of such actions. These cases helped confirm suspicions that

¹¹³ "J. D. Brumbaugh," Fugitive Slave Fund Claims for Payments: Bounties and Reward (1857-1860), Accession APA 689, Auditor of Public Accounts, Library of Virginia.

¹¹⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, February 6, 1804.

¹¹⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, June 26, 1856. Robertson probably referred to the recent law enacted by the Virginia Assembly that increased rewards for runaways. "An Act to amend the 4th section of chapter 105 of the Code so as to increase the rewards for the arrest of runaway slaves, passed March 17, 1856." *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed in 1855-6, in the Eightieth Year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1856), 43-44. Robertson may have misinterpreted the act that offered an additional 10 to 25 percent of the value of the runaway plus mileage based on the location of capture when he claimed the state would pay \$500 in addition to his offer of a \$500 reward.

conspiracies occurred between Virginians and enslaved persons, yet also sent a clear warning that such interference in the control of “property” would be prosecuted.

County Courts and Slaveholder Rights

Anxiety over the inability to control the actions of anti-slavery agitators can be gauged in the lengths slaveholders and pro-slavery advocates pursued to legally control punishments for offenders. Runaway advertisements publicized slaveholder suspicions of assistance provided to absconding slaves. Evidence of more direct interference with enslaved property led to arrest warrants and court trials, especially during the 1830s and 1850s when numbers of runaways rose. Whites faced particularly harsh public censure and legal action if caught or perceived to be involved in any attempt to deprive masters of their enslaved property and two cases stand out for the risk both to reputation and financial stability of such assistance.

In Loudoun County, Yardley Taylor, a well-known and respected Quaker, faced a public trial for his role in helping Harry escape from enslavement. Sometime before January, 1828, Stafford County slaveholder, Mr. Allison, hired out enslaved man, Harry, to Loudoun County resident, Samuel Cox. While working for Cox, Harry decided to escape from bondage and made his way to Yardley Taylor’s house. There Harry received food and shared his dread of being hired away from his family and his fears of an imminent sale with the kindly Quaker, Taylor.¹¹⁶ Harry borrowed a certificate of freedom

¹¹⁶ In an 1857 broadside directed towards Yardley Taylor, the unknown author (the corner with the author’s name has been torn off from the extant copy) conducted an interview with Taylor regarding his court case and charges against Taylor for providing assistance to a runaway. The author wrote, “...you admitted that a runaway slave came to your house; [it seems rather singular that all the runaways should stumble upon your

from a friend and Taylor supplied a list of towns and the mileages between each stop on the way to Taylor's friend, Jonathan Jessup, residing in York, Pennsylvania. Harry's route would take him north of Loudoun County to Frederick, Maryland, then to Woodborough, Taneytown, Petersburg, Hanover, and finally to York, Pennsylvania.

Most incriminating (at least about Taylor's participation in the plan) was the sealed letter carried by Harry and written by Taylor to his "Respected Friend," Jonathan Jessup, requesting assistance in receiving Harry in York, Pennsylvania.¹¹⁷ Beyond the role of suspicions and local lore about active participants along an Underground Railroad, Yardley Taylor's efforts in helping Harry escape from bondage provide crucial information about the motivations for assisting runaways as well as the information supplied a hopeful runaway. In this letter, preserved in Loudoun County court documents, Taylor confessed his uncertainty both in directing his correspondence to and in requesting assistance from Jessup. Yet Taylor affirmed his confidence that Jessup would not refuse to help Harry. Taylor described Harry's desperate situation and the breaking point that convinced Harry to leave family and escape from bondage. Taylor's recognition of the danger in aiding a slave to escape and the ultimate reasons for choosing to offer assistance to an enslaved man offer key insights into when a passive antislavery man turned into an active participant.

residence, but of course it is all accidental,] that you knew him to be a runaway slave; that you took him by the hand and led him gently in; and fed him, and after furnishing him with a letter to a friend in Pennsylvania, sent him on his way rejoicing. And what was your apology for this atrocious offence?—that you were acting in conformity with the principles of your religion. Monstrous! Monstrous!" Yardley Taylor Broadside, July 28, 1857, Taylor Family Papers, 1817-1872, Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Virginia.

¹¹⁷ Yardley Taylor, Loudoun County, Virginia to Jonathan Jessup, York, Pennsylvania, January 23, 1828, *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Criminal Issues 1830-30, LCHAD.

Taylor introduced Harry as “a respectable person of color” who “cannot much longer enjoy the situation that he has hitherto [held]” because

however unpleasant [his servitude] may have been, he was willing to continue in that situation, but that being denied him, he has come to the determination of leaving here, and seeking his fortune somewhere to the Northward in preference to being separated from those he hold most dear, and forced to the south by a set of men to say the least of them their mercies are cruel.

Taylor admitted that his “conduct in this respect would be censured pretty strongly by many here, and if proven might subject me to some difficulty, and indeed it is not pleasant,” but despite the danger, Taylor asserted that “when a fellow creature groaning under servitude, with the prospect of its being rendered doubly severe, and requests a favor of this kind I cannot deny him.” Taylor simply asked Jessup to recover from Harry the borrowed certificate of freedom and to forward the document to Taylor “by a safe private conveyance” in order that Taylor could return the valuable document “to the proper owner” and if able, Jessup should “let me know how he has got along &c.”¹¹⁸

Unfortunately for both Harry and Yardley Taylor, Harry was captured by Thomas Dixon soon after his escape from Samuel Cox. Dixon discovered Taylor’s letter to Jessup, made a notation on the letter that it had been “taken by me from Negroe Slave named Harry (on the 28 Jany 1828) a runaway, belonging as he says to Sam[ue]l Cox of Loud[oun],” and signed his name before turning it over, presumably, to a magistrate. Also confiscated from Harry was the certificate of freedom, dated May 5, 1815 from Wm. Brent, Clerk of Washington City [District of Columbia] for Alexander McPherson,

¹¹⁸ Yardley Taylor, Loudoun County, Virginia to Jonathan Jessup, York, Pennsylvania, January 23, 1828, *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Criminal Issue 1830-30, LCHAD.

manumitted by Catharine McVickers and Mary Thomson which Harry had borrowed from his unnamed friend.¹¹⁹

Based on evidence gathered by Thomas Dixon from Harry and upon testimony provided by David Reese, “a member of their body sworn as a witness & examined at their [the Grand Jury’s] request,” a Grand Jury found a true bill in the cause against Taylor for “enticing, persuading and advising a certain Negro Slave named Harry the property of Wm Allison of Stafford County from the employment and possession of Samuel Cox of Loudoun County” at the July, 1828 Special Term of the Loudoun Superior Court.¹²⁰ Deputy Sheriff Fielding Littleton attempted to execute a warrant summoning Taylor to appear at the March 1829 term of court, but Littleton apparently could not find Taylor. Another warrant summoning Taylor to appear at the August 20, 1829 term of court to answer the Grand Jury’s presentment and “shew cause” why “an Information shall not be filed ag[ain]st him” was successfully delivered to Taylor.¹²¹ By the time the court set a date for information to be filed in the case at the February term of court in 1830, a third warrant demanding Taylor’s appearance was delivered again by Deputy Sheriff Fielding Littleton, and Taylor was required to post a security of five hundred dollars to guarantee his appearance in court to answer charges. Taylor received

¹¹⁹ The record did not indicate how or where Harry acquired McPherson’s pass or if it was forged or valid. *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Criminal Issue 1830-30, LCHAD.

¹²⁰ Loudoun County Clerk of Court, “Information,” *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Criminal Issue 1830-30, LCHAD.

¹²¹ Loudoun County Clerk of Court, “Warrant dated August 20, 1829,” *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Loudoun County Criminal Issue 1830-30, LCHAD.

assistance from Daniel Cockrell in posting the security on February 22, 1830, and was released from Littleton's custody.¹²²

During the presentment of information by Commonwealth Attorney Richard H. Henderson on February 23, 1830, Taylor pled not guilty and a trial was "deferred until the next term."¹²³ By August 3rd, 1830, Taylor and his counsel, identified as "Janney" (probably Joseph Janney) had consulted and determined the better course would be to change the plea. In court, Taylor admitted "he cannot gainsay the action aforesaid, but that he is guilty in manner and form as the commonwealth against him hath complained, and agrees that the said Commonwealth has sustained damage by that occasion to twenty Dollars besides her Costs." He pled guilty and agreed to pay damages and costs.¹²⁴ In a later interview, nearly thirty years after the trial, Taylor apologized for his role by explaining he was "acting in conformity with the principles of [his] religion," a deed the interviewer called "Monstrous!"¹²⁵

Taylor's incriminating letter and trial proceedings provided further information to area slaveholders on potential routes for runaways. Four years later, after the disappearance of brothers Joe and Charles Cook from Loudoun County, their owner, J. L. McKenna received information that the pair were seen "in company with three others who had also absconded, passing at mid-day...through Gettysburg, Pa." and from this

¹²² Loudoun County Clerk of Court, *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Loudoun County Criminal Issue 1830-30, LCHAD.

¹²³ Loudoun County Clerk of Court, *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Loudoun County Superior Court Order Book, Volume I: 347.

¹²⁴ Loudoun County Clerk of Court, *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Loudoun County Superior Court Order Book, Volume I: 372.

¹²⁵ Yardley Taylor Broadside, July 28, 1857, Taylor Family Papers, 1817-1872, Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, Virginia.

report McKenna guessed the quintet were “on their way, it is supposed to York,” a Quaker town and the same intended destination Taylor advised Harry to follow.¹²⁶

In 1837 in nearby Hampshire County, Samuel House was “indicted for aiding and abetting the escape of a runaway slave” in the Hampshire County Circuit Superior Court, found guilty, fined two hundred dollars, and sentenced to six months imprisonment. The Court, determined to further punish the offender, ordered House to pay plaintiffs George E. Deneale \$1,050 and John H. Lipscomb \$1,200 in damages and costs in addition to House’s court-ordered fine and sentence of imprisonment.¹²⁷ This heavy fine probably was imposed to serve as a warning to other persons who contemplated assisting absconding slaves and to demonstrate the resolve of the court to protect the rights of slaveholders.

In contrast, Taylor’s court fine plus the cost of the prosecution totaled a mere \$37.81, not even a fraction of the charges laid upon Samuel House nine years later in the Hampshire County Court. It can be inferred that while the Loudoun Superior Court wanted to fully prosecute any cases of enticing, persuading, advising or “inducing a slave to abscond” from the service of a master, the court also hesitated in creating a public spectacle involved in pursuing a court case against a prominent member of the Quaker community in a county where Quakers held prominent official court positions.¹²⁸ Taylor and his counsel Mr. Janney also realized that by admitting guilt to the form (if not the spirit) of the law and by offering to pay costs, they could extricate themselves from a

¹²⁶ *The Globe*, October 2, 1834.

¹²⁷ *Romney Intelligencer* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, October 2, 1837, microfilm.

¹²⁸ Loudoun County Clerk of Court, *Commonwealth v. Yardley Taylor*, Loudoun County Criminal Issue 1830-30, LCHAD.

potentially divisive issue. Certainly the timing of the cases played a role in how community sentiment may have affected the trial outcome. House's trial during 1837 represented a peak period of runaways and financial insecurity across Virginia and the court may have been pressured to send a strong message. The fact that the House case was publicized in local papers while the press apparently remained silent about Taylor's actions also suggests that timing, reputation, and community sentiment played a role in public prosecutions.¹²⁹

Slaveowners across northern Virginia worried that Landon Phillips was not the only free black capable or willing to actively assist fugitive slaves in escaping bondage. In 1836, Timothy Valentine, a free black man from Pennsylvania, was brought before the Fauquier County Court on charges of "having enticed, persuaded, and advised" certain slaves away from their masters. Despite the paucity of information contained in surviving court documents, it appears that Valentine advised up to four slaves to run away and actively assisted enslaved man, John, to escape to Pennsylvania. Interestingly, the four enslaved persons, Townsend, Gustavus, John, and an unnamed slave, were claimed as property by four different slaveowners. This suggests that either Valentine or the four enslaved men were able to communicate with each other about the escape across some distance. Valentine's sentence, a choice to pay fine of \$15 or receive fifteen stripes and

¹²⁹ For another case involving a white man accused of encouraging runaways see *Commonwealth v. Stinemetz*, Criminal Cases 1858-010, LCHAD. A Loudoun County Grand Jury found a "true bill" on charges that George Stinemetz "unlawfully and feloniously did advise, entice and persuade a certain slave named Sam the property of one Thomas L. Ellzey to abscond from his master" in 1858. "Presentment," *Commonwealth v. Stinemetz*, Criminal Cases 1858-010, LCHAD. A bench warrant for George Stinemetz was ordered on October 21, 1858. Extant court files do not reveal any further information about the case. It is unknown whether this case was related to the case described by Dr. Mason Graham Ellzey that occurred around 1855 as discussed previously. Mason Graham Ellzey, M.D. "The Cause We Lost and the Land We Love." [ca. 1910], 6. Virginia Historical Society.

pay court costs, punished the offence yet could not eliminate the threat against slaveholding.¹³⁰ Valentine's ability to move between Pennsylvania and northern Virginia, impart information to enslaved persons, and actively assist a slave in his escape revealed the difficulty slaveholders faced in maintaining control over enslaved persons and reducing the influence of free blacks.

Local free blacks also fell under suspicion. Fauquier County free black James Asher was charged in 1837 with "feloniously advising, enticing and persuading" John M. Wallace's enslaved man, James, "to abscond from his owner's possession." Wallace apparently believed Asher had contact with James, and feared Asher's influence over his enslaved workers. Despite this accusation, the court later dismissed the charges against Asher.¹³¹

The desperation of slaveholders to protect their enslaved property from loss because of running away increased during the 1850s. Slaveholders increasingly made public their accusations that enslaved persons actively encouraged runaways, and they held enslaved suspects (and by extension their slaveowner) responsible in county courts. In 1853, Ned Dawe, an enslaved man belonging to Dr. Thomas Triplett, was charged with advising, counseling, and aiding "Eliza Ann, a slave, to abscond from her master Richard G. Lake" on the 11th of December, 1852 and then concealing her from her master. Justice Alex M. Smith issued a warrant for the arrest of Dawe on January 17, 1853, more than a month after Dawe's interference supposedly occurred suggesting that

¹³⁰ *Commonwealth v. Timothy Valentine*, Fauquier County Records, Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, Box #17, 1836-002, AAHA.

¹³¹ *Commonwealth v. James Asher*, Box #18, 1837-002, Fauquier County Free Negro and Enslaved Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

Dawe's role in Eliza Ann's absence, if any, had not been immediately apparent. In February the charges were dismissed after the case was brought before the Fauquier County Court. Dawe might have been acquitted of the charges, yet he probably remained under suspicion.¹³²

In another case, on September 17, 1855, Amos T. Skinner of Loudoun County charged that Jonathan, enslaved to Robert A. Ish, did "feloniously aid and advise Lewis, a slave the property of Peter Skinner, and Vincent, a slave, belonging to the Estate of Nathan Skinner, dec'd to abscond from their said owners." The court summoned Lewis and Vincent as witnesses for the prosecution in proving the accusation. Lewis swore on oath that on the first of September Jonathan "did advise" him to abscond. Lewis also related that Jonathan furnished him "with facilities for & toward that purpose." The record does not state what "facilities" Jonathan provided or whether Lewis and Vincent were willing witnesses to the trial or even whether Lewis and Vincent had attempted escape and in order to mitigate their punishment upon recapture offered evidence against Jonathan. Magistrates of the Loudoun County Court found Jonathan guilty of the crime and sentenced him to receive thirty-nine lashes. This punishment, considerably light for a felony, provided a public warning to others while not permanently depriving Amos Skinner of his enslaved man.¹³³

These court cases demonstrate that slaveholders increasingly used legal action to punish persons willing to help runaways. In some cases, persons were accused and tried for the crime of encouraging or advising enslaved persons to run away. While some

¹³² *Commonwealth v. Ned Dawe*, Box #22, 1853-007, AAHA.

¹³³ *Commonwealth v Jonathan (negro)*, Loudoun County Slave Papers, Box 14, 1855-05, LCHAD.

punishments were minimal and some accused were later acquitted, the process of legal adjudication publicized the problem of runaways and suspicions about persons believed to have provided assistance.

The actual or imaged financial loss endured by northern Virginia slaveholders created a real concern over controlling movements of enslaved persons and enforcing the provisions of the Constitution and Fugitive Slave Laws once slaves had slipped beyond the bounds of slaveholding states.¹³⁴ Before 1850, the lack of binding federal law on the subject of rendition of fugitive slaves hindered the ability of Virginia slaveholders to locate and recapture runaway slaves. In 1833, a “Citizen of Fauquier” discussed problems with the rendition of runaway slaves and averred that current laws were “entirely inefficient.”¹³⁵ “Citizen” asserted that at the time “between ten and twenty thousand slaves, the lawful property of citizens of Virginia,” were “going at large in the State of Pennsylvania...where they are aided and employed and protected.” “Citizen’s” fury aimed at the people of Pennsylvania who threw “every obstacle...in the way of such masters as may attempt their recovery” that included threats from mobs. “Citizen” also listed the logistical challenges of procuring a magistrate and the requisite number of witnesses, an inconvenience when, in the opinion of “Citizen,” the oath of the master should be “sufficient to identify his negro – his property.” The writer believed “the whole

¹³⁴ Article IV, Section 2 of the Constitution guaranteed that “no person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.” The 1793 Fugitive Slave Act articulated the process for arrest, identification, and reclamation of fugitives from service or labor. This provision allowed that “the person to whom such labour or service may be due, his agent or attorney, is hereby empowered to seize or arrest such fugitive from labour.” Second Congress, Session II, Chapter 7, 1793, 302.

¹³⁵ The letter, dated July 15, 1833 from St. Bernard, Fauquier County, Virginia most likely came from Richard Bernard Buckner, owner of St. Bernard farm in Fauquier from 1827 to at least 1839. “To the Editors, Messrs Gales & Seaton,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 24, 1833.

population” of Pennsylvania was against slaveowners and that intentional omission of binding federal laws encouraged lack of respect for southern property rights. In his estimation, “the *danger* and difficulty of apprehending a slave is so great, that not one in fifty is ever reclaimed, after having set his foot upon the soil of the great and patriotic and loyal State of Pennsylvania.”¹³⁶

The problem of runaways and the perceived lack of respect for the ownership of enslaved property by northerners who aided escaping runaways or failed to return them to their southern masters was one of the many factors that led to sectional tensions. The passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act was designed to placate southern slaveholders while allowing for federal enforcement of the rendition of fugitive slaves. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law dramatically changed the way northern Virginia slaves understood the relative freedom provided by the “free” states. Fugitive slave cases processed under the provisions of the new law cast northern Virginia slaveholders under heightened public scrutiny and centered freedom-seekers in the public debate over the strength and constitutionality of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and thus influenced the national narrative over slavery.

Northern Virginia and National Scrutiny Following the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law

Northern and southern newspapers chronicled several high-profile fugitive slave cases involving runaway slaves from northern Virginia. Surveying both local and national newspapers indicates the breadth of coverage of fugitive slave cases involving northern

¹³⁶ “To the Editors, Messrs Gales & Seaton,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 24, 1833.

Virginians and elucidates both pro-slavery and antislavery perspectives published on the subject of runaways, capture, and return to enslavement. Newspaper reportage increased public awareness of the “peculiar institution” by demonstrating the resolute will of some enslaved persons to flee from bondage as well as the legal wrangling slaveholders employed in county, state, and federal courts to maintain control of their enslaved “property.” These high profile fugitive slave cases made public the dangers associated with flight, humanized the pain experienced by reclaimed fugitives, and exposed northern Virginia slaveholders to national scrutiny.

After enslaved man Jesse Whitman fled from Loudoun County and enslavement to John Conrad, he was arrested on June 21, 1851 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania by Assistant United States Marshal George H. Roset under a warrant procured through the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law. According to news reports, Whitman “fought desperately before surrendering himself” to the marshal’s custody using a heavy cart whip and a large sheath knife.¹³⁷ Despite Whitman’s desperate effort to escape, he was taken by Roset and his deputies to Philadelphia to meet a steamer bound for Maryland. The *Southern Press* concluded that the “matter was managed so quietly, as far as Philadelphia was concerned that very few persons heard of either the arrival or departure of the fugitive,” suggesting either that Philadelphians were not willing to interfere with the rendition of a presumed fugitive slave or, and more likely, that federal marshals expected resistance against their endeavors and wished to proceed quickly and quietly.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ “Another Fugitive Slave Case,” *The Daily Crescent*, July 3, 1851.

¹³⁸ “A Fugitive Slave from Western Pennsylvania,” *The Southern Press*, June 28, 1851.

Another perspective on the marshals' actions came from Ohio's *Anti-Slavery Bugle* that characterized the apprehension of Whitman as "kidnapping." This paper reported that while "[t]he whole thing was managed with great secrecy in Philadelphia," only "few persons in the city were acquainted with the fact" including "a colored man by the name of Cornish" who applied to a judge for a writ of habeas corpus to detain Whitman in Philadelphia.¹³⁹ Southern newspapers diminished the role of the free black man, Cornish, and his attempt to prevent the rendition of Whitman by only stating that an "effort was made to detain the slave by a writ of habeas corpus, but the boat shoved off before it could be executed."¹⁴⁰ The main story published and republished in many papers characterized Whitman merely as a "fugitive slave" and focused on the work of the "efficient police force" employed by federal marshals to carry out the Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁴¹ Abolitionist Samuel May later publicized Whitman's arrest in 1856 in his pamphlet, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims*.¹⁴² It is unknown what became of Jesse Whitman after his return to the control of John Conrad, but the news of his apprehension, attempted detention in Philadelphia by an apparent sympathizer to his cause, and ultimate return to enslavement may have influenced the actions of other hopeful freedom-seekers.

The following year, newspapers circulated the story of James Phillips, arrested on May 24, 1852 on suspicion of being a runaway slave from Fauquier County slaveholder, Henry T. Fant. The Phillips case focused public attention on two major legal and ethical

¹³⁹ "More Kidnapping in Pennsylvania," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, July 5, 1851.

¹⁴⁰ *National Era*, July 3, 1851.

¹⁴¹ *The Southern Press*, June 28, 1851; *Grand River Times*, July 2, 1851; *Boston Daily Atlas*, June 27, 1851.

¹⁴² Samuel May, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society), 1856, online, Wilson Anti-Slavery Collection, University of Manchester. John Rylands University Library, <<http://222.jstor.org/stable/60227732>> accessed on January 2, 2016.

points in the process of recovering fugitive slaves under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act: first, whether the law could be constrained by a statute of limitations and, second, whether Harrisburg's Commissioner Richard McAllister prejudiced trial proceedings in favor of slaveholders at the expense of justice by accepting dubious testimony as proof of James Phillips's identity. Phillips's story highlighted the dangers to the supposed freedom for runaway slaves that existed in Pennsylvania; the power of slaveholders to have their presumptive claims to property upheld, even with the thinnest of evidence; and the coordinated efforts of abolitionist lawyers, free blacks, and antislavery societies to preserve freedom of a runaway.

James Phillips made his escape from Fauquier County sometime around 1836 when he was fifteen or sixteen years old. Phillips cautiously made his way north and eventually settled in the east ward of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, an enclave of free blacks and possibly other runaway slaves.¹⁴³ There he found employment, married, started a family, and became a valued and respected member of the black and white community.¹⁴⁴ On May 24, 1852, Constables Henry Loyer and John Sanders approached Phillips while

¹⁴³ Historian Gerald G. Eggert claimed that Harrisburg's location and its "reputation for sympathy" influenced the number of runaways that sought shelter in Harrisburg. The city's location on main trade and travel routes via land and water and situation only 80 miles from Harper's Ferry made it a relatively accessible from slave states. Eggert also noted that Harrisburg "offered succor to fugitives" despite the lack of a Quaker contingent or strong public anti-slavery activism. Eggert determined that by 1850 there were 892 blacks residing in Harrisburg and that "nine out of ten claimed to be Pennsylvania born. Ninety percent of those born in other states came from Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware. How many were free blacks who migrated legitimately and how many were fugitive slaves cannot at this point be determined." Gerald G. Eggert, "The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 109, no. 4 (October 1985), 539-540.

¹⁴⁴ "The Work Goes On," *Jeffersonian Republican*, June 3, 1852. James Phillips married a black woman named Mary Ann and had at least two known children, Adelia, born circa 1847, and David, born circa 1848. Other members of his household in 1850 included a black woman named Eliza Wilkinson and a black boy named John Amos. 1850 Federal Census, Harrisburg East Ward, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. Roll M432_774, Page 88A, Ancestry.com, accessed April 4, 2016.

he was at work, knocked him down, and placed him in confinement under suspicion of being a fugitive, based on information provided by two Virginians, A. G. Hudson and James H. Vowles. The *Harrisburg Telegraph* reported that Hudson and Vowles came to Harrisburg “armed with pistols, bowie knives, dirks, &c” and brought a power of attorney from Phillips’s presumed Virginia slaveowner.¹⁴⁵ Hudson and Vowles identified Phillips primarily “because he bore a resemblance to a certain slave family” despite the fact that the witness based his identification on memories from when he was “only ten or eleven years old” and when Phillips had been only about fifteen or sixteen years old.¹⁴⁶ The evidence provided by the witnesses was described by the *Sunbury* (Pennsylvania) *American* as “by no means conclusive”¹⁴⁷ while the *Savannah Daily Morning News* concluded the proceedings “vindicated” the Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁴⁸ The *Richmond Enquirer* transmitted the news that the trial “clearly proved [Phillips] to be a fugitive” and that Phillips had “admitted that he had run away from Culpepper county, Va.”¹⁴⁹

True to his track record in dealing with presumed fugitive slaves, Commissioner Richard McAllister accepted the evidence provided and accordingly pronounced Phillips a fugitive slave and turned him over to the custody of Hudson, Vowles, and the marshals who quickly transported him to Baltimore via the railways.¹⁵⁰ Because of public outcry

¹⁴⁵ “Another Slave Case,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* as posted in the *Lewisburg Chronicle*, June 4, 1852.

¹⁴⁶ “Another Slave Case,” *Harrisburg Telegraph* as posted in the *Lewisburg Chronicle*, June 4, 1852.

¹⁴⁷ “Arrest of an Alleged Fugitive Slave – Great Excitement,” *Sunbury American*, June 5, 1852.

¹⁴⁸ “The Law and Constitution Vindicated in Pennsylvania,” *Daily Morning News*, May 31, 1852.

¹⁴⁹ “Arrest of a Fugitive Slave at Harrisburg, PA.,” *Richmond Enquirer*, June 1, 1852.

¹⁵⁰ Richard McAllister, a prominent Democrat and Harrisburg lawyer, was appointed to the position of commissioner for Dauphin County, Pennsylvania on September 30, 1850. Gerald G. Eggert, “The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 109, no. 4 (October 1985), 545. Historian R. J. M. Blackett characterized McAllister as “passionately committed to enforcement of the [1850 Fugitive Slave] law” and “[n]ot once did he entertain, much less accept, opposing views of defense counsels.” These habits meant that slaveholders “knew they

and the efforts of the black community, an attempt to purchase Phillips before he left Pennsylvania was initiated, yet could not be completed before Phillips' sale to Richmond slave trader William A. Branton.

Newspaper coverage of the Phillips case in northern papers polarized public opinion about the rendition of fugitive slaves, led to McAllister's fall from public grace, and shed an unfavorable light on northern Virginia slaveholders and their determination to reclaim runaway slaves.¹⁵¹ This coverage extended as far south as Mississippi and Georgia and as far north as Vermont. Based on their location, newspaper editors either focused on the efficient workings of the marshals under the federal law or the "great excitement" caused among black and white residents by Phillips' apprehension and the spurious actions of McAllister's trial process.¹⁵²

One discernible difference between coverage of Whitman's rendition and Phillips' rendition was the humanization of the capture and return of fugitive slaves to the South. The publication of a letter from James Phillips to his wife Mary Ann, written while he was held in Branton's slave pen, described Phillips's yearning for his family and freedom. Fearing an imminent trek south in the trader's slave coffle, Phillips wrote he

had a sympathetic commissioner in Harrisburg and beat a regular path to his door in search of their slaves." R. J. M. Blackett, *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 35.

¹⁵¹ Historian Gerald Eggert stated "the remanding of slaves South [from Harrisburg] abruptly halted after the Phillips case in May 1852" and that the publicity surrounding the Phillips case led to his resignation as commissioner and no one stepping in to fill the position. Gerald G. Eggert, "The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 109, no. 4 (October 1985), 566, 567. R. J. M. Blackett claimed McAllister's reputation "was destroyed by the passion he brought to his job as a commissioner." R. J. M. Blackett, *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 50-51.

¹⁵² See among others, "Arrest of a Fugitive Slave," *The Hinds County (Mississippi) Gazette*, June 17, 1852; "The Law and Constitution Vindicated in Pennsylvania," in Savannah's *Daily Morning News*, May 31, 1852; and "The Fugitive Slave Case at Harrisburg," *Vermont Chronicle*, June 15, 1852.

“had almost rather die than to go South” and that he wanted “to get back [to his family in Pennsylvania] very bad indeed.” Phillips implored Mary Ann to “[t]ell all of the people that if they can do anything for me, now is the time to do it” and begged her to

Try and do something for me as soon as you can, for I want to get back very bad indeed. Do not think anything at all of the price, for I am worth twice that amount. I can make it for any person who will buy me, in a short time... You may depend I am almost dying to see you and my children. You must do all you can for your husband.¹⁵³

The letter portrayed Phillips as loving husband, caring father, and hard-working employee, keen to his own worth, yet willing to do whatever it took to insure his freedom. Such a portrayal was quite a different depiction than the “fugitive slave” or “property of a gentleman of Virginia” presented in southern papers.¹⁵⁴

Mary Phillips rallied the support of black and white community members to fund the purchase of her husband from trader Branton. Through the efforts of lawyer, Charles C. Rawn, James Phillips was purchased by three of the main contributors to a fund: James’s employer, John H. Brant; a commission merchant named Dr. William W. Rutherford; and a Harrisburg coal merchant named Ely Byers.¹⁵⁵ On August 20, 1852, *The Liberator* concluded the story of James Phillips’s apprehension, trial, and purchase by transmitting the news from the *Harrisburg Telegraph* that James had returned home

¹⁵³ James Phillips to Mary Ann Phillips, June 20, 1852, Richmond, Virginia, published in *The Worcester Spy* and republished in *The Liberator*, July 16, 1852.

¹⁵⁴ “Arrest of a Fugitive,” *Fayetteville Observer*, June 1, 1852.

¹⁵⁵ Gerald G. Eggert, “Notes and Documents: A Pennsylvanian Visits the Richmond Slave Market,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 109, no. 4 (October 1985), 572.

because the citizens of Harrisburg raised the eight hundred dollars “required for his ransom.” Once home he “was received by his colored friends with great rejoicing.”¹⁵⁶

James Phillips was not the only fugitive from slavery from northern Virginia to influence public opinion of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. William “Bill” Thomas left enslaved service to Fauquier County’s Isham Keith sometime after 1850 and by 1852 he had settled in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, finding work as a waiter in Gilchrist’s Phoenix Hotel.¹⁵⁷ By August, 1853, slaveholder Isham Keith had been alerted to Thomas’s location, probably by someone traveling through Wilkes-Barre who either knew the Keith family slaves or was sent to seek out William Thomas. Determined to retrieve his enslaved man through the legal rights embodied in the Fugitive Slave Law, Keith sent two agents to Pennsylvania to procure the necessary warrants and the services of Deputy Marshal George Wynkoop and two deputies, John Jenkins and James Crosson. The agents identified Thomas while he was at work and the next morning, September 3, 1853, Wynkoop, the two deputies and Keith’s agents attempted, unsuccessfully, to apprehend William Thomas at the Phoenix Hotel.¹⁵⁸

Isham Keith’s hometown newspaper, the *Warrenton Flag of '98*, focused on three main points in its account of the events of September 3. First, the report highlighted the violent resistance Thomas demonstrated in his efforts to escape and the injuries Thomas inflicted upon the deputies. Second, the account reported acts of assistance provided by members of the Wilkes-Barre community that enabled Thomas to avoid capture, actions

¹⁵⁶ *The Liberator*, August 20, 1852.

¹⁵⁷ “Depositions of the Witnesses from Wilkesbarre,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, October 29, 1853.

¹⁵⁸ “Unsuccessful Attempt to Capture a Fugitive Slave,” *Richmond Enquirer*, September 9, 1853.

not mentioned in other news or eye witness accounts. Thirdly, the Warrenton account affirmed the legality of Thomas's arrest as authorized in the terms of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law.¹⁵⁹

The Warrenton account claimed the deputies were able to partially manacle Thomas before he "seized up a carving knife from the table, made a lunge with it to the nearest assistant, used the loose handcuff over the heads of one or two others, and dashed out into the street." The report asserted that Thomas was assisted in his escape from the hotel when "the crowd out side broke down the door, and the slave fled though the crowd which closing behind him impeded the pursuit of the Marshal." After the Marshal fired a shot at Thomas, he ran into the river and "was taken to the other side in a boat and concealed by a party of abolitionists."¹⁶⁰

Quite a different story circulated in papers in Pennsylvania and Ohio. The *Ohio Star* characterized the attempted capture of William Thomas as a "disgraceful and brutal occurrence" and the "barbarity of the scene" based on eye witness reports.¹⁶¹ According to reports from Pennsylvania and Ohio, after Thomas fled into the streets of Wilkes-Barre, Deputy Marshal George Wynkoop, his two deputies and the two Virginians, gave chase. The five men fired three shots at Thomas before Thomas jumped into the Susquehanna River, despite being unable to swim. While dodging more gunfire, Thomas apparently exclaimed he would "be drowned rather than [be] taken alive" and in response to threats that the marshal's party would "blow his brains out," Thomas replied "I will die

¹⁵⁹ "Escape of a Fugitive Slave," *Warrenton Flag* as published in the *Richmond Enquirer*, September 13, 1853.

¹⁶⁰ "Escape of a Fugitive Slave," *Warrenton Flag* as published in the *Richmond Enquirer*, September 13, 1853.

¹⁶¹ "Cruelty and Bloodshed," *The Ohio Star*, September 15, 1853.

first.”¹⁶² The growing crowd along the riverbank watched in horror as one gunshot hit Thomas in the head and began crying “shame! shame!” which halted the marshal’s party. Some time later Thomas was able to float downriver, crawl out of the water, and fall exhausted in a cornfield where “some colored women...carried him off to a place of safety, dressed his wounds.”¹⁶³ The general feeling was that Thomas was hurried off to Canada.

Newspapers across the North published reports that described the violence inflicted upon William Thomas by the marshal and his deputies as a criminal abuse of federal power. Whether sympathetic to the plight of runaways or skeptical of the growing power of the federal government in supporting Southern slavery, these reports touted the manliness of William Thomas in the face of “the fearful odds against him” against the cowardice of the federal officials.¹⁶⁴ A reporter known as “Kappa” writing for the Philadelphia *Ledger* opined that

The idea of five able-bodied [men], armed with the authority of the United States, and pistols and maces besides, being defeated by a naked mulatto, cannot be very agreeable to the parties engaged...To see a young man, nearly white, hunted like a wild beast into the water, cut and bleeding, and probably wounded with pistols shots, and declaring that he would have freedom or perish in the attempt, will always, in spite of the compromises of the Constitution, excite pity among those who are not brought up in the midst of ‘our peculiar domestic institutions.’¹⁶⁵

The violent actions of the five men caused many to speculate on the “proper execution of ...official duties” and whether the “exhibition of a violence not necessary to complete the

¹⁶² *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 17, 1853.

¹⁶³ “Cruelty and Bloodshed,” *The Ohio Star*, September 15, 1853.

¹⁶⁴ “Cruelty and Bloodshed,” *The Ohio Star*, September 15, 1853.

¹⁶⁵ Kappa’s report was republished prefaced by some editorial comment in “The Manliness of Slave Catching,” *The Belmont Chronicle, and Farmers, Mechanics, and Manufacturers Advocate*, September 16, 1853.

arrest” criminalized the actions of the marshal’s party.¹⁶⁶ The editor of the *Washington Star* opined

What is there in the Fugitive Law which exalts it in honor and sacredness above all other laws? Is it its flagrant disregard of all safeguards of personal freedom—its denial of the habeas corpus and right of trial by jury—its establishment of irresponsible and corrupt tribunals—its aggression on State Sovereignty—its contempt for the sentiments and usages of the people of the free States—the encouragement it gives to kidnapping and violence and fraud and murder?¹⁶⁷

The question of use of force became fodder for the “Washington News and Gossip” column and the ability of local citizens to question the use of force was adjudicated in the Circuit Court of the United States for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania in the case of *Ex Parte John Jenkins and James Crosson* in 1853.¹⁶⁸ In December of 1854 lawyers initiated a civil suit on behalf of William Thomas, who remained in hiding, suing for civil damages for injuries Thomas sustained during the apprehension attempt. Three of the deputies involved in the arrest attempt as well as Thomas’s former master, Isham Keith, were charged and jailed in Philadelphia until a federal judge determined that federal authority trumped state criminal prosecution and ordered the release of the four men.¹⁶⁹

Across the North, William Thomas became known as “The Hero of Wilkesbarre” who “feared neither the crack of the whip nor the report of the pistol.” When faced with

¹⁶⁶ “Can a United States’ Marshal Kill a Fugitive Slave?” *Lewisburg Chronicle*, September 16, 1853.

¹⁶⁷ “The Administration and State Laws: An Important Fugitive Slave Law Question,” *The National Era*, October 13, 1853.

¹⁶⁸ “Washington News and Gossip,” *The [Richmond] Daily Dispatch*, October 6, 1853. *Ex Parte John Jenkins and James Crosson*, 2 *American Legal Review* (November 1853 to November 1854), 144-157.

¹⁶⁹ *William Thomas vs. James Crosson*, et al. 3 *American Law Register* (November 1854 – November 1855): 207-229 and Julius Yanuck, “The Force Act in Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 92, no. 3 (July 1968): 352-364.

capture, he “proved that one armed man is more than a match for five mercenary ruffians.”¹⁷⁰ The Boston *Sunday News* stated “the glorious heroism of the hunted slave, who, with a noble American heart in his bosom, preferred death to Slavery, ...afforded one of the finest illustrations of heroism ever presented.”¹⁷¹ Frederick Douglass later recalled the actions of the freedom seeker from Fauquier County when he declared in a speech in New York in 1857:

Every fugitive from slavery who, like the noble William Thomas at Wilkes Barre, prefers to perish in a river made red by his own blood to submission to the hell hounds who were hunting and shooting him should be esteemed as a glorious martyr, worthy to be held in grateful memory by our people.¹⁷²

While it is doubtful that Thomas willingly chose to become a “glorious martyr,” when pressed, he rallied considerable courage to shape his own destiny. Press coverage of the experiences of William Thomas created a forum for debating the merits of the Fugitive Slave Law and created the heroic trope of the runaway slave as a national hero, desperate to find some measure of freedom. This public spectacle placed slaveholding and the appropriation of federal officials and processes to enforce control over enslaved laborers claimed by northern Virginia slaveholders.

While slaveholders with access to regional newspapers would have read of these events, the question remains as to how these fugitive slave cases influenced potential

¹⁷⁰ “The Hero of Wilkesbarre,” from the *Philadelphia Register* published in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, October 8, 1853.

¹⁷¹ “The Wilkesbarre Fugitive Hunt,” *Sunday News* as reported in *The National Era*, September 22, 1853.

¹⁷² Frederick Douglass, *Two Speeches, by Frederick Douglass; One on West India Emancipation, Delivered at Canandaigua, Aug. 4th, [1857] and the Other on the Dred Scott Decision, Delivered in New York, on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the American Abolition Society, May, 1857* (Rochester, New York: C. P. Dewey, Printer, 1857), 22 as found at <http://www.libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Two_Speeches_by_Frederick_Douglass.pdf>.

freedom-seekers from northern Virginia. A formerly enslaved man, J. H. Bland, recalled that after fleeing from Warrenton in 1851 and arriving in New York, he “did not consider [himself] safe there, after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law” and so he left New York to continue north to Canada.¹⁷³

Another measure of relative confidence in the ability of runaways to escape detection and rendition was the frequency of runaways before and after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. J. Blaine Hudson discovered a significant increase in the number of runaways traveling from or through Kentucky after 1850 compared to before 1850. Hudson identified references to 375 runaways prior to 1850 and 426 references from 1850 to 1863.¹⁷⁴ Compare that to the number of runaways from the northern Virginia counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William. From these counties 467 runaways were identified as having absconded between 1800 and 1849 and only 87 runaways from 1850 to 1860 (see table 14). Looking closer at the frequency of runaways across the period, the decade with the greatest number of reported runaways in northern Virginia was that of 1830 to 1839 (see figure 63).

¹⁷³ “Interview with J. H. Bland, 1863, Canada,” John W. Blassingame, ed. *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 429.

¹⁷⁴ J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 33.

Table 14. Frequency of runaways, by decade

Decade	Number of Runaways From Northern Virginia	Number of Runaways Through or Out of Kentucky
1800 to 1809	80	58
1810 to 1819	91	
1820 to 1829	79	142
1830 to 1839	127	133
1840 to 1849	90	139
1850 to 1860	87	630
Total	554	1102

Sources: Northern Virginia Runaway Database and “Table III-5: Kentucky Fugitive Slave Data Base: Fugitive Slaves by Decade” J. Blaine Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderland* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002), 34.

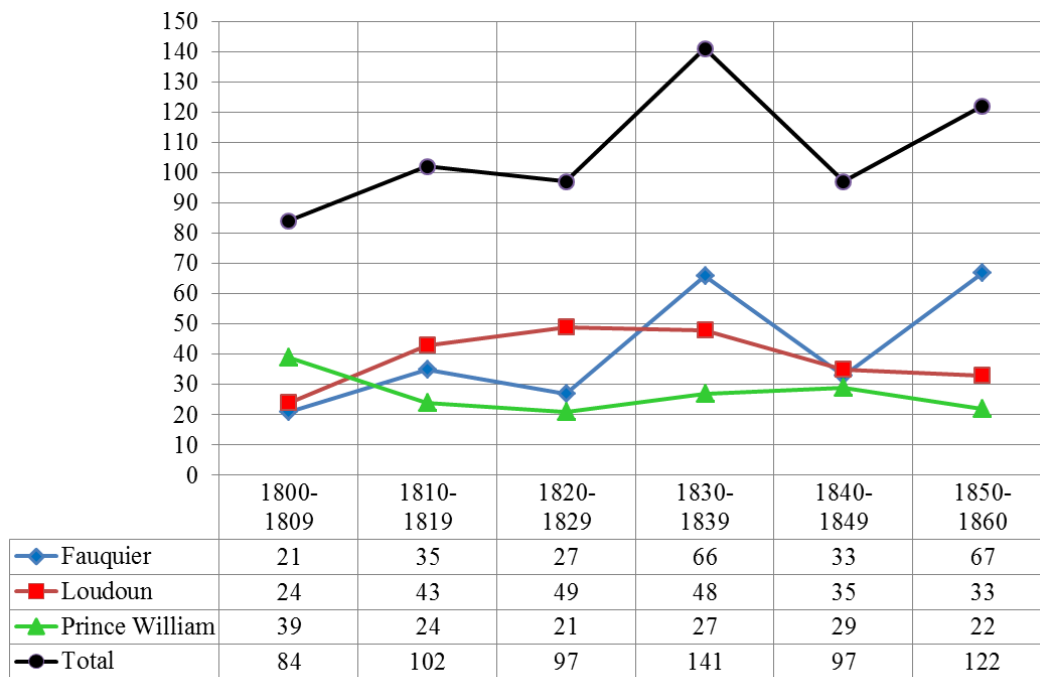


Figure 63. Number of advertised runaways by decade, 1800-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

While the frequency of total runaways across the three counties in northern Virginia did not show an appreciable increase or decrease after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, county totals reveal distinct differences in the advertised activity of runaways. Loudoun and Prince William counties experienced decreases from the decade of the 1840s to the decade of the 1850s while the number of advertised runaways from Fauquier County more than doubled during that time. This suggests that pressures on enslaved persons increased significantly on enslaved persons in Fauquier County during the 1850s, the ability to network and coordinate runaways improved, and slaveholders suspected that absences were not just temporary, but efforts to permanently escape from enslavement. A closer look at the data shows that the occurrence of runaways between 1851 and 1854 showed a significant reduction from previous yearly totals, a trend that would not reverse until the “stampedes” of 1856 to 1859 (see figure 64). These rates suggest that news of fugitive slave cases during this period may well have affected the decision of potential runaways to flee during that period. Following the high profile cases of northern Virginia fugitives, James Phillips’ ability to find freedom after his rendition, and the glorification of William Thomas’s actions, savvy freedom-seekers sensed a shift in support for fugitive rendition in certain areas.

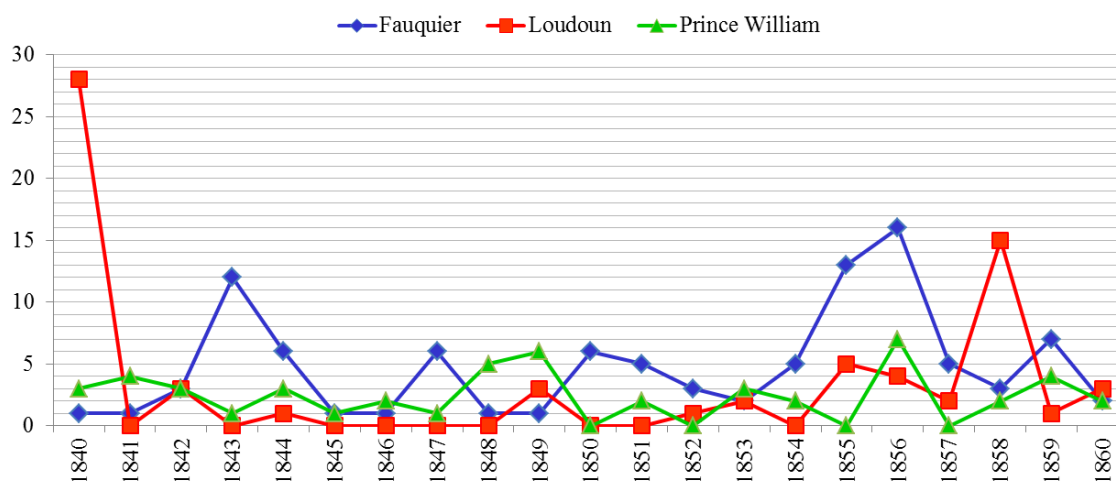


Figure 64. Number of advertised runaways by county, 1840-1860.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

The Effect of Runaways on Slaveholders

Each runaway signified a potential financial loss, either through disrupted work or the loss of an estate asset. The loss of control over a slave's mobility and the suspicion that slaves conspired with freed blacks or abolitionist whites made the significance of each runaway a much greater threat to the overall stability of the master-slave relationship. Historian Philip Schwarz asserted that "running away became sufficiently widespread that it was the most threatening of all acts of resistance in which Virginian slaves ever engaged on an individual or group basis."¹⁷⁵ Yet the question remains about how threatening did northern Virginia slaveholders perceive the act of running away to be?

¹⁷⁵ Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 282.

Sources provide only slim information on the number of successful escape attempts. Few runaways from northern Virginia runaways left published works like former slaves Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs who described their methods of escape.¹⁷⁶ Committal notices, official publications that alerted the public about persons taken up as presumed runaways and request owners to claim incarcerated blacks before a specified period of time, offer incomplete data on the actual number of runaways captured. They pinpoint numbers and tentative identities of captured slaves, but fail to tell us what happened following incarceration. They do describe escape attempts from the perspective of failed experiences, providing information on the place of apprehension, hints to the time between elopement and imprisonment, and in some cases circumstances of the apprehension.

Some runaways were identified and returned so quickly that owners had little or no need for newspaper advertisements. Enslaved man Jerry eloped from the neighborhood of the Broad Run in Loudoun County in 1802.¹⁷⁷ By the time Jerry's owner, Ludwell Lee, wrote to the *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer* to post a runaway ad for Jerry, Sheriff Thomas MacGill had already alerted the public that he had imprisoned an enslaved man calling himself Jerry in the county jail in Prince George County, Maryland. According to MacGill, "a negro fellow by the name of Jerry" claimed he was "the property of Ludwell Lee of Loudoun county" had been committed to

¹⁷⁶ Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. Written by Himself*. (1845), Electronic Edition. <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass/douglass.html>>; Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, L[ydia] Maria Child, ed. (Boston: Published for the Author, 1861), Electronic Edition, <<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/jacobs.html>>.

¹⁷⁷ Loudoun County slaveholder, Ludwell Lee posted his letter on September 15, 1802. *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, September 17, 1802.

the county jail and MacGill requested Jerry's owner to come, identify, and pay Jerry's jail fees.¹⁷⁸

About two weeks after his elopement from John Beveridge near Middleburg in Loudoun County, 17 year old Merryman was apprehended and conveyed to the Frederick County, Maryland jail.¹⁷⁹ Harry and Dick fled from near the Gum Spring in Loudoun County on October 12, 1809 and six days later were committed to the Harford County, Maryland jail.¹⁸⁰ Beverly escaped detection for about a week after absconding from Bernard Carter's Woodstock Farm in Fauquier County.¹⁸¹ Beverly apparently only made it as far as the southern portion of the District of Columbia as he was committed to the jail in Alexandria as a runaway.¹⁸² Husband and wife, Frederick and Matilda ran away from George Noble's property near Upperville in Loudoun County on September 2, 1819.¹⁸³ Two months later Matilda was apprehended and committed to the jail as a runaway in Alexandria, Virginia, ending her bid for freedom.¹⁸⁴ Frederick's fate was not recorded.

In 1856 David Green fled from the Warrenton neighborhood with six other freedom-seekers. Underground Railroad conductor, Sydney Howard Gay, met and

¹⁷⁸ Sheriff Thomas MacGill also wrote his letter informing the public that he had "committed to jail" the presumed runaway on September 15, 1802. *Maryland Gazette*, September 23, 1802.

¹⁷⁹ Merryman ran away from Loudoun in company with Adam and Ephraim on August 23, 1804. *Kline's Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, October 26, 1804. Sheriff George Creager confined Merryman in the Frederick County, MD jail on September 7, 1804. *Republican Star or Eastern Shore General Advertiser*, November 13, 1804.

¹⁸⁰ For details of Harry and Dick's escape see Elias Horsman's advertisement, *Alexandria Daily Gazette, Commercial and Political*, November 11, 1809. For the committal notice posted by Harford County Sheriff John Kean, Jr., see *Republican Star or Eastern Shore General Advertiser*, November 21, 1809.

¹⁸¹ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 21, 1817.

¹⁸² *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, June 28, 1817; *Alexandria Herald*, June 30, 1817.

¹⁸³ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, January 6, 1819; *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 12, 1819.

¹⁸⁴ *Alexandria Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, November 7, 1818.

interviewed Green and learned that Green's group "had traveled about 100 miles when they were attacked by a party of white men." Green apparently was the only one in his group of seven to escape capture. In the process of evading his would-be capturers he lost his "overcoat, pistol & money."¹⁸⁵

These failed attempts show that runaways often could traverse long distances and evade patrols and captors for extended periods of time. These absences certainly affected slaveholders reliant upon the enslaved labor of the runaways. Those able to evade capture often represented a significant financial loss to slaveowners. For slaveholders who had multiple enslaved persons abscond, the labor and financial loss could represent a significant setback. The loss of enslaved "property" constituted a more immediate effect of runaways on slaveholding, and certain slaveholders felt this loss more keenly than others.

Loudoun County slaveholder, George Hosselbeck, reported a series of runaways from his residence near Lanesville between August and December in 1815. First to abscond was forty year old Sam Smith, a literate enslaved man who Hosselbeck believed could forge his own pass.¹⁸⁶ On Christmas Day Hosselbeck noted that three more enslaved men had left his holdings. Twenty-four year old John Smith, possibly related to Sam Smith, fled with twenty-four year old John Lawson and Frank, aged twenty-two years old. Hosselbeck believed Frank, described as "a good shoe-maker by trade" would

¹⁸⁵ Green arrived into Gay's care on July 29, 1856 according to his journal. Don Papson and Tom Calarco, *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City: Sydney Howard Gay, Louis Napoleon and the Record of Fugitives* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2015), 191. William Still recorded David Green's arrival in Philadelphia but did not mention Green's traveling companions or the attempted capture. William Still. *Still's Underground Rail Road Records*. Revised Edition (Philadelphia: William Still, Publisher, 1886), 319-320.

¹⁸⁶ *Alexandria Herald*, September 18, 1815.

“endeavor to obtain work at his trade” and that Frank and John would “endeavor to escape together to the northward.”¹⁸⁷

The loss of four enslaved men, one skilled in a lucrative trade and the others in their prime working years, was a hard financial blow for Hosselbeck. One conservative estimate of Hosselbeck’s potential loss would be between \$1,350 and \$2,100 in 1815.¹⁸⁸ This represents between \$21,093.75 and \$32,812.50 when converted to 2015 currency values.¹⁸⁹ The timing of an individual absconding followed by a group hints at a larger coordinated effort. The three leaving in December could have followed the trail of Sam Smith or all four could have planned or coordinated their flights based on the success or failure of the first to leave. In any case, Hosselbeck suffered a severe financial blow if these escape attempts were successful.

For two years after Stepney and Elias absconded from James B. Ewell’s farm near Buckland in Prince William County, Ewell continued to post advertisements offering a reward for their return, steadily increasing his reward for his “two valuable young negro Men” from \$100 to \$250 per man. Ewell estimated both men to be between 22 and 23

¹⁸⁷ *Alexandria Herald*, January 12, 1816.

¹⁸⁸ Estimates of each enslaved person’s value are based on comparable ranges of values for similarly aged and skilled enslaved men recorded in estate inventories and divisions. A comparison of values appraised for field hands and skilled laborers during estate inventories between 1810 and 1819 suggests that Frank might be worth up to \$750, the value assigned to 25 year old Bill, a wheelwright in Fauquier County in 1816. Inventory of George Carter, deceased, Fauquier Will Book 6: 318. Willis, a shoemaker of unspecified age in Prince William County in 1810, was assessed with a value of \$450. Inventory of John Thornton Fitzhugh, deceased, Prince William County Will Book K: 92. Enslaved men without particular skills in their early twenties would appraise for more than \$400. Enslaved man Spencer, age 19, appraised for \$400 in 1815 and sold at auction in January 1816 for \$551. Inventory of John B. Smith, deceased. Fauquier Will Book 6: 150; For Spencer’s sale see Fauquier County Will Book 7: 143. At age 40, Sam Smith might be valued between \$100 and \$250 depending on his skills and health. In comparison, 50 year old David was assessed at a value of \$100 in 1816 and 40 year old Simon was valued at \$250 in 1821. For David’s valuation see the Inventory of George Carter, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 6: 318. For Simon’s appraisal see Inventory and Division of William Edrington’s Estate, Fauquier County Will Book 8: 111.

¹⁸⁹ I used Dave Manuel’s inflation calculator to determine contemporary currency values.
<<http://www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php>>.

years old. Elias was described as “well made for service.” Using estate appraisals as an indicator of potential ranges for values of enslaved men, Ewell might expect a valuation between \$475 and \$550 for each man in 1833 (or an equivalent of \$14,843.75 to \$17,187.50 for both men in 2015 dollars).¹⁹⁰ Ewell’s determination to retrieve Stepney and Elias hints at the financial loss or deficit in available manual labor he felt following their disappearance.¹⁹¹

As mentioned before, the elopement of Patty Douglass and her six children equated to an estimated loss in assets totaling \$2,775 for slaveholder Joseph Mead according to Loudoun County slave trader William K. Ish, (an estimated value of more than \$71,000 in 2015 dollars).¹⁹² Yet the members of the Douglass family were not the only enslaved persons to run from Mead’s Loudoun plantation. On March 14, 1826 Joseph Mead reported that enslaved men Anderson Patterson and Jerry Sinclair absconded from his lands located near Leesburg. Mead offered a reward ranging from \$10 to \$100 per man based on the location where each was apprehended with the highest compensation offered if either were “taken in Pennsylvania, Ohio, or any other free

¹⁹⁰ Comparable values were calculated from appraisals of 22 year old Elisha and 23 year old Anthony in Fauquier County. Each were each valued at \$475 in 1833. Appraisal of the Estate of William Foote, deceased. Fauquier County Will Book 13: 120. That same year 23 year old Osbourn was appraised at \$550. Inventory of Sarah Taylor, deceased. Fauquier County Will Book 13: 234. Notably, in 1835, values for this age cohort ballooned when 22 year old John was valued at \$800. Appraisal of the Estate of Nelson N. Fishback, Fauquier County Will Book 14: 92. To determine the value in 2015 dollars I consulted Dave Manuel’s inflation calculator. <<http://www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php>>.

¹⁹¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 20, 1834, March 12, 1835, January 14, 1836, May 21, 1836, and June 13, 1836.

¹⁹² See William K. Ish’s valuation of the Douglass family dated September 10, 1839 as reported in *The Emancipator*, December 5, 1839. For a calculation of the converted value into 2015 dollars, I used Dave Manuel’s inflation calculator. Converting \$2,775 (1839 dollars) to 2015 dollars resulted in a value of \$71,153.85. <<http://www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php>>.

State.”¹⁹³ Patterson and Sinclair might have been valued between \$300 and \$350 each in 1826, or about \$7,100 to \$8,300 in 2015 dollars.¹⁹⁴ In 1849 Mead again suffered the loss of an enslaved man, Bob, who absconded from the farm on Saturday, August 25, shortly after receiving his summer allotment of clothing. This time Mead’s financial loss was minimal since Mead did not own Bob, but had hired him for the year from a Norfolk, Virginia slaveowner.¹⁹⁵

Lunnon Osborne and Lewis absconded from slaveholder T. B. Robertson’s farm near Dumfries, on October 25, 1854.¹⁹⁶ Two years later in 1856 twenty-seven year old Moses and his twenty-four year old wife, Betty, also ran away from Robertson’s farm near Dumfries.¹⁹⁷ Only two to three weeks after Moses and Betty fled, five more men left the Dumfries farm in July, 1856. Robertson believed the latest seven runaways were “most probably all now together” or working together in their escape attempt.¹⁹⁸

Robertson’s offer of a \$150 each for Lunnon Osborne and for Lewis reveals the high

¹⁹³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 18, 1826.

¹⁹⁴ At the time of their escape attempt, Joseph Mead estimated both Anderson Patterson and Jerry Sinclair to be about thirty years of age. “200 Dollars Reward,” *Daily National Intelligencer*, March 18, 1826. For comparable values of thirty-year-old enslaved men consider that in 1827, 30 year old Bryant was appraised at \$350. Inventory of the Estate of Philip Fishback, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 10: 284. In Prince William County, both 33 year old Bob and 28 year old Tom were each valued at \$300 in 1828. Inventory of the Estate of Col. John Tayloe, deceased, Tayloe Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society. To convert 1827 money to 2015 values, I used Dave Manuel’s Inflation Calculator. Each man, valued in 2015 dollars would bring between \$7,142.86 to \$8,333.33. <<http://www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php>>

¹⁹⁵ *The Washingtonian*, October 26, 1849, microfilm. Mead would have probably been liable for either a pro-rated annual hire rate or the entire annual hire rate, depending on his agreement with Bob’s owner. Though it is unknown the rent for Bob’s hire, it was likely around \$60 per year. This estimate is based on a slave hire agreement contracted in Prince William County for the year 1845 for the services of “servant man Jesse Bruce.” Henry Love agreed to pay Bruce’s owner, Samuel J. Tebbs \$60 for Bruce’s labor. Slave Hire Contract, LP (1846) 01121_00467, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

¹⁹⁶ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, November 25, 1854.

¹⁹⁷ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, July 1, 1856.

¹⁹⁸ Moses ran away on Monday, July 28, 1856 and the following day Abram, Littleton, Armstead, and Tom also left Robertson’s farm near Dumfries. Robertson advertised a \$1,000 reward for the return of Henry, Betty, Moses, Abram, Littleton, Armstead, and Tom until at least September 1, 1856 in the *Baltimore Sun*. *The (Baltimore) Sun*, July 30, 1856.

value he placed on regaining their service as enslaved laborers.¹⁹⁹ For the capture and return of Moses and Betty, Robertson offered between \$50 and \$100 per person based on the distance from capture to Virginia.²⁰⁰ The reward for the capture and return of Moses, Armstead, Littleton, Abram, and Tom ranged from \$700 if taken in Virginia to \$1,000 if captured and delivered from outside of Virginia.²⁰¹ The loss of nine enslaved persons in just two short years meant potentially thousands of dollars of lost equity for Robertson, with a conservative estimate of between \$5,200 and \$5,800 for Lunnon, Lewis, Henry, Betsy, Moses and Abram (Robertson did not provide data on the ages of Armstead,

¹⁹⁹ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, November 25, 1854.

²⁰⁰ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, July 1, 1856.

²⁰¹ *The (Baltimore) Sun*, July 30, 1856.

Littleton, or Tom).²⁰² This translates to an estimated range approximately between \$144,000 and \$161,000 in 2015 dollars.²⁰³

As seen in the cases of George Hosselback (1815), James Ewell (1833), Joseph Mead (1826, 1839, and 1849) and T. B. Robertson (1854 and 1856), each experienced a severe loss of wealth and labor immediately preceding or during key periods of slave sales, plantation and household migrations, and escalated numbers of runaways. Their financial woes may explain why slaveowners chose to cash in on rising slave prices – as a proactive measure to reap some financial benefit before enslaved laborers in their prime laboring (and prime sale periods) decided to abscond, in which case the slaveholder might lose all potential value and labor. Turning this argument on its head, enslaved

²⁰² According to Robertson's 1854 runaway advertisement, Lunnon Osborne was about 23 years old and Lewis was 19 years old. "Three Hundred Dollars Reward," *The (Baltimore) Sun*, November 25, 1854. In 1856 Robertson estimated Henry's age as 27 years old and Betsy at 24 years old. Robertson offered rewards from \$50 to \$100 each depending on where they were apprehended. "\$200 Reward," *Alexandria Gazette*, June 26, 1856. In July 1856, Robertson estimated the ages of two of his five runaways as follows: Moses at 30 to 32 years old and Abram about 28 years old. Robertson did not provide ages for Littleton, Armstead, and Tom. "One Thousand Dollars Reward," *The Sun*, July 30, 1856. Comparable appraised values for Lunnon include 25 year old Thornton, valued at \$900 in 1853. Appraisal of the Estate of Sarah Bell, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 25: 136. Thornton sold at an estate sale in December 1853 for \$929. Comparable values for Lewis include \$800, appraised value for 18 year old Howard in 1854, \$900 for 22 year old Henry, and \$1,000 for 19 year old blacksmith, Marshall. Inventory of Thomas Fisher, deceased. Fauquier County Will Book 25: 233. Henry and Abram's values might have been comparable to 26 year old Henry of the Craig estate or 27 year old Horace, each of whom were assessed at \$1,000 in 1856. Inventory of the Estate of Mary Craig, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 26: 291. Finding comparable values for Betsy during this time period is difficult for two reasons: the lack of women aged about 23 years old in estate inventories and when similarly aged women were valued, they were assessed in combination with infant children. For example, 25 year old Julian and her child were assessed at \$900 in 1857. Inventory of the Estate of William R. Smith, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 27: 141. Around the same time 23 year old Catharine and her ten-day-old infant were valued at \$700. Appraisal of the Estate of William Glascock, Fauquier County Will Book 27: 46. Twenty-year old Eliza was assessed at \$900 in 1856. Inventory of the Estate of Mary Craig, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 26: 291. Comparable values for Moses include \$800 assessed to 32 year old George in 1855. Division of the Estate of Henry Peters, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 26: 178. Jerry and Shadrack, both aged about 33 years in 1856, each appraised for \$1,000. Inventory of Mary Craig, deceased, Fauquier County Will Book 26: 291.

²⁰³ For a calculation of the converted value into 2015 dollars, I used Dave Manuel's inflation calculator resulting in values ranging between \$144,444.44 and \$161,111.11 in 2015 dollars. <<http://www.davemanuel.com/inflation-calculator.php>>.

laborers in their prime ages for value and labor, responded to increased threat of sale and absconded before sales could be brokered. The increase in runaway attempts and the suspicion that a clandestine network of blacks and whites actively assisted them would inflate the values of those deemed most likely to abscond. In order to ascertain which of these forces acted and which reacted, an investigation of slaveholder fears about the extent of assistance networks is prudent.

As seen in figure 65, slaveholders experienced five peak periods when the number of runaways advertised in newspapers or broadsides appeared to increase significantly: 1804 to 1805; 1816 to 1820; 1825 to 1831; 1833 to 1839; and 1855 to 1859.

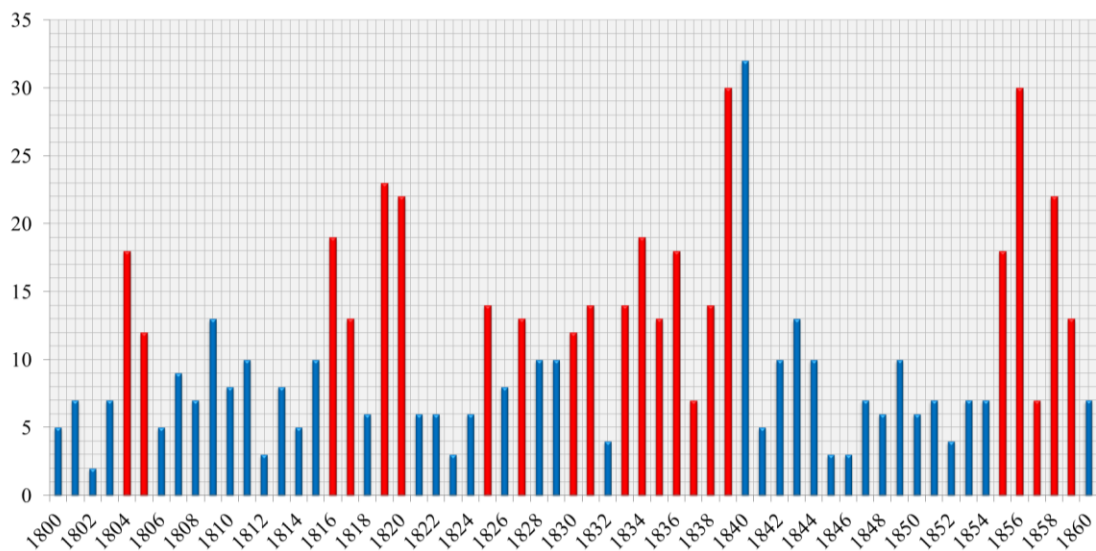


Figure 65. Peak periods of runaway activity.

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

Note: Based on published broadsides and runaway advertisements, there appeared to be five periods of more intense runaway activity. The year 1840 is not included because the majority of runaways that year

ran away as a result of one event – the planned division of the Marshall estate, involving 23 enslaved persons.

While runaway advertisements may not fully reveal the total number of enslaved persons who fled from Loudoun, Fauquier, and Prince William slaveowners, they do suggest the extent to which fugitives destabilized the master-slave relationship. Some slaveholders especially felt the financial loss of fugitive slaves. The range of rewards offered reflected the potential loss of financial investment in enslaved bodies and the costs involved in reclaiming runaways added to financial woes of slaveholders.

Descriptive advertisements revealed in some cases the sense of betrayal experienced by slaveholders and public embarrassment slaveholders experienced by the loss of chattel.²⁰⁴

Northern anti-slavery newspapers used the advertisements to criticize the institution of slavery and the press coverage surrounding fugitive slave cases further brought enslavement in northern Virginia under scrutiny.

Tracking individual slaveholders through runaway ads, a pattern of active resistance against the slaveholding regime in very distinct locations becomes apparent. Runaway ads also provide information about the movements, family connections, and success of runaway attempts for individual enslaved persons. Each act of elopement, whether short-term or long-term, denied a slaveholder the service and labor of an enslaved person. The financial distress of a slaveholder was compounded by costs of advertising runaway ads, hiring slave catchers, paying costs and rewards for capture, or jail fees for runaways “taken up” by local patrols or concerned citizens, or the ultimate

²⁰⁴ See chapter six.

cost of forever losing enslaved property. Runaways presented a dangerous example to other enslaved persons by encouraging flight, another threat of potential loss to a slaveholder. Other hidden costs included the public indication of cracks in the supposedly firm foundation of slavery and masterly control. Every enslaved person who resisted enslavement and sought a life free from the peculiar institution provided additional ammunition for antislavery activist propaganda.

As sectional tensions increased, the importance of this region grew in the national debate over fugitive slaves as northern antislavery presses increasingly commented on Virginia's peculiar institution as portrayed in court cases connected to fugitive slaves. While the absolute numbers of fugitives from service and labor never threatened the institution of slavery in northern Virginia, the threat of loss perceived by slaveholders compounded by the actual financial loss to individuals and specific neighborhoods as well as the negative publicity sparked by runaway advertisements and fugitive slave court cases did generate a symbolic attack against slaveholders.

CHAPTER EIGHT: VIOLENT RESISTANCE TO ENSLAVEMENT

Acts of defiance against the system of slavery, whether overt or covert, upset the order and balance of power in a slave society. Across northern Virginia, slaveowners accepted a certain amount of non-violent resistance that disrupted daily work routines due to their belief that insolence, ignorance, and laziness characterized the natural temperaments of enslaved persons. Other, more criminal acts generated a quite different response from the ruling class and courts, especially when the violence was perpetrated in the domestic sphere by enslaved women entrusted to care for slaveholding families. Over time slaveholders, neighborhoods, and communities across the region responded to the perception that a growing sense of disobedience, disorder, and increasing acts of overt resistance was evident among the region's male and female enslaved class. These experiences generated periods of uncertainty and unrest due to possible threats to individuals, property, and the broader slaveholding community. Although located within a relatively small geographical space, Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William counties experienced real and perceived threats at distinct though dissimilar times between 1800 and 1860. Identifying these patterns of resistance in conjunction with other stresses occurring both locally and nationally reveals a profound reaction by enslaved persons to resist conditions of enslavement. Coupled with the reactions of slaveholders, these

actions generated periods of intense fears, both real and perceived, about the master-slave relationship and the balance of power in northern Virginia's slave societies.

Slaves perpetrated relatively minor acts of defiance to regain control over their time and labors. These ranged from the seemingly mild daily occurrences of insolence, work slow-downs, destruction of tools, or temporarily running away. Historian William DusiBerre asserted that a slave's dissidence, enacted through theft, deception, protest, and absconding was the "strongest bulwark against dehumanization."¹ The path-breaking research by Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer on day-to-day slave resistance broke the mold of characterizing slaves as "docile, well adapted to slavery, and reasonably content with their lot" by revealing the many ways slaves adjusted to enslavement through "slowing up of work, destruction of property, malingering and self-mutilation."² Over time the various ways that enslaved persons pushed back against overseers, masters, and slave communities increased racial tensions.

During his travels through Virginia in the mid-1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted remarked that these incidents of minor defiance, though "trifling in themselves" served to "constantly betray to a stranger [to the South] the bad economy of using enslaved servants." Olmsted noted the "constantly-occurring delays, and the waste of time and labor" as a chronic problem in slave societies.³ Fauquier slaveholder Richard Buckner noted that while "the ploughs work well" on his fields, his enslaved ploughman was "so

¹ William DusiBerre, *Strategies for Survival: Recollections of Bondage in Antebellum Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 141.

² Raymond A. Bauer and Alice H. Bauer, "Day to Day Resistance to Slavery," *Journal of Negro History*, 27, no. 4 (October 1942): 388-419, quotations from 388 and 390.

³ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on their Economy* (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 145.

careless that the work is but indifferently done on the whole” – indifference that slowed down planting.⁴ More than thirty years later Buckner’s son also decried at times the slow-down work habits of his enslaved laborers. The younger Buckner observed that Hannah, Fanny, and Bush “made a small day’s job” of the simple task of “piling manure at the cabin.” Buckner could Bush’s part in the slow-down, he being “a small boy” but Hannah and Fanny were “both grown” so they had no excuse other than “laziness.”⁵

Other acts of resistance included theft of food, goods, or money. Bob was charged with breaking and entering Peter Lamkin’s meat house and “carrying away from thence a parcel of bacon and a piece of Beef of the value of Twelve dollars.”⁶ In another case, Beverley, an enslaved man belonging to William S. Chichester was accused of the theft of \$40 of wheat from Stephen McCormick. A month later Beverley was charged again with stealing food – this time with the cooperation of his fellow slave Thaddeus and “devius [sic] other persons who are unknown” in the theft of twenty barrels of corn from Jacob Weaver’s corn house.⁷ Enoch was found guilty of the theft of a hog from John

⁴ Entry for Sunday, August 3, 1828, Diary of Richard Bernard Buckner, Volume II: January 1, 1828 to March 23, 1829, in *The St. Bernard Diaries 1827-1862*, trans. by Christine Perdue Smith (2003), 10, Library of Virginia. Hereafter referred to as *The St. Bernard Diaries*, Vol. II.

⁵ Entry for December 20, 1860, Diary of Richard Pratt Buckner, Volume I: September 17, 1856 to March 4, 1862, in *The St. Bernard Diaries 1827-1862*, trans. by Christine Perdue Smith (2003), 7, Library of Virginia. Hereafter referred to as *The St. Bernard Diaries*, Vol. I.

⁶ *Commonwealth v. Bob, slave of Berkley Ward*, Box #11, 1824-006, AAHA. The Fauquier Court found Bob guilty on March 25, 1824 yet the Fauquier Court unanimously recommended him to the mercy of the Governor, a commutation that was granted. Ibid. Bob was taken to the state penitentiary in Richmond, arriving on June 22, 1824 and sold to a trader on March 23, 1825. Auditor of Public Accounts, “A List of Slaves and Free persons of color received into this Penitentiary of Virginia for Sale and transportation from the 25th June 1816 to the 1st February 1842,” Library of Virginia, microfilm.

⁷ *Commonwealth v. Thaddeus and Beverley, negro men, slaves of Wm. S. Chichester*, Box #18, 1839-007, AAHA. Thaddeus and Beverley were found guilty of the theft of corn and sentenced to receive thirty-nine lashes. Ibid.

Dawson in 1823 and Job Cooke took “four fat cattle” from John Wornal and Cuthbert Powell in 1825.⁸

Trials involving thefts perpetrated by enslaved persons filled county court records and indicated on one level the amount of deprivation of basic necessities of life experienced by slaves desperate to supplement meager supplies with better fare. In a different interpretation, the thefts represented attacks against the slaveholding society by reclaiming some possession of the bounties produced through enslaved labor. As historian Jeff Forret noted, the “act of pilfering from the owner proved not only materially beneficial but also psychologically gratifying” to persons retained in bondage.⁹

Community observers tended to blame these thefts on the inability or unwillingness of a master to assert “proper authority” failing to recognize slaveholder culpability for the thefts by providing inadequate provisions. In his presidential address to the members of the Agricultural Society of Albemarle in 1825, James Barbour noted that “when proper authority is not exercised, that [when slaves’s] owners are unable to provide for them comfortably—that such slaves become entirely insubordinate, and are generally a pest to the neighbourhood.” Still, the number of court cases involving theft of

⁸ *Commonwealth v. Enoch, slave, the property of Benjamin White*, Criminal Issue 1823-036, LCHAD. The Loudoun Court ordered a punishment of thirty-nine lashes and committal to jail until such time as his master, Benjamin White, would secure future good behavior of Enoch for the period of one year with a recognizance bond of \$100. *Commonwealth v. Job Cooke, slave property of Lewis Smith*, Criminal Issue 1825-009, LCHAD. The court sentenced Cooke to “be burnt in the hand & receive thirty lashes on his bare back” for the theft.

⁹ Jeff Forret, “‘A Slave that will Steal from a Slave, is called *Mean as Master*’: Thefts and Violence inside Southern Slave Quarters” in Jeff Forret and Christine E. Sears, eds., *New Directions in Slavery Studies: Commodification, Community, and Comparison* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 111.

meat, bacon, sugar, or spices suggests that slaves took action against what they rightly considered inadequate provisioning.¹⁰

Northern Virginia slaves resisted enslavement in other ways. Some refused to serve new or hired masters, initiating changes to their ownership, employer, or residence. Apparently aware that her mistress's impending death would lead to her removal from Loudoun County to the home of an heir in Maryland, enslaved woman Sinah made known she was "unwilling to go" causing her mistress, Susannah Chilton, to order her executor to "sell her the said negroe woman Sinah and her three children that are now with her to such a person as she may...choose to serve and live with for the best price that can be had for them." Sinah's ability to communicate her refusal to be transferred either to her new mistress or to a new residence in Prince George's County, Maryland resulted in a sale, yet possibly with the opportunity for Sinah to negotiate her enslavement with a local and desirable slaveowner.¹¹ Similarly, enslaved woman Lett expressed her "unwillingness to go" to James Moore Davis as a hired employee in 1793, an attitude that convinced Davis to "give her up" in order to re-hire her to some other employer. Since "there was no person to take the said negro on hire at that time" Lett's guardian agreed with Davis to allow Lett to "seek for a Master." Lett found employment

¹⁰ "Address of James Barbour, Esq. President of the Agricultural Society of Albemarle, at their meeting on the 8th November, 1825," *The American Farmer*, December 2, 1825. Barbour advocated diet composed of "bread without limit," a "daily (if it be a small one,) allowance of meat, (bacon, if practicable) milk in the summer and autumn, and cider, with those who have orchards, in the winter and spring, to supply the absence of milk." To assuage any frustrations, "a small quantity of whiskey—six or seven gallons to a laboring hand during the year" should be granted to enslaved laborers. Barbour noted that the advantage to offering such provisions "is believed to be far beyond the cost." Ibid.

¹¹ Codicil to the Will of Susannah Chilton, December 2, 1815, Loudoun County Will Book M: 4. To replace the value of Sinah and her remaining children as a legacy to Chilton's daughter, Chilton further desired that her executor purchase "a negroe woman and three other such children if they can be purchased" from the proceeds of Sinah's sale to convey not only an immediate financial asset, but a perpetual legacy deriving from the offspring of the purchased slaves. Ibid.

with Presley Sanders “a day or two after” and apparently was more satisfied with her arrangement for her annual hire.¹² Davis, facing an unwilling employee and potential economic loss through non-work or running away, determined to cut his losses and in effect sub-contract out her hire in order to pay his bond for the annual hire, a financial liability he could not avoid if his hired slave escaped.

While difficult to define, yet relatively easy to notice, the disrespectful speech of disgruntled enslaved persons permeated slave societies and constituted an important aspect of the broadly-defined behavior termed by slaveholders as “insolence.” This type of resistance undermined economic, moral, and social aspects of plantation society at a very personal level by directly challenging the subordination and forced labor of an enslaved people. Complaints or insults against overseers hindered work flow and economic gain and proved immoral to ideals of a slave society when it demeaned (in the perspective of slaveholders) “a divinely ordained paternalism.”¹³ Insolence committed on an individual basis was left to the particular slaveholder, employer, or overseer to determine whether it had escalated to outright disobedience that required correction.

Sometimes slaveholders and observers in neighborhoods noted a general sense of loosening control over the attitudes and actions of the enslaved population or had heightened perceptions of disobedience. Such was the case in 1831 when Benjamin

¹² *James Moore Davis v. Presley Sanders*, Judgments, Loudoun County Slave Papers, 1819-21, LCHAD.

¹³ William E. Wiethoff, “The Nature and Limits of Slave Insolence in the American South,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 87, no. 2 (May 2001): 204-205. Wiethoff also found that insolent speech frustrated the southern code of honor since offended southern gentlemen could not respond with a challenge of an honorable duel to “fighting words” issued by enslaved persons of lower social rank. Wiethoff contended that southern gentry were “[i]ncapable of gaining satisfaction for their wounded dignity through socially approved channels” so instead they “denied to slaves the use of a rhetorical device intended for discourse among equals, and resorted to whips and chains.” Ibid.

Shreve reported that “many owners of slaves” in the Leesburg neighborhood “say that they have seen considerable change in the conduct of the servants for the last six or twelve months” and noted that enslaved persons were “much more insolent than formerly.”¹⁴ Whether this change was actual or merely perceived during the immediate aftermath of the Nat Turner insurrection is unclear, yet the statement demonstrated the awareness of and discussion by community members of enslaved behaviors.

Slave resistance came in many shapes and forms and was present across the South, yet each action represented some effort to upset, challenge, or overturn an individual’s condition of enslavement. In northern Virginia the types of violent resistance challenged the perceived security of white residents and revealed the cracks in the façade of slaveholders’ benevolence and black subordination. Each resistant slave determined the course of action that created an opportunity to mitigate the harsh conditions or exert even limited power over slaveholders. Everyday work slow-downs or insolent attitudes created temporary disruptions in production yet some enslaved parents resorted to dramatic and violent measures to disrupt the cycle of hereditary enslavement.

Infanticide

The death of an enslaved infant could be interpreted in many ways based on circumstances and perspectives. Slaveholders might first consider a slave’s death as a financial loss or the result of a mother’s negligence. They seldom considered poor living conditions, forced work schedules that severely limited mother-child contact and care, or

¹⁴ Letter from B[enjamin] Shreve of Leesburg to Governor John Floyd, September 18, 1831, Box #4, Folder #7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

the victimization of the mother due to sexual abuse. Yet these very conditions sometimes influenced a woman's decision to actively resist against her inability to control her body or the care she longed to give to her child. In these cases a slave mother may feel compelled to take drastic measures to reclaim control over her reproductive capacity and rights to parenting.¹⁵

Since medical examination techniques available during the nineteenth century often limited accurate assessment of the causes of mortality, the cause of an infant's death did not automatically suggest a mother's culpability, yet enslaved mothers were under extra scrutiny when an infant died.¹⁶ In 1850 in Prince William, only two reports of infants, both one month old and both enslaved girls, dying suddenly of unknown causes were reported to the census taker.¹⁷ In Loudoun County during the same period two enslaved infants, a six month old boy and a four month old girl, reportedly died either by being "overlaid" or by "smothering," while another four month old enslaved girl's death was reported as "sudden." In comparison, only one white boy's death at age two months

¹⁵ Marie Jenkins Schwartz explores the competing claims to parenting slave children held by both slave parents and slaveowners. When slaveholders worked to instill in slave children respect for and submission to plantation regimes, slave parents feared that they must "surrender" their own responsibilities as parents. Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Born in Bondage: Growing Up Enslaved in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 8 (quote).

¹⁶ One possible cause for a sudden infant death was smothering or being "overlaid" during the first months of a child's life. Michael P. Johnson found in a survey of six sample counties in Virginia "the death rate of smothered slaves in the Tidewater was much less than that in the Piedmont" of Virginia. In a comparison of instances of smothering deaths reported in the 1860 federal census for Virginia, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina, the highest death rates for enslaved children under the age of one were in areas where "the production of staple crops for market was primary and where gang labor prevailed." Based on Johnson's analysis of the likeliest ages for infants under the age of one year to have succumbed to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome), corresponded to the ages of reported sudden deaths in his sample survey leading credibility to the responsibility of SIDS rather mothers in the deaths of such reported infants. Michael P. Johnson, "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?" *Journal of Southern History*, 47, no. 4 (November 1981): 515.

¹⁷ 1850 Mortality Schedules, Prince William County, Virginia.

was attributed to “unknown” causes in Loudoun County.¹⁸ While not ascribing smothering or overlaying to any deaths, Fauquier County enumerators did report that fifteen out of sixty-one infants under the age of twelve months died of an “accident” or due to “unknown” causes with duration described as “sudden.”¹⁹ The tendency to attribute a sudden death in an enslaved infant as due to “smothering” or “overlaying” while reporting a white infant’s death due to “unknown” causes bore out the “social stigma associated with child smothering.”²⁰

Even so, many slaveowners held enslaved mothers responsible for the death of an infant and were “all too ready to believe that black women had a tendency to kill their infants through negligence if not deliberate murder,” especially when the pregnancy, birth, and infant death were hidden from a slaveowner’s knowledge.²¹ Taking the life of one’s child represented the most drastic measure of resistance taken by enslaved mothers against enslavement. As noted by Jessica Millwood, “giving birth under slavery meant reconciling one’s own role as a reproducer of the slave system with the joys and heartbreaks associated with pregnancy.”²² Committing infanticide represented one extreme measure of reconciling control over an enslaved woman’s reproductive and parenting functions. The act that removed a child from a lifetime of enslavement also deprived a slaveowner the future labor and value of the child, yet also denied a woman

¹⁸ 1850 Mortality Schedules, Loudoun County, Virginia.

¹⁹ 1850 Mortality Schedules, Fauquier County, Virginia.

²⁰ Todd L. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 126.

²¹ Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 208.

²² Jessica Millward, *Finding Charity’s Folk: Enslaved and Free Black Women in Maryland* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 14.

the role of motherhood. In many cases, the sexual exploitation of enslaved women ended in unwanted pregnancies leading to enslaved children bearing striking resemblances to the white children of the household.²³ Whether to deprive a slaveholder of her “increase” or to remove evidence and the shame of forced sexual encounters, the act of infanticide represented drastic resistance to the conditions of enslavement.

In 1823 Elizabeth and Mary J. Armistead charged their enslaved woman, Becca, with the murder of her infant child in Loudoun County.²⁴ That same year in Fauquier County, Catharine, was charged with murder and concealing the death of her child.²⁵ In 1824 Fauquier County Court acquitted Angela, accused of murdering her infant child by “mashing its head in at its birth.”²⁶

In November 1840 the body of an infant was discovered in the woods of Leeds Manor in Fauquier County. Suspicion devolved upon Lucinda, an enslaved woman belonging to Mrs. Ann Brook. Members of the neighborhood believed Lucinda had been pregnant and travelled to the woods away from her own home to deliver the child. An inquest was performed, not by a coroner, but by a justice of the peace in company with twelve “good and lawful men of the county” who were charged to “enquire when, where,

²³ Wilma King explores public knowledge of sexual exploitation and reactions to infant murder in “‘Mad’ Enough to Kill: Enslaved Women, Murder, and Southern Courts,” *Journal of African American History*, 92, no. 1, Women, Slavery, and Historical Research (Winter 2007): 37-56.

²⁴ Becca was accused of concealing her pregnancy and causing the death of the newborn, yet the county court acquitted her of the charges. *Commonwealth v. Becca*, 1823-02, Loudoun County Misc. Papers – Slave Judgments, LCHAD.

²⁵ Perhaps the fact that Catharine’s precarious state of health delayed her incarceration and trial may have led to her acquittal, the fact that charges were brought against Catharine meant that her owner, John Primm, looked to the county court for a determination of guilt or innocence and a local magistrate believed enough reason existed to conduct a trial. *Commonwealth v. Catharine, negro slave of John Primm*, Box #10, 1823-039, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

²⁶ *Commonwealth v. Angela, slave of Alexander J. Marshall*, Box #11, 1824-015, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

how, and after what manner the said infant came to his or her death.” The jury of inquest found Lucinda gave birth to the child in the woods but could not conclusively determine whether Lucinda had “put the same to death by some violence or buried it alive.”²⁷

The case against Phoebe Rozell’s enslaved woman Rhoda illustrated the attentive work of a defense lawyer, medical uncertainties over the causes of infant deaths, and a disbelief that a woman would be capable of murdering her own child, even if enslaved. Slaveowner Phoebe Rozell had hired Rhoda to Henry Plaster, Jr. During the course of her hire, Plaster suspected Rhoda of being pregnant and alerted her mistress of the possibility. Catharine “Kitty” Moran later described Rhoda’s appearance as “lusty,” preceding the appearance of an infant near her lodging.²⁸ Determining pregnancy was not scientific at the time, but mainly based on observable changes in a woman’s physical appearance. Rhoda kept her pregnancy and the delivery of her child a secret. After delivering a child, she apparently tossed the child over a fence and cleaned up the area where she had given birth. Rhoda was accused of murdering her newborn daughter by slashing its throat with a knife.

Lawyers questioned witnesses in order to understand her normal character. Plaster described Rhoda’s character in terms of her “kindness, good temper, & obedience” and replied “so far as he knew it was good.”²⁹ Witness John Sinclair had also hired Rhoda and characterized her temper to be “good & cheerful” and that Rhoda was “kind & obliging particularly to his wife & children & obedient.” Sinclair supposed Rhoda “to be

²⁷ Coroner’s Inquest, Box #15, 1840-008, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, AAHA.

²⁸ “Testimony of Kitty Moran,” *Commonwealth v. Rhoda*, Criminal Case 1842-009, LCHAD.

²⁹ “Testimony of Henry Plaster, Jr.,” *Commonwealth v. Rhoda*, Criminal Case 1842-009, LCHAD.

fond of children.”³⁰ Lawyers asked one witness whether Rhoda showed any feeling towards the dead infant, again indicating an interest in Rhoda’s maternal emotional state.³¹

Rhoda’s defense lawyer called two doctors to testify that upon hearing the evidence, they believed enough doubt existed as to whether the infant had even been born alive. Dr. George Lee cited studies of aborted infants and cases of stillborn infants from the Dublin Hospital indicating the possibility that the child had been born alive, yet because of complications during childbirth, such as having the umbilical cord wrapped around its neck or prolonged labor, the child could have succumbed to death prior to exiting the womb.³² To explain the gaping knife wound evident across the neck of the infant, Dr. Henry D. Magill postulated that “if the cord was about the neck the mother in attempting to cut that part of the cord about the neck with a sharp instrument might make a quick gash.” Whether that was the cause of the infant’s death, Magill could not determine.³³

Enslaved women accused of committing infanticide took extraordinary measures to hide their pregnancies and the resulting infants from the possession and claim by slaveholders. Limited trial information reveals that prosecutors and defense lawyers struggled to understand the motives behind such an action and revealed doubt that enslaved women possessed flawed maternal instincts. Attempts to determine a rationale

³⁰ “Testimony of Jno Sinclair,” *Commonwealth v. Rhoda*, Criminal Case 1842-009, LCHAD.

³¹ “Testimony of Kitty Moran,” *Commonwealth v. Rhoda*, Criminal Case 1842-009, LCHAD. Moran testified that Rhoda “manifested no reluctance at going to the place where the child was found” and that she did not “recollect any objections on the part of Rhoda to taking up the child” nor did Moran notice that Rhoda “show any particular feeling...to the child.”

³² “Testimony of Dr. George Lee,” *Commonwealth v. Rhoda*, Criminal Case 1842-009, LCHAD.

³³ “Testimony of Dr. Henry D. Magill,” *Commonwealth v. Rhoda*, Criminal Case 1842-009, LCHAD.

for behavior that did not conform to the “good slave” or “mammy” image shows how prevalent a belief in this construct tended to be as a pillar of the master-slave relationship.³⁴ Therefore, if female slaves did not exhibit maternal, nurturing instincts, the decision to place enslaved women responsible for the care and safety of white infants, children, and by extension, all family members came into question. None of these perspectives, though, recognized that at the heart of such a decision lay a powerful urge to strike back at the institution of slavery that regularly denied enslaved mothers the time or authority to parent, care, or grow old in the circle of family.

Arson

Sometimes the deliberate firing of homes, barns, businesses, or community buildings represented a means by which frustrated enslaved persons challenged the slaveholding establishment. The increase of fires served as a barometer for the state of tensions between whites and blacks. As the number of fires grew, articles in local newspapers gave rise to the suspicion that fires, even those initiated by natural causes, were the work of “incendiaries” seeking retribution against slaveholders and their communities.

In farming neighborhoods and villages abounding with wooden structures, the chance of fire always existed, endangering the property and lives of enslaved and free

³⁴³⁴ Marie Jenkins Schwartz asserted that stories of infanticide represented competing narratives. Slaveowners might focus on financial loss of property while society focused on the morality of the crime and ways to seek justice for the aggrieved slaveholder. Within the quarters, the narrative focused on the victimization of women and most especially on the grief of the slave mother who “lost her child through the crime of slavery” with slaveholders and overseers playing the role of “villains.” Marie Jenkins Schwartz, *Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 210.

residents. Several fires in the 1850s caused the loss of life and property of enslaved persons and free blacks discounting the notion that arson only hurt white residents. A fire at the Byrne residence in Fauquier in January 1850 consumed Byrne's "negro house" and took the lives of "two negro children."³⁵ The December 1854 fire in Warrenton that began in Mrs. Adams' house spread to another building occupied by "some negroes."³⁶ In 1855 a Sunday night fire in October took the lives of five of the six enslaved persons residing in a slave quarters on John Hill Carter's farm located in Prince William County.³⁷ In 1856 "two negro cabins" were destroyed by fire near the Warrenton Junction.³⁸

Local newspapers included coverage of fires across the region and differentiated between natural fires and works of an "incendiary" or "incendiaries," yet over time the natural threat of fire was often replaced with a suspicion that arsonists caused the destruction of property. This differentiation became especially important by the 1850s.³⁹

³⁵ Diary of Edward Carter Turner, January 9, 1850, Turner Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

³⁶ "Destructive Fire in Warrenton Virginia," *Alexandria Gazette*, December 21, 1854.

³⁷ The victims were "two young men, one woman past middle age, and two children, one a boy ten or twelve years of age, the other a girl some two years younger." *Evening Star*, October 22, 1855.

³⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, April 19, 1856.

³⁹ When Capt. John Baker's flouring mill in Fauquier County was destroyed by fire during the night of June 17, 1846, the *Alexandria Gazette* failed to include any information gleaned or speculated on the cause of the mishap. *Alexandria Gazette*, June 23, 1846. Examples of fires started through "natural" causes include fires started by lightning or spontaneous random fire sources. Alexander Henderson's stable near Dumfries was set on fire by lightning in 1803, destroying horses, flour and other items. *Commercial Advertiser*, May 21, 1803. Elisha Osmun's "large and comfortable dwelling house" in Prince William County was "entirely consumed by fire" supposedly by a "spark, or burning cinders falling on the roof from one of the chimneys that had caught fire from a stove pipe." *Alexandria Gazette*, February 17, 1853. In 1854 the house belonging to the late Elias W. Fletcher of Fauquier County "accidently took fire" on Saturday morning, March 18 resulting in a total loss of the home. *The Sentinel* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, March 31, 1854. Sparks from a blacksmith shop apparently caused the destruction of the house located on the Meade farm in Loudoun County. The family residing in the structure, the Wyncoops, were "aroused from their sleep by the smoke, and consequently were barely able to make their escape saving at the moment but one or two articles from the burning building." *Alexandria Gazette*, June 2, 1854. A devastating fire at

While some fires could trace their origins to natural causes, others cases involved real intent on the part of slaves to seek revenge on masters. In between these two extremes lay a broad chasm of suspicion and fear indicating the level of mistrust between whites and blacks. Acts of arson in northern Virginia occurred in three types of locations: public buildings, dwellings, and non-residential sites. Residents often judged the severity of the crime based on the perceived (or extracted) motivation for the act, on its location in the community, on the fire's proximity to white residents, and the perceived threat to loss of property or life.

The firing of public buildings such as churches, the county jail, and county buildings represented acts of resistance against public institutions. According to the *Alexandria Gazette*, the destruction of the Ebenezer Baptist Meeting House near Bloomfield in Loudoun County on a Monday night in April 1855 was "of course, the work of an incendiary."⁴⁰ The *Richmond Whig* softened this claim by stating that the church was "*supposed* to have been set on fire by an incendiary."⁴¹ The destruction of the Fauquier County court house in 1853 represented to one observer the "climax of [the arsonist's] ambition" after many fires had been reported in Warrenton and its near neighborhoods. Residents expressed little doubt that the fires had been started on purpose and noted that the perpetrator had gained access to the building through a window and

Samuel Frye's farm near Lovettesville began after lightning hit a tree and sparked fire in the nearby rick of straw. The burning straw traveled to the barn "instantly setting it on fire" and within minutes, Frye's "entire stack yard, barn, corn-house, &c. were enveloped in one sheet of flame, which spread with such rapidity as to render the fire unmanageable, though many efforts were made to arrest it." Frye calculated his loss at between \$1,200 and \$1,500. *Spirit of Jefferson* as reported in the *Richmond Whig*, September 8, 1854. When Thomas W. Edmonds's home near Warrenton was "entirely consumed by fire" during the night, the reported cause of the fire was "accidental" despite a spate of fires in Fauquier County in the preceding months. *Alexandria Gazette*, February 25, 1851.

⁴⁰ *Alexandria Gazette*, April 27, 1855.

⁴¹ "Church Burnt," *Richmond Whig*, May 1, 1855. Emphasis mine.

had started the fire in the steeple before apparently leaving the burning building through the front doors, left open when resident fire-fighters appeared.⁴²

The county jail represented an official structure and a public place of violence and pain for enslaved persons. The jail housed captured runaways and suspected criminals while also serving as a holding facility for slaves awaiting sale. As such, fires could enable an escape from incarceration. Richard Scott, an enslaved man belonging to the estate of deceased slaveowner Peyton Norvill, was accused by Prince William County jailor, George W. Clifford of setting fire to and partially burning the county jail in Brentsville in August 1849.⁴³

This was not the first time the Prince William jail had been set on fire. In 1839 a runaway slave from Fauquier County named Landon was apprehended in Prince William County and committed to the Brentsville jail.⁴⁴ The next morning a fire was discovered in the jail and Landon was held accountable for the felonious act.⁴⁵ The magistrates in the county court sentenced Landon to be hanged, yet upon receiving requests for clemency, Governor David Campbell commuted Landon's sentence to sale and transportation

⁴² "Destruction of the Court House at Warrenton, (Fauquier Co.) Va.," *Alexandria Gazette*, May 3, 1853.

⁴³ "Warrant," *Commonwealth v. R[ichard]d Scott*, LP (1849) 001119_00128, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. Scott was accused of setting fire to the jail on the night of August 21, 1849. A warrant for his arrest was signed by Justice of the Peace Allen Howison a day later. At his trial on September 1849 county magistrates acquitted Richard Scott of the charges.

⁴⁴ Fauquier County slaveholder William A. Bower advertised a reward of up to \$100 for the capture and return of Landon, "a likely young fellow of the negro complexion, about the common size, and a blacksmith by trade" who fled from the hire of Mr. H. Barron at Greenwich, Prince William County. "100 Dollars Reward," *Daily National Intelligencer*, April 10, 1838.

⁴⁵ "Summary of the Evidence," *Commonwealth v. Landon*, LP (1839) 001103_00096, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. According to testimony, Landon requested from Overton, a slave working at the jail, a piece of coal to light his pipe. A silk handkerchief found near the fire cast suspicion that the fire had been deliberately set.

beyond the limits of the United States.⁴⁶ One petition from members of the bar and from prominent Prince William citizens claimed that Landon's felony "was committed no doubt for the purpose of liberating himself and not with that malicious intention which actuates the mid-night incendiary."⁴⁷ Perhaps the petitioners realized that Landon had endured a brutal life under enslavement and could sympathize to some extent with his attempts to escape from the control of William Bower. Once Landon reached the state penitentiary in Richmond, a prospective buyer noted that a blacksmith (most assuredly Landon) had been "whipped in a horrid manner which is a great eyesore," giving further credence to the brutal punishments he had endured as a slave.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Commonwealth against Landon, A Slave*, LP (1839) 001107_00118, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. County magistrate Jesse E. Weems petitioned for leniency stating he "could not conscientiously consent to a verdict of guilty" for Landon based on the "valuation of damages assessed by incompetent judges." Weems also asserted that he believed Landon's case would fall under the Act of February 12, 1829 "which entitled [Landon] to benefit of clergy." Apparently Weems consented to the verdict only upon receiving assurances from Commonwealth Attorney Gibson that "the prayer of the court [for clemency] would be granted" by Governor Campbell. "Letter from J. E. Weems of Dumfries, Virginia to Governor David Campbell," March 14, 1839, Box #4, Folder 7, Accession #43151, Executive Papers of Governor David Campbell, Library of Virginia as transcribed by Ronald R. Turner in "Prince William County – Governors Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863"(2008), 148. County residents and members of the Bar serving Prince William also signed a petition in support of clemency for Landon averring that Landon's act of arson "was committed no doubt for the purpose of liberating himself and not with that malicious intention which actuates the mid-night incendiary," circumstances that migrated the perceived threat to the community of the fire. The court magistrates apparently sentenced Landon to execution only with the "confident belief" that the Governor would extend mercy to Landon by commuting the sentence, a belief that was rewarded when Governor Campbell commuted Landon's sentence to sale and transportation. "Petition from Members of the Bar of Prince William to Governor David Campbell," received March 14, 1839, Box #5, Folder #7, Accession #43151, Executive Papers of Governor David Campbell as transcribed by Ronald R. Turner in "Prince William County – Governors Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863"(2008), 148.

⁴⁷ Petition from Prince William County to Governor David Campbell, March 14, 1839, Box #5, Folder #7, Accession #43151, Executive Papers of Governor David Campbell as transcribed by Ronald R. Turner in "Prince William County – Governors Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863"(2008), 148.

⁴⁸ R. H. Dickinson, Auctioneer of Late [for the] firm of Templeman & Dickinson, "Valuation of Convict Slaves," September 1, 1840, Box #3, Folder #1, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas W. Gilmer, Library of Virginia. The buyer's assessment revealed the discrimination exercised in the slave market against persons who had such visible evidence of punishment – a sign that he had been difficult to govern.

The second type of arson occurred in dwellings. County courts and residents often based the significance of a fire based on proximity to white families and value of property destroyed by fire. Vacant properties subjected to fires created a nuisance and threatened property and assets, yet did not endanger the lives of the residents. House fires sparked during the day constituted a less lethal action and a more malicious intent to destroy property as residents could easily notice the fire and react quickly, sparing lives and providing a chance to save property. The most feared house fires were initiated during the night when families were asleep signifying a potent threat to life. Often the responsibility for the fire was placed upon a supposed disgruntled or malevolent slave or a slave conveniently nearby who might be forced to admit guilt under interrogation.

Loudoun resident Samuel Chinn appeared before Justice of the Peace Burr Powell in 1817 to attest that he believed an enslaved woman named Eliza had been responsible for burning down the house occupied by John Wilson and his family in August 1816. After the Wilson family removed to another house Chinn believed Eliza burned down their subsequent residence in August 1817. Since Chinn's father had devised ownership of Eliza to Mrs. Wilson during her lifetime, Samuel Chinn apparently felt some responsibility towards the Wilson family in identifying and bringing to justice the person responsible for twice destroying their residences and suspicion apparently devolved upon the enslaved woman, Eliza, a suspicion that the court could not confirm with evidence. The court acquitted Eliza of the charges.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *Commonwealth v. Eliza*, Criminal Case 1817-018, LCHAD. Eliza was acquitted of the charges of arson by the Loudoun Court on August 12, 1817.

Elizabeth Jones, a term slave to Anna Maria Fitzhugh, was accused of setting fire to the residence of Charles I. Catlett in January 1840. This was apparently the second time that Jones had attempted to burn down Catlett's home. Since charges were not filed until nine months after the incident, Jones's part in the arson did not come to light until quite some time after the fire.⁵⁰ In 1850 Dr. Blight of Fauquier accused his "servant girl" with setting fire to his newly-built home.⁵¹ A couple months later, the home of Carlisle Whiting near Upperville was consumed by fire.⁵² Joseph Barbee of Fauquier County accused Henry and Matilda of setting fire to his home in May 1851.⁵³ In 1852, Robert L. Randolph's enslaved woman, Betsy, was tried and acquitted of burning "Woodstock," the home of Charles J. Stovin in Fauquier County while the family was at church.⁵⁴ The number of fires blamed predominately on women fits with their role as domestic servants charged with household duties in close proximity to white families and the fear then placed upon their presence when some form of danger threatened the family. Trying to understand the inconsistency between trusting enslaved servants so near family members, magistrates chose to try to elicit some reason for the cause of the fires.

⁵⁰ *Commonwealth v. Elizabeth Jones*, Criminal Case 1840-011, LCHAD. Despite Elizabeth Jones's apparent confession that she had tried "once before to burn the house by putting fire in the same place" as the second and successful attempt, her lawyer, J. Janney was able to secure an acquittal for Elizabeth Jones.

⁵¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, December 3, 1850. The fire apparently was started on November 21, 1850.

⁵² *Alexandria Gazette*, February 4, 1851. The brief article only mentions that the home was "consumed by fire" and offered no other details.

⁵³ *Commonwealth v. Henry, a slave belonging to Francis Payne and Commonwealth v. Matilda, a slave belonging to Sarah B. Smith*, Box #21, 1851-016, Fauquier County Free Black and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA. After an examination by court officials, both Henry and Matilda were discharged.

⁵⁴ *Commonwealth v. Betsey*, Fauquier County Minute Book 40 (1851-1853): 37. A letter to the editor of the *Alexandria Gazette* indicated that the fire began while the family was away from the home at church and they "hastened home only in time to see their beautiful dwelling burned to the ground." Stovin had insured his home for up to \$3,000. *Alexandria Gazette*, February 10, 1852.

After enslaved girl named Tulip was apprehended under suspicion of setting fire to Joshua Fletcher's overseer's house, occupied at the time by the Payne family, members of the community asked Tulip about her motives. Tellingly, after Alfred Rector asked her if she had committed the crime, Tulip responded in the affirmative. Rector then asked whether Tulip knew if her actions were wrong, and Tulip also responded she did. Rector continued to probe to determine her motives by asking "if she burnt the house because she had been badly treated by Mr. Payne," a telling question designed to probe into the overseer-slave relationship. According to Rector, Tulip stated "as her reason for burning the house that she had been accustomed to live among slaves, and as there were none at Mr. Payne's she resorted to this method to leave him." Tulip, a young girl between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, apparently committed this act of arson as her second attempt to facilitate a removal from that location to a new home closer to her friends.⁵⁵ The court found Tulip guilty and sentenced her to be hanged, a punishment that Governor John Floyd later reduced to sale and transportation.⁵⁶

Tulip's case was reminiscent of the experience of Mary in 1819 in Prince William County. After being accused of causing a minor fire in the home rented by Mary's mistress, Mrs. Baylor, Mary confessed to Baylor's brother, William A. G. Dade that she

⁵⁵ Enos Payne "tied the prisoner, stripped and whipped her" to elicit her admission of guilt, apparently because Tulip thought that by burning down the house the Paynes would "break up and move among their friends and she [Tulip] would then be among her friends." Tulip also confessed to Payne that this had been her second attempt to burn the house. *Commonwealth v. Tulip, a female slave belonging to the estate of the late Turner Dixon*, Box #15, 1833-004, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁵⁶ Governor Floyd initially decided not to interfere with the court's sentence for punishment, then later submitted her case transcript, petitions from Fauquier residents, and accompanying letters to his Council of State for advice before issuing a reprieve less than one month before her scheduled execution. *Commonwealth v. Tulip*, Box 9, Folder 7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

was “displeased with her residence in the County & wished to get to Town where her mistress had some expectation of fixing her residence.” This motivated Mary to cause damage to the house but not to its inhabitants. Though slightly older than Tulip, (Mary was presumed to be between seventeen and eighteen years old), Dade told the court that her upbringing as a slave “usually hired to poor persons” caused Mary to be “brought up in much ignorance,” a factor to mitigate the punishment of death meted out by the county court.⁵⁷

Both Mary and Tulip recognized that they held some power to alter their circumstances, even though they were young and female. That the state of Virginia considered arson committed by slaves, even with no malicious intent, a crime punishable by death, tells about the fear held by white Virginians. In the case of Tulip, eighty-two concerned citizens from the neighborhood where she and the Paynes lived wrote to Governor Floyd to protest any clemency.⁵⁸ Citing that the crime had been committed “in the upper part of the county in a neighborhood which has suffered as much as any other

⁵⁷ “Record of the conviction of a Slave – Prince William,” Box 8, Folder 4, Accession #41737, Executive Papers of Governor James Patton Preston, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

⁵⁸ While eighty-two petitioners opposed clemency, one hundred twenty-one Fauquier residents including Fauquier’s Commonwealth Attorney, Robert Scott; the clerk of the Superior Court, William F. Philips; and the clerk and deputy clerks of the county court, A. J. Marshall and John Thomas Smith signed a petition in support of clemency. Supporters stated that Tulip’s actions were not “characterized by such circumstances as shew an atrocity of temper or heart, or a preconceived and well-settled intention to destroy or injure the family, or any member of the family with whom she lived.” Also significant was Tulip’s tender age and the belief that a county court’s recommendation for mercy resulted in an “almost uniform interposition of the Executive,” a belief that enabled the court to make their sentence that both complied with state laws and offered a means of evading a death sentence in fact. “Petition for Tulip,” Box 9, Folder 7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Fauquier resident R. Wallace appealed to Gov. Floyd on behalf of Tulip using even stronger language of mercy, entreating Floyd to “spare the life of this young and ignorant offender, and by it add another to the instances, already numerous, in which you have practiced that noble virtue – the boast of Virginia – the ornament of the age, the proudest column in the temple of our Republic’s fame, public sympathy and public mercy.” “Letter from R. Wallace of Warrenton, Virginia to Governor John Floyd,” March 22, 1833, Box 9, Folder 7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

in the State by the hand of an Incendiary and in no one instance has any punishment as yet been inflicted,” the petitioners wanted to take a stand on the issue of arson.⁵⁹ In the view of the residents of the neighborhood, the act of petitioning in this case was “a duty that your Petitioners owe themselves and the society in which they live, to ask that the Law be permitted to take its course as the only means of rendering our...families safe from the hands of some future Incendiary.”⁶⁰ Responding to the threat of acts of arson and the dangerous precedence set by an overly sympathetic court, the neighborhood took their case to the Governor to ensure that a “dangerous” criminal like Tulip could not return or serve as inspiration to other potentially disgruntled slaves.

The third classification of fires occurred to non-residential sites like barns and businesses and included the destruction of agricultural produce. These fires destroyed valuable property including food stores, livestock, and structures without an apparent

⁵⁹ Firmly believing in setting an example would deter any future crimes of arson, the petitioners cited an earlier case of arson committed by a free black woman named Charlotte Payne, (relationship to Tulip’s hirer Enos Payne unknown) for whom the Governor had previously granted clemency. Because Payne was convicted of later committing another crime for which she received a sentence of ten years’ incarceration, the petitioners of the Payne’s neighborhood argued “had she [Charlotte] been executed for the First [crime of arson], the example would have deterred in all possibility the Girl Tulip” from committing arson. “Petition of the undersigned citizens of the County of Fauquier,” n.d. Box 9, Folder 7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. In Charlotte Payne’s second trial, she was charged and convicted of a felony in the theft of approximately \$55 in bank notes and \$21 in silver from the home of Edward E. Allen in 1832. The court first sentenced Charlotte Payne to five lashes and to be sold as a slave and transported outside the bounds of the United States. Two days later the court changed the punishment to ten years in the state penitentiary with half of the time housed in a solitary cell and fed a “low and course diet.” *Commonwealth v. Charlotte Payne*, Box #15, 1832-015, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁶⁰ “Petition of the undersigned citizens of the County of Fauquier,” n.d. Box 9, Folder 7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. While the damage perpetrated to the house was minimal, Mrs. Elizabeth Payne distrusted Tulip’s presence in the household. Tulip had admitted to Payne’s husband that she had attempted to poison Mrs. Payne and in a letter to the Governor against awarding clemency to Tulip, Elizabeth Payne swore on oath that after discovering some “British oil was ascertained to have been put in a Tea pot used by her & family,” Payne believed the oil had been placed there “with an intention of poisoning her & family.” Payne wrote she believed Tulip harbored “an intention of doing the family some serious & lasting injury,” thus disqualifying her from any mercy on the part of the Governor. “Oath of Mrs. Elizabeth Payne,” March 2, 1833, Box 9, Folder 7, Accession #42665, Executive Papers of Governor John Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

attempt to endanger lives. Enslaved arsonists were motivated to commit these types of arson presumably by the goal of financially bankrupting a slaveowner, seeking revenge for punishments, wreaking havoc on operations, encouraging fear among communities, or in some cases providing a convenient distraction away from potential runaways.

Enslaved man Voll was convicted of the crime of “willfully setting fire to and burning the barn house of George Sinclair” of Loudoun County, a deed that destroyed “a barn and a quantity of corn, rye & other grain.” The court sentenced Voll to be hanged in June 1825.⁶¹ Later that year the Loudoun Court also convicted enslaved woman Katy of “burning a barn and wheat stacks” belonging to Lawrence Battaile and sentenced her to be hanged presumably due to her confession. Katy admitted she had carried “a large coal of fire on her pipe” and threw it “into the straw” neither kindling the fire nor staying “to see whether it took effect.”⁶² Both Katy and Voll’s sentences were commuted to sale and transportation by Governor John Tyler.⁶³ In Fauquier County Edward Carter accused his enslaved man Billy of “willfully & maliciously & feloniously” setting fire to Carter’s

⁶¹ *Commonwealth v. Voll*, Criminal Case 1825-019, LCHAD. During his interrogation of Voll Justice of the Peace Samuel M. Edwards asked Voll “what possessed him that he should burn Mr. Sinclair’s barn” to which Voll replied he did not know. Edwards pressed Voll again asking “if he made said confession under the influence of fear of punishment, or the hope of pardon, or if he confessed because he knew he was guilty & ought to tell the truth” to which Voll replied that he confessed “because he was guilty & knew it was the truth” and that he had not been influenced either by the hope of pardon or out of fear of punishment (Testimony of S. M. Edwards.). Sinclair and his neighbors approached the interrogation of Voll in different ways. One of the interrogators told Voll point blank that he “would have to hang” (Testimony of Robert Mathias.) and another told Voll to “confess every thing to his master & save himself” (Testimony of Mr. Barrot.). The differences between these two pieces of advice reveals the various perspective on the power in the county in that the county court could impose a death sentence while the slave master held the power to administer punishment or mercy.

⁶² *Commonwealth v. Katy*, Criminal Case 1825-013, LCHAD. The court found Katy guilty of arson and sentenced her to death on November 15, 1825.

⁶³ Both Voll and Katy were purchased as slave transports by John P. Williams and Warner W. Price. “List of Transports,” undated, Box 3, Folder 10, Accession #42267, Executive Papers of Governor John Tyler, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

stable and burning a stack of fodder and a stack of corn, crimes for which the county court later acquitted Billy.⁶⁴

The destruction of Robert Shackleford's granary, stable, corn house, and their contents in 1848 resulted in a financial loss of about \$2,000 and was "believed to be the work of an incendiary."⁶⁵ Henry Glasscock accused enslaved persons Alice (also called Alcy) and Giles of setting fire to his hay stacks in January 1850, a charge that was later dismissed.⁶⁶ The fire that destroyed the company buildings at the Franklin Gold Mines in Fauquier County in October 1851 apparently began about four o'clock in the morning. Mine representatives suspected the fire to be "the work of an incendiary."⁶⁷ After Ludwell Lake lost over \$1,500 in property due to the destructive fire to his barn, granary, and stables in 1861, two enslaved men, John and Charles, enslaved property of John Butcher in Loudoun County, were brought to trial to answer charges. The court found Charles not guilty but sentenced John to sale and transportation.⁶⁸

The blame for the destruction of Levin Richards's wheat, oats, and haystacks in 1849 fell upon a free black boy named Jack Norval (sometimes called Jack Spott), yet trial testimony revealed the act of arson as a complex plot of revenge and blackmail

⁶⁴ *Commonwealth v. Billy, slave of Edward Carter*, Box #13, 1828-029, Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁶⁵ "Fire in Fauquier," *Alexandria Gazette*, February 29, 1848 and *Richmond Whig*, March 3, 1848.

⁶⁶ *Commonwealth v. Alice (aka Alcy) slave belonging to Mrs. Octavia Dowell and Commonwealth v. Giles, property of G. W. F. Smith*, Box #21, 1850-001, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA. The suspicion against Alcy and Giles also suggests the extent of mobility and malicious communication believed to be occurring across plantations and residences among the enslaved. Alcy and Giles were owned by two different slaveholders and witnesses for their actions were summoned from both the Dowell and Smith residences to appear at trial. After his "patient hearing of this case," Fauquier Justice of the Peace Robert E. Peyton acquitted Giles of the charges and ordered Alcy to stand trial. Alcy was later acquitted of the crime.

⁶⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, October 15, 1851.

⁶⁸ *Commonwealth v. John & Charles*, Fauquier County Minute Book 44: 322.

involving Norval and an enslaved man named Henry. After Norval was taken to the Loudoun County jail, he requested that Richards come talk with him so Norval could explain his actions. According to testimony provided by various witnesses at Norval's trial, Norval's act of arson was brokered a year prior in 1848 between Norval and an enslaved man named Henry. Henry harbored a grudge against Richards who would not let Henry visit his enslaved wife, located on Richards's farm, more than once a week. Henry, an abroad husband, began stealing bacon from Richards, his wife's master. Worried that he would be caught for the thefts, Henry then devised a plan to throw off suspicion. Norval was hired to work on the Richards's farm at the time and Henry feared that Norval would expose his crimes to Richards. Henry offered Norval one dollar to keep his secret and another dollar to burn down Richards's stacks of grain.

After a year, Norval thought Henry would change his mind, but after receiving a whipping by Richards, Henry decided to press Norval again to burn the grain. Henry threatened Norval that if Norval did not go through with the plan, Henry would cut Richards's horses throats. Norval stated he had no quarrel with Richards, who admitted he had whipped Norval while the latter was hired out to work for him. Norval and Henry used the North Fork Meeting House as a rendezvous point where Henry presented Norval with five matches and two weeks later Norval used them to destroy \$420 worth of Richards's wheat and oats. Upon questioning by Justice of the Peace Samuel Purcell, Henry told of Norval's part in the plan while not divulging his own thefts from Richards. Probably to seek mercy from Richards, Norval confessed his part and told of Henry's thefts and role in the destruction of the grain. Henry's master, James Mount, promptly

sold Henry away from Loudoun County for his crimes. Jack Norval was found guilty of arson.⁶⁹

Jack Norval's trial revealed some of the ulterior motives that drove slaves to use arson as a form of resistance to enslavement. Aggrieved Henry was frustrated by Richards's control over his marital relationship with his abroad wife. Henry vented his frustrations through theft of bacon and corn from Richards, then escalated the attack by offering money to a free black man to set Richards's grain on fire.

Over time both the frequency of fires blamed on enslaved arsonists and the fears of an imminent threat of arson increased across northern Virginia. An increase in the number of incidents of fires created panic among neighborhood residents and exacerbated the level of mistrust between slaveholder and enslaved. Patterns in the location and spread of fires indicate that enslaved persons increasingly used fires to instigate changes to their conditions of enslavement and disrupt farming and community operations by

⁶⁹ *Commonwealth v. Jack Norval alias Jack Spott*, Loudoun County Misc. Papers – Free Blacks 1849-018, LCHAD. The case file for Norval in the Free Black papers did not indicate his punishment, but a document located in the executive papers of Governor Henry A. Wise listing the prisoners held in the state penitentiary sentenced to terms longer than five years includes a "Jack Norval" who arrived at the penitentiary on August 29, 1849 at age sixteen from Loudoun County on a charge of stabbing, sentenced to serve a term of fifteen years. This is most likely the same Jack Norval or Jack Spott convicted of arson from Loudoun County. Norval was assigned to work on a canal as part of the convict public works program. "Prisoners in the Penitentiary of Virginia and on Public Works, who were sentenced for terms over Five Years, and who were Fifty Years Old, when received, without regard to length of sentence, dates when received. Where sentenced, Crimes, Sentences and ages when received," June 9, 1858, Box #13, Folder #5, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, Library of Virginia. In 1860 "Jack Norvell" was one of twenty-seven free negroes along with nine slave convicts assigned to work on the James River and Kanawha Canal Company. At the time Norval was described as five foot seven inches high with black eyes and brown complexion. "Names and description of the twenty seven free negroes and nine slave convicts remaining in the custody of the James River and Kanawha Canal Company, on the 1st day of October 1860," Box #6, Folder #1, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher, as transcribed by Ronald R. Turner in "Prince William County – Governors Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863," (2008), 185-186.

targeting specific areas at certain time periods. Yet this method of resistance was not used consistently or to the same end or at the same time across the three counties.

The fear that enslaved arsonists threatened slaveholders and their property reached critical points during various periods, exacerbated by reportage of fires in the newspapers. Fauquier and Loudoun experienced periods of relatively high numbers of fires within certain neighborhoods at different times during the 1850s. The occurrence of the fires, most often attributed to the work of an incendiary or incendiaries, could have been a function of weather conditions, the prevalence of wood structures combined with cooking and heating via open fires, or at worst case, the work of either white or black fire-starters. Fires most often attributed to the actions of slaves occurred in areas with comparatively higher enslaved populations and in homes and properties with enslaved laborers, yet the pervading perception of danger often led to assumptions of guilt.⁷⁰

Historian William Link asserted that “arson so aroused white fears and hysteria that courts would sometimes knowingly convict innocent defendants.”⁷¹ The intimidation of suspects, verdicts of guilt, and harsh sentences, whether justified or not, served the purpose of the community to warn off potential arsonists in the face of immediate and often lethal retribution.

⁷⁰ Philip Schwarz found a slight correlation between greater numbers of arson cases prosecuted in counties with minority slave populations during the period of 1830-1865. In addition Schwarz noted that 31.6 percent of convicted arsonists were women thus suggesting that both women and “the many slaves in counties and cities with a slave minority had a weapon that was quite powerful—no matter how overpowered or outnumbered they might be.” “Table 29: Minimal Rate of Arson Incidents, 1830-1865, per 1,000 Slaves,” Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 289.

⁷¹ William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 49.

Beginning about 1852, residents of the Warrenton neighborhood and its immediate surroundings experienced a series of “mysterious fires” including the near destruction of the court house. By April 1853, the editor of the *Piedmont Whig* of Warrenton observed that for “one whole year we have been at the mercy of scoundrel or scoundrels” and the next conflagration could cause “the total destruction of all the thickly built portion of the village” as well as endangering the lives of the residents of the town. Advocating for a better alarm system and fire-fighting tactics, the editor attempted to rally the people of Warrenton “to take this matter into serious consideration, and to ask themselves the question, whether their duty to themselves and their families, if not to others and to the community at large, does not require them to do something more than they have yet done in this matter.” Advocating preparation rather than alarmism, the editor raised the call to be “sentinels of civic life, as one of the watchmen a part of whose business is to give the alarm when the safety of the community is endangered.”⁷²

The editor was justly concerned about the spate of fires. A fire that began early on an April morning in 1852 in Warrenton started in a carpenter’s shop and enflamed the post office, a saddler’s shop, a silversmith shop, and an unoccupied building. Residents suspected the fire to have been “the work of an incendiary,” primarily because another fire had been set in a different location in Warrenton earlier that night.⁷³ About a week later a frame building near Bronaugh’s Hotel in Warrenton was “set fire to and burned down.” In response, a special patrol was called out, tasked with being “vigilant in

⁷² “The Fires,” *The Piedmont Whig*, April 16, 1853, microfilm.

⁷³ “Fire at Warrenton, Va.,” *Alexandria Gazette*, April 27, 1852.

endeavoring to ferret out the incendiaries.”⁷⁴ The residents took “every precaution” to prevent further fires including keeping a constant guard and patrols on duty and the Mayor offered a \$250 reward “for the detection of the incendiaries in that place.”⁷⁵

Four months later, the granary of Mrs. Mary Gaskins located about four miles from Warrenton fell victim to fire at the hands of “[s]ome fiendish incendiary,” the second such financial loss from fire experienced by Gaskins.⁷⁶ In January 1853, residents responded to the cry of fire at the Episcopal Church in Warrenton, working quickly to extinguish the flames before much damage could occur. At the same time a fire was detected in M. J. Follin’s store. The circumstance of both structures experiencing fires while unoccupied at the same time gave residents cause to claim “[t]hese fires are supposed to be the work of an incendiary” resulting in “great excitement in consequence.”⁷⁷

Newspaper reports did not ascribe blame for the destruction of the Waters Hotel and tavern in Warrenton and fire damage sustained by surrounding wood buildings including Cyrus Cross’s Cabinet and Chair Factory and the roof of Thornton Withers’s brick home in April 1853.⁷⁸ Yet less than a month later when the Fauquier Court House, valued at \$18,000, burned down, a correspondent reported that the “fiend who has for some time past been destroying our property, has reached the climax of his ambition.” The fire apparently had been started in the steeple after an “incendiary” gained access

⁷⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 7, 1852.

⁷⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 10, 1852. *Alexandria Gazette*, May 11, 1852.

⁷⁶ *Warrenton Flag of '98* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 14, 1852.

⁷⁷ “Fires in Warrenton,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 20, 1853.

⁷⁸ “Fire in Warrenton,” *Alexandria Gazette*, April 11, 1853.

through a window.⁷⁹ The series of fires in Warrenton and its near neighborhood from late 1851 to the end of 1853 alarmed the citizens to such an extent that most fires were blamed on a “fiendish incendiary” or “cowardly villain,” though a real possibly existed the fires sprang from natural causes or were the work of disgruntled or mischievous white persons.⁸⁰

Loudoun County residents also experienced a spate of fires presumed to be the work of arsonists during the 1850s, but the period of most intense fire concerns started about 1853 during the Warrenton cycle of fires and continued through 1856. After Robert Saunders’s stable burned down in March 1853 near Belmont in Loudoun County, neighbors thought the fire “to have been the act of an incendiary.”⁸¹ A fire started in the stable of General George Rust on a Sunday morning in March 1854 “between the hours of two and three o’clock” was believed to be the work of an arsonist who then stole a horse “to hasten his escape.” The act was believed to have been committed “by the degraded and inhuman character, who has been firing the property of our citizens during the past winter.”⁸² The following Saturday night, Gen. Asa Rogers of Middleburg lost his barn, stable, and carriage house to fire, a financial disaster believed to be “beyond doubt the act of an incendiary.” A few days later Mr. R. Smith’s tavern in Middleburg was set on fire during the day and that night Mr. Muse’s stable located east of Leesburg also burned. A correspondent from Bolington in Loudoun reported the “large fire” at Daniel Boland’s farm house. The editor of the Leesburg *Washingtonian* opined that the

⁷⁹ “Destruction of the Court House at Warrenton, (Fauquier Co.) Va.,” *Alexandria Gazette*, May 3, 1853.

⁸⁰ The descriptions of the presumed arsonist hail from the news article covering the fire of Mrs. Mary Gaskins’s granary. *Alexandria Gazette*, September 14, 1852.

⁸¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, March 28, 1853.

⁸² “Another Fire,” *The Washingtonian*, March 17, 1854.

“incendiaries seem to have selected the county of Loudoun for the present year, as the field upon which they are to display their grandest and most villainous powers of destruction.” The fires were thought to be the work of either “a band of fiendish scoundrels lurking through the county,” or perhaps “certain localities are cursed with some miserable wretches who seek a devilish gratification in this alarming way.”⁸³

In April 1854 a fire that destroyed the mill house and still-house of Nathan Neer near Hillsborough, resulting in a financial loss of about \$1,200, was believed to have been “the act of an incendiary.”⁸⁴ That same month a fire destroyed the stable of Rev. George Adie, pastor of the Episcopal Church of Leesburg, and all its contents caused a loss of an estimated \$1,200. Not allowing that the fire could have been an act of nature, the *Washingtonian* editor opined that the “sympathies of this community are deeply enlisted in his behalf, and we would have supposed one so generally beloved and so kind, and so amiable would have been the last upon whom the vile scoundrel who has been firing the stables of the town and vicinity during the past winter would have inflicted so severe a calamity.” Two blacks (the report does not say whether free or enslaved) were arrested on suspicion of being responsible for the spate of fires.⁸⁵ Later, an enslaved man named Harrison was found guilty of the crime and sentenced to be transported beyond the limits of the United States.⁸⁶

⁸³ “Fires in Loudoun,” *Washingtonian* as reprinted in the *Richmond Whig*, March 28, 1854.

⁸⁴ *The Washingtonian*, April 28, 1854.

⁸⁵ “Another Fire,” *The Washingtonian*, April 28, 1854. The Charlestown (now in West Virginia) newspaper *Spirit of Jefferson* reported Adie’s loss, stated that “the vile incendiaries who have for months been a terror to the people of Leesburg and its vicinity, again succeeded on Saturday night last, in carrying out their fiendish purposes.” *Spirit of Jefferson* as quoted in the *Alexandria Gazette*, April 27, 1854.

⁸⁶ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 12, 1854.

Harrison's banishment did not stop the fires nor did it abate the perceived danger of incendiaries near Leesburg. In November 1854 George Noland's barn located six miles from Leesburg was "destroyed by fire" believed to have been "the work of an incendiary."⁸⁷ In 1856, an attempt to "fire the dwelling house" of John W. Gover in Leesburg was thwarted when Gover awoke during the attempt and scared off the arsonist. Joseph Mead was not so lucky, losing an entire stack yard full of wheat and oats valued at \$1,700. The fire was thought to be perpetrated by multiple arsonists since "every portion of the yard was found to be in flames at the same time."⁸⁸

The problem of arson appeared to be so widespread across Loudoun County that Jacob Scott, Secretary of the Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Loudoun advised company agents and policy holders to abide by regulations that required an additional premium if insurance policies were taken out "from fear of incendiaries, (either slave or free,) who are supposed to be actuated by motives of private grudge." Interestingly, he allowed that arson was not only the action of the enslaved classes, but the potential work of "slave or free."⁸⁹ Scott's advertisement clearly identified the connection between fire and motivations of revenge, subtly hinting at the contested nature of enslavement.

The appearance of a spate of fires in and near the county seats of Fauquier and Loudoun in different periods reflected the growing tensions and fears of the destabilization of the master-slave relationship and the growing pressure to impose order. Surprisingly, newspapers and court records do not indicate a similar outbreak of fires in

⁸⁷ *Loudoun Democrat* as quoted in the *Alexandria Gazette*, November 10, 1854. Noland lost about \$3,000 to \$4,000 worth of "hay, corn, farming utensils, &c." a loss for which he was not insured.

⁸⁸ "Loudoun Items," from the Leesburg *Washingtonian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

⁸⁹ "Notice," *The Washingtonian*, March 31, 1854.

Prince William County during the 1850s. Instead, certain enslaved persons used more personal, physical attacks on masters and overseers to fight back against enslavement as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Violent Acts of Resistance: Poisoning, Assault, and Murder

Access to the private spaces occupied by slaveholding families placed enslaved servants in situations both of trust and of suspicion. Yet within these domestic and private spaces, overt actions of resistance challenged the established order. Whether aimed at the master, the slaveholding family, or the overseer, physical violence destabilized the institution of slavery and challenged presumptions about the inherent nature of the enslaved and the idealized power structure of a slave society.⁹⁰ Many slaveholders

⁹⁰ While this chapter focuses on criminal, violent, and lethal actions against slaveholders as a measure of resistance against the slaveholding regime, much evidence exists of white-on-white crime and black-on-black crime in northern Virginia. In his comprehensive scholarship on black-on-black crime Jeff Forret synthesized the problem of violence in the slave south by simply stating, “[t]he slaveholding South was synonymous with violence” and violence presented a “distinguishing feature” to the region. Breaking new ground, Forret explores the “frequent physical confrontations internal to the slave quarters” breaking the myth that racial solidarity deflected violence away from fellow blacks. Jeff Forret, *Slave Against Slave: Plantation Violence in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 2015), quotes on pages 1 and 3. For examples of slave-on-slave violence across Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties see *Commonwealth v. Anthony, called Toney Monroe*, Box #9, 1821-021, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records, Commonwealth Cause from Ended Causes, AAHA; *Commonwealth v. Alice*, LP (1824) 001075_00200, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. Alice was accused of “having [a] medium said to be poisonous with the Intention of administering the same” to an enslaved woman named Tuck, alias Susanna. *Commonwealth v. Louisa*, Fauquier County Minute Book 41: 350. Louisa was found guilty of administering “a poisonous substance or drug called arsenic” to George, a fellow enslaved person within William A. Bowen’s household. Perhaps the nature of the crime led the magistrates to impose a sentence of sale and transportation beyond the limits of the United States to permanently remove Louisa as a threat to the community. *Commonwealth v. Edmond*, Fauquier County Minute Book 43 (1857-1859): 23, 38-39. Edmond was found guilty of wounding fellow slave Jane by stabbing her with a knife and beating her with a stone. The court ordered Edmond to receive thirty-nine lashes, be committed to jail for a month, then receive an additional thirty-nine lashes before being released. *Commonwealth v. Osburn*, Fauquier County Minute Book 43 (1857-1859): 153. The Fauquier court found Osburn guilty of assaulting enslaved man William with a knife and sentenced him to receive “thirty-nine lashes on his bare back and that he be then delivered to his owner.” *Commonwealth v. Adam*, Fauquier County Minute Book 44 (1859-1865): 269. Adam was convicted of stabbing, cutting, and fatally wounding an enslaved man named

admitted fears of poisoning, assault, and murder at the hands of their enslaved laborers, especially after the revelation of Gabriel's and Nat Turner's insurrections. The proliferation of laws codifying criminal intentions and felonious acts committed by enslaved persons against the slaveholding class and white community testified to the perceived threats experienced by Virginians, yet local cases of suspected poisoning, assault and murder revealed both the threat of harm from enslaved persons and the level of fear experienced by whites in slaveholding neighborhoods. Despite paternalistic claims that enslaved persons were childlike and masters entrusted their family's care to enslaved workers, trust was often displaced by suspicion and fear where the health and safety of white family members was concerned.

The threat of poisoning perpetrated at the hands of an enslaved domestic servant constituted one of the ongoing fears of slaveholders, both rational and at times irrational. Fauquier slaveholder, Charles Lee accused his enslaved female servant, Edy, of plotting the murder of his newborn son by having "unlawfully prepared a dose of medicine of laudanum and catnip with a wicked intent to cause the murder of said child" in 1815.⁹¹ Sophy was accused of administering "deadly poison and other noxious and destructive substance" to the heirs of Mary Hutchison in 1845, a crime of which she later was found not guilty.⁹² The Herndon family accused their slave Mary and Berkeley Ward's enslaved

Walker. Adam was sentenced to sale and transportation. *Commonwealth v. Tom*, Criminal Case 1820-072, LCHAD. The Loudoun County Court found Tom guilty of assaulting enslaved man Len and sentenced him to receive 39 lashes. *Commonwealth v. Tom*, Criminal Papers 1858-015, LCHAD. Tom was convicted of the murder of Reuben Hurley, a free black man and sentenced to sale and transportation.

⁹¹ Surviving records do not specify the outcome of Edy's trial. *Commonwealth v. Edy, negro slave of Charles Lee*, Box #7, 1815-024, Fauquier County Free Negro and Slave Records from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁹² *Commonwealth v. Sophia, otherwise called Sophy*, Criminal Case 1845-024, LCHAD.

man, Peter Parker, of administering to Catharine Herndon “a large quantity of a certain unknown poison” with intent to injure or kill in 1854, a charge later dismissed.⁹³

Enslaved woman Alice, property of John Fox of Prince William County was first accused of attempting to poison another female slave in the Fox household, a woman named Tuck (also called Susanna) with a “medium said to be poisonous with the Intention of administering the same.”⁹⁴ The charges against Alice were later expanded to include administering a poisonous substance to enslaved woman Sucky and to Fox “and the white members of his family” with intent to murder them by poisoning them. Apparently the substance included broken glass. Court records do not reveal a verdict, but merely indicated that at her trial on July 6, 1824 the court ordered her “to be whipped &c.”⁹⁵

After sudden death of the widow and family matriarch, Arminta Elizabeth Moxley, in Prince William in 1859, presumably from arsenic poisoning, members of the Moxley family were quick to blame Lucy, the family’s enslaved cook. Despite evidence that other enslaved servants and white hired hands as well as white family members in the household had access to the arsenic powder over a series of days and that most of the household, including Lucy’s favored daughter, had ingested the tainted food, the Moxley family including Arminta’s son, Dr. B. G. D. Moxley, blamed Lucy.⁹⁶ In later testimony

⁹³ *Commonwealth v. Mary and Peter Parker*, Fauquier County Minute Book 41 (1854-1855): 27.

⁹⁴ *Commonwealth v. Alice*, LP (1824) 001075_00200, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

⁹⁵ “Information,” *Commonwealth v. Alice, alias Alis*, LP (1824) 001078_00160, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. County court minutes are missing for the period of 1815 to 1833, so the limited record in the loose paper collections appears to be the only information about this case.

⁹⁶ According to a letter written by Dr. Jesse Ewell, M.D. and sent to Governor Wise, two enslaved boys were regularly tasked with the job of kindling fires in the house, yet these boys were “sold & sent off immediately after the homicide & before an examination.” Two enslaved girls were “accustomed to

more details about Lucy's life came to light including Lucy's change in behavior as she became more confrontational towards the Moxley family because of the threatened sale of Lucy's children. Moxley's daughter, Mrs. Hunton, testified that Lucy "raved like some one mad" in the days prior to the presumed poisoning and "declared she would not live there [at Moxley's home] and would be hired out & put herself in jail," a change in temperament from docile, caring servant to demanding, surly, and fractious.⁹⁷ Admission of these details indicates awareness on the part of the Moxleys of the emotional effect on Lucy of selling or threatening to sell her child. It also signaled their recognition of the connection between slave sales and acts of resistance.

Poisoning represented only one form of vengeful action against slave masters. The threat of physical assault by an outraged enslaved person existed in a society that thrived on violent encounters. An especially powerful argument for strict control of enslaved men was the often touted threat of violence upon white southern women. Yet

sleeping in the house" and a hired negro woman was at the house "on the morning of the occurrence" yet "none of these were examined as witnesses." While Ewell doubted that the testimony of these five persons, if taken down, "would have conflicted with that given to the court, or would have thrown more light upon the case" the fact remained that "so many persons having access to a room where a package of arsenic was carelessly left lying for several days, suggests the possibility of its having been accidentally thrown in the water used in preparation of the food." "Letter from Jesse Ewell, M. D. of Haymarket, Prince William County to Governor Henry A. Wise," April 9, 1859, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc. microfilm reel #4213, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

⁹⁷ *Commonwealth v. Lucy*. Trial testimony from Patrick O'Brien, a white hired hand living in the Moxley household, revealed that following the Christmas holidays, shortly after the poisoning, three slaves were indeed sold and carried away: a thirteen year old enslaved boy named Davis, another slave named William, and twelve year old Vina, Lucy's daughter. Ibid. It was not clear whether these sales had been preplanned, were an attempt to remove potential witnesses, or were acts of retribution against Lucy's family. Enough doubt existed about Lucy's guilt in the minds of some community members and one of the magistrates adjudicating the case that Governor Henry A. Wise later commuted Lucy's sentence from execution to life served working on Virginia's public works. Henry A. Wise, "Communication from the Executive, transmitting List of Pardons, Reprieves, &c., Granted, with his Reasons Therefor: January 8, 1860," Document No. XV. *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia: Begun and Held at the Capital in the City of Richmond, on Monday, the fifth day of December, in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-nine – being the eighty-third year of the Commonwealth* (Richmond: James E. Goode, Senate Printer, 1859), 29.

when Catharine Bowman and Sally Rogers accused a “yellow man” named Ben, enslaved property of Stephen Rawlings, of assaulting Miss Rogers, the court could not find Ben guilty of the charge of assault “with intention to kill.” Instead, the court determined there was evidence enough to convict Ben of a “violent assault” and sentenced Ben to receive thirty-nine lashes “on his bare back.” In addition, the court ordered Ben’s master, Stephen Rawlings “enter into a recognizance for his good behavior for the span of 5 years in the sum of \$500.” In this case, the court in a sense found Rawlings as culpable for the assault and ordered him to ensure Ben stayed out of trouble.⁹⁸

In Prince William the Jeffries family accused an enslaved man named Brent of attempting to kill their daughter, Ann Sophenia Jeffries. Little is known about Jeffries, but she probably was the eleven-year-old daughter of John and Margaret Jeffries, farmers residing in the Tudor Hall district.⁹⁹ Brent was the enslaved property of Samuel Catts, a Fairfax county resident. His reason for being in Prince William County at that time was not recorded, but Brent most likely worked for the Jeffries family as a hired man or had run away. Enough evidence of a crime existed for a warrant to be issued for Brent’s arrest on charges of attempted murder.¹⁰⁰

After examining sundry witnesses, magistrates concluded enough evidence existed to bring a unanimous verdict of guilt. A distinguishing feature of Brent’s trial rested with the assigning of punishment. For the first time in the slave trials of the 1850s,

⁹⁸ *Commonwealth v. Negro Ben*, Criminal Case 1823-012, LCHAD.

⁹⁹ 1860 Federal Census, Tudor Hall, Prince William County, Virginia.

¹⁰⁰ The trial transcript in surviving county minute books contains few details of the alleged crime that occurred on May 24, 1859, possibly because the clerk determined that only key formulaic information was required for county purposes. Had Brent been sentenced to execution, a more complete trial transcript would have been prepared and sent to the Governor for executive review.

Prince William magistrates compared the crime to a crime committed by a white man and decided the offense did not qualify as a felony, but as a misdemeanor. While justices in previous trials may have been divided on the motivation or extent of participation in the action, the punishment in Brent's trial was scaled down from an ultimate sentence of death to a pre-1848 slave code style of punishment. As such, Brent's sentence was not execution, nor sale and transportation. Brent received the comparatively light sentence of "sixty stripes, well laid-on" to be administered by the county sheriff in two periods with a thirty day respite in between.¹⁰¹ Possible explanations for this sentence include a heightened awareness of property values, especially for "property" of a slaveowner from outside the county, or an increased desire to consider the crime and the circumstances rather than mandated punishments without regard to individual differences.

Attacks or injuries to the slaveholder's family, whether real or suspected, threatened the security of the slaveholding household, violated the paternalistic relationship, and at its core destabilized fundamental assumptions about trust and filial feelings between a master's white and black families. For historian Eugene Genovese, murder represented more than simple "resistance to slavery." Instead, "such action marked the limits beyond which slaves resisted becoming creatures of their master's will."¹⁰² Violent acts, whether accidental, passionate outbursts, or pre-meditated, represented flashpoints when individuals recognized the inability to acquiesce to an

¹⁰¹ *Commonwealth v. Brent*, Clerk of Court, Prince William County Minute Books (June 6, 1859). See also *Commonwealth v. Brent*, LP (1859) 01056_00117, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. According to the sheriff's account, Brent was kept in the Brentsville jail from May 24 to July 4, 1859. "Account of Thomas K. Davis, Shff," June 9, 1859, LP (1859) 001056_00086 and "Account of Thomas K. Davis," August 4, 1859, LP (1859) 001056_00082, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

¹⁰² Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 617.

enslaved status. The tendency to cast blame on the enslaved reveals much of the insecurity that existed behind the façade of control. Few examples of fatal attacks against the slaveholding class exist in northern Virginia's records, yet those that did appear in court documents reveal that fatal violence against slave masters and mistresses appeared comparatively most often in Prince William County where slavery was in retreat in the 1850s.

Sometimes an act of violence developed out an attempt to avoid corporal punishment. Ben was employed cutting down trees alongside Dick when the overseer's dog ran into the tree-felling area and into the path of a falling tree. Although warned to mind the animal by its owner, Samuel Woodall, Ben's tree fell on the dog and Woodall "said he would take off Ben's linen and give him five hundred [lashes]." Woodall's anger over the demise of his dog and his response to take out his anger on Ben led him to "cut a small dogwood about as big as his thumb" and order Ben to "come up to him and take off his shirt." Fearing the cut of the hastily created lash and Woodall's anger, Ben grabbed his axe and plunged it into Woodall's skull to halt the latter's approach.¹⁰³ The Fauquier Court sentenced Ben to hang for his lethal attack on Woodall and did not consider the act a form of self-defense.

Former enslaved man George Jackson who lived on the Humphrey plantation in Loudoun County later recalled the determination of fellow slave, Tom Lewis, to resist the overseer's whip. According to Jackson, when the Humphreys first purchased Lewis, he

¹⁰³ "Testimony of Dick," *Commonwealth v. Ben*, Box #17, 1835-004, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes, AAHA. The court set the date for Ben's execution on March 6, 1835.

told Humphreys “not to let the overseer whip him” and once when Tom “did something wrong” the overseer “ordered him to de barn. Tom took his shirt off to get ready for de whippin’ and when de overseer raised de whip Tom gave him one lick wid his fist and broke de overseer’s neck.” Tom’s case apparently did not go to court as Jackson recalled “de massa sold Tom to a man by de name of Joseph Fletcher” and Tom Lewis “stayed with old man Fletcher til he died.”¹⁰⁴

In 1840, an enslaved woman named Betsy was accused and tried for the murder of John Somerfield Wilson, the five-year-old son of Joseph C. Wilson in Fauquier County. According to the charges, Wilson accused Betsy of “throwing or forcing the said John S. Wilson into a well of water.”¹⁰⁵ One enslaved acquaintance of Betsy told the court that Betsy hated the Wilson child and bore some unnamed grudge against Mrs. Wilson. The same woman described Betsy as “lazy” in that she “rarely does any thing without orders” and claimed Betsy “frequently makes threats, such as she will knock persons brains out.”¹⁰⁶ Betsy’s sister, Jenny, recalled that just before the Wilson boy’s death he had observed that Betsy had “whipped a black boy severely” and told Betsy that “his father would give her two whippings, one for whipping the boy & one for stealing chickens.” To this threat Betsy supposedly told the boy “O boy, you have too much

¹⁰⁴ Testimony of George Jackson, July 6, 1937, *Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States From Interviews with Former Slaves Volume XII: Ohio Narratives* (Washington: Work Projects Administration, 1941), 46.

¹⁰⁵ “Trial Transcript,” *Commonwealth v. Betsey*, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁰⁶ According to recorded testimony from Amey, an enslaved woman belonging to Mrs. Kelly, Betsy “despised the child; and as for its mother, she would never forgive her but stated no cause of offence against its mother.” Upon cross-examination, Amey admitted she and Betsy had quarreled, but had resolved their differences suggesting that the defense team wondered if Amey used the trial for her own purposes. *Commonwealth v. Betsey*, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

mouth.” Shortly afterwards, the young Wilson went missing and was later found at the bottom of the well.¹⁰⁷ Like Ben, Betsy may have acted to escape punishment by removing a threat to her personal safety, yet other pieces of information gleaned about her suggest that Betsy harbored a grudge against Mrs. Wilson so deep to cause Betsy to seek revenge against the Wilson children.

Betsy’s history as revealed in trial testimony described a disobedient, recalcitrant, and possibly violent woman. Mr. Wilson inherited Betsy and “not having use for her” in his residence in Baltimore, hired Betsy out to a series of employers, each of whom reported being dissatisfied with her. Wilson then sent her to work for his mother-in-law who described Betsy’s conduct as “very bad.” Wilson learned Betsy had made an attempt on the life of Wilson’s nine-year-old daughter Emma by attempting to trick her into looking down into the well for two supposed birds’ nests the week before her brother John’s death. Betsy’s actions against the Wilson children led to her execution at the Warrenton gallows.

Other cases of murder resulted from attempts by slaves to escape conditions of enslavement. When enslaved woman Agnes defended herself against her master, Gerard Mason’s verbal, sexual, and physical attacks on December 19, 1849, resulting in his death, county residents grappled with the abusive reality of enslavement and the legal system that virtually guaranteed a master the power over a slave’s life and death.¹⁰⁸

Agnes had experienced many of the cruelties of enslavement during her short twenty-four

¹⁰⁷ *Commonwealth v. Betsey*, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁰⁸ *Commonwealth v. Agness, a slave: Copy record for the Governor of Virginia*, Box #4, Folder #5, Accession #43924, Executive Papers of Governor John Buchanan Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

year life.¹⁰⁹ She most likely witnessed the effect of Mason's brutality on fellow enslaved woman, Katy, who perished after a series of his beatings in 1845. Agnes herself endured sexual and corporal punishment at the hands of Mason.¹¹⁰ By 1849 Agnes avowed to her fellow slaves that "if her master laid his hands on her she would knock him in the head with a club," a threat that according to another enslaved man named Ben occurred during "shucking corn time" in the presence of himself, Eliza, and Milly, fellow slaves on Mason's Woodbridge plantation.¹¹¹ After receiving a whipping from her master's enslaved foreman, Abram, a few weeks prior to Mason's death Agnes apparently declared that "if any one attempted to whip her again she would destroy or kill the person who did it."¹¹²

Testimony at Agnes's trial suggested that the murder occurred as she defended herself against Mason's sexual attack and his use of both an axe and gun to threaten and abuse her. Yet Mason's cousin, Dr. Richard Chichester Mason of Fairfax County

¹⁰⁹ The enumerator for the 1850 slave schedules for Prince William County noted that the household of jailor George Clifford included a twenty-four year old female black slave who belonged to the "estate of J. Mason" and who "killed her master & was hung." This enslaved woman was surely Agnes who was hanged in July 1850. 1850 Federal Census, Slave Schedule, Prince William County.

¹¹⁰ According to testimony provided by Mason's neighbor, Hugh Hammill, Agnes told him that during the final affray between Mason and Agnes, Mason "wanted to turn up her clothes and take privilege with her" to which Agnes told Mason "she was too old for that now" indicating a long history of sexual abuse. "Testimony of Hugh Hammill," *Commonwealth v Agness, a slave, copy record for the Governor of Virginia*, Box 4, Folder 5, Accession #43924, Executive Papers of Governor John Buchanan Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA. Later remembrances of Agnes collected by county historians described her actions as "rebellious against mistreatment." WPA, *Prince William: The Story of Its People and Its Places* (1941) Expanded Edition (Manassas, Virginia: Ref Typesetting, 1988), 45.

¹¹¹ "Testimony of Ben," *Commonwealth v Agness, a slave, copy record for the Governor of Virginia*, Box 4, Folder 5, Accession #43924, Executive Papers of Governor John Buchanan Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

¹¹² Dr. Saunders explained that at the time of the whipping Mason had been disabled by a broken collar bone and dislocated shoulder due to a fall from a horse, so he ordered Abram to whip Agnes. "Testimony of Dr. A. H. Saunders," *Commonwealth v Agness, a slave, copy record for the Governor of Virginia*, Box 4, Folder 5, Accession #43924, Executive Papers of Governor John Buchanan Floyd, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

publicized his belief that Mason's death was part of a larger plot hatched by Agnes to incite a rebellion. In a letter to Governor John Buchanan Floyd Dr. Mason characterized Agnes as "a most turbulent and unmanageable servant" who "was in the habit of telling her master to his face that she wouldn't obey him" and "generally [told him this] accompanied by an oath." Dr. Mason related a quite different version of Ben's recorded testimony as to Agnes's actions during corn shucking time.

In Dr. Mason's version, Agnes "proposed to the rest of the negroes to murder their master" when Mason came in to get the corn and the slaves had prepared clubs for the proposed attack. When Mason made his appearance "Agnes called to the others, saying 'now is the time, come on'—arose herself and advanced with her club in her hand." Not wanting to diminish the reputation of his cousin, Dr. Mason claimed that "the master [Mason] met the matter so firmly, that the men shrunk back—and Agnes finding herself not sustained, had to finesse & withdraw too." In Dr. Mason's mind, Agnes's actions were "as deliberate, cold blooded, and diabolical a case of murder as could occur." If she were not punished, the decision could cause more unrest among local slaves. Even so, more than eighty Prince William residents and members of the legal bar representing Prince William and Fauquier petitioned Governor Floyd for a commutation of the death sentence assigned to Agnes, a request the Governor failed to authorize. The Governor did grant a seven month reprieve for Agnes due to her claim she was expecting

a child at the time of her trial, yet once this possibility was declared void, her execution proceeded.¹¹³

Brentsville resident W. W. Thornton reflected in a letter to his uncle dated the day before Agnes's execution at the gallows that "[t]omorrow is the day of end of a poor miserable creature who killed her master while asleep under the belief as she says that there was no greater punishment for such a deed than the lash." Despite the testimony of the men who interviewed Agnes following the discovery of Gerard Mason's body that her actions were in self-defense against Mason's attacks with the axe and pistol, Thornton apparently concluded that Agnes perpetrated the crime according to the description of Dr. R. C. Mason who publicized his theory that Agnes acted while Mason was asleep. Thornton could perhaps sympathize with Agnes's plight, calling her a "poor ignorant creature if such be" while admitting to his uncle that "there is much to be pitied" in the case. Thornton reported that Agnes claimed "her continence [countenance] forbid the act but the devil urged her on & if she could bring her master to life she would then be willing to meet her god."¹¹⁴

Each of these acts of resistance constituted a threat to the structure of slavery in northern Virginia. Everyday actions to slow-down work, impede production, reduce the financial viability of slaveholding, or challenge the authority of slaveholders added one more blow against the stability of the master-slave relationship. Differences in how these

¹¹³ Governor Floyd held off on answering clemency requests in order to wait until county officials could confirm Agnes's claims to pregnancy. On April 30, 1850 Floyd granted Agnes a respite until July 16, 1850, but indicated he would take "no further interference" in the clemency petitions on her behalf. *Commonwealth v. Agness, a Slave*, Copy Record, Executive Papers of Governor John Buchanan Floyd, Box # 4, Folder # 5, Accession # 43924, Library of Virginia.

¹¹⁴ Letter from W. W. Thornton of Brentsville to [unidentified] Uncle, July 18, 1850, Morgan Breedon Private Collection. Copy held by author.

actions were perceived by slaveholders across the region shows a distinct shift in the articulation and publication of the threat that enslaved persons held over slaveholding communities.

Slaves in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William responded to their own conditions of enslavement with varying degrees of covert and overt resistance, yet over time a more general discontent with slavery resulted in more frequent individual instances of arson combined with coordinated efforts to destroy property by fire in the early part of the 1850s in Fauquier County and in the mid-1850s in Loudoun County. Opportunities, though few, for slaves in these counties to negotiate self-purchase, find hired-out employment, or successfully run away as described in earlier chapters created safety-valves for reducing tensions. Slaves in Prince William County, though, aware of the more present threat of slave sales that dismembered enslaved families and caused the enslaved population to plummet in the 1800s and the minimal opportunities for manumission, were more likely to respond with physical attacks against the ruling class when other options for mitigating or ameliorating their condition seemed bleak.

CHAPTER NINE: “PERNICIOUS SENTIMENTS”: FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND COMMUNITY DEMAND FOR CONSENSUS

Suppressing Dissenting Thoughts and Opinions

As the perception that persecution and threats from abolitionists increased over time, tolerance for local dissent against the southern institution of slavery decreased. By the mid-1850s neighborhoods and local groups across northern Virginia were acting of their own accord to enforce compliance with a pro-slavery stance both inside and outside of the court-room. Rather than accept that this development was inevitable, the story of Fauquier, Loudoun and Prince William counties demonstrates that this change towards enforced unity of speech and sentiment occurred over a much longer period time and in response to both local and national contestations regarding slavery. The evidence from northern Virginia suggests that the point when southerners clamped down on dissent against the institution of slavery varied depending on local conditions.

Historians have attempted to identify when a collective shift in the South towards a strident pro-slavery rhetoric appeared. Historian Rollin G. Osterweis contended that following the Virginia legislative debates over emancipation in 1832 “a cordon sanitaire against anything that might threaten the status quo surrounded the South.”¹ J. Stephen Knight challenged this assumption and his analysis opened the door to questioning the

¹ Rollin G. Osterweis, *Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949), 55 as found in J. Stephen Knight, Jr., “Discontent, Disunity, and Dissent in the Antebellum South: Virginia as a Test Case, 1844-1846,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 81, No. 4 (October 1973), 438.

cordon sanitaire thesis and the assumption of an “internally homogenous” state after the 1830s.² Historian William Link argued that slaves’ actions and resistance to enslavement, particularly in the 1850s provided the impetus for larger political change in Virginia and the move towards secession.³ Court cases and community actions across northern Virginia demonstrated that tolerance for public dissent against slavery varied by location and over time, yet by the 1850s persons making comments against the rights of slaveholders as well as some persons suspected of harboring anti-slavery thoughts in all three counties faced censure, community reprisals, and legal action.

Although southern traveler Ethan Allen Andrews asserted in 1835 that pro-slavery sentiments “fully” united “almost every man, woman and child, south of Pennsylvania,” the reality of southern society unity was not as solid as appearances would suggest.⁴ The abolitionist mail campaign of 1835 set in motion more stringent efforts to create community consensus on the subject of slavery. This purposeful distribution through the southern mails of anti-slavery newspapers to targeted recipients by the American Anti-Slavery Society constituted an aggressive mission by northern opponents of slavery to raise awareness of the cause of abolition and intrude into southern slaveholders’ lives.⁵

² J. Stephen Knight, Jr., “Discontent, Disunity, and Dissent in the Antebellum South: Virginia as a Test Case, 1844-1846,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 81, No. 4 (October 1973), 440.

³ William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁴ “Letter XXII, Fredericksburg, July 25, 1835,” Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 157.

⁵ For detailed discussions of the abolitionist mail campaign see Jennifer Rose Mercieca, “The Culture of Honor: How Slaveholders Responded to the Abolitionist Mail Crisis of 1835,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 10, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 51-76. See also Clement Eaton, “Censorship of the Southern Mails,” *American Historical Review*, 48, no. 2 (January 1943): 266-280 and Susan Wylie-Jones, “The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meeting in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign,” *Civil War History*, 47, no. 4 (December 2001): 289-309.

To combat this affront, southerners responded by attempting to “reestablish and defend consensus” among their communities. Sensing that a direct attack to abolitionists would not gain as much ground as a consolidation of local rhetorical and legal defenses, local meetings focused on “reaffirming community norms” rather than “persuading the opposition.”⁶

While there is no evidence of such a meeting held in Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties in 1835, minutes from a meeting in nearby Fairfax County described the sentiments of that county and certainly represented the feelings of many in the region.⁷ Secretary Thomas Moss reported that

it behooves all good citizens to unite in council and in action, to protect their families and homes from the diabolical efforts of interested incendiaries and deluded fanatics, in circulating among our slave population, pernicious publications and doctrines (which there is good cause to believe, have already been widely disseminated,) inciting them to insurrection and its attendant horrors...⁸

At least thirty-three counties and incorporated cities across Virginia held such meetings decrying the efforts of northern “fanatics” to destabilize the master-slave relationship through the circulation of “incendiary” literature.

Local religious organizations spoke out against the invasive practice of anti-slavery societies sending unsolicited abolitionist publications through the mail and

⁶ Jennifer Rose Mercieca, “The Culture of Honor: How Slaveholders Responded to the Abolitionist Mail Crisis of 1835,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 10, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 55.

⁷ No published accounts of meetings held in Fauquier, Loudoun or Prince William counties were located in a search of the *Alexandria Gazette* nor in publication of county meetings and resolutions by the Virginia House of Delegates as found in “Proceedings of Various Counties in Virginia, and Several of the Non-Slaveholding States, on the Subject of Abolition,” Document No. 12, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Begun and Held at the Capitol, in the City of Richmond, on Monday, the Seventh Day of December, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Five* (Richmond: Samuel Shepherd, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1835).

⁸ “Fairfax County Meeting,” *Alexandria Gazette*, August 29, 1835.

offered advice to persons receiving such publications. In response to the “efforts of a portion of the Northern people, especially by the practice of sending abolition papers by mail” the Shiloh Baptist Association, comprised of twenty churches from Culpeper, Rappahannock, Madison, Orange, and Fauquier Counties unanimously adopted a resolution in 1835 to either return unsolicited abolitionist papers or “burn them.” The Baptist Association argued that “the public peace is greatly interrupted, and the cause of the religion threatened” by these abolitionist publications.⁹

An anonymous Middleburg resident writing under the pseudonym “Loudoun” attempted to rally unity against abolitionists in 1836 by arguing that the

present times, and the temper of the people, and the approaching tempest which the evil spirit of Abolition is about to engender, demand of every man representing a slave-holding State, to come out and show himself—no shift, no evasion, or equivocation will satisfy the present, and woe betide that man who shall forsake or forfeit his trust in the future trying hour.¹⁰

In response to anti-slavery mailings, rhetoric, and petitions to Congress, “Loudoun” advocated that Virginians “[p]ersevere and strangle in its guilty birth the monster Abolition—the debauched and infamous offspring of renegade religionists and corrupt and mercenary demagogues.” Recognizing the internal threat of abolitionist sentiments in his own county, “Loudoun” avowed that even though the people may be “divided in all other interests” Virginians were “united on this question and contending for the *immediate rejection* of these Abolition petitions.”¹¹ Whether or not unity existed on the question of anti-slavery petitions among Virginians, and especially among the Loudoun

⁹ “The Southern Churches against the Abolitionists,” *Richmond Enquirer*, November 6, 1835.

¹⁰ “Loudoun,” “Communications to Henry A. Wise,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 21, 1836. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ “Loudoun,” “Communications to Henry A. Wise,” *Alexandria Gazette*, March 21, 1836.

population, this correspondent believed that it was time for local communities to unify on the issue of slavery as a measure of property rights.

In addition to rallying white southerners to defend slavery, a stance presented under the banner of community obligation as a function of southern honor, community leaders also used local law to control the actions of residents.¹² The types of prosecutions that arose in northern Virginia during this time against presumed abolitionists created one measure of the suspicion that existed in the region. Residents suspected persons who harbored abolitionist sentiments of influencing the enslaved to riot and rebellion and sought to remove or punish potential threats to slaveholder hegemony and community security. A new Virginia law against distribution of materials denying the right of masters to enslaved property (enacted as a result of the campaign against slaveholding by northern anti-slavery societies in 1835 and 1836) aided county magistrates and community leaders in this venture to root out anti-slavery sentiment.

A 1836 Virginia statute that prohibited abolition or anti-slavery societies as well as “evil disposed persons” from interfering with the “relations existing between master and slave” showed a belief that such interactions and anti-slavery literature excited “in our coloured population” a “spirit of insubordination, rebellion and insurrection.” The statute further specified that

[a]ny member of an abolition or anti-slavery society, or agent of an abolition or anti-slavery society, who shall come into this state, and shall here maintain, by speaking or writing, that the owners of slaves have no property in the same, or advocate or advise the abolition of slavery, shall be deemed guilty of a high misdemeanor,

¹² See Jennifer Rose Mercieca, “The Culture of Honor: How Slaveholders Responded to the Abolitionist Mail Crisis of 1835,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 10, No. 1 (Spring 2007): 51-76, especially 57 and 66.

laying the groundwork for future prosecutions against persons who spoke out against slavery.¹³

This suspicion was not entirely unfounded. Virginians feared the potential for slave unrest following the publication of David Walker's *Appeal in Four Articles Together with a Preamble to the Colored Citizens of the World, But in Particular and Very Expressly to Those of the United States of America*. In the fall of 1829 Walker's *Appeal* was discovered in circulation among slaves and free blacks in Georgia. Later, the pamphlet was found in North Carolina and Virginia. Fear of the potential for its general dissemination and calls for insurrection led many southern states to consider and ultimately enact harsh repressive laws against circulation of "incendiary publications" and the education of slaves.¹⁴ *Richmond Enquirer* editor Thomas Ritchie opined that Virginians had "reasons to believe that a systematic design has been formed for circulating these pamphlets clandestinely among our coloured population."¹⁵ If such a system of transmitting information was feared in 1830 that fear grew as evidence of

¹³ "Crimes and Punishments," Chapter 71, §1, Joseph Tate, *Digest of the Laws of Virginia, Which Are of a Permanent Character and General Operation; Illustrated by Judicial Decisions: To which is added, an Index of the Names of the Cases in the Virginia Reports*, Second Edition, (Richmond: Smith and Palmer, Shepard and Colin, Printers, 1841), 239. Historian Clement Eaton called the act "the most intolerant law that was ever placed on [Virginia's] statute books." Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 127. Eaton argued that due to her status as a border state and diverse population comprised of Quakers, Germans, and northern emigrants, Virginia lawmakers drafted "sterner legislation" against threats to the institution of slavery. Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 130.

¹⁴ Clement Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History*, 2, no. 3 (August 1936), 323. Proslavery whites believed that the prohibition or suppression of literacy among slaves would decrease the influence of anti-slavery publications and reduce the threat of rebellion. In a close vote in Virginia's House of Delegates, a law to prohibit circulation of anti-slavery publications as well as prohibit education of slaves passed by a vote of eighty-one to eighty, yet failed in the Senate in 1830. Opposition to this type of response to the *Appeal*, especially in North Carolina sprang from reluctance to suppress opportunities to teach slaves to read the Bible. Ibid., 329-333.

¹⁵ "The Pamphlet," *Richmond Enquirer*, January 28, 1830.

distribution of anti-slavery materials was apparent in northern Virginia later in the decade.

In Fauquier County free black Spencer Malvin was accused of “misconduct in circulating Anti Slavery papers” and “disclosing a disposition to array the Black against the Whites with a view to the supremacy of the former.”¹⁶ According to Fauquier resident John L. Fant, Malvin was also “instrumental in persuading my servant man Sandy to leave the state of Virginia,” guiding Sandy to Pennsylvania “with a view to obtain his freedom.”¹⁷

In Loudoun County, citizens of Leesburg believed the threat of abolitionist publications existed in the heart of the town. Suspensions focused upon two black men, one a manumitted slave and one enslaved. In 1839 at the June Court, Philip Nelson, a free black man, was arraigned on charges he was directly or indirectly involved “in the circulation of abolition papers amongst the colored population.”¹⁸ Nelson was a long-time resident of Leesburg, both as an enslaved man and, since his self-purchase in 1819 from Leesburg’s doctor, Henry Claggett, as a free black man.¹⁹ Because of the charges filed

¹⁶ Samuel Johnson Legislative Petition, Fauquier County, January 19, 1835, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁷ Letter of John L. Fant, January 9, 1835, Samuel Johnson Legislative Petition, Fauquier County, January 19, 1835, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁸ *Commonwealth v. Phillip Nelson*, Criminal Case 1839-02, LCHAD.

¹⁹ On January 16, 1819 Henry Claggett manumitted Phill, alias Philip Nelson “in consideration of the faithful and meritorious services” Nelson had performed. Loudoun County Deed Book 2Z: 341-342. A later court document indicated that Philip Nelson had “purchased himself from Doctor Henry Claggett.” Loudoun County Land Deed Book 4N: 112-113. After his manumission, Nelson requested and was granted permission from the Loudoun County Court to remain in Virginia beyond the one year limit for slaves manumitted after May 1806. In 1828 Nelson acquired title to his wife, Minty, sons Billy and Grason, and daughter Kitty along with three more of his children from Dr. Claggett, yet kept his family enslaved, most likely to prevent their forced departure one year following manumission if Nelson opted to manumit. Nelson and Claggett maintained a relationship after his manumission and when Nelson was ordered to leave Loudoun County, Claggett took over the management of Nelson’s property and safeguarded Nelson’s

against him, Nelson's position in Leesburg and in Virginia as well as that of his enslaved family became precarious. A court verdict of guilt could threaten Nelson's free status and remove Nelson from Loudoun, placing the enslaved members of the Nelson family at the mercy of the court.

Although the evidence against Nelson, a longtime resident, family man, and property owner in Leesburg, was determined to be "not sufficiently strong to justify the court in executing the law to its full extent against him," which would have resulted in Nelson's sale back into slavery and transportation out of Virginia, enough cause existed, according to the records left by the clerk of court, to "justify the court in ordering him and his entire family to leave the state" within the next year.²⁰ The importance of Nelson's trial to the Leesburg community was apparent in that twenty-three magistrates, a majority of the sitting court, were summoned and came to court to hear the case. This majority determined that Nelson was "party and accessory to the printing & circulating papers denying the right of masters to their slaves" and as punishment revoked Nelson's permission to remain in Virginia.²¹ Nelson's sentence was comparatively mild in that it preserved Nelson's free status and provided time for Nelson to free his family, relocate outside of Virginia, and obtain a local administrator to handle the sale of his Leesburg property. This lenience permitted Nelson's family to stay together, albeit not in Virginia.²²

family, whom Nelson had manumitted on November 11, 1839. Loudoun County Land Deed Book 4N: 112-113.

²⁰ *Alexandria Gazette*, June 19, 1839, microfilm; *Niles' National Register*, June 29, 1839 as found in HeinOnline under 56 Niles' Nat'l Reg. 273, 1839.

²¹ *Commonwealth v. Phillip Nelson*, Loudoun County Minute Book 6 (1837-1839): 284.

²² *Commonwealth v. Phillip Nelson*, Criminal Case 1839-02, LCHAD.

After the conclusion of Nelson's interrogation before the court, Commonwealth Attorney Richard H. Henderson issued a bench warrant for the apprehension of Verlinda Perry's enslaved man, Jarrett, on the charges of "having been engaged in printing & circulating papers & writings denying the right of masters to their slaves."²³ Henderson, representing the county of Loudoun in the court, asserted that Jarrett's publications inculcated "the duty of resistance" to the right of masters to keep slaves, a dangerous and rebellious act.²⁴ According to information gathered, three months prior to his arrest Jarrett had printed and distributed papers "denying the right of Masters to property in their slaves and inculcating the duty of resistance to such right" in March 1839.²⁵ The court found Jarrett guilty of the charges and sentenced him to receive "twenty stripes upon his bare back well laid on," and further ordered that he be "sold and banished beyond the limits of the United States," thus removing him as a potential inciter of rebellion among the enslaved of Loudoun.²⁶

Official documents are silent on how the court received information to transfer suspicion from Philip Nelson to Jarrett, although it was possible the leniency shown Nelson might have been contingent upon revealing information about another potential

²³ *Commonwealth v. Phillip Nelson*, Criminal Case 1839-02, LCHAD.

²⁴ *Commonwealth v. Negro Jarrett*, Criminal Case 1839-01, LCHAD.

²⁵ "Presentment of Commonwealth Attorney Richard H. Henderson," as found in "Proceedings in the Case of the Commonwealth against Negro Jarrett the property of Verlinda Perry," Box , Folder 3, Accession #43151, Executive Papers of Governor David Campbell, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Jarrett supposedly committed the felony in March 1839.

²⁶ *Commonwealth against Negro Jarrett the property of Verlinda Perry*, Box 6, Folder 3, Accession #43151, Executive Papers of Governor David Campbell, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. Jarrett never left Virginia. He developed a "congestive fever" possibly after his removal from Loudoun and died in the Virginia State Penitentiary in Richmond on September 7, 1840. "A Statement of the number of Deaths," Box 2, Folder 10, Accession #43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. "Letter of C. S. Morgan, Superintendent of Penitentiary, to Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer," September 8, 1840, Box 2, Folder 3, Accession # 43419, Executive Papers of Governor Thomas Walker Gilmer, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

suspect.²⁷ Jarrett had lived in Leesburg for at least twenty years, serving some of the time to masters by hire, and sometimes working as a blacksmith, but his life in Loudoun was a precarious life.²⁸ Benjamin Perry, the husband of Jarrett's owner, Verlinda Perry, continually subjected the Perrys and their slaveholdings to a life of financial instability. Perry used deeds of trust to secure the payment of his debts, a process that continually threatened Jarrett, his mother, and his siblings to a possible sale should Perry fail to pay his debts on time.²⁹ This surely affected the sense of security that Jarrett and his family experienced and perhaps led Jarrett to take more aggressive action against slaveholding as he grew into adulthood.³⁰ Living in Leesburg, Jarrett had the opportunity to meet and connect with other like-minded persons, both enslaved and free.

²⁷ While the role of Jarret in disseminating incendiary materials has been discussed in several works, Nelson's role has largely been ignored. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger briefly discuss Jarrett's case within the context of the "price of dissidence" connecting his actions to the publication of Walker's *Appeal* and a general overview of ways slaves expressed "dissatisfaction" with enslavement. Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 15-16. Brenda Stevenson asserted that "Verlinda Perry's literate male slave" had "some lasting effect on local black youth." Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 252.

²⁸ Jarrett was born about 1811, enslaved to the Taylor family in Maryland. After the division of Mr. Taylor's estate, possession of Jarrett, his brothers Trueman and Westly, and the boys' mother, Hannah devolved upon Taylor's daughter, Verlinda Taylor. After Verlinda's marriage to Benjamin W. Perry in October 1813, ownership of Hannah and her three children transferred to Perry and a month later the Perrys brought Hannah, Trueman, Westley and Jarrett to Loudoun County. Certificate of Importation, December 4, 1813, Loudoun County Deed Book 2Q: 470. Deed of Trust proved June 16, 1817, Loudoun County Deed Book 2V: 78.

²⁹ Bonnie Martin described the danger to the personal security of slaves due to these "invisible exchanges" of ownership. A deed of trust held the potential to be transferred to other creditors, further jeopardizing the ownership and potential sale of mortgaged slaves. Bonnie Martin, "Silver Buckles and Slaves: Borrowing, Lending, and the Commodification of Slaves in Virginia Communities," in Jeff Forret and Christine E. Sears, eds. *New Directions in Slavery Studies: Commodification, Community, and Comparison* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 41.

³⁰ Jarrett's security as a member of the Perry household was affected at an early age by the debts Benjamin Perry accrued, spurious business deals Perry made, and Perry's fondness for alcohol. See various documents presented in Superior Court of Chancery at Winchester as filed with *Verlinda Perry Exx v. Admr of John A. Binns, etc.* Loudoun County 1846-010, Library of Virginia Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1846-010#img>. To secure Verlinda's ownership in some of the slaves granted to her from her Maryland family, Benjamin Perry negotiated an agreement with Joshua Taylor (probably a relative of Verlinda's in Maryland) in June 1817 to hold in trust Jarrett's mother, Hannah, and his now four siblings as well as "a negro boy named Peter" and certain pieces of household furniture. The trust stipulated the enslaved family and furniture should be

The expression of anti-slavery sentiments was not always deemed a crime in Virginia, but sensitivity towards the danger of circulating anti-slavery thoughts that could conceivably influence the actions of the enslaved increased dramatically following the more aggressive actions of anti-slavery societies in the 1830s. Samuel M. Janney recalled that opposition to the series of essays he contributed to the *Alexandria Gazette* in the 1820s “was not then so great as it became a few years later.”³¹ Janney knew from experience that a slaveholding community expressed varying degrees of tolerance for free thinkers. Janney had long held anti-slavery beliefs, yet by 1849 these beliefs as expressed in the public sphere caused legal and social repercussions. Upon information presented to the county court by Leesburg’s *Washingtonian* editor C. C. McIntyre, Janney was indicted by a Loudoun Grand Jury on August 18, 1849 on charges he printed “a writing

reserved “for the use of Verlinder Perry... for and during her natural life and after her death then to the use of her children forever” and should “in no manner to be subject to the debts of my contracting.” Deed of Trust proved June 16, 1817, Loudoun County Deed Book 2V: 78. Benjamin Perry was committed to the Loudoun County jail in 1817 for debts due to many people. In order to secure his release, Perry contracted a deed of trust using land and slaves devised to Perry by his father as collateral for repayment of debts on December 8, 1817. Loudoun County Deed Book 2X: 1-3. In June 1817 Perry rented a house and lot in Leesburg from John McCormick despite Verlinda’s belief “that it was a greater rent than he [Perry] was able to pay.” Perry defaulted on \$120 owed for rental payments and Constable John Mullin ordered “a distress to be made...on the negroe boy Jerard [Jarrett]” to satisfy Perry’s debt to McCormick and Mullin advertised the sale of Jarrett to be held on February 8, 1818. Verlinda agreed to let McCormick hold Jarrett until the day of sale or until she could provide some security that she would pay McCormick for the debt, a feat she accomplished in the nick of time, yet the knowledge of his imminent sale, possibly away from his family forever must have shaken the young Jarrett. Jarrett returned to his family after the debt to McCormick was secured, yet his early experiences of being bartered in exchange for Perry’s debts and facing the constant threat of being torn from his family made real the precarious stability of an enslaved family. Bill exhibited by Valinda Perry, September 1819, Superior Court of Chancery at Winchester as filed with *Verlinda Perry Exx v. Admr of John A. Binns, etc.* Loudoun County 1846-010, Library of Virginia Chancery Records, online, <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/chancery/full_case_detail.asp?CFN=107-1846-010#img>.

³¹ Samuel M. Janney, *Memoirs of Samuel M. Janney Late of Lincoln, Loudoun County, Va.* Second edition, (Philadelphia: Friends’ Book Association, 1881), 28-29. Janney contributed to eleven articles on the “Views of the Benevolent Society of Alexandria for ameliorating and improving the condition of the People of Color” series published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, April 30, 1827; May 7, 1827; May 14, 1827; May 22, 1827; May 28, 1827; June 22, 1827; June 27, 1827; June 30, 1827; July 4, 1827; July 18, 1827; and July 21, 1827.

and address...calculated to incite persons of colour within this Commonwealth to rebel and make insurrection.”³² These charges were later revised to conform to the 1836 statute by declaring that Janney published or wrote in the local newspaper that “masters have no right of property in their slaves.”³³ Perhaps Janney’s high profile in the community as a teacher, businessmen and prominent Quaker led to a determination of “*nolle prosequi*” and the dismissal of charges in June 1850, yet the fact that a newspaper editor brought the charges against Janney, a grand jury indicted him, and Justices of the Peace interviewed him demonstrated the determination of some county residents to punish free thinkers.³⁴

Freedom of speech would be further tested in Loudoun County in the politically-charged year of 1856. Loudoun County had long established a tradition of hosting a literary society that debated questions of interest to the community. Some of the topics debated during the 1820s included questions framed on themes of equality of gender and race and questions of morality, not shying away from provocative issues that thirty years later might be considered incendiary.³⁵ An antecedent of the early debate club was the

³² “Certification to Justices,” *Commonwealth v. Janney*, Criminal Case 1849-009, LCHAD.

³³ “Summons, March 19, 1850,” *Commonwealth v. Janney*, Criminal Case 1849-009, LCHAD.

³⁴ A verdict of *nolle prosequi* literally means that the court officers decided to prosecute no further on the issue. According to the Leesburg *Washingtonian*, Loudoun’s prosecuting attorney explained that the indictment against Janney “could not be ultimately sustained” as it lacked the “essential element in all violations of the law, the *intent*.” *Washingtonian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 27, 1849. John Curtis Underwood, another outspoken resident from nearby Clarke County, Virginia, in a letter written from his “exile” in New York claimed that Janney’s words “were almost literal quotations of Jefferson and John Wesley” and Loudoun’s Commonwealth Attorney “became very willing and anxious to enter a *nolle prosequi* and let the Quaker go.” “Virginia Intolerance—An Interesting Letter from J. C. Underwood, the Virginia Refugee,” from the *Buffalo Republic* as published in the *Boston Daily Atlas*, September 3, 1856.

³⁵ Sanford J. Ramey of Loudoun County kept notes from 1820 to 1821 on the meetings and questions entertained by a local debate society possibly held in or near Leesburg, Virginia. The debate society discussed questions of interest on topics of morality, race, gender, society, and religion. The question debated on December 9, 1820 was “Are the abilities of the sexes equal?” The debate on December 23, 1820 affirmed that “all men descended from Adam and Eve” reasoning that “climate to have influenced in changing the character [of] coloured” persons. The question discussed on February 24, 1821, “are all men

Goose Creek Literary Society established in 1851 in Loudoun County, founded on the principles of offering “a free exchange of sentiment, the spreading of truth and mutual improvement.”³⁶ The society’s debate held in March 1856 focused nation-wide attention on the tensions that existed in at least one part of the slave South and sparked a chain reaction of litigation that restricted freedom of speech on topics that could challenge the institution of slavery.

Meeting in March to debate the question, “That we do endorse the nomination of Millard Fillmore by the American Party,” speakers for the negative, Francis H. Ray and Jesse H. Brown argued that they could not endorse Fillmore’s nomination for the presidency because of his support of the Fugitive Slave Act and his lack of opposition to the extension of slavery in the territories. On the issue of slavery, according to some witnesses, the team’s stance was not to abolish Slavery, but to “not disturb the institution where it already exists, but ...leave it to die out on the land that bred it.”³⁷ In response,

equal in mental endowments” resulted in a decision that there was not “an original inequality in the constitution of the mind” but society and education affected the development. The debate group discussed, among other topics, capital punishment, benefits of a liberal education for women, and amalgamation between whites and Indians. Sanford J. Ramey Notebook, 1820-1821, Rubenstein Library, Duke University, North Carolina, n. p. Fauquier County also hosted a debate society in the 1820s for the “young men of the town of Warrenton.” The Warrenton Debate Society was organized on July 17, 1829 and met regularly in the county clerk’s office. The society by-laws allowed for a member to be fined for introducing “any topic of discussion unworthy of the attention of any dignified and intelligent society” and if the proposed subject was “introduced for the purpose of outraging their dignity or disturbing their peace” the offending member would be expelled. It was probably no surprise that the majority ruled in favor of being a poor man in the debate over “which is happier a poor man or a slave?” discussed on September 11, 1829. Other topics offered a choice between two types of lifestyles such as choosing an early or late marriage, type of wife, or discussing more political questions such as the greatest American hero or whether Brutus was justified in condemning his children, none of which posed a serious threat to the institution of slavery. Warrenton, Virginia Debating Society Minute Book, 1829, Fauquier County Records, John K. Gott Papers, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³⁶ “Freedom of Speech in Virginia,” *National Era*, April 24, 1856.

³⁷ “Freedom of Speech in Virginia,” *National Era*, April 24, 1856. See also the article submitted to the Leesburg newspaper, *The Washingtonian*, offering clarification on the arguments offered by Francis Ray. “For the Washingtonian,” *The Washingtonian*, April 11, 1856.

the meeting turned from a debate over the political parties in the upcoming election to a confrontation over the issue of slavery itself, and opposition speakers made public underlying fears of northern influence on southern institutions.

James F. Trayhern attacked Ray's arguments, according to a correspondent, by "*emphatically*" denying that Mr. Ray "had the right of freedom of speech upon that question upon Virginia soil," alluding to Ray's status in the community as a young man who had recently emigrated from New York to teach school in Loudoun County.

Trayhern's claim caused outbursts from the room of "He has the right! he shall have the freedom of speech!" to which Trayhern refined his argument by responding that Ray "might have the entire freedom of Speech on Virginia soil, if he would speak *right*."³⁸

Interestingly, Trayhern focused his venom on Ray, a New Yorker by birth, rather than on the comments of Ray's co-speaker in the negative, Jesse Brown, who also examined the constitutionality of extending slavery into territories by declaring "that the gentle green slopes of Nebraska should not be made rotten with the institution of slavery."³⁹

Picking up on the theme of endorsing slavery, Leesburg's *Democratic Mirror* decried the Goose Creek debate as a "Black Republican Meeting." Despite describing the arguments presented by Ray and Brown as based on the constitutionality of slavery, the *Mirror* took the stance that any speech against the extension of slavery was an act of Black Republicanism. According to the *Mirror*, Trayhern attacked Ray's arguments by claiming "the South was no place for the expression of such opinions [against her

³⁸ "Freedom of Speech in Virginia," *National Era*, April 24, 1856.

³⁹ "Black Republican Meeting," Loudoun *Democratic Mirror* as reported in "The Union in Danger Again," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 5, 1856.

institutions]” and that Ray “had better go back to the North and mingle with Fred Douglas [sic].” News of the Goose Creek debate spread through local papers and was picked up by presses in Washington D.C. and as far away as Chicago. Meeting participants were quick to send cards and letters to newspapers in Leesburg and Alexandria explaining their positions in a face-saving attempt to throw off unfavorable characterizations of the Goose Creek neighborhood (and indeed of all Loudoun County residents) while decrying the prejudicial insinuations of the *Mirror*.⁴⁰

Three weeks after the debate a special meeting was held among Hillsborough residents in Loudoun “condemning the abolition sentiments expressed by certain persons, at a late meeting at Goose Creek.” Members of the Hillsborough neighborhood (as part of Loudoun County) clearly wanted to disassociate themselves from any taint of connection to “observations offensive to the people of the South.”⁴¹ This “ritualistic display” of community unity served the purpose of publicly affirming community norms while simultaneously shaming sentiments perceived as dangerous to community unity.⁴²

⁴⁰ See especially the comments made by the Goose Creek Literary Society President, William Henry Taylor, stating the *Mirror*’s depiction as misrepresentative of “the character and object of that meeting.” “To the People,” *The Washingtonian*, April 4, 1856. Speaker Thomas Taylor affirmed that the purpose of the debate was not to hold a Black Republican rally, but for “the laudable purpose of self-improvement” and Taylor insisted that “three-fourths of that meeting were as good Fillmore Americans as there are in the State, and three-fourths of the remainder, Democrats, and not five Republicans present.” Taylor claimed the *Mirror*’s attacks on the character of the meeting and on the character of attendees and speakers was “nothing more than an electioneering scheme...[to appeal] to the passions of the American party to incite them to hate this community, thereby weakening our united force so they can elect a *Minor* democrat.” Thomas Taylor, “To All it May Concern,” *The Washingtonian*, April 4, 1856. On the importance of reputation and character in the south, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), especially chapter 7.

⁴¹ *Alexandria Gazette*, April 18, 1856.

⁴² In describing the role of community meetings in response to the perceived threat presented by anti-slavery societies Susan Wyly-Jones noted that these meetings “functioned as ritualistic displays of white unity and the communal means of enforcing race control. They reflected Southern Fears both of outside intrusion and of vulnerabilities within the slave system, such as lax enforcement of the slave code, the corrupting influence of free blacks and poor whites, and the complacency of planters.” These meetings,

The characterization of Ray as an outsider and of a man who did not support the southern institution of slavery circulated through innuendo and gossip as much as through the presses. In response to articles in the *Alexandria Virginia Sentinel* the editor of Leesburg's *Washingtonian* declared

We care not who may utter such sentiments in our midst—if any such there be—we shall brand them as traitors to the country and nuisances to the communities in which they reside. The County of Loudoun is no place for Black Republicanism, and our people will tolerate no one who publicly advocates the doctrine.⁴³

The *Alexandria Gazette* branded Ray “the person who made himself so obnoxious to the people of Loudoun, by the Abolition sentiments he uttered” while clarifying that Ray was not native-born Virginian, but a northerner – “a young man who knows but little of the South, or the people of Loudoun county.”⁴⁴ As Ray's reputation lay in tatters in the northern Virginia press and among local members of the community, two varying accounts appeared about his departure from the area.

The *Alexandria Gazette* reported a month after the debate that after his speech, which contained “obnoxious sentiments which gave great offence,” Ray “has concluded to leave Virginia and return to his native State.”⁴⁵ A slightly different account in the *National Era* claimed that Ray was “admonished by the mob to leave the State.”⁴⁶

Residents of Loudoun County made clear that dissent against the institution of slavery

according to Wyly-Jones illustrated the “ways in which Southerners strove to unite the region socially and politically behind its domestic institutions.” Susan Wyly-Jones, “The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign,” *Civil War History*, 47, No. 4 (December 2001), 293.

⁴³ “Local Items,” *The Washingtonian*, April 4, 1856.

⁴⁴ *Alexandria Gazette*, March 31, 1856.

⁴⁵ *Alexandria Gazette*, April 21, 1856.

⁴⁶ *National Era*, July 17, 1856.

would not be tolerated and acted both through public displays of unity and their own brand of law enforcement.

Public response to the Goose Creek debate society crisis and the subject of “liberty of oral discussion” as it existed in Virginia extended across the nation.⁴⁷ The *New York Daily Tribune* observed that while the “equality” of all the free whites were “as regularly served up in every Southern political speech as hog and hominy are at every Southern dinner-table,” the Goose Creek Debate demonstrated the hierarchical structure of southern society in which slaveholders “constituting about a twenty-fifth part of the entire population exercise the *whole* political power and the complete control of the public sentiment in every Slave State.”⁴⁸ In addition, the *Daily Tribune* opined that

Even slaveholders themselves enjoy the privilege of publishing and speaking only so far as they are ready to employ those means for the glorification of slaveholding and for the defense of the social system of the South as it now exists.⁴⁹

Once again, northern presses pounced upon reports from northern Virginia to make a case against the repressive regime of slaveholding, not only for the slaves but also for other segments of the population. Unlike the critique of 1839 that focused on slaveholders’ mistreatment of slaves, this new campaign attacked northern Virginia slaveholders for their oppression of dissenting opinions.

The level of agitation, public commentary, and actions to restrain or remove persons believed to harbor anti-slavery sentiments deserves comment as the Goose Creek

⁴⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 15, 1856.

⁴⁸ The *Daily Tribune* argued that true equality among the classes in Virginia did not exist and the slaveholding class ruled the courts to the detriment of the interests of the poor white class. *New York Daily Tribune*, May 15, 1856. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁹ *New York Daily Tribune*, May 15, 1856.

neighborhood was populated mainly by Quakers. By publicly attacking the Goose Creek community (and impugning the political bent of the debate society) Loudoun residents perhaps reacted to long-held fears that rebellious spirits, born out of religious convictions contrary to the practice of slaveholding, lived among them. During the crisis of 1856 when fears of runaways and insurrection spread rapidly across northern Virginia, many residents believed they could no longer blame “the North” for the destabilization of slavery but rather must look among their midst to root out the anti-slavery influences. To this end, one’s speech became a powerful, if flawed, vehicle to assess and identify insidious influences.

An outspoken transplanted New Yorker politicking in neighboring Clarke County tested the limits of tolerance for anti-slavery rhetoric. John Curtis Underwood, a teacher from Herkimer County, New York who married a Southerner and settled along the Blue Ridge near the Clarke-Fauquier border near Paris, Virginia actively supported free labor policies and anti-slavery activists. After organizing the Republican Party in Virginia, Underwood attended the national convention in Philadelphia in June 1856 and in his speech attacked slavery.⁵⁰ Shortly thereafter on July 26, Fauquier residents gathered at Piedmont Station to “express their indignation at the alleged conduct” of Underwood and denounce his claims that “free soil or abolition doctrines” were “gaining a foothold in Virginia.” Meeting participants delegated a committee to advise Underwood upon his return to Virginia that “he should leave the State as speedily as he can find it in his power

⁵⁰ William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 165-167.

to do so.”⁵¹ To dispel belief that the group acted as a mob, local papers affirmed that the gathering constituted a “large and respectable meeting” governed by parliamentary procedures with the installation of an appointed chair and secretary. Furthermore, the group resolved to publish their preamble and resolves in both local and regional newspapers.⁵²

Ignoring warnings not to return to Virginia, Underwood returned to Virginia to “dispose of his property and close up his affairs in the Old Dominion” a place described by a northern newspaper editor as “whose soil is sacred to slavery, but unsafe for the love of freedom.” Underwood described his welcome from neighbors as one of “great cordiality” and that “the negroes...plied him with inquiries” about the state of politics as they “had been led by the criminations and recriminations between the Buchanan and Fillmore orators during the Presidential campaign to believe that a great party had been organized to secure their freedom.” Sensing the potential for “the effusion of blood,” Underwood later claimed he “urgently counseled them to submit to the power which they have now no means of successfully resisting.” This connection between politics, slavery, and the promise of freedom revealed the danger of outspoken persons who questioned southern institutions. Aware of the discontent of the enslaved, Underwood seemed confident that his “advice” would be “more efficacious in preventing an outbreak in that neighborhood than all the armed patrols...seen on every hand.”⁵³ Yet the ensuing pressure from residents across northern Virginia in response to Underwood’s political

⁵¹ “Political Gossip,” *New York Herald*, July 2, 1856. A similar article appeared in the *Ohio State Journal* a week later, indicating the rapid spread of information regarding the “indignation meeting” of Fauquier residents. “Carry Me Out of Old Virginia,” *Ohio State Journal*, July 9, 1856.

⁵² “Indignation Meeting at Piedmont,” *Richmond Whig*, July 1, 1856.

⁵³ “Proscription in Virginia,” *The Farmers’ Cabinet* (Amherst, New Hampshire), January 15, 1857.

actions ultimately convinced him to leave the state. Though “greeted...with great cordiality” by his neighbors, Underwood ultimately decided to sell his property in December and prepare to leave Virginia.⁵⁴ Described in the presses as “the exile from Virginia” and “the Virginia Refugee,” Underwood continued to agitate tensions in northern Virginia, even from Republican stumps in the North.⁵⁵

A visitor to Loudoun and Fauquier County in July observed that the “people of Loudoun are wide awake” to the presence of persons disloyal to “the institutions of the States” and “manifest a spirit of determination to ferret out, and expel from their midst, with the most summary punishment, the detected violators of their rights [to slaveholding].” The correspondent further threatened that any remaining anti-slavery adherents would be “got rid of, peaceably if *they* will, forcibly if *we* must.”⁵⁶ Residents of Clarke County echoed this militant sentiment of ejecting dissidents “peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must” in a series of resolutions following “a large and respectable meeting of the citizens” on July 26. The community forum affirmed that “the institution of slavery, as it exists in Virginia, is entirely in accordance with the feelings of our residents” and that “we have no respect for the sickly, morbid sentiment which holds slavery to be a ‘moral evil’ or for the anti-slavery propagators of such sentiments.” In their call to action, the Clarke residents charged that it was “high time for Virginia to

⁵⁴ “Proscription in Virginia,” *The Farmers’ Cabinet*, January 15, 1857.

⁵⁵ “An Exile from Virginia on the Stump,” *New York Herald*, July 17, 1856. “Virginia Intolerance—An Interesting Letter from J. C. Underwood, the Virginia Refugee,” from the *Buffalo Republic* as printed in the *Boston Daily Atlas*, September 3, 1856.

⁵⁶ W., “Letter from a Correspondent, Rock Cliff, Fauquier Co., July 29, 1856,” *Alexandria Gazette*, August 1, 1856. Emphasis in the original.

discountenance all such teachers, whether in our pulpits, our school houses, or elsewhere.”⁵⁷

This attitude was not limited to Underwood’s near neighborhood, but spread across northern Virginia. A keen awareness of persons perceived as “outsiders” developed. Prince William County Sheriff William E. Goodwin identified resident John Harrison as a “Northerner” in his list of tax delinquents for the year 1856.⁵⁸ Prince William County residents looked to their own neighborhoods to root out outsiders and to ferret out dissent and publicly censure outspoken persons, thereby reviving the force of the 1836 law restricting speech against the rights of property in enslaved people.

The first case in the county involved John Underwood (no known relation to Clarke County’s John Curtis Underwood) who in 1857 gained national notoriety for declaring anti-slavery sentiments in the presence of his neighbors.⁵⁹ Underwood reportedly claimed shortly after serving as one of the court magistrates adjudicating the county court trial of five slaves accused of murdering their master, George E. Green, “that if he was a slave, and killing his master would free him, he would do it.” Underwood’s comments were spoken at a local store in the presence of “four or five white persons, who were acquaintances of defendant” when the men were engaged in a

⁵⁷ “Underwood Indignation Meeting in Virginia, The Doctrines of Jefferson Denounced As Treasonable,” *Winchester Virginian*, September 5, 1856, as reprinted in the *New York Herald*, September 16, 1856.

⁵⁸ “A List of delinquents in the capitation and property tax in the County of Prince William in the district below Cedar Run and Occoquan for the year 1856 returned by William E. Goodwin sheriff of said County,” LP (1856) 001090_00071, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

⁵⁹ News of Underwood’s case, trial, and fine was transmitted via the *Brentsville Journal* and republished by the *Alexandria Gazette* (August 1, August 8, August 10, November 9, 1857), *Richmond Whig* (November 13, 1857), *The National Era* (November 12, 1857), *The Columbus Enquirer, Tri-Weekly* of Columbus, Georgia (November 17, 1857). Other presses picked up the story and confused John Underwood of Prince William County with John C. Underwood of Clarke County, another man who faced intense censure for his statements against slavery. For examples, see the *Barre Gazette* (Barre, Massachusetts), December 11, 1857; and *Ohio State Journal*, December 16, 1857.

political discussion. According to the report from the *New York Tribune*, Underwood asserted that “Slavery was an evil to the country and to the State” and that “it would put more people on an equality if the slaves were free.” Witnesses noted that there were “no negroes present at any of the conversations” indicating the concern of slaveholders that free and enslaved blacks would be influenced by such “incendiary” talk.⁶⁰

John Underwood’s comments immediately captured the attention and scorn of many of his neighbors. One outraged resident from the area asserted in a letter to the editor of the *Alexandria Gazette* in January 1857:

Let every man or set of men hold the opinions they choose, provided they injure none other than themselves thereby—but when these sentiments prove pernicious to their neighbors, and injurious to the community in which they move, then, we say, the sentiments should not be circulated. The time has come when the South should be as a unit upon one subject—SLAVERY.⁶¹

This call to restrict public expression of opinion on the subject of slavery in published comments attempted to draw northern Virginians more firmly into a stance of southern pro-slavery consensus. Within Prince William County, offended citizens called for legal action against Underwood.

County magistrates brought suit against Underwood for “uttering and maintaining that owners have no right of property in slaves.”⁶² Underwood underwent a preliminary

⁶⁰ “From the New York Tribune of December 8th,” *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, December 19, 1857.

⁶¹ S****, “The Late Excitement,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 8, 1857. Emphasis in the original.

⁶² The statute was designed to prosecute “certain abolition or anti-slavery societies and evil disposed persons, being and residing in some of the non-slaveholding states, to interfere with the relations existing between master and slave in this state, and to excite in our coloured population a spirit of insubordination, rebellion and insurrection” through the publication of anti-slavery writings. The particular section pertaining to the charges laid against Underwood states “Any member of an abolition or anti-slavery society, or agent of an abolition or anti-slavery society, who shall come into this state, and shall here maintain, by speaking or writing, that the owners of slaves have no property in the same, or advocate or advise the abolition of slavery, shall be deemed guilty of a high misdemeanour...” “Crimes and

examination by two of the county magistrates before the county court proceeded with a trial in April 1857.⁶³ The case, the first of its kind prosecuted in Prince William, “created the most intense interest and excitement” in the county.⁶⁴ Despite Underwood’s standing in the county, Prince William magistrates found him guilty and levied against him the substantial fine of \$312.50, a ruling he later appealed.⁶⁵

Underwood’s fine was not the only sanction levied against him by the Prince William community. When Underwood returned to court as a sitting justice of the peace and magistrate in January 1858, “the rest of the magistrates refused to sit with him and requested him to withdraw.” According to a press release in the *Blue Ridge Republican* and *Alexandria Gazette*, Underwood “obstinately refused [to leave his seat on the court], and his brother justices as obstinately persisted in their course [to remove him].” Towards the end of the day, to break the impasse and allow court business to continue, Underwood acquiesced and left the bench.⁶⁶

By the time of the April court, fourteen of the sixteen sitting justices in Prince William County met to express their protest against Underwood continuing to serve as a county court magistrate. The group selected representatives to meet with Underwood to

Punishments,” Chapter 71, §1, Joseph Tate, *Digest of the Laws of Virginia, Which Are of a Permanent Character and General Operation; Illustrated by Judicial Decisions: To which is added, an Index of the Names of the Cases in the Virginia Reporters*. Second Edition (Richmond: Smith and Palmer, Shepard and Colin, Printers, 1841), 239.

⁶³ “Prince William County,” *Brentsville Journal* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 1, 1857. The Grand Jury held at the August Court found a true bill against Underwood, “for maintaining by speaking that an ‘owner has no right of property in his slaves’ &c.” “Prince William County,” *Alexandria Gazette*, August 8, 1857.

⁶⁴ “Prince William County,” *Brentsville Journal* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, August 8, 1857.

⁶⁵ Underwood, a man characterized by the press as “a substantial citizen and wheelwright who, though not agreeing with the mass of his neighbors in politics, is so much respected and confided in that he has been for some years a Justice of the Peace.” *New York Tribune* of December 8, 1857 as published in *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, December 19, 1857.

⁶⁶ “A Scene,” *Blue Ridge Republican* as reported in *Alexandria Gazette*, January 9, 1858.

“ask his determination whether he persists in sitting as Justice” and whether he would recant his statements regarding slaves and their ability to express dissent against masters. Undeterred, Underwood would not relinquish his seat nor retract his statements despite the justices’ resolution that Underwood’s “abolition sentiments” were “in contravention of law and repugnant to public opinion.”⁶⁷ These displays of power by the slaveholding elite of the county represented attempts to coerce Underwood into retracting his statements and adopting a tone towards enslavement more in tune with southern slaveholding standards. Publication of the actions and Underwood’s response further demonstrated the southern code of honor that used community shaming to achieve unity of thought. In the face of such high-profile interactions, the public feared that violence would erupt over the issue of slavery sentiments.

Walter Collins, a neighbor of Underwood’s in the village of Occoquan, noted that when it was Underwood’s turn to lead the county court in the published rotation schedule in July 1858, Collins feared that “a lamentable occurrence [sic]” would take place as threats had been made against Underwood. Collins described Underwood as “a Free Soil Justice of the Peace, a Virginian[,] a man of firmness and a man that his worst enemies can speak no harm of, but that he is an Abolitionist,” hence the reason other Prince William justices continued to refuse to sit at court with him. Collins feared that the other magistrates and angry county residents would “rout” Underwood and if so believed the passions of the community meant “there is great danger of blood shed.”⁶⁸ When the court

⁶⁷ *Alexandria Gazette*, May 4, 1857.

⁶⁸ Collins included a postscript in his letter noting “Threats were not executed.” “Letter from Walter F. Collins of Occoquan to an unnamed cousin,” July 5, 1858, Accession 41930, Personal Papers Collection, the Library of Virginia, Richmond, Virginia.

convened in July, county magistrates once again refused Underwood his seat on the court bench “on account, it is alleged, of entertaining abolition sentiments.” In the view of the newspaper editor, “[t]his whole affair is unpleasant, and the lovers of peace and quiet regret the circumstances connected with it.”⁶⁹ County magistrates denied Underwood his place as a Justice of the Peace in the county court for a period of time until he softened his stance on slavery.⁷⁰

Underwood was not the only person to face backlash from residents of Prince William County for criticizing slavery. In August 1857 John H. Crawford of Prince William was sent to jail by Justice of the Peace Zebulon Kankey for declaring that he was “an abolitionist,” and “that he believed a negro as good as he was if he behaved himself.” Kankey determined Crawford’s comments constituted a violation against Virginia statutes by “maintaining, by speaking, that persons have not the right of property in slaves under the law.” According to the *New York Herald*, this was the second case of its kind in Prince William and the only the third prosecuted in the state.⁷¹ Crawford

⁶⁹ “Letter from Prince William,” *Alexandria Gazette*, July 12, 1858.

⁷⁰ The Prince William County Court ordered the Clerk to “omit the name of John Underwood in entering the Justices at this Court” in the court minutes on August 2, 1858. Prince William County Court Minute Book 17 (1856 – 1861): 247, microfilm. Clement Eaton mentions this case and the case of another Prince William County man named Crawford also charged with making abolitionist statements. Justice Zebulon Kankey issued the warrants for the arrest of Crawford and Underwood, news reported in the *National Era* and the *Liberator*. Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South*, 137-138.

⁷¹ “Another Liberty of Speech Case in Virginia,” *New York Herald*, August 24, 1857. The accuracy of the Herald’s tally of cases prosecuted under the 1836 statute was flawed. In his study of suppressed freedom in Virginia, Clement Eaton identified the first case using the 1836 law as *Commonwealth v. Barrett*, a case that originated in Lewis County, Virginia. During an appeal of Barrett’s case in 1839 the Supreme Court of Virginia found that Lysander Barrett had not violated the letter of the law by distributing a petition praying that slavery might be abolished in the District of Columbia and overturned the county court’s decision. A second trial in Grayson County, Virginia involved “an ignorant and perhaps misguided preacher in a remote county of Virginia” who was fined \$49.62½. In Jarvis Bacon’s appeal, the Supreme Court also reversed the lower court’s decision by finding that Preacher Bacon had not clearly denied “the legal right of slavery.” Samuel Janney’s case in Loudoun in 1850 as discussed in this chapter was the third such case. See Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 133-138.

languished in jail until a writ of *habeas corpus* produced at the end of December 1857 discharged him.

In 1860 Prince William County residents charged yet another man with the crime of speaking out against the rights of masters to slaves. Henry D. Robinson and Basil Robertson both swore they heard Abram Doughty say to Alfred Murphy, a man Doughty presumed to be enslaved yet who was in fact a free black, that slaves “had as much right to their liberty as a white man had to his.” According to the charges brought by Justice of the Peace Edwin Gaines, Doughty reportedly stated that “there had been an insurrection that had been wrongfully put down” and after March 4 (when Abraham Lincoln became President) the nation would “have a man...that would draw the sword across their necks (meaning the slaveholders) & then they (meaning the slaves) would be as free as the whites were.”⁷² The statements uttered by Doughty, a New Yorker by birth, represented dangerous sentiments that at worst could incite some action by blacks, yet at a minimum appeared to be against the law.⁷³ Despite an indictment by the grand jury for uttering these incendiary claims, the charges against Doughty were quashed in August.⁷⁴

⁷² “Warrant sworn on oath of Henry D. Robinson,” LP (1860) 010000_00039, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

⁷³ Doughty, his wife and five children reported their place of birth as New York in both the 1850 and 1860 censuses. “Abram Doughty,” 1850 Federal Census, Prince William County, Virginia, roll M432_970, page 103A, Ancestry.com via HeritageQuest. “Abraham Doughty,” 1860 Federal Census, Independent Hill, Prince William County, Virginia, roll M653_1373, page 519, Ancestry.com via HeritageQuest. Abram Doughty first appears in Prince William deed books in 1849. Prince William County Deed Book 20: 348.

⁷⁴ Commonwealth v. Doughty, Indictment,” LP (1860) 010000_00039, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. Doughty’s position as a landholder led to his selection as a juror for the November 1854 term of county court, indicating that his status as a New Yorker was not seen as a deterrent for his participation in civic duties at that time. “A List of Jurors Drawn to attend November Term 1854,” LP (1854) 001051_00118, Clerk’s Loose Papers, Prince William County, online. While Doughty did not own slaves, according to the 1860 Federal Slave Schedules, he did on occasion hire out enslaved laborers. See Doughty’s hire contract for “servant man Solomon” for the year 1856 in *Berryman’s Guardian vs. Doughty, &c*, LP (1857) 001059_00129, Clerk’s Loose Papers, Prince William County, online.

Sometimes merely the nativity of a resident could be enough cause to draw suspicion of not adhering to or supporting the institution of slavery, especially in the wake of the John Brown raid in Harper's Ferry.⁷⁵ Community members suspected Brentsville's school teacher, Vincent C. Clark, of "entertaining sentiments not suited to this latitude" in 1859, presumably due to Clark's status as a northerner (like Loudoun's Francis Ray, Clark had come from New York to Virginia). A "committee of gentlemen" appointed during a meeting of Brentsville citizens interrogated Clark "on his views on the subject of Slavery" and finding his answers unsatisfactory requested Clark face the Brentsville community for "further interrogation on the subject." In response to their questions, Clark admitted being an abolitionist, that he believed slavery wrong, and "that he would not aid in the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law, if called on by lawful authority to do so; but that he would stand aloof and abide the consequences." The Brentsville committee decided to take a hard stance against non-conformists and told the northern schoolteacher to "wind up his affairs and leave in five days" and if Clark failed to take the hint, the committee warned that "the *consequences* might be unpleasant to him." Believing that retreat was the best course of action, Clark "made his exit from this State." According to the news, in the wake of the ousting of Clark, Justice William W. Thornton appointed forty-one men to serve as patrollers for the Brentsville neighborhood as a show of force to quell any unrest.⁷⁶ Brentsville residents utilized the rituals of the community public meeting to publicly question Clark's stance on slavery, providing a

⁷⁵ John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry is a well-studied event explored by many historians. A comprehensive treatment of the subject is beyond the scope of this study.

⁷⁶ *Prince William Democrat* as published in the *Alexandria Gazette*, November 28, 1859.

public display of the views of the county elite as well as the consequences for those who failed to conform. The further appropriation of public patrols confirmed the legal arm of the elite to root out dissent.

Prince William resident Solomon Brill, a native of New York, must have experienced some hint that his views on slavery were under scrutiny.⁷⁷ Brill's consideration of the experiences of Underwood and Crawford and his awareness of the current community action against Vincent Clark as well as the appointment of a large patrol force influenced Brill to take action to prevent similar community actions against him. Brill preemptively requested a meeting of "the citizens of Brentsville" on November 28, 1859. The purpose of the community meeting was to investigate "the soundness or unsoundness of Mr. Solomon Brill, upon the subject of Slavery." The public meeting took on the formality of parliamentary procedures with an appointed chair and secretary. In front of his neighbors and community leaders Brill "fully and freely stated his opinions on the subject of Slavery, saying that he recognized the right of property in slaves, and that he considered Slavery neither a social, moral nor political evil." Upon hearing Brill's stance, John T. Williams motioned to declare Brill "exonerated from all suspicions as to his unsoundness upon the subject of slavery."⁷⁸

Solomon Brill used the public forum of a community meeting to retain his standing in the county and to publicly affirm his commitment to a pro-slavery viewpoint.

The Richmond *Daily Dispatch* reported that Brill had been "exonerated by the formal

⁷⁷ The Brill family consisting of 66-year-old Philip F. Brill, and children Garrett (33 years old), Hannah (30 years old), and Solomon (26 years old) reported New York as their places of birth in the 1860 census. 1860 Federal Census, Independent Hill, Prince William County, Virginia, roll M653_1373, page 501, Ancestry.com via HeritageQuest.

⁷⁸ *Alexandria Gazette*, December 5, 1859.

judgment of his neighbors, in public meeting, of all suspicion of disloyalty to Virginia institutions.”⁷⁹ The pronouncement confirms the significance of community opinion and the pressure placed on Brill, a non-slaveholding northerner residing in the county, to publicly affirm loyalty to “Virginia institutions.” Perhaps this action removed any lingering doubts as to his politics, an important move since Brill had been elected to serve as a Prince William County constable for District No. 1 in September 1858 for a two year period.⁸⁰ A loss of faith by the Brentsville community and its near neighborhoods could quickly result in his loss of position and potentially the loss of his \$2,000 bond with the State of Virginia for “faithfully discharge[ing] and perform[ing] the duties of his said office of Constable of the County of Prince William.”⁸¹ Brill’s gambit secured his position in the community and his neighbors demonstrated their confidence in him by re-electing him in 1860 to the position of constable for his district.⁸²

Prince William was not the only county to encourage certain persons in the community to leave. One unnamed man, whose business in Fauquier in 1859 consisted of purchasing eggs and chickens, apparently aroused the ire of the residents in the Piedmont neighborhood. Over the course of his stay in the area the man allegedly expressed sentiments regarding slavery, presumably of an anti-slavery nature, that the residents found “repugnant.” The man’s opinions combined with “his [too great] partiality for

⁷⁹ *Daily Dispatch*, December 7, 1859.

⁸⁰ “Prince William Items,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 4, 1858. Brill was elected by a nineteen vote majority in his district.

⁸¹ “Constable Bond,” *Brill &c to Commonwealth of Virginia*, LP (1858) 01197_00133, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. Seymour Lynn and William E. Goodwin served as securities for Brill’s bond.

⁸² “Constable Bond,” *Brill &c to Commonwealth of Virginia*, LP (1860) 01077_00340, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online. For his second term Seymour Lynn and Edwin Nelson were Brill’s securities.

negro society” generated the perception that he was a “suspicious character.” According to the *Alexandria Gazette*, the crowd gathered at Piedmont “politely requested” he “leave the State.”⁸³

Historian Clement Eaton claimed that “the extreme laws limiting the freedom of discussion [in the Upper South] were tempered in nearly every case, by giving the law [of 1836] its most constricted and humane interpretation.”⁸⁴ Yet the experiences of men like Underwood, Crawford, Clarke, Ray, and Brill suggest that when the local court did not censure speech, the community or neighborhood would act to remove the potential threat to consensus on the rights to hold enslaved property and anyone perceived to be instigating or inciting unrest in the black population. These actions became more public and pronounced in the mid-1850s suggesting that they served as a warning to other dissenters that verbal opposition to slavery was no longer an option.

Whites living in northern Virginia faced growing pressure to conform to a defense of slavery, whether via a Scripture-based argument or an enforced community consensus on the rights of masters to hold slave property. The ability of community members to express opinions on the treatment of slaves or the morality of the southern institution of enslavement fluctuated during the early nineteenth century, yet by the 1850s all pretense of freedom of speech on the subject of slavery was curtailed both through legal and extra-legal measures as experienced by Ray, Clark, Underwood, and Crawford. Dissenting speech was not the only perceived threat to the master-slave relationship in northern

⁸³ “ORDERED TO LEAVE THE STATE,” *Alexandria Gazette*, December 1, 1859.

⁸⁴ Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), 131.

Virginia. Enslaved persons, reacting to conditions of enslavement and often to political discussions, initiated their own calls to rebellion.

CHAPTER TEN: “A GROWING SPIRIT OF INSUBORDINATION SEEMS TO EXIST”: SUPPRESSING DISSENT AND UNREST AMONG THE SLAVE COMMUNITY

Early Threats of Insurrection

County residents relied on their magistrates and county courts to represent their values and temperament towards violence perpetrated by enslaved persons, though as explored in earlier chapters, residents sometimes challenged court decisions. Historian Laura F. Edwards argued that local court decisions affirmed community goals for social order by producing sentences that preserved the social status quo and enforced peace.¹ Edwards concluded that “local legalism” created in antebellum courts in the Carolinas reflected popular, elite sentiments on the best way to preserve social order and a peaceful community, even at the expense of individual rights. These decisions, in turn, informed the structure for developing state codes and precedents. Local legalism also functioned in northern Virginia as shown by the operation of northern Virginia’s county court system and the reactions from community members to court decisions. Tensions developed between interpretation of the law and community fears, especially when both whites and enslaved blacks sensed their security and status were under attack.

The highly publicized insurrections fomented by Gabriel in 1800 and by Nat Turner in 1831 unleashed slaveholder fears of the potential for insurrection across the

¹ Laura F. Edwards, *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

South, especially in areas with a high concentration of free blacks and enslaved persons. Evidence of smaller and much less publicized plots among northern Virginia slaves shows that local threats of rebellion increased during the 1800s and added to the heightened sense of unrest in northern Virginia. Rebellion, whether perceived or actual, represented a personal and public threat to the master-slave relationship and the institution of slavery; and as time progressed, slaveholders became more in tune to the possibility of insurrection on both small and large scales. In his survey of slave crime across Virginia, Philip Schwarz determined that “large, collective challenges to white domination were rare” and that it was “primarily individual offenses that truly challenged” the security felt by slaveholders.² These individual offences could take the form of day-to-day acts of resistance or spontaneous passionate acts of violence as discussed in the previous chapter or, in some cases across northern Virginia, in planned campaigns of violence or insurrection.

In March 1810 George Roach overheard enslaved man Job Fallis utter some very disturbing remarks in Fauquier County. According to Roach, Fallis claimed he would “raise the people in slavery and burn and destroy all before him.” At the time Roach apparently gave little thought to the remarks, yet a few months later in October when Roach broached the subject again, Fallis declared “his intention to do so.” For some reason Roach had “cause to believe” this time that Fallis would “carry his threat in to execution.” In his statement to Justice of the Peace John Blackwell, Roach swore he had “just cause to fear the said Fallis will kill him or do him some bodily hurt or destroy his

² Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 280.

property or procure others to do it.” Blackwell ordered Constable Robert Embry to take Job Fallis into custody; and shortly thereafter Fallis posted bond promising to appear in court and that he “shall keep the peace towards the Commonwealth and all its Citizens and especially towards George Roach.” The following year at the March Court the magistrates dismissed the case against Fallis.³ Whether the court found Fallis’s threat not credible or unsubstantiated, the fact that he had uttered a threat of slave insurrection against a white man and the threat was taken seriously enough to warrant legal investigation demonstrated the potency of fears against slave revolt.

The comments of enslaved man Sam in 1813 represented a more feared and credible threat to his neighborhood in Fauquier County. Sam, enslaved property of Enoch Jeffries, was charged with inciting a slave rebellion after his overseer, John Cunningham, overheard Sam claim that the war then in progress (the War of 1812) “was made for the Emancipation of negroes.” Sam’s comments, made in “the presence of other slaves” and in front of Cunningham, occurred when Jeffries was in Richmond in the militia. One key witness, Thornton, an enslaved boy aged between twelve and fourteen years, claimed that Sam told him that “after all the men or nearly all in this County had marched he [Sam] intended to March the Negroe soldiers and take the County” and in particular would kidnap the wives of William Smith and Mr. Gaskins.⁴

³ *Commonwealth v. Job Fallis*, Box 36, 1811-001, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from Commonwealth Causes from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁴ The defense must have questioned Thornton’s motives for offering his testimony as cross-examination centered on whether Thornton had “had quarrels with the Prisoner [Sam]” and how many occasions Thornton had had to whip Thornton and whether Thornton believed he deserved previous punishments at the hands of Thornton. Ibid.

Sam's defense lawyer attempted to show that Sam had neither the motivation nor ambition for implementing such a plan. William McClanahan testified that he had "known prisoner from his infancy until the age of eighteen" and that Sam was "not considered vicious but rather lazy." John Foster, Sam's former owner, also testified that Sam "was not a vicious negro, but required whipping for lazyness." This testimony appeared to determine whether Sam's threats of inciting a rebellion against the white residents of Fauquier posed a credible threat, especially at a time when the local militia was out of the county serving during the war.⁵ Sam was later transported out of the Commonwealth of Virginia, thus removing him as an immediate threat to the security of the Jeffries family and other families in the neighborhood.⁶

Slave Unrest during the 1850s

As time passed, the resistance exhibited by enslaved persons in each county differed, based on the unique circumstances, perceived fears and threats, and options for relieving the tensions between master and slave. As seen in previous chapters, evidence of increased acts of arson in both Fauquier and Loudoun served as one means of displaying frustration with enslavement. The number of individuals and groups who ran

⁵ *Commonwealth v. Sam, negro slave of Enoch Jeffries*, Box #7, 1813-012, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from Ended Causes, AAHA.

⁶ It is unclear from extant records whether Fauquier County magistrates sentenced Sam to be hanged (and later granted clemency by the Governor) or sentenced him to be sold and transported outside the bounds of the United States. For Sam's final sentence see "Slaves Hanged or Transported for Conspiracy and Insurrection 1785-1831" Appendix in Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 329. Out of the 236 enslaved persons Schwarz identified as having been either hanged or transported for conspiracy or insurrection between 1785 and 1831, Sam was notably the only one from Fauquier, Loudoun, or Prince William counties in northern Virginia, yet among those convicted Sam came from the most northern of the Virginia counties.

away from Fauquier increased during the 1850s as shown in the number of extant runaway slave advertisements, while the number of advertisements for runaways from Loudoun and Prince William diminished. These differences suggest that more stringent control over the movements of enslaved persons in Loudoun and Prince William reduced opportunities for those enslaved persons to successfully escape or to elude patrols, thus slaveholders had a decreased need to publish runaway ads. In Fauquier, enslaved persons responded to local conditions of enslavement with increasingly greater numbers of both individual and large group escape attempts (see table 15). While self-purchase and manumission in Fauquier and Loudoun remained a slight option for enslaved, it dwindled to near extinction in Prince William, as reflected in the limited options for creating freedom expressed in wills and the nearly extinguished hope for manumission (see figure 66). The only exceptions appeared to be manumissions ordained or required by religious pressure or beliefs.⁷

⁷ Reverend John Towles' manumission of ten enslaved persons was certainly motivated by the position of his church that forbade ministers from holding enslaved property. The enslaved women and children Towles manumitted on October 29, 1845 were immediately sent to Liberia for colonization on November 1, 1845 on the ship Roanoke. Towles to Sylvia Jackson, Prince William County Deed Book 19: 77; Towles to Violet Peachy, Ibid., 78; Towles to Anna, Mary, Violet, and Eliza Pinckard, Ibid., 78; Towles to Mary Taylor, Ibid., 79; Towles to Emily, Maria, and Christianna Sanders, Ibid., 79. For the colonization of Towles' slaves see Manuscript Ship's List, Reel 314, Records of the American Colonization Society, Library of Congress as posted on the *Virginia Emigrants to Liberia* website, <<http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/liberia/index.php?page=Home>>. In 1856 Joseph Janney freed seven members of Rachel Carter's family on September 2, 1856. Though no evidence has been found that Joseph Janney was a Quaker, he was clearly involved in business with Phineas Janney and Samuel H. Janney, both notable Quakers in northern Virginia. Joseph Janney's holding of Rachel Carter and her family may have been under an agreement of them remaining under his nominal ownership until such time as they were prepared to face freedom and certain eviction from Virginia. Janney to Carter &c., Prince William County Deed Book 23: 416.

Table 15. Number of advertised runaways by decade by county.

	Fauquier	Loudoun	Prince William
1800-1809	21	24	39
1810-1819	35	43	24
1820-1829	27	49	21
1830-1839	66	48	27
1840-1849	33	35	29
1850-1860	67	33	22
Total	249	232	162

Source: Northern Virginia Runaway Database.

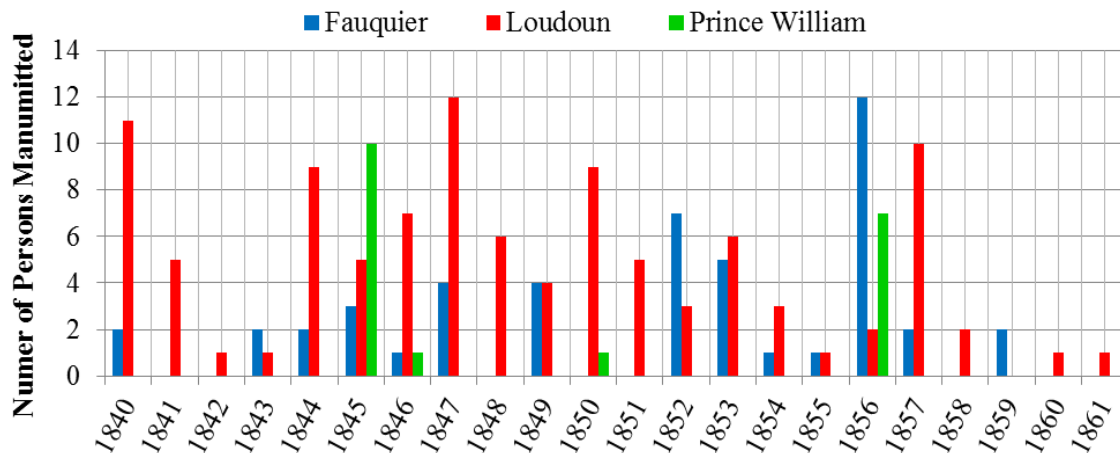


Figure 66. Number of enslaved persons manumitted, 1840-1861.

Sources: Fauquier County Deed Books 39-58; Loudoun County Deed Books 40-5T; and Prince William County Deed Books 19-23.

Decreasing enslaved population in Prince William, both in absolute numbers as well as percentage of the total county population, suggested the devastating effects of slave sales and removal of enslaved forces on the potential for family creation and stability (see figure 67 and figure 68). In the face of limited options for freedom, either

through manumission or flight, the potential for safety-valve tension relief also diminished. Combined with increasing antagonism against the free black population, tensions between whites and blacks amplified until flashpoints of violence erupted in Prince William, especially during the turbulent 1850s.

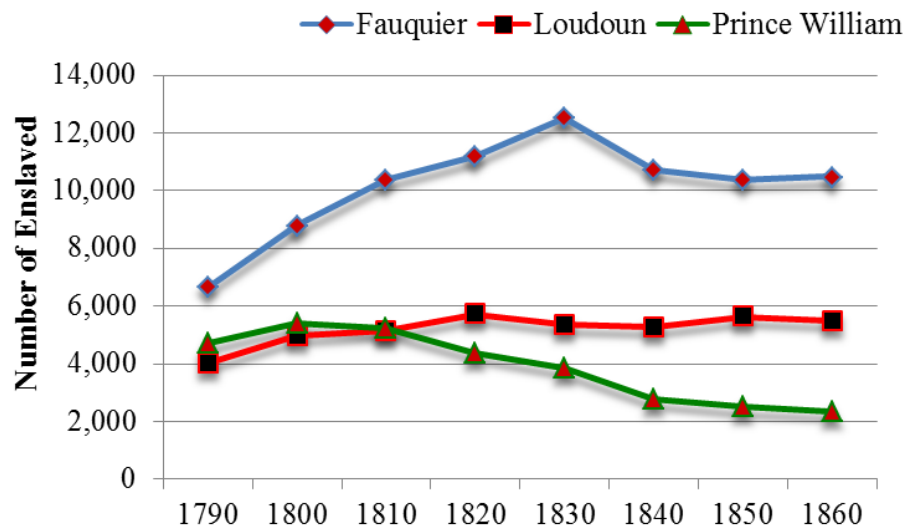


Figure 67. Enslaved population in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William Counties, 1790-1860.

Source: Decennial Census Records, Social Explorer.

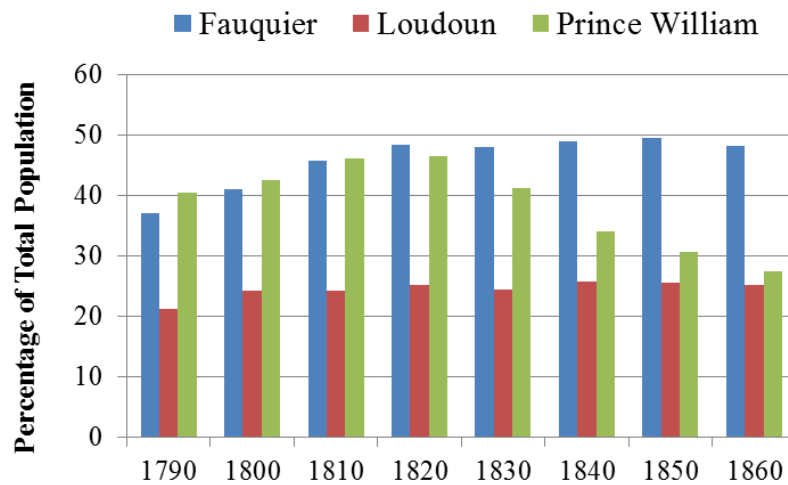


Figure 68. Enslaved population as a percentage of total county population.

Source: Decennial Census Records, Social Explorer.

Between 1849 and 1859 Prince William residents in particular faced several challenges to peace and order when incidents of violence forced whites and blacks to come to terms with the social tensions of slavery. Members of the white and black community closely monitored interrogations and judicial proceedings to understand circumstances prompting the commission of violent acts, gauge the threat of servant insurrection, and develop their own ideas about appropriate punishment. While verdicts handed down by county justices reflected the legal statutes imposed on slaves following changes to the Criminal Code in 1849, they also indicated the fears of the community over imposing social order, protecting property values, and setting an example against future acts of rebellion.

By 1850, “a great and growing spirit of insubordination” seemed to exist among the enslaved population of northern Virginia and especially Prince William County,

according to Fairfax resident Dr. Richard Chichester Mason. Reacting to the death of his cousin, Gerard Mason, at the hands of Gerard's enslaved woman, Agnes, (as discussed in chapter two), Mason opined on the various causes of insubordination in area slaves. First, the proximity of Prince William "to the walls of the national Capital" meant that the enslaved population of northern Virginia could be influenced by the "disgraceful and unprincipled disturbance" occurring in the capital "upon the subject of our slave property." Second, the "immigration of northern men amongst us," according to Mason, also presented an unsettling influence upon slaves. Third, and perhaps most alarming, was "the criminal interference and tampering with these slaves not by northern men, but native born, Virginia abolitionists of the Giddings Order."⁸ The extent of unrest among Prince William slaves during the decade was exhibited in the number of violent attacks upon the white population and especially upon slaveholders and overseers.

In Prince William County, tensions between Richard Porter, an overseer on William H. Gaines's farm, and some of Gaines's slaves led to open conflict in March 1852. Porter, in his attempt to "control the boys" and perhaps seeking to demonstrate his authority over the enslaved work force, requested the assistance of a well-digger working

⁸ Mason's letter was in response to a petition requesting clemency for Agnes, the enslaved woman convicted of murdering Dr. Mason's cousin, Gerard Mason, of Woodbridge plantation in Prince William County. Dr. Mason firmly rejected any cause for clemency and believed that any mitigation of the circumstances would cause further troubles among the enslaved population. "Letter from R. C. Mason [Dr. Richard Chichester Mason] of Fairfax County to Governor John Buchanan Floyd," January 14, 1850, Box #3, Folder #6, Accession #43924, Executive Papers of Governor John Buchanan Floyd, Library of Virginia. Dr. Mason likely referred to the Congressional representative from Ohio's Western Reserve, Joshua Reed Giddings, an outspoken antislavery advocate. While Giddings upheld the legal right to enslaved property, Giddings nonetheless argued that this was not a moral right. As such, Giddings declared that slave revolts and acts of resistance were "entirely justifiable in God's sight." James B. Stewart, "Christian Statesmanship, Codes of Honor, and Congressional Violence: The Antislavery Travails and Triumphs of Joshua Giddings," in *In the Shadow of Freedom: The Politics of Slavery in the National Capital*, ed. Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press published for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 2011), 39.

on the place to help tie up George and move him to the barn.⁹ The experience haunted George who “had never [been] tied before in his life,” according to Gaines’s white neighbor Wellington Finch (who overheard Tom tell of George’s whipping and response). Finch learned that following the whipping George “set in the Kitchen” the rest of the day with an axe in his hand saying he “meant to kill Porter.” Tom believed it “would not be long” before there “would be a fuss there” at the Gaines’s farm and that Wellington Finch “might hear of it.”¹⁰ George apparently gathered his friends, Tom, Arthur, and Tarlton, to seek revenge upon Porter by punishing him in an equally humiliating and painful way, hinting at larger discontent between Porter and the enslaved workers.¹¹

On the following Monday, as Porter rode on his horse to inspect the various fields, the four men stalked Porter. When Porter arrived to a location somewhat secluded from the nearby road, the four men attacked, threw him to the ground, tied his hands and pulled his clothes down, laying bare Porter’s entire back side. Despite carrying both a double-barrel pistol and knife for defense, Porter found himself pinned to the ground

⁹ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger argued that overseers faced problems of “how and when to employ extreme punishments, whether brutal reprisals might create a brooding, vengeful workforce, or worse, precipitate additional runaways.” In addition, sometimes “even the mildest correction could result in an extreme result.” Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 236-238 and 237 (quote).

¹⁰ While Tom was eating dinner at Wellington Finch’s home, Finch, a white neighbor to the Gaines’ farm, overheard enslaved man Tom as he reported Porter’s intentions and George’s response to the whipping. Finch recalled that Tom was “right smart in Liquor when he held the above conversation” but not so much as to be considered drunk. The prisoner’s counsel objected to Finch’s testimony, saying it only applied to Tom and not the other three enslaved men, but the court allowed the testimony and granted counsel the right to file an exception, even though the court thought it “immaterial” to the adjudication of the case. “Testimony of Wellington Finch,” *Commonwealth v. George*, LP (1852) 001055_00357, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

¹¹ During the ensuing assault on Porter, Porter later admitted he “called on George to spare my life” to which George replied “no – you recollect the other morning?” alluding to the whipping that Porter had administered to George, further confirming that the coordinated attack was meant as an act of revenge. “Testimony of Richard L. Porter,” *Commonwealth v. George*, LP (1852) 001055_00357, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

while at least some of the men severely beat him with their grubbing tools. The assault lasted until Arthur entreated the other to come away, quite possibly because he feared that they would be discovered. After the four enslaved men left the scene, two white men traveling towards Brentsville did walk near the site, noticed Porter, and offered him their assistance.

The trials against George, Tom, Arthur, and Tarlton generated “considerable excitement” in Prince William County. According to a report in the *Alexandria Gazette*, “some popular demonstrations of feeling were made on the subject in Brentsville,” the seat of the county court regarding the court’s punishment.¹² Instead of a sentence of death or sale and transportation, each enslaved man, according to the divided court, would receive a total of ninety stripes over a two month period, administered in three separate phases.¹³

The excitement over the assault on an overseer, an agent of control in the master-slave relationship, and a trial that resulted in a punishment believed by some too lenient led to a meeting “of the citizens of Brentsville and its vicinity” held at the Prince William court house. The meeting took on the air of a political discussion as the gathered community appointed a meeting chair and secretary to record and publish the meeting resolutions. Responding in part to news that “a report [had been] circulated in the county, that if the prisoners had been separately tried, the court would have sentenced George to be hanged,” the assembled members of the community discussed the details of the

¹² *Alexandria Gazette*, March 11, 1852.

¹³ “Mittimus,” *Commonwealth v. George*, LP (1852) 001055_00357, Prince William County Clerk’s Loose Papers, online.

assault, each slaves' role in the affray, and the performance of commonwealth attorney and prisoners' counsel. According to the recording secretary, the meeting resolved that "if there has been a failure of justice in this case, it was not for want of the prosecution." Commending the prosecutorial skills of Commonwealth Attorney Col. Eppa Hunton and his assistant, Charles Sinclair, the meeting noted that their "great ability...was remarked by the court at the close of the trial." Releasing Hunton and Sinclair from blame in what was apparently an unpopular ruling of the court, the meeting noted also that the four slaves "by the division of the court ... were acquitted of the offence."¹⁴

The actions of the Brentsville neighborhood in 1852 confirm the public role of the neighborhood in judging what its members deemed a proper punishment for slaves who upset the power structure. Gathering together to discuss the case and the outcome of the trial, residents at the Brentsville meeting supported Hunton and Sinclair, respected members of the bar and county elites, and decried the inability of court magistrates to unify in their response to violence against agents of control. Available records do not indicate Gaines's response to the assault. His recorded testimony merely indicates that after the assault, the four enslaved men travelled to speak with Gaines in Warrenton, where he resided. Whether Porter continued as Gaines's overseer and how Gaines dealt with George, Tom, Arthur, and Tarlton after the trial remains unknown. Considering the amount of scrutiny the neighborhood placed on Gaines's men, it certainly would have been difficult for them to remain in the Brentsville area.

¹⁴ "Public Meeting in Pr. William," *Alexandria Gazette*, March 11, 1852.

In 1859, a scuffle revealed the tensions between a forty-six year old hired slave named Jim and an overseer named John Thompson in Prince William County.¹⁵

Thompson had ordered Jim to haul a load of fodder, but Jim resisted, stating “it was his day to go home.”¹⁶ As the sun started to rise, Thompson told Jim to finish the work. Upon Jim’s continued refusal, Thompson offered Jim the use of a mule to ride home to make up for any time lost while completing the task for Thompson.¹⁷ Jim then apparently threatened Thompson with an axe. Thompson responded by drawing a pistol and shooting four times at Jim, who continued to advance and wrestled the overseer to the ground.

¹⁵ Jim’s age was recorded in an agreement between Governor John Letcher and Thomas Rosser and John W. Larrius, contractors on the Covington and Ohio Rail Road to hire out convict free blacks and slaves from the state penitentiary. Agreement between John Letcher and Thomas Rosser and John W. Larrius, Box #3, Folder #8, Accession #36787, Executive Papers of Governor John Letcher as transcribed by Ronald R. Turner in “Prince William County – Governors Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863”(2008), 198.

¹⁶ According to an agreement reached between Jim, Thompson, and Thompson’s employer, Mr. Fairfax, Jim would be allowed time to regularly visit his abroad family. The events in question occurred on Saturday, February 5, 1859, so Jim possibly had an arrangement to be allowed to go his home on Saturdays. Court records indicate Jim was the property of William M. Lewis, so the fact he was working for Fairfax might indicated Jim was hired out for the year away from his home at the Lewis farm. *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm. Although Thompson only refers to his employer as “Mr. Fairfax” in the court transcript, Fairfax might have been John W. Fairfax, a wealthy farmer from nearby Aldie, in Loudoun County. According to the 1860 Census Slave Schedules, a John “Thomson” employed or hired five slaves from owner John Fairfax of Aldie, Loudoun County. The group included four females aged 7, 10, 13, and 40, and only one boy aged 9. John Thomson also employed two slaves from William A. Dennis of Aldie, two men aged 19 and 21. Perhaps if the Thompson-Fairfax business arrangement was not hampered by the loss of Jim to the public works, Thompson was able to continue working for Fairfax and even employ some of Fairfax’s enslaved women for his own household needs. In this slave schedule, Zebulon Kankey is listed directly after Thomson (Thompson?) giving further credence to the fact that these are indeed the men involved in Jim’s case, since Thompson reported he first went to Kankey’s store after the attack, presumably a short distance. According to the 1860 population schedules, John W. Fairfax of Aldie was a married 35 year old farmer with real estate valued at \$70,000 and a personal estate of \$65,000. By 1860 twenty-seven year old John Thomson, wife Margaret, and infant daughter Emily had acquired real estate valued at \$1,000 and a personal estate of \$100 on their farm located near Kankey. 1860 Federal Census, Prince William County, Virginia, Population Schedules.

¹⁷ Thompson’s neighbor James W. Havener testified he saw Thompson “in the morning about sunrise” when Thompson arrived at Havener’s place after the attack. *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm.

Alerted by his cries for help, Thompson's wife arrived, and begged Jim to stop while shouting for help. She proceeded to hit Jim with a stick; at this interference Jim declared "don't you come here or I will kill you too" and promptly knocked Mrs. Thompson down with a blow to her arm, causing her to twist her foot. She later testified that she "was so scared it [Jim's blow] did not hurt me." Jim fled from the scene. After the assault, Thompson went to a neighbor's house, looking for assistance and for Jim. He then proceeded to Kankey's store to report the incident to Kankey (presumably Justice of the Peace Zebulon A. Kankey) and to seek medical treatment for the wounds on his head. As expected in a time of social crisis, the victim or his neighbors helped spread news of the event, and Thompson contacted a county justice to initiate action against the accused. Justice Kankey swore out a warrant for Jim's arrest on February 7, 1859.

After Jim's apprehension, the Prince William County Court tried him for the assault on Thompson and unanimously decided to sentence Jim to be "sold and transported beyond the limits of the United States and shall never afterwards return into this State," a lighter sentence, possibly in consideration of the case's particular facts, than might have been imposed for the crime of violence against a white man.¹⁸ John and Margaret Thompson represented a class of young property-poor residents of the county who worked under contracts for more prosperous landowners, but aspired to gain land and property.¹⁹ Although Thompson had purchased some property, he had worked as overseer for Mr. Fairfax since March of 1858. The young man reported having "some

¹⁸ *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm.

¹⁹ At the time of the trial, Thompson reported he was only twenty-seven years old, but had recently purchased a farm. *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm.

difficulty” with Fairfax’s slaves, shown particularly by the experience of having three slaves abscond during that year (including Jim). Still, Thompson declared his confidence that he could subdue a recalcitrant slave and impose punishment, provided the slave “does not make battle.”²⁰ To ensure control, Thompson, like other overseers and slaveholders, carried a weapon as a measure of protection.²¹

Jim threatened Thompson with harm, but did not actually use a weapon on Thompson other than his hands and a piece of wood picked up during the confrontation. He left Thompson bloodied and bruised, but alive. The attack on Mrs. Thompson also bears scrutiny. Would the court have been so lenient to Jim if he had hurt or touched a woman of higher socio-economic class? Jim’s sentence suggests justices considered the merits of the case, the level of violence, Jim’s value as chattel property, and quite possibly the social status of the victims before issuing a sentence that allowed Jim to live, but removed him as a threat to other Prince William citizens.²² This incident also reveals

²⁰ *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm. A survey of newspaper runaway ads for 1857, 1858, and 1859 reveal no extant ads published by either Fairfax or Thompson suggesting that they believed the three runaways were only seeking a temporary respite or were captured shortly after their flight. In his testimony, Since Thompson started working for Mr. Fairfax in March 1858, he experienced “some difficulty” with the Fairfax slaves. Thompson stated he had “whipped one of them” prior to two slaves running away from him in 1858. In 1859, Thompson lost three enslaved men due to running away, including Jim. Of the three, Jim was the only one who did not “come back to Mr. Fairfax’s” after their flight. Testimony of John Thompson, *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm.

²¹ While Thompson claimed only a limited knowledge of firearms, his wild shots did make contact with Jim. Once Jim was in custody, Dr. L. A. Jennings reported Jim suffered from a wound to the collarbone where a bullet had grazed the skin.

²² Jim’s case did reach the consideration of Governor Wise and on March 25, 1859, Wise commuted the sentence to “labor on the public works.” *Commonwealth v. Jim*, Box #17, Folder #3, Pardons, March 1859, Accession 36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, misc reel 4213, microfilm. Apparently Jim posed some threat to Prince William County, but not enough of a public menace to be executed or transported out of the state. Instead, he became property of the Commonwealth of Virginia to serve his days working for the public weal. This decision also bears some scrutiny. According to historian Philip J. Schwarz, Governor Wise criticized the system of slave transportation and sought to find alternate means of

much about the relationship between the hired slave, Jim, and his overseer, Thompson. Jim's actions demonstrated an awareness of the terms of his hire contract and a determination to be a master of his own time and labors. Thompson's attempt to renegotiate the terms of the labor agreement signified his understanding that the power structure of their relationship had changed and negotiation might serve both interests than a show of force.

Historian William Link declared the experience of Jim's attack on the Thompsons and the ensuing trial served as an example of "deteriorating discipline" among the enslaved in a time of increased slave hiring and less direct paternalism. Link argued that Thompson's actions "to reassert slaveholder authority" should be viewed in light of this changing dynamic, a trend that shaped not only Virginia politics throughout the 1850s, but also altered the relationships between master and slave.²³ Viewing Jim's actions in that light, it is clear that he had certain expectations as an employee – that he would be able to go home to his family on the weekend without hindrance. When Thompson demanded Jim complete a task on Saturday, despite offering a solution to getting home faster, Jim reacted first not as an enslaved man, but as an employee with presumed rights. Only when Thompson refused to relieve Jim of the assigned task did Jim resort to violence to press the issue. Actions by George, Tom, Arthur, Tarlton, and Jim in Prince

dealing with slave convicts. The resulting "Act providing for the employment of negro convicts on the public works," created on April 7, 1858, authorized the Governor to reallocate convicts sentenced to transportation to instead serve a sentence of life on Virginia's public works. The timing of the Act suggests that even the Governor expressed doubts about the best way to dispose of slaves convicted of a variety of crimes in a slave system designed to maintain racial social order. This Act allowed the state to recoup work from convicts on vital state projects like the Covington and Ohio Railroad. Philip J. Schwarz, *Slave Laws in Virginia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 114.

²³ William Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 51.

William County demonstrated the resolve of some enslaved men to respond to their conditions of enslavement with violent acts of resistance. These responses developed out of the hopelessness that arose from the deterioration of the African American community in Prince William County and signaled a perceptible increase in the willingness to use violence by enslaved persons to resist slaveholder control.

“It is the muttering of a storm whose full fury will inevitably follow the course now pursued:” Dissent and Insurrection Fears in the Turbulent Year of 1856

On January 8, 1856, the *Alexandria Gazette* published a letter from “A Farmer” of Loudoun County asking the farmers of Virginia “to hold meetings, to determine upon some more efficient court of treatment to be pursued toward their slaves, as will secure, at least, a little obedience from them, and, at the same time, prevent them from running off and escaping to the Northern States daily?” This “Farmer” called not only on “our patriotic statesmen” to “present suitable resolutions...to obtain the desired object” but also on “particularly the writers of Fairfax and Fauquier counties” to “swap ideas...on the subject.” With concerns centered on Leesburg, the letter writer called for a meeting of “every slave-holder of Loudoun county” to “adopt suitable resolutions for the more effectual security of the slaves of Loudoun.”²⁴ One responding correspondent from Fairfax County offered five resolutions for improving “the manners and conducts of slaves, and to prevent their running off and being stolen.” First, restrict Christmas and other holidays to three days in length “applying alike to those who are kept at home and

²⁴ “A Farmer,” “To the Farmers of Virginia,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 8, 1856.

those who are hired out.” Second, the slaveholder should personally select masters when hiring out slaves rather than trusting the judgment of the enslaved. Third, the correspondent advised preventing the attendance of slaves at public hirings, either as prospective hires or as spectators. Another source of suspicion were free blacks, and “Fairfax” advocated “proper legislation concerning the free negroes of the State.” Finally, “Fairfax” promoted legal punishment of “all the abolitionists you can catch.” These measures, if “strictly practiced,” would vastly improve the “health, morals, manners, and value of your slaves,” according to “Fairfax.”²⁵

“A Farmer” responded to the Fairfax letter by elaborating on the problems with slave management in Loudoun claiming that

the slaves of Loudoun county, Va., run about more, visit more, and receive more visitors than their masters—that they attend to their business with less proper attention—that they play cards, hussle cups, pitch quoits, cockfight it [sic] for money, and when cash is not convenient, frequently stake their clothing, and get drunk four times more frequently than their masters—save some few special cases.

In “Farmer’s” perspective, the indulgences of a few masters who allowed their slaves to “run about every night, and spend Sundays and other holidays at grogshops, drinking, gambling, &c.” made it all the more difficult for the rest of the slaveholders to “manage” their own slaves. His proposed meeting in Loudoun would call upon both the “big men” and “little men” of the county “to correct the evil habits of their servants.”²⁶ “Farmer”

²⁵ “Fairfax,” “Management of Slaves,” *Alexandria Gazette*, January 21, 1856.

²⁶ “Farmer’s” distinction between “big” and “little” men of the county possibly referred to the strata of economic class structure with wealthy slaveholders, landowners, and public officials at the top (“big men”) and white men with few or no slaveholdings and little or no land as the “little” men. This distinction and attempt at racial class solidarity around the banner of slave management, if so intended, would be complicated by the number of Quaker men with no slaveholdings who also maintained positions of power

further called upon the “[g]entlemen of the upper counties of Virginia” to press for more stringent legislation “to prevent negroes from escaping to the Northern States so successfully, as they now do.” Legislation that would restrict movement of slaves to less than one mile from their place of servitude (for an owner or owner-by-hire), unless authorized to navigate further via a written pass, as well as impose a fine of two dollars per mile distant from their authorized residence; the fines to be paid “by the person claiming the services of the negro at the time.” These measures would challenge blacks “so frequently for their passes, that they could not, as they now can, foot it, or mount a horse and ride through the entire county of Loudoun, en route for the Northern States.”²⁷ In “Farmer’s” mind, indulgent masters, lack of community oversight in challenging the mobility of the enslaved, and the absence of legislation that penalized failures to manage movement effectively were leading causes of runaways. To address these problems, “Farmer” advocated discussion and action at the county, regional, and state level.

This call to action prompted a series of meetings over the next few months to discuss the problems of runaways and management of slaves. During a meeting held in Leesburg on Court Day, February 11, 1856, several resolutions addressed the problems of runaways. First, attendees affirmed that it was “the duty of all slave-holders to take some speedy and efficient means to arrest this great and increasing evil” through a concerted

in the county government. J. William Harris discussed identity among whites in the Augusta, Georgia hinterlands and determined that “even profound racism on the part of wealthy planters did not destroy consciousness of class differences among whites.” These class divisions meant that clear racial solidarity could not be strictly maintained when poor whites relied upon an illicit trade between themselves and blacks (enslaved and free) as a commercial enterprise that benefited both groups and for whom slave ownership was not financially feasible. J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 66 (quote) and see chapter two.

²⁷ “A Farmer,” “A Little More on the Management of Slaves,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 6, 1856.

and coordinated effort. Towards this end, the Leesburg group wanted to gather ideas and adopt “suitable measures to prevent the escape of runaway slaves” from other slaveholders across the border counties of Virginia.²⁸

The problem of control and the perceived loss was keenly felt by some Loudoun slaveholders. According to the estimate provided by “Southron” in the *Alexandria Gazette*, between June 1855 to June 1856 Loudoun County slaveholders had lost “at least sixty thousand dollars” by the escape of slaves, and by June 1856 “a growing spirit of insubordination seems to exist” among the slave population. One slaveholder hoped to rally other around his call for action: “let those of us who are in favor of the *regulation*, rather than the *abolition* of this institution, show them that something *can be done*, and that *we will do what we can*.”²⁹ This spirit of community action may have resulted in the arrest and incarceration of nine slaves who had been “detected in making their escape” from the area near Salem and Rectortown in Fauquier County. A correspondent to the newspaper noted that “the people of Loudoun and Fauquier are taking steps to preserve their property from the arts and designs of persons supposed to be concerned in the matter.” This assertion hinted at a suspicion that the runaways had received aid and that community members banded together to “take steps” to address unrest and resistance.³⁰

At the rescheduled June meeting in Loudoun, attendees called for publication, especially in the *Alexandria*, *Leesburg*, and *Warrenton* newspapers, of the particular laws

²⁸ “Public Meeting,” *Alexandria Gazette*, February 25, 1856. This meeting was later postponed to June 28, 1856 in order to wait on publication and distribution of the Acts of Assembly, especially new legislation relating to the control of enslaved property. “Loudoun County,” *Alexandria Gazette*, May 5, 1856; and *Alexandria Gazette*, June 23, 1856.

²⁹ “Southron,” *Alexandria Gazette*, June 23, 1856. Emphasis in the original.

³⁰ “Fugitives Captures,” *Daily Dispatch*, August 4, 1856.

created by Virginia legislators in response to the perceived crisis in control that dealt with the prohibition of slave hiring in the District of Columbia, the prevention of slave escapes, and the increase of rewards for apprehended runaways. So concerned were these northern Virginia slaveholders, not only for the control of slaves on Virginia soil but also for the cooperation of citizens north of the Potomac River, that the group authorized a force of thirty-nine representatives to collect subscriptions to finance publication of Virginia's Acts of Assembly increasing the rewards for runaway slaves in newspapers printed in Maryland and Pennsylvania and the distribution of hand bills with similar information.³¹ To more immediately address the problem of runaways, a committee would "examine the law respecting patrolling, and, if necessary, to apply to the County Court of Loudoun to establish a patrol upon the Potomac river" to guard the riverfront borders of northern Virginia.³²

As indicated by the series of slaveholder meetings held in Loudoun County the first few months of 1856, a heightened sense of tension between slaveholders and enslaved existed across northern Virginia. This tension grew as the months passed and the presidential campaign heated up. Slaveholders might pretend that enslaved were not aware of the antislavery rhetoric embedded in political speeches, yet this delusion failed to credit the many communication networks in place among the enslaved. Twenty years earlier Ethan Allen Andrews observed that a "sufficient number" of "colored people of the south" were literate enough to "obtain all the information from the newspapers which

³¹ "Public Meeting," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 7, 1856. The subscription committee included members of prominent slaveholding families from across northern Virginia including the Berkeley, Bruin, Carter, Dulany, Hunton, Kephart, Noland, Roberson, Tebbs, Tyler, and Washington families, many of whom had recently advertised for runaway slaves or would do so in the coming months.

³² "Public Meeting," *Alexandria Gazette*, July 7, 1856.

they perceive to be interesting to them.” Therefore, through “ten thousand channels of oral communication” news could be transmitted “until it reaches the most ignorant slave, upon the most remote and secluded plantation.” According to Andrews, slaves might “misunderstand” the importance of antislavery news gathered via these communication networks, but the reception of the news “at least keeps alive his thirst for liberty, and binds him more strongly to his fellows.”³³

As the number of runaways and the size of groups increased into the so-called “stampedes” in 1855 and 1856, especially from Fauquier and Loudoun counties, concern over controlling movement and restoring lost enslaved property increased for slaveholders while the attempts of the enslaved to mitigate their conditions of enslavement spilled over into more aggressive tactics. Slaveholder Richard Pratt Buckner sensed the growing friction between master and slave by September 1856 on his plantation at St. Bernard near Salem in northern Fauquier County. Buckner noted in his journal that he experienced “much trouble with my servants recently.” As a result of the “trouble” and perhaps in an effort to exert visible control over the rest of his enslaved work force, Buckner sold two of his enslaved laborers: Anthony and a male identified as “Pat & Saby’s son.”³⁴

One week after Buckner noted the “trouble” with his slaves, two cases of presumed arson took place followed by the flight of a group of slaves in September. On Monday night slaveholder Joseph Mead lost a stack yard comprised of stacks and ricks of

³³ “Letter XXII, Fredericksburg, July 25, 1835,” Ethan Allen Andrews, *Slavery and the Domestic Slave-Trade in the United States. In a Series of Letters Addressed to the Executive Committee of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race* (Boston: Light & Stearns, 1836), 159.

³⁴ Entry for Sunday, September 17, 1856, *The St. Bernard Diaries*, Vol. I., 1.

wheat and oats valued at \$1,700. The *Washingtonian* asserted the fire “was the work of an incendiary” since “every portion of the yard was found to be in flames at the same time.”³⁵ The following night an attempt to destroy John Gover’s home was foiled when Gover discovered the fire. Gover spotted the arsonist making his escape and was able to save his property.³⁶ The following Saturday night between fifteen and twenty slaves fled from Leesburg and its near neighborhood.³⁷

Troubles did not cease for some slaveholders. At the end of the October an attempt to set Mrs. Lane’s Leesburg home on fire was foiled. On Saturday, November 1, John Gover’s house was once again set on fire, but “fortunately discovered before much damage was done.” That same night Mr. Hineman’s dwelling near Hillsboro’ was destroyed.³⁸ Fauquier magistrates called out additional patrols to respond to this crisis of control.

Patrol claims for nine patrollers for a period of time described merely as the “fall of 1856” reveal that Fauquier magistrates appointed a patrol headed by Captain A. D. Smith during this uncertain time. Captain Smith’s patrollers each served between two and nineteen tours averaging between 7.25 and 8.5 hours per tour. All totaled, Smith’s patrol served 669 hours and charged Fauquier county \$44.96 for their services during the fall months of 1856, a costly intervention. Interestingly, Smith indicated that during this

³⁵ “Loudoun Items,” *The Washingtonian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

³⁶ “An Attempt to Fire,” *The Washingtonian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

³⁷ “Negro Stampede,” *The Washingtonian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, September 22, 1856.

³⁸ “Loudoun Items,” *Loudoun Mirror* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, November 5, 1856.

period the men patrolled at night as well as provided “day service” in their capacities as appointed patrols.³⁹

Smith’s patrol was not the only one appointed by Fauquier magistrates during the fall of 1856. According to Fauquier County Court Minutes, on August 26, 1856 magistrates appointed a five-man patrol for the neighborhood around The Plains and a five-man patrol for the area in and around Morrisville, each patrol to serve for a period of three months until the end of November.⁴⁰ In this case, Fauquier slaveholders might well have requested local magistrates form patrols, for a limited time period, to assist in controlling the unlawful movements of slaves across the county or to capture runaways, a task not specifically outlined in patrol appointments. Despite these efforts, the efficacy of the patrol system could be questioned, especially considering that at least eleven enslaved men ran away from Fauquier County during the month of September 1856.⁴¹

Fauquier magistrates ordered out additional patrols for the area bounded by Magisterial District Numbers 7 and 9 on October 27, 1856, each group to serve for a

³⁹ “Claim of A. D. Smith,” June 22, 1857, Box #23 1857-006, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from County Levy, AAHA.

⁴⁰ The court appointed Henry M. Byrne as captain and T. H. Foster, Hugh S. Graham, James A. Kirkpatrick, and James N. Lunceford “patrols of this County to act in the neighborhood of the Plains.” The same day the court appointed patrollers James M. Anderson, Bernard Oliver, Barnett Brooks, Anderson Embrey, and Oscar Pierce “to act in the neighborhood of Morrisville. Fauquier County Minute Book 42: 127.

⁴¹ On Saturday night, September 13, 1856, a group of ten enslaved men ran away from the Fauquier County plantations of Sally Smith, located near Orlean, and James K. Marshall, Dr. Stribling, and Mrs. E. L. S. Marshall. All but two were captured by “Mr. John T. Cookus and a party of men from Frederick Co.” on Wednesday, September 17, 1856. The news article does not specify the state, either Virginia or Maryland, where the apprehension took place but did identify that the news hailed from the *Romney Independent*, a newspaper published in Hampshire County, adjacent to Frederick County, Virginia. “1200 Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 16, 1856; “\$200 Reward!” Broadside Printed at the Berryville Gazette Office, AAHA Broadside Collection; “Runaways Arrested,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 23, 1856. In addition Robert Singleton reported that his enslaved man, Perry, ran away on Sunday night, September 21, 1856 from the Upperville area while hired to work at the farm of Joseph Fletcher, Sr. “\$200 Reward,” *Alexandria Gazette*, September 25, 1856.

period of three months.⁴² On November 24 that year Fauquier magistrates again appointed a patrol for the area in The Plains' district for another three months, this time appointing James W. Lunceford as captain.⁴³ The court also appointed a three month patrol to serve in Magisterial District No. 3 starting November 27.⁴⁴ Evidence from Fauquier County during this time indicates that residents in specific parts of the county (The Plains and Morrisville) experienced particular insecurities regarding the enslaved and free black population during the fall of 1856. No extant patrol claims specifically for the months of September, October, or November in 1856 from Loudoun or Prince William have been located so it is unclear whether magistrates in these counties, like in Fauquier County, appointed extra patrols to monitor enslaved and free black activities as a balm to soothe frayed nerves of the public or for more apparent threats such as preventing slaves from running away or reducing the likelihood of arson during the fall of 1856.⁴⁵

Prince William patrols submitted claims for more than twelve hundred hours of patrol service between June 1, 1856 and May 31, 1857, a sizeable leap in patrol tours from previous years (refer back to figure 23). The Prince William county court appointed at least two patrols during 1856, a nine man patrol in District No. 4 (Haymarket) to serve three months starting May 6 and a nine man patrol to surveil the neighborhood of

⁴² Fauquier County Court Minute Book 42: 158, 159.

⁴³ Fauquier County Court Minute Book 42: 171.

⁴⁴ Fauquier County Court Minute Book 42: 183.

⁴⁵ The Loudoun County Patroller Records collection does not contain any patrol claims or appointments for the period between March 1850 and October 1858. The AAHA holds copies of three Fauquier County patrol claims for 1856, all from patrol captain A. D. Smith for patrols that served during 1856. Loose Papers from Prince William County so far hold no patrol claims specifically for the fall months in 1856. Claims for unspecified service between June 1856 and May 1857 listed in the court minute book provide a general overview of the amount of hours served.

Bethlehem for three months commencing on July 7.⁴⁶ Patrols did diminish following the insurrection scare of December 1856 and the appointment of neighborhood patrols does not appear to coincide with the outbreaks of slave violence but rather appeared to be regular seasonal appointments, typically appointed in June – July and again in December, (based on the limited extant information). If county citizens had felt threatened by the enslaved community as the incidents of violence in Prince William occurred throughout the 1850s, the frequency of appointments and the number of patrols and hours of service should have proportionally increased. This does not appear to be the case in Prince William, and suggests that residents regarded the events as singular incidences based on “particular circumstances” rather than as part of a larger plot or rebellion.

On December 11, 1856 the New York *Herald* reported receiving “startling reports from Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana and elsewhere in the slaveholding States, of the discovery of alarming insurrectionary conspiracies among the negroes, and of the summary punishment of numerous detected offenders.” Far from “peculiar local circumstances,” these insurrection conspiracies apparently were discovered in many locations, and the *Herald* editor concluded that these plots “can only be accounted for upon the hypothesis of some general delusion lately diffused throughout the South, and acted upon spontaneously here and there, by the negroes themselves.” The *Herald* opined that “[t]he idea, no doubt, was that with Fremont’s election all the negroes of the South would be instantly emancipated or supported from the North in a bloody revolt” and “impudent and boisterous fire-eating” campaigners such as Virginia’s Governor Henry

⁴⁶ Prince William County Court Minute Book 17 (1856-1861): 6, 23.

Wise “prated to Southern audiences, with negroes all around them, of Fremont as an abolitionist—of his designs to drive the slaveholders out of Kansas, and to turn all the slaves of the South loose, to kill, burn and destroy.” Affirming the ability of enslaved and free blacks’ to vicariously take part in political discussions, the newspaper noted that they “pricked up their ears and listened...[and] taking these hints and putting them together, over their cabin fires, the negroes, we dare say, took their white masters at their word, and proceeded to arrange their plans accordingly for a counter-movement of rebellion.”⁴⁷

As the Christmas holidays neared, slaveowners tended to grow uneasy. In 1828 Fauquier slaveholder Richard Bernard Buckner opined that “the holidays of Christmas” were “a jubilee for negroes but a time of tribulation to most white people.”⁴⁸ The holidays meant a week’s off from labor for enslaved persons, yet also a short reprieve before the hires of the New Year separated enslaved husbands from wives, and parents from children. The local newspapers warned slaveholders that “[a]t no season of the year are negroes more liable to contract vicious habits and to impair their usefulness as during the Christmas holydays.” Acknowledging that “many masters will not maintain proper discipline upon their farms and plantations,” the *Richmond Enquirer* advised local magistrates to “assume the responsibility of enforcing with great rigor the laws”

⁴⁷ “Negro Insurrection Plots in the South The Fruits of Nigger Agitation,” *New York Herald*, December 11, 1856. Historian Harvey Wish cautioned against perceiving the tensions of 1856 as solely an “all-embracing slave plot in the South” when many of the tensions could be explained by “a panic contagion originating in the unusual political setting of the year.” Yet Wish allows that “a large number of actual slave plots did exist in 1856.” Suspicions combined with reportage of “the large crop of individual slave crimes reported, especially those directed against the life of the master” certainly bred wide-spread insecurity. Harvey Wish, “The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *Journal of Southern History*, 5, no. 2 (May 1939), 222.

⁴⁸ Entry for Friday, December 26, 1828, *The St. Bernard Diaries*, Vol. II, 18.

presumably through extra surveillance by constables and patrols and apprehension of trouble-makers.⁴⁹

Concerns of holiday rebellions countered the prevailing thought that extra freedoms, celebrations, distribution of treats or gifts, and liberal distribution of libations during the holiday season served as a safety-valve for slaves to relieve the stresses of enslavement. Evidence from at least some slaveholders in northern Virginia indicates that special gifts of money during the holidays incentivized slaves towards “good behavior” and away from resistance or misdeeds.⁵⁰ Some slaveholders and especially estate administrators made special provisions for the oversight of hired-out slaves during the holiday season. John M. Orr paid \$17.50 per year to board seven of the slaves belonging to the heirs of James Stephenson during the Christmas holidays in 1855 and 1856. Orr also provided cash “Christmas presents” and articles to Stephenson’s slaves during those holidays, perhaps to incentivize or reward “good” behavior.⁵¹ This practice was not a new tactic for northern Virginia slaveholders. John P. Philips, administrator for Joseph Thompson, paid a free black woman, Fanny Gillison, and Sarah Berry each \$6 “for

⁴⁹ “Advice to Slaveholders,” *Richmond Examiner* as published in *Fredericksburg News*, December 25, 1856.

⁵⁰ Christmas monetary gifts were especially used by estate administrators, probably as incentive for remaining under the control of the estate. Catharine Bradford’s administrator paid \$12.90 to “servants at Christmas” on December 25, 1852. Fauquier County Will Book 25: 248. John P. Philips, in his capacity as administrator for the estate of Joseph Thompson paid \$22.00 for “Xmas gifts to servants” and to cover the expenses to send hired slave Jackson to travel to Culpeper during Christmas 1853. Fauquier County Will Book 26: 162.

⁵¹ “The Children of James Stephenson, dec’d in account with John M. Orr, Guardian,” Loudoun County Guardian Accounts Book D: 257, 314. Although the seven servants were not named, Orr recorded hires and payments for eleven slaves owned by the late James Stephenson, meaning that four slaves did not require special arrangements during the holiday. The named slaves included Jenny, Margaret, Emily, Jerry, Julia Ann, Violet, Maria Jane and Mary and her three children. Loudoun County Guardian Accounts Book D: 257-258.

keeping servants during Xmas” over the Christmas holidays in 1853.⁵² Between 1847 and 1850 Edward Colston boarded the slaves belonging to the heirs of Thomas Colston “during Christmas week” in Loudoun County.⁵³ Loudoun County resident Mary Vandevanter, in her capacity as guardian for the heirs of Flavius T. Braden boarded the Braden slaves during the Christmas holiday in 1836.⁵⁴

Fauquier County magistrates may have responded to fears of insurrection and to concerns about lawlessness among the slaves and free blacks during the holidays when the authorities ordered out additional patrols across the county in the days before Christmas 1856. On December 11, James S. Thomson, a Justice of the Peace, appointed Christopher Metcalf captain of a patrol comprised of B. Saunders, P. B. Harry, William Murry, P. A. Clipstine (Klipstein) and Thomas Gant to patrol “at least once a week within the town of Salem, or adjoining neighbourhoods and other places suspected of having therein unlawful assemblies, or such slaves as may stroll from one plantation to another.”⁵⁵ Two days later, Warrenton merchant, John G. Beckham, asked the Warrenton Town Council to do something “in view of the uneasiness existing with regard to the

⁵² “Accounts for the Estate of Joseph Thompson from the portion of Charles E. Hume and Mary (Thompson) Hume, his wife, John P. Philips admr of Joseph Thompson,” Fauquier County Will Book 26: 162. “Clarke H. Thompson in Account with John P. Phillips admr of Joseph Thompson dec’d,” Fauquier County Will Book 26: 164.

⁵³ “The Heirs of Thomas M. Colston dec’d in account with Edward Colston, Guardian,” Loudoun County Guardian Accounts Book D: 171, 176.

⁵⁴ “The estate of Flavius T. Braden, dec’d in account with Mary Vandevanter, Guardian of the heirs,” Loudoun County Guardian Accounts Book C: 22.

⁵⁵ “Appointment of Patrol,” Box #23, 1857-010, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from County Levy, AAHA.

Negro population.” The council responded by dividing the city into nine sections and asking citizens within their respective districts to form night watches.⁵⁶

On Saturday, December 13, 1856, “a large number of negroes, male and female, were preparing for a big frolic somewhere in the neighborhood” of Alexandria. The Alexandria watchmen were alerted and members of the Mount Vernon Guards and Alexandria Riflemen, acting as an “auxiliary police force” surveilled the residence of Dr. Alexander and “captured thirty-two free and slave negro men and six women” participating in the assembly. Those who were unable to escape the dragnet were taken before local justices, and fined \$3.84 each before receiving “fifteen stripes.”⁵⁷ The *Richmond Whig*, responding to rumors and news, stated “We are no alarmist; but we think it behooves the good people of the State to be more than usually alert in times like these” and noted that in “various portions of Virginia, suspicion has been aroused on this subject, in the last few days” causing citizens of both Alexandria and Fauquier County to request arms from the Governor.⁵⁸ The *Whig* further advised that troubles with slaves and free blacks confirmed “the importance of organizing an efficient police in every county and neighborhood of the State.”⁵⁹

By December 22, 1856, the Fauquier County court decided that since it had not been “fully advised of the necessity of appointing a general patrol for this County,” it

⁵⁶ Town Council Minutes as quoted in Eugene M. Scheel, *The Civil War in Fauquier County Virginia* (Warrenton, Virginia: published by The Fauquier National Bank, 1985), 1.

⁵⁷ “The Slave Troubles in the South,” “In Virginia, from the *Alexandria Sentinel*, Dec. 16” as published in the *New York Daily Times*, December 18, 1856.

⁵⁸ “The Slave Troubles in the South,” “From the *Richmond Whig*, Dec. 16th” as published in the *New York Daily Times*, December 18, 1856.

⁵⁹ “The Slave Troubles in the South,” “From the *Richmond Whig*, Dec. 16th” as published in the *New York Daily Times*, December 18, 1856. See also Douglas R. Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election: Frémont, Freedom, and the Slave Conspiracies of 1856,” *Civil War History*, 61, no. 1 (March 2015), 47.

declined making any appointments but deferred this authority to county Justices of the Peace who could “as in their discretion they may deem proper” appoint a patrol for their locality.⁶⁰ The very next day Fauquier County Justice of the Peace, William L. Payne, ordered out two extra patrols on December 23, 1856 “to patrol until the first day of the next county court” throughout the county. In his appointment Payne included the usual duties to patrol at least twice a week in search of unlawful assemblies or slaves “as may stroll from one plantation to another” and amended the appointment to include additional responsibilities. Patrollers were charged with searching “in the most quiet and thorough manner” for “all arms, of every kind, in possession of negroes” and were given extra authority to “force open the doors of free negroes or of slaves in the absence of their masters if access be denied.”⁶¹ That same day Fauquier Justice William P. Ficklin appointed Wellington Millon captain of a seven-man patrol for the county.⁶² On December 26, 1856, Justice John G. Beale ordered out a patrol comprised of ten men to patrol until the “first day of the next County Court” and left strict instructions to patrol and visit “at least once a week, all negro quarters, and other places” suspected of holding unlawful assemblies or to apprehend any slave “strolling” from one plantation to another.⁶³

⁶⁰ Fauquier County Minute Book 42: 193.

⁶¹ Payne appointed John S. Embry captain of a patrol formed with Embry, Alexander P. Bower, William D. Brown, William H. Eustace, Henry Read, Thomas G. Murphy, John H. Crump, Thomas Lomax Jr., Charles Weaver, John Pilcher, and William M. Hansbrough. “Appointment of Patrol,” Box #23, 1857-008, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from County Levy, AAHA. Payne also appointed Jesse M. Peters captain of a patrol comprised of Peters, John Eskridge, Winfield S. George, John Eustace, Edwin Huffman, James C. Waller, Robert L. Cowne, George H. Stribling, Joseph D. Tulloss, and Leonard McCoy. “Appointment of Patrol,” Box #23, 1857-009, Fauquier County Free Negro / Slave Records from County Levy, AAHA.

⁶² “Patrol Appointment,” December 23, 1856, Box #23, 1857-007, AAHA.

⁶³ “Patrol Appointment,” December 26, 1856, Box #23, 1857-007, AAHA. Emphasis in the original.

All totaled, extant records show that Fauquier County patrols appointed during the December 1856 crisis reported at least 748 hours of patrol service and submitted claims for payments totaling \$49.40.⁶⁴ After the fact residents wondered if the effort was worth the expense. Fauquier resident, Robert Taylor Scott, recorded the temper of the times in a letter to his fiancée Fanny S. Carter who was staying in Salem, Fauquier County during the troubled winter of 1856. Scott noted that his extended family residing at Gordonsdale plantation “had been much excited the night before XMass upon the subject of an insurrection.” The family had “guns loaded & everything prepared to make a vigorous defence” while patrol guards were “mounted and recruits called in.” Scott learned that another neighboring plantation, Clover Hill, was “also in a very similar condition” in fearful anticipation of some insurrection. From Scott’s perspective the appearance of the area “must have been truly warlike.” Whether he wanted to calm Miss Carter’s fears or he truly doubted there was any credible threat, Scott opined in his New Year’s Eve epistle that “all this turmoil and excitement is wholly unnecessary, there is no occasion for fear.”

In Scott’s opinion:

the race is incapable of concerting and carrying out any well laid plot, they have neither the intellect to conceive nor the energy to carry out a conspiracy against

⁶⁴ Capt. Embrey’s patrol consisting of thirteen men submitted claims for 394 hours of patrol service in the month after December 23. “Patrol Claim, Capt. Embrey,” Box #23, 1857-008, AAHA. Capt. Millon’s patrol of nine men submitted claims for a total of 114 hours patrolling in the month after December 26 “Patrol Claim, Capt. Wellington Millon,” Box #23, 1857-007, AAHA. Capt. James Colvin’s patrol probably only served one night after December 26 as three of the patrols completed a nine hour tour each and two other patrollers served a six hour tour. Colvin submitted a claim for a total of 39 hours. “Patrol Claim of Capt. James Colvin,” Box #23, 1857-008, AAHA. Robert Willis and Grayson E. Oliger went out on a twelve hour patrol on Wednesday, December 17, 1856. “Patrol Claim,” Box #23, 1857-008, AAHA. Capt. Jesse M. Peters submitted a claim for a combined total of 177 hours of patrolling for the ten men under his command under an appointment to serve starting December 23, 1856. “Patrol Claim,” Box #23, 1857-009, AAHA. These totals do not include any payments made by the Warrenton Town Council for patrols serving from December 13, 1856 to January 7, 1857, supposed to be around \$90. Eugene M. Scheel, *The Civil War in Fauquier County Virginia* (Warrenton, Virginia: The Fauquier National Bank, 1985), 1.

their masters, we may naturally expect some insubordination on their part, some complaints in respect to the strictness of the patrols, yet I feel assured there can be nothing more.⁶⁵

Scott's impression of the unlikely possibility of a credible threat of large-scale insurrection was also pronounced in nearby Winchester, Virginia. The editor of the *Winchester Virginian* opined that

Our slaves are not capable of forming a comprehensive conspiracy, nor of carrying one out when formed for them...They may be occasionally be excited to discontent, insubordination, and even spasmodic outrage, by the machinations of incendiaries from the north, but any movement based on the constant assumption of such a state of things, would lead us to error."⁶⁶

A correspondent to the *Alexandria Gazette* likewise asserted that the "well known characteristics of the race preclude such an idea" that a comprehensive insurrection plot could be conceived or implemented. Stating his reasoning, the anonymous correspondent wrote:

Accustomed to obey, naturally improvident, thinking and caring little for tomorrow, provided all goes well today, unaccustomed to mental labor, without the intellect to conceive or energy to execute any concerted plan, the danger in question here, would seem groundless.⁶⁷

The real danger, then, would stem from "foreign aid," and to remedy this, masters and the community must restrict "the intercourse between degraded and depraved whites and our servants" since "[n]o good, and much evil, may result from it." To counter this danger, the correspondent asserted that

⁶⁵ "Letter from Robert Taylor Scott of Oakwood, Fauquier County, Virginia to Miss Fanny S. Carter, Salem, Virginia," December 31, 1856, Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

⁶⁶ "Panic Contagion," *Winchester Virginian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, December 27, 1856.

⁶⁷ S****, "The Late Excitement," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 8, 1857.

Subordination must be preserved; uniformly strict discipline enforced; not lax to-day and tight tomorrow; uniformity is what must be arrived at...Exercise always the same control; firm, at the same time judicious...Vary in our treatment, lessen the restraint; true to the old adage, 'give an inch, they want an el;' they become in subordinate and discontented.⁶⁸

The editor of the Warrenton *Flag of '98* also pondered the extent of the threat and likelihood of insurrection in a news article published in late December, 1856. According to the editor, "various and minute enquiries of gentlemen from this and adjacent counties, where rumors of a servile insurrection are rife and a subject of alarm" did not elicit "any evidence of even a probable cause to suspect the existence of any thing of the kind on the part of the slave population."⁶⁹ The *Winchester Virginian* reported panics over slave rebellions in Tennessee and South Carolina as well as in nearby Alexandria and Warrenton. The cause of the "Alexandria Panic," according to the *Winchester Virginian*, sprang from "a gathering for a negro dance at a house in the neighboring county which it turned out, had been used in the same way for some time" and under the influence of events in other parts of the south, the public "looks around with watchful suspicion" for signs of rebellion locally. Furthermore, the editor blamed the "certain indulgences—proper or improper—which had long been accorded [to their slaves]" that had been deemed harmless during periods of relative content, but in times of frenzy became suspicious. The *Winchester Virginian* blamed this "panic" as being more harmful to race

⁶⁸ S****, "The Late Excitement," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 8, 1857. Emphasis in the original.

⁶⁹ Like others, the author pondered the origins of insurrection fears, blaming "slaves somewhere in Texas, and instigated by Mexicans and half breeds settled in their midst" that "spread from mouth to mouth, until taken up by the press of the country, and through its potency, a molehill has been magnified into a mountain." Other demonstrations of slave unrest in Middle Tennessee were "instigated by white Abolition emissaries in their midst." The author blamed the "continued agitation of the subject by the press of the South" for instilling "a feeling of insubordination in the slaves." "Negro Insurrection Once More," Warrenton *Flag of '98* as published in the *Richmond Whig*, December 30, 1856.

relations than the “reams of abolition tracts and car loads of abolition incendiaries could do” which was to “believe themselves objects of dread to their superiors.”⁷⁰

Whether the threat to white safety was credible or fanciful imagination in Fauquier County, county officials were willing to order out patrols to provide a physical presence of control and order, especially during the Christmas season when “negroes are more liable to contract vicious habits and to impair their usefulness.”⁷¹ To meet the perceived threat, the *Flag* reported that “patrols have been appointed in this and the neighboring magisterial districts—a proceeding right and proper, for they are ever necessary in large slaveholding communities during the Christmas holidays, independent of any fear of servile insurrection.”⁷²

The *Flag*’s editor did not fault Virginia’s laws for enslaved persons, which he described as “stringent and wise,” only the “laxity and criminal disregard” of laws controlling slaves rendered “our Christmas holidays the time for the most dangerous orgies with the slave population of Virginia.” The worst danger, according to the *Flag*, came from the liberal application of alcohol. According to the *Flag*, slaves without passes from their owners

collect at the crossroad grogeries, where the cheap and deleterious stuff called whiskey is sold to them and consumed in quantities sufficient to produce beastly intoxication, and not unfrequently death. At these unlawful assemblies, which

⁷⁰ “Panic Contagion,” *Winchester Virginian* as reported in the *Alexandria Gazette*, December 27, 1856. The dance was most likely the “frolic” held at Dr. Alexander’s property near Alexandria that led to the arrest of thirty-nine enslaved and free black men and women as discussed earlier and reported in “The Slave Troubles in the South,” “In Virginia, from the *Alexandria Sentinel*, Dec. 16” as published in the *New York Daily Times*, December 18, 1856.

⁷¹ “Negro Insurrection Once More,” Warrenton *Flag of '98* as published in the *Richmond Whig*, December 30, 1856, and in the *Fredericksburg News*, December 25, 1856.

⁷² “Negro Insurrection Once More,” Warrenton *Flag of '98* as published in the *Richmond Whig*, December 30, 1856.

may be met with every few miles in the country, every kind of rascality and wickedness is plotted and determined upon by the slave population. Robbery, arson, and bloodshed are not unfrequently the result of these gatherings.

The *Flag*'s editor confirmed the importance of patrols when he maintained:

As many masters will not maintain proper discipline upon their farms and plantations, we trust that for the next few weeks the magistrates will assume the responsibility of enforcing with great rigor the laws for the punishment of slaves and free negroes. A well appointed patrol, composed of respectable and prudent men, and not of vagabonds and vicious boys, by arresting every slave found beyond the lines of his master's farm, would greatly improve the condition of every county in Piedmont and Tidewater Virginia.⁷³

In this case, the supposed failure of masters and overseers to maintain control necessitated a neighborhood response in the form of extra patrols.

The perceived fear of insurrection that swept across northern Virginia like a tidal wave as fall turned to winter manifested in various ways, casting a pall over the usual Christmas holiday festivities. One observer noted that the

grave faces, suspicious whispers, uneasy looks when one of 'the peculiar' suddenly entered; rooms bristling with the instruments of war; anxious watchings, the start occasioned by the moaning of the night-wind, the clutching of the pistol when the quiet of the small hours of the night was broken by the approach of some unwary rat, made us feel very little like 'taking Christmas.'⁷⁴

Loudoun County residents requested the protection of extra patrols during the Christmas holidays. A special eight-man patrol for Waterford and its vicinity headed by Jacob T.

Wine was approved in December 1856.⁷⁵ Loudoun resident, Elizabeth Noland, described the fears of insurrection in her neighborhood in a letter written to her daughter, Ella on

⁷³ "Negro Insurrection Once More," Warrenton *Flag of '98* as published in the *Richmond Whig*, December 30, 1856.

⁷⁴ S****, "The Late Excitement," *Alexandria Gazette*, January 8, 1857.

⁷⁵ "Appointment of Patrol," Patroller Records – 1856, Loudoun County Miscellaneous Papers, LCHAD.

December 29, 1856. Noland lamented that there had been “such a terrible excitement here ever since xmas” that she “did not feel much in the spirit of going from home.” Noland also reported that “several fires” had occurred including one that damaged “Mr Sanford Roger’s fine barn and stables and all his grain, supposed to have been set on fire by his own servants.” Noland chronicled the fears of her neighborhood during the insurrection panic by explaining that “no one feels safe in his own *house*, every body has provided themselves with firearms—what do you think? of a gun and revolver kept loaded in this house and a Bowie knife.”⁷⁶ Home defense as well as the presence of neighborhood patrols could not calm fears during the Christmas holidays in 1856.

Residents in Prince William County reacted to the perceived tensions and insurrection threat in the summer, fall, and winter of 1856. Magistrates called out patrols in June 1856 for the Haymarket neighborhood and in July 1856 for the Bethlehem neighborhood, each serving a term of three months, but court minutes did not report the appointment of any further patrols for the fall or Christmas holidays during 1856.⁷⁷ Even so, the county levy for the period of June 1856 to May 1857 included claims for 1,242 hours of patrol service with payments totaling \$143.13. While these figures represent

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Noland to Ella (Noland) MacKenzie, December 29, 1856, Ella Noland MacKenzie Papers, 3667, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as cited in John J. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 92.

⁷⁷ Prince William County Court Minute and Order Book 17 (1856 – 1861): 6, 23, microfilm. The next patrol appointment noted in court minutes was for the Haymarket neighborhood commencing on March 3, 1857. Prince William County Court Minute and Order Book 17 (1856 – 1861): 82, microfilm.

patrol service over an entire year, it can be presumed that a good share of these patrol hours were served during the Christmas holidays or during time of particular angst.⁷⁸

One event that did confirm fears of insurrection occurred in nearby Prince William County. The Haymarket neighborhood, near the confluence of Prince William, Fauquier, and Loudoun counties, seemed to be a place of particular concerns over unlawful slave mobility and growing tensions between enslaved and masters. Court records indicate that particular patrols had been authorized for the area throughout the 1850s.⁷⁹ On Christmas Eve, 1856, the threat of conflict became reality on Woodview plantation near Haymarket.

Woodview's master, George E. Green, was a white, fifty-five year old bachelor, farmer, and slaveholder.⁸⁰ On Christmas Eve, 1856, during the height of the insurrection panic, "Old Nelly," one of Green's enslaved women, decided to approach Green to request some concessions. First, she asked permission for her and her family to attend religious services, an activity some slaveholders considered a privilege, yet because of Nelly's well-known religious calling, something she valued. Apparently Green failed to concede to Nelly's request, so she asked him sell her family to a different master. After

⁷⁸ The Christmas holidays were in general a time of unease among slaveholders. The movement of hired out slaves across distances returning to home residences, the liberal application of ardent spirits in the slave quarters following a long harvesting season, and the reduced supervision over enslaved workers as parties, church services and home visits occupied the attentions of many slaveholders combined with pent-up frustrations led to tensions. Often slaveholders attempted to mitigate these tensions through the liberal dispersal of ardent spirits or distribution of gifts among the enslaved. Even so, Christmas holidays in Prince William during the 1850s proved to be a time of particular danger.

⁷⁹ The Prince William court ordered a six man patrol for "Haymarket and its vicinity" to serve "for the span of three months" beginning on November 5, 1850. Prince William County Court Order Book 15 (1846-1850): 444, microfilm. Court minutes for the period of 1851 to 1853 were lost, but a patrol for District No. 4 (later identified as the Haymarket neighborhood) was authorized by the court on June 7, 1854 and again on June 2, 1856. Prince William County Order Book 16 (1853-1856): 136, microfilm. Prince William County Court Order and Minute Book 17 (1856-1861): 6, microfilm.

⁸⁰ Susan R. Morton, *Survey Report, Woodview Site*, 1937 July 9.

Green denied the request, the other four members of Nelly's family, daughter Betsy, and grandchildren James, Elias, and Ellen "went in to the house and caught him."⁸¹

While accounts vary as to individual responsibility for actions against Green, repeated axe and shovel blows resulted in his death. Each member of Nelly's family played some role in Green's demise. After Green was fatally wounded and most likely dead, the enslaved family set the house on fire to mask the crime. Nelly, Betsy, Elias, and Ellen returned to their quarters; Elias went to a neighbor's farm to alert them of the fire.

The timing of Green's murder (at Christmas time and during an insurrection panic) and the fact that it was perpetrated under the guidance of an elderly enslaved woman raised important questions about the presumed protections of slaveholder paternalism and the potential source of violent conflict between master and enslaved. Previous attacks on overseers and symbols of power like slave masters were perpetrated primarily by enslaved men in the prime of life in outdoor settings. Violence from enslaved women tended to occur in the intimate, domestic spaces where enslaved and whites mingled and worked. Nelly, her daughter, and grandchildren murdered Green through a coordinated attack begun after attempts to negotiate failed within the home and continued outside where the fatal blows were struck. Green's long-standing relationship with Nelly and her family (at least three decades and probably longer) should have generated feelings of reciprocal duties and obligations, according to the myth of paternalism, yet after more than thirty years under Green's control, neither Green nor

⁸¹ "Record of Cty Co of Prince William in case of Nelly, Betsy, James, Elias & Ellen slaves cond[emned] to death for murder," Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, (1856 December 11 – 1857 January 31) Accession #36710, microfilm.

Nelly could concede to presumed obligations of service (on Nelly's part) and benevolence (on Green's part) that formed the heart of the idealized paternalistic relationship.⁸²

Interrogation of Nelly and her family by community members in the wake of Green's death revealed much about community expectations for the control of the enslaved as well as the perception of the rights of slaveholders. In a society that relied on community members to police itself, investigations into suspicious events relied on the presence of many men to conduct interrogations in the role of unofficial detective for the public good. In the light of day, Christmas morning, about twenty men arrived at Woodview plantation to investigate the circumstances of Green's death. Signs of blood led to suspicions that Green's demise may have occurred prior to the fire that consumed his body.

According to statements heard by Dr. Ewell, an interrogator and Green's close neighbor acting in the capacity of county coroner, Nelly claimed that Green

was a hard master. He would not give us enough meat to eat. He would not allow any of us to go from home, nor give us any of the privileges which other people's

⁸² Green's neighbor, Ellen MacGregor Ewell, remembered that Green "was murdered by his slaves" and described the "fiendish plot" as one instigated by "a woman who had nursed him in infancy." Alice Maude Ewell, *A Virginia Scene Or Life in Old Prince William* (1931, repr., Fredericksburg, Virginia: BookCrafters, Inc., 1991), 46. According to court records, Nelly came under Green's control when Green became administrator for the estate of James Green (relationship unknown, but likely George's father) after James's death in 1826. James Green's estate inventory listed 31 slaves including Nelly, valued at \$200. "An Inventory & Appraisement of the Personal Estate of James Green, deceased made & taken this [blank] day of Oct[obe]r 1826," Prince William County Will Book M: 472. Nelly may have had at least two daughters, Betsy and Eliza as in his capacity as estate administrator, George Green hired out Nelly, Betsy, and Eliza together until 1832. "(1830) Estate of James Green dec'd in acct with Geo. E. Green as administrator," Prince William County Will Book N: 316. On November 17, 1832 George E. Green sold Nelly for \$140.62½, Betsy for \$220, and Eliza & her unnamed child for \$325 at a public auction, but unfortunately Green did not record the names of purchasers in his report to county commissioners. Since neither Eliza nor her child appeared in further records pertaining to Green, one possibility is that Green divided Nelly's family at the 1832 auction and kept Nelly and Betsy. "(1832) The Estate of James Green dec'd in acct with Geo. E. Green as Administrator," Prince William County Will Book O: 44.

servants have. He told us we should stay at home during the Christmas holydays & work. We concluded to get rid of him.⁸³

Ewell also interviewed Nelly's grandson, James, who also claimed Green "was hard upon us" and that his family "could [do] nothing to please him." James told Ewell that Green ordered they "work through the Christmas holydays" and Elias informed Ewell that Green "would not let us have holydays," signifying the importance of Christmas time to the enslaved family either for religious reasons or as an anticipated right to a rest period and family time during the year.⁸⁴

During questioning by Philip D. Lipscomb, long-term clerk of court for Prince William County, shortly after her incarceration in Brentsville jail, Nelly reported Green "did not allow them enough to eat – did not allow them any privileges and said they should get in his corn during the holy days."⁸⁵ When questioned as to the veracity of her characterization of Green, Nelly reportedly told Lipscomb he "knew nothing about him –

⁸³ Testimony of Jesse Ewell, Justice of the Peace Acting as Coroner," December 26, 1856, *Commonwealth v. Nelly, et al*, LP (1856) 00103_900522, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online.

⁸⁴ Testimony of Jesse Ewell, Justice of the Peace Acting as Coroner," December 26, 1856, *Commonwealth v. Nelly, et al*, LP (1856) 00103_900522, Prince William County Clerk's Loose Papers, online. Another neighbor, Luther Lynn, surveyed the food and clothing in the servants' cabin to ascertain whether the family's claims of lack of proper food or clothing proved true. There he discovered ample stores of food and clothing in the two-story quarters. Lynn also mentioned he had "never saw a more comfortable negro house" than the cabin occupied by Nelly's family which was "weatherboarded and ceiled inside" complete with a bedstead and tester curtains, calling into doubt Nelly's claims of mistreatment and her negative characterization of Green as a master. Testimony of Luther Lynn. "Record of Cty Co of Prince William in case of Nelly, Betsy, James, Elias & Ellen slaves cond[emned] to death for murder," Virginia. Governor Henry A. Wise Executive Papers (1856 December 11 – 1857 January 31) Accession #36710, microfilm.

⁸⁵ Testimony of P. D. Lipscomb. "Record of Cty Co of Prince William in case of Nelly, Betsy, James, Elias & Ellen slaves cond[emned] to death for murder," Virginia. Governor Henry A. Wise Executive Papers (1856 December 11 – 1857 January 31) Accession #36710, microfilm.

that he (Green) had taught school up there and treated the children so bad none of them liked him,” a statement strongly refuted by jailor R. G. Davis.⁸⁶

Elizabeth Noland commented on Green’s murder in a letter written shortly after Green’s demise. Noland described Green as “a very peacible [sic] and inoffensive man, and a good *humane* master” who was “horribly murdered and then burnt up in his house and by his own servants.”⁸⁷ Fauquier resident Robert Taylor Scott chronicled his reaction to the Green murder as viewed in the context of the events occurring in northern Virginia and across the South in 1856. Scott wrote the “case in Prince William stands alone, it’s circumstances peculiar” and that “further investigation has developed no organized or concerted plot” connected with the insurrection fears of 1856. Scott called Nelly’s family “poor creatures” and indicated that he “can not help pitying them.” Yet he believed that they would “expiate their crime upon the gallows for the sake of example” and their execution would “end the disturbance in Virginia.” Scott also understood that the case has been “mooted both by the papers and the people” and felt that this continued silence would lead to “bad notions...put into their heads.”⁸⁸

Silence in the newspapers on the subject of discontent between master and slave was explained by the brief note in the *Fredericksburg News* about Green’s death claiming that “[w]e rarely record such horrible crimes. They furnish an argument against Slavery

⁸⁶ Little evidence of Green’s career as a schoolmaster has been located yet in one case he served as a tutor for the Shirley family before 1829. Shirley’s executor paid George E. Green \$6 for tuition on March 1, 1829. “Account of the estate of Fielding Shirley, dec’d,” Prince William County Will Book O: 48.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Noland to Ella (Noland) MacKenzie, December 29, 1856, Ella Noland MacKenzie Papers, 3667, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, as cited in John J. Zaborney, *Slaves for Hire: Renting Enslaved Laborers in Antebellum Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 92. Emphasis in the original.

⁸⁸ “Letter from Robert Taylor Scott of Oakwood, Fauquier County, Virginia to Miss Fanny S. Carter, Salem, Virginia,” December 31, 1856, Keith Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

not quite as strong as the more frequent wife-killing at the North does against Matrimony.”⁸⁹ Even so, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported details of Green’s death, an article that was republished as far away as in the *Glasgow Weekly Times* in Missouri. The *New York Herald* and *New York Daily Times* briefly described the events and sentence of Nelly’s family, and the execution of Nelly, Betsy and James was noted in the Salem, Ohio *Anti-Slavery Bugle*.⁹⁰

After a quick trial, all five members of Nelly’s family were sentenced to be hanged, yet appeals for clemency for the youngest two grandchildren, Ellen and Elias, were submitted by some members of the community. Minister Thomas B. Balch also appealed to the governor for clemency for Ellen and Elias citing their youth and “a strong conviction that the two children might have been instigated by their seniors” perhaps even through threats “even to the peril of their lives.” Balch recognized that it was not in his power “to speak by authority of popular sentiment touching this affair in Prince William,” yet he suggested that it was probable “that except for false alarms and reported insurrectionary attempts in Kentucky and Tennessee the children would have been recommended [by the local court] to the interference of y[ou]r Mercy.” Despite Governor Wise’s preliminary decision to “not interpose in these cases to arrest the execution of the sentences,” Wise, after receiving a transcript of the trial testimony and verdict on January

⁸⁹ *Fredericksburg News*, January 5, 1857.

⁹⁰ “The Murder in Virginia,” *Glasgow Weekly Times*, January 15, 1857; “A WHOLE FAMILY TO BE HUNG,” *New York Herald*, January 12, 1857; “THE NEGRO TROUBLES IN VIRGINIA,” *New York Daily Times*, January 3, 1857; *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, March 21, 1857. The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* reported that a “crowd of spectators attended the hanging at Brentsville, Va., on the 13th, of the three slaves of George Green, for the murder of their master, which they confessed.” Apparently the “two youngest died easy, but the old woman [Nelly], who had long been a professor of religion, and was no doubt the instigator of the whole affair, continued to breath for about seven minutes, and died extremely hard.” *Ibid.* Governor Wise published his explanation for pardoning Ellen and Elias in “Reprieves and Pardons,” *Alexandria Gazette*, December 28, 1857.

17, 1857 and Balch's letter, reversed his stance and authorized a three month reprieve until May 22, 1857 for Ellen and Elias.⁹¹

Ellen's lawyer, John P. Philips, wrote to Governor Wise in February 1857 on behalf of his client and her twin brother, Elias. While admitting that the "case was fully heard and the proof was sufficient I think to convict all five of the slaves" Philips explained that "in consideration of the youth and ignorance" of Ellen and Elias he submitted a motion for the court to recommend appealing to the Governor for executive clemency and a reduction of the sentence from death to transportation. Only one of the magistrates agreed with Philips's motion, so it was over-ruled. Philips thought that "some of the calm and unexcited citizens of the county" would have petitioned for clemency, but like Balch, Philips perhaps suspected that insurrection scares had negatively influenced the community. Philips asserted that "the public justice of the Country will be fully vindicated" with the execution of Nelly, Betsy, and James while execution of the two youngest members of the family "would shock the moral sense of the community."⁹²

After learning that Governor Wise had granted a three month reprieve, Gainesville resident J. B. Grayson wrote to Wise asserting that "no petition has been circulated for signature or signed, by a single respectable man in this County." Grayson believed he spoke for the community as a member of the county court, resident of the neighborhood "in which this most brutal murder was committed," and one who

⁹¹ "Letter from Thomas B. Balch to Governor Henry A. Wise," January 24, 1857, Box 7, Folder 2, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, Library of Virginia, microfilm. "Record of C[oun]ty Co[urt] of Prince William in case of Nelly, Betsy, James, Elias & Ellen slaves cond[emne]d to death for murder," Box 7, Folder 2, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

⁹² "Letter from John P. Philips to Governor Henry A. Wise," February 4, 1857, Box 7, Folder 2, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Henry A. Wise, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

communicated on a daily basis “with men of all classes and from every part of the County.” Grayson asserted that despite hearing about potential petitions for clemency, he had heard many residents express “determination not to sign a petition should one be handed for signatures.” Therefore, Wise’s decision to grant a reprieve caused “surprise in this community” according to Grayson. Grayson contested the supposed tender age of the twins claiming that they were closer to sixteen years old than fourteen and that their master, George Green had placed enough confidence in Elias’s “power of mind & body” to allow him to drive eight miles with Green’s wagon and four horses to and from the railroad depot.

Grayson questioned Philips’ “interest in the matter” claiming that the defense was able and each defendant fully confessed to the murder. The rumor that a petition for clemency started by Wm. E. Gaskins had been circulated also frustrated Grayson since Gaskins was a resident of Fauquier and therefore had “no interest of any sort in Prince William” with “no more right to petition your Excellency, in regard to this, our own County bisness [sic] than I have to advise that you do not allow your overseer in Acomack to whip one of your negroes there, who disobeyed him.” The final salvo in Grayson’s assault upon a gubernatorial reprieve and potential clemency was his determination that “any further interference on the part of your Excellency” with the carrying out of Ellen and Elias’s sentence of execution “would be an improper control of our County business – an interference never contemplated in the framing of our Constitution to be given to the Governor.” Clearly Grayson believed that the county court

and in particular the near residents in the neighborhood where the crime was committed held the ultimate decision as to the proper justice.⁹³

William C. Steel, a Minister of the Gospel in Brentsville was “called to the position of Spiritual adviser” to Nelly and her family during their incarceration in the Brentsville jail and indicated that Nelly, Betsy, and James “felt and acknowledged the justice of their punishments” prior to their executions and that the “effect upon the slave population [of their admission] was beneficial,” presumably as a means of calming unrest. Yet Steel doubted that Ellen and Elias were “sufficiently aware of the nature of the crime they committed to merit death.” Steel credited their youth, ignorance, and his observation that they had “given no indications of that perverse condition which ever clings to the criminal” as criteria that supported the notion that they were unable to decide whether to participate in the attack. Steel noted that “it is perhaps not necessary to state that these two were incited to assist in the crime by their mother and grandmother.” Under these circumstances Steel asked for “a full pardon” for the twins.⁹⁴

Wise considered the viewpoints of the correspondents regarding Ellen and Elias and the pleas of the clergymen Steel and Balch combined with those of the respected lawyer John P. Philips. In his address to the Virginia House of Delegates Wise stated that Nelly, Betsy, and James had been executed, a punishment he deemed “all sufficient for public justice and example.” Due to their “youth and feeble intellects” and the belief the two youngest members of Nelly’s family “were supposed to be acting under the influence

⁹³ “Letter from Wm. B. Grayson to Governor Henry A. Wise,” February 13, 1857, Box 7, Folder 2, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

⁹⁴ “Letter from Wm. C. Fleet to Governor Henry A. Wise,” April 3, 1857, Box 7, Folder 2, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Henry A. Wise, Library of Virginia, microfilm.

and instigation of the older slaves,” Wise opted to commute the sentences of death levied upon Ellen and Elias to sale and transportation.⁹⁵

In the wake of the 1856 insurrection scare the *Baltimore American* noted that “never before...has there been so general a disposition to sell negroes, as at present,” a trend that was “more apparent” in the border states and particularly in Virginia. The paper noted that throughout “those States from which escape is supposed to be easiest, we see indications of unusually heavy sales.”⁹⁶

The next evidence of an insurrectionist plot did not appear in court records until 1860 in Fauquier County when two enslaved men, Chesterfield and Ell, were charged with plotting and conspiring “to rebel and make an insurrection...against the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth of V[irgini]a.” According to the scant extant records, Thompson Rector approached Justice of the Peace Charles H. Gordon with information that Chesterfield and Ell had advised other slaves to rebel. After a trial in which “sundry witnesses were sworn & case fully heard,” Chesterfield and Ell were discharged from custody.⁹⁷

The appearance of perceived insurrection plots during Presidential election years (1856 and 1860) when political rhetoric highlighted fear of abolitionism as a rally point apparently lends further evidence of the ability of enslaved populations to engage with

⁹⁵ Governor Henry A. Wise, “Address to the Senate and House of Delegates of the General Assembly of Virginia,” May 1857, Box 10, Folder 3, Accession #36710, Executive Papers of Governor Henry A. Wise, as transcribed by Ronald R. Turner in “Prince William County – Governors Executive Papers Relating to PWC 1779-1863”, [2008], 173.

⁹⁶ “Transfer of Slave Property,” *Baltimore American*, as reported in the *Fredericksburg News*, January 22, 1857.

⁹⁷ *Commonwealth v. Chesterfield – a slave the property of Wm Bowen and Ell a slave the property of Jno G. Beale*, Box #24, 1860-012, Fauquier County Free Negro and Enslaved Records from Commonwealth Ended Causes, AAHA.

and react to political events. Historian Douglas R. Egerton found that political rhetoric from the Democratic Party during the 1856 presidential race “convinced defiant bondmen in parts of the South that 1856 was a moment of opportunity” and small pockets of resistance led to “terrified whites...conjuring up imaginary conspiracies...across the South.”⁹⁸ Local news conceded that the incidence of rumors of insurrection coincided with “the late election agitation,” a coincidence that was “not without matter for grave consideration.” Observers blamed the continued discussion of abolition by Northerners for the “feeling of rebellion [that] was generated in the bosoms of the worst portion of the slaves” during the 1856 insurrection scare, a “muttering of a storm whose full fury will inevitably follow the course now pursued.” To address this “question of personal safety,” the South “can be nothing but a unit,” and those who differ in stance “will be forced into the cohesion of a dread necessity the moment the state of things indicated by these alarming rumors attains practical importance.”⁹⁹

In Virginia, observers attempted to explain the “very general disaffection among the negroes” as a result of the Democratic Party “constantly...crying out at the top of their voices that Frémont would certainly be elected, and the institution of slavery be as certainly overthrown in consequence.” Noting that “during nearly all the political discussions of the canvass,” enslaved and free blacks “gathered in crowds about the Court-houses and other places of public speaking, and stood listening attentively to every word and syllable that fell from the lips of the party orators.” This political awareness

⁹⁸ Douglas R. Egerton, “The Slaves’ Election: Frémont, Freedom, and the Slave Conspiracies of 1856,” *Civil War History*, 61, no. 1 (March 2015), 39.

⁹⁹ “The Effects of Slave Agitation,” *Baltimore American* as reprinted in the *Alexandria Gazette*, December 10, 1856.

made “the heads of the negroes...giddy and wild by such incessant inflammatory harangues” leading to rumors of insurrection and acts of insubordination.¹⁰⁰

Yet consideration of the tensions mounting within the nature of enslavement evidenced by rising incidents of runaways, arson, and violence across northern Virginia suggests that political rhetoric of 1856 was not the sole reason for the “general disaffection” among the enslaved. An increasing sense of value based on rising slave hire costs and slave prices with awareness of political discussions of the merits of free labor led to more demands by enslaved persons for altered conditions of enslavement as reflected in the ultimatums of female arsonists Mary and Tulip or murderesses Agnes and Nelly, in the affirmation of worker rights by Jim, or in the retribution by George for unmaning punishment at the hands of his overseer. Sophisticated and rudimentary communication networks facilitated more individual and group attempts at escape to the North. By the eve of John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry, enslaved northern Virginians in Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William turned to escalating levels of violence and intensifying periods of insubordination and unrest to protest enslavement and destabilize the master-slave relationship.

The experiences of whites, free blacks, and enslaved persons in the northern Virginia counties of Fauquier, Loudoun, and Prince William between 1800 and 1860 demonstrated that even within a relatively small region of the South, differences in the methods of enforcing racial subordination and negotiating the often tense encounters

¹⁰⁰ “Servile Insurrections,” *Richmond Whig*, December 30, 1856.

between whites and slaves were apparent, negating the idea of one South or a grand narrative of enslavement during the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSION

The impact of daily interactions between masters and slaves shaped perceptions of power, vulnerability, hope, or futility. Slave sales, master migrations, commodity markets, and changing labor needs contributed to a climate of uncertainty and instability for enslaved families. At different times, enslaved persons experienced more intense periods of disruptions from slave values that encouraged or discouraged sales of prime workers and children. These relative measures of market value also emphasized the commodification of enslaved bodies that first relied on predictions for survivability for children to determine value, then shifted to likeliness for farm, domestic, skilled or reproductive labor as markers for value. As the markets for slaves exploded in the 1850s, each year of age equated to an increased measure of value as children as young as thirteen years old could be valued as high as any prime worker in his or her twenties. An increased focus on individual bodily value led to a decreased concern about keeping enslaved families together. Peak periods of slave values also generated peak periods of runaways as a response to the increased fragility of families. When appraised slave values peaked in Fauquier County in 1836 (for males) and in 1837 (for females) and during the mid-1850s, reported incidents of runaways also surged.

Tensions over perceived threats from free blacks limited options for emancipation, and led to increasingly restrictive laws on property rights and free black

residency and fears that free blacks aided in escape attempts or fomented open rebellion and insurrection against white slaveowners. Opportunities to purchase or earn freedom varied across the region as reflected in recorded deeds of manumission and bequests of freedom devised in wills. Opportunities for manumission in Loudoun County dwarfed acts of emancipation in Fauquier or Prince William throughout the period of 1782 to 1865, suggesting a more tolerant climate for freed slaves and free black residency existed in Loudoun. Even so, Loudoun reported nearly as many runaways as Fauquier County (though more than Prince William), an indicator that Loudoun's proximity to avenues of freedom, willing partners in escape attempts, and the desire for release from enslavement persisted even in areas deemed "mild" in comparison to the harsh rice and sugar plantation regimes.

Examples of slave sales and planter migrations showed that the drive for upward mobility placed the wants of slaveholders above the needs of enslaved families. While some may view the transplantation of an entire enslaved force as a kinder type of removal, this attitude discounted the severed ties between abroad spouses and children. Enslaved persons resisted against separations, whether brought on by an estate division, planter migration, local sale or sale to a long distance trader through a combination of tactics. Acts of theft and arson were often attempts to fight back against a master's control of provisions and mobility. Running away presented another opportunity to resist threatened, planned, or future sales.

As counties increased patrols and militia presence to control perceived unrest, enslaved persons responded with even greater force. In Fauquier and Loudoun counties,

slave unrest manifested most notably in separate periods of arson that attacked the symbols of slave-master power: barns that held produce harvested by enslaved persons, jails and courthouses that judged slave actions, churches where masters affirmed the role of subservient slaves, and homes where masters reigned control over mobility, bodies, and food distribution. In Prince William County, slaves pressured by a more intense reduction in enslaved forces, limited opportunities for manumission, and a mainly intolerant stance towards freed slaves, asserted power of retribution through the violent attacks on masters, mistresses, overseers, and employers. These attacks and murders grew out of unrelenting frustrations and demands to reclaim rights to bodily security, mobility to exercise religious beliefs, rights to receive adequate provisions, contract labor rights to control use of time, and ability to maintain family connections.

As white members of these slave societies perceived the growing unrest, experienced aggressive and violent resistance, and saw increased numbers of slaves fleeing, they reacted not only by attempting to control the mobility of blacks, but also to root out any anti-slavery agitators who threatened a community consensus on the importance of maintaining the right of masters to hold slaves. Community members interrogated, judged, punished, or ousted public dissenters, especially among the Quakers in Loudoun and northerners who had settled in Prince William.

Amidst all these pressures, enslaved families continued to place hope in family ties and worked to keep them intact. A poor slave mother's determination to cling to the slim hope of seeing her son again and a son's continued efforts for more than forty years to reclaim the right to sit at his mother's side contradict pro-slavery arguments by

poignantly demonstrating the depth of affection cultivated within enslaved families and the traumatic emotional loss experienced from forced separations. Negotiating contracts to purchase enslaved family members, fighting back against slaveowners who separated family members, fleeing to preserve a marriage or in some cases to preserve a family, advertising in newspapers and journals for any information about missing relatives, naming children in memory of lost relatives, or even writing down the age of a son lost to the slave trade in a Bible. All these actions confirmed the enduring hope of family unity expressed by enslaved man Solomon Hudnall when he sent a message from Mississippi to family located in Fauquier County: “if I never see any of you again on Earth May we all meet in heaven where parting will be no more.”¹ Placing faith in temporal as well as heavenly respites influenced many enslaved persons to seek comfort in religion, especially during periods of uncertainty and instability.

Turner Montgomery, separated from his mother at the young age of ten years old, never forgot his Virginia family. Even as he was “working in the cotton fields of Mississippi, or [in] the uplands of Tennessee, his heart went back to the old Virginia homestead where he was born and [where] his older mother’s eyes were turned toward the great south” wondering where her child had gone. Montgomery never lost faith in the hope that he’d find his mother and utilized any possible information networks in the hope that he might learn about the family he was forced to leave in Fauquier County in 1858.²

¹ Letter from Solomon Hudnall of Brandon, Mississippi to Robert Peyton of Fauquier County, Virginia, June 24, 1860. Peyton Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

² “After Forty Years: A Reunion of Mother and Son Who Were Slaves,” *The Evening Star*, April 3, 1897.

While working as a waiter in a Memphis, Tennessee hotel, Montgomery engaged in conversation with a customer, as he usually did while at his job. When the diner asked Montgomery if he was from Memphis, Montgomery boasted he was from a “quality” slaveholding family in Virginia, the Edmundses, coincidentally a family name known to the customer, a St. Louis businessman. Continuing their conversation later outside the hotel, Montgomery plied the gentleman for information of the Edmundses and naturally expressed an interest in hearing news of his own family about whom he had not “had a word since he said good-bye to his weeping old mammy at the auction block.” The gentleman promised to contact his friend, one of the children of Montgomery’s former slaveowner.³

Though a newspaper reporter later described this encounter as a “chance meeting,” (and certainly the odds of encountering a friend connected to Montgomery’s enslaved life were slim), Montgomery’s ability to cultivate a cordial relationship with strangers and use the opportunity to discover any information about his family, increased the seemingly remote possibility that he could learn any news. Remarkably, through this “chance” encounter and a combination of discrete factors such as Montgomery’s habit of connecting with customers, access to the social networks that connected southern elites, and continued ties between the Edmunds heirs and some of their former slaves, Montgomery was able to find and return to his mother after a forty-year separation. He relocated to Washington, D.C., this time of his own volition, and took up residence near

³ “After Forty Years: A Reunion of Mother and Son Who Were Slaves,” *The Evening Star*, April 3, 1897.

his elderly mother where he could see her every day, a right that had been denied him during slavery.⁴

Meanwhile, following the sale of her son to slave traders in 1858, Montgomery's mother also kept alive the hope that she might one day be reunited with him. As a talisman to maintain that fragile hope and dream, she had written Turner's age in her Bible when he was taken from her and "clung [to it] through all the vicissitudes of the forty years' separation." This Bible and the notation of Turner's age were the only things that she had to remember her son following his forced removal from her care.⁵

These stories of flight, resistance, and power open new avenues for research in the forces that bound and threatened enslaved families and the methods that both slaveowners and enslaved worked to secure their own vision of family and security. Studies of small areas reveal the very "grubby details" of life and how place and community determined the nature of enslavement and the parameters of freedom within the most northern region of the slave South.⁶

⁴ The *Washington Bee* reported on September 29, 1906 that "Bro. Turner Montgomery, head waiter at the National Hotel, was buried on the 16th by the Odd Fellows. Deceased was very prominent in this jurisdiction." *Washington Bee* (Washington, D.C.), September 29, 1906.

⁵ "After Forty Years: A Reunion of Mother and Son Who Were Slaves," *The Evening Star*, April 3, 1897.

⁶ Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, eds. *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 2.

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