

I offer this paper with some diffidence. It will deal with a chapter in the history of our country which, perhaps, many of us would like to overlook, or even forget, if forgetting were possible. And another excuse for my diffidence may be found in my prior ignorance of the topic which I propose to treat in these few pages. About two years ago, in some way, I became aware of this ignorance of mine and set about remedying the defect. After browsing around in the Jones Memorial Library and after some conversation with my friend, the Librarian at Virginia Episcopal School, I read four books on the subject. This paper is the outcome of that reading but I may say at the outset that it is based more narrowly on one book than have ^{been} my other papers read before this Club. I may add, however, that I have done a little looking around on my own account. Now, after this brief preamble, let's start with the interstate commerce in Virginia in our own little city of Lynchburg, - it was a little city in the days of which I am going to speak.

Go down to the Virginia Room of the Jones Memorial Library and turn carefully the fragile and time-yellowed pages of the LYNCHBURG REPUBLICAN and of the LYNCHBURG DAILY VIRGINIAN of a century or more ago. You will find that in the Christmas, 1845, number of the REPUBLICAN and in other subsequent numbers, four slave traders were advertising to purchase slaves, while auctioneer Charles Phelps gave notice that he was in the business of selling slaves both privately and publicly. The names of the four men were George Davis, M. hart, E. Myers and Seth Woodroof. Davis, in an earlier advertisement, had called for 200 young negroes, had promised fully as high prices as could be obtained in Richmond or in any other part of the State, was determined to be liberal in every instance, and of course was ready to go in any direction to inspect and make offers. Davis and Hart, as partners, would buy any number of negroes that would suit the Southern market. Myers merely wanted to purchase "a ^a parcel of negroes of both sexes,"

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but he was an enterprising man and could always be found at this hotel or that store. Woodroof was evidently more of a capitalist; he not only wanted from 75 to 100 negroes between the ages of 10 and 25 (later extended to 30) but, eight years later, in the DAILY VIRGINIAN of January 1st, 1853, he inserted the following advertisement:

NEGROES WANTED. The subscriber continues in market for NEGROES of both sexes, between the ages of 10 and 30 years, including Mechanics, such as Blacksmiths, Carpenters, and will pay highest market prices in cash. His office is a newly erected brick building on 1st or Lynch Street, immediately in the rear of the Farmers' Bank, where he is prepared, (having erected buildings with that in view) to board negroes, sent to Lynchburg for sale or otherwise, on as moderate terms, and keep them as secure as if they were placed in the jail of the corporation.

/s/ Seth Woodroof.

In the same issue, although they do not concern interstate commerce, occur several advertisements of local interest to us:

(1) To close out a partnership - 10 valuable men, No. 1 factory hands.

S. Garland
Surviving partner of Geo. T. Williams & Co.

(2) 100 NEGROES wanted to hire for work on the Virginia & Tennessee.

(3) Scott & Adams (evidently contractors for the railroad) wanted negroes to work on the Virginia & Tennessee in the mountains of Virginia.

Now let's return to Seth Woodroof's advertisement of January 1, 1853, the public notice of his slave jail. Frankly, I had never heard the term "slave jail" used until I started digging into the four books which I have mentioned, and I certainly would not have suspected that there was such an institution in the little city of Lynchburg. The mere fact that there was a slave jail, or slave pen, as such buildings were sometimes called, sets one to thinking and makes us realize that Lynchburg, small though it was then, must have been the central point in the slave traffic in this area. Look

for a moment at the population of Lynchburg in this period:

Year	Whites	Free Negroes	Slaves	Total
1816	1,765	256	1,056	3,087
1828	2,492	385	1,751	4,628
1850	4,178	491	3,401	8,071

We note that in 1850 the number of slaves in Lynchburg added up to more than three-fourths of the white population, while slaves plus free negroes fell only about 350 short of the whites in the city.

Just when the salve traders started advertising in the columns of the Lynchburg newspapers, I have been unable to determine. Seth Woodroof was inserting his advertisements at least as early as 1845 and, from their wording, we are justified in assuming that his slave jail was erected in the latter part of 1852. One must notice, at the same time, that some of these advertisements run continuously for years, usually without any change of wording. There was no display advertising in those days but in these notices the word NEGROES and the phrase NEGROES WANTED are almost awlays spelled in capital letters. Such advertising was no more the gift of the publishers in those days than it is today; it cost money. And if the traders found it profitable to continue such an expense, and if one of them found it profitable to maintain over a period of years a detention house for slaves awaiting sale or transportation south, then we are justified in concluding that there were numerous profitable transeations in the purchase and sale of slaves in the City of Lynchburg. And, as I shall hope to show later, we shall also be justified in concluding that not all these sales were finally consummated within the limits of the Commonwealth of Virginia and that some of them, therefore, fell within the purview of interstate commerce.

Now, with this local picture in mind, let's look over the State at large. We may, of course, dismiss from our consideration all that portion of Virginia which lay beyond the crest of the Blue Ridge Mountains

(Remember that in those days Virginia extended all the way to the Ohio River.)

Slavery was never profitable in the rough mountainous terrain between the Blue Ridge and the Ohio. We may confine our thoughts to that part of the State which lies between the Blue Ridge and the Atlantic Ocean. One must remember that slavery, North and South, was an economic problem; efforts looking towards its abolition followed only upon the discovery, in a particular region, that the "peculiar institution" was uneconomical and hence unprofitable.

Starting in the northern part of our Commonwealth and working our way south, we find that Alexandria became one of the busy centers of the slave trade. In 1846 the Virginia section of the District of Columbia had been returned to the Old Dominion and in 1850 a law was enacted which prohibited the bringing of slaves into the District of Columbia for sale. Washington had been a busy slave-trade center, many being purchased there from the counties of eastern Maryland (eastern shore and western shore), and under the impetus of the two acts just cited, this trade naturally moved across the Potomac into Alexandria. In 1859 the old Franklin & Armfield slave-pen was still doing a thriving business under the direction of four partners. One of these partners continued to operate the pen until the spring of 1861, when he hastily left Alexandria just before the Federal troops entered the city and seized the building. It was soon converted into a military prison in which some captured Confederates brooded over the amazing topsy-turvy state of affairs. Most of the slaves brought to Alexandria for sale were intended for the far South; several steamships made rather regular trips to such ports as Mobile and New Orleans. One of the vessels could carry 400 slaves on each trip.

Petersburg was another center of the trade. In the late 1830's there were as many slave-traders in Petersburg as there were in Lynchburg in 1845.

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Overley & Sanders, who were really eastern Maryland buyers, advertised that they were "particularly anxious to make a shipment of negroes shortly." And half a dozen men named Davis were in the business, each generally advertising for from fifty to one hundred negroes for shipment to New Orleans.

Norfolk, naturally, was a port to which many slaves were shipped and from which many more were transhipped. In 1839 a visitor found the trade there extensively practised and, to use his ^{own} own words, "without censure or reproach." There was a slave-jail so near the hotel in which he was staying that he could hear the shouts and cries of the negroes whom the traders were collecting for distant markets. Advertisements in the Norfolk SOUTHERN ARGUS show that the trade was extensive and that there was at least one other slave-jail or pen besides the one which I have just mentioned. It was advertised as a "safe and convenient jail" and the owner promised to pay Richmond prices for young men and women.

Lastly, and most importantly, there was Richmond. In 1850, Richmond contained a scant 28,000 inhabitants; of these less than 16,000 were white and more than 12,000 were colored. Ten years later, the census of 1860 showed a population of not quite 38,000, - about 23,000 white and 14,000 colored. (It is interesting that today (1966) Richmond's population is rapidly approaching an even division between the two races.)

In the business section of the Richmond City Directory we find eighteen individuals and firms listed under the heading "Negro Traders, Agents and Auctioneers in Richmond, 1858-1860." In addition, we find another list of eighteen names under the heading "Agents, General and Collecting." and then a third list of thirty-four names under the heading "Auctioneers." But in these last two lists, brief notices in smaller type following many of the names give public notice that the individuals or firms indicated were engaged in the business of buying and selling Negroes. For example,

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Browning , Moore & Company, on Franklin Street near 15th, " . . will give their undivided attention to the sale of Negroes," while Hector Davis, on Franklin Street between Mayo and 15th described himself as "Auctioneer and commission merchant for the sale of Negroes." Tabb & Son, who were never classified as Negro traders in the directories, but only as general and collecting agents, were advertising as far away as Baltimore that they had "removed their office to the old Post Office under the Exchange Hotel, where they will continue to HIRE OUT NEGROES AND SELL THEM, (publicly or privately)" and added that they had been engaged in this business for thirty years. In the Franklin-Fifteenth Street area there were many private slave-jails. Most of them were at the service of any slaveholder; a few were more or less reserved for the business of the trader-proprietor who owned them. Hector Davis, one of the most prosperous auctioneers and commission merchants for the sale of Negroes in Richmond, widely advertised that he had a safe and commodious jail where he would board, at thirty cents a day, all slaves intended for his sales. (Davis ran a notice in these words in the Raleigh, North Carolina, tri-Weekly Standard from May, 1858 to January 1859, and perhaps longer.)

Certainly these oft-repeated and widely scattered public notices indicate conclusively that there was a considerable traffic, both intrastate and interstate, in slaves. Just how great this traffic was, we cannot determine at this late date. There was then no state corporation to which reports must be made; there was no interstate commerce commission; the income tax, as we know it today with all its intrusions into corporate and individual affairs, lay three-quarters of a century in the future. The records of any one of these government agencies, had they existed in the period with which we are concerned, could give us a clue to the size of the traffic.

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Without such records, our surest dependence is upon the figures of the United States Census Bureau. These figures we shall use in some detail a little later. Here we pause only to note that in 1830 there were 2,011,919 slaves in thirteen slave-owning states and that thirty years later, in 1860, this number had increased to 3,839,396, an increase of more than 1,800,000. Whence came this increase? Let us remember that in 1808 the United States finally prohibited the importation of human beings from Africa to be sold into slavery and that there is only one well-authenticated case of a shipload of Africans being smuggled into this country after 1808, and that cargo comprised only about 400 persons. There were some wild stories of other importations but these proved to be either pure fiction or braggadocio accounts of a small handful smuggled into our midst. All these stories and rumors, when added together, could not account for one-half of one per cent of this increase of over 1,800,000. The only source left is the natural increase among the slaves themselves. In thirty years, they almost doubled their numbers. And one has only to study the advertisements and some court decisions to realize that many slave owners set a high value upon slave women who could bear children regularly and thus increase the capital of their masters.

But we are concerned here with conditions in Virginia. From 1790 to 1860, in each decennial census, Virginia harbored within her borders more slaves than any other state in the Union. In 1790, her slaves were almost triple the number held in any one of those states whose slave population ranked next to hers: 292,600 in Virginia, 107,000 in South Carolina, 103,000 in Maryland, 100,500 in ^{N.C.} Maryland. From 1790 to 1860 Virginia's slave population grew from 292,627 to 490,865. This increase was steady except between the census of 1830 and that of 1840; in those ten years Virginia's slave population dropped from 469,757 to 448,987, a loss of about 21,000. Eli Whitney's cotton gin had come into its own; the reign of King Cotton was in full swing and the far South was calling for more field

hands. And the Old Dominion had them, - many more than she herself could use.

The problem of estimating numerically or financially the extent of the slave trade among the states presents almost insuperable difficulties. In his long and detailed last chapter entitled "Estimates as to Numbers, Transactions and Value," Bancroft bemoans the lack of statistics on the subject and says that the United States Decennial Census Reports, ^{afford us} the most nearly reliable and extensive bases for any calculations which we may endeavor to make. But, for his own writing in that last chapter, he expressly disclaims any statistical value for his work; that his work can at best be little, if any, more than a careful study in approximations. This reader of his book would be inclined to emphasize the word careful in that last sentence.

A mere cursory glance at the census figures from 1830 to 1860 would, it seems to me, lead to the inescapable conclusion that Virginia was a major source of supply for the Southern slave markets. A few figures, rounded to the nearest thousand, will be suggestive. In 1830, Alabama had 117,000 slaves; in 1860 her slave population was 435,000. Georgia in 1830 had 217,000, and in 1860 she had 462,000. Mississippi in 1830 had a little under 66,000; in 1860 Mississippi had 436,000. Louisiana in 1830 listed 109,588 and in 1860 she had 331,726. North and South Carolina were both importers and exporters but they showed a considerable net increase: in 1830 North Carolina had 245,000 slaves and by 1860 the number had grown to 331,000. South Carolina in 1830 had 315,000; this figure had risen to 402,000 in 1860. When we compare these large increases with that of Virginia, Virginia's figures for the same period are so small as to seem almost unchanged; in 1830 Virginia had 469,757 and in 1860 she had 490,865, an increase of only 20,000 in the thirty years. Set that figure beside Mississippi's increase for the same period, - an increase of 370,000.

Maryland and little Delaware alone showed a decrease in the number of slaves within their borders in the years under discussion. Delaware dropped from 3,292 to 1,798 and Maryland from 103,000 to 87,000. We have already noted in passing that Maryland was a fruitful source for the southern markets.

It would be unwarrantably tedious for me to attempt to set forth here the method by which Bancroft uses the census figures to attain what he calls his "approximations." Let it suffice to say that, starting with the slave population as given in each decennial census from 1830 to 1860, he first takes into account the natural increase among the Negroes. Each of the three decades shows almost the same rate of increase, - 24.2, 26.6 and 23.4%, respectively. He then makes allowance for emancipations and successful runaways, adding that such allowance is at best only an educated guess. We can perhaps best illustrate this by using Virginia's figures for the decade 1830 - 1860.

Virginia's slave population in 1830 was ⁴669,757. With a natural increase of 24.2% or 113,681, and without any exportations to other states, the number of slaves in Virginia in 1840 should have risen to 538,438. The census for 1840, however, shows only 448,987, so that the apparent exportations and their natural increase amounted to 134,451. Allowances for emancipations, runaways and natural increase reduce this total to 117,938, or an annual average of nearly 11,800. This figure can, with negligible changes, be accepted for each of the three decades preceding the Civil War. The acceptance of this figure as being reasonably accurate means that, in interstate commerce, Virginia exported, in the thirty years just before the War, a total of over 360,000 slaves.

It is almost impossible to set a monetary value upon this traffic but, after considerable reading and figuring, I have come to feel that \$800.00 per slave is a fairly conservative average for the three decades. If this figure be accepted, then a total of 288 million dollars came into the State of Virginia between 1830 and 1860 from the exportation of human beings alone.

Prices were higher in the late 1850's and I believe that in the last five years before the War, at least ~~\$~~1,100 on the average came into the State for each slave exported South. If that figure be accepted, then at least \$12,980,000 came into the state each year between 1855 and 1861.

And I know of no way to calculate accurately the loss in dollars and cents caused by the abolition of slavery at the end of the War. To endeavor to estimate it in the depreciated Confederate currency of 186⁴/₅ or 1865 would give a very erroneous impression. If there were any transactions ^{or near} at the end in United States greenbacks or in gold, they must have been few and far between; I have ~~xxx~~ found no record of such sales. Perhaps it may be fair to take the price (\$1,100) that we have arrived at for 1860 and assume that that would have been the average value of a slave in 1865. Upon such an assumption, the value of the whole slave population ~~xxxxx~~ becomes \$4,223,335,000: this capital investment was wiped out forever when Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox.

In writing this paper I have endeavored to deal with my subject solely from an economic point of view, - an objectively dollar-and-cents point of view. One cannot, however, study the subject without being constantly aware of the fact that he is dealing not simply with economic units but rather with human beings who for so many years were handled as if they were economic units and nothing more. This thought has not been unnoticed in the history of our State; witness, for example, the speech which Thomas Jefferson Randolph delivered in the House of Delegates on January 21, 1832. In the course of this speech he said: "The exportation (of slaves to other Southern States) has averaged 8,500 for the last twenty years . . . It is a practice, and ^{an} increasing practice in parts of Virginia, to rear slaves for market. How can an honorable ~~xxx~~ mind, a patriot, and a lover of his country, bear to see this ancient dominion, rendered illustrious by the noble devotion and

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Patriotism of her sons in the cause of liberty, converted into one grand menagerie where men are to be reared for market like oxen for the shambles. (?)"

And when sudden freedom came, how unready for it these four millions thralls were, we of today know, for we are still living with the problems created by slavery and bequeathed to us by our ancestors. The transition from serfdom to freedom was a violent one and one without precedent. An initial phase of that transition is well described by Ben Ames Williams in his novel, THE UNCONQUERED, through the eyes of a seventeen-year old girl who, from an upper window of her home, is watching her father's former slaves sign their first contract to work for wages - signing, of course, under the supervision of a blue-uniformed representative of the Freedmen's Bureau. Williams wrote as follows: "Lucy had till then been amused by the scene below, but now (as the Negroes began ~~to~~ one by one to scrawl their crossmarks upon the document) it took on a profound solemnity. She thought it was like a marriage, or a baptism. These ignorant people, till today only a little higher than the animals, now scratched a cross upon a sheet of paper and by this act became men; this, their first wholly voluntary decision as to what their lives should be, lifted them out of one estate into another. In the past they had been bound by law, and without their own consent; this new bondage they accepted of their own free ~~will~~ choice. The act of making their mark was their first step into the world of free men. Henceforward they could stand erect, masters of themselves and their lives."

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