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Tobacco Culture and Environmental Consciousness: Ecological Change, Race, and Gender, Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1850–1870

Mary R. McGuire
Virginia Commonwealth University

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Tobacco Culture and Environmental Consciousness:
Ecological Change, Race, and Gender,
Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1850-1870

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University

by

Mary Richie McGuire
Bachelor of Arts, Sweet Briar College
May 1989

Director: Dr. Karen A. Rader, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of History/
Science, Technology, and Society Initiative

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Abstract

TOBACCO CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ECOLOGICAL CHANGE, RACE, AND GENDER, PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1850-1870

By Mary Richie McGuire, BA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Major Director: Dr. Karen A. Rader, Ph.D.
Department of History/Science, Technology, and Society Initiative

The purpose of this thesis is to examine through the lenses of an environmental historian the myths and the realities of soil exhaustion as this ecological process relates to the developing environmental ethics of tobacco farmers of Prince Edward County, Virginia, from 1850 to 1880. During the nineteenth century the tobacco farms of Southside Virginia experienced three phases in a century long process of ecological change that both influenced and were influenced by events that occurred in human history. The first phase coincides with the agricultural reform movements led by the planters of the late antebellum period. The second phase spans the Civil War years. The third phase begins with emancipation and Reconstruction and lasts until the end of the century when the cause of scientific agriculture was taken up by the agricultural

reformers of the Progressive era. With each phase of ecological transition in conjunction with the transition from slave labor to wage labor, the relationship of white men and women and African American men and women to the rural landscape changed, thus creating a diverse, dynamic environmental ethic among the tobacco farmers of Prince Edward County, Virginia.

Introduction

Tobacco, Soil, and People: An Environmental History of Prince Edward County, Virginia

Old Tobacco Belt Plantation Systems and Environment

This thesis, a bioregional history, seeks to demonstrate that the agricultural requirements of the tobacco plant together with cultural structures of gender and race influenced development of an environmental ethic as held by the white tobacco farmers of Prince Edward County, Virginia from 1850-1880. Bioregional histories study the continuance of particular human societies and cultures that inhabit distinct places within larger regions of the United States despite the changing natural and cultural systems within those larger regions. In other words, bioregional historians not only study the ways in which human society alters the environment, but also how society adapts to diverse environmental conditions. The strength of this subfield of environmental history, Dan Flores argues, is that the study of place is deep and intense. “We ought to aim for the ‘big view’ not so much through wide generalizations in shallow time,” Flores writes, “but through analyzing deep time in a single place.”¹ Therefore the clay soils of Prince Edward County and the unique requirements of the tobacco plant must be considered over an extended period of time if we are to gain a better understanding

¹ Dan Flores, “Place: An Argument for Bioregional History,” Environmental History Review 18, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 10.

of the society and culture of the white planters as tobacco agriculture transitioned from slave to wage labor.

Carolyn Merchant argues that environmental historians must also include the issues of gender and race in their research. An analysis of biological and social reproduction as it applies to ecology, modes of production, and worldviews, Merchant writes, would demonstrate that contests for power within different environments “are not only those between indigenous and invading cultures but also those between men and women.”² Merchant also points out that race and environment cannot be separated in the study of history, particularly in the American South:

Slavery and soil degradation are interlinked systems of exploitation, and deep-seated connections exist between the enslavement of human bodies and the enslavement of the land. Blacks resisted that enslavement in complex ways that maintained African culture and created unique African American ways of living on the land.³

By employing these methods of inquiry, environmental historians apply a holistic approach to the study of how human culture perceives and values nature.

An ecosystem, by definition, is an interrelated system of plants and animals and the non-living, physical factors that shape the plant and animal life. When describing ecosystems as they relate to human history, environmental historians refer to “new ecology” as defined by Eugene P. Odum in 1964: a systems ecology is “the study of the structure and function of nature” within the context of a space with clearly defined

² Carolyn Merchant, “Gender and Environmental History,” Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1121.

³ Carolyn Merchant, “Shades of Darkness: Race and Environmental History,” Environmental History 8, no. 3 (Jul., 2003): 380.

parameters, such as a crop field.⁴ Odum's concept of an ecosystem is developmental; an ecosystem changes as the plant and animal life within the system evolve. The study of ecosystems, Odum argued, must employ a holistic approach if the complex relationship of the parts to the whole is to be understood.

The changes in the clay soil system due to interruptions in the nutrient cycle, the practice of clean, weed free cultivation, and erosion are the ecological realities faced by the tobacco farmers in Southside Virginia's Tobacco Belt. Soil is a living system with its own internal organization of animals, bacteria, and fungi. Ecologist Robert Leo Smith writes that the soil functions as "the site of decomposition of organic matter and the return of mineral elements to the nutrient cycle."⁵ The term nutrient cycle refers to the flow of nutrients in and out of the soil system either by natural or artificial means. Soil horizons are the layers of soil that differ in thickness, consistency, color, texture, structure, porosity, composition, and acidity. Plowing is a process that blends the soil horizons thus changing the soil profile and altering the soil fertility. When historians write about soil exhaustion in Virginia, they refer to the combined effects of erosion, disturbances in the nutrient cycle, and the blending of soil horizons on the fertility of clay soil systems.

Historiography and Methodology

⁴ Eugene P. Odum. "The New Ecology," *Bioscience* 14, no. 7 (Jul., 1964): 16; Though both Donald Worster and Mart Stewart point out that Odum's arguments are no longer central to the field of ecology or to the field of environmental history, Stewart still finds these ideas helpful in understanding agroecosystems. Mart Stewart, *What Nature Suffers to Grow: Life, Labor, and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920* (1996; with a new Preface, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2002) 9-11.

⁵ Robert Leo Smith. *Ecology and Field Biology* 4th Edition (New York: HarperCollins, 1990) 172.

In 1983 Albert Cowdrey argued in This Land, This South: An Environmental History that the assumption that the South was a region rich in natural resources was a myth. He based his argument on the fact that the clay soils of the South were, in geologic terms, older than northern soils and, because of their acidity, particularly vulnerable to the detrimental effects of the heavy rains and high heat of the southern summers. “Exposed to leaching under heavy rains for ages longer than northern topsoils,” wrote Cowdrey, “the southern earth has progressed farther in a chemical evolution that tends over time to reduce soils to a mixture of clay and the hydroxides of aluminum and iron.”⁶ Rainwater together with the carbonic acid produced by the decomposition of organic matter forced soluble nutrients to leach down into the clay soils beyond the reach of the roots of most plants grown for agricultural purposes. Summer heat accelerated this chemical process because much of the organic matter that supplies many of the soil’s nutrients was reduced. This argument was pertinent to the much debated issues of soil exhaustion and agricultural reform in the South because it provided a longer view of soil exhaustion as a factor in southern agricultural history; soil exhaustion was as much a part of natural history as human history. Cowdrey reminded his readers that the fertility of agricultural soils is dependent on several factors: mineral wealth, soil structure, the state of agricultural science, and the work ethic of the farmer. These factors combined with the farmers expectations of what the agricultural land should yield created a situation where the “mediocre” soils significantly influenced the “growth and wealth of human societies” of the agricultural

⁶ Albert Cowdrey, This Land, This South: An Environmental History (1983, reprint Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) 2.

south.⁷ Cowdrey's survey of the environmental history of the South was broad in scope and encouraged other historians of the South to study the relationship between humans and nature in this ecologically diverse, complex region.

Historians define the field of environmental history as the study of the function of nature in human history and approach their topics from three principle methods of inquiry. The first angle of inquiry focuses on the understanding of the organization and function of natural systems as they change over time. At this level, historians, such as Carolyn Merchant, employ the language of ecology to interpret change within the natural world; ecological theory supports the historians' reconstruction of landscapes of the past. The second angle addresses the socio-economic organization of human communities as they relate to the natural world. Historians Donald Worster, Carolyn Merchant, Mart Stewart, and Dianne Glave all consider how the relationship between human modes of production and material culture, as well as ideas of race and gender, impact the physical surroundings. Society's intellectual and emotional relationship to nature is the third approach. Historians study ethics, perceptions of nature, laws, and myths of human societies to gain an understanding of how humans relate to nature.⁸ This thesis employs the second and third methods of inquiry.

⁷ Ibid, 2-3.

⁸ Donald Worster, "Appendix: Doing Environmental History," in ed. Donald Worster, The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 298-307; William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) xvii-xviii; Carolyn Merchant, Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 1-26; The March 1990 issue of the Journal of American History, dedicated to topics in environmental history, included the following seven articles. Donald Worster, "Transformations of the Earth: Toward and Agroecological Perspective in History," Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1087-1106; Alfred Crosby, "An Enthusiastic Second," Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1107-

The field of southern environmental history was slow to take off for reasons that are best explained by historian Mart Stewart. Revisionist historians of the late twentieth century, in reaction to the Progressive era arguments of environmental determinism that continued into the 1960s, sought to define the region in terms of politics, economics, and culture rather than geography or environment. Earlier generations of southern historians discussed the influence of weather and soils on human history, however, these historians often cast environmental factors as problems unique to the region. Stewart and others point to U. B. Phillips's Life and Labor in the Old South as an example of this early twentieth century interpretation of history.⁹ Avery Craven's 1926 study of soil exhaustion in the Chesapeake provides another example of this genre of Progressive era history. After World War II, southern historians turned away from arguments that linked environmental factors and events in human history to focus their

1110; Richard White, "Environmental History, Ecology, and Meaning," Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1111-1116; Carolyn Merchant, "Gender and Environmental History," Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1117-1121; William Cronon, "Modes of Prophecy and Production: Placing Nature in History," Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1122-1131; Donald Worster, "Seeing Beyond Culture," Journal of American History 76, no. 4 (Mar., 1990): 1142-1147; Stewart, What Nature Suffers to Groe, 5-8; Dianne Glave, "A Garden So Brilliant with Colors, So Original in its Design: African American Women, Gardening, Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of An African American Environmental Perspective," Environmental History 8, no 3 (July 2003): 380-394; Carolyn Merchant, "Shades Of Darkness: Race and Environmental History," Environmental History 8, no 3 (July 2003): 395-411.

⁹ Stewart, 5-8; Otis L. Graham speaks to many of the same points in his historiographical essay, "Again the Backward Region?: Environmental History In and Of the American South," Southern Cultures 6 no. 2 (Summer 2000): 50-72.

<<http://infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/itw/infomark/433/803/74566495w2/p> (accessed on Oct. 30, 2005)>

research on politics, race and culture.¹⁰ Nature took a back seat in the revisionist histories as humans took full agency in shaping their political and cultural worlds.

In recent years, interest in southern environmental history has grown as the study of environmental justice with regard to race, gender, and access to resources and environmental power gained wider attention within the academy. Mart Stewart's environmental history of the Georgia low country, What Nature Suffers to Groe: Life, Labor and Landscape on the Georgia Coast, 1680-1920, not only opened the field of southern landscape history, but it also introduced the idea of environment to the field of African American history. Stewart sought to challenge both the revisionist notions of region as well as Progressive era environmental determinism by arguing that "labor on the land defined both culture and nature in plantation society," thus implying that, though notions of the natural world are cultural constructions, events in nature defy those constructions.¹¹ The relationship of human societies to the environment is dynamic and always subject to change, large or small. Race figures prominently in his argument as he develops his landscape narrative of the Georgia coast. During colonial and antebellum periods slaves labored to satisfy the will of the planters. A system of dikes transformed the tidal low country land into profitable rice fields. When nature fought back against the will of the planters, it was the labor of the slaves that repaired

¹⁰ Stewart, xii; Otis L. Graham, 50-72.

<<http://infotrac.galegroup.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/itw/infomark/433/803/74566495w2/p> (accessed on Oct. 30, 2005)>

¹¹ Stewart, xii, 9-12, 90-150; Stewart further develops this theme with regard to African American environmental history in "Slavery and the Origins of African American Environmentalism," in To Love the Wind and the Rain: African Americans and Environmental History, ed. Dianne Glave and Mark Stoll (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006) 9-20; Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fisherman of St. Brieuc Bay" in J. Law Power, Action, and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge? (London: Routledge, 1986) 196-223.

the damaged dikes. Stewart points out that throughout the antebellum period slaves used their intimate knowledge of the low country ecosystems to subvert the will of the masters. By raising crops and livestock for both the sustenance of their communities and profit, slaves maintained a sense of autonomy. After emancipation the freedmen used these same skills to give them an edge when negotiating in the emerging landscapes of the post bellum Georgia coast.¹²

In the decade since Stewart published What Nature Suffers to Groe the number of monographs addressing topics in Atlantic and southern history, with an emphasis on region and environment, has grown slowly as graduate students incorporate the methods of environmental history into their research.

Max Edelson's study, Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina, reinterprets the regional history by placing the development of the colonial rice plantation within the context of the Atlantic World history. Edelson argues that the environment, culture and society of South Carolina's low country plantations resembled that of the Caribbean until well after the American Revolution: "My approach," Edelson writes, "describes the plantation itself as a dynamic instrument of colonization and economic development."¹³ The demands of commerce within the Atlantic World economy directly influence the evolution of distinctive human and natural environments on the rice plantations. African slaves, who possessed the technical knowledge of rice cultivation in West Africa, occupied a central role in this process. Once technology

¹² Stewart, 193-242.

¹³ Max Edelson, Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) 4.

together with a significant enslaved labor force allowed colonial planters to think of the swampland in term of arable land, the planter adapted the British land use ethic for the colonization. As in the case of Caribbean sugar plantations, the rice plantations in South Carolina were managed by absentee owners. However, what distinguished the colony of South Carolina from that of Barbados or Jamaica was the fact that planters inhabited the towns within the colony. Thus planters and slaves created “contrasting zones of production and consumption” in the South Carolina landscape.¹⁴ The low country planter, unlike his counter part in Tidewater Virginia, fashioned himself after the rising class of British professionals and entrepreneurs. Land was valued in terms of the productive capacity of the enslaved labor force. Edelson cites the comments of one planter who described the damage a hurricane produced as if ““a thousand negroes [had] been employed for a whole day in cutting down . . . trees.””¹⁵ Only after the American Revolution and the opening of the western frontier, Edelson concludes, did the low country planters begin to question the economic security of their plantations and the soundness of the slave labor as a means to settle land.

Historians of Virginia often associate tobacco agriculture with soil exhaustion, but rarely is the ecological process explained within the larger context of the history of the environment. It is into this historical narrative of soil exhaustion and agricultural

¹⁴ Edelson, 6, 36-37, 126-165; Judith Carney emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge in the development of rice agriculture in the Americas as well as the gendered division of labor in African rice agriculture in Black Rice: The African Origin of Rice Cultivation in the Americas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 1-8, 31-68; Walter Hawthorne argues in Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900 that the gendered division of labor in the coastal rice growing regions of Guinea-Bissau developed as the Balanta fled the river valleys and dispersed along the coastal areas to escape the expanding slave trade. Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900 (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003).

¹⁵ Edelson, 11-12.

reform that Lynn Nelson fit his agroecological study of a nineteenth century tobacco plantation, Pharsalia: A Biography of a Southern Plantation located in Virginia's piedmont. Nelson's narrative seeks to cover the ecological "life span" of this plantation. Pharsalia belonged to the Massie family who had close family ties to the Tidewater planters. Pharsalia was unique, Nelson points out, because William Massie, the patriarch, kept an unusually detailed record of the agricultural operations during the antebellum period. In the three decades before the Civil War, a wave of agricultural reform led by gentleman planters, such as Edmund Ruffin, swept through Virginia as the planters sensed a change in the productive capacities of their plantations. Agricultural reformers such as Ruffin advocated crop diversity, crop rotation and the use of fertilizers for the improvement of poor land. Massie was a "practical farmer" who sought to improve the productive capacity of his plantation by decreasing the amount of tobacco planted and implementing the reforms advocated by men like Ruffin.¹⁶

Agricultural reforms advocated by the amateur scientists did not always produce the intended results because the reformers did not fully understand the nature of the newly established ecological relationships. Massie, hoping that the reforms would result in profitable crop yields, often found that the introduction of new cash crops into established rotations and new methods of clean cultivation increased the rate of nutrient

¹⁶ Lynn A. Nelson, Pharsalia: An Environmental Biography of a Southern Plantation, 1780-1880 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007) 13, 25-27, 69-83; "The Agricultural Revival," in Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (reprinted Gloucester, Ma.: Peter Smith, 1965) 122-161.

leaching and accelerated the process of soil erosion.¹⁷ Many reform minded planters blamed the decline in crop production on soil exhaustion to such an extent that this ambiguous term became entrenched in the environmental consciousness of the antebellum South.

None of the studies mentioned above address the role of gender with regard to bioregions, agricultural systems or attitudes toward the environment. Stewart, Edelson, and Nelson focus on plantations established and maintained by men of English origin. All three authors agree that the system of slave labor and the growth of capitalism had the most significant impact on the southern landscape, but they fail to discuss other cultural factors that influence the establishment of the rice and tobacco plantation systems within particular environments. Mart Stewart's landscape narrative is the only history that attributes slaves with agency within the human and natural environments, however he fails to discuss the role of gendered division of labor in African rice agriculture. Nelson's study does not address the agricultural practices of the non-reform minded planter or the subsistence farmer; in his opinion the farming practices of the non-reformers are negligible in the history of soil conservation of the South. Nelson hypothesizes, with condescension, that the resistance to agricultural reform and subsequent poverty of this group of farmers was as much a problem of history as it was of ecology. "Perhaps inherited practices had hardened into unquestioned habits," Nelson

¹⁷ Nelson, 116-120.

writes of the inertia of southern life, “or the weed of ignorance had taken root in the hard soil of poverty.”¹⁸

An environmental history that analyzes a backcountry plantation system from the viewpoint of planters whose cultural ties are not linked to either the Tidewater or Low Country is needed.¹⁹ Tobacco is a unique cash crop because it is not grown for human subsistence. A factor that makes tobacco relevant for an environmental study is that, unlike the culture of corn or wheat, the growing year begins in December and January with the sterilization of the soil in the seed bed by clearing the organic matter, the freezing of the soil during the winter months, and the burning of the seedbed in the early spring. Throughout this process the farmer deliberately altered the ecology of the agricultural field in order to grow a cash crop.

An Agroecological Analysis

In order to put the ecological process described above into historical perspective, this study of soil exhaustion on the tobacco farms will incorporate historian Donald Worster’s concept of an agroecosystem. An agroecosystem forcibly restructures “the productive energies in some ecosystem,” explains Worster, “to serve more exclusively a set of conscious purposes often located outside it – namely the feeding and prospering

¹⁸ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁹ The following monographs are studies that examine backcountry society and culture in the colonial and antebellum South: Richard R. Beeman, The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746-1832 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) and Rachel N. Klien, Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

of humans.”²⁰ Like larger ecosystems, the agroecosystem is dependent on the natural world, however, the numbers of natural species living within the system are fewer and the interrelationships between the species are determined by an economic market which exists outside of the agroecosystem. Worster also argues that man’s relationship to the agricultural land changes when the economy in which the agroecosystem functions changes from a subsistence economy to a capitalist economy. The growth of capitalism changed the way land was perceived by humans. In a pre-capitalist society, land was associated with the self-sustaining biological community of plants and animals and, thus, held a place of emotional significance within the human community that farmed the land. With the rise of capitalism, the idea of land transformed from one that envisioned land as a place with emotional significance to one that treated land as a commodity for trade and as an instrument in agricultural production. Worster argues that this transformation in the human relationship to land marked the introduction of a new agroecosystem based on monoculture, the cultivation of a single crop.

The sources used to reconstruct the natural and human landscape of nineteenth century Prince Edward County include the manuscript Census schedules from 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, land and personal property tax records, the 1958 soil survey maps, topographic maps. Farm families revealed their ideas relating to the ethics of land use and place attachment in their account books, estate papers, and personal correspondence. The business and personal papers of the Dupuy and Watkins families,

²⁰ Donald Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s 25th Anniversary Edition (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 3-8; Worster, “Transformations of the Earth”: 1093; Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 149-197; Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative,” Journal of American History 78, no. 4 (Mar., 1992) 1347-1376; Nelson, 13-17, 23-24.

in particular, provide a detailed record of plantation life in the Meherrin neighborhood of southeastern Prince Edward County from the 1820s to 1900. Included in these collections are the papers of Emily Howe Dupuy, widow of the planter Asa Dupuy, and her daughter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, which demonstrate that on the tobacco plantations of the nineteenth century, gender and race influenced the development of an environmental ethic.

The account books and correspondence of the of the elite planter from the 1830s to 1880 demonstrate that attitudes toward land use and soil fertility among the white tobacco planters was closely linked to faith and rituals of labor unique to tobacco agriculture rather than environmental factors. The culture and society of Prince Edward County was increasingly shaped by evangelical forms of Protestantism as the county transformed, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from a frontier settlement to an established county dependent on tobacco as the principle cash crop. Political, economic and social networks in the county were tightly intertwined and revolved around the county's Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches. During the 1840s and 1850s the paternalist values of the elite planters began to change as the evangelical faiths began to question the nature of salvation and the legitimacy of the system of slave labor. The tobacco planters often found themselves torn between the conflicting tenets of their political, economic, and religious ideologies. Growing interest among the elite planter families in the New School Presbyterian belief in moral progress justified the growth of a capitalist economy, however the economic success of planter depended on slave labor. In the South, ideas of race justified the New School

Presbyterians support of slavery. Emancipation forced the planters to reconsider their labor management practices however they maintained their belief that the protestant work ethic and the ritual of labor determined the productivity of the land rather than environmental factors, such as weather and soil exhaustion. The development of sharecropping in the 1870s reinstated the ritual of labor on the tobacco farm within the context of the wage labor system.

The United States Bureau of Census published an Agricultural Schedule for each of the Virginia counties for the census years 1850-1880. Data gathered from these schedules together with data from the Population Schedules generated the statistical data that documents the dramatic changes in both the physical and socio-economic landscapes of Prince Edward County from 1850 to 1880. As the agricultural land use and land cover transitioned from antebellum plantations to the farms of the New South the size of the farms became smaller, more specialized, and more localized. The process of ecological change on the antebellum tobacco plantations of piedmont Virginia, though slow to materialize, began in the early nineteenth century, and culminated in the rise of scientific agriculture in Virginia in the late nineteenth century. Tobacco plantations of the antebellum and post-bellum Virginia functioned as two different agricultural ecosystems. The plantation system of agriculture was diversified and used slave labor. The antebellum plantation balanced subsistence agriculture with cash crop production. Agricultural production on the smaller post-bellum farm was less diversified and relied on the labor of wage earning farm laborers, sharecroppers, or

tenant farmers.²¹ The Civil War was a watershed period in the ecological history as well as human history of Prince Edward County. With many of the younger planters and overseers away from the county during those years, plantation mistresses, slaves, and remaining planters found themselves thrust into new relationships with the land.

Prince Edward County, during the nineteenth century, stood apart culturally from the neighboring counties in rural Southside Virginia in two important ways. Prince Edward County had a high concentration of Presbyterian churches as compared to neighboring counties which were predominantly Methodist; the wealthiest tobacco planters were Presbyterian.²² Compared to neighboring counties, Prince Edward was an unusually literate county that supported, in addition to a college and seminary for white males, a large number of male and female secondary schools. The surviving correspondence of elite women provide an historical record that is rich with information on topics that range from the religious life of the whites and enslaved to garden crops and cash crops. The observations of the women provide a perspective of plantation agriculture that, when used in conjunction with the account books kept by the men, demonstrates that the production of a cash crop was only one part of this agroecosystem. One is reminded that the natural resources consumed on the antebellum plantations and post bellum farms served to sustain the family and laborers as well as to produce a cash crop.

²¹ Calculated from U.S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, Prince Edward County, 1870 and 1880.

²² Calculated from U.S. Bureau of Census, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Census of the United States: Social Statistics, Prince Edward County, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880; Membership lists from Session Books for Briery Church, Buffalo Church, and College Church, Church Records Collection, LVA.

Historical debate over land use ethics among the planters in the antebellum South reflected the ambiguities concerning the stewardship of agricultural land from the colonial period to the Civil War. Economic historians, such as Gavin Wright have argued that the concept of stewardship during the antebellum period differed from the post bellum period; the antebellum planters' investment was in the slave labor force not the land. Capitalist antebellum planters functioned more as labor lords rather than landlords. Many southern planters, Wright argues, bought land with the intention of wearing it out and migrating to the frontier, thus earning the reputation of "land killer."²³ However, the documentary evidence shows that the Prince Edward County planters maintained a strong, emotional attachment to the land during the antebellum period.

Ideas of a nascent scientific agricultural reform mixed with proslavery ideology and the Protestant work ethic to produce a varied land use ethic among Prince Edward's planters and small farmers until the outbreak of the Civil War. Planters, such as Thomas Tredway, believed that developments in science and technology in conjunction with slave labor would solve the problem of soil infertility.²⁴ Other planters and small farmers believed that hard work and a rigid adherence to established rules of farming would increase tobacco production. William Woodall, a poor Prince Edward farmer who moved to Halifax County, often worked himself until he was ill in an effort to produce a successful tobacco crop. Through out his correspondence with his brother,

²³ Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 31; 17.

²⁴ John Woodall Papers, microform, Reel 2604, LVA, originals at Special Collections Library, Duke University.

John Woodall, William expressed his hope that a successful tobacco crop would render the cash necessary to solve his financial worries, however poor soil in conjunction with other environmental factors prevented Woodall from ever realizing his dream.²⁵

In 1850 much of the tobacco producing land in the county was still organized into large tracts of land owned by the patriarchs of the county's wealthiest Presbyterian families. Emily Howe Dupuy's correspondence with her family in Massachusetts illuminate from a female perspective to what extent proslavery ideology was a part of the planter's faith based environmental consciousness. Emily Dupuy's comments on the condition of slaves in Prince Edward and her careful transcription of Virginia's "Act for the Voluntary Enslavement of the Free Negroes" indicated that, although she had been raised a Presbyterian on a small farm in a free state until her move to Virginia, her experience of plantation life, first as a teacher and then as a plantation mistress, caused her ideas concerning the institution of slavery to change.²⁶ The community of planters that formed Emily Dupuy's social network in Virginia was made up of Methodists and Presbyterians who managed their plantations conservatively for the long-term support of their families. Their paternalist ethic was influenced by the ideas of honor. Rituals that governed land and labor management were imbedded into family life to insure continuity of the white and enslaved communities over time.

During the antebellum period ideas of stewardship differed in the North and South because of the issue of slavery. However, the belief systems of northern farmers

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Emily Howe Dupuy, Transcription of "An Act Providing for the Voluntary Enslavement of the Free Negroes," Section 5, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

and southern planters were rooted in the biblical interpretations of stewardship. Scholars argue that the early Americans used biblical texts such as Genesis 1:28, which instructed western man to subdue the earth and take dominion over every living thing, to rationalize the Puritan's settlement of New England. The belief that God granted Anglican settlers the right to subdue and take dominion over the earth's natural resources was also used to justify the exploitation of Tidewater Virginia's fields and forest. A closer consideration of the actions of the community of planters in Prince Edward County indicates that the influence of religion on a culture's attitudes toward nature is more complicated. Religious ideology, even within an established church, changes over time. The most significant factor in changing the environmental attitudes of the white planters in antebellum Prince Edward was the schism in the Presbyterian Church in which the New School Presbyterians split from the Old School.²⁷

Between 1850 and 1860 a shift in the configuration of crop land of the tobacco plantations and farms and a significant increase in the amount of tobacco produced in the county indicates that planters in the decade preceding the Civil War engaged in intensive tobacco production.²⁸ Capitalist intensification of tobacco production in the 1840s and 1850s coincided with the division and transfer of ownership of a significant number of the largest plantations in the county. The sons of the leading Presbyterian

²⁷ Cronon, *Changes in the Land*, vii; 69; Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 103-108; Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 63-70; Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) 56; Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press) 17-24.

²⁸ Calculated from U.S. Bureau of Census, *Seventh and Eight Census of the United States*: Agricultural Schedule, Prince Edward County, 1850 and 1860.

families began amassing multiple plantations and slaves between 1850 and 1860. Agricultural reforms employed by the capitalist planters relied on the labor of enslaved African Americans and did not conjure ideas of conservation in the minds of the capitalist planters in the utilitarian sense of conservation. Rather the practice of soil amendment and crop rotation to solely increase the number of years the fields remained in production reflects a more egocentric, self-interested land use ethic.²⁹ Prince Edward planters believed that the purpose of land management was simply to increase crop production for a finite period of time rather than to maintain the health and longevity of the soil of the tobacco fields to support subsequent generations of human life on the plantation. The land and labor management rituals that the older generations established and maintained in the early part of the century were largely ignored by the younger generation by 1860.

This younger generation of planters perceived the community of free blacks in antebellum Prince Edward County as a threat to their market oriented environmental ethic. The largest of these communities, Israel Hill, is the subject of historian Melvin Ely's book, Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s to the Civil War. Ely demonstrates in his analysis of civil court cases that, for the most part, the rights of individual members of the Israel Hill community were respected by the white community. However, the sustainable land use practices on Israel Hill and other free black communities indicated that these communities increasingly frustrated and challenged the environmental norms of the capitalist planters

²⁹ Carolyn Merchant, Radical Ecology, 63-70.

by 1850.³⁰ This contradiction in the attitudes toward environment between the white planters and the free blacks in the antebellum period reveals that racial slavery and soil productivity were inextricably linked.

The Civil War years functioned as transitional years because of the absence of the younger planters from the plantations. Wartime correspondence of the planter families exemplified how the environmental consciousness of the plantation mistresses changed as they assumed the role of planter in the absence of husbands. Little in the life experiences of the elite women had prepared them to step into the role of tobacco planter in the summer of 1861. Their knowledge of plantation management was limited to the household; never before had they managed a tobacco crop, managed the slaves who labored in the fields, or hired an overseer. The wartime embargo forced the deputy planters to change their agricultural practices; farm produced manures replaced imported fertilizers such as guano, thus forcing the tobacco planters to revert to “old fashioned” practices. The contrast in the experience of the planter’s and their wives demonstrated that the separation of productive and reproductive roles by gender and race influenced the way in which the men and women living and working on the tobacco farms of Prince Edward County developed an environmental ethic.³¹

³⁰ Francis N. Watkins, “The Randolph Emancipated Slaves” *De Bows* New Series 4 (April 1858): 285-290; Correspondence of Richard Henry Watkins and Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, July to December 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

³¹ Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 16, 167-172; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: The Woman’s World in the Old South* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1982) 16-35; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) 116-117, 172-177, 293-294 ; Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman: Female Slaves in th Plantation South* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1999) 66-69, 119-141; Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*, 75-104, 116-121; Dianne Glave, “A Garden So Brilliant with Colors, So Original in its Design: African American Women, Gardening,

After the Civil War the elite planters of antebellum Prince Edward returned to a world where the mode of tobacco production no longer fit with the agricultural practices thus forcing change in the land use ethic. Many of these planters, burdened with debt, found their material circumstances reduced to a level of subsistence farming as a new generation of elite tobacco farmers assumed political and economic power in the county. “When slavery ended,” Wright argues, “like players in a game of musical chairs, [planters] seized whatever land they occupied at the time and held it tenaciously,” thus causing the political priorities to change.³² During the 1870s and 1880s the size of tobacco farms decreased and farms specialized in the culture of one cash crop. Post bellum tobacco farms typically grew only tobacco and used the cereal crops, corn, oats and wheat, for crop rotation.³³ The agricultural schedules for 1870 and 1880 also reflect an increased use of commercial fertilizers and a decreased use of legumes in the amendment of soils. The changes in the management of the farmland in Prince Edward County as revealed in the 1870 and 1880 agricultural schedules demonstrated the farmers’ recognition that the process of soil exhaustion in conjunction with a system of wage labor had some kind of effect on the ecology of the tobacco farm.³⁴

Progressive Reform, and the Foundation of An African American Environmental Perspective,” 380-394; Kirsten Wood, Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution Through the Civil War (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 35-60, 85-102.

³² Wright, vii; 49.

³³ Calculated from U.S. Bureau of Census, Ninth and Tenth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, Prince Edward County, 1870 and 1880.

³⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 1

Kinship Ties and Resource Management: Real Estate, Personal Property, and Debt

Plantation Management and Environment

Concern for the ecological health of the plantation ran deep in the mind of Asa Dupuy in the fall of 1847. Strengthened by the belief that continued prosperity depended on the careful management of the natural and human resources, he addressed this concern in his will. Asa Dupuy, a wealthy tobacco planter whose career as a lawyer and public servant in Prince Edward County established him as a trusted and “useful man in his neighborhood as well as family,” was a model of southern paternalism.³⁵ He was known for opening his “heart and hands” to aid impoverished members as well as the poor in the larger community.³⁶ Prompted by frequent bouts of ill health in 1847, Dupuy wrote a will that enjoined his executors, William P. Dickinson and Henry N. Watkins, to settle his debts, manage his lands in Virginia and Mississippi, and distribute his slaves in accordance with the provisions outlined in his will. The standard first sentence of the will nonetheless emphasized that the content of the document was the result of the same careful deliberation that characterized Dupuy’s even keeled disposition: “I Asa Dupuy of sound mind do make and publish this my last will and testament in manner

³⁵ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

³⁶ Ibid.

and form following.”³⁷ The will had seven stipulations. The first three stipulations, routine for wills of that period, dealt with debt management, the support of his wife, and the education of his five daughters. However the inclusion of the last four was unusual and demonstrated that Dupuy was keenly aware that the health and welfare of his wife, children, extended family, and slaves depended on the continued productivity of Linden, his Prince Edward County plantation. That required the prudent stewardship of the soil, the cultivation of tobacco, and the management of the slaves who worked the soil and grew the tobacco and food crops. The language of the will made clear Dupuy’s belief that effective land management went hand in hand with labor management.³⁸

In the fall of 1847 the recently widowed Anna Howe Whitteker returned to Virginia’s Southside, after an absence of eleven years, to help her younger sister, Emily Howe Dupuy, manage Linden, the slaves that worked the plantation, and the young family. Whitteker mentioned in a letter to her sister, Sarah Howe Skinner, of Princeton, Massachusetts, that, as of November 1847, Asa Dupuy had sold the land in Mississippi and bought land adjoining Linden so that the plantation encompassed a total of 1500 acres. Dupuy also bought 400 acres of woodland located three miles from Linden, and planned to relocate some of his slaves to that land.³⁹ With this series of events, Dupuy had put into motion the stipulations of his will even before his death January 2, 1848, so that Linden would possess within its boundaries the natural resources needed to provide for the maintenance of his family and education of his children.

³⁷ Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

³⁸ Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 185-190; Lynn A. Nelson, *Pharsalia*, 83-93.

³⁹ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

This concern for the ecological health of the plantation as voiced in the will expressed the belief held widely by Southside tobacco planters that continued prosperity depended on diversification of land cover and topography of the plantation landscape that supported the culture of tobacco. The land, slaves, and the tobacco that generated Dupuy's wealth were carefully managed in accordance with an ethic of land-use that espoused an environmentally aware paternalism and reflected not only Dupuy's class, race, and gender, but also his generation. Prior to 1840 the county's landed elite enjoyed a certain measure of political and economic security that allowed for an ecological approach to plantation management emphasizing crop diversification and self-sufficiency. From its establishment in 1753 until the 1850s, the agricultural land in Prince Edward County was still configured into large plantations owned by the elite families. Dupuy, like many of his peers, inherited his plantation and slaves, so his capital investment was minimal.

This chapter will explore how kinship and the ideal of economic progress influenced the land use ethics and the management of human and animal resources on neighboring plantations, Linden and Oldham, located in the Meherrin neighborhood of Prince Edward County from 1840 to 1860. By the 1850s the county was in the midst of significant economic and social change as the sons of aging patriarchs came of age. The agriculturally diverse backcountry plantation community of the early antebellum period was becoming increasingly dependent on the culture of a single cash crop, tobacco. Though land in the Deep South and West lured young planters away from the county, many of these young men stayed in Prince Edward to build their own plantations from

land that they both bought and inherited from their parents and extended family. This younger generation of planters sought to manage their plantations to maximize profits rather than to maintain ecological health of the plantation. Ambitious men such as Richard Henry Watkins of Oldham firmly believed that the capitalist intensification of agricultural production would bring economic progress. However widows with dependent children, such as Emily Howe Dupuy, managed their plantations with an awareness of the ecological connections between the land, labor, cash crop production, and subsistence farming. Emily Dupuy acknowledged that economic progress depended on the continued production of the plantation. Production in turn depended on the soundness and strength of each part of the interconnected agroecosystem. Also central to the continued productivity of the plantation agroecosystem were the community connections that bound together the planter and yeoman farm families in the Meherrin neighborhood.

Linden: Environmental Paternalism, 1800-1850

“My will,” wrote Dupuy, “is that my estate shall be kept together for the education and support of my children” until the time when “any of my children shall come of age or marry.”⁴⁰ Dickinson and Watkins would then disburse to each child her equal share of two thirds of the slaves. The will stipulated that after the last child came of age or married, two thirds of the land was to be divided equally among all of the children. Dupuy allotted the remaining third of land and slaves to his wife for her

⁴⁰ Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

support during her life time and gave her the option of either managing her portion together with the children's land and slaves or separately. At the time of their father's death in January 1848 the eldest daughter, Mary Purnall Dupuy, was only nine and the youngest, Emily Dupuy, was fourteen months thus insuring that the plantation, land, and slaves, would remain intact for the next decade and, from there, dissolve slowly over time.

The three stipulations that followed the instructions for the division of the Linden land in the Dupuy will directly addressed Dupuy's concern that both the slave and animal populations at Linden exceeded the natural resources at hand within the present boundaries. If the executors ignored this three-part problem of a land shortage, an increasing slave population, and an over abundance of livestock, Dupuy feared that the future of the plantation would likely be compromised. "I feel that the farm is now overburdened," Dupuy wrote and then continued with the instructions "not to keep more slaves or stock" than could be "comfortably supported on the plantation."⁴¹ Dupuy's solution to the land issue was simply to increase the size of his plantation. He authorized the executors to purchase, in the name of his daughters, five thousand dollars worth of land adjoining or near Linden to insure plantation's sustainability, but the sale of the slaves proved to be more problematic. It is evident from the language used that Dupuy thought carefully about specific circumstances that would warrant the sale of human property: "Sixthly, if any of my slaves should misbehave or become

⁴¹ Ibid.

troublesome, I authorize my Executors ~~if they think best~~ to sell them.”⁴² The specific reference to behavior indicates that Dupuy expected the slaves to maintain a code of conduct that promoted the productivity of the plantation. This slave owner believed that the sustainability problem would not be solved by the sale of slaves; slaves were too valuable a resource to be sold for the purchase of land. Only slaves who refused to work with the system in place would be sold. The funds required to finance this purchase of land and to pay his debts, Dupuy decided, would be raised from the sale of his Mississippi lands and his Virginia properties located in Nottoway, Lunenburg, and Prince Edward Counties.

Asa Dupuy’s unusual concern for the continued sustainability of his plantation stemmed from two closely related factors. Dupuy understood well that his death would cast his wife and children into a vulnerable position. Unlike the wives of the neighboring planters, Emily Dupuy did not possess outright either land or slaves for her support; she came to Virginia from Massachusetts to teach school and thus had no real or personal property in Virginia. Asa Dupuy also realized that the land and slaves comprised the wealth that would support his daughters as adult.⁴³

Land and Slave Acquisition

In 1850, the elite planters owned and controlled the management of the best agricultural land in Prince Edward County. The wealthiest plantations encompassed

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 185-190; Nelson, 83-93.

large tracts of land comprising 48% (97,176 acres) of the 204,307 acres of agricultural land in the county. The top 50 plantations averaged 1127 total acres.

The tobacco plantations constituted 93% (191,664 acres) of agricultural land in the county; the top 50 tobacco planters owned a total of 27% (54,879 acres) of the agricultural land in the county. The wealthiest tobacco plantations averaged 1097.58 acres. Thirty-six of the wealthiest tobacco planters ranked among the 50 wealthiest planters in the county. Widows managed six of the 50 wealthiest plantations. Linden, managed by the widowed Emily Dupuy in 1850, ranked eighth among the wealthiest plantations and fourteenth among the tobacco producers. The plantation encompassed a total of 1370 acres.⁴⁴

The land that became Linden plantation was located in the south central part of Prince Edward County about 4 miles north of the border with Lunenburg County. Meherrin, located on the county line, was the closest town. James Zachery purchased the land in 1762 and lived there until 1774. The plantation changed owners twice between 1774 and 1781 when John Purnell purchased it. Purnell and his wife, Mary Flourney Purnell, lived at Linden until his death in 1825. Over the four decades, Purnell accumulated land and slaves that produced crops, including, tobacco, and livestock that were typical of the backcountry plantations of Southside Virginia. At Purnell's death in

⁴⁴ Calculated from U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850, microfilm, LVA. The planters' wealth was determined by the value of the plantation as recorded by the enumerator. The tobacco planters' wealth was determined by the amount of tobacco produced in 1849 as recorded by the enumerator.

1825, Linden contained 1700 acres and was valued at \$26,000.00. In addition to the real estate, the Purnell estate owned 45 enslaved adults and children.⁴⁵

Initially Purnell's widow was granted dower rights to Linden in accordance with John Purnell's will. The land and slaves at Linden were not to be divided among the heirs until Mary Purnell's death. Yet, at some point during the settlement of the estate Mary Purnell gave up her dower rights. This event was unusual given the usual behavior of widows in the county, such as Emily Dupuy, Margaret Venable, and Mildred Watkins. Most widows managed their husband's estates in the interest of their children until their own deaths. John and Mary Purnell were childless, thus altering Mary Purnell's circumstances significantly. In exchange for 300 acres of land, including the house tract, slaves a portion of the crop of corn, pork, livestock, household furniture, and plantation equipment valuing \$8500, Mary Purnell relinquished her lifetime interest in the estate. Each heir contributed real and personal property to the \$8,500 payment in proportion to his or her inheritance. The nephews agreed that the timely payment of debts and the retention of land and slaves were most important in the settlement of the estate. Given that Asa Dupuy was the heir to the house tract, it was in his best interest to ensure that the plantation remained intact and untouched by debt.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Bonds, Plantation Inventory, Slave Distribution Lists, Agreement between the Legatees of General Purnell, John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Land Tax Book, 1782-1810, microfilm Reel 251, LVA; Christine Fansler, Survey Report, Linden, August 9, 1837, Online Survey Report, LVA, <http://lvaimage.lib.va.us/VHI/html/22/0062.html> Report Home Page (accessed October 20, 2007); Nelson, 192-201; "Settling the Backcountry," in Rachel Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*, 9-46; "Building Communities in the Wilderness," in Richard Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*, 42-59.

⁴⁶ Agreement between the Legatees of General Purnell, John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Folder 2, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Copy of Will, William H. Venable, Wills of Southside Virginia, Special

Linden, among the larger plantations in the county, was unusual in two respects. The ownership of the plantation lands remained in the Purnell-Dupuy family from 1781 until 1900, thus delaying sale of land for a century to owners outside of the family. From 1848 until 1867, the Linden land remained intact and the plantation production remained under the management of Emily Howe Dupuy. After 1867, the plantation lands were divided between Asa Dupuy's heirs, and Richard Henry Watkins, Emily Dupuy's son in law, managed the 531 acres of dower land as well as his own land until 1870.⁴⁷

Until the railroad was finished in 1848, the landlocked Meherrin neighborhood was geographically as well as economically isolated from the market towns of Farmville, Richmond, and Petersburg. This isolation required that Dupuy and his neighbors grow and manufacture many of the products used on the plantations and farms. Thus the planters managed the land to meet the needs of both the humans and the cash crops. Asa Dupuy continued to plant tobacco, corn, wheat, and raise livestock in much the same way as his uncle.⁴⁸

Despite this land management strategy, the instructions to Asa Dupuy's executors indicated that the requirements of the plantation agroecosystem and the needs

Collection, UVA; U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1860, microfilm, LVA; Nelson, 90-91, 192-201.

⁴⁷ Plat of Linden, 1866, Section 19, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Christine Fansler, Survey Report, Linden, August 9, 1837, Online Survey Report, LVA, <<http://lvaimage.lib.va.us/VHI/html/22/0062.html>>; Linden Plantation Inventory, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie and Nathaniel Watkins, February 5, 1867, Folder 9, Watkins Family Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

⁴⁸ Plantation Accounts and Inventory, John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers; Letters, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, February 9 and March 20, 1838, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Klein, 24-27; Beeman, 38-40

of the humans came into greater conflict as the enslaved population at Linden increased in the 1840s and 1850s. Asa Dupuy began his management of the land with an enslaved labor force that he acquired by inheritance and by purchase. Certainly, given the sex and age distributions among the slaves, Dupuy deliberately amassed a labor force that immediately began to work on the plantation and, as importantly, began to reproduce.⁴⁹ Dupuy's allotment from the Purnell estate included four adult males, ranging in age from 22 to 36, and one boy, aged 5. The one adult female obtained in the Purnell distribution had a year old daughter. Dupuy received from his father's estate three young males, ranging in age from 18 to 8, and three young females, ranging in age from 13 to 3. In addition to these slaves, he owned four male field laborers, ranging in age from 56 to 23 and one woman, age 38, and her year old daughter. Asa Dupuy purchased these slaves from the estates of neighboring planters, George Walton and John Allen.⁵⁰

The acquisition of female slaves of childbearing age was crucial to the continued productivity of the plantation.⁵¹ It is unknown when and how Dupuy acquired one enslaved woman, Violet, but this woman would become the matriarch of the largest enslaved family on the Dupuy plantation. Violet's three daughters, Dotia, Sally, and

⁴⁹ Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 7-19, 185-190.

⁵⁰ Slave Distribution Lists, John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers; Slave List, Asa Dupuy, Account Book 888, Section 21, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

⁵¹ Deborah Gray White's argument that "slaveholders realized that the reproductive function of the female slave could yield a profit," was based on evidence found in plantation records as well as published sources such as De Bows Review (1857), 30:74. Enslave women usually began bearing children in their nineteenth year and had subsequent children at two and a half year intervals. Gray also points out that slaveholders "also adopted the practice of rewarding prolific women." Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I a Woman, 68-70, 97-98, 99-105; Marie Jenkins Schwartz argues that not only did planters exploit the reproductive lives of their female slaves, she also argues that planters turned to medical professionals to increase and maintain the fertility of enslaved women. Marie Jenkins Schwartz, Birthing a Slave: Motherhood and Medicine in the Antebellum South (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) 1-5, 10-11.

Milly, gave birth to 23 of the 51 children that made up the first generation of slaves born at Linden after 1826. The grandchildren of these women made up half of the second generation of slaves born at Linden by 1860. By the time Asa Dupuy composed his will in 1837, 12 of the 40 children from the second generation had been born. This increase in the number of slaves certainly was part of Dupuy's business plan in 1825, but, it nonetheless, caused him a great deal of concern about the sustainability of the plantation by 1847.⁵²

Land and Slave Management

Until his marriage in 1838, Dupuy managed Linden as an absentee owner, thus creating an unusual relationship between master and slaves. Without a resident master or mistress the slaves Linden established a large degree of independence that significantly influence the day-to-day activities at Linden. When the newly married Emily Howe Dupuy first arrived at Linden, the slaves at Linden let it be known that they valued the established master-slave relationship and would not tolerate a change. The slaves greeting reminded her that they had been without a mistress for a long time, and a few slaves added a warning. "We got a mighty good master, we all love him," they then cautioned, "You must treat him mighty good, hope you both be happy."⁵³

⁵² Slave Distribution Lists, John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers; Slave List, Asa Dupuy, Account Book 888, Section 21, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 7-19, 185-190.

⁵³ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, February 9, 1838, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

Clearly, the slaves did not want the young mistress to create any disruption in the way Dupuy way managed the plantation.⁵⁴

I “shall no doubt have much to learn in managing a family and household matters,” Emily Dupuy concluded, “but intend to give it strict attention to it and hope at any rate to be successful.”⁵⁵ According to Emily Dupuy, her husband granted slaves at Linden liberal privileges. The slaves Emily mentioned as examples possessed skills for specialized jobs that were crucial to plantation production. The cook, Aggy, enjoyed a great degree of freedom of movement. She was allowed to travel to Lynchburg to visit her daughter for up to two weeks. Aggy’s husband, Aaron the blacksmith, was one of several adult enslaved males who could read and write. Slaves were also allowed to cultivate their own cash crops and gardens. Emily Dupuy mentioned that her husband compensated the slaves with cash for plantation work that benefited them as well as the production of cash crops, such as ditching, gathering fodder, and growing corn.

Long distance travel, literacy, religious privileges, and financial compensation were privileges deemed considerable by northern born Emily Dupuy, whose view of slavery in the South was initially formed by what she read in antislavery papers, such as the Massachusetts Spy.⁵⁶ Undoubtedly certain slaves at Linden enjoyed more privileges, however, it is improbable that all of the slaves at Linden enjoyed such privileges. For instance enslaved couples, such as Aggy and Aaron, produced children that added

⁵⁴ Kirsten Wood, Masterful Women, 25-28; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Within the Plantation Household, 308-309, 315-316; White, 77-79.

⁵⁵ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, February 9, 1838, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Wood, 25-28; Fox-Genovese, 308-309, 315-316; White, 77-79.

⁵⁶ Letters, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, April 19, 1837, December 13, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

significantly to the enslaved labor force. Planters used privileges, such as travel and financial compensation, as rewards to promote productivity on the plantation.⁵⁷ And clearly Emily Dupuy's statement regarding the master slave relationship indicted that certain slaves intended to maintain the status quo.

After Asa Dupuy's death, Emily Dupuy continued to manage the agricultural operations at Linden in much the same manner as her husband until the end of the Civil War. Emily Dupuy realized, as her husband did, that those few slaves who possess these privileges also possessed considerable power to maintain order in the absence of the master. Continuity in agricultural productivity and slave management, Emily Dupuy believed, was in the best interest of her daughters in the midst of great economic and social change in the Meherrin neighborhood. Emily Dupuy's allies in this business were the slaves at Linden. She relied on their knowledge of the land, crops, and seasonal weather patterns in order to make a profit from the plantation production.⁵⁸

In the winter and spring of 1848, the newly widowed Emily Howe Dupuy needed a source of cash income. While slaves had been sold to pay off debt, the sale of real estate and human property was not in the best interest of the family because such a

⁵⁷ "The Female Slave Network," in White, 119-141, also see 99-105; Wood, 42-43.

⁵⁸ Anna Whitteker and Mary Watkins mentioned specific slaves in reference to the jobs these slaves performed at Linden and Oldham, thus indicating an acknowledgment by Whitteker and Watkins that the slaves possessed specialized knowledge about plantation operations. Letter, Anna Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847; Letters, Anna Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, February 13, 1851, January 27, 1854, and January 19, 1861, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; The Civil War correspondence of Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins and Richard Henry Watkins detail day to day plantation operations at Linden and Oldham from July 1861 to May 1864. Section 1, Folders 3-7, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; "The Management of Negroes," in Wood, 35-60; Fox-Genovese, 22-25, 132-140, 163-165; "The Female Slave Network," in White, 119-141, also see discussion of slave resistance 76-84.

large percentage her daughters' wealth was in land and slaves. In an effort to diversify the sources of plantation production, Emily Dupuy opened a school for girls at Linden. The tuition from the day and boarding students provided valuable cash income for the support of her family and her widowed sister, Anna Howe Whitteker. Opening a school in partnership with Whitteker was a logical move for Dupuy to make. Teaching jobs brought these women to Southside Virginia in the 1830s and remained the only profession open to women. The wealthy planters and farmers in Nottoway, Lunenburg, and Prince Edward County already knew of and respected Emily Howe Dupuy and Anna Howe Whitteker.

The school at Linden was operated much like the plantation schools that Anna Whitteker and Emily Dupuy ran in Cumberland and Prince Edward counties in the 1830s. The enrollment for 1850 was typical of most years during that decade. In addition to the Dupuy daughters, six girls from Lunenburg County, between the ages of 11 and 18, boarded at Linden.⁵⁹ One of the girls attending the school at Linden from 1847 through 1850, Emma Dupuy, was the niece of the Asa Dupuy. Another student, Mary Woodall came from Jamestown that was located in the northeastern part of the county on the Appomattox River and lived with her uncle, John Woodall, the overseer at Linden.⁶⁰ With Anna Whitteker hired to manage the school as well as teach, Dupuy

⁵⁹ U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States; Population Schedule, 1850, microfilm, LVA.

⁶⁰ Letter, William Woodall to John Woodall, November 13, 1850, John Woodall Papers, microfilm, Reel 2604, LVA; Mary Woodall was listed under John Woodall, her uncle, on the Seventh Census of the United States; Population Schedule, 1850. John Woodall lived at Linden and appears immediately after Emily Howe Dupuy on the Population Schedule.

educated her five young daughters without the added expense of tuition and board until the girls reached their teenage years.

The large size of the planter families, such as the Dance and Dupuy families, often made the cost of education beyond the means of even the wealthiest planter; the planters believed that it was less expensive to educate the children at home then to send them to private academies. Of the ten Dance children, Emily Dupuy taught six her first year in Virginia.⁶¹ The two youngest children were not yet old enough for school. Dupuy explained that one of the two oldest children was too old to have a female teacher and the eldest was away at a school in North Carolina. Planters also took in borders as well as day students to help offset the costs of hiring the teacher. Thirteen children from Prince Edward as well as neighboring counties attended the Dance school to make a total of nineteen students ranging in age from five to fifteen. Dupuy detailed in a letter addressed to her sister in Massachusetts the costs for a student at the Dance plantation; a day student paid tuition of \$20 per month for a ten month session and a border, in addition to the school tuition paid \$10 per month.⁶²

Within six months of her arrival in Prince Edward County, Emily Dupuy established herself as a reputable, highly sought after teacher. Whitteker was pleased that Howe attended the examinations at Mr. Root's female academy at Prince Edward Courthouse with Mrs. Scott, "one of the first ladies in the county," and reassured her

⁶¹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, August 9, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

⁶² Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, June 10, 1837, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

mother that Howe's reputation as a teacher was "considerably noticed there."⁶³ In the fall of 1836 Dupuy wrote to her mother and sisters that many families in the Meherrin neighborhood were anxious for her to stay in the county for another year and willing to offer incentives if she remained in Prince Edward. The number of students attending the Dance school increased significantly from April to October, thus prompting Dance to offer Dupuy the profits from the school if she brought in as many students as she could at \$20 per month per student.⁶⁴

Emily Dupuy came to Virginia because her sister was able to secure for her a teaching job with a reputable family for \$250 per year. The details Emily Howe Dupuy and Anna Howe Whitteker relayed to their mother and sister in Massachusetts concerning salary negotiations revealed how potentially lucrative but uncertain the business the plantation school education could be for female teachers from the North during the antebellum period. The Dances first offered the job to Whitteker. However Whitteker declined it because, with two years teaching experience under her belt, she believed that it would not be in her best interest to accept a position for less than \$300 a year.⁶⁵ Whitteker and Dupuy both realized that economic benefits of teaching in the South far outweighed those in the North. "If I am to teach school for a living," Emily

⁶³ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, September 25, 1836, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

⁶⁴ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, October 10, 1836, Section 5; Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, September 25, 1836, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

⁶⁵ Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, January 3, 1836 and May 11, 1836, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

Dupuy reasoned, "I had rather do it here for two or three hundred dollars a year, than at the north for less than half that sum & with nearly double the labor."⁶⁶

Oldham: Capitalist Intensification, 1850-1860

By 1860 the tobacco producing land in Prince Edward County was parceled into smaller more numerous plantations. In 1850, the U. S. Census enumerator listed 362 tobacco plantations on the Agricultural Schedule; in 1860 the number rose to 413.⁶⁷ Several possible reasons account for this increase in the number of tobacco plantations. In 1860 the addition of tenant farms operated by white males, such as John Woodall, accounted for part of the increase. The deaths of several elite planters, such as Henry N. Watkins, James Wood, and William H. Venable, accounted for another fraction of the increase; these larger plantations were subdivided and distributed among the male heirs. But most significantly, the competition among ambitious, young planters and merchants drove a land grab and intensified tobacco production during the 1850s. Several of the wealthiest planters and merchants, such as Thomas T. Tredway and Hilery G. Richardson, owned more than one plantation. Among this group, ownership of one or more tobacco plantations symbolized professional success as well as socioeconomic status.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Letters, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1836 and October 10, 1836, Section 5; Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, September 25, 1836, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

⁶⁷ Calculated from U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States and Eighth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA.

⁶⁸ Calculated from U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States and Eighth Census of the United States, Population and Agricultural Schedules, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA; Letters, John L. Mickel to John Woodall, April 11, 1856, John Woodall Papers, microfilm, Reel 2604, LVA; Copy of

Prince Edward County experienced a dramatic change in the distribution of agricultural land between 1850 and 1860. The total amount of agricultural land in the county, as listed on the Agricultural Census, was 213,659 acres in 1860, a 4.3% increase (9,352 acres) from 1850. The agricultural land owned and managed by the 50 wealthiest planters was 48,169 acres. This figure reflected a dramatic loss of 50% of the acreage (49,007 acres) between 1850 and 1860. The average size of the 50 wealthiest plantations was 963.38 acres, representing a decrease of 17% from 1850 (163.62 fewer acres). This shift in the ownership of agricultural land in Prince Edward away from the large landholding families explained why the economic profiles of the farmers in Prince Edward began to change as the number of plantations increased (See Appendix, Figure 3).

The tobacco producing community echoed some of the same economic trends that affected the larger agricultural community. The amount of agricultural land within the boundaries of individual plantations decreased as the number of tobacco plantations increased. In 1860, the tobacco planters owned and managed 92% (197,175 acres of the 213,659 total acres) of agricultural land in Prince Edward County. The amount of agricultural land contained within the county's tobacco plantations increased by 2.7% (5,511 acres) from 1850 to 1860. Of the 197,175 acres of tobacco land, the 50 wealthiest tobacco producers owned and managed 22.9% of land; this represented a decrease of 5% from 1850. The average size of the 50 wealthiest tobacco plantations

Wills for William H. Venable and Samuel D. Morton, Wills of Southside Virginia, Special Collections, UVA; Copy of Will, James D. Wood, Section 34, Hoge Family Papers, VHS; "Toward Stability," in Beeman, 161-185, "Politics of Land" in Klein, 178-202.

was 906.44 acres, representing a 17.5% decrease from 1850 (191.14 acres fewer than in 1850). The moderate shift in land distribution among these tobacco producers indicated that the increase in tobacco producing farms was due to an increase in the number of middling to small farms.

Land Acquisition

The moderate shift in land distribution among the wealthiest planters can be attributed, in part, to the fact that seven of the largest tobacco plantations remained intact and managed by either the aging planter or the planter's widow: Emily Howe Dupuy (1400 acres), Branch Scott (1400 acres), D. F. Womack (1200 acres), Joseph Dupuy (1188 acres), Thomas Perkinson (1125 acres), and Sam Watson (900 acres). Joseph Dupuy, although not listed on the Agricultural Schedule in 1850, purchased Falkland from the James D. Wood Estate; Joseph Dupuy managed Falkland and the land he inherited from the Purnell Estate as one plantation.⁶⁹

The strategies used by the younger generation of wealthy tobacco planters to amass plantation land were the most significant factor in limiting the change in the percentage of land owned by the 50 wealthiest tobacco planters. Hilery Richardson, Thomas T. Tredway, John A. Scott, and Samuel Scott were among the younger generation of planters, between the ages of 55 and 30 years old, who owned multiple plantations. Hilery Richardson's climb to the top of the plantation world from 1840 to

⁶⁹ U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census and Eighth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA; John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Land Tax Book, 1856-1879, microfilm Reel 528, LVA.

1850 best exemplified the strategies employed by the new generation of capitalist planters. Richardson began his career as a merchant in Prince Edward Courthouse and was the wealthiest landowner and tobacco producer in the county by the time of his death in 1861. During the 1840s Richardson began buying up agricultural land in the Courthouse; Richardson owned a 560-acre plantation in 1850 and three plantations totaling 2810 acres in 1861.⁷⁰

The division and reestablishment of the Watkins family plantation, Oldham, exemplified this trend toward capitalist intensification within the tobacco plantation community between 1850 and 1860. Thomas Watkins built Oldham in 1784 on 400 acres of land. After Thomas Watkins death in 1798, Betsy Ann Watkins, his widow, purchased an additional 134 acres from Richard N. Venable in 1800. Located north of Meherrin, Oldham neighbored Linden to the southwest. Henry N. Watkins, Thomas Watkins's son, inherited the plantation at his father's death in 1804 and managed it until his own death in 1850. Henry Watkins's will provided his wife with a life interest in a portion of the land and slaves as well as specified the division of the remainder of land and slaves equally between his heirs. Among his heirs were three sons and four daughters: William W. Watkins, Richard Henry Watkins, Nathaniel Watkins, Betsy Ann Ballantine, Maria Edmunds, Susan Redd, and Patti Watkins. At Henry Watkins's death, William Watkins, Betsy Ann Ballantine, Maria Edmunds, and Susan Redd and their spouses had established their own plantation households elsewhere in the county.

⁷⁰ U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census and Eighth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA; Land Tax Books, 1782-1810 and 1856-1870, microfilm Reels 251 and 528, LVA.

Nathaniel Watkins and Patti Watkins remained at Oldham with their mother. Richard Henry Watkins practiced law and resided in Prince Edward Courthouse. It was Richard Watkins who in 1858 bought the dower tract with additional land from his siblings and reestablished Oldham as one of the top tobacco producing plantations in the county.⁷¹

In 1850s an ambitious Richard Watkins devoted his life, first, to building his law practice with a Mr. Isabel and, second, to establishing a plantation. Marriage, Richard Watkins asserted, was “not worthy of the consideration of a sober thinking man for ten minutes.”⁷² He outlined his professional goals and achievements in a letter to his younger brother, Nathaniel Watkins: “Isabel and I are far ahead of all others on the Appomattox docket and alone with the first in Prince Edward and getting a foothold in Buckingham and Charlotte.”⁷³ Watkins was determined to make it to the top of his profession.

After calling the Courthouse “this frog town of ours,” he encouraged his brother to make the most of his studies at the University of Virginia: “strike high,” urged

⁷¹ U. S. Bureau of Census, *Seventh Census and Eighth Census of the United States*, Population Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA; Accounts with Elisha Ballantine, Edwin Edmunds, George Redd, Nathaniel Watkins, and William Watkins, Richard Henry Watkins, Ledger and New Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; Letters concerning outstanding bonds for land in Prince Edward sold to Richard Henry Watkins by Elisha Ballantine, Elisha Ballantine to Richard Henry Watkins, Section, 7, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; Letters concerning outstanding bonds held by Richard Henry Watkins and Nathaniel Watkins for land in Prince Edward County, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Venable, Folders 9 and 10, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA, originals at Manuscript and Rare Books Department, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; Land Tax Books, 1782-1810 and 1856-1870, microfilm Reels 251 and 528, LVA; Will Book 6, 1822-1828, p. 408, microfilm Reel 16, LVA; Christine Fansler, Survey Report, Oldham, December 17, 1837, Online Survey Report, LVA, <http://lvaimage.lib.va.us/VHI/html/22/0075.html> Report Home Page (accessed October 20, 2007); “Toward Stability,” in Beeman, 161-185; “Politics of Land” in Klein, 178-202.

⁷² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, December 28, 1852, Folder 1, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

⁷³ Ibid.

Watkins, “don’t be easily satisfied – it is better to be discouraged than satisfied.”⁷⁴

Given the tone of his description of the rough and tumble town of Prince Edward Courthouse and his advice to his brother, it was unlikely that Richard Watkins would be content living and working in such a place forever. In 1850 he boarded at a hotel in the courthouse and did business with men like Andrew Venable, George Clibourne, and Don Pedro Taylor who ranged in behavior and reputation from honorable to ruffian. By 1853 Watkins moved himself and his seven slaves to Elisha Ballantine’s residence in the Courthouse.⁷⁵ The same advice given to Nathaniel Watkins probably kept a restless Watkins focused on his goals from 1850 to 1858.

Upper most in Richard Watkins’s mind was building a reputation based on economic success and social status. As he reminded his brother: “For a man to succeed in any business today there is but one thing untiring energy & application – He may not be appreciated for a time but his reputation will spread much more rapidly when it once begins.”⁷⁶ With his professional success secured, Watkins began his search for a plantation. In late 1853 Watkins departed on a trip with Leigh Redd, his longtime friend and neighbor from Meherrin, to investigate plantation land in Texas. On his return in

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Richard Watkins office was located in a building owned by Sarah Pearson. The hotel was located in another building owned by Pearson. Don Pedro Taylor was the manager of the hotel. George Clibourne, a cabinetmaker, was a client of Watkins’s. Melvin Ely described both Taylor and Clibourne as fist fighting ruffians. Watkins alludes to Taylor’s aggressive behavior in the letter addressed to Nathaniel Watkins. Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, December 28, 1852, Folder 1, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Accounts with Elisha Ballantine, George Clibourne, Sarah Pearson, and Don Pedro Taylor, Richard Henry Watkins, Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States, Population Schedule, 1850, microfilm, LVA; Ely, 279.

⁷⁶ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, December 28, 1852, Folder 1, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

January 1854, he told Anna Whitteker and others at the Dupuy plantation that he was not impressed with the land in Texas and would not move.⁷⁷

On October 17, 1857 Watkins again left Prince Edward in search of plantation land. The account book he kept during this trip detailed his impressions of the land, soils, and cash crops in North Carolina and Georgia:

Level light grey soil in N.C. oak forests & tobacco till within 20 miles of Raleigh then same kind of land but cotton till 10 miles south of Raleigh then level sandy pine – turpentine & cotton mostly to Fayetteville then swamps to Floral College, turpentine cypress. From F. College to state line sandy, more elevated mainly cotton – From state line to Cherau – good cotton plantations Cherau to Aiken sand hills dwarf oak pine.⁷⁸

Watkins was highly attuned to the quality and variations of land, soils and the natural resources as they changed within the boundaries of the state. The light grey soil of the tobacco belt of North Carolina was very much like the clay soils at Linden and Oldham. As the land transitioned from the sandy soils and swamp in South Carolina he was keen to notice the connection between subtle changes in environment and the natural resources unique to different ecosystems. On December 22, 1857, Richard Watkins reached Havana. Although he did not record his impression of Cuba, a later description of Richmond, Virginia in 1864 as it compared to Havana indicated that he was not impressed with Cuba. He returned to Prince Edward County in January 1858 and began the reestablishment of his father's plantation.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, January 27, 1854, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

⁷⁸ Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book 173, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

⁷⁹ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, January 27, 1854, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book 173, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; Letter, Richard

The reestablishment of Oldham, by Richard Henry Watkins through his purchase of land from his siblings symbolized his professional success.⁸⁰ In 1858, with a plantation in place, Richard Watkins married Mary Purnall Dupuy, the eldest daughter of Asa and Emily Dupuy. Despite Watkins previously stated attitude toward marriage, Watkins's choice of a wife was a logical one. The Watkins and Dupuy families had been closely connected in business and in the Meherrin community for years. Richard Watkins's father, Henry N. Watkins, acted as an executor for Asa Dupuy's estate, and Richard Watkins was the acting attorney at settlement.⁸¹ Although Richard Watkins was fourteen years her senior, the couple knew each other well and shared many of the same interests. They both shared a commitment to reestablishment of Oldham.⁸²

Slave Hire

The most significant contribution Mary Watkins made to the rebuilding of Oldham was the number of adult slaves she owned. Before marriage, Richard Watkins possessed one adult male slave, four young male slaves, ranging in age from 10 to 14, and a five-year old female slave. In addition to these slaves, Richard Watkins also hired three adult male slaves from his sister, Patti Watkins. Just the same, the slaves Mary DupuyWatkins brought with her to the plantation provided much of the labor. When

Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, July 20, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; U. S. Department of Agriculture. Soil Conservation Service. Soil Survey of Prince Edward County, Virginia. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1958, 1.

⁸⁰ Land Tax Book, 1856-1879, microfilm Reel 528, LVA.

⁸¹ Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; Accounts with Henry N. Watkins and Estate of Asa Dupuy, Richard Henry Watkins, Ledger, Account Book 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

⁸² The Civil War correspondence of Richard and Mary Watkins details many of their common interests and social connections. Richard Henry Watkins Papers, Section 1, Folders 3-7, VHS.

Richard Henry Watkins began his planting operation in 1859, he had at Oldham a total of seven adult slaves ranging in age from 51 to 19. Three of the slaves were women of childbearing age. Seven of the slaves were children between the ages of 5 and 13.⁸³

The practice of slave hiring, though expensive, served several purposes for the planters. Asa Dupuy hired out slaves belonging to the Purnell estate to raise cash to use for paying down the debt. Richard Watkins hired his sister's slaves to supplement his own enslaved labor force. He also hired slaves, as in the case of Henry Brown, for the purpose of reproduction. Henry Brown was the husband to one of Mary Watkins slaves, Harriet Brown. Any of Harriet Brown's children after the Watkins's marriage, by law, belonged to Richard Watkins. The expense and hassle of hiring slaves caused friction between Richard and Mary Watkins. In a letter to her husband, Mary Watkins stated plainly that hiring slave was not in the best interest of the family: "I received your letter giving me directions about hiring servants last Saturday. I took the responsibility some time ago of telling [Patti] that we could not keep Nancy for I know she is a dead expense for us. I am very glad you have concluded not to hire any hands this year . . . I don't think it would pay."⁸⁴ The Watkins did keep Henry Brown regardless of the expense and hassle; he was too valuable to give up.

⁸³ Slave List, Richard Henry Watkins, Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; It was common in Prince Edward County as well as throughout the South to hire out slaves. Asa Dupuy hired out Purnell slaves to raise cash to pay down debts accrued by John Purnell. Slave Hire Accounts, John Purnell Estate Papers, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Ely, 107-108; Eugene Genovese stated that between five and ten percent of the slaves were hire out for a year in the late antebellum period. Eugene Genovese, Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1976) 390-392.

⁸⁴ Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, January 13, 1862; Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, October 28, 1862, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

The Briery Presbyterian Church members believed that the business of slave ownership for hire was profitable for the church as well as for the community of planters at large. In 1766, after five years of inconsistent preaching, the congregants of Briery Presbyterian agreed to authorize the trustees to purchase slaves to then be hired out as a source of income for the church: “these trustees buy 6 slaves viz: 3 men and 3 women and that these slave and their increase be in the care of the Trustees to raise money forever hereafter for the benefit of a regular Presbyterian minister to be chosen by a majority of the congregation.”⁸⁵ In 1768 the trustees purchased Tom, 11, and Nell, 24, her infant son, John. By 1774 the number of slaves owned by that church was 9: 4 adults and 5 children.

The slaves owned by Briery were often hired to young planters to supplement their own enslaved labor force. In 1840, the trustees hired out a total of 37 enslaved men, women, and children to 17 Prince Edward County planters. Six of these planters were church members, who, together, hired a total of 10 adults and five children. That hiring pattern was typical during the 1840s. Among the church members who hired slaves from 1840 to 1847 were William W. Watkins, Asa Dupuy, and Hilery Richardson. William Watkins, a young planter, hired three adult male slaves from 1840 to 1842 to supplement his enslaved labor force at his plantation. Asa Dupuy hired one

⁸⁵ Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1760-1840, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

slave, Charles, from 1841 to 1845. Hilery Richardson, just beginning his plantation enterprise in 1847, hired three adult male slaves, Coleman, Jacob, and Charles.⁸⁶

Owners hired out their slaves with the agreement that the planter hiring the slave would feed, cloth, and pay the property tax on the slave in addition to paying the hire fee. Hilery Richardson was notorious for his mistreatment of slaves and the consequences of his actions exemplified the risks owners assumed in hiring out their human property. A letter addressed to John Woodall by Thomas Wood highlights the difficulties owners face when hiring slaves to Richardson. Wood informed Woodall that, as last resort, the sheriff was called to confront Richardson on his delinquency in paying tax as well as to escort the slaves back to Wood's plantation. Richardson's delinquency in feeding and clothing the slaves not only compromised their health, safety, and welfare but also Wood's investment in human property:

I herein send a letter to Mr. Overton requesting him to see to the getting of my negroes when I send for them, and also requesting him to see that they are in proper trim for traveling, & that they received such clothing that they are entitled to. I also enclose a letter to Mr. Richardson, which you will please forward to him by the first opportunity. In this letter I request Mr. Richardson to let the hands have their shoes and winter clothing as soon as he possibly can.⁸⁷

The Briery Church session records detail similar risks involved in the slave hire business.⁸⁸ From 1819 to 1845 church elders periodically debated the sale of the slaves

⁸⁶ Briery Presbyterian Church Treasurers Book, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

⁸⁷ Letter, Thomas Wood to John Woodall, November 30, 1849, John Woodall Papers, microfilm, Reel 2604, LVA; Melvin Ely detailed the events of Richardson's death resulting from an attack of one of his slaves. Ely, 407-411.

⁸⁸ Briery Presbyterian Church Treasurers Book, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA; Account Book, Dr. John Peter Mettauier, Section 2, John Peter Mettauier Papers, VHS.

in favor of other methods of raising church funds such as the purchase of state stocks, but each time the issue of the sale of the slaves was discussed in session, the elders made the decision not to sell or to simply delay the debate for another year. After considering the sale of the slaves on July 25, 1835 because of difficulties in monitoring the conditions of the slaves, the session voted to keep the slaves, but instituted criteria regulating the hiring out and sale of the slaves. The trustees were charged with insuring that “the comfort and moral condition of the slaves” be of first importance and the price of the hire of second importance.⁸⁹ The trustees also held discretionary power to sell any slave that exhibited “vicious conduct, and all extraordinary occasions that would make it improper to retain them in the congregation.”⁹⁰

Yeoman Tobacco Farmers and Westward Migration, 1850-1860

As the competition for land increased, there was a change in the socioeconomic profile of the top 50 tobacco producers from 1850 to 1860. Eighteen of the top 50 tobacco producers did not rank in the top fifty wealthiest planters. These farms belonged to farmers, who at great risk planted the land for all it was worth. The yeoman tobacco farmers, such John Womack, James W. Womack, and William Woodall, represented a group of farmers whose economic security depended, in large part, on a combination of environmental conditions that ranged from weather and pests to their own health and that of their small number of slaves. William Woodall’s letters to his

⁸⁹ Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1760-1840, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

brother, John, between 1846 and 1860, poignantly communicated his despair at the realization that, no matter how hard he worked, the success of his farming activities was in the hands of God. Variables in environmental conditions beyond human control could either make or brake the middling and small farmers: "I have never seen as many tobacco worms as we have had for a week or two," Woodall wrote, "it seems that the worms are determined to eat it up - from about 200 plants I caught 521 worms and eggs the largest not much over an inch long. I have almost killed myself this summer at work in the hot sun."⁹¹ Woodall worked alongside Salina, the one female slave he owned. Salina, as Woodall explained to his brother, was sick most of the summer. Neighbors in the Meherrin area looked on farmers such as Woodall with a certain amount of disdain. The wealthier neighbors failed to understand that, as tobacco farming became more competitive, the yeoman farmers planted at greater risk.

Little of what is known about the Meherrin neighborhood from 1840 and 1850 came from Emily Dupuy's hand because, as was noted by Anna Whitteker, Dupuy was busy with management of her plantation. However, the one surviving letter written by Emily Dupuy in 1855, revealed much about the extent to which ideas of wealth and social conformity governed the way the tobacco plantations were managed. After a decade of declining wealth and "troublesome behavior," the neighborhood was relieved when the John P. Womack family moved to Danville: "It really seemed before they went away," wrote Dupuy, "that they felt their neighbors were in duty, bound to do

⁹¹ Letters, William Woodall to John Woodall, August 26, 1854, September 19, 1846, August 4, 1854, May 23, 1855, August 28, 1858, John Woodall Papers, microfilm, Reel 2604, LVA.

everything for them.”⁹² This statement exposed the resentment that the community held against the middling farmers whose fortunes took a prolonged turn for the worse. In 1850, Womack’s 400 acre farm fit the profile of other yeoman farmer: was valued at \$3200.00 and produced 8,000 pounds of tobacco, 100 bushels of wheat, and 450 bushels of corn.⁹³ Like William Woodall, Womack depended on tobacco for cash and was vulnerable to the effects of drought, pests, and illness.

John P. Womack’s case was especially vexing since this wayward neighbor was once a trusted member of the Dupuy family. A web of unmanageable debt seemed to have caused his downfall beginning in 1847. According to the account book of Richard Henry Watkins, Womack was taken to court twelve times by nine different creditors from 1847 to 1857 to settle the outstanding debts. Womack’s list of creditors included family and neighbors such as Emily Dupuy, William W. Watkins, and Martha Armes, as well as businesses and craftsmen, such as Spencer & Venable and George Clibourne. The order of the creditors indicated a pattern of a debt that began with trusted family and close neighbors and, then, expanded further into the community.⁹⁴

Emily Dupuy, the neighbors, and the elders at Briery Church determined that the cause of John P. Womack’s troublesome behavior was drunkenness and thus a moral failing due to a lack of work ethic. They did not consider that larger environmental and economic forces could cause his farm to fail. Dupuy described the family who moved to

⁹² Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, January 24, 1855, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers; Docket, Account Book 903, Richard Henry Watkins, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

⁹³ U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eight Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1860, microfilm, LVA.

⁹⁴ Docket, Account Book 903, Richard Henry Watkins, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

the Womack farm as honest and respectable and indicated with relief that the neighborhood was better for it.⁹⁵ Unsuccessful planters were a bad reflection on the productivity of the neighborhood of business minded planters and farmers.

The Briery Church Session records indicated that the elders took greater interest in the moral health of the community after 1840. Fist fights at the courthouse and excessive drinking at home and in public were among the disturbances the Briery community would not tolerate. Those Briery members who did not appear to work for their own keep or turned to drink were considered a particularly onerous burden by the community. The number of wayward members censured by the elders gradually increased as the capitalist intensification of tobacco production increased. This trend in church governance suggested that church members became increasingly concerned with the negative impact of economic and social change within their community.⁹⁶

On March 12, 1854 the elders of Briery Church appointed Thomas Spencer and Alex Spencer to look into “rumors” concerning the drinking habits of one of their own, Benjamin Womack. Over the next seven months Thomas Spencer would pay three visits to Womack to “converse” about the over indulgence in “ardent spirits.”⁹⁷

Womack, unlike other habitual drinkers at Briery Church, did not have a previous

⁹⁵ John P. Womack was a both a cousin of and an executor for Asa Dupuy. Slave Distribution, Estate Papers of John Purnall, Section 5, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; Briery Presbyterian Church Session Books, 1760-1840 and 1840-1892, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA; Docket, Account Book 903, Richard Henry Watkins, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eight Census of the United States: Population Census and Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA.

⁹⁶ Briery Presbyterian Church Session Books, 1840-1892, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

⁹⁷ Session Records, March 12 and July 24, 1854, Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1840-1892, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

history of intemperance according to the session records. In fact until the first mention of Womack's drinking habits in 1854, he appeared to be a model church member and citizen; in 1844, at age 31, Womack was elected a church elder and in 1849, appointed a county school commissioner for his district.⁹⁸ He was listed as a merchant and as a farmer on the population and agricultural schedules, and four of his five children attended school. In 1850, Womack's 1200-acre plantation produced 15,000 pounds of tobacco, 400 bushels of wheat, and 1,000 bushels of corn; at this level of production he ranked among the fifty wealthiest planters.⁹⁹ Clearly Ben Womack's mercantile and farming activities generated enough wealth to support a lifestyle that earned him a place of respect within the neighborhood.

Ben Womack's death in 1855 and John P. Womack's declining circumstances served as an alarming reminder to the neighborhood of the uncertainty and fragility of a plantation community dependent on the wealth generated by a single cash crop, whether one was a farmer or a merchant. During the 1840s and 1850s young tobacco planters began to migrate West and to the Deep South. Asa Dupuy and his brother, anticipating the acceleration of migration in the 1850s, believed that the purchase of land in Mississippi was a sound investment.¹⁰⁰ However, as William Woodall mentioned, migration was often as risky as staying in Prince Edward. In 1861 Woodall's son, James, unable to find work, considered migrating west. Woodall, alarmed by the

⁹⁸ Session Records, August 31, 1844, Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1840-1892, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA; Bradshaw, History of Prince Edward County, 169.

⁹⁹ U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States: Population Census and Agricultural Schedule, 1850, microfilm, LVA.

¹⁰⁰ Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy; Plat of Mississippi Land, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

escalation of secessionist sentiment, did not think his son had good prospects in either place. “Times are hard very little money in circulation, and trade of all kinds nearly at a complete stand,” William Woodall wrote, “the prospect before us seems to grow more gloomy every day.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Letter, William Woodall to John Woodall, February 13, 1861, John Woodall Papers, microfilm, Reel 2604, LVA.

Chapter 2

Coming to Virginia: Stewardship, Citizenship, and Regional Identity

Worldviews: Stewardship, Citizenship, and Race

The agricultural landscape and society of Princeton, Massachusetts experienced in the early nineteenth century what historian Carolyn Merchant termed an ecological revolution. Merchant argued that the dramatic change in the farm ecology of this region was the result of the industrialization of neighboring cities such as Lowell and Worcester. Ironically, the same protestant work ethic that legitimized economic progress in Worcester, Massachusetts and a neighboring farming community, Princeton, Massachusetts drove Anna Howe Whitteker and Emily Howe to seek employment in Virginia. This chapter will explore through the lenses of Anna Howe Whitteker and Emily Howe the ways in which the New School Presbyterian ideal of moral progress was interpreted by the tobacco planters in Prince Edward County, Virginia, from 1840 to 1860. The letters that described the arrivals of Anna Whitteker and Emily Howe in Virginia contrasted sharply in the descriptions of the land and the people of Virginia. Because of their dissimilar experiences on the tobacco plantations of the Southside Piedmont, these women would come to express their observations of this plantation society in increasingly divergent ways. Anna Whitteker filled her letters to family in Massachusetts with descriptions of land, land use, and the people who labored on the

land. While she admitted enjoying the fruits of the enslaved laborers, she criticized slavery, promoted the work of New England's yeoman farmers, and voiced her commitment to racial social, religious and educational reform in the South. Emily Howe's letters, on the other hand, criticized northern attitudes toward the South, promoted plantation production, and justified slavery based largely on the tenets of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches in the South. While Howe supported religious reform and education for women, she did not believe, based on her observations of the social and religious climate in Prince Edward County that southern society was in need of radical reform. These contradictions in the women's stories not only exemplified the north's conflicting opinions over slavery in south but also highlighted the racist ideas that were deeply embedded in northern white society.¹⁰²

Emily Howe believed that an adherence to moral progress resulted in economic and social continuity. Ideas of stewardship, citizenship, and property rights in the South were so inextricably linked with ideas of race and slave labor that to suggest immediate emancipation was for southerners to suggest the unimaginable. During the late antebellum period the white planters and farmers could not envision a place for African Americans in the rural southern landscape except as laborers on the plantations.¹⁰³ Howe's pragmatic acceptance of racial slavery after coming to Virginia was justified by her evangelical belief system that sanctioned a hierarchical social system and justified

¹⁰² "Farm Ecology" in Carolyn Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 149-197.

¹⁰³ U. S. Bureau Of Census, Eighth Census of the United States: Population Census, 1860, microfilm, LVA; Ely, Israel on the Appomattox, 21-217, 393-395; Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (reprinted Gloucester, Ma.: Peter Smith, 1965), 126-127.

racial slavery. Howe's experience on the Dance and Dupuy plantations of Prince Edward County lead her to perceive the hard working slaves as content, faithful family members rather than oppressed workers. These ideas of social order and race shaped Emily Howe's worldview after her marriage in 1838 and ultimately divided the sisters at the outbreak of the Civil War.¹⁰⁴

Anna Whitteker's interpretation of moral progress was radically different: she believed that political, economic, and social reform was a direct result of society's commitment to an ethic that viewed moral and material progress as compatible. Whitteker fully recognized that the advantages she enjoyed on the plantations were the products of hard working slaves held in bondage against their will. However she, like other advocates of abolition believed that the system of slave labor could be changed without sacrificing agricultural productivity. A belief that economic and social progress depended on a system of wage labor and an educated citizenry drove Whitteker's

¹⁰⁴ Donald G. Matthews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977) 51-58; 63-67; Christine Leigh Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997) 46-49, 92-94; John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, eds., Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 16-17; Hugh Davis, "Leonard Bacon, The Congregational Church, and Slavery, 1845-1861," in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 221-245; Chris Padgett "Evangelicals Divided: Abolition and the Plan of Unions Demise in Ohio's Western Reserve," in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 249-272; Edward R. Crowther, "Religion Has Something . . . To Do With Politics: Southern Evangelicals and the North, 1840-1861," in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 317-342; "A Profusion of Pathways," in Nancy Hewitt, Women's Activism and Social Change, 38-68; "What Can Women Do?" in Susan Zaeske, Signatures of Citizenship, 29-46.

commitment to the education of women and the enslaved of Prince Edward County, Virginia.¹⁰⁵

Stewardship: Religious Reform

Anna Howe Whitteker first arrived in Virginia in 1834 from Princeton, Massachusetts, to teach at a plantation school in Cumberland County. She was immediately dismayed by what she perceived as a lack of religion and work ethic among the whites in the close knit agricultural community. Throughout the correspondence that spanned her first two years in Virginia, Whitteker repeatedly expressed exasperation at what she perceived as stagnation, willfulness, and “lack of godliness” in Virginia’s “fashionable” society, which preferred laughing and foolishness to serious contemplation of religious and political matters.¹⁰⁶ Whitteker, in the first letter describing her arrival in Virginia, detailed an evening spent at Mrs. Whitley’s residence but assured her sister that she did not enjoy it at all: “There was so much laughing and foolishness it disgusted me.”¹⁰⁷ She commented that the Virginians she met “have a great flow of words, but their ideas are soon exhausted, they run from

¹⁰⁵ John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, eds., Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 16-17; Davis, “Leonard Bacon, The Congregational Church, and Slavery, 1845-1861,” in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 221-245; Padgett “Evangelicals Divided: Abolition and the Plan of Unions Demise in Ohio’s Western Reserve,” in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 249-272; Crowther, “Religion Has Something . . . To Do With Politics: Southern Evangelicals and the North, 1840-1861,” in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 317-342; “A Profusion of Pathways,” Hewitt, 38-68; “A Departure from Their Place,” in Zaeske, 47-72.

¹⁰⁶ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834, Section 1; Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁰⁷ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834, Section 1, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

one thing to another, never dwell long on one subject.”¹⁰⁸ The habits of her first employers, the Methodist Isabel family, demonstrated to Whitteker that they and their extended family preferred visiting to attending church on the Sabbath. While Whitteker enjoyed and appreciated the financial and material benefits she derived from the abundant wealth generated by the slaves on the tobacco plantations on which she lived and worked, she insisted that without religion and a work ethic, the shallowness and wastefulness of Virginia society was corrosive to Virginia’s spiritual as well as political well being.

Anna Whitteker recognized that her opposing religious and political views isolated her from the society around her, and that this sense of isolation eroded her own sense of self-esteem and self worth. “I expect I shall become quite changed in my character or habits if I stay here much longer, for finding no congenial mind with which to communicate,” Whitteker wrote to her sister in 1835, “I am becoming accustomed to my solitary musings in what relates to myself, that should I ever get home again, I fear I shall have lost the power to communicate freely or confidently with my friends.”¹⁰⁹ Her experience in Cumberland County confirmed the assertions of the abolitionist press that wealth in the South was built on a false, godless foundation of slave labor, and she was dismayed to find that little was redeemable within the elite white community.

Whitteker, who was highly attuned to the conditions of the physical world around her, revealed the influence of the northern abolitionists in her antislavery

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, August 23, 1835, Section 1, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

sympathies most directly in her descriptions of the environments in which the slaves in Virginia lived and worked. In a letter addressed to Emily Howe, in April 1834, Whitteker vividly described the opposing conditions that both literally and figuratively demonstrated the geographic and social stratifications in Richmond:

Richmond is built upon undulating land, some considerable hills. On the low part near the river, the business is carried on, the higher parts are occupied by the rich. The lower parts have a most disagreeable smell and are covered with mud and filth and but few people are to be seen but Negroes. The higher parts have a good air are neat and clean and have some elegant buildings.¹¹⁰

The words and phrases Whitteker used to communicate the environmental quality of the geographic areas in antebellum Richmond showed that race as well as wealth determined the health and welfare of the city's inhabitants. As Whitteker recognized, the business that supported the white elite was conducted on the busy riverfront in mud and filth. Slaves accounted for the majority of people who were relegated to this living and working environment that was ripe for the transmission of air, water, and insect borne disease. The environmental health of the riverfront area and its inhabitants were of little concern to the members of the white community, such as Mrs. Whitley, who lived in the clean air and elegant houses on the hills; it was as if the riverfront and its inhabitants were out of sight and out of mind.

The same themes of stratification and environmental justice resonated in her description of the daily life of a slave girl whose life was spent in the service of a family

¹¹⁰ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834, Section 1, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

who cared little for her material or spiritual needs.¹¹¹ Whitteker wrote that when she watched the slave sleeping on a carpet on the floor rolled in a blanket and the girls of the Isabel family on feather beds, she was prompted to think of the slave's "moral degradation, and that she is endowed naturally with as great a capacity of enjoyment and suffering as we and which I believe the negroes are from my own observations of them."¹¹² Whitteker realized with anger and frustration that there could be little physical comfort or spiritual peace for slaves within the boundaries of a bustling city or a plantation house if access to cleaner, healthier environments were limited to elite white citizens. Within the close, personal spaces of the plantation house, Whitteker concluded that her abolitionist sympathies must reach beyond the boundaries of concern for the physical and material wellbeing of the slave and address the moral problem of racism itself.¹¹³

Whitteker, however, did not lose faith in what she came to believe was her primary mission in Virginia: her dedication to teach the planters' children to be self-sufficient, productive stewards and citizens. This sense of mission was deeply rooted in her faith in the teachings of moral progress by the evangelical New School Presbyterian ministers that promoted antislavery and women's rights. Disheartened by the limited expectations of Virginia's elite that emphasized the arts and music, Whitteker

¹¹¹ Martin Melosi, "Environmental Justice, Political Agenda Setting, and the Myths of History," *Journal of Policy History* 12:1 (2000): 43-71. Martin Melosi defines environmental justice as "emphasizing the *right* to a safe and healthy environment for all people," and defines environment as including ecological, physical, social, political, and economic environments.

¹¹² Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834, Section 1, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹¹³ "The Character of Reformers" *The Emancipator* 11:50 (April 7, 1847) Special Collections, University of Virginia

determined that a religious education communicating a commitment to God's work and steady habits must be incorporated into the curriculum at her plantation schools.¹¹⁴ Her reference to her widowed mother's commitment to a solid, New England education revealed her anxiety over women's vulnerable position in nineteenth century Worcester. An education provided women with the means to earn a living through the practice of a profession rather than marriage. Whitteker, determined to live independently, railed against women in Virginia in a letter to her mother:

I shall always be thankful that when young, I enjoyed the means to acquire an education, as it now affords me so good, and honorable a livelihood. When I look upon Virginia women, see how helpless, and dependent they are upon fathers, brothers, and husbands, and who if they fail, fall upon the charity of a selfish and heartless world. I rejoice that I was raised in New England, and not in the lap of ease and affluence, but compelled to practice self-denial, and endure hardships.¹¹⁵

It was for the furthering of this mission as well as the financial benefits that Whitteker recommended her younger sister, Emily Howe, for a teaching position at a plantation school owned by a Methodist minister, Matthew M. Dance, of neighboring Prince Edward County.

There was no doubt that Whitteker, given the tone of her correspondence with her family in Massachusetts, was distressed by her situation in Cumberland County. Anna Whitteker firmly believed that her vocation and avocation must be one and the

¹¹⁴ Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834 and January 4, 1835, Section 1, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Anna Whitteker's commitment to women's education echoed the commitment of women's antislavery societies in the north to the promotion of the antislavery message to children through education. "Organizational Beginnings: Networks and Spheres," in Beth A. Salerno, Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005) 25-48.

¹¹⁵ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, May 6, 1838, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

same. Faced with limited prospects for work as a teacher in Princeton and neighboring Worcester, Massachusetts, Whitteker came to Southside Virginia on the recommendation of Laura Bigelow. A network of Presbyterian teachers and ministers from New Jersey to Massachusetts worked in the plantations schools and academies in the counties of Cumberland, Amelia, Charlotte, and Price Edward.¹¹⁶ Whitteker found another teaching job with the Booth Family in Amelia County through this network, but as often happened with plantation schools, the job fell through. Anna Whitteker, unable to find another teaching job that met with her expectations, left Southside Virginia to open her own schools in Lewisburg and Charleston, Virginia between 1836 and 1840.¹¹⁷

Although Emily Howe's letter recounting her arrival in Virginia did comment on the difficulty of travel as compared to the North, it lacked the critical descriptions of the Virginia landscape and society that characterized Whitteker's narrative. Howe communicated in her letter to her mother, Lucinda Howe, that as she sailed past the ruins of Jamestown, "the first settled town in the U. S." and "saw the ruins of the first church ever built in this country," she was most impressed with the historic significance of the place.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834, January 4, 1835, Section 1; Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, August 23, 1835, Section 1; Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, April 17, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Herbert Bradshaw details the connections between the Presbyterian Church and education in Amelia, Charlotte, Cumberland, and Prince Edward counties. "Lamp of Learning" in Bradshaw, 144-173.

¹¹⁷ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, May 11, 1836 and September 25, 1836, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; "Organizational Beginnings: Networks and Spheres," in Salerno, 25-48.

¹¹⁸ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, April 17, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

Howe was much more taken by the lifestyle of the Dances and their friends, the Jackson family than the conditions under which the slaves lived and worked. Over the course of her first year in Prince Edward County, Howe began to question the gender and faith-based ideals of citizenship that she had been taught as a child in Princeton, Massachusetts. In a number of letters to family members, Howe described a system of slave labor that, if managed by pious and lenient masters, was just. Howe mentioned that the slaves belonging to Matthew Dance and Nathaniel Jackson, a Methodist as well, were “not treated much like slaves,” and thus concluded, “I don’t suppose one of them would accept freedom if it was offered them.”¹¹⁹

The “powerful revival of religion” which brought many of the people of rural Massachusetts “into the light and liberty of the Gospel” shaped both Anna Whitteker’s and Emily Howe’s ideas of stewardship and citizenship.¹²⁰ A revival of evangelical faith swept through the North and the South during the 1830s and 1840s and created a tension in the established Protestant churches as both ministers and congregants questioned the nature of men’s relationship with God as well as to each other. The state of religious life in antebellum Prince Edward County exhibited a trend in American Protestantism that gained strength as the antislavery movement intensified. Anna Whitteker and Emily Howe fully integrated themselves into the large and active community of church going Presbyterians and Methodists in the Prince Edward County.

¹¹⁹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, August 9, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹²⁰ Letter, Lucinda Brooks Howe to Emily Howe Dupuy, March 27, 1839, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Hewitt, 99-100; Carolyn Lawe, Women and Reform in a New England Community, 1815-1860 (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) 60-61.

When these women referred to “the light and liberty of the Gospel,” they spoke of the belief, prominent among New School Presbyterians in the North, in a life dedicated to mission work as a means to salvation. Whitteker and Howe’s widowed mother, Lucinda Howe, characterized God not as a judge but a kind and benevolent shepherd who guarded over his flock.¹²¹ These ideas promoted by the evangelical ministers also challenged the long held belief within the orthodox churches that the ministry of God’s word was limited to seminary trained ministers; New School Presbyterians enthusiastically embraced mission work of both ordained and lay ministers.

The spiritual issue that Old and New School Presbyterians in the North and South found most contentious was the issue of racial slavery. Emily Howe noted in a letter to her mother that an atmosphere of intense revivalism in the county’s churches raged as fiercely as the political debates over the antislavery movement.¹²² Presbyterian and Methodist churches fared differently during this period, Howe noted. The “powerful” Methodist revivals in the county exemplified the “faithful and devoted” ministry of a unified church, but the state of the Presbyterian Church, on the other hand, was less stable.¹²³ During the 1820s and 1830s Briery Church, College Church and Buffalo Church experienced revivals that significantly expanded church membership

¹²¹ Letter, Lucinda Brooks Howe to Emily Howe Dupuy, March 27, 1839, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Mathews, 101-124; Elizabeth R. Varon, “Evangelical Womanhood and the Politics of African Colonization Movement in Virginia,” in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, ed. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 169-195.

¹²² Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Mathews, 160-164; Crowther, “Religion Has Something . . . To Do With Politics: Southern Evangelicals and the North,” in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 317-342.

¹²³ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, March 20, 1838, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

and established the Presbyterian Church as the spiritual home of many of the county's elite planters.

By the mid 1830s the nature of the Presbyterian revivals changed as the debates over slavery intensified. The faculty at the Presbyterian Seminary, located in Hampden Sydney, Prince Edward County, was so fiercely divided over the issues of mission work and slavery that professors who strongly advocated an antislavery stance and a commitment to mission work were soon dismissed.¹²⁴ Among the faculty who were dismissed from the Seminary was the northern born, antislavery advocate Elisha Ballantine. After his dismissal from the seminary in 1837, Ballantine preached regularly at Briery and Forest Grove Presbyterian churches. Ballantine, described by Emily Howe as a "worthy, pious young gentleman," also superintended the Sabbath school at Forest Grove.¹²⁵ While at these churches, Ballantine gathered a loyal following that would stay with him as he moved from church to church within the county over the next seventeen years.

The tension between the Old and New School believers at Briery Church reached a breaking point at the end of 1839. Henry N. Watkins was the first member officially to break from Briery Presbyterian congregation because of what he perceived as an impasse in church governance caused by the rise of New School sympathies within the largely Old School congregation. On March 29, 1840, Watkins, acting as the

¹²⁴ Bradshaw, 249.

¹²⁵ Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1760-1840, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA; Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, May 6, 1838 and June 24, 1838, Section 2; Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, June 10 1837, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

representative for the New School congregants, presented a petition to the elders, William Scott, Adam Calhoun, Lillious D. Womack, Thomas C. Spencer, and James W. Womack, in which he advocated for the separation of the congregation and equitable division of church property due to the irreconcilable differences of opinion within the church. Of the thirty-three members who signed the petition sixteen left the church with Watkins. Asa Dupuy was one of the seventeen who signed the petition but remained a member.¹²⁶

At first glance this petition appeared to be theological in nature however, the conclusion of the petition revealed that the theological debate was complicated by disagreements over church property. Watkins followed his proposal for separation with this request: “We therefore request that the session of Briery call a congregation to consider of this subject and to take measures for an amicable separation & division of the funds upon equitable principle.”¹²⁷ At the center of the dispute was most likely the division of the slaves owned by the church. Slave ownership had long been a source of contention in the church: the trustees formed committees to consider the sale of slaves in 1819 and again in 1835. However, in spite of this ongoing debate, the majority of church members still maintained the belief that slave ownership made good business sense. The equitable division of the slaves would have significantly diminished the church income for the benefit of a few radical members. In the end, only one of the signers, Thomas Spencer, voted in support of Watkins’s petition. The elders decided not

¹²⁶ Briery Presbyterian Church Session Books, 1760-1840 and 1840-1892, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

¹²⁷ Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1760-1840, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA.

to risk the loss of income and turned down Watkins petition to divide the congregation and church property.¹²⁸

Although Emily Howe perceived the division within the established Protestant churches as a roadblock in the path of progress in religion and politics, this conflict opened the door for greater lay participation in the religious life of this plantation community that bridged the gaps between gender and race from the 1830s through the 1850s. The evangelical conception of God and God's work enabled northern and southern whites alike to believe that God's message transcended barriers in human society, such as class, gender, and race. Thus mission work, particularly in religious education, became an important component of the New School Presbyterian ministry.¹²⁹

The demand for religious instruction increased during this period of revival to the extent that both men and women of the Forest Grove congregation acted as lay ministers in conjunction with the ordained ministers.¹³⁰ The commitment of Henry Watkins and Elisha Ballantine to religious reform in the county manifested itself most directly in their establishment of the Sabbath school at Forest Grove Church in

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Hugh Davis points to the National Congregational Society vote in 1852 to support the American Home Missionary Society in granting aid to those missionary societies that only supported "southern churches that attempted to preach the Gospel in such a way as to mitigate the oppressions of slavery" as an example of the New School Presbyterian effort to promote antislavery mission work in the South. Davis, "Leonard Bacon, The Congregational Church, and Slavery, 1845-1861," in Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 231-235; John McKivigan notes that while New School Presbyterians supported antislavery organizations, abolitionists criticized New School antislavery societies for being too lenient in their aid to the southern churches. John R. McKivigan, The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1884) 116-117, 133; "Organizational Beginnings: Networks and Spheres," in Salerno, 25-48.

¹³⁰ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1836, Section 5; Anna Howe Whitteker to Sara Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Anna Howe Whitteker, to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Anna Howe Whitteker to Henry Clay Skinner and Sarah Ann Skinner, October 30, 1849, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

Meherrin.¹³¹ Run by Emily Howe in 1837 and 1838 and continued by Anna Whitteker after her return to Virginia in 1847, the Sabbath school provided non-elites Christians not only with a religious education but also with a reading education. Both women found this work rewarding. Emily Howe described, with a hint of condescension, the school as located in an “ignorant, degraded neighborhood” where her six young female students were “so desirous to learn.”¹³² In 1847, Anna Whitteker anticipated a large class of students, some children walking as much as four miles.¹³³

The commitment of the New School Presbyterians to mission work affected the spiritual lives of enslaved African Americans of Prince Edward significantly. In 1837, Howe wrote that she believed, from her observations of slave life on the Dance, Jackson, and Dupuy plantations, that “the poor slave too, . . . has been a sharer in this good work” that swept through the elite white community.¹³⁴ All of the adult slaves on the Dance plantation, except for one, Howe noted, “profess religion” and gave “evidence of real piety” by attending preaching on the Sabbath: “When I reflect upon it,” Emily Howe wrote, “it really seems astonishing that the people of the North have no more correct ideas of slavery as it exists here.”¹³⁵ The seemingly happy acceptance of

¹³¹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, June 10, 1837, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Briery Presbyterian Church Session Book, 1840-1892, Briery Church Records, 1760-1892, Church Records Collection, LVA; Bradshaw, 248-250; “Missionaries and More: Women, Sewing, and the Antebellum Sewing Circle,” in Lawes, 45-81.

¹³² Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, June 10, 1837, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹³³ Letter, Anna Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹³⁴ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1837, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Christianity by the Dance slaves thus provided Emily Howe with additional evidence that northerners did not possess accurate view slavery.

Whitaker's commitment to the Christian education of the Dupuy slaves reflected her desire to reverse what she felt was the moral degradation of the enslaved. In 1849, Whitaker reported that on the Dupuy Plantation a revival among the enslaved was in full swing; one slave joined the Methodist Church and the rest joined the Baptist church at Sandy River.¹³⁶ In her correspondence with family in Massachusetts, Anna Whitaker made a particular note that the whites in the neighborhood joined the slaves to hear Mr. Dance preach: Mr. Dance "preaches once month on a week day to the negroes on this plantation, at my school house and we all go to hear him."¹³⁷ Anna Whitaker, in an effort to extend her mission of social reform to the slaves in the Meherrin neighborhood, used her Sabbath school at Forest Grove Church as a way to provide the slaves with a reading education. Whitaker wrote with pride to her sister in Massachusetts that the slaves, eager to learn to read, were "learning very well" and "knew by heart."¹³⁸ Whitaker's students, such as Isaac Read, continued to build on their education and, during Reconstruction, supported both public and private schools for freedmen.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Letter, Anna Howe Whitaker to Henry Clay Skinner and Sarah Ann Skinner, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹³⁷ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, February 9, 1838, Section 5; Letter, Anna Howe Whitaker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹³⁸ Letter, Anna Howe Whitaker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹³⁹ Letter, Anna Howe Whitaker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3; Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitaker, July 12, 1870, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

However Howe and Whitteker seemed to be blind to both the outright and the subtle acts of resistance to Christianity. The accounts of slave life on the antebellum tobacco plantations, as found in the correspondence of Anna Whitteker, Emily Howe, and Mary Watkins, at first seemed to communicate an enthusiastic acceptance by slaves of their master's religion. A few slaves expressed outright their refusal to accept their master's religion. "One old man, John Shepard," Whitteker wrote, "says he wants to convert mightily, but he has lived so long in his sins, he is afraid he will never get through if he begins."¹⁴⁰ "I never saw a negro who was a Universalist," Whitteker added, "they all believe they shall got to hell if they don't repent."¹⁴¹ A closer look at the descriptions of slave illness and death revealed that slaves continually challenged the interpretation of the spiritual world as established by whites. One particular event recorded by Anna Whitteker dramatically recounts a young enslaved woman's resistance to Christianity and to death and reveals the inability of the evangelical Christians, white and enslaved, to understand the desperate and harsh reality this young enslaved woman faced. The slaves did not die with as much peaceful Christian resignation as their white counterparts; they fought death and resisted conversion sometimes up until the end.

Catherine Margaret battled long and hard with consumption and with evangelical Christianity in the spring of 1848. This young woman was the eldest living daughter of Aggy, one of the matriarch's within the slave community on the Dupuy

¹⁴⁰ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Henry Clay Skinner and Sarah Ann Skinner, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

plantation.¹⁴² Catherine Margaret claimed, “she was completely miserable” and refused to “prepare to die”¹⁴³ Much to the distress of her mother and her father, as well as her mistress and Anna Whitteker, she resisted requests that she profess a belief in a kind and benevolent God.¹⁴⁴ The white and the enslaved bystanders feared that if Catherine Margaret died before conversion, she would risk attaining salvation. Just before Catherine Margaret’s death, Anna Whitteker reported “a very happy change in her.”¹⁴⁵ In a letter to her sister in Massachusetts, Whitteker described Catherine Margaret’s conversion experience:

She says, Christ has come to her, to take away her sins, that ‘she loves God, and God loves her.’ She said before Christ came to her, she was so unhappy when she lay there alone, she would do nothing but cry. Now she loves to be alone, to think of God and Heaven, She says she will soon go home to her Father’s house, She expects every night when he will send for her.¹⁴⁶

Whitteker considered Catherine Margaret’s acceptance of God as an example of “true Christian faith and hope.”¹⁴⁷

Anna Whitteker’s concluding sentences revealed that her assessment of Catherine Margaret’s words was influenced by her belief in the moral degradation of the enslaved:

¹⁴² Slave Register, Asa Dupuy Account Book 888, Section 21, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; U. S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census, Population Schedule, 1870, Prince Edward County, microfilm, LVA.

¹⁴³ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁴⁴ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Section 3, and Lucinda Brooks Howe to Emily Howe Dupuy, March 27, 1839, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁴⁵ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Section 3; Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, April 24, 1834, Section 1, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

Here is a display of the triumphant grace of God, to the poor and disposed of this world, confounding the things that are mighty. Margaret, poor ignorant slave as she is, seems to have a clear view of the way of salvation. She casts herself into the arms of Christ a poor miserable sinner, is filled with thankfulness and joy, that He receives one so unworthy, and says she lies in His arms like a helpless infant, to be disposed of as he sees chooses.¹⁴⁸

Whitaker, because of her persistent belief in the moral degradation of the slaves, failed to recognize an underlying meaning of Catherine Margaret's painful acceptance of death and retreat from the world. Anna Whitaker's idea that the slaves suffered from moral degradation was as prevalent among the northern antislavery advocates as it was the southern proslavery advocates. It was an idea rooted in the racism that was as pervasive in the North as in the South.¹⁴⁹ She neglected to connect the young woman's fear of death and suspicion of God with her fear of the uncertain world her husband and eleven month old daughter, Leanna, would continue to inhabit after her death. Catherine Margaret's illness and death coincided with the sale of eight of the Dupuy slaves. Seven of the eight were either children or grandchildren of Dotia and Milley, who were sisters as well as the two eldest of the seven matriarchs. Dotia was the mother of James Scott, 31, Elvira, about 29, and Rebekah, 12, and the grandmother of Elvira's two young daughters, ages 9 and 3. Laura Ann, 18, and Polly, 15, were the daughters of Milley. Agnes, 7, was the daughter of Serena. Until the spring of 1848, these eight enslaved

¹⁴⁸ Letter, Anna Howe Whitaker to Sarah Ann Skinner, May 8, 1848, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁴⁹ "We Who Own Slaves Honor God's Law," in Mathews, 136-184, also see 66-80; "Evangelical Revival and the Definition of Christian Stewardship," in Klein, *Unification of a Slave State*. 269-302; "Antislavery," in Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, revised edition, New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1997) 77-102; "The Church and the Negro," in Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 187-213.

human beings had lived and worked their entire lives with their mothers and extended family on the same plantation. The trauma Catherine Margaret experienced as she faced an impending death in conjunction with the sale of people she had known all of her life would most certainly caused her to first reject and then accept, with grudging resignation, her parent's and her mistress's god.¹⁵⁰

Citizenship: Social Reform

Plantation schools in Southside Virginia, like the Sabbath schools, functioned as transmitters of cultural knowledge through which the tobacco planters maintained large measure of social control within their neighborhoods. Unlike other schools in Prince Edward and neighboring counties, such as the single sex common schools and academies, the co-ed plantation schools were owned and operated by the planters for the education of the white children on the plantation as well as the children of neighborhood families who could afford the tuition.¹⁵¹ These schools were physically as well as ideologically isolated from the world at large. The resources and the labor needed to support the planter's own children as well as the day students and borders were produced on the plantation by the enslaved laborers. The teacher was often the only paid employee directly connected with the plantation school. Anna Whitteker and

¹⁵⁰ Slave Register, Asa Dupuy Account Book 888, Section 21; Slave Register, Joseph Dupuy Commonplace Book, 1810-1865, Section 4, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; U. S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census, Population Schedule, 1870, Prince Edward County, microfilm, LVA; White, 76-87.

¹⁵¹ U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of the United States and Eighth Census of the United States: Social Statistics, 1850 and 1860 for Cumberland and Prince Edward Counties, microfilm, LVA; Fox-Genovese, 45-47, 110-111, 257-259.

Emily Howe came to Virginia with preconceived ideas of women's education that were grounded in their evangelical faith and commitment to the antislavery movement. However, as the women realized, the teacher was drawn into the web of paternalistic relationships that governed the plantation society thus often preventing them from reconciling their belief system with the demands of the job.

While the economic benefits seemed significant to these young women, the terms by which the planter hired teachers, such as Anna Whitteker and Emily Howe, enabled the planter to exercise a significant amount of control over the material taught to the students. Teachers, such as Whitteker and Howe who worked far away from their homes and families, relied on the planter not only for cash payments but also for bed, board and social connections. Whitteker, remembering the disappointment and frustration she experienced at the Isabel plantation, reassured her mother that Howe, the youngest of three sisters, was well situated in Prince Edward County. "E. has a pleasant school and lives with an excellent family," Whitteker wrote, "there is also a good neighborhood (much better than that in which I lived in Cumberland)."¹⁵² However both Whitteker and Howe noted in letters addressed to their mother and sister that they found it necessary to censor their own opinions about the role of education in society. While Whitteker refused to teach music at the Isabel plantation, Howe was more compliant and agreed to take music lessons so that she could "command a higher price" as a

¹⁵² Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, May 11, 1836, September 25, 1836, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

teacher in Prince Edward.¹⁵³ Often necessity compelled the women to teach the children according to the wishes of the family.

In her correspondence Emily Howe explained to her family in Massachusetts that the abolitionist movement in the North had inflamed political and religious discussions throughout the county to such an extent that, she feared, a split within the southern Presbyterian Church over the political issue of slavery was inevitable. In the majority Democratic Prince Edward County the religious debates over slavery crisscrossed between the religious and the political worlds. Howe mentioned that her opinion of slavery had changed somewhat since coming to the South. Her comments on an article she read in the Massachusetts Spy about a speech delivered by Levi Lincoln indicated that Howe, as of 1837, still maintained her antislavery sentiments: “I have just read it and like it mightily,” Howe wrote, “but I don’t intend to show it as it would not suit the people here much.”¹⁵⁴ This statement revealed Howe’s characteristic sensitivity to the pro-slavery political sentiments of her Virginia employers and their friends.

After reading Emily Howe’s description of the school house on the Dance plantation, her family in Massachusetts may have believe that the plantation school, which stood in a field of clover about a quarter mile from the main house, was located in a sort of pastoral paradise. “It was once the house of an overseer,” Howe wrote, “and is romantically situated, the field being surrounded by woods and an excellent spring of

¹⁵³ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Emily Howe Dupuy, January 4, 1835, Section 1; Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁵⁴ Letters, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, April 19, 1837, December 13, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

water a little distance from it.”¹⁵⁵ That idealistic image represented the way in which the planters wanted the schools to be perceived by the teachers and the students. Howe then provided the reader with a physical description the schoolhouse on the Dance plantation; it was a windowless structure made of logs and mud. This dark, stuffy environment could hardly have made it an ideal place for learning for nineteen students.

However the building itself was less important in shaping the ideas of the young students than the surrounding fields and woodland and the system of labor that worked the land. Because these schools were located within the boundaries of the plantation, they were physically isolated from the society of the outside world. A cocoon-like environment sheltered the students from any ideological challenges, such as antislavery and pro-wage labor positions, by presenting the students with a curriculum that emphasized the importance of place and reinforced the paternalistic values of the slave society.

Exposure to the political and social movements in the northern states would prove to be stressful for the young students who eventually left Prince Edward to continue their education in the northern states. The comments of the sons of Prince Edward planters who did go north for their professional education demonstrated how sensitive the Prince Edward planters were to challenges to slavery. The feelings of outrage expressed by Richard N. Venable and George McPhail to any challenge of their worldview intensified rather than lessened their commitment to the southern pro-slavery ideology. Venable, while at medical school in Philadelphia in the 1830s, vehemently

¹⁵⁵ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Howe, August 9, 1836, Section 5, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

complained to his parents about the growing antislavery movement, especially when ministers aired their antislavery sentiments in the sermons. “It is poor encouragement for any southern person to go to church here,” a frustrated Venable explained, “for he most confidently expects every other Sunday to have his feelings outraged on a subject that I think of all others should be kept out of the pulpit.”¹⁵⁶ George McPhail, after stating his disagreement with the ministers’ antislavery stance, pointed out in self-defense that the actions of the reformers in New England often contradicted their advocacy. Racism, McPhail argued, was worse in the “liberal” North than in the South: “They talk of ameliorating our coloured population, when they treat those among them with supreme contempt and indignity.”¹⁵⁷

Religion, Politics, and Regional Identity

“What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?” wrote a newly married Emily Howe to her mother in the spring of 1838.¹⁵⁸ Emily Howe’s reticence to offend her southern friends sprang from her experience on the Dance plantation. She often repeated in her correspondence from 1836 to 1838 that, since moving to Virginia, she experienced the most happiness and stability. “I have now been fixed for nearly two years in the same place,” Howe explained, “and perhaps never enjoyed such prosperity

¹⁵⁶ Richard N. Venable to William H. and Margaret M. Venable, Feb. 19, Section 8, Carrington Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵⁷ Letter, George McPhail to Mary Venable Carrington, August 18, 1837, Section 26, Carrington Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁵⁸ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, March 20, 1838, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

and happiness for the same length of time.”¹⁵⁹ In January of 1837, Emily Howe married Asa Dupuy whom met on her arrival to Prince Edward County. The Dances, Howe pointed out, were “anxious” for her to accept.¹⁶⁰ Howe, anticipating her family’s concern, explained that the decision to marry was not made hastily and assured her mother and sister in Massachusetts that Dupuy was not respected for his wealth but rather for his piety and character.

Anna Whitteker’s response to her sister’s marriage exposed an intense feeling of betrayal: “As to Emily, there are such tremendous mountains between us,” wrote Whitteker, “if she has improved her situation I have no objection . . . although I would much prefer her settling in a free state.”¹⁶¹ Slavery, not economic progress, was the most contentious issue that divided the sisters. Emily Howe’s marriage to a wealthy slave owner was interpreted by her family as a rejection of the mission work ethic espoused by the evangelical Presbyterians in Princeton, Massachusetts. This division between the sisters over slavery reflected the division over the issue of slavery within the Presbyterian Church in the North. In the late 1830’s and 1840s, New School Presbyterians increasingly pushed for a stronger stance against slavery. For Emily to reject that New School antislavery ethic, Whitteker believed, was as if she rejected her family in the North.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1837, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁶⁰ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Lucinda Brooks Howe, December 13, 1837, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁶¹ Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Lucinda Brooks Howe, March 3, 1838, Section 2, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁶² McKivigan and Snay, eds., Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery, 16-17; Davis, “Leonard Bacon, The Congregational Church, and Slavery, 1845-1861,” in Religion and the Antebellum Debate

Anna Whitteker was forced to censor her abolitionist and feminist opinions, although for different reasons than her sister. Anna Whitteker also took great pride in work as a teacher to the slaves. She feared that if the slaves found out that her writing appeared in the Emancipator, “it would destroy all my influence with the black people.”¹⁶³ Whitteker understood that the enslaved community would interpret antislavery opinions as a threat because their welfare depended on the maintenance of good relations between mistress and slaves. Whitteker realized that her commitment to liberate the minds of her young students from the confines of the paternalistic society would pose a threat to their parents. An excerpt from the Emancipator illustrates the ethic Whitteker hoped to communicate to her students:

The Better Way. – The sons of the poor die rich, while the sons of the rich die poor. What encouragement to toil through life in acquiring wealth to ruin your children! Better to go with our money as we go along – educate our sons – secure their virtues by habits of industry and study, and let them take care of themselves.¹⁶⁴

Anna Whitteker was determined to break this isolation of the plantation school from the outside world albeit in a subversive manner.

The juxtaposition of Howe’s transformation in attitude toward the institution of slavery and Whitteker’s reaction to her marriage to Asa Dupuy, a slaveholder, revealed a proslavery political ideology that, ironically, was justified by the same evangelical

Over Slavery, 221-245; Padgett “Evangelicals Divided: Abolition and the Plan of Unions Demise in Ohio’s Western Reserve,” in Religion and the Antbellum Debate Over Slavery, 249-272; Crowther, “Religion Has Something . . . To Do With Politics: Southern Evangelicals and the North, 1840-1861,” in Religion and the Antbellum Debate Over Slavery, 317-342; “A Profusion of Pathways,” in Hewitt, 38-68; “A Departure from Their Place,” in Zaeske, 47-72.

¹⁶³ Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 8, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁶⁴ Joshua Leavitt, “The Better Way” The Emancipator 11:50 (April 7, 1874), Special Collections, UVA.

beliefs of moral progress that the northern abolitionists used to condemn it. These conflicting applications of religious doctrine in the northern and southern evangelical Presbyterian churches demonstrated that religious reform did not necessarily go hand and hand with social reform. Historian Donald Mathews argued that the evangelical institutions that best exemplified the contradiction evangelical ministries in the North and in the South were the missionary societies. Where the northern missionary societies promoted the cause of antislavery, the mission of the southern societies was to reinforce the social hierarchy that legitimized racial slavery.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ "We Who Own Slaves Honor God's Law," in Mathews, 136-184, also see 66-80; "Evangelical Revival and the Definition of Christian Stewardship," in Klein, 269-302; "Antislavery," in Walters, 77-102; "The Church and the Negro," in Litwack, 187-213.

Chapter 3

The Meherrin Neighborhood: Place, Gender, and Race

Gender and Plantation Production

This chapter will explore the role of gender as it applies to agricultural production in Prince Edward County as the tobacco plantations transitioned from the capitalist tobacco production of 1860 to more diversified plantation production during the Civil War. The outbreak of war proved to be a test for the agroecological system created by the capitalist planters during the 1850s. The wartime correspondence of Richard Henry Watkins and Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins functioned as a dual plantation diary in which the couple recorded their experiences, thoughts and fears regarding the plantation as the upheaval and violence of the Civil War pushed the rate of environmental change in their community to an extreme. Mary and Richard Watkins resided at Oldham for only three months before the outbreak of war. The exchange of letters through the summer and fall of 1861 revealed that both husband and wife expected the war to end after a few weeks of fighting and, so, neglected to make preparations for Watkins's extended absence. Little in Mary Watkins's life experience had prepared her for the role of tobacco planter; never before had she managed a tobacco crop, managed the slaves who labored in the fields, or hired an overseer. As summer turned to fall in 1861, Watkins and his wife realized that the war's end was not

in sight, and Mary Watkins's would have to assume her husband's role on the plantation.

Until 1861, Mary Watkins paid little attention to plantation production at either Oldham or her mother's plantation, Linden. A shy, thoughtful woman, Mary Watkins spent most of her teenage years following academic pursuits. Anna Whitteker, her aunt and teacher, hoped to prepare Mary Watkins and her sisters for entrance into Mount Holyoke and careers in teaching.¹⁶⁶ Emily Dupuy's correspondence with her daughters indicated that she supported and reinforced Whitteker's vision for the education of her five daughters. Thus, when Mary Watkins took the role of plantation mistress, she found that her knowledge of agriculture and slave management was lacking.

Mary Watkins was just settling into her role as plantation mistress in the summer of 1861. The renovation of the plantation house at Oldham had just been completed in December of 1860, four months before the outbreak of the war.¹⁶⁷ "It hardly seems like home without you," wrote Mary, "I am all the time listening for your steps."¹⁶⁸ Until moving to Oldham, Mary Watkins had spent most of her life at Linden. She had never before run her own household. As summer turned to fall in 1861, Mary Watkins turned to her mother for advice on a range of subjects from processing pork products to finding the materials needed to clothe the slaves for winter. Mary Watkins

¹⁶⁶ Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Henry Clay Skinner and Sarah Ann Skinner, October 30, 1849, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁶⁷ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Eliza Lavalette Dupuy, November 16, 1860, Section 6, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; "added \$2000 building," Richard Henry Watkins, Land Tax 1861, Land Tax Book 1856-1870, microfilm Reel 528.

¹⁶⁸ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, July 1, 1861, Section 1, Folder 2, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

made few comments about the two principle cash crops, tobacco and wheat, except for when she consulted the overseer. The garden at Oldham, however received more attention. The garden, the supervision of the hog slaughter and production of clothes for slaves were the traditional jobs of the plantation mistress. The skills Mary Watkins acquired came from her mother's practical knowledge of agricultural production became increasingly necessary for the subsistence of the plantation as the Civil War progressed. The acquisition and mastery of this knowledge, Mary Watkins admitted, marked a turning point in her attitude toward the land around her. In effect her awareness of the environment around her was intensified as she realized the necessity for diversified crop production at Oldham. More often than not the farm produce derived from traditional women's work, she realized, was profitable even when the cash crops failed.¹⁶⁹

It is clear from the contents of Mary Watkins's letters that the tobacco plantations shifted to subsistence production during the war. Historian Carolyn Merchant explained that in a subsistence economy farm tasks were gender specific and the tasks of each sex were "essential to the family's economic survival." Mary Watkins's growing interest in the gardens, orchards, and livestock reflected her understanding that a switch in agricultural production for home use and the neighborhood market was essential to the plantation's survival.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Letters, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, March 24, 1862, May 16, 1862, June 3, 1862, September 9, 1862, and October 7, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS;

¹⁷⁰ This chapter seeks to explore the experience of an agroecological system during a period of war. "Farm Ecology: Subsistence Versus Market," in Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 149-197.

The events that followed over the next four years caused Richard Watkins to question his decision to plant tobacco. "I have almost concluded to quit raising tobacco and become a farmer instead of a planter," Richard Watkins declared in October 1862 while camped outside of Leetown, Virginia.¹⁷¹ Watkins knew that his wife would be impressed by the healthy looks of the cattle and stock on the yeoman farms. He described the landscape as pretty but not as fertile as the valley in the Culpepper area. The forests were composed of mainly oaks and hickory, but did not, in his opinion "compare with beautiful beech and maple" that he and Mary Watkins saw when they traveled to the limestone rich areas of Indiana.¹⁷² Watkins's own father was of the opinion that tobacco agriculture was as detrimental to society as it was to the land. Henry N. Watkins often stated that he "wished that his lot had been to raise wheat & so to feed men."¹⁷³ Though Richard Watkins may have wished to change his farming practices, he was never able to pull himself away from the tobacco culture of Southside Virginia, because, like his father, he understood that the crop grown on the sandy clay soil was too profitable to abandon. His correspondence from 1861, 1862, and 1863

Lynn Nelson's agroecological study of a tobacco plantation in Nelson County, on the other hand, depicts the wars years as a period of "stagnation." The outbreak of war coincided with the death of the reform minded planter, William Massie. Nelson criticizes Massie's widow for allowing the plantation to slip into a "declining old age" from 1862 until her death in 1889. Lynn Nelson, *Pharsalia*, 202-222.

¹⁷¹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, October 4, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁷² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, October 4, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁷³ Letter, Elisha Ballantine to Richard Henry Watkins, November 19, 1885, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

reflected his vision that the tobacco land was a resource to be managed for maximum profit of a single crop rather than for diversified production.¹⁷⁴

The Southside Piedmont

Descriptions of Virginia's diverse geographical regions, such as the Peninsula, the Valley, and the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, and memories of the Prince Edward County landscape filled Richard Watkins's letters home to his wife. The thick pinewoods of the Tidewater landscape, in particular, prompted memories of the flora and fauna of places such as Goode's Hill and Wade's Hill. "There goes a squirrel running and jumping down the hill toward the shop spring," Watkins imagined, "we go along until we get to the large chestnut oak with Emmie's moss at the root and we sit down and talk of days gone by."¹⁷⁵ Coming back to the present, Watkins then described the soil and topography of the Peninsula as fertile, "very level sandy country" yet "hardly as attractive as Ashland."¹⁷⁶ Though he missed the gently rolling hills of the piedmont landscape, Watkins was quick to add that his troop was camped in full view of the impressive, mile wide Poquoson River. The clear, salty water of the tidal river,

¹⁷⁴ In *Ecological Revolutions* Carolyn Merchant links the transformation from an organic to mechanistic worldview in eighteenth and nineteenth century New England with the simultaneous development of scientific technology and capitalism. "Farm Ecology: Subsistence Versus Market" and "The Mechanization of Nature: Managing Farms and Forests," in Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 149-197, 198-231; William Massie increased production on his plantation in the 1840s and 1850s by implementing many of the reforms advocate by agricultural writers of the day, such as Edmund Ruffin. Nelson, 155-157, 208-209, 226-227.

¹⁷⁵ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 20, 1861, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁷⁶ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, September 19, 1861, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

which he described as “but an arm of the sea,” supported such a quantity of fish and oysters of all sizes, as Watkins had never before seen.¹⁷⁷

The swamps of the Tidewater region held a particular fascination for him. Watkins was struck by what he perceived as the harsh environment of the marshes and rivers of the Tidewater region. “’Tis quite a lonesome place right down in the marsh on the sea beach.” Watkins wrote, “A few oystermen and their families live about in the marsh in some of the most uninviting places.”¹⁷⁸ On the Black River, the diet of these families consisted almost entirely on fish such as hogfish, spot, and jumping mullet, and cornbread. Watkins was surprised to find that on the shores of the Poquoson the oystermen ate a diet rich in oysters because the fish “found so much else to feed on that they could seldom be caught there.”¹⁷⁹ The nutrient rich coastal ecosystem of the Poquoson River was a sharp contrast to the patchwork of agricultural fields, woodland, and narrow, shallow freshwater streams he knew at Oldham, his Prince Edward County plantation.

Watkins’s descriptions of Virginia’s diverse landscapes, in effect, created a foil for the familiar tobacco fields of home as articulated by Mary Watkins in her correspondence. The tobacco plantations and the surrounding landscape of antebellum Southside Virginia conjured up a distinct sense of place in the minds of the white planters and farmers. Prince Edward County, located in the south central of Virginia, is

¹⁷⁷ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, September 24, 1861, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁷⁸ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, October 18, 1861, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁷⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, September 24, 1861, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

bounded to the north by the Appomattox River, to the east by Amelia and Nottoway Counties, to the south by Lunenburg and Charlotte Counties, and to the west by Appomattox County. The county encompassed an area about 356 square miles.¹⁸⁰ In the nineteenth century the county was still forested with virgin forests consisting of pines and hardwoods, such as oaks, sycamores, yellow poplars, sweet gum, ash, and elm. Slow running streams and creeks crisscrossed the county; water flow in a few creeks was sufficient to power mills.

Corn, small grains, and dark tobacco were the principle crops grown in the county in the nineteenth century. The soils types occurring most often in Prince Edward County are the Cecil, Appling, Madison, Lloyd, Durham, Vance, Helena, and Fluvanna series.¹⁸¹ Most of these clay soils are grey brown in color and have a sandy texture. The soil preferred by the nineteenth century tobacco planters was bottomland bordering the streams and creeks. Periodic flooding deposited organic matter on this land that helped to maintain the soil fertility and moisture.

The Dupuy and Watkins plantations were located on the Bush River and Evans Creek and possessed bottomland that was highly sought after by dark tobacco planters.¹⁸² These nutrient rich alluvial soils were particularly good for the culture of dark tobacco and corn. Both crops preferred nitrogen rich moist, soil. In 1861 Richard Watkins gave Mary Watkins specific instructions to have the low grounds along Evans

¹⁸⁰ U. S. Department of Agriculture. Soil Conservation Service. Soil Survey of Prince Edward County, Virginia. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1958 , 1.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, December 10, 1868, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

Creek prepared for tobacco in 1862.¹⁸³ The other soils occurring most frequently on plantations in the Meherrin neighborhood were Wilkes-Appling-Cecil association and the Cecil-Madison-Wilkes association. The light colored Wilkes-Appling-Cecil clay soils were well suited for bright tobacco and corn grown in rotation with small grains, such as wheat and oats. Maria Dupuy Anderson noted the white clay soils at Linden in her correspondence.¹⁸⁴ The reddish brown Cecil-Madison-Wilkes clay soils tended to retain more moisture and were well suited to corn, small grains and dark tobacco. The fact that Maria Anderson and Richard Watkins referred to fields by name, location, and purpose in their correspondence indicated that the plantation owners had a keen understanding of the natural environment.¹⁸⁵

Tobacco production in the county increased a dramatic 66% (1,710,847 pounds) from 1850 to 1860. The fifty wealthiest farmers increased their production by 44% (466,900 pounds) from 1850 to 1860. Over half, 58 %, of the fifty top tobacco producing plantations were clustered in the center of the county near Prince Edward Courthouse; the top three tobacco producing plantations were located in this area. At 77,000 pounds of tobacco, Hilery Richardson's largest plantation was the top producing tobacco farm in the county. Francis P. Wood's and Edward Beach produced the second and third largest crops of tobacco, each weighing 50,000 pounds. The average amount of tobacco produced by the fifty wealthiest planters was 30,398 pounds. Among these

¹⁸³ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁸⁴ Letter, Maria Lucinda Dupuy Anderson to Eliza Lavalette Dupuy Cole and Anne Lefevre Dupuy, February 21, 1872, Section 8, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

¹⁸⁵ Many planters and farmers referred to their land name, location, and purpose. Diagram of Pharsalia, ca. 1825, Nelson, 87.

producers were Emily Howe Dupuy (30,000 pounds) and Richard Watkins (37,000 pounds).¹⁸⁶ Clearly, elite planters engaged in intensive tobacco agriculture between 1850 and 1860.

(See Appendix Figures 4, 7, 8, 11, and 12 for graphs illustrating the distribution of tobacco, corn and wheat production in the county from 1850 and 1860.)

As the land distribution in Prince Edward County changed from 1850 to 1860, so did the profile of the agricultural fields and woodlots that made up the plantations. Between 1850 and 1860 the 50 wealthiest plantations increased in the number of unimproved acres by 68% (6525 acres).¹⁸⁷ Tobacco planters valued the unimproved land, especially woodland. Asa Dupuy's will referenced the need for woodland.¹⁸⁸ Woodlands served a dual purpose on tobacco farms. Woodlands provided planters with both a source of fuel and fertile ground for new tobacco fields. Richard Watkins purchased woodland acres from Dr. William Wooton in 1860. Watkins managed his woodlands with specific needs in mind.¹⁸⁹ In December 1861, he specified that the firewood to be used that winter come from a stand of pines located to the left of the granary. Watkins used the wood from the Wooton land for tobacco production 1860 and 1861.¹⁹⁰ (See Appendix Figures 5 and 6 for graphs illustrating land use in the county from 1850 and 1860)

¹⁸⁶ Calculated from U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth Censuses of the United States, Agricultural Schedule and Population Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁸⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Ritualized Plantation Management

“Well, this is a changing world,” exclaimed Mary Watkins in a letter to her husband in August 1861.¹⁹¹ Although, at the time, Mary had no way of knowing how accurate her exclamation was. The ritualization of farm work, in accordance with the demands of the growing year, was as critical to the continued ecological health of the plantation as the ratio of improved to unimproved land. However, between 1850 and 1860 the ritual of plantation production at the larger tobacco plantations, such as Linden and Oldham, changed. The railroad afforded the planters in isolated areas like Meherrin greater access to eastern market towns and the Deep South. The railroad began the transformation of the tobacco producing plantations from diversified, complex agroecological systems to an agroecological system focused on the culture of the two principle cash crops, tobacco and wheat. Improved transportation brought raw materials, such as cotton, and other finished products into the county thus allowing the planter to focus the energy of his enslaved labor force on the production of cash crops for export rather than multiple crops for both plantation use and export.

Tobacco

Richard Watkins viewed plantation production Oldham was a symbol of his economic success. He was intent on making his plantation as productive as those of his wealthy neighbors. The summer and fall of 1861 proved to be difficult because he was

¹⁹¹ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, August 26, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

away from Prince Edward and relied on his wife for crop reports. "Has my wheat been stacked? Had the tobacco been hilled up, the corn laid by ect. ect.," Watkins asked of his wife, "And tell me about mother's crop and Uncle Joe's and Mr. George Redd's, ect., ect."¹⁹² His persistent use of the possessive pronoun when referring to the plantation reflected his deep attachment to the land and all that it symbolized to him. His investment in land, slaves, and equipment amounted to a considerable debt that he planned to pay off with the cash raised from tobacco.¹⁹³ In November of 1861 he thanked Mary Watkins for "all the home news about my plantation," and he added, "Am delighted that you take so much interest in it and in the negroes."¹⁹⁴

Richard Watkins planted his land according to a schedule posted in his farm account book in 1858:

"Rules for Farming:"

1. Commence following 15th Nov if possible (by which time the corn crop should be housed) and finish by 25 Dec.
2. Burn plant beds in January: burn hard then rake off ashes then hoe up with grubbing hoe twice; the second time across the first then apply a heavy coat of guano, chop this in with hilling hoes and rake it nicely then sow the seed a tablespoonful to 50 sq yds whip them in; then cover hog hair or fine stable manure & then cover thick with brush and fence it in.
3. Prepare the fence rails & do all the fencing in January, Feby & March

¹⁹² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, July 8, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

¹⁹³ Accounts with Elisha Ballantine, George Redd, David Morton, Mildred J. Watkins (Patti), Richard Henry Watkins Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS; Correspondence between Richard Henry Watkins and Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, 1861-1865, Section 1, Folders 3-7, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Letters, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, 1866-1882, Folders 8 and 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, LVA; Letters, Elisha Ballantine to Richard Henry Watkins, 1866-1885, Section 7, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁹⁴ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, November 23, 1861, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

4. If any new ground: coulter, plow and hill it in March.
5. Sow high land oats in February & low ground oats in March finishing by 10th of April.
6. Plant high land corn from 10th to 15th April and low land corn from 1st to 15th of April.
7. Never fail to have the tobacco land ready for planting by 15th May if possible and plant in May though the seasons be very slight rather than wait till June.¹⁹⁵

The growing season for tobacco lasted twelve-months, and the selection of good land for the tobacco bed was made in December before the winter freezes. Richard Watkins, like other planters, took care to choose a well-protected, fertile piece of land for the seedbed. As the war dragged on, George Redd, a neighboring planter, advised Mary Watkins where to locate the seedbeds. Redd suggested that the bed be located on the most fertile land even if that meant using the same shift.¹⁹⁶

Fire marked both the beginning and end of the growing year for tobacco. At Oldham until 1866 the tobacco beds were prepared in December.¹⁹⁷ At times, planters burnt beds as late as February because December and January was too warm and wet.¹⁹⁸ Tobacco farmers in nineteenth century Virginia understood that the winter burning of the plant bed was essential to the health of the tobacco crop. Burning both eliminated

¹⁹⁵ Rules for Farming, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

¹⁹⁶ Letters, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3; Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, December 25, 1861, November 1, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4; Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, December 5, 1863, December 14, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; The "Rules for Farming" together with George Redd's advice exemplified Carolyn Merchant's definition of a mechanistic worldview. Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1980. Reprinted with a Preface, New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1990) 192-215.

¹⁹⁷ Letters, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, December 25, 1861, November 1, 1862,

¹⁹⁸ Letter, Thomas T. Tredway to John Woodall, February 9, 1856, John Woodall Papers, microfilm 2604, LVA; Nannie May Tilley, *The Bright Tobacco Industry, 1860-1929* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1948. Reprinted, New York: Arnos Press, 1972) 37-38.

weeds as well as increased soil fertility by adding potassium. The practice of clearing land, cutting wood, hauling leaves, hauling rails, and burning wood and brush was a time consuming practice in the preparation of the tobacco seed bed. Both Thomas Tredway and Richard Watkins specified a particular supply of wood to be used in burning the seedbed.¹⁹⁹

Richard Watkins, like many of the other intensive planters in the 1850s, used guano imported from Peru to fertilize the seedbeds. Guano supplied phosphorus to the soil. After burning the tobacco bed, the soil was plowed deeply, fertilized liberally, and left exposed to the elements through the winter.²⁰⁰ Agricultural writers of the period endorsed this practice because they believed that the freeze thaw cycle helped to pulverize the soil and integrated the nutrients from the composted manure more effectively than plowing.²⁰¹ The Civil War brought this practice to an end with the embargo imposed on the South by the Union. Richard Watkins instructed his wife to use the traditional way of preparing the bed:

¹⁹⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Letter, Thomas T. Tredway to John Woodall, February 9, 1856, John Woodall Papers, microfilm 2604, LVA.

²⁰⁰ Adam Beatty, Southern Agriculture: Being Essays on the Cultivation of Corn, Hemp, Tobacco, Wheat, Ect., and the Best Method of Renovating the Soil (New York: C.M. Saxton, 1843) 117; Otto Carl Butterwick, "The Culture of Tobacco," U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin 82, Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1898; Alistaire MacKenzie Ferguson, All About Tobacco: Including Practical Instructions for Planting, Cultivation, and Curing of the Leaf, with other Suitable Information from a Variety of Sources, Referring to the Industry in Ceylon, South India, Sumatra, Virginia, and the West Indies, (Columbo, Ceylon: A. M. & J. Ferguson, 1889) 9; J. W. Fitz, Profitable Farming in the Southern States. (Richmond: Franklin Publishing Co., 1890) 291; Letter to the Editor attributed to an Experienced Grower, Southern Planter and Farmer: Devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, and the Mining, Mechanic and Household Arts X:3 (Mar., 1873): 108.

²⁰¹ Beatty, Southern Agriculture, 117; Butterwick, "The Culture of Tobacco," U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin 82, Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1898; Ferguson, 9; Fitz, 291; Letter to the Editor attributed to an Experienced Grower, Southern Planter and Farmer: Devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, and the Mining, Mechanic and Household Arts, 108.

As to the plant bed it will not be possible to get any guano this year. There is none in market and no probability of any until the blockade has been broken up. Mr. Baker had better sow the patch as early as possible and do the best that he can under the circumstances. Tell him to fall back upon the old fashioned way of raising plants. He knows or ought to know what that is. Mr. Tom Baker can tell him.²⁰²

The old fashioned method used for preparation of the seedbed involved working large amounts of farm-produced manure into seedbed. Some Prince Edward farmers such as John Woodall used the tobacco tops as insecticide for livestock. However his employer, Thomas Tredway, disagreed with that practice. In response to Woodall's letter concerning the use of tobacco stalks, Tredway stressed that the stalks were to be piled under a shelter and the plant manure used in the tobacco beds the following spring. Tredway concluded by stating: "If the stalks should kill the vermin on the cattle, I should be willing to use them that way: but they will not."²⁰³ Tredway, unlike Woodall, believed that tobacco stalks acted as a necessary component in the nutrient cycle of the tobacco patch.

The rhythm of work for the summer months was determined by the unique needs of the plant once the seedling were transplanted to the field. Four jobs necessary for the cultivation of tobacco were hilling, worming, suckering, and topping. Topping and suckering and worming ensured that the plant continued to grow vigorously until harvest. During the months of July, August, and September enslaved laborers concentrated their efforts on the suckering and worming of the tobacco crop. Tobacco

²⁰² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, January 6, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS

²⁰³ Letter, Thomas T. Tredway to John Woodall, February 15, 1856, John Woodall Papers, microfilm 2604, LVA.

was a crop that had to be cultivated and harvested by hand because the value crop was judged by the appearance of the leaf as well as the weight. Thus the expert labor of trusted slaves became the mechanism by which the planter produced leaf tobacco for market. After emancipation Watkins continued to hire his former slaves to cultivate his tobacco crop.²⁰⁴

The tobacco worm was a voracious pest that could quickly destroy a crop if not kept in check. In 1889, Alistaire McKenzie wrote, “worm eaten crops bring no money,” therefore aggressive pest management was essential in the culture of tobacco.²⁰⁵ Methods of pest management ranged from the use of poison to enslaved children.²⁰⁶ Richard Watkins remedy for the tobacco fly was a dry mixture that consisted of eight pounds of sulphur and ashes. This mixture was distributed “over a plant bed 25 yards square early in the morning.”²⁰⁷

The topping, priming, and suckering of the tobacco crop were messy but necessary jobs. Tobacco was a succulent plant, and when the leaves were picked a sticky gum oozed out to cover the workers hands.²⁰⁸ Topping the plant just as the flower bud appeared prevented the plant from flowering and, thus, going to seed. The further removal of the top leaves promoted the healthier growth of the remaining leaves.

²⁰⁴ Farm Journals, 1872-1874, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book 902, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

²⁰⁵ Ferguson, 10.

²⁰⁶ Simon Stokes, Interview, Prior to 1941, interviewed by Lucille B. Jayne, in Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia's Ex-slaves, edited by Charles L. Purdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden, and Robert K. Phillips (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1976. Paperback edition, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1992) 281; Wilma King, Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth Century America. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995) 31-32, 35.

²⁰⁷ Richard Henry Watkins, “1873 Crop,” Account Book, Mss1 D9295 a 902, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

²⁰⁸ Gabe Hunt, Interview, Date unknown, interviewed by William T. Lee, in Weevils in the Wheat: Interviews with Virginia's Ex-slaves, 148.

Energy spent by the plant went into the growth and development of the valuable leaf:

“In topping tobacco the end aimed at is to secure the greatest weight consistent with the desired texture.”²⁰⁹ The experienced grower calculated in his mind the correct number of leaves to remove by noting the number of the top leaves in relation to the index leaf in the third tier directly above the first leaf. “I hope you will be able to keep the tobacco in good condition, worked, wormed & suckered, and topped as fast as it will bear topping at 8 leaves,” Thomas Tredway instructed, “Top at 8 leaves till the last day of next week – then top all at seven leaves.”²¹⁰

The suckering of the tobacco occurred after the plant was topped and primed. The priming of the tobacco crop involved the removal of the bottom leaves. Richard Watkins made no specific mention of topping and priming in his account book; he simply recorded that “succoring tobo” commenced on August 28, 1873.²¹¹ Suckers, which sapped nutrients from the leaves of the plant, developed at the top of the plant shortly after the removal of the flower bud. Suckering was an endless job; the entire crop required suckering five to six times every seven days. No farm accounts survive for the Civil War years, but Watkins’s farm diaries from the 1870s provide a view of the amount of work required to culture tobacco for market. During the months of August and September of 1873, Watkins recorded that twenty-four out of fifty workdays were spent suckering the tobacco crop.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Tilley, 51.

²¹⁰ Letter, Thomas T. Tredway to John Woodall, August 14, 1856, John Woodall Papers, microfilm 2604, LVA.

²¹¹ 1873 Crop, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book 902, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

²¹² Ibid.

The practices of topping, priming, and suckering were performed because the market demanded that tobacco leaves have a certain size, shape, and texture. However, following passage appearing on a statement addressed to William W. Watkins from Barksdale and Read pointed to additional factors that affected the quality of tobacco: “As you will observe in the sale annexed, we succeeded in selling 4 of your Hhs at an average of \$9 but the one sold at 7 1/2 was a showy Hhs but poor and red, and such kinds are very unsaleable. Your crop was managed neatly, but it wanted quality. We hope the sale will meet your expectations.”²¹³ The “poor but red” evaluation suggested that, even with careful management, environmental factors such as variations in nutrients and soil moisture also determined the quality of the leafy crop.

“Horace Booker told me he rode through your tobacco last week,” she wrote in August 1861, “it was the best crop he had seen anywhere this year.”²¹⁴ News of a healthy tobacco crop a month before cutting began was welcomed. “The tobacco was beginning to suffer for rain last week,” Mary Watkins reported, “but we had fine rains Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday which I think will do a great deal of good.”²¹⁵ Cutting and curing ripe tobacco was labor-intensive work that occurred in late September or early October. It was a job that had to be done carefully so that the leaf would not be damaged. Once the tobacco was cut, the slave hung in tobacco barns to cure. In mid-October 1861, Mary Watkins reported that after three weeks of cutting all

²¹³ Invoice, Barksdale and Read, Richmond, Va. to William W. Watkins, June 24, 185?, Section 28, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²¹⁴ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, August 26, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²¹⁵ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, August 19, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

of the tobacco was cut, hung, and six of the seven barns were already cured.²¹⁶ Watkins noted in his 1858 account book that the process of curing tobacco grown on new land is different than that for tobacco grown on old land. Watkins writes the tobacco grown on virgin soil “may be hurried more.”²¹⁷

Richard Watkins recorded his procedure for curing tobacco in his account book dated 1858. The first step, wrote Watkins, was to hang a thermometer in the center of the second tier of the curing barn. Readings taken regularly from the thermometer and observations of the color of the ripening tobacco guided the farmer in the curing process. The farmer then selected the tobacco for curing, hung in place “all over the bottom of the first tier” and heated; a tobacco “cut of a green color” was “put directly in the house” and heated until the mercury thermometer read 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature was maintained at ninety degrees for six to eight hours and then increased to one hundred until “the tails of the tobacco curl little.” Once the leaves dried enough to curl the temperature was raised ten degrees every six hours. When the leaves began to turn from a green to a bright yellow color, they were considered ripe enough for the fire to be kindled ten degrees every four to five hours. Watkins then noted that the farmer should “never suffer the mercury to rise above 160.”²¹⁸ The completion of the curing process marked the end of the growing season for tobacco planters.

²¹⁶ Letters, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, September 17, 1861, September 29, 1861, October 10, 1861, and October 15, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²¹⁷ For Curing Tobacco, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²¹⁸ For Curing Tobacco, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

As the war progressed it became increasingly difficult for Richard Watkins to make a profit from tobacco. The crop declined in weight and in the quality of the leaf. Droughts interspersed with hail storms damaged the tobacco leaf as well as reduced the weight. By 1863 Watkins despaired that he would ever manage to pay off his debt. Mary Watkins could send only seven hogsheads to market in July 1863. After hearing that the crop earned only \$2156, an exasperated Watkins wrote: "am afraid that McKinney and Dupuy since taking on a new partner have so much business they cannot attend to such a small crop as mine. I know that it could have been sold for more."²¹⁹ Rather than turning to other means of raising cash, Watkins continued to have tobacco planted and hope that it would manage to turn a healthy profit.

Grains and Legumes

Mr. Bagby "wants to know whether he should fallow all of the oat land for wheat," Mary Watkins wrote, "He does not think it will bring good wheat."²²⁰ Critical to the tobacco rotation were the grains, wheat, oats, and corn and legumes. The small grains and legumes worked together to maintain the soil fertility for the tobacco crop. Sown in the late fall after the tobacco harvest, wheat functioned as a cover crop that held the soil. The Richard Watkins, like Thomas Tredway, sowed nitrogen building clover and peas into the fields the season before they went fallow. Mary Watkins wrote of her husband's reputation among the overseers in the neighborhood: Mr. Anderson

²¹⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, July 18, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²²⁰ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, August 26, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

“knows you were a great man for having clover and would not like to have it rooted up.”²²¹ In December 1861, Watkins wrote that the low grounds planted in clover in 1861 were to be fallowed for tobacco in 1862. He also rotated corn with clover in the highland fields.²²² Watkins continued the clover wheat rotation through the Civil War.²²³

Wheat was the second cash crop at Oldham. In 1861 M. Bagby predicted that 250 bushels of wheat would be produced at Oldham.²²⁴ The wheat crops of 1862 and 1863 were so poor that little seed wheat was made. Either the seed failed to germinate or rust damaged the crop. In September 1863, Mary Watkins was forced to sell the wheat crop at a loss to earn cash to pay the taxes. Mr. Barrett Dupuy, the commission merchant in Richmond, Virginia explained that the wheat “was so indifferent that none of the millers would buy it.”²²⁵ However, the wheat crop at Linden was sufficient for Mary Watkins to obtain enough seed to replant. This pattern of crop production at Linden and Oldham continued through the war years: where Oldham was short, Linden had a surplus.

²²¹ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, July 13, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²²² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, April 11, 1863, June 6, 1863, June 23, 1863, July 13, 1863, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Letter, Thomas T. Tredway to John Woodall, February 15, 1856, John Woodall Papers, microfilm 2604, LVA

²²³ Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, February 12, 1863, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Legumes slowed but did not prevent the loss of nitrogen in New England. Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 156.

²²⁴ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, August 19, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²²⁵ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, July 14, 1862, September 9, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4; October 7, 1863 and September 28, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

Corn was the principle crop used for home consumption on the southern plantations. Corn was fed to the slaves as well as to the livestock, yet during the Civil War, it became as valuable a cash crop as tobacco. Mary Watkins provided two possible reasons for the decline in corn production in the Meherrin neighborhood between 1862 and 1863. The first reason was environmental: a severe drought in 1862 and 1863 reduced the amount of corn produced at Linden. The second reason was due to the war: government demand for corn reduced the reserves of individual planters. While the wheat crop at Oldham was poor, the corn crop was healthy. In December 1863, Emily Howe Dupuy took thirty-three barrels of corn from Oldham as payment for the seed wheat and oats that Mary Watkins obtained from Linden in 1862. Mary Watkins figured after subtracting her mother's thirty-three barrels and the share the government planned to take, Oldham would have fifty to sixty barrels of corn left from the 1863 crop. This figure proved to be low, much to Mary Watkins surprise; rather than scraping by with 50-60 barrels, she was able to sell the 114 barrels of surplus corn to neighboring farmers for a total of \$5814. However the payment in Confederate money proved to be worthless: the cash "would almost get you out of debt," Mary wrote her husband, "if people would take confederate money wouldn't it? If we were only out of debt, I should be right well satisfied."²²⁶

Livestock

²²⁶ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 14, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

The domesticated animals found on the antebellum plantations and farms provided multiple functions that supported production of the cash crops: food, fertilizer, fuel, clothing and transport. Livestock produced manure for fertilizer, powered farm equipment, and grazed fallowed fields. Livestock consumed a significant amount of resources and planters managed them so that their environmental impact was made part of the routine of the farm. Overgrazing of pastureland and the trampling of soil, Richard Watkins warned his wife, was as detrimental to soil fertility as over production of the cash crop.²²⁷

Hog killing was a critical time of the year – regulated not by human need, but by the weather. Mary Watkins had never participated in hog slaughtering before this time, and her observations of the process from 1861 to 1865 shed light on the importance of weather and salt in the ritual of killing hogs.

The weather in December 1861 was perfect for killing hogs. “The air cold but dry,” Watkins wrote home, “Some of the best weather for killing pork I have ever seen.”²²⁸ If weather conditions were too warm or too wet slaughtering was delayed.²²⁹ Mary Watkins began to slaughter hogs in early December but was forced to stop until mid January because of a scarcity of salt in Meherrin: “Salt,” concluded Mary Watkins,

²²⁷ Letters, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, April 18, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²²⁸ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, December 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²²⁹ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, December 16, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, VHS; Thomas T. Tredway to John Woodall, December 15, 1855, John Woodall Papers, microfilm 2604, LVA.

“seems to be more precious than sugar in this neighborhood.”²³⁰ She wrote to Richmond and to Lynchburg in search of a source for salt but without any luck. As Mary Watkins recounted to her husband, she lay awake at night “thinking what we were to do when our last was gone.”²³¹ By January 21, a merchant in Richmond found two bags of salt at \$4.00 per bag. This amount was just enough to finish the slaughtering the hogs. Mary Watkins, like her mother Emily Dupuy, attributed her good fortune to Providence: “I think it is the best way now to trust Providence for everything and I know we shall not suffer as long as we do.”²³²

Hogs were critical to the crop rotations and food production on the plantation. The hogs at Oldham scavenged in the wheat fields after the harvest in July.²³³ This practice marked the beginning the fattening process as well as provided the wheat field with the necessary fertilizer. “The hogs are improving very fast,” Mary Watkins reported with tempered optimism, in 1861, and then added, “though eleven shoat and pigs died from eating mushrooms.”²³⁴ The Watkins again lost hogs in April 1862, however this loss of two shoats and a yearling was attributed to heavy rains.²³⁵ Hogs were not immune to dangers in the environment, such as mushrooms. As the one of the

²³⁰ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, December 25, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²³¹ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, January 21, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, August 19, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, April 28, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

staples in the diet of the enslaved laborers, death of a significant number of hogs could cause a problem.

Mary Watkins constantly compared the size of the hogs at the Oldham to the size of those at Linden. In November 1861, Emily Dupuy had sixty-seven hogs “very fine” fattening in the pen, while the forty hogs at Oldham, Mary Watkins reported, “looked right meager by hers.”²³⁶ Richard Watkins responded by instructing his wife to make sure the hogs fattened well, making sure “not to kill early unless they are very fat, especially the small hogs.”²³⁷ Only the larger hogs were chosen for slaughter, the smaller hogs were released to free range for another year. 1860 had been a year that was lean on meat at Oldham, and 1861 did not look any better. Mary Watkins hope that with 104 pieces of meat in the smokehouse at Oldham combined with the 158 pieces of meat from the 18 slaughtered hogs, “we can get buy without buying.”²³⁸ The amount of pork slaughtered for 1862 an 1863, as stated by Mary Watkins in her correspondence, remained constant at 1380 and 1089 respectively.

The lard rendered in this slaughtering process was as necessary to plantation production as the meat. Lard was a commodity that was produced and marketed by plantation mistresses. In 1861 Mary Watkins, with her mother’s assistance, prepared and packaged about two hundred pounds of lard to send to Richmond.²³⁹ Mary Watkins

²³⁶ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, November 16, 1861, November 25, 1862, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²³⁷ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, November 23, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²³⁸ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, November 16, 1861, November 25, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²³⁹ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, December 11, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

used the sale of lard as a way to supplement the cash income derived from tobacco and wheat. By 1863 Mary Watkins was accustomed to the lard making ritual. She boasted: “I understand it right well now and I don’t think I shall have to trouble Mama much more with that.”²⁴⁰

Textiles

Textile production prior to 1865 was directed toward home consumption rather than for the market. In 1850 cotton was grown on 216 of the 362 tobacco farms for a countywide total of 15,702 400-pound bales. The 50 wealthiest plantations grew 3,108 400-pound bales of cotton. By 1860, cotton was no longer grown in the county because of the opening of the cotton plantations and the construction of two railroads in Prince Edward County. The absence of cotton in the county allowed planters to devote more land to the cultivation of tobacco and grains, thus intensifying the plantation agroecosystem. In 1862 cotton was still available to planters; Mary Watkins purchased four 400-pound bales of cotton from Mr. Lockett. Unlike cotton, wool production remained in the county after 1860 primarily for the manufacture of the slaves’ winter clothing. In 1850 tobacco farms produced a total of 15,664 pounds of wool. In 1860 the amount of wool produced in the county was 10,092 pounds, a decrease of 36%.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, January 6, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins, VHS.

²⁴¹ Calculated from U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth Censuses of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and 1860, microfilm, LVA; For references to the importation of cotton to Linden see Letter, Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, November 7, 1847, Section 3, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; For cotton at Oldham see Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, March 2, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 190-197.

The manufacture of winter clothes for the slaves began in the fall with the spinning and weaving of wool. Mary Watkins identified her slave, Mary Brown, as the woman who spun the cotton wool at Oldham.²⁴² In 1861 Mary Watkins did not have the cloth woven at Oldham, rather she contracted it out to women in the neighborhood. Watkins tried to hire Miss Sally Stokes to weave the cloth, but she had too much work.²⁴³ In the end the wool was woven by Martha Dixon, the wife of a neighboring tenant farmer.²⁴⁴ Mary Watkins was conscious of the need to employ neighborhood women who had “lazy husbands” and large families to support.²⁴⁵ By 1863 the scarcity of cotton and wool forced the Watkins to turn to other sources for winter clothes for the slaves. “I reckon the negroes will have to suffer some along with the rest of us,” Richard Watkins wrote to his wife, “we cannot under present circumstances furnish them with everything they really need . . .”²⁴⁶ Richard Watkins procured clothing and blankets for his slaves from the clothing and blankets confiscated from the Union soldiers.²⁴⁷

Labor, War, and the Disruption of an Agroecosystem

²⁴² Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, October 10, 1861, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; Slave Register, Richard Henry Watkins Account Book, 1847-1861, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²⁴³ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, October 10, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Letters, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, October 21, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3 and January 6, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁴⁶ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, September 22, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁴⁷ Letters, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, September 12, 1863; Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, September 19, 1863, September 24, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

The work ethic of the overseer, Mary Watkins found, was a critical to the productivity of the plantation. In 1861, Richard Watkins hired Archer Bagby as the overseer for Oldham. Mary Watkins thought that Mr. Bagby, as well as the slaves at Oldham, were “decidedly lazy and fond of running about”²⁴⁸ Mary Watkins’s criticisms of the management of Oldham reveal not only the difference in work ethic and management of slaves, but also her own limited perspective of plantation operations.

The problem of hiring overseers to manage Oldham during the war proved to be the most difficult problem for Mary Watkins. Although she managed the day to day business of the plantation, she often found herself left out of this important decision making process. In October 1861 Mary Watkins found that hiring an overseer was a competitive business especially when the men making the arrangements left her out of the negotiations. Dissatisfied with Mr. Bagby’s work, Mary Watkins suggested to Richard Watkins that John Baker would be best for the job. John Baker was one of three brothers whom neighboring planters considered to be the most competent overseers in the Meherrin area. Plantation management was the family business, and Thomas Baker, the father and overseer at Linden, managed the brothers’ careers. Confusion in hiring John Baker came when Richard Watkins followed up on the suggestion with neighbors George Redd and Robert Smith rather than his wife. Robert Smith and George Redd “say \$200 is enough to give Mr. John Baker these times,” a concerned Mary Watkins

²⁴⁸ Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, September 17, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

wrote, “and [Thomas Baker] says he can’t let him come for less than you paid Mr. James Baker. What must he do?”²⁴⁹

Mary Watkins eventually secured John Baker’s employment, however within a few months John Baker was drafted. Richard Watkins assured his wife that the problem of overseer would be taken care of: “Asa Dickinson promised me that he would introduce a bill to exempt overseers of widows and volunteers.”²⁵⁰ However a solution to the problem never came to pass. John Baker, the Watkins’s overseer, joined the company for Prince Edward.²⁵¹

From 1862 through 1865, the Watkins employed three different overseers and, for a period of time, Mary Watkins managed the plantation with the help of George Redd. Mr. Tom Anderson followed John Baker as overseer, but Anderson was hesitant to stay through the year.²⁵² An increasing number of animal deaths together with Mr. Anderson’s refusal in 1863 to stay at Oldham alone indicate that there was considerable slave resistance on that plantation beginning in 1863 and lasting through 1864.²⁵³

Slave resistance was not uncommon among the Dupuy slaves at Oldham. Tilman came back the day you left,” Mary Watkins wrote her husband, “half starved

²⁴⁹ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, November 1, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁵⁰ Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, March, 16, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, October 22, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁵³ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, July 13, 1863, September 22, 1863, Section 1, Folder 5, April 28, 1864, Section 1, Folder 6, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

and with a mighty bad cold.”²⁵⁴ This account of Tilman’s reappearance after his master’s departure suggested that the Dupuy slaves resisted the move to Oldham. Richard Henry Watkins demanded absolute submission and ruled the slaves with a heavy hand. When the cows trampled the wheat field, Richard Watkins instructed Mr. Thomas Baker to beat Tom Watkins, the slave who worked the cattle. “I fear that Tom has been idle so long that he will give Mr. Baker trouble,” Richard Watkins wrote, “Tell Mr. Baker to give him a good whipping whenever he disobeys his orders, and if he feels any delicacy about it to get Mr. George Redd to be present with him.”²⁵⁵ Thomas Baker was the overseer at Linden. This statement by Watkins indicated that the slaves at Linden were not treated in the same manner and probably resisted their treatment at Oldham.

Conclusion

Neither Richard nor Mary Watkins believed that the war would last longer than the summer, and certainly neither thought that Mary Watkins would have to learn the ins and outs of tobacco farming. Over the course of four years the war forced Richard and Mary Watkins to form a new relationship that would carry over to the farm of the New South. Watkins repeatedly expressed his relief that his wife took such an interest

²⁵⁴ Letter, Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins to Richard Henry Watkins, July 1, 1861, Section 1, Folder 2, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁵⁵ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, April 15, 1862, Section 1, Folder 4, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS; For discussions of slave resistance see Deborah Gray White, Ar’n’t I a Woman, 7-10, 76-84, 189-190.

in the management of his plantation.²⁵⁶ Over the course of the wartime correspondence Richard Watkins moved from referring to the plantation as “his” to calling it “ours.” Mary Watkins found herself overseeing more and more of the farm tasks as the war years progressed. By 1863 they no longer dreamed of an idyllic plantation life. Instead they began to question the soundness of the idea and debated selling the land.

Carolyn Merchant described this attitude toward nature as expressed by planters, such as Richard Watkins, Thomas Tredway, and William Massie, as mechanistic. It was distinctly different from Mary Watkins more organic view of nature. Merchant traces the transformation of an organic view of nature to a mechanistic one in Europe and the United States to the scientific revolution and the rise of capitalism. In Death of Nature Merchant defined and explained the difference between the organic and mechanistic view of nature: “In the organic world, order meant the function of each part within the larger whole, as determined by its nature, while power was diffused from the top downward through the social or cosmic hierarchies. In the mechanical world, order was redefined to mean the predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system of laws, while power derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world.” The developing view of disorder and dominion over nature in the seventeenth century, Merchant wrote, was central to this transformation from an organic to a mechanistic worldview.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ Richard Henry Watkins to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, November 23, 1861, Section 1, Folder 3, Richard Henry Watkins Papers, VHS.

²⁵⁷ Merchant, The Death of Nature, 192-215, and “Farm Ecology: Subsistence Versus Market” and “The Mechanization of Nature: Managing Farms and Forests,” in Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 149-197, 198-231; William Massie increased production on his plantation in the 1840s and 1850s by implementing

Chapter 4

Renegotiated Boundaries: Reconstruction, Landowner, and Laborer

The Meherrin Neighborhood

In a letter addressed to her sister, Emily Howe Dupuy described the many changes taking place in the still rural Prince Edward County, Virginia. “You needn’t look amazed and wonder where we have all moved to,” Emily Dupuy wrote to Anna Howe Whitteker, “for we are still at Linden.”²⁵⁸ Dupuy, in explaining the change of address on the letter, reported the reconfigured political and social landscape of the county that was set in motion by political and economic changes at both the state and local levels. In the summer of 1870 the state legislature divided the county into townships, but, as Emily Howe Dupuy pointed out to her sister, the rural character of the county had not yet changed significantly: “I don’t perceive any advantage as yet from living in town, but hope someday we shall.”²⁵⁹ Farmers in the Meherrin neighborhood still grew tobacco and wheat as the cash crops and raised corn, vegetables and livestock for home consumption. By 1867 the Linden land had been subdivided,

many of the reforms advocate by agricultural writers of the day, such as Edmund Ruffin. Nelson, 155-157, 208-209, 226-227.

²⁵⁸ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitteker, July 12, 1870, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

²⁵⁹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitteker, July 12, 1870, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; U. S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States: Population Schedule and Agricultural Schedule, 1870, Microfilm, LVA.

according to the stipulations in Asa Dupuy's will, among the four surviving Dupuy daughters, was managed by Richard Watkins, and worked by freedmen as the plantation was before the war. Although the mode of production and boundaries had changed, Anna Whitteker would have recognized little difference in the diversity of crop production and livestock management at Linden and neighboring tobacco plantations in the summer of 1870.²⁶⁰

In this letter, Emily Dupuy highlighted a variety of themes that shaped a narrative which details how, why, and to what extent the tobacco society and culture of Prince Edward County changed with regard to environment, gender, and race in the two decades following the Civil War. "A kind Providence has seemed to be over us for good this year," Dupuy continued, "in supplying our destitute ones with food in the shape of fruits and vegetables of every description."²⁶¹ Dupuy remarked to Whitteker that her orchards were loaded with fruit of every size and variety and wished that she was closer to a market so that she could sell the produce: "I could make more from it than from the farm."²⁶² Emily Dupuy's reference to "A kind Providence" as the source of a bountiful harvest reflected not only her faith based environmental ethic, but also her very real relief in having enough vegetables and fruit for home consumption to compensate for the poor profits brought in by the cash crops. A less obvious, though equally important,

²⁶⁰ Plat of Linden, Section 19, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS; Copy of Will, Asa Dupuy, Section 4, Watkins Family Papers; Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, February 25, 1867, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Lynn Nelson noted that after emancipation Maria Massie continued to manage Pharsalia in the same conservative manner as during the war. Nelson argues that Maria Massie's success as a farmer allowed her to keep the plantation lands intact and productive, despite the debt, until her death in 1889. "The Gentry Family and the Fall of Pharsalia," in Lynn Nelson, *Pharsalia*, 190-222.

²⁶¹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitteker, July 12, 1870, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

²⁶² Ibid.

transformation that took place in the county was the change in the tobacco planter's identity and relationship to the land. Prolonged drought in the years immediately following the Civil War forced the planters to reconsider how they managed the land. The year 1870 did stand out as the turning point in which political and economic changes transformed Prince Edward County from an isolated tobacco county to a prominent tobacco market in Southside Virginia.

Consequences: Prewar Debt and Postwar Property Rights

"It is said that Frank Wood is broke to smashes," Patti Watkins reported to her sister-in-law in North Carolina, "and has deeded all his property to John A. Scott."²⁶³ News that Wood, the second wealthiest tobacco planter in 1860, was broke by 1867 was alarming indeed.²⁶⁴ Unbeknownst to Patti Watkins and her peers, the downward spiral of economic depression was just beginning to grip the tobacco planters of Prince Edward County. On his return from the war, Richard Watkins resumed work as a lawyer in partnership his wartime crony, John Knight. Watkins's account books detailed a growing practice, although, as Watkins complained, more often than not the cash

²⁶³ Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, February 25, 1867, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA. Lynda Morgan points to the antebellum debt and the political success of the Conservatives in 1870 as the principle factors in shaping politics and economics in Virginia between 1870 and 1880. "Fusion and the Failure of Reconstruction, 1869-1870," in Lynda Morgan, Emancipation in Virginia's Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992) 127-150; Jane Dailey argues that the antebellum debt and the Conservative party not only shaped the politics and economics of Virginia from 1870 to 1880, but it would eventually lead to the formation of the radical biracial political party, the Readjusters. "Origins of the Readjuster Movement," in Jane Dailey, Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 48-76.

²⁶⁴ Calculated from the U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1860, microfilm, LVA.

strapped clients were unable to pay for the legal services rendered. In August 1866, after nine months of practice, Watkins had realized only \$30 in cash while several hundred dollars worth of payments remained on the books. With little prospect for relief Watkins was powerless: "I am hedged in and wedged in," Watkins wrote with impatience and frustration, "I must wait for something to turn up."²⁶⁵ Debt was an unkind master to many of the antebellum planters who failed to oversee the transition of their plantations to the smaller farms of the New South. The reluctance to repudiate the debt together with a decade long succession of poor crop years left many of the wealthiest antebellum planters in Prince Edward County with out land and without cash.

The capitalist intensification based on enslaved labor of the 1840s and 1850s left the planters in debt and unable to adjust. Many of the cases on Watkins's docket involved prewar bonds and land disputes that bound together Prince Edward and Charlotte county tobacco planters in an intricate web of financial obligations. The debts carried over from the prewar years often involved bonds between family members, such as Edwin Edmunds, William Watkins, and George Redd, for land transfers as well as for slave hires between family members and other planters.²⁶⁶ In particular, the debt accumulated by the young tobacco planters, such as Frank Wood, John Knight, and Jacob Morton, during the land grab of 1850s came back to haunt many of them during

²⁶⁵ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 14, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁶⁶ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Richard Henry Watkins, Docket, Account Book 903, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers; Richard Henry Watkins, New Ledger, Account Book 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

the 1860s and 1870s.²⁶⁷ Individual planters could not cancel their debts without significantly impacting the whole community of tobacco planters.

The Watkins, Edmunds, and Ballantine families, who had been so close during the two decades preceding the war, found the financial ties that bound them together under considerable strain from 1865 until the 1880s. The outstanding bonds on the Oldham land purchased by Richard Watkins from his siblings during the 1857 and 1858 hung like an albatross around Richard Watkins's neck. Watkins canceled his outstanding debt of \$300 to Edwin Edmunds by writing a will and agreeing to act as debt collector for Edmunds.²⁶⁸ The other debts proved more difficult to settle.

Bonds held by Elisha Ballantine in the name of his wife, Betsy Watkins Ballantine especially vexed Watkins because he regarded this particular debt as an example of the North's oppression of the South, a moral failing as well as a financial burden. As Richard Watkins described, Elisha Ballantine once "stood to me 'in locus parentis' and in my affections occupied a place next to my father," but Ballantine's antislavery and pro Union sentiments rendered Watkins unable to find sympathy for Ballantine's strapped financial state.²⁶⁹ When Ballantine requested payment on the remaining \$1942.73 on the bond for the purchase of the slave, Tom Watkins, Richard Watkins's perceived the request as the personification the North's "cruel oppression of

²⁶⁷ Richard Henry Watkins, Docket, Account Book 903, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

²⁶⁸ Account with Edwin Edmunds, Richard Henry Watkins, New Ledger, Account Book 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²⁶⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 29, 1865 and January 25, 1866, Folders 8 and 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

the South.”²⁷⁰ The oppression of the South, Watkins reasoned, also reflected a break down of the New School ethic of individual liberty and economic progress that his father, Henry N. Watkins and Ballantine so enthusiastically endorsed in the 1840s. Richard Watkins exclaimed to his brother: “I could not honor him – Nat, my liberties are dearer to me than my kindred.”²⁷¹

In the winter of 1866 Watkins, like several of his neighbors, reluctantly decided that the best solution to the debt problem was to sell his plantation, even if the land sold at a loss. “A gentleman came to view it a couple of days ago and I almost begged him to buy it,” Watkins wrote his brother, “I believe that my eagerness to sell defeated the very object I had in view.”²⁷² He was desperate to settle his debts totaling upwards of \$5745.50.²⁷³

Finally in late August 1866, Watkins sold the Oldham land to Frank and George Redd jointly for a bond worth \$12,000.00.²⁷⁴ Watkins’s primary objective for selling the Oldham land to the Redd brothers was to settle both his outstanding \$2000.00 debt to George Redd for the prewar purchase of Oldham land. Richard Watkins also accepted

²⁷⁰ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Account with Elisha Ballantine, Richard Henry Watkins, New Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896; Letters, Elisha Ballantine to Richard Henry Watkins, December 11, 1866, January 2, 1868, July 5, 1868, August 5, 1870, January 8, 1873, and November 1885, Section 7, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²⁷¹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 23, LVA.

²⁷² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 14, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁷³ Watkins also held outstanding debts for land with James M. Booker, David Morton and George Redd. Watkins also held an outstanding bond with his sister, Patti Watkins, for prewar hire of slave. Accounts with James M. Booker, David Morton, George Redd, and Martha J. (Patti) Watkins, Richard Henry Watkins, New Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²⁷⁴ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 14, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

the transference of the outstanding bond worth \$4000.00 Frank Redd held against Nathaniel Watkins as part payment. In the new bond with his brother, Richard Watkins explained that he substituted a portion of Nathaniel's \$4000.00 bond with Frank Redd for his own \$2258.50 bond with their sister Patti: "My desire being," Watkins wrote, "to get in all of my bonds immediately."²⁷⁵ The \$6000.00 balance was made up by Watkins's acceptance of a bond with George and Frank Redd.²⁷⁶

While Watkins's plan was to sell Oldham for cash to pay his debts, however, in his correspondence, he never questioned the fact that he received no hard cash from the Redds. By accepting the transference of Nathaniel Watkins's bond with Frank Redd as part payment for the Oldham land, Richard Watkins moved the debt of his brother from neighbor to family, while at the same time canceling his own financial obligation to his sister. This transaction, Watkins believed, would save him from the humiliation of bankruptcy as well as placed the debt of his younger brother in the hands of a sympathetic creditor. The preservation of the family's honor was paramount in Watkins's mind. Watkins closed his letter to Nathaniel with the statement that, though he was "without money, without clothes, & without a home," he was no longer a slave to debt and wrote "freedman" after his signature.²⁷⁷

Watkins failed to understand that this transference of the role of debtor from the Watkins to the Redds was not a solution to his debt woes but rather a complication.

²⁷⁵ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁷⁶ Letters, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866 and August 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁷⁷ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

Richard Watkins, by securing the sale of Oldham land with a personal bond, risked prolonging his state of indebtedness if the Redds repudiated their debt, thus making the land deal with the Redds a risky one. Watkins description of the turn of events with the Redds illustrated the ripple effect of bankruptcy that so frustrated Watkins: "Would have been able to breathe freely already but Mr. Clark failed to pay the Mssrs Redd according to his agreement and consequently they have failed to pay me."²⁷⁸ By 1868 Watkins held Frank Redd in the same predicament as Redd held Nathaniel Watkins in 1866 with little prospect of receiving the payment due him.

Watkins lashed out at men such as Frank Redd by characterizing them as "bankrupt in character as well as purse."²⁷⁹ Watkins was desperate to avoid bankruptcy. He reasoned that the repudiation of personal debts exemplified the debtor's failure of live up to the ethic of moral and economic progress. By 1866 the repudiation of personal debts was already a contentious issue facing Prince Edward tobacco planters because it acted as a double edged sword within the community. Watkins mentioned that he had already lost \$3000 from the sale of land at Prince Edward Courthouse in 1858 because the buyers, claiming insolvency, repudiated on their debts in the winter of 1866. In a letter to his brother he characterized repudiation in moral terms and endorsed the state law that banned it: repudiation, Watkins believed, exemplified a breach of honor. "Were it not for State Law I hardly know what I should do. Many of our people

²⁷⁸ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, February 22, 1868, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Richard Henry Watkins, Docket, Account Book 903, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

²⁷⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, April 16, 1879, Folder 10, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

are for repudiation of old debts.” Watkins wrote, “I hope to sell property and pay all mine off before this comes, for I fear the temptation would be too great to avail myself of it.”²⁸⁰ The loss taken on the Courthouse land and the Redds’ failure to pay their debt left Richard Watkins without the cash needed to settle his own debts as he thought was his duty. Watkins wrote that the repudiation of his creditors “in addition to my negro property and other things make my losses by the war very severe.”²⁸¹

“At the close of the war Tom Tredway and Frank Redd were, I reckon, the richest men in the county,” Watkins related to Nathaniel Watkins in 1879, “They are now as poor as beggars.”²⁸² The plantation enterprise these young planters built on credit in the 1850s collapsed in the prolonged postwar economic depression. Among Watkins’s neighbors who were penniless and farming for subsistence were John Knight, Robert Smith, Howsan Clark, and Charles Redd.

In 1870, Richard Watkins sold Oldham to W. A. Lash. The sale of this real estate marked the beginning of a new era in the for the Meherrin neighborhood. In lieu of full cash payment Watkins engaged Lash to build a new farmhouse and buildings on his portion of the Linden land. Patti Watkins located the new farmhouse within two miles of George Redd’s farm. Watkins called this farm Cottage Farm.²⁸³ Although still

²⁸⁰ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1865, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; A debate over repudiation raged in the state legislature from 1871 to 1879. Farmers in western Virginia initiated the movement to repudiate the debt beginning in 1871. By 1879 the issue of debt repudiation was the central focus of the Readjuster party. Dailey, 31-32, 41-42

²⁸¹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁸² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, April 16, 1879, Folder 10, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁸³ Account with W. A. Lash, Richard Henry Watkins, New Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896; Richard Henry Watkins, Farm Accounts 1872 and 1873, Account Book 901, Section 22, Dupuy Family Papers,

in debt and not rich by any means, Watkins managed to continue planting tobacco through the 1880s. After renting her land to her former overseer, Thomas Baker, from 1870 to 1879, Emily Dupuy sold her dower portion of the Linden Baker in 1880.²⁸⁴

Overburdened with debt by 1869, John A. Scott, the recipient of the Wood plantation in 1867, chose to rent his plantation as a way to raise cash. In 1870, Smythy Spain, an immigrant from Britain, bought Maylena.²⁸⁵ Spain's move to Prince Edward County and acceptance into the community was an example of the white Southside Virginian's promotion of the region as a profitable area for white immigrants from abroad to settle. However by 1872, Smythy Spain was anxious to sell Maylena for \$7000.²⁸⁶ Often immigrants found that farming in Virginia's piedmont was not as profitable as expected.

Fannie Hundley's identification of Maylena as "the Scott farm" in a letter to her brother reflected the persistence of the planter families to identify the land with the antebellum owner well into the late nineteenth century. The deep seeded cultural attitudes toward class and race shaped the perception of the planter families to such an extent that the change of farm ownership was interpreted as a threat. Fannie Hundley strongly urged her bankrupt brother, Nathaniel Watkins, to sell his farm in North

VHS; Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, May 14, 1870, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁸⁴ Account of Emily Howe Dupuy, Richard Henry Watkins, New Ledger, Account Book, 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

²⁸⁵ Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, February 2, 1870, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Letter, Fannie Edmunds Hundley to Nathaniel Watkins, January 15, 1872, Folder 10, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; U. S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States: Population Schedule, 1870, microfilm, LVA.

²⁸⁶ Letter, Fannie Edmunds Hundley to Nathaniel Watkins, January 15, 1872, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

Carolina and buy Maylena because she wrote, “we are afraid it will fall into the hands of some Yankees.”²⁸⁷ Emily Dupuy echoed Hundley’s concern about the Meherrin neighborhood in 1882. Much to Emily Dupuy’s disappointment, William Dupuy sold Falkland. “I was glad to hear Johnnie Morton was the purchaser of the Falkland farm,” Emily Dupuy wrote to her granddaughter and added, “if it must go out of the family.”²⁸⁸ With the sale of Oldham in 1870, Linden in 1880, and Falkland in 1882 the Dupuy-Watkins family no longer owned the core of the Meherrin neighborhood that stretched from the intersection of the Bush River and the Prince Edward Courthouse Road south to Forest Grove Church.

Land, Labor, and Weather

“How are you getting on with your farm?” Richard Watkins asked in a letter to his brother, Nathaniel, in January 1865.²⁸⁹ Farm work in the two decades following the war, as detailed in the exchange of letters between these two farmers, was slow, tedious, and costly. The Watkins brothers represented a class of tobacco planter that viewed the practice of farming as a symbol of economic and social status rather than a profession in its own right. Their plantations during the prewar years were built and maintained according to an environmental ethic that justified slave labor, supported a socio-economic hierarchy, and cultured a society that was never forced to take notice of or

²⁸⁷ Letter, Fannie Edmunds Hundley to Nathaniel Watkins, January 15, 1872, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁸⁸ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Mildred Stuart Watkins, October 9, 1882, Section 7, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

²⁸⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

understand the limitations of the natural world. The repeated claims of poverty put forth by these two men represented a real change in their material circumstances, but, more importantly, these claims revealed their inability to adapt their relationships to the transitioning human and natural worlds in which they lived. The transition to a system of wage labor in this tobacco county was not easy for most of the elite antebellum tobacco planters; cash was scarce and the planters and laborers had differing views of what their responsibilities were.²⁹⁰

Watkins, like neighboring tobacco planters returned home in the summer of 1865 to a place that was almost unrecognizable to him. Prince Edward County planters complained vehemently about the damage and loss of property, both in slaves and in crops, and the “much demoralized” behavior of the freedmen.²⁹¹ Planters such as Edwin Edmunds, William Watkins, and Richard Watkins, encouraged by the signs of a favorable growing season, looked forward to the cash income brought by the surplus fall harvests of corn and oats. In August, Watkins anticipated that a crop yield of two hundred barrels of corn and 25 stacks of oats would offset the loss of the crop of wheat and the low price of tobacco. However the planters failed to factor the cost of labor, both in terms of wages and scarcity, and the late start of the growing season into their projections. Watkins remarked to his brother, Nathaniel, that his trip to North Carolina in May to retrieve his mules and horses delayed the planting of two thirds of his crop.

²⁹⁰ “Farm Ecology,” in Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions*, 149-197; “The Gentry Family and the Fall of Pharsalia, 1861-1889,” in Nelson, 190-222; Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, *Freedpeople in the Tobacco South: Virginia, 1860-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press) 47-48; Morgan, 132-133, 138-139, 152-159.

²⁹¹ Letters, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 29, 1865 and January 25, 1866, Folders 8 and 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

By the time the corn crop was ready for shucking in the late fall, the freedmen, having already made contracts with other farmers for 1866, were unwilling to do the work. A frustrated Watkins was still shucking corn at the opening of the New Year.²⁹²

“The Freedmen do not work but still I have concluded to try them this year,” Richard Watkins wrote.²⁹³ His attitude toward the freedmen was in keeping with those of his white neighbors. In 1866 Watkins hired six hands in addition to Tom Watkins, his former slave. Richard Watkins was not particularly hopeful of his prospects for the growing year. “No good hands among them, a very slow team,” Watkins complained to his brother, “yet the best I could get in the neighborhood.”²⁹⁴ Watkins and George Redd both complained about having to hire day laborers, but Watkins especially distrusted system. “Men who are compelled to offer money wages alone either pay very high prices,” Watkins explained to his brother, “or get unreliable floating laborers, those who move about from place to place and live mainly on thieving.”²⁹⁵ Watkins simply did not want to expend the effort to find laborers more to his liking.

Watkins’s continued use of the possessive pronoun when referring to both the land and the freedmen indicated his inability to come to terms with the realities of life in the county in the immediate postwar years. Emancipation changed the rules governing labor and the culture of tobacco, but he did not want to loose control over either. Some

²⁹² Letters, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 29, 1865 and January 25, 1866, Folders 8 and 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁹³ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1865, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, October 22, 1870, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, February 2, 1870, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; U. S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States: Population Schedule and Agricultural Schedule, 1870, microfilm, LVA.

of the white planters in the Meherrin area chose not to hire freedmen in 1866 because they lacked “confidence in the negro.”²⁹⁶ Among Watkins neighbors who sought out white labor were Beverly Scott, John Archer, and Col. Stokes.

The representatives of the Freedmen’s Bureau became the scapegoats in which the planters placed the blame for their diminished financial circumstances. In a letter to Emily Dupuy, who was in Massachusetts in the summer of 1867, Lavallette Dupuy described her cousin Purnall Dupuy as looking old and haggard and emphasized Dupuy’s physical appearance mirrored the economic condition of the neighborhood: “he and all down here are getting on right badly.”²⁹⁷ Lavallette Dupuy passed on a message from Purnall Dupuy to her mother that reflected the anger and injustice felt by the tobacco planters during Reconstruction. “Coz. P. says that I must give his best to you and all his Northern friends, and must tell you that he and all down here are getting on right badly,” Dupuy continued, “He thinks that if the Freedmens Bureau were abolished he would get on a great deal better.”²⁹⁸ As the phrasing of Lavallette Dupuy’s postscript communicates, Purnall Dupuy as well as other planters in the Southside tobacco counties, perceived Reconstruction as a personal injustice as well as political. Emancipation forced these planters to face for the first time the unrealistic ideal of large-scale plantation tobacco agriculture.

²⁹⁶ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

²⁹⁷ Letter, Eliza Lavallette Dupuy to Emily Howe Dupuy, August 9, 1867, Section 7, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Richard Watkins was determined to return his plantation to prewar working order and to pay off his debts by the spring of 1866. Many of the elite planters, including Watkins, continued to believe well into the 1870s that the large scale farming of tobacco, corn, and wheat would generate enough cash to solve their financial woes. However Watkins and his neighbors failed to realize the extent to which debt, emancipation, unrealistic expectations for crop production, and environmental factors would continue to impact this unique agroecological system.

By the end of January 1866, Richard Watkins's air of determination had changed to one of "gloom and sadness."²⁹⁹ "Never in my life before have I been in such straightened circumstances," Watkins complained, "with nothing to sell from my plantation and not a dollar coming from my profession."³⁰⁰ Watkins knew that his financial situation would get worse if the plantation failed to produce a healthy surplus of corn, oats and tobacco. Whether sold to a merchant or privately to another planter, as William Watkins chose to do, the tobacco crop of 1865 did not bring enough cash to begin settling the prewar and wartime debts or pay for the cost of labor. In the winter of 1865 Richard Watkins, refusing to lose faith in the Confederacy, sold the tobacco crop with the exception of three hogsheads for Confederate money; the currency was worthless by summer. Two of the remaining hogsheads sold in the fall of 1865 for the

²⁹⁹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

³⁰⁰ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 29, 1865, Folder 8, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

low figure of \$3.20 per pound.³⁰¹ The yield from Watkins's second cash crop, wheat, was poor and also sold at a loss. Throughout the county the wheat crop was such a failure that Watkins was unable to obtain the seed to plant a crop for 1866.

In an attempt to ease her son-in-law's financial situation, Emily Dupuy proposed to buy Watkins's interest in Linden in the fall of 1866, thus, providing him with the cash needed to settle most of his debt. However, that proposal never manifested because Emily Dupuy, like her neighbors, was unable to raise enough cash from the sale of her tobacco crop. These planters could not control the effects of the unpredictable weather of the Southside Piedmont on the value of their crops. Watkins's language communicated the desperation of the farmers as violence of the storms ruined the crops. A "severe" drought and "two very severe hail storms" that struck the Meherrin neighborhood and parts of Charlotte county in 1866 severely "injured" the tobacco crop which "sold for a mere song."³⁰² The farms William Watkins and Edwin Edmunds, located north of Meherrin, both "escaped" the storms and produced "very good crops."³⁰³ The unpredictable and often localized nature of the weather in Virginia's piedmont made the culture of a leafy plant a risky gamble. Exasperated by nature's interference with his mother-in-law's plan, Watkins wrote, "instead of my receiving the

³⁰¹ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 29, 1865, Folder 8, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13; Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

³⁰² Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866 and August 14, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

³⁰³ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 14, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

promised five thousand from the proceeds I got the lean of sixty dollars to buy a little bacon for my family.”³⁰⁴

In the winter of 1867 the Watkins family moved back to Linden where Richard Watkins planned to make “a fresh start” on his share of the land.³⁰⁵ The move of his tobacco corn, and his farm equipment from Oldham to Linden occupied much of his time that winter. Confident that the growing season would be a success, Watkins hired fourteen hands and optimistically planned a large crop of corn and tobacco. However the farming plan was hindered by the unusually wet winter weather. As Patti Watkins explained to her sister-in-law, Nannie Watkins, the exceedingly cool, wet weather delayed the planting of the tobacco beds, which in turn made the farmers such as Richard Watkins and George Redd, “very restless.”³⁰⁶ However the rain soon ended and drought returned.

Unlike the men, Emily Dupuy did not attributed poor crop yields to scarce and unreliable labor. Rather, Emily Dupuy realized that the more significant but less obvious culprit for the disappointing crop yields from 1866 to 1869 was the prolonged drought. Patti Watkins corroborated Emily Dupuy’s assessment of the environment in a letter to her brother: “The drought still continues and people have almost ceased to peak

³⁰⁴ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, January 25, 1866 and August 14, 1866, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

³⁰⁵ Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, February 25, 1867, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA; Plantation Inventory, Richard Henry Watkins, Account Book 1847-1896, Watkins Family Papers, VHS.

³⁰⁶ Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, February 25, 1867, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

about it.”³⁰⁷ Emily Dupuy described her 1868 crop at Linden to her nephew, William Dupuy, as “not as successful as the last year, tho’ perhaps on an average with my neighbors.”³⁰⁸ The 1869 corn, wheat, and oat crop were more promising, Emily Dupuy observed: 1420 bushels of corn, 250 bushels of wheat and 425 bushels of oats were produced at Linden in 1869.³⁰⁹ The 1869 crop yield compared to the crop yield from 1859 was dramatically low: 3500 bushels of corn and 1000 bushels of oats were produced at Linden in 1859.³¹⁰ In her correspondence, Emily Dupuy blamed the drought for the poor tobacco crop of 1868; the small crop filled only two and a half houses.³¹¹

Family Migration

Freedom for the Dupuy and Watkins slaves brought with it a conflicting mix of experiences that ranged from opportunities for economic advancement and reunion to dislocation, and poverty. The contrasting stories of these individuals exemplified the difficulties faced by the freedmen in their quest to become a politically independent and economically self-sufficient force in Prince Edward County.

³⁰⁷ Letter, Patti Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, September 6, 1869, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

³⁰⁸ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to William Purnell Dupuy, January 4, 1869, Section 7, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

³⁰⁹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitteker, July 12, 1870, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; U.S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1870, microfilm, LVA.

³¹⁰ U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1860, microfilm, LVA.

³¹¹ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to William Purnell Dupuy, January 4, 1869, Section 7, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

Harriet Brown and her younger children moved from Linden to Farmville to begin life as a family unit with Gid Brown, Hilery Richardson's former slave.³¹² This move was the beginning of a migration away from the Meherrin neighborhood for a number of the Dupuy slaves. Jim Branch, his two daughters, his sister and her husband moved to Springfield, Massachusetts on 1870. Three of the Brown's daughters, Hattie, Edna, and Margaret, and two of Paulina Jackson's daughter's, Nannie and Dora, moved north as well. Anna Whitteker was instrumental in finding work for the women and kept the families in Prince Edward County informed of their progress. Most of the women settled in Providence, Rhode Island and Worcester, Massachusetts and worked at jobs similar to those they performed on the Dupuy plantation before emancipation. Whitteker mentioned that Leanna was especially successful and managed to save over \$500 from 1871 to 1879: "She is a good cook, washer and ironer, and can make good butter which are the chief tings to be done here."³¹³

By 1870 the Meherrin neighborhood many of the African American farm hands whose labor the white farmers desired and trusted had either settled on their own farms, rented farms or left the South. Emily Dupuy informed her sister with a genuine sense of pride that Isaac Reid managed his twenty-acre farm with industry and was able

³¹² Letters, Anna Howe Whitteker to Alicia Boylston and Sarah Ann Skinner, August 10, 1861, Section 3; Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Ann Skinner, March 24, 1873, Section 7, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; U.S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States: Population Schedule, 1870, microfilm, LVA.

³¹³ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitteker, July 12, 1870, Section 4; Anna Howe Whitteker to Mary Purnall Dupuy Watkins, September 28, 1879, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; Lynda Morgan pointed out that black migration out of the tobacco belt during the 1870s caused a significant shortage in labor. Morgan, 208-209.

to produce enough tobacco to support and educate his eight children.³¹⁴ Emily Dupuy, on the other hand, was not as complimentary of Asa Dupuy's efforts at farming as a tenant. Farm ownership was still the mark of economic success in the minds of the white planters. The untimely death of Tom Watkins, who worked as a farm laborer for Richard Watkins, not only pointed to the prevalence of consumption among the population of freedmen in the Meherrin neighborhood, but also indicated that the living and working conditions for the freedmen were still quite perilous in the years following emancipation.

Tobacco Farming in the New South

George W. Redd was one of the few tobacco planters in Prince Edward County who successfully transformed his antebellum plantation to a profitable tobacco farm in the New South. In 1860, George Redd was the fourth largest producer of tobacco in the county. In 1870 he ranked fifth in the production of tobacco.³¹⁵ Richard Watkins often wrote of his amazement at Redd's ability to adapt his farming operation in the two decades after the war:

Was delighted to find on my return that Mr. Redd had not suffered at all from the Yankees and that Ma had not seen more than one or two. Everything at Mr. Redd's goes on as if there had been no war. He has an excellent crop and is altogether one of the most remarkable men of the

³¹⁴ Letter, Emily Howe Dupuy to Anna Howe Whitteker, July 12, 1870, Section 4, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS; U.S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1870, microfilm, LVA; Morgan, 206-207; Kerr-Ritchie, 32-33.

³¹⁵ Calculated from the U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1860, Ninth Census of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1870, microfilm, LVA.

age. The equanimity of his temper seems not at all disturbed by anything that has happened.³¹⁶

Redd's ability to successfully adapt his farming operation was due to his understanding of the land and needs crop. Because he was not saddled with as much debt as his neighbors, he was able to change course as labor and environmental conditions required.

"Mr. Redd is over head and ears in work weeding corn and hilling," Patti Watkins wrote in 1870.³¹⁷ As the tobacco plantation transitioned to the tobacco farm of the New South, farmers adjusted not only attitudes towards labor but to crop production as well. Redd's labor force consisted primarily of day laborers. Redd's wartime experience as the overseer of his plantation primed him for the changing realities of tobacco farming in the post war period. Quite simply, George Redd was successful because he and his wife, Susan, understood how to do the work required on a tobacco farm in these decades of transition. Redd, unlike Richard Watkins, realized early on that a successful farmer viewed farming as a profession rather than a hobby.

In December 1872, the members of the Bush and Briery Agricultural Club held their monthly meeting at the farm of Mr. W. S. Dance, in Prince Edward County, Virginia. It was customary for a club member to present an essay on a previously agreed upon topic of concern within the community of farmers. That winter day Mr. Dance presented an essay that addressed the preparation of new ground with a comparison of

³¹⁶ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, August 29, 1865, Folder 8, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

³¹⁷ Letter, Patti Watkins to Nannie Watkins, May 14, 1870, Folder 9, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

yields of corn grown on new ground versus yields of corn grown on improved “worn out land.”³¹⁸ A debate of these topics followed the delivery of the essay. Apparently the group was deeply divided in opinion. One member moved to abandon the practice of writing essays and the club, at first, voted to carry the motion. A second motion to reconsider the first touched off a series of exchanges that resulted in such “considerable confusion” that “no further action was taken in the matter.”³¹⁹ The members then adjourned the meeting after agreeing on the topic of fencing the land for the next meeting in January 1873. Farmers in the county tried several times to revive the Bush and Briery Agricultural Club during the course of the 1870s; however the each attempt fizzled when “all hands get too busy to attend.”³²⁰

By 1880 farmers, such as George Redd and Andrew Venable, understood that the farmer of the future would be a professional who regarded their interaction with the land in economic terms. Over the course of the 1870s, the farmer’s perception of and connection to the agricultural field changed. Emancipation rendered large diversified farms a burden to the planters: farmers could no longer own and farm the land as either a symbol of social status or the means of subsistence for the plantation family. In 1880, unlike in previous census years, farmers identified themselves on the Agricultural Schedule either as an owner, tenant, or sharecropper. These terms defined the farmers’

³¹⁸ Minutes of the Bush and Briery Agricultural Club, October ?-December 12, 1872, William Purnell Dupuy, Section 12, Dupuy Family Papers, VHS.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Letter, Richard Henry Watkins to Nathaniel Watkins, December 16, 1882, Folder 10, Watkins Papers, microfilm 29283, Reel 13, LVA.

economic relationship to the land. The tobacco farmers of the New South realized that human labor was an important factor in successful tobacco farming.

The farmer came to regard the land in the economic rather than ecological terms. Soils and crops were managed by Prince Edward farmers for the production of a single cash crop for a national market. The economic depression that gripped the region caused debt to weigh heavily on many of the elite planters in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. More importantly, it was the inability of the elite planters to understand the nature of, and thus solution to their debt problems that accelerated the break up the tobacco plantations. This change in the perception and management of the land had a profound effect on the elite planter families who, for the most part, were unable to adapt to the new agroecological system.³²¹

The most significant and obvious transformation rendered to the tobacco agroecosystem by the economic events of the early 1870s was the increase of crop specialization.³²² Farms in Prince Edward County were smaller and specialized primarily in the production of tobacco. Of the 1053 total farms listed on the Agricultural Schedule in 1880, 837 grew tobacco. The average tobacco-producing farm encompassed 271 acres, a fraction of the size of the average tobacco-producing farm in 1860, and produced 2944 pounds.³²³ These professional farmers realized that the soils of the tobacco belt counties were well suited for the cultivation of bright tobacco, which

³²¹ Lynn Nelson noted the same trend in the Massie family. "The Gentry Family and the Fall of Pharsalia," in Nelson, 190-222.

³²² Calculated from the U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth and Ninth Censuses of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1860 and 1870, microfilm, LVA.

³²³ Calculated from the U.S. Bureau of Census, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Censuses of the United States: Agricultural Schedule, 1860, 1870, and 1880, microfilm, LVA.

was increasing in demand.³²⁴ But even the promise of fertile land did not guarantee the success of the crop. Like the yeoman farmers of the antebellum period, environmental factors such as weather or pests could make or break a small farmer or sharecropper whose livelihood depended on the market production of a single crop such as tobacco.

³²⁴ Nanny May Tilley, The Bright Tobacco Industry, 89-122; "Farm Ecology," in Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, 149-197.

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Appendix

- Figure 1 Linden: John and Mary Purnell and Heirs
- Figure 2 Oldham: Thomas and Betsy Ann Watkins and Heirs
- Figure 3 Farm Sizes: Prince Edward County, 1850-1860
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth
 Censuses of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and
 1860
- Figure 4 Tobacco Production: Prince Edward County, 1850-1860
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth
 Censuses of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and
 1860
- Figure 5 Land Use, Top 50 Tobacco Farms, Prince Edward County, 1850
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh
 Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850
- Figure 6 Land Use, Top 50 Tobacco Farms, Prince Edward County, 1860
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Eighth
 Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1860
- Figure 7 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1850
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh Census of
 the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850
- Figure 8 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1860
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Eighth Census of
 the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1860

- Figure 9 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1870
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Ninth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1870
- Figure 10 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1880
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Tenth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1880
- Figure 11 Corn Production: Prince Edward County, 1850-1860
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and 1860
- Figure 12 Wheat Production: Prince Edward County, 1850-1860
 Calculated from the U. S. Bureau of Census, Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States, Agricultural Schedule, 1850 and 1860

Linden

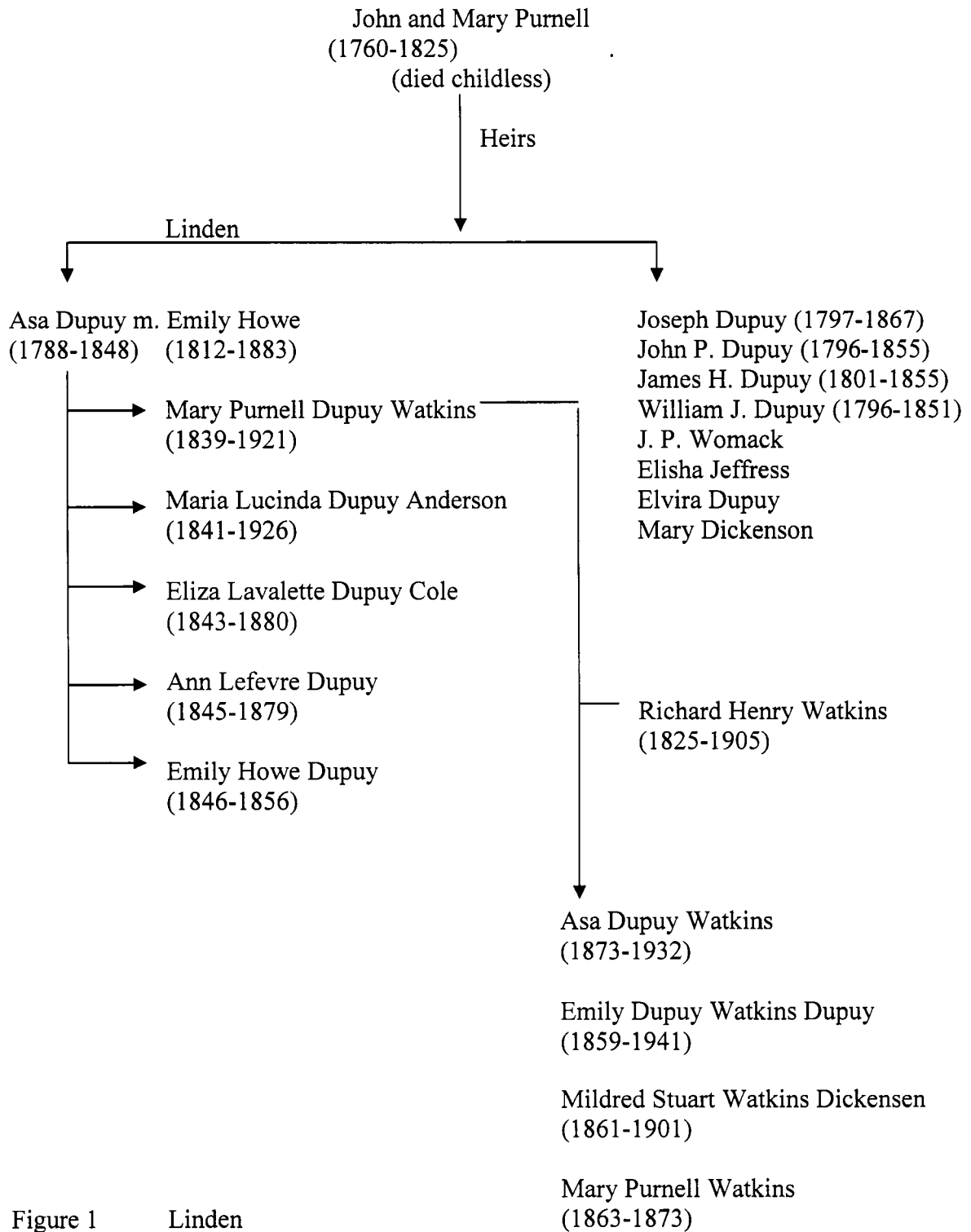


Figure 1

Linden

Oldham

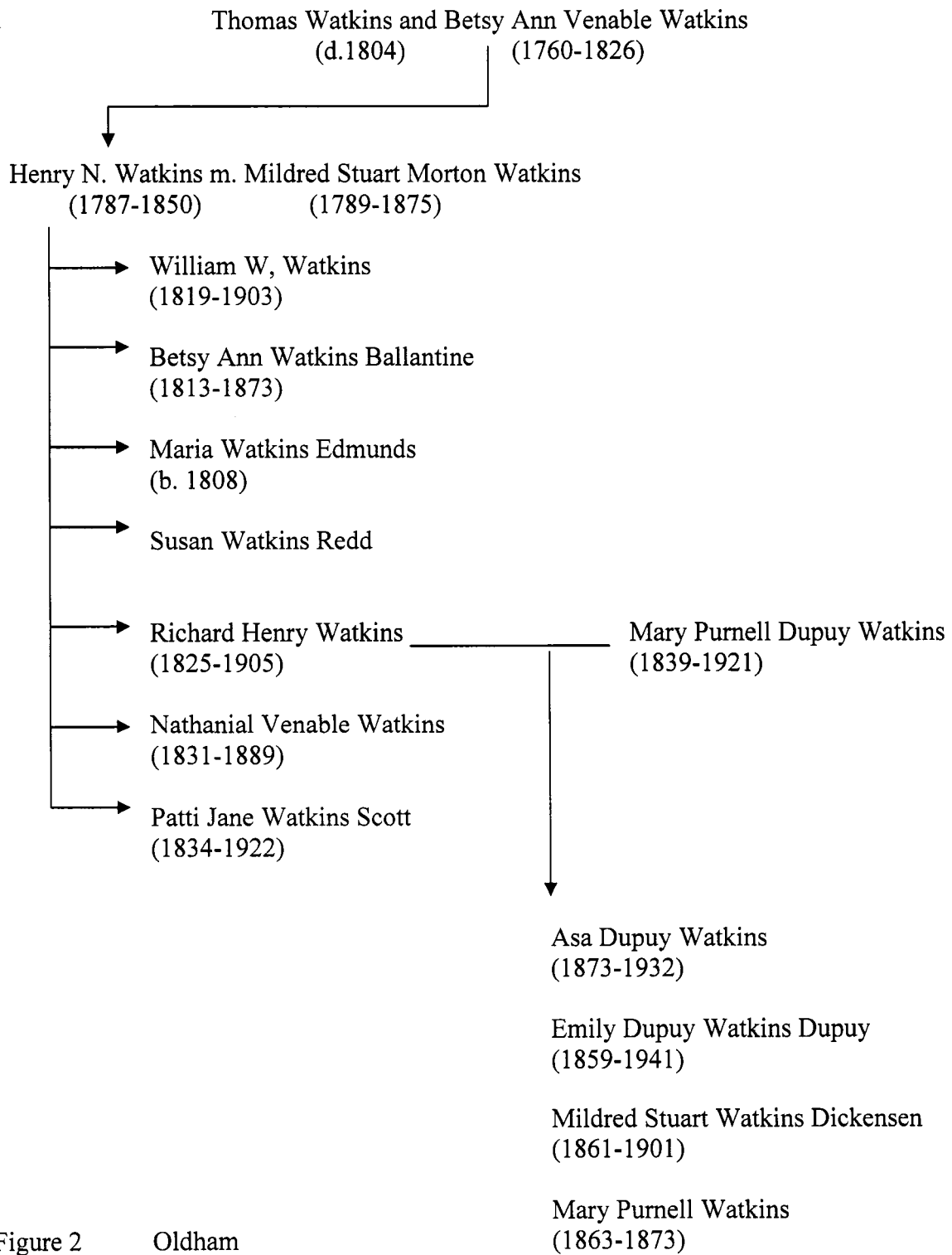


Figure 2

Oldham

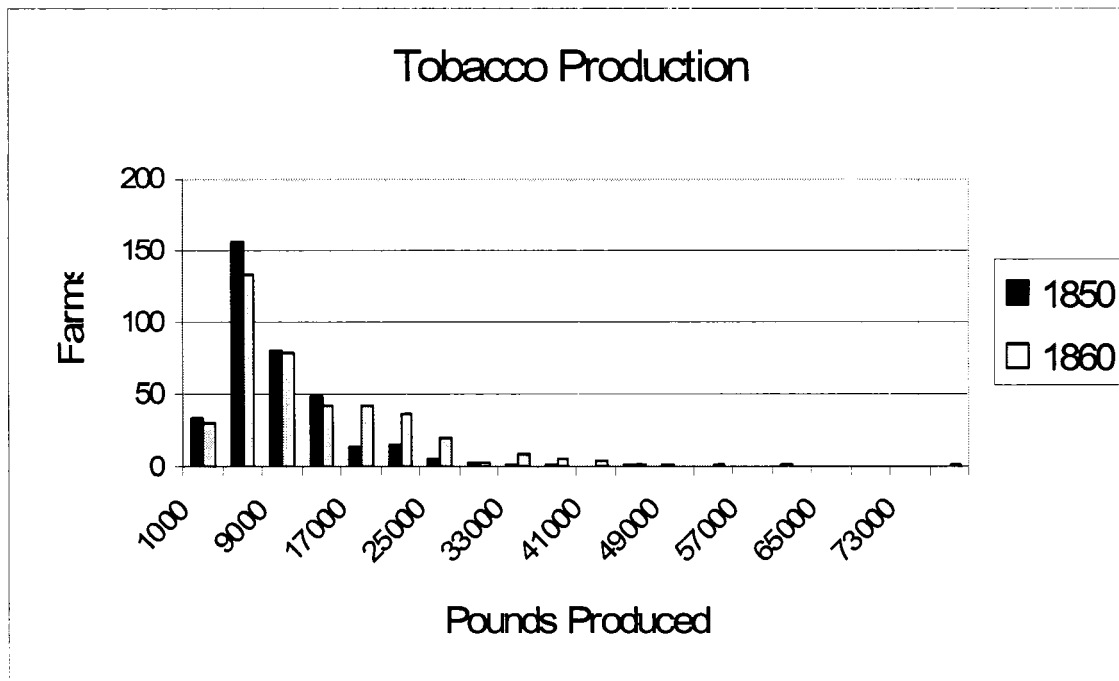


Figure 3 Tobacco Production, Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1850-1860



Figure 4 Farm Sizes, Prince Edward County Virginia, 1850-1860

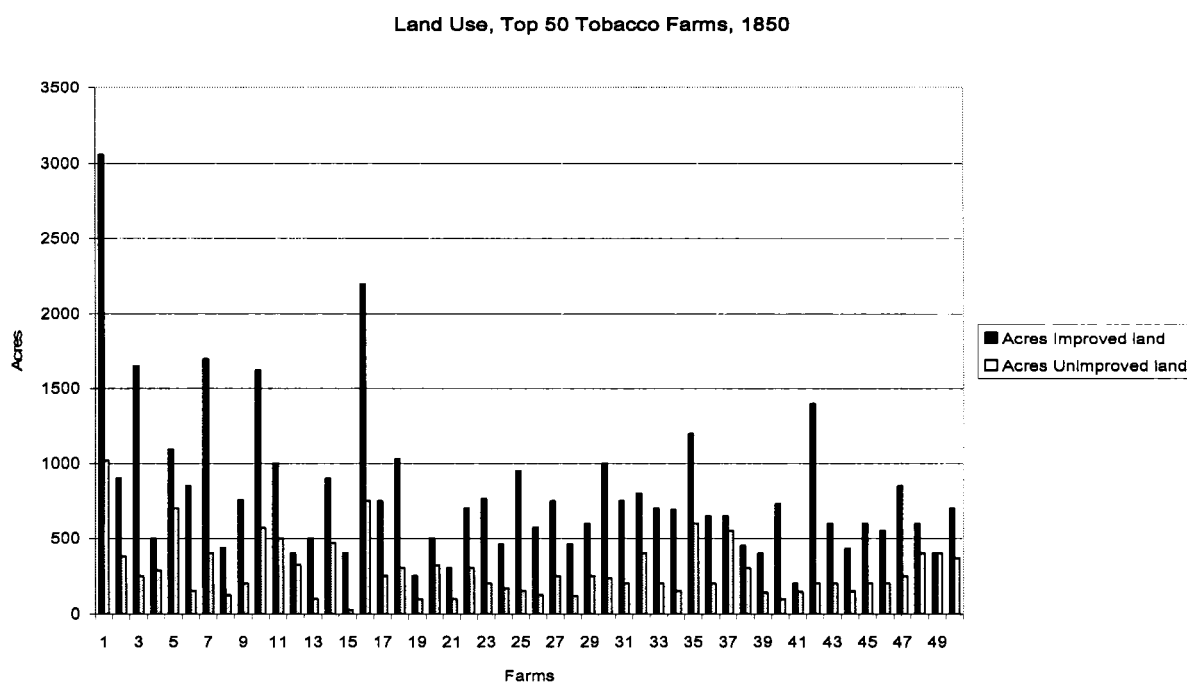


Figure 5 Land Use, Top 50 Tobacco Farms, Prince Edward County, 1850

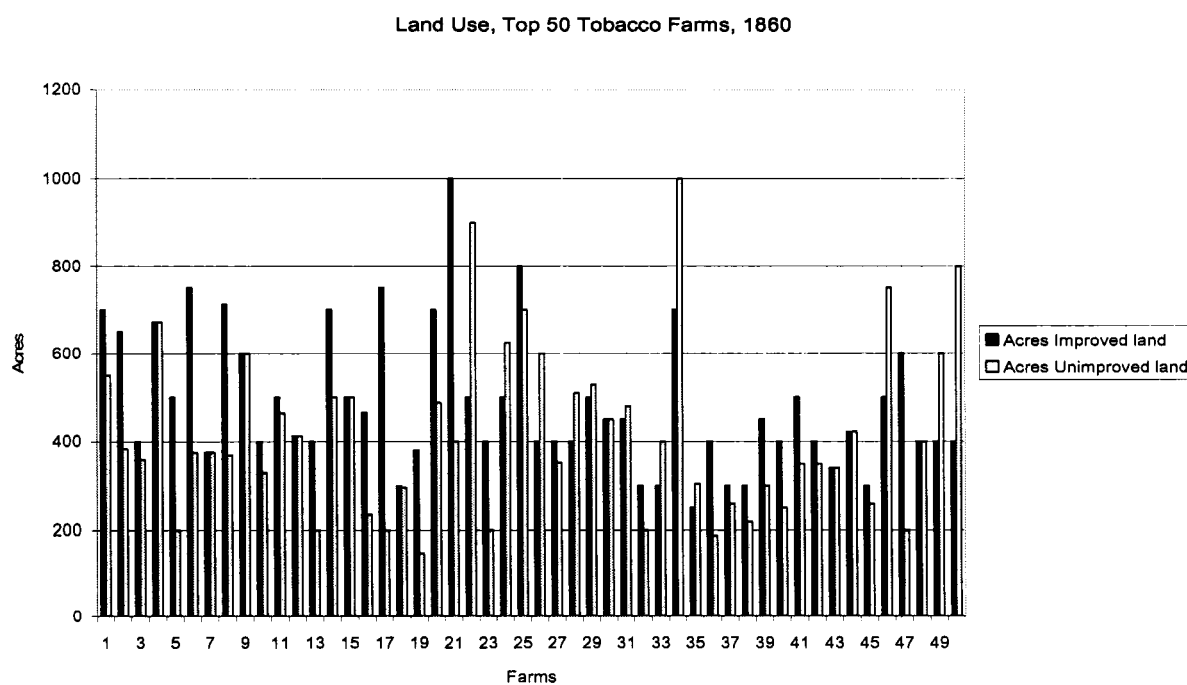


Figure 6 Land Use, Top 50 Tobacco Farms, Prince Edward County, 1860

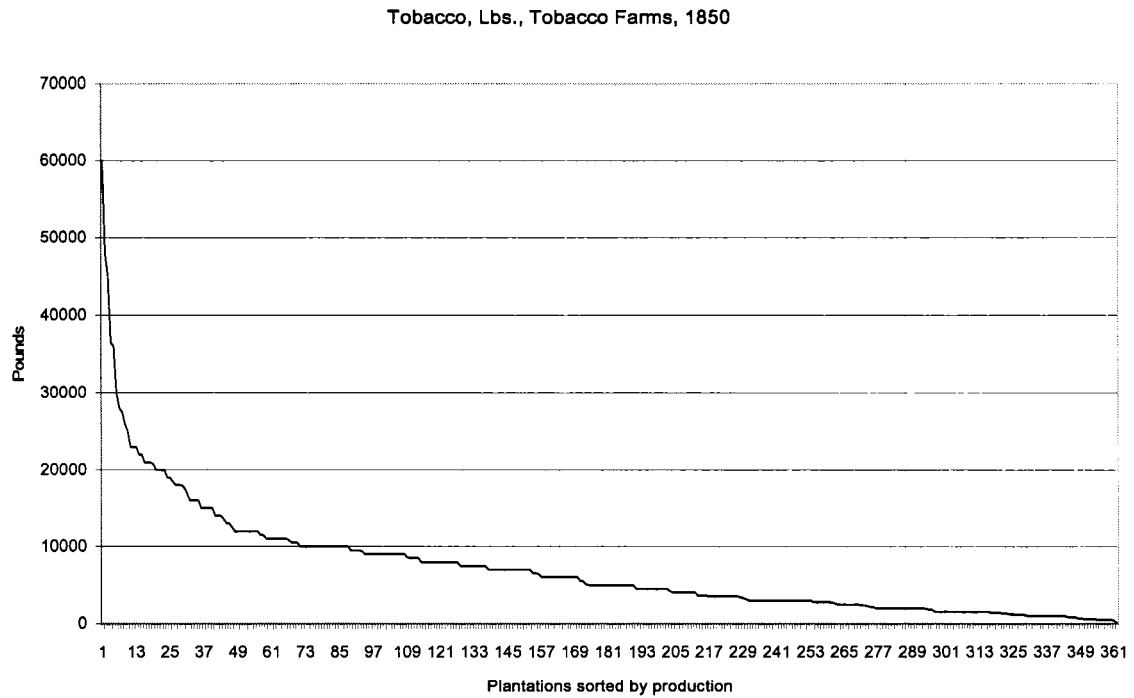


Figure 7 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1850

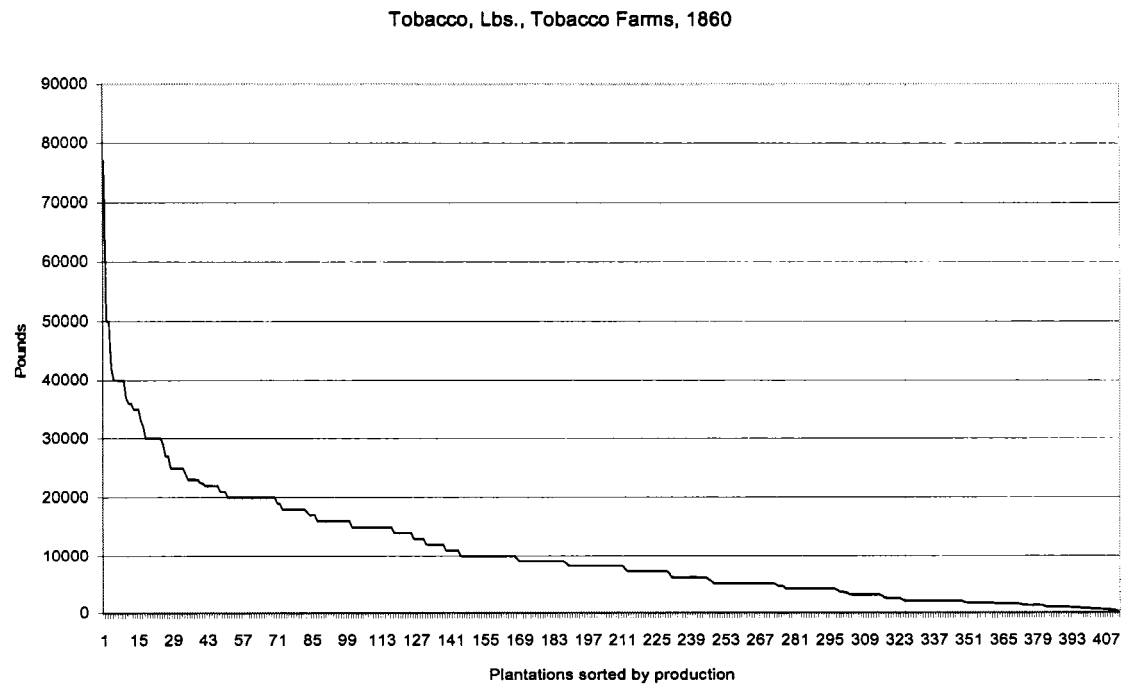


Figure 8 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1860

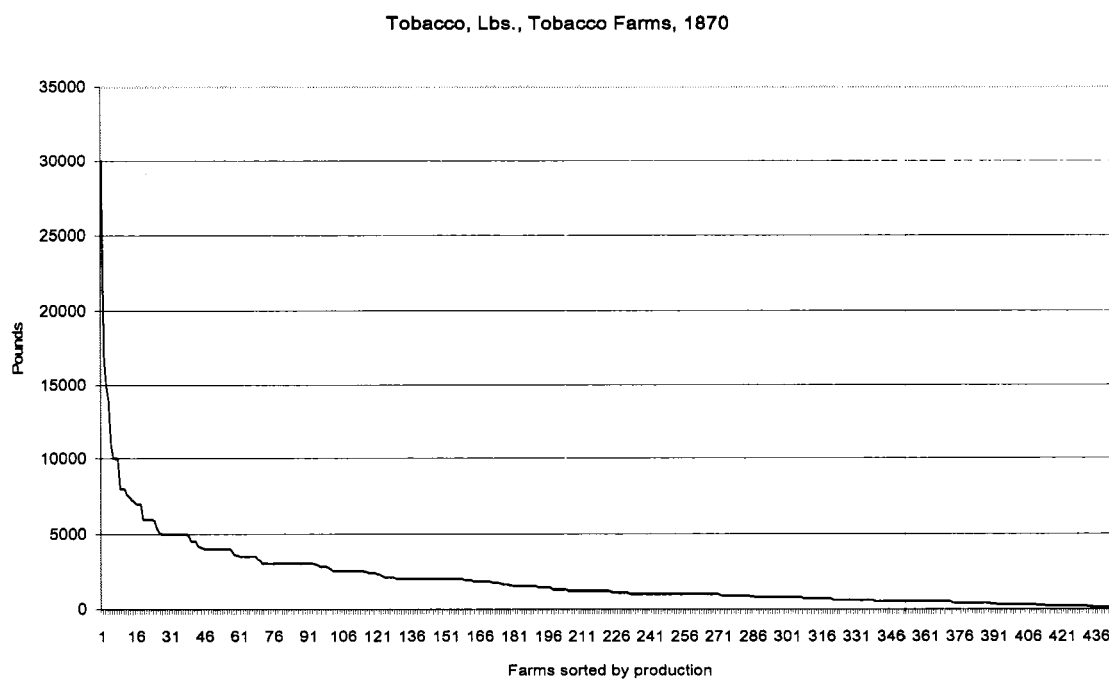


Figure 9 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1870

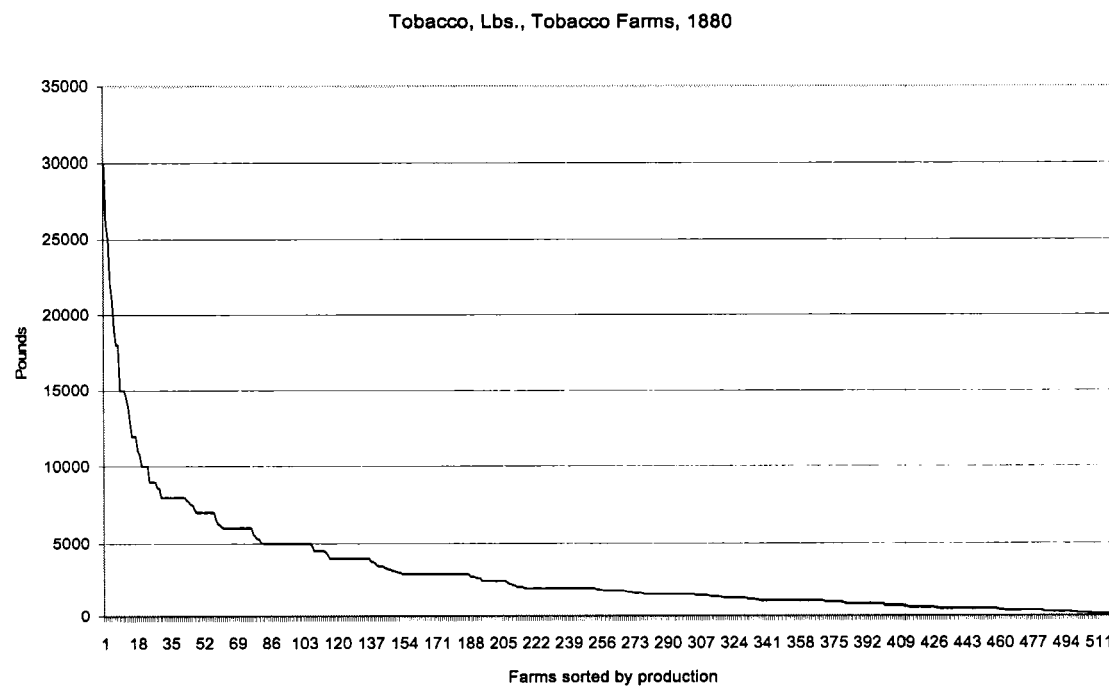


Figure 10 Pounds of Tobacco Produced, Prince Edward County, 1880

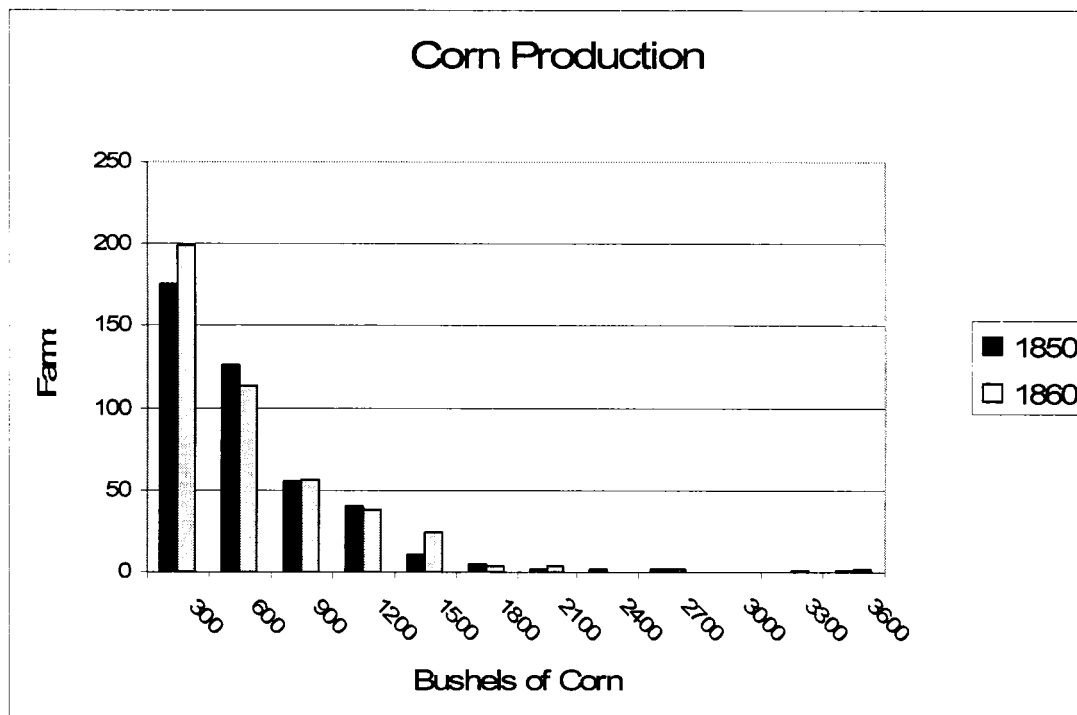


Figure 11 Corn Production, Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1850-1860

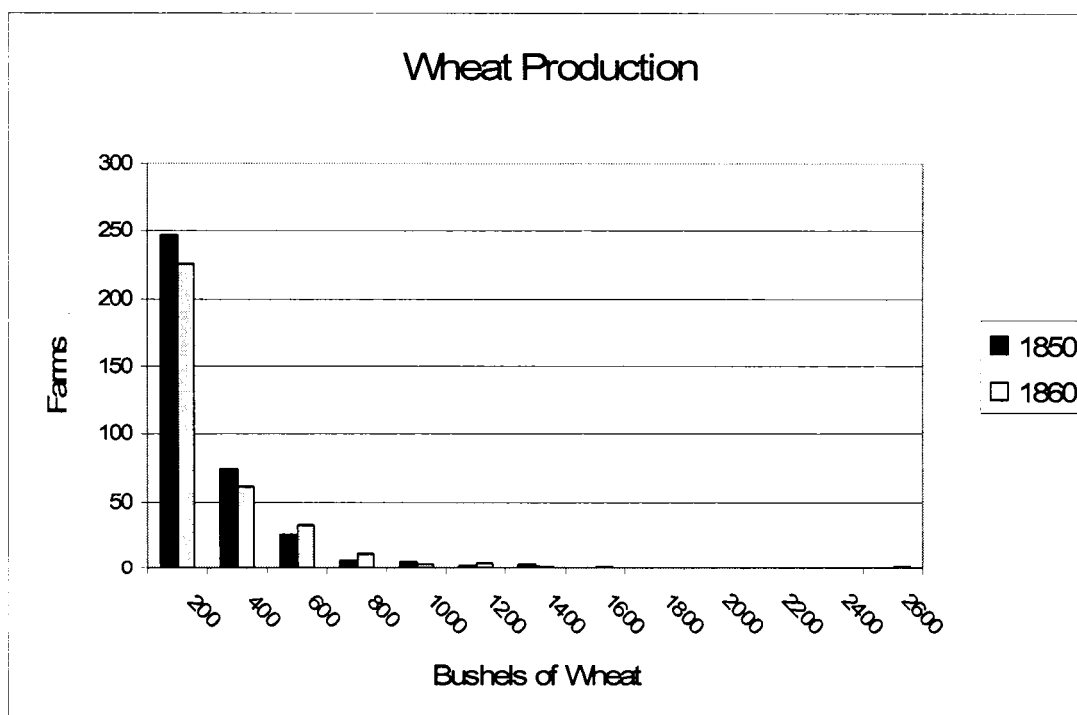


Figure 12 Wheat Production, Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1850-1860

Vita

Mary Richie McGuire was born in Richmond, Virginia, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Sweet Briar College in 1989 with a degree in History and a minor in European Civilizations. From 1991 to 1992 she worked on the Photographic Survey Project at the Smithsonian Institution Archive. From 2003 to 2005 she interned at the Science Museum of Virginia on a documentary film project.