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J. Holt merchant

SOME ASPECTS OF SLAVERY
IN ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA

HONORS THESIS

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I

Writing about Lexington and Rockbridge County, Henry Boley recalled in 1936 that:

The finest feeling has always existed between the races, and doubtless there is no community in the whole country where understanding and harmony are more evident.¹

The visible monuments in this county in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley boast of such a harmonious relationship, even during the time when the black men lived in bondage to the white. In the Lexington cemetery stands a headstone inscribed:

David McKinley, died 1854, aged about 70 years,
"My Trust in God", erected by Peter Fleming, his
former slave.²

Another monument that formerly stood on the grounds of the county courthouse, read:

A tribute by the white friends of Rockbridge
County in grateful remembrance of the faithful-
ness and loyalty of the old servants of the past.
They loved their owners and were trusted and loved
by them.³

Over a century ago, when many southerners were prepared to give their lives in defense of Negro slavery, the citizens of Rockbridge County showed no general enthusiasm for secession. They gave an overwhelming majority of their votes in the presidential election of 1860 to John Bell of Tennessee, whose sole pledge was to uphold the Constitution and the Union. Yet when President Abraham Lincoln issued his call for troops, Rockbridge County

followed Virginia in her decision to leave the United States and join the Confederacy. The institution of slavery had never become the driving force for the inhabitants of Rockbridge County that it was to so many other southerners.⁴ As early as the 1840s, Dr. Henry Ruffner of Lexington, a lifelong slaveholder, proposed that the western part of the State rid itself of slavery by separating from eastern Virginia. According to Ruffner, the peculiar institution kept immigrants from settling in Virginia, crippled the State's agriculture, and distorted its social ideals.⁵

Prior to 1800, slaveholding in western Virginia was confined to a few wealthy families. The size of the iron industry in the 1830s and 1840s helped to bring more slaves into the Valley. "By 1861," remarked Colonel J. T. L. Preston of Lexington, "we were quite a slaveholding people."⁶

Of course Negro slavery never existed in Rockbridge County to the extent that it did east of the Blue Ridge in the heart of the Virginia tobacco belt. In 1860, the County included 569 slaveholders. The average holding was seven slaves. Seven planters owned fifty or more slaves, and twenty-one more owned from twenty to forty-nine. Frederick County, typical of the northern part of the Valley of Virginia had 406 slaveholders in 1860 with an average holding of six slaves. Only one slaveholder there held more than thirty slaves.⁷ Henry County, in Virginia's tobacco belt, had 422 slaveholders with an average holding of twelve slaves. Eleven Henry County planters owned from fifty to one hundred slaves in 1860, and five owned over one hundred.

The largest bloc of Rockbridge slaveholders, ninety-six, held only one slave.⁸ Virginia had 1,047,299 white inhabitants, 58,042 free blacks, and 490,865 slaves in 1860.⁹ The commonwealth had 52,128 slaveholders. Statewide, 27.2 per cent of all slaveholders held from one to ten slaves. In Rockbridge County, some 79.4 per cent of the slaveholders were in that category. While 32.2 per cent of all Virginia slaveowners held from twenty to fifty slaves, only 3.7 per cent of those in Rockbridge County held that many.¹⁰

According to the census of 1860, Rockbridge County had 17,248 residents. The population included 13,263 whites, 3,985 slaves, and 422 free blacks. Of the 3,985 slaves, 2,042 were males and 1,843 were females. In the town of Lexington, there were 2,135 inhabitants: 1,438 whites, 606 slaves, and 91 free blacks. Of the slaves, 301 were males and 305 were females. Thus, slaves comprised 28 per cent of the City's population and 23 per cent of the County's. In contrast, slaves made up approximately 30.7 per cent of Virginia's population in 1860.¹¹ While 48.7 per cent of Virginia's population was comprised of slaveholders and slaves, only 26.4 per cent of the population of Rockbridge County fell into these categories. During the period from 1850 to 1860, the number of slaves in the County decreased from 4,197 to 3,985. The overall population of the County rose from 16,045 to 17,248 during the same period.¹² By 1860, the imminence of civil war depreciated slave values and stimulated

sales to planters in the cotton states of the deep south. This no doubt accounts for the decline in the number of slaves.¹³

Geographically, Rockbridge County is an irregular rectangle, containing 593 square miles. It lies in the basin of the James River which runs ten miles through the southeastern portion. The crest of the Blue Ridge mountains provides a natural border on the County's eastern edge while the west is bordered by such peaks as Camp Mountain, North Mountain, Mill Mountain, and Sideling Hill. The central lowland between these two mountain ranges formed the agricultural heart of the County. The soil there was well adapted for grazing and the production of general crops. The hillsides provided pasturage and forest reserves.¹⁴

In 1860, the County included 139,236 acres of improved lands and 200,886 acres of unimproved farm lands. Most of the County's 850 farms contained from 100 to 500 acres. The average value of a farm in Rockbridge County was \$6,806.04, and the total value of all farms was \$5,785,133. The leading crop was tobacco, with 456,566 pounds produced. The other chief crops were corn (423,952 bushels), wheat (193,338 bushels) and oats (138,298 bushels). Rockbridge County also produced 199,756 pounds of butter.¹⁵ Although it may seem surprising that tobacco was one of the County's leading crops, Lewis C. Gray, in his History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860 stated that by 1860 the counties of Albemarle, Augusta, and Rockbridge embodied a successful tobacco growing region.¹⁶

Along with William Weaver's iron works, the tobacco plantations of men such as John Hamilton, M. H. Effinger, Hobson Johns, Samuel McD. Reid, and E. S. Tutwiler were the chief employers of slave labor in Rockbridge County.

II

Rockbridge County was typical of the inland, non-staple producing regions of the antebellum South. Farm to market transportation through the mountains was poor, and most of the crops produced were not sold, but used to feed livestock and to "keep body and soul together" for the planter.¹ Tobacco, corn, wheat, and oats were the crops produced by the County's farmers, especially those who held substantial numbers of slaves.

The larger slaveholders in Rockbridge County were also the County's leading agricultural producers and landowners. Lewis C. Gray reported that, in 1850, the average southern farm contained 120.9 improved acres.² In 1860, fifteen of Rockbridge County's biggest slaveholders owned farms containing from 350 to 1500 improved acres. Only 35 of the County's 851 farms contained over 500 acres. Slaveholder Samuel McD. Reid owned 800 improved acres, Hobson Johns 760, and A. W. Cameron 1000 improved acres. The two iron producers, William Weaver and F. T. Anderson, each owned 1500 improved acres of farm land. In 1860, Reid's farm was valued at \$60,000, Johns' at \$80,000, and Cameron's at \$55,000.³ Lewis Gray stated that the average value of a southern farm in 1850 was \$2,131.14.⁴

The growers of the County's leading crop, tobacco, were holders of substantial numbers of slaves. In the southern portion of Rockbridge County, Hobson Johns owned 56 slaves and produced 28,500 pounds of tobacco in 1860. Thomas G. Burks, farming in the

same area, grew 15,000 pounds of tobacco and owned 30 slaves. John Michie, with 50 slaves, produced 2,500 pounds of tobacco. Tobacco farming was not limited to southern Rockbridge County. Further north, in the central part of the County around Lexington, were the farms of E. S. Tutwiler, M. H. Effinger, J. W. Hamilton, and Samuel McD. Reid. These planters raised between 11,100 and 19,300 pounds of tobacco in 1860. Reid held 61 slaves, while the others held from 25 to 31.⁵ L. C. Gray classed a farm which produced over 3,000 of tobacco as a plantation.⁶ Rockbridge County's largest tobacco growers obviously belonged in that category. In his Story of Tobacco in America, Joseph C. Robert contended that the combination of tobacco raising with general farming tended to discourage large scale operations.⁷ This does not seem to hold true for Rockbridge County's leading tobacco farmers, since nearly all of them also grew corn, wheat, or oats in substantial amounts. These men successfully combined large-scale tobacco production with general farming.

Robert also stated that slavery on the average tobacco plantation was less formal and more patriarchal than slavery in the cotton and sugar producing areas. Many of the tobacco planters supervised their hands personally. Kenneth Stampf noted that one Virginia planter grew only cheap tobacco, because the finer variety "required more pains-taking and discretion that it was possible to make a large gang of negroes use."⁸ Growing tobacco, according to Joseph Robert, could be an exasperating experience. Droughts,

frosts, and recurring plagues of worms were among the problems with which the tobacco grower had to contend. The tasks required of the slaves on a tobacco plantation were tedious and exhausting, but tobacco farming rarely required any powerful exertion. Thus, weaker hands, women, and children could carry out many of the operations. Light tasks included planting seeds and chasing turkeys and guinea fowls through the tobacco patches to consume the ever present worms.⁹ The tobacco growing cycle began in winter, when planters sowed the seeds. They transplanted the tobacco shoots in May, while worming, topping, and suckering took place during the summer. Stalks were cut, split, and left to wilt in the late summer. During the fall, farm hands carried the tobacco to the curing houses where it remained until the following year. The hands then stripped the leaves from the stalks, sorted and tied them into bundles.¹⁰

In 1860, tobacco grown in Rockbridge County was marketed primarily in the warehouses of Richmond, Petersburg, and Lynchburg; smaller quantities were marketed at stations in Farmville, Clarksville, and Danville.¹¹ The warehouse system arose in the early nineteenth century to prevent sales of poor quality tobacco. Buyers travelled to the warehouses and examined samples of each planter's tobacco before they made any purchases. The tobacco auction existed much as it does today, with the melodious chant of the auctioneer.¹² Much of the tobacco crop in the Shenandoah Valley was sold by less formal means than the warehouse system. For

example, growers carried their tobacco to county merchants to exchange for goods purchased during the year.¹³ Some farmers sold their crops to small tobacco manufacturing operations that were scattered across the Virginia countryside. A small cigar factory operated in Lexington during this time. Most of these smaller tobacco manufacturers rarely employed more than five workers, and frequently combined their operations with retail sales of tobacco products.¹⁴

Corn had been a leading crop in the Old Dominion since colonial days. By 1859, the southern states including Delaware produced 52 per cent of the nation's corn crop.¹⁵ Most southern corn was consumed where it was produced. The Valley of Virginia was too far from the major eastern markets and too badly served by inexpensive means of transportation to allow it to ship out large amounts of corn. A good portion of this corn was necessary to feed the region's cattle. The South produced high yields of corn in the 1850s, with some farmers obtaining 140 bushels per acre. By 1860-1861, the average price of shelled corn in Virginia was 60 cents per bushel. "Pulling fodder" was the most widely used method for growing corn in northern and western Virginia. As the corn grew, outer blades from the ears were pulled off and used as a sort of mulch for the stalks. Farmers contended that this provided more nourishment than hay. Others disagreed, and argued that the crop was likely to be injured if tender blades were ripped off before the corn was ripe. When the ears ripened, the entire stalks were cut down, gathered, and shocked.¹⁶

In Rockbridge County, corn was the leader among general farm crops, with 423,952 bushels produced in 1860. Two of the leading corn producers were the County's iron manufacturers William Weaver and F. T. Anderson. Each owned more than 60 slaves. Weaver grew 6,000 bushels of corn in 1860, while Anderson's farm produced 3,000 bushels. Both men farmed in the southern portion of the County, where most of the large slaveholdings were located.¹⁷ Weaver was widely known as a scientific farmer who used clover and plaster to increase yields from even the poorest mountain soil. He sometimes produced as many as 40 bushels of corn per acre.¹⁸ Further north in the County, Samuel McD. Reid's farm grew 3,500 bushels of corn. The area closer to Lexington also contained the farms of E. S. Tutwiler, M. H. Effinger, and John Hamilton, which produced 2,000 bushels, 1,500 bushels, and 1,500 bushels respectively in 1860. The farmlands near Goshen and Brownsburg were particularly fertile. In this area, the farms of A. W. Cameron, A. Lavelle, Robert Sterret, and W. W. Davis grew between 1,200 and 2,000 bushels of corn and employed between 17 and 46 slaves each.¹⁹ Nearly all of the leading corn growers also raised wheat or oats, as well as tobacco.

Virginia was fifth in the nation among wheat producing states in 1859.²⁰ In 1860, the price of wheat was \$1.40 per bushel, continuing the high prices paid for wheat during the period from 1852 to 1860.²¹ Crop rotation in western Maryland, piedmont Virginia, and the Valley demonstrated the adaptability of these regions to wheat. Generally, farmers employed a five course

rotation, with a cycle of wheat, corn, wheat, and two plantings of clover. When a planter also raised tobacco, he commonly employed a six course cycle of tobacco, wheat, and two plantings of clover.²² These methods of crop rotation were undoubtedly used in Rockbridge County where the leading tobacco producers also grew sizeable crops of wheat. Samuel McD. Reid produced 3,000 bushels of wheat in 1860, and Thomas Burks, 1,300 bushels. E. S. Tutwiler and J. W. Hamilton, also tobacco growers, produced 800 and 760 bushels of wheat respectively. William Weaver and A. W. Cameron were leading wheat growers, but raised no tobacco. Weaver produced 2,000 bushels of wheat in 1860, and Cameron raised 1,500 bushels.²³ In 1860, farmers in Rockbridge County harvested wheat with a cradle, a sickle-like tool which cut the stalks and caught the wheat. The harvester periodically dumped the wheat from the cradle, to be gathered by the rakers and binders who followed along behind.²⁴

Oats were introduced into Virginia by the German farmers who settled up and down the Valley after the Revolution. William Weaver raised 2,500 bushels of oats in 1860. Other leading producers of oats were F. T. Anderson, A. W. Cameron, and T. G. Burks. These growers raised between 1,000 and 2,000 bushels each.²⁵ Oats were consumed locally and used as feed for livestock.

Butter was yet another product that was produced in quantity and consumed locally. There were few local markets for dairy products and the state of transportation and technology did

not permit Rockbridge County producers to ship it over long distances. Much of the butter than reached these markets was of poor quality, if it survived the trip at all.²⁶ Robert Sterret and A. W. Cameron of the Goshen-Brownsburg area each produced 1,500 pounds of butter in 1860. Weaver and Anderson, the County's leading farmers, also produced butter. Weaver's farms made 600 pounds of butter, and Anderson's had 640 pounds.²⁷

These statistics give a picture of widely diversified farming in Rockbridge County. Most of the large slaveholders raised at least three of the County's four leading crops. The farmers who owned fifty or more slaves raised larger amounts of each of the leading crops than did farmers who owned fewer slaves. Tobacco, corn, wheat, and oats seem to have done well in each of the County's most productive farming regions: The southern portion around Natural Bridge, the central lowland extending from the south up toward Lexington, and the area around Goshen and Brownsburg. Tobacco was most prominent in southern Rockbridge County, while the two leading dairymen were located in the Goshen-Brownsburg area.

Throughout the South, the contrast between the slaveholding planter and the small farmer who owned only a few blacks or none at all was marked. The difference was no less evident in Rockbridge County.

Samuel McDowell Reid was one of Rockbridge County's leading citizens during the late antebellum period. A prosperous farmer and owner of sixty-one slaves, Reid was also an attorney, clerk of the county court, and secretary to the Board of Trustees of Washing-

ton College. In addition to his farm hands, Reid owned four house servants: George, a stable man; Patrick, a butler; Caroline, a cook; and Anaka, a chambermaid.²⁸ Small slaveholders could not afford to divert so much labor from their farming operations. Reid also employed an overseer to supervise his farm. While seeking an overseer in 1855, Reid received several letters of recommendation for William Gollady, one of the applicants for the job. Matthew Pilson assured Reid that Gollady "would not be rough or rash" with his Negroes.²⁹ Planters like Reid chose an overseer only after examining the man's credentials and past record. An advertisement in the December 1, 1859, Lexington Gazette called for "an overseer, a single man who can come well recommended and who has experience in cultivation of tobacco."³⁰ Another advertisement in the Gazette sought an overseer and cautioned, "No one need apply unless he can come well recommended and has had some experience in managing Negroes."³¹ Reid often spent time away from his farm, particularly during 1860 and 1861 when he served in the Virginia legislature and attended secessionist meetings in Richmond. During such times, Reid needed a competent overseer to operate his plantation. Reid's daughter, Mary Lou Reid White, provided some assistance in managing the farm. During the winter of 1861, she wrote her father in Richmond asking for cotton cloth to make clothes for the Negro men. When Reid complied with her request, she promised "to begin on the work as early as possible," and noted that she had to make "sixty-six pairs of pantaloons and nearly the same number of shirts."³² Mrs. White

soon ran out of material and wrote her father asking if she could buy more in town.³³

On at least two occasions, slaves attempted to run away from the Reid estate. In 1857, Reid paid Thomas L. Perry fifty cents for detaining Jim, a runaway slave. Reid also reimbursed Perry ninety cents for feeding Jim over a period of three days.³⁴ During the winter of 1859, Reid paid J. H. Johnson of Lynchburg ten dollars for arresting a runaway slave named John.³⁵

The small slaveowning farmer did not rely on an overseer or even a family member to help manage his farming operations. He had to remain on his farm, day in and day out, and to work alongside his Negroes. J. H. B. Jones was a farmer in Brownsburg who also surveyed land for the County. In 1860, he owned nine slaves.³⁶ Corn, beans, potatoes, and wheat were among the crops he raised. When a flood washed out his road in 1855, he worked with his hands to repair the damage. He recorded in his diary that he "worked on road 1/2 day with 3 hands, wagon + 2 horses."³⁷ The diary includes numerous other entries in which Jones recorded that he had "worked on road with hands."³⁸ In 1857, Jones began work on a new house for his slaves. That summer, he wrote that he was "digging cellar for negro house."³⁹ A month later, he predicted that he would "finish brick work of my servants house today and put up furnace."⁴⁰ Jones showed a personal interest in his slaves, and tried to provide for them as best he could. Around New Year's in 1856, he gave each one \$3.25.⁴¹ Later that year, he lamented that it was cold and the slaves were without shoes.⁴²

A deeply religious man, Jones was saddened by the death of one of his slaves in 1856. He wrote in his diary, "Our servant Hetty died at midnight. She was a valuable and good servant and a member of the Methodist Church . . . "⁴³

In the end, small farmers like J. H. B. Jones suffered least from the institution of slavery. Historian Edward W. Phifer wrote that the small farmer, not totally dependent on his slaves, ". . . maintained the vigor, the independence, the mechanical resourcefulness, and the shrewd adaptability of the traditional frontiersman."⁴⁴

III

The iron industry in Rockbridge County and western Virginia depended largely on labor provided by Negro slaves. Few whites were employed in the iron works that sprang up in Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri during the antebellum period. Many iron manufacturers regarded white laborers as unreliable, and prone to drinking and brawling. Slave labor seemed easier to control.¹ Most slaves employed in Virginia iron works were hired from owners east of the Blue Ridge for terms of one year, usually commencing on January first and ending on the following Christmas.²

The hired Negroes' trip westward was not without its hazards. During the winter of 1854, a boat carrying one hundred slaves from eastern Virginia to Rockbridge County hit a dam on the James River and capsized. Many slaves perished despite the efforts of one black man to save his comrades. A small monument honoring him stood at the Balcony Falls watergap near Glasgow:

In memory of Frank Padgett, a colored slave, who, during a freshet in James River in January, 1854, ventured and lost his life by drowning in a noble effort to save some of his fellow creatures from death.³

Rockbridge County's leading iron magnate was William Weaver, a native Pennsylvanian who spent most of his adult life in the Valley of Virginia. In 1860, at age 79, Weaver owned real and personal property valued at \$130,000.⁴ He possessed sixty-six slaves - thirty-one men, fifteen women, and twenty children - whom

he employed at his Buffalo Forge ironworks and on his farm in Rockbridge County.⁵

The Buffalo Forge foundry was located southeast of Lexington, near what is now Buena Vista. At Weaver's Etna Furnace in Boutetourt County, slave laborers fed measured amounts of iron ore, charcoal, and limestone into furnaces to produce pig iron. This process, called blasting, lasted from four to five months with slaves manning the furnaces day and night. The pig iron was then shipped to Buffalo Forge by wagon where a force of slave beaters and hammermen turned it into "merchant bars", a term used to describe refined iron that has been hammered into standard sized ingots. Weaver then shipped the finished product down the James River to markets in Richmond and Lynchburg.⁶ The majority of Weaver's hired Negroes were general forge hands. Weaver also owned a number of skilled slave artisans who worked at Buffalo Forge. Henry Mathews was a blacksmith, carpenter, and forge hand. Jim Garland and Tooler operated the chafery, where the pig iron was heated and worked before it was pounded into bars. A group of four slaves managed a six mule team. The slaves at Buffalo Forge produced about 100 tons of bar iron annually for the Lynchburg and Richmond markets, where it was sold to plantation and railroad interests. Machinery, farm implements, and railroad ties were among the products manufactured from this iron.⁷

By 1860, slave labor for the ironworks such as William Weaver's was scarce and expensive. In the 1820s, the annual rate of hire was \$40 to \$50 per hand. By 1855, one of Weaver's agents

lamented that the eastern Virginia slave owners were "asking \$135-\$150 for good hands, no one can tell what the price will be . . ." ⁸ James C. Davis, a nephew of Weaver, blamed the high rates of hire on the high prices of farm produce and the consequent demand for slave labor in the agricultural sector of the economy. Plantation owners in Virginia were paying \$140 to \$150 per hired man at this time. ⁹ The iron man also competed for labor with other iron manufacturers, tobacco factories, coal mines, and cotton mills. ¹⁰ Historian Robert Starobin noted that despite the tight labor market, the iron industry was still profitable. Between 1844 and 1861, iron industries employing slaves were earning an annual rate of return of about six per cent. ¹¹

Like many other slaveholders, William Weaver operated an "overwork" system for his hands, giving them cash or goods in exchange for extra work. Wood choppers, for example normally chopped $1\frac{1}{2}$ cords per day, six days a week. Weaver's system allowed them forty cents for every extra cord chopped. He also rewarded slaves who worked on Sundays or holidays, grew vegetables, weaved baskets, or raised animals. The "overwork" system also operated in reverse. Weaver sometimes gave his hands "credit" and required them to perform extra labor at a later time. ¹² Weaver's records indicate that his slaves took full advantage of the overwork option. One slave, Henry Towles, had \$102.53 in his account in 1858. Sam Williams earned five dollars for every extra bar of finished iron that he produced. In the 1850s, he earned sugar, coffee, and three yards of cotton goods for his wife. ¹³ Williams also earned enough cash

to open a savings account in a Lexington bank.¹⁴ Slaves like Sam Williams took pride in earning cash or goods to give to their wives. One slave received "1 pr. brogans for wife."¹⁵ A slave with the intriguing name of Daniel Dumb Boy received "cash for Louisa".¹⁶ Margaret Junkin Preston, a prominent Lexingtonian, commented in her memoirs on the pleasure that slaves got in giving small gifts to their spouses:

A few pounds of coffee or sugar, a little parcel of tea, a pair of fowls, or a new handkerchief are the husband's gift, purchased with the (pennies) that find their way to the pockets of any of them who choose to perform extra services.¹⁷

Some slaves probably took their extra cash earnings to local stores. John A. Kinnear ran a small store in the Timber Ridge area from 1837 to 1860. Kinnear extended credit to slaves, and allowed them to open charge accounts. His books listed accounts for slaves such as "Davidson's Rachel", "Gibson's Betty and Mack," and "Lackey's Archie and Patsy." Cigars, candy, gloves, pocket knives, eggs, hats, and calico were among the items purchased by slaves at the store.¹⁸

John C. Calhoun once warned his son-in-law that a man who hired a slave had little incentive to care for him properly. "The object of him who hires," admonished Calhoun, "is generally to make the most he can out of them, without regard to their comfort or health."¹⁹ A century later, historian Kenneth M. Stamp agreed with Calhoun's assessment:

The overwork of hired slaves by employers with only a temporary interest in their welfare was as notorious as the harsh practices of the overseers.²⁰

In contrast, treatment of hired slaves in Rockbridge County seems to have been relatively good. In his History of Rockbridge County, Oren F. Morton remarked that at the Buffalo Forge, "the houses for slaves were of an uncommonly substantial and comfortable kind."²¹ In addition to his practice of allowing hands to earn "overwork", Weaver permitted his slaves to travel. The slave usually left on a Saturday and returned Monday. During a four-month period in 1857, Weaver's Daniel Dumb Boy made seven trips to Lynchburg, and received a three dollar allowance for each trip.

Weaver's records also indicate that he may have tolerated some misbehavior from his laborers. He notes, for example, that Tooler had been "loafing", but gave no indication that the slave suffered any punishment.²²

Historian Charles B. Dew contends that William Weaver never had serious problems with runaways. Dew states that between 1829 and 1861, thirteen slaves ran away from Weaver's foundry.²³ Dew argues that the master-slave relationship in the iron industry was complex, and involved mutual accommodation and compromise.²⁴ Weaver depended on the hands to make his operation a success, and the eastern Virginia owners would not have hired out their slaves to his foundries if he had abused them. Owners feared that if their slaves were mistreated, they might run away, and this was a loss that the owners did not want to suffer. Facing the tight labor market of the late antebellum period, iron men such as Weaver had to provide decent treatment for their hands if they expected

to obtain sufficient labor to keep their foundries running. Kathleen Bruce, in her Virginia Iron Manufacture in the Slave Era, called the slaves hired to work in the iron industry a "picked lot" who took advantage of their privileges.²⁵

In contrast, other accounts tell of abuses meted out to slaves at Weaver's Buffalo Forge. In an article published in the Journal of Southern History, S. Sidney Bradford writes that Weaver regularly whipped his slaves for small infractions. Bradford relates that ten slaves ran away in 1855 because of poor treatment. The slaves made their way home, according to Bradford, and their owners refused to return them to Weaver. One of Weaver's white managers struck a slave on the arm and left him unable to work for six days. Another manager struck a slave on the head with a rock.²⁶ Bradford describes the slaves employed in the iron industry as poorly fed, poorly clothed, and separated from their families for a long period. He notes that in 1859 and 1860, many slaves at Weaver's furnace were "barefooted when even the manager admitted that the . . . (ground) was so damp and rough that they needed shoes."²⁷ At times, the shortage of food was a problem. In the spring of 1859, Weaver had almost no meat in his smokehouse. Much of it had been spoiled in the warm weather, and the hands had only cornpones and molasses to eat. Later in July, one of the Buffalo Forge managers reported that some slaves had threatened to leave if they did not soon get some bacon. There is no evidence that any hands actually carried out this threat.²⁸ Aside from the alleged abuses by Weaver's managers, it should be noted that

working in an iron foundry was in itself a grueling task. Fires and explosions occurred frequently and slaves always ran the risk of being scalded or injured by the machinery.²⁹

Despite some instances of abuse, most of the evidence suggests that the hands at Buffalo Forge received decent treatment from William Weaver. Accommodation was far more prevalent than downright repression.

Weaver's chief competitors were John Jordan and Francis T. Anderson. Jordan, who helped to construct Washington College, operated the Lucy Selina furnace in Alleghany County, and four more furnaces in Rockbridge County. An acquaintance once described him as "a slave owner but not a slave driver."³⁰ He freed all of his slaves before his death in 1854.³¹ Anderson operated the Glenwood furnace in Rockbridge County, and employed sixty-one slaves in 1860.³² Like Weaver, Anderson permitted his hands to work overtime for extra earnings. Anderson's brother also owned the Tredegar Ironworks in Richmond, a huge operation with nearly 450 slaves, the largest labor force in that city.³³

At best, the prosperity of the southern ironmaker was shortlived. He was always at the mercy of competitors who found new processes or better deposits. The cost of labor and provisions were high, and southern iron manufacturers faced disadvantages when they had to compete with their counterparts in the North. The disadvantages were not largely attributable to the use of slave labor. Rather, the North held the decisive advantage because of internal improvements, better routes for transportation, and lower

transportation costs. Cheap native and immigrant labor were also available to northern iron producers.³⁴

Looking back on this bygone era, one observer remarked:

As the tourist rides through the mountains, he will see close to some roaring torrent, the ruins of old stove blast furnaces overgrown with ivy and and bright with the fiery tinted trumpet flower, gentle and dainty reminders of the of the ruddy glare of other days, of the sparks and flames from these forgotten shrines of Vulcan.³⁵

IV

The position of the Negro slave under the law provides justification for calling slavery the "peculiar institution". Legally, the slave was both person and property. The slave was his master's chattel, and owed him time, labor, service, and obedience without limit. Conversely, the slave as person relied on the law for the obligations it imposed on his master to provide him with food, clothing, and humane treatment. Though technically a chattel, the slave was also subject to the jurisdiction of the courts when he broke the law.¹

Historian Kenneth M. Stamppe contends that the slave as property had priority over the slave as person. Stamppe notes that this was particularly true when masters executed their wills. Some slaveholders exhibited care and compassion for their slaves, but according to Stamppe these were exceptions. Most divided their slaves among their heirs just as they apportioned the rest of their property.² Historian Edward W. Phifer agrees that in their wills, slave owners were primarily concerned with the equitable distribution of property to their heirs. The law compelled administrators to handle estates in a manner which would produce the most revenue for the heirs.³

An examination of will books in Rockbridge County reveals that the majority of slaveholders were primarily concerned with their slaves as valuable property. The will of John Ruff, who died in 1858, serves as a good example. After willing two slaves to his daughter, Ruff directed that the balance of his slaves

" . . . be apportioned by my executors into seven lots of value as nearly equal as may be, and assign by lot, one share to each of my children . . ." ⁴ Yet scattered throughout the recorded wills are examples of masters who took a humane interest in their slaves' well-being. Richard J. Wright's will exhibited such an attitude toward his Negroes. Wright ordered in 1858 that his slave Hannah was to be hired out for two years and that she must "choose or be satisfied with her master". ⁵ He further stipulated that at the end of two years, "she with her present child Jane together with her future increase . . . (would) be emancipated." ⁶ Wright's Negro boy Jesse was to serve William P. Burks until he reached the age of twenty-one, and then be freed. A slave named Washington was to be hired out for one year "convenient to his wife." ⁷ Finally, Wright directed that his slave Cassandra and her six children be sold as a family, "convenient as possible to her husband and to a humane master." ⁸ In 1856, Peter Salling wrote in his will, "I do not want any of my Negroes to be sold. I want them to be humanely and well treated." ⁹ Some masters left a sum of money for their slaves to use in finding their way to a new home. The will of Joseph Glasgow, written in 1856, states:

. . . in order that there be no doubt about it
 I hereby declare that every slave belonging to my estate at the death of my wife and daughter . . . shall then be entitled to freedom and a perpetual discharge from slavery (I) direct my executors . . . to set aside and invest the sum of \$3000 . . . in a fund to aid in the removal of my slaves from the commonwealth of Virginia . . . , any residue (to be) distributed amongst them. ¹⁰

In 1857, James Walker willed two hundred dollars to his emancipated slaves "for their outfit and settlement in Africa or wherever they may go."¹¹

Kenneth Stampf quotes a judge in antebellum Virginia as saying, "With us, nothing is so usual as to advance (our) children by gifts of slaves."¹² The extent to which the slaveholders' children benefited was contingent upon the value of the slaves. During the 1850s, the growth of railroads and markets opened up new cotton lands throughout the southwest. Slave prices soared as the demand for labor exceeded the supply.¹³ An individual slave would be worth most, according to Ulrich B. Phillips, ". . . when his physical maturity and his training became complete, and continue until his bodily powers began to flay."¹⁴ For most male hands, this period spanned the years from age twenty-five to age fifty.¹⁵

In Richmond, a good male sold for \$1,450 - \$1,550 in 1857, according to Stampf.¹⁶ The slave prices recorded in Rockbridge County will books when estates of slaveholders were appraised are slightly lower. During the years from 1855 to 1858, the inventories of the estates of various slaveholders in the County show that a male between the ages of twenty and forty was worth from \$856 to \$1,100. Most were valued at around \$1,000. A female in the same age span brought between \$350 and \$800. Young slaves from ten to twenty years old were worth \$600 to \$1,000 for males and \$600 to \$900 for females. Males aged one to nine were valued between \$217 and \$500, and females between \$200 and \$466. Slaves over the age

of forty brought the lowest prices. Males were assessed from \$150 to \$700 and females from \$75 to \$500. Some old and infirm slaves were listed as "charges" with no monetary value. By 1860, slave prices in Rockbridge County reflected the inflationary trend that affected the entire South. Estates of Rockbridge County residents suggest that in 1860, males between ten and nineteen often brought from \$900 to \$1,300. Males aged from thirty to thirty-nine fell into the same price range. The value of female slaves rose significantly, with females from twenty to twenty-nine years of age bringing as much as \$1,000 on several occasions. Values of both very young and older Negroes seemed to stay close to the 1855 to 1858 levels.¹⁷ While Rockbridge County slaves were worth more in 1860, the price of Negroes was much higher in the deep South and the southwest. Phillips states that male slaves sold for \$1,800 in the New Orleans markets.¹⁸ In 1859, the Lexington Gazette carried a report from the Abingdon Virginian that several slaves there had been sold at "prices unprecedented in this part of the country at least."¹⁹ The article stated that a "negro man small in stature and delicate in constitution sold, with his infant for \$2,925."²⁰ A boy who served as a carpenter sold for \$2,450 there.²¹ These extremely high prices never affected Rockbridge County. Thus, by 1860, local slaveholders had some impetus to sell Negroes into the southwest, and the County's slave population declined over the decade from 1850 to 1860. The Lexington Gazette carried numerous ads similar to this one which appeared in 1860:

500 Negroes wanted: I wish
to purchase 500 likely young
Negroes of both sexes for the
Southern Market for which I
will pay the highest market
prices in cash . . . J. E. Carson.²²

Another advertisement read:

\$100,000 in cash for Negroes:
I will pay in cash the highest
market prices for able bodied young
Negroes . . . John B. Smith.²³

It seems probable that neither the slave as a chattel nor the slave as a human was befriended by the law. When a slave stood charged with a crime, the punishment was often severe. Ulrich Phillips states that slave crime in Virginia rose gradually until the 1820s, when a slow decline began. Crimes committed most frequently by slaves in Virginia included murder, burglary, arson, assault and rape. Murder was the most common crime among the slave population from 1780 to 1864.²⁴ Whipping was the most common form of punishment. Some states of the upper South, including Virginia, limited punishment to thirty-nine stripes at one time.²⁵

Slave crime was certainly not a serious problem for Rockbridge County. The County court records for 1855-1860 show relatively few crimes committed by slaves. Several of those accused of crimes were acquitted. In 1855, Frederick Tyler, a slave belonging to Charles Young, was found not guilty of breaking into

the storehouse of James A. F. Randolph.²⁶ That same year, George, a slave, was acquitted on charges of setting the home of Charles Campbell on fire. Despite the verdict, George's owner, Samuel Paxton, was required to pay a bond of \$300, to insure the good behavior of his slave over the next twelve months.²⁷ In 1859, a slave belonging to the President of Washington College, the Rev. George Junkin, was charged with attempting to poison Junkin, George Junkin, Jr., and William Anderson. Bill Evans, the slave, was released because "evidence was not sufficient" to bring him to trial.²⁸ Ironically, Junkin was made to pay \$1,000 security to insure Bill Evans' good behavior for the next twelve months.²⁹ Slaves who were convicted in court faced harsh punishments. In 1858, a slave belonging to Charles Bruce was found guilty of stabbing a white man named Samuel Johnson. The slave was sentenced to "thirty-nine lashes on his bare back at the hands of the sheriff tomorrow morning, thirty-nine lashes on the first day of December court next, and thirty-nine lashes on the first day of January court next."³⁰ The slave remained in prison until the full sentence was executed, and his master paid a \$5,000 security.³¹ Many crimes committed by slaves were dealt with by the individual slave owners. In these instances, punishment varied according to the owner.

The Rockbridge County court also appointed the slave patrols. Disliked by both slaves and slaveowners, the patrol was usually a force of non-slaveholders who were instructed:

. . . to patrol the bounds of said district at suitable times, visit Negro quarters and other places suspected of having unlawful assemblies of slaves as may stroll from one plantation to another without permission.³²

The slave patrol also apprehended runaways. The Virginia Code for 1860 provided that slave patrols were entitled to a reward of \$100 for arresting a slave between fifteen and forty-five years of age. The arrest of a slave over forty-five or under fifteen brought \$60, and any other slave brought only \$40. The sum was divided equally among the members of the patrol who arrested the slave.³³

In Rockbridge County, when Negroes escaped the yoke of slavery, they frequently discovered that freedom was not all they had hoped it would be. According to Eugene D. Genovese, the free black faced "economic deprivation, political and social discrimination, and legal outrage."³⁴ Whites regarded the free Negro as a potential instigator of slave revolts and a corrupting influence in general. The law required free Negroes to carry papers certifying their free status. At the same time, the law prohibited blacks from testifying against whites, and banned interracial marriages.³⁵ During the later antebellum period, white immigrants forced many free blacks out of the labor market and left them only the most menial jobs as farm hands or unskilled workers.³⁶ The free Negro was a slave without a master. Under Virginia law, free blacks could petition the courts to return them to their former status as slaves. One such incident occurred in Lexington in 1858. Mary Elizabeth, a free Negro, petitioned the circuit court to return

her to slave status and allow William Miller to be her master. Judge Lucas P. Thompson examined both parties in private, and for reasons not recorded, denied the request.³⁷ Two years later, Mary Elizabeth returned to court with a similar request. This time she asked that Joseph Saville be made her master, and Judge Thompson granted the request. The decree of the court stated that:

. . . the conditions of the said Mary Elizabeth shall in all respects be the same as though the said Mary Elizabeth had been born a slave.³⁸

Shortly thereafter, the Lexington Gazette praised Mary Elizabeth's decision in an article entitled "A Sensible Negro". After reviewing the case, the article concluded:

. . . she was sensible because (slavery) is the highest state of happiness that a Negro can reach.³⁹

A slave who faced the choice between nominal freedom and bondage sometimes chose the latter. It could not have been an easy decision, but some Negroes no doubt realized that they were bound to suffer, whatever their status.

A good indication of how much opprobrium was attached to slavery by a community is found in the identity of the slaveholders themselves.¹ In Rockbridge County, slaveholding was not a practice limited to planters. Prominent attorneys, clergymen, and educators owned slaves, as did Washington College.

The slaves owned by Washington College came to the institution as part of a bequest from John Robinson, when he died in 1826. Robinson came to the United States from Ireland at the age of seventeen. By horse trading and speculating in soldiers' certificates, "Jockey John" was able to purchase a farm known as "Hart's Bottom" in Rockbridge County in 1779. During his lifetime, he owned 3,200 acres of land and sixty slaves. In later years, Robinson's chief source of income came from distilling whiskey and not from farming.² When the Washington Building (now Washington Hall) was completed in 1824, "Jockey John" sent a forty gallon barrel of his finest whiskey to the campus. Students and faculty partook of the gracious offering, and within a few hours, "the barrel was upset and the wreckage about the place, human and inanimate, suggested a battlefield".³ When the colorful Robinson died, he left his entire estate to Washington College, stating in his will:

Though a foreigner by birth and without a child to provide for, I rejoice in the trust that I have done something to confirm the political institutions of this country by enlightening the public will upon which they rest.⁴

The Trustees of Washington College attempted to employ Robinson's slaves on his old Hart's Bottom estate, but this soon became an

unprofitable venture. Most of the slaves were sold within a few years. Washington College hoped to sell all of the slaves to one master, and in time a resident of Arkansas named Samuel Garland bought fifty-one of them. The remaining Negroes became custodians on the campus, and also performed odd jobs, such as cutting wood and mending fences. The College also earned extra revenue by hiring out the slaves.⁵ Samuel McD. Reid, secretary to the College's Board of Trustees and executor of John Robinson's estate, received \$1,238.18 in 1860 for hire of these slaves.⁶ At times, Reid had problems in collecting payment from individuals who hired the Washington College slaves. In 1858, Reid wrote Henry Ruffner, a prominent Lexingtonian and former President of Washington College, asking for \$264 for hiring the slave Henry in 1837.⁷ Ruffner replied that he was surprised by this demand, and blamed Reid "for not keeping better track" of his records. Now that twenty-one years had elapsed, Ruffner called the claim "invalid both morally and legally".⁸ "I must say that you write a most extraordinary letter." answered the indignant Reid, who further stated that he was aware of the statute of limitations, but thought he was addressing a gentleman and a scholar. Reid concluded that "this statute is for those who paid and lost the evidence, and not those who never paid."⁹ There is no indication of how this dispute between two of the County's leading figures was resolved.

As late as 1878, one of Robinson's slaves remained on the campus. Some of these Negroes had become favorites of the

townspeople. "Old Barney" considered himself the heir to all the old clothes belonging to the students at Washington College and VMI. He often marched through Lexington sporting a discarded cap and pompon, and boasting of the "advantages of belonging to a literary institution."¹⁰

Both George Junkin, President of Washington College, and Francis Smith, Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute, owned slaves in 1860. Before coming to Lexington in 1848, Junkin had founded Sunday Schools and temperance organizations in Pennsylvania.¹¹ While living in Rockbridge County, he owned one slave and hired seven more.¹² An avid Unionist, President Junkin resigned in 1861 after a zealous band of students hoisted the Confederate flag above the campus' statue of George Washington. He spent the remainder of his life in Pennsylvania.¹³

Francis Smith was VMI's first superintendent and served in that capacity for fifty years. A West Point graduate, he was renowned for giving each cadet a Bible along with his diploma.¹⁴ Smith owned nine slaves, and hired four more.

John Letcher, a prominent Lexington attorney, owned four slaves.¹⁶ Letcher served in the House of Representatives from 1851 to 1859, and was elected Governor of Virginia in 1859.¹⁷ Another Lexington lawyer-politician, James D. Davidson, owned ten Negroes despite his reputation as the town's foremost Unionist.¹⁸ The Reverend William Nelson Pendleton served as rector of the Grace Episcopal Church, and as Robert E. Lee's chief of ordnance during the Civil War.¹⁹ Pendleton owned three slaves.²⁰

General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson was the owner of four slaves and was well known for his kindness to them.²¹ In 1855, Jackson began a special Sunday school for slaves in Lexington. He often delivered prayers at the school.²² In 1860, a letter appeared in the Lexington Gazette on the subject of one such school. The letter, signed by "Veritas", stated:

Perhaps all the citizens of Lexington do not know that there are those in town who are willing to teach their servants on Sunday evenings We have been teaching in that school for sometime and have become satisfied of the great benefits accruing to those who attend regularly.²³

According to "Veritas", seventy to eighty Negroes attended the school. Masters brought their slaves to class and received reports on their progress. "Veritas" appealed to the slaveholders' self-interest by urging them to send their slaves to the school "if not for reason of welfare, at least it prevents their being in mischief."²⁴ General Jackson showed sincere concern for his slaves after he left Lexington to serve in the Confederate Army, never to return again. On October 23, 1861, Jackson wrote his sister-in-law, Mrs. Margaret Junkin Preston, thanking her for looking after his slaves Emma and Amy. Jackson continually replenished an account in a Lexington bank to provide for the needs of his slaves, and also sent financial contributions for his Negro Sunday school.²⁵

These prominent Lexingtonians who owned only a few slaves probably employed them as domestics. Domestic servants were prized, and served their masters as hostlers, coachmen, laundresses, seamstresses, cooks, footmen, butlers, housemaids, chambermaids, nurses,

and personal servants.²⁶ The domestic servants were often well dressed in order to uphold the prestige of their white families.²⁷ For this reason, some of these Negroes became "white folks servants", devoted to their masters and alienated from their fellow slaves.²⁸ Wealthy townspeople often had staffs of domestic servants as large as those of rural planters, according to Kenneth Stamp.²⁹

Rockbridge County, like most of the South, employed its slaves to help grow its crops, to perform the hard labor necessary for its industrial production, and to act as its domestic servants. Rockbridge County's planters and iron magnates took advantage of the peculiar institution as did one of its beloved generals, its leading clergyman, its leading attorneys, and the Unionist President of its Washington College. Still, there were few if any citizens of the County who would have expressed their love of slavery as fervently as did the fire-eaters of the southern tidewater and piedmont. The Scotch-Irish who settled the Shenandoah Valley were realists who placed a high value on hard work. Struggling for whatever they obtained, these settlers gave priority to gaining wealth and property, and never attempted to justify Negro slavery on moral grounds. Slavery was an institution of property and wealth when these newcomers arrived in America, and they had neither the time nor the inclination to question it.³⁰

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION BY LEADING SLAVEHOLDERS, 1860

	<u>Slaves</u>	<u>Imp. Acres Farm</u>	<u>Value of Farm</u>	<u>Value of Equipment</u>	<u>Value of Livestock</u>	<u>Tobacco (lbs.)</u>	<u>Corn (bushel)</u>	<u>Wheat (bushel)</u>	<u>Oats (bushel)</u>	<u>Butter (lbs.)</u>
Wm. Weaver	66	1,500	\$ 6,000	\$1,000	\$4,312		6,000	2,000	2,500	600
F. T. Anderson	61	1,500	\$150,000	\$ 450			3,000		2,000	640
S. McD. Reid	61	800	\$ 60,000	\$ 500	\$4,800	19,300	3,500	3,000		400
Hobson Johns	56	760	\$ 80,000	\$ 400		28,500	1,000	600	800	500
John Michie	50	450	\$ 25,230	\$ 300	\$2,194	2,500	1,500	700		600
A. W. Cameron	46	1,000	\$ 55,000	\$ 500			2,000	1,500	1,000	1,500
A. Lavelle	34	500	\$ 18,920	\$ 400		5,000	1,500	400		500
E. S. Tutwiler	31	422	\$ 31,000	\$1,000	\$3,350	20,000	2,000	800	250	300
T. G. Burks	30	500	\$ 25,000	\$ 450		15,000	2,000	1,300	1,000	400
M. H. Effinger	26	350	\$ 24,000	\$ 450	\$2,173	11,100	1,500	600	300	300
J. W. Hamilton	25	500	\$ 36,000	\$ 500	\$3,401	18,000	1,500	760	400	500
Robt. Sterret	20	550	\$ 20,000	\$ 250			2,000	300		1,500
W. W. Davis	17	400	\$ 27,000	\$ 150	\$1,305		1,200	500	300	500
Hugh Barclay	16	140	\$ 3,600	\$ 50			300	375	100	

SOURCE: U. S. Census, 1860, Rockbridge County, Virginia,
Schedules II and IV
(National Archives, Washington, D. C.)

SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDINGS - 1860

1 Slave	96
2	72
3	58
4	44
5	44
6	47
7	32
8	31
9	28
10 to 15	65
15 to 20	24
20 to 30	16
30 to 40	3
40 to 50	2
50 to 70	6
70 and Over	0
Total Slaveholders	569
Total Slaves	3,985

SOURCE: U. S. Department of the Interior,
 Bureau of the Census, Population
of the United States in 1860
 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1860), 244.

AGE AND SEX OF SLAVES - 1860

<u>AGE</u>	<u>MALES</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>
Under 1	46	66
1 - 5	241	274
5 - 10	296	261
10 - 15	297	245
15 - 20	244	201
20 - 30	381	284
30 - 40	250	225
40 - 50	177	107
50 - 60	107	97
60 - 70	74	55
70 - 80	24	18
80 - 90	3	6
90 - 100	1	2
Over 100	1	2
	<hr/>	<hr/>
TOTAL	2,142	1,843

SOURCE: U. S. Department of the Interior,
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FOOTNOTES

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