

Washington and Lee University

An Inheritance of Slavery:

The Tale of "Jockey" John Robinson, His Slaves, and Washington College

An Honors Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the College
in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
Department of History

by

Emma Burris

Lexington, Virginia

May 2007

Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Introduction: Slavery at Washington College.....	1
Chapter One: John Robinson, Slavery, and the Age of Revolution in Lexington, Virginia, 1770-1826.....	4
Chapter Two: Mastery by Committee, 1826-1835.....	23
Chapter Three: The Parting of the Ways, 1835 Onward.....	38
Works Cited.....	50

Acknowledgments

No man is an island, and no person can claim complete credit for any work. Much is inevitably drawn from coursework, conversations, and chance encounters of all types. It is terribly difficult to give full credit to every source of aid and inspiration, especially when one is dealing with an undergraduate thesis. I would like to begin by thanking Professors Holt Merchant, Theodore DeLaney, and Taylor Sanders for serving as my readers (and being so patient with my frustratingly slow progress). Of course, no one writing a thesis for the History Department can go without thanking Mrs. Ashworth. Aside from making things run smoothly, she provided me with much-needed support and encouragement at the most crucial times in the writing process. I am also especially grateful to Professors DeLaney and Merchant for *always* having faith in me and providing me with inspiration.

In many ways, I owe my greatest thanks to Professor Merchant. He was the first professor who made me feel like I had something to contribute to the academic discourse. At a time when I was ready to abandon my college “experiment” entirely, his wonderful teaching style and encouragement inspired me to pursue the study of history. I can never thank him enough for all he has done. The fact that I have made it this far in my college career is largely due to him. He and Professor DeLaney made it possible for me to write this thesis through their unflinching devotion to their students and their work.

I also owe incredible thanks to Vaughn Stanley and Lisa McGowan^C in Special Collections. Without them, I never would have been able to navigate through the primary source material. They were always incredibly kind and helpful.

I would also like to thank my dad (and favorite historian), Bill Burris, for constantly reminding me to “cut the crap and stick to the facts.” My mom, Patti Burris, is another pillar of support and source of inspirational, Nebraska sayings, and I cannot imagine life without her advice. My sister, Caroline Burris, is my muse, and she knows it. Pat Janssen, my fiancé, deserves a medal for helping me through the times when nothing about the thesis felt right. He read drafts, said everything he could to get me to believe in myself, and cheerfully endured weekends when I had to work instead of spend time with him.

Introduction:

Slavery at Washington College

The census of 1860 said there were 2,670 slaves in Manchester County, but the census taker, a U.S. marshal who feared God, had argued with his wife the day he sent his report to Washington, D.C., and all his arithmetic was wrong because he forgot to carry a one.

- Edward P. Jones¹

Census takers forgot to carry ones, record keepers misspelled and misarranged names, slave owners sometimes caricatured their slaves and misrepresented their actions. Document-reliant historians must navigate a safe route between questioning their evidence and approaching it as the sole purveyor of the past. Historians must tread through the history of American slavery with special humility. Information about the African American experience in bondage has traveled almost exclusively through white hands. No matter their intentions, whites' observations were those of interested parties in a conflict.² Elite whites writing about slaves had agendas: abolitionists wanted to end the institution by emphasizing its degrading aspects, slaveholders wanted to validate their way-of-life, many north and south needed to justify their nation's cruel but seemingly necessary institution to the world. When former slaves wrote about their experiences, they too felt the pull of practicality – their voices had to effect social and economic change.

Every document possesses a bias, a possible error, or a stretch of the truth. Still a fascinating “never land” exists through their preservation. It is a place where people

¹ Edward P. Jones, *The Known World* (New York: Amistad, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 7.

² Bernard A. Weisberger, “The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography,” *The Journal of Southern History* 24 (November 1959): 438.

remain as they were when pen met paper. They seem like individuals frozen in time for our observation – people whose remains could either challenge or confirm our traditional understandings of history. It is easy to see men and women of the past as stock figures crossing the historical landscape in predetermined directions. But their experiences and understandings altered between the letters they wrote and the accounts they compiled. They meandered blindly through time with little if any notion of where they were going. They represent a great gap in our knowledge of the past, yet what they expose about their lives and times is vastly more important than what they conceal. They reveal things that surprise, shock, and support previously-held ideas. The records of slavery at Washington College are no different – they both uproot and support many a well-worn idea.

Slavery at Washington College is documented in Trustees' Minutes, personal wills, Treasurers' Reports, doctors' bills, receipts of sale and hiring out, casual letters, and court records. The slaves are mentioned in passing, by first names, and only when their paths cross those of literate whites. Much of the Washington College slaves' inner lives remain a mystery. The evidence does, of course, illuminate a great deal about the general course of their lives. John Robinson acquired and later bequeathed them to Washington College. In his 1825 will, he required that they be kept on his Hart's Bottom plantation for the span of fifty years following his decease. He wanted their happiness and family life protected, but he did not suggest they be given their freedom. With his death in 1826, Robinson's slaves passed into the hands of the Trustees, who betrayed the wishes of their benefactor. They sold most of the Robinson slaves into the South's developing Cotton Kingdom after a mere decade of ownership. The Washington College

Trustees contravened one of the will's basic terms but respected Robinson's desire to keep the slave families intact. They kept spouses together and children with their parents. The ties of community and extended family, however, fell by the wayside. In late 1835 or early 1836, the Robinson slaves left their Lexington home for the cotton plantations of their new owner, Samuel Garland, a prominent resident of nearby Lynchburg, Virginia. Garland was an absentee master, relying on his brother Burr to run the plantation and its daily operations.

Part of the slave population disappeared into the Cotton Kingdom, while others stayed behind and were slowly sold away or cared for until their deaths. Along the way, the Robinson slaves experienced personal loss, joy, and new beginnings. Members of the original Robinson slave community were divided by death and distance from the ones they loved. They labored, they lived their lives the best they could, and they died. Throughout the years they spent in bondage, they also asserted themselves, challenged their masters' rules, and struggled to make lives for themselves both within and outside of the system of chattel bondage. Their stories, even filtered through white accounts, are as diverse as they are difficult to uncover. The slaves owned by Washington College were men and women known to the historical record through their first names, prices, and relationships with white men. A great deal, however, happens in life when the record keepers are not looking.

Chapter One:

John Robinson, Slavery, and the Age of Revolution in Lexington, Virginia, 1770-1826

A few years ago, we thought slavery an evil- or at least a source of much evil & were anxious to be rid of it.

- J. S. McCutchan, 1837¹

Slaves arrived in Lexington, Virginia, in 1729, long before the most intrepid white pioneers. Using tools taken from their owner's James River plantation, they cultivated the ground, built dwelling places of tree boughs and grasses, and elected a chief of their maroon community. The first non-native enclave established in the environs of present-day Lexington was black. It did not last long. Fearful lest the maroon settlement prove "as dangerous to this Country, as is that of the Negroes in the Mountains of Jamaica to the Inhabitants of that Island,"² colonial officials sent troops to destroy the runaways' haven. Militiamen from throughout the colony converged on the Lexington area, crushed the settlement, plowed the crops under, executed the community's chief, captured the runaways, and returned them to their master.³ For another 136 years, African Americans in Virginia continued to test the boundaries of white mastership through acts of rebellion, both covert and overt. Slaves sought to preserve and assert their unique humanity, and slaveholders sought to define their slaves in relation to themselves, whether valuing slaves for the price of their labor or for the

¹ Letter from J. S. McCutchan to Henry Ruffner, President of Washington College, January 3 1837, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

² William Gooch, Lieutenant Governor and Acting Governor of Virginia, quoted in Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 121.

³ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 120-121; Wilma A. Dunaway, *Slavery in the American Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 224.

price of their flesh. Throughout the annals of Lexington slavery, this conflict would resurface and evolve with each changing age and each individual participant in the peculiar institution.

Slaves entered the Lexington area of their own volition in 1729 but did not return in large numbers until the Era of the American Revolution when they came at the bidding of white masters. During the Revolution, foreign sources of hemp became largely inaccessible. Lexington was uniquely suited to the crop's cultivation, and the area's demand for slaves sky-rocketed along with increasing demands for the crucial naval store. Lexington slavery emerged hand-in-glove with the ideology and ethos of the American Revolution. The end of the war cancelled the need for domestic hemp production in western Virginia, but slavery remained and adapted to other economic pursuits. Tobacco cultivation became a staple of Lexington agriculture, largely because its time requirements allowed for the simultaneous cultivation of other cash crops such as corn, wheat, and oats - the crops that would make Lexington's reputation as an integral part of Virginia's Bread Basket.⁴ With the passage of time, wheat became Rockbridge County's most crucial cash crop, growing alongside manufacturing in economic importance.⁵ Between the 1790s and the 1830s, Lexington evolved from subsistence agriculture to market farming and manufacturing. Hemp production and the Revolution established the importance of slavery in Lexington and Rockbridge County. From that

⁴ Fitzhugh Brundage, "Shifting Attitudes Towards Antislavery in Rockbridge County," *Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society* 10 (1980-89): 335-338; Fitzhugh Brundage, "Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County," Washington and Lee University Special Collections: Unpublished Manuscript (1983): 2-3.

⁵ Ellen Eslinger, "'Sable Spectres on Missions of Evil': Free Blacks of Antebellum Rockbridge County, Virginia," in Kenneth E. Koons and Warren F. Hostra, Eds., *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800-1900* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000).

time until the end of the peculiar institution, local masters employed slaves in every facet of the Valley's rapidly expanding and diversifying commercial economy. Many of Lexington's original settlers came from backgrounds that encouraged antislavery sentiments, though they soon found that the temptations of profit and social standing provided an adequate rationale for abandoning their early condemnation of slavery.⁶

By his own estimation, "Jockey" John Robinson arrived in Rockbridge County in 1773. Beyond that rough, almost conjectural date, he revealed little more about his unique American adventure. Born in Ulster Ireland's County Armagh in 1754, Robinson spent his early life as an orphan apprenticed to a local weaver. Through cleverness, deception, or a combination of the two, he escaped his indenture, set sail for America, and wandered into western Virginia. He never explained *how* any of this took place, suggesting that he either had no interest in exposing the details of his journey or had a keen interest in concealing how the "spice" of his "Irish wit" came to Lexington.⁷ Regardless of specifics, Robinson arrived and quickly captured the interest of the "gentleman of the neighborhood," General Bowyer, an aging bachelor of a decidedly Dickensian cast. Bowyer, impressed with the lad's "good temper and good behaviour,"⁸ offered Robinson a place in his household. Under the terms of this somewhat unusual adoption, he gave Robinson "free use of hay and other provender"⁹ to cultivate his

⁶ Brundage, "Shifting Attitudes," 335-338; Brundage, "Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County," 1-13.

⁷ Archibald Alexander, "A Reminiscence of John Robinson, The Founder of a Professorship in Washington College, Virginia," *The Princeton Magazine*, reprinted in the *Southern Collegian*, December 23 1871, 194.

⁸ Alexander, "A Reminiscence of John Robinson," 193.

⁹ Alexander, "A Reminiscence of John Robinson," 194.

ambitions as a horse trader. Young Robinson traded his first horse for a considerable profit and another horse to improve for sale.¹⁰

From a shadowy past pock-marked with indentured servitude, unexplained and possibly dramatic escape, and an advantageous adoption, Robinson had, by the time of the American Revolution, emerged as “Jockey” John, the honest horse trader. Despite his paperback exploits, Lexington’s newly-dubbed “Jockey” fell far short of the idealized standards of Southern manhood developing in the eighteenth century. Robinson was not a native-born American; he was not the son of a planter; he did not have a history stretching back into America’s variation on the theme of aristocracy.¹¹ Because he did not conform to a ready-made pattern of inchoate American nationalism, he had to cast around for other ways of defining himself as truly American and Southern. From its origins, the American Revolution sparked with myth-making potential. No sooner was a battle fought or a speech given or a tract composed than it found immortality in the lore of the nascent nation. There was no better way to acquire an American identity than to find a role in this collective mythology. For reasons that remain his own, Robinson served as a “soldier of Washington” in a capacity as shady as his Armagh origins.¹²

Robinson’s origins, as ambiguous as they seem, hint at a revolutionary inheritance predating the American Revolution. Calvinism dominated his Scotch-Irish place of birth, and he could not have avoided the influence of Presbyterianism, which strongly opposed governmental absolutism, approved necessary revolution, and valued republican

¹⁰ Alexander, “A Reminiscence of John Robinson,” 193-194.

¹¹ Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Random House, 1972), 296-297.

¹² Harrington Waddell, “John Robinson of Hart’s Bottom,” *Rockbridge County News*, January 14 1932.

individualism and ambition for self-betterment. In spite of this revolutionary heritage, Robinson, as a son of Ulster, would also have understood feeling pride in another group's oppression. The Scotsmen who settled northern Ireland had wrested land and rights from the native people. They had fought for their property and preeminence, and recognized the potential of the people they were repressing to destroy their hard-won place in Ulster society. America's slaves had not, like Native Americans or the native Irish, resided on the land at the time of take-over, yet they certainly qualified as a caste apart - a caste that provided the basis of their masters' social, political, and economic power.¹³

Most of the Scotch-Irish who immigrated to America during the 1770s did so to escape poverty and injustice.¹⁴ These same factors influenced John Robinson's migration to the American South. He had been indentured against his will. He had no property or security in Ireland. He contributed to Ulster society at a level barely elevated from that of the native Irish. In order to escape these conditions, he embarked for America - a land to which a quarter of a million Ulstermen fled between 1717 and the American Revolution.¹⁵ They came with a desire to acquire land, prestige, and freedom, and were prepared to found their dreams on what James Henry Hammond would later call the "mudsill" of society. "Jockey" John, in spite of his revolutionary credentials, must have held a basic, deep-rooted understanding that one class always provided for the advancement of another. He also understood the world well enough to know that the key to advancement was to ensure that the trod-upon class lay well beneath his own standing.

¹³ James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 147-150, 153.

¹⁴ David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 12-13.

¹⁵ Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*, 157.

After the American Revolution, John Robinson made his fortune by trading in soldiers' certificates. No matter how new or shady the source, wealthy men in the South almost invariably invested in the twin concerns of land and slaves. True to form, Robinson invested in both. Comments in the several drafts of his will imply that Robinson believed his slaves were incapable of caring of themselves - they, like children, required the watchful care of a benign parent to remain safe. Like the native Irish, they formed an inferior caste. They were the base on which he would build his social and economic security. In return, he would provide them with protection. Robinson's remarks on slavery certainly never reflected the whip-wielding mentality of a sadistic slaveholder set on dehumanizing his chattel. Quite the contrary; Robinson had experienced bondage of a sort and the insecurity of being among society's lowly. He had imbibed the rhetoric of the American Revolution and the revolutionary thought of his native, Calvinist Ulster. Identification on some points did not, however, create an interracial brotherhood of master and slaves. Robinson could sympathize with the plight of his slaves, but he must, like other men of his time, have perceived differences between the two races that justified his ownership of the one. Robinson was a paternalist. He valued his slaves for their labor and treasured them as cogs in the machinery of his gentlemanly ambition, but he did not view them as brothers. They composed a caste specially suited to hard labor and keenly in need of seigneurial protection.

In spite of all his paternalistic values and intentions, John Robinson, the master of men, did not readily conform to the standards of his adopted society. At the end of his rather specious biographical sketch of John Robinson in *The Princeton Magazine*, Dr.

Archibald Alexander drew one heavy-handed moral from the life of the Ulster County Irishman turned Southern gentleman: “wealth cannot make men happy; and ... as a general rule, men commit a great mistake when they engage in a business to which they have not been brought up.”¹⁶ Earlier in the same article, Alexander focused his most caustic comments on Robinson’s lack of experience and resulting failures as a slaveholder. In Alexander’s 1850 article, the once feisty Irishman emerges as a man disappointed in later life, a man cut off from the basic enjoyments of wealth by his status as an outcast, a foreigner still. Alexander’s unfavorable comparisons did not end there; he carefully described the process by which Robinson realized “he must now buy slaves to work the land; and those in market, are commonly of the worst sort; addicted to running away, or pilfering, or some other evil habits. At any rate such were the kind of labourers he happened to procure, and they were a continual vexation to him. He was totally unacquainted with the proper method of governing slaves.”¹⁷

Alexander spent a large portion of his account detailing Robinson’s attempts to master his slaves, often alluding to the Ulsterman’s many weaknesses as a gentleman land- and slave-owner. It seems quite likely, from the documentary evidence Robinson himself left, that what Alexander saw as slaveholding weaknesses originated in “Jockey” John’s refusal to discipline his slaves as harshly as his neighbors did. Both Alexander’s testimony and the documentary evidence left by Robinson reveal that the “Jockey” did not exercise the control over his slaves that Lexingtonians like Archibald Alexander deemed adequate. Another piece of evidence that supports this conclusion was the

¹⁶ Alexander, “A Reminiscence of John Robinson,” 197.

¹⁷ Alexander, “A Reminiscence of John Robinson,” 196-197.

murder of one of Robinson's slaves by a fringe member of the white community shortly after his owner's death. The murderer, Hiram Byas, took umbrage at the slave Jack's "saucy" attitude. Though an occupant of the low end of Lexington's social hierarchy, Byas acted out of a desire to "properly" discipline at least one of the Robinson slaves.¹⁸ A man who had no wealth or prestige believed he could regulate his slaves more effectively than their owner did.

Not only did John Robinson fail to discipline his slaves according to the standards of Lexington society, he also foolishly purchased what, if Alexander's account is accurate, must have been nothing less than a set of hardened criminals. Alexander accused them of being runaways, thieves, and followers of every manner of evil. In light of other available evidence, these accusations seem suspect. Had his slaves made his life the living hell Alexander described, "Jockey" John would hardly have taken such pains to ensure their welfare after his death. He would have been far more likely to have allowed his heirs the right to sell the scoundrels South with little or no consideration for the integrity of their families. Instead, Robinson praised his slaves for their "faithful services" throughout his life and tried to protect them after his death. He attempted to prevent their sale away from his land for fifty years after his death; he required the recipients of his estate to keep his slaves' families intact - a provision the Trustees later honored when the slaves were sold into the Deep South in 1835; and he repeatedly asserted that he wished the "strictest regard be paid" to his slaves' "comfort and

¹⁸Doug Harwood, "Whiskey, Slaves and Land Bankrolled the Colonnade," *The Advocate*, February 2000, 44.

happiness.” He may not have believed them worthy of liberty, but they had, in his eyes, earned happiness and security by their dependable service.¹⁹

Who were these dependable servants, these people Alexander called the dregs of the open slave market? Outside observations, chance comments, and three slave lists reveal partial portraits of the Robinson slaves that challenge Alexander’s derogatory accounts of their capabilities and dispositions. The members of Robinson’s workforce performed tasks ranging from shoe-making to whiskey-distilling and wagon-making. As members of a self-contained community, the slaves were friends, lovers, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts. They helped friends in need, fought over all manner of things, sang, danced, worshipped, played, and generally engaged in every facet of human life. The details of their daily lives went to the grave with them. For historians, little of these slaves’ individual personalities survives in the formal historical record. Their names appear in account books and bare-bones lists, but their images emerge through their masters’ eyes. In many ways, what historians know about slavery involves more about what slaves meant to upper class whites than what slaves meant to one another. To John Robinson, his slaves existed “for the purposes of labour.”²⁰ To the Trustees of Washington College, the slaves were worth their weight in gold – they were valuable not only for their labor but also for the price they could fetch on the interstate market. The question remains: who were the slaves to each other? Who were the slaves to themselves?

¹⁹ Will of John Robinson, 1826, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Rockbridge County Deed Book L, 248.

²⁰ The Last Will and Testament of John Robinson, April 25 1825, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

At the top of Robinson's 1818 slave list stands the name of Adam, a "waggoner." Born in 1773, the year "Jockey" John arrived in Lexington, Adam fathered his first child with wife Luckey when he was thirty-two years old and Luckey was thirty-six. They gave their first child her mother's name and, by the time of Robinson's next slave listing in 1826, she was married to Andy, the eldest son of the resident shoemaker and his wife. Young Luckey was just twenty-one at the time of the 1826 list and already had two children with Andy, who was three years her elder. In the end, she and Andy would have six children within the span of ten years. Their eldest, John, was born in 1823, and their youngest, Andy Jr., came into the world in 1833. The other four children, Daniel, Robert, Jeffrey, and Easter, appeared in rapid succession during the interim.

Young Luckey and Andy's second son, Daniel, had a name that tied him to his family; both Luckey's younger brother and Andy's father went by the name Daniel. The fate of Luckey's younger brother is shrouded in mystery; he disappeared from the Robinson records after 1818 and never reappeared. Young Luckey's other brother, Jefferson, disappeared in the same way and may also have served as the namesake for Young Luckey and Andy's fourth child, Jeffrey. Adam, the "waggoner," and his wife Luckey had one more child after Young Luckey, Daniel, and Jefferson. Her name was Nancy, with or without an "e" based in the inclination of the white record keeper. She was born in 1808 and married John, a laborer, apparently unattached to any other family

in the 1818 slave population. Nancy and John had four children, the eldest born in 1825 and the youngest in 1833; their names were Sarah Ann, Eliza, John, and Nancy.²¹

Andy, the husband of Young Luckey, came from a family Robinson owned before 1818. He and Young Luckey came of age together at Robinson's Hart's Bottom farm. Andy was the eldest son of Daniel, the shoemaker, and his wife Barbara. Daniel was born two years before his master, and his wife Barbara was born twelve years after him. At age fifty, Daniel fathered Andy, and, at age fifty-six, he fathered his last son, Moses. Ben, Daniel's second son, appeared in the 1818 and 1826 Robinson slave lists but not thereafter. Moses, on the other hand, was a fixture of the Lexington community into the 1850s and plays a role later in the saga of the Robinson slaves. Moses was slated to accompany his fellow slaves to Mississippi in 1835, but remained in Lexington because of John Robinson's stipulation that the slave families be kept together except in the case of extraordinary circumstances. Moses, at the time of the 1835 sale, had a wife in Lexington at the home of Major Alexander. Of Daniel the shoemaker's progeny, only Andy went with the others to Mississippi. The Robinson will respected the ties between husbands and wives but failed to recognize the connection between siblings. In 1836, Moses's older brother, Andy, had to leave him behind, making reunion and even communication unlikely. Sale often permanently fractured the slave family and the larger slave community.²²

²¹ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

²² John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase

Religion, one of the bedrock institutions of slave life, surely played a large part in the lives of the Robinson slaves, regardless of their family associations or their work. Listed as a parson in 1835, James fathered a family worthy of any Biblical patriarch. Within the span of twenty-two years, James the preacher and his wife Mary had ten living children. Mary may have given birth to even more children who died shortly after birth or were miscarriages in an age of high infant mortality. James was three years older than his wife, and they had their first child together when Mary was twenty-one and James was twenty-four. Henry, their eldest child, remained with them until their sale south into Mississippi in 1835. Like Moses, Daniel and Barbara's youngest son, Henry, had a wife in Lexington and could not be separated from her, even if that meant being parted from his parents and his seven surviving brothers and sisters. One of the ten siblings – Elvira or Eliza – died sometime between the making of the 1826 and the 1835 lists. Another of Henry's sisters, Martha, was born in 1825 and died on the eve of the Robinson slaves' journey south when she was barely ten years old. The death occurred suddenly, shortly before the family's journey away from Lexington. Martha's name appears on one list of slaves sold to Samuel Garland but is scratched crudely off of the one that followed, the word "dead" scrawled next to her age, and a deduction made from the sum Garland had

of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives; Report of Samuel McD. Reid and John Alexander respecting the sale of the negroes of the Robinson Estate, February 1836, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Treasurer's Report, June 1852, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Treasurer's Supplemental Report, June 1852, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Letter from Jacob M. Ruff to Reverend B. M. Smith, date unknown between 1846 and 1848, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Statement of Debts due to Washington College, June 1849, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Treasurer's Report, June 1850, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Supplement to the Treasurer & Proctor's Report, June 1850, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Hiring Certificate for Doctor Archibald Graham, January 1 1851, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Trustees' Reports of Debts to Doctor Paine, 1840, 1841, 1843, 1846-1850, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

agreed to pay for the lot. All of the lists calculate her death in terms of dollars and cents. Nothing reveals how her parents and siblings felt as they trudged to lands and fates unknown.²³

Of the children who accompanied Jim and Mary to Mississippi, only one reappears in the record. Mary, also called Mary Ann (ostensibly to differentiate her from her mother), was born in 1816, and by the time of her sale, she objected loudly to her treatment as a slave. She refused to work as a field hand, and begged to be returned to Virginia, a move supported by her father. He did not want to see his daughter worked as a field hand and voiced his opinion on the subject – an opinion that Samuel Garland asked for and took into serious consideration. What ultimately happened to her, however, is unknown. The remaining children of Jim and Mary apparently survived the rigorous trip to Mississippi and continued to live with or near their parents. In their declining years, Jim and Mary probably benefited from having six of their children near them. Slavery often separated slave families by death or distance, so there is no way to know who held Jim or Mary when they died, or if any of their children were with them.²⁴

²³ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives; Report of Samuel McD. Reid and John Alexander respecting the sale of the negroes of the Robinson estate, February 1836, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Treasurer's Report, June 1852, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Treasurer's Supplemental Report, June 1852, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Letter from Jacob M. Ruff to Reverend B. M. Smith, date unknown between 1846 and 1848, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Statement of Debts due to Washington College, June 1849, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Treasurer's Report, June 1850, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Supplement to the Treasurer & Proctor's Report, June 1850, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Hiring Certificate for Doctor Archibald Graham, January 1 1851, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Trustees' Reports of Debts to Doctor Paine, 1840, 1841, 1843, 1846-1850, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

²⁴ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase

During the inspection of the Robinson slaves, Samuel Garland refused to purchase Jerry, a slave who resided at John Robinson's "Lower Place." After Jerry was "refused on inspection," almost every reference to him included the adjective "old."²⁵ Before Jerry became "Old Jerry," he fathered at least eight children with his wife, whose name is recorded as either Aylsey or Elsey based on the whim of the record keeper. Aylsey, like her husband, was later identified by her defect. By 1826, she was blind, and the slave list duly recorded this decline in her bodily health, ability, and monetary value. Aylsey was born in 1787, the year the Constitution was drafted in Philadelphia, and had gone blind by 1826 when she was just twenty-nine years old. By this time, Aylsey's child-bearing days were also apparently over. Between 1810 and 1823, she gave birth to eight children who lived past infancy, several of whom disappeared from the lists before or during their teenage years. Had Aylsey not died before 1835, she would also have had to endure separation from her children, all of whom made the trip to Mississippi following their 1835 sale. One child, Caroline, died during the trip or shortly after her arrival. By that time, she was married to Gabriel, a Robinson slave twenty years her senior. She had two children, Alexander and Alfred, before she died when she was barely twenty-one years old. Her father "Old Jerry" probably heard of her death from one of the Washington

of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives; Letter from Samuel M. Garland to Samuel McDowell Reid, February 13 1837, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁵ Report of Samuel McD. Reid and John Alexander respecting the sale of the negroes of the Robinson Estate, February 1836, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

College Trustees during 1837, after Samuel McDowell Reid received the news from Samuel Garland.²⁶

One coupling that did not produce a brood of children was the marriage of Isaac and Creasey, a union that may have ended in separation or continued in spite of a white record keeper's poor organizational skills. Isaac and Creasey (alternately spelled Crissey) appear together in 1818 but are listed separately on the 1826 slave list. The reason why a seventy-one year old man and a sixty-eight year old woman might separate so late in life certainly invites speculation. Another duo that invites speculation consisted of an aging "Gardiner" named Robin and a youth the record keeper labeled "Little Robin." Robin and Little Robin appear together on the 1818 list, but in the 1826 revision, only the elder Robin, then seventy years old, appears. The nature of the relationship remains unclear, but there must certainly have been a close bond between the elder and the younger Robin, perhaps even that of father and son.

Several couples among the Robinson slave force were divided by death. One match most likely ended by death rather than distance was between Stephen, the resident blacksmith, and his first wife Beckey. Stephen and Beckey had two children named Ben and Tempe, born in 1817 and 1818. By 1824, Stephen was remarried. His second wife was named Milly, and she was eleven years Stephen's junior. She and Stephen had three children together between 1824 and 1834. Between the conception of their last child, Sarah Ann, and the 1835 sale of the Robinson slaves, Stephen died, leaving Milly to care

²⁶ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives; Letter from Samuel M. Garland to Samuel McDowell Reid, February 13 1837, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

for Stephen's child Ben and her three children on the trip down to Mississippi. On that journey, Milly had to travel by foot with three children under the age of twelve. Given the fractured bonds of the slave community and the fear that must have accompanied the slave force all the way to the Garland cotton plantations, this must have been especially difficult. Milly was a widow, a single mother, and a displaced person before she had turned thirty.²⁷

Bob and Salley, another couple probably divided by death, also appear on the 1818 Robinson slave list. One of them – Bob – was not present on the sale list of 1835. Salley, however, remained and was married to Dick Philips, one of the slaves also on the 1818 list. Before his marriage to Salley, Dick appeared as one of the many single laborers on the Hart's Bottom farm not a part of any family. He was fifteen years Salley's elder. The final couple on the 1818 slave list was also divided by ten years. Dick McCollum and his wife Hannah had four children between 1816 and 1826: Sam, Clelia (also spelled Celia), Dick, and Simeon. Sam, Celia, Dick, and Simeon went south. The eldest, Sam, with no aid from his parents, had to care for his three younger siblings, the youngest of whom – Simeon – was only nine years old. Sam, only nineteen years old himself, became a surrogate parent after the disappearance of his parents from the slave lists after 1826. Again, a single man was forced to care for his siblings on their trip to their new home in Mississippi.²⁸

²⁷ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁸ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase

Between 1818 and 1826, John Robinson continued to acquire new slaves. He had possessed 57 in 1818 but bequeathed 76 to Washington College in 1826. Among the additions to the Robinson slave force was Rachel, who became the wife of Ben McCluer, listed as a preacher on Robinson's 1818 tally. Separated by only two years, Ben and Rachel remained together throughout the 1820s and 1830s but were separated in 1836, when Ben was sold to A. T. Sloan and Rachel to William H. Letcher. Both masters resided in Lexington, but the sale to separate owners was fraught with difficulties and dangers. One owner might die, and one spouse might be sold far from the other; one owner might move away and separate the married couple. The list of threats to slave families was almost endless. No matter how beneficent the master or stable the situation, no paternalist could defy death or guard against all the economic uncertainties that might force a sale of his slaves. Slavery, by its very nature, threatened the stability of the family. Because slave marriages were never recognized by law, they could be severed with impunity. The only familial bond generally honored among slaveholders was the one between mother and child, and even that could be disregarded. The bonds of family were sacred to most slaves, but they were never sacred to all slaveholders. Slaves, human property, were generally respected as far as was practicable but rarely any further. Forced separation was the cruelest facet of the peculiar institution.²⁹

of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

²⁹John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Deed Book L, February 21 1818, 244-249; John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

Two more slaves Robinson purchased after 1826 were Peter and Polly, who appear on the list as married with three children. Robinson had apparently purchased an entire family. Their first child was born in 1814, indicating that they had been together for at least twelve years before they first appear on Robinson's lists. After the birth of their first child, Stephen, Peter and Polly had two more; Mathilda and Tom, born in 1818 and 1824. The tale of the two children is a tragic one. All three of their children were sold to Samuel Garland, but only one appears to have made the trip. Stephen, twenty-one years old at the time of the journey, was the sole family member who traveled south to Mississippi. Before the Robinson slaves left for the Garland cotton plantations, Mathilda's infant child died. Mathilda, only sixteen at the time, was allowed to remain in Lexington, presumably because of the state of her health following the death of her baby. Mathilda's husband resided in Lexington, and the College later claimed that he was the reason it retained her. Had Mathilda's child not died, she would have been parted from her baby's father. Only the death of her newborn child spared Mathilda the anguish of separation for her marital partner. The tragedy did not end there. Another death occurred slightly before the scheduled journey. Tom, the eleven year old brother of Mathilda and Stephen, also died after the sale but before the trip south. Again, nothing but a ragged line and a price reduction mark the passing of a youth whose place within his community and his family group could never be filled. His place on the bill of sale could be filled by another slave of comparable age and price, but he could never be replaced. He was an

individual with unique talents and weaknesses – talents and weaknesses unknown to the historical record but supremely important to those who loved him and mourned his loss.³⁰

³⁰ John Robinson slave list, Rockbridge County Will Book 6, July 7 & 8 1826, 404; Lists of slaves for the purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

Chapter Two:

Mastery by Committee, 1826-1835

“Well what are you worth!” “Why I guess I worth 500 dollars” -
“Where you worth \$500” – “Why I guess I worth that much in Charleston
or Georgia - Ain’t that *personal* property squire.”

Lexington Gazette, September 11, 1835¹

By the terms of his Last Will and Testament, John Robinson instructed his heirs - the Trustees of Washington College - to retain “all the negroes I may die possessed together with their increase ... for the purposes of labour, upon the above Lands [Hart’s Bottom] for the space of fifty years after my decease.” Once the fifty years had passed, however, Robinson released “the Trustees aforesd. ... from all restraint as to the disposal of the negroes” so that they could “sell or retain them as the results of their labour shall be demonstrated to be best.”² Sale of the slaves, however, must have been a step the Trustees took after a great deal of thought. Even after his death, Robinson expected to provide for the “comfort and happiness” of his bondsmen and women. He instructed the Trustees, in no uncertain terms, to protect his slaves, employ them on the Hart’s Bottom plantation, and treat them with the humanity they had earned by their many years of service. After his death, Robinson remained the ever-committed paternalist. The Washington College Trustees, unlike “Jockey” John, lived in a complicated time when the labor of the slave did not always justify the expense he incurred. The Trustees, bound to act like the paternalists of old, also had to act like the Upper South businessmen of

¹ From “humorous” anecdote regarding a slave man trying to post bail money in the *Lexington Gazette*, September 11 1835.

² The Last Will and Testament of John Robinson, April 26 1825, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

their day. They believed they could no longer afford to honor Robinson's directives. They could not afford to value the Robinson slaves for their labor alone. They needed cash, they needed income, and, most of all, they needed a reason to keep the chattel they had inherited.

Between John Robinson's First South and the Trustees' Old South, a sea-change in attitudes toward slavery took place in Lexington and in Virginia as a whole. Uneasiness with the institution of slavery increased in Lexington at the turn of the century, and the town edged nearer and nearer to embracing the slave society of the east. Between 1800 and 1830, the Valley's slave population grew by 92.3%, and its white population increased by a paltry 26.8%.³ Within the limits of Lexington, slavery began taking root in earnest just as the institution began to command greater national attention.⁴ Slavery and the critique of the institution entered Lexington hand-in-hand. Unlike the easternmost areas of Virginia, Lexington did not have time to adapt and react to its entrenched slave population before it had to defend it on the national stage. In the Age of Revolution, Lexington's discourse on slavery was predicated on fear - fear of the freedman, fear for the freedman. In the Old South, fear shaped Lexingtonians' understanding of slavery, especially after the shock of the Nat Turner insurrection, the calls for gradual emancipation during the slavery debates of 1832, and the reaction to the threat of abolitionism.

³ Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 32-33.

⁴ Brundage, "Shifting Attitudes Towards Antislavery in Rockbridge County," 338-339.

Fear bridged the gap between Lexington in the Age of Revolution and Lexington in the Era of the Old South; a distinct shift in the course of that fear, however, took place between the two periods of time. In the afterglow of the Revolution, fear led some men to advocate the retention of the old system. Lexington slaveholders had to hold the wolf by the ears because they foresaw destruction if they relinquished control over the dangerous creature at their doorsteps. As fear intensified following the Southampton Insurrection scare, Lexingtonians paused to take stock of their situation. When the watershed debate over slavery occurred in 1832, Lexington's voters chose emancipationists James McDowell and Samuel McDowell Moore to represent their interests – interests that pointed in the direction of gradual emancipation. Between the 1832 Virginia Legislative Debates and the anxious 1850s, another change had taken place. What had been politically viable before the 1832 debates was, by 1850, no longer countenanced by most of Lexington's elite. Slavery had become an oppressive but indispensable institution; Lexington had held the wolf too long to let it go.

Nat Turner's Southampton Insurrection marked a turning point in the way Virginians thought about slavery. Previously they had been comforted by the relative benevolence of their brand of slavery, but now they began to worry that they had been too generous, too lax in their treatment of the slave population. For the first time, Virginians began to consider the attitude of their slaves to their bondage. Nat Turner had reacted to his owner, his status, and his environment. Mere property could not react to an owner's actions. Mere property could not murder its owners. Slaves were not livestock who could be controlled by simple force or coddled by small gestures; they were human

beings who reacted to external circumstances as their personalities dictated. Lexington responded swiftly to the news of the insurrection by establishing “[a] very rigid patrol” to which “many ... provided arms in consequence.”⁵ Suspicion of the community’s slaves grew to the extent that Lexington had its own insurrection scare shortly after news of Nat Turner’s murderous activities had reached the community. In a letter to a Georgia relative, Aylett Alexander noted, “[w]e have had a disturbance in this county, at least much excitement - it was reported that a number [of blacks] were to assemble at Hearts [sic] Bottom that they were to be reinforced by others who were to come from Amherst County.” In retaliation, “[a] great many armed white men went down and brought to Lexington about 7 or 8 blacks; but they had no evidence on which they could rely; so they were dismissed.” Fears of insurrection focused on Hart’s Bottom and, presumably, on the Robinson slaves who lived and worked there. Suspicion of the “7 or 8 blacks” at Hart’s Bottom must have rested on evidence of some sort that led whites to conjure up the specter of Nat Turner. Turner never left Southampton, but he shaped the fears of local whites who thought they saw him traveling a road in Botetourt County.⁶

The slavery debates that followed Nat Turner’s messianic rebellion uncovered the complexities inherent in slavery and then forced them into a false dichotomy. In the state legislature, delegates spoke for or against slavery, and created the belief that the West was firmly opposed to slavery.⁷ Forced to choose between slavery on the one hand and

⁵ Letter from Andrew Alexander (Lexington) to William D. Alexander (Greenville, Georgia), November 25 1831, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

⁶ Letter from Aylett Alexander (near Lexington) to William Alexander (Greenville, Georgia), October 19 1831, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

⁷ Lolita G. Brockington and John Herbert Roper, “Slave Revolt, Slave Debate: A Comparison,” *Phylon* 45 (2nd Quarter 1984): 107.

emancipation with colonization on the other, the Valley delegates chose emancipation and won a reputation as antislavery men in the annals of history. Representing Rockbridge County in the legislature's slavery debates were James McDowell and Samuel McDowell Moore, both emancipationists and both labeled abolitionists after the convention. McDowell owned four slaves, but Moore owned none and would later put his name to a petition asking Henry Ruffner to publish his "radical" emancipationist pamphlet.⁸ Moore was willing to affix his name to an antislavery document in 1847 and to vote with the antislavery contingent during the Virginia slavery debates, but he later renounced this radical stance. By the 1850s, Moore asserted that he had been searching for some way of "getting rid of the negroes in our section."⁹ McDowell, like Moore, focused on the physical danger posed by the slaves. In the legislature, McDowell explored the precarious position of Virginia slaveholders who had just discovered that their "docile" property could lash out against their masters. At one point in the debates, McDowell replied to speakers who proposed to improve the treatment of the state's slaves: if you "[l]ift up the condition of the slave, you bring him nearer the liberty he has lost."¹⁰ Virginia's paternalism, rather than acting as a safeguard against insurrection, actually encouraged it. Owners could not guarantee their safety by any action that left the institution of slavery intact.¹¹

⁸ Freehling, *Drifting Toward Dissolution*, Table VII; Henry Ruffner, *Address to the Citizens of West Virginia* (Lexington, Virginia, 1847), cover page of pamphlet.

⁹ Samuel McD. Moore quoted in Brundage, "Shifting Attitudes Towards Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County," 340.

¹⁰ James McDowell quoted in Freehling, *Drifting Toward Dissolution*, 156.

¹¹ Freehling, *Drifting Toward Dissolution*, 156.

Slaveholders no longer felt confident in their ability to control their slaves, and they feared the ability of abolitionists to stir their slaves to rebellion. In its August 28, 1835, edition, the *Lexington Gazette* published a story that would hold the continued interest of the Lexington community for months to come. On the Friday evening before the newspaper's publication, a "furious Abolitionist" stopped in Lexington on his way to Natural Bridge. During his time in Lexington, James F. Otis, the "furious Abolitionist," intimated that he would return to Lexington later that night. While Otis was in Natural Bridge, "Judge Lynch very opertunely came to town, & threatened to take him into his hands. Fearing this threat might be carried into execution, the magistracy issued a warning for the seizure of his person and examination of his trunk so as to take the business out of the hands of the mob." Otis managed to convince an angry mob that he did not harbor abolitionist views and invited them to inspect the contents of his trunk. Convinced that Otis was innocent, the mob dispersed, and the suspected abolitionist went about his business. Following this event, however, one of Otis's "yankee political opponents" revealed that he was "not only ... tainted with the infamous heresy, but a lecturer - not only a robber, but a captain of banditti!"¹²

Between August and October, the *Lexington Gazette* continued to repeat the saga of James F. Otis with a furor that ebbed and flowed as new facts emerged. Finally, the situation became so acute that Otis himself wrote a letter to the editor, assuring the people of Lexington that his political opponents had planted false information in the *Richmond Enquirer* and the *Lexington Gazette* to ruin his good name. He described his true beliefs,

¹² *Lexington Gazette*, August 28 1835.

which were entirely acceptable to the townspeople. At the end of the debacle, the editor of the *Lexington Gazette* apologized for his attacks on Otis, and complimented the people of Lexington on the restraint they had shown in not lynching Otis when he first appeared in the community. The law had taken hold of Otis in the nick of time, but ill winds would undoubtedly buffet any other abolitionist interlopers who dared to criticize the institutions and traditions of the South. James Otis escaped with his life, but the popular rage he had inspired remained.¹³

Between 1826 and 1835, Lexingtonians repressed criticism of the institution of slavery, but still took comfort in their paternalism - in the knowledge that free blacks could not claim to be “half as well off – as comfortably clothed and fed – as well taken care of, and provided for in sickness and calamity” as their slaves. In Lexington, they claimed, “[i]t is the *name* of slavery, not the reality.”¹⁴ Slavery may have been no more than a name to local whites, but it was a cold reality to the Robinson slaves. Certainly, elements of paternalism persisted after the transfer of the slaves to the Washington College Trustees, but the change in masters also marked a marked change in their enslavement. Under the ownership of “Jockey” John, the slaves had lived as integral parts of Robinson’s Hart’s Bottom plantation. They were valuable to him for the labor they performed. To continue the success of his Hart’s Bottom endeavor, Robinson had to reach an implicit agreement with his bondsmen and women. In return for their labor, he would provide them with the necessities of life and ensure that they lived as happily as possible under the institution of chattel bondage. Posthumously, Robinson tried to

¹³ *Lexington Gazette*, August 28 1835; September 11 1835; September 18 1835; October 9 1835.

¹⁴ *Lexington Gazette*, August 7 1835.

continue his paternalism, but he failed to ward off one of slavery's fundamental cruelties – a master could die at any moment, forcing his slaves into a new arrangement, subject to terms he could no longer control. Robinson left his slaves to a college and demanded that it honor their family ties and treat them according to the paternalist's social contract.

After his death, and sometimes during his life, no master could keep such a promise to his slaves. Life was simply too uncertain.

The Trustees of Washington College could not afford to be paternalists. After less than a decade, they sold the bulk of their inherited slaves to another man, who employed them on a plantation in the Deep South. The Trustees valued the slaves primarily for their value on the market. They had struck no implied bargain with the slaves. They needed the cash they could obtain by hiring out or selling their inherited property. The Trustees neither honored nor violated the demands of paternalism. They felt responsible for the medical care of the slaves and continued to care for elderly slaves, but they could not afford to respect slave families or the slave community by keeping them at Hart's Bottom. They could not integrate the slaves into their overall plans for the operation of the College. The slaves became a group apart – both an asset and a burden for the Trustees. They were not a necessary source of labor as they had been for John Robinson. The College had to spend money on their upkeep, but they did not return it in satisfactory amounts. By 1849, this situation caused so many problems for the Trustees that they described the deaths of three elderly slaves simply as a reduction of expenses. Their deaths would “reduce the expences for the maintainance of the Old Negroes from 250 to \$100 per Annum.” On the same balance sheet, the College's Treasurer also noted

that "Two Negro Men Henry & Moses belonging to the College are hired One for \$70 and the Other for \$40 per Annum and are in better health than formerly."¹⁵ Moses and Henry may have earned the College \$110 per year for their labor, but three dead slaves saved the College \$150. The slaves the Trustees retained into the 1840s were worth more dead than alive. They were more hinderance than help to their committee of owners.

This alteration in the attitude of the Trustees emerged early in their dealings with the slaves. The Trustees kept the bulk of the slaves at work on the Hart's Bottom land, but they increased the number they hired out in Lexington and Rockbridge County, an early indication that the Trustees determined their slaves' worth based on the amount of money they could earn for the College. The College's practice of hiring out its slaves began slowly at first but gathered momentum through the years. Washington College hired out its first slave in 1827 and made \$65. In 1828, the number increased to four. During the following year, the Board hired one of its slaves to William Weaver, whose iron foundry at Buffalo Forge was one of the largest in the Valley.¹⁶ The records do not describe the work done by slaves hired away from Hart's Bottom, but it seems likely that they carried out all manner of work, ranging from housework to labor in the iron foundry. Whatever the work, however, hiring out could be problematic for both slave and owner. Hiring out could separate the slave from his family and friends at any point in his childhood or adult life. The distance appears never to have been very great. Some were hired out at young ages. Isaac, the middle son of James the slave preacher and his wife

¹⁵Statement of Debts due to Washington College, June 1849.

¹⁶List of Negro hire due to Washington College, 1827-1836.

Mary was already hired out to William H. Alexander at age thirteen.¹⁷ Alexander lived in Lexington, and Hart's Bottom, the home of Isaac's parents, was approximately nine miles away. Nine miles must have loomed large in the mind of a young boy separated from his family and community and living close to a white man and his family.

Hiring out could also be a risky practice for the masters involved. Hiring a slave out to another man implied a division of control, a division of responsibility, a division of authority in a system that largely depended on authoritarian rule.¹⁸ The Trustees, already engaged in ownership and mastery by committee, had to divide their control a second time when they hired out any of their slaves. Inevitably, there would be disagreement over whether the slave had been cared for well enough during his time with the man who hired him or whether the instructions of one master superseded those of the other. Hiring out in an urban area gave slaves more freedom of movement, more autonomy, more opportunities for misdeeds and even rebellion. When authority was divided between two masters, the boundaries were frequently unclear, and locals often deemed the resulting amount of discipline was not "sufficient." Especially after the Nat Turner slave insurrection, masters must have reacted uneasily to every instance of slave autonomy. Despite any concerns the Trustees may have had about the process of hiring out their inheritance, they continued to rent slaves in increasing numbers. By 1835, the last full year of residence in Lexington for most of the Robinson slaves, the Trustees hired out more slaves – nine in all – than ever before. Still the disorientation and alienation slaves

¹⁷ William H. Alexander note to Washington College: \$5 Due 1st January 1831, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

¹⁸ Jonathan D. Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2-16.

must have experienced at being hired out could not compare with what was to come. By 1835, they would be neither Robinson nor Washington College slaves; they would be the property of Samuel M. Garland who owned a home in Lynchburg and plantations in Mississippi.

In the final draft of his will, John Robinson cautioned his heirs that the right to sell his slaves ought “to be exercised upon a sound discretion and in such manner as to give to the negroes who are allotted for hire the alternative of being sold to masters of their own choice.” Robinson wanted his slaves to have some degree of control over their own lives. He required “that the strictest regard be paid to their [the slaves’] comfort and happiness as well as to the interest of the estate.”¹⁹ In short, Robinson wanted everything to remain as it had been when he was master. He wanted the estate preserved. He wanted his slaves to remain on his Hart’s Bottom plantation as if his death had never taken place. He wanted his brand of paternalism to persist during the oversight of the Trustees. The Trustees, on the other hand, had to contend with a constantly changing world. They had to adapt to a changing economy. Ten years after Robinson’s death, the Trustees decided the slaves were more a burden than a blessing. Times had changed since Robinson’s day, perhaps even before Robinson’s death. As the plantation culture of the Southwest developed and cotton began its reign as “King” of Southern agricultural exports, Virginians began shipping their excess slaves south where their labor was more valuable. The birth of cotton culture in the Old Southwest made slaves in the Southeast increasingly valuable in the internal slave trade. A sea change in the nature of slavery

¹⁹ The Last Will and Testament of John Robinson, April 26 1825, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

had occurred. In the days of John Robinson, a man who had already made his fortune invested in land and slaves and became a planter. For the administrators of a struggling Virginia college in the 1820s and 1830s, however, slaves represented much-needed cash. They were no longer valuable for their labor, but they could bring in a large amount of money because of the value of their labor elsewhere.

During the 1830s, Virginia's black population decreased by more than 18,000. That number meant 18,000 men, women, and children forced to migrate – 18,000 lives uprooted by a complex alteration in the section's economy.²⁰ The "certain negroes" the College sold to Samuel Garland contributed to that multitude – men, women, and children sold south to meet the need of cotton planters for labor.²¹ Some slaves traveled south in the hands of speculators, the pariahs of antebellum slave society. Men who dealt in human flesh did not seem respectable to the paternalists of the Old South, but many of them relied on such men to convert slaves into cash. Slave traders, though heartily despised by planters and abolitionists alike, were necessary to the internal trade and the slave economy of the Old South. The rise of the internal slave trade occurred in tandem with the death of the more liberal-minded First South. The reliance of the Upper South on the internal slave trade began with the death of the Revolutionary generation. As the internal trade became increasingly important to the economy of the South, the Upper and the Lower Souths became economic partners. The Upper South needed the Deep South slave market, and the Cotton Kingdom could not do without slaves from the Border

²⁰ Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 44.

²¹ Report of Samuel McD. Reid and John Alexander respecting the sale of the negroes of the Robinson estate, February 1836, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

States to labor in their fields. The slave trader was a product of economic necessity, just as the planter sold his "black family" out of economic necessity. Some planters from the Upper South established new operations in the Southwest and took their slaves with them, avoiding the services of the slave trader altogether. Still others moved to the land of cotton hoping to acquire wealth. Some sold slaves they could not control. Some sold their slaves from economic necessity. Others maintained homes in Virginia and established new plantations in the Southwest operated by relatives or professional overseers. Others moved to the Southwest to make their way in the world and buy slaves of their own. In the case of the Washington College slaves, a committee of owners in need of money sold slaves to a man, Samuel M. Garland of Lynchburg, Virginia, and Hinds County, Mississippi, who wanted to buy slaves to work his plantation in Mississippi.²²

Garland was involved in many a major business transaction. By 1835, he and several cousins had established themselves as cotton planters in Hinds County, Mississippi. Garland invested in the venture but remained in Lynchburg and left the operation of the plantation to his brother, Burr Garland. Burr owned approximately 100 slaves in his own right and used them as laborers on the Tudor Hall plantation situated in Hinds County, Mississippi. Samuel, perhaps to uphold his end of the enterprise, began casting about for slave labor. Whether by personal acquaintance or advertisement, Samuel Garland found a group of slaves for sale that must have seemed ideally suited to his needs. He could inspect the Washington College slaves thoroughly before he bought

²² Robert H. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 1-34, 62-117.

them. He could inquire about their collective reputation. He could deal directly with other gentlemen. He did not have to endure the vagaries and vicissitudes of the slave trader.

There was one problem both the seller and buyer had to solve. The Trustees had decided to sell the Robinson slaves before the end of fifty years, but they were determined to preserve the slave families. This stipulation, however, was as much an asset as a liability. Garland lost control of the ages and talents of his slaves, but he gained in slave discipline and price. Even the most notorious slave traders often preferred to buy entire families because it saved money and soothed the consciences of Upper South paternalists. Purchasing slaves in families also made them easier to transport south. Slaves who were parts of family groups were far less likely to rebel or run away during the trip. For the men and women with families, the most effective way to preserve and protect their families was to cooperate and not to cause trouble that might lead to their separation.²³ Samuel Garland, however, unlike the prototypical cruel and scheming trader, made a more binding and restricting promise to the men who sold him his laborers.

As a condition of the sale, Garland promised that he would not divide the slave families he purchased. He, like the Trustees, agreed to dispose of individual slaves only under extraordinary circumstances such as murder or rebellion. He pledged to uphold the terms of the Robinson will that protected the integrity of the slave families. He could easily have made more money by selling the Robinson slaves separately as laborers and

²³ Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 13, 68-71.

field hands in Mississippi, but he bound himself by honor and contract not to do any such thing. This agreement, an extension of Robinson's will, was almost impossible to enforce. The Trustees, of course, had no way to keep Garland from violating his pledge and disposing of his property as he saw fit.

For the Trustees, distance made information about the slaves hard to get, and the only information they received came from Garland himself. Distance allowed Garland to violate Robinson's will without the knowledge of the Trustees. A gentleman's agreement was the only thing that stood between the Robinson slaves and sale away from their families, perhaps deeper into the Cotton South. The record does not show whether Garland stuck to his end of the bargain. He was a socially and politically prominent man. Whatever the monetary temptations, it was decidedly against his best interests to do anything that might jeopardize his reputation as a gentleman. News of what happened in Mississippi might trickle back to Virginia, back to the Trustees, back to other members of the Virginia social and political elite. Still, all that stood in the way of dishonest profit and family fragmentation was the hope that Garland might be found out and the hope that he had conscience enough not to commit such an act. A legally-binding, enforceable contract would surely have been more comforting to the slaves, but they were property to these men – property with no hope of binding legal protection.

Chapter Three:

The Parting of the Ways, 1835 Onward

Throughout Hinds and Madison the excitement was tremendous. ... The populace, breathing fury and vengeance, are up for blood – they have tasted some, and God alone knows where they will stop.

- Lexington, Kentucky, *Intelligencer*, July 12, 1835¹

It is curious how quick the people of this county can be roused to a state of watchfulness for their all depends on this. The blacks must have no chance to make a beginning and they know this. I think the letter was a hoax, but ... if their plans had succeeded it would have been right dull times this Christmas.

- Giles Gunn, Lexington, Virginia, January 6, 1851²

Seven months after they decided to “sell the negroes & real estate devised to the college by J. Robinson decsd.,” the Trustees of Washington College began negotiating the sale with Samuel Meredith Garland, whom they knew would transport the Robinson slaves to his cotton plantations in Hinds County, Mississippi.³ Hinds County, as the Trustees knew, had been the site of one of the most far-reaching insurrection scares of the 1830s, an alleged plot that resulted in the hanging of a white man named Robinson near Lynchburg for his supposed involvement in the Mississippi.⁴ The College sold the Robinson slaves to the scene of the plot and the region of several slave lynchings. In the

¹ Articles from the Lexington, Kentucky, *Intelligencer* were reprinted in the *Lynchburg Virginian* and the *Lexington Gazette*

² Letter from Giles Gunn to Mary Gunn, January 6 1851, Couper Collection, Virginia Military Institute Library.

³ Trustees Minutes, March 18 1835, Washington and Lee University Special Collections; Letter from Samuel M. Garland to the Trustees of Washington College, October 27 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives; Letter from Samuel McDowell Reid to Samuel M. Garland, November 5 1835, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

⁴ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 325-327.

latter half of 1835, Hinds County, Mississippi, was a scene of open warfare, where whites were “[b]y their own high-handed and violent measures ... giving a magnitude and terror to the contemplated insurrection which it otherwise never could have gained.”⁵ Sale threw the Robinson slaves into a cauldron of racial tumult. Blacks outnumbered whites by margins of nearly fifty to one, but whites were determined to restore order by any means necessary.⁶ Fear framed Lexington’s attitude toward slavery; in Hinds County the presence of slavery inspired all-out panic.

Suspicion fell on all blacks in Mississippi and hit imports from the Upper South the hardest. Deep South slaveholders suspected that masters from the borderlands used the Cotton Kingdom as a “dumping ground” for rebellious blacks. Mississippi whites, outraged by their exploitation as the peculiar institution’s safety valve, became increasingly suspicious of blacks imported from the Upper South – slaves like those Garland had purchased.⁷ Their 1835 sale threw the Robinson slaves into a new kind of bondage, one characterized by back-breaking field labor and limited autonomy. The gap in material well-being of slaves in the Upper and Lower South was not as large in the mid-nineteenth century as it had been earlier, but most material improvements were the result of white fear⁸ – the same fear that forced whites to curtail the freedom the Robinson slaves had known in Lexington. Whatever the relative harshness of their bondage, the essential injustice remained. Most of the Robinson slaves were unwilling immigrants. They, like almost a quarter of all slaves in the 1830s, were torn from friends

⁵ Lexington, Kentucky, *Intelligencer*, July 12 1835, reprinted in the *Lynchburg Virginian* and the *Lexington Gazette*.

⁶ Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts*, 325.

⁷ Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 62-117.

⁸ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 53-55, 322.

and loved ones and forced to work in an unfamiliar place, under different conditions, and with little autonomy and few material comforts. The Trustees preserved nuclear slave families, but they did not protect the relationships of siblings, friends, and extended families. They sold their slaves into a situation marked by extreme uncertainty. Garland vowed to respect the slaves' immediate families, but the Trustees could no more control their lives from Virginia than John Robinson could protect his slaves from the grave. The Trustees sold the Robinson slaves in violation of the strict provisions of their deceased owner's will. What Garland chose to do with his slaves was his affair. His use of his property was protected by the law. The power to control the lives of his recently-purchased slaves was his alone and the basis of the entire system of chattel slavery. Neither Robinson nor the Trustees could interfere in the lives of the Robinson slaves without defying the very foundation of southern slavery.

Slavery, whether in the Upper or the Lower South, was the basis of the economy of the section throughout the antebellum period. Slave property had value in the Upper South only as long as the Lower South required labor. Owners could make more money by selling slaves to the Lower South than by working them farther north. Upper and Lower South were seamlessly entangled; individual wills and larger ideologies lived in uncomfortably close quarters; individual intentions meant little unless they were backed by money and ideology. The will of the slave was subservient to the will of the owner. The Trustees sent him south, and he earned money for his new masters. He had no control over his own destiny. The trek of Robinson's slaves into the south, on the surface, was the result of a business transaction between white men. Slaves entered the

story only as names on lists. The Robinson slaves appeared only as first names and prices. But they were real people – men and women who could run away, who could barter with their new owner, who could feel paralyzed by fear of the unknown. They did not move blindly from Upper to Lower South like pieces on a chessboard. They experienced every step of the trip south as individuals, and dealt with the strain in their own way. Nobody recorded their hopes and fears, and historians can recapture their lives only by reading evidence left by their white masters.

Owners used the threat of sale south, away from family and friends, to discourage bad behavior. Sale into the Cotton South posed a deadly threat to stability, home, family, community. Sale south, whatever the individual situation, was frequently the product of a master's financial desperation, his inability to discipline his slaves, or his simple fear of the institution and its implications. Simple fear of their uncertain future likewise inspired acts of desperation by the slave. The history of the interstate slave trade is littered with suicide, flight, resistance, and rebellion. Slaves who had never acted against their masters or their condition in life did so when they felt they had no other option. For some slaves, the temptation to run was too much to resist. They knew that the deeper they traveled into the south, the less likely escape would become. On the journey south, some slaves attempted to escape their enslavement. Slaves who might have remained all their lives in bondage without resistance ran because it was their last chance, and their futures seemed too bleak and uncertain to bear. The uncertainty of labor in the cotton fields of Mississippi spurred many slaves to resist. Whether they complained, violently rebelled, broke tools, or slowed the daily operation of the plantation, even "docile" slaves

rebelled on the way to their strange and threatening futures. To leave their small plantation in western Virginia and become the slaves of a strange man in an uncertain place must have placed unbelievable strain on the thoughts and emotions of the Robinson slaves. Like other slaves before them, the Robinson slaves asserted their humanity during their forced migration. They did not follow the path before them thoughtlessly; they were not resigned to their fates. Instead, they challenged the power of their new master to reshape their lives.⁹

Samuel Garland asserted that “all the negroes” went “cheerfully” to his Mississippi plantation and were eager to have “the labours of the journey ... at an end.” In the same letter, however, he told the story of Billy, a thirty-five year old Robinson slave, who “was apprehended ... on his way to Cincinnati, with a paper, signed John [illegible], directing the negro under a nother name to his son, in that city.” Billy fled but was captured. Following his capture, he looked so “haggard” that Garland demanded his price “be reduced to his real value.” The Washington College Trustees had sent Billy with Samuel Garland even though his wife lived with William Leyburn in Lexington, and they had agreed not to break up slave marriages. Billy was originally slated to stay with his wife and must have been sent to Mississippi to replace a slave who had either died or disappeared. Perhaps he knew the terms of the Robinson will and understood that he had a right to remain with his wife in Lexington. Perhaps he had little or no sense of the promise the Trustees had broken, but ran away out of blind desperation. The record does not reveal what was racing through Billy’s mind as he planned his escape, ran, and was

⁹ Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 245-275.

caught. Billy tried to seize what may have been his last chance at freedom. The attempt was daring and was not the only one by a member of the Robinson group during that wintry trip to the Lower South.

When Garland found out that “one of the College negroes was confined in the Fayette jail as a runaway,” he “at once concluded it must be Frank.” Frank was thirty nine at the time of the sale. He had no recorded family ties to other Robinson slaves or to anyone else. Perhaps he was a perennial bachelor. Perhaps he kept his romances private. In any case, Garland expected *him* to be the slave sitting in the jail. At some point, he must have fled, and Garland daily expected his return. The unfortunate Billy may even have served as a replacement for Frank. After describing Billy’s “haggard” appearance and diminished value, Garland suggests that “he can’t be worth more than Frank,” and concluded that he and the Trustees could “settle this matter” after he returned to Virginia.¹⁰ Flight was not the only way slaves resisted during the journey to Mississippi and after their arrival. Other slaves, like young Mary Ann, resisted their transportation and enslavement in other ways.

Mary Ann’s behavior was different from both Frank and Billy’s, but no less dramatic. She was nineteen years old when she was sold and nearly twenty-one when she decided to resist. She was the daughter of James, the slave preacher, and his wife Mary. She was one of many children, though it appears she inherited more independent spirit than the rest. Her spirited assertion of her humanity caught her master’s attention, and, in 1837, he wrote to the College Trustees that “the whole of them [the College slave group]

¹⁰ Letter from Samuel M. Garland to Samuel McDowell Reid, January 19 1836, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

are now very comfortably settled in Arkansas, except Mary Ann." Because the job she was doing on the Garland cousins' cotton plantations was "no longer necessary," Garland decided to make her a field hand on another of the plantations. Mary Ann refused to turn field hand, in "all her anxiety" she focused on returning to Virginia. Garland observed that she "would sell here for \$1,500," but he had pledged "not to separate the families but for bad conduct" and "they have been guilty of none." His plans to sell his troublesome slave away were thwarted by old John Robinson's will and his own sense of obligation to his slaves.

Still, Garland insisted that her father, James, could see no reason why she should be a field hand and agreed that it might be to her advantage to be sold away from the family and work in another capacity. Garland suggested to both James and the Trustees that he send her to Virginia to work in the household of one of his widowed relatives. In spite of her rebellious spirit, Garland deemed Mary Ann "a fine girl" whose wishes deserved consideration. Whether Garland acted out of compassion for his slave or for some other reason is impossible to know, but a slave girl young enough to be Garland's daughter had convinced her much older, socially prominent, white owner that her feelings were important. This "fine girl" asserted herself and refused to work as a field hand. She used every means at her disposal to protest. After this fleeting appearance, Mary Ann disappears from the documentary record. The Trustees may have made an exception, and

allowed her to dictate her own fate. They may have broken John Robinson's will when it contradicted the wishes of the above's family.¹¹

On the way to Mississippi, Caroline, a young wife and mother, died. The arduous trip and the change in disease environments made her two children orphans and her husband a widower. Many of the Robinson slaves fell ill following the journey, and though Samuel Garland assured the Trustees that "the others all recovered" and were settling into their new lives with little difficulty, historians cannot take his assertions at face value. In his optimistic, business-like letters, Garland describes his slaves' assertions of their humanity and individuality, the complex interactions that took place between master and slave as well as between past masters, current masters, and the slaves they bought, sold, and bartered away from one another. The Robinson slaves' intimate ties to the past were unique. Their past lives and former owners constantly shaped their present situations. John Robinson, dead when the Old South emerged out of the First South, continued to reach into their lives as long as they lived in slavery. Garland kept the Washington College Trustees informed about the conditions of the slaves and consulted them on matters involving the slaves' well-being. In the end, however, though they passed from Robinson to the Trustees to Samuel Garland, the slaves always remained Robinson's slaves. His will and his paternalism permeated every aspect of the lives of the men and women he had owned. Many in the Robinson slave population no longer remembered the man behind the will, but his presence in their lives persisted. When he bought them from the College, Samuel Garland referred to them as John

¹¹ Letter from Samuel M. Garland to Samuel McDowell Reid, February 13 1837, U.B. Phillips Collection, Yale University Library Manuscripts and Archives.

Robinson's slaves. They never really became the Trustees' slaves or Samuel Garland's slaves. In many ways, they remained the property of their shadowy Irish patriarch.

The world of the Robinson slaves who stayed behind as a result of their family attachments or their infirmity also altered. As the years passed, the conditions in which the slaves in Lexington lived became more restrictive. Slave patrols became an active part of the Lexington scene, and owners no longer had as much latitude to treat their slaves as they chose. Slaveholders could no longer protect their bondsmen and women from tensions within the community. Still, the Washington College Trustees did what they could to maintain their paternalistic mastery over the remaining slaves. They paid members of the community to care for and house slaves who were too elderly to work. They paid the local doctor to administer medication to help ease the slaves' aches and ills, and they continued to hire out slaves where they could. By the 1840s, however, only two slaves – Moses and Henry – were physically fit to work. The two of them, Moses and Henry, earned the College approximately \$120 per year during the 1840s and 1850s, but the elderly slaves cost the Trustees \$50 each per year to maintain, and, for much of that time, elderly slaves outnumbered working ones.¹² As late as 1857, the Trustees were still caring for three elderly incapacitated slaves who cost them a total of \$130 per year, a cost that persisted even after the College sold its last two physically fit slaves.¹³ The elderly slaves, at least, were too infirm to be implicated in any insurrectionary activity.

¹² Treasurers' Reports, 1840 – 1860, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

¹³ Report of Treasurer of Washington College, July 1857, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

With the possibility of emancipation irretrievably gone, slavery in the 1850s became arguably the most inhuman in American history. White Lexingtonians denied their slaves' very humanity when they decreed enslavement perpetual. When the possibility of emancipation was closed to them, the slaves had no way to force whites to recognize their humanity. They became an underclass of not-quite-human property.¹⁴ As slavery became more psychologically severe, it increasingly curtailed their autonomy. As early as 1843, one Lexington resident wrote to the *Lexington Gazette* complaining of "slaves being permitted to prowl about the streets till 12 or 1 o'clock ... laugh and talk, and sometimes even *yell*, to the intolerable annoyance of those who live near." In response to this "intolerable annoyance," the anonymous editorialist suggested that "our patrols avail themselves of the sport which these gangs would afford them."¹⁵ The restrictions became more rigorous during the Christmas holidays of 1850, when Lexington's white population discovered a letter describing plans for a slave uprising lying in the road between Lexington and Natural Bridge. The letter described a plot to "rise 300 men" and "attack the Military Institute and get possession of the 20,000 stand of arms in the arsenal there." After they had stolen the arms, the army of the enslaved and freedmen "were to walk the city of Lexington killing all they could get hold of."¹⁶

As the ring-leader of the insurrection, Lexington residents identified Henry Allen, the son of preacher James and his wife Mary. Like his sister Mary Ann, Henry apparently had no compunctions about asserting his humanity. In their accusation, the

¹⁴ David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 156.

¹⁵ *Lexington Gazette*, June 1843.

¹⁶ Letter from Giles Gunn to Mary Gunn, January 6 1851, Couper Collection, Virginia Military Institute Library.

town council told the Trustees that Henry “has been and is now exerting ... over the slaves of Lexington and its vicinity an influence highly prejudicial not to say dangerous in the extreme.” Because the members of the council believed that “his longer continuance” in the community “should be productive of incalculable evil,” and petitioned the Trustees to remove him from the community immediately.¹⁷ William G. White, the Proctor and Treasurer of the College, sold Henry to Doctor Archibald Alexander for \$500. Moses, the only other slave not entirely physically infirm, successfully petitioned White, to buy him.¹⁸

With the passage of time, John Robinson’s slaves and their offspring were sold away from Lexington and the College. A handful died at the Hart’s Bottom plantation. Robinson had envisioned that their lives would play out very differently. He had wanted his slaves to live and die on his plantation. He had wanted them to maintain his legacy and the land in which he took such pride. Times, however, turned against men like John Robinson – old-fashioned Virginia paternalists. As time passed and the economy changed, slaves’ labor was not worth as much in the Upper South. The price of cotton in the Lower South exploded and a complicated interstate trade began. Robinson’s slaves were caught in that trade and sold south because the Trustees of the College were rich in slaves but poor in money. When the Trustees sold the bulk of their slaves to Samuel Garland, they succumbed to the lure of easy profits. Most of the Robinson slaves lived out their lives in bondage in the Cotton South, but the slaves who remained in Lexington

¹⁷ Memorial to the Trustees of Washington College, January 6 1851, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

¹⁸ Report of the Washington College Financial Committee, June 1852, Washington and Lee University Special Collections.

also suffered from changing circumstances. Robinson sought to control his slaves' lives, but after his death, his influence came to an end, and he could not have guaranteed them their welfare had he lived. Slavery was failing in the Upper South, and Robinson's slaves were among the victims. The Robinson slaves did not experience the changes as a group, but Robinson's paternalism imposed itself on the lives of his slaves until slavery itself came to an end in 1865. In a sense, they would always remain Robinson's slaves – whatever befell them in their enslavement. Death and distance separated them, but they were still a community of slaves created by their "Jockey" John.

Works Cited

Secondary Source Material

Books:

- Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1943.
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Davis, David Brion. *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Deyle, Steven. *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Dunaway, Wilma. *Slavery in the American Mountain South*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Freehling, Alison Goodyear. *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Antislavery Debate of 1831-1832*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1976.
- Gleeson, David T. *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.
- Gudmestad, Robert H. *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003.
- Jones, Edward P. *The Known World*. New York: Amistad, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.
- Leyburn, James G. *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962.
- Martin, Jonathan D. *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Articles:

Brockington, Lolita G. and John Herbert Roper. "Slave Revolt, Slave Debate: A Comparison." *Phylon* 45 (2nd Quarter 1984): 98-110.

Brundage, Fitzhugh. "Shifting Attitudes Towards Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County," in Bond, Larry I., Ed. *Proceedings of the Rockbridge County Historical Society* Volume 10 (1980-1989). Lexington, Virginia: the Rockbridge County Historical Society, 1990.

----- "Slavery in Antebellum Rockbridge County." Washington and Lee University Special Collections: Unpublished Manuscript, 1983.

Eslinger, Ellen. "'Sable Spectres on Missions of Evil': Free Blacks of Antebellum Rockbridge County, Virginia," in Koons, Kenneth E. and Warren F. Hostra, Eds. *After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, 1800-1900*. Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 2000.

Harwood, Doug. "Whiskey, Slaves and Land Bankrolled the Colonnade." *The Advocate* (February 2000).

Waddell, Harrington. "John Robinson of Hart's Bottom." *Rockbridge County News* (January 14 1932).

Weisberger, Bernard A. "The Dark and Bloody Ground of Reconstruction Historiography." *Journal of Southern History* 24 (November 1959): 427-447.

Primary Source Material: Published:**Contemporary Books, Pamphlets, and Speeches**

Alexander, Archibald. "A Reminiscence of John Robinson, The Founder of a Professorship in Washington College, Virginia," *The Princeton Magazine*, reprinted in the *Southern Collegian*, (December 23 1871): 193-197.

Ruffner, Henry. *Address to the Citizens of West Virginia*. Lexington, Virginia, 1847.

Newspapers

Lexington Gazette, 1835-1860.

Primary Source Material: Unpublished:

Manuscripts

Rockbridge County Courthouse, Lexington, Virginia.

Rockbridge County Deed Book L.

Rockbridge County Will Book 6.

Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.

Gunn, Giles. Letter to Mary Gunn, January 6, 1851. William Couper Collection.

----- Letter to Molly Gunn, February 1, 1854. William Couper Collection.

Smith, Francis H. Letter to William Richardson, January 2, 1851. Records of the Superintendent.

Washington and Lee University Special Collections, Lexington, Virginia.

Alexander, Andrew. Letter to William D. Alexander, November 25, 1831.

Alexander, Aylett. Letter to William Alexander, October 19, 1831.

Alexander, William H. Note to Washington College: \$5 Due 1st January 1831.

Hiring Certificate for Doctor Archibald Graham, January 1, 1851.

List of Negro Hire due to Washington College, 1827-1836.

McCutchan, J. S. Letter to Henry Ruffner, President of Washington College, January 3, 1837.

Memorial to the Trustees of Washington College, January 6, 1851.

Reid, Samuel McD. and John Alexander. Report respecting the sale of the negroes of the Robinson Estate, February 1836.

Report of the Washington College Financial Committee, June 1852.

Robinson, John. Last Will and Testament, April 25, 1825.

----- Will, 1826.

Ruff, Jacob M. Letter to Reverend B. M. Smith, date unknown between 1846 and 1848.

Statement of Debts due to Washington College, June 1849.

Washington College Treasurer's Report, 1840-1860.

Washington College Trustees' Report of Debts to Doctor Paine, 1840; 1841; 1843; 1846-1850.

Washington College Trustees' Minutes, March 18, 1835.

Washington College Supplemental Treasurer's Report, June 1850; June 1852.

Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Garland, Samuel M. Letter to Samuel McDowell Reid, January 19, 1836. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips Collection. MS 397.

----- Letter to Samuel McDowell Reid, February 13, 1837. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips Collection. MS 397.

----- Letter to the Trustees of Washington College, October 27, 1835.

List of Slaves for the Purchase of Samuel M. Garland, October 27, 1835. Ulrich Bonnell Phillips Collection. MS 397.

Reid, Samuel McDowell. Letter to Samuel M. Garland, November 5, 1835.