



# Slavery and the Underground Railroad at the Eppes Plantations, Petersburg National Battlefield





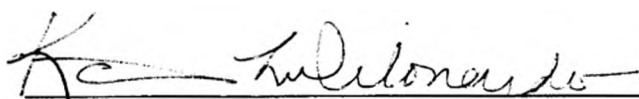
SLAVERY AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD  
AT THE EPPES PLANTATIONS  
Petersburg National Battlefield

Special History Study  
by  
Marie Tyler-McGraw

*A Study Prepared Under the Cooperative Agreement between  
the National Park Service and the Organization of American Historians*

Northeast Region  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
2005

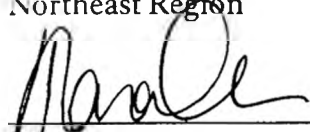
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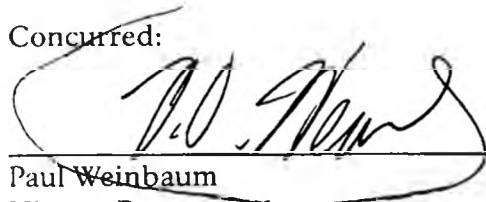


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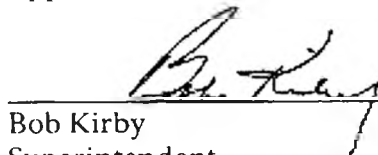


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*Prepared for*



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# Acknowledgements

This study of the Underground Railroad at Petersburg National Battlefield and the region around it originated with the desire on the part of Tara Morrison, Underground Railroad Coordinator for the Northeast Region of the National Park Service (NPS) and Kathy Dilonardo, Interpretive Program Manager for the Northeast Region, to do a set of interlocking studies of NPS sites and the Underground Railroad. Morrison and Dilonardo were particularly interested in creating a usable model of research methodology and in making that research easily available to interpreters. Their reiteration of that vision of the final product has kept the study on track in ways that are apparent and will become more apparent over time.

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Marie Tyler-McGraw  
Historian  
Consultant to the Organization of  
American Historians



# Executive Summary

## Research Methods and Summary of Findings

*[Eppes's] methods of control, while they could never eliminate resistance to enslavement, were effective to the extent that few, if any, slaves were fugitives from his properties.*

With the passage of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act in 1998, the National Park Service (NPS) undertook a national initiative to identify and preserve Underground Railroad resources and to interpret the story of the Underground Railroad for visitors to NPS sites. Even before passage of the Act, it was clear that research on the Underground Railroad would not be limited to NPS sites, but would inevitably connect communities and peoples across state and national borders and would yield much new information about the varied systems of slavery from which fugitives made their escape.

This study of slavery and runaways from the Eppes plantations near City Point and Petersburg, VA, was originally planned as one part of a three-part history study of the Underground Railroad that would include three NPS sites within the Northeast Region of the NPS. Those sites were Boston African American National Historic Site (MA), Hampton National Historic Site (MD), and Petersburg National Battlefield (VA). The primary goal of this multi-site study was to demonstrate the widespread activity of the Underground Railroad and its connections from region to region and nation to nation. A secondary goal was to place the Underground Railroad within the context of African American life at those three sites, two of which were upper South plantations using enslaved labor.

Various delays made it impossible for research at the three sites to move forward together, but the Petersburg NB study, by including the town of Petersburg in its research, fulfills the goals of linking regions, nations, and individuals in the Underground Railroad. At the heart of this study are the enslaved families on the Eppes plantations

(Chapter 4) and the residents of Petersburg (Chapter 6) who comprised an effective network of assistance to fugitives. This study of the four Eppes farms or plantations, with the Appomattox and Hopewell farms now comprising part of the Petersburg National Battlefield, is the first in-depth examination of antebellum African American life at that site. If we consider, as recent scholars have, that “runaways” were those who stayed in the area and were soon caught or returned and “fugitives” were those who made a real attempt to leave slaveholding regions,<sup>1</sup> then the Eppes plantations had no fugitives, as yet uncovered, until the Civil War, although there were many short-term runaways over the decades.

On balance, in the decades before the Civil War when the Underground Railroad was at its most active, research indicates that the Eppes bondsmen weighed their options and found the effort to strike out for permanent freedom too difficult, too emotionally wrenching or too dire in consequences to attempt. Richard Eppes, the last antebellum owner, ran a highly-organized and closely-scrutinized group of plantations, and escape would not have been easy, especially by land. Eppes set himself the difficult task of modernizing his plantations by utilizing the latest technology and by studying agricultural journals while keeping the enslaved labor force that was originally acquired for a tobacco economy. His desire to economize and show a profit caused him to monitor the activities of his enforced labor more closely than was typical for Virginia planters. His methods of control, while they could never eliminate resistance to enslavement, were effective to the extent that few, if any, servants were fugitives from his properties.

*...resistance was occasional and opportunistic. Deviance from Eppes's expectations was constant, but usually performed in a minor key.*

With a code of laws that offered predictable rewards and punishments and with a domestic system that encouraged marriages of enslaved persons and offered stability for extended families, he resolved two of the greatest anxieties among enslaved African Americans — the fear of arbitrary and unpredictable punishment and the fear of separation from family. By not selling, he was eliminating one of the main reasons for running away: to reconnect with family. It seems to have been part of his scientific farm strategy, as well as his religious principles, to encourage strong family relationships among his bondsmen and thus make running away too emotionally painful for many. Because Richard Eppes encouraged marriage within the plantation household, most of the enslaved families were related. There are fragmentary lists from 1819 and the early 1840s that, combined with the slave censuses conducted by Richard Eppes, suggest great continuity of families on these plantations. This study has constructed family units and relationships from the inventories of bondsmen. In many cases, three generations of a family may be traced. (See Appendix II)

Throughout this study, forms of resistance to slavery, often called “weapons of the weak,”<sup>2</sup> are noted. But the question of resistance is a loaded question, because too often lack of overt resistance seems to imply that slavery was benign and enslaved persons content. Instead, resistance was occasional and opportunistic. Deviance from Eppes's expectations was constant, but usually performed in a minor key. Eppes tried to isolate his enslaved families from knowledge of the world off the plantations and to keep people who might aid escapes far from his lands. He was not really successful in isolating his laborers and domestic servants from local and national events, but their scattered dwellings near the fields and few opportunities to earn cash meant that they were at a disadvantage if they wanted to make connections with those who knew successful fugitives or wanted to

pay a boatman or ship's captain to hide them aboard.

Just as important as resistance was the post-Civil War interpretation of slavery as benign and the plantation as a place of happy enslaved family life. Closer examination of individual lives shows violence, coercion, and children of uncertain origin, even among those who were favored slaves. For example, religious ceremonies and Eppes's desire for peaceful domestic relationships notwithstanding, slave marriage had no status in the law. Harriet Ruffin appears to have had three children by two other men before she married Madison Ruffin. Jim Booker's “marriage” to a woman in Essex County appears to have been easily dissolved when it became somehow inconvenient, and he was able to marry Jane Oldham very quickly. This is a reminder that slave marriage was a malleable concept and served the needs of the slave owner first. Still, marriage had powerful emotional significance and was one of the ways in which enslaved persons developed and kept a sense of self-worth. Both resistance and an independent identity were closely tied to family relations and further research on the lives of those enslaved should demonstrate this reality.

The first three chapters are a chronological historic context for understanding the history of African Americans on the upper James and the Appomattox Rivers. These chapters pay attention to the landscape that Africans encountered and learned to know. Landscapes on the Eppes plantations and around City Point were the center of work routines, and African Americans based their first decisions about autonomy and resistance on these daily realities. African participation in Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 was one indicator that resistance depended on opportunity. Other themes in the first three chapters are:

1) the seventeenth century movement toward legal enslavement of Africans

*Evidence suggests that neither the Eppes slaves nor Petersburg's black residents were isolated from events in the larger world.*

brought to Virginia;  
2) the eighteenth century period of high African importation to Virginia before the American Revolution;  
3) the disruptive effect of the Revolution on slavery along the James River;  
4) the politics of the early American republic, in which the Northern states slowly ended slavery, sectional division became apparent, and the American North and Canada became destinations for runaways;  
5) the growth of black churches as a key form of African American organization and communication;  
6) new systems of transportation and communication that lessened the isolation of enslaved individuals.

While the first three chapters rely primarily on secondary sources, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 rely upon primary sources to create narratives about the lives of enslaved and free blacks. It was once frequently claimed that there was not enough evidence or documentation available to recapture the lives of southern bondsmen. A generation of local research has shown the fallacy of this argument. As this study further demonstrates, careful attention to plantation records and public records, local newspapers, letter collections, diaries, and court cases make it possible to reconstruct enslaved families and something of their daily lives and personal dramas. The methodology employed here is highly adaptable to other NPS and related sites. Chapter 6 is a wide-ranging overview of what is known and what is suspected about the very active Underground Railroad network in Petersburg. It is not conclusive and is intended to aid in further research.

This study of the Eppes's enslaved families and Petersburg's black residents has yielded enough information about their daily lives to interpret them more nearly from their own perspectives and to ask more informed questions about their lives over time. Evidence suggests that neither group was isolated from events in the larger world. They knew of escapes to the North and

Canada, emigration to Haiti and Liberia and events such as Gabriel's conspiracy and Nat Turner's rebellion. To my knowledge, no one has taken all the Petersburg names — white and black — that occur in William Still's records of the Underground Railroad and searched them through the census, personal property tax lists, wills, deeds, church records, military records and other sources. Such research would answer many more questions about connections among free blacks, enslaved blacks, and whites. That there are areas for further research among the Eppes bondsmen and especially among Underground Railroad participants in Petersburg will become apparent to readers of this study.



# Chapter 1

## Frontiers and Boundaries (1640s – 1765)

Appomattox Manor at City Point, 1864. Courtesy New York State Museum, Albany, NY

Appomattox Manor, the ancestral home of the Eppes family that still overlooks the confluence of the Appomattox and James Rivers, is considered to have two fronts. One faces the rivers, surveying the ancient Eppes domain and the larger world, and the other is the driveway approach to the house, surveying the Virginia landscape.<sup>3</sup> The manor sits on the Appomattox farm and adjoins the next farm, Hopewell, both in Prince George County. The river front entrance once looked across the James River to Eppes Island in Charles City County and across the Appomattox River to Bermuda Hundred in Chesterfield County, the larger two of the Eppes farms or plantations. The region is layered in four centuries of American history and much of that history is African American. The land that became James River plantations was repeatedly and heavily occupied by American Indians for between ten and twenty centuries before the appearance of Europeans or Africans. The plantations themselves were outgrowths of the early exploration patterns of the English as they navigated the James and Appomattox Rivers, above their settlement of Jamestown, and traveled through the

heart of the Appamatucks country, at that time a part of the Powhatan confederation of Algonquians.<sup>4</sup>

Francis Eppes, the first of that family to come to the Virginia colony, settled at Shirley Hundred (later Eppes Island) about 1624. Eppes was in time to take advantage of one of the political rearrangements that occurred frequently in the young colony. When Bermuda City lost its autonomy in 1634, the land was claimed by Francis Eppes and became his Bermuda plantation. To encourage settlement, the Virginia Company in 1619 introduced the headright system, by which any person who immigrated to Virginia and stayed three years was given fifty acres. For men with cash, such as Eppes, this became a way to amass land because it became possible for an individual to claim fifty acres for each person or servant brought into Virginia. Eppes had returned to England with his family in 1628 and came back to Virginia in 1631 with indentured servants, able to claim headrights for thirty-four persons, including the five members of his own family. At fifty acres for each passage that he paid, he had rights to 1,700 acres and waited until 1635 to make his claim.<sup>5</sup>

*In the years after Bacon's Rebellion, racial differentiations were further encoded in law and encouraged in daily transactions.*

Within sixty years of the founding of the English colony of Virginia, the James River area was edged with English planters' land claims and populated with their African and English indentured servants. The Powhatan Confederation of Indians made periodic attempts to drive the English back toward Jamestown, but their strength grew less over time. After a 1644 war, the Jamestown government was strong enough to force the weakened and dispersed Indians to accept a peace treaty, with a line drawn across present-day Chesterfield County and to the west, still near the new plantations, that designated Indian lands.<sup>6</sup> Some Indian settlements were on this reservation-like land and others were on land not yet controlled by the English government. Early settlers, such as William Byrd, Abraham Wood, Nathaniel Bacon and perhaps Francis Eppes engaged in an important Indian trade that included furs, guns, and, in some cases, enslaved Indians and Africans. In the early decades, the legal status of enforced labor — African, Indian, and European — was uncertain and deviation from the model of European indentured labor affected both Indians and Africans. These settlers, who were both merchants and aspiring planters, used other settlers and Indians in the unsettled regions south of the James River and into North Carolina. This trade made an early and important connection between the James River planters and the southside counties and it supplied the money to buy indentures or slaves so that agriculture could become the basis of wealth by the end of the seventeenth century.

The frontier era on the James River was punctuated in 1676 by the rebellion of the ambitious planter, Nathaniel Bacon, who sought to obtain Indian land and trade. Bacon promised freedom to Africans and all English indentures who would take up arms with him against both the Indians to the west and the colonial government to the east. Although Francis Eppes had died before Bacon's Rebellion, his sons — Francis, John and

Thomas — may have participated at an early stage of the rebellion when the goal was simply to frighten the royal governor, Sir William Berkeley, into granting more land rights to such ambitious young planters as they were. White indentured labor still predominated over African labor in the Upper James, and Bacon also sought the support of Englishmen who had served indentures and now wanted land, especially the western land reserved by treaty for Indians. Bacon's ally, William Byrd I, eventually abandoned Bacon in time to save himself from arrest, but not until after the attempt to overthrow Berkeley and the burning of Jamestown. The rebellion failed, but forced the colonial government to give the frontier planters and white ex-indentures much of what they had demanded.<sup>7</sup> Among the last to surrender, and tricked by a promise of freedom, was a group of eighty black bondsmen and twenty white servants who saw each other as allies for the purpose of running away or rebelling.

Bacon's Rebellion was important in the efforts of seventeenth century English settlers to define racial differences between Africans and Europeans. Bacon had to unite the grievances of both the aspiring gentry, such as the Eppeses, and the landless ex-indentured whites. He united them on the basis of their rights as Englishmen, visible as white masculinity, while Africans were outside this covenant of convenience. In the years after Bacon's Rebellion, racial differentiations were further encoded in law and encouraged in daily transactions. Laws were passed to prohibit African men from property ownership, gun possession, alliances with white women, or testifying in court. At the same time, the lower orders of white men were accepted into fuller participation in politics and society.<sup>8</sup>

The earliest Africans brought to Virginia may have been on ships landing at Jamestown in 1619 or may have been earlier and at other sites along the rivers. For the late seventeenth and most

*In 1670, Africans represented one person in twenty in the [Virginia] colony; by 1700, they were one in four.*

of the eighteenth century, ships engaged in the slave trade anchored in the channels of the James River and sent their goods, including enslaved Africans, ashore on flats or sloops or sold them from the decks of ships. One large slave transatlantic slave vessel brought in more Africans at once than a year's worth of small vessels engaged in the Caribbean trade that could travel up the shallow James River to the docks of plantations. In the early years, smaller vessels brought enslaved Africans from the West Indies where they had acquired some Spanish or English. In 1670 Africans represented one person in twenty in the colony; by 1700 they were one in four. Other slave societies, such as those in South Carolina, Cuba, and Brazil, developed even more rapidly and had a greater infusion of "new Africans" to renew the cultural and social ties with Africa. By 1720 the African American population of Virginia was growing more rapidly by natural increase than by the importation of Africans.<sup>9</sup> From the early eighteenth until the early nineteenth century, the bay created by the confluence of Appomattox and the James was an important tobacco port. "All of this activity – this massing of tobacco fleets, this constant sailing of smaller vessels, this sale of Africans at the end of the Middle Passage — took place in full view of Appomattox Manor and its predecessor, of the Eppes Bermuda plantation, and of the Eppes Island plantation."<sup>10</sup>

The descent of Africans into permanent lifetime bondage took place over most of the seventeenth century and was not fully set in place until the slave code of 1705. The body of Virginia law that began to distinguish between "Africans" or "blacks" as permanently enslaved and "whites" or "Christians" as indentures was passed between the 1640s and 1705. The greatest forced migration of Africans — now coming directly from Africa — took place between 1690 and 1770, with the highest numbers entering Virginia in the 1740s. Even after Virginia law had established hereditary slavery,

laws continued to draw the net tighter. As late as 1723, a statute made emancipation by slave holders much more difficult. Some Africans who arrived before 1700 managed to slip through the tightening net of slave laws and become free when they had served out the standard indenture. It is estimated that by 1690 there were over 350 free blacks in Tidewater Virginia.<sup>11</sup> Those African Americans became part of a free black class that played an important role in local history. Other seventeenth century sources of the free blacks on the James River and in the counties south of the James River were the mulatto children of white women, who were indentures or ex-indentures, and African men. Because children took the status of their mother, a white woman's children would be free while the mulatto children of an African mother frequently remained in bondage.<sup>12</sup>

Children of Indian and African unions also appeared and, in time, tri-racial families complicated efforts to classify and separate by race. The Indians were drawn into the 1600s James River and Carolina trade that enslaved Indians, as well as Africans. While retaining aspects of their ancient heritage for many years, Indians mixed culturally and physically with both Africans and Europeans. With Africans, they shared enslavement and, sometimes, efforts at escape. The land originally reserved for them in the southside counties, those counties below the James River down to the North Carolina border, was taken away, piece by piece, by the Virginia government or sold off by the Indians themselves. The free blacks of these southside counties, of whatever origin, had very few landowners among them and often found their way to Petersburg, and even Norfolk and Portsmouth, seeking employment.<sup>13</sup>

Colonial Virginia experienced few slave uprisings, but frequent examples of fugitives from slavery. Only two slave uprisings were known to have been planned in Tidewater Virginia before 1700 and both were discovered before

*...the Dismal Swamp, at the base of the southside counties, was famed for its “maroons” – people who were able to hide indefinitely in the woods and swamps of the region.*

they were carried out. One rebellious group intended to run away to the “dutch plantation” (New Amsterdam) and the other to murder and replace all the whites.<sup>14</sup> The eighteenth century provided more reason for uneasiness. In a 1769 uprising on the Hanover County plantation of Bowler Cocke, possibly a kinsman and surely known to the Eppes family, resistance to a new foreman who tried to “discipline” a bondsman led to a general uprising. These enslaved Virginians believed that, even as bonded labor, they had negotiated certain rights and they acted as a plantation community when boundaries of acceptable punishment were crossed.<sup>15</sup>

General uprisings were much less common than running away, which took two forms: individual escape and group escape. Since there was no legal freedom to be found on the North American continent, except for the freedom of possible anonymity, individual Virginia runaways tried to pass as free if they could put enough distance between themselves and their place of origin. Colonial Virginia bondsmen ran to towns such as Williamsburg, Dumfries, Urbanna, Yorktown, Petersburg, Norfolk, Richmond, or Fredericksburg and tried to pass as free. Some succeeded, since the labor shortage was so great that employers did not inquire too deeply into the laborer’s past.<sup>16</sup>

There were also occasional group escapes in which enslaved Indians and Africans or groups of Africans sought out forests and swamp-like regions.<sup>17</sup> Before these lands were cleared, this was a common, but not necessarily successful, form of escape. Frequently, runaways were captured and returned to slaveholders. But the region called the Dismal Swamp, at the base of the southside counties, was famed for its “maroons” — people who were able to hide indefinitely in the woods and swamps of the region. The legend of the Dismal Swamp maroons began in the colonial era. Africans enslaved on

the Eppes plantations would have at least hearsay knowledge of the maroon communities whose symbolic value was far out of proportion to their numbers. One recent scholar suggests:

“Though most maroon camps and settlements in the US were eventually crushed . . . The Dismal Swamp Maroons persisted from the colonial era up to the [Civil] War. Their villages stood in the swamplands bordering Virginia and North Carolina. Reaching from the Roanoke area to the Albemarle waterways, the Dismal Swamp sheltered about 2000 fugitives. Similar to the permanent marooners of Louisiana and Florida, they carried on ‘regular’ trade with ordinary citizens. They even assisted the Union Army, as independent contractors, in its triumph over the Confederate militia in their region.”<sup>18</sup>

This assessment of the maroons is the most positive. An artist who camped in Dismal Swamp in the 1850s, sketched ragged swamp-dwellers, free and fierce, but just barely surviving.<sup>19</sup>

The early plantation in the wilderness looked like a shabby village with its cluster of ramshackle small buildings scattered over the landscape. The buildings were not intended to be permanent and the slaveholder’s dwelling was not much better than the other structures. They were one or two rooms with a wooden chimney, a loft and wooden or earth floors — a simple design to get a house up quickly.<sup>20</sup> The famous Virginia mansion or Great House appeared in the 1720s and 1730s and was restricted to just a few families until the final third of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century when a building boom created many of the imposing houses most often associated with a southern plantation. Appomattox Manor, constructed in 1763 by the first Richard Eppes, great grandson of Francis Eppes, apparently on the site of an earlier house, is a relatively modest structure, but its site on the bluff above the river gave it gran-



deur and importance.<sup>21</sup> The one constant factor through the centuries of the Eppes family plantations was the waterway as transportation, source of goods and information, center of the trading system, and best possibility for escape.

The structures and landscape of the Eppes plantations were familiar to both black and white, but always had different social and symbolic meanings for each. The four large farms that made up the Eppes plantations, the manor house, the docks with scattered flats and sloops at anchor, and the small functional buildings that made up the village of City Point were spaces controlled by whites, while the slave quarters, rural footpaths, the woods, and isolated waterways were areas where enslaved African Americans might exert some control or create a private social space. Moreover, they often did not envision or interpret the white-dominated landscape as planters intended them to do. They had a sense of ownership over artifacts and structures that they had made, or improved, or been allotted or bought. What John Vlach said of slave quarters might be said of the entire plantation: it was “a kind of dueling ground upon which the relative strengths of black and white cultural values was tested.”<sup>22</sup> Slaves “privately remapped the domains designed by planters, reconceptualizing their various assigned landscapes in ways that they found more suitable.” They took advantage of numerous opportunities to assert counterclaims over the spaces and buildings to which they were confined and in which they worked.<sup>23</sup>

Well before the American Revolution, blacks in Virginia were predominantly native-born. They had created a fusion culture that drew on both African and Anglo traditions, based on each tradition’s usefulness at any given moment.<sup>24</sup> They had their own mental map of the Eppes plantations and their own perception of what was significant on the landscape. It was a private map with its connections between places

and people always tentative due to the imbalance of power between white and black, yet it was also enduring. If Eppes plantation bondsmen planned escape, they would begin with this mental map. This was true before and after the American Revolution. Only the map would change.

*Slaves “privately remapped the domains designed by planters, reconceptualizing their various assigned landscapes in ways that they found more suitable.”*

John Vlach

## Chapter 2

### Revolutions

#### (1765 – 1816)

The second half of the eighteenth century in Virginia was an age of revolutions. Best known was the political and military upheaval of the American Revolution, but there was also an evangelical religious revolution that emphasized an emotional and unmediated relationship between the Deity and the believer. The evangelical revolution was both separate from and part of the political revolution of breaking ties with Britain. Both emphasized the individual and his judgment, “free will” and liberty, and thus gave both dignity and power to the individual. But both failed, ultimately, to include Africans as equal partners in these beliefs. A third revolution took place in the agricultural economy of Virginia as, in the late 1700s, planters began to shift from tobacco to corn and cotton and then to grains and livestock farming. This changed the labor needs of the state without changing the labor force. Africans had been imported to raise a cash crop for an international market, but African Americans remained enslaved when the economy shifted. It was not clear that a large enslaved labor force was economically efficient in the new agricultural and commercial system.

#### **The Agricultural Revolution**

The exact time when the transition from tobacco to grains and mixed farming took place on the Eppes plantations is not known, but it was likely to have been in the late eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Most of the large holdings along the James River had long been tobacco plantations, and planters traded directly with commercial firms in Britain or with English and Scots factors in America. The companies or their agents bought tobacco and then supplied planters with most of the goods that they needed or desired. One desirable species of property could not be im-

ported directly from Europe, however. The demand for African labor rose throughout the latter part of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. British ships were busily engaged in the slave trade, bringing Africans from the western coast of that continent to Chesapeake Bay and other British possessions. Slavers brought more and more “new Africans” up the James River, while other British trade ships loaded tobacco and unloaded such items as gilt-edged mirrors, shoe buckles, fine saddles and books. Little docks such as Bermuda Hundred and towns such as Petersburg collected and stored tobacco and the larger towns displayed imported goods. Colonial tobacco towns on Virginia rivers initially offered inhabitants and visitors a few small stores, inns and ordinaries, lawyers, doctors, and a church. They had a few artisans, but the processing of grain and tobacco was the chief industry.

Tidewater Virginia and other British colonies needed to develop a one-crop agriculture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in order to be part of the international British trading system and to sustain the plantations necessary for large scale production, a stable labor force was necessary. Enslavement of Africans was, by 1700, the solution for a society where white indentured laborers hoped to move on and acquire their own land. The sense of “difference” that the English in Virginia felt between themselves and Africans soon became a rationale for African inferiority and enslavement. The relative powerlessness of the Africans made such exploitation of their labor too tempting for ambitious Englishmen to resist. Tobacco was labor intensive and new planters spent as much as they could on acquiring slave labor, postponing capital improvements on their property until they had a sufficient work force. Slavery, sup-

*...the Revolution “was a profound educational experience for slaves. They learned much more about the geography and composition of the new nation.”*

Lorena Walsh

ported by the Virginia legal system, became deeply embedded in the society, economy, and politics of the region up the James River.

Planter indebtedness became a common plight in the early eighteenth century. Reasons included the restrictions of the British trade system, the win-or-lose nature of growing just one crop, and the attractions of a consumer revolution that offered more goods to more people. The frontier was gone. Even planters who maintained modest manor houses were now engaged in furnishing them from Europe. After 1750 imperial wars disrupted Atlantic shipping and markets. The part of the war between England and France that was known in the colonies as the French and Indian War (Seven Year’s War, 1756-63) meant fewer loans to planters and an English effort to tax their American subjects for a war that seemed to benefit Americans. Planters reacted by resisting the new taxes and by trying to raise tobacco production with more slave labor and increased acreage. The slow advent of the American Revolution began in 1765 with tax resistance and a financial recession, beginning about 1772, that put planters further into debt after they had extended their holdings in order to raise more tobacco.

The eighteenth century saw the Eppes plantations in the hands of three more male descendants of the first planter, Francis Eppes (d. 1668). After his son and grandson, both named John Eppes (d. 1691 and 1718), oversaw the end of the frontier and the development of a tobacco economy with a slave-based society, two Richard Eppeses (d. 1768 and 1792) brought the plantations through a period of maturation and the upheavals of the American Revolution. Under the new agricultural system, the labor of those enslaved became more diversified and less tied to the rhythms of tobacco culture. There were more tasks and fewer slack times in agriculture. We do not know how the Revolutionary Eppes families handled this agricultural transition, but Benjamin

Cocke, father of the third Richard Eppes, in an effort to diversify and modernize, apparently invested unwisely in canals and railroads. His widow changed her son’s name from Cocke to Eppes as an angry response to Cocke’s financial failings. This third Richard Eppes, understood that planters would need to be as efficient in the fields as their counterparts in New England were in the new factories.

### **The Political Revolution**

The American Revolution had a real impact on the enslaved population of Virginia. To a great extent, they suffered more than the general population of the Chesapeake, where the war brought a halt to trade and also brought social disruption. Shortages of everything from salt to shoes affected slaves first. On the other hand, the Revolution “was a profound educational experience for them. They learned much more about the geography and composition of the new nation.”<sup>26</sup> Many thousands fled to the British, even though they had heard reports that conditions for them as recruits or laborers were often dismal. Still, this seemed a better chance for freedom than remaining on the land. Virginia’s enslaved population was about 250,000 during the Revolutionary War and tens of thousands made the effort to reach the British lines. Those who fought with Lord Dunmore’s army in 1775 and 1776 were the first to be cruelly disillusioned. In 1775 Lord Dunmore, the deposed royal governor, promised to emancipate bondsmen who would fight with the British. Dunmore’s military campaign consisted principally of destroying property and freeing or kidnaping the human property of planters who lived up the rivers from the Chesapeake Bay. To thwart him, some masters sent their bondsmen inland but thousands of them ran away or were caught up in the war actions and became aware of possibilities for freedom. Hundreds of Virginia black men with Dunmore, weak from inadequate shelter and clothing, died from diseases or were simply abandoned.<sup>27</sup>

*African Americans were known as good navigators of Virginia's waterways and their knowledge made the Virginia navy quick to use them in coastal defense aboard ships.*

Military campaigns moved away from the James River after Lord Dunmore left in 1776 but the war returned in 1779 and the James River became the center of attacks by both land and water. General Clinton issued a proclamation from his headquarters in Philipsburg, New York that said blacks taken in rebellion would be sold, but those who came over to the British lines could pursue any occupation they desired. It was not a declaration of freedom or a statement of moral principle. It was simply a military strategy, but it encouraged some enslaved Virginians to join the British commanded first by Benedict Arnold, then William Phillips. British forces did extensive damage to the region between 1779 and 1781, firing from ships and landing to destroy stores of rum, tobacco, arms, and ammunition while seizing horses and encouraging runaways. The region near the Eppes plantations was particularly ravaged by destruction and theft. The British made little use of blacks in combat in this campaign, using them as servants to officers and as laborers for the hardest and most unpleasant tasks.<sup>28</sup>

Those leaving Virginia with Cornwallis's army in 1781 were scattered in a second diaspora, traveling to Nova Scotia, Britain, and West Africa. Some American blacks traveling with the British Army were shipped to British colonies in the West Indies and sold. The number of enslaved persons who escaped Virginia forever during the American Revolution is uncertain, estimates range from a thousand to tens of thousands.<sup>29</sup> It is certain, though, that some of them came from the James River area and their escape would remain part of the oral history of enslaved people in that area.

There was no real sentiment for emancipation among the British military. If the British Army had been sincere about protection and emancipation for those slipping into their lines, it would have encouraged slave revolts and mass desertions from plantations throughout the Virginia river system that flowed

into Chesapeake Bay. One recent scholar has documented rumors of four separate slave plots in the James River watershed in the month of April 1775 alone. Though the slave plots at the beginning of the Revolutionary War signaled that African Americans saw the war as an opportunity to change their own condition, the effort of both armies was to use the black soldier or seaman as labor, not to change the social order.<sup>30</sup>

At the beginning of the war, Virginia army and navy units excluded African Americans from enlisting in the Revolutionary cause but, by the time the war moved south in 1779, the Virginia revolutionaries were willing and even eager to accept free black and enslaved recruits. African Americans were known as good navigators of Virginia's waterways and their knowledge made the Virginia navy quick to use them in coastal defense aboard ships. But when the British cruised nearby, such African American navigation skills caused uneasy planters to remove all the small boats moored on the water. Luther Porter Jackson estimated that in Virginia 500 free blacks and a smaller number of enslaved blacks served the American cause in the Revolution. But that number may be low, if all forms of service are included. They could be volunteered by their masters for service or commandeered briefly by the Revolutionary forces, but few of the enslaved African Americans who served in the military were ever freed by their masters as required by law.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of the American Revolution and Confederation periods, a new federal government legitimized slavery without naming it. In the Constitutional Convention that met in 1787, Congress was prohibited from abolishing the slave trade until at least 1808; three-fifths of the enslaved population was counted for representation, giving the South a powerful edge in the new Congress; and states were required to return fugitives from bondage to their owners. The latter constitutional reality

*In the 1780s and 1790s, biracial congregations of the converted were formed all over eastern Virginia, bringing free blacks, slaves, urban artisans and rural farmers together.*

was reemphasized in the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. At the state level, Virginia legislation in 1782 made manumission easier for slaveholders. While northern states, after the Revolution, began the process of outlawing slavery, Virginia made this concession and then no more.

The Revolution was justified by an interpretation of liberty and human rights that was not applied to the enslaved population, but both enslaved and free blacks absorbed the theory and used it in their own arguments and justifications for freedom, even freedom through insurrection. That the ideals of the Revolution could be used by black Virginians created new fears for white Virginians. Whites had always feared groups of blacks gathered together and also feared combinations of blacks and poor or marginal whites. Rumors and reports of uprisings among bondsmen continued in the decades after the Revolution. How many of these were expressions of white fear cannot be known, but there can be little doubt that African Americans discussed among themselves their own rights to liberty and, in some cases, went so far as to plan insurrection. There were plots reported in Richmond in the summer of 1793 and another one a month later in Petersburg. There were rumors of slaves poisoning their masters and stories about maroons from the Dismal Swamp threatening travelers and stealing property.<sup>32</sup>

Rumors of conspiracies and real plans for uprisings mingled together for much of the eighteenth century so that nervous slaveholders often could not tell which was which. All this fear and speculation came into focus with the report of Gabriel's conspiracy that came out of Richmond in August, 1800. The enslaved blacksmith Gabriel had recruited followers over a wide Virginia landscape to carry out a planned insurrection. That event sent tremors of fear throughout the state. Even though his plans were thwarted by betrayal and a heavy rainstorm, Gabriel had organized

a large-scale conspiracy and come close to carrying it out. At their trials, he and his followers talked about their right to liberty and the fact that they planned to spare Quakers, Frenchmen and certain whites who were seen as sympathetic to them.

Reuben and Jesse Byrd, free blacks in Petersburg, were named as part of the conspiracy. Fearful white Virginians sought tighter controls on enslaved African Americans and an end to the increase in free blacks. In 1806 the Virginia legislature amended the 1782 act to require that blacks who were manumitted must now leave the state within a year of their emancipation unless they were given permission by the state to remain. Those already free had to register with the county. Sporadically enforced, this measure was an effective threat designed to keep free blacks from even the appearance of conspiracy with those enslaved.<sup>33</sup>

### **The Religious Revolution**

Concurrent with the American Revolution and its doctrines of human rights was the advent of a more emotional religious appeal to human dignity and worth. While a colony, Virginia had an established church, the Church of England or Anglican Church. Conversion to Christianity did not constitute grounds for freedom. Indeed, many slave holders did not believe it advisable to convert bondsmen to Christianity at all, believing that the doctrines of spiritual equality might create mischief among them. What are commonly called the First and Second Great Awakenings were, in Virginia, one steady discernible move toward a more personal and emotional connection to God than was provided by the Church of England or its successor, the Episcopal Church in Virginia. Beginning among Presbyterians in the 1750s in Virginia, this evangelical movement spread to Separate Baptists and to those who called themselves Methodist Episcopal. In the 1780s and 1790s biracial congregations of the converted

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were formed all over eastern Virginia, bringing free blacks, enslaved persons, urban artisans, and rural farmers together. From the religious fervor arose black preachers and the first black congregations. The black Baptist churches of the middle and late eighteenth century represent an early form of African American community identity, reaching out to rural and urban, enslaved and free, and connecting all to a larger world.

Religious worship formed and shaped by African Americans had a long history in the City Point and Petersburg areas, a history that was almost one hundred years old when Richard Eppes began keeping diaries. The larger region was the source of three of the first African American churches in America. All had their origins on the plantations and later moved to towns. The Bluestone Church, African Baptist, was organized about 1758 on the plantation of William Byrd III on the Bluestone River in Lunenburg, now Mecklenburg County. The church was formally constituted by white separatist preachers. When Byrd's bondsmen were dispersed, possibly because of the bankruptcy that preceded his suicide, the church was broken up, but the members hoped for renewal. Between 1772 and 1774, part of the church was reconstituted by the white Rev. John Michaels who ordained four black ministers: Moses, Benjamin and Thomas Gardner and Ord Farrell. In 1820 the church moved to Petersburg and became Petersburg First Colored Church with black ministers John Benn and Daniel Jackson.

In the 1780s and 1790s, Baptist and Methodist camp meetings drew many of Virginia's African Americans. In those decades, enslaved black preachers might exhort white or mixed congregations, and the two races practiced an approximation of equality in their religious interactions. Gowan Pamphlet, a black man from Middlesex County, preached at Green Spring, then Raccoon Chase, and then later around 1776, in Williamsburg. By the 1780s, the

Williamsburg church had a membership of over 500 and in the 1790s became a member of the Dover Association of regional Baptist churches. For a decade or so, black and white Baptists, enslaved and free, frequently met together at conferences and in worship. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Baptists, as well as Methodists and Presbyterians, moved to place white preachers over black preachers.

A racially mixed Baptist congregation in rural Prince George County, known as the Davenport Church, existed in 1788. Around 1800 the Davenport Church disbanded and its black members formed a church in Petersburg in 1803. In 1818 the church purchased a site called Gillfield, and it became known as Gillfield Baptist Church. In 1837 Sampson White became the first African American to serve as pastor. After his departure, both black and white pastors served, mainly because Virginia law made the presence of a white minister a legal necessity. Ministers, and sometimes members, traveled north and south, bringing back news about their brethren in the North, including some who were fugitives from Virginia.<sup>34</sup>

Two years later, Sampson White was very active in the racially-mixed First Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. and led a group out of the Washington church to form the First Colored Baptist Church of Washington, D.C. In 1848 he was pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, then a church in Brooklyn and, later, other churches, ending in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1868. It is important to note that Union Colored Church of Philadelphia was founded in 1832 by Daniel Scott from Gillfield Church, who was a minister there from 1832 to 1851, except for 1834-36. He was followed by Sampson White in 1851; and, in 1859, James Underdew, who had been pastor at Gillfield in Petersburg and at Berean Church in Carsville, New York, came to Union Colored Church. Underdew later enlisted as a chaplain to African

*Revolutionary ideals gave African Americans in Virginia a language and belief system to justify emancipation...but the Constitution and Bill of Rights did nothing to include them.*

American Union troops in the Civil War, many of whom fought in the campaigns of Petersburg and Richmond. Thus, the black church came full cycle from its origins near the Eppes plantations just after the American Revolution to the soldiers and chaplains of the Civil War with roots in the same area. And for all the years before, the black churches of the Petersburg region were connected by ministers and members to churches in most of the cities of the North.<sup>35</sup>

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, in Virginia played a role in the lives of local enslaved persons, but it was not through conversion. Southeastern Virginia, especially Petersburg and Southampton County, attracted Quaker farmers as early as 1702. Some of these families had been slaveholders in the early- and mid-1700s, but by the Revolutionary era they were required to end their ownership or leave the Society of Friends. Those who ceased being slaveholders continued to have close relationships with certain African American families, both enslaved and free. Frequently they represented African Americans who claimed freedom or they held title to an enslaved person until a family member could purchase freedom. Others left the Society rather than give up slaveholding, or married outside the Meeting and lost their membership. Many Quaker families moved west in the early 1800s. The Quaker Meetings that once existed in the Petersburg and City Point regions were given up for lack of members by 1800 with one brief exception, but the residual effect of Quakerism took various mildly benevolent forms.<sup>36</sup>

Revolutionary ideals gave African Americans in Virginia a language and belief system to justify emancipation and the disruption of war gave them an opportunity to see the wider world, but the Constitution and Bill of Rights did nothing to include them. While northern states began the process of ending slavery, the peculiar institution was expanding rapidly in the lower southern

states of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. The number of free blacks grew in Virginia, through manumission and self-purchase as well as natural increase, but the number of those enslaved grew faster. However, the very rapid and chaotic nature of change in the United States between the American Revolution (1776-1783) and the War of 1812 (1812-1814) left free and enslaved blacks with hope. In a society so changing, might there not be hope for emancipation and citizenship?

Virginia's emancipation act of 1782 had increased the number of emancipated African Americans by the thousands until it was severely modified in 1806. Urban free blacks in Virginia, in particular those who had acquired property and skills, thought that surely their merits would entitle them to full citizenship. Bondsmen who were skilled craftsmen, who had some literacy and were church members thought that their merits should entitle them to emancipation.<sup>37</sup> Could not Virginia follow the northern states? Virginia's natural advantages for international trade in tobacco were no longer enough to maintain the state's dominance in the new republic. There was some question as to whether slavery was appropriate for the new economy, but few Virginians wanted to face the implications of that possibility. They preferred to keep slavery and try to adapt it to new circumstances, as the Eppes family did on their landholdings.

# Chapter 3

## The Great Divide (1816 – 1844)

For the region along the James and Appomattox Rivers, improved transportation and communication between 1820 and 1860 brought the North and the outside world closer to such port towns as City Point and Petersburg, while, at the same time, the political differences that would lead to the Civil War made Virginians more wary of northern influences. Northern teachers, peddlers, newspapers and seamen — indeed, all things Yankee — became suspect. Unhappily for slaveholders, the increasing efficiency of the U. S. mail after 1820, the growing number of newspapers and journals that included political commentary, the railroad tracks that began to connect Virginia cities with the North, and the speed and number of schooners, steamers and other trade vessels that visited Virginia's port cities, all made knowledge of the larger world available to African Americans in the Petersburg and City Point areas.

Petersburg, Norfolk, and Richmond were deeply interconnected. Trade vessels usually stopped at all three ports and left those ports for Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Enslaved African Americans from Petersburg were usually sent to Richmond to be sold in the much larger market that operated there. Norfolk was the Virginia departure point for emancipated and free blacks who were emigrating to the African colony of Liberia. Both enslaved and free blacks in Petersburg had relatives in Richmond and Norfolk, and African Americans in all three cities had family and plantation kin in the surrounding countryside. For all three cities, the black church, the black barber-shop, the grog shop and grocery were among the places where the “slave grapevine” might give the errand-runner from the Eppes plantations or the

intrepid soul who sneaked into town the latest news of runaways and their methods. Skilled bondsmen who worked in places where they met the traveling public, as did Gilbert and Sarah, runaways from Thomas Epes, proprietor of Powell's Hotel in Petersburg, heard about escapes and understood that their skills would gain them employment in the North.<sup>38</sup>

The North and South became more aware of their differences with the 1819 debate over whether Missouri could be admitted to the Union as a slave state. The angry sectional division provoked by the debate over Missouri statehood shocked the nation. The Compromise of 1820 that resolved the Missouri question was the first of many efforts to paper over serious and growing national divisions. When the North criticized slavery, the South found itself on the defensive and elaborated a theory of African inferiority, already implicit in the legal code and social relations, in order to justify slavery. South Carolina challenged federal power and developed a “positive good” rationale for slavery that Virginia was reluctant to embrace, but ultimately did. By 1850 another sweeping set of legislative actions, the Compromise of 1850, was necessary to hold the fraying strands of national union together.

The state of Virginia, reaching from the Atlantic to the Ohio, was divided in its allegiance to slavery, with support much diminished in the western part of the state. But slaveholding politicians from eastern Virginia, the region of the Eppes plantations, dominated the legislature and passed laws that supported property rights in human chattel and placed restrictions on both free and enslaved blacks. The 1776 constitution kept political power in the Tidewater by



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a voting system that permitted some large landholders to vote in several places and by a legislature that refused to redistrict as the western population of the state grew. A further benefit for the Tidewater was that enslaved African Americans were counted as three-fifths of a person for state voting purposes. In Petersburg and the region of the Eppes plantations, the Tidewater political and social world of increasing commitment to slavery was the one reflected in the newspapers, the legislature and most pulpits. Reformers in Virginia did not succeed until 1850 in revising the constitution to give votes to all adult white males and thus move the center of power a little westward in the state. Most Virginians, including Dr. Richard Eppes, hoped right up until mid-April 1861, to hold onto both slavery and the federal union.<sup>39</sup>

Even so, the state frequently bemoaned the evil effects of slavery on agricultural and industrial progress. The argument against slavery in Virginia was most frequently about its bad effects on white Virginians; seldom about its effect on the lives and souls of African Americans. Many Virginians claimed they would like to have ended slavery, but how to compensate masters and what to do with free blacks were only two of the questions that appeared to have no answers. Given deep prejudices against African Americans, white Virginians believed it was impossible to consider making them full citizens of the republic after emancipation.

The creation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 reflected the concern that free blacks could not be full citizens in the United States because of white prejudice and should be encouraged to start a republic of their own in Africa. Founded to send free blacks from the United States to Liberia, the colony that the Society created on the Western coast of Africa, the ACS claimed that such a venture would also have the benefit of Christianizing Africa through the work of African American Christians. This was the as-

pect that interested evangelical African Americans in the James River cities, especially black congregations in Petersburg and Richmond that had formed African Missionary Societies as early as 1815.

Emigration to Africa was not attractive to most free blacks in the North, but in Virginia and especially in Petersburg, Richmond, and Norfolk, the prospect appealed to a group of ambitious and educated free mulatto families who left the two cities for Liberia in the 1820s. The families stayed connected with their free black and enslaved relatives and certain white families in the Petersburg area through letters and travel back to the United States. These free blacks included successful entrepreneurial families limited in their upward mobility because they lacked the rights of citizens and the families of Baptists and Methodist ministers committed to Christianizing Africa.<sup>40</sup> Frederick Brander of Petersburg sailed on the first ship to Liberia and the Reverend Colston Waring of Petersburg was on the second. Both were from highly-respectable free black families, and both returned to encourage free blacks to emigrate and slaveholders to emancipate slaves for Liberia.<sup>41</sup> Waring, who returned from his first trip to Liberia to take his wife and family back, preached colonization to large meetings of African Americans in Richmond and Petersburg, spreading the message to enslaved and free blacks in the congregations:

“The Annual Meeting of the Richmond African Baptist Missionary Society was held on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup> instant, at 11 o’clock, in the First Baptist meeting house in this city. A large number of coloured people were present, probably two thousand and the heart of the philanthropist and Christian must have been gratified to witness the orderly deportment and Christian zeal evinced on this occasion. Rev. Colston M. Waring, a pious, warm-hearted coloured man from Petersburg, preached from Isaiah ixii:10. ... This society was formed in the

*Throughout the 1820s hundreds of free blacks and dozens of emancipated African Americans from the James and Appomattox Rivers region left for Liberia....*

spring of 1815 with the sole object of sending persons of color as missionaries to Africa since which time they have collected nearly \$1000.”<sup>42</sup>

The African Missionary Societies were founded primarily by the African American members of mixed-race or black congregations to create a private space, a church within a church, where both free and enslaved could work together with less white supervision. These societies usually attracted the most ambitious among African Americans. They were in contact with other such societies across the United States debating strategies for finance and choosing candidates for missionaries. Black congregations and religious meetings were suspected of helping their enslaved members to escape, but it was never proved against them in Virginia. First African Baptist Church in Richmond, the largest of several African churches in the city, was always under suspicion of communicating with runaways in the North. In 1848 successful fugitives were discovered to have addressed letters back to friends, in care of the church, in which they described their escape plans and promised aid to others who sought freedom. The white minister at First African determined not to deliver any more letters from the North to his congregation unless he knew the recipients personally.<sup>43</sup> Inevitably enslaved persons expanded their sense of possibility when they talked to free blacks who had traveled widely. This alone may have led to a desire for freedom and subsequent flight.

Throughout the 1820s hundreds of free blacks and dozens of emancipated slaves from the James and Appomattox Rivers region left for Liberia, mostly from the port of Norfolk. One exception to this was the ship *Harriet* that carried several hundred free blacks from Richmond and Petersburg to Liberia and left from City Point, very near Appomattox Manor. That particular ship included most of the future governmental officers of the republic of Liberia. On board was Joseph Jenkins

Roberts, a free black born in Norfolk but raised in Petersburg, accompanied by his mother and siblings and dozens of other Petersburg free blacks. Roberts formed a partnership with William Colson, a free black barber in Petersburg, to conduct trade between Liberia and Virginia. Colson was to operate the Petersburg end of the business, but died on a visit to Liberia.<sup>44</sup> Roberts became the first President of Liberia in 1847. In the shops and taverns of City Point, some of them leased out by the Eppes family, Liberian emigration was surely a source of conversation. There can scarcely have been an African American in the region of the James River who did not know of these emigrants and their rise to prominence.

The interest of free blacks in Liberia declined after 1830 despite the fact that Colston Waring and Joseph Roberts returned to urge their fellow African Americans to join them. After 1831 most Virginia emigrants to Liberia were those who had been emancipated for that purpose or free blacks who sought to escape the violence inflicted on them after Nat Turner’s rebellion in August, 1831. Nat Turner, a bondsman in Southampton County, led the largest and most devastating slave rebellion in United States history. He and his band of recruits murdered fifty-five men, women and children before they were dispersed. In the days following the murders, whites in the southside counties sought bloody vengeance. Those enslaved dared not venture outside and free blacks sought protection with sympathetic whites. Free blacks from many parts of the state, but particularly from below the James, hastily sold their possessions and traveled to Norfolk to await the next ship to Liberia. The voluntary emigration of the 1820s and the flight from fear in 1831 and 1832 added up to a large exodus, an aspect of life that Eppes’s slaves must have known.<sup>45</sup>

Early in the nineteenth century, the Eppes plantations had been inherited by Mary “Polly” Eppes who had married Benjamin Cocke and had one surviving

*It was in the 1830s that Americans first began to hear and use the term “underground railroad.”*

son, Richard Eppes Cocke, born in 1824. Polly Cocke was shocked when, at the death of her husband, she found the plantations to be deeply in debt. She was able to stabilize the plantations' economy, but seemed to have passed on her resentment of Benjamin Cocke to her son. He always thought of his father as a bad manager; but the entire Petersburg region was in an economic depression in the 1820s and that may also have been a factor. Benjamin Cocke invested, as did many Virginia planters and businessmen, in the railroad and canal ventures that were popular in Virginia in the 1820s and 1830s. Most investors lost money; Benjamin Cocke had much company in financial distress. This era may have been one in which slaves were sold. Polly Cocke, embittered by her husband's breach of her trust, had her son drop “Cocke” from his name. She ran the plantations from 1836 until her death in 1844, while sending Richard first to boarding school, then to the University of Virginia.<sup>46</sup>

While the Eppes-Cocke family turmoil and the nearby revolt of Nat Turner were the primary influences on the lives of enslaved workers on the Eppes plantations from 1820 until 1848, events in the nation also shaped their worlds. Nat Turner was quickly associated in the Virginia slaveholder's mind with two other events. First, North Carolina-born free black, David Walker, published his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens* in 1829 in Boston, calling for the enslaved to resist slavery. Copies of his pamphlet were carried south by black seamen, among others, and found in Virginia. Shortly thereafter, in January 1831, William Lloyd Garrison founded his abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*. These developments made slaveholders very nervous and more determined to keep their slaves away from the corruptions of literacy and association with free blacks. Then the murders of fifty-five whites by Turner and his allies brought a rash of new state legislation prohibiting enslaved or free blacks from gathering in groups for any purpose without white supervision and

forbidding the teaching of literacy to enslaved persons, except by the slaveholder.

Books, speech, and newspapers were censored both formally and informally. Abolitionist literature sent south through the Post Office was blocked, discarded by the postmaster or, in some cases, destroyed publicly by irate citizens. Black churches came increasingly under the control and supervision of whites. Yet those churches continued to grow in numbers and membership, representing a central part of the culture of black Virginians. More than that, black churches continued to represent a conduit for travel, information, and assistance to black Virginians in the North. In the years after 1832, Tidewater Virginia and much of the Southern Piedmont area moved toward a defense of slavery, and other sections of the state felt constrained to adopt a silence about their concerns. Although Richard Eppes was personally nonpolitical, political debate raged all around him and his neighbors included Virginia's most prominent secessionist and “fire eater,” Edmund Ruffin. Eppes was sent north to medical school in Philadelphia, where he met and courted his first wife. His ties and connections with the North were considerable and, although he became much in harmony with Edmund Ruffin as an advocate and practitioner of scientific agriculture, he never developed any enthusiasm for Ruffin's secessionist views.<sup>47</sup>

It was in the 1830s that Americans first began to hear and use the term “underground railroad.” It was used to describe an activity that had a long history on the North American continent — attempts at escape from slavery and assistance to fugitives from slavery. While there is no agreement about the origin of the term, it linked American fascination with technology with dramatic escapes from bondage. Despite vigilance, some bondsmen were literate and could read to others. Those still enslaved and even fugitives hiding out received letters through the post office, even occa-

sional telegrams, routed through free blacks or sympathetic whites.<sup>48</sup> Run-aways might use the railroad lines to the North or hide themselves on the ships that steamed in and out of the James River docks and might be in Philadelphia in two days. Although it could be argued that slave hunters, too, could use this new technology, the fact is that, as North and South experienced a great political divide over slavery, the American world was actually growing smaller and more easily connected in a way that could be used by those enslaved in the American South.

## Chapter 4

### Calculating the Costs (1848 – 1862)

Richard Eppes ran a highly-organized and closely-scrutinized group of plantations and escape would not have been easy. He thought of himself as a scientific farmer and kept meticulous notes on all aspects of his plantations. His diaries are almost entirely devoted to his farm labor and farm practices with comments about his personal life few and scattered. This means that his diaries contain a great deal about the work routines of his enslaved labor, who was punished and who was rewarded for work performance, and a fair amount about the domestic relations of the bondsmen. There are no references to runaways except for those who ran to the nearby woods or City Point and were very quickly caught or came back. Eppes's references to runaways suggest quarrels over labor or attempts to evade "correction," as whipping was called, not attempts to reach freedom.

The efforts at scientific agriculture made by Richard Eppes show him to be aware of the latest ideas in crop rotation for soil enrichment. Farms and plantations in eastern Virginia had suffered from over planting tobacco, then corn and cotton, and the area appeared far behind the North in restoring soil and other agricultural practices.<sup>49</sup> Travelers noted that tobacco appeared to have exhausted the eastern Virginia soil, but less well understood was that, for many planters and farmers in Tidewater Virginia, it was cheaper to abandon tobacco-worn farms and to buy into the abundance of fresh land to the west. And if enslaved families grew while the tobacco crop shrank, it was more profitable to sell bondsmen to the cotton-rich area farther south than to keep them on a debt-ridden farm. If Eppes was to stay in the region without selling his labor force, he had the task of further experimentation with grains,

fertilizers, and the production of livestock, dairy products and market crops.<sup>50</sup> Richard Eppes set himself the difficult task of redeeming his plantations with the latest technology and by studying agricultural journals, while keeping the slave labor force that was originally acquired for a tobacco economy.

Fugitives from slavery in nineteenth century Virginia frequently ran away when afraid of being sold or when family members had recently been sold. Those enslaved ran away to see a loved one or to get away from a serious dispute with another bondsman, perhaps a foreman. Disputes occurred over workloads or punishment for infringement of rules, such as stealing. The most common areas of conflict between enslaved labor and the master were food supply and appropriate work loads. Eppes's diary reflects his concern over food stolen to be eaten or food stolen to be sold for money. Cruelty and unpredictable punishment also drove enslaved people, especially women, to flee slavery. It was not a step taken lightly. Fear of being caught and sold into a worse situation was one factor in keeping workers on the Eppes plantations. As the nineteenth century progressed, the slave trade became a more and more important part of Virginia's economy, and slaves had reason to fear being "sold South."<sup>51</sup> A study of Thomas Jefferson's plantation, Poplar Forest, describes the pattern of runaways from there while another recent study of the South made a computer-based study of fugitives and runaways.<sup>52</sup> Both studies note that enslaved people usually had a sense of limits as to how far an owner or overseer could punish them or deprive them. Flights from the Eppes's plantations fall into the category described by the latter study as

*...part of Eppes' religious principles as well as his scientific farm strategy [was] to encourage strong family relationships among his slaves thus make running away too emotionally painful for many.*

rebels against restrictions, such as lack of ability to connect with family members or rules considered unjust and arbitrary.

Eppes's desire to economize and show a profit caused him to monitor the activities of his enforced labor more closely than was typical for Virginia planters. His methods of control, while they could never entirely eliminate resistance to enslavement, were effective to the extent that few, if any, bondsmen were fugitives from his properties. He set out a code of laws (see Appendix 1) that offered predictable rewards and punishments and a domestic system that encouraged slave marriages and offered stability for extended families. It seems to have been part of Eppes's religious principles as well as his scientific farm strategy to encourage strong family relationships among his slaves thus make running away too emotionally painful for many. He celebrated slave marriages, although they had no standing in the law, and gave money as wedding gifts to those who married within the plantation family rather than taking spouses "abroad" on other plantations. In doing so, he resolved two of the greatest anxieties among enslaved African Americans — the fear of arbitrary and unpredictable punishment and the fear of separation from family. But, while Eppes put forth an explicit set of rules, the ultimate power to interpret the rules was his.

Eppes tried to isolate his enslaved families from knowledge of the world off the plantations and to keep people who might aid escapes far from his lands. He was not really successful in isolating his laborers and domestic servants, but he made every effort. Eppes knew that absconding was based on opportunity and he made certain that opportunities were limited. He watched the deep tidal estuary beyond his manor and noted suspicious craft, quick to enquire about their purposes. "A very suspicious looking craft - sloop called the *Tippecanoe* Norfolk, with a red stripe on sides bottom green. Stem notched. Supposed to

be after sailors is now lying under the hill at the reel. To be watched as they might carry more than they brought."<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the very real threat presented by ships and even small boats, Eppes understood the danger of taking enslaved domestic servants out of the South. He and his wife visited Philadelphia often and knew that many fugitives from slavery had settled there, helped by local free blacks. He was taking no chances: "We reached Philadelphia on Wednesday morning, having left our maid Sarah at Burnam's to be shipped home by steamer *Belvidere* on Thursday evening. . . ."<sup>54</sup> Eppes also participated in the local night patrol, common in slave societies, in which part of his civic duty as a white man was to take his turn riding the roads around City Point in the night, looking for signs of any activity by African Americans.

In one dramatic diary account, Eppes and two other men were patrolling the neighborhood and noticed, late at night, three black men rowing with muffled oars toward a small store at a landing. They listened to the voices of the men and the female store owner, Mrs. Penny. The three men, one a cook at a neighboring plantation, were captured, and it was determined that they had sold bags of corn and wheat to the woman for cash.<sup>55</sup> This was a very common practice among enslaved persons who had access to grain and to the little village stores run by middling-poor whites, who were only too happy to buy the grain cheap and sell it dear. This collusion between enslaved blacks and the white lower classes was something Virginia planters always feared, because illegal trade alliances, annoying but not dangerous, were sometimes extended to alliances over escapes.<sup>56</sup> In addition, Eppes measured out food very carefully and his diaries record many instances of bondsmen punished for stealing rather small amounts of basic foodstuffs. Lack of food was frequently resolved by theft, barter, foraging, gardening, or purchase. Food could also be converted to cash, as the cook from the neighboring plantation was attempting to do.

*Richard Eppes actually preferred to call in other doctors for his sick or injured slaves but he would, if necessary, or if he preferred, treat them himself.*

Were the enslaved families lacking sufficient food? What was the physical condition of servants on the Eppes plantations? In the most detailed study yet done on the health of Virginia bondsmen, the conclusion was that their health was dependent on sufficient clothing, especially shoes; weather-tight and uncongested housing; an adequate and balanced diet; and appropriate care for illnesses. Clothing may have been the least problem, given that the moral standards of nineteenth-century society demanded more than earlier times had that people, especially adults, be covered. Dirty clothes were not much of a problem in disease transmission, but inadequate clothes and lack of shoes led to frostbite and vulnerability to respiratory diseases, the worst of which was pneumonia. Shoes were actually the most important clothing item for protection from cold, punctures, bites, scratches, and worms.<sup>57</sup> There is evidence that Eppes did as most planters did — he withheld shoes until after the first frost.<sup>58</sup>

Summer shoes prevented intestinal diseases caused by poor outdoor sanitation and contact with the earth. Todd Savitt estimates that at least one-half of Virginia's black population harbored worms at some point during their lifetime. The damp clay soil of Virginia favored roundworms. Going barefoot, working in fields or sitting on the riverbank and fishing made people susceptible to hookworm invasion. Hookworms went from the heart to the lungs to the intestines and caused anemia, chronic illness, and enormous appetite, and sometimes physical and mental retardation.<sup>59</sup>

Savitt believes most bondsmen were reasonably well fed.<sup>60</sup> Facts about nutritional deficiencies are hard to obtain because they take some time to show up and their symptoms mimic other symptoms. Most common foods on plantations were cornmeal and pork (salted, pickled or as chitterlings). Also common were sweet potatoes, butter-milk, molasses, and fish from nearby

ivers. If flour was used, it was unrefined. Spoiled pork caused trichinosis, a worm disease.<sup>61</sup> Lactose intolerance was common among African Americans, but milk was not an important part of the adult diet. Malnutrition was more likely to be found in the free black population than among those enslaved. Free blacks also received the worst medical care, although not as bad as several accounts have contended.<sup>62</sup>

Although a few doctors of the time understood the general connection between contaminated water supplies and cholera, many doctors, including Eppes, insisted that overeating or eating certain combinations caused cholera and other illnesses among blacks. Although this was bad science, it gives us some idea of the range of foods in the Virginia African American diet. Doctors listed as suspicious “many pears,” “meat, cheese, etc, fried together,” “shoat, chicken pie, apples, etc.,” “cabbage – boiled the previous day,” or “a hearty supper of boiled turnips.” Norfolk made it illegal to sell melons, green corn and pineapples during time of cholera; Richmond prohibited “spoiled fish, crabs, and stale vegetables,” most of which were earlier available to slaves<sup>63</sup> Malaria was milder in the upper South and blacks were immune to two forms of it. If they had the sickle cell trait, they were even more immune to malaria. On the other hand, the problems of childbed fever and delivery complications were much the same for black and white women. Women of childbearing age frequently appeared on sick lists with menstrual complaints. Pregnancy was much valued, but it did not save enslaved women from hard work.<sup>64</sup>

Slave owners wanted their workforce to be healthy for both financial and humanitarian reasons. And they feared that diseases could spread to their own families. As a doctor, Richard Eppes actually preferred to call in other doctors for his sick or injured workers, but he would, if necessary, or if he preferred, treat them himself. Those enslaved on

*A master who punishes not crime is not only annoyed continually himself, but a perfect curse to the whole neighborhood....*

Richard Eppes

the Eppes plantations were spared some of the “leeching and cupping” cures that still prevailed in the region, left over from the earlier notion that drawing blood would aid the patient. Eppes’s store of remedies was a little more varied and useful than the store-bought bottles that many planters used and his diagnoses and prescriptions were surely as good as any available at the time. Planters, seeking to save money by not calling a doctor, often employed home remedies. Free blacks and poor whites purchased quinine, laudanum, castor oil, calomel, paregoric, etc. over the counter. Knowledge of the plant and animal life of the region was an important survival strategy in many ways. Those who couldn’t afford such bottled remedies collected roots, barks, and the leaves of local vegetation. Bondsmen, secretly or openly, consulted “root doctors,” of whom there were quite a few in Virginia.<sup>65</sup>

Richard Slaughter, a young boy on the Appomattox Point plantation in the 1850s, was later asked if there were any runaways from the plantations and his enthusiastic affirmative reply also showed how his woods lore earned him money:

“Did slaves ever run away! Lord, yes. All the time. Where I was born, there is lots of water. Why there used to be as high as ten and twelve Dutch three masters in the harbor at a time. I used to catch little snakes and other things like terrapins and sell ‘em to the sailors for to eat roaches on the ships. In those days a good captain would hide a slave way up in the top sail and carry him out of Virginia to New York and Boston.”

This is also a brief, mythic, and condensed image of escape from a man who heard about escapes from his elders. But, again, it points to the water route for escape all the way to the North. At a minimum, those on the Eppes plantations were aware of runaways and reveled in the stories of escapes. William Still’s *The Underground Railroad* frequently mentions that fugi-

tives from Virginia’s port cities contacted an “agent,” who they knew would help. Port city newspapers, like the Norfolk *Beacon*, complained that there was a black society in Norfolk that helped bondsmen escape.<sup>66</sup> One candidate for that honor, according to a local historian, was The Grand United Order of Tents, a secret society formed in Norfolk by two enslaved women, Annetta Lane and Harriet Taylor, that aided runaways and emerged after the Civil War as an official black women’s benevolent association.<sup>67</sup>

On balance, however, in the decades before the Civil War when the Underground Railroad was at its most active, the Eppes slaves weighed their options and found the effort to strike out for permanent freedom too difficult, too emotionally wrenching or too dire in consequences to attempt. This does not mean that Richard Eppes was a model of kindness and self-restraint. His own diaries record his temperamental outbursts. Richard Slaughter described Eppes as a “very nice man” who “never sold but one man, fur’s I can remember, and that was cousin Ben [Bins]. Sold him South. Yes.” But Eppes did not spare the rod, and whether he was a good master might depend on perspective. Richard Slaughter was twelve years old when the Civil War broke out. As a child, he did not encounter the inflexible and strict accounting for work performance that Richard Eppes demanded. Eppes described his own reasons for discipline and they reflect his lifelong fear of dying in debt and losing respect, as he believed his father did. Richard Eppes was very fearful of insolvency and saw his father, Benjamin Cocke, as having been too easy-going. He was determined to make rational and scientific decisions and to discipline his environment:

“When a crime occurs on a plantation or a negro is universally careless and indolent, he cannot be paid his wages and dismissed as the white man at the North or in Europe, but the question arises immediately in the mind of the



*[Eppes] sold a slave attending him while he was a student at the University of Virginia. His mother commented on the importance of this act in establishing boundaries of behavior for the other slaves.*

master, shall he be sold or whipped? The only two resources he has, for let it once be known on the plantation that master will not whip, there is an end to all management, all the talking, giving good advice will effect nothing. U.S. Navy. A master who punishes not crime is not only annoyed continually himself, but a perfect curse to the whole neighborhood, (John Archer, Bermuda Hundreds) and pretty generally loses his estate or dies insolvent. My father."<sup>68</sup>

Eppes apparently sold only two slaves between 1841 and 1861, although some were sold after his father's death in 1836. The two sales by Richard Eppes were both for long-running disobedience, and the sales were intended to be examples to the other slaves of the results of insubordination. In the first instance, he sold a body servant attending him while he was a student at the University of Virginia. His mother commented on the importance of this act in establishing boundaries of behavior for the other bondsmen:

"Mr. Gilliam . . . returned on Thursday and told me that your man James was sold & that Watson the gambler had bought him, you only got 450 dollars for him, he was so worthless that no one that knew him would buy him. I think it was well that you got rid of him, for he was a deceitful drunken Vagabon [*sic*] he would have been the cause of the other servants acting wrong, for they waited to know what would be done with him, they knew he was a favorite of mine and thought that I would not part from him and that he was to do as he pleased..."<sup>69</sup>

Evidence from the first page of an 1845 letter addressed to "mother," care of Richard Eppes, may cast a little light on the identity of James and a later sale of him, but also revises some long-held assumptions about who was sold in 1836 in order to pay the debts of Eppes's father, Benjamin Cocke:

"Dear Mother I take this opportunity of writing to you to inform you that I

am well hoping this may find you the same. I wrote to you about the distress of my Brother James Lewis he is sold and gone to east florida. I has not heard for [from] him but I believe he has a good master give my love to my young master Richard Epes [*sic*] hoping to hear that he is well give my love to my uncle mat slaughter and to his family and paul and andrew Stuart give my love to cousin Richard Slaughter and his two daughters Elizabeth and laura give my love to Sister Vina Robertson and tell her I have wrote to her as many times as four and have not received any answer yet my love to Father Daniel Jackson and his family do send me word how Lucy Ann child is and whether she is in Petersburg or not can you tell me what word of Alabama whether she is [moor] is in for I want to write to her as soon as I can I am yet living in Aiken, So Ca with William Merrit my boy & my husband Solomon [Mopford] and if he is married for [faded ink] and our Paul is well and how his family is."<sup>70</sup>

The letter breaks off at the end of the page. There was probably a second page, now lost. The reference to Daniel Jackson may indicate a connection with free black Reverend Jackson's Baptist Church in Petersburg, and the letter certainly indicates kinship with the Slaughter family. James Lewis may be the "James" sold by Richard Eppes while he attended the University of Virginia, and this may represent a second sale of James.

The Eppes family story has long been that Richard Eppes's baby nurse was sold when his widowed mother was desperate for cash and that Eppes tried to repurchase her from Alabama. He was, one version says, prevented from doing this by her death in Alabama.<sup>23</sup> This story may have been partially based on an 1867 entry in his diary that was transcribed as: "Ariadne daughter of old Tizzy my black nurse formerly a slave in our family but was sold at the death of my father to pay his debts 31 years ago (1836) called to see us this

*...any dispute between any two Eppes slaves quickly involved dozens of their relatives.*

evening and I recognized her when we were separated I was only 12 and ½ years old, she has been living in Aiken, S. Carolina.”<sup>24</sup> The name Izzy, wife of Frank Lewis, has been transcribed as Tizzy. Her children, Ariadne and James, were sold. The baby nurse, Izzy Lewis, was not sold, but died in the mid- to late-1840s and Ariadne, enslaved in Aiken, South Carolina, was the author of the letter above and the person whom Richard Eppes recognized when she returned in 1867. The source of her literacy is uncertain, but those families who were part of the domestic household were most likely to acquire some literacy. She has frequently been identified as Mrs. Solomon Mopford, but I believe she is inquiring after a Solomon, perhaps Morris, on or near the Eppes’s plantations, not naming Solomon [Mopford] as her husband.<sup>73</sup>

This letter fragment again suggests that the Eppes’s bondsmen were not as isolated as he might have wished. Eppes may never have known that his strategy of isolation was not entirely successful. If he read the Petersburg papers, he was aware of the existence of the Underground Railroad in that region, and he worried about escapes by water or the dangers of taking enslaved servants to the North. But he knew little of the many ways in which slaves near City Point, Petersburg, and along the James River acquired information. While Eppes knew something of the resistance around work and food and family, he did not know the extent to which bondsmen had a private world on the plantations, connected to free relatives or those enslaved elsewhere.

Family relationships are an important key to understanding the context in which these enslaved African Americans constructed their own identities and meanings. In dividing the enslaved population of the Eppes plantations into family groups based on slave censuses, as this study has done, family structures appear, but they may look simpler and more orderly than they really were. Because some families had

been on the land for generations and because Richard Eppes encouraged marriage within the plantation household, there was a vast cousinage. There are fragmentary lists from 1819 and the 1840s that suggest great continuity of families on these plantations. But the family structures that emerge in the 1850s from Eppes’s inventories, which make an effort to note parentage, must be supplemented with information on individuals taken from Eppes’s diaries.

The way into an understanding of the real persons enslaved on the plantations is through families and stories, beginning with the generation born during the Revolutionary era. Jenny Oldham was one of the matriarchs of the Eppes plantations. Born in 1789, she was the mother of at least five and the grandmother of at least nine children on the plantation and was still living at the outset of the Civil War. She took advantage of her first opportunity to cross the James River and leave the Eppes plantation, doing so in June 1862.

Just before the Civil War, the aged Jenny Oldham was engaged in a family quarrel that showed how any dispute between any two Eppes bondsmen quickly involved dozens of their relatives. On March 25, 1861, Eppes recorded that he had gone to the Island farm “to settle a difficulty among the negroes which occurred on the evening of March 16<sup>th</sup>, but, of which I heard nothing until last Saturday.” Ned Oldham, senior, son of Jenny, hit his wife, Fanny, and “was about to whip her.” Jim Booker, married to Ned and Fanny’s daughter, Jane, jumped in to protect Fanny and “drew his knife on Ned.” Jim and Jane Booker had named their first child Fanny Ellen for Jane’s mother, and it was clear that Jane sympathized with her mother. Crocodile Lewis and his wife, Sally, daughter of Jenny Oldham and sister of Ned, entered on the side of Ned. Only the intervention of William White and Henry Corsen, the latter married to one of Jenny’s granddaughters, prevented a murder as “sticks, knives and hoes [were] in the hands of the parties.” This

indicates long-running anger and resentment within the Oldham family, with members of all generations dividing on the basis of old quarrels. Eppes relocated the aged Jenny Oldham and her granddaughter, Jane Booker, to Hopewell in order “to secure the separation [*sic*] of the parties engaged in this fracas,”<sup>74</sup> indicating that the oldest and youngest women were somehow seen as the most angry and aggrieved in this family fight.

To look further at this quarrel will tell us more about enslaved families on the Eppes plantations. We have no record of Jenny’s husband. She was born and had her first children in an era before evangelical religion began to prevail upon some masters to encourage marriage. Jenny and the other elderly persons born in the 1780s and 1790s had been in the Eppes family since birth. Her first son, George, was still on the property as the 1850s ended, but had no family listed. It is possible that he had married off the plantation. Her son, Ned, was a carpenter and with his wife, Fanny, had Jane and Ned Jr., and perhaps other children. The extent of Ned’s skills as a carpenter is suggested by the list of specialized tools issued to him.<sup>75</sup> Jenny’s daughter, Sally Oldham Thompson, had three children before marrying Crocodile Lewis, three years her junior. Eppes was relieved when Crocodile and Sally married in early 1852, but his hopes for reform in Crocodile’s drinking were not fulfilled.<sup>76</sup> As late as the March 1861 fight on the Island plantation, Crocodile had been drinking. “Strict injunctions were given overseer to keep Crocodile on the farm for six months no leave allowed as he invariably gets drunk if allowed to visit City Point or Bermuda Hundreds.”<sup>77</sup>

As Jenny Oldham, born in the Revolutionary era, was one matriarch of the plantation families, Franklin and Isobel (Frank and Izzy) Lewis were also founders of large families dating back to the eighteenth century. The large Lewis family may have had some mem-

bers, such as Ariadne and James, sold during the Cocke years, but that is not certain. Frank Lewis (b. 1781) and Izzy Lewis were the parents of four adults still present on the plantation in the 1850s. Eight years separates the first and second children while two or three years is typical spacing for enslaved families on this and other plantations. The eight years without a recorded birth may be accounted for by infant death or by the sale of Ariadne and James.

Jim Booker, described by Eppes as “one of my best men,”<sup>78</sup> who married Jenny Oldham’s granddaughter, Jane Oldham, was married to a different woman at the time of his purchase from slave traders Dickinson and Hill in Richmond. His previous owner, Mr. Faulconer of Essex County, assured Eppes that Jim Booker was an excellent worker and he only sold him because of a “difficulty” between Booker and a favored domestic servant over a woman, Faulconer’s cook. Still, that Christmas Eppes gave Booker a pass to see his wife “living at Mr. Faulconer’s in Essex City.” The pass did not prevent Jim Booker from being arrested by Faulconer and held in Tappahannock, and it was time-consuming, as well as expensive, for Eppes to get him out of jail.<sup>31</sup> Obviously, Faulconer wanted no flare up of the difficulties. Perhaps for this reason, Eppes encouraged Booker to find another wife on the plantation. Or Booker himself or his Essex City wife might have decided that it was too difficult and dangerous to try to see each other. Either way, Booker married Jane Oldham just two months later on March 6, 1859. This was another example of the way in which enslaved families were made to conform to the convenience of slaveholders.

Another family uproar had occurred two years prior to the fracas at the Island farm. Solomon Morris’s wife, Mary Jane Oldham Morris, had been accused by her husband of adultery with William White.<sup>80</sup> Eppes did not record how that accusation was re-

*...religious ceremonies and Eppes's desire for peaceful domestic relationships notwithstanding, slave marriage had no status in the law and served the master's convenience.*

solved, but the Morrises remained together, and William White was one of those who separated the supporters of Ned from the supporters of Fanny in March 1861. Some nine years earlier, Eppes had noted: "Eliza [Page] sick, about 3 months in the family way William White the father according to her statement understand that he wishes to marry Katy."<sup>81</sup> Eliza, a girl of 14 and granddaughter of Fanny Oldham, may have lost the child as there is no record for an 1853 birth to her or any subsequent mention of such a child. It was not in the interest of White to stir up old hostilities or memories in the extended Oldham and Lewis clans. Indeed, the other man who jumped in to stop the fight, Henry Corsen, now married to a granddaughter of Jenny Oldham, had once been accused of seducing Elizabeth White, wife of George White and daughter of Nancy Lewis, back in 1852.<sup>82</sup>

If this seems complex to the reader, it was not so to the participants. They had lived through these romances, marriages, and extra-marital affairs and any quarrel among them brought out alliances based on old grievances or gratitude. They brought their own personal loyalties to any argument within plantation families. Looking closely at these families shows the extent to which the strains within the families were brought on by slavery itself. Eppes thought that he imposed an orderly regime that sanctioned marriage — and he did to the extent that it was possible within his definition of plantation efficiency. But the need to marry within the plantation created mismatches and break-ups. Young women not infrequently had several children before they married. For example, Harriet Ruffin appears to have had four children by other men before she married Madison Ruffin. Jim Booker's "marriage" to a woman in Essex City appears to have been easily dissolved when it became somehow inconvenient, and he was able to marry Jane Oldham very quickly. This is a reminder that, religious ceremonies and Eppes's desire for

peaceful domestic relationships notwithstanding, slave marriage had no status in the law and served the master's convenience. Marriage off the plantation, as in the case of Jim Booker, or even on another part of the plantation, as in the case of Henry Corsen, got men into trouble as they tried to see their wives.

In the interests of efficient farming, Eppes moved laborers from farm to farm and sometimes failed to provide the circumstances that would allow husbands to be with their wives. Eppes complained that "Henry Corsen left here for the Island without a pass and did not get back until this morning, reduced his allowance a pound of meat & gave him warning" and, a few months later, "Henry Corsen took the oars of Davy's boat this evening and my white boat & went over to the Island without letting me know or having any pass . . ." Henry Corsen was recently married and his wife was on the Island plantation. He had asked to marry Eliza Page, the young woman who had been pregnant at 14, in July 1858, and Eppes had expressed himself "very glad that Eliza is married at last."<sup>83</sup> Eppes's relief in getting this young woman married was perhaps premature. She is the only Eliza in the inventories and she is still Eliza Page at the outbreak of the Civil War. Corsen, instead, married a young woman named Carolina and had two small children when he left with her in 1862. This is the woman he was anxious to see on the Island plantation.

The Slaughter and Ruffin families, the former present on the plantation at the time of the American Revolution, produced survivors who gave oral interviews in the 1930s. They were also among the most favored on the plantations. Yet, they were not spared the arbitrary brutality of slavery. Particular attention to Eppes's comments on those families will enlarge — and perhaps change — the picture offered by the elderly ex-bondsmen who gave interviews and who were very young in the last decade of slavery. Looking closely

at several incidents in the lives of these families will reveal something of the texture of daily life.<sup>84</sup>

Mathew and Hannah Slaughter were another set of elderly progenitors, the oldest couple enslaved on the plantation. They were the parents of at least eight children. By the late 1850s, they lived in a house of their own on the Hopewell farm. Many of the Slaughters worked in the Eppes household and were in daily contact with the Eppes family. Mat and Hannah's son, Steward was married to Susan Slaughter, who was a cook for the Eppes family. Patty Slaughter, a daughter of Mat and Hannah, was one of those required to answer the bell pull at night, and, thus had to remain near the manor house.<sup>85</sup> Her daughter, Ursula, was chosen by Mrs. Eppes to apprentice to Susan Slaughter, the cook and Ursula's aunt.<sup>86</sup>

The children and grandchildren of Mat and Hannah sometimes suffered from being among the best domestic servants. Hired out to overseers' wives or to others in the neighborhood, they were often abused physically. "Complaints from Amy (Slaughter) of Mrs. Marks (overseer's wife) treatment of Susan (Slaughter), sent her word by Fannie not to strike her over the head but whip her if she thought she required it."<sup>87</sup> The next year, the roles were reversed and Susan was complaining that Amy had been beaten by Mrs. Marks. She took the child to Mrs. Eppes and presented "a shirt of Amy's [,] neck arm & half the back covered with blood." Amy had a gash on her head and a knot "nearly as large as a pullet egg."<sup>88</sup> Patty Slaughter's daughter, Ursula, was whipped "very severely" by another overseer's wife.<sup>89</sup> The children near the manor house also had to face Eppes's anger when he could not discover who was stealing fruit from the trees and had Tom and Dick (Richard) Slaughter strapped along with four Ruffin children.<sup>90</sup> Susan herself, a woman trusted as the family cook, was whipped by Eppes for "playing possum" and not working for two days.<sup>91</sup>

Madison Ruffin, a skilled ornamental gardener at Appomattox Manor, was Richard Eppes's most trusted servant, as he was given keys and sent on errands. He was not born on the Eppes plantations, but purchased, possibly from Isle of Wight County, since he went there on the steamship to visit friends.<sup>92</sup> The background of his wife, Harriet, was also a little mysterious in that, although she was not purchased, no information was listed as to her mother, unlike most persons on the inventories. The Ruffin family attended the Episcopal Church with the Eppeses and was clearly favored among the servants. Harriet was the mother of Robert Moody, who escaped from a Confederate camp with Eppes's pistol. She was also the mother of Sally Rud, of whom we know no more, and two Gilliam boys. Lack of records makes the story partial and incomplete, but it is clear that Eppes maintained his relationship with the Ruffins and they to him after the Civil War because it was in both their interests — despite Moody's desertion and the departure of most of the Ruffins in 1862.

Eppes listed 127 servants in the inventory he gave to Confederate officials in 1863. In 1851, in the first inventory after he began to manage the farms, he listed seventy persons. The increase was largely through births, but he did buy at least two of his best male workers in that decade, Henry Corsen and Jim Booker. He attempted to keep the numbers roughly equal between the Island farm and the Bermuda Hundred plantation, and kept fewer, but more skilled workers at Appomattox. Hopewell was a newer and smaller acquisition. Throughout the 1850s, he purchased land whenever possible to gain unimpeded access to all his land and to center his holdings at Appomattox Manor. Figures appear to vary on his total landholdings, but after a decade of acquisitions and at the outbreak of the war, his acreage, including town lots, approached 3,000. The few references to slave dwellings on his properties indicate that he attempted to

*Eppes listed 127 slaves in the inventory he gave to Confederate officials in 1863.*

*Most southern postmasters adopted a policy that if a letter arrived for a slave, they did not give it out, but placed it in the owner's mailbox.*

keep them in decent repair, but that they were usually multifamily dwellings with little privacy. Maps indicate that bondsmen lived near the fields on the Island farm and the Hundreds and in service buildings near Appomattox. Eppes apparently constructed a multifamily dwelling in the 1850s for the new Hopewell farm. Skilled workers moved from farm to farm with their work, probably maintaining a home base.

The Eppes bondsmen were very near the village and dock of City Point, while Petersburg was some few miles away, depending on from which plantation the distance was calculated and whether transportation was by land or water. There was no question that cities offered enslaved and free blacks increasing opportunities for every kind of information that might lead to escape. In urban Virginia, literacy among African Americans was not uncommon, and the role of letters has been noted in Chapter 3. Most southern postmasters adopted a policy that if a letter arrived for an enslaved person, they did not give it out, but placed it in the owner's mailbox. This level of literacy in and around Virginia's cities was a result of the need for skilled black labor in industry, the construction trades, commerce, and service industries, such as hotel waiters and cooks. In many of these occupations, basic literacy was a requirement. This was the dilemma that faced the South and, especially, Virginia: How to benefit from new trade systems and technology while keeping the essential part of their workforce in ignorance? The answer was that they could not, although they tried.

William Still noted that:

“. . . the Underground Rail Road [sic] brought away large numbers of passengers from Richmond, Petersburg and Norfolk, and not a few of them lived comparatively within a hair's breadth of the auction block. Many of those from these localities were amongst the most intelligent and respectable slaves in the South, and except at times when disheartened by

some grave disaster which had befallen the [rail]road, as, for instance, when some friendly captain or conductor was discovered in aiding fugitives, many of the thinking bondsmen were daily maneuvering and watching for opportunities to escape or aid their friends to do so.”<sup>93</sup>

One grave disaster that disheartened potential fugitives occurred in the spring of 1859 when the *Keziah*, a vessel long suspected of aiding runaways, was stopped below City Point as it attempted to leave Petersburg. Local authorities searched the vessel and discovered five runaways on it. Captain William Bayliss and the first mate were arrested and the schooner was towed back to Petersburg where an estimated 2000 angry citizens waited along the Appomattox River to revile the Yankee slave-stealers. Sent to the Virginia Penitentiary, Bayliss joined other men imprisoned there for aiding enslaved persons to escape. All but one of them appear to have been white men who took money for such aid. The one exception was William Lambdin, captain of the schooner *Mary Ann Elizabeth*, who left Petersburg for Delaware in November 1855 and picked up five fugitives in Norfolk. When a storm ran the ship aground in Princess Anne County, the scheme was detected and all were arrested.<sup>94</sup>

The Petersburg *Daily Express* called the *Keziah* capture “the most intensely exciting event that has ever transpired within [the city] limits from the earliest to the latest period of history.”<sup>95</sup> Perhaps part of the excitement was a sense of vindication on the part of Petersburg slaveholders who had grown more and more frustrated with the slipping away of enslaved laborers to the north and the great difficulty they had in retrieving them or even discovering their means of escape. Plantation owners and citizens in Virginia's port cities knew that many runaways were leaving on vessels, but they could not catch some of the ship's captains they suspected. Slaveholders and the southern

press preferred to believe that slaves were lured away by Yankees. The capture of William Bayliss seemed to mark a new era when such instigators could be apprehended and it did slow the traffic northward for a year or so. Yet, just as the nation moved toward disunion and Civil War, the Underground Railroad on the upper James and Appomattox Rivers picked up again. When the war came to City Point with General George McClellan, those on the Eppes plantation would have their best opportunity to leave.

## Chapter 5

### Contraband: Escape During the Civil War (1861 – 1867)

While the enslaved families on the antebellum Eppes plantations had assessed the possibilities of escape and decided that their situation was not intolerable when contrasted with the possibility of capture and sale, the Civil War provided a new situation. Now the dynamics of Eppes's control over the landscape and the daily routine changed; and the most trusted family domestic slaves were among the first to leave. The Civil War began in April 1861, and a gloomy Dr. Richard Eppes, no great Confederate partisan, reluctantly prepared to join a local unit. No doubt he felt he was showing his patriotism when he sent a young and valuable carpenter from his home estates, Robert Bolling, off to the employ of the Prince George Cavalry at Burwell's Bay. He also took Robert Moody, a clever young man, as his body servant when he reported for military duty in May 1861. Eppes boasted, in a letter to his wife, "Robert bids fair to make the best servant in camp and will prove invaluable..." In a postscript, Eppes added, "Robert sends remembrances to all."<sup>96</sup>

That was actually Robert Moody's farewell to all. The last week in August 1861, proved calamitous. Eppes was called home to attend to his wife's childbirth and, in his absence, Robert Moody took Eppes's pistol and "ran away from camp." Three days later, Robert Bolling "ran off to the enemy."<sup>97</sup> Neither ever returned to Eppes's control. Sometime in the late winter or spring of 1862, as General George McClellan began the Union Army ascent of the James River, ten more of Eppes' bondsmen attempted to leave by rowing down to the Union lines. A copy of what happened is recorded in an undated and unsigned note to Eppes: "A Copy of a Dispatch:

A Boat with 10 negroes belonging to Dr. Eppes went down this a.m. We chased them below Jamestown Island to Muddy Creek. When they landed, we captured a woman and child, the balance made their escape."<sup>98</sup> These events indicate that those enslaved by Eppes were poised to take advantage of any opportunities for freedom.

There were no more trusted skilled laborers on the Appomattox estate than the Ruffin family. Yet they were among the first to leave when the Union Army approached Appomattox Manor in May 1862. Because they were among the few families to return to the Eppes plantations after the Civil War, the story of their escape has been reworked over time. At the time of their return in 1867, Eppes noted in his diary, "Harriet Ruffin's family came over to see me yesterday, she was formerly a slave in the family, has now returned home again." Also, "Jim Ruffin, son of Madison, having come over, I got him to row me over to Bermuda farm."<sup>99</sup> As the Lost Cause became the dominant story and Jim Crow the daily reality in the region after 1890, those Ruffins who remained with the family, especially Paulina, a young girl of 14 when the war broke out, modified their story to fit the times. Paulina Ruffin's 1930s story included a foreman who had taken the Ruffins and others to Norfolk for their protection.<sup>100</sup> No doubt the Ruffins did go to Norfolk, then in Union hands, but not with a foreman. It was a polite convenience for the Ruffins and Eppes to view it that way in later years.

In an 1863 official document, written in order to receive compensation from the Confederate government, Richard Eppes told of the departure of his



*When McClelland [sic] retreated from Richmond through the peninsula to Washington, I came to Hampton as a government water boy.*

Richard Slaughter

bondsmen. He listed each person missing, with age and skills, to satisfy the Confederate treasurer keeping records of such losses. It is important to remember that he was making a claim for stolen property in order to be reimbursed. Even so, there is an uncertainty in his choice of verbs as to whether or not they went voluntarily. He describes his bondsmen as “taken off by the Yankees” and “carried away by the land and naval forces of the United States of America,” but also notes:

“... the negroes leaving en masse immediately after the first bombardment of City Point, May 18, 1862. . . <sup>101</sup> my Eppes Island estate, considered by the enemy to be within their lines and was made a depot at that time for negroes who escaped from the Southside of James River. No communication between the South and North sides of James River and my overseer on Eppes Island having been driven off by the enemy, it is impossible to say the exact day that those [who] were sent to this farm were removed. Immediately preceding the evacuation of Westover by General McClellan [sic], sixty nine of the negroes, embracing some from each estate, were sent off by order of General Peck to Westover and thence shipped down James River.”<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps Eppes himself, in 1863, was uncertain as to whether or which of his laborers had left completely voluntarily or not. There is one first-person account of the departure, that of the young Richard Slaughter, whose family clearly left purposefully and under cover of darkness:

“It happened this-a-way. Hampton was already burnt when I came here. I came to Hampton in June 1862. The Yankees burned Hampton and the fleet went up the James River. My father and mother and cousins went aboard the *Meritanza* with me. You see, my father and three or four men left in the darkness first and got aboard. The gunboats would fire on the towns and plantations and run the white folks off. After that they

would carry all the colored folks back down here to Old Point and put ‘em behind the Union lines. . . . I didn’t come down all the way on the gunboat. I had the measles on the *Meritanza* and was put off at Harrison’s Landing. When McClelland [sic] retreated from Richmond through the peninsula to Washington, I came to Hampton as a government water boy.”<sup>103</sup>

The Confiscation Act of August 6, 1861, allowed the Union Army to seize enslaved African Americans if they were being used to support the Confederacy. Later, the Confiscation Act of July 17, 1862, allowed the Union Army to seize slaves even if their labor was not being used for the Confederacy.<sup>104</sup> Many of those “seized” were runaways who found their own way to the Union lines or chose to leave enslavement quickly and furtively when an opportunity was presented, as the Slaughter family did. The Union view of the status of bondsmen changed over time in such a way that runaways became first contraband and then freedmen when the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in January 1863. By 1862, a Militia Act set the wage and compensation rates for free blacks employed as laborers by the Union Army or its contractors. After the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in January, 1863, the Union army considered all of them as freedmen because they had belonged to supporters of the Confederacy. Their previous owners continued to view them as runaways and hoped to reclaim them or be reimbursed for their loss.<sup>105</sup>

The Eppes’s central plantation, Appomattox, was the staging area for the climactic Civil War campaign, beginning in June 1864 and continuing through the winter of 1865, to lay siege to Petersburg, destroy R.E. Lee’s army and ultimately capture the Confederate capital of Richmond. The Appomattox manor house and the grounds became a Union headquarters at City Point and the supply and staging port for the Union Army. Wharves, piers, warehouses, coal and ammunition piers, a

commissary, a railroad, telegraph and postal connections, hospitals, encampments, and offices were all constructed in a short time.<sup>106</sup> All this construction, as well as transportation created many opportunities for labor among freedmen and women.

There were hundreds of black laborers at City Point. They consisted of those who had escaped to Union lines around Petersburg and workers shipped to City Point from freedmen's camps in coastal Virginia and North Carolina, as well as Washington, DC. In one case, black workers in New Bern, North Carolina, turned down an offer of higher pay at City Point because they did not want to leave their families. Many freedmen worked for the Quartermaster Corps, the Repair Depot or the Military Railroad and many families of freedmen worked for the Union hospitals, with women as cooks and laundresses.<sup>107</sup>

The upheaval of war brought refugees and runaways from Richmond and Petersburg to the Union lines at City Point steadily during the fall of 1864 and winter of 1865. Thomas Chester, an African American Civil War correspondent for a New York newspaper, leaned heavily on the Underground Railroad metaphor to describe the human traffic on the roads in this period.

"The underground railroad, from Richmond, seems to be thoroughly repaired, and is not only in running condition, but is doing an increasing business. The former officers of this company were obliged, under a press of appealing circumstances, to grant many free passes, which prevented the institution from being a paying concern, but under a more systematic management it has become regular and profitable. Previous to the war, the road was used only by negroes, but now both colors, upon terms of singular equality, patronize it with much satisfaction. . . . Notwithstanding this road is considered contraband by the rebel authorities, its officers thus far have been able to baffle the vigilance of their detectives, and fulfill

the obligations which they have made to the public. Men, women and children, of all colors, with their household effects, are daily coming into our lines and report at this place."<sup>108</sup>

African American Union soldiers were present in significant numbers at and near City Point and the Eppes plantations in 1864 – 65 for the Petersburg and Richmond campaign. The Civil War abounded in ironies and one was surely the return of runaway or contraband black men to their old neighborhoods in the uniform of the Union Army. Richard Slaughter described the circuit that brought him back to the Petersburg and Richmond areas:

"I went to Baltimore in 1864 and enlisted. I was about 17 years old then. . . . I was assigned to the Nineteenth Regiment [U.S. Colored Troops] of Maryland Company B. While I was in training, they fought at Petersburg. I went to the regiment in '64 and stayed in until '67. I was a cook. They taken Richmond the fifth day of April 1865. On that day I walked up the road in Richmond"<sup>109</sup>

This is a laconic account of a military career that had made him a witness to extraordinary history in his own region. His service record tells more. Slaughter took part in the Union campaign from the Rapidan to the James River in May and June 1864 and was part of the siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond from June 1864 until April 1865. He was back on his home ground when he saw action on the Bermuda Hundred front in November 1864, and was stationed at Bermuda Hundred until the April 1865 assault and capture of Petersburg and the pursuit of Lee to Appomattox Court House. He was on duty at Petersburg and City Point until June 1865, when his unit was moved to Texas.<sup>110</sup>

Two of the young people that Eppes had noted as "very likely" and "Number 1," both in their early teens at the time of the 1862 slave evacuations from the Eppes plantations — Richard

*The underground railroad, from Richmond, seems to be thoroughly repaired, and is not only in running condition, but is doing an increasing business.*

Thomas Chester  
1864-5

Slaughter and Paulina Ruffin — lived long enough to give their account of slavery and the Civil War to the WPA Slave Narrative project sponsored by the federal New Deal program in the 1930s. Slaughter simply did not tell his interviewer much about his career in the Union Army. Certainly he said nothing about his activities while stationed as a soldier on the land where he had so recently been enslaved. While Slaughter and his family remained in Norfolk and Hampton for many years after the war, the Ruffin family returned to the Eppes household and some, including Paulina, remained for the rest of their lives. It was likely a calculated choice on the part of the Ruffins to return to Appomattox and resume their lives, now as freedmen. Their story of leaving and returning, as told by Paulina Ruffin, also has important omissions.

There is anecdotal evidence that Madison Ruffin asserted himself a little too much, sending other ex-bondsmen away and perhaps annoying Richard Eppes. But he stayed on until his death in February 1876, and Eppes praised him highly in his diary, noting that Ruffin, a sexton at St. John's Episcopal Church, was eulogized there and buried very near where Eppes intended to be buried.<sup>111</sup> A further source of verification for the return of the Ruffins can be found in the records of the Freedman's Society at City Point. Agnes, Samuel Welch and Indianna Ruffin are listed as students in 1866 and 1867.<sup>112</sup> Another former enslaved person who returned can be identified, through Minerva Spratley's attendance at the same school, as James Spratley, first child of Fanny Oldham<sup>113</sup>

Those who left the Eppes plantations scattered throughout the region and were apparently not around to be hired in 1864 when the Union Army made its 1864 headquarters at Appomattox.<sup>114</sup> To return to the region before the conclusion of the war was to return to slavery. Given the family connections between the four plantations and their connec-

tions in Petersburg and the surrounding counties, it is unlikely that those who abandoned the plantations in 1862 left the James River area completely, although they likely stayed well behind Union lines in Norfolk, Hampton and other towns, finding employment and awaiting the end of the conflict.<sup>115</sup> After the war's end, a few families returned to seek employment with Richard Eppes. In addition to the Ruffin family, Jim Booker may have returned. There is a record of Eppes paying "Booker" five dollars on September 7, 1865.<sup>116</sup> Another notation, made in July 1867, suggests that the runaway, Robert Moody, a runaway, may have returned:

"A delegation of two[,] Moody and Field[,] from the colored population at Bermuda Hundreds called upon me to solicit money to pay the expenses of delegates to the Union Republican convention about to set at Richmond, replied to them that my field of operations was on my farms[,] that I was no politician and did not give to either white or colored for such purposes[,] devoted my money as fast as I could get it to my debts and give work to those who would work around me."<sup>117</sup>

The period of Reconstruction in Virginia in which African Americans were actively engaged in politics was brief, but it lasted long enough for ex-bondsmen to demonstrate how much they understood of the exercise of political power and the ironies possible with the bottom rail on top. The ever-cautious Richard Eppes confined his comments to those above. What Moody and Field thought is not recorded.

# Chapter 6

## The Underground Railroad In Petersburg

In the antebellum era (1820 – 1860), there is no extant evidence that slaves on the Eppes plantations ran away intending to reach the North or Canada. This does not mean that many would not have done so, if the opportunity had been present. Neither does it mean that those on the Eppes plantations were so isolated as to be unaware of the events in the larger world beyond the plantation. They knew of escapes by ship from City Point and Petersburg. They knew of the black churches around them, with their much-traveled black missionaries, even if they attended the Episcopal Church with the Eppes family. Given that most of the African Americans on the Eppes plantations had family roots in the region that extended to well before the Revolution, they were inevitably related to those on other plantations and to free black families. Even if Richard Eppes's efforts

to keep marriages and families within his plantations' boundaries were entirely successful — and they were not — enslaved families' kinship patterns were widespread over the landscape long before he became master of the plantations. Especially given the fact that Petersburg, Virginia, was very active in the Underground Railroad and also provided much of the leadership for the Republic of Liberia, it must be assumed that those enslaved on the Eppes plantations were aware of the movement of African Americans from the upper James River area out into the wider world.

To place the Eppes plantations in the context of the Underground Railroad, for further research, it is important to have as background a survey of what is currently known about the Underground Railroad in the region. Included

Petersburg, Va., Oct. 17, 1860

Mr. W. Still: –Dear Sir –

I am happy to think that the time has come when we no doubt can open our correspondence with one another again. Also I am in hopes, that these few lines may find you and family well and in the enjoyment of good health, as it leaves me and my family the same. I want you to know, that I feel as much determined to work in this glorious cause, as ever I did in all of my life, and I have some very good hams on hand that I would like very much for you to have. I have nothing of interest to write about just now, only that the politics of the day is in a high-rage, and I don't know of the result, therefore, I want you to be one of those wide-a-wakes as is mentioned from your section of country now-a-days, &c. Also, if you wish to write to me, Mr. J. Brown will inform you how to direct a letter to me.

No more at present, until I hear from you; but I want you to be a wide-a-wake.

Yours in haste,

*Ham & Eggs* <sup>119</sup>

*Restaurants, hotels, barbershops and printers' offices were places where black Virginians, as service workers, could hear useful bits of information that proved valuable to planned escapes.*

in this overview are groups and individuals in the Petersburg area, such as free blacks, who were culturally marginal or who appeared resistant in some manner to the proslavery politics and philosophy of Tidewater Virginia. Petersburg had more free blacks than other Virginia cities, even larger ones such as Richmond, at almost every census.<sup>118</sup> This sample examination of existing material focuses on the significant Underground Railroad activities in and around Petersburg. This chapter does not claim to be comprehensive, but it provides a framework for understanding the local context and for further investigation.

Less than a year before the Civil War began, this letter (previous page) left Petersburg, addressed to William Still in Philadelphia, secretary of the Vigilance Committee that undertook to aid escaped slaves and protect free blacks from kidnap or other illegalities.

Still simply identifies Ham & Eggs as a slave and an Underground Railroad agent in Petersburg. From the internal evidence of the letter, the writer has a family and reads the newspapers. He refers to the high emotions brought on by the coming presidential election of November 1860, and to the political faction in the North called the Wide-awakes. He asks Still to be wide awake in another way, however. The J. Brown who knows the method by which to write to him is probably the John Brown in Philadelphia to whom numerous runaways refer in the Still volume.<sup>120</sup> If Still had not referred to the writer as a slave, it would be reasonable to think that Ham & Eggs was John, or Jack, McCrae, a free black merchant of some influence in Petersburg. Jack McCrae or McCray also operated a restaurant on Bollingbrook Street. Restaurants, hotels, barbershops and printers' offices were places where black Virginians, as service workers, could hear useful bits of information that proved valuable to planned escapes. The writer may have been any of perhaps two dozen men in the city — free and en-

slaved — whose activities showed them to be knowledgeable and assertive in furthering African American interests and who had the ability to roam the city freely, listening to gossip.

Jack McCrae was the father-in-law of John Henry Hill, the latter one of the best known escapees from slavery in Petersburg. His story is detailed in the National Park Service pamphlet “Exploring a Common Past: Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad,” 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2000.<sup>121</sup> The letters of the Hills give hints of the connections and special circumstances that permitted the family and friends of many fugitives, agents of the Underground Railroad, to range between Richmond, Norfolk and Petersburg, to hide escapees, and to transmit information rapidly from North to South and among themselves. The range of possibilities for those involved is broad and branches out from the McCrae, Hill and Colson families.

One important factor was the black church, discussed earlier. Its highly mobile ministers stayed in touch with their old Petersburg congregations. Jack McCrae, apparently traveling in the North in September 1860, sent his daughter, Martha McCrae, in Petersburg, a “good chain and thirty dollars by Dr. Sampson White.”<sup>122</sup> White was the Baptist minister who had long since left Petersburg for Philadelphia, New York and Washington, but this suggests he was still returning to Petersburg, bearing information and goods. Another preacher who traveled frequently, but in local preaching circuits, was Daniel Jackson, pastor of the African Baptist Church of Petersburg from about 1819 to 1865. Although restricted by law from performing as pastor, the congregation got around this, as they did in many places, by having Jackson as the head deacon, exhorter, prayer leader, and baptizer; and he was listed in Petersburg papers in the 1850s as baptizing in the Appomattox River. Jackson and his wife, Amy, purchased

*Whites came to admire and respect the integrity and ambition of certain free blacks and slaves and became committed to working with them to obtain their goals of freedom.*

themselves in 1819 and bought a residence on Perry Street. The South Carolina woman who wrote to “mother” care of Richard Eppes asked about “Father Daniel Jackson.”<sup>123</sup>

After Gabriel’s conspiracy in 1800, Petersburg grew more fearful of the free black population and complained in an 1805 state petition that the number of free blacks was growing too rapidly, especially since many had moved to town from the countryside, apparently after manumission. The law of 1806 that made manumission dependent upon banishment from the state within a year almost stopped the private emancipation impulse in Petersburg for a dozen years. A trickle of manumissions began again in 1818.<sup>124</sup> A prominent local example was that of Jane Minor, also known as Gensey Snow, freed by Benjamin H. May, the first emancipator of that family of Petersburg. He freed her for her “good character and conduct” in 1825. In 1824 she had nursed a number of sick people in Petersburg at the risk of her own health. “Jane Minor became one of the most distinguished characters of Petersburg. Her daughter married Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who was once a resident of Petersburg...” The daughter, Sarah Minor, died some years later in Liberia.<sup>125</sup> Over the years, Jane Minor freed fifteen persons whom she had bought with her own money. In 1838 she freed five — 2 unnamed mothers with one child each — and Cecily Brown. In 1840 she freed five mulatto children and their mother, Emily Smith, purchased from David May for \$1,500. The next year she freed Phillis Sowell and the following year Mary Swann and her two children.<sup>126</sup>

The May family several times freed a bondsman on the same day as he was purchased, indicating that the individual had supplied the money, but needed a white owner willing to emancipate after purchase. Robert Bolling also made such transactions, and members of the Meade family apparently aided in education and emancipation for blacks. The white Meade family is

almost as involved with emancipations as the May family. The Meades, as well as the Mays, seem to have been agreeable to arranging manumissions and acting as facilitators for emancipation. Thomas Bolling, the bondsman of John May, was freed by him in 1838. Prior to May, Bolling had been owned by John E. Meade. Bolling was a light mulatto of twenty-eight and had been employed as a waiter at Powell’s Hotel. This was the same hotel from which skilled laborers Sarah and Gilbert attempted an escape on the *Keziah* in 1858.

As a waiter, Thomas Bolling was in an excellent position to hear what was going on in Petersburg. In 1844 he freed his own children, James and Fanny Bolling, apparently from the John Meade family. Another James Bolling, the brother of Thomas Bolling, purchased his freedom from John E. Meade in 1838. The next year James Bolling bought his wife. In 1858 Armistead Wilson purchased himself from John F. May for \$800.<sup>127</sup> Henry Mason was emancipated in Sussex County in 1844. His wife and child were enslaved in Greensville County, but were bought by David May, who set them free in 1848. Mason was a “superior bricklayer” employed in Petersburg and Richmond and the Court was petitioned so that he could live in Richmond as well as Petersburg.<sup>128</sup> Urban black workers in hotels, restaurants, barbershops, newspaper offices, and building trades, heard all the news, skilled artisans such as Mason could carry news and private messages from city to city.

Skilled occupations and work that permitted overtime or tips permitted these urban workers to earn enough money to purchase themselves and their families. To what extent were they aided by friendly whites who respected their efforts? Virginia had many cases of what might be called “particularism.” Certain whites and blacks came to know each other very well through day-to-day work or religious endeavors or other encounters. Whites came to admire and

*Nine months I was trying to get away. I was secreted for a long time in a kitchen of a merchant .... When I got tired of staying in that place, I wrote myself a pass to pass myself to Petersburg....*

John Henry Hill  
1853

respect the integrity and ambition of certain free blacks and bondsmen, and became committed to working with them to obtain their goals of freedom. While many of these whites thought slavery was inefficient or evil, they were acting, even when outside the law, for African Americans they knew personally. It is doubtful that they would have taken the risks for “abolition” as an abstraction. Among African Americans, too, ties of kinship and friendship sustained those purchasing freedom and those escaping from slavery. Trust based on experience and kinship was the tie that bound such people in Virginia, white and black, together.

Fanny, daughter of Thomas Bolling, had secretly been taught to read and write while she lived with the Meades, the former owners of her father and uncle. Luther Porter Jackson reported that oral informants said she had been sent to Philadelphia for more education.<sup>129</sup> In 1852 she married James Major Colson, a free black shoemaker and son of William Colson, partner of Joseph Jenkins Roberts in their Liberian trading company. This was the genesis of a prosperous and educated free black family. By 1860 Fanny’s father had real estate valued at three thousand dollars. After the Civil War, she promoted education for freedmen and continued an interest in academics and cultural activities.<sup>130</sup>

Joseph Jenkins Roberts was first a boatman and then a barber in the shop of William Colson. In 1829 Roberts and Colson established a business partnership to trade in West Africa. Roberts emigrated that year to Liberia, after they had acquired a schooner, a line of credit in Philadelphia and New York, and had purchased goods to sell and trade. A few years later, Colson traveled to Liberia to better know that end of the business. He caught the acclimating fever and died there. His wife, Sarah, tried to manage the Colson part of the trading company with the assistance of her Elebeck brothers, who traveled to Philadelphia and New York in an effort

to keep their credit and increase their commerce. Colsons, Roberts, McCraes and other free black businessmen from Petersburg were reasonably frequent travelers to the North and were in touch with the free black communities there. They were aware of the developing abolitionist networks and stayed in contact with such men as William Still, once those groups were organized to aid fugitives. They were more likely to assist a relative or an urban bondsman than they were to aid someone less well known to them and less able to negotiate town life. They might have seen many of the laborers from the Eppes plantation as lacking the experience necessary to handle themselves in cities such as Petersburg, Richmond, or Norfolk — cities that they would have to negotiate their way through on the water routes to the north.<sup>131</sup>

After the letter of Ham & Eggs, the most revealing account of the Underground Railroad in the Petersburg area is the account given by John Henry Hill of his escape. Hill was twenty-five when, in January 1853, he learned he was to be auctioned off in Richmond by his owner, John Mitchell, and ran away from the auction block. He knew where to run:

“Nine months I was trying to get away. I was secreted for a long time in a kitchen of a merchant near the corner of Franklyn and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, at Richmond, where I was well taken care of by a lady friend of my mother. When I got tired of staying in that place, I wrote myself a pass to pass myself to Petersburg, here I stopped with a very prominent Colored person who was a Friend to freedom.”

Was that prominent colored person his father-in-law, Jack McRae or would that have been too dangerous? Other prominent colored persons would include the Elebeck and Colson families.

“. . . stayed here until two white friends told other friends if I was in the city to tell me to go at once and stand not upon the order of going because they

*Southern legislatures and municipalities passed laws making it illegal for black seamen to leave the ship when docked in a Southern port.*

had heard a plot. I wrote a pass, started for Richmond, reached Manchester, got off the Cars, walked into Richmond, once more got back into the same old Den.” Hill wrote a pass for himself that allowed him to take the train from Petersburg to Manchester, which is now South Richmond, an easy walk into downtown Richmond. Hill’s literacy enabled him to write the pass and demonstrates why southerners feared black literacy:

“Stayed here from the 16<sup>th</sup> of August to the 12<sup>th</sup> of September. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 8 o’clock P.M. a message came to me that there had been a State Room taken on the steamer City of Richmond for my benefit, and I assured the party that it would be occupied if God be willing. ....I wrote my pass for Norfolk left my old Den with many a good bye.”

His many goodbyes included his mother, many friends in Richmond, and perhaps relatives.<sup>132</sup> When Hill got as far as Toronto, he wrote to Still asking that Still write to his wife care of “Philip Eubank, Petersburg, Va.”<sup>133</sup> His wife was a free woman but it might not have been wise for her to receive a letter from Philadelphia — or perhaps she did not live with her father and mother.

John Henry Hill left on the *City of Richmond*, a vessel that frequently carried escaping bondsmen north. There was at least one Underground Railroad contact on that ship serving as a steward, William Meekins or Minkins, who was later arrested for aiding Richmond fugitives in escaping to Canada, but released for lack of evidence.<sup>134</sup> Minkins was not the only contact available to fugitives. Another Petersburg runaway, Isaac Forman, hoped to bring his wife and child to Canada in the same manner, but learned that Minkins had refused to transport her on the *City of Richmond* because of her child. Hill wrote to Still, “. . . we are very sorry to hear Such News ... as we have learnt that Minkins cannot do what we wishes to be done; we perpose [*sic*] another way. There is a white man that Sale

from Richmond to Boston, that man are very Safe, he will bring F’s wife with her child. . . . there is a Colored gen. That works on the basin in R—d this man’s name is Esue Foster who worked at ladlum’s warehouse on the basin . . . this foster are a member of the old Baptist Church.” This is a reference to the First African Baptist Church in Richmond, separated from the white church in 1842. By the 1850s, there was a Second and a Third African Baptist Church in Richmond. Foster could be found at “the warehouse of Ludlam and Watson, shipping and commission merchants, at the corner of Byrd and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets.” Mrs. Forman was to use Hill’s name to gain Foster’s trust, and he would put her in touch with the captain.<sup>135</sup>

Black seamen from northern ports were frequently asked by those enslaved to help them escape, usually without pay. William Minkins and a man named Bagnall were African American ship’s stewards who were known to aid fugitives. Lott Mundy, a free black ship’s cook from New York on the schooner *Danville* in 1856, was convicted of hiding two Richmond bondsmen discovered on the ship, although he denied knowing them or engaging in a stowaway plot. Mundy was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. William Thompson, free black cook on the *Francis French*, was sentenced to ten years in 1858. Southern legislatures and municipalities passed laws making it illegal for black seamen to leave the ship when docked in a southern port.<sup>136</sup> Ships prominently mentioned in William Still’s book as transporting fugitives from the James River were the *City of Richmond*, the *Pennsylvania*, and the *Keziah*.

William Bayliss, captain of the schooner *Keziah* out of Wilmington, Delaware, had been preceded in the shipping trade by his brothers, Samuel and John, at least one of whom was also suspected of aiding enslaved African Americans to escape. John Kneebone documents several mass escapes from Norfolk that sent the local newspapers



*The best for [Willis Johnson] is to make his way to Petersburg: that is, if you can get the Capt [Bayliss] to bring him. He have not much money.*

John Henry Hill

into a frenzy and brought about local meetings calling for a thorough search of any vessel leaving Norfolk for the North. The result of such anger was the passage by the General Assembly of the 1856 law that required the inspection of all ships leaving Virginia for the North. Many ship's captains learned to search for fugitives themselves and, for those who continued to aid runaways, the stakes were much higher. Accused of aiding fugitives in Norfolk were Willet Mott, once a packet boat operator and now engaged in salvage work, and William Danenburg, who ran a clothing store and was thought by the police to be working with Bayliss. Danenburg and his family left for Baltimore, and Mott sent his wife and children to New York. Free blacks Edward White and George Washington were accused of working with abolitionists and ordered out of the city.<sup>137</sup> The capture of the *Keziah* set off a round of arrests in Petersburg in June 1858. John M. Davis, "a white man and former employee of Slaughter's Eating House;" Eliza Parham, a free woman of color; and George, the property of A. Faulconer, were all under suspicion, but not enough evidence could be brought against them.<sup>138</sup>

As was the case with many successful escapees from the upper James ports, James Mercer and John Clayton, who escaped together from Richmond, made references in letters to friends in both Petersburg and Richmond and to seamen who traveled between the cities. Mercer asked, "I wish you see James Morris or Abram George the first and second mates on the ship Penn. [Pennsylvania]...and ask James if he will call at Henry W. Quarles on May Street oppisit the Jews synagogue and call for Marena Mercer...tell her to send all the news." Clayton added directions for his letter: "You will please to direct the [letter] to Petersburg Luenena Johns or Clayton John is best."<sup>139</sup> If Marena Mercer received the request and complied, the Quarles house on May Street, if still standing, might be interpreted as part of the Underground Railroad network.

It is hard to imagine that a black seaman, unknown to the owners of the house, knocked on the front door to inquire for Mercer. There are several references to hiding under kitchen and pantry boards, so we may assume that information flowed in and out of the kitchen spaces and service areas that were in or connected to white residences.

But there were black residences that might have provided cover for fugitives. In Petersburg, John McCrae had houses on Gill Street and Low Street. Eliza Parham's was one of four Parham residences in New Blandford. There were free black Hills on Lee Alley, Halifax Street, Wells Alley, Gillfield and Sheppard Street. There were many Branders, related to the Liberian emigrants; the prominent Elebeck family; Harriett Roberts on Halifax Street and Lucy Scott in New Blandford, whose husband may have been a seaman in New Bedford.<sup>140</sup>

In another letter to Still, John Henry Hill requested, "...do whatever is in your power to save poor Willis Johnson . . . All I wish to say is this, I wish you to write to my uncle [John M. Hill] at Petersburg, by our friend the Capt. [Bayliss]. Tell my uncle to go to Richmond and ask my mother whereabouts this man is." This is simply more evidence of the close relations between free blacks and slave networks in the port cities. Knowledge of fugitives and their hiding places was part of the network, but it encompassed all aspects of African American life. "The best for him is to make his way to Petersburg: that is, if you can get the Capt to bring him. He have not much money."<sup>141</sup> In Petersburg, Willis Johnson could get more help and it was safer than staying in Richmond.

Shortly before the Civil War, Hezekiah Hill, long hidden in Richmond and as desperate as Willis Johnson, wrote to Still.

"Please do me the favor as to write to

*Southern newspapers, including those in Petersburg, frequently referred to fugitives as “enticed away” or “stolen.” This allowed southerners to continue to believe that slaves were content.*

my uncle a few lines in regard to the bundle that is for John H. Hill, who lives in Hamilton, C.W. [Canada West]. Sir, if this should reach you, be assured that it comes from the same poor individual that you have heard of before; the person who was so unlucky and deceived also. If you write, address your letter John M. Hill, care of Box No. 250. I am speaking of a person who lives in P.va. I hope, sir, you will understand this letter is from a poor individual.”<sup>142</sup>

John M. Hill’s post office box illustrates the difficulty of controlling information, although the post office was the most closely-watched venue in the late antebellum South. It was not uncommon for southern postmasters to refuse to deliver some northern newspapers and even religious journals that were thought to be “incendiary.”

In another example of family and Underground Railroad connections between Richmond, Petersburg, and Philadelphia, John Scott, who had fled from Richmond to Montreal, wrote to Still: “I received a letter here from James Carter in Petersburg saying that my wife would leave there about the 28<sup>th</sup> or the first September and that he would send her on by way of Philadelphia to you to send on to Montreal... please to give her this direction, she can get a cab and go to the Donegana Hotel and Edmund Turner is there he will take her where I lives...”<sup>143</sup> That Edmund Turner, working at the Donegana Hotel, was another fugitive from Petersburg. His brother, Jackson Turner, escaped first, no doubt with help from his free wife living in the North and perhaps from his elderly father in Philadelphia. Seven months after Jackson Turner’s escape, in May 1857, Isaac and Edmund or Edmondson escaped, in December, 1857, but another brother was later sold by Mrs. Ann Colley, a widow living near Petersburg, on the traditional sale and hiring-out day of January 1 in 1858.<sup>144</sup>

Edmund Turner took time to write an

essay against slavery that he sent to Still, asking for his approval. The polished sentiments of the letter were intended for publication and no doubt edited by Still. The letter itself appears to be in Turner’s own hand, and the enclosed admonishment, “A Warning to Slaveholders,” written more elegantly and grammatically, are probably his sentiments but not his grammar:

“Hamilton, Canada West March 1, 1858 ... Mr. Still, sir, i have writing a letter to Mr. Brown of Petersburg, VA. Pleas reed it and ef you think it right Plas sen it by the Mail or by hand you wall see how i have written it they will know how sent it by the way this writing ef the ancer it you can sen it to ME i have tol them direc to yor care from Ed. T. Smith Philadelphia i hope it may be right i promorst to rite...”<sup>145</sup>

Mr. Brown in Petersburg may be a newspaper editor or other public figure. The essay was not a private letter, but meant to be published. It was increasingly unlikely that the Petersburg papers would publish such a letter, unless it was under a heading like “Impudence from Canada” and was designed to make southerners even angrier at northerners for “stealing” bondsmen and filling them with false doctrines.

By the 1850s, the term “Underground Railroad” had come to mean, for southerners, that abolitionists were involved in all escapes from slavery. This, for the southerners, meant that slaves would not have gone off without northern abolitionist encouragement. Southern newspapers, including those in Petersburg, frequently referred to fugitives as “enticed away” or “stolen.” This allowed southerners to continue to believe that bondsmen were content. They were not forced to contemplate the depth of dissatisfaction among the enslaved. As reluctant as the Petersburg papers were to quote New York papers for verification of anything, they did so when the *New York Herald* wrote a long article about the Underground Railroad in New York and Canada, naming

people and places. *The Petersburg Press* was happy to quote:

“The underground railroad is no myth. A regular organization, to which this name has been applied, stretches through every free State in the Union and has its agents and emissaries on the borders of every Slave State. It is a systematized association of negroes and republican abolition whites, having for its object the enticing away of the slave property of the South and its safe transportation into Canada....”<sup>146</sup>

In reality, many fugitives left the area unassisted and, if they were helped at all, it was by friends and relatives and by paying such ship’s captains as William Bayliss, William Lambson, Alfred Fountain and Robert Lee. Captain Lambson was arrested in Norfolk in 1855, and Bayliss, commanding the *Keziah* with five runaways hidden on it, was arrested near Petersburg in 1858.<sup>147</sup> It was the tacit agreement between the Underground Railroad operatives in the North and the ship’s captains who took money for transporting fugitives that the captains assumed all the risks since they were paid. Still describes the relationship thus:

“In Richmond, Norfolk, Petersburg and other places . . . many slaves were fully awake to their condition. ...The class most anxious to obtain freedom could generally manage to acquire some means which they would willingly offer to captains or conductors in the South for such assistance as was indispensable to their escape. Here it may be well to state that, whilst the Committee gladly received and aided all who might come or be brought to them, they never employed agents or captains to go into the South, with a view of enticing or running off slaves. So when captains operated, they did so with the full understanding that they alone were responsible for any failure attending their movements.”<sup>148</sup>

During his first days in Toronto, John Henry Hill looked “for someone from

the old sod for several days, but I was in good hopes that it would be my poor Uncle. But poor fellow he are yet groaning under the sufferings of a horrid system.... I have prayed for him more than 12 months, yet he is in that horrid condition. I can never hear anything directly from him or any of my people.... Mrs. Mercer have told the friend what to do.”<sup>149</sup> This is the same Marena Mercer, likely to have been the wife of successful fugitive, James Mercer, who was sent information by black seamen. She also knew where Hezekiah Hill, uncle of John Henry Hill according to Still, was hidden.

Hezekiah Hill was hidden under a floor for thirteen months by a friend. Then “a private passage was procured for him on the steamship Pennsylvania, and with a little slave boy, seven years of age (the son of the man who had secreted him)... he came safely to Philadelphia.” That child was with Hezekiah Hill when he arrived in Canada. Hill must have promised to care for the child in freedom or to take him to a relative already in Canada. Again, this Hill family member asks that a letter be sent to either John Hill or, if not convenient to send by hand, by mail to Philip Ubank in Petersburg.<sup>150</sup>

William Still’s accounts sometimes tantalize more than they inform. He does not give us — and perhaps did not have — the identity of C.A. or G. A. who wrote the following letter, apparently about James Hill, a young Petersburg man hidden in Richmond for more than three years. This young man may be James Anderson Hill. There is a connection between the Anderson and Hill families, not yet explained.<sup>151</sup> “Dear Brother Still – I received a message from brother Julius Anderson asking me to send the bundle on but I has no way to send it. I have been waiting and truly hoping that you would make some arrangement . . . the bundle has been on my hands now going on two years, and I have suffered a great deal of danger. . .”<sup>152</sup> Shortly after this, James Anderson [Hill] left Richmond for Boston.

*I received a message from brother Julius Anderson asking me to send the bundle on but I has no way to send it.... The bundle has been on my hands now going on 3 years, and I have suffered a great deal of danger....*

“CA” to William Still

*The end of the Civil War and the end of slavery in the south sent many fugitives back to the U.S. or back to their homes to test the possibilities.*

After this young man's escape, almost at the outset of the Civil War, he wrote a letter from Boston to his uncle, John Henry Hill, and another to his brother, Hezekiah. To his uncle, he wrote:

"dear uncle it has been a long [*sic*] Since I heard from you and also it has been a very long since you heard from me. after a long 28 months I was delivered to Newyork on the 14<sup>th</sup> inst. Just think what awful times it must have been with me lying in the house all that time too summers and 3 winters. I could not tell the suffering I have experienced since the first of 1859 until the 12<sup>th</sup> of this present Month [March, 1861] I wish if it be in your power to do so you would please send me something to help me for I left Richmond with not the first piece more than I had on my back. We have always heard that you and brother had sent to Mr. Still 50 dollars so I want you al to write to me at once let me know if youal have given any money to Still or not. I have wreten to Still & Received an answer Stating that he has never Received the first penny from no one direct Wellington H. Davis care of Lewis Howard No. 170 Cambridge Street Boston Mass your nephew James Anderson." <sup>153</sup>

In his letter to Hezekiah Hill, James Anderson [Hill] described "when the time came I had to go down to Rocketts [the wharf and dock area] in the Broad day time . . . before I left Richmond they had arrested my uncle John & 3 others in Petersburg on suspicion that they were goint to Raise an army of 400 men By the 4<sup>th</sup> of March." Consider the context here. As James Anderson [Hill] finally left Richmond, Lincoln had been elected and seven states had left the Union. Virginia is in the second month of a Constitutional Convention to determine whether or not to stay in the Union. March 4 was Lincoln's inaugural day. How hard would it have been, in the state capital of Richmond, to be worried that enslaved and free blacks might organize a secret army in collusion with Lincoln and the Black Republicans to take over the state once Lin-

coln was in office? The John Hill of Box 250 in Petersburg was clearly suspect. "Some person wrote the letter from Norfolk to some White person in Petersburg saying John was at the head of it . . . but they could not get any evidence." This is another example of the interconnection of the port cities, but also of the care with which the Underground Railroad operated. Now, after secession, the same persons long suspected of aiding fugitives were now suspected of aiding a Republican insurrection in Virginia.<sup>154</sup>

In the period just before the Civil War, the fugitives from Petersburg in Canada were as eager to take up arms in defense of their freedom as northern blacks were once the Civil War had commenced. One wrote to William Still:

". . . I was talking to you about going to Liberia, when I saw you last, and did intend to start this fall, but I since looked at the condition of the colored people in Canada, I thought I would try to do something for their elevation as a nation . . . . In order to do this I have undertaken to get up a military company amongst them . . . I took with me Mr. J. H. Hill to see him [Allen McNab] – he told me that it should be done, and required us to write a petition to the Governor General, which has been done. The company is already organized. Mr. Howard was elected Captain; J.H. Hill, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant; Hezekiah Hill, Ensign; Robert Jones, First Sergeant. The Company's name is Queen Victoria's Rifle Guards."

Most of these men are from Petersburg. Robert Jones and his wife, arrived from Petersburg, Virginia, escaping from Thomas N. Lee, "a very hard man." His wife Eliza, belonged to Eliza H. Ritchie who was called a "moderate woman" toward her human property.<sup>155</sup>

Just after the conclusion of the Civil War, as the Massachusetts Fifty-Fourth Regiment and long-time antislavery groups celebrated, James

Wellington Davis, the cousin with whom James Anderson [Hill] took up residence when he reached Boston, wrote an interesting letter (below) to his uncle, John Hill, in Petersburg. It is part description of the celebration, in which he took part with his other friends of the Underground Railroad movement, and part a nervous explora-

tion of whether or not a certain woman was really pregnant, as she claimed. Either Davis had been down to the falls of the James River or the woman had been to Boston in the recent past. The end of the Civil War and the end of slavery in the south sent many fugitives back to the U.S. or back to their homes to test the possibilities.

East Boston, Mass  
June 6, 1865

My Dear uncle,

I now take my pen in hand to inform you of my health and hope that these few lines may find you Enjoying good health as they leaves me at present I have nothing of important to Relate to you at present. More than I am sorry to hear the death of little John Hill the only son that John had but then we all have got to go and he could not have parted from this world of trouble in a better time but then I can but sympathise with his parents for their lost. I wish you would try all in your power to find out whether that individual who is at the Falls is Realy in family way or not and let me know as soon as you can – I think they are only playing off on me it is my belief that they thinks if they can come that game on me. that they can have me and I will have them but I don't want that played out thing but I want to find out Realy whether they are in the condition which they say or not if it is Realy so I will help them but could never marry such person. There was a grand time in Boston the [first? seventh?] inst. in honor of President Lincoln they had a grand and long procession & a grand oration by Hon. Chas. Sumner to which I was present to [hear?] [ ] Myself and Mr. George Ruffin were the only colored gents present the tickets being for select citizens and councilmen the committee having the giving of the tickets so Mr. [J. Miller] McKim gave me one. There was no tickets sold so no outsiders was not admitted. I mailed yesterday the paper which have Mr. Sumner's speech in it. John, you must have it Read & you will find it very interesting. The Rev. Mr. Grimes<sup>156</sup> Rode at the head of the prosession in open top carriage with Mr. McKim and Some other noble gent drawn by four Horses The president's horse was the first in front then followed the 2<sup>nd</sup> with Grimes, McKim and others. The Shaw [group?] and all the colored Masons turned out in the prosession all the colored sailors from the navy and was out making a grand display.

I wish you would tell Martha McCray to tell Magg Feltson for me that I say that she have proven to be a ladiie of her word about the Black coat a nice black frock made to order will cost you from 35 to 50 dollars according to quality there is some cloth worth from 15 20 30 45 very nice for 30 40 & 45 dollars I could send you some samples if you wish them What is greenbacks worth in your city nowadays let me know when I write I will expect an answer to this soon.

Write me and if you hear from Petersburg, VA again I wrote to my uncle John the day that I received What do you say about going down to Virginia I am thinking of going wright off I think I can get a pass from McKim to Fortress Monroe How is the tobacco business are you [ ] work yet I now must close believe me to be yours Respectfully

James W. Davis  
at No. 73 Lexington Street, East Boston, Mass.<sup>157</sup>

*Hints and clues about the operation of the Underground Railroad in and near the Eppes plantation abound in unexpected places. The investigation is far from complete.*

“What do you say to going down to Virginia,” James Davis asked his uncle in Petersburg. On this hopeful note, in the late spring of 1865, African Americans in Petersburg could consider the Underground Railroad closed and travel from North to South dependent only on personal choice. After the Civil War, John Henry Hill returned to Petersburg and, by 1872, became a justice of the peace.<sup>158</sup> James Anderson Hill, who wrote from Boston care of James Wellington Davis, remained there. Davis, like the Anderson connection, was related to the Hills. He was in the Boston City Directory in 1862 as a blacksmith, working at 374 Harrison Avenue and living in Roxbury. His friend, George Ruffin, was a hairdresser at 28 Staniford and lived at 18 Grove Street. In Davis’s 1865 letter he is living at 73 Lexington Street in East Boston and he is still there in 1868, listed as a servant and boarder. A Mrs. James W. Davis lives in a house at 21 Chadwick Street. George Ruffin, who participated in the parade with James Hill, is still a hairdresser in Boston with a business at 62 Green Street and a house at 18 Grove Street. There is a William N. Colson, almost surely the son of William Nelson Colson, who is also a hairdresser at 4 Change Avenue and 4 Faneuil Hall Square, with a house at 4 Kennard Avenue. There are six other Colsons in the Boston City Directory for 1868. What this suggests is that James River free blacks and their enslaved relatives had connections in major northern cities before the Civil War and that they moved back and forth after the war.

These fragmentary letter references and scraps from public records do extend understanding of the Underground Railroad through the family connections of the people involved in it. Much of this story was lost as the participants and their children died. It would be useful to know how much the early historians of African Americans in Virginia knew but did not include in their work. Luther Porter Jackson, working with elderly black citizens in the 1920s through the 1940s, hints at clandestine

activity. Earlier, in the first decade of the twentieth century, John H. Russell wrote a history of free blacks in Virginia. Most of his work was in archives, but he lived in Washington and interviewed African Americans from Virginia. “James H. Hill, 227 V Street NW, Washington, D.C.,” he wrote, [is] an instructor in woodwork in the public schools [and] owns property in Richmond which belonged to the Hill family of free negroes long before the Civil War.”<sup>159</sup>

Hints and clues about the operation of the Underground Railroad in and near the Eppes plantation abound in unexpected places. The investigation is far from complete. A useful next step would be to take all the Petersburg area slaveholders named by Petersburg area fugitives in William Still’s book and research their families and properties through the public records. Did fugitives live in the urban areas of town before their escapes? Did they live near each other? Did they live near free blacks? Who was left behind when they absconded? Who were the enslaved and free members of Gillfield Baptist and the other African American churches?

Our knowledge will never be complete, but it is always possible to learn a little more of the complex connections that were part of the lives of enslaved Virginians and influenced their decisions for flight or other mixtures of accommodation and resistance.

## Footnotes

- 1 Philip Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001); John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweningen, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 2 This term has come into common usage since the publication of James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
- 3 Richard G. Turk and G. Frank Willis, “Historic Structure Report: Physical History and Analysis Section, Appomattox Manor, City Point Unit, Petersburg National Battlefield, Virginia,” Report for Denver Service Center Branch of Cultural Resources, Mid-Atlantic/North Atlantic Team, National Park Service (NPS), US Department of the Interior, Denver, CO, 1982. Thanks to Clifford Tobias for this information.
- 4 David G. Orr, Brooke Blades and Douglas V. Campana, “The City Point Archaeological Survey: Completion Report.” National Park Service Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, 1983; Douglas V. Campana, “A Survey of the Prehistoric Occupation of City Point, Virginia,” NPS Mid-Atlantic Region, May 1989, 63-64 in H. Eliot Foulds, draft report “Cultural Landscape Report for Appomattox Manor,” Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation/NPS (Boston, 2000), 63.
- 5 Harry Butowsky, “Appomattox Manor-City Point: A History,” Unpublished report for the NPS Mid-Atlantic Region (Philadelphia: 1978), 11-14, believes that the passages paid rated only 700 acres, not 1700.
- 6 Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas’s People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia Through Four Centuries* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 84-93; Richard L. Jones, “Appamatica: Historical Sketches of the Lower Appomattox River Valley, Including the Counties of Chesterfield, Dinwiddie, and Prince George and the Cities of Colonial Heights, Hopewell and Petersburg.” Unpublished manuscript, copy in possession of Petersburg National Battlefield. This section unpaginated. Jones cites Eppes claims as follows: “Captain Francis Eppes, Patent Book 1, Part 1, page 280. August 26, 1635 – 1700 acres between Bailey’s Creek and Cawson’s Creek.” and “Captain Francis Eppes, Patent Book 3, page 219, January 23, 1653 – 280 acres.”
- 7 Thanks to Dulaney Ward, Petersburg, for his insights into this era.
- 8 Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1996), 4, 139-40, 158, 166, 168-69, 179, 180-86; Warren Billings, *The Old Dominion in the Seventeenth Century: A Documentary History of Virginia, 1606-1689* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1975), 159, 243-47; Wilcomb Washburn, *The Governor and the Rebel: A History of Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 29, 35-39, 162-66. See also Douglas Deal, *Race and Class in Colonial Virginia: Indians, Englishmen and Africans on the Eastern Shore during the Seventeenth Century*, Studies in African American History and Culture (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1993).
- 9 See Philip Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Walter Minchinton, Celia King, and Peter Waite, eds. *Virginia Slave Trade Statistics, 1698-1775* (Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1984); Alan Kulikoff, “‘A Prolifick People’: Black Population Growth in the Chesapeake Colonies, 1700-1790,” *Southern Studies* XVI (1977): 391-428.
- 10 Dulany Ward, Petersburg, e-mail correspondence, August 20, 2002.
- 11 John Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1913), 19-21, 33-37, 39; Curtin, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 157.
- 12 In his study of mulattoes, Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 6-14, states that the majority of mulattoes in Virginia before 1700 were the product of white servant women and African men. “Mulatto” and “free black” are not the same, but mulattoes often had a separate status in colonial Virginia and free blacks were frequently mulatto. Al-

though this contention is the source of much lively debate, the much earlier study by Russell (1913) uses Virginia documents to arrive at the same conclusion.

- 13 Thomas C. Parramore, *Southampton County, Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 1-3, 12, 18; James Axtell, "The Rise and Fall of the Powhatan Empire," in *After Columbus: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 182-221.
- 14 Billings, *Old Dominion*, 151, 159-60.
- 15 Michael Mullin, ed., *American Negro Slavery: A Documentary History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), 94-95; James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 25-26.
- 16 Gerald Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. ( New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 117-19.
- 17 Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*, 43, 120.
- 18 Annette Kashif, "Africanisms upon the Land: A Study of African-Influenced Place Names of the USA," 18, in draft report *Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape*, NPS Conference Proceedings, Atlanta, 2001.
- 19 Porte Crayon in Jack Temple Kirby, *Poquosin: A Study of Rural Landscape and Society* ( Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 154-61, 180-81.
- 20 Chief source is a 1687 travel account edited by Gilbert Chinard who quotes the traveler "Whatever their rank and I know not why, they build only two rooms with some closets on the ground floor, and two rooms in the attic above; but they build several of these according to their means. ... when you come to the home of a person of some means, you think you are entering a fairly large village." Durand, of Dauphiné, *A Huguenot Exile in Virginia or Voyages of a Frenchman Exiled for his Religion, with a Description of Virginia and Maryland*, ed. Gilbert Chinard (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1934, 119-20, cited in Foulds, draft "Cultural Landscape Report," 6.
- 21 It might have been demolished at some point if it had not been for the financial difficulties of the Eppes family before the Civil War and the fact that the structure stayed in family hands for generations after that conflict. A small number of Virginia's antebellum mansions survived into the twenty-first century and those that did may not be representative of the majority. Only a few plantation houses had real grandeur in their construction and landscaping and these are the ones that were most likely to be preserved.
- 22 John Vlach, "'Not mansions . . . but good enough': Slave Quarters as Bi-Cultural Expression," in *Black and White Cultural Interactions in the Antebellum South*, ed. Ted Ownby, 93 ( Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1993).
- 23 John Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 230-31.
- 24 The search for Africanisms has been most successful in such areas as coastal South Carolina and New Orleans. The dispersal of a few Africans throughout a wide Chesapeake frontier made cultural adaptation imperative. The best recent comment on this is in Theesa Singleton, ed., "An Introduction to African American Archeology," in *I, Too, Am America: Archaeological Studies of African-American Life*, 2 (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999) "Moral mission archaeology sought to interpret the everyday lives of African Americans from their own perspectives using the remains of housing, foodways, and personal effects recovered from excavations. It succeeded in giving a voice to the voiceless, but many of the interpretations were overly simplistic. African American communities were perceived as bounded, insular enclaves . . . capable of reproducing material aspects of African culture. This view of African American life ignored the complex social relations involved in the formation and maintenance of the cultural identity of any group and was particularly unsuitable for the study of African Americans who were forced to occupy a subordinate social position. Further, by choosing African survival rather than its demise or reconfiguration as a research focus, moral mission archaeology established a research precedent that still stalks African American archaeology today: the search for cultural markers linked to Africa as the most significant aspect



of African American material life.”

- 25 T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 185-86, 204-05.
- 26 Lorena Walsh, “Slave Life, Slave Society and Tobacco Production in the Tidewater Chesapeake, 1620-1820.” in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, eds. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 187.
- 27 Sylvia Frey, “Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution,” *The Journal of Southern History* 49/3 (August, 1983), 376, 378, 380; Luther Porter Jackson, “Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the American Revolution,” *Journal of Negro History* 27/3 (July 1942):249.
- 28 Sylvia Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 113-115.
- 29 Frey, *Water*, 175, 191-199; Frey, “Slavery and Freedom,” 380-383, 388-389, 395-397. Graham R. Hodges and Susan Hawes Cook have compiled names of Virginia “Black Loyalists” from ships’ passenger lists. While many left their masters from Norfolk, Portsmouth and Williamsburg, and some from “James River” or from New Kent, Isle of Wight, and Chesterfield, I found only one from Petersburg and none with Eppes or Cockes as owners. They list of total of 895 from Virginia leaving with the British forces in 1783. See Hodges and Cook, eds. *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* (New York: Garland Publishing Company and the New England Genealogical Society, 1996).
- 30 Frey, “Slavery and Freedom,” 387-88; Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves & the Making of the American Revolution in Virginia*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 176.
- 31 Frey, “Slavery and Freedom,” 383; Jackson, “Virginia Negro Soldiers,” 250-51, 255-57, 262.
- 32 Thomas C. Parramore, *Southampton County, Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 65.
- 33 James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*, discusses the immediate and long-term impact of the conspiracy in Chapters 4 and 8. For a more detailed account of the events, see Douglas Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
- 34 Luther Porter Jackson, “Religious Development of the Negro in Virginia from 1760 to 1860,” *Journal of Negro History (JNH)* 16 MG. 2 (April 1931): 170-175; Thad W. Tate, *The Negro in Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1965), 88-90. Edward Smith, *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Rise of Black Churches in Eastern American Cities, 1740-1877* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press for Anacostia Museum, 1988), 84; Mechal Sobel, *Trabelin’ On: The Slave Journey to an Afro-Baptist Faith* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 300; “Brief History of Gillfield Baptist Church,” in “Records of Gillfield Baptist, 1827-1939,” Acc No. 10041, Box 2, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
- 35 Sobel, *Trabelin’ On*, 271-74, 409.
- 36 Worrall, Jay Jr., *The Friendly Virginians: America’s First Quakers*, (Athens, GA: Iberian Publishing Company, 1994), 537-538.
- 37 For insight into the post-Revolutionary world view of Virginia enslaved and free blacks, see James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords*.
- 38 John Kneebone, “A Break Down on the Underground Railroad: Captain B. and the Capture of the *Keziah*, 1858,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 48 (Spring 1999): 74-83.
- 39 Shearer Davis Bowman, “Conditional Unionism and Slavery in Virginia, 1860-61: The Case of Dr. Richard Eppes,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography (VMHB)* 96 (January 1988): 31-54; William Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion, 1824-1861* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Daniel Sutherland, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univer-

- sity of North Carolina Press, 1989), 308-323; Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debates of 1832* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).
- 40 Marie Tyler-McGraw, "Richmond Free Blacks and African Colonization, 1816-1832," *Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 2 (1987): 207-24.
- 41 Tom Shick, "Emigrants to Liberia: 1820-1843, an Alphabetical Listing," Liberian Studies Research Working Paper No. 2 (Newark, DE: Dept. of Anthropology, University of Delaware, 1971).
- 42 *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Vol. 1, no. 10 (Fourth Month, 1822), reprinted there from the Richmond *Family Visitor*.
- 43 Robert Ryland, "Reminiscences of the First African Baptist Church, Richmond, VA., by the Pastor," *American Baptist Memorial* 14 (November 1855): 323-24; W. Harrison Daniel, "Virginia Baptists and the Negro in the Antebellum Era." *The Journal of Negro History* 56, no. 1 (January 1971): 1-16. See also see Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 148-50.
- 44 Shick, "Emigrants to Liberia," 198-193; Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro Labor and Property-Holding* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1942), 146-48.
- 45 Parramore, *Southampton County*, 114-116, 71-72. See also Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).
- 46 This story is retold in the studies by Harry Butowsky (1977) and Gail Brown (2000) among others. The documents are in the Eppes Family Collection in the Virginia Historical Society (VHS).
- 47 Kirby, *Poquosin*; 74-82 Eppes's lack of interest in politics is evident throughout his diaries and his reluctance to leave the Union is apparent in his entries for April, 1861. See Bowman, "Conditional Unionism."
- 48 See William Still, *The Underground Railroad*, (reprint ed. New York: Arno Press, 1968; orig. pub. Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872) for examples of letters and telegrams between concealed fugitives, those still enslaved, free blacks and successful escapees. See Chapter 6 for examples in the Colson-Hill papers.
- 49 John Stilgoe, *Common Landscapes of America: 1580-1845* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 58-60, 77-79; Frederick Law Olmsted in Charles E. Beveridge, Charles Capen McLaughlin and David Schuyler, eds. *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Vol 2: *The South*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 103-04, 136-37, 141 quoted in Foulds, draft report "Cultural Landscape Report," 16-17, 64-65.
- 50 The move away from tobacco in the Tidewater may have begun well before the American Revolution. Terry Sharrar, Division of Agriculture, Smithsonian Institution, personal communication based on discussion of Avery Craven, 1987. Gregg Kimball, *American City, Southern Place*, 15-21, makes an excellent case for the development of Tidewater towns as sites for milling and marketing grains as early as the mid-eighteenth century.
- 51 See "Geographies of Family and Market: Virginia Domestic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century" at <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/slavetrade/home.html>.
- 52 Barbara J. Heath, "Bounded Yards and Fluid Boundaries: Landscapes of Slavery at Poplar Forest," in draft report, "Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape," NPS Conference Proceedings, Atlanta, GA, 2001; Results of the computer-based study in Franklin and Schweninger, *Run-away Slaves*.
- 53 Eppes: Aug. 30, 1852, [MssIEp734d296 Eppes, VHS, Richmond, VA.] [Cited as Eppes: [September 17, 1860 below].
- 54 Eppes, Sept. 17, 1860, [MssIEp734d296 Eppes, VHS, Richmond, VA.] No Sarah located, thus far, in slave inventory.
- 55 Eppes: Nov. 30, 1851.

- 56 Larry McKee, "Food Supply and Plantation Social Order: An Archeological Perspective" in draft report "Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the Landscape," NPS Conference Proceedings, Atlanta, GA: 2001. McKee notes (219) "Foodways, as a physically and emotionally charged category of human behavior, was an inevitable source of conflict in plantation life. An adequate diet was recognized by all as a basic 'right' of the enslaved but there was always an intense struggle over defining what was 'adequate' and over attempts to add or subtract from rations and supplements. Masters attempted to use food an important part of their overall system of social control, and slaves in turn devised strategies to make their rations more satisfying."
- 57 Todd Savitt, "Sound Minds and Sound Bodies: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Ante-Bellum Virginia," Ph.D dissertation, University of Virginia, 35, 38, 50-58, 81-110. See bibliography for Savitt's later book, *Medicine and Slavery* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978).
- 58 Eppes: Dec. 1, 1851.
- 59 Savitt, "Sound Minds," 54, 68-69.
- 60 Savitt, "Sound Minds," 81-110, 457n, disagrees with other scholars such as John Blassingame, *Slave Communities* (1972) who believed that enslaved children were chronically undernourished. Savitt's work on Virginia and the evidence of the Eppes plantations both run counter to that conclusion.
- 61 Savitt, "Sound Minds," 86.
- 62 Ibid., 45, 208.
- 63 Ibid., 222, 226-27, 232-34.
- 64 Ibid., 45, 26-28, 115-23.
- 65 Ibid., 150-71.
- 66 Norfolk *National Era*, June 28, 1855 in Patricia Hickin, "Antislavery in Virginia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1968, 78.
- 67 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 23; George Holbert Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights, 1584-1881* (Norfolk, VA: Norfolk Historical Society, 1972), 122, quoted in Philip D. Morgan, Michael E. Hucles, and Sarah S. Hughs, *Don't Grieve After Me: The Black Experience in Virginia 1619-1986*, (Hampton, VA: Hampton University, 1986), 44.
- 68 Eppes: Jan. 2, 1853. Emphasis in original.
- 69 Mary Cocke, City Point, to Richard Eppes, University of Virginia, March 12, 1841. Mss1Ep734d493, Eppes family collection, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 70 "Mrs. Solomon Mopford" to "Mother" care of Richard Eppes, City Point, Virginia, April (1 or 7), 1845 Eppes Family papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 71 Mrs. Elise Cutchins to Harry Butowsky, "Appomattox Manor," 30-31.
- 72 Eppes, June 17, 1867 in Foulds, draft report "Cultural Landscape Report," 64, n33.
- 73 Research into the names of Solomon Mopford and William Merrit of Aiken, South Carolina may reveal that the sentence construction supports another interpretation of the woman's identity.
- 74 Eppes: March 25, 1861.
- 75 Eppes: Jan. 1, 1859.
- 76 Eppes: Jan, 17, 1852.
- 77 Eppes: March 25, 1861.
- 78 Eppes: Jan. 3, 1859.
- 79 Eppes: Dec. 24, 1858; Dec. 30, 1858; Jan. 4, 1859; Jan. 5, 1859.

- 80 Eppes: Dec. 24, 1858; Dec. 30, 1858; Jan. 5, 1859.
- 81 Eppes: Sept. 2, 1852.
- 82 Eppes: Sept. 25, 1859 and Eppes: March 25, 1853 in Gail W. Brown, "African Americans and Appomattox Manor," 59.
- 83 Eppes: April 24, 1859 and Eppes; Sept. 1, 1859 in Brown, "African Americans and Appomattox Manor," 29; Eppes: July 11, 1858.
- 84 Primary Source: Richard Eppes, "Copy of a List of Negroes Taken off by the Yankees 1862: Negroes Belonging to the Estate of Dr. Richard Eppes of City Point, Prince George County, Virginia Who were Carried Away by the Land and Naval Forces of the United States of America during the Months of May, June, July and August, 1862"; Richard Eppes, Inventory of Slaves taken on November 20, 1858. Richard Eppes diaries, 1851-1861, Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 85 Eppes: Sept. 2, 1859.
- 86 Eppes: Dec. 27, 1857 for Ursula as apprentice.
- 87 Eppes: March 6, 1856.
- 88 Eppes: Dec. 10, 1857.
- 89 Eppes: March 2, 1856.
- 90 Eppes: July 21, 1858.
- 91 Eppes: Jan. 18, 1858.
- 92 Eppes: Feb. 1857.
- 93 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 41
- 94 Kneebone, "A Break Down," 1-16; Still, *Underground Railroad*, 124.
- 95 Cited in Kneebone, "A Break Down," 1.
- 96 Richard Eppes, Camp Isabel, Lower Brandon to Mrs. Eppes, 25 May 1861, Mss1 Ep734a 62 Eppes, in Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA..
- 97 For Moody, oldest son of Harriet Ruffin, see "Ages of Negroes Belonging to the Estate of Richard Eppes of Appomattox, Aug. 24, 1859;" Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA , for Bolling, see "Copy of a List of Negroes Taken off by the Yankees, 1862," Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 98 Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 99 Eppes diary, Sept. 1, 1865–July 4, 1867. First quote on p.15; second quote on p.17, Section 47 MssEp 734d297 Eppes, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 100 Paulina Ruffin Eppes interviewed by Judge Thomas Robertson and Roland Gil for Works Projects Administration, Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 101 Eppes was off by one day. The first bombardment was actually on May 10. Thanks to James Blankenship for this information.
- 102 Eppes, "Negroes Carried Off from Eppes Island, Charles City County;" "Copy of a List of Negroes Taken off by the Yankees, 1862" and "Negroes Carried Off from Chesterfield County," Eppes Family Papers, Mss1Ep734d296, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 103 Charles L. Perdue Jr., *et al.*, *Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 269-270.
- 104 O.R. 3, II: 276, 281-82 in Hayward Farrar, "Final Draft of the Special Historical Study of African American

- Civilians at City Point, Virginia, 1864-66,” National Park Service (NPS), 1991, 11-12.
- 105 Farrar, “Final Draft,” 10-12.
- 106 Farrar, “Final Draft,” 2, 10.
- 107 Farrar, “Final Draft,” 14-15, 24-28.
- 108 Richard Blackett, *Thomas Morris Chester, Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches from the Virginia Front*. Biographical Essay by R.J.M. Blackett (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 219-220. Among the free blacks abandoning Richmond for Petersburg in the latter days of the war, Chester noted “Joseph G. Hill, lady and child.”
- 109 Perdue, *Weevils in the Wheat*, 271
- 110 Data received from Eric Sheetz, African American Soldiers and Sailors Project, NPS, Washington, D.C., March 27, 2002.
- 111 Eppes: Feb. 20, 1876 in Foulds, draft report “Cultural Landscape Report,” 31-32, 1118.
- 112 Freedman’s School at City Point/Bermuda Hundred, 1867-68, Item 14, Commonplace Book, Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 113 Freedman’s School, 226. The Olmsted Center’s draft report (2000), 31, says George Bolling and Edward Oldham also returned. This would be reasonable, given their favored status, but evidence is not cited.
- 114 This is the consensus of earlier studies and local histories, including Harry Butowsky who draws his conclusion from an oral history interview with Mrs. Elise Eppes in 1977. (Butowsky [1977], 51) This assumption is again offered by Hayward Farrar, citing Butowsky, in his study, “African American Civilians at City Point, 1864-1866.” (Farrar, [1991], 15).
- 115 Farrar notes that a sampling of Union Army laborers were still in the region decades later, according to the census. The names, however, do not correlate with Eppes plantations families. Farrar, “Final Draft,” 24.
- 116 Eppes: Sept. 7, 1865 in MSS1 Ep.734/d297, Section 47, Eppes Papers, post Civil-War Diary 58, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 117 Eppes: July 30, 1867.
- 118 Luther Porter Jackson, *The Free Negro in Virginia*, (New York: Appleton-Crofts, 1942), 278-79.
- 119 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 23.
- 120 Ibid., 193, 195.
- 121 For the online version of “Exploring a Common Past,” see [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online books/ugrr/exugrr1.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/ugrr/exugrr1.htm).
- 122 Colson-Hill Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 31, Family Correspondence 1845-65, Virginia State University Library, Petersburg, VA. McCrae is also spelled McCray and McRae.
- 123 Luther Porter Jackson, “Manumission in Certain Virginia Cities,” *Journal of Negro History* 15 (July 1930), 292; “Mrs. Solomon Mopford,” Aiken, South Carolina to “Mother,” care of Richard Eppes, City Point, VA, April (1 or 7), 1845. Mss1E0734d493, Eppes Family Papers, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 124 Jackson, “Manumission,” 286, 288-91, 296.
- 125 Oral interview, Harvey Roberts and Lucious Edwards, Virginia State University, Feb. 4, 2002; Jane Minor’s freedom recorded in Petersburg Deed Book 7, p. 267; quote from Jackson, “Manumission,” 291-92.
- 126 Jackson, “Manumission,” 301-02. See also Suzanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984) for context.
- 127 Kneebone, “A Break Down,” 2-3; Jackson “Manumission,” 301, 306.

- 128 Petersburg Deed Book 16, p. 637; Henrico County Petitions, Dec. 22, 1847 in Jackson, "Manumission," 303-04.
- 129 There is at least one case in Richmond of an emancipated young woman being sent to Philadelphia for education. In that case, the sender was Elizabeth Van Lew, later the leader of the Union spy network in Richmond during the Civil War, and the emancipated woman returned to Richmond to serve in the spy network. See Elizabeth Varon's, *Southern Lady, Yankee Spy: The True Story of Elizabeth Van Lew, a Union Agent in the Heart of the Confederacy*, (New York:Oxford University Press, 2003)
- 130 Petersburg Land Book, 1860, and US Census, 1860 in Luther Porter Jackson, "Free Negroes of Petersburg, Virginia," *Journal of Negro History* 12 (July 1927). Jackson also notes Mrs. Colson's postwar civic activism.
- 131 Jackson, "Free Negroes," 376. Letters among the Colson family members and between the Colson and Roberts families, held in the Colson-Hill collection at Virginia State University, Petersburg, establish their travel and their connections with northern free blacks, but conjectures about assistance to fugitives could not be confirmed or negated by the Colson-Hill papers. The family correspondence boxes hold important historical and business papers, but no more information on fugitives than is available in William Still's *The Underground Railroad*.
- 132 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 191.
- 133 Ibid.,193.
- 134 Kimball, *American City, Southern Place*, 150-51; Still, *Underground Railroad*, 58, 192, 541.
- 135 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 197-98.
- 136 Kimball, *American City, Southern Place*, 151-52; Schwarz, *Migrants against Slavery*, 192.
- 137 George Washington may have returned as a man of that name is listed among the adult night students in the City Point Freedman's School in 1867-68. "Freedmen's School at City Point/Bermuda Hundred," Item 14: Commonplace Book, Eppes Family Papers, Mss1 E734d, VHS, Richmond, VA.
- 138 Kneebone, "A Break Down," 7, 10, 12-13.
- 139 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 58-59.
- 140 Lucious Edwards Jr. "Free Black Property Holders in Petersburg, Virginia, 1865-74," MA thesis, Virginia State College, 1977, 74-80; [Kathryn Grover, New Bedford, e-mail communication to Marie Tyler-McGraw, Nov. 30, 2001,] "Crew Lists, New Bedford Customs District," Ship *Favorite*, New Bedford, East Cape, 8 June 1837, David Peter Scott, Richmond, 31, colored: in case of accident notify Lucy Ann Scott to the care of John D. Towns, Petersburg, VA."
- 141 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 22.
- 142 Ibid., 23.
- 143 Ibid., 94
- 144 Ibid., 107-09.
- 145 Ibid., 109-10.
- 146 *The Press* (Petersbug, VA), Jan. 12, 1860.
- 147 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 60-61, 87, 124.
- 148 Ibid., 161-63.
- 149 Ibid., 200.
- 150 Ibid., 202 - 04.
- 151 The 1850 and 1860 Indexes to the Richmond Free Black Census, Valentine Museum, Richmond, show free

black Anderson and Hill families living very near each other in the city. One is Gustavus Anderson, who may have been G.A., the author of the above letter. The names Gustavus and Julius Anderson suggest German paternity.

152 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 205.

153 James Anderson to John Henry Hill, n.d., Colson-Hill Family Papers, Correspondence/Family 1845-65, Box 3, Folder 31, Virginia State University Library, Petersburg, Virginia. Emphasis in original.

154 James Anderson to Hezekiah Hill, n.d., Colson-Hill Family Papers, Correspondence/Family 1845-65, Box 3, Folder 31, Virginia State University Library, Petersburg, Virginia.

155 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 278-279. *The Black Abolitionist Papers* reprints this letter but says that Robert Jones had been a barber in Philadelphia before going to Canada, returned to Philadelphia in 1863, encouraged black enlistment in the army, and reestablished himself as a barber, practicing until his death in 1890. See C. Peter Ripley, et al., eds. *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, Vol. 2, Canada, 1830-1865. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 62.

156 Grimes was born of free black parents in Leesburg, Loudoun County, VA., in 1812. Aided escapes in the District of Columbia area until caught and tried in Loudoun County. Served 2 years in Richmond penitentiary. Then moved to Boston, pastor of Twelfth Baptist Church, known as the "Fugitive Church." Grimes remained active in antislavery and Underground Railroad, then recruited for 54th Mass. during Civil War. This information from Loudoun County African American Heritage Trail draft booklet.

157 Colson-Hill Family Papers, Box 3, Folder 31, Virginia State University Library, Petersburg, Virginia.

158 Still, *Underground Railroad*, 205. Still says that Hezekiah Hill moved to West Point; but he does not say if the town is West Point in New York, Virginia, or perhaps another state.

159 Russell, *Free Negro in Virginia*, 151.

# Appendix I

## Richard Eppes's Code of Laws for the Island Plantation

“We regard you all in the light of human beings possessing faculties similar to our own and capable of distinguishing between right and wrong. As such we will give to you a code of laws which we expect you strictly to adhere to and we can assure you they will be obeyed to the very letter by ourselves.

- I. You shall not steal from your master, overseer, fellow servants, or neighbors.  
Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive ten stripes.
  2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, 25 stripes or lashes.
  3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, 39 stripes or lashes, head shaved.
  
- II. You shall not be insolent to your master or overseer.  
Penalty: For the first offence your weekly allowance will be cut short.
  2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 10 stripes.
  3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 25 stripes.If the act of stealing or insolence be a very bad one, the full punishment will be administered at once.
  
- III. You shall be perfectly obedient and obey orders.  
Penalty. For the first offence your weekly allowance will be cut short.
  2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you will receive 10 stripes.
  3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you will receive 20 stripes.If the act is a very bad one the whole punishment will be administered at once.
  
- IV. You shall not strike or injure the overseer.  
Penalty. For the first blow you shall receive 150 stripes
  2. For the second blow, if given in the same month, you shall receive 200 stripes.
  3. For the third blow, if given in the same month, you shall receive 300 stripes.If the act is a very bad one you will be given up to the laws of your country and hung.
  
- V. You shall not strike or injure your master.  
Penalty. For the first offence if a mild one you shall receive 500 stripes administered in 5 days 100 a day.  
If the act is a bad one you shall be given up to the laws of your country and hung.
  
- VI. You shall not leave the plantation without a pass from the overseer or your master except when sent on business by your master or overseer.  
Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 5 stripes.
  2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month 10 stripes.
  3. For the third offence if occurring in the same month 25 stripes.
  
- VII. You shall not commit adultery



Penalty. For the first offence the man shall receive from the husband of the woman on his bare back 20 stripes. The woman shall receive 15 stripes from her seducer.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same year the man shall receive 39 stripes the woman 39 stripes both punishments will be executed in the manner mentioned above.

VIII. You shall not fight or quarrel with each other.

Penalty. For the offence the parties shall be stripped naked placed in a closed room each with a cowhide and made to whip each other until they are commanded to stop by the overseer or their master. If of equal strength.

IX. You shall appear every Monday morning with a clean shirt on and cleanly dressed.

Penalty. For the first offence your weekly allowance will be cut short.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 5 stripes.

3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 15 stripes.

X. You shall answer to the call of the role every Sunday evening at sunset.

Penalty. For the first offence your weekly allowance will be cut short.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 5 stripes.

3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 10 stripes.

XI. You shall not tell a lie.

Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 5 stripes.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 10 stripes.

3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 15 stripes.

XII. You shall not get drunk.

Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 10 stripes.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 15 stripes.

3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 25 stripes.

XIII. You shall not runaway from your master or overseer.

Penalty. For the first offence you will receive 20 stripes.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same year, you will receive 30 stripes.

3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same year, 39 stripes.

XIV. You shall obey your foreman because he is responsible to the overseer or your master for your work.

Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 5 stripes.

2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall return 10 stripes.

3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 15 stripes.

- XV. You shall not break, injure or destroy any of your master's, overseer's, or fellow property intentionally.  
Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 5 stripes.  
2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 10 stripes.  
3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, 25 stripes.  
If the act is a bad one, the whole punishment will be administered at once.

### **Laws for the Foreman or Driver**

- I. For Stealing, Insolence, Disobedience, Striking or Injuring your Overseer or Master, Leaving the plantation without a pass, Committing Adultery, want of Cleanliness, Absent at the call of the Role, Lying, Drunkenness, Running Away, Breaking, Injuring or Destroying your master's, overseer's or fellow servants property intentionally his punishment in all cases shall be double that of the other servants.
- II. You shall blow your horn every morning (Sunday excepted) at daybreak and be at your work by sunrise with the hands under your charge. You shall report to the overseer or your master the names of those under your charge absent from their work at that hour so that they may be corrected.  
Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 5 stripes.  
2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 10 stripes.  
3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 15 stripes.
- III. You shall not strike the hands under your charge but report them to the overseer or your master and they will be punished.
- IV. You shall report to the overseer or your master any servant who shall break these laws.  
Penalty. For the first offence you shall receive 20 stripes.  
2. For the second offence, if occurring in the same month, you shall receive 30 stripes.  
3. For the third offence, if occurring in the same month, 39 stripes.
- V. You are to obey the directions of the overseer always except when your master directs not.

### **Privileges of the Negroes on the Island Plantation**

- I. To each of you will be allotted a small spot of ground for a garden.
- II. You will be allowed to raise ducks and chickens.
- III. Each of the men will be allowed to cut four cords of wood which, when brought over and deposited in my woodhouse, they will receive \$5.00.
- IV. You will be allowed four days holiday Christmas and one at Easter.
- V. You will work from sunrise until sunset ordinarily but when a press longer. Three quarters of an hour will be allowed you to breakfast and one hour and a quarter to dine from the month of October until April. One hour to breakfast

and one hour and three quarters to dine from April until October.

VI. You will be allowed to have half of every Saturday leaving your work at 12 o.c. except when a press then it will not be allowed you. In all cases we reserve to ourselves the right to take away from you one or all the privileges mentioned.

VII. You shall not be allowed to keep boats or fish float seines.  
Penalty. For the offence you will receive 20 stripes.

VIII. You shall not keep dogs for guard or any other purposes except with especial permission from myself.  
Penalty. For the offence you will receive 10 stripes.

### **Privileges of the Foreman and The Head Plougher**

The Foreman will be allowed all the privileges mentioned above and also the privilege of cutting eight cords of wood for which he will receive \$10 when brought over and deposited in my woodhouse and moreover we give to him the privilege of raising two hogs. The headplougher will supply the place of the foreman when sick. To him we grant the privilege of cutting six cords of wood for which he will receive eight dollars when brought over and deposited in my woodhouse and moreover we grant to him the privilege of raising one hog. You all will receive a suit of summer and winter clothes, two shirts, one pair of shoes, one summer hat for the men and boys, one handkerchief for the women apiece every year. A blanket every two years apiece.

Your weekly allowance will be a peck and half of meal for the men and a peck for the women apiece. Two pounds and half of pork for the men and two pounds for the women and boys over fourteen apiece. To the Foreman and Head Plougher will be given three pounds of pork apiece.

## Appendix II

### Enslaved Families on the Eppes Plantations

#### Primary Sources:

Richard Eppes, "Copy of a List of Negroes taken off by the Yankees 1862: Negroes belonging to the estate of Dr. Richard Eppes of City Point, Prince George County, Virginia who were carried away by the land and naval forces of the United States of America during the months of May, June, July and August, 1862". [Eppes Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.]  
Richard Eppes, Inventory of Slaves, November, 1858.  
Richard Eppes, Inventory of Slaves, October, 1851

Sandy [no other information available]

BINS b. 1838 – sold in 1859  
"Cousin Ben" [Bins] according to Richard Slaughter in WPA narrative.  
Interviewer probably misheard the name.

#### BIRD

John Bird b. Oct. 18, 1836 (son of Nancy [Lewis?])  
Toby Bird b. 1838 (son of Nancy) – left June 1, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell  
Patience Bird b. 1839 – left May 20, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell  
Colen Bird b. Aug. 20, 1858 – died 1861 (?)  
Adeline Bird b. April 25, 1859  
Allen Bird b. Jan. 17, 1861  
Lavinia Bird b. Sept. 11, 1861

#### BLAND

Edward Bland b. 1834

#### BOLLING

Sarah Bolling b. 1834  
Robert Bolling b. 1835  
George Bolling b. 1838  
Richard Bolling b. May 24, 1840  
Patty Bolling b. March 1845

"Robert Bolling, 27, "very valuable carpenter and ostler, escaped August 27, 1861. Attached to Hopewell and Appomattox estates. ...ran off to the enemy from Burwell Bay, Isle of Wight County, August 27, 1861 where he was employed in the Prince George Cavalry, then stationed at that place."

#### BOOKER

Jim Booker (purchased) b. 1831 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell – left July, 1862  
Jane Oldham Booker b. 1841 – left June 1, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell  
Fanny Ellen Booker b. Dec. 25, 1859 – d. Feb. 13, 1861  
Ida Booker b. Jan. 26, 1861

#### CARY/CAREY

Jack Cary b. 1824

Martha Ann Cary b. 1833

Richard Cary b. 1849

Charlotte Cary b. 1850 – left June 1, 1862 – attached to Hopewell/Appomattox

Agnes Cary b. July 1857 – died

Betsy Cary b. 1857

Celia Ann Cary b. Nov. 1860

#### CORN

Amy Corn b. 1790

Sally Corn b. 1807 (dtr of Amy)

John Corn b. 1817 (son of Amy)

Patrick Corn b. 1820 (son of Amy)

Mary Jane b. 1821 (dtr of Amy)

Lucy Corn b. 1829 (dtr of Jenny Oldham)

Bob Corn b. 1847

Dolly Corn b. 1848

Mary Corn b. 1850

Cornelius Corn b. 1852

Hannah Corn b. 1854

Fanny Corn b. 1856

Polly Corn b. 1857

Alfred Corn b. May 6, 1859

Lavinia Corn b. April 12, 1861 Comment by Eppes: “Civil War commenced today April 12, 1861. Bombardment of Sumter.”

#### CORSEN

Henry Corsen b. 1821 “very robust” – left June 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell

Caroline Corsen b. Feb. 1834

Irene Corsen b. March 1860

[ ] Corsen b. 1862 Child born after family leaves Eppes plantations in summer of 1862.

#### DAVIS

Frederick Davis b. 1799 (son of Dolly) dead in 1851 census?

Charles Davis b. 1818 (son of Dolly) – left June 1, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell

#### FIELD

Joshua Field b. Aug. 20, 1858 – d. 1862

#### HARRIS

Judy Harris b. 1787

James Harris b. 1830

#### HENDERSON

Davy Henderson b. 1820 (bought)

Milly Henderson b. 1826 (bought)

William Henderson b. 1842 (son of Milly)

Davy Henderson Jr b. Aug. 1843 (son of Milly)

John Henderson b. Aug. 1845 (son of Milly)

Mary Frances Henderson b. Sept. 1847 (dtr of Milly)

Randolph Henderson b. July, 1851  
Ellick Henderson b. 1854  
Matilda Henderson b. 1856  
Melville Henderson b. 1857  
Rosena Henderson b. May 23, 1859  
Annianus Henderson b. March 24, 1861 (pd) – d. Aug. 1, 1861  
[ ] Henderson b. 1862 Born after family left Eppes plantations in summer of 1862

#### JASPER

Susan Jasper b. 1843

#### LEWIS

Frank Lewis b. 1781 – listed as dead in 1851 Inventory  
Izzy Lewis (wife of Frank; died before 1851 Inventory)  
Charles Lewis b. 1808 (son of Izzy; first wife may have been Violet)  
Sally [Oldham] Lewis b. 1815 weaver – left May 20, 1862 – attached to Hopewell/Appomattox  
Nancy Lewis b. 1816 (dtr of Izzy)  
Crocodile Lewis b. 1818 (aka Ned Lewis – son of Izzy) m. Sally Thompson in 1852  
William Lewis b. 1822 (son of Izzy)  
Archer/Arthur “Archy” Lewis b. 1833 (son of Violet – dead) – “very likely” left May 20, 1862 – attached to Hopewell/Appomattox  
Katy Lewis White (dtr of Violet ) b. circa 1835  
Frank Lewis b. 1840 – left June 1, 1862 – attached to Hopewell/Appomattox  
Judy aka Margaret Lewis b. 1841  
Nancy Lewis b. 1844  
Ada Lewis b. 1858 – (dtr of Crocodile and Sally) d. 1861  
Rose Lewis b. Sept. 1860 (dtr of Crocodile and Sally)  
Andrew Lewis b. July 17, 1861

#### MOODY

Martha Ann b. 1833 (dtr of Phoebe – dead)  
Patience b. 1839 (dtr of Phoebe – dead)

#### MORRIS

Solomon Morris b. 1817 (bought – had no last name in 1851 inventory) Blacksmith – left May 20, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell  
Mary Jane Morris b. 1821  
George Morris b. 1843

#### OLDHAM

Jenny Oldham b. 1789 – attached to Hopewell and Appomattox; escaped June 1862  
George Oldham b. 1804 – attached to Hopewell and Appomattox; escaped June 1862  
Edward Oldham b. 1813 – carpenter; left July 1862 – attached to Hopewell and Appomattox  
Fanny Oldham b. 1819 (“dtr of Jenny – dead” 1851 Inventory)  
Jack Oldham b. 1824 (son of Jenny – dead)  
Lucy Oldham Corn b. 1829  
Ned Oldham Jr. b. 1844 (son of Fanny and Edward/Ned)  
Jane Oldham Booker (dtr of Fanny and Edward/Ned)

## PAGE

Sucky [Oldham] Page b. 1817 (dtr of Jenny Oldham)

Eliza Page b. 1838

## RUFFIN

Madison Ruffin b. 1812 (bought) "Very valuable house servant" left May 20, 1862  
Harriett Ruffin b. 1816 no parental ID – "Excellent house servant" – left May 20, 1862

\* Robert Moody b. June 19, 1835 (son of Harriet) – "This man was taken as my servant during the civil war of 1861 and ran away from camp at Burwell's Bay near mouth of James River, Aug. 24, 1861, stealing my pistol and I being at home with Mrs. Eppes during her confinement." R. Eppes, 1862 List of Slaves

\*George Gilliam b. Apr. 13, 1838 (son of Harriet)

\* Richard Gilliam b. May 24, 1840 (son of Harriet) .

\* Patty Rud b. 1845 (dtr of Harriet)

Paulina Ruffin b. 1848 (dtr of Madison and Harriet) "Very likely" left May 20, 1862

James Ruffin b. 1850 (son of Madison and Harriet) – did not leave or returned

Agnes Ruffin b. Dec. 21, 1851 – (dtr of Madison and Harriet) left May 20, 1862

John Williams Ruffin b. 1853 – left May 20, 1862

Samuel Ruffin b. 1855 – left May 20, 1862

Indianna Ruffin b. 1858 – left May 20, 1862

## SMITH

James Henry Smith b. 1790 – "died" in 1851 census

James Smith b. 1830 (son of Mary) – dead

Henry Smith b. March 1832 (son of Mary)

Caroline b. 1834 (dtr of Mary) – dead

## SLAUGHTER

Mathew Slaughter b. 1781

Hannah Slaughter b. 1786

These were the oldest laborers on the plantations in 1859. They lived in a separate house or cabin on the Hopewell plantation. (Eppes, 2 Dec. 1856 and 30 Dec. 1859 in Brown, 55). They did not leave during Civil War.

Paul Slaughter b. 1803 (son of Mat) – in 1851 census, not 1858.

Susan Slaughter b. 1813 (dtr of Amy [Corn]; wife of Stewart) – cook – did not leave

Stewart Slaughter b. 1817 (son of Mat and Hannah) left June 1, 1862 – attached to Hopewell/Appomattox

Patty Slaughter b. 1821 (dtr of Jenny [Oldham])

Dilsy Slaughter b. May 10, 1841 – (dtr of Susan and Stewart) left June 1, 1862 – attached to Hopewell/Appomattox

Amy Slaughter b. March, 1844 (dtr of Susan and Stewart ) d. July 15, 1861 in childbed

Ursula Slaughter b. May, 1844 (dtr of Patty) – did not leave

Tom Slaughter b. 1846 – (son of Susan and Stewart) – did not leave

Sally Slaughter b. 1847

Richard Slaughter b. 1849 (son of Susan and Stewart) “ No. 1 – well grown for his years” – left May 20, 1862, His narrative recorded by WPA in 1930s and printed in Charles Perdue, *et al*, *Weevils in the Wheat*.

Louisa Slaughter b. 1850 – left May 20, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell

Peter Slaughter b. 1853

Willie Slaughter b. April. 1858 – d. Sept. 15, 1863 (?)

Emma Slaughter b. May 25, 1858

“Give my love to my uncle mat slaughter ... Give my love to cousin Richard Slaughter and his two daughters [sic] Elizabeth and Laura.” Unsigned and undated letter to “mother” from a Lewis family member in South Carolina. The Richard Slaughter referred to is off the Eppes plantations as are his daughters. This is evidence for kinship relations that are maintained through contact and naming practices throughout the region. This Richard Slaughter is not the one born in 1849.

#### SPRATLEY

James Spratley b. Feb. 15, 1838 (son of Fanny) – left June 1, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell, May have returned after Civil War.

#### THOMPSON

Sally Thompson Lewis b. 1815 (dtr of Jenny Oldham)

m. Crocodile Lewis b. 1818, in 1852.

William Thompson b. 1840 (son of Sally)

Nancy Thompson b. Nov. 22, 1842 (dtr of Sally) – left May 20, 1862 – attached to Appomattox/Hopewell

Ansy Thompson b. 1850 (dtr of Sally)

#### WEBB

Sally Webb b. 1807

#### WHITE

Louisa White b. 1800 – bought by Mrs. Cocke in 1841 – “Midwife most excellent” – Hundreds plantation – left May 1862

William White b. 1822 (son of Louisa)

George White b. 1825 (son of Louisa)

Mary Ann White b. 1829 (dtr of Louisa)

Elizabeth White b. 1834

Katy Old ham White b. 1835

Giles Randolph White b.1837 (also listed in 1853 inventory as born 1847) – ( son of Louisa)

Mathew b. 1848

Emmeline White b. 1855

Louisa White b. 1856

Lavinia White b. 1857

Henrietta White b. June 12, 1858

Harris White b. Sept. 12, 1858

Lewis Eldridge White b. January 1859

[Linden] White b. Nov. 1860

Emmanuel White b. Feb. 24, 1861 – d. Aug. 6, 1861

Nicholas White b. April 29, 1861

[ ] White b. 1862

This is Richard Eppes’ calculation of the birth of a woman pregnant when she left with the others for the Union Army lines.



# Appendix III

## Census Data for Virginia

### *Blacks as Percentage of Total Population in Virginia, 1640-1790*

1640= 1%

1670=6%

1700=28%

1730=26%

1760=41%

1770=42%

1780=41%

1790=41%

From James Potter, "Demographic Development and Family Structure," in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, ed. Jack P. Green and J.R. Pole, 137-38, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

### *1850 Virginia Census by Counties: Region of Eppes Plantations*

#### Charles City County

Whites - 1,664

Free Blacks - 772

Enslaved Blacks - 2,764

#### Chesterfield County

Whites - 8,406

Free Blacks - 467

Enslaved Blacks - 8,616

#### Dinwiddie County

Whites - 10,942

Free Blacks - 3,296

Enslaved Blacks - 10,880

#### Petersburg

Whites - 6,665

Free Blacks - 2,616

Enslaved Blacks - 4,729

Free blacks had constituted a higher percentage of the total population in 1830 and 1840

#### Richmond

Whites - 15,274

Free Blacks - 2,586

Enslaved Blacks - 11,639

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

This bibliographic essay is also an account of what was and was not possible in the search for information about the Underground Railroad on and around the four Eppes plantations, beginning with oral traditions. Oral tradition in the area was first captured by the work of Luther Porter Jackson of Virginia State College (now University) in the 1930s, who skillfully blended the public records with his oral interviews with local African Americans. As a scholar publishing broadly in the Jim Crow era, he had to sustain fact-based credibility at all times, but he also incorporated some speculative material on the Underground Railroad's operations around Petersburg. Jackson's speculations can be relied upon and function as a ground work for further research. I hoped that his unpublished notes would be more forthcoming on this topic, but they were not. The few people to whom I was directed said that they had no information about the Underground Railroad. The most interesting possibility was a 102-year-old woman named Hattie Scott, who was in a nursing home, but quite sharp. Her nephew, Harvey Roberts, offered to take me out to see her that day. With some trepidation about just walking in on the woman and other bad oral history techniques, we drove to her nursing home. When we got there, she had gone out for the day. I asked Mr. Roberts if he would speak to her himself later, but Mrs. Scott apparently had no information.

In the end, my best source for oral history of the Underground Railroad in the region was Lucious Edwards Jr., Archivist and History Professor at Virginia State University. He grew up in the area and has been collecting documents on related topics for three decades or more. He has been a participant in several sponsored research projects to document African

American history sites in the area. His master's thesis was on free black property holders in Petersburg after the Civil War. His source was primarily Petersburg Land Tax Books at the Library of Virginia in Richmond. His work illustrates one of the problems in determining African American ownership of particular houses. Houses or lots in the section known as "Pocahontas," primarily an African American neighborhood after the Civil War and containing many free black residences prior to that, are not designated by street name, but simply as Pocahontas. This makes it harder to determine who might have owned an antebellum structure still standing or where people actually lived. Edwards is convinced of the participation of many free and enslaved blacks in the area in the Underground Railroad and believes that the white May family was also centrally involved. I am inclined to include some branches of the white Bolling family and the Meade family for reasons noted in Chapter Six.

Oral tradition in Petersburg has long connected a house on Whitten Street in Pocahontas with the Underground Railroad. Because the property tax lists simply say "Pocahontas" for free black residents there, it is difficult to know who the owners were in the prewar decades. If those owners can be connected with the individuals listed as potential Underground Railroad participants in Chapter Six, then the claim may be valid. Lucious Edwards seems dubious. He and others investigated the house for a 1994 African American history survey of Petersburg. (Mary Ellen Bushey, Ann Creighton Zollar, Lucious Edwards Jr., L. Daniel Mouer and Robin L. Ryder, "African Americans in Petersburg: Historic Context and Resources for Preservation, Planning, Research and Interpretation," unpublished study, 1994). It may be that the promoters of

the site have claimed too much by promoting tunnels and a history longer than the existence of the house. But there may be a more modest, yet real, connection to the Underground Railroad. An unpublished history of Pocahontas Island (James W. Smith, Martha Dance and the L. R. Valentine Youth Group, "The History and Legend of Pocahontas Island," unpublished manuscript., copyright 1981 by authors, at Virginia State University Library, Petersburg) is primarily a compilation of previous sources and does not document the role of the Underground Railroad on the island. It is fortunate that the Underground Railroad in Petersburg can be fairly well-documented in William Still and in related public records and correspondence of the mid-nineteenth century.

On the question of runaways from the Eppes plantation, I now feel safe in saying that there were no advertisements for runaways from the Eppes-Cocke-Eppes family. The Virginia Center for Digital History at the University of Virginia has produced *Virginia Runaways*, a digital database, Thomas Costa, University of Virginia at Wise, editor and compiler. (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways>). The web site lists runaways in seventeenth and eighteenth century Virginia. For that period, five were advertised for by an Eppes, and four of those runaway advertisements were placed by James Eppes, the jailer in Charles City County, who held captured runaways in the jail and advertised for owners to come for them and pay the costs of holding them in jail. The fifth advertisement was for Caesar, advertised June 1, 1769, in the *Virginia Gazette*: ". . . it is imagined that he is in Charles City [C]ounty, on Chickahominy, at James Eppes's, as he has a wife there." No members of the Eppes family who ran the plantations under consideration here (Francis, John, Archibald) advertised for runaways in the colonial *Virginia Gazette*.

The period up to 1820 has been better studied for Virginia slave advertisements than the period from 1820 to 1860. Sources on the early period, none of which yielded any Eppes or Cocke family names, include the following. Lathan A. Windley, ed. *A Profile of Runaway Slaves in Virginia and South Carolina from 1730 Through 1787* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1995) — an important aspect of the context of this book is the discussion of colonial laws that punished runaways and their abettors and the development of the fugitive slave clause (Section 2, Article 4) of the US Constitution. Also: Lathan A. Windley, comp. *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s through 1787* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983); Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, eds. *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1729-1790* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); and Daniel Meaders, ed. *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves in Virginia* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1997).

For the post-1820 period, I looked at all the antebellum Petersburg papers held at the Library of Congress. The library does not have a complete run of the five or six papers that published sporadically in Petersburg from 1820 to 1860, but it does have a good basic selection from each decade, adding up to about 100 papers. Since ads often continued from week to week, I had numerous opportunities to see Eppes runaway ads or slave sales. There were none. Next, I examined the excellent index for Petersburg Newspapers to 1877, held at the Main Branch of the Petersburg Public Library. Although there were several hundred advertisements for runaways, none were inserted by or about Eppes or Cocke bondsmen at the four plantations. The index, however, was an excellent source for stories of arrests on suspicion of aiding fugitives

although, again, there were no references to the Eppes plantation or families. Finally, I examined the personal collection of Chris Calkins. I want to be cautious in saying that there were no ads for Eppes runaways because one may yet surface. But I think it is indisputable that running away was infrequent on those plantations and usually involved a short term departure, not justifying a newspaper advertisement.

In archival research, I was surprised to find only two city directories for Petersburg for the pre-Civil War era. Neither of these had the standard names and addresses of residents; they had only advertisements. I checked at Petersburg Public Library, Library of Virginia and Library of Congress. Looking for lists of Eppes family laborers on the Island and Bermuda Hundreds plantations, I checked Charles City County Will Books 1 & 2, 1789-1808/1808-1824 (Reel 8); Charles City County Index to Wills and Fiduciary Accounts (Reel 11); Chesterfield County Indexes to Wills (Reel 37); Chesterfield County Index to Deeds, A-J (Reel 22); and Chesterfield County Personal Property Tax List, 1816-1826, all at the Library of Virginia, Richmond. For the latter, I checked Cocke as well as Eppes.

While John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger's *Rebels on the Plantation* is probably the best general study of runaways and fugitives in the last decade or more, a useful study by Philip Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation*, (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2001), offers an excellent summary of the current state of knowledge about escape from Virginia slavery. Schwarz also notes, in agreement with Franklin and Schweninger, that most runaways were short-term. As noted in the Executive Summary, these historians make a distinction between "runaways," who stay in the general area and usually

return or are returned, and "fugitives," who intend to escape permanently.

Ongoing work by Philip Morgan and Michael Nicholls suggests that the overall number of runaways is much higher than previously thought for the eighteenth century, but that the percentage of bondsmen attempting escape in Virginia was lower than in other regions. Virginia had a larger proportion of the total enslaved population at that time and high numbers did not mean high percentages. The Virginia runaways were very predominantly male, predominantly Virginia-born and mulatto, often skilled, and usually leaving alone. They spoke English well, they attempted escape more than once, and they could manipulate the legal and social system. These characteristics continued into the nineteenth century.

The landscape and the structures on it, over time, are an important aspect of understanding life for African Americans. For the post-Revolutionary era, essential reading for understanding the built structures and space of southern plantations is John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Vlach uses a variety of sources to examine yards, kitchens, smokehouses, barns, quarters for field slaves, overseers' houses, infirmaries, and other buildings. He concludes that bondsmen often used these structures and spaces in ways different from what white owners intended. In another publication, Vlach notes the cultural mix evident in clothing, food choices, furniture, tools, and musical instruments. See Vlach, "Afro-American Domestic Artifacts in Eighteenth Century Virginia," *Material Culture* 19/1 (1987), 3-23 and Vlach, "Not mansions . . . but good enough': Slave Quarters as Bi-Cultural Expression," in *Black and White Cultural Interactions in the Antebellum South*, ed., Ted Ownby, 89-114 (Jackson,

MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1993).

Several recent studies conducted at Petersburg National Battlefield are excellent background. Gail Brown's study of the slave landscape at Appomattox Manor is based primarily on a reading of Richard Eppes's diaries. ("African Americans and Appomattox Manor within the Structured Landscape of the Eppes Plantation," Report Submitted to NPS Valley Forge Cultural Resource Center and Petersburg NBP, 2000.) Brown concludes that the enslaved workers were isolated, while this study concludes otherwise, but it is a very useful and well done piece of work. Although still in draft form and perhaps not going any further, H. Elliott Foulds' study, "Cultural Landscape Report for Appomattox Manor," Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, October, 2000, contains much useful information. These studies incorporate historical base maps first prepared by G. Frank Willis, NPS Denver Service Center, 1982.

A study of black housing in southern Maryland from colonial times to the beginning of the twentieth century by George McDaniel, *Hearth and Home: Preserving a People's Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), describes houses and furnishings and the ways the inhabitants used them. Two other architectural and material culture historians who have focused on antebellum Virginia and on space shared by blacks and whites are Dell Upton and Camille Wells. Dell Upton sees the plantation, with its variety of planter houses and slave quarters, as a village with all the social, educational and religious functions of a village. (Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George, 357-68 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988)). Camille Wells has also provided a general description

of plantation outbuildings, based on descriptions in the *Virginia Gazette*, in "The Planters' Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia." 1-31 *Winterthur Portfolio* 28 (Spring 1993). Mechal Sobel points out that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Virginians, black and white, lived in "rude wooden houses of similar construction and size." ("Sharing Space Inside the Little House," in *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*. 100-102 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.))

A useful new National Park Service publication (2001) is *Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape*, based on papers given at a conference with the same name. The Places of Cultural Memory Conference took place May 9-12, 2001, sponsored by the NPS Cultural Resources Diversity Initiative. Further information or a hard copy of the proceedings of the conference may be obtained by contacting Brian D. Joyner at National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, 350 NC, Washington, D.C. 20240; e-mail [brian\\_joyner@nps.gov](mailto:brian_joyner@nps.gov); phone 202-343-1000.

An essay of interest, indicating that food was a constant area of rebellion and subversion, is Larry McKee, "Food Supply and Plantation Social Order: An Archaeological Perspective," 218-239. In the same volume, see Annette Kashif, "Africanisms upon the Land: A Study of African-Influenced Place Names of the USA," 15-34, primarily for her comments on maroon communities. She relies upon Hugo P. Leaming, *Hidden Americans: Maroons of Virginia and North Carolina* (New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1995), 286-293, and Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons within the Present Limits of the United States," in *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*. ed., R.Price, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press,

1979), 151-167. See also James H. Johnston, "Documentary Evidence of the Relations of Negroes and Indians," *Journal of Negro History* 14, no. 1 (1929): 29-30. The most useful work on Virginia Indians is that by Helen Rountree, although she does not really grapple with the question of African and Native American intermixture. See: Helen C. Rountree, *The Powhatan Indians of Virginia: Their Traditional Culture* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989) and Helen C. Rountree, *Pocahontas's People: The Powhatan Indians of Virginia through Four Centuries* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990). The links and connections between members of tri-racial groups and their relatives who were enslaved or free or living on reservations make up an important part of the fugitive story.

The African origins of those in slavery on the Upper James River are best discovered by looking at Minchinton, King and Waite, *Virginia Slave Trade Statistics*, cited in Chapter One. The information on slave imports does not begin until 1698, so the earlier era is somewhat speculative and based on other sources. The period from 1698 to 1727 includes many ships from the West Indies. The dominant port of embarkation then begins to shift to the West African coast for ships debarking on the Upper James River. Certainly not all the Africans brought to the Upper James River and purchased stayed there. But a great many did, perhaps especially on the relatively stable Eppes plantations.

Benjamin Quarles's legendary work, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), remains a classic because he was the first to explore African American participation in the Continental Army. He admitted, but underplayed, the extent to which bondsmen chose to run to the British because part of his intent, in 1961, was to emphasize the African American

role in all American wars. The military reality was more likely that described by Sylvia Frey in journal articles and in her book, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), in which she describes a primarily cynical and often brutal British effort to use, but not necessarily free, enslaved Africans. Still, many Virginia bondsmen did manage to leave with the British. Because the last years of battles of the American Revolution touched so closely on the Eppes plantations, it is almost inevitable that some runaways from those sites either died, were left to return to their masters, or left Virginia. Most historians agree with Benjamin Quarles that enslaved Africans tried to use both sides in the American Revolution to their advantage, as opportunity presented itself.

The story of the enslaved families on the Eppes plantation is one that has had to be put together almost entirely from the primary sources available in the Eppes family papers at the Virginia Historical Society. Harry Butowksy's interviews with Mrs. Elise Eppes Cutchins were very helpful in understanding the transmission of the Eppes's oral tradition. The WPA slave narratives of Paulina Ruffin and Richard Slaughter in Charles Perdue and Thomas Barden's *Weevils in the Wheat* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1976) were very useful, but earlier accounts of those narratives, such as the 1940 WPA publication, *The Negro in Virginia*, contain many errors of fact. Luther Porter Jackson was the best researcher of African American history until the last quarter of the twentieth century, when much well-researched work on slavery and free blacks in Virginia emerged. It would be impossible to list all of it here. Strangely, except for Suzanne Lebsock's book, *The Free Women of Petersburg* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), little of it has been on Petersburg. Among the many recent

studies helpful to understanding antebellum African American urban history in Virginia is Gregg D. Kimball, *American City, Southern Place: A Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000).

What happened to the Eppes servants is a story with several versions. Harry Butowsky quotes Mrs. Elise Cutchins as saying they scattered in 1862. Hayward Farrar uses Harry Butowsky's study. Mrs. Cutchins deserves credit for resisting the temptation to be self-serving and compose a story about the loyalty of the Eppes laborers. Writers of a local history of Petersburg did not resist and quoted Paulina Ruffin Eppes as saying they had stayed with the overseer who took them to Norfolk, meaning they had not wanted to leave. This is unlikely and not supported by the evidence. A draft study done in 2000 by Eliot Foulds, "Cultural Landscape Report, City Point Unit, Petersburg National Battlefield," Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, picks up the story and says Dr. Eppes was "mistaken" in his account of what happened to his bondsmen in 1862. Dr. Eppes told the story in his usual precise fashion and it was more accurate to say, as he did, that they left with the Union Army. His need to establish "theft" makes his version one more among many competing stories of this central event when enslaved people gained their first freedom.

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