

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: “THERE SLAVERY CANNOT DWELL”: AGRICULTURE  
AND LABOR IN NORTHERN MARYLAND, 1790-1860

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History

There were many paths from slavery to free labor in the Americas and the Caribbean. In some cases, freedom came with a thunderclap amid civil war and revolution. Elsewhere, governments sounded slavery's knell through a prescribed process of immediate or delayed emancipation. The people of northern Maryland experienced a different kind of emancipation in the decades preceding the Civil War. Final freedom came when Maryland adopted a new constitution in 1864, but slavery along the Mason-Dixon Line had been collapsing under the combined weight of slave flight, manumission, and the interstate slave trade since the 1820s. This dissertation examines the dynamic, multifaceted relationships that developed among northern Maryland's labor regimes during the region's gradual transition from slavery to free labor.

Having expanded into the Maryland piedmont during the flush decades of the Napoleonic Wars, slavery experienced a sharp decline in the lean years that followed the Panic of 1819. Faced with mounting slave resistance and stagnant demand for wheat, their primary staple, landowners struggled to forge a more efficient, economical workforce. Many espoused the emerging free labor critique and began to

divorce themselves from slavery by liberating their bondspeople or selling them southward. Slavery did not, however, die a quick death. Many owners freed their slaves through delayed manumission agreements, which guaranteed that the institution would linger for several decades. During this extended emancipation, landowners and their free and enslaved workers fought pitched battles over the terms of emancipation and the contours of the emerging free labor regime.

Unlike previous scholarship, which tends to examine the various segments of a given workforce in isolation, this dissertation considers the evolving workforce of northern Maryland as a single, unified whole. It examines how landowners cobbled together workforces from a diverse laboring population of apprentices, indentured servants, slaves, and wage laborers. The study also explores how—and why—the composition of the workforce changed over time, and how the region's myriad labor regimes jostled and merged. In tracing the evolution of northern Maryland's kaleidoscopic workforce, the dissertation considers how wage laborers and slaves navigated the treacherous shoals of the rural economy and how workers' gender, race, and status shaped their experiences.

“THERE SLAVERY CANNOT DWELL” AGRICULTURE AND LABOR IN  
NORTHERN MARYLAND, 1790-1860

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2007

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In July 1842, attorney and poet Francis Scott Key escaped the “dusty avenues” of Washington, D.C., to visit his family’s farm in rural Frederick County, Maryland. As he journeyed through Frederick’s rolling countryside, Key surrendered to the “enchanted” landscape, which was carpeted with shocks of wheat “standing so thick that the valley seems to laugh and sing.” “How shall I break through the temptations around me here,” he wondered, “to go back to the dust & smoke & noise & nonsense of the city?”<sup>1</sup> Like Key, I have sought refuge from Washington’s din in northern Maryland’s fields and pastures. While much of the pastoral scenery that so captivated Key has been engulfed by suburban sprawl, there are places where one can glimpse the region’s agricultural heritage; the times I have spent discovering these places—and their pasts—have been among the happiest of my life.

My travels through northern Maryland, both literal and figurative, were all the more enjoyable because of my companions. Michael W. Fitzgerald served as my undergraduate mentor at St. Olaf College and has been a constant support throughout my graduate career. The research for this dissertation originated in a historical resources survey for the National Park Service, and I am grateful to the dedicated historians at the Antietam National Battlefield and the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal for guiding me to the rich, untapped veins of primary source material on northern Maryland. Numerous archivists and librarians have since assisted me in my research, but special thanks are due to Robert Barnes of the Maryland Hall of Records, who guided me through the warren of county court records and provided constant good

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Scott Key to “P.,” July 1842, Vertical File, MdHS.

cheer. While completing this dissertation at the University of Maryland, I had the opportunity to serve as the graduate assistant at the Freedmen and Southern Society Project, whose editors exposed me to the complexities of agriculture, emancipation, and rural labor. The project's director, Leslie S. Rowland, shepherded me through graduate school, sharpened my often inchoate thoughts, and taught me the importance of precise, thorough scholarship. Ira Berlin took an early interest in this project and insisted that I ask large questions of this small corner of slavery's empire. Likewise, Stephan Palmié encouraged me to consider northern Maryland alongside Caribbean and South American societies where slavery failed to take root. Finally, James Henretta, Clare Lyons, and Edward C. Papenfuss offered thoughtful critiques and questions at my dissertation defense that challenged my assumptions and forced me to sharpen my arguments.

The research and writing of this dissertation would have been impossible without the generous financial support of the University of Maryland at College Park. A fellowship from the History Department allowed me to undertake my graduate studies, while the Mary Savage Snouffer dissertation fellowship awarded by the College of Arts and Humanities afforded me the opportunity to spend the 2006-07 academic year completing the study.

My parents instilled in me an early love of history and made great sacrifices to ensure that I would be the first in my family to attend college. Still, my greatest debt is to my wife, Traci, whose unflagging faith in this project and its author sustained both of them through long stretches. Dedicating this dissertation to her cannot repay

the immeasurable debt I owe, nor can it adequately express my gratitude and love, but I hope that it is a step in the right direction.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|      |  |
|------|--|
| HSFC | Historical Society of Frederick County, Frederick, Md.         |
| LOC  | Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.    |
| MdHR | Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis, Md.                       |
| MdHS | Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Md.                    |
| NARA | National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. |
| UMCP | Special Collections, University of Maryland, College Park, Md. |
| VaHS | Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.                     |
| VaSA | Virginia State Archives, Richmond, Va.                         |
| WCHS | Washington County Historical Society, Hagerstown, Md.          |

## Introduction

On September 17, 1862, the Union's Army of the Potomac and the Confederacy's Army of Northern Virginia clashed on the corn and wheat fields, pastures, and woodlots surrounding Sharpsburg, Maryland. When the smoke cleared, upwards of 23,000 men had been killed or wounded and the irrepressible conflict between societies built upon slavery and free, wage labor had taken a radical turn. Emboldened by the triumph of northern arms, President Abraham Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation that transformed the war into a crusade against slavery. In so doing, he etched Sharpsburg and the Battle of Antietam into the nation's historical memory.<sup>1</sup>

The sleepy village had witnessed other struggles over slavery. One of these battles erupted on the night of December 31, 1803, when the barn and stables on George Carey's farm erupted in flames. While the buildings burned, free black Edward "Ned" Ford, his enslaved wife "Negro Nancy," and Ludwick Speice's slave "Negro Anthony" took advantage of the confusion to break into a nearby store and steal a chest containing \$1,800 in banknotes and silver and several yards of cloth. Within a week, the three suspects were apprehended and lodged in the Washington County jail. Under pressure from county authorities who needed his assistance to convict Ford and Nancy, the twenty-five-year-old Anthony confessed to arson and burglary and testified against his co-defendants. Although Anthony's testimony was inadmissible in Ford's trial for arson, it was sufficient to secure his conviction for

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<sup>1</sup> On the historical significance of the Battle of Antietam, see James M. McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

theft, which translated into a six-year stint on the public roads and a six-year prison sentence. For receiving stolen merchandise, the court sentenced Nancy to be “burnt on the crown of the thumb.” In recognition of Anthony’s services, the court petitioned Governor Robert Bowie to pardon him, arguing that “it was necessary to make use of Anthony as a witness for the state” and that he had been “directed and influenced by Ned.” Governor Bowie agreed. On March 26, 1804, he issued a pardon “on the express condition that the master of the said Anthony do within one hundred days . . . sell the said Anthony to some person residing out of the State of Maryland.” Anthony’s master raised no objections to the governor’s decision. Having only been a slaveholder for three years, Speice seemed eager to rid himself of his troublesome chattel. On May 3, he removed Anthony from the Washington County jail and sold him to Benjamin Dorsey, a slave trader who was driving a coffle overland to Georgia. The bondspeople had not marched more than thirty miles when Anthony struck for freedom. Eager to be reunited with his wife, also a slave, Anthony escaped from Dorsey near Winchester, Virginia, and fled to the neighborhood of his wife’s master near Sharpsburg. Anthony’s freedom was, however, short-lived. On July 24, sheriff Nathaniel Rochester recorded his arrest and imprisonment in the county gaol. But Anthony was not done fighting. After being auctioned in September, he “immediately” escaped and disappeared, leaving the frustrated sheriff to conclude that “it is probable he is now lurking about . . . Sharpsburg.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The fire, burglary, and the arrest of Edward “Ned” Ford, Nancy, and Anthony are described in *Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Weekly Advertiser*, 4 January 1804 and 11 January 1804. The trials of the three suspects are recorded in Washington County Circuit Court, Docket and Minutes, February 1804, MdHR. The judges ruled Anthony’s testimony inadmissible in Ford’s trial for arson—

Anthony was not alone in challenging slavery on northern Maryland's farms and small plantations. Decades before their farm was engulfed in some of the heaviest fighting of the Battle of Antietam, the Jacob Mumma, Sr., fought in a series of skirmishes with their slaves. Despite, or perhaps because of, the small size of his slaveholding (Mumma never owned more than five slaves), Mumma's grasp on his bondspersons was, at best, tenuous. In 1799, Mumma provided Harry with a pass "written in German" to visit Frederick-Town. With few opportunities for a family or community life on his home place, Harry may have been visiting kinfolk. In any case, he seized the opportunity to run away, possibly with the assistance of "a free black woman, by the name of Nancy." Although he was recaptured, Harry remained unbowed. On March 13, 1801, he made another unsuccessful bid for freedom.

Despite being hobbled by a deformed leg and "half worn shoes," George Amos made

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a capital offense—under a 1717 law that allowed slaves and free blacks to testify against slaves and free blacks, "provided such evidence or testimony do[es] not extend to the depriving them, or any of them, of Life or Member." "A Supplementary Act Relating to Servants and Slaves," 8 June 1717, Thomas Bacon, comp., Laws of Maryland at Large (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1765). The law remained in force until 1808, when the General Assembly declared that slaves and free blacks could testify "in all criminal prosecutions against any negro or mulatto or slave, or against any negro or mulatto free or freed." "A Further Supplement to the Act, Entitled, An Act Relating to Servants and Slaves," 24 December 1808, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the Seventh of November, 1808 (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1809). An 1801 law declared, however, that slave testimony would be admissible in all cases in which free blacks stood accused of receiving stolen merchandise. "An Act Respecting Free Negroes," 31 December 1801, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on the Second of November, 1801 (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1802). For Anthony's role in the trial and the judges' appeal for his pardon, see Wm. Claggett and Robert Hughes to Gov. Robt. Bowie, 29 February 1804, Maryland Governor and Council, Pardon Papers, MdHR. Governor Bowie's pardon is recorded in Maryland Governor and Council, Pardon Record, 1791-1806, MdHR. The dates of Anthony's imprisonments are in the Nathaniel Rochester Jail Docket, 1804-1806, Western Maryland Room, Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown, Md. Census returns from 1800 reveal that Ludwick Speice did not own any slaves. He purchased Anthony from Sharpsburg resident John Wade in March 1801 for £130. Purchase agreement between Ludwick Speice and John Wade, 18 March 1801, Washington County Court, Land Records, vol. N, p. 376, MdHR. For descriptions of Anthony's escapes, see Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 15 August 1804 and 1 March 1805. Anthony's second escape may have been more successful than his first. There is no record of his being returned to the Washington County prison in either 1805 or 1806, and the sheriff continued to advertise for his return through late April 1805. Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 26 April 1805.

a bid for freedom in June 1806. Mumma's slaves must have been a rebellious lot, for the following spring, the frustrated slaveholder announced the escape of "a negro man named Perry." Within a few months, Mumma posted advertisements for Sarah, a young who spoke "tolerable good German and English" and whom he believed had been seduced away by "a mulatto fellow at Hughes's forge." In 1814, yet another slave escaped. That August, a "remarkably stout built" blacksmith from St. Mary's County named Sam Tillman escaped with a forged or stolen pass. Mumma's bondspeople may have struck their most decisive blow on the morning of January 2, 1822, when his barn—which housed between \$4,000 and \$5,000 in grain and livestock—caught fire. Suspicion soon focused on the slaves. "It is supposed," wrote a local newspaper, "that it was set by a negro who belonged to Mr. Mumma." Not surprisingly, Mumma accused the truculent Harry, who once again defied his master's authority by pleading not guilty and beating the charges.<sup>3</sup>

What follows is, to a large extent, an attempt to reconstruct the lives of northern Maryland's slaves. It is, however, impossible to disentangle the slaves'

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<sup>3</sup> In 1800, Jacob Mumma, Sr., owned two slaves. By the end of the decade, his slaveholding had swelled to five bondspeople. In 1820, however, he owned one slave—a girl under fourteen. Some of the slaves may have been transferred to his son, Jacob Mumma, Jr., who owned a man and a woman, both between the ages of twenty-six and forty-five, and a girl under fourteen. Manuscript Returns, 1800 U.S. Census, Washington County, Md., NARA; Manuscript Returns, 1810 U.S. Census, Washington County, Md., NARA; and Manuscript Returns, 1820 U.S. Census, Washington County, Md., NARA. For Harry's escapes, see Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser, 13 June 1799; and Alexandria Advertiser, 31 March 1801. George Amos's flight is described in the Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 13 June 1806. Mumma advertised for Perry's return in the Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 3 April 1807. Sarah may have been a recent purchase at the time of her escape, for Mumma noted that she was "formerly the property of Jacob Schnebley, in Hagerstown." Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 7 August 1807. For Samuel Tillman's flight, see Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 17 August 1814. Mumma apparently decided to sell the eighteen-year-old fugitive after his capture. In 1821 Washington County farmer John Davidberger advertised for the return of Samuel Tilghman, a "stout made" blacksmith then aged twenty-four. Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 24 June 1821. For the suspected arson on the Mumma farm, see Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 24 January 1822. Harry's trial and acquittal are recorded in the Washington County Court, Docket and Minutes, March 1822, MdHR.



pasts from those of the region's free black and white farmhands, for their lives were interwoven in the fabric of rural life. One need only glance at the journals of Washington County planter John Blackford to sense the myriad relationships between labor regimes and among workers. In 1829, for example, Blackford harvested his wheat with the assistance of his five slave men, four free blacks (three men and a woman who raked), at least ten white farmhands, and a hired slave woman who cooked.<sup>4</sup> The bonds forged at workplaces radiated outward; they formed a loose web that spanned farms and plantations and linked workers of diverse races, sexes, and statuses. When Blackford refused to grant free black farmhand Henry Blue a cash advance, the frustrated laborer turned to an enslaved woman on Jacob Mumma's farm, who loaned him \$2.<sup>5</sup> Additional evidence of the relationships that developed among the region's motley rural workers surfaced in 1856, when free black Nace Dorsey was imprisoned for stealing a mackerel. The petitions for Dorsey's pardon reveal that the Sharpsburg farmhand sometimes lived with slaves in a house owned by their master and that he passed his evenings at a tavern with white laborers and other "plain people"—many of whom rallied to his defense.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John Blackford Journal, 26 June – 4 July 1829, MdHS.

<sup>5</sup> Blue was a poor risk for his creditor. In November 1836, Blackford noted that "Jacob Mumma's negro woman called" and asked Blackford to "retain 2 Dollars out of H. Blue's wages for her." Blue was absent from Blackford's plantation for much of the following month with an injured leg, but the unnamed slave woman was a persistent collector. In late December, she again visited Blackford and called for "H. Blue's debt – he owes her \$2." John Blackford Journal, 21 November 1836 and 30 December 1836, MdHS.

<sup>6</sup> The account of Nace Dorsey's crime is drawn from Petition of Peter Middlekauf, Wm. Kemple, Samuel King et al., 18 March 1856, Maryland Governor, Miscellaneous Papers, MdHR. The descriptions of Dorsey's living arrangements and of his supporters are in Geo. Thompson Mason to Governor T. W. Ligon, 11 March 1856, Maryland Governor, Miscellaneous Papers, MdHR.

The background against which these workers' lives unfolded was truly a "middle ground" between slavery and freedom.<sup>7</sup> Nestled along the Mason-Dixon Line, northern Maryland encompassed Baltimore, Carroll, Cecil, Frederick, Harford, and Washington counties. The region bore the indelible marks of the societies whose collision—and confluence—during the eighteenth century had created a setting where slavery and free labor jostled, mingled, and merged. Much of this borderland was settled by Pennsylvania Germans pressing southward, a fact reflected in everything from farm management to folk architecture.<sup>8</sup> The diffusion of crops and farming practices blurred the border between Maryland and Pennsylvania; the primary crops grown by farmers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line were wheat, oats, and rye, along with a variety of garden crops. It was, therefore, not surprising that agricultural writers described the Middle Atlantic as a single, unified whole. "Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland may be classed together, from a resemblance of climate, soil, and mode of cultivation," argued one writer, while President George

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Jeanne Fields used this phrase to describe antebellum Maryland in her seminal Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>8</sup> The migration of Pennsylvania Germans into northern Maryland is discussed in J. Thomas Scharf, History of Western Maryland, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1882; reprint, Baltimore, Regional Publishing Company, 1968), 1:58-74; Elizabeth Augusta Kessel, "Germans on the Maryland Frontier: A Social History of Frederick County, Maryland, 1730-1800" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1981); Todd Harold Barnett, "The Evolution of 'North' and 'South': Settlement and Slavery on America's Sectional Border, 1650-1810" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1993); and Robert D. Mitchell, "Agricultural Regionalization: Origins and Diffusion in the Upper South before 1860," International Geography (1972): 740-42. The spread of farm design and folk architecture across the Maryland-Pennsylvania border is discussed in Henry Glassie, "Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," Winterthur Portfolio 7 (1972): 29-58; and Paula Stoner, "Early Folk Architecture of Washington County," Maryland Historical Magazine 72 (Winter 1977): 512-22.

Washington lumped together several Maryland and Pennsylvania counties, declaring them “inferior in their natural state to none in America.”<sup>9</sup>

Northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania were bound together by the rhythms of agricultural production and the movement of commodities, manufactured goods, and people. Throughout the early republic and antebellum decades, a fierce struggle between the merchants of Baltimore and Philadelphia for the region’s surplus prompted the construction of an extensive network of turnpikes, canals, and railroads that fused the border counties into a series of “overlapping hinterlands.”<sup>10</sup> By 1800, wagons hauling produce across the Mason-Dixon Line had become a common sight on country roads. Improvements in the transportation network strengthened interstate connections. In 1823, for example, the completion of turnpikes and canals across the Susquehanna River allowed an “abundant supply of fine Pennsylvania butter, poultry, eggs, [and] pork” from Lancaster County to flood Baltimore’s markets.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the completion of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to Williamsport, Maryland, in 1835 attracted produce from farmers in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, who proclaimed the canal their “natural outlet.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 10 December 1819 [first quotation]; Franklin Knight, ed., Letters on Agriculture from His Excellency George Washington, President of the United States, to Arthur Young, Esq., F.R.S., and Sir John Sinclair, Bart., M.P. (Washington: Published by the Editor, 1847), 30-31 [second quotation].

<sup>10</sup> James Weston Livingood, The Philadelphia-Baltimore Trade Rivalry, 1789-1869 (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1947); Jane N. Garret, “Philadelphia and Baltimore, 1790-1840: A Study of Intra-Regional Unity,” Maryland Historical Magazine 55 (March 1960): 1-13; and Jo N. Hays, “Overlapping Hinterlands: York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, 1800-1850,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 116 (July 1992): 295-321.

<sup>11</sup> Patriot and Commercial Advertiser [Baltimore, Md.], 16 January 1823.

<sup>12</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 21 November 1835.

With the creation of a regional economy, labor, too, flowed across state borders. Migrant farmhands who followed the wheat harvest's northward march from Virginia through Pennsylvania were a mainstay of the workforce. "As usual, quite a large influx of harvest hands from the mountains of Pennsylvania has taken place," announced a Hagerstown, Maryland, paper in 1858, "and these with the aid of reapers, will speedily disrobe the fields of their mantles of waving grain."<sup>13</sup> The forges and foundries that dotted Maryland and Pennsylvania also recruited workers from across the border. In 1830, the Sallone Forge near Carlisle, Pennsylvania, advertised for ironworkers in Baltimore's newspapers.<sup>14</sup> A few bound laborers crossed the Mason-Dixon Line as well. In 1823, John Agnew transported William Little—a "very bright mulatto" who had been bound to him by the overseers of the poor in Adams County, Pennsylvania—to Frederick County, Maryland.<sup>15</sup>

The bleeding of Pennsylvania's agricultural economy across the Mason-Dixon Line struck travelers, who noted that the distinctions between free and slave territory appeared only gradually. In the 1790s, Englishman Isaac Weld described northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania as virtually indistinguishable; it was only after leaving Frederick and proceeding southward into counties where slavery was more firmly entrenched that the differences between free and slave soil became readily apparent.<sup>16</sup> The blurred boundaries created confusion for the enslaved, whose flights

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<sup>13</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 8 September 1858.

<sup>14</sup> American and Commercial Advertiser [Baltimore, Md.], 10 January 1830.

<sup>15</sup> Affidavit of John Agnew, 5 November 1823, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

<sup>16</sup> Describing his journey from Frederick to Montgomery Court House, Weld noted that "[t]he change in the face of the country after leaving Frederick is gradual, but at the end of a day's journey a striking difference is perceptible." The "well cultivated fields, green with wheat," were replaced by

to freedom were complicated by the similarities between Maryland and Pennsylvania. Having resolved to flee from his master in the autumn of 1827, Washington County slave James W. C. Pennington worried that the imperceptible border would thwart his escape. “[H]ow can I expect to succeed,” he fretted, when “I have no knowledge of distance or direction—I know that Pennsylvania is a free state, but I know not where its soil begins or that of Maryland’s ends.” Pennington’s fears were not groundless. After creeping along northern Maryland’s roads for several days, he was dismayed to discover that that he had traveled east, not north, and was eighteen miles west of Baltimore. His uncertainty lingered as he pressed northward. “I know not at what point I should strike Pennsylvania,” he wrote, “or when or where I should find a friend.”<sup>17</sup> Pennington’s dilemma reveals a great deal about the crosscutting currents that buffeted northern Maryland; despite their profound similarities to Pennsylvania, the counties south of the Mason-Dixon Line were fundamentally different because they were embedded in a slave state.

Throughout the eighteenth century, a trickle of Chesapeake slaveholders had transplanted plantation agriculture and slavery to northern Maryland. This movement accelerated in the immediate aftermath of the American Revolution, when struggling

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vast tracts of abandoned and exhausted lands. As he neared his destination, Weld sensed a more profound transformation. Frederick’s industrious yeoman farmers had disappeared and “[t]he eye is assailed in every direction with the unpleasant sight of gangs of . . . slaves toiling under the harsh command of the overseer.” Isaac Weld, Travels through the United States of North American and the Provinces of Upper Canada during the Years, 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London: J. Stockdale, 1800), 133.

<sup>17</sup> James W. C. Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith, or Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of the Presbyterian Church, New York, formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, 3rd ed. (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 22-23.

tobacco planters sought new frontiers in the Maryland piedmont.<sup>18</sup> Although slaves never constituted more than 20 percent of the region's total population, scattered enclaves contained significant numbers of slaves and slaveowners. Within this checkered landscape lay districts dominated by slaveholders and districts dominated by non-slaveholders, but the boundaries between them remained fluid and porous. The melding in northern Maryland of the farm economies of Pennsylvania and the Chesapeake yielded a hybrid that combined grain production, farms and small plantations, and an amalgamated workforce that one historian has described as an "ever changing mosaic of free and unfree laborers."<sup>19</sup>

The economy built by these laborers remained agricultural and rural throughout the antebellum decades. The earliest employment figures from Frederick County reveal that in 1820 approximately 68 percent of the free men whose occupations were recorded were engaged in agriculture. That figure was still higher in Washington County, where 74 percent of the workers earned their livings from the land.<sup>20</sup> The percentage of Frederick County's workforce engaged in agriculture remained constant through 1840, but in Washington County it dropped to 57 percent.<sup>21</sup> By 1860, approximately 26 percent of Frederick County's free workforce consisted of farmers, with an additional 41 percent composed of rural artisans, such

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that most migrating Chesapeake planters bypassed northern Maryland and settled in Kentucky. Bayly Ellen Marks, "The Rage for Kentucky: Emigration from St. Mary's County, 1790-1810," in Geographical Perspectives on Maryland's Past, ed. Robert D. Mitchell and Edward K. Muller (College Park: Department of Geography, University of Maryland, 1979), 108-28.

<sup>19</sup> Charles G. Steffen, From Gentlemen to Townsmen: The Gentry of Baltimore County Maryland, 1660-1776 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 70.

<sup>20</sup> U. S. Census Office, Census for 1820 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1821), 21-28.

<sup>21</sup> U. S. Census Office, Sixth Census or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, as Corrected at the Department of State in 1840 (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1841), 201.

as blacksmiths, coopers, and millers, and of laborers, a slippery term that encompassed farmhands, canal workers, and factory operatives.<sup>22</sup>

Small farms dominated the northern Maryland countryside from its earliest European settlement through the Civil War. In 1792, Governor Thomas Johnson wrote that land in Frederick County was “generally in small farms of 100 to 250 acres,” while Englishman John Palmer observed that “[t]he size of farms, near Hagerstown, is 200 acres, often half in wood.”<sup>23</sup> This pattern seems to have held over the subsequent decades. In 1835, Frederick County’s tax assessment revealed that 90 percent of farms consisted of fewer than 300 acres.<sup>24</sup> By 1860, all but 16 of the county’s 2,365 farms were less than 500 acres in size, as were 1,033 of the 1,038 farms in Washington County.<sup>25</sup>

The workforces employed on northern Maryland’s farms and small plantations were motley collections of blacks and whites of varied legal statuses who labored under a broad spectrum of arrangements; indentured servants, slaves, term slaves, tenants, and wage laborers toiled alongside each other in both field and shops. The diversity of this workforce makes it necessary to shatter some of the traditional boundaries of labor history and to reconfigure its parameters. Labor historians tend to examine particular segments of the workforce in isolation, to excise them from their

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Fitzhugh Hitselberger and John Philip Dern, Bridge in Time: The Complete 1850 Census of Frederick County, Maryland (Redwood City, Calif.: Monocacy Book Co., 1978), xvi-xvii.

<sup>23</sup> Knight, ed., Letters on Agriculture, 34 [first quotation]; John Palmer, Journal of Travels in the United States of North America in Lower Canada, Performed in the Year 1817 (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1818), 39-40 [second quotation].

<sup>24</sup> Frederick County Commissioners of the Tax, Assessment Records, 1835, MdHR.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Census Office, Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census, under the Direction of the Secretary of the Interior (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 203.

larger historical contexts and tease apart the constituent elements of their experiences. To the extent that other segments of the workforce are discussed, it is for comparative purposes alone. Some scholars have, however, recognized the inadequacy of this approach. In 1974, anthropologist and historian Sidney W. Mintz argued that a region's economy could "only be fully understood when slavery, contract labor, forced labor, and all other means of relating labor to the instruments of production are seen in relation to one another."<sup>26</sup> A central tenet of this argument for the interconnectedness of labor regimes was Mintz's conviction that they "were not interchangeable, each representing a variant response to labor needs, nor was it accidental or random that they usually occurred in combined forms."<sup>27</sup> He insisted that labor systems were complementary and interdependent, a conclusion that has been supported by those who have undertaken studies of composite workforces.<sup>28</sup>

Scholars who have attempted integrative studies of a region's different labor institutions have discovered that their histories are inextricably linked. John Bezis Selfa has demonstrated, for example, that foundry owners in the late eighteenth-century Middle Atlantic purchased slaves to reduce their dependence on indentured

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<sup>26</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1974), 94. Mintz expanded upon this argument in subsequent works. In 1978, he suggested that the various labor systems that had coexisted throughout Caribbean history were implemented to serve the larger national and international economies in which they were embedded. It was, therefore, incumbent upon scholars to neither define nor study labor systems in isolation, for all were "linked intimately by the world economy that had . . . given birth to them." Sidney W. Mintz, "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?" *Review 2* (Summer 1978): 81-98.

<sup>27</sup> Mintz, "Was the Plantation Slave a Proletarian?" 86.

<sup>28</sup> In his study of agricultural slavery in ancient Rome, Moses I. Finley came to the following conclusion: "The coexistence of free and slave labor . . . was more than a coincidence in time and place; it was often a symbiosis . . . where an adequate supply of free, seasonal labor was a necessary condition for both the operation of the slave latifundia and the economic survival of the peasantry." Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 77.



servants and wage workers. By creating an artificial labor surplus, iron masters depressed wages, made free laborers more tractable, and spurred “the development of a wage-labor regime.”<sup>29</sup> Decades later, the managers of the Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia, pursued a similar strategy. In 1847, Tredegar’s white ironworkers struck over the management’s decision to employ more slaves in skilled positions. Fearing that a protracted struggle would expose the economic and political fissures within southern society and that a victory for the strikers might threaten slaveholders’ rights, the foundry’s managers replaced the white ironworkers with enslaved blacks. This decision, argues one historian, was designed to undercut white workers’ economic position and, more importantly, to maintain “the social and political order necessary to upholding the slave regime.”<sup>30</sup>

The linkages between labor regimes were not confined to industrial settings. In his study of rural workers in antebellum North Carolina, Wayne K. Durrill found that “day labourers served as a labor reserve for planters” and that an underground economy flourished among slaves and yeoman farmers.<sup>31</sup> Even slavery’s staunchest advocates conceded that certain segments of the southern economy could not operate without wage laborers. Explaining why his farm’s wheat harvests “cannot be executed very perfectly,” agricultural reformer Edmund Ruffin admitted that his “limited force” of slaves could not meet the increased labor demands of the harvest season and that hired farmhands were unavailable. “No laborers, either reapers or

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<sup>29</sup> John Bezis Selfa, “Slavery and the Disciplining of Free Labor in the Colonial Mid-Atlantic Iron Industry,” *Pennsylvania History* 64 (Summer 1994): 270-86.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia A. Schechtner, “Free and Slave Labor in the Old South: The Tredegar Ironworkers’ Strike of 1847,” *Labor History* 35 (Spring 1994): 165-86.

<sup>31</sup> Wayne K. Durrill, “Routine of Seasons: Labour Regimes and Social Ritual in an Antebellum Plantation Community,” *Slavery and Abolition* 16 (August 1995): 161-87.

binders, worth having, can be hired here,” he grumbled, “and all who seek for such employment in harvest, studiously avoid all farms where there is any heavy growth . . . and no whiskey is permitted.”<sup>32</sup>

In reconstructing the history of northern Maryland’s agricultural workforce, this dissertation delves into the experiences of free farmhands, both black and white. Most historians examining the evolution of free labor—both as ideology and as a form of labor extraction—have focused on legal developments or on the economic transformations that reduced artisans to hirelings.<sup>33</sup> These studies have made important contributions to our understanding of free labor, demonstrating that its ideological and legal ascension was an uneven, halting process. Furthermore, they have shown that workers’ experiences were influenced by a constellation of economic and social factors; ethnicity, gender, race, and skill all determined how people fared in the emerging free-labor regime.<sup>34</sup> Still, the literature is riddled with holes, the most obvious being a continued inattention to rural workers. Despite their newfound interest in common laborers, most historians attending to the unskilled have focused

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<sup>32</sup> Edmund Ruffin, “Management of Wheat Harvests,” Report of the Commissioner of Patents for 1850, pt. 2, Agriculture, House Executive Documents, 31st Cong., 2nd Sess., No. 32, serial 601, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> On the legal development of free labor, see Robert J. Steinfeld, The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and James D. Schmidt, Free to Work: Labor Law, Emancipation and Reconstruction, 1815-1880 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998). For an overview of the literature on antebellum artisans, see Bruce Laurie, Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989).

<sup>34</sup> For an overview of this literature, see Eric Foner, “The Idea of Free Labor in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), ix-xxxix.

on urban environments or on modernizing sectors of the nation's economy.<sup>35</sup> To the extent that scholars have considered agricultural laborers, their work has been primarily descriptive.<sup>36</sup> Those undertaking more analytical studies of rural workers have been primarily interested in tracing the evolution of a rural proletariat, a pursuit that is often subsumed to larger arguments about the origins of rural capitalism.<sup>37</sup>

Because both landless whites and free blacks occupied an anomalous place within southern society, and because their experiences often illuminate the Old South's class and racial fault lines, southern historians have been somewhat more attentive to farmhands and tenant farmers.<sup>38</sup> Still, most have viewed these

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Peter Way, Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1770-1810 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Mathew E. Mason, "The Hands Here are Disposed to be Turbulent": Unrest among the Irish Trackmen of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, 1829-1851," Labor History 39 (August 1998): 253-72; Seth Edward Rockman, "Working for Wages in Early Republic Baltimore: Unskilled Labor and the Blurring of Slavery and Freedom" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Davis, 1999); Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>36</sup> Only a handful of studies have focused on antebellum farmhands. See David E. Schob, Hired Hands and Ploughboys: Farm Labor in the Midwest, 1815-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975); Richard D. Brown, "Farm Labor in Southern New England during the Agricultural-Industrial Transition," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 99 (1989): 113-19; and Ross W. Beales, Jr., "The Reverend Ebenezer Parkman's Farm Workers, Westborough, Massachusetts, 1726-82," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 99 (1989): 121-49.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Winifred Barr Rothenberg, From Market Places to a Market Economy: The Transformation of Rural Massachusetts, 1775-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> Although much of the literature on southern free blacks and poor whites has focused on urban settings, a handful of scholars has undertaken studies of rural wage laborers and tenant farmers. The antebellum South's urban wage laborers—black and white—are discussed in Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," American Historical Review 88 (December 1983): 1175-1200; and James Sidbury, Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On rural poor whites, see Charles C. Bolton, Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994); Jeff Forret, Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); and David Franklin Herr, "'Wheat and Tares Together Grow': Common Whites in a North Carolina Slave Society, 1740-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, 2003). For a discussion of poor white women, see Victoria E. Bynum, Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

marginalized southerners primarily as barometers of economic, political, and social change. Thus, historians attending to poor whites or rural free blacks often focus chiefly on particular aspects of their lives—such as their relationships with slaves—in an attempt to glean insight into larger questions.<sup>39</sup> In sum, the literature on landless workers remains fraught with shortcomings and the subject continues to be a ripe field for inquiry.

Slaves constituted an understudied, yet important segment of northern Maryland's rural workforce. Early historians either ignored slavery or emphasized its marginality to the region's economic and social development. They assumed that northern Maryland's predominantly German population opposed slavery on moral and religious grounds, and that the region's primary staples were unsuited to bound labor.<sup>40</sup> These interpretations are not without merit. Some contemporaries noted the Germans' hostility toward slavery, and a cursory review of census records suggests that slavery did indeed wither in Maryland's grain-producing counties. Still, these generalizations must not be accepted uncritically. The numerous fugitive-slave advertisements that describe German-speaking slaves indicate that not all Germans were averse to owning or hiring slaves. Moreover, the decennial federal censuses reveal that the slave populations of some northern Maryland counties increased,

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<sup>39</sup> Historians have devoted considerable attention to the interactions among poor whites, free blacks, and slaves. For a sampling of this literature, see Elizabeth Fortson Arroyo, "Poor Whites, Slaves, and Free Blacks in Tennessee, 1796-1861," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1996): 56-66; Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins*; Timothy James Lockley, *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Herbert C. Bell, *History of the Leitersburg District, Washington County, Maryland* (Leitersburg, Md.: Published by the Author, 1898), 54-56; Thomas J. C. Williams, *A History of Washington County, Maryland, from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time, including a History of Hagerstown* (Hagerstown, Md.: Published by the Author, 1906), 250-51.

rather than decreased, between 1790 and 1820, a circumstance which suggests that slavery's decline was a result neither of its inhabitants' hostility towards the institution nor of its incompatibility with the local economy.

Barbara Jeanne Fields, whose work remains the standard treatment of slavery in antebellum Maryland, identified many of its salient features in the state's northern counties—small slaveholdings, diversified agriculture, and an increased reliance on mechanization and free, wage labor—but her treatment of the early national and antebellum decades sometimes lacks specificity. Because much of her work focuses on the profound transformations unleashed by the Civil War and emancipation, Fields tends to compress the earlier decades, an approach that obscures important changes that occurred in the period immediately following the American Revolution.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Fields devotes but scant attention to white farmhands and offers little on the daily lives of rural free blacks. She observes, for example, that many black families were scattered across several white households and that free blacks and slaves often intermarried, but does not examine how black families marshaled their meager resources to redeem enslaved relatives, establish independent households, and acquire property.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> On the evolution of Maryland's labor systems during the post-revolutionary decades, see T. Stephen Whitman, The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland (Knoxville: University Press of Tennessee, 1997); John Joseph Condon, Jr., "Manumission, Slavery, and the Family in the Revolutionary Rural Chesapeake: Anne Arundel County, Maryland, 1781-1831" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2001); Rockman, "Working for Wages in Early Republic Baltimore"; and Christopher Phillips, "The Roots of Quasi-Freedom: Manumission and Term Slavery in Early National Baltimore," Southern Studies 4 (Spring 1993): 39-66.

<sup>42</sup> Although Fields offers a brief discussion of free blacks' daily lives, her work focuses primarily on the intellectual and disciplinary problems that Maryland's growing free black population created for slaveholders. Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground, 63-89. Fields is not the only scholar to have overlooked rural free blacks. Indeed, most studies of southern free blacks have focused on cities. See, for example, Christopher Phillips, Freedom's Port: The African-American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Sidbury,

By reconstructing the history of northern Maryland's rural wage laborers and reintegrating it with that of the region's slaves, this dissertation aims to bridge the gulf separating two literatures and chart a course towards a broader, more inclusive history of American workers. The need for such a holistic approach has grown more pressing as historians have begun to problematize the stark—and static—dichotomy between slavery and free labor. This reassessment has been driven by recent studies demonstrating that the distinctions between these institutions sometimes blur under close scrutiny. Amid the outpouring of studies demonstrating the geographical and temporal diversity of both slavery and free labor, scholars have discovered numerous instances in which slavery mimicked its ostensible opposite. The enslaved occasionally earned cash wages and engaged in petty production, while their owners embraced elements of bourgeois modernity and attempted to imbue the “peculiar institution” with the flexibility usually associated with free labor.<sup>43</sup> At the same time,

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Ploughshares into Swords, 169-231; Suzanne Lebsock, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860 (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984), 87-110. To a certain extent, this bias seems justified, for urban blacks established more stable—and visible—communities and institutions. Still, studies of urban free blacks do not reflect the experience of most southern free blacks, for as Ira Berlin has noted, “Most free Negroes, like most Southerners, lived in the countryside and earned their living working the land.” Ira Berlin, Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York: Pantheon, 1975; reprint, New York: The New Press, 1992), 218. There are signs that scholars are beginning to expand their focus beyond the cities. For a recent study focusing on rural free blacks, see Melvin Patrick Ely, Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s through the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Loren Schweninger has documented a divergence between slaves' legal status and their daily lives, demonstrating that “a group of virtually free slaves” engaged in self-hire and independent production. “The Underside of Slavery: The Internal Economy, Self-Hire, and Quasi-Freedom in Virginia, 1780-1865,” Slavery and Abolition 12 (September 1991): 1-22. On slaveholders' selective embrace of bourgeois values, see Mark M. Smith, “Time, Slavery, and Plantation Capitalism in the Ante-Bellum South,” Past and Present, no. 150 (February 1996): 142-68; and Steven G. Collins, “System, Organization, and Agricultural Reform in the Antebellum South,” Agricultural History 75 (Winter 2001): 1-27. For examples of slaveholders' attempts to imbue slavery with greater measures of flexibility, to adapt the institution to employments usually dominated by wage labor, and to make the enslaved respond to incentives, see Keith C. Barton, ““Good Cooks and Washers”: Slave Hiring, Domestic Labor, and the Market in Bourbon County, Kentucky,” Journal of American History 84

historians have demonstrated that nominally free labor contained its own economic, legal, and social compulsions.<sup>44</sup> These intertwined developments have led some to challenge, or at least problematize, the conventional slavery-free labor duality.

Such interpretations have not gone unchallenged. The adversaries in the political and military struggles that resulted in the collapse of New World slavery posited a profound antimony between slavery and free labor. This dialectic has been defended by subsequent historians, perhaps none more vigorously than Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. In a thesis advanced and refined in a series of seminal pieces, they have argued that slavery created profound economic, intellectual, and social differences between the South and North. The social relations of production on antebellum southern plantations were governed by a paternalistic ethos that was, in many ways, antithetical to the bourgeois values that dominated the free-labor North. Slaveholders were embedded in national and international capital markets, but their commitment to slavery and its social trappings entailed a complete rejection of free labor. In an expansion of this thesis, Eugene Genovese has maintained that slaveowners celebrated progress and embraced elements of

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(September 1997): 436-60; and Charles B. Dew, Bond of Iron: Master and Slave at Buffalo Forge (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994).

<sup>44</sup> As early as 1948, Richard B. Morris called attention to the legal compulsions that were brought to bear upon antebellum Maryland's free blacks and poor whites. Citing the state's apprenticeship laws and the enforcement of specific performance clauses in free blacks' and maritime workers' labor contracts, Morris argued that freedom was "a mirage for the free Negro" and was "difficult to achieve by the poor white . . . who constantly ran the risks, both at law and in fact, of falling into a status of quasi-bondage." "Labor Controls in Maryland in the Nineteenth Century," Journal of Southern History 14 (August 1948): 385-400. Since the publication of Morris's work, several historians have documented the legal and extra-legal compulsions that were interwoven into the "free" labor markets. See, for example, Steinfeld, The Invention of Free Labor; Schmidt, Free to Work; Amy Dru Stanley, From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Christopher L. Tomlins, "The Ties that Bind: Master and Servant in Massachusetts, 1800-1850," Labor History 30 (Spring 1989): 193-227.

modernity, but never reconciled themselves to free labor, which they considered “a brutal fiction that undermined the propertied classes’ sense of responsibility for the moral and material welfare of society.”<sup>45</sup> Other adherents of the traditional slavery-free labor dichotomy dismiss the passing similarities between these institutions as mere ephemera. Edmund S. Morgan has offered a forceful rejoinder to those seeking to narrow the distance between slavery and free labor: “There could be grades of status within slavery, some slaves winning more privileges than others,” he argues, “but there was no halfway house between slavery and freedom, no set of steps that led progressively from one to the other.”<sup>46</sup>

The debates are further complicated by the proliferation of local studies demonstrating slavery’s diversity. “It is increasingly clear,” Peter Kolchin observes,

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<sup>45</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 34. The argument that southern planters were enmeshed in capitalist markets, but that they managed to keep bourgeois social relations from dominating southern society and from shaping the routines of plantation management received its clearest formulation in Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983). The paternalism that defined the master-slave relationship and provided the framework for the contentious, unequal negotiations between slaveholders and their chattels is discussed in Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Vintage, 1972). Other Marxist historians have also argued that slavery and free labor were incompatible. In her study of antebellum Maryland, Barbara Jeanne Fields suggests that the “middle ground” between slavery and free labor was inherently unstable—and ultimately untenable—because it was impossible to “reconcile two systems of labor discipline whose ideological preconditions stood in diametrical opposition.” Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground, 87.

<sup>46</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, “Introduction to the Francis Parkman Prize Edition,” in American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia, Francis Parkman Prize Edition (New York: History Book Club, 1995), xiv. In the same spirit, Tom Brass has challenged those seeking to “dissolve the free/unfree labour distinction or else to dismiss its significance.” Tom Brass, “Introduction,” in Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues, ed. Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (New York: Lang, 1997), 20. Brass was responding specifically to an argument advanced by Robert J. Steinfeld and Stanley L. Engerman, who suggest that the distinction between free and unfree labor was an “arbitrary not a natural classification” and was shaped by highly contingent—and specific—economic, legal, and political circumstances. “Labor—Free or Coerced? A Historical Reassessment of Differences and Similarities,” in Free and Unfree Labour: The Debate Continues, ed. Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (New York: Lang, 1997), 107-26.



“that we must come to grips not so much with slavery as with slaveries.”<sup>47</sup> If slavery was not a static, undifferentiated institution, it may be worth pondering whether broad, overarching questions about its workings can yield meaningful insights. Clearly, there was a distinction between slavery and free labor, but the sharpness of that divide varies with one’s vantage point. Like an image viewed through a lens shifting in and out of focus, the boundaries of slavery and free labor become clear or blurred as one proceeds through time and progresses downward from the level of ideological and legal debates, through the operation of regional labor markets, and finally to level of individual workers. When viewed from the level of economic, legal, or political abstraction, the slave-free divide seems precise and unambiguous. In practice, however, the distinction between these regimes were more complicated. As historian O. Nigel Boland has noted, labor systems “rarely conform to social scientists’ ideal types.” It is, therefore, incumbent upon historians to narrow their focus, to understand how labor regimes operated and interacted in specific times and places.<sup>48</sup> Because our perceptions of the slave-free divide change with our vantage point, and because labor regimes can be neither defined nor understood in isolation, this dissertation eschews a single, timeless duality between slavery and free labor and instead posits a series of multiple, overlapping relationships that were profoundly historical.

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Kolchin, “Variations of Slavery in the Atlantic World,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 59 (July 2002): 551.

<sup>48</sup> O. Nigel Boland, “Proto-Proletarians?: Slave Wages in the Americas,” in From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas, ed. Mary Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 123-47.

In examining the dynamic, multifaceted relationship between slavery and free labor, the dissertation combines chronological and thematic approaches. The opening chapter, “‘The Land Flows with Milk and Honey’: Land and Labor, 1783-1815,” treats northern Maryland’s economy and workforce during the early republic. These were prosperous times for the region. With farming and trade in Europe and the Caribbean disrupted by the Napoleonic Wars, Americans reaped windfalls by supplying the belligerents and their colonies with foodstuffs. As commodity prices soared, northern Marylanders waded deeper into export markets and were drawn more closely into Baltimore’s commercial orbit. In these heady decades, many cast caution to the wind; they speculated in land, purchased consumer goods on credit, and amassed fortunes in dubious notes issued by rural banks and turnpike companies.

While the region basked in prosperity, employers stitched together workforces from whatever pieces were available. Experimentation and opportunism were the hallmarks of labor arrangements; farmers eager to increase production purchased slaves, engaged indentured servants, and hired wage laborers. There was no consensus on the relative merits of different labor regimes, and few believed that free and unfree labor were incompatible. Moreover, the boundaries, definitions, and futures of the region’s labor regimes were unsettled. Indentured servitude was waning and coming under increased scrutiny, but bound whites continued to toil alongside enslaved blacks. Having weathered the American Revolution, slavery seemed poised to expand from Maryland’s tobacco-producing counties into the piedmont. In the war’s aftermath, tobacco planters on the Eastern Shore and in southern Maryland staggered under the combined weight of debts and flagging

markets. Many switched from tobacco to grain, which created a surplus of slave labor that was partially absorbed by farmers and planters in the prosperous piedmont. In some northern Maryland counties, the growth of the slave population outpaced that of the white population between 1790 and 1820. Still, slavery's long-term future was uncertain. Maryland had liberalized its manumission laws after the Revolution, and the free black population of the state's northern counties posted dramatic increases during the early republic.

The expansion of slavery into the Maryland piedmont was, to a certain extent, a product of employers' ambivalence towards hired laborers. Farmers often balked at hirelings, who commanded high wages and possessed greater legal freedoms in the post-revolutionary decades. Stripped of the legal compulsions they had once wielded over hired laborers and denied the right to punish free workers physically, many employers doubted whether hirelings could be molded into an efficient workforce.

The constellation of labor arrangements in northern Maryland began to realign during the 1810s and 1820s. The ideological and legal borders between free and unfree labor hardened and became increasingly rigid as the antebellum decades progressed. Chapter 2, "'A Strange Reverse of Fortune': Land and Labor, 1815-1860," examines the causes of this transformation and considers why many of northern Maryland's farmers and planters abandoned slavery and embraced free labor. It locates the roots of this momentous change in both national trends and developments internal to northern Maryland. On both the national and local levels, a variety of economic, legal, and political forces conspired against indentured servitude in the decades following the Revolution, thus obliterating an important "halfway

house” between slavery and free labor. Without indentured servitude, labor arrangements were increasingly divided into a dichotomy between slavery and free labor. The strains upon northern Maryland’s economy during the lean years that followed the end of the Napoleonic Wars widened the chasm between slavery and free labor. The return of peace brought the region’s decades of prosperity to a crashing halt. Stagnating commodity markets, financial panics, crop failures, and increased competition from western farmers all combined to create an economic malaise that lasted for much of the antebellum period.

Hard times forced landowners to scrutinize their operations and to reconsider the composition of their workforces. Eager to resurrect northern Maryland’s fortunes, agricultural reformers and political economists implored landowners to rid themselves of slaves and to employ wage laborers, a move they believed would foster agricultural innovation and promote European immigration. Farmers struggling to regain their footing became convinced that slavery was an outmoded, inefficient form of labor extraction and, perhaps more important, an impediment to recovery. In the 1820s and 1830s, a growing chorus of writers posited a stark dichotomy between slavery and free labor—one that locked these institutions in an almost Manichean struggle for supremacy.

Not only was slave property deemed unprofitable, it was becoming untenable. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Pennsylvania was transformed into free soil and a haven for runaway slaves through the workings of its gradual emancipation act and the implementation of anti-kidnapping statutes and a personal liberty law. Faced with an economy that was in the doldrums and fearful

that their slaves would escape northward, slaveholders on the sectional border began to rid themselves of their human chattels. The number of manumissions climbed during the 1820s as owners grew more apprehensive about the security of slave property and more confident in their ability to command free laborers. The decision to abandon slavery did not necessarily entail financial loss, for the onset of hard times in northern Maryland coincided with slavery's expansion into the Deep South. Eager to mend finances that had been torn during the 1810s and 1820s, northern Maryland's slaveowners consigned hundreds, perhaps thousands, of bondspeople to the South's cotton and sugar plantations. Growing involvement in the interstate trade accelerated slavery's decline within the region. The constant threat of sale drove the enslaved to greater acts of resistance, which, in turn, compelled more slaveowners to either manumit their chattels, sell them south, or risk the total loss of the financial value and labor through flight. The combined effects of manumission, flight, and sale were soon apparent in census returns; between 1820 and 1860, northern Maryland's slave population dropped precipitously.

Yet the turn from slavery to wage labor did not result in a sudden, complete restructuring of the rural workforce. Unlike the Deep South, where freedom struck with a thunderclap amid the Civil War, northern Maryland experienced emancipation as a long, extended process. While slavery lingered, farmers continued to cobble together workforces from slaves, free blacks, and hired whites. Their strategies for recruiting and disciplining their often diverse crews are examined in Chapter 3, "‘There are objections to black and white, but one must be chosen’: Managing Farms and Farmhands, 1815-1860." Regardless of the composition of their workforces,

northern Maryland's landowners labored under certain imperatives; they needed to eliminate, or at least trim, the cost of supporting their workers' dependent kin and to rid themselves of surplus hands during slower seasons, all the while guaranteeing that there would be enough workers to harvest the wheat. As Barbara Jeanne Fields has observed, Maryland's employers "wanted to have it both ways. They wanted labor readily available when they needed it and prepared to serve on terms they found acceptable—something that slavery could guarantee. But they did not want the charge upon their operating capital of maintaining that labor when they did not need its services—something that slavery required."<sup>49</sup> To balance these competing imperatives, employers of free labor winnowed workers they perceived as unproductive—women, children, the elderly—from their rolls, and crafted economic and legal stratagems to bring hired farmhands to heel. For their part, slaveowners grafted the most attractive elements of free labor onto the "peculiar institution." They offered cash payments to induce the enslaved to work harder at harvest. They found additional chores to occupy their slaves during slack times. They dangled the promise of freedom before bondspeople to guarantee their obedience. And they began shifting the burden of their slaves' support and reproduction onto their free black relatives. Likewise, all landowners struggled to break their free and enslaved workers of the excessive drinking and other pre-industrial habits that characterized farmwork. Thus, when viewed from the perspective of northern Maryland's farmers and planters, the distinction between slavery and free labor appears murky; these competing regimes were both shaped by the seasonal rhythms of wheat production.

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<sup>49</sup> Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground, 84.

Yet efforts to transplant slavery to the Maryland piedmont exposed the limits of the institution's flexibility. On the most basic level, masters found that slavery and grain farming were an imperfect fit because women and children were incapable of performing many essential tasks. Most women and children lacked the upper-body strength to swing cradles and scythes during the harvest, and few could steer the heavy double-shovel ploughs used for planting. While landowners could refuse to support their free workers' dependents, those who owned enslaved men and their families were burdened with supporting workers whose productive and reproductive labor was of little value to them. In a larger sense, northern Maryland provided poor soil for slavery because the daily routines of wheat production diluted slaveholders' mastery. Unlike their counterparts in the Deep South, who toiled in gangs under the watchful eye of an overseer, slaves in northern Maryland often worked alone or in small squads alongside free blacks and white hirelings. In such settings, slaves attempting to escape found innumerable opportunities to steal a march on their pursuers and sometimes discovered allies among their coworkers.

Although slavery and free labor coexisted on northern Maryland's farms, the boundary between slavery and freedom was neither obscured nor undermined. When viewed through the lens of individual slaves and slaveholders, the distinctions between slavery and freedom snap into sharp relief. Both masters and their bondspersons were mindful that their remote corner of slavery's empire was enmeshed in a larger plantation complex. The interstate slave trade cut broad swathes through northern Maryland's slave communities and spurred the enslaved to seek freedom

through flight, the threat of which sometimes prodded slaveholders toward manumission.

Chapter 4, “‘A Bargain’: Negotiating the Limits of Slavery, 1815-1860,” continues the examination of manumission, the interstate slave trade, and resistance begun in the preceding chapters, but devotes particular attention to the unequal negotiations between masters and mistresses eager to preserve slavery and bondspeople desperate to escape. Both parties confronted two central and inescapable realities: the enslaved could inflict grievous financial loss upon their owners by escaping to Pennsylvania, and slaveholders could destroy black families and communities by selling their slaves southward. The corrosive effects of flight and the domestic traffic eroded the master-slave relationship. To restore a tenuous peace and to eliminate the intertwined threats of flight and sale, slaveholders and their chattels hammered out delayed manumission or term slavery agreements, whereby slaveowners promised to free their slaves after a certain date—a pledge that was contingent upon the slaves’ continued obedience. Bondsmen and women who entered into such agreements not only received the promise of freedom, they received a legal guarantee that they would not be sold outside Maryland. Slaveowners thus negated the threat of flight and found a new means of extracting years of labor from their slaves, while the enslaved secured protection from the ravages of the interstate trade.

The wall separating slavery and freedom may have been the most prominent feature in northern Maryland’s labor market, but the terrain of free labor was neither stable nor unvaried. Indeed, the rocky ground navigated by free black and white



farmhands belied the idealized image of free labor that abolitionists and liberal economists had forged as a counterpoint to slavery.<sup>50</sup> Chapter 5, “‘Chased Out on the Slippery Ice’: Free Black and White Laborers, 1815-1860,” examines how landless workers survived in an economy whose defining characteristics were scarcity and uncertainty. Unskilled and unorganized, rural free laborers faced a desperate struggle for survival; they were buffeted by seasonal and cyclical unemployment, and their non-wage economic activities were constricted by a legal system that was designed to maintain slaveholders’ authority. Single women’s prospects were especially dismal. Unable to perform the heavier branches of agricultural labor and confronting a labor market that pegged their wages lower than men’s, women eked out a living on the margins of the rural economy. Meanwhile, the growing number of African Americans who escaped slavery discovered that the institution cast a long shadow. Denied the labor of relatives who remained in bondage, and hobbled by laws that circumscribed their movements and limited their economic options, free blacks found themselves in a legal shadowland.

The interplay between the multiple boundaries between slavery and freedom are examined in the dissertation’s conclusion. Northern Marylanders lived on slavery’s tattered margin, a circumstance that had a profound influence on how workers experienced both slavery and free labor. Like the borders of tectonic plates, the contours of the region’s labor regimes—and of workers’ lives—were continually

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<sup>50</sup> For discussions of how economists and anti-slavery ideologues crafted free labor against the foil of slavery, see David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Seymour Drescher, The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Foner, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men. The gulf between free labor ideology and the realities of wage labor are explored in Thomas C. Holt, The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

reshaped by collisions. Not all the forces shaping the fault lines were local. Northern Maryland was part of a slaveholding state whose legal and political apparatuses were forged by, and for, Chesapeake planters. They were, moreover, inextricably linked to the vibrant slave societies developing along the South's cotton frontier. The tangled intersection where labor systems collided—and where local and national forces converged—was the setting where the slavery-free labor boundary emerged.

## Chapter 1

“The Land Flows with Milk and Honey”: Land and Labor, 1783-1815

While journeying northwest through Montgomery County, Maryland, in 1796, Polish nobleman Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz was sickened by the “ill-kept” houses of poor white farmers, the scrawny livestock, and the plantations whose tobacco crops were “watered by the sweat of unhappy negroes.” Niemcewicz found the scenery more agreeable as his stagecoach rolled beyond the neighborhoods of Montgomery County dominated by tobacco and slaves and into Frederick County, where farmers raised wheat and owned fewer bondspeople. As his coach lumbered through southeast Frederick County, Niemcewicz observed steady improvements in the land and “more abundant growth” in the fields. By the time he arrived in Frederick-Town, Niemcewicz was exclaiming, “There is nothing more fertile than this land.” He marveled at the prosperous farms, the luxuriant fields that “groan under the weight of Indian corn, wheat, rye, etc.,” the meadows “covered with clover,” and the sprawling orchards “filled with fruit.” The roads and turnpikes that laced the countryside were crowded with “great wagons” hauling the farmers’ bounty to markets and mills in Baltimore. “In a word,” the excited nobleman concluded, “the land flows with milk and honey.”<sup>1</sup>

Niemcewicz had glimpsed the salient features of northern Maryland’s farm economy. The transition he observed between Montgomery and Frederick counties

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Travels through America in 1797-1799, with Some Further Accounts of Life in New Jersey*, trans. Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, N.J.: Grassman Publishing Co., 1965), 110-13.

reflected the region's location on the unstable fault line between slavery and freedom, while the prosperous country surrounding Frederick-Town bespoke its deepening involvement in robust international flour markets. Beginning in 1793, the French Revolution flared into a series of conflicts that disrupted both European agriculture and international trade. Into this void stepped the Middle Atlantic's farmers and merchants, who scrambled to supply European and Caribbean markets with American foodstuffs, especially flour. The Pennsylvania-German farmers and Chesapeake planters who had settled northern Maryland responded to the thriving commodity markets with alacrity. Between 1793 and 1815, the agricultural boom and financial expansion that fueled Baltimore's meteoric rise as a milling and shipping center enmeshed northern Maryland's farmers in the city's hinterland and cemented them in larger national and international markets. Baltimore's merchants—along with their competitors in Alexandria and Philadelphia—financed the construction of a dense web of turnpikes and canals throughout the hinterlands. Rural merchants and farmers greeted these developments with cheers and promises of financial support.<sup>2</sup>

It was against this background that northern Maryland's landowners undertook the arduous chore of assembling their workforces. The task often proved bedeviling, for the region's myriad labor regimes experienced seismic shifts in the years immediately following the American Revolution. Indentured servitude was waning. Slavery may have become a moribund institution throughout New England and the northern Middle Atlantic, but it had survived revolutionary upheaval in

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<sup>2</sup> The intensification of commercial agriculture during the Napoleonic Wars is discussed in Brooke Hunter, "Wheat, War, and the American Economy during the Age of Revolution," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 62 (July 2005): 505-26; George Terry Sharrer, "Flour Milling and the Growth of Baltimore, 1783-1830" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1975), 90-135.

Maryland. Indeed, the flourishing farm economy of the state's northern counties drew slaves from both the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland. Yet slavery's future was uncertain along the Mason-Dixon Line. Even as the number of slaves in Frederick and Washington counties climbed, Maryland's liberalized manumission law was fueling the explosive growth of the free black population. In Cecil and Harford counties, manumission conspired with soil exhaustion and the demand for bound laborers in Baltimore to send the slave population tumbling downward (see Table 1.1).

The apparent ambivalence that marked employers' attitudes towards slavery was matched by their profound misgivings about free, wage labor. Northern Marylanders were hesitant to embrace the nascent free-labor regime. Hired workers were probably scarce, for the white populations of Cecil, Frederick, and Washington counties either declined or stagnated between 1790 and 1810 (see Table 1.1). Maryland's workers benefited from a sharp, albeit temporary increase in their wages during the 1790s (see Figure 1.1). The shortage of hired farmhands and the spike in the earnings tipped the field against employers. "[T]he labourers, owing to their small numbers in proportion to those in Europe, have it in their power to prescribe their own prices, instead of submitting to those of proprietors," observed a German traveling near the Mason-Dixon Line. In 1796, he was astonished to find that harvesters near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, had demanded daily wages of \$1.25, "a pint of Madeira wine, and a half-pint of rum a day, and received it."<sup>3</sup>

The egalitarian impulse of the American Revolution had narrowed the

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<sup>3</sup> "Interesting Travels in America, Translated from the German of Bulow," The Port-Folio, 5 June 1802.

distance between employers and their bosses. The assertiveness—the presumptuousness—of American workers shocked English farmer John Parkinson, who leased a farm in Baltimore County between 1799 and 1800. “It is very common,” he observed, “if you step out of your house into the garden, to find a man of any description (black or white) when you come in, to have lighted his pipe and [sat] down in a chair, smoking, without apology.” Parkinson complained that anyone who challenged his workers was viewed as “an enemy to the rights of man, and infringer of the rights which they and their fathers have fought for.”<sup>4</sup> Workers were further emboldened by legal developments that expanded their legal freedoms. Throughout the nation, a series of court decisions and laws redrew the boundaries between voluntary and involuntary labor and stripped employers of older forms of compulsion—including physical punishment, criminal sanction, and specific performance clauses—that had long been wielded over workers. Thus, landowners grumbled that hirelings demanded exorbitant wages and wondered whether this rootless, often truculent workforce could be brought to heel.<sup>5</sup>

### **“A Rage for Mills”: Farmers and Markets in the Early Republic**

Northern Maryland’s farmers and planters were no strangers to commercial agriculture. They had expanded production to meet the Continental Army’s demands

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Parkinson, The Experienced Farmer’s Tour in America: Exhibiting, in a Copious and Familiar View, The American System of Agriculture and Breeding of Cattle, with Its Recent Improvements (London: John Stockdale, 1805), 31-32.

<sup>5</sup> For the impact of the American Revolution on employment relations, see Robert J. Steinfeld, The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 123-72; and Christopher L. Tomlins, Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

during the American Revolution, and they waded deeper into national and international markets after independence. During the late eighteenth century, the region's farmers moved more extensively into wheat cultivation, with Frederick County posting a 300 percent increase between 1770 and 1800.<sup>6</sup> Much of this grain found its way to market. In 1785, German immigrant Christian Boerstler observed that "much grain was planted" outside Hagerstown in Washington County and that "almost all farmers have their wheat ground into flour that is packed into barrels . . . and taken to port cities."<sup>7</sup> The deepening commitment to commercial agriculture manifested itself in a bifurcated market, with stagnant local demand standing in stark contrast to thriving export markets. In 1793, a Frederick editor noted that farmers in the county's more remote districts needed better access to larger markets because "wheat or flour does not command cash" on the local market.<sup>8</sup> Frederick County farmer David Shriver concurred. Explaining why he needed to transport his wheat to

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<sup>6</sup> On the market orientation of the farmers who settled southern Pennsylvania, northern Maryland, and portions of northern Virginia, see Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977); James T. Lemon, The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1972), 185-228; Kenneth E. Keller, "The Wheat Trade on the Upper Potomac, 1800-1860," in After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, ed. Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000), 21-24; and Warren R. Hofstra and Warren D. Mitchell, "Town and Country in Backcountry Virginia: Winchester and the Shenandoah Valley, 1730-1800," Journal of Southern History 59 (November 1993): 619-46. The growth of the Middle Atlantic's flour trade during the late eighteenth century is discussed in Hunter, "Wheat, War, and the American Economy during the Age of Revolution"; Sharrer, "Flour Milling and the Growth of Baltimore, 1783-1830"; and Elizabeth Augusta Kessel, "Germans on the Maryland Frontier: A Social History of Frederick County, Maryland, 1730-1800" (Ph.D. diss., Rice University, 1981), 97-99.

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey A. Wyand, trans., "The Journal of Doctor Christian Boerstler: Prominent Funkstown Resident, 1785-1866," 6 July 1787, MdHS.

<sup>8</sup> Bartgis's Maryland Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 25 April 1793.

Baltimore or the District of Columbia, he simply stated that “I can’t sell it at home,” suggesting that local markets were either non-existent or unprofitable.<sup>9</sup>

The intensification of commercial production gave rise to a thriving milling industry in rural Maryland. In 1792, Governor Thomas Johnson was astounded by Frederick County’s “rage for mills,” an observation seconded in 1798 by a Frederick newspaper that counted “upwards of 80 grist mills, busily employed in the manufacture of flour.”<sup>10</sup> While touring Washington County in 1806, geographer Joseph Scott found no slackening in the milling industry. Antietam Creek alone turned fourteen mills that sent “large quantities of flour” to merchants in Alexandria, Georgetown, and Baltimore.<sup>11</sup> In 1810, Frederick County was home to 101 flour mills with an annual production 84,080 barrels, while Washington County’s 52 mills produced an impressive 86,250 barrels.<sup>12</sup>

During the early national era, northern Maryland’s farmers and millers were cemented into Baltimore’s commercial orbit; they kept a weather eye on fluctuations in the city’s economy, and they viewed the local economy through the prism of its flour markets. As early as 1787, farmers near Liberty-Town in Frederick County were gathering to toast “the success of the plough” and to “enquire [about] the price

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<sup>9</sup> David Shriver to Andrew Shriver, 1 May 1795, Shriver Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>10</sup> Knight, ed., Letters from His Excellency George Washington, 34-35 [first quotation]; The Key [Frederick, Md.], 20 January 1798 [second quotation].

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Scott, A Geographical Description of the States of Maryland and Delaware; Also of the Counties, Towns, Rivers, Bays, and Islands, with a List of the Hundreds in Each County (Philadelphia: Kimbee, Conrad, and Co., 1807), 148.

<sup>12</sup> Tench Coxe, A Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States of America, for the Year 1810 (Philadelphia: A. Cornman, 1814), 87.



of Wheat and Flour, at Baltimore.”<sup>13</sup> That same year, Washington County planter Elie Williams weighed his decision to market flour against trends in the city’s markets. “I have two loads of flour,” he wrote his brother, “but from the accounts of the low price of flour in Balto. shall decline sending it at present of in hopes of a greater demand and of course a better price.”<sup>14</sup> Millers courted farmers by emphasizing that their operations were geared to the Baltimore trade. In 1811, a Frederick County miller advertised that his mill was “built to manufacture flour for the Baltimore market,” while another boasted that his prices were “within a few cents” of those offered by the city’s millers.<sup>15</sup> Mindful that their flour’s price would, in part, be determined by the grade it received from inspectors in Baltimore, rural millers prided themselves on receiving high marks. In 1817, rumors that his flour had been condemned in Baltimore sparked a furious response from Frederick miller Jacob Cronise, who threatened to sue his “slanderers.”<sup>16</sup>

Although wheat was, to Governor Johnson’s reckoning, “a cash article and therefore the chief that we cultivate for market,” farmers’ commercial activities were not confined to small grains.<sup>17</sup> Joseph Scott found that Washington County’s farmers distilled “large quantities of whiskey” for coastal markets, an observation seconded

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<sup>13</sup> Maryland Chronicle, or Universal Advertiser [Frederick, Md.], 21 February 1787.

<sup>14</sup> Elie Williams to Otho Holland Williams, 21 October 1787, Otho Holland Williams Papers, MdHS.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Town Herald, 22 June 1811 [first quotation]; Frederick Town Herald, 24 October 1818 [second quotation].

<sup>16</sup> Frederick Town Herald, 9 February 1817.

<sup>17</sup> Franklin Knight, ed., Letters on Agriculture from His Excellency George Washington, President of the United States, to Arthur Young, Esq., F.R.S., and Sir John Sinclair, Bart., M.P. (Washington: Published by the Editor, 1847), 34-35.

by census returns indicating that the county's ninety-two distilleries produced 200,043 gallons of alcohol in 1810.<sup>18</sup> Landowners also continued to raise tobacco, although the extent and duration of their involvement in its culture remains unclear.<sup>19</sup> Livestock herding rounded out farmers' market activities. In 1792, a French traveler reported that landowners in Frederick and Washington counties "raise much livestock, which they drive to Baltimore."<sup>20</sup> In addition to marketing their own stock, farmers sold fodder to backcountry drovers who were herding cattle and swine to Baltimore and Philadelphia.<sup>21</sup>

Before the construction of canals and turnpikes, most farmers marketed their produce on Potomac River flatboats, which carried large shipments of flour along with whiskey, deerskins, venison, and maple syrup. Although the volume of this trade is difficult to gauge, anecdotal evidence suggests that it flourished at the turn of the century. In 1789, a traveler in Old Town—one of Washington County's largest Potomac River entrepôts—declared that "the place puts me very much in mind of a seaport," with crowds of sailors and masters "running up and down, disposing of their

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, Geographical Description, 148; Coxe, Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States, 83.

<sup>19</sup> In 1791, French traveler Ferdinand Marie Bayard noted that landowners in Frederick County "have been growing tobacco profitably for several years," but he was silent on its importance in relation to other crops. Tobacco was probably the principal staple of some of the larger planters who settled along the Potomac River in Frederick and Washington counties. When an early frost struck southern Washington County in 1792, a local newspaper reported that the tobacco had been "totally destroyed" and that "the loss sustained . . . is very considerable in this part of the county, and will be severely felt by the suffering individuals, whose labor and expectations for the whole season have been blasted." Ferdinand Marie Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman in Maryland and Virginia with a Description of Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1791, or Travels in the Interior of the United States, to Bath, Winchester, in the Valley of the Shenandoah, etc. etc., trans. Benjamin C. McCary (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Edward Brothers, 1950), 34; Washington Spy [Hagerstown, Md.], 26 September 1792.

<sup>20</sup> Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman, 34.

<sup>21</sup> Washington Spy [Hagerstown, Md.], 7 September 1791.

cargoes of rum, wine &c., and purchasing wheat and bacon to take down again.”<sup>22</sup>

Surveyor Tobias Lear offered a similar description of the Potomac trade in 1793.

“Boats, carrying from one hundred and fifty to two hundred barrels of flour already pass from Cumberland to Great Falls; and many thousands of barrels of flour have been brought in boats . . . during the present year.”<sup>23</sup> John Thompson Mason’s

accounts with the owners of several barges provide another barometer of western Maryland’s flour trade. Between 1806 and 1808, the Washington County planter increased the number of barrels of flour he shipped annually from 615 to 1,045.<sup>24</sup>

Mason’s barrels would have joined a massive surge of flour descending the Potomac that sometimes overwhelmed draymen and merchants. In 1796, a Georgetown trader advised an associate that their firm’s flour should remain in warehouses at the Great Falls because the volume of flour shipped that spring had driven carriage rates “uncommonly high.”<sup>25</sup>

Northern Maryland’s integration into larger national and international markets triggered concern that farmers would become dependent upon foreign wares and foodstuffs. Some worried that farmers wading deeper into foreign markets risked losing a crucial measure of self-sufficiency. In 1786, an anonymous writer from

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<sup>22</sup> Pennsylvania Gazette, 10 June 1789. For descriptions of flourishing commerce on the Potomac River and its Maryland tributaries, see Dan Guzy, “Bateaux, Mills, and Fish Dams: Opening Navigation on the Monocacy River and the Conococheague and Antietam Creeks,” Maryland Historical Magazine 98 (Fall 2003): 281-301; Niemcewicz, Travels, 161; Maryland Chronicle and Universal Advertiser [Frederick, Md.], 5 April 1786; The Hornet [Frederick, Md.], 20 March 1804; and Edward Green Williams to William E. Williams, 10 October 1817, Williams Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>23</sup> Tobias Lear, Observations on the River Potomack, The Country Adjacent, and the City of Washington (New York: Samuel Loudon & Son, 1793), 9.

<sup>24</sup> John Thompson Mason, Account Books, LOC.

<sup>25</sup> Horatio Ross to Major Henry Bedinger, 19 March 1796, MdHS.

Frederick County begged his neighbors to “remit something of our rage for raising wheat for exportation,” a dangerous trend that had “changed and enervated our whole system” and “led us to the brink of ruin.” He chastised farmers and planters for devoting all their fields to wheat and importing “malt, hops, beer, soap, candles, even beef, pork and potatoes in considerable quantities.”<sup>26</sup> These fears may have exaggerated, for there is evidence suggesting that most farms conformed to the “composite farm” model described by historian Richard Bushman. In the early republic period, Bushman has argued, most growers integrated both market-oriented and subsistence agriculture into their overall economic strategies.<sup>27</sup> Of Frederick County, Maryland Governor Johnson observed that, while farmers raised large quantities of wheat for export, they also tended orchards and cultivated beans, cabbages, carrots, corn, potatoes, and turnips “for family consumption . . . seldom with a view towards sale.”<sup>28</sup> In 1819, an Englishman traveling through Frederick County noted that farmers continued to mix market and non-market activities. “On farms of 300 acres,” he wrote, “100 is in wood, 100 in corn and rye, for the support of the farm establishment, and 100 is in wheat, clear gain, which might be put in the pocket every year.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Maryland Chronicle and Universal Advertiser [Frederick, Md.], 8 February 1786.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Lynn Bushman, “Markets and Composite Farms in Early America,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, 55 (July 1998): 351-74.

<sup>28</sup> Knight, ed., Letters from His Excellency George Washington, 34-35.

<sup>29</sup> W. Faux, Memorable Days in America: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States, Principally Undertaken to Ascertain, by Positive Evidence, the Condition and Probable Prospects of British Emigrants (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1823), 149-50.

Far from being concerned about the disruptive potential of commercial agriculture, most farmers in northern Maryland sought improved access to commodity markets. The periodic disruption in river transportation occasioned by droughts and floods prompted some to seek more efficient, dependable means of marketing their produce. The need for improved transportation was made more urgent by the poor state of the region's roads, which were left in a shambles by the heavy volume of wagons carrying flour. As early as 1787, the Maryland General Assembly had complained that roads between Baltimore and the state's western counties were "rendered almost impassible during the winter season" by "the great number of wagons" that traversed them.<sup>30</sup> Whether by canal or by turnpike, farmers clamored for more efficient means of hauling their produce to market. In 1793, a resident of Frederick County complained that the poor state of local roads and rivers rendered transportation costs prohibitively high and prevented farmers and millers from taking advantage of "sudden advances" in the Baltimore market.<sup>31</sup> In 1803, a Washington County farmer encouraged Baltimore's merchants to finance a turnpike through the state's western counties, reminding them that "it is in our interest to have as many avenues to market as possible; it is yours to promote the easiest communication with the agricultural part of the community."<sup>32</sup> Farmers also rallied behind schemes to improve navigation in the Potomac watershed. In 1804, for example, residents of the Monocacy River valley advanced money to the struggling

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Austin Durrenberger, Turnpikes: A Study of the Toll Road Movement in the Middle Atlantic States and Maryland (Cos Cob, Conn.: John E. Edwards, 1968), 37.

<sup>31</sup> Bartgis's Maryland Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 25 April 1793.

<sup>32</sup> The Hornet [Frederick, Md.] 10 January 1804.

Potomac Canal Company to “improve navigation . . . into the Heart of Frederick County.”<sup>33</sup>

The agitation for a more robust transportation system soon prodded the state legislature into action. Between 1796 and 1801, Maryland’s General Assembly incorporated five turnpike companies. By 1804, these ventures had all foundered, which prompted the legislature to charter three additional companies to build a network of turnpikes connecting Baltimore with Boonsboro, Frederick, Middletown, and communities in southern Pennsylvania. Public enthusiasm for turnpikes remained high into the 1810s. In 1809, construction began of a turnpike from Frederick to Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, followed in 1813 by a road linking the Frederick County villages of Westminster, Taneytown, and Emmitsburg.<sup>34</sup>

While farmers in Frederick and Washington counties concentrated on small grains, those in the immediate vicinity of Annapolis, Baltimore, Georgetown, and Washington City devoted considerable resources to truck farming. Quaker Zephaniah Buffington, who visited several estates near Annapolis and Baltimore in 1813, was astonished by the variety of garden crops raised for urban markets. Beets, cabbages, celery, onions, parsnips, pumpkins, tomatoes, turnips, and watermelons “all fetch a great price,” he observed, for “demand is twice as much as they can probably raise.” In a single year, a farmer with an orchard of 500 apple and peach trees cleared \$1,000 in cider and fruit, while another boasted that he had received exorbitant prices for hens, turkeys, and lambs. Farmers also responded to demand for firewood and staves.

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<sup>33</sup> The Hornet [Frederick, Md.], 17 January 1804.

<sup>34</sup> Durrenberger, Turnpikes, 65-68.

“Find a good cooper,” advised Buffington, “as there is want for more barrels than they can get made—fish barrels, thousands of them wanted, and flour barrels the quantity of them wanted is immense.”<sup>35</sup> As butter and dairy products became mainstays of the local economy, farmers grew more attuned to changing urban markets. In 1811, for example, Harford County landowner Mark Pringle informed his manager that butter was “at an extraordinary price—\$3 per pound” in Baltimore and ordered his dairy maids and tenants to “make all [they] can to be sent down.”<sup>36</sup> A successful farmer could reap handsome rewards by producing for urban markets. Between 1822 and 1824, Baltimore County planter Harry Dorsey Gough marketed \$2,760 worth of livestock and produce, the variety and value of which is illustrated in Table 1.2.

Unlike their counterparts in the immediate vicinity of Baltimore and the District of Columbia, farmers in Frederick and Washington counties marketed few fruits, vegetables, and dairy products in the early national period. High prices could, on occasion, induce them to send dairy products and garden crops to urban markets. In 1805, for example, a Georgetown merchant begged Frederick County farmer William Morsell to send “what butter you throughout the year make,” adding that “it is a scarce article with us just now.”<sup>37</sup> Butter prices remained high the following winter, when John Thompson Mason shipped a keg to Georgetown. Still, these counties’ distance from urban markets, combined with the prohibitive cost of

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<sup>35</sup> Zephaniah Buffington Papers, ca. 1813, MdHS.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Pringle to Paca Smith, 28 October 1811, Mark Pringle Letterbooks, MdHS.

<sup>37</sup> J. Peter to William Morsell, 28 April 1805, Davis Family Collection, UMCP.

transportation, made such forays infrequent; the keg that Mason sent was the only butter he marketed between 1806 and 1809.<sup>38</sup>

### **“We are week handit”: Labor in the New Nation**

In 1795, Abraham Shriver purchased a farm in York County, Pennsylvania, on short credit. Desperate to begin planting, Shriver appealed to his father in Frederick County, Maryland, for additional workers. “We are week handit,” his father replied, explaining that the family’s indentured servant had recently received his freedom and that their hired farmhand was “going home next week.” Disappointed, Shriver asked an associate to scour Baltimore’s wharves for indentured servants. These efforts, too, met with no success. “Yesterday [there] arrived a ship from Bremen, went on Bord to look out for a servant but there was only one which was a stone worker and [he] did not like to keep from his trade,” his disappointed partner reported. Shriver’s fortunes improved in March 1796, when he contracted with farmhand Andrew Kenna. In exchange for one year’s service, Shriver agreed to furnish Kenna with clothing, room and board, a \$20 advance, and an additional \$30 upon completion of the contract. Shriver also secured the services of Jennett Franklin, a young indentured servant. Unfortunately for Shriver, his hold on Franklin proved tenuous; in 1797 or 1798, she abandoned him and married. Rather than press his claims to the remainder of her term of service, Shriver nullified the agreement. By 1801, Shriver had relocated closer to his father’s farm in Frederick County, where, perhaps soured by his experiences with indentured servants, he began to assemble an enslaved workforce. In November, Shriver’s attorney promised “the first chance I get in procuring one [a

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<sup>38</sup> John Thompson Mason, Account Books, LOC.



slave] of the kind you want I shall purchase, if even at a high price.” It is unclear whether the lawyer found a slave, for the following spring Shriver’s brother, Andrew, bought him an enslaved family consisting of a woman named Minta and her three children. “The husband of the woman, an old man named Sam, a freeman . . . would be glad to be employed by you,” Andrew noted, “but of this you will know more by conversing with the old man.”<sup>39</sup>

Other landowners also experimented with the region’s diverse labor regimes. Irish immigrant Clotworthy Birnie tinkered with both indentured servitude and slavery after he settled in Frederick County in 1810. While contemplating his move, Birnie had received advice from his uncle, Annapolis physician Upton Scott, who encouraged him to ponder the relative merits of indentured servants, hired workers, and slaves. Scott warned his nephew that hired farmhands were scarce and commanded “enormous wages” and that slaves were unreliable. “I can, from my own experiences, assure you, that unless you strictly supervise their [slaves’] conduct and rigidly enforce the performance of their duties, you will not earn from their labors enough to feed and cloth them.” In Scott’s opinion, the best solution was to purchase indentured servants.<sup>40</sup> Birnie heeded his uncle’s advice. Upon arriving in Maryland, he requested that his associates in Ireland begin contracting with indentured servants. In particular, he asked that they secure the services of a carpenter (who would serve three years) and of Jonathan Maxwell, a farmhand who—along with his three

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<sup>39</sup> David Shriver to Andrew Shriver, 1 May 1795; [Buchard] Kohl to Andrew Shriver, 1 July 1795; Contract of Andrew Kenna, 15 March 1796; Agreement between Joseph Kork and Andrew Shriver, 2 February 1798; John Schley to Andrew Shriver, 27 November 1801; and Abraham Shriver to Andrew Shriver, 21 April 1802, Shriver Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>40</sup> Upton Scott to Clotworthy Birnie, 28 October 1806, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

adolescent sons—would serve terms ranging from three to seven years.<sup>41</sup> Yet finding laborers willing to indenture themselves was something of a challenge. An agent in Belfast managed to find two servants but reported “a good deal of trouble with the laborers,” while an associate in Northampton avoided discussing the character of the servant he had secured, noting simply that he “shall go without being bound hand and foot.”<sup>42</sup> While awaiting the arrival of his indentured servants, Birnie scoured Frederick and Prince George’s counties for slaves. He purchased at least two slaves during his first months in Maryland, and subsequently purchased another five slaves between 1810 and 1814.<sup>43</sup> Still, neither Birnie nor his uncle man was convinced that slaves offered the best solution. When Pompey and Jenny ran away, Scott lamented the “necessity we are under of employing Negroes,” declaring it “one of the most disagreeable circumstances attending a residence in this country.” But as “servants of a different nature cannot be gotten when wanted,” he suggested that his nephew “mix young women amongst your servants” and encourage the slaves to establish families. The children born of these unions could be inculcated with “the habits of industry,” “a kind affection for your family,” and a sense of their master’s “magisterial authority.”<sup>44</sup> Once again, Birnie heeded his uncle’s advice. In 1815, the “Profit and

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<sup>41</sup> Clotworthy Birnie Diary, 7 September 1810, MdHR.

<sup>42</sup> Wm. Napier to C. Birnie, 10 July 1811 [first quotation]; and Osborne Sprigg to Clotworthy Birnie, 6 December 1810 [second quotation], Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHS.

<sup>43</sup> In his effort to purchase bondsmen and women, Birnie attended a slave auction in Frederick-Town, visited neighboring slaveholders, and traveled south to Prince George’s County to inspect slaves belonging to the county’s planters. He also purchased slaves from his uncle’s estate. Clotworthy Birnie Diary, 17 October 1810, 1 December 1810, and 2 December 1810, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR. For the purchase of slaves, see Clotworthy Birnie Ledger, 1810-1847, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

<sup>44</sup> Upton Scott to Clotworthy Birnie, 8 March 1812, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

Loss” column of his account book included credit for children born to Molly and Bett.<sup>45</sup> By 1820, Birnie had expanded his force to include fourteen slaves, nine of whom were children or adolescents.<sup>46</sup>

Shriver’s and Birnie’s winding route through northern Maryland’s labor market illuminates the contingency, experimentation, and opportunism that marked labor arrangements between 1783 and 1815. Frustrated by the unavailability of wage laborers and dissatisfied with indentured servants, Shriver and Birnie had, perhaps reluctantly, embraced slavery as an imperfect solution to their farms’ chronic labor shortages. Such promiscuity was not unusual, for in the three decades following the American Revolution the Middle Atlantic’s artisans and farmers stitched together workforces that included apprentices, indentured servants, slaves, tenants, and wage laborers. In 1810, an employer in Frederick captured the opportunism that characterized labor arrangements in early national Maryland when he advertised for an hostler. Either “a white man, a free black, or slave,” would suffice, provided that he had a reputation for “industry, sobriety, and honesty.”<sup>47</sup> Decisions concerning the composition of individual crews were determined less by doctrinaire beliefs in the relative merits of different labor regimes than by a constellation of economic and political forces—and a certain amount of chance. The shifting and uneven terrain of freedom left employers with little recourse but to corral workers haphazardly.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Clotworthy Birnie Ledger, 1810-1847, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

<sup>46</sup> Manuscript Returns, 1820 U.S. Census, Frederick County, Md., NARA.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 9 June 1810.

<sup>48</sup> The shifting landscape of labor relations in the early national Middle Atlantic has received extensive commentary elsewhere. See, for example, Paul G. E. Clemens and Lucy Simler, “Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1850,” in Work and Labor in

The uncertainty that characterized labor arrangements in early national Maryland was a product of the American Revolution. Among the Revolution's unintended consequences was a profound reordering of labor arrangements on both the local and national levels; slavery, wage labor, and indentured servitude were all fundamentally altered in the wake of revolution. The Revolution had unleashed a wave of emancipations that swept across New England and the Middle Atlantic before crashing against the rocks of slaveholder resistance and receding. Between 1777 and 1804, every state north of the Mason-Dixon Line abolished slavery through constitutional amendment or judicial fiat, or set it on the road to extinction through the enactment of gradual emancipation laws. Although antislavery forces also floated schemes for gradual emancipation in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia during the 1780s and 1790s, these proposals gained little traction and soon stalled. Slavery thus remained firmly entrenched in these states, but it did not survive unscathed. Yielding to a combination of slave resistance, economic pressures, and political and religious concerns, the Chesapeake states liberalized their manumission laws. In 1782, Virginia allowed private acts of manumission without legislative approval. Five years later, Delaware stopped requiring slaveholders to post bonds before liberating their bondspeople. Maryland's General Assembly caught the spirit in 1790 when it legalized manumission by last will and testament.<sup>49</sup>

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the Early Republic, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 144-88; Sharon Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully": Labor and Indentured Servants in Pennsylvania, 1682-1800 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 137-71; Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation and Its Aftermath (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Seth Edward Rockman, "Working for Wages in Early Republic Baltimore: Unskilled Labor and the Blurring of Slavery and Freedom" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Davis, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> For overviews of emancipation in New England, see Arthur Zilversmith, The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967);

In some northern Maryland counties, slavery became a moribund institution in the decades following the Revolution. In Cecil and Harford counties, the transition from tobacco to mixed agriculture and truck farming, along with the concomitant increase in the number of manumissions, was causing slavery to unravel. In Harford, the slave population posted a dramatic increase between 1790 and 1800 before plummeting 22 percent over the next two decades (see Table 1.1). Although the number of slaveholding households in the county increased between 1790 and 1810, the average size of individual units slipped to under five.<sup>50</sup> Despite some fluctuations, the slave population of neighboring Cecil County followed the same downward spiral. Between 1790 and 1820, Cecil's slave population declined 31 percent. Slaves were a diminishing presence in both counties' overall populations during these decades; the percentage of Harford's population composed of slaves fell from 23 to 21 percent, while the share of Cecil's population in bondage dropped from 25 to 16 percent (see Table 1.1).

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and Joanne Pope Melish, Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). On the enactment of gradual emancipation laws in the more northern states of the Middle Atlantic, see Graham Russell Hodges, Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County New Jersey, 1613-1865 (Madison, Wis.: Madison House, 1996), 92-166; Nash and Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees; and Shane White, Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991). On the process of manumission in the Upper South states where slavery remained legal, see Patience Essah, A House Divided: Slavery and Emancipation in Delaware (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 36-107; T. Stephen Whitman, The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); John Joseph Condon, Jr., "Manumission, Slavery and Family in the Post-Revolutionary Rural Chesapeake: Anne Arundel County, Maryland, 1781-1831" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2001); and Eva Shepherd Wolf, Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> The discussion of slavery's decline in Harford County is drawn from Richard S. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776-1810," in Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 49-82.

At the same time, slavery was developing along a different track in the Maryland piedmont. Frederick and Washington counties both registered increases in their slave populations that either equaled or outpaced the growth of their white populations (see Table 1.2). The percentage of slaves in the counties' overall population also grew, rising from 12 to 17 percent in Frederick and from 8 to 14 percent in Washington. The number and percentage of white slaveholding households also increased; by 1820, about one-quarter of white households included slaves (see Table 1.3). In both counties, slavery's geographical distribution was uneven. In Frederick, the largest concentration of slaves and slaveholders was found in the 1st, 2nd, 8th, and 9th districts, which lay in the county's eastern and southern districts. Although geographical disparities were less pronounced in Washington County, masters and slaves clustered in the portions of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th districts bordering the Potomac River (see Tables 1.4 and 1.5).

The dramatic growth of the slave population in Frederick and Washington counties reflected both the piedmont's flourishing grain economy and the stagnating tobacco markets that gripped the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland. Members of some of the Chesapeake's most prominent families—the Barneses, Tilghmans, and Ringolds, for example—responded to soil exhaustion and flagging tobacco markets by abandoning their worn-out plantations and seeking new beginnings in the piedmont.<sup>51</sup> The upcountry estates they established became nodes for distributing

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<sup>51</sup> Although the migration of planters into western Maryland postdated the settlement of planters in the Virginia piedmont, the movements were roughly analogous. For the movement of slavery into the Virginia Piedmont, see Philip D. Morgan and Michael L. Nichols, "Slaves in Piedmont Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser. 46 (April 1989): 211-51; and Michael L. Nichols, "Piedmont Plantations and Farms: Transplanting Tidewater Traditions?" *The Magazine of Albemarle History* 49 (1991): 1-18.

slaves throughout their neighborhoods. This process occurred on Colonel Richard Barnes's plantation in Washington County. After Barnes's death, his executor, John Thompson Mason, assumed responsibility for the colonel's 104 slaves scattered across St. Mary's and Washington counties. Barnes's will freed many of them, but Mason needed to find hirers or purchasers for those too young to be freed and those whose age or disability precluded legal manumission. Between 1804 and 1807, he sold sixteen of Barnes's slaves to farmers and manufacturers in Washington County. He hired out another forty-one to employers scattered throughout western Maryland, many of whom retained them for several years.<sup>52</sup> Mason tailored his advertisements to the region's non-slaveholding majority, suggesting that several aging, but "honest, well-disposed, and orderly," women would be "very useful to persons who have few or no slaves."<sup>53</sup>

The slaves of deceased planter George Scott were likewise dispersed throughout his neighborhood following his death. In March 1810, Scott's executor announced that his fifty-six slaves, along with livestock and "farming utensils of every kind" would be auctioned at Scott's plantation near Boonsboro in Washington County. As had been the case with Richard Barnes's slaves, most of Scott's bondspeople were scattered among non- or small slaveholders. Twenty-one of the twenty-eight people who bought slaves at Scott's auction could be identified in the 1810 federal census. Of these, nine were purchasing their first slaves; seven owned between one and four slaves; two owned between five and ten slaves; and only three

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<sup>52</sup> The accounts of Barnes's estate are included in the John Thompson Mason Account Book, LOC.

<sup>53</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 20 November 1807.

owned eleven or more slaves. Although many of the purchasers bought mothers and their infant children, the dissolution of Scott's plantation undoubtedly fractured many families and communities. Most of his bondspeople were sold in lots of between one and four slaves. Twenty-three slaves, including fourteen children and adolescents, were sold by themselves. Most of the remaining twenty-seven slaves were sold in groups comprising mothers and their infant or young children.<sup>54</sup>

Those Chesapeake planters who remained on their lands and revived their fortunes by making the transition from tobacco to wheat soon found themselves with labor surpluses, which were partially absorbed by piedmont farmers and planters.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, slaveholders in the former tobacco counties found ready markets for their unneeded slaves in northern Maryland. "I have too many negroes," wrote Queen Anne's County planter Richard Tilghman to an associate in Frederick County. He offered him two "stout, handsome, and active fellows" in their twenties, as well as three children.<sup>56</sup> Chesapeake slaveholders who were unwilling to sell their bondspeople southward found the piedmont an especially attractive market. Explaining her decision to sell "between 30 and valuable country born slaves," an Anne Arundel County mistress noted that she had "too many" slaves and meant to

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<sup>54</sup> Scott's estate sale was announced in the Frederick-Town Herald, 31 March 1810. For an account of the auction, see Washington County Register of Wills, Accounts of Sale, vol. C, pp. 433-34, MdHR. For biographical information on the purchasers, see Manuscript Returns, 1810 U.S. Census, Frederick County, Md., and Washington County, Md., NARA.

<sup>55</sup> On the labor surpluses generated by the transition from tobacco to wheat culture, see Paul G. E. Clemens, The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980); and Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization in the Chesapeake, 1650-1820," in Work and Labor in Early America, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988), 144-87.

<sup>56</sup> Richard Tilghman to Wm. Elie Williams, 4 October 1818, Otho Holland Williams Papers, MdHS.



“reduce their number by sale.” She was, however, determined that “[n]o person from any of the southern states or their agents will be permitted to bid,” a circumstance that might explain why she advertised the auction in a Frederick newspaper.<sup>57</sup> The slaveholder had good reason to advertise her sale in a western Maryland newspaper, for landowners in the piedmont seem to have been eager to purchase bondsmen and women. The numerous fugitive-slave advertisements from the 1800s and 1810s describing slaves from northern Maryland attempting to reunite with kin on the Eastern Shore and in southern Maryland bespeak a brisk market for slaves and a large forced migration. When Elijah escaped from a farm near Hagerstown, his disgruntled master noted that “[h]e was purchased of a certain William Evans of St. Mary’s County, Md., and probably may have taken that course.” Washington County farmer Coleman Combs had similar suspicions about his fugitive slave “Negro Luke,” who was raised “about 15 miles from Port Tobacco, in St. Mary’s County, and may, perhaps bend his course that way.”<sup>58</sup> A Hagerstown master suspected that “Negro Winny” might attempt to return to her previous homes on the Eastern Shore or in St. Mary’s County.<sup>59</sup>

Other masters and mistresses in the state’s tobacco-growing counties found outlets for their unneeded slaves by hiring them to employers in western Maryland.

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<sup>57</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 12 December 1807.

<sup>58</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 26 August 1812 [first quotation]; Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Weekly Advertiser, 8 May 1800 [second quotation].

<sup>59</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 24 October 1804. For similar examples, see The Republican, or Anti-Democrat [Baltimore, Md.], 22 November 1802; Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Advertiser, 5 January 1805; Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 21 November 1810, 18 September 1811, 28 April 1813, 1 June 1814; and Frederick Town Herald, 18 November 1820.

In 1800, a Washington County farmer advertised for the return of Luke, whom he described as “the property of a Mr. Lock of St. Mary’s County, hired by George Lock of this county to me.” Edward Price of St. Mary’s County took a similar approach with his unneeded slaves; in 1808, he hired Harry to a farmer near Hagerstown. Not every bondsman hired out by slaveowners from the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland was destined to work the land. Charles County master Robert Brent hired “Negro James” to John Hughes’s ironworks in Washington County.<sup>60</sup>

For the unscrupulous, northern Maryland’s demand for labor created opportunities to defraud slaves who had been promised their freedom—and to pocket a handsome profit. In 1792, “Negro Rachel” petitioned the Frederick County court for her freedom, claiming that her former master had reneged on her manumission and “resolved to take her to the back country and sell her.” Rachel’s master had taken her to Frederick County, where he quickly sold her to Richard Truman, “who not only refuses to permit your petitioner to come to court but also holds your petitioner in slavery.”<sup>61</sup> Three years later, Walter Butler lodged a similar petition. Born to free parents, Butler had been apprenticed by his mother to Charles County farmer John Huford. Upon Huford’s death, Butler was sold to a succession of

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<sup>60</sup> Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Weekly Advertiser, 8 May 1800 [first quotation]; Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 31 October 1810 [second quotation], and 16 January 1807 [third quotation]. Similar examples abound in county records and newspapers. In 1798, the Washington County Court held an inquest for “Negro Mingo,” who belonged to Calvert County slaveholder William Wells. Wells had hired Mingo to Washington County farmer Joseph Clark, who apparently allowed him to hire himself in the neighborhood. In 1812 the Washington County employer of “Negro Jim” reported that the bondsman had escaped and would likely return to the neighborhood of his master’s plantation in St. Mary’s County. Washington County Court, Judgment Record, vol. 1, p. 16, MdHR; and Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 13 April 1812.

<sup>61</sup> Petition of “Negro Rachel,” 1792, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP. A notation on the reverse of Rachel’s petition indicates that the county officials ordered her and Truman to appear in court, but the outcome of the case remains unclear.

masters within Charles and St. Mary's counties, the last of whom rechristened him Stephen and sold him into Frederick County "as a slave." Fortunately, the petition reached the Frederick County court, whose judges ordered Butler released from bondage.<sup>62</sup>

Adding to the torrent of slaves pouring into northern Maryland was a trickle from southern Pennsylvania. Evidence of this movement surfaced in 1791, when John McPherson transported his slave, Cyrus, from Pennsylvania to Frederick County. Fearful that Pennsylvania's gradual emancipation act would deprive him of the services of a valuable farmhand, McPherson agreed to manumit his twenty-two-year-old slave upon entering Maryland, provided that he "indenture himself to serve the said John McPherson for the term of seventeen years."<sup>63</sup> Cyrus was not the only bound laborer to cross the Mason-Dixon Line. In 1804, Frederick County farmer Philip Dietrich sold Thomas, a young slave, to another Marylander for \$200. In the bill of sale, Dietrich described the circuitous route that had brought the young bondsman to Maryland. Born near Lancaster, Pennsylvania, around 1786, Thomas had been sold to five different masters in southern Pennsylvania before being purchased by Dietrich, who stipulated that the terms of the commonwealth's gradual abolition law must be honored and that Thomas would therefore "be free at age twenty-eight."<sup>64</sup> Pennsylvanians who settled in northern Maryland sometimes brought their slaves with them. When Mary Brown crossed the Mason-Dixon Line

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<sup>62</sup> Petition of Walter Butler, 24 November 1795, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

<sup>63</sup> Manumission of "Negro Cyrus," 12 May 1791, and Indenture of "Negro Cyrus," 12 May 1791, both in Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 10, pp. 34-36, MdHR.

<sup>64</sup> Purchase agreement between Philip Dietrich and Charles Baltzell, Jr., 7 January 1804, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 25, pp. 291-92, MdHR.

from Adams County, Pennsylvania, she brought along “Negro Phillis,” then aged twenty-five.<sup>65</sup> Brown safeguarded the young woman’s prospective freedom by registering her with the Frederick County court, but others were less scrupulous. In 1785, Pennsylvanian William Kelso ignored the provision of his state’s gradual abolition law that required masters to register their slaves with county officials and sold “Negro Diana”—as a slave for life—into bondage in Montgomery County, Maryland, where she was subsequently resold to Frederick County resident Thomas West.<sup>66</sup> Pennsylvanian Abraham Green suffered a similar fate. In 1802, Matthew Patton of Chester-Town, Maryland, notified the Pennsylvania Abolition Society that Green, a freed slave, had been abducted by “Georgia Men” and sold him a resident of Hagerstown, who subsequently held him “a long time as a slave.” Patton was, however, optimistic that Green could be freed and “paid for what time he has been there” if a copy of his manumission could be secured.<sup>67</sup>

How the white population greeted the expansion of slavery into their region remains uncertain. The growing number of slaveholding households in Frederick and Washington counties suggests that many welcomed the additional help. For some, the decision to purchase slaves bespoke temporary expediency more than an abiding commitment to the institution. Washington County farmer William Ford depended upon slaves while his children were maturing, but by 1800 his children had reached

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<sup>65</sup> Affidavit of Mary Brown, 13 April 1803, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 24, pp. 251-52, MdHR.

<sup>66</sup> Petition of “Negro Diana,” n.d., Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP. For a similar complaint, see Petition of “Negro William,” n.d., Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

<sup>67</sup> Matthew Patton to Rev. Robert Green, 13 July 1802, Loose Correspondence, Incoming, 1796-1819, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society [microfilm edition], Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.

working age and Ford found that he had “no occasion for slaves” and offered to “sell them for ready money.”<sup>68</sup> Farmer and gunpowder manufacturer Christian Boerstler managed his operations on Antietam Creek with the assistance of his son, but when the young man was badly burned, Boerstler was “forced to buy a negro for \$300 who attended to the mill.”<sup>69</sup> Not everyone succumbed to the temptation to buy slaves. While touring the countryside near Hagerstown, Ferdinand Bayard asked an overworked farmwife why her husband had not purchased slaves. “Even if we were richer I would not want any of them,” she replied. “These poor negroes, receiving none of the fruits of their labor, do not love work,” she explained, and “if we had slaves, we should have to . . . beat them to make use of them.”<sup>70</sup>

Yet nothing revealed northern Marylanders’ misgivings about slavery more than the dramatic increase of the region’s free black population. Although a thorough review of manumissions in the years immediately following the revolution awaits completion, a cursory review of census returns suggests that slaveholders freed many people during this period. From its very humble beginnings of 213 in 1790, Frederick County’s free black population increased a whopping 734 percent to 1,777 in 1820, while that of Cecil County posted an almost ten-fold increase during the same years, rising from 163 to 1,783 (see Table 1.1).

Ambivalence about slavery did not, however, automatically translate into enthusiasm for free, wage labor. To the extent that political economists imagined a

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<sup>68</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 21 August 1800.

<sup>69</sup> Jeffrey A. Wyand, trans., “The Journal of Doctor Christian Boerstler, Prominent Funkstown Resident, 1785-1866,” n.d. [1805], MdHS.

<sup>70</sup> Bayard, Travels of a Frenchman, 31-32.

binary relationship between bound and free labor, it was constructed around slaveholding plantations and family farms. Farmers' increased participation in commodity markets had not undermined the importance of family labor; the family farm or freehold remained the dominant form of land tenure and labor extraction in New England and the Middle Atlantic through the early nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>71</sup> Republicanism strengthened the rhetorical significance of small farmers, for it posited that independent yeomen—Jefferson's "chosen people of God"—were both repositories of virtue and bulwarks against tyranny. The laboring poor, whether employed in agriculture or industry, occupied an undesirable position in this cosmology. Pointing to the miserable plight of European workers, American political economists cited a large population of permanent wage laborers as a harbinger of social decay.<sup>72</sup>

Whether performed by family members, apprentices, indentured servants, or slaves, household labor formed the backbone of the agricultural workforce, but farmers and planters did have periodic recourse to hired laborers. We glimpse farmers' need for hired help in a 1770 agreement between Frederick County farmer George Dillenher and his son John, in which the father relinquished control of the family's 200-acre "Buck Lodge Farm." Recognizing that wage laborers would be

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<sup>71</sup> James A. Henretta has emphasized the powerful grip that independent, family-owned farms held on rural people's economic and social outlooks in "Families and Farms: *Mentalité* in Pre-Industrial America," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 35 (1978): 3-32. Despite farmers' increased participation in commercial agriculture in the decades following the American Revolution, the household remained the basic unit of rural production through much of the antebellum decades. See Christopher Clark, The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 59-117.

<sup>72</sup> Drew R. McCoy, The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 13-17.

essential to the farm's operation, Dillenher agreed to pay half the wages of "all ye laborers or workmen which he, sd. John, would be necessitated to hire or employ to assist . . . in working and managing sd. plantation to advantage in a proper and regular manner from to time to time."<sup>73</sup> The need for hired laborers was most acute during haymaking and the grain harvests. When Peter Weedle divided his Frederick County farm between his son and his widow, he therefore specified that the son must assist his mother by paying "half of all expenses in hiring labourers in hay making and harvesting."<sup>74</sup> Farm account books underscore the need for hired laborers at harvest. Despite owning twenty-four slaves, Harford County planter Nathan Rigbie employed free black and white farmhands for 242 days between 1772 and 1780. The vast majority of those days (216) were devoted to cutting hay or harvesting rye and wheat.<sup>75</sup>

Whether these harvesters and farmhands were permanent wage laborers or members of landowning families making temporary forays into the labor market is uncertain. Many contemporaries complained that permanent free farmhands were scarce during the early national period. In 1792, Philadelphian Richard Peters reckoned that "the class of people merely labourers is not very numerous, and by no means stationary or collected." The causes of this shortage, Peters argued, were the uncertainty of agricultural employment and the abundance of inexpensive frontier land. With wage laborers scarce, farmers turned to nearby farmers during the busiest

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<sup>73</sup> Contract between George Dillenher and John Dillenher, 16 April 1770, Frederick County Court Papers, box 1, MdHR.

<sup>74</sup> Will of Peter Weedle, 27 October 1787, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GM3, pp. 455-56, MdHR.

<sup>75</sup> Nathan Rigbie Ledger, Harford County Register of Wills, Exhibits, MdHR.

seasons. “Many who have small farms,” Peters noted, “can spare a portion of their time to assist their neighbors for hire.”<sup>76</sup>

Despite, or perhaps because of, the scarcity of wage laborers, employers on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line voiced numerous complaints and misgivings about hired hands. In 1787, Alexander Coventry, a farmer in New York’s Hudson River Valley, bemoaned the “insolence of what is called hired help, who must be humored like spoiled children, or they will leave at their own will.”<sup>77</sup> According to Benjamin Rush, Pennsylvania’s farmers shared these sentiments. “The Germans seldom hire men to work upon their farms,” he reported, because “the feebleness of that authority which masters possess over hired servants, is such that their wages are seldom procured from their labor.”<sup>78</sup> In Maryland, dissatisfaction with hirelings led some to express a preference for bound laborers. In 1785, for example, Maryland Governor Thomas Johnson encouraged George Washington to employ indentured servants and slaves on the Potomac Canal. Johnson thought it “desirable to hire Negroes as well as purchase servants” for the canal, believing that “their labor will be more valuable than that of common white hirelings.”<sup>79</sup> That same year, Baltimore

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<sup>76</sup> Knight, ed., Letters to His Excellency George Washington, 75-76.

<sup>77</sup> Martin Bruegel, Farm, Shop, Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1860 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 20.

<sup>78</sup> Benjamin Rush, An Account of the Manners of the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania, Written in 1798 (Philadelphia: Samuel P. Town, 1875), 24-25.

<sup>79</sup> Governor Thomas Johnson to General George Washington, 21 September 1785, McPherson Papers, MdHS.



County farmer Thomas Jones grew frustrated with his white hands and decided to harvest his wheat with slaves.<sup>80</sup>

The most scathing indictment of wage labor came from Richard Parkinson, an English agricultural reformer who rented “Orange Hill” farm on the outskirts of Baltimore from 1799 to 1800. After a series of disastrous dealings with American domestic servants and farmhands, Parkinson concluded that “if I was compelled to live in that country I would not wish to have more land than myself and my family could cultivate . . . for all white men I employed there ate much and worked little.” Parkinson’s difficulties stemmed, in large part, from the chronic labor shortage that gripped northern Maryland and forced employers to compete for workers. It was not uncommon, Parkinson recalled, for neighboring farmers “to offer wages, before your face, to induce the white men who are working with you to go with them, which makes them very saucy.” Recognizing that opportunities abounded, Parkinson’s farmhands demanded advances, refused to engage except by the month, and spent days, even weeks, “frolicking” in Baltimore.<sup>81</sup>

The American legal and political systems compounded Parkinson’s troubles. To his dismay, he had discovered that American workers enjoyed greater legal freedom than their English counterparts. “There is no power given you, as a master, to confine a hired servant by law,” Parkinson lamented, “nor is there any compulsion by the whip.” Worse, the radical egalitarianism unleashed by the American Revolution had emboldened laborers, rendering them ungovernable. “The idea of

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<sup>80</sup> Lorena S. Walsh, “Rural Africans in the Constitutional Era in Maryland, 1776-1810,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 84 (Winter 1989): 327-41.

<sup>81</sup> Parkinson, *The Experienced Farmer’s Tour in America*, 27-32, 421-22.

liberty and equality there destroys all rights,” Parkinson complained, “and every one does as he likes.” Parkinson attempted to disabuse his farmhands of their republican beliefs, but soon learned that “any man that obstructs these liberties is looked upon as a bad subject, and an enemy of the rights of man.” Indeed, Parkinson’s attempts to enforce verbal agreements and discipline his workers often ended in disaster. When he chastised a German farmhand for careless mowing, the worker “threw down his hat and scythe, stamped upon his hat, damned me and all Englishmen, and went his way.”<sup>82</sup>

Parkinson’s narrative must be approached with skepticism. An ardent conservative, he despised the “wild chimeras of fallacious equality” that had swept through the United States and France. Parkinson hoped that an “unadorned relation” of his bitter disappointment in North America would stem the tide of English emigration and spare his country “the loss of many a valuable though humble member.”<sup>83</sup> Not surprisingly, American critics ridiculed Parkinson’s account of his tribulations. “[S]o cautiously is every consolatory topic avoided, that we are at a loss how, in the midst of all sorts of calamity and vexation, he could either have paid his rent or preserved his reason,” opined Charles Brockden Brown, editor of The Literary Magazine, and American Register. Still, Brown conceded that Parkinson’s depiction of American workers contained a kernel of truth; hired workers were expensive and they were often difficult to manage. He was, however, optimistic that servants and farmhands would become more tractable over time. “It must be allowed, that as

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<sup>82</sup> Parkinson, The Experienced Farmer’s Tour in America, 172-74, 234, 422.

<sup>83</sup> Parkinson, The Experienced Farmer’s Tour in America, i-ii.

numbers increase in America, the evil complained of will wear out,” Brown predicted, for laborers, “like all other dealers in articles of growing supply, will become more and more courteous to their employers.”<sup>84</sup>

It was, however, unclear what form wage labor would take. In 1801, former slaveholder and agricultural reformer John Beale Bordley captured the uncertainty that marked labor relations during the early national period: “When slavery shall cease or be inhibited,” he wrote, “where or how are means of cultivating the southern and middle states to be found?” For Bordley, and for many farmers in southern Pennsylvania and northern Maryland, the question was vexing. Farmers needed workers at critical junctures in the growing season, which created short-term labor shortages and drove wages upward. “The farmer is fortunate who can find then hands for his purposes,” Bordley observed, “for, generally, when one farmer wants additional aid, others also want it.” While annual contracts would guarantee enough hands for harvest and planting, farmers with slaves or large standing crews of contract workers might find themselves saddled with idle, unproductive hands during much of the year.<sup>85</sup>

For Bordley, and for many farmers along the Mason-Dixon Line, the solution to this dilemma lay in employing cottagers. These tenants and their families were granted houses and small plots, in exchange for which they were expected to labor for their landlords during the busiest seasons but were otherwise free to support

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, “An Account of Parkinson’s Tour in America,” The Literary Magazine, and American Messenger 5 (March 1806), 219-27.

<sup>85</sup> John Beale Bordley, Essays and Notes on Husbandry and Rural Affairs, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram, 1801), 387-91.

themselves and seek outside employment. Such agreements offered many benefits to landlords. The debts laborers accrued could be used to cudgel them into the fields. Employers could commend the services of their workers' dependents but were not responsible for their maintenance. For their part, landless workers gained limited access to productive property and found a measure of autonomy and security. As slavery waned, such arrangements became increasingly popular among both farmers and landless laborers.<sup>86</sup>

If the prognosis for both slavery and wage labor was uncertain, that of another labor regime became increasingly certain during the early national period. Although it is unclear how many indentured servants were present in northern Maryland, an examination of estate inventories from Frederick County suggests that their numbers were small. The 110 estate inventories recorded between 1786 and 1790 contained only three indentured servants.<sup>87</sup> In the decades following the American Revolution, several factors conspired to place indentured servitude on the road to extinction. In southern Pennsylvania, an unstable economy and a growing reserve of white laborers—especially in cities—rendered indentured servants an unsound investment for employers, who increasingly opted for wage laborers.<sup>88</sup> Structural changes in the

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<sup>86</sup> Bordley, Essays and Notes on Husbandry and Rural Affairs, 387-91. For discussions of Bordley's writings and of cottagers in southern Pennsylvania, see Lucy Simler, "The Landless Worker: An Index of Economic and Social Change in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 109 (April 1990), 163-99; and Lucy Simler, "Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser. (October 1986): 542-69. The relationship between emancipation in Pennsylvania and the growing number of cottagers is explored in Nash and Soderlund, Freedom by Degrees, 188-93.

<sup>87</sup> Fifteen of the estates belonged to slaveholders (one of whom also owned an indentured servant) and included a total of 114 slaves. Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. GM 2, MdHR.

<sup>88</sup> Salinger, "To Serve Well and Faithfully," 137-53.

international economy also sapped the institution's foundations. Improvements in European financial and shipping networks reduced transportation costs, thus allowing immigrants to secure passage with remittances from American relatives—or to simply pay their own way—instead of binding themselves to captains or merchants.<sup>89</sup>

Market forces coincided with a changing legal and political climate to hasten the demise of indentured servitude. State and federal courts continued to uphold contracts binding immigrants to service, but during the 1790s and 1800s jurists began to safeguard servants' rights and to circumscribe their masters' ability to command specific performance, imprison servants, or inflict corporal punishment.<sup>90</sup>

Beginning in 1790, Maryland's General Assembly created more daylight between indentured servitude and slavery. Believing it “contrary to the dictates of humanity and the principles of the Christian religion to inflict penalties on the children for the offenses of the parents,” the legislature declared—without irony—that the offspring of black men and free or indentured white women would no longer be forced into servitude.<sup>91</sup> Having proclaimed that whites could not, under any circumstances, pass their unfree status to succeeding generations, the General

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<sup>89</sup> Farley Grubb, “The End of European Immigrant Servitude in the United States: An Economic Analysis of Market Collapse, 1772-1835,” Journal of Economic History 54 (December 1994), 792-824.

<sup>90</sup> Steinfeld, Invention of Free Labor, 134-35.

<sup>91</sup> “An Act to Repeal certain Parts of an Act, Entitled, An Act to Prevent Disabled and Superannuated Slaves Being Set Free . . . and for certain other Purposes,” 14 December 1790, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the First of November, in the Year of Our Lord, 1790 (Annapolis, Frederick Green, 1791). The 1699 law this statute repealed had declared that “any white woman, either free or servant, that shall suffer herself to be begot with child by a negro or other slave or free negro . . . the issue or child or any such unnatural and inordinate copulations shall be servants until they arrive at the age of thirty one years.” “An Act Relating to Servants and Slaves,” 22 July 1699, Wm. Hand Browne, ed., Archives of Maryland: Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland, March 1697/8 – July 1699 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society Press, 1902).

Assembly in 1818 further distanced indentured servitude from slavery by enacting legislation that limited masters' authority over bound immigrants. Noting that German and Swiss servants were "frequently exposed to cruel and oppressive impositions," the legislature required state-appointed registers to review and record all indentures. Terms of service for adults were limited to four years, and those of minor children were capped at ages eighteen for girls and twenty-one for boys. Children's rights were protected in other ways as well: they could not be bound by anyone except their parents, next of kin, or the state register; their masters were required to provide two months of education annually; and they could not be held responsible for debts incurred by their parents or relatives. Moreover, the law stipulated that a ship's master could not detain immigrants longer than sixty days. If labor contracts were not made within that period, the immigrants' transportation costs would be transformed into a simple debt, recoverable through collection actions, but not through forced labor.<sup>92</sup>

The changing legal landscape dovetailed with emerging public hostility towards indentured servitude to erode masters' and mistresses' authority. In 1811, Clotworthy Birnie discovered how his neighbors' unwillingness to support his claim on a fugitive indentured servant, Betty, could render him powerless. That December, Birnie attempted to reclaim Betty, who was being sheltered at the nearby home of a Mr. and Mrs. Cowers. Birnie "reasoned" with Betty and asked her to return voluntarily, then flourished her indenture before the Cowers and demanded that they

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<sup>92</sup> "An Act relative to German and Swiss Redemptioners," 16 February 1818, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the First Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Seventeen (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1818).

surrender the runaway. Birnie seized Betty, but was immediately confronted by the Cowers and another couple, the Gildeas, who had rallied to Betty's defense. A tussle soon erupted. Amid the melee, Birnie threatened violence against Betty and Mrs. Gildea and warned that he would prosecute the Cowers and Gildeas. Undeterred, Mr. Gildea growled that Birnie "should feel the weight of his hand (or fist)" if he "would lay a hand on her," while Mr. Cowers declared "it was his house & that I [Birnie] should not take her away." Birnie retreated, but the following summer he brought his complaint before the Frederick County court. The court upheld the indenture and authorized Birnie to "use reasonable force to enforce her return to my service," but Birnie seems to have been unwilling to risk another confrontation; there is no evidence that Betty returned to his household. Other masters found themselves in a similar bind. In 1819, Clotworthy Birnie, Jr., informed his father that an English immigrant who had arrived in Frederick with fourteen indentured servants was unable to retain them. "[T]hey are all leaving him," the younger Birnie reported.<sup>93</sup>

The limitations imposed upon indentured servitude, combined with the institution's gradual disappearance, clarified racial distinctions that were sometimes murky during the colonial period. The argument should not be overstated. Maryland had been a thoroughgoing slave society since the seventeenth century, and whites had long been granted privileges and spared abuses that distinguished them from blacks. Still, white servants sometimes found themselves subjected to harsh treatment. In 1788, William Boswall petitioned the Frederick County court for redress, claiming that his master, Nathan McGruder, had held him "under the most rigid government,"

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<sup>93</sup> Clotworthy Birnie Diary, 12 December 1811, 4 July 1812, and 9 August 1812, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR; and Clotworthy Birnie, Jr., to Clotworthy Birnie, 26 August 1819, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

kept him “almost naked,” and “compelled your petitioner to receive a few old rags, a pr. of old shoe buckles, and a pr. of good shoes for his freedom dues.”<sup>94</sup> The punishments inflicted on indentured servants made a powerful impression on one Carroll County slaveholder, who decades later remembered seeing an Irish servant whipped and placed in an iron collar.<sup>95</sup>

Working alongside blacks sometimes fostered friendships and intimate relationships between indentured immigrants and slaves. In 1773, John Fletcher hauled his servant Ann Grimes before the Frederick County Court, where she stood accused of “bastardy” and rearing a “Child begot by a Negro.”<sup>96</sup> Remnants of these older, more fluid racial boundaries lingered into the early republic, occasionally subverting the arithmetic that equated whiteness with freedom and blackness with slavery. In 1792, a slaveholder in Baltimore County advertised for the return of Bob, “a country born, young negro man,” who had escaped with an Irish indentured servant.<sup>97</sup> After being captured at Yorktown, former redcoat Thomas Salmon bound himself as a carpenter at Roger Johnson’s iron furnace in Frederick County. While there, the indentured Salmon married a free black woman, fathered several children, and incurred his master’s anger by escaping to Baltimore.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> The court agreed that Boswell had been ill-used and ordered his former master to make additional compensation. Petition of Wm. Boswall, n.d. [1788], Frederick County Court, Petitions, MdHR.

<sup>95</sup> Susannah Warfield Diary, 4 January 1849, MdHS.

<sup>96</sup> That same year, Thomas Tyler brought his bound Irishwoman, Ann Dunn, into court with her “mulatto bastard child.” Frederick County Court, Minutes, 1773, MdHR.

<sup>97</sup> Washington Spy [Hagerstown, Md.], 26 September 1792.

<sup>98</sup> Bartgis’s Federal Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 27 October 1796.



The physical punishments inflicted upon both slaves and indentured servants continued to muddy the waters between these labor regimes during the early 1800s. In 1817, for example, Frederick's aldermen declared that "any slave or imported servant" convicted of violating municipal ordinances would suffer identical penalties; both were subject to "any number of stripes, not exceeding thirty-nine."<sup>99</sup> These were exceptional cases, for whites bristled at anything that smacked of slavery. Courts had inflicted beatings and public humiliations upon both blacks and whites into the first decade of the nineteenth century, but such punishments came under increased scrutiny during the 1810s. In February 1804, the Washington County court sentenced John Murdoch, a free white man, to "thirty lashes on his bare back, well laid on, and stand ten minutes in the pillory," while John Saunders, also a free white man, received twenty lashes for petty larceny. At the same session, the court sentenced "Negro Bob" to fifteen stripes for stealing a few pieces of iron.<sup>100</sup> Such sentences became increasingly distasteful to whites over the following decade. In 1819, the Washington County court sparked a firestorm when it sentenced a poor white man to be flogged for profane swearing. "We can scarcely believe that such proceedings should have taken place in Maryland," thundered one writer, who insisted that whipping a white man was "repugnant to humanity . . . and inconsistent with the spirit of free government."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 14 June 1817.

<sup>100</sup> Washington County Circuit Court, Docket and Minutes, February 1804, MdHR.

<sup>101</sup> Baltimore Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser, 8 March 1819.

## **The Williams Brothers Construct a Workforce**

In 1786, General Otho Holland Williams, a Frederick County planter and former officer in the Continental Army, declared slavery a “national crime” and expressed his earnest desire for “the entire emancipation of the human race.” He was, however, wary of manumitting his slaves and questioned the wisdom of those who freed “a number of ignorant, indisposed barbarians.” Despite his misgivings, Williams justified his decision to continue owning slaves by claiming that “buying a slave is different from selling one, for in buying a slave we can be sure our slaves are well-treated.”<sup>102</sup>

Williams’ unease over slavery was symptomatic of a more widespread uncertainty about labor arrangements in the new nation. Like many of his neighbors, Williams’ spent much of the 1790s groping for a suitable workforce. He and his managers constantly adjusted the composition of the plantation’s laboring population; not only were individual workers hired and discharged, but entire labor regimes were introduced, modified, and scrapped. In 1791, Williams informed his manager that he intended to purchase “three or four stout hands” from the next shipment of German redemptioners. They must have proved unsatisfactory, for the following spring his manager ended an appeal for additional hands by imploring, “I wish for no more of your doche men.” Discipline problems may have been at the root of his discontent. In 1794, an associate encouraging Williams to purchase a German indentured servant had to assure the planter that, although the man had been “outrageously insolent” to

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<sup>102</sup> O. H. Williams to William Lewis, 15 June 1786, Otho Holland Williams Papers, MdHS.

his previous master, the threat of a flogging would make him an “honest and industrious servant.”<sup>103</sup>

Williams’s growing doubts about indentured servants joined with simmering resentment of another segment of his plantation’s workforce—the “helpless worthless sett” of tenants—to overcome his doubts about slavery. In 1793, he resolved to evict the tenants, winnow out unneeded servants, and rebuild his workforce around a resident manager who would oversee an expanded force of slaves. Williams hired additional slaves and instructed his attorney to buy “two or three” at an upcoming auction. In a letter outlining his manager’s duties, he ordered that the manager and his family be integrated into the evolving workforce. The manager “need not be a constant laborer,” Williams explained, “but should set his hand to everything,” while his wife and children were expected to manage a household, assist with the slaves’ cooking, mending, and washing, and oversee the plantation’s dairy and poultry operations.<sup>104</sup>

While the general tinkered with his workforce, his brother, Elie Williams, was beset with his own problems. In 1789, the Washington County planter complained that his former indentured servant had “behaved in such a manner since he got free as obliged me to discharge him.” Unable, or unwilling, to continue without a personal servant, Williams begged his brother to secure an Irish indentured servant. The Irish, he explained, “being men of honor are the most to be depended on for a compliance

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<sup>103</sup> O. H. Williams to Philip Thomas, 16 February 1791, David Bryan to O. H. Williams, 2 March 1792, and Philip Thomas to O. H. Williams, 28 May 1794, all in Otho Holland Williams Papers, MdHS.

<sup>104</sup> Dr. Philip Thomas to O. H. Williams, 9 April 1794, and O. H. Williams to Benjamin Williams, 6 May 1794, both in Otho Holland Williams Papers, MdHS.

of [sic] what they promise.” He wanted no Germans—they were “generally too dull”—nor would he accept any Englishmen, who were “are almost without exception villains.” Williams was less choosy about the composition of his agricultural workforce. “In order to enable Dutch John & my negro men to clean up and sow in good order” and “make other necessary and profitable improvements,” he augmented his force with a tenant who would “work the fields, which are not in grain on a share.” The tenant was, however, merely a temporary solution. In fact, Williams seems to have engaged the tenant in order to free his German farmhand and slaves to erect fences and complete sundry building projects.<sup>105</sup>

The Williams brothers’ workforces thus spun on several axes that muddied, or at least problematized, the divide between slave and free, black and white. Their efforts to recruit diverse workers and blend them into a unified force further underscore the contingency and experimentation that characterized labor arrangements in northern Maryland at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Otho Holland was troubled by slavery, but when other labor regimes could not meet his needs, he hired and purchased slaves. Still, neither he nor his brother believed that the region’s various labor regimes were incompatible. Indentured servants, slaves, tenants, and hirelings were all acceptable alternatives to those searching for solutions to their labor troubles.

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<sup>105</sup> Elie Williams to Otho Holland Williams, 17 March 1789, Otho Holland Williams Papers, MdHS.

Table 1.1

## Population of Northern Maryland, 1790-1820

|                       | 1790   | 1800          | 1810          | 1820          |
|-----------------------|--------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Cecil Co.</b>      |        |               |               |               |
| White                 | 10,055 | 6,542 (-35%)  | 9,652 (+48%)  | 14,723 (+53%) |
| Slave                 | 3,407  | 2,103 (-38%)  | 2,467 (+17%)  | 2,342 (-05%)  |
| Free Black            | 163    | 373 (+128%)   | 947 (+154%)   | 1,783 (+88%)  |
| <b>Frederick Co.</b>  |        |               |               |               |
| White                 | 26,937 | 26,478 (-02%) | 27,893 (+05%) | 31,997 (+15%) |
| Slave                 | 3,641  | 4,572 (+26%)  | 5,671 (+24%)  | 6,685 (+18%)  |
| Free Black            | 213    | 473 (+122%)   | 783 (+71%)    | 1,777 (+127%) |
| <b>Harford Co.</b>    |        |               |               |               |
| White                 | 10,784 | 12,018 (+11%) | 14,606 (+21%) | 11,207 (-23%) |
| Slave                 | 3,417  | 4,264 (+25%)  | 4,431 (+04%)  | 3,320 (-25%)  |
| Free Black            | 775    | 1,344 (+73%)  | 2,221 (+65%)  | 1,367 (-38%)  |
| <b>Washington Co.</b> |        |               |               |               |
| White                 | 14,472 | 16,108 (+11%) | 15,591 (-03%) | 19,247 (+23%) |
| Slave                 | 1,286  | 2,200 (+71%)  | 2,656 (+21%)  | 3,201 (+21%)  |
| Free Black            | 64     | 342 (+434%)   | 483 (+41%)    | 627 (+30%)    |

SOURCE: U.S. Census Office, Fifth Census, or, Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, to Which Is Prefixed a Schedule of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States, According to the Acts of 1790, 1800, 1810, and 1820 (Washington: D. Green, 1821).

Table 1.2

Value of Produce Sold, "Perry Hall" Plantation  
Baltimore County, Md., 1822-1824

|                   |          |           |        |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|--------|
| Apple Cider       | \$776.37 | Potatoes  | \$9.94 |
| Wheat             | 713.73   | Eggs      | 8.26   |
| Peaches and Pears | 603.45   | Piglets   | 5.31   |
| Butter            | 416.88   | Turnips   | 4.50   |
| Calves            | 70.25    | Turkeys   | 2.25   |
| Hides and Bones   | 54.31    | Figs      | 1.38   |
| Apples            | 43.18    | Mutton    | 1.38   |
| Lard              | 30.20    | Asparagus | 1.38   |
| Bacon and Ham     | 14.20    |           |        |

Source: Harry Dorsey Gough Ledger and Family Accounts, 1816-1826, MdHS.

Table 1.3  
 Slaveholding Households  
 Frederick and Washington Counties, Md., 1790-1820

|                       | 1790        | 1800        | 1820        |
|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Frederick Co.</b>  |             |             |             |
| Slaveholding          | 678 (16%)   | 899 (19%)   | 1,459 (27%) |
| Non-Slaveholding      | 3,681 (84%) | 3,741 (81%) | 3,900 (73%) |
| <b>Washington Co.</b> |             |             |             |
| Slaveholding          | 269 (11%)   | 390 (15%)   | 798 (24%)   |
| Non-Slaveholding      | 2,165 (89%) | 2,154 (85%) | 2,581 (76%) |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, United States Census, 1790, 1800, and 1820, NARA.

Table 1.4

Slave Population (by Census District)  
Frederick County, Md., 1820

| District No.               | 1     | 2   | 3     | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8     | 9   | Frederick<br>(City) |
|----------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|-----|---------------------|
| Slaves                     | 1,118 | 586 | 1,110 | 298 | 150 | 356 | 474 | 1,082 | 983 | 436                 |
| % of Total                 | 35    | 9   | 21    | 9   | 5   | 8   | 10  | 17    | 26  | 12                  |
| Slaveholding<br>Households | 184   | 110 | 193   | 69  | 89  | 128 | 160 | 232   | 128 | 166                 |
| % of White<br>Households   | 52    | 31  | 33    | 15  | 19  | 20  | 21  | 28    | 35  | 30                  |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, United States Census, 1820, NARA.

Table 1.5

Slave Population (by Census District)  
Washington County, Md., 1820

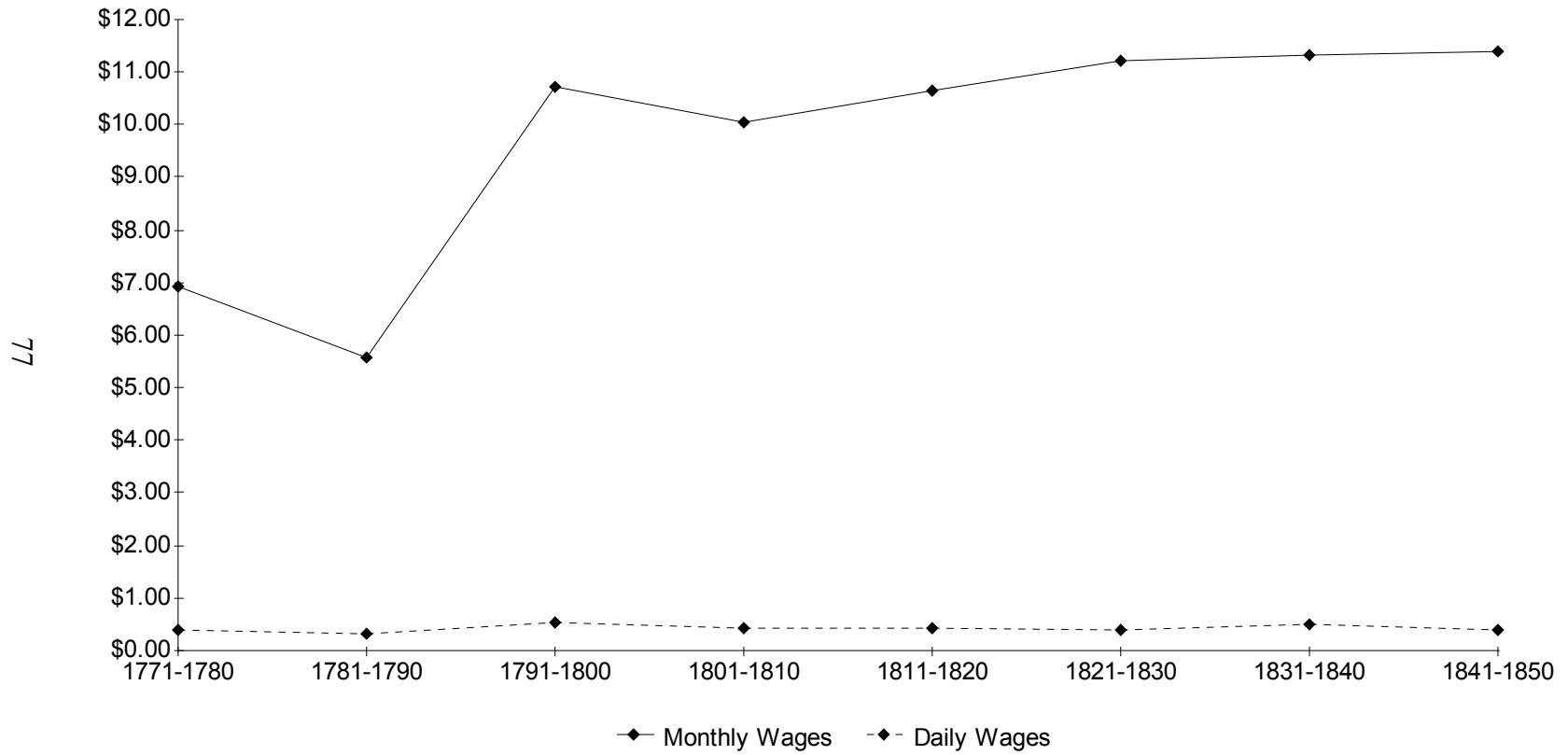
| District No.               | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | Hagerstown |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------|
| Slaves                     | 544 | 840 | 800 | 432 | 222 | 334        |
| % Total                    | 10  | 21  | 14  | 17  | 10  | 12         |
| Slaveholding<br>Households | 139 | 205 | 178 | 106 | 53  | 114        |
| % of White<br>Households   | 18  | 32  | 20  | 26  | 20  | 28         |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, United States Census, 1820, NARA.



Figure 1.1

Average Agricultural Wages in Maryland,  
1771-1850



SOURCE: Donald R. Adams, Jr., "Prices and Wages in Maryland, 1750-1850," *Journal of Economic History* 46 (September 1986), 633.

## Chapter 2

### “A Strange Reverse of Fortune”: Land and Labor, 1815-1860

In 1831, John P. Thompson of the Frederick-Town Herald climbed the “High Knob” of Catoctin Mountain. There, he was confronted with a glorious vision. “I have stood upon the mountain high in the air, and witnessed on all sides, as far as the eye can reach, an almost unbroken line of yellow grain, which reflected in the sun, like the shining bed of *Paetolus*.”<sup>1</sup> Thompson’s appreciation was shared by other commentators, including the acerbic travel writer Anne Royall, who toured Maryland in the 1820s. Although she spared few criticisms in her description of the Middle Atlantic, Royall was enthralled by Frederick County, which “exhibits a uniform representation of beautiful farms and mansions.” “Nothing like poverty shows its head, in or near Frederick,” she gushed, “all is flowing with wealth, health, and beauty.”<sup>2</sup> Such effusive praise suggests that little had changed in the decades since Polish traveler Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz exclaimed that “the land flows with milk and honey.”<sup>3</sup> But a great deal had changed, and those changes had left indelible marks on the countryside.

For those who cared to notice, there were abundant signs that northern Maryland had weathered numerous tempests during the 1820s. In 1832, English traveler Thomas Hamilton found that “the appearance of poverty seemed to increase”

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 2 July 1831.

<sup>2</sup> Anne Royall, The Black Book: Or, A Continuation of Travels, in the United States, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Printed for the Author, 1828), 1:276.

<sup>3</sup> Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Travels Through in America in 1797-1799, with Some Further Accounts of Life in New Jersey, trans. Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, N.J.: Grassman Publishing Co., 1965), 113.

outside Hagerstown. “Here and there a ragged negro slave was seen at work near the wretched hovel of his master,” but many farms were abandoned and the fields allowed to “relapse into a state of nature.”<sup>4</sup> For James W. C. Pennington, an enslaved blacksmith living near Hagerstown, nothing embodied the fundamental—and wrenching—changes in the region’s economy more than “Fountain Rock,” the former seat of Washington County planter Samuel Ringgold. As he penned his autobiography in the 1840s, Pennington remembered a bleak night during the 1820s when he crossed the yard of the abandoned plantation and witnessed its overgrown walks, rusting fences, sagging ceilings, and a silence broken only by “the crying cricket and cockroaches.” “I could but pause a moment and recur in silent horror to the fact, that a strange reverse of fortune had lately driven from that proud mansion a once opulent family,” Pennington wrote.<sup>5</sup>

Pennington intended his remarks as a cautionary tale about slavery’s corrosive effects on whites, but the crumbling plantation embodied something larger as well. It attested to the agricultural and financial upheavals that had, by 1830, left northern Maryland’s economy in ruins and placed slavery on the path to gradual extinction. This “strange reverse of fortune” was a dramatic departure from the decades immediately following the American Revolution, when slavery and free labor had mingled without creating serious dissonance among employers. The misgivings that landowners harbored about slavery were, to a large extent, balanced by their

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hamilton, Men and Manners in America (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, and Blanchard, 1833), 288.

<sup>5</sup> James W. C. Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, 3rd ed. (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 70.

ambivalence towards wage laborers, and most were content to cobble together a workforce from the ranks of both free and unfree workers. Beginning in 1815, however, the fluidity that had characterized earlier labor arrangements gradually hardened. Over the following decades, a growing chorus of agricultural reformers and political economists crafted a new dialectic between slavery and free labor, one that locked these labor regimes in a Manichean struggle for supremacy. How these transformations came about, and what they portended for the region's free and enslaved laborers, are the subjects of this chapter.

### **“The Day of Retribution”: The Economy, 1815-1860**

“[W]e have been rioting and reveling in the blood of Europeans,” declared Frederick merchant and publisher Mathias Bartgis. Writing amid the tempest unleashed by the Panic of 1819, Bartgis reckoned that his countrymen were experiencing God's retribution for “basking in the sunshine of good times” while thousands died. “Alas, human nature shudders, it never occurred how we should be scourged for our inequities; and, not until the day of retribution had come, did we think of our past follies.”<sup>6</sup> Others also saw the hand of providence in the economic crises. In 1822, the mayor of Hagerstown proclaimed a “day of humiliation and prayer” for deliverance from the depression, a protracted drought, and a cholera outbreak.<sup>7</sup> Bartgis and his neighbors had not missed the mark, for the region's farmers and merchants were suffering the consequences of decisions made during the

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<sup>6</sup> Mathias Bartgis Journal, 24 August 1819, HSFC.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Kennedy to Gov. Samuel Sprigg, 19 September 1822, Thomas Kennedy Papers, MdHS.

Napoleonic Wars, when robust commodity markets and the rapid expansion of credit networks had buoyed the economy and encouraged many to become dangerously overextended.

The return of peace presaged great hardship for northern Marylanders. In 1815, England enacted a more restrictive corn law that made it difficult for American produce to compete in that country's flour markets. Poor harvests in both Europe and North America in 1816 sent flour prices rocketing upward, but northern Maryland's farmers were unable to capitalize because their crops had also failed. Over the following years, expanding domestic markets and growing demand for foodstuffs in the West Indies and South America softened the impact of restrictive trade measures and the resumption of European agriculture, but flour prices never regained their wartime levels.<sup>8</sup>

Disruptions in the financial system dovetailed with the weakening commodity markets to exacerbate northern Maryland's woes. By the 1810s, there were signs that the unstable banking and credit systems that had emerged and flourished during the Napoleonic Wars were beginning to collapse. During the 1790s and 1800s, banks throughout the Middle Atlantic had pursued a reckless course, issuing currency and extending loans under the assumption that commodity markets would continue their upward march. When the wars ended, Baltimore's bankers and the farmers in the city's hinterlands began losing confidence in the small, undercapitalized institutions in rural communities. In 1815, a Washington County editor warned local distillers, farmers, and millers to "be on their guard" when selling produce in

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<sup>8</sup> George Terry Sharrer, "Flour Milling and the Growth of Baltimore" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1975), 146-68.

Baltimore, for “[t]he merchants of that city have paid you in the notes of distant country banks, and when the same notes are carried back and offered to them, they will not receive them, unless you make a large deduction.” Washington County legislator Thomas Kennedy concurred. Although many of his neighbors thought they “were doing wonders when they get a few more cents per barrel for their flour” by taking worthless “western paper,” he believed it “a losing business to them in the end.” Although northern Marylanders believed their own financial institutions were secure, Baltimoreans were less sanguine. Some of the city’s bankers and merchants began refusing currency issued by banks in Hagerstown and Frederick, while others imposed drastic discounts.<sup>9</sup>

The resulting deflation and financial constriction sent shockwaves through the countryside. As early as 1813, Frederick County planter Thomas S. Lee fretted that growers had become too dependent upon commercial flour production and the increasingly scarce currency issued by banks in Baltimore. “Flour is almost the only article that will command money,” he wrote, “but money seems to have vanished from the mountains.” The potentially disastrous consequences of a financial constriction alarmed many in the countryside. “Much vexation and some loss have been and will be experienced in this and other counties by the refusal of the Baltimore banks to receive any but their own paper,” warned a Frederick editor in 1815. Two years later, Frederick’s businessmen conceded that much of the currency in circulation was unsound. At a public meeting, fifty-four merchants and millers

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<sup>9</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 25 October 1815 [first quotation], and 31 December 1817 [second quotation]. On the actions of Baltimore’s financial community during the 1810s, see Sharrer, “Flour Milling and the Growth of Baltimore,” 237-40.

resolved not to receive “the notes of any bank, corporation, road company, or private association, under one dollar” and to “seek opportunities to transmit them to the institutions where they are redeemable.” In January 1818, a merchant in Hagerstown echoed these complaints, noting that “small notes are constantly getting out of credit” and that “much trouble arises from their circulation.” That summer, farmers and millers gathered at Hagerstown to condemn the “sort of paper, purporting to be bank notes” and to warn that, unless these bills were removed from circulation, “a most serious loss and heart-breaking distress will and surely must be soon felt.”<sup>10</sup>

The prediction proved remarkably prescient. In 1818, the Baltimore branch of the Bank of the United States attempted to collect some of its outstanding loans—which amounted to about \$20 million—and to rein in the unstable credit networks. The resulting depreciation and contraction of credit sent shockwaves through the countryside. In January 1819, Hancock merchant Samuel Gregory described a “great stagnation of business—banks all thro’ this country shutting up and failing.”<sup>11</sup>

The financial panic soon reverberated through commodity markets. Baltimore’s flour markets tumbled so rapidly that one of the city’s agricultural journals expressed “great embarrassment in attempting to state the price of anything,” a task which the editor equated to measuring “the height of a tree in the midst of a

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<sup>10</sup> Thos. S. Lee to Eliza Horsey, 24 October 1813, Outerbridge Horsey Papers, MdHS [first quotation]; Political Examiner [Frederick, Md.], 1 November 1815 [second quotation]; Bartgis’s Republican Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 3 January 1818 [third quotation]; and Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 21 January 1818 [fourth quotation]; The Torch Light [Hagerstown, Md.], 28 July 1818 [fifth quotation].

<sup>11</sup> Sharrer, “Flour Milling and the Growth of Baltimore,” 239-40; Samuel Reznick, “The Depression of 1819: A Social History,” American Historical Review 39 (October 1933): 28-47; Gary L. Browne, “Baltimore and the Panic of 1819,” in Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland, ed. Aubrey C. Land, Lois Green Carr, and Edward C. Papenfuse (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 212-27; and Samuel F. Gregory to Lavina Richmond, 1 January 1819, Gregory Family Papers, MdHS.

passing tornado.”<sup>12</sup> Farmers nervously watched the collapsing markets. From Frederick County, Clotworthy Birnie, Jr., wrote that “the harvest has commenced here & it certainly is as luxurious as has ever been known, but if prospects do not mend the farmers may feed their wheat & distill their rye.”<sup>13</sup> When the dust settled, flour fetched a mere fraction of its previous value; between 1817 and 1821, prices plummeted from \$14 per barrel to a paltry \$3.62.<sup>14</sup> The impact of this collapse was felt by rural merchants and millers, whose fortunes were inextricably linked to those of Baltimore. In 1820, Frederick County miller Ignatius Davis traced the decline of the flour market for a census taker. “During 1815, the price varied from \$10 to 9 [per barrel],” he reported; “1819, from \$7 to 6; the present year, \$5 to 4.”<sup>15</sup> The depression did not dissuade manufacturers from producing large quantities of flour and whiskey, but the flagging markets yielded meager profits. “The demand for flour not great—sales considerable—but the price very low,” griped Jonathan Hoover, also a miller, while a neighboring whiskey distiller complained of producing “as much as ever” but making “a small profit.”<sup>16</sup>

Property values were dragged down in the undertow of commodity prices. “Times here . . . begin to wear an alarming aspect,” worried Samuel Gregory, a merchant in Washington County. “[P]roperty, I do believe, within a month, has fallen

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<sup>12</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 9 June 1819.

<sup>13</sup> Clotworthy Birnie, Jr., to Clotworthy Birnie, 28 June 1819, Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.

<sup>14</sup> Sharrer, “Flour Milling and the Growth of Baltimore,” 326.

<sup>15</sup> Return of Ignatius Davis (Frederick County, Md.), 1820 U.S. Census of Manufacturers, NARA.

<sup>16</sup> Return of Jno. Christian Hoover (Frederick County, Md.) and Return of John Conch (Frederick County, Md.), both in 1820 U.S. Census of Manufacturers, NARA.



25 pr. cent.”<sup>17</sup> Washington County legislator Thomas Kennedy concurred, noting that “land which cost sixty or seventy dollars will not bring twenty” and most of the farms seized for debts during the previous year remained “unsold for want of bidders.”<sup>18</sup>

The twin collapses of the commodity and land markets had disastrous consequences for overextended farmers and merchants. Farmland in Frederick County had tickled \$125 per acre during the previous decade, and many speculators found themselves caught in a terrible bind. They “stupidly thought it would continue to rise in the same way,” observed immigrant J. Jakob Rutlinger. “Then the peace came, and the price fell unbelievably. There they were, the rogues.”<sup>19</sup>

Others found themselves staggering under consumer debts. As he traversed northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania attempting to settle outstanding accounts, Mathias Bartgis lamented that during “the good times of Dress and Fashion” many farmers “possessing not more than one hundred acres of land” had accrued debts of more than \$1,500 that “would take their all at the rate property is selling.”<sup>20</sup> The consequences of the region’s indebtedness are strikingly revealed in county court records. In November 1819, the Washington County court heard 411 cases involving debts or ejectments. This was a dramatic increase from earlier sessions. In October 1810, for example, the court tried 144 cases involving debts or

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<sup>17</sup> Samuel F. Gregory to Lavina Richmond, 7 June 1819, Gregory Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>18</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 18 January 1820.

<sup>19</sup> J. Jakob Rutlinger, “Day Book on a Journey to North America in the Year 1823,” in The Old Land and the New: The Journals of Two Swiss Families in American in the 1820s, ed. and trans. Robert H. Billigmeier and Fred A. Picard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 228-29.

<sup>20</sup> Mathias Bartgis Journal, 25 August 1819, HSFC.

ejectments, while in October 1814 it heard 131 such cases.<sup>21</sup> In 1820, at the urging of delegates from the state's northern counties, the Maryland General Assembly stanching the bleeding by enacting a stay law, which suspended the execution of existing debts until November 30, 1821.<sup>22</sup>

Domestic and foreign competition added to the region's troubles. Northern Maryland's under-capitalized industries felt the strain of competition from more efficient operations in New England and Europe. In 1820, Frederick County tanner John Mantz received discouraging news from a Richmond merchant, who feared that he would be unable to sell Mantz's leather "so long as we are glutted with such quantities of sole leather from the North, which altho' greatly inferior to yours [is] more desirable on account of its cheapness."<sup>23</sup> Mantz also felt pressure from overseas. "Leather has considerably declined these two years," he complained,

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<sup>21</sup> Washington County Circuit Court, Docket and Minutes, October 1810, October 1814, and November 1819, MdHR. The severity of the crisis confronting debtors in 1819 left a powerful impression on the region's residents. In 1829, a Hagerstown editor remembered that "[t]en years ago the number of actions [for debt] were at least 600." Having survived the "effects of speculation in land and the excessive emission of paper money," the farmers had now embraced a "more cautious and economic mode of living." Farmers' Register and Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 17 November 1829.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Kennedy of Washington County was one of the bill's chief supporters in the Maryland General Assembly. In an attempt to garner the support of his colleagues from the state's tobacco counties—whose primary staple had not suffered such a dramatic drop—Kennedy conceded that many northern Marylanders had "speculated largely" but argued that "if the legislature did not interpose, things would find their level, but it would be such a level as an earthquake or a hurricane would produce on a large city." Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 8 February 1820. For the act's provisions, see "An Additional Supplement to the Act, entitled, An Act for Regulating the Mode of Staying Executions, and Repealing the Acts of Assembly therein Mentioned," 12 February 1820, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis on Monday the 6th Day of December 1819 (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1820).

<sup>23</sup> David Barclay to John Mantz, 22 April 1820, John Mantz Letterbook, 1811-1820, Quynn Family Papers, MdHS.

“owing no doubt, in some measure, to severe competition from the Brasil [sic].”<sup>24</sup> Textile mills too were swamped in the tempest. In 1819, Mathias Bartgis visited a struggling factory outside Hagerstown “with water power sufficient to give employment to two hundred hands” that could employ only twenty.<sup>25</sup> The Frederick County textile mill of G. J. Conradt was also foundering. “The immense influx of foreign goods [has] glutted and depressed the market to a ruinous extent,” Conradt grumbled, leaving his fledgling operation at the mercy of “foreign competitors of immense wealth, long established in business.”<sup>26</sup>

The weakening demand for flour did not prevent farmers from sending their produce to Baltimore and Georgetown. In the spring of 1819, the Frederick-Town Herald reported that 4,500 barrels of flour had been inspected at Georgetown, and that an additional 10,000 barrels had arrived at the city’s wharves. “This quantity came down the river in two days, and great quantities more are on the way.”<sup>27</sup> The following winter, the Herald noted that the “badness of the roads and the low price of produce” had not prevented flour from “pouring into Baltimore.”<sup>28</sup> While traveling between Frederick and Baltimore in May 1821, tailor Jacob Englebrecht counted 102 wagons “all going to Baltimore with flour.”<sup>29</sup> Warnings from Baltimore’s merchants

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<sup>24</sup> Return of John Mantz (Frederick County, Md.), 1820 U.S. Census of Manufacturers, NARA.

<sup>25</sup> Mathias Bartgis Journal, 1 September 1819, HSFC.

<sup>26</sup> Return of John Mantz (Frederick County, Md.), 1820 U.S. Census of Manufacturers, NARA.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 20 March 1819.

<sup>28</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 19 February 1820.

<sup>29</sup> William R. Quynn, ed., and James Lowery, trans., The Diary of Jacob Englebrecht, 1818-1882, 2 vols. (Frederick, Md.: Historical Society of Frederick County, 2002), 1:40.

and millers did not dissuade farmers from sending their produce to market. Despite reports that the market was glutted, “large supplies” of wheat from Frederick County continued to arrive.<sup>30</sup> The cruel arithmetic that compelled farmers to continue marketing their produce was delineated by Washington County planter John Blackford in 1824. Describing the bleak situation facing the region’s landowners, Blackford noted, “Our markets keep down, [and] the calculation is that the market will be glutted this winter.” Worse, there was “a large quantity of flour in this section of the country to go out—and out it must go—the people must have, which is scarce throughout the union.”<sup>31</sup> Unwilling or unable to withdraw from commercial production, some farmers sought ways to manipulate the markets. “[D]elay grinding what wheat you may have on hand, as long as you can,” advised a Virginia farmer, “and when you have your flour ready, never, never store it any market, as it has a direct tendency of keeping down the price.”<sup>32</sup>

The depression abated somewhat in 1824, but northern Maryland’s reprieve proved brief. The Hessian Fly, an insect whose larvae destroyed maturing wheat, assaulted the region with particular intensity during the 1820s and 1830s.<sup>33</sup> The infestations combined with recurring droughts and unstable commodity markets to devastating effect. In 1832, a harsh winter and a cold, dry spring “totally blasted” the

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<sup>30</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 12 August 1820.

<sup>31</sup> John Blackford to Uriah Blue, 2 December 1824, Blackford Family Papers, MdHS. .

<sup>32</sup> Farmer’s Repository [Charles Town, Va.], 7 June 1820.

<sup>33</sup> The impact of the Hessian Fly on the nation’s economy is discussed in Brooke Hunter, “Creative Destruction: The Forgotten Legacy of the Hessian Fly,” in The Economy of Early America: Historical Perspectives and New Directions, ed. Cathy Matson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 236-62.

crops. “The wheat fields present a bleak and barren appearance, with scarcely a green spot upon the surface to delight the eye,” lamented one newspaper, which added that, besides damaging the crops “almost past recovery,” the inclement weather had destroyed the meadows and forced farmers to feed their livestock with surplus grain or drive them to market undersized.<sup>34</sup>

Farmers not only gathered meager harvests in 1833, but also found their efforts undercut by flagging commodity markets. The following spring, the directors of the Washington County Bank painted a bleak portrait of the local economy. Despite the “immensely diminished products of the earth in this section of the country,” prices were in a “rapid and continuing decline.” Property values had also plummeted at an “alarming” rate, with some land commanding a mere quarter of its purchase price.<sup>35</sup> Northern Marylanders limped through 1834 and 1835 before disaster struck in the summer of 1836. The Hessian Fly descended with renewed ferocity, destroying most of the wheat. “The ravages of the fly are very obvious in many fields,” reported one newspaper. “It is much to be feared that there will not be half the usual product.”<sup>36</sup>

These dire prophecies proved accurate. By June, some farmers were offering their blighted wheat fields as pastures to drovers, while others desperate to provide for their families were retrieving from the warehouses flour that had been intended

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<sup>34</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 14 April 1832.

<sup>35</sup> “Memorial of the Washington County Bank, at Williamsport, Maryland, in Favor of the Recharter of the Bank of the United States, March 21, 1834,” Senate Documents, 23rd Cong., 1st sess., no. 195, serial 240.

<sup>36</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 18 June 1836.

for export.<sup>37</sup> Flour prices on the local market climbed to unprecedented levels that fall, and some residents became temporarily dependent upon imported food.<sup>38</sup>

The situation worsened during the following winter and spring. “The prospect of the wheat crop is exceedingly unfavorable,” warned one newspaper. Many farmers abandoned their fields and those who persevered did not expect more than one-third the usual harvest.<sup>39</sup> A series of terse entries in the harvest rolls of Hagerstown farmer George F. Heyser illustrate the calamities that befell the region’s farmers during the 1830s. In 1835 he recorded “nothing more than a good half crop this year.” The following year, his workers gathered a mere forty bushels—“the wheat killed by the fly.” There was a slight improvement in 1837, but the situation remained grim: “two fields in wheat this year . . . very bad crops.”<sup>40</sup>

### **“Could Not Beg—Could Not Obtain Employment”: Labor, 1815-1860**

The tempest unleashed by the Panic of 1819 slammed all segments of the rural workforce, but hard times were experienced differently by free and enslaved workers. The economic collapse made hired farmhands’ hardscrabble existence even more difficult; unemployment became more frequent and those fortunate enough to find work found their wages cut. The enslaved fared worse. While the financial pressure

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<sup>37</sup> On July 1, 1836, Frederick tailor Jacob Englebrecht observed that “the crops will be very short generally in our neighborhood,” in consequence of which many farmers had decided not to harvest their wheat. He recorded a conversation with one drover who said that “on his way down he had been offered several wheat fields to pasture his cattle in.” Quynn, ed., and Lowery, trans., The Diary of Jacob Englebrecht, 1818-1882, 1: 525; Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 18 June 1836.

<sup>38</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 10 September 1836, 14 September 1836.

<sup>39</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 15 April 1837.

<sup>40</sup> George F. Heyser harvest rolls, 1835-1837, MdHS.

weighing upon slaveowners led some to manumit their slaves, others responded by selling them south. These responses contributed to larger transformations that redrew the landscape of slavery and freedom. Amid the economic crisis, northern Maryland's landowners haltingly, and sometimes grudgingly, embraced free labor.

The precipitous collapse of commodity markets pulled wages downward. "We have it from unquestionable authority that mowers have this season been hired at less than half the wages they had the last seven years," reported a Frederick newspaper.<sup>41</sup> The plight of workers was no better in Pennsylvania. There, English traveler William Faux recorded a conversation with a farmer who lamented that there were "many more [workers] than could be employed." "The excess of laborers," Faux warned, presaged "much distress in the coming winter."<sup>42</sup> Those fears were soon realized. The following winter and spring brought little relief; labor markets remained unsteady and wages low. Although he retained most of his workforce, Frederick County farmer Clotworthy Birnie demanded concessions from his farmhands and tenants "in case the markets do not improve." Other workers were less fortunate. Among those Birnie considering hiring in 1820 was a young wagoner whose previous employer had defaulted on his entire year's wages.<sup>43</sup> For some, the chronic unemployment and grinding poverty proved unbearable. Hagerstown miller

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<sup>41</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 18 September 1819. In Adams County, Pennsylvania, a newspaper reported a similar reduction in workers' wages. The Compiler [Gettysburg, Pa.], 14 July 1819.

<sup>42</sup> W. Faux, Memorable Days in America: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1823), 159-60.

<sup>43</sup> Clotworthy Birnie Diary, 4 March 1820, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR; and Andrew Thompson to Clotworthy Birnie, 25 May 1820, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

James Huston explained why he had committed suicide in a terse note tucked inside his vest: “could not beg—could not obtain employment.”<sup>44</sup>

The plight of northern Maryland’s farmhands was exacerbated by the sudden arrival of displaced urban workers seeking employment in the country. The Panic of 1819 brought Baltimore’s commercial and industrial sectors to a screeching halt and spawned widespread unemployment. One of the city’s newspapers lamented that many “manufactures have stopped or are about to stop, and every branch of mechanical industry is reduced from one-third to one-half,” a situation that had plunged “many thousands of productive workers” into poverty.<sup>45</sup> The impact of Baltimore’s crisis soon reverberated throughout the hinterlands. In Washington County, Samuel Gregory found that “tradesmen of all descriptions are seeking refuge and employment in the countryside. I can now hire hands at \$10 a month, whereas in May and June I gave \$14.50.”<sup>46</sup> Urban laborers continued to scour the countryside for work the following year. In July 1820, the Baltimore Patriot encouraged the city’s idled workers to tramp into rural Pennsylvania, where “a thousand men would find EMPLOYMENT in cutting down . . . the present most abundant harvest.”<sup>47</sup>

Amid the maelstrom of the 1820s, it was the enslaved who suffered most. The onset of Maryland’s economic woes coincided with slavery’s expansion into the lower South, which tempted many of the state’s slaveholders to square their accounts with the flesh of their bondsmen and women. The scale of the devastation was

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<sup>44</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 13 June 1820.

<sup>45</sup> Niles’ Weekly Register [Baltimore, Md.], 24 July 1819.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel F. Gregory to Lavina Richmond, 9 July 1819, Gregory Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>47</sup> Baltimore Patriot, 13 July 1820.



staggering (see Figure 2.1). Between 1818 and 1829, slaveholders in Frederick County sold at least 952 people—and probably more—to speculators or planters from the Deep South. At the time, the county’s slave population stood somewhere between 6,685 and 6,370, which means that Frederick County lost at least 12 percent of its slave population to the interstate traffic during the 1810s and 1820s. The land records of neighboring Washington County suggest that the trade also cut a broad swath there, with the county’s masters and mistresses consigning at least 209 people to traders’ coffles between 1819 and 1826. Once sold, these men, women, and children were scattered throughout the South, with 244 going to Louisiana, 224 to Kentucky, 195 to Tennessee, 106 to Mississippi, 100 to Georgia, 49 to North Carolina, 34 to Alabama, 31 to Virginia, 27 to South Carolina, 10 to Missouri, and 1 to East Florida. The remaining 151 were purchased by traders in Baltimore and the District of Columbia.<sup>48</sup>

It is difficult to determine the precise dimensions of the interstate slave trade for the remainder of the antebellum decades. The land records of Frederick County for 1840-1848 and 1853-1860 included only thirty-two slaves sold to speculators or non-resident planters. This low figure is doubtless illusory. Northern Maryland stood

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<sup>48</sup> The figures were collected from the Frederick County Court, Land Records, vols. JS 10-33, MdHR, and Washington County Court, Land Records, vols. DD-HH, MdHR. Using land records to investigate the interstate slave trade is problematic, as many transactions involving slaves were never recorded in the county courts. For example, when several men accused of shooting a fugitive slave petitioned the governor for a pardon, their appeal stated that the victim—“Negro George”—had been sold six times during the previous decade, but none of those transactions were recorded in the Frederick County land records. Petition of John Smith, James Mumford, James Merryman, et al., 1818, Maryland Governor and Council, Pardon Papers, MdHR. Thus, the figures cited are almost certainly lower than the actual number of slaves sold to the Deep South. For discussions of the problems inherent in using land records for studying the domestic slave trade, see Herman Freudenberger and Jonathan B. Pritchett, “The Domestic United States Slave Trade: New Evidence,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21 (Winter 1991): 447-77; and Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 283-96.

at the crossroad of the Upper South's most important slave trading routes, and abundant anecdotal evidence indicates that the domestic trade retained its terrible vigor throughout the antebellum decades.<sup>49</sup> Hagerstown resident George Hussey recalled seeing “hundreds of men and women, chained together, two by two, and driven to the South” during the 1830s.<sup>50</sup> George Ross, who escaped from his master in Hagerstown around 1850, recalled

. . . hundreds of cases where families were separated. I have seen them in droves, 150 or 200 together—men, women, and children—linked side by side. There used to be drivers to drive, one driver in front and one behind. I have seen them eight or nine years old up to 45 and 50; and when the mothers were sold, I have seen young babes, from the cradle in these gangs. I have seen this many & many a time, and heard them cry fit to break their hearts.<sup>51</sup>

Middletown farmer Allen Sparrow had similar memories from the 1840s and 1850s. “I have seen from 20 to 30 Negros cuft together one on each side to a long chain,” he recalled, with “the Georgemen [i.e., Georgia traders] . . . with his whip driving them.” The traders roamed the countryside purchasing their victims “same as a man would horses and cows,” sometimes offering \$1,200 for a “good looking” slave.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For a description of slave trading routes in northern Maryland, see Wilma A. Dunaway, “Put in Master’s Pocket: Cotton Expansion and Interstate Slave Trading in the Upper South,” in Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation, ed. John C. Inscoe (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 128. Additional evidence concerning northern Maryland’s continued involvement in the domestic slave trade comes from the numerous newspaper advertisements offering the “highest price, in cash, for likely young Negroes.” For examples, see Hagerstown Mail, 20 December 1833, 29 May 1835, 5 January 1838, 22 June 1838, 8 November 1839; and Frederick-Town Herald, 16 October 1830.

<sup>50</sup> Theodore Dwight Weld, American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 76.

<sup>51</sup> Testimony of George Ross before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 1863, Letters Received (Main Series), series 12, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, NARA.

<sup>52</sup> Allen Sparrow Diary, n.d., Middletown Valley Historical Society, Middletown, Md.

The tremendous sums offered by traders and planters from the Deep South spawned a bifurcated slave market in northern Maryland, with anemic local demand standing in stark contrast to vibrant southern markets. As early as 1818, Frederick businessman Andrew Turner reported that “the Georgia people . . . always give better prices than the regular purchaser, who buys for his own use.”<sup>53</sup> The difference between local and interstate markets became more pronounced as the antebellum decades progressed. By the 1850s, slave prices in northern Maryland were largely underwritten by the interstate trade. “A prime able-bodied slave is worth three times as much to the cotton or sugar planter as to the Maryland agriculturalist,” observed the Frederick Examiner in November 1858. “The principal interest of the Maryland slaveowner is . . . production for the southern market; for if that demand were cut off, the value of this property would depreciate from sixty to seventy percent.”<sup>54</sup> The newspaper’s editors were not exaggerating. The previous week, a lot of fourteen adolescent slaves had fetched the “unprecedented” average price of \$828.50.<sup>55</sup> Three months later, an executor in Washington County auctioned a parcel of teenage slaves for the disappointing average of \$358 each. “These negroes are not to be taken or hereafter sold beyond the limits of the State,” explained a newspaper, “and hence they did not bring as high prices as they otherwise would have done.”<sup>56</sup> The importance of

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<sup>53</sup> Andrew Thomas to Clotworthy Birnie, 12 October 1818, Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.

<sup>54</sup> Frederick Examiner, 10 November 1858. A slaveholder in neighboring Jefferson County, Virginia, made a similar observation after attending a slave auction in December 1857. Explaining why the slaves at a local auction had “all sold moderate,” he noted that there were “no traders bidding.” James Lawrence Hooff, *Commonplace Book*, 27 December 1857, VaHS.

<sup>55</sup> Middletown Valley Register [Middletown, Md.], 5 November 1858.

<sup>56</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 5 January 1859.

interstate markets became even more apparent during the Civil War. In 1862, a Frederick County editor was shocked when six young slaves brought a meager total of \$400 at auction. “Less than two years ago servants of this description would have commanded \$2,500,” he fumed. “The reader will remember that [we] admonished the sympathizers with the rebellion, in advance, that this would be the consequence of the crime and folly of rebellion.”<sup>57</sup>

The number of people jettisoned southward—combined with the bifurcated slave markets that developed—portended both slavery’s vigorous expansion on the cotton frontier and its bleak prospects in Maryland’s piedmont. Northern Maryland’s slaveholders had not escaped the catastrophes of the 1820s. Indeed, Washington County merchant Samuel F. Gregory believed that the economic “derangement” was most profound among slaveowners. In the earliest stages of the Panic of 1819, Gregory informed his fiancé that “[h]undreds who a few months ago stood aloof from want and looked down with contempt on their slaves and subjects are today sinking into poverty and ruin!”<sup>58</sup> He had not exaggerated. The pressures bearing upon slaveowners are revealed in the dramatic upswing in the number of slaves mortgaged during the 1820s (see Figure 2.2). Slaveholders were feeling the effects of hard times, and they were not above mortgaging their bondpeople to save themselves.

The severity of the economic downturn caused some slaveholders to question their commitment to slavery. Erosion of confidence in the “peculiar institution” was apparent on Frisby Tilghman’s “Rockland” plantation. In 1819, Tilghman had described his plantation as a model of Washington County’s enterprising and

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<sup>57</sup> Middletown Valley Register [Middletown, Md.], 4 April 1862.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Gregory to Lavina Richmond, 9 July 1819, Gregory Family Papers, MdHS.

improving spirit. He and his twenty-nine slaves had inaugurated a range of agricultural reforms; they practiced crop rotation, fertilized the fields with manure and plaster, and experimented with the latest implements. The results were impressive. Tilghman boasted that his estate's 260 acres of improved land yielded 1,100 bushels each of corn and wheat, 400 bushels of oats, and 300 bushels of rye. The plantation's pastures and woodlots were home to extensive livestock herds, including 200 to 300 sheep, 40 to 60 beeves, and 100 hogs.<sup>59</sup>

The robust agricultural economy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had made Tilghman's large slaveholding profitable, but during the 1810s and 1820s his large, unwieldy force became increasingly burdensome. Even before the economic collapse, Tilghman had made repeated efforts to hire out or sell unneeded slaves.<sup>60</sup> Former bondsman James W. C. Pennington, whose family belonged to Tilghman, remembered the planter grumbling about owning too many slaves. "I shall have to sell some of you," Tilghman once told Pennington's father, "and then the rest of you will have enough to do; I have not work enough to keep you all tightly employed . . . ."<sup>61</sup> Tilghman struck similar chords in his personal correspondence. In 1826, he lamented that farming had become unprofitable when

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<sup>59</sup> Tilghman described his farming operations in a letter dated 1 June 1819. American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 18 June 1819.

<sup>60</sup> In 1816, Tilghman sought employers or purchasers for "several valuable Negro Men, Women, and Boys." Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 4 December 1816. These efforts seem to have intensified as the economy worsened. In 1820, he offered to hire out "four Negro Men and Boys" and "Two small Boys and three Girls." Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 9 May 1820. He posted a similar announcement two years later. Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 8 January 1822. Tilghman also extended generous terms to those wishing to purchase his slaves. In 1817, he offered two years' credit to encourage anyone interested in purchasing "several young negro women." Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 25 April 1817.

<sup>61</sup> Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith, 6.

“grain only brings 62¢ per bushel.” Still, if wheat prices rebounded and stabilized, Tilghman believed he would “feel perfectly satisfied, provided we could get rid of the blacks.”<sup>62</sup> Reducing the size of the plantation’s enslaved workforce became the cornerstone of Tilghman’s efforts to revive his fortunes. In 1827, he proposed to “curtail my farming and go more extensively into the grazing [sic] system, which would enable me to curtail my number of hands.”<sup>63</sup>

As commodity markets sputtered and crops failed, slaveholders began to stumble under the weight of mounting debts. Even those who sold their bondspople to the Deep South sometimes found it difficult to salvage their finances. In 1821, Montgomery County farmer William Darne pleaded for an extension from his creditor, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, claiming that a series of “unfortunate” events—the Hessian Fly, a disease that killed his tobacco, and scarce currency—had left his finances in a shambles. Hoping to raise cash, Darne had offered two slaves to a trader, who balked at purchasing them because they were “rather above the age that Negro traders approve of, say about forty.” Sensing that their master might make another attempt to sell them, the men ran away. Although he recaptured them, Darne could not find a purchaser for the aging fugitives and was “obliged to be at the expense of sending them to Alabama,” where he hoped they might find a buyer.<sup>64</sup> Darne’s woes continued unabated during the following years. By 1827, he had concluded that his tattered fortunes could not be mended in Maryland. In a final

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<sup>62</sup> Frisby Tilghman to James Hollyday, 4 November 1826, Hollyday Papers, MdHS.

<sup>63</sup> Frisby Tilghman to Susan Hollyday, 14 October 1827, Hollyday Papers, MdHS.

<sup>64</sup> Wm. Darne to Chas. Carroll of Carrollton, 26 October 1821, Charles Carroll of Carrollton Family Papers, MdHS.

appeal for forbearance, Darne informed Carroll that his family and “a very few Negroes” were planning to settle near Tallahassee, Florida, where he would work as a merchant “while my negroes are getting the plantation open.” “If I can make arrangements to go to Florida,” he concluded, “I indulge a hope that I may be able to recover my losses.”<sup>65</sup>

Not only had the economic crisis of the 1820s shaken slaveholders’ confidence in slavery, it had sapped the institution’s foundations by removing those slaves whose labor—both productive and reproductive—would ensure its future. The gashes that the interstate trade ripped through the slave population boded ill for the institution’s survival in northern Maryland. Slave traders and southern planters seem to have been unconcerned about the sex of their quarry, but they were interested in their ages. While men and women were sold in roughly equal numbers, the traffic bore heaviest upon those adolescents and young adults whose children would soon perpetuate slavery.<sup>66</sup> Masters hoping to expand slavery’s domain needed men who could hack plantations out of the timber and women who would expand their slaveholdings, a truth that was underscored by the average ages of those sold away from northern Maryland: 17.2 years (male) and 16.9 years (female).<sup>67</sup> These young men and women would build an empire for slavery, but not in northern Maryland.

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<sup>65</sup> Wm. Darne to Chas. Carroll of Carrollton, 16 March 1827 [first quotation]; Wm. Darne to Chas. Carroll of Carrollton, 3 October 1827 [second quotation], both in Carroll-McTavish Papers, MdHS.

<sup>66</sup> Of the 1,088 slaves sold from Frederick and Washington counties whose sex can be determined, 560 (52 percent) were male and 528 (48 percent) were female.

<sup>67</sup> The statistics were gathered from slave sales recorded in the Frederick County Court, Land Records, vols. JS 10-33, MdHR, and Washington County Court, Land Records, vols. DD-HH, MdHR.

The slave trade scoured away the paternalistic façade that covered the master-slave relationship, exposing the dehumanizing violence that lay at its foundation and inspiring the enslaved to greater resistance. The domestic trade terrorized the region's slaves. Decades after escaping from bondage, Lewis Charlton was haunted by a coffle he saw in Frederick during the 1820s. "The slave owners bought up all the slaves they could," he remembered, "and had them all brought to the jail and handcuffed together with an iron collar around their necks." The slaves were then marched 150 miles and crowded onto a ship bound for South Carolina.<sup>68</sup> While the enormous power slaveholders wielded made it impossible for most slaves to thwart their owners' designs, the enslaved took desperate measures to avoid sale. The earliest stirrings of the domestic trade had already spawned violent resistance throughout the Chesapeake. In 1802, anxious whites in St. Mary's County reported a suspected slave insurrection whose leaders had vowed that "the whites will soon pay for selling negroes to Georgia men."<sup>69</sup> In Baltimore, the cotton boom that gripped the Deep South in 1815-1816 triggered both an increase of slave-trading activity and a spike in the number of runaway slaves.<sup>70</sup> Some of the bondspeople sold from Maryland's tobacco-producing counties sought refuge in the piedmont. In 1800, the Washington County sheriff Jonathan Wagoner reported the capture of Richard Johnson, a slave who recently been purchased in Kent County, Maryland, by "a

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<sup>68</sup> Lewis Charlton, Sketch of the Life of Mr. Lewis Charlton, and Reminiscences of Slavery (Portland, Maine: Daily Press, n.d.), 5.

<sup>69</sup> John Joseph Condon, Jr., "Manumission, Slavery and Family in the Post-Revolutionary Rural Chesapeake: Anne Arundel County, Maryland, 1781-1831" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2001), 146-47.

<sup>70</sup> T. Stephen Whitman, The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 78-81.



gentleman in Savannah in the state of Georgia.”<sup>71</sup> Two years later, Wagoner’s successor imprisoned “Negro Bob,” who had been raised in Caroline County and who had escaped from William Wells, “a dealer in negroes, living in North or South Carolina.” After escaping, Bob spent the fourteen months lurking about Washington County.<sup>72</sup> The resistance to the domestic traffic mounted by slaves from the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland was matched by their piedmont counterparts. In the 1820s, immigrant Jakob Rutlinger recounted the tale of a local slave who, upon discovering that his wife and children had been sold to a trader, “took the first opportunity to escape at night” and pursued his family to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, where he made an unsuccessful attempt to rescue them.<sup>73</sup> In 1822, a Washington County slave ambushed the men who had purchased his family and “lodged the contents of a musket into the side” of a trader.<sup>74</sup> Acts of violence could also be directed inward. When strangers approached Susan Gray’s farm in Washington County, a young slave mistook them for traders and severed her own hand with an axe, thus rendering herself worthless on the market. Fearing sale, a slave confined in the Hagerstown jail took similar action, mutilating his hands and head by smashing them against the prison walls.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Weekly Advertiser, 20 November 1800.

<sup>72</sup> Maryland Herald and Elizabeth-Town Weekly Advertiser, 15 September 1802.

<sup>73</sup> Rutlinger, “Day Book,” 233.

<sup>74</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 5 November 1822.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas J. C. Williams, The History of Washington County, Maryland, from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time, including a History of Hagerstown, 2 vols. (reprint, Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1968), 1:251. Incidents of self-mutilation and suicide were not uncommon. On January 21, 1836, Frederick resident Jacob Englebrecht noted that an imprisoned fugitive slave had severed four of his fingers while awaiting sale to the “Soul Drivers.” William R. Quynn, ed., and James Lowery, trans., The Diary of Jacob Englebrecht, 1818-82, 2 vols. (Frederick,

The most widespread response to the threat of sale was flight. Frederick County slave Israel Todd escaped “to save his wife . . . and her brother from being sold south,” while another fled because “he felt that his owner was in the notion of trading him off.”<sup>76</sup> Those ensnared by traders made determined efforts to reunite with their kin in Maryland. In 1806, Nathaniel Rochester, the sheriff of Washington County reported the arrest of “Negro Sally,” a slave from Stafford County, Virginia, whose master was “taking her and other slaves to the westward or southward.”<sup>77</sup> Sally may not have fled alone, for the previous week Rochester had announced that John Williams, a slave from St. Mary’s County, Maryland, was in custody. Like Sally, Williams had escaped from a coffle marching to the southwest.<sup>78</sup> Neither time nor distance deterred some from returning home. In 1818, Mississippi planter Peter Isler advertised for the return of Nace, a young slave who had escaped the previous December. Born near Hagerstown, Nace had been sold to a Tennessean sometime in 1812. Five years later, his owner transported him to Natchez. Within a few months, Nace escaped to New Orleans and boarded a ship bound for New York, where Isler suspected he would find passage to Baltimore and then return to his kin in Washington County.<sup>79</sup>

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Md.: Historical Society of Frederick County, 2002), 1:513. A similar case of self-mutilation was recorded in the Banner of Liberty [Liberty-Town, Md.], 13 June 1856. For some, the consequences of the trade were unbearable. In 1859, a slave in Sharpsburg hung himself after his wife was sold South. The Sun [Baltimore, Md.], 10 October 1859.

<sup>76</sup> Still, Underground Railroad, 262, 396.

<sup>77</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 14 January 1806.

<sup>78</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 7 January 1806.

<sup>79</sup> Bartgis’s Republican Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 2 May 1818.

Those who escaped from traders' coffles sometimes returned to their old neighborhoods, where some waged a guerrilla war against slavery and attempted to liberate relatives. During the 1820s, an unnamed slave "who was sold three or four years ago to a soul driver" returned to Frederick County, passed as a freedman, and guided a fellow slave into Ohio.<sup>80</sup> After being sold to a trader, "Negro George" escaped and lurked outside Liberty-Town in Frederick County. There, he committed a series of "depredations" before being cornered by a white posse in the workshop of a free blacksmith. When called upon to surrender, George emerged from the smithy wielding two axes and vowing to "kill or be killed." The stunned posse answered George's with a deadly hail of gunfire.<sup>81</sup>

The breakdown in slave discipline occasioned by the acceleration of the interstate trade during the 1820s combined with the desperate plight of Maryland's free laborers to further weaken slaveholders' authority. When impoverished free blacks and whites turned to crime, they often found allies among the enslaved. In 1823, a gang of whites, free blacks, and fugitive slaves raided a Frederick County plantation to steal turkeys. That same year, four slaves and "a white youth" robbed a Harford County resident of \$100 in specie.<sup>82</sup>

The task of maintaining slave discipline was made more challenging by the workings of Pennsylvania's gradual emancipation act, which was steadily transforming the commonwealth into free soil and a haven for Maryland's slaves. As

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<sup>80</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 22 January 1822.

<sup>81</sup> Petition of John Smith, James Mumford, James Merryman, et al., 1818, Maryland Governor and Council, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>82</sup> Baltimore Patriot and Commercial Advertiser, 5 February 1823, and 28 March 1823.

early as 1815, Washington County masters bemoaned “the facility with which Negro Slaves get into the state . . . and the great difficulty which attends regaining them, owing, in great measure, to the Laws of Pennsylvania.”<sup>83</sup> The complaint was not unusual; between 1816 and 1822, the Maryland General Assembly peppered the state’s northern neighbor with five resolutions criticizing its residents for harboring fugitive slaves and impeding efforts to recover them.<sup>84</sup> Pennsylvania’s legislature raised the stakes in 1820 by enacting an anti-kidnapping statute that increased to twenty-one years the maximum prison sentence for abducting free blacks and prohibited local officials from assisting in the recovery of fugitive slaves. Six years later, Pennsylvania enacted a personal liberty law stipulating that suspected fugitives must receive due process and that masters must obtain a certificate of removal from a judge before returning suspected fugitives to bondage.<sup>85</sup> The laws incensed slaveholders along the Mason-Dixon Line, who worried that their already tenuous hold on their slaves would be further weakened. In 1828, masters in Frederick County complained that they had sustained “serious losses” from slaves escaping into Pennsylvania and cautioned that “the evil seems to be growing, and unless a speedy stop can be put to [it], much greater evils can be anticipated.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 29 November 1815. The petitioners were probably protesting Pennsylvania’s anti-kidnapping law, which was enacted in 1780 and strengthened in 1788. Under the revised law, anyone convicted of kidnapping a free black with the intention of selling him or her into slavery would face six months at hard labor and a £100 fine. Thomas D. Morris, Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 25-27.

<sup>84</sup> T. Stephen Whitman, Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775-1865 (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007), 194.

<sup>85</sup> Morris, Free Men All, 44-46, 49-53.

<sup>86</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 7 June 1828.

In a larger sense, the looming presence of Pennsylvania sapped slavery's foundations by encouraging slaveholders in northern Maryland to question the economic and social value of the institution. Unlike most of their brethren further South, masters along the Mason-Dixon Line would have had little difficulty imagining a society without slavery. Across the border, and often within their immediate neighborhoods, they could observe farmers growing identical crops with hired laborers. Comparisons were inevitable, and slavery often fared poorly. Eli Ayres of the Maryland State Colonization Society reported that Harford County was "favorably circumstanced for deciding upon the relative value of free and slave." Harford's farmers were "constant witness to the rapid increase of population, improvement of soil, [and] accumulation of wealth" in Pennsylvania, which contrasted with depleted soil and declining population in their county "where slavery abounds."<sup>87</sup> Advocates of free labor delighted in recounting stories of thrifty Pennsylvanians who purchased plantations from bankrupted slaveholders, cultivated them with hired labor, and "made a fortune, on the same place, and at the same business, that a Marylander spent one."<sup>88</sup>

In the hands of free-labor ideologues, the relationship between slavery and free labor was re-crafted into a mortal struggle that offered little room for coexistence or compromise. "Free labor and slave labor cannot abide together," thundered Hezekiah Niles in 1831, for as "the one becomes stronger and stronger . . . the other

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<sup>87</sup> Report of Dr. Eli Ayres, recorded in Minutes of the Board of Managers, 5 August 1831, Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, MdHS.

<sup>88</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 16 July 1819.

becomes weaker and weaker.”<sup>89</sup> The collapse of indentured servitude during the 1810s, combined with the widespread desire to attract white immigrants, widened the gulf between slavery and free labor and created opportunities to racialize free labor. Eager to assure prospective immigrants that laboring in a slave society would neither undercut their racial prerogatives nor limit their economic prospects, agricultural reformers proclaimed that “the slaves are gradually vanishing away, and free white labor is becoming both productive and honorable.” In the emerging construct, slavery’s collapse became both a necessary precondition for, and the inevitable consequence of, the expansion of the white population.<sup>90</sup> “Slave labour has become unprofitable,” declared a Baltimore County farmer. “[W]henver white labor competes with slavery, it undersells it, and drives it out in all temperate climes.”<sup>91</sup>

Proponents of this argument pointed with glee to Frederick and Washington counties, where they perceived the results of free labor’s triumph over slavery. From Hagerstown, an agent of the Maryland State Colonization Society reported in 1831 that “all classes of blacks in this county are diminishing in number & their place is filling up with an industrious white population.”<sup>92</sup> “What counties have increased in population in the ten years between the two last censuses?” asked a Frederick County farmer in 1823. His answer: “Frederick, Washington, and Alleghany, where there are but few slaves.” As to why these counties boasted growing white populations, the

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<sup>89</sup> Niles’ Weekly Register [Baltimore, Md.], 15 October 1831.

<sup>90</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 8 June 1827.

<sup>91</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 15 September 1826.

<sup>92</sup> Report of Dr. Eli Ayres, recorded in Minutes of the Board of Managers, 5 August 1831, Maryland State Colonization Society Papers, MdHS.

farmer explained that a small slave population translated into increased employment options for whites. Moreover, the absence of slaves created a setting where “labour is not servile and considered degrading.”<sup>93</sup> This interpretation gained momentum over the following decades. Northern Maryland gradually became a powerful counterpoint to the state’s southern—and slaveholding—counties. “It is a well authenticated fact,” asserted the American Farmer in 1846, that Maryland’s most prosperous farmers were to be found in the northern counties, where “the free labor system has obtained to a considerable extent.”<sup>94</sup>

The combined effects of hard times, the instate slave trade, slave resistance, and slaveholders’ growing displeasure with slavery soon manifested themselves in census returns. The slave population of northern Maryland entered into a precipitous decline between 1820 and 1860 (see Table 2.1). The movement of slaves into the Maryland piedmont was arrested by slavery’s expansion into the Deep South; unwanted slaves would henceforth be sold south, not north. Other masters and mistresses chose to rid themselves of unwanted slaves through manumission. In the immediate aftermath of the Panic of 1819, the increasingly tenuous authority by which slaveholders held their chattels dovetailed with the worsening economic situation to drive the number of manumissions upward. In the twenty years between 1799 and 1818, Frederick County’s slaveowners had manumitted a total of 549 slaves. That number spiked to 807 in the lean decade following the Panic of 1819,

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<sup>93</sup> Genius of Universal Emancipation 3 (1823), 90.

<sup>94</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], April 1846.

with most of the manumissions occurring during the worst years of the depression in the early 1820s (see Figure 2.3).

The process of manumission continued to winnow away Frederick County's slave population during the remainder of the antebellum period. Slaveowners freed men and women in roughly equal numbers (see Table 2.3). It is clear, however, that they were in no hurry to end slavery altogether; delayed manumissions consistently outnumbered immediate manumissions (see Table 2.2). For some slaves, the promise of freedom must have had a hollow ring. In 1858, for example, a Frederick County master sold two women whose freedom was to commence only after ninety-nine years.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, the 1857 inventory of Mountjoy Luckett included a slave who would have celebrated his freedom—and the conclusion of World War One—in 1918.<sup>96</sup> Still, most slaveholders proposed more realistic terms. There was no considerable difference between the ages of term slaves those manumitted outright. In Frederick County, term slaves received their freedom at age 28.6 (men) and 29.3 (women) on average, while those freed immediately were age 27.4 (men) and age 27.6 (women).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Purchase agreement between Charles E. Trail and Daniel Derr, 23 November 1858, Frederick County Circuit, Land Records, vol. BGF 2, p. 603, MdHR.

<sup>96</sup> Inventory of Mountjoy Luckett, 5 May 1857, Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. GH 3, p. 94, MdHR.

<sup>97</sup> The figures represent the 1,939 manumitted slaves whose age and sex could be determined. Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1799-1830 and 1840-1848, MdHR; Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, 1853-1860, MdHR; Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, 1799-1830, 1840-1848, and 1853-1860, MdHR.



## **The Long Road from Slavery to Free Labor**

In March 1860, the Maryland General Assembly made a last, desperate effort to buttress slavery by outlawing manumission and creating mechanisms for free blacks to renounce their freedom. Northern Marylanders were dubious about this legislation, which had been spurred by slaveholders from the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland. As the proposed legislation snaked its way through county conventions and into the legislature, citizens from the state's northern counties denounced it as an unnecessary—and futile—effort to resuscitate a dying institution.<sup>98</sup> “It is seriously doubted if there be a demand for more slave labor in Maryland,” opined a Frederick newspaper, for “machinery is rapidly superceding manual labor in grain growing districts.” Indeed, were the slave population to be stabilized, the editor suspected that the “surplus would find its way to the cotton plantations.”<sup>99</sup> As the June deadline for manumissions approached, northern Maryland's slaveholders flocked to courthouses to liberate their slaves. In Washington County, “quite a large number of persons . . . set their negroes free,” while their neighbors in Frederick manumitted an “unprecedented” number of slaves in the three months following the law's passage.<sup>100</sup> This apparent rejection of slavery was the culmination of trends inaugurated in the 1810s, when northern Marylanders

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<sup>98</sup> “An Act . . . Prohibiting Manumissions of Negro Slaves and Authorizing Free Negroes to Renounce Their Freedom,” 10 March 1860, Laws of the State of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of the General Assembly Begun and Held at Annapolis on Wednesday the 4th of January and Ended on Saturday the 10th of March 1860 (Annapolis: Elihu S. Riley, 1860). For a discussion of the political controversy that swirled around the law's passage, see Barbara Jeanne Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 81-84.

<sup>99</sup> Frederick Examiner, 1 June 1859.

<sup>100</sup> Middletown Valley Register, 8 June 1860.

began remaking their region into a bastion of free labor. By 1860, it seemed that free labor's triumph was almost complete, for slaves constituted a mere 5 percent of the region's population. Yet slaveholders did not surrender their chattels without a struggle. Of the 129 Frederick County slaves manumitted in the spring of 1860, only 33 were freed outright. While the remaining 96 would receive their freedom when Maryland abolished slavery in 1864, many of their owners had envisioned slavery surviving into the 1880s—if not longer.<sup>101</sup> Northern Maryland's slaveholders imagined a long, protracted transition from slavery to freedom. The “peculiar institution” may have been unsustainable and untenable along the sectional border, but this realization did not translate into a hasty, pell-mell retreat from slavery. Pressed by a flagging economy and outflanked by their slaves, masters fought a stubborn rearguard action throughout the antebellum decades.

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<sup>101</sup> Of the ninety-six delayed manumissions recorded in 1860, twenty-three specified terms longer than twenty years. Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, vol. BGF 5, MdHR.

**Table 2.1**

## Population of Northern Maryland, 1830-1860

|                       | 1830          | 1840           | 1850          | 1860          |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| <b>Carroll Co.*</b>   |               |                |               |               |
| White                 |               | 15,521 (n/a)   | 18,667 (+20%) | 22,525 (+21%) |
| Slave                 |               | 1,122 (n/a)    | 975 (-13%)    | 783 (-20%)    |
| Free Black            |               | 898 (n/a)      | 974 (+08%)    | 1,225 (+26%)  |
| <b>Cecil Co.</b>      |               |                |               |               |
| White                 | 11,478 (-22%) | 13,329 (+16%)  | 15,472 (+16%) | 19,994 (+29%) |
| Slave                 | 1,705 (-27%)  | 1,352 (-21%)   | 844 (-38%)    | 950 (+13%)    |
| Free Black            | 2,249 (+26%)  | 2,551 (+13%)   | 2,623 (+03%)  | 2,918 (+11%)  |
| <b>Frederick Co.</b>  |               |                |               |               |
| White                 | 36,706 (+15%) | 28,975 (n/a)** | 33,314 (+15%) | 38,391 (+15%) |
| Slave                 | 6,370 (-05%)  | 4,445 (n/a)    | 3,913 (-12%)  | 3,243 (-17%)  |
| Free Black            | 2,716 (+53%)  | 2,985 (n/a)    | 3,760 (+26%)  | 4,957 (+32%)  |
| <b>Harford Co.</b>    |               |                |               |               |
| White                 | 11,314 (+01%) | 12,041 (+06%)  | 14,413 (+20%) | 17,971 (+25%) |
| Slave                 | 2,947 (-12%)  | 2,643 (-10%)   | 2,166 (-18%)  | 1,800 (-17%)  |
| Free Black            | 2,058 (+51%)  | 2,436 (+18%)   | 2,777 (+14%)  | 3,644 (+31%)  |
| <b>Washington Co.</b> |               |                |               |               |
| White                 | 21,277 (+11%) | 24,724 (+16%)  | 26,930 (+09%) | 28,305 (+05%) |
| Slave                 | 2,909 (-09%)  | 2,546 (-12%)   | 2,090 (-18%)  | 1,435 (-31%)  |
| Free Black            | 1,082 (+73%)  | 1,580 (+46%)   | 1,828 (+16%)  | 1,677 (-08%)  |

SOURCE: United States Census, 1830-1860.

\* Carroll County was carved from portions of eastern Frederick County and western Baltimore County in 1837.

\*\* It is difficult to determine the extent to which the population losses recorded in Frederick County in 1840 were caused by the creation of Carroll County.

**Table 2.2**

Number of Slaves Manumitted, Frederick County, Md.

| Type of Manumission         | 1799-1818  | 1819-1830  | 1840-1848  | 1853-1860  |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Immediate (Deed)            | 189        | 289        | 113        | 180        |
| Immediate (Will)            | 33         | 91         | 31         | 45         |
| <b>Total Immediate</b>      | <b>222</b> | <b>380</b> | <b>144</b> | <b>225</b> |
| <b>Percentage Immediate</b> | <b>40</b>  | <b>47</b>  | <b>47</b>  | <b>42</b>  |
| Delayed (Deed)              | 250        | 211        | 83         | 186        |
| Delayed (Will)              | 77         | 216        | 78         | 125        |
| <b>Total Delayed</b>        | <b>327</b> | <b>427</b> | <b>161</b> | <b>311</b> |
| <b>Percentage Delayed</b>   | <b>60</b>  | <b>53</b>  | <b>53</b>  | <b>58</b>  |
| <b>Total Manumissions</b>   | <b>549</b> | <b>807</b> | <b>305</b> | <b>536</b> |

SOURCE: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1799-1830 and 1840-1848, MdHR; Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, 1853-1860, MdHR; Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, 1799-1830, 1840-1848, and 1853-1860, MdHR.

**Table 2.3**

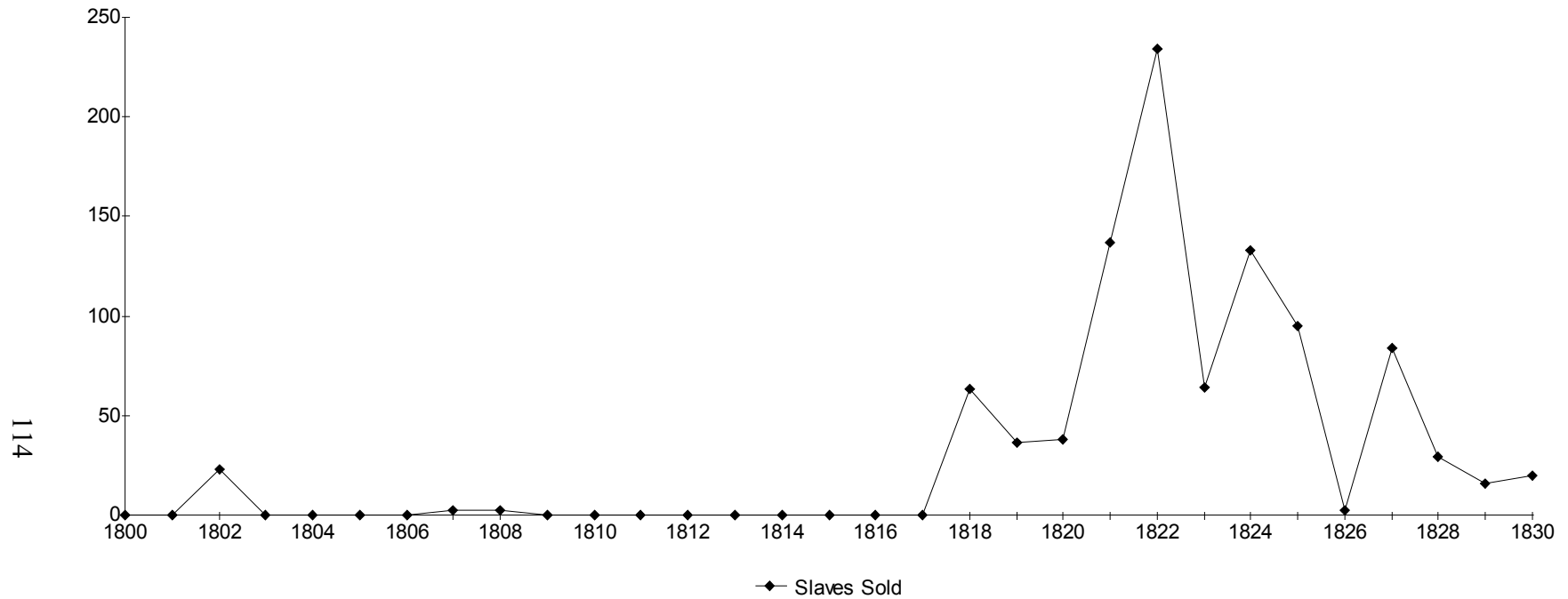
## Sex of Slaves Manumitted, Frederick County, Md.

| Sex of Slave<br>(Type of<br>Manumission) | 1799-1818  | 1819-1830  | 1840-1848  | 1853-1860  | Total      |
|--|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Male (Immediate)                         | 98         | 177        | 60         | 117        | 354        |
| Male (Delayed)                           | 172        | 229        | 75         | 143        | 447        |
| <b>Total Male</b>                        | <b>270</b> | <b>406</b> | <b>135</b> | <b>260</b> | <b>801</b> |
| <b>Percentage Male</b>                   | <b>49</b>  | <b>50</b>  | <b>44</b>  | <b>49</b>  | <b>49</b>  |
| Female (Immediate)                       | 124        | 202        | 81         | 107        | 390        |
| Female (Delayed)                         | 155        | 197        | 86         | 168        | 451        |
| <b>Total Female</b>                      | <b>279</b> | <b>399</b> | <b>167</b> | <b>275</b> | <b>841</b> |
| <b>Percentage Female</b>                 | <b>51</b>  | <b>50</b>  | <b>56</b>  | <b>51</b>  | <b>51</b>  |

SOURCE: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1799-1830 and 1840-1848, MdHR; Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, 1853-60, MdHR; Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, 1799-1830, 1840-48, and 1853-60, MdHR.

**Figure 2.1**

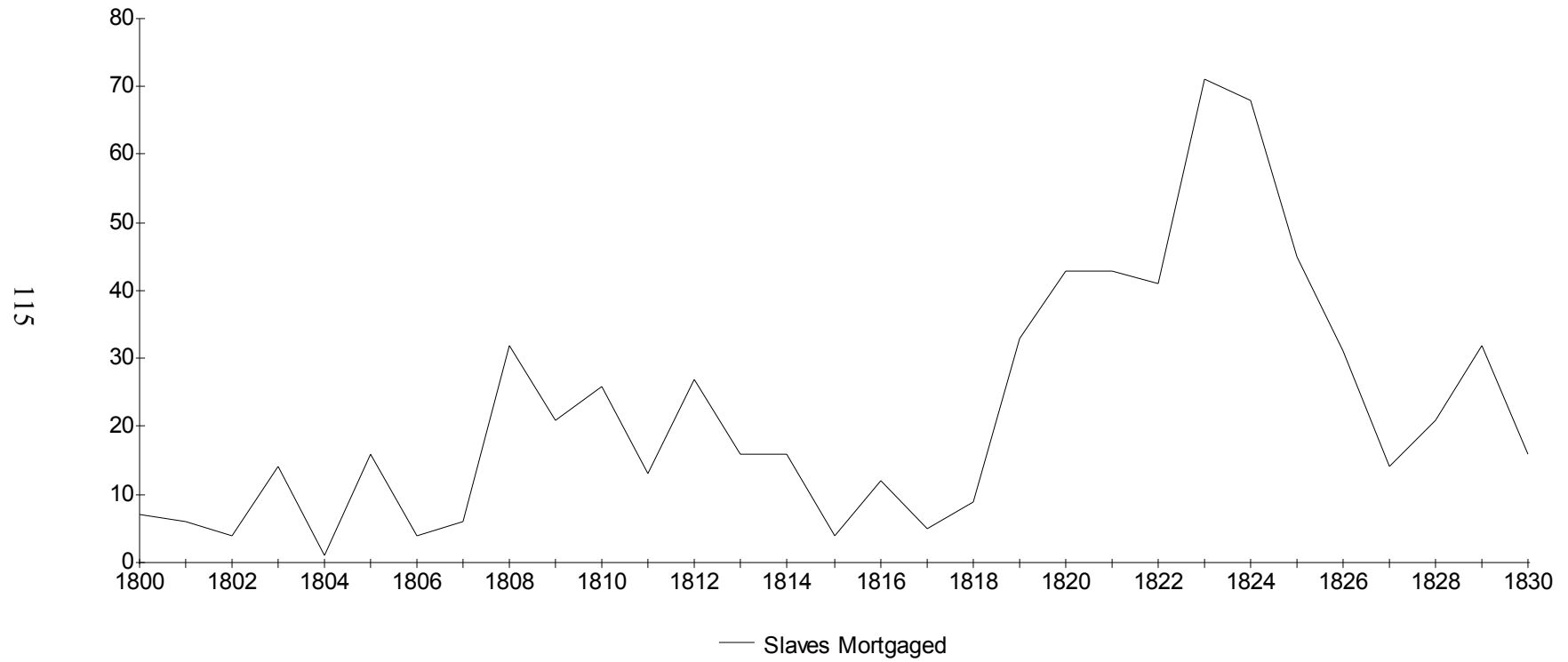
Documented Interstate Slave Sales  
Frederick County, Md., 1800-1830



SOURCE: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1800-1830, MdHR.

**Figure 2.2**

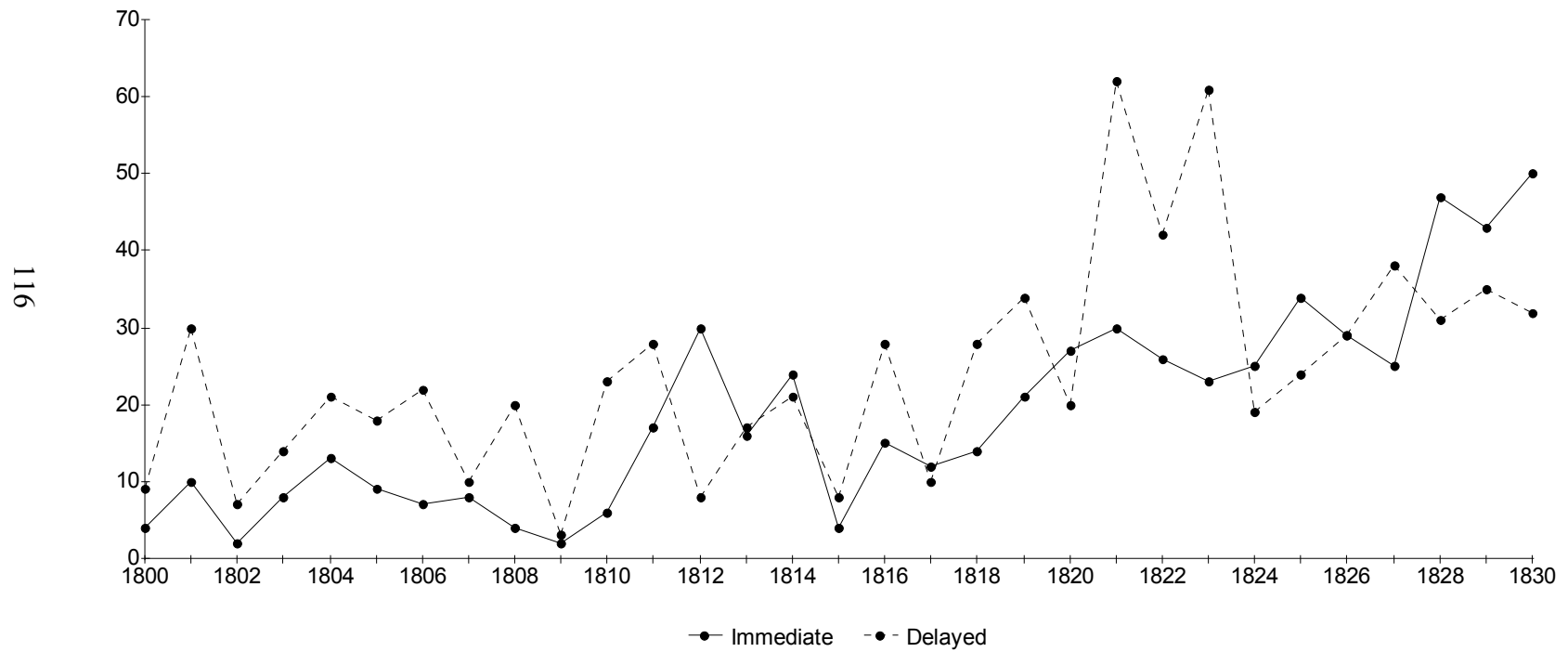
Number of Slaves Mortgaged  
Frederick Co., Md., 1800-1830



Source: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1800-1830, MdHR.

**Figure 2.3**

Number of Slaves Manumitted  
Frederick County, Md., 1800-1830



SOURCE: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1800-1830, MdHR; Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, 1800-1830, MdHR.



### Chapter 3

“There are objections to black and white, but one must be chosen”:

#### Managing Farms and Farmhands, 1815-1860

Between 1845 and 1847, Arthur W. Machen, a slaveholder in Fairfax County, Virginia, peppered his father with questions about the composition of his workforce. Like other farmers in this northern Virginia county, Machen was reeling from economic reverses. Soil exhaustion, languishing commodity markets, and increased competition from western wheat producers had reduced many to a hardscrabble existence. Amid these catastrophes, Machen attempted to salvage his fortunes by restructuring his labor force. His growing family and their five slaves could handle some of the routine chores, he reckoned, but he worried about the additional hands that would be needed over the course of the year. “What can be done?” Machen asked his father. He knew that it was imperative to “reduce my force, change its description, or to divide the profit of the farm with someone who, under a prescribed system, would defray the entire cost of cultivation,” but the choice between slaves, tenant farmers, and free laborers proved vexatious. Hired slaves were an option, but he feared they would “ruin” his own slaves’ morale. Tenants or sharecroppers could be engaged, but Machen believed that the depressed market would make such arrangements unprofitable. White farmhands were available, but “the universal testimony of farmers is that a white hand worth having is the rarest of characters.” Moreover, his father feared that whites—especially Irishmen—might refuse to work

alongside blacks. Exasperated, Machen concluded that “[t]here are objections to black and white, but one must chosen.”<sup>1</sup>

In theory, the decision should have been straightforward. While Machen pondered the composition of his workforce, a growing chorus of agricultural reformers and political economists was declaring that slavery was incompatible with the diversified agriculture practiced on the farms and small plantations of northern Virginia and northern Maryland. “There is but one element in the agriculture of Maryland to which slavery is attached with any affinity, and that is tobacco culture,” proclaimed anti-slavery writer John L. Carey in 1845. “The rude hands of servile labor” could wield hoes on tobacco plantations, but they could not plough the wheat fields, tend the livestock, or operate the machinery on farms like Machen’s.<sup>2</sup> Unlike free laborers, slaves lacked the “delicacy of touch” necessary for more complicated operations. “In grain growing districts, counties where a scientific agriculture prevails, where the mind of man as well as the hands of labor find employment in the culture of the ground, the rearing of trees, the improvement of breeds of cattle, horses, and swine” Carey contended, “there slavery cannot dwell. It is not compatible with such scenes.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur W. Machen to Lewis H. Machen, 31 December 1845, Lewis H. Machen to Arthur W. Machen, 8 July 1846, Arthur W. Machen to Lewis H. Machen, 3 March 1847, and Lewis H. Machen to Arthur W. Machen, 8 January 1847, Lewis H. Machen Papers, LOC. In 1850 Machen’s slaveholding consisted of three men (aged 45, 35, and 12) and two women (aged 22 and 18). 1850 United States Census, Schedule 2 (Slaves), Fairfax County, Va., NARA.

<sup>2</sup> Machen’s farm did not produce tobacco or any of the traditional plantation staples. In 1850, his 230 improved acres yielded 800 bushels of wheat, 1,200 bushels of Indian corn, 600 bushels of oats, and 40 tons of hay. Machen also owned livestock valued at \$2,120 (5 milch cows, 4 oxen, 11 horses, 28 cattle, 150 sheep, and 20 swine). 1850 United States Census, Schedule 4 (Agriculture), Fairfax County, Va., NARA.

<sup>3</sup> John L. Carey, Slavery in Maryland Briefly Considered (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1845), 26-30.

This argument has been echoed by many historians, who maintain that slavery and wheat production were an imperfect fit. “The economically rational antebellum wheat farmer almost always employed wage labor,” concluded historical geographer Carville V. Earle, because the crop’s seasonal labor requirements made hired farmhands “decidedly cheaper and more efficient than slaves.”<sup>4</sup> Still, Machen’s dilemma should give us pause. Although he had declared that one system of labor discipline “must be chosen,” Machen was in fact promiscuous when it came to constructing his force. Between 1843 and 1850, he employed hired slaves, free black and white farmhands who labored under annual and short-term contracts, and a welter of day laborers.<sup>5</sup> Each system of labor discipline had its flaws, but like an alchemist Machen struggled to fuse them into an efficient, productive whole. Other farmers

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<sup>4</sup> Carville V. Earle, “A Staple Interpretation of Slavery and Free Labor,” Geographical Review 68 (January 1978): 51-65. This interpretation has been advanced by historians as well. See, for example, Paul G. E. Clemens, The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland’s Eastern Shore: From Tobacco to Grain (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980). A corollary to this argument is that landowners decided against slavery because it impeded agricultural reform. Proponents of this interpretation argue that farmers could not implement crop rotation, purchase fertilizer, or introduce improved machinery until they sold their unneeded slaves. Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Maryland and Virginia, 1606-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1925), 114; and Eugene D. Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South (New York: Vintage, 1967), 136-41. These interpretations continue to have adherents. See, for example, Todd Harold Barnett, “The Evolution of ‘North’ and ‘South’: Settlement and Slavery on America’s Sectional Border, 1650-1810” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1993), 84-121, 178-204. Still, over the past two decades, a steady trickle of studies has eroded the foundations of the staple interpretation. For studies demonstrating slavery’s compatibility with wheat production, see Kenneth E. Koons, “‘The Staple of Our Country’: Wheat in the Rural Farm Economy of the Nineteenth Century Valley of Virginia,” in After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, ed. Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003): 3-15; John T. Schlotterbeck, “Plantation and Farm: Social and Economic Change in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1717 to 1860” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1980), 161-211; James R. Irwin, “Exploring the Affinity of Wheat and Slavery in the Virginia Piedmont,” Explorations in Economic History 25 (1998): 295-322; and Gavin Wright, “Slavery and American Agricultural History,” Agricultural History 77 (Fall 2003): 527-52.

<sup>5</sup> During this eight-year period, Machen augmented his standing force—comprising his family and his slaves—with six white men employed under annual contracts, a free black man and eight white men who labored under short-term contracts, three white men, and four enslaved men who worked as day laborers, a free black women who seems to have been a domestic servant and dairy maid, and at least four slave men hired by the year. Lewis H. Machen Account Book, 1837-1857, LOC.

dissented from the triumphant free-labor ideology. Washington County planter John Blackford was disillusioned with both slaves and wage laborers. Having dealt with drunken farmhands—both free and enslaved—and witnessed their shoddy work, he condemned both in the same breath, blasting his “lazy worthless negroes” and his hired hands, whom he called “inattentive interested characters.”<sup>6</sup> Others explicitly rejected the argument that wage labor was more advantageous, while still others modified slavery to make it more responsive to their unstable labor demands.<sup>7</sup> Harford County farmer Ramsey McHenry charted such a course when he rejected a relative’s “nigger driving scheme” to expand the family’s slaveholdings and establish a plantation in Louisiana. Instead of buying additional slaves, McHenry proposed purchasing an “estate of large extent in the northern part of Maryland” and implementing a modified form of slavery, whereby the lands would be “parceled out among the servants on shares.”<sup>8</sup>

This chapter examines farmers’ and planters’ protracted struggle to bend the ostensibly antithetical systems of slavery and wage labor to the seasonal routines of diversified agriculture. The task was daunting, for wheat was a temperamental staple; it required little attention for long stretches and then demanded the strenuous exertions of dozens of farmhands during the summer harvest. Although the composition of individual crews varied, employers’ objectives remained constant: to maintain a small workforce during dull seasons, to mobilize a large number of

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<sup>6</sup> John Blackford Journals, 5 October 1837, MdHS.

<sup>7</sup> Despite relying on slave labor, one Carroll County farmer reportedly implemented a range of agricultural reforms and conducted his affairs with such “industry and frugality” that he became a model to his neighbors and “even to Pennsylvania farmers.” *American Farmer* [Baltimore, Md.], August 1845.

<sup>8</sup> Ramsey McHenry to James McHenry Boyd, 9 April 1839, McHenry Papers, MdHS.

laborers for the harvest, and to winnow out laborers they perceived as unnecessary or unproductive whenever possible. They developed numerous strategies to balance these competing imperatives. They infused their workforces with the necessary measures of flexibility and stability by amalgamating workers from different labor regimes into multi-tiered crews that included slaves, contract laborers, casual or day laborers, and a smattering of tenants. To guarantee that their tenuous purchase on hired farmhands did not slip at harvest, employers wielded a combination of debt, restrictive contracts, and incentives to command their workers' presence.

Managing free laborers involved more than their recruitment. Farmers needed workers who were biddable and, perhaps more important, sober. The chapter concludes by examining efforts to discipline the rural workforce, focusing primarily on the temperance movement. Farmers' persistent, yet often frustrating efforts to discipline the motley workforces that they had concocted offer a powerful rejoinder to the free-labor ideologues who imagined that an industrious, orderly workforce would spring from slavery's ashes. Slavery may have been on the wane, but employers could not rely solely on the workings of the labor market to discipline their laborers; they needed to construct new economic, legal, and social controls to guarantee the survival of the nascent free-labor regime.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Over the past two decades, historians have problematized our understanding of free labor, demonstrating that its halting, often uneven development was influenced by a constellation of economic, political, and social forces. For an overview of this literature, see Eric Foner, "The Idea of Free Labor in Nineteenth-Century America," in Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), ix-xxxix. The construction of the ideological and legal underpinnings of free labor during the early national period and the antebellum decades is discussed in Robert J. Steinfeld, The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); James D. Schmidt, Free to Work: Labor Law, Emancipation, and Reconstruction, 1815-1880 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); Christopher L. Tomlins, Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993);

## **“The Changes of the Seasons”: The Routines of Farmwork**

“Nothing is more variable than the quantity of labour which the farmer has occasion to employ . . . at different times and under different circumstances,” declared Frederick County agricultural reformer James Raymond. “The changes of the seasons, as they severally occur . . . call upon the farmer to make corresponding changes in the quantity of his labor.”<sup>10</sup> Former slave George Jones concurred. His master’s farm, Jones recalled, was “like all other farms in Frederick County, raising grains, such as corn, wheat and fruit, and on which work was seasonable, depending upon the weather, some producing more and some less.”<sup>11</sup> The “seasonable” routines of agricultural production exercised a powerful influence on farm management, influencing the number and kind of farmhands employed and the terms under which they labored. The regimens of individual farms varied with their acreage, crop mixtures, and workforce, but the fitful nature of rural work remained a constant throughout the antebellum period.<sup>12</sup>

In northern Maryland, farmers began working their fields in March. As winter faded to spring, rural workers trudged into the muddy, stubble-ridden fields and

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and Amy Dru Stanley, From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage and in the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>10</sup> James Raymond, Prize Essay on the Comparative Economy of Free and Slave Labor in Agriculture (Frederick, Md.: John P. Thompson, 1827), 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> Works Progress Administration, Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves, vol. 8, Maryland Narratives (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1941), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the discussion of agricultural work routines in the following paragraphs is drawn from the following sources: James Crawford Neilson, “Preistford Farm” Journal, 1824-1831, MdHS; John W. Stump, Diary and Letterbook, 1826-1827, MdHS; “Liliendale Farm” Diary, 1827-1832, MdHS; Stephen Boyd, Farm Account Book, 1828-1840, MdHS; John Blackford, Journal, 1838-1839, MdHS; Harry Dorsey Dough, Account Book, 1851-1852, MdHS; and Richard Gittings, “Roslin Farm” Daybook, 1857-1858, MdHS.

busied themselves clearing debris, stones, and weeds—a disagreeable chore called “grubbing.” Once their fields were cleaned, farmers commenced plowing, harrowing, spreading fertilizers (manure, guano, or plaster), and sowing clover, corn, and oats. In April, they turned their attention to gardening, planting a range of vegetables for home consumption, including cabbages, carrots, potatoes, and tomatoes. Farmers continued to tend their gardens during May, when they also sheered their sheep and commenced hoeing their corn.

The pace of labor quickened as the weather warmed. In June, the smell of ripening sweet clover announced the beginning of haymaking season. The flurry of activity that commenced with haymaking continued without interruption for several weeks. The climax of the growing season came in July, when farmers harvested the wheat sown during the previous fall. Typically, they employed gangs of between fifteen and thirty laborers to gather their grain. Harvesters were divided into squads of five or six, with a man swinging a cradle or scythe in the lead, followed by a man or woman who raked the cuttings into small piles. A “binder”—often a younger worker or a woman—tied these bundles into shocks. Once the grain had been shocked, farmers allowed it to dry a few days before wagoners hauled the sheaves into barns and granaries. Depending upon the weather, the size of the crop, and the number of workers employed, the entire process took about three or four weeks.

With their wheat secured, farmers turned to harvesting their oats, which likewise required them to recruit large numbers of cradlers, rakers, and binders. Once the summer harvests were completed, farmers began making preparations for the next year. In September and October, they dressed and fertilized their fields before

sowing them with wheat. At the same time, they harvested their corn and potatoes, cut fodder, and hauled their produce to markets and mills.

Work slowed during the winter months, but farmers and laborers were not idle. Agricultural writers implored farmers “not to throw away in winter the hard earned and precious products of the summer’s labor,” to spend the season “feeding and taking care of stock, laying in a good supply of wood, and improving one’s mind.”<sup>13</sup> Many farmers heeded this advice; account books and diaries reveal that they spent the season repairing fences, stocking icehouses, and slaughtering livestock. Farmers also turned to bi-employments during the winter. “A man would sometimes farm in the summer and follow a trade in the winter,” recalled a Frederick County blacksmith. “My father was a farmer and made flour barrels in the winter,” he continued. “I have known a farmer also to be a tailor.”<sup>14</sup>

The seasonality that characterized men’s working lives was largely absent from those of their wives and daughters.<sup>15</sup> With the exception of occasional forays into the field—usually at harvest—women’s tasks seldom intersected with those of their men-folk.<sup>16</sup> While men busied themselves with small grains, hogs, and cattle,

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<sup>13</sup> Jacob Gruber’s American Farmers’ Almanack, for the Year of Our Lord 1833 (Hagerstown, Md.: J. Gruber, 1833).

<sup>14</sup> Emmitsburg Chronicle, [January 1908], Vertical File, Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, Emmitsburg, Md.

<sup>15</sup> Women’s agricultural work routines are discussed in Joan M. Jensen, Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 36-56; John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 104-18; Donald L. Winters, Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 122-27.

<sup>16</sup> The massive labor mobilization triggered by the summer harvests brought large numbers of women into the fields. Although most women lacked the strength to wield cradles and scythes, their contributions were essential to a successful harvest. One Frederick County resident remembered that “it was customary for nearly all of the women to help in gathering the harvest; some raked, while



women managed the dairy, tended the poultry, and oversaw a range of domestic manufactures. The sharpness of this division of labor shocked one immigrant, who exclaimed, “Sometimes you would think that they didn’t know each other . . . . The wife is as little concerned over the good or bad farming of her husband as I care about the harem of the sultan of Turkey!”<sup>17</sup> Because many of women’s responsibilities required attention throughout the year, and others could be completed regardless of the season (spinning yarn, sewing clothes), women often faced unrelenting toil. If anything, winter heralded an intensification of their domestic manufacturing efforts. Recalling his childhood in the 1810s and 1820s, Frederick County resident James Pearre wrote that his mother and sisters sometimes spent the “entire winter spinning [flax] from four o’clock A.M. to nine P.M. with the only abatement of time to do the cooking & milking, etc.”<sup>18</sup>

Mechanization began to alter the patterns of rural work in the 1830s. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, farmhands spent much of the winter processing the grains harvested during the previous summer. “We always thrashed in the winter time,” recalled Frederick County resident Nathaniel Rowe, who offered the following description of the process:

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others would bind, but as a general thing the women did all the raking. . . .” J. W. Beck, “History of Harney,” Carroll County Times [Westminster, Md.], n.d., Vertical File, Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, Emmitsburg, Md.

<sup>17</sup> J. Jakob Rutlinger, “Day Book on a Journey to North America in the Year 1823,” in The Old Land and the New: The Journals of Two Swiss Families in America in the 1820s, ed. and trans. Robert H. Billigmeier and Fred A. Picard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965), 224.

<sup>18</sup> James Pearre, “Memoirs,” n.d., MdHS. The introduction of factory-made thread and cloth eased women’s domestic responsibilities, but some rural women continued to spin flax and wool into the 1840s and 1850s. Joshua Herring, “Memoirs,” pp. 89-90, MdHS.

Our methods of thrashing were as primitive as our reaping. Horses trod the grain as the oxen in the scripture did. The heads were piled in a big circle on the barn floor and four horses, two and two, walked around and around on them until the grain was trodden. . . . Rye and buckwheat were thrashed with flails, two men striking together.<sup>19</sup>

This “primitive” technique provided weeks of steady employment for several workers, but the introduction of threshing machines during the 1820s and 1830s allowed farmers to process their crops in a fraction of the previous time. The changes heralded by these machines worried a Hagerstown writer, who feared their impact on rural laborers. “Every farmer who has a crop, which would require the labor of five or six hands [in] the winter season, in getting it out the ordinary way, now has a machine . . . which gets out his crop in a few days,” he wrote. “This seriously affects the labouring part of the community.” Thus, as the antebellum decades progressed, workers spent more of the winter felling timber for urban markets and collecting bark for local tanneries.<sup>20</sup>

Haymaking and grain harvesting underwent dramatic changes in the 1850s with the introduction of mechanical mowers and reapers. In some neighborhoods, broken and rocky fields prevented farmers from employing these machines. In 1854, a Frederick County newspaper complained that landowners had purchased a “good many self-raking reapers,” but they “don’t answer the farmers’ purpose, consequently they have been thrown aside, and the old-fashioned cradle again resorted to.”<sup>21</sup> Still, most welcomed the new machinery. That same year, a farmer boasted that the

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<sup>19</sup> Emmitsburg Chronicle, 24 July 1908, Vertical File, Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, Emmitsburg, Md.

<sup>20</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 27 January 1830.

<sup>21</sup> Catoctin Whig, n.d., quoted in Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 4 July 1854.

McCormick Reapers had “maintained their high reputation” and proclaimed that “it is now no longer a question whether they can be used as an implement of economy in Washington County.”<sup>22</sup> The savings farmers achieved with these machines were often quite impressive; one farmer claimed that his Buckeye Mower spared him the expense of hiring additional laborers during haymaking and that his McCormick Reaper cut his wheat for a mere \$22.<sup>23</sup> In 1859, Jacob Miller, who farmed near Sharpsburg, reported that “farmers are using the reaper more and more every year” and predicted that “before many years the wheat, rye, oats, and barley will all be cut with reapers.”<sup>24</sup>

The seasonal nature of agricultural production left a distinct imprint on northern Maryland’s rural workforces, which expanded and contracted with the changing labor demands. Typical was Columbus Shipley’s “Bloomsbury Farm,” where the number of farmhands peaked at fourteen during the July wheat harvest before dwindling to two in January. Between these extremes, Shipley’s crew ranged from six to eight laborers (see Figure 3.1). A single month could witness dramatic fluctuations in the size of a workforce. In January 1852, the workforce on Richard Gittings’s “Roslin Farm” varied from one to five workmen, while in June it swung between three and eight (see Figure 3.2). Outlay for wages likewise reflected the profound seasonality of agricultural labor. On “Bloomsbury Farm,” wages during the

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<sup>22</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 12 July 1854.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Herald, 28 June 1859. A Frederick County resident made a similar observation, noting that a mechanical reaper did “the work of a dozen men” at harvest. James Pearre, “Memoirs,” n.d., MdHS.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Miller to Catherine Amelia Houser, 1 July 1859, Miller Family Letter Collection, Antietam National Battlefield, Sharpsburg, Md.

haymaking and harvesting season were at least double those of other seasons (see Figure 3.3). Striking a balance between the harvest season's heavy and urgent labor demands and the lighter—but important—needs of the slower seasons represented rural employers' most persistent challenge.

The most effective strategy that farmers developed for weathering the seasonal swings in their labor requirements was to construct multi-tiered workforces.<sup>25</sup> A handful of domestic servants and farmhands employed under annual or quarterly contracts formed the nucleus. Around them swirled a cloud of casual laborers who assisted with such massive undertakings as harvesting, haymaking, slaughtering livestock, and gathering ice. The core of the workforce need not consist of hired laborers. On smaller properties, it might consist of the farmer's own family. It might also be assembled from enslaved workers. In 1819, an English traveler in Frederick County visited a farm whose workforce comprised “five male negroes, all the year round, and in harvest five extra hands.”<sup>26</sup> Some farmers forged workforces that were an amalgam of slaves, free blacks, and whites. In 1857, Baltimore County

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<sup>25</sup> Such segmentation has been described in the agricultural workforces of New England and the Middle Atlantic. See Winifred B. Rothenberg, “Structural Change in the Farm Labor Force: Contract Labor in Massachusetts Agriculture, 1750-1865,” in Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History: A Volume to Honor Robert W. Fogel, ed. Claudia Goldin and Hugh Rockoff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 105-32; Richard B. Lyman, Jr., “What is Done in My Absence?: Levi Lincoln's Oakham, Massachusetts, Farm Workers, 1807-20,” Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 99 (1989): 151-87; Jack Larkin, “Labor Is the Great Thing in Farming?: Farm Laborers of the Ward Family of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, 1787-1860,” Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 99 (1989): 189-226; and Paul G. E. Clemens and Lucy Simler, “Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820,” in Work and Labor in Early America, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 144-88.

<sup>26</sup> W. Faux, Memorable Days in America: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1823), 144. A wheat farmer in northern Virginia reported that his “regular force” consisted of ten slaves, “occasionally calling in some aid, particularly in harvest, hay-making, fodder saving, &c.” American Farmer, 27 July 1821.

farmer Richard Gittings described his “regular standing force” as “Black Man Jim, hired at \$10 per annum and found (i.e., provided with food and lodging), Irishman Patrick hired by the month at \$19.00 he finding himself, and a boy named Billy, about 16 years old, a servant of my own.” Augmenting the standing force was an assortment of day laborers and hired slaves. “Independent of the above force,” Gittings continued, “there is now hired at 75 cents per day and found (except when engaged in cradling wheat when the price is \$1.25 per day), a black man, free, named Addison, Mr. Wilson’s black man John, and Mr. Mansfield’s black man Johnson.”<sup>27</sup>

Farmers imbued their workforces with an additional measure of flexibility by engaging workers under short-term contracts, which often extended from spring to fall. Such contracts guaranteed farmers valuable assistance during the busiest seasons but allowed them to trim their payrolls during the dull season. When contracting with such farmhands, Arthur W. Machen believed that it “would probably be advisable to hire one or two for 8 or 9 months only, as fewer hands are needed in winter.”<sup>28</sup>

Beneath the regular workforce and the contract laborers stood a diverse array of casual or day laborers, who were often employed for a specific task and then discharged. In December 1839, for example, Harford County farmer and physician Robert H. Archer augmented his regular force of three slaves and a free black contract laborer with ten casual laborers—including several free blacks and hired slaves—who spent a few days slaughtering hogs and filling the icehouse.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>27</sup> Richard Gittings, “Roslin Farm” Daybook, 10 July 1857, MdHS.

<sup>28</sup> Arthur W. Machen to Lewis H. Machen, 16 January 1847, Lewis H. Machen Papers, LOC.

<sup>29</sup> The following spring, Archer again supplemented his standing force with seven laborers to thresh his oats, rye, and wheat. Dr. Robert H. Archer Daybook, MdHS.

fluctuations in labor requirements resulted in kaleidoscopic workforces whose contours and colors shifted with the seasons. These evolutions were apparent on the Harford County farm of Ramsey McHenry, whose laboring force spun on the axes of size, color, and status (see Figure 3.4).

Slavery and free labor may have been interwoven in the fabric of northern Maryland's workforce, but they remained distinct strands; the region's labor market neither blurred nor obscured the boundaries between these institutions. The seasonal fluctuations tugged at both slavery and free labor, but they responded differently. Farmers' strategies for managing these regimes were therefore different as well.

### **Making Free Labor Work**

To agricultural reformer James Raymond, the variability of farmers' labor needs was the most compelling argument against slavery. "The inconvenience of making frequent changes in the quantity of slave labor . . . must present itself to anyone who reflects on the subject," he wrote. "But where labor is free, and therefore the subject of contract between employer and laborer, these changes are frequently taking place," and farmers could purchase labor like "any other commodity, in such quantities, and at such times, as he wants it."<sup>30</sup> But how would these laborers be recruited and disciplined? Raymond never raised these thorny questions, but they were inescapable to farmers and planters struggling to assemble workforces that were both flexible and tractable.

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<sup>30</sup> Raymond, Prize Essay, 4.

The gritty, messy operations of the free labor market emerged in sharp focus during the wheat harvest, when farmers and planters scrambled to expand their workforces. Once their wheat ripened, farmers needed to cut, shock, and store it quickly, for overripe grain might shatter or become lodged and shocked wheat was vulnerable to smut.<sup>31</sup> Ever mindful of the adage that “a crop is never safe until it is in your pocket,” anxious farmers recruited large workforces and drove them at a frenetic pace.<sup>32</sup> Immigrant Jakob Rutlinger observed that small farmers often cultivated their lands with a few children and a slave, but that during harvest “they hire day labor, as much as they can get, so that everything is quickly completed.” These forces could be immense, including anywhere from twenty to forty farmhands “mowing, cutting, tying, shocking, everything all at once, as though it were a matter of life and death.”<sup>33</sup>

Agricultural writers underscored the importance of assembling large workforces, reminding farmers to “lose no time in securing the services of such hands in your neighborhood as can be relied upon” and emphasizing that it was “more economical to have too many, than to have too few hands on such occasions.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Heavy rain seems to have been the greatest danger confronting farmers at harvest. In 1843, persistent storms rains prevented farmers in Carroll County from gathering their wheat, causing the “entire failure” of some crops. Three years later, floodwaters carried off “large quantities” of freshly-cut wheat in Washington County and “injured the standing wheat considerably.” A similar catastrophe occurred in 1850, when “heavy dashing rains” left the county’s wheat “prostrated and tangled” and resulted in significant losses. Democrat and Carroll County Republican [Westminster, Md.], 20 July 1843; Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 7 July 1846; Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 3 July 1850.

<sup>32</sup> The quotation is from a Frederick newspaper, which was warning farmers that the year’s promising wheat crops might still be destroyed. Frederick Herald, 11 May 1833.

<sup>33</sup> Rutlinger, “Day Book,” 225. For additional evidence on the size of harvest forces, see The Mail [Hagerstown, Md.], 27 June 1834

<sup>34</sup> Frederick Examiner, 27 June 1855. Such admonitions were common. “In providing for your harvest hands, if you have to hire any, and we presume you will, do it early so that you may select the good,” cautioned one Frederick newspaper. “Don’t dally in engaging them until the harvest is upon you.” Frederick Herald, 13 June 1857.

Farmers had good reason to be apprehensive, for they often mortgaged their wheat to merchants and millers in the months preceding harvest. If workers could not be secured and the crops suffered, farmers risked a severe financial blow.<sup>35</sup> Despite these pressures, some farmers dallied and found themselves scrambling for harvesters. In 1839, for example, Washington County farmer Franklin Blackford scoured his neighborhood for hands, but found only one unemployed worker. Six years later, he faced a similar crisis. After searching Sharpsburg, Maryland, and Shepherdstown, Virginia, for laborers, he returned home lamenting that he “could find none.”<sup>36</sup> At times, the shortage of harvest hands affected the entire region. In 1851, farmers in Frederick County began harvesting before their grain had ripened because of “the fear of the anticipated scarcity of hands.”<sup>37</sup>

The headaches that seasonal labor shortages caused for farmers were exacerbated by workers’ increased militancy at harvest. Sensing their employers’ vulnerability, some harvesters reneged on their agreements and demanded additional wages or bonuses. Midway through the 1830 harvest, free black Levy Austin capitalized on John Blackford’s need for laborers to demand a bonus. The planter reluctantly complied but grumbled that “Austin, not satisfied with his wages, filched

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<sup>35</sup> Examples of such mortgages abound in county land records. For examples, see Contract between George Mort and William Galt, 5 December 1818, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 7, p. 506, MdHR; Contract between Wm. Atwood and Joshua Aldesburger, 24 April 1819, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 8, pp. 464-65, MdHR; Contract between Daniel Main and Michael Zimmerman, 8 March 1845, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 2, p. 42, MdHR; and Contract between Daniel Main and Thomas Picking, 21 March 1818, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 2, p. 100, MdHR.

<sup>36</sup> Franklin Blackford Diary, 3 July 1839 and 7 July 1845, Blackford Family Papers, VaHS.

<sup>37</sup> Frederick Examiner, 2 July 1851.



me out of \$1.50.”<sup>38</sup> Laborers sometimes banded together in small groups to demand more pay. In 1861, for example, four harvesters on Henry Massey’s farm in Harford County “struck for higher wages & struck off.”<sup>39</sup>

Labor militancy might also be more organized and widespread. In 1853, farmhands carrying cradles, rakes, scythes, and other “emblems of their calling” rallied in Berks County, Pennsylvania, to demand the prompt payment of their wages, a 25¢ increase in daily wages, and complimentary food and lodging.<sup>40</sup> Although the workers did not achieve their objectives, harvesters throughout southern Pennsylvania and northern Maryland continued to press their demands. The following year, delegates to a “workingmen’s meeting” held at Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, complained that the “present prices of grain, produce, &c., are such as to place them almost beyond the reach of those who are dependent upon their daily toil.” Contending that “the fluctuations in the prices of breadstuffs, and the rise and fall of all kinds of produce and trade, should be attended by corresponding changes in the price of labor,” the assembled workers established wage scales for the upcoming harvest, which they pledged not to violate. For cradling, workers were to receive \$2.25 a day; for binding, \$1.50; for raking, \$1; for mowing hay, \$1.25; and for hauling \$1.<sup>41</sup> These calls reverberated across the Mason-Dixon Line into Frederick County, where “it was pretty well understood” that wages would be similar to those in Pennsylvania, and into neighboring Washington County, where farmers were

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<sup>38</sup> John Blackford Journals, 3 July 1830, MdHS.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Massey, “Bohemian Manor” Account Book, MdHS.

<sup>40</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 20 July 1853.

<sup>41</sup> The News [Shippensburg, Pa.], 17 June 1854.

astonished when “\$2 a day and roast beef, including trimmings and side dishes, [were] freely offered and refused.”<sup>42</sup>

In addition to demanding higher wages, harvesters also insisted upon immediate cash payment. From his family’s farm in Fairfax County, Virginia, Arthur W. Machen asked his father for additional money for the upcoming harvest because “some of the hands . . . will expect payment at the close or during the course of their work.”<sup>43</sup> Frederick County farmer Chester Coleman made a similar appeal to his father-in-law, asking for \$125 for “additional labor in securing our harvest, which is always a cash consideration among farmers here.”<sup>44</sup> Elaborating on farmhands’ ability to command higher wages and immediate payment during the preceding harvest, Coleman explained that “to obtain a day’s labor I must either pay in advance or as soon as the day is closed” because workers were “very scarce and difficult to obtain and consequently high in price.”<sup>45</sup>

Their desperate need for labor forced employers to tolerate undisciplined workers and to accept shoddy, hurried work. As early as 1785, German immigrant Christian Boerstler had complained that harvesters “are treated well for the terrible job they do.”<sup>46</sup> In the 1820s, Jakob Rutlinger observed that the harvest “is very superficially and sketchily done.” “It is a grubby mess whereby a shocking amount

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<sup>42</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 28 June 1854.

<sup>43</sup> Arthur W. Machen to Lewis H. Machen, 14 July 1846, Lewis H. Machen Family Papers, LOC.

<sup>44</sup> Chester Coleman to Augustus Graham, 15 July 1846, Samuel Cock Papers, MdHS.

<sup>45</sup> Chester Coleman to Augustus Graham, 18 October 1846, Samuel Cock Papers, MdHS.

<sup>46</sup> Jeffrey A. Wyand, trans., “The Journal of Doctor Christian Boerstler, Prominent Funkstown Resident, 1785-1866,” 6 July 1785, MdHS.

of fruit is lost,” he added.<sup>47</sup> Another Frederick County resident was appalled by the liberties taken by the free black harvesters on a relative’s farm. “They would cut through and then shoulder their cradles and walk back to the starting place and whet, and this they did in no hurry either.” When asked why he tolerated such lackadaisical work, the farmer revealed the power laborers wielded at harvest: “He said this was the custom of the whole country; and if he made his blacks do it they would talk about him over the neighborhood for a hard master.”<sup>48</sup>

Farmers developed numerous strategies to bring their truculent harvesters to heel. To safeguard themselves against labor protests, they demanded that their hands sign “entire” contracts (also known as special contracts), which stipulated that a worker who quit before harvest or the completion of his contract would forfeit all accrued wages.<sup>49</sup> Although it is difficult to determine how many of northern Maryland’s landowners employed these devices, scattered evidence suggests that workers paid a heavy price for abandoning their employers at harvest. In 1841, Harford County farmer Ramsey McHenry fined Elijah Oliver and Elijah Kell two months’ wages “for damages in consequence of . . . absconding just before harvest, contrary to agreement.” The following year, McHenry fined John Barnes, who “quit just before harvest, in violation of his contract.”<sup>50</sup> Frederick County farmer Charles

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<sup>47</sup> Rutlinger, “Day Book,” 226.

<sup>48</sup> Unsigned Letter, 11 July 1860, Davis Family Papers, UMCP.

<sup>49</sup> For a general discussion of the doctrine of “entirety” in the United States, see Robert J. Steinfield, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 290-303. The evolution of entirety clauses in agricultural employment is discussed in Schmidt, *Free to Work*, 38-44.

<sup>50</sup> Ramsey McHenry Ledger, MdHS.

H. Lighter took similar action in 1852, discharging farmhand Henry Hett without his previous three months' wages after he missed 19½ days during the wheat harvest.<sup>51</sup>

While some farmers relied on legal compulsion to discipline their harvest crews, others used incentives and rewards. In 1804, Baltimore County farmer Thomas Johnson promised two farmhands paid vacations at the conclusion of harvest; if they labored faithfully during harvest they would receive five days for themselves and be paid 75¢ per day. Johnson extended a similar offer to his foreman, who would also receive a cash bonus “if he behaved himself well in harvest as leader.” Johnson continued to negotiate such arrangements over the following decades. In 1839, for example, he allowed “Negro Marlborough” to seek outside employment once he had finished cutting his crop.<sup>52</sup>

Landowners who combined farming with another business—a profession, a country store, or a mill—used the debts accrued through these operations to recruit harvesters. Such arrangements could be beneficial to both employers and workers; debts could be used to push workers into participating in the harvest, while the increased wages offered during the harvest allowed laborers to retire their debts quickly. It was perhaps for this reason that a writer in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, waxed poetic when describing the harvest, boasting that it united “Rich and Poor, the Landlord and the Tenant” in “joyous though heavy labor, blessed with a mutual contentment and happiness.”<sup>53</sup> What Milly Ingram thought about the “joyous though

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<sup>51</sup> Charles H. Lighter Farm Account Book, Middletown Valley Historical Society, Middletown, Md.

<sup>52</sup> Dr. Thomas Johnson Memorandum Book, July 1804, and Dr. Thomas Johnson Farm Account Book, 1839, both in Johnson Papers [Unprocessed Collection], MdHS.

<sup>53</sup> The Compiler [Gettysburg, Pa.], 26 July 1820.

heavy labor” remains a mystery, but she benefited from the opportunities created by the harvest. In 1836, she repaid Frederick County farmer and physician George Hughes for several bleedings and purges by working as a binder.<sup>54</sup> Many customers at George Feaga’s grist- and sawmills, also in Frederick County, settled their accounts by laboring during the harvest.<sup>55</sup> Jacob Reichard pursued a similar strategy, using his general store and rental properties near Hagerstown to recruit harvesters. In 1851 and 1852, Reichard provided Benjamin Howl with a house, cash advances, and store credit, for which he received small cash payments and periodic labor. The vast majority of this labor—which comprised the bulk of Howl’s payments—was performed during the wheat harvest.<sup>56</sup>

Landowners further augmented harvest workforces by stipulating that their artisans and other nonagricultural laborers were expected to assist at harvest. Baltimore County farmer Robert N. Carman specified that blacksmith John Butler was to “work diligently and carry out the business to the best advantage he is capable of, and, in harvest, to assist in securing the grain.”<sup>57</sup> Washington County planter John Thompson Mason seems to have made similar agreements with cobblers James Dunn

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<sup>54</sup> Dr. George Hughes Daybook, 1819-1855, MdHS.

<sup>55</sup> Of the sixteen farmhands who assisted with Feaga’s harvest in 1834 and 1835, at least fourteen had accrued debts for having their corn, wheat, and timber processed at Feaga’s mills. George Feaga Sawmill and Gristmill Ledger, 1823-1837, HSFC.

<sup>56</sup> Jacob Reichard Account Book, 1849-1906, MdHS. Such arrangements had a long history in northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania. In 1810, several customers of a store and tavern in Sharpsburg, Maryland, squared their accounts by mowing hay and harvesting wheat. Similarly, in 1804 free black Samson Grant settled his debts with a Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, merchant by laboring in the wheat harvest. Untitled Daybook and Ledger, 1809-1812, WCHS; Little Britain General Store Ledger, 1796-1807, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Del.

<sup>57</sup> Agreement between Robert N. Carman and John Butler, 6 April 1806, Robert N. Carman Memorandum Book, 1804-1836, Johnson Papers [unprocessed collection], MdHS.

and Godfrey Smith, who—along with their families—spent several weeks harvesting during the 1810s.<sup>58</sup>

Farmers also expected the families of their farmhands and tenants to join their menfolk in the harvest field. Indeed, agricultural reformer Chauncey P. Holcomb reckoned that the chief advantage of employing cottagers or tenant farmers was that “their families are there, and sometimes the wife, or junior members of the family, may be of service, and can be called on in the hurry and press of the harvest.”<sup>59</sup>

Another praised those Frederick County farmers who employed laborers and their families under twelve-month contracts, noting that “this system obviates much of the difficulty so often experienced by frequent change of hands at a time when field work is most pressing” and that farmhands employed by the year “will be less likely to be tempted away by the offer of a dollar or two higher wages during seed time or harvest.” Such arrangements would, moreover, allow landowners to marshal the workers’ wives and children throughout the year, thus sparing their own wives the “too oppressive burden of household chores.”<sup>60</sup>

Contracts stipulating that farmhands’ families were to labor for their employers were outgrowths of a general pattern of engaging a single worker to gain access to the services of his entire family. Such agreements were not confined to agricultural employments; hirers also demanded that the families of rural artisans and factory operatives assist with their businesses. When Thomas Reed commenced as a

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<sup>58</sup> John Thompson Mason Account Book, 1802-1835, LOC.

<sup>59</sup> Chauncey P. Holcomb, Address Delivered before the Montgomery County, Maryland, Agricultural Society, at Its Annual Exhibitions, at Rockville, September 14, 1854 (Washington: Globe Printing Office, 1854), 6.

<sup>60</sup> “Some Items in Maryland Farming,” The Cultivator 16 (December 1860), 375-76.

blacksmith at Mt. St. Mary's seminary, the institution made his wife's board and lodging conditional on her raising poultry for the college.<sup>61</sup> The owners of a Frederick County paper factory expressed a preference for "a person with a family of children from eight years and upward" and promised a "house and garden [to] be given rent free and employment in the mill to all children who may be capable of doing anything."<sup>62</sup> It was, however, more common for employers to negotiate such agreements with farmhands and their families. In 1819, a Frederick County farmer advertised for "an industrious, steady man" with a "small family to work on the farm."<sup>63</sup> The following year, Baltimore County farmer Robert N. Carman made similar demands of laborer Leven Hall. In their contract, Carman agreed to give Hall, his wife, and his sons

the sum of \$200 a year, and also to find his sons in common working clothes and provide his wife with a half bushel of corn meal per year and one pound of bacon or pork or beef per day, also with milch or cider for their breakfasts and suppers, and they all to labor faithfully in and about any work upon the farm and conduct themselves in a sober, orderly, and industrious manner.<sup>64</sup>

Although most employers followed Carman's example and subsumed women's and children's earnings under a family wage, some contracted separately with married women. In 1843, Charles R. Carroll engaged a manager for \$11 per month and hired

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<sup>61</sup> Memorandum Book, 1827-1832, Mt. St. Mary's College and Seminary Archives, Emmitsburg, Md.

<sup>62</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 22 August 1818.

<sup>63</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 6 March 1819.

<sup>64</sup> Agreement between Robert N. Carman and Leven Hall, 20 March 1820, Robert N. Carman Memorandum Book, 1804-1836, Johnson Papers [unprocessed collection], MdHS. Baltimore County farmer Philip R. J. Reese struck a similar bargain with laborer Daniel McKarran and his wife Mary. Reese's contract specified that "the man [is] to operate as a farmhand generally and to take charge of the farm house . . . [and] the woman to have the control of the dairy, attend to the cooking and other matters connected to the domestic management of the farm house." Journal of Philip R. J. Reese, 10 July 1834, MdHS.

his wife at \$4 per month, with the expectation that “I am to have all her time.”<sup>65</sup> The expectation—whether explicit or implicit—that a farmhand’s family would form an auxiliary workforce remained a staple of labor agreements throughout the antebellum period.<sup>66</sup>

Employers’ desire to harness the labor of a worker’s family did not translate into tolerance for non-working children or women who were deemed unproductive. Laborers’ families may have been indispensable adjuncts to the workforce, but employers would not suffer disruptive or idle dependents. Maryland agricultural reformer John S. Skinner offered a forceful statement of this ethos: “Every farmer should himself take special care that . . . he is not encumbered with a single idle mouth—of man, woman, child, bird or beast—with not one consuming non-producer on his estate.”<sup>67</sup> Skinner’s advice would have resonated with northern Maryland’s landowners, who systematically limited the number of dependents on their farms and winnowed those less capable of productive labor from their crews. Washington County planter John T. Mason preferred hiring overseers with families, provided that they were “not too large.”<sup>68</sup> Harford County landowner Sophia McHenry initially allowed “Brown,” a ditchdigger and farmhand, to settle his newborn child and wife in

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<sup>65</sup> Ledger, 1823-1853, Charles R. Carroll Account Books, 1821-1863, MdHS.

<sup>66</sup> Examples of such agreements can be found through the 1850s. On February 1, 1852, John Einholdt and his wife Katherine contracted with a Baltimore County farmer to serve “as gardener, farmhand, and general servant for the time of one year . . . for the compensation of \$120 . . . said Preston also to provide us with boarding and a room.” William P. Preston, “Pleasant Plains” Account Book, 1852-1864, MdHS.

<sup>67</sup> Transactions of the Agricultural Society and Institute of New Castle, Delaware, at the Ninth Annual Meeting, Held at Wilmington on the 11th and 12th of September 1844 (Wilmington, Del.: Porter and Naff, 1844), 27.

<sup>68</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 19 August 1818.



an outbuilding, but soon concluded that “both mother and child are encumbrances on my hands.” She recommended that the family remove to her cousin’s estate, where they might find employment and could perhaps be housed in a ramshackle structure used as a stable.<sup>69</sup> Baltimore County farmer Philip R. J. Frese had “reason to rejoice” when his manager and his “troublesome family” sought greener pastures. “There are few things less desirable on a farm, than a large family of small, idle, mischievous, ill-disposed, children whose parent prefers seeing them running bout in filth and laziness than . . . giving them employment.”<sup>70</sup> Others indemnified themselves against the possible expense of supporting a worker’s family during slack periods by specifying that they would receive wages and maintenance only when employed. Thus, Middletown farmer Charles Lighter stipulated that David Baumgarter’s “wife and children [were] to work in harvest and when needed, they then to have wages and board.”<sup>71</sup>

If employers sometimes hired married men in part to gain access to the labor of their wives and children, they were unwilling to engage single women with dependent children. Because most women were incapable of heavy agricultural labor, and because their childrearing responsibilities might interfere with an employer’s domestic and farm routines, single mothers were virtually unemployable. The marginal position of such women within the rural economy became painfully clear to Sarah Woolford when her husband John was convicted of burglary and

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<sup>69</sup> Sophia McHenry to James Howard McHenry, 1 February 1850, McHenry Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>70</sup> Journal of Philip R. J. Reese, 8 March 1834, MdHS.

<sup>71</sup> Agreement between Chas. H. Lighter and David Baumgarter, n.d., Loose Paper in Charles H. Lighter Farm Account Book, Middletown Valley Historical Society, Middletown, Md.

sentenced to nine years in the state penitentiary. Sarah had been a dairymaid on Baker Johnson's plantation in Frederick County, where her husband worked as a cobbler, farmhand, and wagoner. Despite her "honest and industrious" character, Johnson was unwilling to retain Sarah and the family's four children after her husband's conviction. Within a year, Johnson observed—without remorse—that the Woolfords "appear to be in great poverty" and were "chiefly supported by the bounty of friends."<sup>72</sup> Rachel R. Dell and her infant children found themselves in similar straits after being abandoned by their alcoholic husband and father. Dell's petition for outdoor relief underscored employers' prejudice against single mothers. "I have heard it has been communicated to you that I would not work, which is all false," Dell declared. "I would be very glad to get a situation but that is very hard to get as they are so small one of them is only five months old and the other 18 months."<sup>73</sup> The stigma attached to abandoned or unmarried mothers persisted after the Civil War. In 1865, a Freedmen's Bureau agent stationed at Winchester, Virginia, reported that "demand exceeds the supply" for male farmhands, but that women—especially those burdened with young children—"find it difficult to obtain employment."<sup>74</sup>

Nor were landowners inclined to hire workers whose age prevented them performing heavy labor. Farm account books contain only a few references to aged workingmen, who generally performed light chores at token wages. Indeed, most of

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<sup>72</sup> Petition of John Woolford, n.d. [1812 or 1813], Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>73</sup> Petition of Rachel R. Dell, 6 August 1860, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1852-1879, MdHR.

<sup>74</sup> Capt. W. Storer Howe to Col. O. Brown, 8 October 1865, Letters Sent, ser. 4302, Winchester, Va., Superintendent, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, NARA.

their employers seem to have been moved by charity or pity. In 1810, for example, Clotworthy Birnie and a neighboring farmer agreed to employ a free black man named “Old Jack” for his subsistence alone.<sup>75</sup> In 1836, John Blackford hired “Old Negro Charles” to pull weeds from his garden, but grumbled that he “can do but little” and “is not worth his victuals.” After three days, Blackford discharged him with 25¢ in pay. Two years later, Blackford hired “Old Jim Adley,” agreeing to “give him what I may think he is, or what he may do, is worth.” In the coming weeks, Adley cleaned stables, mended fences, and performed other “piddling work,” for which he received small cash payments, tobacco, and lodging.<sup>76</sup>

### **“Insubordinate and Unmanageable”: Slave Management**

In 1820, the editor of Baltimore’s celebrated agricultural journal, the American Farmer, enquired about “the general system of slave management” on the region’s farms. “There is in fact little or no system of management in regard to slaves—they are insubordinate and unmanageable,” responded a disenchanted master from Harper’s Ferry. “The licentious doctrines that are propagated and the inducements held out to them to abscond . . . by the inhabitants of a neighboring State, have established a baneful influence on their manners, rendered them discontented and useless, and greatly impaired the tenure, by which we hold them.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Under the agreement, Birnie would feed “Old Jack” and his neighbor would provide him with clothing. Clotworthy Birnie Diary, 6 November 1810, Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.

<sup>76</sup> “Old Negro Charles” and Jim Adley were not the only aging workers that Blackford employed at small jobs on his plantation. On June 18, 1839, he hired “Old Negro Lucy” to tend his garden and do light housework. John Blackford Journals, 16 July 1836, 15 March – 27 August 1838, and 18 June 1839, MdHS.

<sup>77</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 16 March 1821.

The slaveholder's tirade no doubt received a sympathetic reading from his peers along the Mason-Dixon Line, whose struggle to forge a "general system of slave management" was consistently foiled by slave resistance.

Adapting slavery to grain production was a tricky proposition. Instead of working in gangs under an overseer's lash, the slaves on northern Maryland's wheat-producing farms and plantations were scattered across the estate, often toiling alone or in small squads with minimal direction.<sup>78</sup> Agriculturalist Robert Russell believed that the resulting lack of supervision was slavery's great weakness in the region. "The management of a slave property on which nothing but wheat and Indian corn are raised is necessarily attended with great disadvantages," he maintained, "because the operations are diffused over a great area and the superintendence must be more imperfect."<sup>79</sup> The extreme seasonality that characterized grain production exacerbated slaveholders' difficulties; bound labor represented a fixed investment in a region whose staples required an elastic workforce. Agricultural reformers therefore implored farmers to abandon slavery. "Slaves must all—big and little, young and old—be maintained throughout the year," argued one writer, while the wheat crop "demands their labor not more than one aggregate month in the year."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For example, on May 14, 1838, John Blackford instructed Murphy to plow, Will to cut timber in the woodlot, Daph to clear rubbish from a field, Enoch to fetch ploughs from a nearby foundry, and Ned and Jupe to operate the plantation's ferry. John Blackford Journals, MdHS. On September 7, 1857, Jefferson County, Virginia, James Lawrence Hooff recorded the following disposition of his slaves: "Sent George with team . . . for ten 10 bls. corn, which he got. Rezin, Jim, Hawkins, and Ned were hauling corn to the mill for meal and hauling wood. Afterwards George crushing corn. Jim went to mill for feed. Rezin and Hawkins still at corn, while Ned went to town with horses for shoes." James Lawrence Hooff Commonplace Book, VaHS.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Russell, North America, Its Agriculture and Climate, Containing Observations on the Agriculture and Climate of Canada, the United States, and the Island of Cuba (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1857), 141.

<sup>80</sup> "Remarks on Things in General," Monthly Journal of Agriculture 3 (September 1847), 101.

While not immune to such arguments, masters did not believe that slavery was incapable of meeting the demands of grain production. A Shenandoah County, Virginia, slaveowner recognized that “bankruptcy, sooner or later, is the inevitable consequence” of being burdened with “a large, and oftentimes, useless auxiliary force,” but he insisted that his work crew—composed of ten slaves—was not an encumbrance. Three of the slaves turned their hands to blacksmithing, cobbling, and carpentry during the winter, while the remainder tended livestock and threshed grain.<sup>81</sup> Masters sought, moreover, to inject slavery with a measure of flexibility that would allow it to respond to the region’s seasonal labor demands. Aware that seasonal un- or underemployment taxed their estates, they sought additional tasks to keep their bound workforce constantly employed. Some masters hired their slaves to non-slaveholders or allowed them to go “jobbing” in the neighborhood during slow periods. Frank Bell, who had been enslaved on a wheat plantation near Vienna, Virginia, recalled that his master “would hire out his slaves in slack times to cut timber an’ build barns or fences.”<sup>82</sup>

In wedding slavery to mixed farming, masters had been forced to surrender some of the control necessary for maintaining discipline. The tensions inherent in these adaptations were apparent in the employment of slave wagoners. The intensification of commercial agriculture and the concomitant expansion of the Middle Atlantic’s transportation networks during the Napoleonic Wars had created

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<sup>81</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 27 July 1821.

<sup>82</sup> Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Philips, eds., Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia Ex-Slaves (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 27. For additional evidence of slaves “jobbing” or seeking employment, see James Lawrence Hooff, Commonplace Book, 22 January-29 January 1858, VaHS.

opportunities for slaveholders to employ bondsmen as drovers and wagoners during slower seasons. After visiting a Frederick County slaveholder, Englishman W. Faux described how training slaves as wagoners defrayed transportation expenses by creating bi-employments when they might otherwise be underemployed. “He finds living 40 miles from market of no importance,” Faux explained, “as the carrying is done when men and horses have nothing else to do.”<sup>83</sup> Slave teamsters were commonplace on northern Maryland’s roads, and wagoning became an essential component of a farm laborer’s skills.<sup>84</sup> Skilled wagoners fetched hefty prices and it was not uncommon for slaveholders to boast that their bondsman was an “excellent wagoner” or “possessed of few equals as a wagoner.”<sup>85</sup>

Assigning slaves to drive wagons to distant markets was a dangerous proposition. While it allowed masters to keep their slaves profitably employed, it also created opportunities for them to work without supervision, to become familiar with the region’s roads, and perhaps to escape bondage. A slave named Isaac may have capitalized upon these opportunities when he fled from George Carter’s plantation in Loudoun County, Virginia. Unable to speculate on his slave’s whereabouts, the frustrated Carter explained that Isaac had an extensive knowledge of

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<sup>83</sup> W. Faux, Memorable Days in American: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States, Principally Undertaken to Ascertain, by Positive Evidence, the Condition and Probable Prospects of British Emigrants (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1823), 142-43.

<sup>84</sup> In 1807, travelers in Frederick County noted that most of the wagoners they encountered were slaves. “Cursory Sketches in Pennsylvania and the Borders of Maryland and Virginia,” The Portfolio, 26 December 1807.

<sup>85</sup> In 1824, a resident of Washington County testified that John Berry had sold for about \$800 “as he was counted a valuable hand, being a good wagoner, and that other gentlemen had bid for him.” Niles’ Weekly Register [Baltimore, Md.], 2 October 1824. Northern Maryland’s newspapers abound with advertisements praising slaves’ skills as wagoners. For examples, see Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 26 June 1807, 24 June 1808, 29 June 1814, 9 August 1815, 5 June 1816; Frederick-Town Herald, 4 October 1823; and Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 18 December 1830.

local geography. “He has driven my wagon several times to Baltimore, and is very-well acquainted with Alexandria.”<sup>86</sup> A Frederick County master found himself in a similar bind, for his slave, Peter, had been employed to “drive a team from Baltimore to Tennessee.”<sup>87</sup> Even slaveholders whose bondsmen and women seldom strayed from their home farm or plantation might find their authority compromised by black wagoners. Montgomery County slaveowner Benjamin Jones suspected that his slave Sally had escaped with “a person of color who drove a wagon,” as did a Virginian whose runaway slave was seen “in company with some Negro wagoners driving . . . for Baltimore.”<sup>88</sup> White wagoners posed a similar threat. In 1816, a white man hauling wares to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, aided Washington County slave Barney Mason. Mason’s bid for freedom failed, but his master remained suspicious of wagoners. When Mason escaped again in 1818, he believed it “probable he may get in with some wagoner . . . and make for Pennsylvania.”<sup>89</sup>

The tension between making slavery responsive to changing labor demands while maintaining discipline resurfaced at harvest. Capitalizing on their neighbors’ urgent labor needs, slaveholders sought outlets for unneeded slaves and drafted contracts that bore the imprint of the seasonal labor markets. When Harford County

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<sup>86</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 11 August 1807.

<sup>87</sup> Frederick Plain Dealer, 19 August 1813.

<sup>88</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 15 August 1815 [first quotation]; Hagerstown Mail, 29 June 1832 [second quotation].

<sup>89</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 January 1818.

farmer John W. Stump hired out Harry and Isaac, he stipulated that, while “no rate of wages [was] fixed,” the slaves must receive “harvest wages.”<sup>90</sup>

Slaveholders dangled incentives before bondspeople to guarantee their utmost exertions at harvest. Washington County farmer George F. Heyser rewarded his slaves’ efforts with the same daily wages paid to free harvesters, while Virginian Lewis H. Machen allowed his bondsmen to earn “extras” during haymaking and harvesting.<sup>91</sup> Others granted their slaves brief holidays, which were often used to earn additional cash. In 1838, John Blackford hired several neighborhood slaves whose master had already gathered his crops. In addition to hiring the slaves of others, Blackford allowed his own slaves to seek outside employment. After the 1837 harvest, he granted his slaves a brief respite, which sent “the negroes off in different directions.”<sup>92</sup> In 1854, Jefferson County, Virginia, master James L. Hooff threw a “frolic” at the conclusion of the harvest and “let my boys go until Friday night.” The next day, he found only one slave on his farm; the “balance of [the] hands were harvesting.”<sup>93</sup> The wages garnered at harvest were vital to the enslaved, especially to

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<sup>90</sup> John W. Stump Diary and Letterbook, 14 August 1837, MdHS. Such flexible contracts became common in the Chesapeake during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as planters abandoned tobacco and began to cultivate wheat. Jonathan D. Martin, Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 29-31.

<sup>91</sup> George F. Heyser, Harvest Rolls, 1827-1829, MdHS. During June and July, 1851, Machen’s three adult male slaves performed 172 such “extras” valued at a total of \$151. Lewis H. Machen, Account Book, 1837-1857, Lewis H. Machen Papers, LOC. Farmers throughout the wheat-producing regions of Virginia offered similar incentives. See Schlotterbeck, “Plantation and Farm,” 191.

<sup>92</sup> John Blackford Journal, 22 July 1838, 26 July 1838, and 16 July 1837, MdHS. Blackford was not the only master to augment his harvest workforce with hired slaves. Among the harvesters employed by one Washington County farmer were “Duffy’s Black Man,” “Kealhooffer’s Jim,” and “Galloway’s Charles.” George F. Heyser, Harvest Rolls, 1828 and 1835, MdHS.

<sup>93</sup> James Lawrence Hooff Commonplace Book, 5 July – 6 July, 1854, VaHS.



those attempting to ransom themselves or their kin. Of her father's Herculean labors to purchase his family, former Baltimore County slave Amanda Smith remembered that "in harvest time, after working for his mistress all day, he would walk three or four miles, and work in the harvest field till one or two o'clock in the morning."<sup>94</sup>

The loosening of the shackles at harvest occurred with the blessing of the state of Maryland. Recognizing that grain production required a more flexible, mobile workforce, the General Assembly stipulated in 1787 that, while slaves were not generally allowed to hire themselves or "act as free," such behavior would be permitted for ten days at harvest.<sup>95</sup> In 1818, the legislature expanded this concession to twenty days.<sup>96</sup> Both laws buttressed slaveholders' authority by imposing fines on those employing slaves without their owners' consent, but enforcement of this provision seems to have been sporadic.

Allowing the enslaved to seek outside employment may have imbued slavery with a measure of plasticity needed for wheat production, but it also cracked open the door to freedom. Harvest provided an ideal opportunity for slaves to melt into the motley bands of roaming harvesters and make their escape. A Frederick County master suspected that Arch was following the harvest to freedom. "He is a fast

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<sup>94</sup> Amanda Smith, An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealing with Mrs. Amanda Smith the Colored Evangelist: Containing an Account of Her Life Work of Faith, and Her Travels in America, England, Ireland, Scotland, India, and Africa, as an Independent Missionary (Chicago: Meyer & Bros., 1893), 17-18.

<sup>95</sup> "An Act to Prevent the Inconveniences Arising from Slaves Being Permitted to Act as Free," 22 May 1787, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis on Tuesday the Tenth of April, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Seven (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1787).

<sup>96</sup> "A Supplement to the Act, entitled, an Act to Prevent the Inconveniences Arising from Slaves Being Permitted to Act as Free," 4 February 1818, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the First Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Seventeen (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1818).

reaper,” the slaveholder noted when advertising for Arch’s capture, “and no doubt will procure a sickle and attempt to pass as a freeman.”<sup>97</sup> When Ned escaped from his owner’s plantation, the anxious slaveholder feared that he had fled under cover of harvest, for he “understands felling, mowing, [and] cradling.”<sup>98</sup> On rare occasions, women also made bids for freedom at harvest. Henry Cooley believed that “Negro Hannah” would fund her escape by harvesting because she was “only used to plantation work.”<sup>99</sup> The earnings possible at harvest may have emboldened those contemplating escape; with work abundant and wages high, fugitives could purchase food, lodging, transportation, and new clothing. When Jacob escaped after having “left home with the avowed intention of going to Loudoun County, Virginia, to harvest,” his master grumbled that a description of his clothing was unnecessary, for Jacob—“having without a doubt a good supply of money”—would probably purchase a different outfit.<sup>100</sup> Since migrant workers often tramped along major transportation arteries, the expansion of northern Maryland’s turnpikes and canals facilitated harvest escapes. In 1832, a northern Virginian heard rumors that his runaway slave had been cooking at a tavern, laboring on the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, and working as a harvester.<sup>101</sup> A Frederick County master received similar intelligence concerning a

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<sup>97</sup> “Ten Dollars Reward” Broadside, 24 June 1793, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

<sup>98</sup> Potomack Guardian and Berkeley Advertiser [Shepherdstown, Va.], 30 June 1796.

<sup>99</sup> Baltimore Telegraph and Daily Advertiser, 10 August 1801.

<sup>100</sup> Daily National Intelligencer [Washington, D.C.], 30 July 1842.

<sup>101</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 6 July 1832.

runaway who had “been engaged somewhere upon Carroll’s Manor or its vicinity” and was following the harvest along the Potomac River.<sup>102</sup>

The breakdown in slave discipline revealed by runaway wagoners and harvest hands was symptomatic of larger, more profound difficulties in the troubled marriage of slavery and northern Maryland’s farm economy. Like farmers who employed wage laborers, slaveholders were reluctant to subsidize the maintenance and reproduction of their workforces. Pinched by a stagnating economy and worried that their chattels might flee into Pennsylvania, masters and mistresses had scant interest in bearing the costs associated with slavery’s long-term survival. Thus, the pressures that forced free women with young children to the margins of the rural economy also operated upon their enslaved counterparts. Agricultural reformers warned slaveholders against keeping or purchasing pregnant women and their dependent children. Dispensing with “breeding women and young children” was the cornerstone of Virginia farmer J. H. Turner’s strategy for “lopping off all useless expenditures” and eliminating “everything that does not contribute to . . . our immediate comfort or profit.” Believing that it was “cheaper to buy than to raise,” Turner limited his workforce to adults, which resulted in every slave having “full employment” without “noisy groups of mischievous young negroes to feed.”<sup>103</sup>

Even though slave children increased their estates, most slaveowners viewed pregnant women or those with infant children as encumbrances. They bristled when a slave’s pregnancy or childcare responsibilities interfered with her work routine.

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<sup>102</sup> Bartgis’s Republican Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 24 July 1818.

<sup>103</sup> “The Farm and Farming of the Rev. J. H. Turner,” The Farmers’ Register 10 (1842), 129.

Frisby Tilghman was outraged to discover that a recently purchased slave was “in the family way.” When the woman asked to be relieved of her duties, the incensed Tilghman demanded that she continue to work. “I had understood she was apt to lay up,” he explained to a relative, “but that it would not answer here, as I can judge of her indisposition and shall proceed accordingly.”<sup>104</sup> When Charles A. Worthington purchased a woman and her five children for his plantation in Jefferson County, Virginia, he noted that the oldest boy could plow and that his younger brother was “useful in raking a fire in the house and attending the stable,” but lamented that their mother—who was nursing an infant—was “awkward” and that her youngest children “will have to be supported.”<sup>105</sup> Complaints about dependent children were often interwoven with concern about women’s other family attachments. Lewis H. Machen balked at purchasing a slave because she was “dogged with the disagreeable appendage of a young child and a bad husband.”<sup>106</sup> Slaveowners selling women either stressed that they were unencumbered by family ties or assured potential buyers that those ties could be severed. When Frederick County farmer Michael Late, Jr., offered to sell a “Negro woman about 27 years of age with her four children,” he emphasized that the purchaser might “only take the youngest child and the mother” if such an arrangement would be “more agreeable.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Frisby Tilghman to Susan Hollyday, 7 July 1823, Hollyday Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>105</sup> Charles A. Worthington to George Fayette Washington, 6 January 1847, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

<sup>106</sup> Arthur W. Machen to Lewis H. Machen, 2 December 1843, Lewis H. Machen Papers, LOC.

<sup>107</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 7 January 1815. For similar examples, see Frederick-Town Herald, 8 January 1808, 25 January 1817, and 29 March 1817.

Slaveholders' aversion to assuming reproductive costs led some to cull women, children, and the aged from their holdings. In 1826, Baltimore County mistress Mary C. Spence outlined such a strategy in a petition seeking permission to liquidate some of her late husband's thirty-nine slaves. Spence had already leased some of the family's plantation to a sharecropper, and the remaining lands "would not require one-fourth" of the slaves. Having curtailed her farming operations, Spence argued that she would suffer "extreme inconvenience and loss . . . by being compelled to keep them." Anticipating the court's objections, Spence explained that hiring out the surplus slaves was not an option, because "the wage is precarious and generally accompanied with mutual complaint." Moreover, there was considerable danger of hired slaves "absconding from service altogether." She cinched her argument by highlighting the composition of her slaveholding, which included many who were "very young and others getting old."<sup>108</sup> Washington County executor Samuel Lynch, Jr., echoed these concerns when he sought the court's blessing to sell some of the fourteen slaves under his control. The "proceeds of the hire of those negroes capable of working is not more than hundred dollars pr. year," Lynch argued, because "many of said Negroes [are] Women and Children incapable of rendering service."<sup>109</sup>

These petitions illuminate another difficulty confronting northern Maryland's slaveholders—the unsuitability of women to many of the chores performed on the region's farms. Unlike cotton, rice, or tobacco cultivation, which could be performed

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<sup>108</sup> Petition of Mary C. Spence, 18 November 1826, Baltimore City Register of Wills, Petitions, MdHR.

<sup>109</sup> Of the fourteen slaves under his authority, nine were children under ten and two were women with infant children. There were only two men and one childless woman. Petition of Samuel Lynch, Jr., 18 November 1818, Washington County Register of Wills, Petitions and Orders, MdHR.

by women wielding light tools, grain production required workers with considerable upper-body strength.<sup>110</sup> Men drove the heavy cultivators, drills, and double-shovel ploughs used during planting season, and they swung the cumbersome cradles and scythes used in haymaking and harvesting. When organizing their harvest crews, slaveholders implemented gender hierarchies that relegated women to the least demanding positions. Describing the wheat harvest on a plantation near Vienna, Virginia, former slave Frank Bell recalled that “De men would scythe and cradle, while de women folks would rake and bind. Den us little chillum, boys and girls, would come along an’ stack.”<sup>111</sup> There were clear limits to women’s employability. Between September 20, 1836, and January 3, 1838, John Blackford’s adult slave women Caroline and Daphney performed a combined forty-eight days of farmwork, the bulk of which (nineteen days) were spent in the plantation’s vegetable garden and orchard. The remainder of their time was spent hoeing and husking corn (fourteen days), raking and binding in the wheat harvest (six days), and cleaning the barnyard (six days).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> The gendered aspects of slavery in districts that produced corn and wheat have received scant attention. On the declining value of women’s agricultural labor to Chesapeake planters making the transition from tobacco cultivation to general farming, see Lorena S. Walsh, “Work and Resistance in the New Republic: The Case of the Chesapeake, 1770-1820,” in From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas, ed. Mary Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 107-08. Joan M. Jensen has offered a mild corrective to this interpretation, arguing that the transition from tobacco to corn and grain production did not necessarily mean a reduction in women’s workload. She found that slave women on these properties often assumed additional responsibilities, such as managing dairies and engaging in domestic manufacturing. Joan M. Jensen, Promises to the Land: Essays on Rural Women (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 158-63.

<sup>111</sup> Perdue et. al., eds., Weevils in the Wheat, 26.

<sup>112</sup> Blackford seldom recorded the domestic chores performed on his plantation, so it is unclear what these women did during the remaining days. John Blackford Journals, 20 September 1836-3 January 1838, MdHS.

While slaves were, in theory, powerless to decide when, where, and how they labored, there is some evidence that enslaved women accepted and, to some extent, enforced a gendered division of labor. Explaining why she had run away from her master near Boonsboro, Sarah Mills claimed that the slaveholder—“a tax collector and very bad man”—had violated her understanding of what constituted men’s and women’s work by forcing her to “chop wood, curry horses, [and] work in the field like a man.”<sup>113</sup>

It would be a mistake to underestimate female slaves’ value to the region’s farmers, for the gendered division of labor that kept women from performing certain types of labor sometimes became murky. Women could be forced to perform a wide variety of agricultural and domestic chores. Slaveholders attempting to sell female slaves often boasted of their proficiency at “house and out work.” In 1824, for example, a Frederick County master claimed that, in addition to being “a good cook, [who] can sew, knit, wash, and iron,” his slave woman could do “any kind of work, is famous in the harvest field or tobacco ground.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, women’s adaptability and dexterity sometimes made them invaluable to slaveholders. When Rachel Teger died, her mistress, Martha Ogle Forman, recalled her many contributions to the plantation. “[S]he was a field hand when I came here,” Forman wrote, “but I soon discovered that she had a great deal of intelligence and industry.” In the years that followed, Teger became an indispensable worker, sewing clothing for the slaves, whitewashing,

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<sup>113</sup> William Still, The Underground Railroad (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1872), 491.

<sup>114</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 20 March 1824. Another northern Maryland slaveowner declared that his “colored girl” was “accustomed to house or farm work.” Democrat and Carroll County Republican [Westminster, Md.], 19 January 1843.

repairing rugs, making candles, spinning, and serving as the plantation's dairymaid, in which capacity she earned for her owners "thousands in butter."<sup>115</sup> Still, because of women's inability—or unwillingness—to perform certain chores, their labor remained undervalued by the region's farmers. Thus, a farm manager near Shepherdstown, Virginia, discouraged his employer from purchasing additional female slaves, noting that "a man will suit you best, as we have now . . . too many women who work in the field."<sup>116</sup>

Farmers also struggled to find suitable employment for enslaved children. Landowners often hired local free children to perform light chores, but they were seldom responsible for anything beyond the meager wages children garnered; the cost of hired children's maintenance remained squarely with their parents. The same was not true for enslaved children. Eager to recoup their investments, impatient slaveholders pressed children into fields and workshops at tender ages. Lewis Charlton remembered that his master, a tanner, "imposed many laborious duties upon me, such as no child possibly do; he would make me spread heavy hides, so heavy that men could hardly handle them." When he proved incapable of performing certain tasks, the incensed slaveowner flogged him "so badly that I could not lay down for weeks."<sup>117</sup> Those possessed of larger slaveholdings sometimes eased their young chattels into the workforce more gradually. Baltimore County slave James Watkins was raised by "an old female slave" until he turned six, when his master

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<sup>115</sup> W. Emerson Wilson, ed., Plantation Life at Rose Hill: The Diaries of Martha Ogle Forman, 1814-1845 (Wilmington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1976), 421-22.

<sup>116</sup> Alexander Wood to William Lewis, 18 February 1812, Lewis Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

<sup>117</sup> Brown, Sketch of the Life of Mr. Lewis Charlton, 3-4.



assigned him “to attend the cows, and keep them off the corn.” After performing light chores for three years, Watkins was sent into the fields, where he busied himself clearing stones, sheering sheep, and “making myself generally useful.” Within three years, he was “employed in the general work of the farm.”<sup>118</sup>

Unwilling to support enslaved children during the approximately fifteen years when their labor was of little value, slaveholders schemed to avoid, defray, or eliminate the expense. Some hired slave children to white artisans, “not only because they save themselves the expense of taking care of them, but in this way they get among their slaves useful trades.”<sup>119</sup> These arrangements seldom generated much income, for, as one Frederick County mistress found, “no one will take them to raise unless they can have their services until they are—girl 18 years and boy 20 years—of age for nothing . . . up to that time they are of no value to you and you run the risk of their life”<sup>120</sup> It was not surprising, therefore, that a Washington County master should offer to “put out” several young children “for their victuals and clothes.”<sup>121</sup>

Slaveholders’ dislike for dependent or unproductive workers extended to aged slaves as well. The commentaries scrawled alongside such slaves’ names in estate inventories reveal something about slaveowners’ gratitude towards these lifelong

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<sup>118</sup> James Watkins, Narrative of the Life of James Watkins, Formerly a “Chattel” in Maryland; Containing an Account of His Escape from Slavery, together with an Appeal on Behalf of Three Millions of Such “Pieces of Property.” Still Held under the Standard of the Eagle (Manchester, England: A. Heywood, 1860), 8-9.

<sup>119</sup> James W. C. Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 4.

<sup>120</sup> Armstrong to Mary, 10 December 1856, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

<sup>121</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 1 February 1820.

servants: “nuisance,” “not worth anything,” “worse than nothing.”<sup>122</sup> Masters and mistresses developed numerous strategies to circumvent the laws prohibiting the manumission of aged or disabled slaves.<sup>123</sup> Some dodged their responsibilities by simply abandoning unwanted slaves. This was the approach taken by Frederick County slaveholder Joseph Smith, who “turned loose” an elderly slave who was “subject to spasms” and unable to labor.<sup>124</sup> Davis Richardson apparently took a similar tack with an “old servant woman”; his will noted that she “has been at large for some years past.”<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Rezin Smith’s will directed that his slave, Jerry, be allowed “to go for himself” if age or disability precluded a legal manumission.<sup>126</sup> Others sidestepped the laws by smuggling unwanted slaves across the Mason-Dixon Line and granting them *de facto* freedom. A Pennsylvanian recalled that, when Maryland’s laws prohibited a legal manumission, “it was the custom of the

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<sup>122</sup> Inventory of George Fox, 6 February 1843, and Inventory of Catherine Willard, 2 June 1843, both in Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. GME 11, p. 456 and 573, MdHR; and Inventory of Daniel Duval, 17 March 1846, Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. GME 12, p. 633, MdHR.

<sup>123</sup> In 1790, the Maryland General Assembly declared that “the faithful services of slaves should not be forgotten after they are grown old or incapable of labor, and humanity requires that such slaves, when grown old in service, or rendered infirm by accidents or misfortunes, should be still supported and maintained by their masters, mistresses, or owners.” Slaveholders who failed to provide sufficient clothing, food, and housing, or who allowed their servants “to depart from their respective habitation or quarter, and wander or remain at large, begging or becoming burdensome,” would be required to post a £30 bond to guarantee their slaves’ support. “An Act to Repeal certain Parts of an Act, entitled, an Act to Prevent Disabled and Superannuated Slaves being set Free, or the Manumission of Slaves by any Last Will and Testament,” 25 December 1790, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the First of November, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1790).

<sup>124</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 23 February 1814.

<sup>125</sup> Will of Davis Richardson, 30 October 1858, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GH 1, pp. 358-64, MdHR.

<sup>126</sup> Will of Rezin Simpson, 13 July 1847, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GME 3, pp. 259-60, MdHR.

Washington County people who wanted to get rid of their negroes to bring them across the line . . . and set them free.”<sup>127</sup>

Because superannuated slaves might become a burden to their heirs, those slaveholders who were unwilling to abandon aged bondsmen and women sought other means to defray the cost of their maintenance. In some cases, they shifted this charge onto younger slaves. Believing that slaves “too old or helpless to be manumitted” were “entitled to some consideration,” Frederick County slaveholder David Shriver willed that some of his remaining slaves be “bound out” and their wages “applied toward the comfort and support” of their elders.<sup>128</sup> In 1824, Maryland’s General Assembly lifted some of this responsibility from slaveholders’ shoulders, ordering county governments to “make such suitable provision for all old and infirm Negro slaves belonging to insolvent estates of deceased persons . . . as may be necessary for their support and maintenance.”<sup>129</sup>

### **Disciplining Workers**

In 1823, immigrant Jakob Rutlinger complained that farmhands in Frederick County wanted “big wages and little work.” Even though northern Maryland was in the throws of an economic depression, laborers were pocketing their harvest wages

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<sup>127</sup> John McClintock, Jr., to “Mrs. Zeamer,” 21 September 1901, Zeamer Family Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, Pa.

<sup>128</sup> Will of David Shriver, 21 February 1826, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. HS 3, pp. 458-60, MdHR.

<sup>129</sup> “An Act to Provide for Old and Infirm Negro Slaves Belonging to Deceased Persons’ Estates,” 10 February 1824, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis on Monday, the First Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Twenty-Three (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1824).

and withdrawing from the workforce. “Most of them, when they are not employed, spend their time in the taverns,” Rutlinger lamented. “A great many dissolute fellows are hatched out in this way.”<sup>130</sup> The complaint was neither novel nor unique. As early as 1799, Polish nobleman Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz had bemoaned the shiftless behavior of northern Maryland’s itinerant laborers, who punctuated brief stints of work with long bouts of drinking. “Why not?” he sneered. “After all, three days work is enough for a week’s drinking.”<sup>131</sup> There was, however, a special urgency attached to complaints about workers’ morale—and morality—beginning in the 1820s. As the region became more thoroughly enmeshed in wider markets and transportation networks, it became necessary to regulate the growing population of itinerant laborers and peddlers who traversed northern Maryland’s canals and turnpikes. Moreover, the newly ascendant free-labor ideology leant itself to the creation of personal and social restraints that many believed were necessary to a market economy.<sup>132</sup>

Beginning in the 1820s, temperance societies sprouted up throughout northern Maryland, but rooting out “demon rum” was a difficult task, for alcohol production and consumption were thoroughly imbedded in rural society. Travel narratives from

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<sup>130</sup> Rutlinger, “Day Book,” 227.

<sup>131</sup> Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Travels through America in 1797-1799, with Some Further Accounts of Life in New Jersey, trans. Metchie J. E. Budka (Elizabeth, N.J.: Grassman Publishing Co., 1965), 116.

<sup>132</sup> The connections between the temperance movement, the rise of market economies, and worker discipline have been drawn elsewhere. See, for example, Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 79-83. Despite his disagreement with certain facets of Johnson’s argument, historian Anthony F. C. Wallace also finds that revivals and temperance reform helped employers consolidate their authority over their workforces. See Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution (New York: Knopf, 1978).

the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries indicate that northern Maryland's producers marketed a significant portion of their apples, corn, and rye in the form of alcohol. The link between market-oriented farming and alcohol production continued through the 1820s. Many of the large, commercial distilleries enumerated in the 1820 federal census of manufactures were attached to flour mills, and the value of the produce they purchased was often impressive.<sup>133</sup> Smaller operations flourished throughout the countryside. Indeed, operating a still during the winter months provided an important bi-employment for many of the region's farmers. Although he believed "the number of whiskey distilleries is greater here than in any other country," Baltimore physician John Campbell found that "[s]carcely any of them make [distilling] their whole business. It is generally carried on by farmers . . . for 6 or 7 months a year, the summer season is not favorable to fermentation."<sup>134</sup> Not surprisingly, many balked at surrendering this important stream of revenue. "We would live happier were there more drunkards among us, because we would be wealthier," declared one farmer, for the drunkard "swills down the farmer's corn and rye and thus makes markets for these articles."<sup>135</sup>

Not only did alcohol grease the wheels of the farm economy, it was infused into patterns of rural work. Joshua Herring recalled that farmers in Frederick County

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<sup>133</sup> In Washington County, eleven of the thirty-one distilleries enumerated were attached to flour mills. The average value of the apples, corn, rye, and wheat purchased by the county's mills was \$880. The information collected in neighboring Allegany and Frederick Counties is probably incomplete; in Allegany County the enumerator collected information on two distilleries and in Frederick County he counted only four. 1820 U.S. Census of Manufactures, NARA.

<sup>134</sup> Dr. John Campbell to "Dear Sir," 1807, Carroll County Historical Society, Westminster, Md. A few enterprising farmers found local outlets for their alcohol by combining their farming operations with an inn or tavern. One traveler to Frederick County observed that "in small towns farmers do not forsake the plow completely for the inn, and thus the landlord with whom I stayed had 150 acres." Niemcewicz, *Travels*, 113-14.

<sup>135</sup> *Torchlight and Public Advertiser* [Hagerstown, Md.], 27 January 1830.

believed that whiskey was a “necessary adjunct” to agricultural labor. “They had the erroneous notion, that men could endure more, who would moderately use stimulants; and that they were not so likely to be overcome in the harvest field.”<sup>136</sup> Workers also received drams when working in inclement weather or when performing disagreeable chores, such as clearing land, digging ditches, or cleaning millraces.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, alcohol was the cornerstone of rural sociability. Storekeepers sometimes greeted their customers with a free bottle, and farmers hosting frolics were expected to treat their neighbors to whiskey.<sup>138</sup>

It is unclear whether the temperance movement made significant inroads in northern Maryland. The few surviving records from the region’s temperance societies suggest that the movement received more widespread support from prosperous farmers, merchants, professionals, and tradesmen than from landless workers. In western Frederick County, the Union Temperance Society of Middletown Valley enlisted some laborers—including a few African Americans—but enjoyed greater success among landowning farmers. Between 1843 and 1846, the society registered 170 men and 160 women. Of the 106 men whose occupations were recorded in the 1850 federal census, 32 (30 percent) were farmhands or laborers.

Twenty-three of these laborers headed independent households, and fifteen of them

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<sup>136</sup> Joshua Herring, “Memoirs,” p. 96, MdHS.

<sup>137</sup> Aquilla Hall Account Book, 1799-1810, Historical Society of Harford County, Bel Air, Md.

<sup>138</sup> Frederick County resident Frederick Stokes remembered that at one store “there was always a bottle of whiskey on the shelf behind the counter and everybody who came in could have a drink free if he wanted it. . . .” “Life in Emmitsburg in the mid 1800’s,” Vertical File, Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, Emmitsburg, Md. For farmers treating workers at husking frolics to alcohol, see John Mitchell Account Book, 1808-1840, UMCP; Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Union Temperance Society of Harford County, Maryland (Bel Air, Md.: C. D. Bouldin, 1833), 4-5.

had accrued small amounts of real property. The temperance society also attracted some laborers' wives and daughters, who made up 25 percent of its female membership. By contrast, landowning farmers constituted 39 percent of the society's male members, and their wives and daughters represented 41 percent of its female members. The most striking feature of the society's members was their wealth. Although only one member was a slaveholder, a significant number were either landowners or members of landowning families. Indeed, 133 (73 percent) of those identified in the census (male and female) came from landowning families. The average value of these members' real estate was an impressive \$3,525, with eighty-five members owning land valued above \$1,000 and forty-eight owning property whose value exceeded \$3,000.<sup>139</sup>

In neighboring Carroll County, the Sons of Temperance gained little support from landless workers. Located in the prosperous village of Westminster, the society attracted 232 members, most of whom were artisans, landowning farmers, and professionals. Of the 150 members located in the 1850 census, 55 (37 percent) were tradesmen, 41 (27 percent) were landowning farmers, and 33 (22 percent) were either merchants or professionals. Twenty-one laborers joined the society, including nine whose resided in artisans' households, suggesting that they were apprentices or journeymen. Thus, only twelve of the society's members appear to have been career laborers. As was the case with Union Temperance Society, the Sons of Temperance drew significant support from landowning households; seventy-four (50 percent) of the society's members were either landowners or the adolescent children of

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<sup>139</sup> Daybook of the Union Temperance Society of Middletown Valley, 1831-1874, UMCP; 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Free Population), Frederick County, Md., NARA; and 1850 United States Census, Schedule 2 (Slaves), Frederick County, Md., NARA.

landowners. The average value of the members' real property was \$3,757, with twenty-seven members—mostly farmers—owning land valued at more than \$3,000.<sup>140</sup>

Gauging the impact of the temperance movement in northern Maryland is difficult because anti-drinking societies reported a mixture of successes and failures, together with a good deal of backsliding. In 1833, the Union Temperance Society of Middletown Valley boasted that “four of the more respectable stores of the valley, if not more,” had stopped peddling whiskey. By 1841, however, these gains had been reversed and “the small stores in our neighborhood that had . . . stopped selling whiskey have again commenced.” Worse, the society found that two large distilleries were under construction.<sup>141</sup> The situation was not as bleak in neighboring Frederick, where, in 1841, a temperance advocate noted, “It is now a somewhat rare sight to see men reeling and staggering through our streets in a state of intoxication.”<sup>142</sup>

Ultimately, divining the truth behind these conflicting observations may be less important than understanding the appeal of temperance to farmers.

Temperance offered employers an opportunity to discipline their workforce and impose order upon the countryside. Beginning in the 1810s and 1820s, northern Maryland's civil authorities, landowners, and merchants evinced heightened anxiety

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<sup>140</sup> Account Book, 1847-1851, Maryland Sons of Temperance, Carroll Division, MdHS. 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Free Population), Carroll County, Md., NARA; and 1850 United States Census, Schedule 2 (Slaves), Carroll County, Md., NARA.

<sup>141</sup> Minutes, 16 May 1833 and 20 May 1841, Daybook of the Union Temperance Society of Middletown Valley, 1831-1874, UMCP.

<sup>142</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 3 December 1841.



over the growing population of “vagrant, loose, and disorderly persons.”<sup>143</sup> In many cases, these fears stemmed from the worsening economy, the expansion of the region’s transportation networks, and a growing population of outsiders, including canal and road workers, wagoners, and peddlers. It is not surprising that the earliest and most persistent complaints about the rising tide of intemperance and disorder emerged from the towns and rural neighborhoods along major commercial arteries. In 1807, the Frederick County sheriff denounced the “disorderly and riotous conduct of laborers” on a turnpike and warned that “the military authority” would quell future disturbances.<sup>144</sup> Concerns about disorder along the turnpikes intensified over the following decade. By 1817, Washington County merchant Samuel Gregory—whose store was located along the National Road—lamented that “[d]istilleries are daily increasing & more & more of that deadly poison is poured down the throats of unthinking, deluded mortals!”<sup>145</sup> Two years later, printer Mathias Bartgis echoed these complaints from Middletown, “which lies on the great western turnpike,” noting that it had become a “place of considerable notoriety” because of the “many persons traveling through it.”<sup>146</sup> Similar concerns arose as the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad’s mainline crept through northern Maryland. In 1831, the superintendent of the line in Frederick County complained that tavern licenses are “obtained with so much facility

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<sup>143</sup> In 1817, Frederick’s municipal government enacted an ordinance against such people, declaring that all people without visible means of support were to be confined to the county workhouse for thirty days. Frederick-Town Herald, 12 April 1817.

<sup>144</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 7 November 1807.

<sup>145</sup> Samuel F. Gregory to Lavina Richmond, 3 May 1817, Gregory Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>146</sup> Mathias Bartgis Journal, 2 September 1819, HSFC. Later that year, an Englishman traveling along the National Road in Washington County was shocked to discover a “little tavern, where, though it is Sunday, all is smoke and fire, and Bacchus is the God.” Faux, Memorable Days, 163.

and at so moderate a charge” that “shops have been opened . . . in many places contiguous to and along the line.”<sup>147</sup>

Although public anxiety about disorder and intemperance first surfaced along canals, railroads, and turnpikes, it soon radiated outward to encompass the crossroads taverns, racetracks, and revivals where farmworkers congregated. In 1820, a resident of Washington County complained that the rural village of Orr’s Gap was “becoming a far-famed Sunday theatre of every species of drunken riot, of profane swearing and obscene jest . . . and every sort of low jollity that would disgrace a savage tribe.” The writer urged the sheriff to arrest the “wretched publican who presided as high priest over [these] horrid youth” before he further corrupted the community’s morals.<sup>148</sup> Camp meetings were another source of disorder. Despite their ostensibly religious purpose, these tumultuous gatherings sometimes degenerated into mayhem. In 1819, Mathias Bartgis stumbled across a revival near the Potomac River whose attendees were “guilty of every despicable act . . . roaring, ranting, ripping, tearing, cursing, and swearing.” The meeting may not have netted any souls, Bartgis noted, but it did yield a stolen horse, two dead dogs, and eight “stark raving and mad” men who were maimed in fights.<sup>149</sup> County authorities made a concerted effort to enforce order at

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<sup>147</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the President and Directors to the Stockholders of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (Baltimore: Wm. Wooddy, 1831), 113-15.

<sup>148</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 7 November 1820. Although concerns about such rural gatherings assumed a special urgency during the 1810s and 1820s, they were not necessarily new. In 1794, for example, the Frederick County Court had indicted several men for gathering at a rural blacksmith shop and spending six hours in a “riotous, tumultuous, and unlawful manner.” Indictment of Frederick Graff and “divers other persons,” November 1794, Frederick County Court Papers, box 60, MdHR. Five years later, the court indicted John Buckey for “selling liquor at races at Carroll’s Manor . . . without a permit.” Indictment of John Buckey, November 1799, Frederick County Court Papers, box 3, MdHR.

<sup>149</sup> Mathias Bartgis Journal, 28 August 1819, HSFC.

revivals and imposed fines on people caught peddling whiskey at these events, but these efforts had little effect.<sup>150</sup>

Long a staple of rural life, horse races came under increased scrutiny during the 1810s. As early as 1796, an anonymous Hagerstown resident had bemoaned “the pernicious consequences attendant on horseracing” and encouraged his neighbors to shun the town’s annual races. Although he couched his argument in moral and religious language, concerns about workplace discipline figured prominently. Not only would farmers’ ploughs stand idle during the races, he averred, but apprentices and young tradesmen would “crowd to the booths, drink to intoxication, and proceed to quarrelling, and frequently to murder” before returning to their shops “unfit for any industry.”<sup>151</sup> The writer may not have been exaggerating. In 1805, a spectator at the races in Liberty-Town, Maryland, complained that “[s]ince the present races commenced here . . . this village has been kept in constant uproar: fighting, gambling, reveling and every kind of lewdness have been practiced in the most shameful manner.”<sup>152</sup> The Washington County court stopped short of outlawing

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<sup>150</sup> In Carroll County, revivals often resulted in several indictments for selling liquor to attendees. In September 1853, the county court indicted seven people for selling liquor at one revival. Despite the \$50 fine imposed on each of the three people convicted of the offense, the court found itself grappling with the same problem in September 1858, when it indicted six people for selling liquor at a camp meeting. Carroll County Circuit Court, Criminal Docket, 1856-1863, MdHR. The general reputation of camp meetings does not seem to have improved during the antebellum decades. When announcing a revival outside Hagerstown in 1847, an editor expressed his hope that the townsfolk “will not be annoyed, as has too often heretofore been the case, by the ill-behaviour of the large crowds which usually attend such gatherings.” Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 25 August 1847.

<sup>151</sup> Washington Spy [Hagerstown, Md.], 17 August 1796.

<sup>152</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 6 September 1805. Little seems to have changed over the following decades. Recalling his childhood in Frederick County during the 1840s, one resident noted that a patch of abandoned land hosted “scrub horse races and all kinds of gambling games” whose participants “would get drunk and stay drunk for a week.” “Life in Emmitsburg in the mid 1800s,” n.d., Vertical File, Emmitsburg Area Historical Society, Emmitsburg, Md.

racing, but in 1817 it yielded to mounting concerns and implored citizens to “discountenance the long list of enormities, which none but those who frequent such scenes of dissipation are able to enumerate.”<sup>153</sup>

As the anxiety aroused by horseracing suggests, fears about rural workers’ boisterous entertainments were interwoven with concerns about workplace discipline. The linkages between drinking, gambling, petty theft, and a poor work ethic were apparent to both employers and slaveholders, who were convinced that a worker’s dissipated habits led inexorably to rebelliousness. It was therefore not surprising that mayor George Baer’s complaints about the growing number of brothels and unlicensed taverns in Frederick included a reference to their “destructive and demoralizing” effects on apprentices. In addition to spreading disease and encouraging “gambling, intoxication and every description of vice,” disorderly houses created spaces “where masters and servants are upon equal terms.”<sup>154</sup> Such concerns were not confined to public officials. In 1821, Hagerstown tailor G. C. Hamilton reported that one of his employees, Daniel Matzenbaugh, had broken his contract and fled town “indebted to a number of persons.” Of his former journeyman, Hamilton wrote, “He is a drunkard, a great braggadocio, a foot racer, jumper, wrestler, cocker, swearer, and liar.” The tailor’s failings were reflected in the workshop where, Hamilton sneered, “[h]e cuts too deep, stitches himself into debt, and cabbages equal to any tailor.”<sup>155</sup> Farmer John Irvin observed similar character

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<sup>153</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 3 December 1817.

<sup>154</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 25 March 1820.

<sup>155</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 26 June 1821.

flaws in Daniel Knight, an itinerant laborer whom he suspected of stealing from his farm near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Knight had no trade, but “road [in] races, and [was] fond of talking racing and gambling.” Indeed, Knight preferred crime and gambling to regular employment and boasted to his erstwhile employer that “he will never make his living by working.”<sup>156</sup>

These complaints were echoed by slaveholders, whose descriptions of unmanageable slaves bore a striking resemblance to those uttered by employers of free workers. “He is fair of speech, plausible and artful; fond of dress, drink, and gambling, of cock fighting and of women, but not of work,” observed the master of a fugitive slave.<sup>157</sup> The extent to which drunken slaves could disrupt a farm’s operations and the near impossibility of preventing them from obtaining alcohol are illustrated by John Blackford’s protracted struggle to keep the slaves on his “Ferry Hill” plantation sober. Because his property was adjacent to an important ferry and the C & O Canal, Blackford’s slaves had constant interaction with boatmen, canal workers, and travelers who provided them with alcohol. In April 1837, Blackford complained that “Murf has been hanging about the packet boat all day [and] has obtained liquor sufficient to make him fool.” That September, he lamented that “there has been much disorder and intoxication about the ferry. Julius drunk. Murf not sober.” Adding to Blackford’s difficulties were his free laborers, black and white, who shared the slaves’ fondness for whiskey. Martin Shellman, a poor white farmhand and woodcutter, was often drunk, while farmhand James Moore stashed a

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<sup>156</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 31 July 1821.

<sup>157</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 31 July 1821.

bottle in an outbuilding and spent an evening drinking with Blackford's slave Murphy. Drinking not only disrupted the work routine, but also spawned disorder and strife in the quarters. During one binge, Murphy quarreled with slave women and thrashed a slave child. Drunken whites workers also wreaked havoc among the slaves. In 1837, Martin Shellman, stormed into the plantation's kitchen "pretty well corned" and "made a fuss . . . with the negroes."<sup>158</sup>

Blackford made repeated attempts to curb his slaves' drinking. In October 1830, he promised Julius a new suit of clothing if he did not "drink any ardent spirits between this day and the first of April next."<sup>159</sup> Such incentives did little to keep the slaves sober. In January 1837, he summoned Murphy and "lectured him on intoxication." Two months later, Lewis, a slave who helped operate the ferry, stumbled from a boat while drunk and almost drowned, which prompted another lecture. Throughout the summer, Blackford reported—with growing anger—that his slaves were "a little corned," "swamped," "pretty drunk," "quite drunk," and "drunk." By August, his patience was exhausted. Blackford hauled Julius into his office, where he was "tied and whipped severely" for drinking. The whipping was evidently to little effect; a month later Blackford flogged Julius again, this time for "fighting and otherwise behaving bad." In the end, Blackford's efforts proved futile. Unable to police his estate's borders and prevent people from smuggling whiskey to his slaves, he never curbed their drinking.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> John Blackford Journals, 30 April 1837, 3 September 1837, 20 August 1838, and 18 May 1839, MdHR.

<sup>159</sup> John Blackford Journals, 14 October 1830, MdHS.

<sup>160</sup> John Blackford Journals, 11 January 1837, 6 March 1837, 15 May 1837, 25 May 1837, 15 August 1837, and 16 August 1837, MdHS.

Slaveholders blustered about tavern keepers who sold “ardent spirits” to their slaves. In 1830, an overseer on a farm near Williamsport, in Washington County, threatened to prosecute those suspected of “dealing in any manner, especially in the articles of whiskey and other liquors, with the slaves of Mrs. Williams,” while a slaveholder cautioned the town’s merchants against “selling or bartering, to my servants, liquor of any description or quantity.”<sup>161</sup> When threats against individual merchants failed, masters wielded their political power to convince municipal governments to enact ordinances that penalized merchants who catered to African Americans. In 1838, Frederick’s aldermen decreed that “no person shall sell any distilled liquor to any free negro or slave, or suffer them to collect on [their] premises on the Sabbath” and imposed a \$10 fine on offenders.<sup>162</sup> Slaveholders made certain that these statutes were vigorously enforced. In 1856, for example, Howard County masters organized a petition campaign against the pardon of a man convicted of operating an unlicensed tavern, complaining that he was in “the habitual habit of selling to blacks, bond and free, and also desecrating the Sabbath . . . to the great annoyance of our order loving and church going community.”<sup>163</sup> Although most probably continued to sell whiskey to slaves, a handful of merchants and barkeepers buckled under pressure from slaveholders. In 1840, the proprietor of a Washington County tavern announced that he would not allow “children, apprentices, or slaves”

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<sup>161</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 20 February 1830 [first quotation], and Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 17 April 1830 [second quotation].

<sup>162</sup> Untitled resolution, 21 April 1838, Frederick City Board of Aldermen, Minutes, 1835-1847, HSFC.

<sup>163</sup> Petition of Stephen Bryan, Thomas Newton, H. P. Worthington, et al., [1856], Maryland Governor, Miscellaneous Papers, MdHR.

into his establishment “for the purpose of obtaining liquor, or of loitering about the room and smoking tobys.”<sup>164</sup>

Despite the importance of alcohol to the region’s agricultural economy, farmers were mindful of the dangers drunken farmhands posed to their operations. As his workers began distilling cider and whiskey, Baltimore County farmer Philip R. J. Frese expressed “serious apprehensions” that the “ardent spirits” would “disturb all order and involve our little community in disgraceful confusion.” Indeed, Frese considered “totally prohibiting the distribution of the least quantity of alcohol.” His anxiety was not groundless. The previous week, a farmhand had “evinced a disposition to be troublesome by getting drunk and taking liberties incompatible with the situation he fills.”<sup>165</sup> Excessive drinking not only disrupted farming operations, it also wreaked havoc within workers’ families. Disturbances in their farmhands’ households were irksome to employers, who were drawn into their laborers’ domestic squabbles. John Blackford was forced to provide separate quarters for a female worker after her husband “abused and threatened her in such a manner . . . that she had him taken before a magistrate.”<sup>166</sup> When a farmhand’s drinking spawned domestic violence and shattered his household, the employer risked losing the labor of his family. In 1833, Philip Frese complained that farmhand James Hughes—“a victim of insatiable thirsts for ardent spirits”—had gone into “such a frenzy that he destroyed nearly all his furniture and frightened his poor wife and children almost out

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<sup>164</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 24 January 1840.

<sup>165</sup> The nature of the “liberties” taken by the farmhand were not specified. Philip R. J. Frese Journals, 28 October 1833 and 7 November 1833, MdHS.

<sup>166</sup> John Blackford Journal, 3 February 1838, MdHS.



of their senses.” Not surprisingly, the laborer’s family deserted the farm. Frese attempted to broker a reconciliation, but Hughes’s wife “would not consent to return and live with him, as he uses malt liquor to keep him excited.”<sup>167</sup>

Employers attempted to reform dissipated farmhands through a combination of admonitions, firing, and incentives. In 1831, Blackford caught one of his white farmhands—“Dutch John”—stealing jugs of whiskey from his cellar and burying them in the garden. Outraged, Blackford “drove him off.” In August 1838, he gave laborer Martin Shellman “a lecture on whiskey drinking,” after which he promised to “quit and drink no more.” Blackford’s lecture proved ineffective and Shellman’s vow worthless. The following March, Blackford scrawled in his diary: “Martin Shellman drunk. I gave him a severe lecture.”<sup>168</sup> Baltimore County farmer William P. Preston adopted more stringent measures with farmhand George Einhaus. In 1856, after enduring several years of the laborer’s chronic drinking, in 1856 Preston drafted a stringent contract requiring Einhaus to remain on the farm, to abstain from alcohol, and—in the event of a breach or violation of the agreement—to surrender his wages “as an indemnity to him [Preston] for the injury he has already sustained.” Preston’s demands were not unreasonable. In the contract’s preamble, he noted that Einhaus had “frequently become inebriated and at such times [had] gone off and remained away days or several weeks, greatly to [the] detriment of Wm. P. Preston’s farm work.” Einhaus evidently managed to remain sober for more than a year before once again yielding to temptation. On April 29, 1858, he scratched his signature under the

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<sup>167</sup> Philip R. J. Frese Journal, 5 November 1833, MdHS.

<sup>168</sup> John Blackford Journal, 8 January 1831, 26 August 1838, and 8 March 1839, MdHS.

following entry in Preston's ledger: "In leaving your service without notice and unfortunately falling into my old habit of drinking, I have forfeited the wages due me."<sup>169</sup>

The danger that drunken farmhands would disrupt work routines loomed largest at harvest. In July 1837, John Blackford complained that his harvesters were "pretty hot with liquor" and that "Caroline, the black girl, was alarmingly drunk and not able to walk or stand."<sup>170</sup> Before he banished whiskey from his fields, Washington County farmer Paul Summers confessed that "I experienced much trouble, and indeed often dreaded the approach of Harvest, from the many unpleasant occurrences which were likely to take place among my hands," while another farmer bewailed the "noise, and bustle, and profanity, and contention" that excessive drinking spawned at harvest.<sup>171</sup>

The need to discipline harvesters stemmed not only from the season's pressing labor demands, but also from the significance attached to harvesting. For both landowners and laborers, the wheat harvest represented the culmination of the agricultural year and was cause for celebration. Workers had good reason to greet harvest as a holiday; it brought together large numbers of workers—men, women, and children—who rejoiced in the generous wages, ample whiskey, and bountiful meals proffered by landowners. "The fields were vast, wages good, and the people happy," recalled one farmboy. "When the harvest was over, [we had] such a feast. Tubs of

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<sup>169</sup> William P. Preston, "Pleasant Plains" Account Books, 3 September 1856 and 29 April 1858, MdHS.

<sup>170</sup> John Blackford Journal, 22 July 1837, MdHS.

<sup>171</sup> The Mail [Hagerstown, Md.], 27 June 1834.

lemonade and tables loaded with ginger bread and other good things.”<sup>172</sup> For employers and those concerned with the community’s morals, the festivities that accompanied harvest were laced with ambiguity. Because harvest blurred the distinction between recreation and work, the pre-industrial traditions that flourished in and around harvest fields—feats of strength, drinking, courting, and fighting—were both reflections of workers’ enthusiasm and potential sources of disorder.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the breakneck pace set by landowners, harvesters imbued their labors with an element of play.<sup>173</sup> After watching a gang of harvesters sweep across a field, a visitor to Frederick County noted that “their labor seemed turned to a sport, and ready hands and joyous hearts were making a short job of the task before them.”<sup>174</sup> For men, harvest was also an opportunity to demonstrate their physical prowess. Here again, we see the seamless blending of labor and leisure; a reaper who outdid his fellows not only earned bragging rights, but also served the interests of his employer. This conjuncture was apparent to Baltimore County slave James Watkins, whose overseer once came into the harvest field and, “thinking that the slaves had not worked hard enough,” seized a cradle and set a blistering pace for the workers. When the slaves overtook him, the overseer’s pride trumped his judgment. “[H]e was determined not to be beaten, so [he] kept going at a

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<sup>172</sup> Joseph R. Stonebraker, A Rebel of ‘61 (New York: Wynook Hallenback Crawford Co., 1899), 31.

<sup>173</sup> Such weddings of recreation and work were a prominent feature of pre-industrial work routines. See E. P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” Past and Present, no. 38 (December 1967): 56-97.

<sup>174</sup> The Family Magazine; or Monthly Abstract of General Knowledge, 1 May 1841.

furious rate till he was quite exhausted. He was almost immediately taken ill . . . and died the next day.”<sup>175</sup>

The festive elements of the harvest season were not confined to the fields. As workers tramped the countryside seeking employment, morals sometimes slipped their moorings. Workers’ mobility—combined with their anonymity—created innumerable opportunities for casual sexual relations. Farmhand Basil Evans of Frederick County suspected that his wife had spent the 1853 harvest “whoring across the mountains.”<sup>176</sup> In 1848, an itinerant workman recalled that Susannah Stilley had “loose conversation” with harvesters on her husband’s farm, “holding out inducements to him or others to have criminal conversations with her.” At least some yielded to temptation. Another laborer saw “Susannah and a man in the act of copulation, in a barn . . . . They were at it a good while.”<sup>177</sup>

Their spirits buoyed by harvest wages and liberal doses of whiskey, workers descended on the region’s towns and villages to continue their revelries. While storekeepers welcomed the business, others worried about the disorder spawned by these celebrations. After the 1858 harvest, Shepherdstown was infested with “numbers of rowdies, drinking hurraing in our streets, to the annoyance of all peaceful citizens.”<sup>178</sup> The following year, a newspaper in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, complained that a massive brawl among the town’s black residents

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<sup>175</sup> Watkins, Narrative, 8-9.

<sup>176</sup> Testimony of Dennis Borne, 28 March 1854, enclosed in Maryland vs. Basil Evens, n.d. [1854], Frederick County Circuit Court Papers, box 154, MdHR.

<sup>177</sup> Affidavits of Enoch Waltz and James Wood, 9 August 1849, enclosed in John H. Stilley vs. Susannah Stilley, filed 14 September 1848, case no. 2208, Frederick County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, MdHR.

<sup>178</sup> The Register [Shepherdstown, Va.], 17 July 1858.

had punctuated the harvest. “Harvest ended and Whisky plenty—courage up to fighting point, at it they went,” the paper reported, “and for two days and nights the combat raged.”<sup>179</sup>

Policing the roaming bands of harvesters was a difficult task, for the itinerant laborers were often unknown to their employers. On June 20, 1830, John Blackford noted that four workmen—identified only by their first names—had arrived on his plantation seeking work as harvesters.<sup>180</sup> The names recorded on the harvest rolls of Washington County farmer George F. Heyser suggest that some of his harvesters were also complete strangers: “German Women,” “Six Irish,” “Black Woman,” “Big Pennsylvanian,” “Little Pennsylvanian.”<sup>181</sup> Adding to employers’ difficulties was the tremendous turnover from harvest to harvest. Between 1825 and 1841, Heyser employed a total of 164 harvesters, the vast majority of whom (117) labored in a single harvest. Only seven workers assisted with five or more harvests.<sup>182</sup> Farmers thus confronted a nameless, constantly shifting workforce at the season when a breakdown of discipline could undo an entire year’s labor. Because community restraints had been loosened, and because many harvesters were unknown to their employers, personal appeals were ineffective tools for disciplining workers.

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<sup>179</sup> Valley Spirit [Chambersburg, Pa.], 20 July 1859.

<sup>180</sup> John Blackford Journals, 20 June 1830, MdHS.

<sup>181</sup> George F. Heyser, Harvest Rolls, 1826, 1832, 1833, 1861, MdHS. Similarly, John Mann recorded that “two Germans” had assisted with the harvest on the lands adjoining his Washington County sawmill. John Mann, Ledger and Miscellaneous Papers, 1835-1840, UMCP.

<sup>182</sup> George F. Heyser, Harvest Rolls, 1825-1841, MdHS. A similar pattern prevailed among workers on James Crawford Neilson’s farm in Harford County. Of the seventy-seven harvesters employed between 1824 and 1827, fifty-nine worked in only one harvest. James Crawford Neilson, “Priestford Farm” Journals, 1824-1827, MdHS.

Given the importance of the harvest, it is not surprising that the region's fledgling temperance movement chose harvest drinking as its first target. Indeed, interest in eliminating harvest drinking had preceded the establishment of local anti-drinking societies.<sup>183</sup> In 1826, the Frederick County Agricultural Society had encouraged local growers to discontinue "the use of ardent spirits, except when used as a medicine" and had offered premiums to farmers who cultivated their lands without the traditional rations of rum and whiskey.<sup>184</sup> Advocates of temperance reform rallied around the cause. In 1828, the Washington County Temperance Society included a stricture against harvest drink in its articles of incorporation. Brushing aside concerns that "it will be difficult to procure laborers without whiskey, especially during the busy season of haymaking and harvesting," the society proclaimed that "laborers enough can be found who will cheerfully dispense with whiskey."<sup>185</sup> Anti-drink reformers evangelized throughout the county, sponsoring meetings at which farmers discussed "the propriety and expediency of excluding the use of ardent spirits from their meadows."<sup>186</sup>

Temperance societies reported impressive gains in their campaign against harvest drinking. In 1831, the Union Temperance Society of Harford County boasted of the "considerable number of farms, on which no ardent spirits were used during the last harvest." Within two years, the number of farmers in the county who had

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<sup>183</sup> As early as 1819, a newspaper in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, had reported with great interest that "farmers near Philadelphia are forming associations for the purpose of excluding spirituous liquors altogether from their harvest fields and meadows . . . . Let the experiment be tried here!" The Compiler [Gettysburg, Pa.], 14 July 1819.

<sup>184</sup> Genius of Universal Emancipation, 1 January 1826.

<sup>185</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser, [Hagerstown, Md.], 25 December 1828.

<sup>186</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 18 May 1832.

“banished ardent spirits” from their harvest fields had increased from 68 to 130, with “many others having partially discontinued its use.” By 1836, about 160 of Harford’s farmers had prohibited their harvesters from drinking.<sup>187</sup> From Frederick County came the encouraging news that 250 members of the St. John’s Temperance Society had reaped three successive harvests “without consuming a drop of ardent spirits.”<sup>188</sup> Reformers also trumpeted important strides in northern Virginia, where a Charles Town newspaper reported “with pleasure, that many farmers cut their last crop of grain without using a drop of spirituous liquors in their fields.”<sup>189</sup>

Although farmers were divided about the economic benefits of temperance, something approaching a general consensus soon emerged about the advantage of employing sober farmhands. Indeed, farmers who sang the praise of the temperance movement emphasized its commendable effects on workplace discipline. A farmer in Washington County boasted of the “harmony and good will . . . together with a readiness and promptness to obey command, formerly unknown,” that prevailed among his harvesters. Another reported that “time is not wasted in foolish talking and wrangling . . . and the employer is saved the disagreeable duty of discharging hands for drunkenness, or the misconduct produced by it, at the time he has need of their help.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> First Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Union Temperance Society of Harford County, Maryland (Belle-Air, Md.: C. D. Bouldin, 1831), 5; Third Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Union Temperance Society of Harford County, Maryland (Belle-Air, Md.: C. D. Bouldin, 1833), 6-7; and Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Union Temperance Society of Harford County, Maryland (Belle-Air, Md.: C. D. Bouldin, 1836), 6.

<sup>188</sup> Frederick Herald, 4 August 1832.

<sup>189</sup> Virginia Free Press [Charles-Town, Va.], 19 July 1832.

<sup>190</sup> The Mail [Hagerstown, Md.], 27 June 1834.

Temperance reformers also achieved victories against the frolics that marked the conclusion of the harvest season. “We have no more ‘harvest homes’ in this section of the country,” lamented an 1853 editorial in Hagerstown newspaper. Remembering the days before progress “swept all the customs of our forefathers,” the nostalgic writer recalled that “[m]any years ago, our country people . . . used to flock to town in large numbers, thronging its sidewalks and overrunning its stores, making purchases, and participating in the pleasures of what was termed a ‘harvest frolic.’”<sup>191</sup> A few years later, the county’s rural folk experienced “a sort of harvest frolic” when a circus visited Hagerstown following the harvest. Although the event drew “large numbers of persons, male and female, white and black,” this pale imitation of earlier frolics “passed off without much drunkenness or anything else of an unpleasant character.”<sup>192</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The attempts to root out harvest drinking were part of a larger campaign to strip farmwork of its disruptive, pre-modern features and to discipline both free and enslaved workers in a setting where employers’ and slaveholders’ authority was often compromised. These battles, which were joined by slaveholders and non-slaveholders alike, were but one manifestation of the larger currents that cut across all segments of the rural workforce. Employers and slaveholders both felt the seasonal pressures of wheat production, and both groped for the levers that would allow them

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<sup>191</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 20 July 1853.

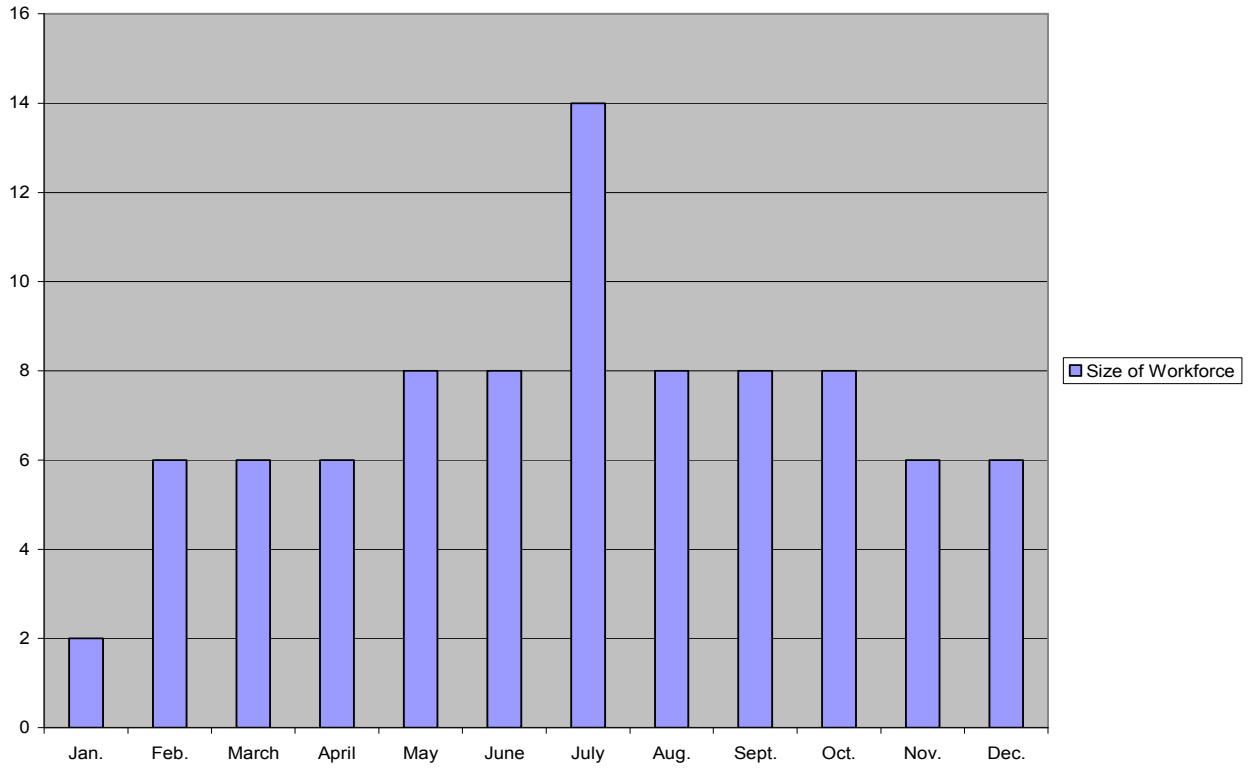
<sup>192</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 30 July 1856.



to manipulate farmhands. In the end, however, slavery proved less supple than free, wage labor. For slaveholders, bi-employments and incentives offered solutions to the intertwined problems of underemployment and harvest discipline, but there was no escaping the threat—or reality—that unsupervised slave wagoners and harvesters could dash into Pennsylvania. Moreover, slaveholders butted against the obdurate problem of finding employment for their enslaved women, children, and the elderly. Those who were unwilling to either manumit or sell unwanted bondspeople faced a quandary. To preserve slavery along the sectional border, masters and mistresses need to keep their bondspeople from absconding and find more effective means of defraying the cost of their workforce's reproduction. Meeting these intertwined challenges required a re-negotiation of slavery.

**Figure 3.1**

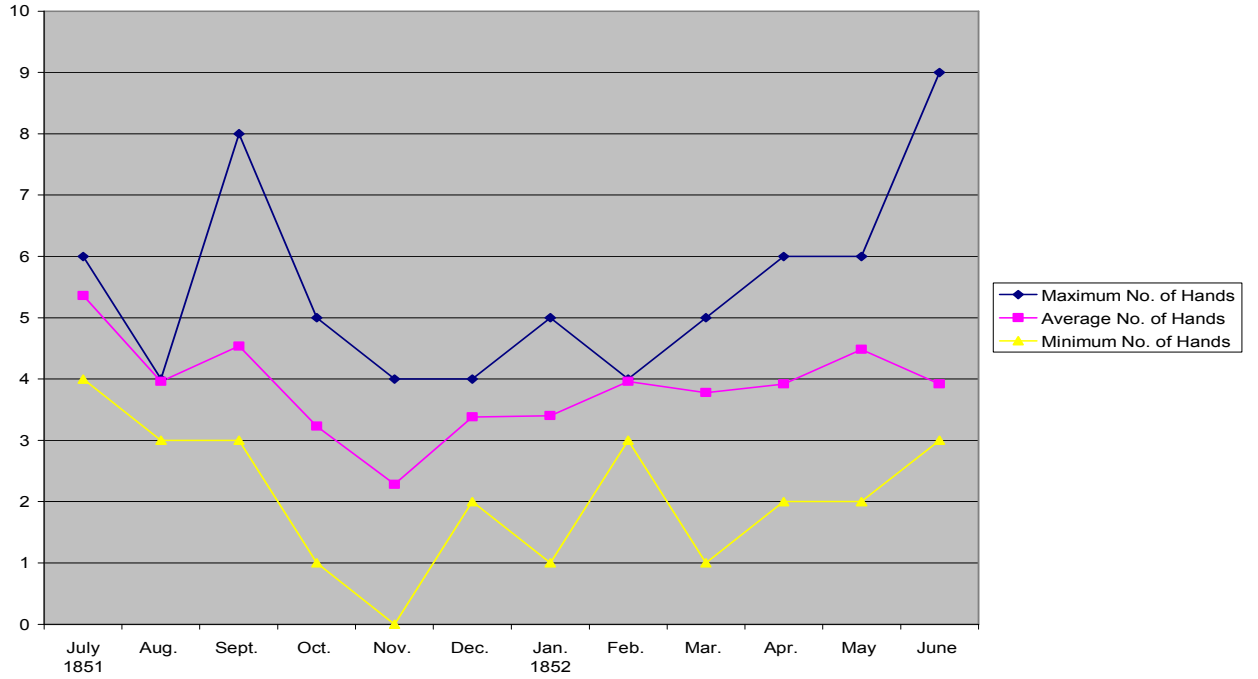
**Number of Workers Employed on “Bloomsbury Farm,” Carroll County, Md.  
January-December 1853**



Source: “Bloomsbury Farm” Account Book, MdHS.

**Figure 3.2**

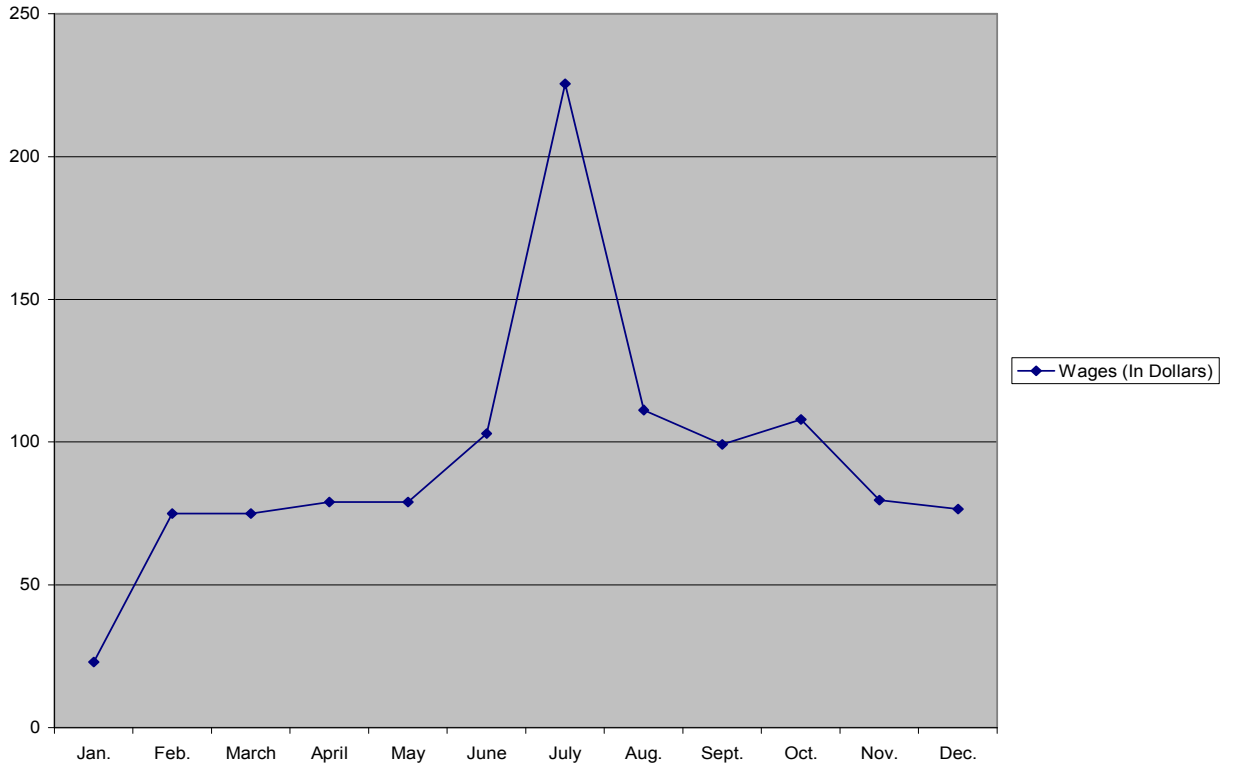
**Number of Workers Employed on “Roslin Farm,” Baltimore County, Md.  
July 1851-July 1852**



Source: Richard Gittings, “Roslin Farm” Daybook, MdHS.

**Figure 3.3**

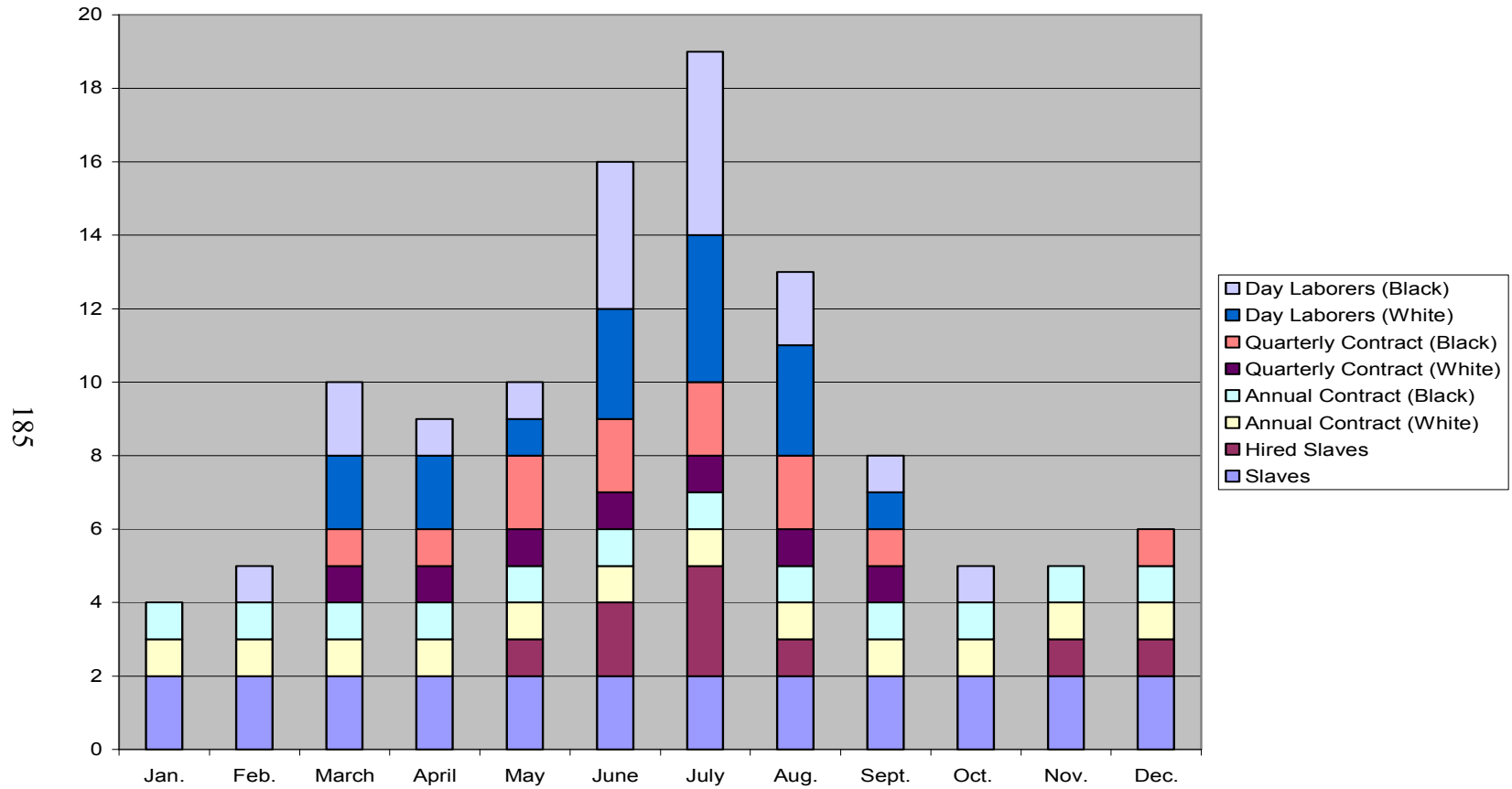
**Wages Paid, "Bloomsbury Farm, Carroll County, Md.  
January-December 1853**



Source: "Bloomsbury Farm" Account Book, MdHS.

Figure 3.4

Composition of Workforce on Ramsey McHenry Farm, Harford County, Md.,  
January-December 1841



Source: Ramsey McHenry Ledger, MdHS.

## Chapter 4

### “A Bargain”: Negotiating the Limits of Slavery, 1815-1860

In 1822, Washington County master Daniel Cooke advertised for the return of his slave, Hector. Beneath the screaming headline “SON OF PRIAM OFF!” Cooke described a bold, ungovernable slave whose growing dissatisfaction had culminated in escape (see Figure 4.1). Hector displayed none of the deference Cooke expected from his slaves; he was “fond of dress” and “impudent and saucy when among those he considers his equals . . . especially so when in liquor.” In the year preceding Hector’s flight, Cooke had granted him “the privilege of hiring himself out,” which he abused by “becoming a terror to the neighborhood he was in, stealing and pilfering.”

Hector embodied, quite literally, the forces that were tearing slavery asunder in northern Maryland. His body bore the unmistakable mark of the region’s agricultural economy—a scar on the leg “occasioned by a cut from a scythe” that had undoubtedly been inflicted at harvest. In a larger sense, Hector’s story illustrates the dangers that slaveholders encountered when they transplanted slavery to the Maryland piedmont. The routines of wheat cultivation diluted their authority; those who raised wheat with slave labor were often forced to surrender a measure of direct control over their bondspeople and to enmesh them in workforces that included free blacks and poor whites whose commitment to the “peculiar institution” was, at best, suspect.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Cooke’s observation that Hector grew “impudent and saucy when

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<sup>1</sup> The problems confronting slaveholders on wheat-producing farms and small plantations were akin to those facing urban masters and mistresses, whose slaves often labored without direct

among those he considers his equals” was likely an oblique reference to the subversive tendencies unleashed when slaves toiled alongside free workers. Viewed in this light, Cooke’s decision to grant Hector “the privilege of hiring himself out” was both an attempt to make slavery more flexible and a desperate concession to maintain his compromised mastery.

The narrative constructed by Cooke stands in stark contrast to those spun by agricultural reformers, who imagined landowners weighing the relative merits of free and slave labor before tossing the latter into the scrapheap. Yet abstract economic arguments seem to have been of little concern to Cooke, who lost Hector because the truce they negotiated proved untenable. And Cooke was not alone. Here on slavery’s tattered margins, the institution’s paternalistic façade was peeled away and the property relationship at its heart was laid bare. Neither slaveowners nor slaves could have any illusions about the situation. The ravages of the interstate trade reminded the enslaved of the precariousness of their situation and the shallowness of their owners’ paternalism, while the steady stream of runaways fleeing across the Mason-Dixon Line underscored for slaveholders that their bondspeople were anything but content.

The pressures of maintaining slavery could transform masters into supplicants. In 1820, farmer Henry Benner of Washington County offered “A Bargain” to fugitive slave Harry Darnel, promising that “if he will return home, I hereby pledge myself, to

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supervision and came into frequent with free blacks and non-slaveholding whites. As many historians have suggested, this diffusion of slaveholders’ authority ultimately doomed urban slavery. See, for example, Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Midori Takagi, “Rearing Wolves to Our Own Destruction”: *Slavery in Richmond, Virginia, 1782-1865* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999).

let him choose a master, if he does not wish to live with me.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, former bondsman George Ross remembered how slaveowners outlined slavery’s benefits to keep their chattels from escaping. “Often the argument is used to the slaves that they have been treated well, and it would not be fair for them to go away,” he averred. Ross’s master had made such an appeal. “You are a good boy,” the slaveholder began, “and we will give you enough to eat and drink, & clothe you pretty well, & pay your doctor’s bills . . . & you should make yourself satisfied.”<sup>3</sup>

The paradoxical adaptations, compromises, and negotiations that extended slavery’s moribund existence along the sectional border are considered in this chapter. Farmers grafted slavery onto the region’s agricultural economy, but the changes they implemented proved unsustainable. Slaveholders soon found themselves grappling with a host of unanticipated discipline problems. With freedom beckoning a few miles away, slave property became increasingly insecure and consequently less valuable. This breakdown unfolded against the background of slavery’s expansion into the Deep South. In an attempt to salvage something from the wreckage of slavery, northern Marylanders masters consigned hundreds—perhaps thousands—of slaves to the South’s sprawling cotton and sugar plantations, but their participation in the interstate trade merely accelerated the collapse of their rickety authority. To resuscitate slavery, masters and mistresses dangled the promise of freedom before their remaining slaves. By proffering freedom through delayed

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<sup>2</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 November 1820.

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of George Ross before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 1863, Letters Received (Main Series), series 12, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, NARA.



manumission agreements, they gained a new purchase on their slaves—who were required to serve faithfully until the date they would become free—and found another means of extracting labor from disaffected bondsmen and women.

### **The Contours of Black Life**

Former slaves left conflicting views of life in northern Maryland. Although he never flinched at describing how the interstate trade shattered black families, George Ross maintained that slavery was somewhat milder along the Mason-Dixon Line. “Down in Prince George’ County, Md., they are a little harder than they are in the upper part of the State,” he testified.<sup>4</sup> Lewis Charlton had different memories of his years in Frederick County. His mistress was “possessed with some Satanic influence, and never was in her glory unless she could have her slaves tied to the whipping post, stripped naked, with a pair of flat irons fastened to their feet. . . .”<sup>5</sup> Sharpsburg slave Stephen Pembroke, who had lost relatives to the Deep South, remembered seeing men “working all day, day in and day out, with iron collars on their neck” but conceded that there were “many degrees” in slavery. During his years in bondage, Pembroke had three masters, one of whom was “moderate,” while the others were “rigid and wicked.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Testimony of George Ross before the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission, 1863, Letters Received (Main Series), series 12, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 94, NARA.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Everett Brown, Sketch of the Life of Mr. Lewis Charlton, and Reminiscences of Slavery (Portland, Maine.: Daily Press, n.d.), 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> John W. Blassingame, ed., Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 167.

If treatment varied, there was one constant in slaves' lives: loneliness. Because many of northern Maryland's slaveholders could not find constant employment for large numbers of slaves, most of the region's bondspople found themselves living in units comprising nine or fewer slaves. Their isolation became more pronounced as the antebellum decades progressed. By 1850, three-quarters of the slaves in Frederick and Washington counties dwelled in units of fewer than ten slaves. Almost half of these counties' slaves lived with masters or mistresses who owned five or fewer slaves (see Tables 4.1 - 4.4).

While separation from families and friends caused anguish and loneliness for the enslaved, it also created consternation among slaveowners.<sup>7</sup> In 1826, John Goldsborough complained that one of his slaves had become "so restless and so anxious" by his wife's sale that he "would now rather have another hand on his farm." As long as the separation continued, Goldsborough believed the man would "probably never be satisfied."<sup>8</sup> Slaves' persistent demand to be reunited with their kin compelled some owners to yield. Explaining his decision to sell a "valuable farmhand," a Washington County farmer noted that the slave was "sold for no fault, but having a wife in Hagerstown makes him dissatisfied with me."<sup>9</sup> Masters could, of course, ignore their slaves' protests and erect additional barriers between the slaves and the families from whom they were separated. James W. C. Pennington

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of how the scattering of slave families undermined slaveholders' authority, see Stephanie M. H. Camp, "'I Could Not Stay There': Enslaved Women, Truancy, and the Geography of Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South," *Slavery and Abolition* 23 (December 2002): 1-20.

<sup>8</sup> John Goldsborough to R. N. Cronan, 27 May 1826 and 15 July 1826, Johnson Papers, MdHS.

<sup>9</sup> *Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser*, 7 February 1816.

remembered that his owner became “greatly irritated” when two slave men returned late from family visits and thundered that there would be “a general whipping-match among them.”<sup>10</sup> Still, limiting slaves’ contact with their families could backfire; disgruntled bondsmen or women might express their outrage by overstaying their passes or by running into Pennsylvania. A Frederick County master learned this lesson when Francis Hill escaped. Speculating on what caused Hill’s flight, the slaveowner mused that he had “always been anxious to live in town” with his family.<sup>11</sup>

Small slaveholdings meant that neighborhoods—not plantations—would be the building blocks of the slave community.<sup>12</sup> Scattered and isolated, the enslaved sought fellowship whenever the opportunity arose. They gathered at the husking frolics that punctuated the calendar and transformed camp meetings, funerals, and Sunday services into social gatherings. On holidays and weekends, throngs of blacks descended on the region’s towns and milled about country stores and taverns. While these boisterous gatherings were biproducts of an agricultural economy that dictated small slaveholdings, they alarmed slaveholders who rightly sensed their subversive potential.

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<sup>10</sup> James W. C. Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, 3rd ed. (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 8 January 1822.

<sup>12</sup> This configuration was not unique to non-plantation districts. Anthony E. Kaye has identified a similar pattern among slaves on large plantations in Mississippi. See “Neighborhoods and Solidarity in the Natchez District of Mississippi: Rethinking the Antebellum Slave Community,” Slavery and Abolition 23 (April 2002): 1-24.

To a certain extent, slaves' desire for companionship could be made to serve the interests of slaveholders and the white community.<sup>13</sup> Farmers looking to muster large numbers of laborers to husk corn, slaughter livestock, or for other projects could depend upon the eager participation of African Americans. Joshua Herring, whose family farmed in Carroll County, recalled that his neighbors "would always count, with absolute certainty, upon every Darkey who was within reach" when they organized husking bees. "[T]here was scarcely a night in the late fall that you could not hear, from some part of the neighborhood, the corn husking songs of the Negroes."<sup>14</sup> So important were husking frolics to slaves that they pressured their owners to throw several a year. In 1853, Susanna Warfield's family did not have a husking party "owing to our negroes making us have three in '50."<sup>15</sup> Years earlier, she had glimpsed the excitement that husking bees held for rural blacks:

It was a merry time and a grand husking—negroes 50 in number singing songs . . . . They kept it up until 10 o'clock, when the corn was husked and they came to supper. The singing ones then got to dancing—they danced all the way up and down the field—and danced the buzzard dance in imitation of the buzzard's whirl and swoop and pounce . . . . About 11 o'clock they returned home, singing resounding in the hills.<sup>16</sup>

These festivities could become disorderly indeed. In 1855, the Herring family assembled fifty-seven farmhands, including many African Americans, to clean their millrace. As the work progressed, Margaret Orr Herring remembered, "all their cry

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<sup>13</sup> Rebecca Griffin explores the ambiguous meanings of collective work in "'Goin' over there to See that Girl': Competing Social Spaces in the Lives of the Enslaved in Antebellum North Carolina," *Slavery and Abolition* 25 (April 2004): 94-113.

<sup>14</sup> Joshua Herring, "Memoirs," pp. 167-68, MdHS.

<sup>15</sup> Susanna Warfield Diary, 5 February 1853, MdHS.

<sup>16</sup> Susanna Warfield Dairy, 18 November 1846, MdHS.

was plenty of whiskey, until they drank better than eight gallons, and the result was a good many drunk niggers.”<sup>17</sup>

Funerals provided another opportunity for black communities and families to coalesce. Former slave James W. C. Pennington remembered that funerals brought together people from neighboring plantations and thus served as catalysts for community formation. In defiance of slaveowners who often interred their chattels with little ceremony, Pennington recalled that a slave exhorter would “send notice from plantation to plantation, calling the slaves together at the grave on the Sabbath, where he would sing, pray and exhort.”<sup>18</sup> Small slave holdings, combined with the lack of independent black churches before the 1820s or 1830s, meant that most of these unauthorized interments occurred on marginal, unoccupied lands, much to chagrin of angry landowners who complained that their property sustained “much injury” from the “burying of persons of color.”<sup>19</sup>

Funerals remained a cornerstone of black communities as they matured during the antebellum decades. In Frederick, Jesuit priest John McElroy observed that black funerals drew large numbers of mourners during the 1820s and 1840s.<sup>20</sup> The eagerness with which African Americans attended funerals struck others as well, who saw in them the ligaments of northern Maryland’s black communities. “The colored

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<sup>17</sup> Margaret Orr Herring to Dr. Edwin Herring, 16 August 1855, Dr. E. A. Herring Family Correspondence, MdHS.

<sup>18</sup> Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith, 67.

<sup>19</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 23 March 1814.

<sup>20</sup> In 1824, for example, McElroy preached at a “very large funeral for a colored person.” Years later, he presided over the “very large funeral of a colored man, Charles, a convert.” Journal of John McElroy, S.J., 15 August 1824 and 7 November 1841, Archives of the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus, Special Collections, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

people love to congregate, and these occasions gave them an opportunity to get together,” observed a Frederick County master. Explaining why his bondspeople attended funerals “nearly every week,” he noted that “[i]t was customary, when one of the colored people would die, to have the funeral service performed in all the colored churches, far and near. So that, the death of one darkey, would furnish material for a number of funeral services; and they always used every such occurrence, for all that was in it.”<sup>21</sup> Susanna Warfield concurred that “[t]he darkies will preach a funeral over two or three times for a frolic,” adding that black funerals would cause the roads to become “lined with darkies . . . all out in their best.” Not surprisingly, these services aroused slaveholders’ fears. Masters and mistresses worried that black preachers—or white abolitionists—would sow discontent among the enslaved mourners. When two of her family’s slaves escaped, Warfield’s suspicions turned immediately to the funeral they had attended the previous week. “[T]hey may have been decoyed away by some abolitionist who may have been at the great funeral sermon,” she mused, for “a strange preacher preached it.”<sup>22</sup>

The anxiety aroused by “strange” preachers were not confined to funerals. Camp meetings and religious holidays drew throngs of rural blacks—and a good deal of scrutiny from slaveholders. For the enslaved, these festivals provided an escape from the isolation and monotony that were the hallmarks of rural life. Like funerals, camp meetings muddled the distinction between religious services and social gatherings. When a clerk at a Frederick County store asked a fieldhand why he

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<sup>21</sup> Joshua Herring, “Memoirs,” p. 141, MdHS.

<sup>22</sup> Susannah Warfield Diary, 20 May 1849, 29 May 1849, MdHS.

wanted to purchase hair tonic, the slave explained, “Ise a goin’ to a woods meeting, Sunday next, way down most to New Winsor, and I liked [sic] it mighty well if I could get some. Ise goin’ to take my gal down dare.”<sup>23</sup> Blacks tramped considerable distances to these services. African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) minister Thomas W. Henry recalled that his Christmas and Easter sermons in Washington County drew people “from every direction.” “They came from the lower part of the Maryland tract and up the Potomac on the Maryland side, from Harper’s Ferry, and a great many a considerable distance in Virginia.”<sup>24</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of, the small size of the black population, camp meetings attracted considerable numbers of African Americans. In 1818, a revival near Sharpsburg drew “about three thousand whites, and from three to five hundred blacks.”<sup>25</sup> In 1854, “a large number of darkies” celebrated Whitsunday along Antietam Creek, where “they conducted themselves with propriety and enjoyed themselves very much.”<sup>26</sup> Four years later, a Middletown newspaper reported that “quite a large number of ‘wooly heads’ . . . passed through our town on Sunday last to attend a wood’s meeting about five miles east of this place.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Joshua Herring, “Memoirs,” p. 157, MdHS. The camp meeting was probably held near New Windsor, Maryland, which was approximately twenty-four miles from the store the slave was patronizing.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Libby, ed., From Slavery to Salvation: The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas W. Henry of the A.M.E. Church (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 31-32.

<sup>25</sup> David Martin, The Trial of the Rev. Jacob Gruber, Minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, at the March Term, 1819, in the Frederick County Court, for a Misdemeanor (Fredericktown, Md.: David Martin, 1819), 27.

<sup>26</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 June 1854.

<sup>27</sup> Middletown Valley Register, 6 August 1858. The meeting was apparently a tremendous success. Later that month, it was reported that “between three and four thousand persons were in

The motley crowds that assembled at camp meetings unsettled slaveholders, who feared that the revivals would spawn disorder and undermine their slaves' morale. James Lawrence Hooff may have captured the prevailing attitude among slaveowners when he sneered, "There is a bush meeting now being held in the woods . . . for loafers and servants."<sup>28</sup> For those fearful of the pernicious influence of abolitionists, camp meetings were more than a nuisance; they were a dangerous chink in slavery's armor. In 1818, slaveholders' paranoia focused on Methodist preacher Jacob Gruber, who asked worshippers at a Washington County meeting whether slaves might "rise up and kill your children, their oppressors, and be hung for it, and all go to their destruction together?" Believing that the circuit rider's comments were meant to incite an insurrection, several masters conspired to have Gruber arrested and hauled into court. There was little substance to the charges, and Frederick attorney Roger B. Taney secured the minister's acquittal, but slaveholders' fears about religious meetings lingered.<sup>29</sup> Despite the presence of white constables and the strict propriety of the attendees, a Frederick County newspaper sensed menace in the 800 blacks who spent Whitsunday 1854 "feasting and dancing along the Monocacy River." "We are not prepared to sanction these occasions," the editor noted, for "the mischief that may come of such assemblies is not to be prevented by one or two police officers."<sup>30</sup>

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attendance at the woods meeting held by the colored folks." Middletown Valley Register, 27 August 1858.

<sup>28</sup> James Lawrence Hooff *Commonplace Book*, 9 August 1857, VaHS.

<sup>29</sup> John B. Boles, "Tension in a Slave Society: The Trial of the Reverend Jacob Gruber," Southern Studies 18 (Summer 1979): 179-97.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Examiner, 7 June 1854.



Whites expressed similar concerns about independent black congregations. Beginning in 1817, A.M.E. minister Daniel Coker began preaching throughout southern Pennsylvania and northern Maryland with the intention of founding “African churches whenever it would be possible.” His missionary work took him through Hagerstown, where he encountered violent resistance.<sup>31</sup> While the opposition that thwarted Coker’s initial efforts to form an independent congregation in the town had less to do with concerns about slave discipline than with white churchmen’s reluctance to lose black parishioners, many whites worried that black congregations would become sources of slave unrest.<sup>32</sup> In 1854, a slaveholder in rural Frederick County complained about a new black church, where the “young fellows congregate . . . to arrange plans for mischief and rascality, drinking, eating and gambling all hours of the night, robbing hen-roosts and piggeries and disturbing the neighborhood by their yells going home.”<sup>33</sup>

On weekends and holidays, the crossroads and country stores that dotted northern Maryland became gathering points for enslaved and free blacks, who—like their white counterparts—flocked to these destinations seeking amusement and fellowship. Located at the intersection of several transportation arteries, John Blackford’s “Ferry Hill” plantation typified the rural crossroads where rural blacks

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<sup>31</sup> Coker described his activities in northern Maryland in a letter dated 19 June 1817. Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 1 July 1817.

<sup>32</sup> Describing the hostility he encountered in Hagerstown, Coker wrote, “I met with great opposition . . . by a James Brown, who I am informed was sent by the white Methodists for that purpose, and the reason they oppose [it] is very obvious Viz. should African Churches be established it would rob them of the support they get for their Churches and traveling preachers.” D. Coker to “Rev. Sir,” 3 June 1817, Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland, Baltimore, Md.

<sup>33</sup> Frederick Examiner, 18 January 1854.

congregated. These gatherings were a recurring nuisance to Blackford, whose journals contain numerous references to rowdy black crowds. On November 15, 1835, for example, he complained that “a number of negroes collected on this side of the river—twenty or more—and [were] quite noisy and annoying.” He recorded a similar meeting on May 28, 1837, and another on September 17, 1837, when he grumbled that “a number of Negroes came over . . . apparently drunk and making much noise and quarreling, etc.”<sup>34</sup>

When slaves descended upon these intersections, they often gathered at country stores. “There were a good many Negro slaves in the neighborhood,” recalled a former clerk from rural Frederick County. “[T]hey would come to the village nearly every Saturday night to make their little purchases of tobacco, etc.” Although the slaves were “polite, well behaved, and gave us no trouble,” many masters worried that such gatherings would erode slave discipline.<sup>35</sup> When interacting with merchants, slaves shed their deference and learned to deal with whites on terms of relative equality. Describing a local merchant’s business with his slaves, a Frederick County master grumbled that “he is on the most intimate terms with them all, he has a sum of money on lone [sic] of my Bill, and holds conversation with them most familiarly, and solicits their custom to his store.”<sup>36</sup>

Convinced that merchants were receiving stolen livestock and produce, slaveholders mounted a vigorous assault upon those suspected of doing business with

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<sup>34</sup> John Blackford Journals, 15 November 1835, 28 May 1837, and 17 September 1837, MdHS.

<sup>35</sup> Joshua Herring, “Memoirs,” p. 157, MdHS.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Shriver to Andrew Shriver, Shriver Family Papers, 19 May 1821, MdHS.

their slaves. They printed ominous warnings in newspapers, threatening disreputable storekeepers with “the lash of the law.” “It is high time to put an end to the infamous practice of dealing with the Negroes,” fumed one master, “which practice has, for a long time, flourished with impunity, not only with my negroes, but negroes belonging to others.”<sup>37</sup> Slaveholders lobbied for harsh punishment of merchants convicted of receiving stolen merchandise. When a tanner convicted of purchasing two stolen hides petitioned the governor for a pardon, angry masters rallied against his release from the state penitentiary. “I believe him to be a very bad citizen,” stated one. “He has been . . . of great disadvantage to my slaves, and those of many others, by dealing and trading with them in a private way.” Another threatened that “[t]o pardon him would be productive of very great dissatisfaction amongst all the slaveowners about Westminster to whom he has been a great annoyance—they would complain bitterly.”<sup>38</sup>

Especially worrisome to slaveholders were the ubiquitous disorderly houses, stills, and unlicensed taverns scattered throughout the countryside. Drunken slaves might be seduced into committing crimes—or escaping—by free blacks and whites. A bender might also culminate in a valuable slave being injured or killed. In 1819, residents of Sharpsburg complained that tavern keepers were leading slaves “into the vortex of death and destruction” by peddling whiskey. They cited a recent “quarrel”

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<sup>37</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 5 December 1818. For a similar warning directed against merchants in the village of New Market, see Frederick-Town Herald, 20 February 1808.

<sup>38</sup> Were the governor to reject their appeal, the slaveholders recommended that the offender be banished to the northern states and “not be allowed to live within forty miles of the Maryland line.” Jacob Palmer to Philip F. Thomas, 14 June 1850, and Wm. Mantz to Philip F. Thomas, 9 April 1850, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHS.

among black men gathered at a tavern that left a slave “stabbed and severely wounded in several parts of the body.”<sup>39</sup>

While bothersome to slaveholders, these rural gatherings paled in comparison to the weekend assemblies in northern Maryland’s towns. Seated at the center of the region’s transportation network, Hagerstown and Frederick were hubs of the African-American community. As early as 1779, residents of Frederick were concerned that the abandoned military barracks on the town’s outskirts were becoming a “rendezvous for Negroes in the night.”<sup>40</sup> In 1798, the grand jury commissioned several constables to disperse the “disorderly meetings of Negroes and other ill-disposed persons, [who] frequently collect in numbers on Sundays and Holy Days in Frederick and other towns.”<sup>41</sup> The constables had little effect. In 1807, a visitor observed that Frederick’s blacks spent the Sabbath “in noise and riot.”<sup>42</sup> By 1818, the mayor conceded that efforts to “suppress the tumultuous meetings of Negroes . . . on Sabbath days” had failed and that “the evil, instead of being removed, has actually increased.”<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the problem seems to have persisted throughout the antebellum decades. In 1835, the aldermen approved harsher punishments for blacks caught

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<sup>39</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 15 June 1819.

<sup>40</sup> Council to Abraham Fa[w], 7 December 1779, Journal and Correspondence of the Council of Maryland, 1779-1780, MdHR. Blacks continued to congregate in the dilapidated barracks and powder magazine through the 1820s. In 1825, the General Assembly authorized the sale of the abandoned buildings, noting that they had “almost constantly been . . . occupied by free persons of color, which causes complaints by neighboring citizens.” Untitled Resolution, 25 January 1825, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the Sixth Day of December, Eighteen-Hundred and Twenty-Four (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1825).

<sup>41</sup> Grand Jury Report, March 1798, Frederick County Court, Miscellaneous Papers, MdHR.

<sup>42</sup> The Port-Folio, 19 December 1807.

<sup>43</sup> Bartgis’s Republican Gazette [Frederick, Md.], 13 June 1818.

roaming the streets after ten o'clock; slaves violating the curfew might receive thirty-nine lashes, while free blacks faced \$20 fines or thirty days in the county prison.<sup>44</sup>

Three years later, city officials increased the fines levied upon those who sold "any distilled liquor to any free negro or negro slave, or suffered them to collect on his or her premises on the Sabbath day."<sup>45</sup> Despite these ordinances, authorities continued to wrestle with the disorder created by illegal, unruly assemblies of poor whites, free blacks, and slaves. In 1851, in 1854, and again in 1858, Frederick's aldermen strengthened the ordinances against the "noisy and rude crowds of boys, negroes or other persons."<sup>46</sup>

Hagerstown's constables and magistrates fared little better. Early attempts at suppressing black assemblies were intermittent and, for the most part, unsuccessful. Between 1804 and 1806, Washington County sheriff Nathaniel Rochester arrested only three blacks for disturbing the peace, gambling, or violating the Sabbath.<sup>47</sup> In 1815, the constable of Hagerstown promised to eliminate the "dangerous, odious, and abominable concourses" of blacks who "frequently infest the public square, especially on the Sabbath day."<sup>48</sup> Despite these assurances, the problem continued unabated. In 1818, the councilmen complained that "numbers of people of color, are in the habit of collecting in groups, in the public square, in the streets and alleys, in

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<sup>44</sup> Minutes, 12 June 1835, Records of the Board of Aldermen, HSFC.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes, 21 April 1838, Records of the Board of Aldermen, HSFC.

<sup>46</sup> Untitled resolutions, 17 May 1851, 20 May 1854, and 15 May 1858, Resolutions and Ordinances, Records of the Board of Aldermen, HSFC.

<sup>47</sup> Nathaniel Rochester Jail Docket, 1804-1806, Western Maryland Room, Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown, Md.

<sup>48</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 23 August 1815.

stables, hay lofts, and other places, for the purpose of gambling.” To combat this evil, they imposed a \$1 fine on black men and women caught gambling or disturbing the peace.<sup>49</sup> Within two years, the councilmen were lamenting that blacks still gathered “in large assemblages at night and particularly on holidays . . . to play at cards and other unlawful games, tipping, riots, etc.” The council subsequently strengthened the ordinance, declaring that those who “shall get drunk and become riotous” would receive “fifteen lashes on their bare back at the public whipping post—”<sup>50</sup> The ordinances were a poor deterrent. In 1849, a constable stumbled across some “twenty or more colored gentlemen” who had gathered to “raffle, with cards and dice, for turkeys, geese, chickens, and whiskey.” The men scattered at the constable’s approach and through “some amusing specimens of ‘Tall Walking’” most escaped arrest.<sup>51</sup> Frustrated by the persistence of such assemblies, another constable prowled the streets with a cowhide, snapping it at “all the colored boys, whom he could catch in any kind of mischief.”<sup>52</sup>

When bondspeople gathered at crossroad villages and towns, they gained something more important than time with family and friends; they gathered intelligence about pathways to freedom. These lessons were valuable to “Negro Harrison.” Despite being “ignorant of the country” beyond his owner’s farm in

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<sup>49</sup> “An Ordinance for Preventing Immoral Practices and Disorderly Assemblages of People of Color within Hagerstown and its Additions,” 4 May 1818, Mayor and Council Minutes, Office of the City Clerk, Hagerstown, Md.

<sup>50</sup> “A Supplement to an Ordinance for Preventing Immoral Practices and Disorderly Assemblages of People of Color within Hagerstown and its Additions,” 20 May 1820, Mayor and Council Minutes, Office of the City Clerk, Hagerstown, Md.

<sup>51</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 November 1849.

<sup>52</sup> John McClintock, Jr., to “Mrs. Zeamer,” 21 September 1901, Zeamer Family Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, Pa.

Frederick County, Harrison had been befriended by blacks in nearby Taneytown, who provided him with an education in local geography and assisted him when he escaped.<sup>53</sup> By 1825, the anxieties aroused by blacks gathering in towns and villages had become endemic, prompting Governor Samuel Stevens, Jr., to demand legislative action. In an address to the General Assembly, Stevens warned that “the meeting together of bodies of negroes, whether at public places for the purpose of disruption and riot, or in the woods for pretended worship,” threatened the peace and endangered slave property. “The pernicious effects of their meetings at small villages and other places where plans of inequity and vice are engendered and mature” were obvious, he continued, for “it is at these haunts . . . where they frequently perfect their plans for escape.”<sup>54</sup> Stevens’s appeals did not translate into legislative action, and the problem persisted. In 1828, Frederick County slaveholders presented the General Assembly with what must have been a familiar litany of complaints: “The frequent and illegal assemblages of Negroes, on holy days, week days, and the Sabbath allows them to array their plans, indulge in drinking, fighting, and carousing.”<sup>55</sup>

Slaveholders’ anxieties became more pronounced as the antebellum decades progressed. The simmering conflict caused by Pennsylvanians’ interference with the recovery of fugitive slaves intensified as the sectional crisis gained momentum. In the 1842 case of *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, the United States Supreme Court declared the commonwealth’s 1826 personal liberty law unconstitutional. The decision

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<sup>53</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 1 September 1821.

<sup>54</sup> Annual Message of Governor Samuel Stevens, Jr., to the Legislature, December 1825, Maryland Governor and Council Letterbook, MdHR.

<sup>55</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 7 June 1828.

maintained slaveowners' right to recover fugitive slaves, but did little to stem the tide of runaways. "During the past six or twelve months, a greater number of slaves have absconded from their masters . . . than at any former period for years," fumed a Hagerstown editor in 1846. The root of the problem, he argued, was a "set of prowling missionaries, of both races, who . . . poison the mind of the slave."<sup>56</sup> Later that year, the editor gloated over the capture of a "negro preacher" responsible for enticing many to desert their "comfortable homes," but the celebration proved premature.<sup>57</sup> Within a month, he noted that fifteen slaves had decamped from Washington County. Unless the "secret influence" behind this "ocean of runaway negroes" was discovered, he feared the "total abolition of slavery" within ten years.<sup>58</sup>

In the aftermath of *Prigg*, Pennsylvania's legislature attempted to safeguard its black residents from kidnappers and to circumscribe slaveholders' authority by enacting the 1847 personal liberty law. The statute prevented state officials from assisting in recovery efforts, prohibited slaveholders from housing suspected fugitives in state prisons, and authorized judges to issue writs of *habeas corpus* to runaways. Moreover, the law punished slave catchers who seized their quarry in a "violent, tumultuous and unreasonable manner."<sup>59</sup> Northern Marylanders bewailed the law's pernicious effects on slave discipline. "[S]ince the passage of that law, our slave property has depreciated to more than half of its real and actual value; our slaves have

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<sup>56</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 18 February 1846.

<sup>57</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 August 1846.

<sup>58</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 15 September 1846.

<sup>59</sup> Morris, Thomas D. Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws on the North, 1780-1861 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 117-19.



absconded by scores,” complained a Washington County legislator. The county’s geographical location exacerbated slaveholders’ woes. “No county in the State of Maryland is more exposed in the loss of her slave property,” complained a lawmaker from Washington County, who added that his slaveholding constituents lived “within arms reach of her boundary line.”<sup>60</sup>

The political controversies surrounding both Pennsylvania’s personal liberty law and the federal fugitive slave law sparked a string of violent skirmishes along the Mason-Dixon Line in the 1840s and 1850s. As slaveholders’ resolve stiffened, the enslaved began banding together in armed companies before setting off for Pennsylvania. In 1845, Adam Shank, Jr., stumbled across ten suspicious blacks in rural Washington County and sounded the alarm in his neighborhood. The unarmed posse, which included the sheriff, descended upon the fugitives but discovered that the slaves carried an array of pistols and “tomahawks.” Despite having four of their number pummeled into submission, the fugitives mounted a furious resistance that bloodied many of their pursuers.<sup>61</sup>

The growing militancy of the enslaved was matched by that of Pennsylvania’s free blacks, who waged a determined campaign against Maryland’s slaveholders. Although the worsening racial climate and the constant threat of abduction prompted many of southern Pennsylvania’s blacks to decamp for safer areas of the North (or to Canada), others responded by attempting to thwart slave catchers.<sup>62</sup> In 1845,

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<sup>60</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 19 January 1848.

<sup>61</sup> Young American, 21 June 1845.

<sup>62</sup> For black resistance to the fugitive slave law, see Gerald Eggert, “The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 109 (1985): 537-69; Whitman, T. Stephen. Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake (Baltimore:

Hagerstown resident Thomas Finegan—who had been “particularly active and successful in apprehending runaway slaves” and “the colored emissaries of the abolitionists”—was assaulted in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, by a “horde of free negroes, perhaps a hundred in number” flinging “stones and other missiles.”<sup>63</sup> That same year, the African-American community of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, made an unsuccessful attempt to rescue fugitive Asa Stanton, who had been remanded to his master by a local court.<sup>64</sup>

Violence intensified in the following years. In 1847, Hagerstown slaveholders ventured into Pennsylvania to recapture a dozen runaways. Having seized some of the fugitives outside Shippensburg, the slaveholders hauled them to Carlisle for extradition. When the judge acceded to their request, “a large crowd of infuriated colored men and women” assaulted the posse with clubs and paving stones. The ensuing melee freed two slaves and left James H. Kennedy—a prominent resident of Hagerstown—mortally wounded. Although several members of the mob were arrested and subsequently convicted, the riot outraged white Marylanders. “[I]f they continue to perpetrate these outrages,” bellowed a Hagerstown editor, “they must expect that [we] will take measures, by way of retaliation.”<sup>65</sup> Washington County’s nonslaveholders found common cause with their slaveholding neighbors in the

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Maryland Historical Society Press, 2007), 199. On the economic and racial pressures bearing upon southeast Pennsylvania’s African-American communities, see Willis L. Shirk, Jr., “Testing the Limits of Tolerance: Blacks and the Social Order in Columbia, Pennsylvania, 1800-1851” Pennsylvania History 60 (January 1993): 35-50; Carl D. Oblinger, “New Freedoms, Old Miseries: The Emergence and Disruption of Black Communities in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1780-1860” (Ph.D. diss., Lehigh University, 1988), 213-39.

<sup>63</sup> Niles’ National Register [Baltimore, Md.], 17 May 1845.

<sup>64</sup> Niles’ National Register [Baltimore, Md.], 25 August 1845.

<sup>65</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 9 June 1847.

aftermath of the riot. Among those signing a petition condemning the Pennsylvanians' actions were many "who do not own slaves on principle" but would not "violate, or patiently see violated, the chartered rights of his fellow citizens."<sup>66</sup>

The bloodiest encounter in the fractious borderland erupted at Christiana, Pennsylvania, in 1851, when Baltimore County master Edward Gorsuch attempted to capture two fugitives who had escaped in 1849. On September 11, Gorsuch and a federal posse surrounded the bondsmen and their free black allies at the home of William Parker—himself a fugitive from Anne Arundel County. Reinforced by upwards of a hundred black and white supporters, the African Americans inside Parker's house unleashed a hail of gunfire that left Gorsuch dead and his son badly wounded. When the smoke cleared, the fugitives had eluded their captors and were making their way northward to Canada.<sup>67</sup>

The pitched battles that erupted along the sectional border were manifestations of slavery's decay in northern Maryland and northern Virginia. The canals, railroads, and turnpikes that traversed the region rendered it difficult, if not impossible, for slaveholders to police the borders of their estates. The intensification of commercial activity broadened slaves' horizons by granting them greater mobility and bringing them into more frequent contact with free blacks and nonslaveholding whites. Slave boatmen and wagoners wove webs of familial and personal connections that extended across the state and facilitated escapes. Montgomery County mistress Eleanor Brooks

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<sup>66</sup> National Era [Washington, D.C.], 15 July 1847.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas P. Slaughter, Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 43-75; Whitman, Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake, 197-201.

highlighted the corrosive effects of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal on slave morale when she described the suspected route of her runaway slave Charles Ringgold. “He was hired on the C & O Canal,” she noted, “and has probably made his way up it to Mr. Abraham Barnes’s in Washington Co., where he pretends to have a wife, and thence to Pennsylvania.”<sup>68</sup> In 1860, slaveowners living along the C & O protested the General Assembly’s decision to lease the state’s interest in the canal to northerners, warning that their slaves would be “persuaded and aided away, by the lowbred set of abolitionists that now traverse said canal.” In a petition laced with xenophobia, they argued that leasing the canal to northern interests would open the floodgates to abolitionists and foreigners, who already “tamper with our Negroes in every possible way.”<sup>69</sup>

Adding to slaveowners’ worries were the peddlers who trawled the countryside receiving produce and dispensing alcohol, often with few questions asked. In the 1830s, northern Virginians complained that trading carts “generally owned and managed by Free Negroes (and sometimes by white men, of no higher growth of character)” were conducting a brisk—and illegal—trade with their slaves. This commerce, they argued, had encouraged “innumerable depredations by the slaves of the neighborhood, who always find . . . ready purchasers.”<sup>70</sup> Slaveowners

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<sup>68</sup> Daily National Intelligencer [Washington, D.C.], 2 May 1838. For similar examples of slaves escaping along the canal, see Daily National Intelligencer [Washington, D.C.], 26 July 1833; and Montgomery County Sentinel [Rockville, Md.], 7 September 1860.

<sup>69</sup> Petition of Citizens of Montgomery County, Protesting against Leasing the State’s Interest in the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, Maryland General Assembly, Public Document “N” (Annapolis: E. Riley, 1860), 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> Petition of Noble Beveridge, Wm. Benton, James Smith et al., January 1836, Legislative Petitions, Legislature of Virginia, VaSA. The petition seems to have been ineffective. Two years later, many of the same slaveholders complained that people of “bad character” were purchasing stolen

sometimes directed their wrath against immigrants in particular. In 1841, residents of Jefferson County, Virginia, lamented that peddlers, “many of whom are foreigners,” were prowling the quarters and conducting a “highly injurious” traffic.<sup>71</sup> These concerns were echoed by slaveholders in Maryland. In 1820, a Washington County master railed against the peddlers who were trespassing on his farm and “dealing with his servants for produce” and “furnishing them with liquor.”<sup>72</sup> The General Assembly recommended legislation for “the suppression of stragglers and venders of small wares and notions, of no use, but of great injury to our people.” In particular, they suggested the “exclusion of all foreigners from the right to peddle anything” and that the peddling licenses be limited to “our people alone.”<sup>73</sup>

### **At the Crossroads: Manumission, the Interstate Slave Trade, and Slave Discipline**

Faced with a stagnating economy and the steady erosion of slave discipline, northern Maryland’s slaveowners began to disentangle themselves from the “peculiar institution.” There were two options for those determined to wash their hands of slavery: manumit their slaves or shovel them into the churning interstate slave trade. At first blush, the decision appeared to be one between polar opposites, but the two were in fact inseparable. Sale inside northern Maryland had, of course, long been

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goods from their slaves. Petition of Noble Beveridge, H. B. Powell, H. H. Hamilton, et al., 9 January 1836, Legislative Petitions, Legislature of Virginia, VaSA.

<sup>71</sup> Petition of B. T. Towner, Adam Licklider, Jacob Bernie et al., December 1841, Legislative Petitions, Legislature of Virginia, VaSA.

<sup>72</sup> Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.] 7 March 1820.

<sup>73</sup> Report of the Committee on the Colored Population to the Legislature of Maryland, Maryland General Assembly, Public Document “O” (Annapolis: E. Riley, 1860), 7.

integral to preserving the master-slave relationship. Owners unwilling to manumit a truculent slaves might dispose of them on the local market, while bondspeople unable to secure their freedom might clamor for a new, more agreeable master.<sup>74</sup> But as the domestic traffic accelerated, and as masters and mistresses grew more apprehensive over the security of their slave property, both slaves and slaveowners realized that the threat of sale and the promise of freedom were, in fact, different sides of the same coin. This harsh reality was made apparent to Sharpsburg slave Stephen Pembroke when he broached the subject of manumission. When Pembroke told his master, “I am getting old, and ought to have some rest,” the angry slaveholder snapped, “No, sir; if you speak about freedom, I will sell you further South.”<sup>75</sup>

The connections between manumission, flight, and forced relocation resurfaced often in northern Maryland. While making preparations to transport his slaves from Frederick County to a sugar plantation in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana, in 1828, John Lee claimed that he had mulled a scheme to manumit his slaves “as an inducement to good conduct on the part of the slaves, and in recompense for their greater services to be performed in the South.” In the bitter legal dispute that followed the failure of the Louisiana plantation, Lee testified that he had wished to “liberate them all after service for a certain term” but his partner and brother-in-law, Outerbridge Horsey, had “utterly refused.”<sup>76</sup> Horsey averred that he had no

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<sup>74</sup> In 1807, a Frederick County master offered a cooper on the local market because he found the young slave “too impudent.” Three years later, another Frederick County slaveowner offered a family of slaves to local buyers because “they wish to change their master.” Frederick-Town Herald, 13 June 1807 [first quotation]; The Hornet [Frederick, Md.], 31 January 1810 [second quotation].

<sup>75</sup> Blassingame, ed., Slave Testimony, 167.

<sup>76</sup> Answer of John Lee, 1 November 1837, Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

knowledge of the scheme. “But if true,” he testified, “he would have declined the proposal as insincere & deceptive [sic] & only calculated to awaken false hopes in the servants, for the selfish purpose of reconciling them to go & preventing escape.”<sup>77</sup> Regardless of the truth behind Lee’s and Horsey’s testimony, the motives they ascribed to their actions are revealing. Both men recognized that manumission, slave discipline, and forced relocation to the Deep South were inextricably linked. For Lee, the promise of freedom was an inducement to guarantee his slaves’ cooperation in his southern venture, while his partner believed that any such offer was merely a scheme to prevent them from escaping before they were shipped to Louisiana. The connections between the interstate trade—which eroded the bonds linking master and slave—and manumission would be a recurring theme in slavery’s history in northern Maryland. While slaveholders could decide the fate of their chattels, they could not discount their agency. Flight was a powerful weapon for the enslaved, and it guaranteed that slaves’ fears and yearnings would figure into the brutal arithmetic that consigned some to freedom and others to Louisiana.

The interstate trade loomed large in whites’ attitudes towards slavery. As early as 1807, a Hagerstown newspaper published a poem that decried “the inhuman practice of negro buying, which is so unfortunately prevalent in this country.” In the poem, a homesick slave is snatched by “a despot fierce, [who] has marked him for his prey; and though his cries the heavens pierce, he bares [sic] him far away.”<sup>78</sup> Unable to stop it, opponents of the interstate trade sought to limit the involvement of local

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<sup>77</sup> Remarks of Outerbridge Horsey, Complainant, upon the Answer of John Lee, n.d., Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

<sup>78</sup> Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 5 June 1807.

governments in the traffic. In 1819, the General Assembly received a petition from some of Washington County's "most respectable citizens . . . praying that some measures may be taken to stop the traffic in slaves" and complaining that the county prison was being used as a "receptacle of slaves intended for other markets."<sup>79</sup> The legislature acceded to their request and imposed a \$500 fine on any sheriff who "shall receive into the public gaol any negro slave, unless committed in due course of law."<sup>80</sup>

Northern Maryland's slaveholders had an ambivalent relationship with the interstate slave trade. Some owned plantations on the cotton frontier and were actively involved in the domestic trade. Frederick County master William M. Beall owned land in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, and his son-in-law John Knight of Natchez, Mississippi, routinely purchased bondspeople for shipment to the southwest.<sup>81</sup> Other slaveowners were more conflicted about the interstate traffic. For some, the trade's innumerable cruelties and the terrible conditions on the Deep South's cotton and sugar plantations provided a foil against which they forged an

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<sup>79</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 16 February 1819.

<sup>80</sup> "An Act to Prohibit Sheriffs from Receiving Negro Slaves into the Public Gaols of this State, except when Committed by Due Course of Law," 19 February 1819, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the Seventeenth Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Eighteen (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1819). In an open letter to his constituents, Washington County delegate Thomas Kennedy stated the petition from his county had been the impetus for the law's introduction. Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 17 February 1819.

<sup>81</sup> Beall identified Knight as his son-in-law in his 1847 will, in which he also bequeathed his southern properties to him. Will of Wm. M. Beall, 26 April 1847, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GME 3, pp. 239-41, MdHR. Prior to receiving his father-in-law's lands, Knight—who listed his residence as Natchez, Mississippi—had purchased numerous slaves in Frederick County. See, for example, Purchase agreement between John Wilson and John Knight, 27 August 1833, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 43, p. 494, MdHR; Purchase agreement between Geo. Kephart and John Knight, 26 February 1845, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 1, p. 83, MdHR; and Purchase agreement between Greenburry Duke and John Knight, 5 September 1845, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 1, p. 270, MdHR.



identity as benevolent, paternalistic masters. Marylanders knew better than to trust the likes of trader Austin Woolfolk, who assured a Baltimore County farmer that “9 times out of 10, negroes are better off in Louisiana than in Maryland.”<sup>82</sup> They understood that conditions in northern Maryland were radically different from those in the Deep South. The news that his daughter Mittie had accepted a marriage proposal from a Louisiana planter caused great anguish for Harford County farmer John Anthony Munnikhuysen, who worried that the brutal regime on a sugar plantation would crush her spirit. “I don’t see how I can object but I don’t think I will ever consent to her going out there,” he wrote to his son in 1860. “Mit has never been used to seeing negroes flayed alive and it would kill her. . . .”<sup>83</sup>

For some northern Marylanders, the need to shield their bondspeople from the auction block became a justification for slavery. To the extent that the region’s slaveowners constructed a paternalistic ethos, it involved an unequal bargain whereby the enslaved offered labor and obedience and their owners sheltered them from the domestic traffic. Sharpsburg farmer Jacob Miller articulated this bargain in 1859, when he described how the county sheriff had confiscated several of his slaves for debt. Although the sheriff attempted to console Miller by noting that the bondspeople would settle his accounts, the distraught slaveholder felt a profound sense of guilt. “Now I would almost as soon he would have my life as to have taken them three boys from me, and I believe they would have risked their lives for me,” he wrote to a

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<sup>82</sup> W. F. Johnson to Austin Woolfolk, 12 April 1842, Johnson Papers [unprocessed collection], Correspondence, 1840-1849, MdHS.

<sup>83</sup> Kimberly Harrison, ed., A Maryland Bride in the Deep South: The Civil War Diary of Priscilla Bond (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 342-43.

relative, adding that “if those boys had been bad fellows as some are I would [not] have said a word, but they were . . . always willing to do my bidding.” The cause of Miller’s anguish seems to have been his deficiencies as a master. Despite having no qualms about selling “bad fellows,” Miller believed that his slaves’ good conduct had entitled them to his protection. Owing to his financial failure, the slaves had been ripped “from their home of which they were well contented” and sent “to the South, where they will run the risk [of] not getting a good home.”<sup>84</sup>

Slaveholders who participated in the “second middle passage” attempted to distance themselves from the anguish they were causing in the quarters. White Marylanders relocating to the Deep South might spare a favored few to appease their slaves and assuage their consciences. Explaining why he had not took his slave Beck to his new plantation in Louisiana, Frederick County master John Lee noted that “her mother (an old and faithful servant) begged so earnestly that this, her youngest child, might not be separated from her, that this respondent could not permit himself to send her away.” Lee’s benevolence did not extend to Beck’s four siblings—they were sent to Louisiana—but it did secure the grudging consent of Beck’s mother, who was willing “to acquiesce in the separation from all the rest, if only Beck should be spared.”<sup>85</sup> Other slaveholders expressed their misgivings about the traffic by attempting to recover slaves that their families had previously consigned to the Deep South. In 1842, Baltimore County farmer William Fell Johnson made inquiries about

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<sup>84</sup> Jacob Miller to Catherine Amelia Houser, 10 August 1859, Miller Family Letter Collection, Antietam National Battlefield, Sharpsburg, Md.

<sup>85</sup> Answer of John Lee, 1 November 1837, Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

two slaves, Reuben and Duke, whom his father had sold to a trader in 1826 or 1827. Johnson hoped to secure their “redemption” and send them to Liberia, provided that doing so was “not attended with too great a pecuniary sacrifice.”<sup>86</sup>

Slaveholders’ ambivalence about the interstate traffic may have been a tacit acknowledgment of its corrosive effects on slave discipline. Masters and mistresses were mindful of the possibility that their chattels might respond to an approaching sale by escaping and thereby inflict a severe financial wound. In 1848, the enslaved workers of the Antietam Iron Works grew apprehensive and dissatisfied with their bankrupt owner, John McPherson Brien. “Many of them came to me & expressed their unwillingness to remain with me, to my great astonishment, for I have always treated them most kindly,” the disgruntled slaveowner wrote. Although outraged by his chattels’ “gross ingratitude,” Brien could not discount their concerns, for “it will be a serious loss to me if they would leave this place for Pennsylvania.”<sup>87</sup> The executor appointed to handle the dissolution of Brien’s property shared these fears, noting that the bondspeople were “apprehensive of being sold away” and might “run away and escape in the non-slaveholding States, which their proximity to the State of Pennsylvania will enable them readily to accomplish.” In the end, the slaves were sold, but the threat of escape had figured into the calculations of both their master and his executor.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> W. F. Johnson to Austin Woolfolk, 12 April 1842, Johnson Papers [unprocessed collection], Correspondence, 1840-1849, MdHS.

<sup>87</sup> Jno. McPherson Brien to Jno. Meredith, 12 June 1848, Meredith Papers, MdHS.

<sup>88</sup> Michael D. Thompson, The Iron Industry in Western Maryland (Hagerstown, Md.: The Washington County Historical association, 1976), 90-91; Jean Libby, “Historical Essay,” in Libby, ed., From Slavery to Salvation, 86.

Worried that their slaves might catch wind of schemes to sell them southward, slaveholders launched a preemptive strike to prevent them from escaping into the free states. A vicious circle soon took shape. The insecurity of human property became a justification for dumping slaves to the Deep South, which sparked additional resistance and further increased the region's involvement in the interstate slave trade.<sup>89</sup> In 1847, a Hagerstown slaveowner made the connection explicit. "Chiefly by reason of the proceedings of Pennsylvania," he wrote, "Negro property has become insecure in Maryland, and its value greatly diminished here, while in other regions it is increasing." "Do the lovers of blacks in Pennsylvania think that they are acting favorably when they make it necessary that they should be sent away from the mild discipline of Maryland to the far South?" he asked. "Yet such has been and is the fact; and thousands and tens of thousands from the cotton and rice fields there, might justly accuse of their fate, the false and misguided philosophy of their too busy friends."<sup>90</sup> His words would have resonated with other slaveholders along the sectional border. For the owners of rebellious slaves, selling their bondspersons further south offered the surest means of indemnifying themselves against the complete loss of their property through flight. Thus, a mistress near Martinsburg, Virginia, noted that her husband was considering taking all their slaves "to the south" after several of them were captured while escaping. "It is very evident we cannot keep them in these border counties," she explained, "they are going off all around us.

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<sup>89</sup> T. Stephen Whitman found a direct correlation between the number of slave escapes and Baltimore's deepening participation in the interstate slave trade during the 1810s and 1820s. The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 78-81.

<sup>90</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 July 1847.

The abolitionists and Pennsylvania have destroyed the tie between master and slave.”<sup>91</sup>

As the domestic trade gained momentum, masters and mistresses conjured the specter of sale to the Deep South to cudgel the disobedient into submission.<sup>92</sup> “It is a frequent custom in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Delaware, for masters to endeavor to reform their bad slaves, by terrifying them with threats of selling for the Georgia market,” wrote abolitionist Jesse Torrey, Jr., in 1817.<sup>93</sup> Such threats would not have rung hollow, for masters and slaves were aware of the terrible conditions in the Deep South. Of the forty-eight slaves John Lee transported from Frederick County to Louisiana beginning in 1828, only thirty-three survived until the plantation failed in 1836.<sup>94</sup> Those who remained on the plantation were in a sorry state. In 1835, Lee informed his partner that their “diminished and exhausted force” could not make a crop. Indeed, a neighbor had informed him that it was “probable we sh’d lose several of the hands in the course of the summer—& certainly unless they were much indulged—that when overworked & severely treated for one or two years, they were apt to die off in the hot weather.”<sup>95</sup> It was therefore not surprising that Louisiana

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<sup>91</sup> Ann Buchanan to Sophia Buchanan, 6 July 1847, Buchanan Family Papers, Special Collection, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

<sup>92</sup> Robert H. Gudmestead has likewise found that the threat of sale was an essential component of slaveholders’ authority in the Upper South. Robert H. Gudmestead, “Slave Resistance, Coffles, and the Debates over Slavery in the Nation’s Capital,” in The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 79-80.

<sup>93</sup> Jesse Torrey, Jr., A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States (Philadelphia: Published for the Author, 1817), 37.

<sup>94</sup> Answer of John Lee, 1 November 1837, Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

<sup>95</sup> John Lee to Outerbridge Horsey, 28 February 1835, Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

planter J. H. Shepherd should respond to news that his family's slaves in Shepherdstown, Virginia, were becoming unmanageable with an ominous suggestion. "I should like very much to have [your] Negroes on one of our places for twelve months; they would receive a lessen in obedience that they would not get over for some years."<sup>96</sup>

So vital was the threat of sale to preserving discipline that slaveholders were loath to surrender it. We glimpse the linkages between sale and slave discipline in the negotiations between Frederick County farmer Clotworthy Birnie and Montgomery County artisan Robert Lyles. In 1818, worsening commodity markets and personal reverses compelled Birnie to sell an entire slave family, but he refused to sell them to anyone involved in the domestic trade. Lyles's associates assured Birnie that "we have . . . never heard of his trafficking in slaves," but Birnie remained skeptical. He insisted upon a bond—and a personal pledge—that the slaves would never be sold beyond Maryland.<sup>97</sup> The frustrated purchaser balked at these demands. Lyles offered to post a "good security that I will not sell them out of the state" and swore that "I am no speculator," but refused to guarantee that they would never be sold outside the state. "In doing so, I would be at once binding myself never to sell them, let their conduct be what it might."<sup>98</sup> For Lyles, relinquishing the authority to sell the slaves

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<sup>96</sup> J. H. Shepherd to Abraham Shepherd, Jr., n.d., James H. and Abraham Shepherd, Jr., Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

<sup>97</sup> Geo. Baer to Clotworthy Birnie, 2 October 1818, and Andrew Thomas to Clotworthy Birnie, 5 October 1818, Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.

<sup>98</sup> Robert Lyles to Clotworthy Birnie, 10 November 1818, Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.

southward was tantamount to surrendering his mastery and accepting their behavior, “be what it might.”

Despite his desire to shelter his bondspeople from traders, Birnie knew that the threat of sale was the most powerful weapon at a slaveholder’s disposal. He himself had wielded it with great effect during the winter of 1811-1812, when Pompey and Jenny made separate, unsuccessful bids for freedom. Upon their capture, Birnie lodged them in a local prison and began making preparations to sell them in Baltimore. Birnie’s uncle, Upton Scott, advised his nephew to make “speedy measures to remove Jenny from the expenses attending her being lodged in prison” but confessed that he felt “much uneasiness” about selling her. Because Jenny’s husband and daughter remained with Birnie, Scott believed that it “would be inhumane to separate them.” He was, however, quick to add that if Birnie could sell them and if “he deem[ed] such a measure prudent, I shall not object thereto.” Unmoved by Jenny’s family connections, Birnie continued with his plans to sell the erstwhile runaways. Faced with the threat of imminent sale, Pompey buckled on the road to Baltimore. “He and I came to an understanding,” Birnie noted, “he preferred coming home and promised to behave well.” Birnie accepted Pompey’s promise, had him flogged by a constable, and sent him home. Jenny was less fortunate. “I preceded to B. More.,” he scrawled in his diary. “Sold Jenny.” Scott approved of his nephew’s handling of the situation, although he believed that Jenny’s sale price (\$435) was “less than her real value.” Pompey’s conversion—and the anguish that he must have witnessed on the part of Jenny’s husband and daughter—taught Birnie a

powerful lesson: the auction block was more effective than the scourge in controlling slaves.<sup>99</sup>

Other slaveholders also grasped this lesson, which soon worked its way into Maryland law. Masters and mistresses throughout the state recognized that sale provided the surest guarantee that troublesome bondspeople would no longer challenge slavery in Maryland. Anne Arundel County slaveholder Luther Martin believed that the state would be better served by sending his slave, “Negro Jacob,” to Louisiana instead of the penitentiary for receiving stolen goods. In Louisiana, he argued, the slave “would be more effectually prevented from inflicting further injury to the state than by a short confinement . . . after which he would be again let loose upon society.”<sup>100</sup> In 1819, the General Assembly embraced this logic. In a move designed to trim expenditures and strengthen slavery’s ramparts, the legislature ruled that free blacks and slaves would no longer be received into the penitentiary. Blacks convicted of non-capital offenses would henceforth face flogging, banishment, and sale beyond Maryland and the District of Columbia.<sup>101</sup> In 1839, the legislature

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<sup>99</sup> Upton Scott to Clotworthy Birnie, 18 January 1812 [first quotation]; Clotworthy Birnie Diary, 25 January 1812 [second quotation]; Upton Scott to C. Birnie, 8 March 1812 [third quotation]; all in Clotworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.

<sup>100</sup> Pardon of “Negro Jacob,” 25 September 1818, Maryland Governor and Council, Pardon Records, 1806-1818, MdHR.

<sup>101</sup> The statute’s provisions for conducting slave sales were confusing. The law stated that slaves would be sold “for the benefit of the state or county” and that they would “be valued and paid for, as is now or shall hereafter be directed by law.” Yet the statute made no provisions for conducting these sales, nor did it say how the proceeds were to be divided. “An Act to Repeal all such Parts of the Laws of this State as Authorize the Courts of Law to Sentence Negro or Mulatto Slaves, or Free Negroes or Mulattoes, to Undergo a Confinement in the Penitentiary,” 18 February 1819, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the 17<sup>th</sup> Day of December, 1818 (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1819).



broadened its authority over slaves, making escape beyond the borders of Maryland a felony punishable by sale at public auction and permanent removal from the state.<sup>102</sup>

In the state's hands the threat of sale was a potent, yet unwieldy weapon, for punishments designed to bolster slavery were prejudicial to the interests of individual slaveholders. Moreover, the county authorities responsible for selling slave convicts encountered legal barriers that undercut the slaves' value on the otherwise buoyant interstate market. Several states prohibited the importation of slave criminals, and buyers were understandably wary of purchasing convicts. Maryland's slaveholders bristled at the statutes that sacrificed their property at reduced prices. Henry Ankeny of Washington County insisted that his "rights as a master" had been compromised by the "extreme sentence" imposed on his slave, George Barnes, who had been convicted of forgery. Ankeny railed against the unfairness of the law demanding his slave's sale outside Maryland, complaining that he would be denied his slave's services and, perhaps more importantly, that Barnes would fetch only a fraction of his actual value if sold as a convict.<sup>103</sup> Frederick County mistress Mary Hall voiced similar concerns when two of her slaves were indicted for petty larceny. Worried that a conviction and scourging would diminish their value, she petitioned the governor

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<sup>102</sup> After deducting the necessary expenses, the proceeds of the sale would be paid to the slave's owner. "An Act to Provide for the Recapture of Fugitive Slaves," 16 February 1839, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, on Monday, the 30<sup>th</sup> Day of December, 1838 (Annapolis: Jeremiah Hughes, 1839).

<sup>103</sup> Henry Ankeny to Governor Philip F. Thomas, 2 February 1848, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

for permission to sell them outright, thus sparing the state—and herself—the costs of a trial.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to reducing a slave's value, the laws requiring the sale of convicts outside Maryland jeopardized slaveholders' control over their remaining slaves, who might protest the court's ruling by escaping into Pennsylvania. In 1838, Frederick County master Frederick Schley petitioned the governor to pardon his slave, Tom, who had been convicted of petty larceny and sentenced to be sold outside Maryland. Schley's son, who managed the family's farm, was confident that a sale would result in "many, if not all of my other servants, mak[ing] their escape into Pennsylvania," which was only ten miles away. Indeed, Schley predicted that, within a week of the sale, he "would not have a negro on the farm." His slaves, he explained, were convinced that Tom's arrest was a "a mere trick and contrivance, for the purpose of selling Tom, for a good price, to a slave trader." "These poor creatures have been so often tricked in this way," Schley continued, that "they would run off, under the full conviction, that they would soon be the next victim of the trader."<sup>105</sup>

Schley's petition speaks to something larger than simple flaws in Maryland law. It illuminates how the interstate traffic both upheld and undermined the authority of slaveowners. The threat of sale might intimidate an individual slave, but the destructive energies unleashed by the domestic trade strained the bonds connecting masters and slaves and clouded slavery's future in northern Maryland.

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<sup>104</sup> B. T. Johnson to Gov. E. Louis Lowe, 6 September 1853, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR. For similar examples, see Petition of Baker H. Simmons and John Leather, December 1856, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>105</sup> Petition of Frederick A. Schley, 14 May 1838, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

## **Term Slavery**

The tension between the interstate trade and manumission compelled northern Maryland's slaves and slaveowners to navigate a treacherous course between Scylla and Charybdis. The Deep South's insatiable demand for bound laborers gave masters and mistress along the sectional border a vested interest in the survival of slavery, but the promise of freedom beckoning from across the Mason-Dixon Line rendered its future uncertain. For many slaveowners, the prospect of manumitting their chattels, selling them southward, or watching them escape were equally unpalatable. Those seeking a middle path between these stark, yet intertwined alternatives turned to delayed manumission or term slavery, which promised to ease the pressures that were crushing slavery.

Determining the number of term slaves in the region's slave population is a difficult task. Federal census returns do not contain separate categories for term slaves, forcing historians to splice together information from estate inventories, wills, and the sales recorded in chattel or land records. The figures derived from these records are, moreover, problematic. Not all executors identified term slaves when compiling estate inventories, which means that these records must be compared against wills. This task is further complicated by the ephemeral nature of term slavery. A slave could enter into a delayed manumission agreement, complete his or her term of servitude, and enter freedom while leaving fragmentary evidence. Consider, for example, the case of Shadrach Hedge's slave Benjamin. In his 1835 will, Hedges promised Benjamin his freedom on December 21, 1841, but because the

will was not recorded until his death in 1846, Benjamin was not recorded in Hedges's inventory.<sup>106</sup>

That term slaves are an elusive quarry is further illustrated by an examination of inventories recorded by Frederick County's register of wills. Between August 1841 and December 1850, the register entered 722 inventories, 182 of which contained slaves. An examination of the slaveholders' estates uncovered at least 65 masters and mistresses (36 percent of the total) who owned term slaves. Of the 1,030 slaves inventoried during this period, at least 305 (30 percent) were term slaves. As mentioned above, these statistics may be imperfect. For example, an examination of wills recorded between November 1843 and January 1847 uncovered twenty-eight slaves—mostly aged or very young—who were not enumerated in their deceased owners' inventories. By integrating the information in the inventories with manumissions recorded in land records, an additional twenty-eight term slaves were discovered. Thus, despite the imprecision of county records, it seems reasonable to conclude that, by 1850, approximately one-third of Frederick County's slaves were laboring under delayed manumission agreements.<sup>107</sup>

The increased presence of term slaves within the region's overall slave population was reflected in and perhaps driven by larger transformations in northern Maryland's slave market. Although local demand for lifelong slaves remained

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<sup>106</sup> Will of Shadrach Hedges, 7 April 1846, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GME 3, pp. 168-69, MdHR; Inventory of Shadrach Hedges, Recorded 31 July 1846, Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. TS 1, pp. 155-56, MdHR.

<sup>107</sup> The statistics were compiled from Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. 11-12 and TS 1-2, MDHR; Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GME 3, MdHR; Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. HS 11-23; and Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 1-5, MdHR.

stagnant throughout the antebellum decades, there was a brisk trade in term slaves. As Table 4.5 illustrates, transactions involving term slaves dominated the local market during the 1840s and 1850s. Several circumstances contributed to make term slaves attractive to local purchasers. On the most basic level, they were less expensive than slaves for life. The 1855 inventory of Frederick County slaveholder Thomas Warfield illustrates the relative value of lifelong slaves and term slaves. When appraised as slaves for life, Warfield's adolescent slaves Alfred, Ann Maria, and Gusty were valued, respectively, at \$500, \$375, and \$400. Because the slaves were to be manumitted at age twenty, however, their values were \$140, \$100, and \$75.<sup>108</sup> These values seem consistent with the prices that term slaves commanded. In Frederick County, the average price of term slaves varied depending upon the slave's sex and the length of remaining service, with men fetching between \$168 and \$325 and women bringing between \$103 and \$301. This represented an impressive bargain for buyers. Those who purchased adolescents or young adults would receive from six to fifteen years of service for an average annual cost of between \$16 and \$27 (see Table 4.6).

A purchaser bought only a fixed amount of a term slave's life, but any children born during that time would be permanent additions to his or her estate. Unless the owner specified otherwise, children born to term slaves were slaves for life. Most slaveholders seemed content with this arrangement. Of the 451 women freed in Frederick County through delayed manumissions, 112 (25 percent) had specific provisions made for children born while they remained in bondage. Of these,

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<sup>108</sup> Inventory of Thomas Warfield, 12 November 1855, Frederick County Register of Wills, Inventories, vol. GH 2, p. 380, MdHR.

only 18 were manumitted with the promise that their children would be freeborn or liberated with their mother. The remaining 94 were manumitted under agreements stating that any additional offspring would receive their freedom anywhere between the ages of eleven and forty, with most being freed in their twenties or thirties. A few masters fixed the number of generations that would be born in bondage. When Robert Dodds manumitted Hester in 1832, he specified that her children would remain slaves until age twenty-one (sons) and twenty (daughters) but that her grandchildren would be freeborn.<sup>109</sup> Most slaveowners were less generous. Some ensured that the cycle of delayed manumission would continue in perpetuity. In 1830, for example, Daniel Boyle freed his slaves at age twenty-eight, but stipulated that “their children forever” must serve the same terms.<sup>110</sup> A few even demanded longer terms from subsequent generations. When Jacob Lewis manumitted Hester, he demanded that any children born during her servitude would remain in slavery until the ages of thirty (sons) and twenty-five (daughters), terms that would increase to thirty-five (grandsons) and thirty (granddaughters) in future generations.<sup>111</sup>

The appeal of term slaves to prospective purchasers was enhanced by the additional leverage their owners gained over them. In drafting delayed manumission agreements, slaveholders drew explicit connections between their slaves’ eventual

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<sup>109</sup> Hester’s own freedom was to commence in fourteen years, on 1 April 1846. Manumission of Hester, 28 February 1832, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 38, pp. 254-25, MdHR.

<sup>110</sup> Will of Daniel Boyle, 12 September 1828, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GME 1, pp. 189-90, MdHR. In 1845, Nathan Maynard made similar demands of several slaves who were to receive their freedom at age thirty, stating their “offspring hereafter [are] to serve like terms.” Manumission of Elizabeth, Jane, and Catherine Ann, 6 September 1845, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 1, pp. 362-63, MdHR.

<sup>111</sup> Manumission of Savilla, 16 May 1856, Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, vol. ES 7, p. 424, MdHR.

freedom and their conduct. In 1816, John Knox of Frederick County manumitted Sal and her son Silas, whose freedom would commence, respectively, in 1824 and 1853, provided that they “continue to serve me as heretofore” and demean themselves as “faithful and obedient” slaves.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, in 1817 Jacob Smith bequeathed his slave, Charles, to his widow with the promise that he “shall be a free man on May 8, 1830, if he . . . obeys his mistress [and] orders and conducts himself well at all times.” If Charles proved disobedient, Smith authorized his widow to revoke the promise and sell him.<sup>113</sup> Albert Ritchie made similar demands in 1857, when he stipulated that Margaret Bacon would receive her freedom on January 1, 1868, “if her deportment shall be good.”<sup>114</sup> Once proffered, the promise of freedom could be dangled before recalcitrant slaves and used to cudgel them into submission. When one of her family’s slaves refused to keep flies off the table, Susannah Warfield recalled that her brother “had to whip her a good deal” and that her angry father barked, “You have forfeited your freedom!”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Manumission of Sal and Silas, 12 August 1816, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 3, p. 338, MdHR. Such agreements were not uncommon. In 1806, George Fryberger declared that his slave, Bill, would receive his freedom in 1813 unless he “become disobedient or abscond or absent himself at unreasonable times.” Any such “turbulence or misbehavior” would result in Bill’s manumission being delayed until 1818. Manumission of Bill, 2 June 1806, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 29, pp. 94-95, MdHR. For similar examples, see Manumission of Peggy Wilson, Dewey Wilson, and Sabilla Wilson, 31 May 1832, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 40, pp. 250-51, MdHR; Manumission of Amos, Frank, Noah et al., 28 February 1833, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 41, pp. 470-82, MdHR; and Manumission of Henry Griffith, 6 April 1843, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. HS 19, p. 36, MdHR.

<sup>113</sup> Will of Jacob Smith, 30 July 1817, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. HS 2, pp. 98-99, MdHR.

<sup>114</sup> Will of Albert Ritchie, 22 October 1857, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GH 1, p. 285, MdHR.

<sup>115</sup> Susannah Warfield Diary, 6 July 1848, MdHS.

Slaveholders' control over term slaves was further strengthened by a series of statutes that granted them greater disciplinary latitude. In 1805, the legislature declared that fugitive term slaves could have their terms extended "for such length of time . . . as justice may require," provided that "no negro or mulatto so adjudged shall be liable to be sold or assigned to any person residing out of this state."<sup>116</sup> In 1834, the assembly overturned portions of this law. Noting that term slaves "frequently abscond" and that captured fugitives "have little difficulty in continuing to abscond until the authority of the master is put at complete defiance, and the value of their service completely lost," the legislature authorized county courts to extend the terms of "notoriously vicious and turbulent" slaves and, more importantly, to sell them beyond the state's borders.<sup>117</sup>

The connections among delayed manumission, slave discipline, and the domestic trade appeared in stark relief during a series of incidents that unfolded on Susanna and William Henry Warfield's plantation in 1849. That January, a Quaker had purchased the son of "Little Sam," for the ostensible purpose of manumitting him. Unfortunately, the Quaker reneged and sold him to a trader. Sam's resentment over the betrayal simmered until May, when he and his father, "Big Sam," struck for Pennsylvania. Upon discovering the escape, William Henry Warfield fumed that he

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<sup>116</sup> "An Act relating to Runaway Servants and Slaves," 19 January 1805, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, begun and held at the City of Annapolis on Monday the Fifth of November, in the Year of Our Lord, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Four (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1805).

<sup>117</sup> The statute included provisions guaranteeing the term slaves' eventual freedom. It prohibited non-resident slaveholders from holding convicted slaves indefinitely, and it required county clerks to provide slaves with copies of their manumission papers. "An Act relating to Persons of Color, Who are to be Free after the Expiration of a term of Years," 14 March 1834, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session begun and held at Annapolis, on Monday the 30th Day of December, 1833, and ended on Saturday the 15th Day of March, 1834 (Annapolis, J. Hughes, 1834).



would “sell them and whip them,” which prompted a quick reproach from his sister, who warned that “if they hear that they will not return.” Within days, the fugitives were captured and imprisoned. Warfield “spoke kindly” to the fugitives and “asked them if they were willing to go back, to which they said No!” He then transferred them to the pen of notorious slave dealer Joseph S. Donovan. Warfield subsequently sold the fugitives to Donovan for \$850 but reserved the right to void the transaction within five days. While he haggled with Donovan, the fugitive’s mother and grandmother made a desperate appeal to Warfield’s sister, Susanna, pleading with her mistress to spare them from being sold to the Deep South, where she feared “they would be cut up so.” Susanna Warfield soon joined her brother in Baltimore, where they “agreed that if they would take an oath on the Bible that Big Sam would serve five years, and Sambo [“Little Sam”] fifteen, that he, William Henry, would take them back.” After mulling the proposal, the slaves responded, “Yes, Master William, we will serve you [on] those terms, better than ever.”<sup>118</sup>

Recognizing that successful implementation of the state’s delayed manumission laws was predicated upon slaves’ continued confidence that freedom, once proffered, would in fact be received, the Maryland General Assembly enacted several pieces of legislation to prevent fraud. In 1800, it imposed a \$500 fine on slaveholders convicted of selling term slaves to non-residents or selling “such servant or slave for a term of years longer than he or she is bound to serve.”<sup>119</sup> In 1818, the

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<sup>118</sup> Susanna Warfield Diary, 8 January and 29 May-June 7, 1849, MdHS.

<sup>119</sup> “An Act relating to Servants and Slaves,” 23 December 1810, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the Fifth of November, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Ten (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1811).

assembly admitted that this law “had been found insufficient to restrain the commission of such crimes and misdemeanors” and created additional penalties—including prison sentences—for slaveholders convicted of selling term slaves to non-residents and for non-residents who smuggled term slaves beyond the state’s borders.<sup>120</sup> In 1835, the law’s provisions were extended to include Marylanders who “shall purchase or receive . . . any servant or slave, who is, or may be entitled to freedom after a term of years . . . with an intention to transport such servant or slave out of the State.”<sup>121</sup>

The effect of these statutes remains unclear. The trial of Frederick County master Abram Warfield demonstrates the ease with which slaveholders and their associates might defraud slaves of their promised freedom. In 1843, Warfield—who was staggering under a series of financial reverses—sold his term slave, Samuel, to a Baltimore trader. Warfield never mentioned that Samuel was entitled to his freedom, and the merchant subsequently resold him to the Deep South. Samuel’s previous owner, Dr. B. E. Hughes, caught wind of the transaction and brought charges against Warfield. At the trial, Hughes’s testimony was refuted by David Hargate, who testified that it was the doctor, not Warfield, who had perpetrated a fraud. According to Hargate, Hughes had confessed that he “was sorry that he had sold the said Negro Sam for life . . . as he was entitled to freedom after a term of years.” Because the

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<sup>120</sup> “An Act to Prevent the Unlawful Exportation of Negroes and Mulattoes, and to Alter and Amend the Laws concerning Runaways,” 3 February 1818, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday, the First Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Seventeen (Annapolis: Jonas Green, 1818).

<sup>121</sup> “A Supplement to an Act, entitled, an Act to Prevent the Unlawful Exportation of Negroes and Mulattoes, and to Alter and Amend the Laws concerning Runaways,” 18 March 1835, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, on Monday, the 29th Day of December, 1834 (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1835).

prosecution could not produce any written evidence (a deed of manumission or a receipt), Hargate's statements were sufficient to create reasonable doubt and acquit Warfield. Over the ensuing weeks, however, doubts surfaced about Hargate's testimony. Witnesses testified that Warfield had been heavily indebted to Hargate, who had learned about Warfield's surreptitious visit to the Baltimore. Hargate used this information to blackmail Warfield, threatening to "reveal something that would put him . . . in a worse situation than his debts, unless he settled like a gentleman." Thus, Warfield squared his accounts with Samuel's purchase money and Hargate gratefully perjured himself. Hargate's eventual conviction and imprisonment for perjury offered Samuel little comfort; there is no evidence that the court attempted to redeem him.<sup>122</sup>

Still, the statutes outlawing the exportation of term slaves were not toothless. State officials seemed determined to safeguard term slaves' promised freedom. In 1818, the Harford County court convicted John Ritchie of selling "Negro Poll" outside Maryland, despite knowing that she was "entitled to her freedom." Governor Charles Ridgely of Hampton pardoned Ritchie, but stipulated that he must execute a bond guaranteeing that he would purchase Poll and any children she may have had and return them to Maryland.<sup>123</sup> In May 1830, the Frederick County court sentenced David Bennett—an agent of slave trader John Derrick—to two years in the Maryland penitentiary for purchasing and exporting a young woman entitled to her freedom at

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<sup>122</sup> Frederick County Court, Docket (October 1844); Frederick County Court, Docket (February 1845). The testimony is recorded in State of Maryland vs. David Hargate, Frederick County Court Papers, box 89, MdHR.

<sup>123</sup> Pardon of John Ritchie, 12 December 1818, Maryland Governor and Council, Pardon Records, 1806-1818, MdHR.

age twenty-one.<sup>124</sup> Later that year, the court brought similar charges against Bennett's employer, who had apparently left the state.<sup>125</sup> In 1835, the court responded to a complaint lodged by five men and indicted John Hartzock, Jr., for selling a term slave to a non-resident.<sup>126</sup> So real was that the threat of prosecution that Joseph Geasey of Frederick County fled the state after discovering that he had inadvertently sold a term slave to a non-resident.<sup>127</sup> Blacks who were being defrauded of their freedom could call on the assistance of white allies, who often brought slaves' complaints before county authorities.<sup>128</sup> After "soul drivers" spirited her to Martinsburg, Virginia, Betty Toogood contacted white friends in Frederick, Maryland, who "strongly corroborated" her claims before a local magistrate. "If she is entitled to freedom," warned a Frederick newspaper, "we trust the indignation of the offended laws will demand justice from those who attempted to enslave her."<sup>129</sup>

The case of "Negro Charles" offers insight into both the treacherous path that slaves trod toward freedom and the workings of the laws protecting term slaves.

Charles's mother, Maria, had been promised her freedom at age thirty-one by Anne

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<sup>124</sup> Bennett's conviction and sentence are recorded in the Frederick County Court Docket, May 1830, MdHR. For additional details in his case, see Petition of David Bennett, May 1830, Maryland Governor, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>125</sup> Frederick County Court Docket, December 1830, MdHR.

<sup>126</sup> Indictment of John Hartzock, Jr., December 1835, Frederick County Court Papers, box 100, MdHR.

<sup>127</sup> Petition of Mary Ann Geasey, [1838], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>128</sup> In 1849, a Maryland judge argued that it would be difficult to defraud term slaves of their freedom because they could call upon the assistance of white supporters. The instruments of manumission "are exposed on public records, to which all persons have ready access," he opined, adding that "there is very small probability in this age of benevolence and charity, that there will be wanting persons to remind them of their rights, should they be otherwise uninformed." "Negro Franklin vs. Waters," in Richard W. Gill, comp., Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals of Maryland in 1849 (Annapolis: Robert F. Bonsall, 1852), 331.

<sup>129</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 29 July 1818.

Arundel County slaveholder Susanna Pitts. Under the terms of her manumission, Maria's children were also entitled to their freedom when they reached their thirty-first birthdays. Charles was subsequently sold to Frederick County resident Philemon Smith, who resold him to John H. Harding of Montgomery County. On October 4, 1833, Harding sold Charles "as a slave for life to Henry Kidwell . . . a person engaged in the business of buying slaves for the purpose of transporting them out of the state." While in Kidwell's custody, Charles successfully petitioned the Frederick County court for his freedom.<sup>130</sup>

Frederick County slave Jerry Palm dodged the same pitfalls. Born in 1816, Palm was manumitted by Charles Simpson, whose will stated that the bondsman's freedom would commence in 1846. Simpson's executors sold Palm to John Wolf, who resold him to Daniel McKemp in 1838. Ignoring the laws that required slaveowners to provide written documentation of transactions involving term slaves, neither Simpson's executors nor Wolf recorded Palm's sale in the county land records. In 1839, McKemp handed Palm to Jacob Hope, "a dealer in slaves for the southern market." Hope had Palm shackled in irons and spirited him to a house in Middletown, where he lodged the bondsman in an attic. While there, Palm overheard McKemp encouraging Hope to smuggle him into Baltimore and sell him, promising the trader "all he got . . . over four hundred dollars." Before McKemp and Hope could execute their scheme, Palm somehow managed to escape, fleeing northward. Unfortunately, he was overtaken near Duncan Islands, Pennsylvania, carried before the Frederick County court, and sentenced—ironically—to be sold outside Maryland.

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<sup>130</sup> Petition of "Negro Charles," 1833, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

But Palm's fight was not over. In 1841, sympathetic attorneys launched a successful appeal against his conviction. Noting that McKemp had never obtained a title to Palm's services and that he had attempted to defraud their client, the attorneys prevented his sale outside Maryland and secured his freedom.<sup>131</sup>

Although it is impossible to determine how many masters and speculators evaded the ordinances against exporting term slaves, the laws gave some slaveholders pause. In 1825, Frederick County resident Upton Wager purchased Cass and subsequently resold her to Kentucky trader Samuel J. Dawson. At the time, Wager "was totally ignorant of the condition of said girl," who was entitled to freedom in 1836. Soon after the sale, however, Wager had a conversation with Cass's previous owner that caused "considerable doubt with me respecting the time of her service." Worried that he had inadvertently violated Maryland law, Wager approached Dawson and voided the transaction. By that time, rumors of the illegal sale had reached county officials; Wager was soon convicted and imprisoned for the offense. Cass's reputation seems to have had little bearing on the proceedings. Despite protests from several citizens that she was "vicious, ill-disposed, and of bad habits" and that it "would have been a relief to the neighborhood and the county had she been driven from it," Cass received her freedom because of her master's criminal dealings.<sup>132</sup>

Despite laws protecting their rights, delayed manumission agreements neither slaked slaves' thirst for freedom nor guaranteed their pliability. Indeed, a Baltimore

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<sup>131</sup> The papers in the case were bundled with the Criminal Writs for the October 1841 session of the Frederick County court. Frederick County Court Papers, box 152, MdHR. For the court's rulings in Palm's trial and appeal, see Frederick County Court, Docket, October 1841, MdHR.

<sup>132</sup> Petition of Upton Wager, [1825]; Upton Wager to Joshua Cockey, 16 March 1825; Petition of Sundry Citizens of Frederick County, [1825], Maryland Governor, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

County judge believed that delayed manumission rendered slaves “wholly unfit to enjoy the benefits designed for them, as they thereby become a sort of middle class, neither slaves nor free; exempted from many of the motives for obedience which influence slaves, and possessed of some rights in common with free men, which encourage them in acts of insubordination.”<sup>133</sup> The enslaved continued to bargain with their owners and to search for opportunities to improve their lot. Mary Jones insisted that she had not absconded from her master “with the intention of robbing him or stealing her time,” but had “left his premises for a time to hunt for another and more congenial master.”<sup>134</sup> The reduced prices of term slaves may have encouraged such negotiations, for it allowed masters to sell dissatisfied bondsmen and women at a lower cost. While attempting to broker the sale of a “negro girl,” William Grammer insisted that she was “a good girl, but being corrected a few weeks since desires to leave and get another master.” Grammer offered the remaining eleven years of her term for \$230, but added, “I suppose she could be bought for \$200 cash.”<sup>135</sup>

When a new owner would not make enslavement more palatable, term slaves expressed their dissatisfaction through flight and violent resistance. Between June and November 1835, “Negro William” ran away three times, forcing his master to

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<sup>133</sup> “Extract from the Letter of Judge Brice to the Governor of Maryland,” Genius of Universal Emancipation, 1 March 1828.

<sup>134</sup> The court seems to have accepted Jones’s explanation. While it acceded to her master’s request to extend Jones’s term from 1861 to 1863, it denied him permission to sell her outside Maryland. Petition of Henry Shaw and Answer of Mary Jones, 17 November 1857, Washington County Orphans Court, Petition and Orders, MdHR.

<sup>135</sup> William Grammer to A. K. Shriver, 28 July 1849, Shriver Papers, MdHS.

“put him into confinement . . . which is the only means of keeping him.”<sup>136</sup> “Negro Matilda” took more drastic measures. In 1836 her master complained that she “greatly misbehaved herself . . . and attempted to cut her own throat and with poison to destroy your petitioner and his family.” Hoping to salvage his investment, the slaveholder offered to “sell her to a good master inside Maryland,” an offer she rejected.<sup>137</sup>

Frederick County master Roderick Dorsey discovered the extent of one term slave’s anger during the winter of 1840-41. In November, Dorsey had apprehended his slave, Samuel, who had fled into Pennsylvania. Dorsey confronted Samuel in prison, and the bondsman offered the “most earnest” assurances that he would remain on the farm. Within a month, however, Samuel was arrested at “the house of a free Negro in the neighborhood . . . with some 15 or 20 other Negroes, who had by previous arrangement met there for the purpose of running off in a body.” Dorsey offered Samuel another opportunity to reform, but warned that he was considering selling him to a trader. Samuel was unimpressed. According to Dorsey, the slave threatened “that if he ever escaped from jail, he would ‘put it out of the power of your petitioner to ever sell a Negro.’”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Petition of Daniel M. Kemp, 13 November 1835, Frederick County Court Papers, box 100, MdHR.

<sup>137</sup> Petition of Reuben B. Carlisle, 1 November 1838, Frederick County Court Papers, box 91, MdHR. Matilda’s violent resistance was not unique. In 1838, Thomas Baker accused his term slave, Amos, of spreading a “large quantity of arsenic” on a piece of bacon in an attempt to murder him. Indictment of “Negro Amos,” 10 September 1838, Frederick County Court Papers, box 37, MdHR.

<sup>138</sup> Petition of Roderick Dorsey, 14 November 1842, Frederick County Court Papers, box 92, MdHR.



Term slaves had good reason to escape, for there was no guarantee that slaveholders would honor their agreements, especially when they were informal and unwritten. In some cases, owners honored their verbal pledges. In 1814, for example, Reverend John Dubois purchased Violet and promised to manumit her after five years, provided that she “conduct and demean herself honestly and faithfully.” The promise remained unrecorded—and unenforceable—until 1819, when Dubois manumitted the bondswoman.<sup>139</sup> Violet’s experiences may have been somewhat unusual, for verbal pledges could be ignored, retracted, or simply misinterpreted. The confusion that sometimes swirled around these arrangements is illustrated by a series of depositions describing the final moments of Frederick County slaveholder Patrick Quinn. Finding himself “getting very weak,” Quinn directed that his slave Maria be freed after a certain period. Unfortunately, those in attendance could not agree on the length of the term Quinn had specified. The minister, whose hearing was “somewhat impaired,” confessed that he “did not hear the time at which Negro Maria was to be free, the deceased having spoken in an undertone,” while the executor remembered Quinn mumbling five years and another witness heard three years.<sup>140</sup>

Even when verbal promises were unambiguous, their execution was sometimes dependent upon the assertiveness of the enslaved. Soon after he purchased Nelson Williams, John D. Crumbaugh of Frederick County made the following proposition: “I have a little son, two years and some months old. Now if

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<sup>139</sup> Manumission of Negro Violet, 29 October 1819, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 9, pp. 668-69, MdHR.

<sup>140</sup> Depositions of Rev. John Hickey, John Lefevre, and John Hickey, Jr., 24 December 1828, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GME 1, pp. 29-30, MdHR.

you are a good boy, when he is twenty-one, I'll give you your freedom." After working as a teamster and foreman on Crumbaugh's farm for nineteen years, Williams walked into his owner's office and declared, "Well, boss, you always said you were a man of your word . . . I guess I'm my own master." Crumbaugh waffled. "I don't know about that," he replied, "I can get a thousand dollars for you tonight." Undaunted by Crumbaugh's thinly veiled threat, Williams replied, "I know that, boss. You can. But you promised me my freedom when he was twenty-one . . . if I was a good boy. Now, have I not been a faithful servant?" Crumbaugh reluctantly agreed, but now stipulated that Williams must leave Maryland and settle in Liberia. "You colored people get so trifling when you go free," Crumbaugh declared, explaining the fresh demand. "I am afraid I'll get into trouble, because Maryland law makes me go your security for your good behavior." Williams remained unbending. "If you are to make [the] choice for me where I shall make my living after I am my own master, I might as well remain your servant," he replied. In a masterful stroke, Williams then called his master's bluff and volunteered to remove to Pennsylvania. Chilled by the prospect of losing a valuable farmhand, Crumbaugh relented and freed Williams, who remained in the neighborhood a few years before departing for Pennsylvania.<sup>141</sup>

Despite assurances that he would receive his freedom in five years, lingering suspicions about his master's integrity compelled Harford County bondsman Samuel Archer to escape into Pennsylvania. Archer feared having his term extended and being "sold South" because he "had seen too many . . . held over their time, or cheated out of their freedom." Indeed, his own mother "was kept over her time,

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<sup>141</sup> John S. Crumbaugh, "The Little Boy and the Slave Lad," Friends' Intelligencer, 22 December 1894, 826.

simply that her master might get all her children. Two boys and girls were thus gained, and were slaves for life.”<sup>142</sup>

Archer’s narrative illuminates another source of dissatisfaction among term slaves. Delayed manumissions resulted in many black families being divided between slavery and freedom, often along generational lines. The repercussions of a delayed manumission agreement could reverberate across several generations. On January 1, 1801, the executors of Frederick County master Upton Sherridine manumitted Kate (age thirty-two), whose freedom was to would commence when she turned forty. The deed further stipulated that Kate’s descendents would remain in bondage until their thirty-first birthdays.<sup>143</sup> Decades later, her grandchildren and great-grandchildren were still working towards freedom. On August 27, 1840, a Frederick County slaveholder sold Juliet Gooding (age twenty-one) and her infant daughters Sarah Jane and Minerva, whom he described as “descendants of Kate, to be freed at 31.”<sup>144</sup>

While parents neared freedom, their children lingered in bondage and remained susceptible to abuse and sale. The desire to preserve their families and protect their children compelled some term slaves to stake everything in a desperate

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<sup>142</sup> Still, Underground Railroad, 526. Carroll County slave Henry Franklin found himself in similar straits. “He had been frequently promised his freedom at the age of thirty-five,” noted a biographer, but “[t]wo years before arriving at that age . . . and hearing nothing concerning the subject so dear to him and also fearing that something might occur to prevent his receiving the precious boon, he concluded to take the matter into his own hands.” On Whitsunday, 1837, he fled into Adams County, Pennsylvania. A Sketch of Henry Franklin and Family (Philadelphia: Collins Printing House, 1887), 2.

<sup>143</sup> Manumission of “Negro Kate,” 1 January 1801, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 20, pp. 388-89, MdHR.

<sup>144</sup> Purchase agreement between Anthony Kimmell and Anna Israel, 27 August 1840, Frederick County Court Land Records, vol. HS 11, pp. 386-87, MdHR.

attempt to free their offspring. In 1858, Frederick County slaves Rezin and Emeline Martin—who were both approaching the dates of their manumissions—escaped with their daughter, Elizabeth, who had also been promised her freedom. Having heard rumors that their daughter’s master was straining under financial burdens, the Martins became fearful that their daughter might be sold outside the area. Hoping to secure their daughter’s freedom or hasten their own manumissions, the Martins scoured the neighborhood for loans or prospective purchasers. Emeline twice begged a neighbor, John Strausburger, for money “to buy themselves.” When Strausburger rebuffed her, Emeline turned to another neighbor, who refused to purchase their daughter but agreed to “give her money toward buying herself.” Ultimately, the family decided that the surest path to freedom led to Pennsylvania, but their bid was unsuccessful.<sup>145</sup>

### **Paths to Freedom**

If, as Susan O’Donovan has argued, historians must come to grips with both “multiple slaveries” and a “welter of freedoms,” northern Maryland suggests yet another route from slavery to freedom.<sup>146</sup> Emancipation did not come suddenly, nor did it arrive through a mandated program of delayed manumission. Instead freedom arrived fitfully. There was, of course, a moment when slavery finally died, and at that moment northern Maryland’s slaveholders—like their brethren further south—behaved badly. One master greeted the news that Maryland had abolished slavery by

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<sup>145</sup> The Trial of Emanuel Myers, of Maryland, for Kidnapping Certain Fugitive Slaves, Had at Carlisle (Carlisle, Pa., 1859), 3-7.

<sup>146</sup> Susan Eva O’Donovan, Becoming Free in the Cotton South (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7-8.

demanding that his former bondsman strip naked or continue working until the clothes were paid for.<sup>147</sup> Most slaveholders had, however, recognized that the institution was mortally wounded decades before its final demise. Like their counterparts in other societies where slavery's collapse preceded general emancipation, northern Maryland's masters reconfigured a dying institution to suit their labor requirements.<sup>148</sup> They clung to their human chattels, who might still fetch a tidy sum, and they found ways of grafting the most attractive elements of the emerging free-labor regime onto slavery's stricken body.

Slaveholders' authority might have been compromised, but their property rights were safeguarded by state and federal authorities. As compared to their counterparts in the Deep South, Maryland's slaves faced better odds when they attempted to escape from bondage, but flight remained a desperate gamble. The immediate and delayed manumission agreements that masters and slaves forged on this uneven battlefield reflected their relative power. Slaves would receive their freedom, but not before their owners extracted several years of labor and not before they added to their owners' fortunes by bearing children. By 1850, the effects of these unequal negotiations were apparent in the census records. A majority of Frederick County's slaves were children or adolescents (see Figure 4.2). The county's black population grew freer as it grew older. As figures 4.3 and 4.4 reveal, the ratio

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<sup>147</sup> Kathleen A. Ernst, Too Afraid to Cry: Maryland Civilians in the Antietam Campaign (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1999), 228.

<sup>148</sup> In the Bahamas, for example, the collapse of the cotton economy during the first decade of the 1800s transformed labor arrangements decades before Britain abolished slavery. Unable to employ their bondpeople profitably on their cotton plantations, some owners resorted to self-hire agreements while others divided their estates and employed slaves as tenant farmers. Howard Johnson, The Bahamas: From Slavery to Servitude, 1783-1933 (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 1-118.

of free blacks to slaves increased steadily among those in their thirties, forties, and fifties.

As the process of manumission unfolded, many black families were divided between slavery and freedom. Indeed, the worlds of free and enslaved blacks were inextricably linked. Free blacks and slaves often intermarried, and the workings of delayed manumission agreements guaranteed that different generations were divided along the free-slave axis. Of the thirty-two black couples married by Baptist minister Joseph Mettam at Pikesville, Maryland, between 1836 and 1861, at least ten were of mixed status.<sup>149</sup> When asked why they refused to emigrate to Liberia, many of the free blacks interviewed by the Maryland Colonization Society explained that they had spouses or children still in bondage. In 1832, for example, farm laborer Joshua Brooks stated that while he and his wife were both free they were unwilling to leave Frederick County because their three children remained enslaved.<sup>150</sup> Slaveholders groused about such arrangements. They worried that that their slaves' free relatives would encourage their bondspeople to escape and complained when that free people

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<sup>149</sup> Of the remaining twenty-two marriages, four were between slaves, fifteen were between free blacks, and three involved couples whose status cannot be determined. Reverend Joseph Mettam Marriage Register, 1836-1883, Archives of the Baptist Convention of Maryland and Delaware, Columbia, Md. Thomas E. Will found a similar pattern in the marriages registered at St. John's Episcopal Church in Harford County between 1842 and 1861. Half of the black marriages recorded at the parish involved couples of mixed status. Thomas E. Will, "Weddings on Contested Grounds: Slave Marriage in the Antebellum South," *The Historian* 62 (Fall 1999): 99-117. For a discussion of the problems that the marriages of free blacks and slaves created for slaveholders, see Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, 28-32.

<sup>150</sup> Deposition of Joshua Brooks, 26 April 1832, Maryland Manuscript Collection, UMCP. Wagoner Abraham Lea offered a similar explanation, noting that his wife and their five children were the slaves of Felix Taney. Deposition of Abraham Lea, 26 April 1832, Maryland Manuscript Collection, UMCP.

lingered around the slave quarters, “thereby securing a home, where they bask in the fruition of their own native indolence.”<sup>151</sup>

In truth, however, the fracturing of families along the slave-free axis often redounded to slaveholders’ benefit. Some masters dodged laws forbidding the manumission of young children by selling them to their free parents.<sup>152</sup> Others leveraged the authority they wielded over their slaves to gain access to the labor of the slaves’ free relatives. On Susannah Warfield’s plantation, a free black washerwoman lived with her enslaved husband, who helped support his free kinfolk by raising garden crops.<sup>153</sup> Likewise, a slaveholder living near Sharpsburg confessed that he “did not wish any of them [his slaves] to marry slave women,” preferring that “they should marry free women and bring them to that place.” Despite professions of altruistic motives, labor concerns were never far from his mind. He considered his slaves’ wives necessary adjuncts to the workforce and paid them for cleaning, cooking, and mending for his white laborers.<sup>154</sup>

The division of black families between slave and free allowed many masters to graft the most attractive elements of free, wage labor onto the “peculiar institution.” In particular, it created opportunities to transfer the expense of child rearing onto free blacks without surrendering ownership of their young slaves. Not

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<sup>151</sup> Cecil Whig, 27 February 1858, quoted in Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground, 29.

<sup>152</sup> Frederick attorney Francis Scott Key advised a client looking to rid himself of two children that, while “children cannot be emancipated,” they could be sold to their free relations. Francis Scott Key to “Dear Sir,” 25 June 1824, Maryland State Papers, Scharf Collection, MdHR.

<sup>153</sup> Susannah Warfield Diary, 22 August 1854, MdHS.

<sup>154</sup> Libby, ed., From Slavery to Salvation, 26.

every slaveowner who concocted such a scheme was attempting to dodge his or her responsibilities. A few subsidized the households that contained their dependent slaves, but their motives were not necessarily altruistic. Indeed, providing occasional support to these semi-independent households may have been less expensive—and less troublesome—than raising slave children in their own households. Such arrangements also allowed slaveholders to maintain their connections with the children’s parents, who formed an auxiliary workforce. Howard County master Thomas Anderson may have weighed these considerations after determining that he could not provide “constant employment” for his slave, Rebecca Garrett. To ease his financial burden, Anderson leased Garrett to her free husband, William, reserving to himself the “right, at any time, to take and remove her, or any child or children, she might afterwards have.” Rebecca subsequently bore five enslaved children, who placed a tremendous strain on the family’s resources and prevented William from reimbursing Anderson for his wife’s hire. Still, Anderson permitted Rebecca and the children to remain with William and never balked at providing them with cash and food.<sup>155</sup>

Some slaveholders had no compunction about shirking their responsibilities and compelling free blacks to support their young slaves. In some cases, slaveowners simply dispatched children on extended stays to their free parents. An Alleghany County master pursued this strategy, sending a young slave on a yearlong visit to his father, a free black carpenter and preacher.<sup>156</sup> Such arrangements were often informal

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<sup>155</sup> “Thomas Anderson vs. Rebecca Garrett et al.,” in Richard W. Gill, comp., Report of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals in Maryland in 1850 and 1851 (Annapolis, Md.: Robert F. Bosnall, 1852), 123-24.



and without legal standing, amounting to little more than abandonment. Even before he freed teenage slave Jane Addison, a Frederick County slaveholder had “long since given up any claim in the girl to her mother,” whom he had liberated fourteen years earlier.<sup>157</sup> As this case suggests, sending children to their parents could be a precursor to legal manumission. When John Andrews manumitted his slaves William and Eleanor, he specified that their infant daughter, Mary, was to remain under “his direction and control, until she shall have attained the age of eighteen years, claiming no other authority over her than as guardian to an infant or master of an apprentice.”<sup>158</sup>

Free black parents might shoulder the expense of their enslaved children’s upbringing, but slaveholders did not believe that this entitled them to their offspring’s labor. In 1830, Mrs. Francis Warfield freed Rachel Jason but stipulated that her free husband, Aaron, must “support and bring up” their enslaved sons. Aaron raised the boys for several years, occasionally hiring them out for “victuals and clothes” to defray the cost. Unfortunately, Warfield never filed a deed of manumission, which allowed her heirs to swoop in and claim the children once they were capable of working.<sup>159</sup> Other slaveowners made no pretense of freeing their young chattels. In the 1840s, a Frederick County master sent “Negro Dick” to be raised by his free

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<sup>156</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 29 April 1819.

<sup>157</sup> Manumission of Jane Addison, 22 September 1834, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 47, p. 210, MdHR.

<sup>158</sup> Manumission of William, Eleanor, and Mary, 28 August 1830, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 34, p. 463, MdHR.

<sup>159</sup> “James T. Henderson vs. William Jason et al.,” in Richard W. Gill, comp., Report of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals in Maryland in 1850 and 1851 (Annapolis, Md.: Robert F. Bosnall, 1852), 483-86.

mother—herself an “aged woman”—until he was “large enough to be taken,” when his master planned to “hire him for wages.”<sup>160</sup> Elias Ramsburg concocted a similar scheme when he manumitted Caroline Tyler. Although Tyler received her freedom outright, the slaveholder charged her with raising her three- and four-year old children until they were seven.<sup>161</sup>

Eager to disencumber themselves of aged slaves, slaveowners also foisted the expense of their maintenance onto their free relatives, who were forced to shoulder the additional weight to prevent their elders from being abandoned and maltreated. In 1844, free black David Gray negotiated an agreement with his mother’s master, Paul Summers, whereby Gray agreed to provide a “valuable consideration” and the slaveowner promised to “maintain his aged mother, Martha Barns, a slave, for and during her life.” To further indemnify Summers, Grays posted a \$200 security, which would be forfeited if he defaulted.<sup>162</sup> David Bryan became a millstone around his family’s neck when financial reverses left his master bankrupt and incapable of supporting his aged slaves. Over sixty years old and “unable to walk or help himself,” Bryan became the responsibility of his free son, who was “hardly able to

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<sup>160</sup> Papers in the Case of Robert H. Dudderer vs. Zachariah T. Windsor, February 1855, Frederick County Circuit Court Papers, box 15, MdHR.

<sup>161</sup> Manumission of Caroline Tyler, 5 May 1855, Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, vol. ES 6, p. 445, MdHR. The following year, Serena Lockett saddled her former slave, Arey, with similar obligations. Although Arey and her two oldest children—aged twenty-one and nineteen—were freed outright, Lockett specified that her sixteen-year old son, Charles, and her eight-year old son, George, were to remain in bondage until their twenty-first birthdays. Lockett willed that George was “to stay with his mother until age 16, then be hired out by my executors.” Will of Serena Lockett, 14 July 1857, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GH 1, p. 222, MdHR.

<sup>162</sup> Petition of Nathaniel Summers, 10 November 1854, Washington County Register of Wills, Petitions and Orders, MdHR.

keep his own family by working [as] a day laborer when he can get work.”<sup>163</sup> In some cases, slaveholders liberated slaves with the express condition that they would be responsible for supporting unproductive relatives who could not be manumitted because of age or disability. Frederick County mistress Mary Brengle freed her unnamed “Negro Man” and granted him \$100, but specified that he must support his aged mother.<sup>164</sup> George Lands faced an even more daunting challenge. His master had freed him “for the purpose of supporting his aged Mother . . . and several small children, one of which is nearly quite blind.”<sup>165</sup>

The agreements that resulted in growing numbers of African Americans receiving their freedom—and bearing the economic burden of supporting their enslaved children and aging kinfolk—were part of slaveholders’ efforts to graft what they perceived to be the most attractive elements of free labor onto slavery. The dictates of wheat production had compelled masters to imbue slavery with a flexibility usually associated with free labor; they sought additional chores to keep their workers employed, they offered incentives and relaxed discipline during harvest, and they pruned unneeded hands from their workforces. They even found ways to make slaves marketable within Maryland’s border counties. In the end, however, their greatest success came not through alterations in work routines, but by exchanging deferred freedom for years of labor, ownership of their former slaves’

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<sup>163</sup> Petition of David Bryan, 23 February 1839, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>164</sup> Will of Mary Brengle, filed 14 February 1858, Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. GH 1, pp. 18-19, MdHR.

<sup>165</sup> George A. Hanson to Governor T. Watkins Ligon, 21 February 1857, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

children, and the prospect of having their erstwhile slaves contribute to the support of their dependent slaves.

**Table 4.1**

Slaveholdings by Size in Frederick County, Md., 1820

| Slaves Owned | Slaveholders<br>(N=1,520) |      |                | Slaves<br>(N=6,685) |      |                |
|--------------|---------------------------|------|----------------|---------------------|------|----------------|
|              | (N)                       | (%)  | Cumulative (%) | (N)                 | (%)  | Cumulative (%) |
| 1-2          | 761                       | 50.0 | 50.0           | 1,031               | 15.4 | 15.4           |
| 3-5          | 371                       | 24.4 | 74.4           | 1,402               | 20.9 | 36.3           |
| 6-9          | 219                       | 14.4 | 88.8           | 1,597               | 23.9 | 60.3           |
| 10-19        | 137                       | 9.0  | 97.8           | 1,762               | 26.4 | 86.6           |
| 20-29        | 25                        | 1.7  | 99.6           | 594                 | 8.9  | 95.5           |
| 30+          | 7                         | 0.4  | 100.0          | 299                 | 4.4  | 100.0          |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, 1820 United States Census, Frederick County, Md., NARA.

**Table 4.2**

Slaveholdings by Size in Frederick County, Md., 1850

| Slaves Owned | Slaveholders<br>(N=1,093) |      |                | Slaves<br>(N=3,907) |      |                |
|--------------|---------------------------|------|----------------|---------------------|------|----------------|
|              | (N)                       | (%)  | Cumulative (%) | (N)                 | (%)  | Cumulative (%) |
| 1-2          | 585                       | 53.5 | 53.5           | 764                 | 19.5 | 19.5           |
| 3-5          | 300                       | 27.4 | 80.9           | 1,138               | 29.2 | 48.7           |
| 6-9          | 141                       | 12.9 | 93.8           | 999                 | 25.6 | 74.3           |
| 10-19        | 59                        | 5.4  | 99.2           | 781                 | 20.0 | 94.3           |
| 20-29        | 6                         | 0.5  | 99.7           | 150                 | 3.8  | 98.1           |
| 30+          | 2                         | 0.3  | 100.0          | 75                  | 1.9  | 100.0          |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, 1850 United States Census, Schedule 2 (Slaves), Frederick County, Md., NARA.

**Table 4.3**

Slaveholdings by Size in Washington County, Md., 1820

| Slaves Owned | Slaveholders<br>(N=782) |      |                | Slaves<br>(N=3,201) |      |                |
|--------------|-------------------------|------|----------------|---------------------|------|----------------|
|              | (N)                     | (%)  | Cumulative (%) | (N)                 | (%)  | Cumulative (%) |
| 1-2          | 348                     | 50.2 | 50.2           | 517                 | 16.1 | 16.1           |
| 3-5          | 214                     | 27.4 | 77.6           | 825                 | 25.7 | 41.8           |
| 6-9          | 103                     | 13.3 | 90.9           | 732                 | 22.9 | 64.7           |
| 10-19        | 54                      | 6.9  | 97.8           | 711                 | 22.2 | 86.9           |
| 20-29        | 7                       | 0.9  | 98.7           | 166                 | 5.3  | 92.8           |
| 30+          | 6                       | 0.9  | 100.0          | 250                 | 7.8  | 100.0          |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, 1820 United States Census, Washington County, Md., NARA

**Table 4.4**

Slaveholdings by Size in Washington County, Md., 1850

| Slaves Owned | Slaveholders<br>(N=553) |      |                | Slaves<br>(N=2,018) |      |                |
|--------------|-------------------------|------|----------------|---------------------|------|----------------|
|              | (N)                     | (%)  | Cumulative (%) | (N)                 | (%)  | Cumulative (%) |
| 1-2          | 300                     | 54.2 | 54.2           | 410                 | 20.3 | 20.3           |
| 3-5          | 145                     | 26.3 | 80.5           | 546                 | 27.1 | 47.4           |
| 6-9          | 63                      | 11.3 | 91.8           | 449                 | 22.2 | 69.6           |
| 10-19        | 41                      | 7.4  | 99.2           | 517                 | 25.6 | 95.2           |
| 20-29        | 3                       | 0.5  | 99.7           | 66                  | 3.3  | 98.5           |
| 30+          | 1                       | 0.3  | 100.0          | 30                  | 1.5  | 100.0          |

SOURCE: Manuscript Returns, 1850 United States Census, Schedule 2 (Slaves), Washington County, Md., NARA.

**Table 4.5**

Slaves Sales, Frederick County, Md.

| Description of Slave (Type of Transaction) | 1799-1818<br>N (%) | 1819-1830<br>N (%) | 1840-1848<br>N (%) | 1853-1860<br>N (%) |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Slaves for Life (Local Sale)*              | 393 (75.0)         | 371 (27.2)         | 142 (33.1)         | 38 (9.7)           |
| Slaves for Life (Interstate Sale)†         | 88 (17.0)          | 888 (65.1)         | 23 (5.3)           | 9 (2.3)            |
| Term Slaves (Local Sale)                   | 41 (8.0)           | 105 (7.7)          | 265 (61.6)         | 344 (88.0)         |

SOURCE: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1799-1830 and 1840-1848; Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, 1853-1860, MdHR.

\* Excludes slaves who were mortgaged and redeemed by their owners.

† Includes sales to non-residents and to agents of slave traders in Baltimore and the District of Columbia.

**Table 4.6**

Term Slave Sales by Length of Term, Frederick County, Md.

|                | 1-5<br>years | 6-10<br>years | 11-15<br>years | 16-20<br>years | 20+<br>years |
|----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| <b>Males</b>   |              |               |                |                |              |
| (N=Total)      | 21           | 42            | 30             | 35             | 32           |
| Avg. age       | 28.7         | 22.5          | 18.9           | 13.8           | 10.4         |
| Avg. price     | \$168.9      | \$223.2       | \$325.7        | \$281.6        | \$287.5      |
| Cost/per year  | \$54.5       | \$27.6        | \$24.5         | \$16.1         | \$9.6        |
| <b>Females</b> |              |               |                |                |              |
| (N=Total)      | 17           | 48            | 40             | 28             | 17           |
| Avg. age       | 23.9         | 20.2          | 18.5           | 13.8           | 5.9          |
| Avg. price     | \$103.7      | \$211.3       | \$241.3        | \$301.7        | \$171.8      |
| Cost/per year  | \$27.3       | \$26.1        | \$18.9         | \$17           | \$6.6        |

SOURCE: Frederick County Court, Land Records, 1819-1830 and 1840-1848; Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, 1853-1860, MdHR.


Note: The sample includes only the 305 slaves whose age, gender, length of service, and price could be determined from the records. They constitute 42.7 percent of the total number of term slaves sold.



Figure 4.1

Fugitive Slave Advertisement  
Washington County, Md., 1822

**SON OF PRIAM OFF!**  
**\$100 REWARD.**



RAN AWAY from the subscriber, residing in Washington county, Md. about the 25th ult. a Negro Man, named

**HECTOR,**

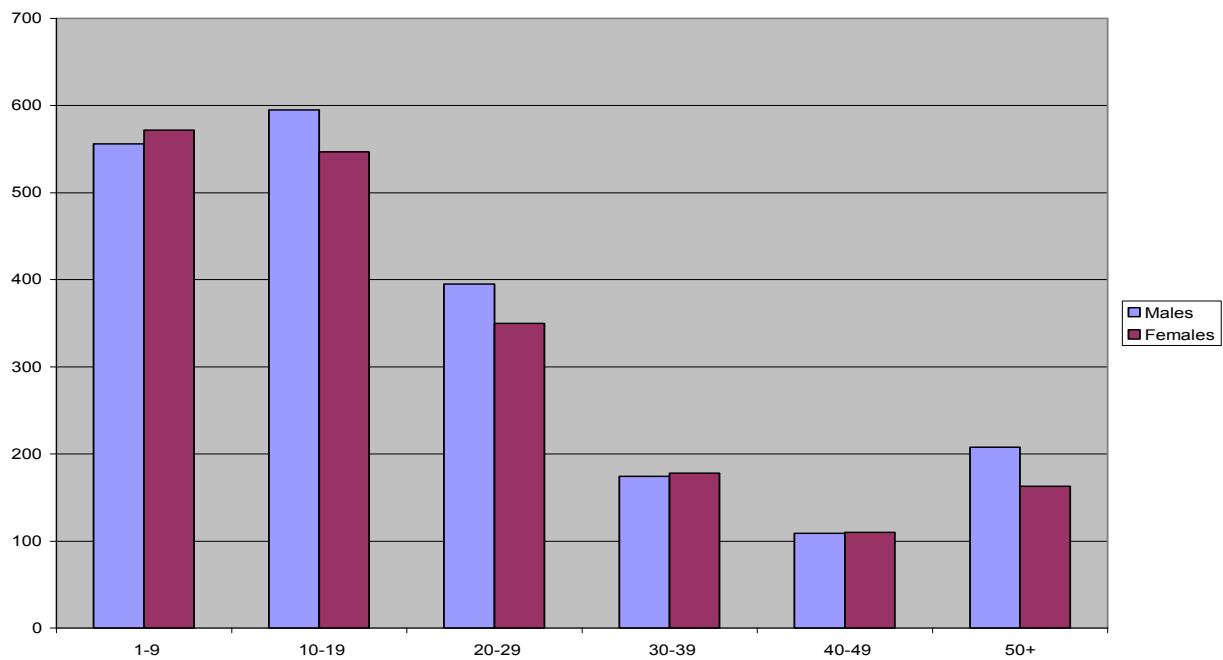
who calls himself Hector Williams.— He is about 30 or 32 years of age, five feet 8 or 9 inches high, stout made, knock kneed—has a scar on one side of his mouth, believed to be the right, on which the skin is whiter than on the rest of his face; also a scar on the upper part of his forehead, and one on his right leg, occasioned by a cut from a scythe. He is fond of tobacco, and a great chewer when engaged at work, impudent and saucy when among those he considers his equals, and especially so when in liquor. It is impossible to describe his clothing, as he had an abundance, being very fond of dress. He had the privilege of hiring himself out during the last year, and I am informed was a terror to the neighborhood he was in, stealing and pilfering. I will give the above reward, if taken out of the state of Maryland, and 50 dollars if taken in the state and secured in a jail so that I get him again, and in either case all reasonable charges shall be paid if brought home.

D. COOKE.  
Hagers-town, April 23. 25—tf.

SOURCE: Torghlight & Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 1 October 1822.

**Figure 4.2**

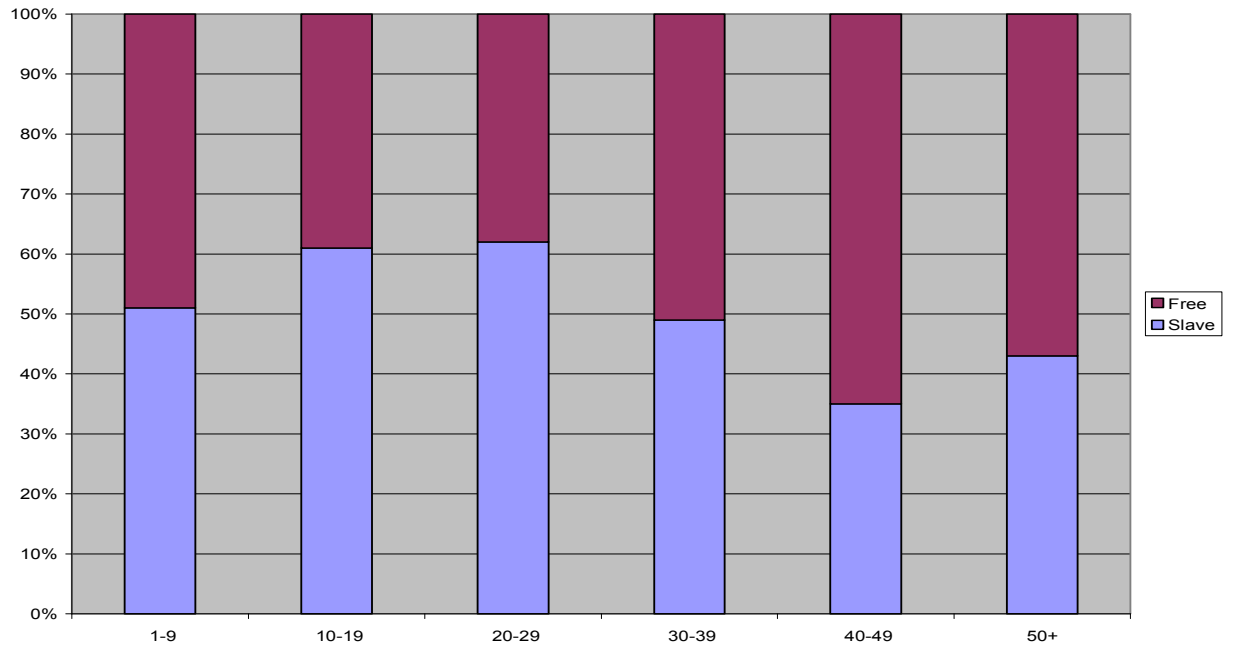
Age and Sex of Slave Population  
Frederick County, Md., 1850



SOURCE: Manuscript returns of the United States Census, 1850, Schedule 2 (Slaves).

**Figure 4.3**

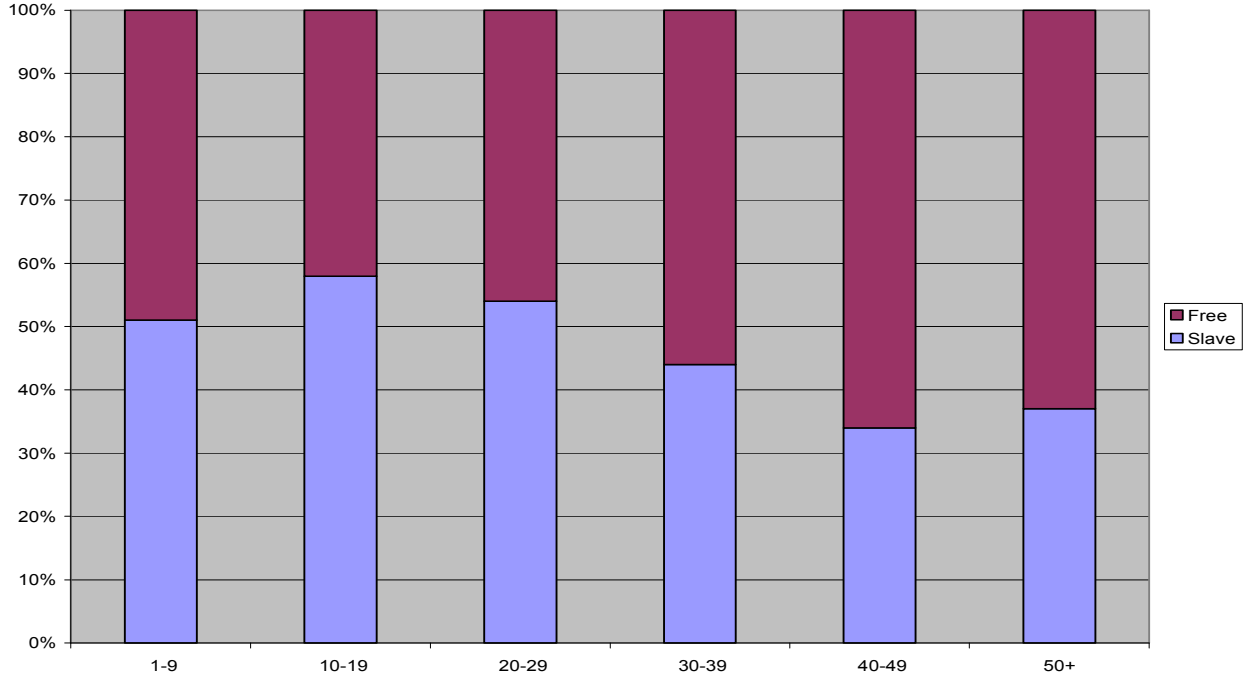
Percentage of Black Males Free and Enslaved  
Frederick County, Md., 1850



SOURCE: Manuscript returns of the United States Census, 1850, Schedule 1 (Free Population) and Schedule 2 (Slaves).

**Figure 4.4**

Percentage of Black Females Free and Enslaved  
Frederick County, Md., 1850



SOURCE: Manuscript returns of the United States Census, 1850, Schedule 1 (Free Population) and Schedule 2 (Slaves).

## Chapter 5

### “Chased Out on the Slippery Ice”: Free Black and White Laborers, 1815-1860

On February 5, 1817, landless farmhand and woodcutter Jacob Getzendanner disappeared while working in a woodlot in rural Frederick County. Although the weather had been “extremely cold,” Getzendanner’s employer was unconcerned about the missing workman, assuming that he had returned to the “house in the neighborhood where he had his washing done and made his home when not employed.” Meanwhile, the woodcutter’s landlord had noticed that Getzendanner was no longer retrieving his laundry but was not alarmed by his absence, “supposing he was still with the person for whom he had engaged to work.” Thus, two weeks passed before anyone bothered to enquire after Getzendanner’s whereabouts, and it was not until February 20 that searchers discovered his frozen body in a wooded field near his employer’s farm.<sup>1</sup>

That a landless worker’s disappearance should go unnoticed is not surprising. Impoverished and rootless, such people flitted through rural neighborhoods scratching a living from agricultural labor, employment on internal improvement projects, and, when work failed, charity and petty crime. This chapter traces the odyssey of landless workers—blacks and whites, men and women—through the turbulent rural economy. Where previous chapters focused on employers’ efforts to tame these foot-loose workers, the present chapter examines laborers’ strategies for surviving in an economy that offered little quarter. It begins with a broad overview of the forces that

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 22 February 1817.

shaped the experiences of all rural laborers, then considers how gender and race operated in workers' lives. The portrait that emerges is grim, and it offers a counterpoint to the narratives of class formation and collective resistance spun by historians focusing on artisans and factory operatives. Northern Maryland's rural laborers were engaged in a relentless struggle, one made all the more difficult by the racial fissures dividing black and white laborers.

### **Seasons of Work, Seasons of Want**

The agricultural workforce in northern Maryland was an unstable concoction. Like a whirling kaleidoscope, its contours and composition were constantly in motion, shifting with the seasons and with the varied fortunes of the regional economy. The ranks of this protean workforce were filled by landless rural residents, members of small-landowning families, canal and railroad workers, displaced factory operatives and dockworkers, and under- or unemployed craftsmen and apprentices. It was, moreover, a mobile force. When winter brought the agricultural economy to a grinding halt, many laborers tramped into crossroad villages, river towns, and seaport cities, where they subsisted on intermittent employment and poor relief. As winter yielded to spring, small troops of farmhands drifted back into the countryside. This trickle became a torrent during the wheat harvest, when thousands followed the ripening wheat northward from Virginia into Pennsylvania. Not surprisingly, the workforce created by these accretions was a motley assemblage, riven along overlapping lines of age, ethnicity, gender, and race.

The churning waters of the agricultural workforce crested during the wheat harvest, when, as one newspaper noted, “[e]very sickle is busy . . . and every idler capable of handling one has been pressed into service.”<sup>2</sup> Even those on the fringes of the region’s economy—beggars, drunkards, and petty criminals—trudged into the fields when the grain was ripe.<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, fitting that a discussion of agricultural workers begin at the harvest, for the roaming gangs of harvesters embodied the diversity, mobility, and instability that were the hallmarks of the rural proletariat. Moreover, the harvest season provides a counterpoint to the remainder of the year, when unemployment thinned the ranks and sent desperate laborers scrambling for a living. Farmhands’ prospects shone brightest at harvest, when work abounded, wages were comparatively generous, and otherwise powerless workers could wrest concessions from employers.

The wheat harvest spawned a massive labor mobilization that blurred distinctions between rural and urban workforces. From the countryside, newspapers trumpeted the “great demand and uncommonly high wages” being offered to harvesters, enticing townsfolk “who are laboring for low wages, or even high wages at ordinary work, to come on and assist our farmers. A rich reward awaits them.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Farmers’ Register and Maryland Herald [Hagerstown, Md.], 6 July 1830.

<sup>3</sup> During the 1838 harvest, Washington County planter John Blackford balked at hiring two “rough blackgardish behaved fellows” who had been scouring the neighborhood for work. Other employers were less discriminating. In 1826, Harford County farmer James Crawford Neilson hired “Bubb, a Drunkard” to help gather his harvest but discharged him after two days. John Blackford Journals, 5 July 1838, MdHS; Priestord Farm Journals, 5 July 1826, Neilson Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>4</sup> Hagerstown Courier, 4 July 1838, quoted in Virginia Free Press [Charles Town, Va.], 12 July 1838. If appeals to urban workers’ self-interest failed, newspapers resorted to tongue lashings. When a labor shortage threatened the 1858 harvest, a Middletown editor excoriated the “loafers about town [who] positively refuse to help gather the grain, with which they hope to be fed.” Middletown Valley Register [Middletown, Md.], 9 July 1858.

These cries reverberated in Baltimore. “The farmers are crying out for help in all directions. . . .,” one of the city’s newspapers proclaimed. “Turn out, you lazy fellows, and go assist the honest farmers.”<sup>5</sup> Urban workingmen answered with enthusiasm. Indeed, the exodus of Hagerstown’s workers startled an editor, who lamented the “general dullness and desertion of our streets during harvest,” while a Washington County farmboy recalled that the wheat harvest “caused such a demand for labor that it depopulated the towns of all able-bodied men and boys.”<sup>6</sup>

Unskilled workers from the region’s internal improvement projects were swept along in the stampede to the harvest fields. In 1829, Frederick tailor Jacob Englebrecht commented on the movement of canal workers into the harvest workforce, noting that “the hands are very plenty owing, I suppose, to the Chesapeake & Ohio [C & O] Canal’s stopping during the harvest to give the farmers a chance to have the grain cut.”<sup>7</sup> Workmen on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad also swapped their hammers, picks, and shovels for agricultural implements during the wheat harvest. As construction of the railroad’s mainline progressed through Frederick County, contractors scoured the countryside for hands and indiscriminately recruited

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<sup>5</sup> The Sun [Baltimore, Md.], 4 July 1838.

<sup>6</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 23 July 1856; Joseph R. Stonebraker, A Rebel of '61 (New York: Wynook Hallenback Crawford Co., 1899), 31. This pattern persisted after the Civil War. In 1866, the Freedmen’s Bureau assistant superintendent at Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, reported that “the time for Harvest being near at hand, those who have heretofore been laying about the Towns preferring a small ten cent job to going into the country at steady work, have left, unable to resist the offers of big wages tendered them. So soon however as the season is over they will return picking up a miserable existence here & there, rather than come down to daily labor.” 1st Lt. A. F. Higgs to Sir, 30 June 1866, Reports Received from the Shenandoah Division, ser. 1977, Maryland and Delaware Assistant Commissioner, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, NARA.

<sup>7</sup> William R. Quynn, ed., and James Lowery, trans., The Diary of Jacob Englebrecht, 1818-82, 2 vols. (Frederick, Md.: Historical Society of Frederick County, 2002), 1:469.



“every description of laborer” and “all descriptions of persons.”<sup>8</sup> This motley force was plagued by heavy turnover, especially during harvest. Although railroad foremen had been forced to pay higher wages in the weeks preceding the 1829 harvest, an editor observed that pay rates had “experienced a very considerable fall” after harvest and that the upcoming months promised “cheap wages.”<sup>9</sup> Such seasonal fluctuations in workers’ wages underscore the profound link between the agricultural and non-agricultural workforces and suggest that employers were, to a large extent, recruiting from the same pool.<sup>10</sup>

Like common laborers, rural craftsman abandoned their regular pursuits during harvest.<sup>11</sup> Among the harvesters on Joseph M. Wolf’s Washington County farm were several neighborhood artisans, including saddler Hezekiah Hurley, shoemakers Ezra Smith and Isaiah Reese, and wagonmaker John Springer.<sup>12</sup>

Apprentices, too, joined in the movement from workshop to harvest field. Maryland law provided that all apprentices, “except those bound to tradesmen and mechanics

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<sup>8</sup> Fifth Annual Report of the Presidents and Directors to the Stockholders of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (Baltimore: Wm. Woody, 1831), 113-15; Sixth Annual Report of the President and Directors to the Stockholders of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (Baltimore: Wm. Woody, 1832), 73.

<sup>9</sup> Baltimore Patriot, 4 August 1829.

<sup>10</sup> The overlap of the agricultural and non-agricultural workforces seems to have emerged early in the region’s history. As early as 1805, the managers of the Frederick-Town Turnpike Company announced that they would schedule their work around the busiest times of the growing season to avoid “raising the price of labor and interfering with the ordinary occupations of the farms & manufactories in the vicinity of the road.” Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser, 18 October 1805.

<sup>11</sup> This pattern was not unique to northern Maryland. While touring central Virginia, Frederick Law Olmstead observed that “[i]n harvest-time, most of the rural mechanics closed their shops and hired out to the farmers at a dollar a day.” Frederick Law Olmstead, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States: with Remarks on Their Economy (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), 52.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph M. Wolfe Ledgers, 1839-48 and 1848-59, WCHS; 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Washington County, Md., NARA.

residing in any town,” could be compelled to perform “reasonable labor” during the summer harvests “unless the particular contract shall be otherwise.”<sup>13</sup> Foregoing harvest earnings or surrendering them to a master craftsman was, however, unpalatable to many apprentices and their parents, who negotiated indentures that preserved their freedom to labor independently during harvest. In 1853, for example, Thomas Castle apprenticed his son to a shoemaker, but stipulated that he receive twelve days’ leave during harvest.<sup>14</sup> The following year, William Luther Duvall secured “two weeks in harvest” for his son, an apprentice carpenter.<sup>15</sup> Others made stronger demands. When apprenticing himself to a rough carpenter, Joel Stimmel demanded “four weeks in harvest for his own use,” while Peter Powell stipulated that his son receive eight days’ harvest wages if he was needed in his master’s blacksmith shop during harvest.<sup>16</sup>

The surge of harvest workers spilled across state borders, creating a migrant force that spanned the Mason-Dixon Line. Among those toiling in the harvest fields were residents of the mountainous regions of western Maryland, southern Pennsylvania, and northwest Virginia, who poured into the fertile valleys and

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<sup>13</sup> The provision was included in the state’s first law concerning apprentices and remained in effect through at least 1860. “An Act for the Better Regulation of Apprentices,” 28 December 1793, Wm. Kilty, comp., The Laws of Maryland (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1800); Otho Scott and Hiram McCullough, comp., The Maryland Code: Public General Laws (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860).

<sup>14</sup> Indenture of Rezin Castle, 10 June 1853, Frederick County Register of Wills, Indentures, vol. GME 3, p. 286, MdHR.

<sup>15</sup> Indenture of William Duvall, 1 February 1854, Frederick County Register of Wills, Indentures, vol. GME 3, p. 294, MdHR.

<sup>16</sup> Indenture of Joel Stimmel, 24 April 1816, Frederick County Register of Wills, Indentures, vol. HS 1, pp. 95-97, MdHR; Indenture of William Powell, 23 March 1846, Washington County Register of Wills, Indentures, 1845-1917, (no vol. number), pp. 34-36.

followed the harvest's northerly march. "The grain in our section ripened some weeks before the Pennsylvania fields," recalled one Marylander, "and many persons journeyed from that state to our valley to help harvest the crop. In squads, many came from the mountainous portions of Huntington and Bedford counties, and were called 'backwoodsmen.'"<sup>17</sup> Farther south, the migration drew the attention of a newspaper editor in Charlestown, Virginia, who found "upon our streets quite a number of harvest hands . . . from the more mountainous counties, seeking employment in harvesting our grain."<sup>18</sup> Although the composition of this migrant workforce remains unclear, some were impoverished laborers or farmers possessed of marginal lands. Among the Pennsylvanians who followed the 1846 harvest into Washington County was Amok Hauck, whose family lived near Shippensburg. Accompanied by his eldest son, Hauck had hoped to "make a little money to procure necessaries" for his wife and fourteen children. He harvested near Hagerstown and earned \$12.50 before succumbing to a lethal combination of alcohol and exhaustion and collapsing in a meadow.<sup>19</sup>

The eagerness with which workers followed the harvest bespoke the vital importance of harvest wages, the loss of which could spell catastrophe for working families. Hagerstown attorney Thomas Kennedy recognized this reality when he petitioned Governor Samuel Sprigg to pardon Samuel Riley, a free black man who

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<sup>17</sup> Stonebraker, *A Rebel of '61*, 31. During the 1850 harvest, a Hagerstown newspaper echoed Stonebraker's observations, noting that "the county is alive with the hardy sons of Pennsylvania (commonly called 'Backwooders'), who annually make a pilgrimage from their unproductive fastnesses to the fertile valleys . . . for the purpose of harvesting." *Herald of Freedom and Torchlight*, 3 July 1850.

<sup>18</sup> *Virginia Free Press* [Charlestown, Va.], 24 June 1858.

<sup>19</sup> *Herald of Freedom* [Hagerstown, Md.], 14 July 1846.

had been convicted of assisting fugitive slaves. Noting that the jury had been sharply divided and that Riley's family had suffered during his fourteen-month imprisonment, Kennedy urged the governor to release his client before the upcoming wheat harvest. "Harvest is now at hand," he wrote, "and if released [Riley] will be able to do something to help himself and wife."<sup>20</sup> The friends and neighbors of white farmhand John Buchart echoed this argument in their petition to Governor Philip F. Thomas. Although Buchart had completed his six-month prison sentence for assault, his "very poor" family was unable to pay the \$50 fine imposed by the court, which meant that Buchart would have to serve an additional thirty days in the state penitentiary.<sup>21</sup> Worried that the extension of his term would delay Buchart's release until "after the harvest is over and labor not much in demand," the petitioners asked the governor to pardon him "so that he may be able to realize the fruits of his labor during the approaching harvest."<sup>22</sup>

Governors might grant clemency to farmhands who needed harvest wages, but they could offer no relief when the crops failed. Whether occasioned by disease,

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas Kennedy to Governor Samuel Sprigg, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>21</sup> For the law requiring convicts to serve additional time if they were unable to pay their fines, see "A Further Supplement to the Act, entitled, An Act concerning Crimes and Punishments," 18 February 1830, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session of the Said Assembly, Begun and Held in the State House, in the City of Annapolis, on the last Monday of December 1830 and Concluded on the Twenty-Fourth Day of February 1831 (Annapolis: J. Green, 1831).

<sup>22</sup> Byron Ramam, Thomas Harbine, James Watson, et al. to Governor Philip F. Thomas, n.d. [1850], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR. Buchart was not the only farmhand to find himself in such a predicament. In September 1846, Margaret Miller petitioned the Frederick County court to issue a writ of *habeas corpus* for her husband John, who had been imprisoned for receiving stolen goods. She pleaded that she could not afford to pay her husband's fine because his imprisonment during the "busiest season" had left their family's finances in a shambles. Petition of Margaret Miller, 18 September 1846, Frederick County Court Papers, box 15, MdHR.

drought, or the Hessian Fly, crop failures were a common occurrence. In 1835, a poor crop forced Hagerstown farmer George F. Heyser to trim his harvest rolls. Then, in 1836 and 1837, Heyser harvested no wheat at all, as the Hessian Fly and an unspecified disease had ruined his crops. In 1838, he employed a handful of workers to gather his “very bad crop,” but did not engage a more robust force until the summer of 1839.<sup>23</sup> These calamities were repeated on farms throughout the region, with tragic consequences for the working poor. In January 1839, a Hagerstown newspaper lamented that the “drought of last summer,” the “high prices of provisions,” and widespread unemployment had “operated most severely upon the laboring poor” and left many “almost destitute of fuel and the necessities of life.”<sup>24</sup> Another string of disastrous harvests struck Allegany and Washington counties between 1853 and 1859.<sup>25</sup> Amid this crisis, laborer Noah Wable was sentenced to three years in the state penitentiary for stealing two pieces of bacon, a crime his friends attributed to the previous year’s crop failure. “In the winter of 1855 provisions was very scarce here [sic] and could not be got even for money,” they pleaded, adding that “many in our neighborhood suffered for want of food.” Wable

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<sup>23</sup> George F. Heyser Harvest Rolls, 1825-1855, MdHS.

<sup>24</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 25 January 1839.

<sup>25</sup> Evidence of western Maryland’s economic crisis comes from several sources. In 1856, a newspaper observed that a prolonged drought had devastated corn crops during the previous two years, resulting in an “extreme scarcity of the essential article of food.” The following year, a Sharpsburg clergyman informed a colleague that “the deficiency in our crops the last four years and the poor prospect of the present one” was forcing his parishioners to enact “the most rigid economy.” The situation did not improve over the following years. In 1859, a Hagerstown newspaper reported that the 1858 wheat harvest had been poor and that a freak summer frost had destroyed a large portion of Allegany County’s crop. The crop failure had forced the Allegany County commissioners to appropriate an additional \$500 for poor relief because it “was out the power of many to buy or borrow” foodstuffs. Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 30 July 1856; John Alex. Adams to the Right Rev. W. R. Whittingham, 21 May 1857, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland Archives, Baltimore, Md.; Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 29 June 1859.

stole, they concluded, because he “could not get any work” and wanted to “keep his family from starving.”<sup>26</sup>

Unable to find steady employment during the winter, farmhands deprived of harvest earnings might face severe privation. Elias Kroft made this connection explicit when he demanded additional daily wages of between 75¢ and \$1 during the harvest, as “the support of his wife and children during the winter chiefly depended on what he earned during Harvest time.”<sup>27</sup> Kroft was not exaggerating, for seasonal unemployment was endemic to the rural economy. An Episcopalian missionary preparing to tour Maryland’s northern counties believed that winter provided an excellent opportunity to “improve the piety of the laboring class, who, during the long and dreary seasons . . . have little to occupy their time.”<sup>28</sup>

For free labor ideologues, seasonal fluctuations in the agricultural labor market were a decided advantage to the region’s overall economic development. In a society where free labor predominated, unemployed farmhands could labor at commercial or industrial employments during dull seasons. “Hireling laborers upon a farm are not necessarily confined to that occupation,” observed Frederick attorney and agricultural reformer James Raymond. “They often unite some mechanical art . . . to that of laboring on the farm in the summer months,” so that they are “in one shape or another . . . constantly promoting the tri-fold interests of himself, his employer, and

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<sup>26</sup> Petition of Noah Wable, n.d. [1857], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>27</sup> Journal of Philip R. J. Frese, “Elm Grove Farm,” 1833-34, MdHS.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. Charles Mann to Bishop Kemp, 27 November 1823, Episcopal Diocese of Maryland Archives, Baltimore, Md.

his country.”<sup>29</sup> The laboring poor were less sanguine. For them, unemployment—whether occasioned by changing seasons, crop failures, or economic downturns—translated into an unending and sometimes desperate search for work. Immigrant Jakob Rutlinger likened the plight of landless workers to that of “someone who can’t skate and is chased out on the slippery ice.” “If they are careful and capable of much work they can make a living,” Rutlinger observed, “but it must be sought ceaselessly and anxiously.” Workers might find steady employment during the summer, but their livelihoods became “uncertain and subject to capricious change” in the colder months. Rutlinger had experienced many of these trials firsthand; during their first winter in Maryland, his family survived by binding books, making hat boxes, weaving straw hats, operating a singing school, and peddling firewood.<sup>30</sup>

Because regular employment and steady wages were scarce, farmhands lived with a gnawing uncertainty. The seasonal fluctuations in the agricultural labor market may have borne heavily upon Harry Lockett, a free black farmhand employed on Richard Vansant’s Baltimore County farm from 1855 to 1859. During his forty-month tenure with Vansant, Lockett was seldom fully employed (see Figure 5.1). On average, he worked only 14.7 days per month. During the slowest seasons, Lockett was often entirely unemployed. He found steadier work during the summer, but even haymaking and harvesting could not guarantee full employment. Indeed, there were only thirteen months during which Lockett worked more than twenty days. The

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<sup>29</sup> James Raymond, Prize Essay on the Comparative Economy of Free and Slave Labor in Agriculture (Frederick, Md.: John P. Thompson, 1827), 5.

<sup>30</sup> J. Jakob Rutlinger, “Day Book on a Journey to North America in the Year 1823,” in The Old Land and the New: The Journals of Two Swiss Families in American in the 1820s, ed. and trans. Robert H. Billigmeier and Fred A. Picard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1965), 222-27.

irregularity of employment was matched by seasonal fluctuations in wages. Lockett's earnings during the winter were paltry (see Figure 5.2), a circumstance that forced him to garner a disproportionate share of his annual earnings—between 20 and 25 percent—during the harvest.<sup>31</sup> The same seasonality marked the incomes of other agricultural workers. White farmhand John Stockman's daily wages ranged from \$1.25 during the wheat harvest to a mere 50¢ in the winter.<sup>32</sup> In the winter and spring of 1840, "Negro Abraham Cooper" spent 144 days mending fences, cutting firewood, and tending livestock, for which he received 40¢ per day. As the weather warmed and tasks became more demanding (grubbing, harrowing, and planting), Cooper's daily wages increased to 75¢. His earnings peaked during June (haymaking) and July (wheat harvest), climbing to between \$1 and \$1.25 per day.<sup>33</sup>

How rural workers coped with these seasonal patterns of underemployment and unemployment remains unclear. Farmhands are an elusive quarry. They emerge from the shadows, appear in farmers' account books, and then vanish from the historical record, making it difficult to track them across an extended period or to uncover the full range of their economic activities. What evidence we have, however, suggests that they danced between farmwork and non-agricultural employment with the changing seasons. The confession of Amos Green, a free black executed for

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Vansant Account Books, 1855-1859, MdHS.

<sup>32</sup> Stockman labored periodically on the Charles H. Lighter's farm in Frederick County between April 1851 and November 1852. Charles H. Lighter Account Book, 1851-1852, Middletown Valley Historical Society, Middletown, Md.

<sup>33</sup> Dr. Robert H. Archer Daybook, 1838-1840, MdHS. These seasonal fluctuations were characteristic of wheat-producing regions throughout the nineteenth century. For a nationwide survey of farm wages, see U. S. Department of Agriculture, Division of Statistics, Wages of Farm Labor in the United States: Results of Nine Statistical Investigations, from 1866 to 1892, with Extensive Inquiries concerning Wages from 1840 to 1865 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1892).



raping a German woman, offers a glimpse into the careers of rural workers. When he met his alleged victim, Green was working at the flour mills near Ellicott City. After the mills suspended operation for the season, Green found occasional employment on nearby farms in Howard and northern Prince George's counties. With the onset of winter, he turned to working at the copper deposits in the Little Patuxent River.<sup>34</sup>

Seasonal movement between industries was not uncommon. In 1846, for example, Arthur W. Machen noted that a farmhand he had previously employed "is at work for the present some twenty miles off at Canal."<sup>35</sup> Even artisans and landowning farmers shuttled between agricultural and non-agricultural pursuits. When Michael Connolly escaped from prison, a newspaper reported that the fugitive was "a weaver by trade, but occasionally works on turnpike roads."<sup>36</sup> David Heim, who managed his father's farm in Frederick County, also labored on neighboring farms, collected produce for urban merchants, followed the wheat harvest into Pennsylvania, and spent several months working on a canal boat.<sup>37</sup>

The seamless integration of agricultural and non-agricultural employment is well illustrated by the accounts of Washington County farmer Christian Sheppard and his tenant Peter Shombaugh. Between 1833 and 1834, Shombaugh accumulated debts totaling \$22.75 for house rent, pasturage, and cash advances. In discharging

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<sup>34</sup> Confession of Amos Green, n.d., enclosed in the Papers in the Case of Amos Green, 1851, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur W. Machen to Lewis H. Machen, 23 January 1846, Lewis H. Machen Family Papers, LOC.

<sup>36</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 10 July 1819.

<sup>37</sup> Testimony in the Case of David Heim vs. Elias Heim, July 1844, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. HS 23, pp. 587-96, MdHR.

these debts, Shombaugh moved nimbly between farm and workshop. During the autumn and winter of 1833-34, he earned \$9.73 making and repairing shoes for his landlord, then settled the remainder of his account by mowing hay and cradling wheat during the 1834 harvest.<sup>38</sup>

While alternating between agricultural and non-agricultural employment, workers sometimes migrated between town and country. Many of the felons sentenced to the Maryland Penitentiary from Baltimore and other towns listed their occupation as farm laborers, suggesting that unemployed farmhands regularly drifted into urban centers.<sup>39</sup> Typical, perhaps, was William Fry, a young laborer who was convicted for stealing horses in 1822. Describing the events preceding his crime, Fry stated that “about the middle of March I left the neighborhood of Harper’s Ferry, where I had spent the winter and came to Fredericktown to look for work.” During his travels, Fry met Harry Cairn, who claimed to be a farmer from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. “He offered me good wages and steady employment if I would go home with him, and being out of employment and destitute of a home I readily agreed.” Unfortunately, Cairn had been stealing horses in Virginia and Maryland, and he soon pressured Fry into joining his criminal enterprise.<sup>40</sup>

The migration of unemployed white farmhands into towns and cities may have been mirrored by an exodus of free blacks into the countryside. In 1839, a slaveowners grumbled that free blacks congregated in cities during the spring and

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<sup>38</sup> Christian Sheppard Account Books, 1805-1896, MdHS.

<sup>39</sup> Barbara Jeanne Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 88-89.

<sup>40</sup> Petition of William Fry, 5 October 1822, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

summer, where they waited to “receive what their slave connections might steal.” With the onset of winter, however, they moved into the countryside “to corrupt the slave and share in his allowance!”<sup>41</sup> The slaveholder’s observations must be viewed with some skepticism, for pro-slavery ideologues often contended that free blacks preferred puttering about cities to laboring on farms and plantations.<sup>42</sup> Still, such complaints underscore the permeability of the boundary between rural and urban workforces. Indeed, racial language was sometimes absent from calls for urban workingmen to seek employment in the countryside. In 1856, for example, a Rockville newspaper encouraged all workers—black and white—who “lounged and loaf about the cities, living from hand to mouth upon haphazard employment . . . to seek the country, where they would find constant demand for their labor at lucrative prices.”<sup>43</sup>

Just as the changing seasons drove some farmhands into towns and cities, economic crises forced non-agricultural laborers into the fields. African Methodist Episcopal minister Thomas W. Henry recalled that his parishioners’ poverty required him to stitch together a livelihood from a variety of employments. “Whenever I found myself pushed, I would turn in to anything that I could get to do. Sometimes I was called upon to go to quarry rock—sometimes to the harvest field; and in this way

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<sup>41</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 25 December 1839.

<sup>42</sup> Complaints about free blacks migrating to Baltimore and refusing to contract with farmers and planters were especially vociferous on the Eastern Shore, where growers were most dependent on free blacks. See Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground, 67-72.

<sup>43</sup> Rockville Journal, n.d., quoted in Baltimore Sun, 7 January 1856.

I supported myself and family.”<sup>44</sup> William Booth found himself in a similar predicament after being “thrown out of employment” as a merchant’s clerk. Unable to find another situation, he drifted into the countryside, where “driven by necessity, in order to obtain a livelihood” he worked “grubbing a piece of land.”<sup>45</sup>

The seasonality that characterized the agricultural labor market may have been less pronounced in the non-agricultural sector, but these industries, too, experienced seasonal downturns. Rural mills suspended operations during the coldest months, victims of frozen creeks and millponds. Nor were internal improvement projects immune from the general tightening of the labor market. Although contractors on the B & O Railroad retained a “large number of workmen,” the “excessive severity” of the winter of 1828-29 forced them to winnow their workforce to about 1,000—approximately half the number employed during spring and summer.<sup>46</sup> Turnpike construction and repair also slowed during winter. Contractor John Piper employed a modest workforce on the National Road near Cumberland during the warmer seasons, but discharged the entire crew at the onset of winter (see Figure 5.3).

The seasonal constriction of the labor market presented an obstacle to workers attempting to exchange agricultural for non-agricultural employment. It could, moreover, have dire consequences for manual laborers. In 1849, Susanna Warfield discovered that an Irish family had squatted in a dilapidated shanty on a neighboring plantation. Although its door and floorboards had been stripped by previous

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<sup>44</sup> Jean Libby, ed., From Slavery to Salvation: The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas W. Henry of the A.M.E. Church (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> Petition of William Booth, n.d. [1853], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>46</sup> Third Annual Report of the President and Directors to the Stockholders of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (Baltimore: Wm. Wooddy, 1829), 22.

occupants, the family—which included a pregnant woman—spent several weeks in the shack, subsisting on charity from local families. “They are fresh immigrants,” Warfield lamented, “and all work being suspended on the road the man cannot get work.”<sup>47</sup>

Employers and laborers recognized that unemployment was more prevalent during the winter and negotiated accordingly. Indeed, landowners often contracted with farmhands in February or March in order to capitalize on the desperation of workers who may have been unemployed for several months. Laborers searching for steady employment during the winter were often forced to accept reduced—or no wages—in exchange for clothing, food, and shelter. English traveler W. Faux found that many Marylanders and Pennsylvanians “labor during the winter for their food, lodging, washing, &c.”<sup>48</sup> Those who continued to receive cash payments found their wages slashed. One Washington County farmer noted that daily wages dropped from 50¢ during the summer to 40¢ during the winter, but that this reduction was no obstacle to securing workers “whenever he wants them.”<sup>49</sup>

Under such circumstances, displaced farmhands negotiated at a great disadvantage. When Irish immigrant Archy McCullough found himself unemployed during the winter of 1812-13 he made a desperate appeal to farmer Andrew Thomas, who attempted to find work for the farmhand by promising prospective employers that he would accept low wages. “There is a man here I suppose about 50 years of

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<sup>47</sup> Susannah Warfield Diaries, 8 January 1849, MdHS.

<sup>48</sup> W. Faux, Memorable Days in America: Being a Journal of a Tour to the United States, Principally Undertaken to Ascertain, by Positive Evidence, the Condition and Probably Prospects of British Emigrants (London: W. Simpkin and R. Marshall, 1823), 159-60.

<sup>49</sup> Testimony of “Mr. Smith,” n.d., enclosed in Petition of Andrew Harbaugh, 24 February 1852, Washington County Register of Wills, Petitions and Orders, MdHR

age,” Thomas wrote to an associate, “he would hire pretty reasonable for the winter, he says \$8 per/month and victuals.”<sup>50</sup> Farmhand John Coniff made an even more desperate appeal to Baltimore County landowner William P. Preston during the winter of 1858-59. Although Preston agreed to engage Coniff, their contract reveals much about workers’ vulnerability during winter. In a preamble, Coniff declared that “I desire work, being at this time out of employment” and acknowledged that Preston “although not at this time in need of a hand [has] at my earnest solicitation agreed to employ me.” The “earnest solicitation” may have amounted to begging; Coniff waived cash wages, agreed to receive payment in food and lodging, and stipulated that Preston could “at any time discharge me at his option.”<sup>51</sup>

The combination of low wages, unemployment, and added expenses for firewood and seasonal clothing made winter especially precarious for rural workers. Northern Maryland’s winters were harsh, and impoverished laborers often needed advances for heavy clothing and boots in order to continue working outdoors.<sup>52</sup> Those incapable of manual labor faced even graver difficulties. In a petition for outdoor relief, the neighbors of John Perkins, Sr., noted that “age and infirmity

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<sup>50</sup> Andrew Thomas to Clotworthy Birnie, 27 October 1813, Clotworthy Birnie Papers, MdHR.

<sup>51</sup> Contract between John Coniff and William P. Preston, 11 January 1859, “Pleasant Plains” Account Book, 1852-1864, William P. Preston Collection, MdHS. The position of unemployed workers in winter remained untenable after emancipation. On November 2, 1864, Washington County farmer Otho Nesbitt informed his slaves that they were free, but added, “It is now near winter, and they had no house and probably could get no work this time of year. . . .” He did, however, offer the freedpeople the opportunity to remain on the farm and continue working without compensation. Recognizing that they could not find employment—at least anything that paid more than their clothing, food, and shelter—the former slaves accepted. “They said it was so,” Nesbitt noted, “and they would work on till spring as they had been doing.” Otho Nesbitt Diary, Clear Spring Historical Association, Clear Spring, Md.

<sup>52</sup> During the winter of 1836-37, free black farmhand Henry Blue twice requested advances for winter clothing and boots. The following winter, “Negro George” made similar pleas. John Blackford Journals, 16 December 1836, 12 January 1837, and 17 February 1838, MdHS.

prevented [him] from earning a livelihood by his labor at all seasons of the year, particularly during fall and winter, when he suffers the want of sufficient food and clothing.”<sup>53</sup> P. M. Gill petitioned the Frederick County commissioners to compensate him for assisting Fender Smith, an “old colored lady,” because “I think she would have suffered this winter had I not given her some bread and some meat. She is very bare of clothing.”<sup>54</sup>

Securing firewood presented another challenge for working families. The account book of Frederick County farmer and firewood peddler Jacob Reich indicates that most households consumed one or two cords of firewood per month, each of which cost between \$3.50 to \$7. Reich’s customers typically purchased enough firewood for three or four months, making the average annual cost for firewood between \$12 and \$21—the equivalent of one or two months’ non-harvest wages for an adult male farmhand.<sup>55</sup>

Cooking and heating fuel may have consumed a greater percentage of workers’ earnings as the antebellum decades progressed. Because farmworkers’ wages posted few increases during this period, small changes in commodity, housing, and fuel prices could place a severe strain on their finances (see Figure 1.1). This seems to have happened with firewood. Businessmen in Baltimore and the District of Columbia had an insatiable appetite for lumber, which was essential to the booming

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<sup>53</sup> Petition of John Perkins, Sr., 26 April 1852, Frederick County Board of County Commissioners, Levy Papers, 1789-1889, MdHR.

<sup>54</sup> Petition of P. M. Gill, 14 February 1851, Frederick County Board of County Commissioners, Levy Papers, 1789-1889, MdHR.

<sup>55</sup> Reich’s account book includes his dealings with at least forty-three customers spanning the period 1818 through 1823. Jacob Reich Account Book, 1817-1830, Daughters of the American Revolution Library, Washington, D.C.

construction, shipbuilding, and transportation industries. To cultivate this trade, merchants advertised the generous prices farmers could expect for their wood. In 1823, a Baltimore newspaper invited “our friends on the bay and rivers” to send more lumber before navigation closed, promising the “exorbitant price of five dollars and upward for Oak Wood and other kinds in proportion.”<sup>56</sup> The lumber trade was not confined to the Chesapeake; farmers living along navigable rivers further inland also found ready markets for their timber. In 1819, a merchant noted that a “considerable lumber trade” was carried on at Williamsport and that “vast quantities of lumber [were] brought down the Potomac and Conococheague.”<sup>57</sup> Newspapers promoted this trade. In 1839, a Williamsport editor encouraged farmers to market more lumber in Alexandria, for “there is a great and increasing demand in that market for red oak for the West Indies, and, in addition to these, a quantity of staves.”<sup>58</sup>

The lumber trade was a financial boon to northern Marylanders. It provided landowners with another marketable commodity, and it offered the laboring poor steady, if less remunerative employment during seasons when they might otherwise be idle. As the antebellum decades progressed, however, some residents grew concerned about the trade’s toll. “The timber land which used to gird our town, on all sides, has been cleared nearly as far as the eye can reach,” lamented a Hagerstown writer in 1852, who added that “we now obtain our principal supply of wood from

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<sup>56</sup> Baltimore Patriot and Commercial Advertiser, 20 November 1823.

<sup>57</sup> Mathias Bartgis Journal, 26 August 1819, HSFC.

<sup>58</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 11 November 1839. That same year, a Washington, D.C., merchant encouraged an associate in Hagerstown to purchase a stave-making machine, noting that “in your county its value must be great” as it would “make the staves for 150 barrels per day, easy work!” William St. Clair Clarke to Elie Beatty, 25 December 1837, Hagerstown Bank Collection, UMCP.



farmers who reside some distance from town.” To make matters worse, urban merchants were contracting with farmers for the remaining timber, which made firewood “more and more scarce and consequently higher in price.”<sup>59</sup>

As competition for the region’s dwindling resources drove firewood prices ever higher, those with means began purchasing their fuel supplies during seasons when firewood was relatively inexpensive. A few writers even wagged disapproving fingers at poorer residents for not following the example of their wealthier neighbors. “Were certain persons to use a little more forethought and economy . . . there would not be found in winter so many families without fuel, provision, or even clothing,” proclaimed one newspaper. Poor people’s fondness for alcohol and tobacco produced “too great a waste of both time and means by that very class, amongst whom there should be [the] most industry and economy.”<sup>60</sup> Still, most pundits blamed grasping merchants and landowners for the worsening plight of the poor. In 1840, a Hagerstown newspaper excoriated merchants for charging \$4.50 for a cord of firewood: “The man who could ask such a price has but little conscience, and the little he has he leaves at home. Such exorbitant charges are the more revolting from the fact that poor are the principle sufferers; only the wealthy can lay aside during the summer and fall.”<sup>61</sup> A decade later, another writer grumbled that the “principle [sic] part of the wood which is brought to market is sold before it arrives,” which left “a

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<sup>59</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 1 December 1852.

<sup>60</sup> The Register [Shepherdstown, Va.], 29 November 1856.

<sup>61</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 3 January 1840.

class of citizens who are not prepared, through poverty, from engaging their winter supply in warmer months” to freeze.<sup>62</sup>

Recognizing the desperate plight of the region’s poor, prominent citizens and municipal governments distributed firewood to suffering families. In 1839, judge and politician John Buchanan donated a large quantity of firewood to Williamsport’s municipal government, which appointed a committee to distribute the firewood “to all families who most need wood at this time.”<sup>63</sup> During the harsh winter of 1845, residents of Hagerstown worried that the public relief budget might be overwhelmed by the growing numbers of “poor and destitute, by whom we are surrounded.” To keep “the purse strings of the rich from continuing undrawn,” concerned townspeople organized a bazaar and donated the proceeds to the city’s poor relief fund.<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, private charity and public assistance were unequal to the need. Municipal governments often burned through the funds allocated for poor relief, forcing them to appropriate additional funds or curtail the programs. In February 1849, Frederick’s aldermen discovered that their winter relief funds were already exhausted and had to scramble to find an additional \$100 “for the purchase of wood for gratuitous distribution among the poor.”<sup>65</sup>

When private and public relief failed, the poor resorted to scavenging and theft to heat their homes. The desperation felt by poor people is revealed in the

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<sup>62</sup> The Sentinel [Clear Spring, Md.], 14 November 1850.

<sup>63</sup> Council Minutes, 24 January 1831, Office of the City Clerk, Williamsport, Md.

<sup>64</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 17 December 1845.

<sup>65</sup> Untitled resolution, 17 February 1849, Resolutions of the Board of Aldermen of Frederick, Md., 1840-1880, HSFC.

trifling amounts of firewood stolen; a single board or a handful of shavings might keep a hearth burning through a cold night. Desperation probably drove both former slave “Negro Jim,” who stole a single stick of firewood from the Frederick courthouse, and free black Prosper Jackson, who was arrested in November 1832 for stealing two fence rails valued at 12¢.<sup>66</sup> Despite the small amount of property involved, such offenses could lead to significant fines or imprisonment. In 1835, for example, free black Jane Williams was sentenced to two years in the Maryland Penitentiary for stealing woodchips from a construction site on the outskirts of Frederick. Two years later, free black Nelson Carter received the identical sentence for stealing a board from the C & O Canal on a “cold and snowy night.” While not condoning these crimes, many citizens were sympathetic towards their perpetrators. Seventy-six residents of Williamsport petitioned the governor to pardon Nelson Carter, praising him for supporting his wife and children “in an unusually creditable manner for a colored man” and noting that his crime was born of desperation, not dishonesty.<sup>67</sup> Jane Williams’s attorney made a similar appeal. He praised his client’s solid reputation, noted that she had only stolen a handful of shavings, and added that such crimes were ubiquitous during winter: “The season of the year at which the chips were taken was cold . . . and numerous others besides this woman had gone to the place and taken away the hewings of the lumber.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Frederick County Court, Judgment Records, March 1801, MdHR. Indictment of Prosper Jackson, December 1832, Frederick County Court Papers, box 83, MdHR.

<sup>67</sup> Petition of Nelson Carter, n.d. [1837], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>68</sup> Mountjoy Luckett to Governor James Thomas, 18 December 1835, enclosed in Petition of Jane Williams, n.d. [1835], Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

As winter brought the rural economy to a standstill, unemployed workers who remained in the country drifted into an underworld of shooting matches, gambling houses, and grogshops. There, they filled their idle hours—and empty pockets—engaging in activities that roused magistrates’ suspicions but were nevertheless thoroughly engrained in the rural economy. Indeed, for many poor whites, operating an unlicensed gambling house or selling whiskey was a necessary adjunct to seasonal labor. James Brightwell, a Frederick County farmhand and woodcutter sold “a small quantity of liquor” at a backwoods shooting match that he had organized during the winter of 1820-21. Arrested and fined, the illiterate Brightwell called upon his friends, who petitioned the governor on his behalf. The shooting match, they argued, had been held “according to the customary practice of his neighborhood.” Moreover, Brightwell’s motive for hosting the event was to provide for his “wife and four small children,” who were “altogether dependent upon his labor, [as] he has no property whatsoever.”<sup>69</sup> By emphasizing that the shooting match transpired in accordance with “the customary practice of the neighborhood,” Brightwell’s supporters underscored how such unlawful activities were woven into the social fabric. The boundaries between legal business, sociability, and criminal activity became muddled. This ambiguity seems to have been the undoing of Isaac Mons, a small farmer of “very moderate circumstances with a large family,” who was convicted of keeping a gambling house during the winter of 1856-57. To supplement his income, Mons had constructed a shed on his farm, in which operated a blacksmith shop and a “very small country store.” There was, however, slight distinction between these

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<sup>69</sup> Petition of James Brightwell, 12 December 1821, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

businesses and a gambling house, for Mons's "neighbors and customers proved to be in the habit, during the winter months, of using a room adjoining his store . . . to amuse themselves at cards, and sometimes to play for money."<sup>70</sup>

When their earnings were exhausted and they could not—or would not—turn to crime, petty production, or independent marketing, workers sought refuge in the county almshouse. Not surprisingly, almshouse admissions followed a seasonal pattern. In January 1855, the Frederick County almshouse sheltered 100 people. A month later, the population had increased to 102. By late April, warming weather and an improved job market had whittled the number to 85. This trend continued through June, when the number of inmates dwindled to 77.<sup>71</sup> Few people lingered in almshouses, a circumstance suggesting that the laboring poor turned to these institutions primarily for temporary relief from pressing emergencies. In 1856, the superintendent of Frederick's almshouse noted that most of its residents remained "but for a few days, some of them merely for rest, and other for medical treatment; a majority of whom do not stay over a week." Indeed, the only residents who stayed for extended periods were the "deranged, crippled, or superannuated."<sup>72</sup> Although fragmentary, almshouse records confirm that these institutions' populations were transitory. Of the seventy-five individuals admitted to the Hagerstown almshouse

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<sup>70</sup> W. Veirs Bowie to Governor T. Watkins Ligon, 19 November 1857, enclosed in Petition of Isaac Mons, n.d. [1857], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>71</sup> The Examiner [Frederick, Md.], 7 February 1855, 14 March 1855, and 6 June 1855. The overseer of the poor in neighboring Jefferson County, West Virginia, noted that there was a seasonal pattern to almshouse admissions. "Heretofore," he wrote, "we have had more white and colored in the winter season than in the summer." Francis Yates to Major How, 31 March 1866, Narrative Reports from Subordinate Officers relating to Policies of Board of Overseers of the Poor toward Destitute Blacks, ser. 3803, Virginia Assistant Commissioner, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, NARA.

<sup>72</sup> The Examiner [Frederick, Md.], 16 January 1856.

between May 1847 and May 1848, sixty-two were discharged within a year, five were apprenticed, and ten died.<sup>73</sup> A similar pattern was apparent in Frederick. Of the 312 persons admitted to the almshouse in the year ending January 1858, 203 were discharged and 19 died within a year.<sup>74</sup>

Seasonal disruption of to the region's economy was to a large extent, predictable and manageable; harvest wages, casual employment in cities, and the underground economy sustained workers during the winter, and charities—both public and private—caught those who stumbled. Financial panics and prolonged depressions were another matter. Regional or national economic crises spawned widespread unemployment, drove wages downward, and plunged workers into misery. Worse, the increased demands on charitable organizations strained their meager resources and limited their ability to assist the downtrodden.

In the aftermath of the Panic of 1819, private charity and public relief offered some limited assistance to suffering workers, but their resources soon buckled under the pressure. In Frederick and Montgomery counties, the depression forced “many inhabitants who have never before knew [sic] what it was to want bread” to seek assistance from “wealthy neighbors who can no longer provide relief.” County governments fared little better. The combination of diminished revenues and citizens' demands for retrenchment forced counties to trim expenditures during economic crises. In 1820, the directors of the poor in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, cited “the present reduced prices of agricultural produce” when they slashed payments to

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<sup>73</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 26 July 1848.

<sup>74</sup> The Examiner [Frederick, Md.], 27 January 1858.

the county's poor.<sup>75</sup> The following year, the Frederick County commissioners railed against the soaring medical bills and "superfluous luxuries" charged to the almshouse. "We earnestly admonish the trustees, in these times of general pressure, to turn their attention to reform and prudent retrenchment, for which we think there is abundant room."<sup>76</sup> Trimming expenses proved difficult. In 1823, the county's overseers of the poor requested an additional \$3,000, noting that "the pressure of the times" had doubled the almshouse population during the previous year.<sup>77</sup>

While devastating, seismic economic upheavals were infrequent. More threatening were the innumerable tremors that threatened workers' finances. The countryside was fraught with dangers; disease, injury, or an unscrupulous employer could leave workers disabled, unemployed, or fleeced of their earnings.

Farmwork placed tremendous strains on workers' bodies and undermined their health. Many observers believed that toiling in the countryside might prove injurious—even fatal—to those unaccustomed to manual labor. Political economist Mathew Carey scoffed at the notion that venturing into the country was "a panacea for the distresses" of unemployed urban workers. The "utter unfitness of most of those persons for country labour," combined with the uncertainty of finding steady employment, afforded men with weak constitutions or dependent families a

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<sup>75</sup> Minutes, 5 January 1820, Lancaster Directors of the Poor and House of Employment, Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster, Pa.

<sup>76</sup> Minutes, 26 May 1821, Board of Commissioners of Frederick County, Minute Book, 1803-1826, HSFC.

<sup>77</sup> Minutes, 16 May 1823, Frederick County Trustees of the Poor, Proceedings, 1822-1838, MdHR.

“miserable chance” of surviving as farmhands.<sup>78</sup> Jakob Rutlinger concurred with this assessment. Describing employment opportunities in Frederick County, he noted that “all through the summer you could indeed get work and good pay with the farmers” but that it entailed “ruining all your strength and health, as well as digging yourself an early grave if you are not accustomed to such hard work.”<sup>79</sup>

Harvest fields contained numerous dangers for workers; the combination of excessive heat, swinging cradles, and abundant alcohol often proved lethal. Fugitive slave advertisements contain numerous references to harvest injuries, the most common being missing fingers and large scars caused by cradles and scythes.<sup>80</sup> On occasion, injuries sustained from cutting tools were fatal. In 1847, for example, Frederick tailor Jacob Englebrecht noted that Evan Gaither, a free black farmhand, had received a deep gash in the thigh from another worker. “He died about 2 ½ hours later,” Englebrecht lamented, “got the lack jaw.”<sup>81</sup> The introduction of horse-powered threshing machines and mowers added to the dangers confronting farmhands. In 1852, an overburdened threshing machine exploded “with such violence that pieces flew in every direction, some to a distance of 150 yards.” Although the workers attending this machine were unscathed, others were less

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<sup>78</sup> Mathew Carey, Address to the Wealthy of the Land, Ladies as Well as Gentlemen, on the Character, Conduct, Situation, and Prospects, of Those Whose Sole Dependence for Subsistence Is on the Labour of Their Hands (Philadelphia: Wm. F. Geddes, 1831), 30.

<sup>79</sup> Rutlinger, “Day Book,” 222.

<sup>80</sup> Describing his fugitive slave John Johnston, a Frederick County slaveholder noted that “[d]uring the last harvest he gave himself a large cut on his right leg with a cradling scythe, which still remains unhealed.” Maryland Herald, 11 August 1813. For other examples, see Frederick-Town Herald, 15 October 1814; Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 1 October 1822; and Hagerstown Mail, 14 August 1829.

<sup>81</sup> Englebrecht, Diary, 2:668.



fortunate. Free black George Harrison was tending a threshing machine near Clear Spring, Maryland, when he caught his sleeve in an exposed gear, which “drew his arm in between the cylinders [and] crushed and tore it in a shocking manner.”<sup>82</sup>

The cessation or slowing of agricultural labor during the autumn, winter, and early spring offered little respite from occupational dangers. The chores performed during these seasons—lumbering, hauling ice, working in distilleries or mills, and quarrying—maimed or killed numerous workers. While cutting wood outside Frederick, white laborer John Finch had “his leg crushed by the falling of a tree, which remained upon the mangled limb for nearly two hours,” leaving him, his wife, and their six children dependent upon charity.<sup>83</sup> Harvesting ice for the region’s cellars and icehouses required workers to tread upon surfaces that were unstable and less than solidly frozen. In January 1829, two black farmhands were plunged into a millpond when “a large cake of ice gave way.” Although one man escaped, his coworker “got under the ice and has not been heard of.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> The Sentinel [Clear Spring, Md.], 30 August 1850. Such injuries were not uncommon. In 1848, for example, white farmhand Harrison McGinnis made a “foolish attempt” to walk across the top of a threshing machine and “had his leg caught in the breakers, and the foot, ankle and leg horribly mutilated,” while free black Sam Sander caught his clothes in a threshing machine and “in an instant . . . was thrown down and whirled round as to break his arm and injure his person.” These accidents sometimes led to workers’ deaths. In 1850, Daniel Wagner of Middletown died of injuries sustained by a threshing machine. Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 13 September 1848; Frederick Herald, 20 July 1858; and Petition of Mary Wagner, May 1852, Frederick County Board of County Commissioners, Levy Papers, 1789-1889, box 2, MdHR.

<sup>83</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 25 December 1830. Less dramatic injuries could be as crippling—both physically and financially—to woodcutters. Samuel Trine became “so crippled by the cut of an axe upon the foot” that he was “totally incapacitated from obtaining a livelihood for himself and family.” Petition of Samuel Trine, n.d., Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>84</sup> Reservoir and Public Reflector [Frederick, Md.], 20 January 1829.

Those who ventured into distilleries, mills, and quarries faced additional dangers; bubbling stills, spinning gears, whirling belts, and explosions inflicted grievous injuries upon unsuspecting workers. Such was the fate of George King, who was crippled by “severe burns and scalds” sustained at a Carroll County distillery.<sup>85</sup> Workers who lowered their guard—even momentarily—exposed themselves to great peril. Edward Coyle was greasing a sawmill on Antietam Creek when the machine lurched, ensnaring his forearm in the gears, pulling him through the machinery, and crushing him to death.<sup>86</sup> It was limestone quarrying, however, that presented the greatest dangers. Those who blasted limestone from Maryland’s hillsides ran a gauntlet of flying debris, falling rocks, and unstable explosives that left many disabled. In November 1839, for example, Jacob and George Miller were employed at a limestone quarry near Uniontown, Maryland, when an accidental blast left them blinded and “very much injured.”<sup>87</sup>

Employers’ inability—or unwillingness—to settle their labor accounts could also place workmen and their families in a desperate situation. Farmhand and woodcutter Isaac Widows discovered this harsh reality during the winter of 1838. On January 10, Widows arrived at John Blackford’s plantation seeking work. Blackford hired him, but their relationship quickly soured. On January 15, Widows broke

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<sup>85</sup> Petition of George King, n.d. [1847], Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>86</sup> Inquest on the Body of Edward Coyle, 17 April 1861, Washington County Circuit Court, Coroners Inquests, MdHR.

<sup>87</sup> Petition of Jacob and George Miller, 6 August 1840, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR. The Millers’ plight was not unique. William Warner and his family became dependent upon public relief when he was blinded while quarrying rocks. Petition of William Warner, n.d. [1849], Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

Blackford's grindstone, which caused the planter to conclude that "he is a very trifling fellow." Two weeks later, Widows "begged" Blackford for two bushels of corn because "his family has no bread." Widows returned on February 17, pleading for "bread and meat." Blackford refused. Although Blackford paid Widows \$1 on February 20, the woodcutter was unsatisfied. "He wants everything," Blackford scratched in his journal. Not until the following month did Blackford finally settle Widows's account, paying him \$2.25 on March 5 and 25¢ on March 10.<sup>88</sup>

Farmers' tendency to delay payment or to pay in produce or store credits rather than cash created opportunities for both misunderstanding and outright fraud. In the summer of 1822, white farmhand Daniel Harling attempted to square his accounts with Andrew Renner by forging a note from Renner to merchant John Houck. Convicted of forgery, Harling petitioned for a pardon, claiming that he was "acting under the belief that, as Renner was indebted to him and Houck to Renner" he could draft the note "without incurring any legal or moral guilt."<sup>89</sup> Others took more direct measures to collect the wages they were owed. In 1836, William Johnson, a free black farmhand, was imprisoned for stealing from his employer, James Buchanan of Baltimore County. Although Johnson had worked on Buchanan's farm for a year, Buchanan had paid him only "small parcels of corn on two occasions" and was still "considerably" in Johnson's debt. Late in the fall, when Johnson was "destitute of clothing" and "much in need of his wages" to feed his large family, he stole a peck of corn. Describing Johnson's plight, a group of sympathetic whites argued that he had

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<sup>88</sup> John Blackford Journals, 10 January-10 March 1838, MdHS.

<sup>89</sup> Petition of Daniel Harling, 19 June 1822, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

been “driven to this expedient in consequence of his employer refusing or neglecting to pay his wages.”<sup>90</sup>

### **Working Families**

In 1848, shoemaker Alexander Redman led one of his children to a thicket outside their home in rural Washington County. There, Redman took a razor and slashed the child’s throat “so effectually as almost to have severed the head from the body.” After committing the murder, the dazed shoemaker wandered to a neighbor’s house and confessed to murdering the child “because he was afraid it would come to want.” He then returned to his own home and committed suicide, leaving behind his wife, four dependent children, and “some little property.” In the aftermath of these tragic events, Redman’s friends testified that he suffered from “temporary fits of madness” caused by “excessive dissipation” but insisted that he had been sober for several months. Echoing the shoemaker’s confession, they affirmed that he had, for some time, been languishing under a “depression of spirit, caused by fear of coming to poverty and want.”<sup>91</sup>

It is unwise to attach undue significance to the gruesome drama that unfolded at Redman’s home; his periodic bouts with alcoholism and “fits of madness” suggest a disturbed individual, not a social critique. We might, however, imagine others sharing the nightmares that haunted Redman, for workers’ families teetered between ruin and a bare subsistence. Plagued by difficulties, working families survived by

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<sup>90</sup> Petition of William Johnson, n.d. [1836], Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>91</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 21 June 1848.

forging strong bonds of mutual dependence. Young, childless couples were often able to weather economic storms, as were families with healthy children old enough to work. Broken families, or those saddled with infant or sick children, labored under a heavier load. Disease, injuries, and the burden of caring for aged relatives added to the strain. When working families collapsed or faltered, the results were often catastrophic.

Despite numerous studies of landowning families' strategies for surviving the economic upheavals of the nineteenth century, little is known about the impact of these dislocations on their poorer neighbors.<sup>92</sup> Most studies of unskilled laborers have depicted them as rootless, unattached men and have thus devoted little attention to workers' families.<sup>93</sup> A few studies of urban workers have offered a corrective to this portrait, but there are no corresponding studies of rural working families.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, the notions that agricultural wage laborers were scarce throughout much of the antebellum period and that they were, for the most part, young men waiting to climb the agricultural ladder to landownership have blinded scholars to the struggles of rural wage laborers and their families.

The argument that most antebellum farmworkers were the adolescent or adult children of landowning farmers is not groundless. Of the 2,892 workingmen

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<sup>92</sup> For discussions of how the expansion of commercial agriculture affected farm families, see Martin Bruegel, Farm, Shop, and Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1860 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Christopher Clark, The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Thomas Dublin, "Rural Putting-out Work in Early Nineteenth-Century New England: Women and the Transition to Capitalism in the Countryside," New England Quarterly 64 (1991): 531-73.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Peter Way, Common Labor: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1770-1810 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>94</sup> Rockman, "Working for Wages," 148-80; Billy G. Smith, The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Labor People, 1750-1800, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 177-96.

enumerated in the 1850 federal census of Washington County, 1,831 (63 percent) were not heads of households.<sup>95</sup> Only 510 of these were the children of landowning farmers, artisans, or professionals and might therefore expect to inherit property, receive an education or craft training, or assume control of their fathers' businesses. Many workingmen reached adulthood and established independent households without accumulating significant amounts of real property or becoming artisans, farmers, or professionals. In 1850, Washington County contained 1,061 landless workers who were heads of households. Most of these men were married. Of the 870 whites, only 16 were single, while all but 6 of the 191 African-American laborers who headed households were married. The vast majority of married laborers had children. Indeed, only 103 (12 percent) of the white families and 24 (13 percent) of the black families were childless. Workers' families tended to be young. Among those considered, 551 (63 percent) of the white families and 115 (60 percent) of the black families consisted of married couples and children under the age of fifteen. An additional 149 white families and 27 black families included both dependent and adult children, raising the overall percentage of laboring families with dependent children to about three-quarters.

The rural labor market encouraged interdependence within workers' families. Despite being the titular heads of their households, farmers and common laborers could not survive without the assistance of their wives and children, who performed

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<sup>95</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all statistics on workers' families are drawn from a database culled from the 1850 federal census of Washington County. Because the language used to describe rural workers was often imprecise, the database includes the 2,982 white and free black men identified as farmhands, laborers, day laborers, well-diggers, drovers and wagoners, fence makers, woodcutters, and shingle makers. To highlight the plight of rural women—whose occupations were not recorded by census enumerators—the database also includes information on the 626 free black and white women who headed households. 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Washington County, Md., NARA

unpaid household labor, engaged in domestic manufacturing or outwork, and made occasional forays into the ranks of wage laborers. Conversely, prevailing ideas about gender norms—which emphasized female dependency—dovetailed with women’s domestic responsibilities and limited employment opportunities to undermine their ability to maintain independent households or support families without a husband’s earnings.<sup>96</sup>

The bonds of interdependence within rural workers’ households were, in part, a product of the labor market. So strong was employers’ preference for married men as farm managers and overseers that single men sometimes found it difficult to secure such positions. It was perhaps for this reason that an unemployed overseer boasted that his wife previously “had charge of a Dairy of ten well fed cows, from which she generally made 50 lbs of excellent butter per week.”<sup>97</sup> Those less fortunate found their opportunities restricted. Among the reasons a Baltimore County farmer cited for refusing to hire Joseph Pickering as an overseer was his “not having a wife to look after the dairy, nor having been acquainted with the American methods of farming, nor the management of blacks (slaves).”<sup>98</sup> Employers’ preference for married men also extended downward to common farmhands. White laborer Basil Eves discovered how important women’s periodic field labor was to employers when he

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<sup>96</sup> Jeanne Boydston, Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Rockman, “Working for Wages”; and Smith, The “Lower Sort,” 177-96. On farm families, see John Mack Faragher, “History from the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America,” American Quarterly 33 (Winter 1981): 537-57; and Joan M. Jensen, Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>97</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 14 September 1821.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Pickering, Inquiries of an Emigrant: Being the Narrative of an English Farmer from the Years 1824 to 1830 (London: Effingham and Wilson, 1832), 29.

demanded that his wife, Sarah, be exempted from such tasks—both he and his wife were promptly discharged.<sup>99</sup> Unmarried farmhand Philip Lester also found it difficult to obtain employment from Cecil County farmer Sidney George Fisher. Initially, Fisher had been reluctant to hire Lester, but he relented upon discovering that he “expects soon to be made happy and . . . that his intended is a good housekeeper and competent to manage a dairy.” Unfortunately, Lester’s wife proved to be a disappointment, and Fisher’s relationship with the farmhand soured. Fisher complained that Lester’s wife suffered from a weak constitution, was “too delicate for life on a farm,” and that her frequent illnesses “affect my comfort somewhat, as things do not go on so well.” Not surprisingly, Fisher soon dismissed the couple.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to making their husbands more attractive to prospective employers, wives made important contributions to their families’ incomes. Although farm ledgers seldom contain separate entries for laborers’ and overseers’ wives, their presence often determined whether the family had access to housing, firewood, and pasturage. The importance of women’s unpaid farmwork is revealed in the accounts of “Thomas,” a black farmhand who worked in Baltimore County. Between August 3 and September 16, 1828, Thomas labored for daily wages of 50¢ and found himself. When his wife, “Betty,” began working as a laundress and dairymaid, the couple received housing, firewood, and access to the vegetable garden. The value of Betty’s

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<sup>99</sup> Testimony of Dennis Borne, 28 March 1854, enclosed in Maryland vs. Basil Evens, n.d. [1854], Frederick County Circuit Court Papers, box 154, MdHR.

<sup>100</sup> W. Emerson Wilson, ed., The Mount Harmon Diaries of Sidney George Fisher, 1837-1850 (Wilmington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1976), 157, 287.



labor was also reflected in her husband's wages; instead of receiving a daily wage, Thomas now received a monthly salary of \$15.<sup>101</sup>

Although men's wages were the mainstay of workers' households, women's unpaid domestic chores were crucial to their survival. Indeed, the loss of a mother might cripple a family with dependent children, for it shifted domestic burdens unto the husband, limited his mobility, and curtailed his earnings. Such was the fate of black laborer Lewis Jackson, who petitioned for outdoor relief soon after his wife's death. Explaining why he and his newborn daughter were "without visible means of support," Jackson stated that he had been forced to raise their child "without any assistance"<sup>102</sup> Farmer Nathaniel Bonsack faced a similar dilemma when his wife, Mary, committed adultery and became pregnant with an illegitimate child. Bonsack received a divorce from Maryland's General Assembly but soon "felt the necessity of marrying some person who would aid him to fulfill his official ties in raising his two children." Bonsack therefore remarried his ex-wife but stipulated that her illegitimate child must be raised in a separate household and would receive "no benefit whatever" from his estate.<sup>103</sup> Still, the most eloquent testimony to women's importance to poorer families is the fact that few laboring men attempted to raise children on their own; of the 1,061 households headed by free black and white laborers in the 1850 Washington County census, only 6 consisted of single men and dependent children.

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<sup>101</sup> "Liliendale Farm" Diary, 1827-1832, MdHS.

<sup>102</sup> Petition of Lewis Jackson, 7 April 1860, Frederick County Board of County Commissioners, Levy Papers, 1789-1889, MdHR.

<sup>103</sup> Agreement between Nathaniel Bonsack and Mary Rhinehart, 20 June 1843, Frederick County Court Land Records, vol. HS 20, pp. 88-89, MdHR.

The bonds of interdependence that bound together working couples radiated outward to encompass their families and households. Merchant Jacob Reichard's accounts with tenant farmer John McFerren illuminate the tangled skein of dependency that united rural households. Having fallen into Reichard's debt, McFerren mustered the labor of his entire family in an unsuccessful attempt to square their accounts. He contributed corn, firewood, and staves, while his wife and daughters added butter, eggs, and rags. The family dog even lent a hand, adding "two puppies" to their credits.<sup>104</sup> Jeremiah and Henry Harlan's accounts with their tenants in Harford County further underscore the importance of women's and children's labor to a household's survival. In 1823, Jeremiah Harlan leased a cottage and provision grounds to "Negro Anthony Smith" and his family. Harlan retained them as tenants for several years, despite their continued inability to settle indebtedness accrued for housing, bacon, cider, cornmeal, and beef. Smith's entire family contributed to the struggle to extricate themselves from debt; his daughter worked in wheat harvests, his wife earned \$2.34 by spinning and washing, and he sold a cow, valued at \$12, which had probably been cared for by his daughter or wife. The family's efforts proved futile. On April 26, 1826, Harlan issued a distress against them for the recovery of their outstanding debts and evicted them from his property.

Thomas West, Sr., the white tenant farmer who replaced Anthony Smith, was, like his predecessor, dependent upon his family's earnings. In 1827, West's family accrued debts totaling \$61.48 for rent, foodstuffs, and orders at nearby stores. Of the \$57.46 credited to the family's account, \$33.40 came from Thomas West, Jr., who

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<sup>104</sup> Jacob Reichard Ledger, 1833-1840, MdHS.

labored for fourteen days during the harvest and an additional 131 days during the remainder of the year.<sup>105</sup> This pattern of interdependence persisted among the Harlans' tenants throughout the antebellum period. Between 1855 and 1858, Jeremiah Harlan's son leased a house and small plot to "Negro Moses Warfield" and his family. As Figure 5.4 illustrates, Moses leaned heavily upon his sons Alfred, Charles, and Isaac to settle the family's accounts.<sup>106</sup>

The webs of dependency that enabled workers' families to survive were also a potential liability. Like teetering houses of cards, their households crumbled under the slightest strain. The contributions of both spouses were essential, an arrangement that placed additional strain upon marriages and exacerbated existing tensions within the family. The divorce proceedings of Otho and Margaret Snyder illuminate the friction caused by a spouse's unwillingness to contribute to the family's finances. In 1848, Otho, a wagoner, petitioned for a divorce from his wife, a laundress, claiming that her "vicious conduct" was responsible for their frequent quarrels. Neighbor Thomas Henry supported this contention, describing Margaret as "a very quarrelsome kind of woman" who had accused her husband of adultery with four different women and "provoked him so much as to make him strike her." Merchant John Lashbaugh, who sometimes employed Otho, was unaware of Margaret's suspicions but insisted that her overbearing attitude had wrecked the marriage. According to Lashbaugh, Margaret often interrupted Otho's discussions with his employers, an irksome habit that once led Otho to "threaten to take the wagon whip to her."

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<sup>105</sup> Jeremiah Harlan Account Book, MdHS.

<sup>106</sup> Henry S. Harlan Account Book, MdHS.

Other witnesses described the marriage differently. Free black James Gruber conceded that Margaret's accusations sometimes sparked violent arguments but insisted that she was "good tempered and works hard." Gruber's sympathetic testimony was echoed—and amplified—by the female witnesses, who portrayed Margaret Snyder as a diligent, dutiful woman saddled with a worthless husband. Sarah Kelley conceded that her neighbor was "very passionate" but swore that she was an "industrious woman who works at her washing every day, while her husband does not." Mary Brown was more adamant: "She is hard working and a good enough wife, except when she gets mad—and there is cause for her to get mad. Sometimes Otho gets things for the house and sometimes he does not, sometimes he provides for them and when he does not she does."<sup>107</sup>

The testimony in Otho and Margaret Snyder's divorce proceedings illuminates a critical fault line in working families; spouses had little tolerance for partners who did not fulfill their obligations. Margaret Snyder was a hellcat; even sympathetic witnesses noted that she threw stones at her husband and forced him to spend many nights sleeping in the stables. Still, the testimony suggests that her suspicion and violent temper were born of frustration. There was universal agreement among the witnesses that she was an industrious, frugal woman who shouldered her share of the family's financial burdens. Her husband was less dependable. Indeed, John Lashbaugh's testimony demonstrates that Margaret had little confidence in her husband's business acumen, while Sarah Kelley's and Mary Brown's statements reveal that Otho's shortcomings forced his wife to become the family's primary

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<sup>107</sup> Papers in the Case of Otho Snyder vs. Margaret Snyder, case no. 999, filed 26 January 1848, Washington County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, MdHR.

provider. Regardless of Margaret's temper and Otho's dalliances, it seems that a breakdown of gendered financial roles was, to a large extent, responsible for the foundering of their marriage.<sup>108</sup>

Because the survival of a poor household hinged upon each member's contribution, the disability of a husband, wife, or working child might plunge the family into ruin. After having "the bones of his arm dreadfully shattered" in an accident, Baltimore County farmhand Solomon Osburn saw "the savings of some years of industry" evaporate. His family became dependent upon handouts and the earnings of his wife, whose health deteriorated from exposure and overwork. Within two years, the combined pressure of his "melancholy affliction," mounting medical bills, and the unpredictability of private charity forced Osburn to petition Baltimore County's overseers of the poor for outdoor relief.<sup>109</sup> Women's wages might have softened the impact of a husband's incapacitation, but their domestic responsibilities kept them tethered to their households, further limiting their employment opportunities and earning potential. When black farmhand Hilleary Hillman became "seriously afflicted with a cancer" that left him bedridden, his wife attempted to support the family's several children. Despite making a determined effort, Hillman's wife discovered that her wages were "greatly inadequate for their support."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The case was not unique. Explaining why Agnes and Thomas Finnegan's marriage had unraveled, a witness at the couple's divorce proceedings testified that Thomas was a drunkard and an indifferent provider. "Instead of his keeping her," he swore, "she had to keep him." Papers in the Case of Agnes Finnegan vs. Thomas Finnegan, case no. 1364, filed 20 March 1856, Washington County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, MdHR.

<sup>109</sup> Unsigned Letter to William Fell Johnson, 11 June 1840, Johnson Papers [unprocessed collection], MdHS.

<sup>110</sup> Petition of Hilleary Hillman, n.d. [1844], Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

An excessive number of dependent children might also upset the delicate equilibrium of a working family. James Spencer cited rheumatism and a “painful excrescence on one of his hands” as the causes of his family’s financial woes, but even a healthy worker would have been hard-pressed to support his wife and seven children, the youngest of whom was a newborn and “the three eldest able to do little than earn their victuals and clothes.”<sup>111</sup> A disabled or sick child might also wreak havoc upon a poor household. Laborer Peter Snavelly augmented his earnings by hawking and peddling because he could not support his blind daughter, “the support of whom would in any situation be a burden, but to a poor man is particularly so.”<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Mary Kelly began selling liquor to ease the “great mental and pecuniary embarrassment” caused by her daughter’s “severe illness.”<sup>113</sup>

Inadequate housing, poor nutrition, and exposure made impoverished families more susceptible to disease, which added to their financial hardships. When illness struck, many working families compensated by resorting to the small crimes and petty marketing that allowed the poor to survive economic downturns. After the Washington County court fined laborer George Rudy \$37.80 for selling liquor, he protested that he was “extremely indigent [with] a wife to support by his individual exertions” and that he could not find regular employment because he and his family

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<sup>111</sup> Petition of James Spencer, n.d., Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>112</sup> Petition of Peter Snavelly, 1827, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>113</sup> Petition of Mary Kelly, 1841, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

“had for a considerable time been afflicted with a lung disease.”<sup>114</sup> John Wachter hoped to sustain his wife and four children, “who are dependent on him for their bread,” by erecting an unlicensed liquor booth at a Frederick County horserace. Wachter later explained that he had committed the crime because he was “sickly and infirm in his health and at the time unable to labor.”<sup>115</sup> The burden of supporting ailing relatives drove some able-bodied workers to commit petty crimes. Laborer James Wilson of Harford County explained that he stole firewood worth \$2 because he mother was “lying ill with an abscess of the liver and cannot recover and my sister is also ill with an inflammation of the lungs.”<sup>116</sup>

With luck, a family might be spared disease or injury, but there was no escaping the ravages of time. As their strength ebbed, aging workers found themselves adrift in a labor market that valued power and stamina. The debilitating effects of diminished earning potential and deteriorating health were depicted in a pension application filed on behalf of free black Thomas Reed and his wife Ellen. The anonymous petitioners described Thomas as “very old” and “able to earn enough to maintain himself, but not himself and his wife.” Ellen was unable to contribute to the family’s coffers, being “very infirm, destitute, and helpless.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Petition of George Rudy, 14 June 1820, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHS.

<sup>115</sup> Petition of John Wachter, 13 December 1822, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHS.

<sup>116</sup> Petition of James Wilson, n.d. [1837], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>117</sup> Petition of Thomas and Ellen Reed, 2 June 1852, Frederick County Board of Commissioners, Levy Papers, 1789-1889, MdHR.

Elderly workers sometimes managed to find employment, but their earnings were meager. White laborer John H. Miller found that his wages on a dairy farm were insufficient to support himself and his “aged and decrepit wife.” Miller compensated by stealing a small pot of cream and “other trifling articles,” which resulted in his being sentenced to the penitentiary and his wife’s becoming “utterly destitute.”<sup>118</sup> When steady employment proved unobtainable, some turned to domestic manufacturing and petty marketing. John Blackford sold broomcorn to an unnamed “Old Negro” who peddled brooms in the neighborhood.<sup>119</sup> Thomas Nixon, whom his attorney described as a “poor man, old and infirm,” supported himself by working as an unlicensed hawker and peddler because he was “unable to procure a living through his labour” and wanted to “avoid the almshouse.”<sup>120</sup>

Many superannuated workers lost the struggle to keep poverty at bay; relief rolls and almshouse registers are littered with those who succumbed to the pressures of the rural economy. Of the 226 petitions for outdoor relief received by the Carroll County levy court between 1837 and 1851, 103 (46 percent) cited advanced age or a combination of age and illness as the cause of their poverty.<sup>121</sup> Almshouses were also crowded with the elderly. In 1850, for example, the average age of inmates in the Washington County almshouse was 57.8 (male) and 42.3 (female). Those confined to

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<sup>118</sup> Jacob M. Kunkel et al. to Governor Philip F. Thomas, 15 May 1848, enclosed in Petition of John H. Miller, n.d. [1848], Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>119</sup> John Blackford Journals, 10 March 1838 and 10 June 1839, MdHS.

<sup>120</sup> John Foxwood to Governor Samuel Stevens, 19 August 1824, enclosed in Petition of Thomas Nixon, n.d. [1824], Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>121</sup> Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR. A similar pattern developed in neighboring Frederick County. In 1850, the average age of black pensioners was 70.3 for men and 74.1 for women. Whites who received outdoor relief tended to be younger, but their average ages remained high (60.7 years for men and 61 for women). 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Frederick County, Md., NARA.



Frederick County's poorhouse were somewhat younger, but their overall cast remained elderly.<sup>122</sup>

The inability of aging workers to support themselves may explain why few households headed by laborers contained elderly relatives. While landowners wielded the promise of land or productive property to guarantee their children's support of themselves or their widows, the poor had little leverage on their children. Of the 1,061 households examined in the 1850 Washington County census, only 46 (4 percent) included persons whose age and surname suggest that they were related to the head of the household. An additional 101 households contained aged people whose surnames differed from those of the family, suggesting that they may have been in-laws or boarders.

Some evidence suggests that working families sought to disencumber themselves of aged relatives—or to at least convince county governments to share the expense. In 1846, free black Matilda Brown complained that she was “getting weary” of her “very aged and blind” mother, Sarah Slater, and petitioned Carroll County's levy court to grant a small pension.<sup>123</sup> Brown's petition was not unique; many poorer families saddled with aged relatives sought relief. “We have at considerable expense, more than we are able to bear, been keeping old Grandmother Bowers for the last nine months,” explained one petitioner, reminding the court that “you are aware of the expense it is upon a poor man that depends upon his labor for a

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<sup>122</sup> Information on county almshouses was collected from the 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Frederick and Washington Counties, Md., NARA.

<sup>123</sup> Petition of Matilda Brown, 23 December 1846, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-51, MdHR.

living.”<sup>124</sup> Likewise, a group of several siblings maintained that their mother had become “a heavy burden to her children who are scarce able to support her.”<sup>125</sup>

The neighbors of aged paupers balked at the demands on their benevolence. Although free black Polly Barnes was “destitute of food and nearly bare of clothing,” her neighbors—themselves residents of a “poor settlement”—had grown “tired of giving” and demanded that the county commissioners provide for her relief, lest she “dies of hunger or cold.”<sup>126</sup> Thomas Well lodged a similar appeal. In October 1838, he sheltered Henry Thompson, “an old and infirm negro unable to procure subsistence for himself.” Despite his “feelings of humanity,” Well soon tired of the “great trouble and expense” of supporting Thompson and protested that he was “unwilling longer to bear the burden of his support.”<sup>127</sup>

When a working family faltered or collapsed, the repercussions rippled outward with devastating consequences for the household’s extended kin. Abandoned or widowed women and their children often sought refuge with their elderly parents, who lacked the resources to support dependents. After leaving her husband, who had “frequently beat her inhumanly” and subjected her “to the extreme want for the ordinary necessities of life,” Rebecca Haggerty was forced to live with her father, “an aged and extremely poor man.” Haggerty remained with her father

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<sup>124</sup> Petition of James Edwards, 19 April 1848, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>125</sup> Petition of Ann Susan Wagner, 1 March 1847, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-51, MdHR.

<sup>126</sup> Petition of Polly Barnes, n.d. [1848], Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>127</sup> Petition of Thomas Well, 20 May 1839, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

until she heard rumors that her husband had died in Pennsylvania, rumors she believed because of his “vagrant and drunken” lifestyle. Hoping to relieve her father of “the burthen of supporting herself and child” and to secure “sustenance for herself,” Haggerty chose one of the few options available to single women—she remarried.<sup>128</sup> The expense of supporting a relative’s illegitimate or orphaned children might also strain a family’s resources to the breaking point. Such was the fate that befell Barney Ohlwine when his deceased son’s fiancée, Sarah Turner, left the couple’s illegitimate child at his doorstep. Ohlwine, who described himself as “almost blind and past labor,” was dependent upon his daughter’s earnings and could not afford the expense “of supporting other people’s children.” Rather than leave the child “friendless and unprotected,” he begged the Washington County court to apprentice it to another family.<sup>129</sup>

Tossed about in the tumultuous rural economy, common laborers clung together in fragile households. The workingmen who headed these households belie our traditional image of agricultural laborers. They were not single or unattached. They were not poised to become landowners. And they often leaned heavily upon the labor—both paid and unpaid—of their families. Workers’ families could provide refuge in an otherwise unforgiving environment, but they were continually besieged by difficulties. Too many children, the burden of supporting a superannuated

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<sup>128</sup> Unfortunately for Rebecca Haggerty, her first husband, Levi, resurfaced soon after her second marriage and accused her of bigamy. Petition of Rebecca Blaney, 3 August 1822, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>129</sup> Petition of Barney Ohlwine, 22 May 1822, Washington County Register of Wills, Petitions and Orders, MdHR.

relative, or the sudden loss of a breadwinner through death, disease, or injury might shatter a household and send its surviving members scurrying for shelter with their relatives or in the almshouse.

### **Single Women in the Rural Economy**

In 1799, the Frederick County court held an inquest on the body of an unknown infant whose mangled body had been unearthed by hogs, “the hogs destroying part of an arm and the back part of its head lying open [with] the brains out.” Both the child and its parents remained unidentified, and despite strong suspicions of infanticide, the court drew no conclusion concerning the cause of death.<sup>130</sup> Although rare, such cases occurred throughout the early national and antebellum periods. The courts seldom did more than rule that the child had died “by foul means at the hands of some unknown person or persons.”<sup>131</sup> Even when the child’s mother was arrested and convicted, the courts and newspapers showed little interest in uncovering the motives behind the murder, contenting themselves with the assumption that she hoped “to avoid the shame and disgrace, necessarily attendant upon the birth of an illegitimate offspring.”<sup>132</sup> The identities of the murdered children and the details surrounding their deaths may have been erased by the passage of time, but their anonymity and the ease with which their mothers escaped detection

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<sup>130</sup> Inquisition on Child Unknown, 20 May 1799, Frederick County Court Papers, box 152, MdHR.

<sup>131</sup> Inquisition on Female Child, 19-20 September 1854, Washington County Circuit Court, Coroners Inquests, MdHR. For similar examples, see Inquisition on Child Unknown, 27 December 1860, and Inquisition on Male Child Unknown, 30 November 1861, Washington County Circuit Court, Coroners Inquests, MdHR.

<sup>132</sup> Torch Light [Hagerstown, Md.], n.d., quoted in Baltimore Patriot, 8 February 1822.

illuminate an important feature of life in rural Maryland.<sup>133</sup> The discovery of an infant's body might incense public morality and set the legal system in motion, but the plight of the child's mother during her pregnancy and the dim—even desperate—prospects awaiting her after childbirth aroused neither interest nor sympathy.

In a society structured around households and whose labor market was dominated by single men or male-headed families, few opportunities were available to single women, and fewer still to unwed mothers. The wages of women employed on the region's farms were, on average, between one-quarter and one-third of men's, making it difficult for women to support themselves and their children in the absence of a man.<sup>134</sup> There was a market for women's labor, but farmers were not indiscriminant hirers. Those seeking dairy maids and domestic servants often bemoaned the scarcity—and poor quality—of women available for such positions. In 1837, Chester Coleman complained that he had been unable to secure “good and efficient female help” and that “the help we generally get is not worth the having, either that of black or white, and this for half the time is not to be had at all.” A decade later, little had changed. “It is one of the most difficult of all difficulties to

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<sup>133</sup> Studies of free women in the early national and the antebellum United States devote little attention to infanticide, and there is no systematic study of the subject. The topic is discussed briefly in Joan M. Jensen, Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850 (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), 69-71; and Christine Stansell, City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 82.

<sup>134</sup> A survey conducted by an agricultural journal in 1850 revealed that farmers in Frederick and Washington counties paid men between \$8 and \$10 per month, while women received between \$2 and \$4. A similar discrepancy characterized annual wages, which varied from \$80 to \$100 for men and from \$30 to \$40 for women. “Table of the Products of Maryland,” The Plough, The Loom, and the Anvil 3 (January 1851): 432-33. The account book of Frederick County farmer Charles H. Lighter confirms these findings. In 1854, his male farmhand received \$120 and board for nine months' labor, while the woman he employed as a dairy maid and house servant received a mere \$42 for the entire year.

obtain domestic female help,” he lamented, adding that it ranked among his “most pressing necessities.”<sup>135</sup>

Employers may have needed female laborers, but they wanted single, childless women. Of the ten women employed by Washington County farmer Joseph M. Wolf between 1848 and 1859, only four can be identified in the 1850 or 1860 census, suggesting that they may have married and changed their surnames soon after leaving his employ. Among those located in the census records were two single women, Lucinda Thomas (age twenty-four) and Eve Dephenbaugh (age sixteen), both of whom lived with their mothers and dependent siblings. Another of these women, Susan Bowers, was a single mother who lived near Wolf’s farm. The only married woman employed in Wolf’s household was free black Susan Diggs, who lived with her husband and four children. Unlike the other women, who were employed as dairy maids or domestic servants and who lived with Wolf, Diggs worked as a laundress, which did not require her to reside in Wolf’s house.<sup>136</sup>

The harvest season offered women greater opportunities to enter the agricultural workforce. Farm ledgers reveal that women constituted a significant—and underpaid—minority of the harvest workforce. Of the 164 harvesters employed by Washington County farmer George F. Heyser between 1825 and 1841, 18 (11

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<sup>135</sup> Chester Coleman to Mr. and Mrs. Seth Coleman, Jr., 25 December 1837, and Chester Coleman to Augustus Graham, 9 November 1847, Samuel Cock Papers, MdHS.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph M. Wolf Ledgers, 1848-1859, WCHS. The lone woman employed by farmer and merchant Stephen P. Grove was young and childless. Mary Benner, the daughter of a local laborer, was nine years old when she commenced sewing, cooking, harvesting, and tending livestock on Grove’s farm outside Sharpsburg. Stephen P. Grove Ledger, 1855-1899, Western Maryland Room, Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown, Md.

percent) were women.<sup>137</sup> In Baltimore County, the Virdin family employed a slightly higher percentage of female farmhands in their harvest fields; of the forty-nine workers involved in gathering the 1839 harvest, nine (18 percent) were women.<sup>138</sup> On both farms, women were confined to lighter chores (raking, binding, cooking), which guaranteed that their wages would lag behind those of male harvesters. This disparity is apparent in the wages earned by carpenter Peter Fogle and his wife, Sarah, during the 1852 harvest. Although both toiled for nine days, Peter earned \$9.50 for cradling compared to the meager 50¢ Sarah received for “cuking.”<sup>139</sup> Although paltry, these wages were important to women, who sometimes joined the roaming bands of harvesters. In 1842, Sevilla Moonshour left her home in Frederick County and traveled to Carroll County, where she found employment with a farmer near Taneytown. She continued with that farmer from June 30 through July 3, when another farmer, Henry Hess, hired her to rake. Moonshour remained with Hess through July 9. The following day, she “was engaged in carrying water for some hands cutting grain” on yet another farm. By July 12, Moonshour had again changed employers.<sup>140</sup>

The freedom to seek employment in a farmer’s household or to become a migrant harvester was predicated upon being unencumbered by domestic obligations. A married woman could not enter the workforce without her husband’s approval,

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<sup>137</sup> George F. Heyser Harvest Rolls, 1825-1841, MdHS.

<sup>138</sup> Harvest Book, 1839, Virdin Family Papers, MdHS.

<sup>139</sup> Papers in the case of Peter Fogle vs. Fred Birely, n.d. [1852], Frederick County Court Papers, box 166, MdHR.

<sup>140</sup> Affidavit of Samuel Fair, 24 February 1844, enclosed in State of Maryland vs. John Patterson, Frederick County Court Papers, box 89, MdHR.

which was sometimes withheld. This requirement could have a disastrous impact on women trapped in abusive marriages. Amanda Double's husband, Martin, was an abusive and drunken lout who threatened to "beat her brains out," laced her food with arsenic, committed adultery, denied her the "necessaries of life," and forced her "to go out in all kinds of weather to sweep and do outwork." Short of divorce, there was little she could do to improve her situation, for her "very jealous" husband "refused to let her do any work for any person for the purpose of providing for herself."<sup>141</sup>

Women abandoned by their husbands occupied a nebulous—and vulnerable—legal status. Under Maryland law, an abandoned woman could not petition for a divorce unless "such abandonment has continued uninterruptedly for at least three years, and is deliberate and final."<sup>142</sup> Until the divorce was finalized, women had no legal right to their property or wages, nor could they enter into contracts. Worse, they remained subject to their husbands, who might return and plunge their world into chaos. Soon after her 1833 marriage to Henry Eaton, Mary discovered in him a "wayward disposition and a strong propensity towards dissipation." Often he abandoned his family for extended periods and spent his time "in the society of the dissolute." In 1836, Henry enlisted in the army, leaving his family destitute. Undaunted, Mary began sewing women's clothing and seems to have prospered. Not only was she "nothing of an encumbrance to the county," but she had "for years supported herself by her individual exertions," employed apprentices in her business,

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<sup>141</sup> Amanda Ann Double vs. Martin Van Double, case no. 1357, filed 16 February 1856, Washington County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, MdHR.

<sup>142</sup> Otho Scott and Hiram McCullough, comp., The Maryland Code: Public General Laws, 3 vols. (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 1:76.



and “realized a little money [that] she has been anxious for some time to invest in a home for herself and children.” Despite her achievements, Mary’s position remained vulnerable. After an absence of several years, Henry Eaton returned and threw Mary’s household into disarray. She was forced to discharge her apprentices because her husband “indulges in language in their presence of the grossest character and repugnant to female modesty.” He had, moreover, begun beating her. One “sally of rage” left her bedridden for days and “unable to attend to her daily vocations.” In 1846, Mary petitioned for a divorce, but a terse note scrawled on her petition indicates that the case was dismissed <sup>143</sup>

Given the legal and social impediments strewn in their paths, it is not surprising that single mothers clung to the lowest rung of the rural economy. Shorn of male support, abandoned or unwed mothers walked a treacherous path through pregnancy and childbirth. For some, finding shelter or securing medical attention proved impossible. In 1859, a German immigrant gave birth in a stable after being abandoned by her “worthless husband,” who was later discovered “drunk and oblivious to her condition.”<sup>144</sup> While the unnamed German woman’s plight was desperate enough, other single mothers and their children were even less fortunate. Julian Bost, whom the coroner described as “a single woman,” died alongside her child “through want of the necessary assistance in the delivery—no person being present at the time.”<sup>145</sup> Complications and illnesses arising from their pregnancies

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<sup>143</sup> Petition of Mary Eaton, case no. 2044, filed 21 January 1846, Frederick County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, MdHR.

<sup>144</sup> Frederick Herald, 21 June 1859.

<sup>145</sup> Inquest on the Body of Julian Bost, 12 January [n.d.], Frederick County Circuit Court Papers, box 32, MdHR.

prevented some single mothers from rejoining the workforce. After being abandoned by her husband, free black Julia Patrick attempted to support herself and her newborn child, but “being weak and feeble and unable to do any kind of work through sickness” she soon found herself “entirely destitute of support.”<sup>146</sup>

Women might brighten their employment prospects and ease the strain on their family’s resources by apprenticing their adolescent children through the county orphans court, but this option was not available to those with young children. In her petition for outdoor relief, widow Eliza Koon pleaded that she had “two small children entirely two [sic] young to bind out and depending upon her for the necessarys of life,” which left her family “entirely dependent upon the charitableness of the people of the neighborhood.”<sup>147</sup> In 1844, Catherine Taylor, a widow with three children, found herself in similar straits, claiming that she “made some effort to put her children out, but in consequence of their being too small no person wanted them and they have to remain on her hands.”<sup>148</sup>

Given their desperate plight, it is not surprising that many single women became objects of charity. Free black Betsey Reister became dependent upon a neighboring family after giving birth, but being “incapable of compensating them in any way” she soon became a burden upon her caretakers, who grumbled that they “are not in a condition to keep her free of charge” and warned that “had it not been

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<sup>146</sup> Petition of Julia Patrick, 27 April 1848, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>147</sup> Petition of Eliza Koon, 25 March 1841, Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>148</sup> Petition of Catherine Taylor, n.d. [1844], Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

for them she must be exposed to increased suffering.”<sup>149</sup> When private charity failed, single mothers turned to public relief, becoming a disproportionate share of the young women on relief rolls. Of the nine female paupers of childbearing age in the Frederick County almshouse in 1850, seven were mothers with infant children. A similar pattern prevailed in the Washington County almshouse, where all five of the female paupers of childbearing age had infant children. Single mothers also constituted a significant share of the women receiving outdoor relief. Of the twenty-two women of childbearing age listed as paupers in the 1850 census of Frederick County, sixteen (73 percent) were single mothers.<sup>150</sup>

In an effort to indemnify taxpayers against the expense of supporting illegitimate children, the Maryland General Assembly required white women who bore illegitimate children to post bonds guaranteeing that their offspring would not become public charges. Those unable or unwilling to post the necessary security could be imprisoned indefinitely. Women might avoid these penalties by naming the father, who would then become responsible for the \$80 bond. If the father of an illegitimate child failed to offer securities or refused to support his offspring, the courts could sentence him to prison or require him to pay the child’s guardian “such a sum of money as may appear adequate for the support of such child” until it reached age seven.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Petition on behalf of Betsey Reister, n.d., Carroll County Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>150</sup> Childbearing age is here defined as fifteen to fifty years old. Women who were described as idiotic, insane, blind, deaf, or dumb were excluded from this sample. 1850 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Frederick and Washington Counties, Md., NARA.

<sup>151</sup> Otho Scott and Hiram McCullough, comp., The Maryland Code: Public General Laws, 3 vols. (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 1:62-64.

The bastardy statutes were not dead letters. In 1842, Samuel Springer received a rough legal education when he fathered a child with Sarah Ann Toll, whom he described as a “common prostitute” and an “inmate of a bawdy house.” Despite working as a prostitute, Toll demanded that Springer assume responsibility for the unborn child. When he refused, she had Springer imprisoned for seduction and breach of marriage promise. While the nature of the couple’s relationship—and the truth behind Toll’s allegations—are lost to history, her strategy had the desired effect. Unable to discharge his prison expenses or raise the \$80 security for the child’s support, Springer relented and married Toll, noting that it was “the only mode known to him of regaining his liberty.” Given the marriage’s inauspicious beginnings, it is not surprising that it quickly unraveled. Within a year, Sarah abandoned her husband and moved into a Hagerstown brothel with her infant child. Soon afterward, the Washington County Court granted Springer’s request for a divorce and custody of the child.<sup>152</sup>

The attitudes of single mothers towards their dependency and social marginality remain enveloped in historical silence; only fragmentary evidence suggests how single mothers viewed their predicament. One of those scraps is a petition filed on behalf of a woman—identified only as Elizabeth—who had been accused of abandoning an illegitimate child on a butcher’s doorstep. Speaking through her attorney, Elizabeth insisted that she was a “good, true, faithful, pious, chaste, and honest citizen” and vehemently denied rumors that she “was a whore and had many bastard children and would have them again if they . . . were to be

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<sup>152</sup> Samuel Springer vs. Sarah Ann Spring, case no. 810, filed 2 March 1844, Frederick County Court Equity Papers, MdHR.

supported by the county.”<sup>153</sup> Elizabeth’s petition offers a tantalizing glimpse into women’s attitudes towards illegitimacy and dependency. While conclusions drawn from this single shred of evidence must not be overstated, Elizabeth’s declaration illuminates the stigmatized position of unwed mothers. It is therefore not surprising that many citizens harbored deep misgivings about providing outdoor relief to mothers of illegitimate children. These fears surfaced in 1852, when Mary Johnson petitioned the Frederick County commissioners to make her the custodian of the small pension paid to her disabled son, Jacob. Johnson’s assertiveness angered her neighbors, who viewed her with a mixture of contempt and suspicion because she had been abandoned by her husband and had subsequently born two children out of wedlock. Johnson’s neighbors worried that she “would be likely to bestow too much of it [the pension] upon a couple of illegitimate children she had since her husband left her.”<sup>154</sup>

The path leading single mothers to the almshouse was well-trodden, but many found the means to survive and preserve their families. Households headed by single women with dependent children may have constituted only a small fraction of the households enumerated in the 1850 Washington County census, but they represented a considerable minority of the female-headed households. Of the 549 households headed by white women, 59 (11 percent) comprised single women and dependent children, while another 48 (9 percent) consisted of single women, young children, and adults with different surnames. Given the pressures that slavery placed upon black

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<sup>153</sup> Petition of “Elizabeth,” 1 February 1793, Frederick County Court Papers, box 3, MdHR.

<sup>154</sup> Petition on behalf of Jacob Johnson, 4 June 1852, Frederick County Board of Commissioners, Levy Papers, 1789-1889, MdHR.

families, it is not surprising that a higher percentage of households headed by free black women consisted of mothers and their dependent children. Of the seventy-six households headed by black women, twenty-four (32 percent) consisted of women and dependent children. Another eleven (15 percent) included single women, dependent children, and adults with different surnames. Despite these racial disparities, certain similarities between black and white female-headed households reveal much about single mothers' economic strategies. That many women with dependent children (42 percent) expanded their households to include adults with different surnames—often other single mothers—suggests that they either leased rooms to boarders or pooled their meager resources with women in similar situations.

Single women with adolescent or adult children fared better, as employers and landlords were willing to engage them in order to gain access to their children's labor. An employer, landlord, or merchant might extend credit to an unwed or widowed mother if he believed her children's services might offset the expense. Occasionally, farmers' contracts with single mothers made specific demands of their children. In 1815, Thomas C. Stump leased a cottage, garden, and meadow to Polly Ford and her children John and Sally, "for which [her] son is to work 5 days a month—rent and board himself—the rest of the work he does is to be at 5 dollars pr. month."<sup>155</sup> As their children neared adulthood, single mothers became increasingly dependent upon their earnings. We see this case of Elizabeth Ware, a woman in her sixties who rented a house from Franklin Osburn, a farmer and merchant in Jefferson County, Virginia. In 1860, Ware headed a household that included herself, her son Richard, who was twenty-one years old, a daughter or daughter-in-law, Susan, age twenty-

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas C. Stump Account Book, Jeremiah Harlan Papers, MdHS.

four, and three children who were eight, two, and two months old, respectively.<sup>156</sup> Between 1855 and 1861, Ware's family accumulated debts totaling \$187.97 for rent, food, firewood, and credit at their landlord's store. Elizabeth managed to settle a small part of her family's debt by working as a farmhand, but her age and sex prevented her from working routinely. In 1856, for example, she worked in the wheat harvest for four days. The following year, she spent thirteen days harvesting and another four days hoeing and cutting corn. Her wages for this work were but \$8.74, a mere fraction of her family's total debt. Elizabeth and Susan further contributed to the family's income by sewing clothing for Osburn's household and for sale in his store. Still, their income from seamstress work was meager, amounting to only \$22 over the course of six years. It was Richard who earned the bulk of the family's income by working as a field hand. During his family's tenure at Osburn's farm, Richard earned \$80.98, the vast majority of which—some \$61.12—was earned harvesting wheat.<sup>157</sup> Although the Wares never settled their accounts Richard's work during critical periods of the growing season seems to have been crucial to their remaining on Osburn's property.

Given the importance of children's wages to their families' economic survival, single mothers strove to secure the greatest possible returns for the labor of their offspring. In 1840, the promise of higher wages impelled free black Fanny Baptist to remove her son, Tom, from Robert Archer's farm, where he had been working for food, clothing, and an annual wage of \$40. "I kept this boy all winter

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<sup>156</sup> 1860 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Jefferson County, Va., NARA.

<sup>157</sup> Franklin Osburn Account Book, Thorton Tayloe Perry Collection, VaHS.

and clothed him for twelve months,” the angry farmer scrawled in his account book, “now he went off with his mother who said she could hire him for \$6 pr. month.”<sup>158</sup>

Small amounts of property—whether personal or real—allowed some single women to keep their footing in the rural economy. We catch a glimpse of one such woman in the account books of Joseph M. Wolf, a Washington County farmer. Between 1848 and 1854, Wolf recorded numerous transactions with Sarah Bowers and her son, George.<sup>159</sup> During those years, Sarah accumulated debts totaling \$77.80 for flour, a few hogs, pasturing her cow and other livestock, and renting Wolf’s plough. She managed to settle a significant portion of her debt (\$23.01) through sewing and light agricultural labor such as gardening, pulling blades from corn stalks, and assisting with the threshing machine. George made a similar contribution, adding \$22.42 to his family’s account by planting corn, cutting firewood, and harvesting. Wolf’s ledgers do not encompass all of her family’s economic activities, for Sarah settled the remainder of her debts—and moved \$8.91 into the black—with cash payments.<sup>160</sup> Although it is unclear how she earned the money, one suspects that her real property, worth \$250, combined with her access to Wolf’s pastures, allowed her to raise garden crops, sell hogs or poultry, and market dairy products. Moreover, she had reduced her expenses by sharing her household with Mary Bowersmith, herself a single woman with three dependent children and a small amount of personal property

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<sup>158</sup> Robert Archer Ledger, J. Alexis Shriver Collection, MdHR.

<sup>159</sup> Neither Sarah nor George Bowers could be located in the 1850 federal census. In the 1860 census, however, they appeared two households away from Joseph M. Wolf’s farm. At the time, Sarah was 65 and George was 22, placing their respective ages between 53-59 and 10-16 during their dealings with Wolf. 1860 United States Census, Schedule 1 (Population), Washington County, Md., NARA.

<sup>160</sup> Joseph M. Wolf Account Book, 1848-1859, WCHS.



appraised at \$300. Such an arrangement would have allowed them to pool their resources, reduce their expenses, and avoid the almshouse. Still, theirs would have been a precarious existence, for even a slight reversal of fortune could wreck their finances. In 1832, Eliza Miller, a widow with six small children, was pushed to the brink of ruin when a B & O train struck and killed her cow. “I am in great need of another cow,” Miller pleaded in a letter to the railroad’s president. The cow, she explained, had been the family’s only productive property and their principal source of both income and food.<sup>161</sup>

Because the rural economy afforded single women few opportunities, many sought their livelihoods on its shadowy fringes; they turned to petty production or operating unlicensed boardinghouses, grogshops, and restaurants. The marginality—or downright illegality—of these operations is suggested by the small number of female proprietors who bothered to purchase licenses from the county courts. In 1850, for example, Frederick County granted sixty-six tavern licenses to men, but only nine to women. The gender imbalance was even more skewed among merchants. Only 15 women received merchant licenses, compared to 266 men. Moreover, the average value of women’s stock (\$259) lagged far behind that of men (\$930).<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Eliza Mercer to Philip E. Thomas, 20 June 1832, Papers of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company, 1827-1866, MdHS.

<sup>162</sup> Frederick County Circuit Court, License Records, 1845-1863, MdHR. A partial list of licenses granted by the Washington County court during the 1820s suggests that these patterns may have persisted throughout the antebellum period. In March 1823, for example, the court granted ordinary licenses to seventy-nine men and seven women. Two years later, the court issued forty-eight licenses to sell spirituous liquors, all to men. In May 1829, the court granted eighty-eight licenses to retailers of dry goods, all but two of which went to men. Washington County Circuit Court, License Records, 1822-1829, MdHR.

The centrality of petty marketing to single women’s economic strategies surfaced when the Maryland General Assembly imposed license fees upon a range of small-scale economic activities. Beginning in 1820, the assembly enacted a series of license laws to regulate the sale of manufactured goods, produce, and spirits.<sup>163</sup> In 1828, the legislature passed its most stringent—and controversial—measure. Whereas previous laws had targeted wholesale merchants and exempted petty marketers, the new statute required any person “other than the grower, maker, or manufacturer” to obtain a \$12 license before selling any “goods, wares or merchandize, foreign or domestic.” The law extended to other small businesses as well; brewers and distillers were prohibited from selling alcohol in quantities of less than a pint without a license, as were the owners of “cook shops” and oyster houses. Violations were adjudged misdemeanors and carried the penalty of fines, imprisonment, or both.<sup>164</sup>

The 1828 statute unleashed a torrent of criticism from those who objected to its perceived inequity and the burdens it imposed upon the poorest free people. “I know not was justice is,” fumed Washington County legislator Thomas Kennedy, when “the richest merchant and the poorest milliner, the keep of an oyster house, a

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<sup>163</sup> The first two laws were “An Act Laying Duties on Licenses to Retailers of Dry Goods, and for other Purposes,” 14 February 1820, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the Sixth Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Nineteen (Annapolis.: Jonas Green, 1820); and “A Supplement to the Act Laying Duties on Licenses to Retailers of Dry Goods and for other Purposes,” 23 February 1822, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on Monday the Third Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Twenty-One (Annapolis.: J. Chandler, 1822).

<sup>164</sup> “An Act to Regulate the Issuing of Licenses to Traders, Keepers of Ordinaries and Others,” 27 March 1828, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, on the last Monday of December, Eighteen Hundred and Twenty-Seven (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1828).

booth, or a stall . . . are all put upon an equality, each hav[ing] to pay twelve dollars a year license.”<sup>165</sup> A Hagerstown editor urged the legislature to create exceptions for single women and widows who peddled butter, milk, or domestic manufactures, arguing that it would “be a considerable relief to many females, whose stock in trade is small.”<sup>166</sup> When the legislature revisited the issue in 1832, Thomas Kennedy demanded concessions for female milliners and peddlers. In a scathing indictment of the 1828 statute, Kennedy painted a bleak portrait of single women’s plight and underscored the importance of petty marketing to their welfare:

I have known many a worthy lady who had been raised in affluence, who had been taught by smiling hope to look for happiness, but who was reduced to poverty by the changes of the time or by the loss of a beloved partner, or by the cruel neglect of a worthless or dissipated husband . . . who toiled day and night to support themselves and their suffering children, and sometimes supported by the aid of kind friends would be enabled to lay in a small stock, and were thus prevented from soliciting alms from the cold hand of charity, and nobly support themselves.<sup>167</sup>

Kennedy’s impassioned speech resonated with his fellow legislators. The debates culminated with the General Assembly rescinding the most offensive elements of the 1828 law. Under the modified statute, retail licenses would cost between \$120 and \$50, depending upon the value of an applicant’s “stock of goods, wares or merchandize generally on hand, at the principal season of sale.” Concerning female milliners and retailers of “other small articles of merchandize,” the law stipulated that

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<sup>165</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 5 April 1828.

<sup>166</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 20 May 1830.

<sup>167</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 30 March 1832.

“they shall pay six dollars for a license,” provided that their stock did not exceed \$500 and that they refrain from selling spirituous liquors.<sup>168</sup>

The constraints of the rural economy forced some single women to combine their marketing with illegal activities, such as peddling alcohol. Proprietors of small groceries, cookeries, and taverns danced along—and across—the boundary separating legal and illegal. Women who sold alcohol roused the anger of local authorities, who believed that such businesses were a public nuisance and arrested or fined their proprietors. In 1828, for example, the Allegany County sheriff fined Anne Hosford for selling liquor without a license. Petitioning the governor for a pardon, Hosford’s attorney described his client’s plight. “Your petitioner is a widow with a family,” he declared, who “keeps an ordinary house for the purpose of supporting herself and family [and] has no means of subsistence.”<sup>169</sup> Although the fine was small, Hosford had few resources and could not pay “without jeopardizing the support of herself and children.” Baltimore County widow Mary Ockes had found herself in a similar situation the previous years. Ockes, who had six children and was pregnant with a seventh when her husband died, peddled baked goods, vegetables, and—on occasion—alcohol to support her family. Arrested and fined \$16 for selling liquor

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<sup>168</sup> “An Additional Supplement to the Act of December Session, Eighteen Hundred and Twenty-Seven, Entitled, An Act to Regulate the Issuing of Licenses to Traders, Keepers of Ordinaries, and Others,” 10 March 1832, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, At A Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, On Monday the 26th Day of December, 1831, and Ended on Wednesday the 14th Day of March, 1832 (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1832).

<sup>169</sup> Petition of Anne Hosford, n.d. [1828], Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

without a license, Ockes begged Governor Joseph Kent for a pardon, claiming that she could not afford to pay the fee.<sup>170</sup>

Despite the threat of arrest, women continued to sell alcohol because the rural economy afforded them few other opportunities. Mary Mackey, an impoverished woman in her seventies, supported herself by working as an itinerant peddler in rural Harford County. Fined for selling a half-pint of whiskey, Mackey begged her neighbors to petition the governor for relief. In a successful appeal, Mackey's supporters argued that she had been driven to the crime by her age and poverty. "She is old and very poor," they wrote. "[H]aving none to render her the smallest assistance . . . she had for a number of years supported herself by the sale of cakes and small beer."<sup>171</sup> Four years later, Mackey was arrested for the same crime. Once again, her neighbors petitioned the governor. Despite being nearly eighty, propertyless, and "entirely alone," Mackey had continued to peddle strong liquor, a crime her neighbors were willing to ignore because "she supports herself by her own industry, and by that means avoids burthening the public with her support."<sup>172</sup>

When women could not muster the resources for a grogshop or petty marketing, they sometimes turned to selling themselves. Women's marginal position within the rural economy dovetailed with the expansion of northern Maryland's network of canals, railroads, and turnpikes to make prostitution a viable—if not

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<sup>170</sup> Petition of Mary Ockes, 12 April 1827, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>171</sup> Petition of Mary Mackey, 19 September 1827, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>172</sup> Petition of Mary Mackey, 27 April 1830, Maryland Governor and Council Records, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

lucrative—option. The pressures that drove women to prostitution are well illustrated by the experiences of Matilda Green. In January 1854, Matilda’s alcoholic husband, Edward, went on a tremendous bender that culminated in his enlisting in the U.S. Army. The bedraggled Edward promptly escaped from the recruiting depot and returned home, where he remained for three months before being recaptured. Edward begged his wife to accompany him to Baltimore “to assist in getting his discharge,” which she did. While awaiting his discharge, Edward was stunned to learn that Matilda had resorted to prostitution after he enlisted and had, moreover, recently been arrested in a Baltimore brothel. After his “expulsion” from the military, a dismayed Edward learned that his wife had gone to Frederick, where she had begun “residing at houses of prostitution and unlawfully cohabiting with other men.” In the three years following their separation, Matilda moved between brothels in Baltimore, Frederick, and Hagerstown. Describing her activities during these years, Matilda’s disapproving sister Elizabeth Springer testified that “she has been living in a bawdy house, has contracted a venereal disease . . . and has not been doing anything for a living.”<sup>173</sup>

It is difficult to determine how rampant prostitution was in northern Maryland. Important questions about the frequency of arrests for prostitution or keeping bawdy houses cannot be answered until a systematic review of county court records is undertaken. Likewise, the gender, race, and social background of those convicted of these crimes await more thorough investigation. Still, a cursory review of court dockets suggests that courts seldom convicted people for prostitution or operating brothels. Between March 1829 and November 1830, the Washington County court

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<sup>173</sup> Edward Green vs. Matilda Green, case no. 1361, filed 4 October 1856, Washington County Circuit Court, Equity Papers, MdHR.

tried—and acquitted—one man for operating a disorderly house.<sup>174</sup> Officials in neighboring Frederick County heard few cases concerning prostitution or disorderly houses. Between May 1830 and May 1831, the county convicted three men of operating disorderly houses and initiated proceedings against four men and two women accused of the same crime.<sup>175</sup> A review of Carroll County’s criminal dockets suggests that the pattern of legal inaction—or indifference—continued throughout the antebellum decades. Between 1837 and 1860, the court tried three women and eleven men accused of operating bawdy or disorderly houses. Convictions proved elusive; jurors acquitted all three female defendants and five of the men.<sup>176</sup> Still, these statistics may belie the prevalence of prostitution.

As the region’s transportation network developed and commerce intensified, local governments evinced heightened anxieties about prostitution. In 1820, Frederick mayor George Baer urged the town’s aldermen to enact harsh ordinances against “keeping houses where lewd and licentious women are harbored,” which he blamed for “corrupting and debauching” the town’s morality and jeopardizing public health. Wherever “gambling, intoxication, and every description of vice and immorality are tolerated,” Baer warned, “diseases disgusting to human nature, are communicated, producing bodily infirmities & oftentimes death.”<sup>177</sup> Concerns about prostitution soon surfaced in Hagerstown as well. In 1824, the town’s council declared that “all vagrant, loose, and disorderly persons, lewd women, keepers of

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<sup>174</sup> Washington County Court, Dockets, March 1829–November 1830, MdHR.

<sup>175</sup> Frederick County Court, Criminal Docket, 1830–1831, MdHR.

<sup>176</sup> Carroll County Circuit Court, Criminal Dockets, 1837–1852 and 1853–1863, MdHR.

<sup>177</sup> Frederick-Town Herald, 25 March 1820.

bawdy houses, and persons having no visible means of support” would be subject to a one-month confinement in the workhouse or penalties not exceeding \$20.<sup>178</sup> It is unclear whether Havre de Grace’s councilmen enacted ordinances against prostitution, but they were attuned to citizens’ fears about the dangers posed by brothels and disorderly houses. In 1831, schoolteacher R. C. Story petitioned the town’s council to take action against Mary McNally, whose house “almost constantly exhibits a scene of the most profligate licentiousness and debauchery.” Although the crimes committed under her roof “preclude direct proof,” Story insisted that the brothel’s mere presence was “destructive alike of social order and happiness.” The council concurred, ordering McNally to leave town within two weeks “or they will be compelled to remove her beyond the limits of the same.”<sup>179</sup>

Prostitutes did not believe that their marginal economic and social status was tantamount to social death; they strenuously defended their reputations, struggled to preserve family ties, and sought better lives for themselves and their children. After being convicted and fined for operating a brothel in Frederick, Ann Roe promised to “amend her life, and try to become a useful member of society in future,” but her petition reveals a certain defiance. Roe insisted that she had been “esteemed more honorable than most women who have followed her course in life” and that she had “kept girls for the accommodation of gentlemen, but they were of the most

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<sup>178</sup> “An Ordinance to Regulate the Police of Hagerstown,” 29 May 1824, Mayor and Council Minutes, 1791-1827, Office of the City Clerk, Hagerstown, Md. In 1832, the council strengthened the ordinance by granting informants half of the fines collected. “A Supplement to an Ordinance to Regulate the Police of Hagerstown,” 17 January 1832, Mayor and Council Minutes, Office of the City of Clerk, Hagerstown, Md.

<sup>179</sup> Minutes, 12 April 1831, Havre de Grace, Maryland, Council Minutes, 1831-1840, MdHR.



respectable character.”<sup>180</sup> Roe’s claims to respectability were based upon perceived differences between herself and other prostitutes, but not all women were so apologetic.

In 1856, William T. Burkhart petitioned the Frederick County court to dissolve his fifteen-year marriage with his wife, Agnes. According to William, Agnes was “leading a life of prostitution and harlotry, and is in the habit of committing the crime of adultery.” She had, moreover, claimed custody of their children, an arrangement that William believed improper, “given her character and association.” William’s charges may not have been groundless. “Mrs. Burkhart is a notorious strumpet,” testified one witness, who added that she could be found “running the street day and night in the company of strumpets” and “lodging in the houses [that] are the general resort of strumpets.” Agnes Burkhart did not challenge these accusations, but denied that she was “incompetent, unfit or in anywise disqualified from taking care of her children.” The court agreed, ruling that the children could remain with their mother for a probationary period, after which the custody issue would be revisited.<sup>181</sup>

We catch another glimpse of a prostitute’s self-image in a letter that Matilda Green wrote to her sister, Elizabeth Springer. In the letter, Green welcomed the news that her alcoholic husband, Edward, had finally requested a divorce. “Tell him to come with his paper & I will sine it,” she wrote, adding that she had begun a relationship with “the prettiest man you ever seen [and] soon as we are parted he and

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<sup>180</sup> Petition of Ann Roe, 28 October 1820, Frederick County Court Petitions, MdHR.

<sup>181</sup> Wm. T. Burkhart vs. Agnes Burkhart, case no. 2696, filed 23 December 1856, Frederick County Court Equity Papers, MdHR.

I will be together.” She was, moreover, determined to defend her reputation against her husband and his supporters, who were spreading malicious rumors about her. Regarding one rumor monger, Green snapped, “[S]he is a liar and soon as she lands her foot in Frederick I am bound to whip her so hard she will never want to talk about me again.” Green’s anxieties about her reputation stemmed, in large measure, from her determination to regain custody of her only surviving child, James Edward Green. “I want you to send eddy soone,” she instructed her sister. In a tacit recognition that she could not, at present, provide her son with a decent home, Green promised that “I will take him to his good home with respected peopel” where he could “go to schooll and be treated well and I can go see him whenever I lik.”<sup>182</sup>

The survival of working families hinged upon women’s contributions, but the codependency that characterized laboring families did not alter their fundamental gendered inequalities. The relative weakness and vulnerability that defined married women’s lives elsewhere were also present in the northern Maryland countryside. Still, male-headed households may have been havens for poor rural women, whose dismal employment prospects and paltry earnings could not sustain independent homes. A childless woman might muddle through without male support, but those with dependent children faced a dire situation. When abandonment, death, or divorce stripped a woman of her husband’s support, she had little recourse but to seek public assistance or scrape out a living on the margins of the economy through petty marketing, operating an unlicensed grocery or grogshop, or prostitution.

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<sup>182</sup> Matilda Green to Elizabeth Spring, 1 October 1855, enclosed in Edward Green vs. Matilda Green, case no. 1361, filed 4 October 1856, Frederick County Court Equity Papers, MdHR.

## **Suspended between Slavery and Freedom: Rural Free Blacks**

Buffeted by tempestuous agricultural economy and by white authorities who viewed them with suspicion, northern Maryland's free blacks walked a tightrope. Doing so required dexterity and nimbleness; even poor whites—who labored under few legal restraints—could easily lose their footing. The additional burdens heaped upon blacks made the task especially daunting.

The households of free black and white laborers were similarly structured. Regardless of race, most workers' families consisted of married couples with dependent children. Other striking similarities existed between the households of black and white workers. Their average size was nearly identical, 5.09 for blacks and 5.12 for whites. Workers' households also tended to be racially homogenous. Of the households headed by free blacks, 187 (98 percent) consisted entirely of African Americans, while only 11 (1 percent) of white laborers' households were multi-racial. Rates of property ownership did not differ markedly. About 15 percent of white workingmen owned real property, whose average value was around \$335. A slightly larger percentage (16 percent) of the black laborers who were heads of households owned property, but its average value (\$223) lagged behind that of whites.

The structural similarities between black and white households should not, however, distract attention from the special challenges confronting African Americans. Families making the transition from slavery to freedom often found themselves in limbo; they could neither cast off the shackles of bondage nor enjoy the benefits of free labor. Free black Anne Briscoe was “much crippled by an affliction of the spine” and was, along with her children, maintained by an enslaved relative

named Abraham Ireland. This Herculean task might have swamped any laborer, but they were insurmountable to Ireland, who could support his kindred only by “his labour at night, by sawing wood, after he has served his master through the day.”<sup>183</sup> To survive northern Maryland’s tempestuous economy, laborers needed to muster the resources of their entire family—a feat that slavery often precluded.

African Americans strove to ransom their enslaved kin and disentangle their families from white masters. This was, however, a formidable challenge, for purchasing a family member might consume a lifetime’s earnings. Free black Judy Pickney directed her executrix to liquidate her entire estate and use the proceeds “in the most advantageous manner” toward procuring freedom for her two sons. If the size of her estate precluded the children’s purchase and manumission, Pickney asked that her estate be used “in such other legal purpose as [may] be found most beneficial to them.”<sup>184</sup>

For those who owned little, and whose principal possessions were their freedom and their labor, purchasing a husband’s or wife’s freedom often meant indenturing themselves to their spouse’s owner. On December 29, 1809, John Cregar bought “Negro Nace” and provided for his eventual freedom, which would commence on December 23, 1817. In exchange for manumitting her husband, Hannah Burgee indentured herself to Cregar for eight years. Moreover, she pledged that “if she should turn out to be a slave” or if she or her husband absconded, Cregar

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<sup>183</sup> Petition on behalf of Ann Briscoe and Abraham Ireland, 5 May 1851, Carroll Count Levy Court, Pension Papers, 1837-1851, MdHR.

<sup>184</sup> A search in the Frederick County Court’s Land Records uncovered no evidence that Pickney’s executrix purchased or manumitted her children. Frederick County Register of Wills, Wills, vol. HS 3, pp. 462-63, MdHR.

could retain Nace in slavery for an indefinite period to compensate him for his loss.<sup>185</sup> In 1846, free black Elias James assumed a similar burden in order to secure his wife's freedom. Because the \$125 demanded by slaveholder Joseph Christ was beyond his limited means, James was forced into peonage until the debt was retired. If James defaulted on the debt, or if he refused to work, the contract specified that he would forfeit his wages and his wife "would again become the property of Jos. Christ."<sup>186</sup> Some free blacks went to truly remarkable lengths to manumit a loved one. In 1828, Charles Fletcher bound himself to Frederick County planter John Lee, who was preparing to embark for Louisiana. Fletcher agreed to "faithfully serve, as a slave laborer, within the United States, and particularly within the state of Louisiana" until January 1, 1831, in exchange for Lee's agreement to manumit Fletcher's wife, Sal, at the conclusion of his term.<sup>187</sup>

Blacks who mortgaged their freedom were sometimes attempting to liberate a spouse and their children. In 1856, Daniel Baker, Jr., purchased and manumitted Savilla (age twenty-four), whose freedom would commence in 1868. Baker further stipulated that her youngest child would be manumitted with its mother and that any additional children born during her enslavement would be free at age thirty-five

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<sup>185</sup> Purchase agreement between John Walker and John Cregar, 29 December 1809, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 36, pp. 98-99, MdHR.

<sup>186</sup> Purchase agreement between Joseph Christ and Elias James, 26 December 1846, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 3, pp. 507-08, MdHR.

<sup>187</sup> Agreement between Charles Fletcher and John Lee, 24 September 1828, Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C. The story had a happy ending. Years later, John Lee testified that Fletcher had accompanied his enslaved wife to Louisiana, where "the service enjoined by said contract was faithfully performed." Lee added that "they both were returned to Maryland, and are now living as free people . . . in Frederick County." Answer of John Lee, 1 November 1837, Lee Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C.

(male) and thirty (female). In an effort to “shorten the term of servitude of his wife” and prevent additional children from being born into bondage, Savilla’s husband bound himself to the slaveholder for six years, in exchange for which Baker advanced the date of Savilla’s liberation to 1862.<sup>188</sup>

To secure a relative’s purchase, free blacks entered into complex negotiations with slaveholders and with third parties who provided financial backing in exchange for labor. In 1819, Frederick attorneys Roger B. Taney and Frederick Schley bought Clarissa from Woodward Evitt for \$350. That same day, Clarissa’s husband, Harry Peter, drafted a \$350 personal note to Taney and Schley, which he secured by indenturing himself to the attorneys for ten years. During his service, Peter was to receive clothing, food, and lodging “suitable for a slave.” If, at any point, Peter discharged the debt, Taney and Schley promised that he and his wife would be manumitted.<sup>189</sup> Ann Koon and her infant son entered into a similar agreement with Henry Keller, who had purchased them from Richard Temper for \$60 and provided for their freedom. To compensate Keller, Koon agreed to work for “50¢ per week, clear of sickness, time lost, etc.” until her debt was retired.<sup>190</sup> Brokers who acquired slaves on such terms kept a close watch on their investment. After purchasing Mary Hill’s unexpired term, Ezra Barrick allowed the bondswoman to live with her free husband, Samuel Timmons, but stipulated that the couple must repay the \$225

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<sup>188</sup> Purchase agreement between Jacob Lewis and Daniel Baker, Jr., 16 May 1856, and Contract between Daniel Baker, Jr., and Henry Williams, 16 May 1856, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. ES 7, pp. 425-25, MdHR.

<sup>189</sup> Agreement between Harry Peter and Roger B. Taney and Frederick Schley, 2 December 1817, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 5, pp. 850-51, MdHR.

<sup>190</sup> Agreement between Ann Koon and Henry Keller, 19 June 1829, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 32, pp. 76-77, MdHR.

purchase price with interest. If they defaulted on the agreement, Barrick specified that he would “be compensated with the wages of Hill and her issue.”<sup>191</sup>

That blacks would surrender their own liberty to reclaim kinfolk not only under-scores the importance of family, it speaks to the difficulties attending blacks’ quest for freedom. Few blacks managed to ransom their kinfolk outright. An examination of fifty years of transactions recorded by the Frederick County court uncovered only 114 slaves who were purchased by their relatives. Their average cost was \$139, which amounted to more than a year’s wages for an adult male farmhand.<sup>192</sup> The records further suggest that African Americans’ most pressing concern was to liberate their enslaved wives, for doing so would limit the number of children born into slavery. Thus, forty-one of the recorded transactions involved men purchasing or freeing their wives. Because of their limited earnings, and because men commanded higher prices, only three women managed to scrape together enough money to ransom their husbands.

After reclaiming their spouses, African Americans moved to liberate their children. Twenty-eight of the recorded transactions involved parents purchasing their offspring, and another forty-two were parents manumitting their children. Most of the children were quite young; the average age of the twenty-five children whose ages were recorded was 11.2 years. The same was true of those manumitted. The average age of the twenty-eight children manumitted outright was 8.4, while the average age

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<sup>191</sup> Purchase agreement between Robert Nelson and Ezra Barrick, 27 August 1846, Frederick County Court, Land Records, WBT 3, pp. 340-41, MdHR.

<sup>192</sup> These statistics were gathered from the Frederick County Court, Land Records, MdHR. The data cover 1800-1832; 1840-1848; and 1853-1860.

of those whose parents entered them into term slavery agreements was 11.8. Not all parents who bought their children manumitted them immediately. Perhaps because of their age, only ten of the children purchased by their parents were immediately freed. Another two received their freedom through a delayed manumission agreement.

The vital importance of women's and children's labor forced African-American families to make hardnosed decisions about purchasing and manumitting their kin. We glimpse these calculations in the transactions between "Negro Stephen," a free carpenter and farmhand and Frederick County planter Solomon Davis. Between 1810 and 1820, Stephen labored on Davis's plantation, where his wife and three children were enslaved. In 1810, Stephen purchased and liberated his wife, Will, who occasionally worked alongside her husband during the following decade. By 1814, Stephen and Will had saved enough to hire their daughters Polly (age twenty-one) and Sarah (age eleven), but their youngest child, Stephen (age five), and an unnamed infant remained in bondage. The planter's decision to retain control of Stephen's namesake and youngest child may have reflected an unwillingness to loosen his grip on the family. It is also possible, however, that these transactions were guided by Stephen's shrewd economic calculations. Unlike his youngest child, Stephen's daughters could immediately contribute to the family's welfare.<sup>193</sup>

Blacks who refrained from liberating their children may have been deterred by state laws that forbade the manumission of slaves incapable of supporting themselves. Too, a desire to retain possession of their children—and their labor—and to safeguard them against white interlopers may have led black parents to purchase their children

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<sup>193</sup> Solomon Davis Account Book, 1812-1826, Special Collections, Duke University Libraries, Durham, N.C.



and keep them in bondage. Although Thomas Denby manumitted his son, Thomas (age ten), and daughter, Catherine (age six), he “reserved their services . . . for my own use and benefit” until they reached the respective ages of twenty-one and eighteen.<sup>194</sup> A few blacks made the difficult decision to sell their enslaved children. In 1847, for example, Malinda Howard manumitted her son, Lloyd (age twelve), and then sold the remaining nine years of his term to a white farmer for \$150.<sup>195</sup> Washington Mitchell sold the unexpired term of his eight-year old daughter, Ruth, to a Frederick merchant for \$50 and agreed that any children born during her servitude would become her master’s property. In exchange for her service, Ruth would receive freedom dues of \$20.<sup>196</sup> Still, such arrangements were uncommon, for many African Americans were unwilling to have their children remain in slavery, even for a fixed term, if only because the promise of freedom might be unfulfilled.

African Americans had good reason to keep their children in bondage. Over the course of the antebellum decades, Maryland’s General Assembly enacted a series of increasingly harsh apprenticeship laws that undermined black parents’ authority over their free children. The emerging legal regime vested control of black children in the hands of county authorities, who exercised great latitude in wrenching young African Americans from their families and binding them white masters. Although Maryland’s original apprenticeship law had been race neutral, in 1808 the legislature authorized county courts to bind out “the child or children of any pauper or vagrant,

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<sup>194</sup> Manumission of Thomas Denby and Catherine Denby, 28 February 1801, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WR 20, p. 495, MdHR.

<sup>195</sup> Purchase Agreement between Malinda Howard and Geo. Souder, 3 March 1845, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. WBT 2, pp. 13-14, MdHR.

<sup>196</sup> Purchase Agreement between Washington Mitchell and Nathan Nelson, 15 June 1857, Frederick County Circuit Court, Land Records, vol. ES 10, p. 409, MdHR.

or the child of lazy, indolent and worthless free negroes.”<sup>197</sup> In 1819, that authority was broadened to include black children “not at service or learning a trade, or employed in the service of their parents.” Thus, a parent’s perceived turpitude or a child’s unemployment became causes for removing African-American children from their families. Worse, the legislation extended black women’s term of service from sixteen to eighteen years and allowed masters to forego educating a black apprentice in exchange for a small cash payment.<sup>198</sup>

The grounds for binding out black children became even more nebulous in 1840, when the assembly enacted the state’s most draconian apprenticeship code. Under the new statute, county officials could apprentice young blacks “to some white person” if they believed that such an arrangement “would be better for the habits and comfort” of the children. In a significant departure from previous laws, which required local officials to “gratify the inclinations” of the child’s parents respecting the choice of a master or mistress, the 1840 statute contained no such provisions. To guarantee that its provisions would be aggressively enforced, the law provided cash incentives to county officials for pursuing black children. Moreover, “any negro or other person” who abducted or enticed a black apprentice would face a prison

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<sup>197</sup> The original statute made no reference to a child’s race, stating simply that “such children as are suffering through the extreme indigence or poverty of their parents, the children of beggars, and also illegitimate children” could be bound out by county authorities. “An Act for the Better Regulation of Apprentices,” 28 December 1793, Laws of Maryland, Made and Passed at a Session of Assembly, Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis on Monday the Fourth of November, In the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Three (Annapolis: Frederick Green, 1794); “A Further Supplement to an Act, Entitled, An Act for the Better Regulation of Apprentices,” 23 December 1808, William Killty et al., comp., The Laws of Maryland (Annapolis: J. Green, 1815).

<sup>198</sup> “An Act Authorizing the Judges of the Orphans Courts to Bind Out the Children of Free Negroes and Mulattoes,” 17 February 1819, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, At a Session Begun and Held at the City of Annapolis, On Monday the Seventh Day of December, Eighteen Hundred and Eighteen (Annapolis: J. Green, 1819).

sentence ranging of one to four years.<sup>199</sup> The legislature further diminished black parents' authority in 1845, when it authorized the masters of black apprentices to sell the children's unexpired terms to persons within the same county.<sup>200</sup>

Despite the legal apparatus arrayed against African-American families, relatively few black children were apprenticed. Between 1837 and 1860, only 465 blacks were apprenticed in Carroll, Frederick, Howard, and Washington counties.<sup>201</sup> Blacks did, however, constitute a disproportionate percentage of those bound out. Most black apprenticeships were compulsory, triggered by a child's being impoverished, orphaned, or judged to be the offspring of "lazy and worthless negroes." The masters of these children were concerned with securing laborers for their farms, a fact reflected in the large number of adolescent male apprentices. Some 221 (48 percent) of the black apprentices were males between the ages of ten and twenty-one, the majority of whom were to learn farming, labor, or "usefulness." Black children bound under these circumstances had few opportunities to acquire skills; only 10 of the 363 African Americans bound out by county authorities were placed with tradesmen. Black parents fared little better in securing craft training for

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<sup>199</sup> "An Act to Provide for the Better Regulation of Free Negro and Mulatto Children within this State," 20 March 1840, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, At a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, On Monday, the 30<sup>th</sup> Day of December, 1839, and Ended on Saturday, the 21<sup>st</sup> Day of March, 1840 (Annapolis: William McNeir, 1840).

<sup>200</sup> "An Act Supplementary to an Act Entitled, An Act to Provide for the Better Regulation of Free Negroes and Mulatto Children within this State," 8 March 1845, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, At a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, on Monday, the 30<sup>th</sup> Day of December, 1844, and Ended on Monday, the 10<sup>th</sup> Day of March, 1845 (Annapolis: William McNeir, 1845).

<sup>201</sup> Carroll County Indentures, 1840-1860, Office of the Register of Wills, Westminster, Md.; Frederick County Register of Wills, Indentures, 1837-1860, MdHR; Howard County Register of Wills, Indentures, 1840-1860, MdHR; and Washington County Register of Wills, Indentures, 1837-1860, MdHR.

their children; of the ninety black children who were voluntarily apprenticed by their parents, only four were bound to craftsmen.

The fierce resistance mounted by African-American families might explain the small number of black apprentices. Abduction was the most direct strategy for thwarting their children's indenture. In 1829, for example, free black Adam Shorter was indicted for "stealing and carrying away three indented Negro children."<sup>202</sup> The struggle to free black children from the clutches of a white master sometimes mobilized entire families. When free black Priscilla Dorsey died and left behind five dependent children, her brothers and sisters "agreed to divide the children amongst them, as nearest of kin." As the children's father, a slave, had been sold outside Maryland, Samuel Dorsey took possession of his eight-year old niece, Lucy Powell. Dorsey supported her by hiring her to different families for her clothing, food, and small cash payments. He continued this arrangement until one of his niece's employers claimed that he was "better able to care for her" and had Powell bound to him for three years. Samuel Dorsey and his siblings appealed the indenture and succeeded in having it annulled because it was made without their consent.<sup>203</sup>

The preponderance of economic and legal authority confronting African-American families forced some to concede the battle over their children. Instead of resisting county authorities, they sought to negotiate the most advantageous contracts

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<sup>202</sup> Shorter was eventually acquitted of the crime. Washington County Circuit Court, Dockets and Minutes, November 1829 and November 1830, MdHR. Such actions may not have been uncommon. In 1819, an enslaved man named Breston Smith reclaimed his daughter, Mary, from her white master. That same year, "a negro man named Ben" abducted his daughter, Harriet, from her master. Petition of Lane Mathews, 20 August 1820, and Petition of John Mauldin, 19 May 1819, both in Baltimore County Orphans Court, Petitions and Orders, MdHR.

<sup>203</sup> Petition of Samuel Dorsey, n.d., Howard County Register of Wills, Petitions, 1844-1927, MdHR.

for their offspring and to guarantee that their households would continue to benefit from the children's labor. In some cases, black parents arranged contracts that protected their sons and daughters from the apprenticeship system's worst abuses. Thus, when free black William Riggs apprenticed his daughter Lucretia to learn housekeeping, he specified that her master must "enter into a recognizance with security to be forfeited in case he should remove or carry [her] out of the state." After his daughter's master refused to post the required security, Riggs successfully petitioned to have the apprenticeship agreement voided.<sup>204</sup> Others challenged the legitimacy of their children's indentures and demanded that they be bound to different masters. Free black Sophia Johnson conceded that she could not support her son, John Hammond, but insisted that his current master, Amos Welsh, held him "against his will and without authority." Citing irregularities in her son's indenture, she asked that John be bound to a master of her choosing.<sup>205</sup>

Another strategy employed by black parents to avoid the involuntary—and uncompensated—apprenticing of their children was to bind them to a white master in exchange for cash payments. Of the ninety black children apprenticed by their parents, thirty-two (36 percent) were bound for a monetary consideration. Such transactions reflected the changing legal climate, which was reducing black apprentices to chattel. Changes in the state's apprenticeship laws allowed masters to sell the unexpired terms of their black apprentices, an opportunity that many of them

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<sup>204</sup> Indenture of Lucretia Riggs, 13 June 1849, Frederick County Register of Wills, Indentures, vol. GME 3, pp. \_\_\_\_, MdHR.

<sup>205</sup> It is unclear how the court responded to Johnson's request. Petition of Sophia Johnson, n.d. [1847], Howard County Register of Wills, Petitions, 1844-1927, MdHR.

seized.<sup>206</sup> Recognizing that their hold on children was tenuous—and that their children were a valuable financial resource—some black parents preempted whites and sold their offspring into temporary servitude.

Black parents who decided to apprentice their children found numerous ways to leverage their labor. In some cases, they bound out their children as collateral. In 1841, for example, Absalom Reed apprenticed his son to Frederick County farmer James Nickum to secure a \$100 loan.<sup>207</sup> More commonly, blacks bound out their children for a single payment or for annual wages. When Jane Dunn bound her teenage children, John and Mary Bryan, to a Washington County farmer, their indentures stipulated that Dunn was to receive annual payments of \$35 and \$25 for their labor.<sup>208</sup> The indentures that Dunn negotiated were quite advantageous, for the wages her children garnered would have matched her earnings as a domestic servant or dairymaid. Most agreements were not as remunerative. In 1853, for example, Nelly Fisher bound her son, Robert Stewart, age eleven, to farmer Martin Emmett, in return for which she received annual payments of \$4.<sup>209</sup>

In apprenticing their children to white masters, some black parents were simply adding another component to their multi-faceted relationships with employers

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<sup>206</sup> In 1856, for example, Howard County farmer Nicholas Ridgely sold the unexpired twelve years of apprentice James Matthews' term for \$120. Three years later, William Lawrence sold the remaining term of his bound farmhand James Crabb for \$150. Howard County Register of Wills, Indentures, vol. WG 1, pp. 130 and 182-84, MdHR.

<sup>207</sup> Indenture of John Francis Reed, 1 March 1841, Frederick County Register of Wills, Indentures (Original), 1813-1857, MdHR.

<sup>208</sup> Indentures of John Bryan and Mary Bryan, 2 March 1855, Washington County Register of Wills, Indentures (no volume number), pp. 208-10, MdHR.

<sup>209</sup> Indenture of Robert Emory Stewart, 30 June 1853, Washington County Register of Wills, Indentures (no volume number), pp. 176-77, MdHR.

or landlords. Consider, for example, the case of Nat Cooper, a black tenant on Robert Archer's farm in Harford County. Between 1829 and 1833, Cooper's family earned \$220.98, the vast majority of which—some \$164.64—was garnered by his children, Nat, Jane, and Jim. The younger Nat collected \$34.25 by laboring in wheat harvests, while his sister Jane earned \$8.75 by working as a domestic servant and seamstress during the winter. In was Jim, however, who made the largest contributions to the family's coffers, first by earning \$40.46 through an annual contract and then by apprenticing himself to the age of twenty-one, for which he received \$80.<sup>210</sup>

The legal strictures upon their families were but one of the impediments hobbling African Americans. Slaveholders had crafted the state's legal apparatus, which guaranteed that blacks seldom received a fair shake in the county courts. Free blacks may have been more vulnerable to the frauds landowners perpetrated on other workers as well. Lewis Charlton remembered that a Harford County farmer once refused to pay his wages of \$235, "but said he would compromise by giving me three cents and calling it square." Charlton fought a protracted, and ultimately futile, legal battle to recover his wages. The "court was a mockery" he later fumed. "[T]here was no such thing as justice . . . the law protected the white man and trampled upon black men."<sup>211</sup>

As the antebellum decades progressed, free blacks found their movements increasingly circumscribed. The freedom to roam throughout the countryside seeking employment—and to cross state borders—was vital to workers' economic survival;

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<sup>210</sup> Robert Archer Ledger, J. Alexis Shriver Collection, MdHR.

<sup>211</sup> Edward Everett Brown, Sketch of the Life of Mr. Lewis Charlton, and Reminiscences of Slavery (Portland, Maine: Daily Press, n.d.), 6-7.

farmhands followed the summer harvests northward from Virginia, through Maryland, and into Pennsylvania, while boatmen, drovers, and wagoners crossed and re-crossed borders en route to commercial entrepôts. During the early nineteenth century, political boundaries were not insurmountable obstacles to black workers. In an indirect indication of their freedom of movement, the Maryland Penitentiary housed numerous free blacks from Delaware, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia who had been convicted of crimes in northern Maryland. In 1812, for example, free black hostler Richard Fisher, a native of New York and a resident of Baltimore, was convicted of assault in Washington County, while black laborer Ignatius Drake was born in Pennsylvania, resided in Washington, D.C., and was arrested in Frederick County in 1818.<sup>212</sup> Employers had little compunction about sending free black workers across state borders. Gettysburg merchant James Sheehan employed Lewis Johnson, whom he described as “one of the best colored men I ever knew,” to transport wares into Frederick County during the summer of 1819.<sup>213</sup>

Fearful that free blacks would smuggle slaves into Pennsylvania or that outsiders would spread the contagion of abolitionism among their bondspeople, Maryland slaveholders began, however, to clamor for restrictions on blacks’ interstate movements. In 1832, the Maryland General Assembly prohibited non-resident free blacks from entering the state and remaining ten successive days. Violations were punishable by a \$50 fine for each week they remained in the state, and free blacks unable to pay their court expenses, fines, and prison fees were to be sold at public

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<sup>212</sup> Maryland Penitentiary, Prisoner Records, MdHR.

<sup>213</sup> James Sheehan to Cloworthy Birnie, 13 July 1819, Cloworthy Birnie Collection, MdHR.



auction. The law also limited the ability of resident free blacks to travel outside the state. It stipulated that blacks leaving Maryland for an extended period (longer than thirty days) must file papers with their county court, lest they be considered non-residents upon their return. Finally, the act assessed a \$20 daily fine for whites who employed or harbored non-resident blacks longer than four days.<sup>214</sup>

Despite the strict limits it placed upon free blacks' mobility, the 1832 statute did not assuage slaveholders, who insisted that even the brief interstate forays permitted under the legislation posed a threat to slavery. When a black wagoner assisted several fugitive slaves, a disgruntled master complained that the existing law was inadequate to "prevent this, or any free negro fellow, from going into Pennsylvania, making the necessary arrangements, coming back, and carrying off as many as chose to go."<sup>215</sup> Another slaveholder demanded that the legislature restrain blacks "from going to and fro, between Maryland . . . and Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey."<sup>216</sup> In 1840, the General Assembly yielded to slaveholders' demands and strengthened the law, banning non-resident blacks from coming into Maryland at all. Regardless of their intentions or the duration of their visit, free blacks who entered the state faced a \$25 fine for their first offense and a \$500 fine for

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<sup>214</sup> "An Act Relating to Free Negroes and Slaves," 14 March 1832, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, on Monday the 26th Day of December, 1831, and Ended on Wednesday the 14th Day of March, 1832 (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1832).

<sup>215</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 29 January 1840.

<sup>216</sup> American Farmer [Baltimore, Md.], 25 December 1839.

subsequent offenses. Once again, those who could not discharge their legal expenses and penalties would be auctioned into servitude.<sup>217</sup>

The statutes had a chilling effect on free blacks' mobility. John McClintock, Jr., whose farm was four miles north of the Mason-Dixon Line, recalled that "the colored men employed as farmhands could not be sent across the line, even with a team, lest they would be claimed as slaves."<sup>218</sup> McClintock's workers had reason for concern. Maryland's courts vigorously enforced the statutes prohibiting free blacks from entering the state. On May 11, 1847, Washington County magistrate Thomas Boteler received information that three non-resident blacks were "going at large." That same day, he issued a warrant to Constable Thomas Wilson, who quickly arrested the suspects and confined them to the county prison.<sup>219</sup> While convictions were far from automatic, all blacks arrested for entering Maryland faced the inconvenience—and the horror—of imprisonment, not to mention the financial burden of prison expenses. Despite being acquitted of settling in Maryland, Hezekiah Newman remained responsible for \$3.50 in jail fees and rations.<sup>220</sup> Others fared worse. In April 1844, the Carroll County court convicted Pennsylvanian James Allen

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<sup>217</sup> "An Additional Supplement to the Act of Eighteen Hundred and Thirty-One, Chapter Three Hundred and Twenty-Three, Entitled, An Act Relating to Free Negroes and Slaves," 18 March 1840, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, At a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, on Monday, the 30th Day of December, 1839, and Ended on Saturday, the 21st Day of March, 1840 (Annapolis: William McNeir, 1840).

<sup>218</sup> John McClintock, Jr., to Mrs. Zeamer, 25 September 1901, Zeamer Family Collection, Cumberland County Historical Society, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>219</sup> Papers in the Case of Christian Norman, Sarah Bell, and Lucy Bell, 11 May 1847, Washington County Orphans Court, Petitions and Orders, MdHR. Such cases were not uncommon. For similar examples, see Warrant for Henry G. Bright, 13 April 1853, Warrant for Jane Truly, 3 October 1854, and Warrant for John L. Gruber, 18 May 1855, Washington County Orphans Court, Petitions and Orders, MdHR.

<sup>220</sup> Frederick County Court, Commitment Docket, 1842-1845, MdHR.

of entering Maryland and imposed \$41.73 in fines, prison fees, and court costs. Unable to discharge the penalties, Allen was sold into slavery for an unspecified term.<sup>221</sup>

The threat of being arrested and imprisoned as a suspected fugitive further tightened the shackles on blacks' mobility. African Americans might navigate a particular neighborhood in relative safety, but those venturing farther away faced additional perils. Farmhand Sam Walker never bothered to obtain his freedom papers while laboring near the plantation of his deceased master. It was only upon discovering that "farmers in our part had . . . slaves or hands of their own" and concluding to "try some other parts" that he secured his papers.<sup>222</sup> Despite having lost his freedom papers in an "unaccountable accident," free black Damon Brown remained undisturbed until he moved outside his rural neighborhood, when he was beset by "frequent and very unpleasant interruptions."<sup>223</sup>

In addition to being anchored to certain neighborhoods by legal restraints, free blacks were also tethered by the presence of enslaved relatives. In the 1820s, freewoman Monica Walker accompanied her husband William Walker, "a bright mulatto slave," from his home in southern Frederick County to the plantation of his new master, John Gleason, near Libertytown. Although her husband died soon after

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<sup>221</sup> Carroll County Circuit Court, Criminal Docket, 1837-1852, MdHR. For similar examples, see Hagerstown Mail, 17 June 1842 and 12 August 1842.

<sup>222</sup> Richard W. Gil and John Johnson, eds., Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals (Baltimore: F. Lucas, Jr., 1832), 219-33.

<sup>223</sup> Affidavit of John P. [Dowlan], 5 October 1848, Frederick County Court Papers, box 91, MdHR.

he was sold, Monica remained on the plantation for about eleven years, possibly because her freeborn son, Perry, had been apprenticed to Gleason.<sup>224</sup>

Dovetailing with the legal and social constraints upon free blacks' mobility was a series of ordinances and statutes that circumscribed their economic activities. Driven by fears that free blacks would fence property stolen by slaves, authorities erected legal barriers to prevent blacks from engaging in the petty production and proprietorship that were often essential to the working poor's economic survival. In 1827, authorities in Hagerstown directed constables to "disperse and prevent idle and disorderly persons, rude and noisy boys and persons of colour from frequenting the market-house."<sup>225</sup> In 1832, the Maryland General Assembly prohibited blacks from selling "bacon, pork, beef, mutton, corn, wheat, tobacco, rye, or oats" without first obtaining written permission from their employer, a justice of the peace, or "three respectable persons." The legislation also made it difficult for free blacks to obtain liquor licenses by stipulating that they must undergo additional examinations by a county court before receiving a license.<sup>226</sup>

The Maryland legislature also limited blacks' freedom to contract and change employers. Responding to concerns from farmers and planters on the Eastern Shore, who perceived a growing assertive among free blacks, in 1854 the General Assembly imposed penalties on blacks who abandoned their employers before the completion of

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<sup>224</sup> Affidavit of John Gleason, 9 December 1840, Maryland Manuscripts Collection, UMCP.

<sup>225</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 24 May 1827.

<sup>226</sup> The law did not provide guidelines for determining which blacks should obtain liquor licenses. "An Act Relating to Free Negroes and Slaves," 14 March 1832, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, at a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis, on Monday the 26th Day of December, 1831, and Ended on Wednesday the 14th Day of March, 1832 (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1832).

their contracts. Those convicted under this statute could be arrested, returned to their employers, and held financially responsible for lost time and court expenses. Repeat offenders faced arrest, brief prison sentences, financial penalties, and being reduced to the status of a “free negro apprentice.” The legislature also limited blacks’ ability to entertain offers from competing employers. Any white person who knowingly contracted with a black man or woman who had already hired him- or herself to another employer could be fined an amount equivalent to two-fifths of the worker’s wages and be compelled to return the employee to the original hirer.<sup>227</sup>

Navigating the treacherous shoals of the rural economy was a difficult task. Under the best of circumstances, working families had to harness the labor of men, women, and children while drawing upon reserves of ingenuity, perseverance, and luck. The burden shouldered by free blacks was, however, even more onerous. Living in slavery’s long shadow, they were forced to support dependent relatives who remained in bondage while being denied the fruits of their enslaved kinfolk’s labor. The constraints that slavery imposed upon free blacks’ inter- and intrastate movements added to their woes. Free blacks lacked the mobility, the nimbleness, that laborers needed to survive in the unstable rural economy because they were often shackled to a neighborhood and dependent upon white protectors.

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<sup>227</sup> “An Act to Provide a Remedy against Free Negroes Who May Hire for a Stipulated Period to Any Person, and Quit the Service of Such Person after Entering on the Same, and to Provide a Remedy Against Persons Who May Employ such Free Negroes, with the Knowledge that They Had Previously Hired to Another, or Engage in Another’s Service,” 10 March 1854, Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland, At a Session Begun and Held at Annapolis on Wednesday, the 4th Day of January, 1853, and Ended on Friday, the 10th of March, 1854 (Annapolis: E. S. Riley, 1854).

## **Race, Class, and Gender in the Countryside**

In July 1861, a white farmhand—identified only as Grimes—and several free black harvesters left the Carroll County store of C. S. Snouffer where they had spent the evening drinking. As they milled around the store, “talking about the nearest road to the place they were at work,” a Mr. Drum “took the idea that it was a squad of Negroes” and accosted the farmworkers. A local newspaper reported that “the darkies left (being afraid)” but that Grimes, who carried a pistol, took umbrage and challenged Drum. Outraged at the “black” man’s impudence, Drum sprinted across the road and “struck him over the head two or three times with a cane, and tore his clothing very much, and also took [the] pistol out of Grimes’s pocket.” Grimes sought refuge inside the store, where he begged a young clerk for assistance. The clerk confronted Drum, who promptly threatened to “put the contents of his own pistol into him, which he immediately did.” Having worked himself into a frenzy, Drum barged into the building and shot Grimes, inflicting a severe wound in his thigh.<sup>228</sup>

This violent encounter was, to a large extent, fueled by mistaken identities. In the dark, Drum had assumed that the farmhands assembled outside Snouffer’s store were all African Americans, which made Grimes’s resistance an unbearable insult and a challenge to the racial order. Grimes was not, however, confused about his racial identity. Poverty might have compelled him to work alongside African Americans, but he must have felt it unnecessary, even degrading, to suffer abuse from a white man. The black harvesters, for their part, had no illusions about their position

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<sup>228</sup> Carroll County Democrat [Westminster, Md.], 25 July 1861.

in the racial hierarchy. Aware of their vulnerability, and possessed of good sense, they scattered before the armed, besotted, and belligerent whites. Thus, amid the gunshots we snatch glimpses of how class and race operated in northern Maryland. Blacks and whites might find themselves in the same economic straits, working together in harvest fields, or mingling in grogshops, but these encounters occurred within the context of a slaveholding state, which guaranteed that racial boundaries would retain their terrible vigor.

The rough equality imposed upon farmhands neither obscured nor undermined racial distinctions within the rural workforce. Race reared its head whenever white laborers mustered the strength to impose racial hierarchies within their workplaces. Racial tensions flared at rural factories and internal improvement projects, where white workers flexed their collective muscle to prevent competition from blacks. In 1831, “an altercation of a very serious nature” transpired between black and white workmen on the B & O Railroad near New Market. Although the causes of the riot remain unclear, it may have been triggered by the introduction of black workers or by whites attempting to defend skilled or supervisory positions.<sup>229</sup> Evidence from other industries suggests that white workers expected blacks to occupy the least desirable, lowest paying positions. When a manager at the Antietam Woolen Manufacturing Company complained that “it is hard to get white [workers] . . . in attending the carding machines on account of the dirtiness of the work and the wages [being] so low,” he proposed to solve the problem by hiring “some little Negro Boys.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Republican Banner [Williamsport, Md.], 27 August 1831.

<sup>230</sup> Unsigned Letter to Board of Directors, 17 July 1815, Antietam Woolen Manufacturing Company Records, 1814-1843, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Del.

Blacks who overstepped the boundaries established by their white coworkers risked intimidation and violence. The Reverend Thomas W. Henry, who ministered to the enslaved ironworkers at the Antietam Iron Works, recalled that “the white help had a spirit of animosity against [the] servants because of their being so well treated.” The foundry’s owner not only allowed the slaves to gather refuse fuel and earn overtime wages (privileges denied the white workers), he also appointed them as foremen and managers. The white ironworkers’ resentment simmered until 1835 or 1836, when, during the owner’s absence, they attempted to flog several of the slave workers. The slaves mounted a spirited resistance, forcing the whites to retreat to nearby Sharpsburg, where they summoned the militia. Upon their arrival at the furnace, the soldiers found that the slaves had scattered into the hills and woods, where they remained hidden for several days.<sup>231</sup>

While rural industries provided settings for racial conflict, they were also the scenes of the rare instances of interracial unity that developed in the countryside. In 1838, a resident of Mechanicstown reported that about twelve hands from the nearby Catoctin Furnace, “having indulged too freely in their libation at the race course, came into town, accompanied by two stout negroes, for the purpose, as one of them after-wards expressed himself, of ‘using up the people.’” A group of townsfolk confronted the ironworkers, who became belligerent and refused to disperse. The constable soon arrested the black ironworkers (whom the correspondent identified as slaves), but “their white associates rescued them from the officer having them in charge.” The confrontation culminated in a bloody affray, which resulted in the

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<sup>231</sup> Libby, ed., From Slavery to Salvation, 27-28.



ironworkers being forced to beat a hasty retreat. “It was a fortunate circumstance that the two negroes left the town a few moments before the fight commenced,” the correspondent concluded, “for such was the excitement that I have no doubt, had they remained they would have been killed on the spot.”<sup>232</sup> It is not clear that the white ironworkers were moved by a sense of solidarity with their enslaved counterparts; their decision to rescue the slaves may have been spurred by whiskey, not class consciousness. It is, however, noteworthy that incidents of interracial conflict and cohesion seem to have been limited to industrial settings.

In many respects, northern Maryland’s volatile agricultural economy narrowed the distance between black and white farmhands. The lives of all farmworkers were defined by uncertainty; a catastrophic crop failure, a misstep near a threshing machine, or the mundane pattern of seasonal unemployment offered little quarter. Possessed of few skills and little property, white farmhands could neither drive their black counterparts from the fields nor demand special treatment from employers. Black and white farmworkers often received identical wages, and landowners seemed indifferent to the racial composition of their workforces.<sup>233</sup> In addition to working together, farmhands mingled during the holidays that punctuated the growing season. In 1856, “drunken rowdies, black and white, principally from

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<sup>232</sup> Baltimore Gazette and Daily Advertiser, 17 September 1838.

<sup>233</sup> Donald R. Adams, “Prices and Wages in Maryland, 1750-1850,” Journal of Economic History 46 (September 1986): 634-35. Competition between black and white farmhands may have intensified after emancipation. In 1865, an army officer stationed in Carroll County reported that “some trouble” had been caused by a “party of white men who seek to drive away colored laborers, fearing that their staying will cause a decrease in the rate of wages.” Lt. S. N. Clark to Col. John Eaton, Jr., 12 Sept. 1865, Maryland State Papers (Series A), MdHR.

the country,” marked Whitsunday by swarming into Rockville and shattering “the quiet of our usually peaceable town.”<sup>234</sup>

There were, of course, incidents of interracial conflict, but they were virtually indistinguishable from a larger pattern of violence endemic to the masculine world of farmhands. In 1827 a husking match in Frederick County descended into bedlam when a white worker, identified only as Davis, assaulted a free black farmhand named Sam. In the ensuing melee, Davis brandished a knife and stabbed Sam, killing him immediately.<sup>235</sup> While violence among farmhands—both black and white—was common, it often stemmed from the nature of agricultural labor, not simmering racial hatred. Muddled by whiskey and exhaustion, agricultural laborers developed quick, violent tempers. During the winter of 1833, an argument between two drunken workers culminated in one of the men having “a piece of his ear bitten off.”<sup>236</sup> Such episodes were common. In June 1844, farmhand Valentine Mumell thrashed fellow laborer Joshua Wilson so severely that he was bedridden for two days and required a doctor’s attention. Mumell must have been a brawler; later that year, he left another coworker, Fritz Keating, incapacitated for four days after a “serious affray.”<sup>237</sup>

Poor white men might carouse and work alongside blacks without jeopardizing their racial identities, but white women who ventured into racially mixed social settings and workplaces risked surrendering their racial prerogatives. To be

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<sup>234</sup> Montgomery County Sentinel [Rockville, Md.], 17 May 1856.

<sup>235</sup> Englebrecht, Diary, 1:284.

<sup>236</sup> Deposition of John H. Manahan, 23 May 1833, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 43, p. 96, MdHR. For a similar example, see Deposition of John Michael, 30 December 1818, Frederick County Court, Land Records, vol. JS 7, pp. 609-10, MdHR.

<sup>237</sup> Ramsey McHenry Ledger, 29 June 1844 and 7 October 1844, MdHS.

sure, authorities policed racial boundaries and protected respectable white women from the perceived aggression of black men. In June 1839, a Hagerstown constable discovered “an athletic negro man” and a “well clad white female, apparently not more than 14 or 15” hiding in the city’s market. The officer hauled the couple before a local magistrate, where the young woman confessed that the man—a free laborer on her uncle’s farm—had “seduced her and persuaded her to elope with him and that they were on their way to Pennsylvania.” The story spread like wildfire, attracting a “considerable number of persons” to the courthouse. When the magistrate announced that “there was no law to meet the case,” the outraged crowd began erecting a scaffold and unsuccessfully attempted to wrest the prisoner from the constables. Ignoring orders to disperse, the mob lingered until a “compromise” was negotiated with the magistrate. Although legal charges could not be levied, the magistrate ordered that the prisoner receive thirty-nine lashes and be sent into Pennsylvania.<sup>238</sup>

The tender age and apparent respectability of the unnamed woman at the center of the Hagerstown riot undoubtedly fueled the mob’s violence. Women whose backgrounds were suspect, or who courted black men’s attention, had fewer white defenders. The ambiguity of poor women’s racial identities were exposed at the 1851 trial of former slave Amos Green, a millwright and farmhand condemned to death for raping Josephine Pepee, a young German woman who worked at the textile mills near Laurel, Maryland.<sup>239</sup> While the jury accepted Pepee’s recounting of the alleged

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<sup>238</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 14 June 1839.

<sup>239</sup> In an account of the alleged rape, a newspaper in Ellicott’s Mills reported that Green was “formerly the property of Resin Snowden, Esq.” Howard Gazette and General Advertiser, 28 June 1850.

assault, doubts about the verdict soon surfaced. Some doubted that Green had received a fair trial. “If the woman had been a colored woman,” insisted one juror, “he would have insisted upon a verdict of acquittal.” One of the judges who heard her original complaint was likewise dubious because of her “levity of manner and entire want of a proper sense of degradation,” a suspicion that was nurtured by numerous reports that she had “at least encouraged . . . the act by previous intimacy.”<sup>240</sup> Green’s supporters shared this dim view of her character. “She is represented as having associated with negroes, and with negroes of the lowest class,” wrote M. B. Grier, “[and] as having frequented their dances, and having been seen drinking with them.” William Fort, an English immigrant who took a leading role in Green’s defense, argued that intercourse between Green and Pepee had “been by her encouragement, or, at any rate, without strong resistance.” Moreover, he contended that Pepee’s behavior had undermined the racial boundaries that should have separated her from Green. “All who knew them [Pepee’s family] concurred in calling them ‘Low Dutch,’ mingling with negroes and low persons, allowing them on terms of equality at their house, and evidently regarding negroes as equals.” It was, therefore, not surprising that “the difference in color had no restraint upon him.” By associating with blacks, Green’s defenders argued that Pepee had forfeited her claims to whiteness and surrendered the gender and racial identities that should have entitled her to the white community’s protection.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> James Moore to Rev. J. P. Carter, 16 June 1851, and H. P. Howard to Governor E. Louis Lowe, 21 June 1851, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>241</sup> Statement of William Fort, 20 June 1851, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR. Supporters of a free black man accused of raping a white woman in Baltimore City mounted a similar defense, arguing that the accused was an “industrious, honest man,” while the victim resided “in one of the low brothels of our city, and was regarded by all who knew her, as a most abandoned

Others insisted that, despite her poverty and suspect character, Pepee deserved the full protection of the law. “True she is poor,” noted a local official, “but notwithstanding her poverty, she [is] as much entitled to the full protection of our laws as if she possessed the wealth of the Indies and moved in the first circles of society.”<sup>242</sup> In the end, however, Governor E. Louis Lowe could not, or would not, interfere in the matter. On August 6, 1851, he sent a terse response to Green’s request for executive clemency: “The sentence must stand.”<sup>243</sup> Pepee may have dwelled on the margins of white society, but she was, nevertheless, white and her accusations against a black man carried great weight.

Far from blurring racial distinctions, poor whites’ proximity to free blacks and slaves heightened their sensitivity to situations that jeopardized their racial identities. Politicians preyed upon poor whites’ racial anxieties. In 1836, Democrats bewailed General William Henry Harrison’s decision to support laws that allowed state officials to sell white criminals and vagrants into temporary bondage. Eager to excite opposition to Harrison’s presidential candidacy, a Hagerstown editor conjured the specter of poor whites being “DRIVEN INTO SLAVERY BY A FREE NEGRO.” “Selling a white man at public sale,” he ranted, “would be revolting to every principle of humanity and a disgrace to the age in which we live.”<sup>244</sup> Such appeals resonated with

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and loose woman.” P. T. Merryman to T. Holliday Hicks, 27 January 1859, and Ben. J. Merryman to T. Holliday Hicks, 22 March 1859, both in Maryland Governor, Miscellaneous Papers, 1850-1859, MdHR.

<sup>242</sup> Littleton McClain to Gov. E. Louis Lowe, 21 June 1851, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>243</sup> E. Louis Lowe to the Hon. Thos. H. O’Neal, 6 August 1851, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

<sup>244</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 30 September 1836.

poor whites. In Washington County, angry voters “harpooned” a speaker who defended the law as “humane.” Describing the raucous meeting, a local Democrat wrote, “[E]very poor man responded, if you justify Harrison in voting to sell the poor man, you must be in favor of a similar law here.”<sup>245</sup> Poor whites’ fear of being reduced to anything resembling slavery would remain a potent political force in the coming years. In 1848, opponents of presidential candidate Lewis Cass noted that he had signed laws as governor of Michigan allowing “vagrant, lewd, idle, or disorderly persons to be whipped, kept at labor for three months, and hired out for the best wages that could be procured.” Indeed, they accused Cass of being “fond of selling poor white men into bondage, when they were too poor to provide for themselves.”<sup>246</sup>

Anxieties about poor whites being forced into bondage were liberally dosed with hyperbole and hysteria; freedom from slavery was the incorruptible boundary separating poor whites and blacks. Still, this otherwise sharp distinction might become blurred in a setting like northern Maryland, where poor whites, free blacks, and slaves constantly mingled. An extreme example of the confusion that sometimes occurred began in 1800, when Mary Daniel, “a poor girl, born of free white parents,” was apprenticed to Joseph Stoner by the Frederick County court. In 1802, a visiting family purchased Daniel’s remaining term and carried her to their home in Georgia, where she remained for several years. Despite her persistent and vigorous complaints, Daniel’s employers kept her after she was entitled to her freedom,

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<sup>245</sup> Hagerstown Mail, 30 September 1836.

<sup>246</sup> Herald of Freedom [Hagerstown, Md.], 5 July 1848. The newspaper’s editors echoed this charge as the election neared. “Poor men,” they trumpeted, “don’t forget that Lewis Cass, while Governor of Michigan, caused a law to be enacted for whipping . . . white men and women, who happened unfortunately to be out of money and unable to get work.” Herald of Freedom, 7 November 1848.

holding her in a legal limbo. A bizarre series of twists culminated in Daniel's being placed under the authority of a new master, who tricked her into a sham marriage.

Daniel endured her husband's abuses for several years—and bore him eight children—before he decided to rid himself of his dependents. He made several attempts to sell Daniel and their children to local slave traders, but “the fact that they were all white, and that the mother constantly asserted her right to freedom, in the most solemn manner, prevented him from succeeding in that neighborhood.”

Undaunted, her husband trucked the family to South Carolina, where he sold them to slave dealer who parceled them out among his relatives. Over the following years, Daniel was sold across northern Alabama to Madison, Mississippi, before finally making a successful bid for freedom. She escaped to Cincinnati, where she contacted attorneys in Frederick who found the indentures proving that she was, in fact, a freeborn white woman. Armed with this evidence, Daniel returned to Mississippi to redeem her children.<sup>247</sup>

Mary Daniel's plight was an extreme example of the subversion of racial hierarchies that might occur in settings where poor whites lived and worked alongside free blacks and slaves. There were, however, more mundane cases of whites being stripped of their racial prerogatives. The illegitimate and impoverished white children apprenticed by county officials were, like their black counterparts, consigned to drudgery and abuse.<sup>248</sup> Such cases attracted little attention; nobody argued that

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<sup>247</sup> *The Liberator*, 29 May 1840. Such cases occurred periodically and became a mainstay of abolitionist literature. Carol Wilson and Calvin D. Wilson, “White Slavery: An American Paradox,” *Slavery and Abolition* 19 (April 1998): 1-23.

<sup>248</sup> For descriptions of the abuse endured by white apprentices, see Petition of Henry A. and Elizabeth A. M. Jones, 29 February 1840, Frederick County Court Papers, box 12, MdHR; and Petition

poor whites were entitled to craft training and jurists defended a master's right to discipline apprentices. More threatening were the rare incidents in which county officials bound white paupers to black masters. In October 1826, the Washington County orphans court indentured William Price, "an illegitimate boy aged about thirteen years," to an African-American blacksmith. The following month, two associate judges discovered the mistake and annulled the indenture, but not before it caught the attention of local politician Benjamin Galloway.<sup>249</sup> In a blistering editorial, he demanded the removal of the judges responsible for binding a "poor, friendless, illegitimate, white orphan child" to a black artisan.<sup>250</sup>

While whites struggled to distance themselves socially from slaves and free blacks, they could never escape the gravitational pull of slavery. Poor whites may have insisted upon their racial prerogatives, but the uncertainty that characterized the rural economy drove them into an underground economy of cookhouses, grogshops, and tippling houses that underscored the similarities—and mutual dependency—among the different segments of the region's workforce. To the extent that public authorities scrutinized poor whites non-wage labor activities, it was to prevent them from sapping slaveholders' authority. Many of the indictments filed against the operators of unlicensed businesses included charges that bespoke slaveowners' priorities. In 1819, for example, planter John Thompson Mason accused John Duncan of selling liquor without a license, and, perhaps more importantly, harboring

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of Wm. Henry Jones, 7 November 1848, Washington County Register of Wills, Petitions and Orders, MdHR.

<sup>249</sup> Indenture of William Price, 10 October 1826, and Indenture of William Price, 28 November 1826, Washington County Register of Wills, Indentures, MdHR.

<sup>250</sup> Torchlight and Public Advertiser [Hagerstown, Md.], 29 March 1827.



a slave, dealing in stolen merchandise a slave, and “keeping a disorderly house and permitting negro slaves and others to gamble.”<sup>251</sup> Poor whites who operated on the shadowy borders of the region’s economy found allies among free blacks and slaves—who may have preferred to conduct some of their business away from slaveholders’ glare—while, at the same time, their underground economy was constrained by the dictates of preserving slavery.<sup>252</sup>

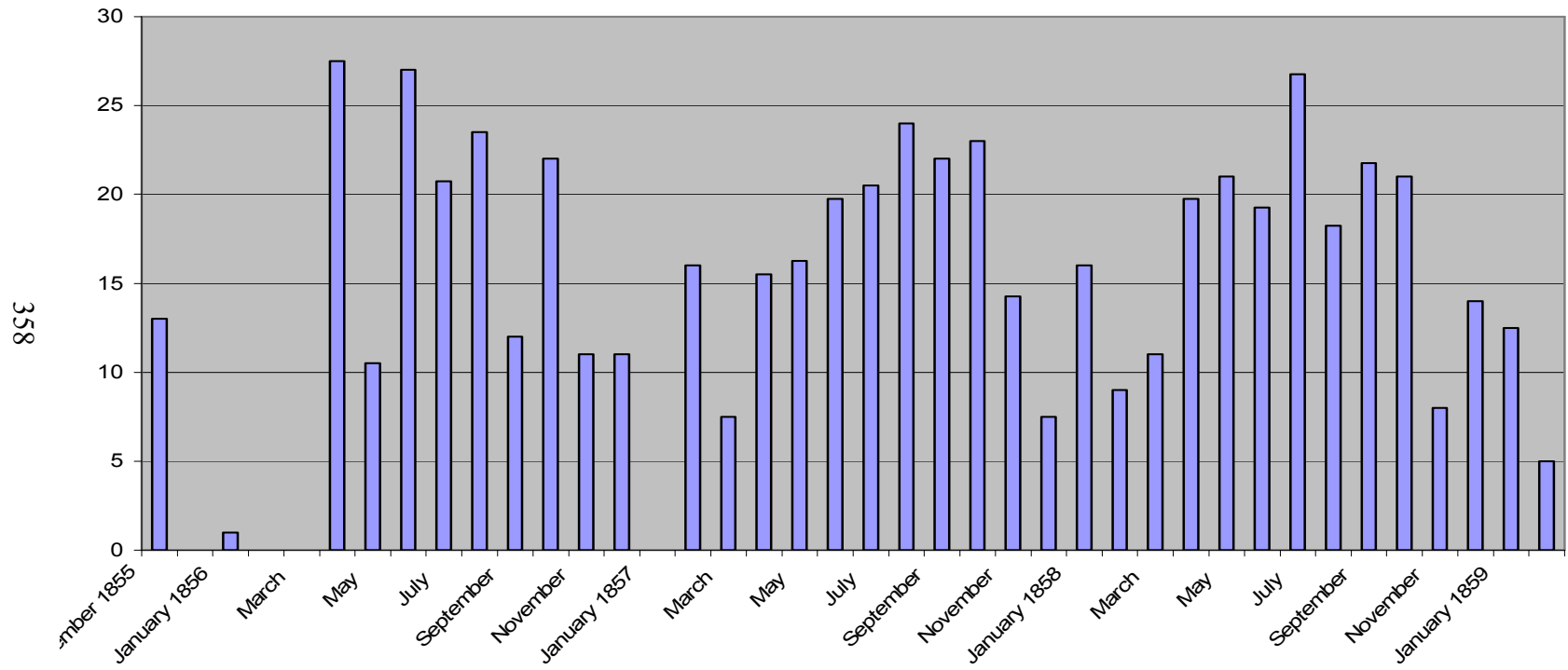
The confused melee outside C. S. Snouffer’s country store, the controversy that swirled around Josephine Pepee, the fears aroused by whites being sold into bondage, and the underground economy were all responses to a political economy that simultaneously pushed together poor blacks and whites while maintaining the legal and social controls necessary for upholding slavery. Race protected whites against actual enslavement and guaranteed that they would have fewer impediments placed in their paths than free blacks, but it offered them few economic guarantees. Conversely, the exigencies of maintaining slavery left free blacks with a stunted, truncated form of freedom. The unskilled and unstable nature of agricultural labor may have prevented white farmhands from viewing themselves as a class, but the looming presence of slavery meant that they could not see their black neighbors, coworkers, and lovers as participants in the same struggle for survival.

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<sup>251</sup> Washington County Circuit Court, Docket and Minutes, November 1819, MdHR. For similar examples, see Indictment of Godley Bodreiner, October 1841, Indictment of Joseph Runkles, October 1841, and Indictment of Wm. Lloyd, October, 1841, all in Frederick County Court Papers, box 92, MdHR; Indictment of Julian Edwards, 22 September 1841, and Indictment of Mary Brown, n.d. [1842], Howard County Court Papers, Howard County Historical Society, Ellicott City, Md.

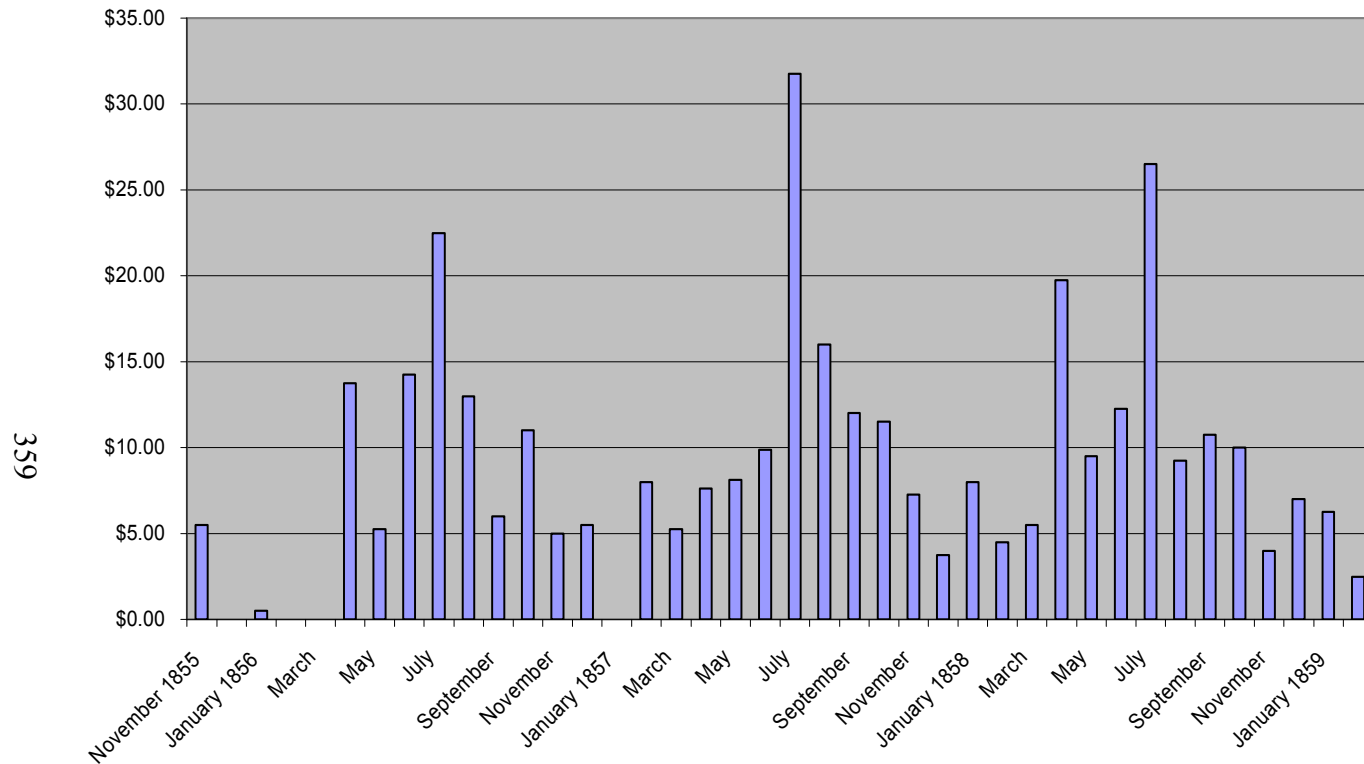
<sup>252</sup> Other historians have documented a flourishing underground economy among poor whites, free blacks, and slaves. See, for example, Jeff Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); and Wayne K. Durrill, “Routine of Seasons: Labour Regimes and Social Ritual in an Antebellum Plantation Community,” *Slavery and Abolition* 16 (August 1995): 161-87.

**Figure 5.1**  
**Days Worked by Harry Lockett (Farmhand) on Richard Vansant's Farm**  
**November 1855-February 1859**  
**Baltimore County, Maryland**



Source: Richard Vansant Account Books, 1843-1896, MdHS.

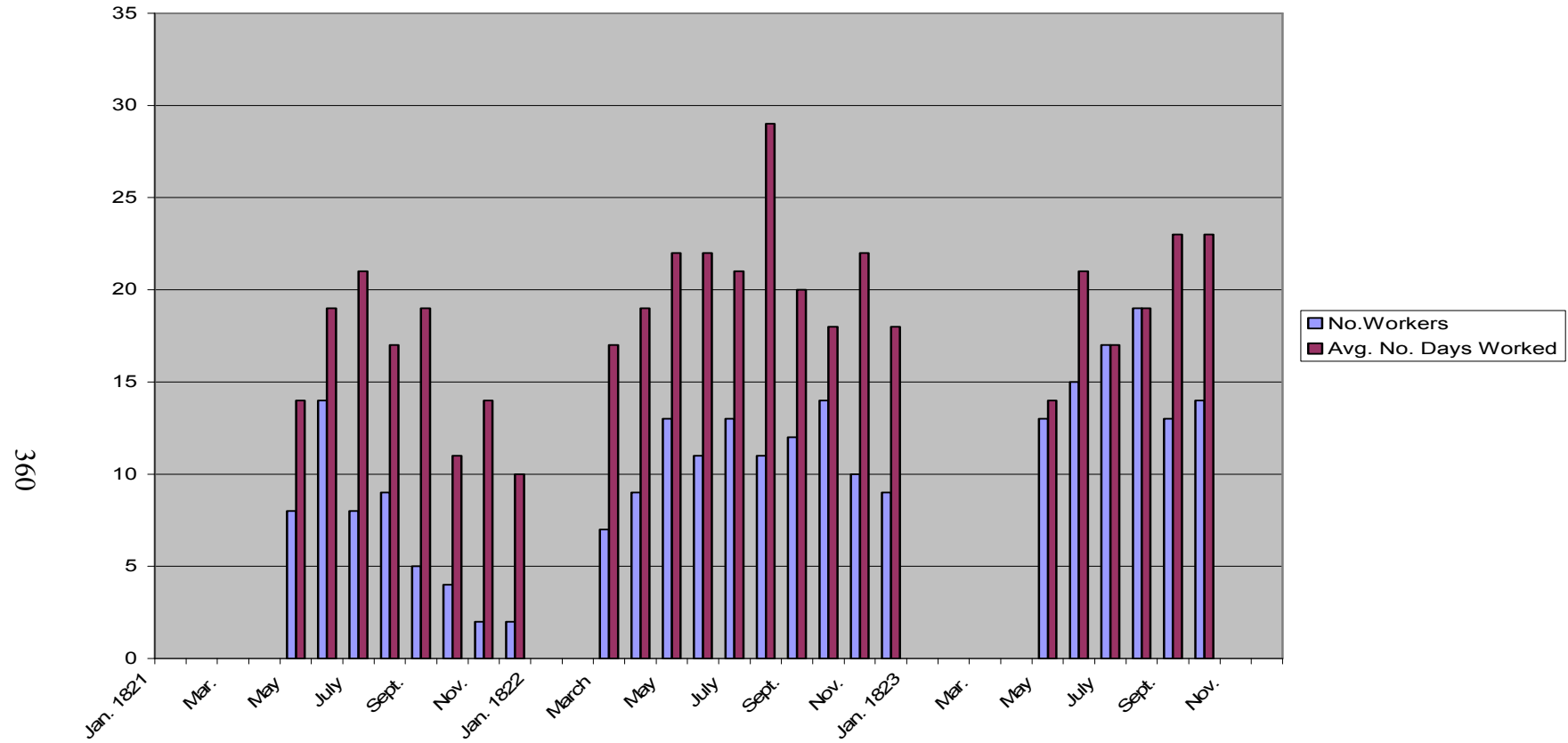
**Figure 5.2**  
**Monthly Wages of Harry Lockett (Farmhand) on Richard Vansant's Farm**  
**November 1855-February 1859**  
**Baltimore County, Maryland**



Source: Richard Vansant Account Books, 1843-1896, MdHS.

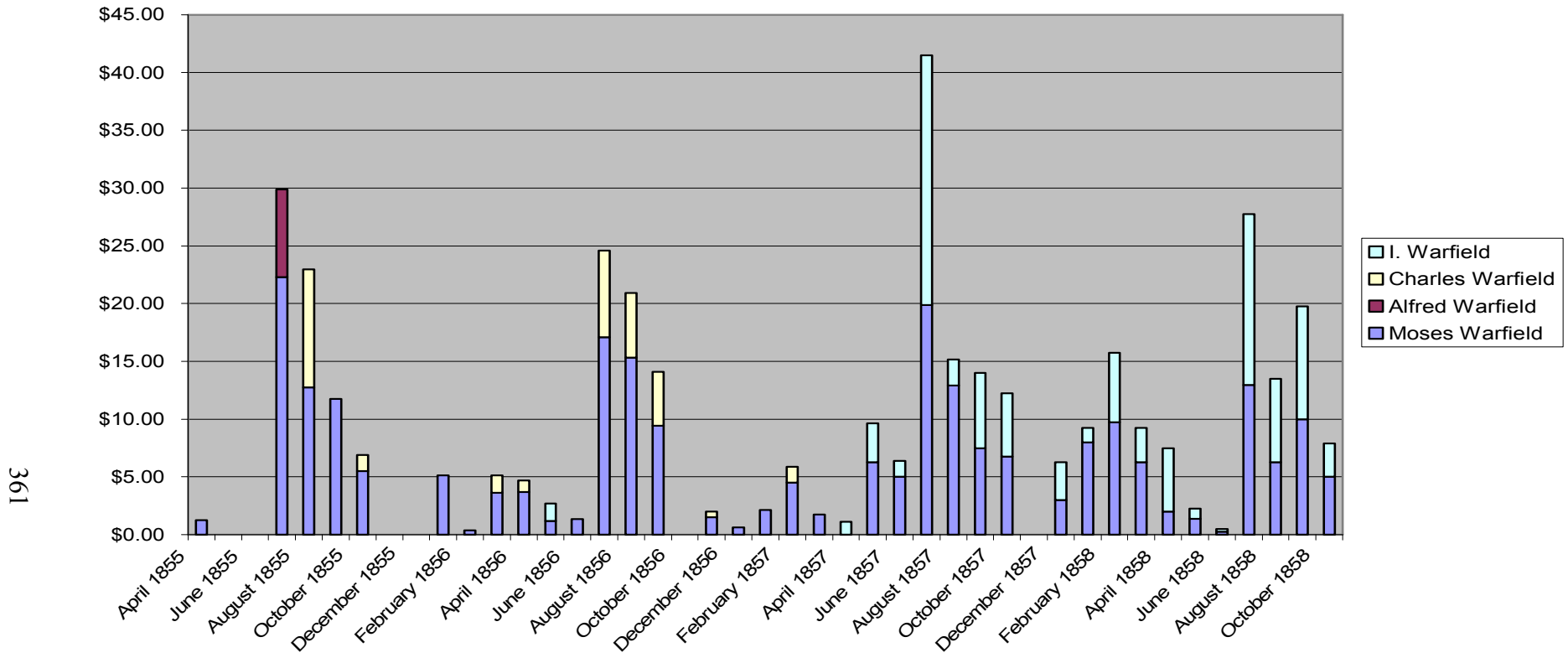
Figure 5.3

Turnpike Workers Employed by John Piper,  
National Road, Cumberland, Md., 1821-1823



Source: John Piper Account Book, 1820-1826, Special Collections, UMCP.

**Figure 5.4**  
**Wages Earned by Warfield Family**  
**April 1855-October 1858**



Source: Henry S. Harlan Account Books, 1854-1860, MdHS.

## Conclusion

Compared to the slave societies that flourished elsewhere in the antebellum South, northern Maryland was something of an oddity. Perched along the Mason-Dixon Line, this society with slaves produced few of the traditional plantation staples.<sup>1</sup> By 1860, a steady stream of manumissions, escapes, and interstate sales had reduced the region's slave population to a numerically and statistically insignificant remnant. In comparison with their brethren further south, northern Maryland's masters wielded little economic and political clout within their neighborhoods and had but a limited sense of themselves as a distinct class. Slaveholdings were small; in both 1820 and 1850, half of the region's masters and mistress owned only one or two bondspople. While there is some evidence that these small slaveholders sought to distance themselves from their non-slaveholding neighbors, their commitment to the institution may have been shallow.<sup>2</sup> The anemic response of the region's slaveholders to the 1859 conventions called by masters from the Eastern Shore and southern Maryland bespoke their political weakness and slavery's marginality. Although the meetings were organized to strengthen slavery's legal edifice, the one called in Hagerstown fizzled "owing to a misunderstanding as to the day, or lack of

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<sup>1</sup> On the distinction between slave societies and societies with slaves, see Ira Berlin, Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick County farmer Allen Sparrow noted that owning slaves, if only on a small scale, created a social distinction between slaveholders and non-slaveholders. "In the part of the country where I came from all the people were poor, some poorer than others, but if they owned a negro or two they thought themselves up in the world." Allen Sparrow Diary, n.d., Middletown Valley Historical Society, Middletown, Md.

interest in the matter,” and “but six or seven people attended.”<sup>3</sup> When a Frederick master threatened “a brand that he will find difficult to remove” for anyone who refused to support the meeting, a fellow slaveowner derided the entire “laughable convention.” “[I]n Catoctin District there is only one slaveholder,” he mocked, “and if he should ever take up the notion to brand every man who refuses to act with him, he would no doubt have to call . . . for a mite of assistance.”<sup>4</sup>

Given the liminal role of slavery within northern Maryland, and considering the region’s comparative insignificance within slavery’s empire, there may be a temptation to dismiss this study as an irrelevant footnote in the history of the institution. Indeed, some have suggested that the recent outpouring of scholarship on slavery’s peripheries—cities, industries, maritime employments, non-plantation rural districts—has resulted in these exceptional cases receiving undue attention. Philip D. Morgan has complained of the “centrifugal” tendency unleashed by these studies, which has sent the literature “spinning off in all directions.” He suggests that slavery in “farms, shops, ships, and manufacturing enterprises may be likened to safety valves that helped keep the great engine running,” but rightly insists that plantations were “the engine that drove the Atlantic slave system.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Herald of Freedom and Torchlight [Hagerstown, Md.], 8 June 1859. For a discussion of the 1859 slaveholders’ conventions and their consequences, see Barbara Jeanne Fields, Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 63-89.

<sup>4</sup> Middletown Valley Register [Middletown, Md.], 27 May 1859.

<sup>5</sup> Philip D. Morgan, “Rethinking American Slavery,” in Inequality in Early America, ed. Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger (Hanover, Conn.: University Press of New England, 1999), 241-42. Morgan was not the first to view industrial and urban slavery as safety valves in the plantation system. See, for example, Peter Parish, “The Edges of Slavery in the Old South: Or, Do Exceptions Prove Rules?” Slavery and Abolition 4 (December 1983): 106-25.

Morgan's complaint is symptomatic of a larger ailment in the historiography of the Old South. Since the 1970s, scholars have expanded the field's parameters beyond the plantation districts. While this approach has broadened our understanding of the antebellum South's economic and social diversity, it has also caused fragmentation. "Like blind men groping an elephant," observes Robert Tracy McKenzie, "scholars have begun to describe different parts of the whole but as yet have no systematic basis for comparing them."<sup>6</sup> Yet disarming the tensions between periphery and core, and between local peculiarities and regional generalities, requires something more than comparison; it requires an integrative framework, one that illuminates the connections among the Old South's numerous slave and slaveholding societies.<sup>7</sup>

Northern Maryland may have been a backwater in the sprawling plantation complex, but its history was inextricably linked to developments in the Deep South. The interstate trade was, and is, the touchstone for interpreting slavery in northern Maryland, for it bound the fate of slavery in these counties to its strength on the South's cotton and sugar plantations. Slaves' financial value in northern Maryland was underwritten by the interstate trade, which simultaneously undercut slaves' value by driving frightened bondpeople into Pennsylvania.<sup>8</sup> On the national level,

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Tracy McKenzie, One South or Many? Plantation Belt and Upcountry in Civil War-Era Tennessee (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Others have suggested the need for integrative or systemic approaches to the study of slavery. See, for example, David Brion Davis, "Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspectives," American Historical Review 105 (April 2000): 452-66.

<sup>8</sup> The findings here are consistent with those recently presented by Steven Deyle. The domestic trade, he argued, created a "regionwide slave market that tied together all the various slaveowning interests into a common economic concern and help put to rest whatever doubts slaveowners in the Upper South may have had about the future of the institution." "The Domestic Slave



therefore, the distinctions between periphery and core, between slave societies and societies with slaves, collapsed under the weight of the interstate trade.

Aware that the interstate trade wedded them to slaveholders elsewhere, masters along the sectional border kept a weather eye on developments in the Deep South. When their southern neighbors enacted laws banning the importation of slaves convicted of crimes, northern Marylanders sought surreptitious means of unloading their problems.<sup>9</sup> In 1844, Washington County sheriff William Freamer, along with a judge and a trader, conspired to sell bondsman William Gross outside Maryland. Although Gross had been convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to receive thirty-nine lashes, the trader urged his associates to forestall the punishment, for a “strong and good looking fellow” might fetch \$600 but a “scarred and disfigured” slave would be worthless. The judge concurred and directed Freamer to smuggle Gross to Baltimore and “sell him, as his own property, without disclosing his conviction.” Unfortunately for the conspirators, their plans unraveled when some “secret enemy” contacted officials in New Orleans, who seized Gross at the docks and demanded that Maryland authorities prosecute the schemers.<sup>10</sup>

The enslaved knew all too well that northern Maryland was enmeshed in a larger, more dangerous system. Before escaping from bondage near Hagerstown,

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Trade in America: The Lifeblood of the Southern Slave System,” in The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 94-95.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the effort to regulate the slave trade in the Deep South, see Michael Tadman, Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 83-93; and Lacy Ford, “Reconsidering the Internal Slave Trade: Paternalism, Markets, and the Character of the Old South,” in The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 154-60.

<sup>10</sup> Petition of William Freamer, 1848, Maryland Secretary of State, Pardon Papers, MdHR.

James W. C. Pennington had lost relatives to the interstate trade. He scoffed at those who contended that slavery was more benign along the sectional border. “The mildest form of slavery . . . is comparatively the worst form,” he reasoned, for it “keeps the slave in the most unpleasant apprehension, like a prisoner in chains” and “trains him under the most favorable circumstances the system admits of, and then plunges him into the worst of which it is capable.”<sup>11</sup> Those who were spared sale did not escape the trade’s devastating effects. Frederick County bondsman Fred Fowler suffered the loss of his mother and six siblings to the interstate traffic. In 1858, a neighbor warned Fowler that his master was “contemplating selling him the following winter, probably because some less valuable slave could do the work.” As it had with many others, the specter of imminent sale drove Fowler northward, first to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and later to Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Although northern Maryland’s slaves lived in the shadow of the auction block, the domestic traffic was not an all-encompassing reality. The circumstances of slavery along the Mason-Dixon Line were markedly different from those in the Deep South. In most of the categories of slave treatment sketched out by Eugene Genovese, bondspople in northern Maryland fared better than their counterparts further south.<sup>13</sup> The enslaved may have had fewer opportunities for family and

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<sup>11</sup> James W. C. Pennington, The Fugitive Blacksmith; or, Events in the History of James W. C. Pennington, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church, New York, formerly a Slave in the State of Maryland, United States, 3rd ed. (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850), iv-v.

<sup>12</sup> Fowler subsequently served in the 29th Regiment of Connecticut Colored Volunteers and later became a doorman and messenger at the Library of Congress. Frederick Bancroft, “Some Undistinguished Negroes,” Journal of Negro History 5 (October 1920): 476-80.

<sup>13</sup> Genovese identified three categories of slave treatment that must be addressed in any comparative study of slavery: day-to-day living conditions, which include food, clothing, and work routines; conditions of life, such as opportunities for family formation and the creation of independent

community life on their home places, but the bondspeople on wheat-producing farms and small plantations were seldom subjected to work routines as grueling as those of the Deep South's cotton and sugar estates. More importantly, slaves along the Mason-Dixon Line benefited from greater access to freedom than their counterparts elsewhere. Maryland's manumission laws remained quite liberal through the 1850s, and in the decade preceding the Civil War free blacks outnumbered slaves in all of the state's northern counties. Slaves whose owners refused to grant them legal manumission could steal their freedom by escaping into free territory—a task that, while dangerous, was easier for Marylanders than Mississippians. The interstate trade may have loomed over these distinctions like the Sword of Damocles, threatening to obliterate them at any moment, but it never erased local variations within the “peculiar institution.”

The distinctions between national and local are, of course, somewhat artificial, for slaveholders and the enslaved understood their worlds in both contexts. Indeed, the contours of slavery in northern Maryland were formed by cross-cutting local and national currents. The combined effect of these influences was most visible in the working of delayed manumission agreements, whereby slaveowners and their chattels attempted to reconcile the tensions that were destroying slavery along the border. In the hands of slaveholders, the promise of freedom, however far removed, became a patch to prevent slavery from unraveling altogether from the destructive pull of the interstate trade. Bondsmen and women laboring under delayed manumission

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social and religious organizations; and access to freedom and citizenship. Eugene D. Genovese, “The Treatment of Slaves in Different Countries: Problems in the Applications of Comparative Method,” in *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History*, new ed. (Knoxville: University Press of Tennessee, 1984), 159.

agreements exchanged years of labor—and risked having additional children born into bondage—for protection from the interstate trade. Term slaves who struck for immediate freedom risked have their servitude extended and, perhaps more threateningly, being sold away. Far from being removed from the mainstream of historical scholarship, northern Maryland thus stands in the van of the emerging literature emphasizing the centrality of the domestic trade to any understanding of slavery in the Old South.<sup>14</sup>

In a larger sense, northern Maryland offers an opportunity to plumb the murky waters dividing slavery from free labor. Over the past decade, scholars have attempted to bridge these straits, to reconfigure the dichotomous relationship between slavery and free labor into a more fluid, nuanced spectrum.<sup>15</sup> If there was any place where different labor regimes could have existed in a spectrum, it was northern Maryland. The imperatives of the agricultural economy exerted their influence on both slavery and free labor, and landowners bent both regimes to their needs. The concerns voiced by employers of free labor and owners of slaves were strikingly similar; both worried about the expense of seasonal underemployment, groused about drunken farmhands, and complained about women, children, and other undesirables. To combat these problems, farmers concocted strategies to discipline enslaved and free workers that were roughly analogous. Whether they bought labor or laborers,

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Steven Deyle, Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Walter Johnson, Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and the essays collected in Walter Johnson, ed., The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> For a review of this literature, see John Bezis-Selfa, “A Tale of Two Ironworks: Slavery, Free Labor, Work, and Resistance in the Early Republic,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 56 (October 1999): 677.

farmers employed similar tactics to discipline their workforce. They used bonuses and “extras” to induce workers to exert themselves at harvest. They either refused to hire, sold, or manumitted their male workers’ unwanted dependents. And they combined lectures, fines, and (for slaves) the occasional flogging to curb their workers’ excessive drinking.

Slavery could be hammered into something resembling free labor, but, as former bondsman Stephen Pembroke observed, slavery “is a hard substance; you cannot break it nor pull it apart, and the only way is to escape from it.” Having been threatened with sale to the Deep South after an unsuccessful escape attempt, and having witnessed the sale of several family members, Pembroke understood that the interstate trade scoured away any superficial similarities between slavery and free labor.<sup>16</sup> If the experiences of bound and free laborers were fundamentally shaped by their respective statuses, the rough contours of their lives were, nevertheless, hacked and hewed by their interactions with workers of different races and statuses. Nor were systems of labor discipline insulated from each other; slavery and the various manifestations of free labor may have remained distinct components of the workforce, but employers found innumerable ways of splicing them together on the region’s farms and shops. Thus, the boundaries of labor regimes and the meanings of workers’ statuses are best viewed through a shifting lens, one capable of viewing individual groups of workers in detail, of expanding outward to view the workforce as a whole, and of widening to encompass the larger national and international forces that interacted with local processes to shape the landscape of slavery and free labor.

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<sup>16</sup> John W. Blassingame, ed., Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 108 and 169.

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