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## “DIGNITY AND IMPORTANCE:” SLAVERY IN JEFFERSON COUNTY, FLORIDA— 1827 TO 1860

by LARRY RIVERS

**J**EFFERSON County, formed January 16, 1827, from Leon County, was a part of the area then called middle Florida. Many settlers who migrated to this frontier area came with their slaves seeking cheap fertile land. Thomas Randall and his wife, Laura, arrived in 1827 from the Washington, D. C./Maryland area to buy inexpensive land, and a year later had their slaves brought down to them. John and Robert Gamble were among the first families of Jefferson to transport their slaves with them, in their case from Virginia. Other settlers, like the Randall and Gamble families, moved from Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

Ideologically and emotionally committed to an agrarian way of life, the Florida frontier offered white settlers “a democratic atmosphere” in which they could compete for land, accumulate capital, and become citizens of “substance.” Randall noted in 1828, that fertile land could be purchased in Jefferson County for as little as \$1.25 per acre. He, like other settlers, however, were concerned that the price of “good tracts of land” would ultimately increase with the demand for it by newcomers. His fears were justified; within a two-year period, the cost increased from \$1.25

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Larry Rivers is associate professor of history at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Tallahassee. He wishes to thank his colleagues, Frances J. Stafford and Donnie D. Bellamy for their comments on an earlier draft of this article. An abridged version hereof was presented at the second annual Banks-Pierro-Rutland Social Sciences Colloquium, Fort Valley (Georgia) State College, in May 1981.

1. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 17, 1827, roll 9; Laura H. Randall to Mother, September 4, 1827, roll 9; William Wirt to Laura H. Randall, December 7, 1827, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, January 12, 1828, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, December 12, 1828, roll 11; William Wirt Papers, Microfilm copy in Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland (hereinafter cited as Wirt Papers); copy also in Robert M. Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee; Major Robert Gamble, Jr.'s Notebook, 55-56, Jefferson County Historical Society (copy), Monticello, Florida (hereinafter cited as Gamble Notebook); Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida 1821-1860* (Gainesville, 1973), 17.

per acre to \$5.00 per acre. Still, William Wirt, Randall's father-in-law and former United States Attorney-General informed him that Jefferson would provide the opportunity for him to become "not only independent— but rich" in ten to fifteen years if he remained "prudent" in his business affairs.<sup>2</sup> After his tenure in the Monroe administration and other business affairs were complete, Wirt, who had invested heavily in land through Randall, planned to settle with his family on their plantation, Wirtland in Jefferson County. Wirt, in fact, had invested so much money in land that his daughter felt that he suffered from a "sort of mania," as did her uncles Robert and John Gamble, "for purchasing Florida lands." Much like Wirt, Randall, and the Gambles, many others took advantage of every opportunity to purchase relatively cheap land in Florida and to become yeoman farmers and planters.<sup>3</sup>

As the settlers knew, slave labor was central to wresting profits from the land and gaining status. Since it was difficult to purchase slaves in Florida prior to 1821, the majority of settlers brought their workers with them. The settlers who intended to buy blacks after they arrived in Florida, usually faced disappointment. Randall wrote Wirt in Baltimore warning that "there is not the same certainty and convenience in procuring" slaves in Florida as in Maryland and Virginia. He also asserted that they cost "25 to 50 percent" more in Florida. As a result, Randall, the Gamble brothers, and Governor William P. DuVal were among the many settlers who purchased slaves elsewhere in the South and transferred them to Florida. Because of the inability of many Jefferson citizens either to purchase or hire blacks, there were some who resorted to hiring immigrants from Europe to work their plantations. This alternative was not very successful. William Wirt employed free-labor German immigrants in 1833 to work his Miccosukee plantation, but he found them hard to manage, and they were unable to adapt to the living and working arrangements on the plantation. Later, Wirt purchased slaves to replace the Europeans.<sup>4</sup>

2. William Wirt to Thomas Randall, January 17, 1828, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, May 1, 22, 1827, roll 9; Wirt Papers.
3. Laura H. Wirt to Mother, April 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 17, October 13, November 8, 1827, roll 9, December 30, 1827, roll 10, August 10, 1828, roll 11; Laura Wirt to Catharine Gamble, December 10, 1827, roll 10; William Wirt to Thomas Randall, January 17, 20, February 1, 1828, roll 19; Wirt Papers.
4. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 9, 17, September 21, 1827, roll

Records show that as Jefferson County grew in population and economic productivity after 1827, the availability of slaves also increased. In 1829, the county tax roll listed 464 taxable blacks out of a total of 597 taxable inhabitants. Much like Leon and the other counties of middle Florida, except Gadsden and Hamilton, the slave population was slightly smaller than the white population at that time. Approximately a decade later, the number of blacks had increased to 1,630, while the number of taxable whites rose by 324.<sup>5</sup> As indicated by Table 1, the slave population of Jefferson, again like its sister counties in middle Florida, continued to exceed the free population from 1840 to 1860. The number of slaves rose from forty-nine per cent in 1830, to sixty-two per cent by 1860, while the percentage of whites proportionally declined during the same period.

TABLE I  
POPULATION OF JEFFERSON COUNTY, 1830 TO 1860

Year	Total	Whites	%	Free Blacks	%	Slaves	%
1830	3,312	1,695	51.17	7	.21	1,610	48.61
1840	5,713	2,162	37.84	2	.03	3,549	62.12
1850	7,718	2,775	35.95	5	.06	4,939	63.98
1860	9,876	3,498	35.41	4	.04	6,374	64.51

Sources: *Fifth Census; or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830* (Washington, 1832), 156-57; *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840* (Washington, 1841), 454-55; *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, 1853), 391-401; *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1864), 50-54.

The growth of the slave population in Florida prior to the Civil War was due to natural increase, the domestic slave trade, and settlers bringing their blacks with them when they moved in from other parts of the South. It is likely also that slaves were brought

9; Elizabeth Wirt to Laura H. Randall, October 12, 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, November 8, 1827, roll 9, December 30, 1827, roll 10; William Wirt to Laura and Thomas Randall, 1828, roll 10; Laura H. Randall to Mother, November 19, 22, 24, 1827 roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, January 22, November 19, 27, 1832, roll 15; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 12, 22, June 29, 1833, roll 16; Thomas Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, September 20, 1834, roll 17; Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, March 16, 20, 1843, roll 20; Wirt Papers.

5. Jefferson and Leon County Tax Rolls for 1829 and 1839, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereinafter cited as J. C. or L. C. Tax rolls).

in illegally from outside the United States.<sup>6</sup> In middle Florida the slave trade was conducted by T. R. McClintock and the firm of Patterson and Hughes, both located in Leon County. Occasionally, McClintock would travel to Monticello, county seat of Jefferson County, to sell slaves to local residents.<sup>7</sup>

As of 1830, 137, or forty-two per cent of Jefferson County's 321 families owned at least one slave. Of those, eighty-four per cent owned fewer than twenty slaves, and sixty-seven per cent less than ten slaves, while fifty-three per cent held less than five. Members of the planter class who owned twenty or more slaves made up sixteen per cent of the total slaveholding population. James Gadsden, with 144 slaves, was the largest Jefferson County planter in 1830. The relative proportion of slaves owned by Jefferson citizens was slightly higher than that held by county residents in Alabama and Louisiana in 1830.<sup>8</sup>

TABLE 2  
CLASSIFICATION OF SLAVEHOLDING FAMILIES IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IN 1830

1 Slave	2-4 Slaves	5-9 Slaves	10-19 Slaves	20-49 Slaves	50-99 Slaves	100 or More Slaves
33	40	21	21	14	6	2

Source: *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Population Schedules of Florida, No. 19, Sheets, 156-70* (National Archives, Washington, 1943), 311-39.

The 1860 census count of slaveholders in the county reveals that within thirty years, slavery had become a widespread institution. The typical Jefferson County resident, much like his counterpart in Leon, was by then a slaveholder. With 675 families

6. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 28-29; Julia F. Smith, "Slave-trading in Antebellum Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, L (January 1972), 252-61; Frances J. Stafford, "Illegal Importation: Enforcement of the Slave Trade Laws Along the Florida Coast, 1810-1828," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLVI (October 1967), 124-33; An Act For The Establishment of a Territorial Government in Florida, 1822, 1st sess., in *Laws of Florida, 1822-1827*, I, xxxi-xxxix.
7. See, for example, *Tallahassee Floridian*, December 5, 12, 1835, November 12, 1836, April 7, 1838, February 2, July 8, 1839, January 2, 1841; *Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate*, April 6, 1830, February 28, 1832; Jerrell H. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County* (Tallahassee, 1976), 135.
8. The author prepared a card index containing all the names of slaveholders listed in U. S. Census Office, *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Population Schedules of Florida, No. 19, Sheets 156-70, 223-73*; Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution, Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1956), 30.

residing in the county, 397 or fifty-nine per cent owned at least one slave. The percentage of slaveholders in Jefferson was higher than in many other counties in the South.<sup>9</sup>

TABLE 3  
CLASSIFICATION OF SLAVEHOLDING FAMILIES IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IN 1860

1 Slaves	2-4 Slaves	5-9 Slaves	10-20 Slaves	30-49 Slaves	50-99 Slaves	100-200 Slaves
64	84	91	74	55	20	9

Sources: *Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1864), 225; *Statistics of the United States (Including Mortality, Property, etc.) in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns and Being the Final Exhibit of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1866), 340-41.

Jefferson County slaveholders increased from forty-two per cent in 1830 to fifty-nine per cent in 1860. The largest group in this category, totaling fifty-three per cent, continued to own between one to nine slaves. The proportion owning twenty slaves or more comprised only twenty-one per cent of the slaveholding population. Like other southern counties, slavery in Jefferson had apparently become, as one historian noted, "an integral part of the Southern way of life . . . and positive good."

Judging from the steadily increasing slave population in Jefferson from 1827 to 1860, the majority of the county's residents believed that there were many benefits to owning slaves. Slave owning planters held status and power in the community. Politics was the way they could dominate public affairs at the local, state, and federal levels. A survey of Jefferson County men who influenced or actively participated in the political arena during this period indicates that they were all slaveholders, some possessing a sizable number of blacks and extensive property and others with more moderate holdings. For example, Thomas Randall, circuit court judge from 1827 to about 1840, owned forty-eight slaves and listed 4,400 acres of land in 1840. His status and image as a southern gentleman in the Jefferson community,

9. See, for example, Harry L. Coles, Jr., "Some Notes on Slaveownership and Landownership in Louisiana, 1850-1860," *Journal of Southern History*, IX (August 1943), 381-94; Chase C. Mooney, "Some Institutional and Statistical Aspects of Slavery in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, I (September 1942), 195-228; Frank L. Owsley and Harriett C. Owsley, "The Economic Structure of Rural Tennessee, 1850-1860," *Journal of Southern History*, VI (April 1940), 24-45.

he believed, were more directly related to his agricultural activities than to his judicial responsibilities. He often wrote to his relatives in Maryland stating that he was a "planter" first and a "judge" second.<sup>10</sup> Randall's successor as judge, A. B. Shehee, owned twenty slaves and listed 1,320 acres of land in 1840. Records reveal John A. Cuthbert, with twenty-seven slaves and 768 acres in 1829; Achille Murat, ninety-five slaves and 2,776 acres in 1839; and attorney Joseph McCants, eight slaves and 160 acres of land. All, at one time or another, held the office of county judge of Jefferson. Other slaveholders served as sheriff and county tax collector. These included Smith Simkins, who owned sixteen slaves and listed 400 acres of land, and Elias Blackburn, who held five slaves and 480 acres in the 1840s and eight slaves in 1850. Of the seven Jefferson County councilmen appointed in 1836, fifty-seven per cent owned from two to thirty-seven blacks and from zero to 920 acres of land.<sup>11</sup>

Joseph M. White, territorial delegate to Congress from Florida (1825-1837), owned sixty slaves and 1,540 acres of land in 1829. John M. Smith, a state senator from 1846 to 1850, owned seventy-nine slaves in 1840, although he was not listed as owning any land. Joshua Taylor, state representative from Jefferson County, owned ten slaves and 500 acres in 1850. Congressman E. Carrington Cabell owned seventy-one slaves and 2,680 acres of land in 1840. By 1852 his ownership of slaves had increased to ninety-eight while his acreage remained the same. William D. Moseley, governor of Florida from 1845 to 1848, owned seventy-two slaves and 2,505 acres in 1850.<sup>12</sup>

As in politics, Jefferson slaveholders also determined the economic affairs of the county. Many "became involved in banking, mercantile businesses, and the professions in addition to planting operations."<sup>13</sup> An examination of the economic activities of persons who ranged from wealthy to moderately so, reveals

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10. William Wirt to Thomas Randall, February 13, 1828, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 20, 1838, roll 18; Thomas Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, n.d., roll 17; Wirt Papers.

11. See J. C. Tax Rolls for 1829, 1839, and 1850; U.S. Census Office, Sixth Census of Florida, 1840, Population Census Schedules, 44-57; U. S. Census Office, Seventh Census of Florida, 1850, Original Census Schedules, Schedule 4, Agriculture, 141-59.

12. J. C. Tax Rolls for 1829, 1839, and 1850; Sixth Census of Florida, 1840, Population Census Schedules, 44-57; Seventh Census of Florida, 1850, Original Census Schedules, Schedule 4, Agriculture, 141-59.

that all could be classed as influential business and professional men. When the First Bank of Florida was chartered in Leon County around 1829, John Gamble, James Gadsden, and William Bailey were listed as stockholders. At the time, Gamble owned two plantations, one in Jefferson and another in Leon. The Jefferson property comprised 134 slaves and 4,480 acres. Gadsden owned 144 slaves and 1,520 acres, while Bailey held fifty-seven slaves and 240 acres of land. Three years later when the Planters Bank of Tallahassee began operations, Gamble and Bailey were listed as stockholders. The next year Gamble was named president of the newly-formed Planters or Union Bank of Florida which became the largest of its kind in middle Florida. Gamble held office until his death in 1852.<sup>14</sup> Of the ninety middle Florida stockholders in the Union Bank, twenty-six were from Jefferson County, including Robert Gamble, Joseph McCants, Canada Rouse, Alexander Jernigan, and Claude D. Jacqueminot, all with sizable slave and land holdings. In fact, eighty-six per cent of the twenty-six stockholders were slaveholders.<sup>15</sup>

Of the thirty-five merchants identified in Jefferson County from 1830 to 1860, seventy-one per cent owned slaves and land. Of this group, forty per cent possessed twenty-five to 108 slaves, and land holdings from zero to 2,236 acres. Martin Palmer and James L. Parish operated a store near Monticello in 1832. The latter owned eleven slaves and 480 acres of land; Parish, forty slaves and 2,236 acres. In 1838, Andrew Denham and Thomas R. Randolph owned a store called, A. Denham and Company. Denham owned seven slaves but no acreage; Randolph owned twenty-four slaves and 1,700 acres of land in 1840. The majority of merchant-slaveholders in Jefferson never increased their ownership of land and slaves significantly enough to be regarded as planters.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike bankers and merchants, not many professionals in Jefferson owned slaves. As a rule, fewer Jefferson lawyers be-

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13. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 85.

14. J. C. Tax Rolls for 1829; Kathryn T. Abbey, "The Union Bank of Tallahassee," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XV (April 1937), 207-31.

15. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 109; Abbey, "The Union Bank of Tallahassee," 212.

16. Seventh Census of Florida, 1850, Original [Slave] Population Schedules, 417-533; Lula Dee Keith Appleyard, "Plantation Life in Middle Florida: 1821-1845" (master's thesis, Florida State University, 1940), 11-39; J. C. Tax Rolls for 1840.



came either planters or yeomen farmers during the antebellum period. Moreover, many seemed to have found it hard making a living in the county because of a large number of competing lawyers and doctors. As a result, some moved to other counties. Of the twelve lawyers identified as "practicing" in Jefferson half did not stay long enough to appear on any census returns. Dabney C. Wirt, one of William Wirt's sons, began practicing law in Jefferson around 1840, but moved because he could not collect money "owed to him" by his clients. He departed the county in search of clients who could pay for his services.<sup>17</sup> Only five lawyers owned slaves ranging from four to nine, and land estimated from none to 180 acres. Attorney David S. Walker, later governor of Florida, was perhaps the only exception to the rule. In 1860 he held fifty-two slaves and 900 acres of land.<sup>18</sup>

As with lawyers, few medical doctors in Jefferson seemed to have acquired slaves and land. Of the sixteen physicians identified in the county, thirty-eight per cent remained so briefly that their names did not appear on any census returns. Nineteen per cent of those listed on the census did not own slaves or land; fifty-nine per cent owned between three to eleven slaves, from none to thirty acres; and twenty-two per cent owned from twenty to twenty-nine slaves and up to 1,750 acres of land. Drs. John G. Pettus and Benjamin Johnson were successful planters. Johnson abandoned his medical practice, and with his thirty-three slaves joined with E. Carrington Cabell during the 1840s on the Dulcie Domain plantation.<sup>19</sup> Henry Wirt, another son of William Wirt, rented Dr. Johnson's Monticello home, and set up his own medical practice. Henry often complained to his mother about the many physicians in the county. In one letter written in 1843, he noted that his patients owed him \$500. He subsequently had to borrow money from his mother to continue his practice. He could not make what he considered a decent "living" since the medical business had to be "cut up" among so many doctors.<sup>20</sup>

17. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, roll 19; Wirt Papers.

18. J. C. Tax Rolls for 1860; U. S. Census Office, Eighth Census of Florida, 1860, Original [Slave] Population Schedules, 1-64.

19. Seventh Census of Florida, 1850, Original [Slave] Population Schedules, 417-533; J. C. Tax Rolls for 1840.

20. Henry Wirt to Mother, May 19, June 3, July 14, 1843, roll 19; Louisa Anderson Wirt to Elizabeth W. Wirt, February 14, 1844, roll 20; Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, June 30, 1845, roll 20; Wirt Papers.

Most Jefferson County professionals were not successful in diversifying their assets and did not become either yeomen farmers or planters.

Members of the clergy in the county were also slaveholders. Of the fifteen Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal ministers in the antebellum period, sixty-six per cent owned slaves and land. The Methodist clergymen were the major slaveholders. Thomas Linton owned twenty-six slaves and 800 acres of land in 1850; Adam Wirick held twenty-nine slaves and 1,760 acres; while Wesley Adams listed twelve slaves and 400 acres. With the exception of John N. Partridge, an Episcopal minister who owned twenty-two slaves and 320 acres of land, most, of the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopal clergy in Jefferson possessed modest holdings of slaves and land, usually ranging from as few as three slaves and no acreage in 1830, to as many as twenty-two slaves and 400 acres by 1860.<sup>21</sup>

Jefferson's economy centered around agricultural production. Ranked third in population among middle Florida counties during the antebellum period, it was second to Leon County in the cultivation of cotton, corn, and rice. Jefferson was an aggregate of numerous small and moderate size farms of fifty to 500 acres. According to the 1860 tax rolls and slave schedules, Jefferson was second only to Leon County in the number of plantations utilizing thirty slaves or more. There were seventy-five Leon County plantations that worked thirty slaves or more. In Jefferson County there were fifty-five plantations with the same or more slaves. John Gamble, James Gadsden, and Thomas Randall thought that "100 Negroes" could profitably work a maximum of 800 acres.<sup>22</sup> In Leon County there were 146 plantations with 500 or more acres, and in Jefferson 110.<sup>23</sup>

While there was fertile land in Jefferson County there was no good river system to transport commodities to market. "Transportation to and from the ports was as much a problem as find-

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21. Seventh Census of Florida, 1850, Original [Slave] Population Schedules, 417-533.

22. J. C. and L. C. Tax Rolls for 1860; Eighth Census of Florida, 1860, Original [Slave] Population Schedules, 1-64; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, August 10, 1828, roll 11; Wirt Papers.

23. U. S. Census Office, Eighth Census of Florida, 1860, Original Census Schedules, Schedule 4, Agriculture, 1-22.

ing a suitable channel from the ports to the ocean."<sup>24</sup> The St. Marks River which flowed alongside the seaport towns of Magnolia, Newport, and Port Leon was about twenty miles from Jefferson. Despite the distance, it became the river used by Jefferson and middle Florida farmers as the major avenue for transporting products.<sup>25</sup> The poor condition of the roads was an additional aggravation. Consequently, transportation to and from the coast posed a constant problem.<sup>26</sup>

Cotton production, of course, was vital to the economy of Jefferson County. As Louis Goldsborough noted in a letter to his wife, it was "regarded as the gold of a Florida plantation."<sup>27</sup> George Anderson, manager of the Wirt plantation, predicted in 1844 that the property would yield at least 400 bales of cotton. The Gamble, Gadsden, Randall, and Wirt families were among the largest cotton growers in the county.<sup>28</sup> Prosperous agricultural production was dependent upon a good working relationship between masters and slaves.

While owners realized that they had complete control over their slaves, they knew from experience that the bondsmen needed to be manipulated and given incentives in order to get the maximum amount of work from them. Randall and the Gambles knew well the workings of the slave system and how best to motivate the workers.<sup>29</sup> Better performances resulted if the blacks

24. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 104; Allen Morris, *The Florida Handbook, 1977-1978* (Tallahassee, 1978), 332-33.

25. Henry Thompson to William Wirt, December 5, 1827, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, January 28, February 24, 1828, roll 10; Laura Randall to William and Elizabeth Wirt, May 4, 1838, roll 10; William Wirt to Laura and Thomas Randall, 1828, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, June 17, 1829, roll 12; Ellen McCormick to Family, January 29, 1843, roll 19; Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, October 20, 1843, roll 20; H. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth W. Wirt, January 19, 1846, roll 20; Wirt Papers; May 29, August 2, 1825, June 7, 16, 1836, July 1, 1837, Gamble Family Papers, ms 105, folder 3 (Photocopy), Special Collections, Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee (hereinafter cited as Gamble Family Papers); J. William Yon, *Geology of Jefferson County, Florida* (Tallahassee, 1966), 15-18 (Geological Bulletin No. 48).

26. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 102-06.

27. Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth W. Goldsborough, July 26, 1836 (ms nos. 429-430); Goldsborough Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection, Washington, D.C., (hereinafter cited as Goldsborough Papers).

28. Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, February 18, 1843, roll 19; Laura Randall to Mother, October 26, 1828, roll 11; Wirt Papers.

29. Gamble Notebook, 54-55; Laura Wirt to William Wirt, June 17, 1827 roll 9; Laura Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, September 4, June 15, November 26, 1827, roll 9, February 9, 1828, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William

were allowed to do certain things which they enjoyed.<sup>30</sup> Slaves sometimes received extra food, money, gifts, and other inducements if they worked more efficiently. Randall permitted his slaves to cook their own meals in the mornings and evenings; their noon meals were prepared by a plantation cook, so as not to interfere with work in the fields. The Gambles were advised that it was important to let their slaves grind their own corn and to give them their share of pork and other food stuffs. Mrs. Wirt cautioned Randall to make sure that his "people" had an ample supply of pork and food.<sup>31</sup>

Most slaveholders realized the wisdom of maintaining the integrity of the slave family. Thomas Randall shortly after his arrival in Jefferson County in 1828 had to deal with a slave problem. David, a slave purchased by Randall for the Wirtland plantation, had been separated from his wife in Maryland. He complained about the separation and wanted to be sold. Randall, fearing that David "would infect the whole body of the black community with his despondence," decided to buy the wife. He later wrote his father-in-law, "I regret I was not at home to witness the reunion of David and his wife." Later in another letter to Wirt, Randall reported that David and his wife were very "happy" together.<sup>32</sup> When Randall wanted to send some peafowls from his Belmont plantation to Wirtland, he entrusted them to his servant Jacob, who used this opportunity also to visit his wife and family. John Gamble often noted in his diary that he had "purchased some articles for housekeeping" to be given to his male slaves when they became engaged or married on the plantation. On occasion, Laura Randall, wife of Thomas Randall, informed her mother that several of her uncle John Gamble's slaves had become engaged to a couple of their female

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Wirt, January 7, February 10, March 9, 1828, roll 10; Laura Randall to William Wirt, April 13, 1828, roll 10; Wirt Papers.

30. Gamble Family Papers, January 26, 1847; William Wirt to Laura and Thomas Randall, 1828, roll 10; Elizabeth Wirt to Catharine Wirt, January 3, 1839, roll 18; Ellen McCormick to Wirt Family, January 29, 1843, roll 19; Wirt Papers.
31. Gamble Family Papers, passim; Elizabeth Wirt to Laura Randall, November 13, 1837, roll 18; Laura Randall's Journal, November 22, 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, March 20, April 7, 1833, roll 16; Wirt Papers.
32. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, December 20, 1828, November 20, 1829, roll 12, Wirt Papers.

slaves at Belmont.<sup>33</sup> When Betsey, a slave at Wirtland, was asked to be a nurse for Mrs. Wirt who was then in Baltimore, she replied that she “wanted to be married to this man Noah” and that “she preferred being married at all events.”<sup>34</sup> Fearing that this situation might affect her work at Wirtland, Elizabeth Wirt gave Betsey permission to remain and marry Noah, a slave belonging to Mr. Graham, the owner of a sawmill in Monticello.<sup>35</sup> Although not recognized by law, the “slave family” was a useful tool to many slaveholders in encouraging stability and productivity in their blacks.

Moreover, slaveowners recognized the importance of religion to the bondsmen and used it to foster good work habits, Randall and Wirt allowed their slaves to build their own church. The former reported to his father-in-law soon after the arrival of their first group of blacks from Maryland in 1828: “On the way to town, I discovered that near a beautiful grove of hickories North of the house . . . they had formed an under enclosure with logs for seats and somethings [*sic*] like a pulpit for their religious exercises – this was the first I had seen of it.”<sup>36</sup> Randall was surprised that his slaves had “erected such an establishment even before they had finished their own dwellings.”<sup>37</sup> It seems as though Randall, Wirt, and other slaveholders were allowing their bondsmen to worship by themselves with their own preachers (or those from other plantations in the county) in exchange for their cooperation in the cotton fields. However, this situation changed somewhat during the 1840s and 1850s as whites became agitated and fearful over the abolitionist movement. Many planters then sought the

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33. Gamble Family Papers, January 26, 1847; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, December 26, 1840, roll 18; Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, roll 19; H. Louisa Anderson to Catharine Wirt Randall, December 1, 1842, roll 19; H. Louisa Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, July 14, 1844, roll 20; H. Louisa Wirt to Elizabeth W. Wirt, November 26, 1844, roll 20; Wirt Papers.

34. H. Louisa Anderson to Catharine Wirt Randall, December 1, 1842, roll 19, Wirt Papers.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 13, 1828, roll 10; William Wirt to Laura and Thomas Randall, 1828, roll 10; Wirt Papers; see Wills of Jefferson County slaveholders (hereinafter cited as J. C. Wills), in Book B, Will of Emmula Bellamy, dated April 12, 1851; Will of William Bailey, Jr., dated July 16, 1862; Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

37. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 13, 1828, roll 10, Wirt Papers.

services of white preachers whom they trusted to convey certain values to their slaves.<sup>38</sup>

According to contemporary records of owners and managers, many Jefferson County slaves were both skillful and efficient in their work performances. Following the arrival of his slaves from Maryland, Randall informed Wirt that they were soon “steadily and efficiently engaged” in planting and clearing land.<sup>39</sup> During the same year, Laura Randall emphasized the efficiency of a slave called “Old Georgia woman” who did “more than any other about the establishment.”<sup>40</sup> Many of the letters written by Louis Goldsborough or Randall to the Wirts in Baltimore focused on the skill and efficiency of the slaves in operating the grist, saw, and corn mills at the Wirtland and Belmont plantations. Randall was particularly proud that their “people” could also make “bricks” for the houses and chimneys.<sup>41</sup> John Gamble noted in his diary that his slaves were skilled in processing sugar cane and preparing cotton for shipment. He, also, acknowledged that many were skilled brick masons, blacksmiths, and carpenters.<sup>42</sup> Goldsborough praised the hard work and productivity of Robert Gamble’s slaves in picking large quantities of cotton in comparison to other plantations.<sup>43</sup> Many residents in Jefferson used slaves to transport personal belongings, along with cotton and other staples, to the port towns of Newport, Magnolia, and Port Leon for shipment.<sup>44</sup>

Slaves working for Achille Murat, Robert and John Gamble, John Hollingsworth, Sr., and the Wirts were often given re-

38. Will of Emmula Bellamy, dated April 12, 1851; Florida State Archives, Tallahassee; Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 133-34.

39. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, March 9, 1828, roll 10, July 11, 1828, roll 11; Laura Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, February 9, 1828, roll 10; Laura Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, October 19, 1827, roll 9; Wirt Papers.

40. Laura H. Randall to William and Elizabeth Wirt, February 9, 1828, roll 10, July 11, 1828, roll 11; Wirt Papers.

41. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, September 23, 1833, roll 16; Louisa Anderson Wirt to Elizabeth W. Wirt, February 14, 1844, roll 20; Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall and Family, January 14, February 5, 1842, roll 19; Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, October 20, 1843, roll 20; Louisa Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, May 15, 1844, roll 20; Catharine W. Randall to Ellen McCormick, September 11, 1844, roll 20; Wirt Papers.

42. Gamble Family Papers, May 29, August 2, 1835, June 7, 16, 1836, July 1, 1837; Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 98.

43. Louis Goldsborough to William Wirt, February 1, 1834 (ms nos. 337-338); Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth Goldsborough, January 9, 1837 (ms no. 468-A); Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth Wirt, June 28, 1834 (ms no. 336-L); Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth W. Goldsborough, April 24, 1835 (ms no. 363); Goldsborough Papers.

44. Gamble Family Papers, *passim*.

sponsibility for running day-to-day farm operations. Although it was a violation of law because a white man was not present, John S. Taylor, a county sheriff, demonstrated confidence in his slaves' abilities when he permitted a black overseer and other slaves to manage his plantations for several years. Louise Wirt and Ellen McCormick often wrote to the Wirts in the North praising the work that Eliza or Betsey did for them and their children.<sup>45</sup>

If slavery was inefficient and unprofitable in some areas of the South that does not seem to be the case in Jefferson County. Based upon the available sources, many planters realized good profits from the labor of their bondsmen. While Laura Randall did not like Jefferson County when she first arrived in 1827, she hoped to "become as infatuated with it as the sugar planter" who had earned "extraordinary profits." Randall and Wirt frequently discussed a family who had grossed \$25,000 in one year growing cotton and sugar cane.<sup>46</sup> Based upon their children's and relatives' accounts, William and Elizabeth Wirt believed that their two plantations in Jefferson would, in the long run, make money for them. Randall felt that the county offered good prospects for producing "great staples in the future," as did the Gamble brothers who had grown "a great crop of corn . . . [and] a valuable crop of Sea Island cotton for the market in 1828."<sup>47</sup>

Examination of contemporary documents— diaries, probate records, and newspaper accounts— reveal that slaves often made money for their masters by being hired out. Besides utilizing their slaves on their own plantations, William Nuttal, Thomas S. Johnson, William Bailey, and John Gamble hired out their slaves to grind corn and grist and to package cotton. Slaves usually brought in between "\$12.00 or \$15.00."<sup>48</sup>

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45. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 32-38; Laura H. Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, October 19, 1827, roll 9; Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall and Family, February 5, 1843, roll 19; Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, October 20, 1843, roll 20; Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, February 14, 1844, roll 20; H. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, May 15, 1844, roll 20; Catharine W. Randall to Ellen McCormick, September 11, 1844, roll 20; H. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, January 19, 1846, roll 20; Wirt Papers.

46. Laura H. Randall to William Wirt, October 13, 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, September 22, 1828, roll 11; Wirt Papers.

47. Thomas Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, October 25, November 3, 1828, roll 11, Wirt Papers.

48. Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, May 15, 1845, roll 20; Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, roll 19; Wirt Papers.

Early in the history of Wirtland, Randall had advised his father-in-law against renting slaves because of the high cost. Nevertheless, before the arrival of the plantation's initial group of blacks from Maryland, he, like other Jefferson citizens, was forced to pay for bondsmen to work in the fields.<sup>49</sup> Laura Randall "hired a boy in the neighborhood to carry their letters to town once a week."<sup>50</sup> Goldsborough, who managed the Wirtland plantation from 1834 to 1839, hired out slaves. He also profited from selling the wood they had cut, and he received one-twelfth of the cotton ginned by the slaves for neighbors who could not afford their own ginning machine.<sup>51</sup> Fearing that the Indians might attack Wirtland in 1836, he arranged to take the slaves to Pensacola and to hire them out in the Navy Yard and to the railroad company there. Goldsborough noted that "the railroad would pay \$200.00 a year for every man hand, and to feed, clothe, and pay doctor's bills besides."<sup>52</sup> Sometimes slaves could be hired out for as much as \$25.00 a month as was the case with Henry, a slave owned by Ellen McCormick and her husband.<sup>53</sup>

Sometimes slaveholders specified in their wills that their slaves were to work on the plantation and to be hired out whenever possible. John B. Morris stipulated that his slaves were to be worked elsewhere when not engaged in other tasks on the plantation. John Doggett provided in his will for his slaves to be given to his sister Mary and her husband John in order that they might benefit from them financially. Although it was uncertain what duties they might perform, Jefferson slaveholders hired their blacks to many county non-slaveholders.

49. Laura H. Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, January 17, February 3, 1828, roll 10; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, December 12, 1828, May 4, 1831, roll 14, January 10, 1832, roll 14; Elizabeth Wirt to William Wirt, June 28, 1827, roll 9; Wirt Papers.

50. Laura W. Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, October 4, 1828, roll 11, Wirt Papers.

51. Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth Goldsborough, January 9, 1837 (ms no. 468-A), Goldsborough Papers.

52. Tallahassee *Floridian*, December 12, 1835, November 12, 1836, June 8, 1839, January 2, 1841; Tallahassee *Floridian and Advocate* April 6, 1830, February 28, 1832; Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth W. Goldsborough, August 28, 1836 (ms nos. 437-438); Goldsborough Papers.

53. Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, June 8, 1845, roll 20, Wirt Papers.

54. See Jefferson County, Wills of Slaveholders in J. C. Wills, Book B: John B. Morris, Will dated January 17, 1847, 9-10; John Doggett, Will dated September 9, 1849, 45; William S. Murphy, Will dated July 31, 1863, 130-31; and Thomas H. Triplett, Will dated August 30, 1863, 127-28; Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.



Slaves were considered a safe investment in Jefferson County. In a letter to Mrs. Wirt, Goldsborough noted that "it was common practice to invest in slaves."<sup>55</sup> William Wirt encouraged his daughter and son-in-law to save money from the labor of their slaves in order to invest in more each year. When Dabney Wirt asked his sister, Ellen McCormick, for a loan to help his law practice, she wrote to their mother stating that she wished she could help her brother, but that it was not possible since they had to "purchase Negroes" to supply themselves "with the necessities and could not spend a useless dollar on" anything else.<sup>56</sup> In a letter to Mrs. Wirt, Goldsborough strongly suggested that she should recover the money that her brothers, John and Robert Gamble, owed her because they were also thinking of investing in additional slaves.<sup>57</sup>

Slaveholders like the Gambles, Wirt, and Randall, hoped their slave investment would grow as more and more children were produced over the years. The Gambles and other planters, encouraged slaves to marry and to have children.<sup>58</sup> Many in their wills indicated how the slaves, including those that might result from marriage, were to be divided. Emmula Bellamy, Mary Sattonstall, Theodore Turnbull, Cornelius Beasley, Sarah Green, Mary Edwards, Achille Murat, James Slater, John F. Dewitt, and Paul Ulmer stipulated who would go to members of their immediate families and who would be gifts to other relatives.<sup>59</sup> John

55. Louis Goldsborough to Mrs. Elizabeth Wirt, July 28, 1834 (no. 342-C), Goldsborough Papers.

56. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, roll 19; William Wirt to Laura and Thomas Randall, January 17, 1828, roll 10; September 22, 1828, roll 11; Thomas Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, September 28, 1834, roll 17; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, July 11, 1828, roll 11, April 12, 22, June 29, 1833, roll 16; Wirt Papers.

57. Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth Wirt, July 28, 1834 (no. 342-C), Goldsborough Papers.

58. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, May 4, 1831, January 10, 1832, roll 14; Wirt Papers; Gamble Family Papers, *passim*.

59. See the following Wills of Jefferson County Slaveholders in J. C. Wills, Book A: Joseph M. White, Will dated September 28, 1836, 30-31; Ebenezer Folsom, Will dated October 12, 1833, 28; Clay Arledge, Will dated April 17, 1840, 34-35; John Hollingsworth, Sr., Will dated September 25, 1838, 57; Joseph R. Rawls, Will dated July 7, 1841, 111-12; and John Moore, Will dated March 24, 1843, 86-87; see also the following Wills of Jefferson County Slaveholders in J. C. Wills, Book B: James Slater, Will dated December 11, 1837, 53-55; Achille Murat, Will dated March 8, 1847, 5-7; Mary Edwards, Will dated August 10, 1847, 85-87; Paul Ulmer, Will dated May 14, 1850, 38-39; Emmula Bellamy, Will dated April 12, 1851, 34-36; Mary Sattonstall, Will dated November 29, 1851, 71; John F. Dewitt, Will dated December 30, 1854, 64; Theodore Turnbull, Will

B. Morris, Thomas H. Triplett, John Braden, and John Finlayson directed that certain of the proceeds would be for the education of their children.<sup>60</sup>

Not all planters operated at a profit. The Wirt plantation was in debt throughout much of the period, but that was likely because Wirtland was the victim of absentee ownership. Wirt, who may have planned to settle in Florida, died in 1834 without ever visiting his Florida properties. His wife, Elizabeth, preferred Baltimore to Florida, and she never permanently lived in Florida. From 1827-1833, Wirt's son-in-law, Thomas Randall, attempted to supervise the plantations, while managing his own plantation, Belmont, and presiding as county judge. Louis Goldsborough, another son-in-law, managed the plantations from 1834-1839, but he was also too busy advancing his career in the United States Navy to give the properties the attention they needed. Dabney C. Wirt managed the properties from 1839-1842, but then left to practice law in St. Louis, Missouri. J. George Anderson, who was not a relative but whose sister was married to Henry Wirt, took over the management from 1842 to 1845, but he was also taking care of Increase, his own plantation. Robert Gamble, Elizabeth Wirt's brother, tried unsuccessfully to supervise the plantation from 1845-1851 while managing his own large personal holdings in the county. Finding managers who had the time and means to supervise Wirtland profitably proved to be very difficult.<sup>61</sup>

Henry Wirt, who practiced medicine in Monticello, had been optimistic about the selection of George Anderson as manager of Wirtland. In 1844, he informed his mother that Anderson "is as devoted to your interest and whole business of the Estate as though it were his own, and more so, if possible."<sup>62</sup> But because of his other interests and responsibilities, Anderson hired Thomas Ross,

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dated December 25, 1857, 92-93; Sarah B. Green, Will dated August 30, 1860, 110; Cornelius Beasley, Will dated December 2, 1865, 94; Julius High, Will dated September 30, 1852, 193-204; Wesley Adams, Will dated April 28, 1854, 58-59; William Budd, Will dated June 27, 1862, 162-63; I. T. Webb, Will dated July 6, 1862, 125; William Bailey, Jr., Will dated July 16, 1862, 100; and Behethland Bird, Will dated December 30, 1863, 135-36; Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

60. See, for example, the following Wills of Jefferson County Slaveholders in J. C. Wills, Book B: John B. Morris, Will dated June 17, 1847, 9-10; Thomas Triplett, Will dated August 30, 1863, 127-28; John Braden, Will dated February 6, 1855, 90; and John Finlayson, Will dated February 23, 1865, 155-58; Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

61. See, for example, the Wirt Papers, 1827-1851, microfilm rolls 8-21.

62. Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, February 21, 1844, roll 20, Wirt Papers.

to oversee Wirtland. The Wirts were short of money, so both Anderson and Ross agreed to be paid by using the Wirtland slaves when they needed them.<sup>63</sup> With this arrangement, Henry Wirt's enthusiasm about Anderson's concern for Wirtland soon changed. He became incensed because Ross had used his mother's "carpenters, blacksmiths and everything necessary for him to begin planting on his own hook" instead of Wirtland. He noted that the milk cows, chickens, and hogs had dwindled to almost "nothing."<sup>64</sup> He complained to his mother that Ross did not know how many slaves they had, or what work they were supposed to perform.<sup>65</sup> He finally encouraged her to get rid of Ross before her "whole business" was completely ruined.<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth Wirt did relieve Ross of his duties in 1845. Apparently Ross had profited from his tenure at Wirtland. By 1846 he was planting, in partnership with Grant Scurry, an area next to George Anderson's plantation, and both jointly owned thirteen slaves.<sup>67</sup>

Not only did poor management hurt Wirtland, but there were other contributing factors. Mrs. Wirt was persuaded, for instance, by her children either to sell slaves below market value or to lend them without compensation over an extended period of time. Elizabeth Wirt's daughter Ellen, bought several slaves from her at below market price, and she borrowed her mother's female blacks who were seamstresses for long periods without paying for their services. Henry often used Wirtland slaves for his personal needs. During much of 1843, he used his mother's bondsmen to construct a home in Monticello.<sup>68</sup> Yet even with poor management, the Wirts still produced annually from 200 to 400 bales of cotton during the 1840s.<sup>69</sup>

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63. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, roll 19; Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, February, 1843, roll 19, and n.d., 1845, roll 20; Wire Papers.

64. Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, January 6, 1844, September 28, 1845, roll 20, Wirt Papers.

65. Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, 1845, roll 20, Wirt Papers.

66. H. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, July 13, 1845, roll 20; Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, September 28, 1845, roll 20; Wirt Papers.

67. H. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, February 28, 1846, roll 20, Wirt Papers.

68. Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, March 16, 1843, roll 19; H. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth W. Wirt, January 19, 1846, roll 20; John Gamble to Elizabeth Wirt, March 20, 1843, roll 19; Wirt Papers.

69. Henry Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, February 18, 1843, roll 19; Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth W. Wirt, July 14, 1844, roll 20; William Wirt to Thomas Randall, February 1, 1828, roll 10; Laura Randall to Elizabeth

Cotton was the biggest source of income in Jefferson County from 1840 to 1860. The county was second only to Leon in cotton production in the antebellum period. In 1840, of the 30,276 bales of cotton (each weighing 400 pounds) grown in Florida, 4,639 bales, or 15.32 per cent, was produced in Jefferson County. In 1850, the Florida crop was 45,131 bales, and in Jefferson County, 9,468 bales, or 20.98 per cent of the total. In 1860 cotton production for the state had increased to 65,153 bales, and in Jefferson to 10,847 bales. This meant that the county was producing 16.64 per cent of the total for Florida.<sup>70</sup>

Because of fluctuating prices, Florida cotton growers usually had to settle for no more than ten cents a pound on their product. Despite Goldsborough's prediction in 1836 that cotton would bring twenty cents a pound, he never received more than ten and one-half cents for the cotton produced at Wirtland in the period 1834-1837.<sup>71</sup> The 4,639 bales (1855,600 pounds) of cotton produced in Jefferson County in 1840, at ten cents a pound, would be worth \$185,560.00. In the 1850s cotton prices increased to an average of thirty cents a pound. Thus if one added Jefferson County's totals for 1850 and 1860—20,315 bales (8,126,000 pounds) at thirty cents a pound—the total was \$2,437,800. No other staple crop brought in as much money for Jefferson County planters as did cotton in the antebellum period.<sup>72</sup>

Both male and female slaves worked the fields of Jefferson County as they did elsewhere in the South.<sup>73</sup> Achille Murat in

Wirt, October 26, 1828, roll 11; Ellen McCormick to Mother, October 12, 1842, roll 19; Wirt Papers.

70. U. S. Census Office, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1864), 18-21.
71. *Ibid.*; J. D. B. DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850, Agriculture* (Washington, 1854), 408; J.D.B. DeBow, *The Industrial Resources of the Southern and Western States*, 3 vols. (New Orleans, 1852), 1, 149; Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth W. Goldsborough, September 22, 1836 (ms no. 449); Louis Goldsborough to William Wirt, February, 1834 (ms no. 336); and Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth W. Goldsborough, August 8, 1836 (ms no. 431); Goldsborough Papers.
72. Students of the peculiar institution generally concur that the average price for cotton during the 1850s and 1860s was about 30 cents per pound: (n.a.) *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, Sixth Census, 1840 (Agriculture)*, 336; *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Agriculture*, 408; and *Agriculture of the United States, 1860, Eighth Census*, 19-21.
73. Laura H. Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, October 19, November 19, 22, 24, 26, 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, December 20, 1828, roll

1827 utilized both sexes to work his land. During the picking season in 1842, Ellen McCormick, concerned that there might be a major outbreak of illness among the slaves, sent Charlotte, who was in charge of the plantation hospital, to the slave quarters to nurse "Caroline who had a child." Nelly then took Charlotte's place at the hospital. In a letter to her mother, Mrs. McCormick expressed the hope that there would be "no danger of a sickly season" on the plantation.<sup>74</sup> She explained, "Nelly has never been in the field since the birth of her child, having been a good deal invalid ever since; suffering with pains, and constant visitation of monthly sickness until last month when she missed it. – So as soon as she is dismissed from the hospital . . . she will go into the field again."<sup>75</sup> That same year, Mrs. McCormick wrote her sister Catherine Randall that "Lucy" was "unfit for the field," but had "no objection to cooking for them." When Ellen wanted to purchase a slave from her parents, she made it clear that the "sum [of money given to the plantation manager] was sufficient for the purchase for a good field hand (man or woman)."<sup>76</sup> Many of John and Robert Gamble's females routinely worked the crops.

This contention lacks validity when the ages of male and female slaves are compared in Jefferson County from 1830 to 1840. Federal population returns for that period reveal that male slaves outnumbered and lived longer than female slaves within all but two of the age brackets. Table 4 shows that 122 male slaves, or fourteen per cent of Jefferson's total of 874, were listed as being thirty-six years of age in 1830. For the same age range, female slaves numbered ninety-three, or thirteen per cent of the female aggregate of 736. Ten years later, seventy-six males, or four per cent of 1,781, were fifty-five years or older as compared to forty-six females or three per cent of an entirety of 1,768. Male slaves in Jefferson outnumbered and lived slightly longer than female slaves, within specific age ranges discussed, from 1830 to 1840.

By 1850, and for the first time, female slaves in Jefferson out-

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11; Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, April 15, 1842, roll 19; Ellen McCormick to Family, March 10, 1842, roll 19; Wirt Papers.

74. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, April 15, 1842, roll 19, Wirt Papers.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, January 15, 1843, roll 19, Wirt Papers.

TABLE 4  
AGE CLASSIFICATION OF FEMALE AND MALE SLAVES  
IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IN 1830 AND 1840

Year	Under 10		10 to 24		24 to 26		36 to 55		55 Under 100		100 & up		Totals	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1830	295	254	244	238	213	151	101	76	21	17	0	0	874	736
1840	569	570	562	585	369	367	205	200	75	46	1	0	1,781	1,768

Sources: *Fifth Census, or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830* (Washington, 1832), 156-57; *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840* (Washington, 1841), 96-99.

numbered and lived slightly longer than male slaves as indicated By Table 5. Three hundred and thirty-three or thirteen per cent out of a total of 2,452 males were listed as forty years or older, while fourteen per cent, or 334 out of 2,487 female slaves, were designated within the same age group. A decade later, female slaves continued to outnumber male slaves within the age range of forty to 100 years. For example, there were 418 males out of a total of 3,075, or fourteen per cent, within the age range of forty to 100 years, while 437, or thirteen per cent of the females out of a total of 3,299, were listed in the same age category. Since both worked basically on the same cotton farms and plantations in Jefferson County, there seems to have been no significant difference between the longevity of female and male slaves, although females twenty-four years or younger outnumbered males during the two decades before the Civil War.

Slaves based upon contemporary prices were the most valuable property in Jefferson County. According to various newspaper accounts in middle Florida, the price of a slave averaged about \$1,000.<sup>77</sup> Slaves who were skilled, such as brick masons, carpenters, and artisans, might bring up to \$3,500. If a slave were valued at an average of \$1,000 in Jefferson by 1860, then the 6,374 slaves were equal to \$6,374,000. The value of all the cotton produced in Jefferson in 1860 was estimated to be worth \$1,301,640, and the land, both improved and unimproved, was set at \$1,646,074. Thus, the total sum of these items was substantially less than the value of the bondsmen.<sup>78</sup>

As a result of the high prices that they brought at the marketplace and the constant demand for their labor in Jefferson, few slaves were emancipated in the years prior to the Civil War. Realizing the inevitability of black population increase and anticipating the responsibility of social control, regulations relating to slaves and free blacks began appearing on the statute books of Florida as early as 1822. By the time Jefferson County was organized in 1827, a law had been enacted which called for the

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77. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution* 338; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1932), II, 664-66; see also Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, February 9, January 23, 1858, February 12, 1859, November 15, 1856.

78. Eighth Census of Florida, 1860, Original Census Schedules, Schedule 4, Agriculture, 1-22; Eight Census of Florida, 1860 Original Slave Population Schedule, 1-64.

TABLE 5  
AGE CLASSIFICATION OF FEMALE AND MALE SLAVES  
IN JEFFERSON COUNTY IN 1850 AND 1860

Year	Under 10		10 to 20		20 to 40		40 to 60		60-Under 100		100 & up		Totals	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1850	826	804	599	602	694	736	250	276	82	66	1	3	2,452	2,487
1860	1,045	1,125	792	796	820	941	323	343	95	93	0	1	3,075	3,299

Sources: *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, 1835), 399-400; *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, 1864), 52-53.



forfeiture of “\$200.00” by any master who emancipated a slave. After 1829, slaveowners were prohibited from freeing slaves brought into the Florida territory. Slaves could not move about without permission from their masters, they could not trade or sell goods on their own initiative, and they could not inherit property.<sup>79</sup>

Because free blacks were perceived by Florida whites as a threat to the stability of slavery, they were also denied many social, political, and civil rights. As indicated in Table 1, free blacks approximated less than one per cent of the population in Jefferson County before the Civil War. There were reasons for this. Free blacks could not migrate into the territory after 1832. If they had been emancipated before 1829, they could not stay in Florida for more than thirty days without being returned to slave status. Free blacks over twenty-one years of age had to pay a higher revenue tax than whites. They could not gather to worship except at white churches. Those under twelve years of age were required to select a white guardian for “safe keeping.”<sup>80</sup> If they defaulted debts, they could be sold at public auction to satisfy their creditors. Later, there was even a law giving free blacks the opportunity to “select their master and to become slaves.”<sup>81</sup> As a result, the total number of free blacks in Jefferson from 1830 to 1860 numbered only eighteen.<sup>82</sup>

There were no recorded incidents in Jefferson County of

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79. See, especially, An Act to Prevent the Manumission of Slaves in Certain Cases in this Territory, 1829, 8th sess., 134-35; An Act for the Punishment of Slaves for Violation of the Penal Laws of the Territory, 1822, 1st sess., 181-85; An Act Concerning Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes, 1827-28, 6th sess., 97-100, in *Laws of Florida, 1822-1831*, vols. I and II.

80. See, An Act to Prevent the Future Migration of Free Negroes to this Territory, 1826-1827, 5th sess., 81-84; An Act to Raise a Revenue in the Territory of Florida, 1827-1828, 6th sess., 49-50; An Act Concerning Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes, 1827-1828, 6th sess., 97-110; in *Laws of Florida, 1822-1831*, vols. I and II; for an examination of the treatment of free blacks in Florida, see David Y. Thomas, “The Free Negro in Florida before 1865,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, L (October 1911), 335-45.

81. See, An Act to Amend the Several Acts in Relations to Slaves, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes, 1840, 18th sess., 23; An Act to Prevent the Future Migration of Free Negroes or Mulattoes to this Territory and for other purposes, 1842, 20th sess., 30-31, in *Laws of Florida*, vol. IV.

82. An Act to Raise Revenue for the State of Florida, and Defining Duties of the Assessor and Collectors thereof, 1845, 1st sess., 32-33; and An Act to Permit Free Persons of African Descent to Select Their Own Master and Become Slaves, 1858-1859, 9th sess., 13-14, in *Laws of Florida, 1845-1861*, vols. I and III.

groups of slaves threatening or destroying the lives or property of whites, and public officials never had to request the assistance of the local military. There were some instances, however, of slave rebellion and retaliation against the authority of masters or overseers.<sup>83</sup> The slaves of Richard B. Cole, were found guilty of his death. Ben, a slave of James Watts, was charged with the murder of his master, but was adjudged guilty of manslaughter and given thirty-nine lashes.<sup>84</sup> Sally, with the aid of two other slaves, tried to poison Thomas Randall's overseer, and the three were later sold to avoid similar problems on the plantations.<sup>85</sup> On other Jefferson County plantations, slaves were charged with arson and assault and battery on local whites.<sup>86</sup>

Newspaper accounts, diaries, and letters of Jefferson County slaveholders relate a variety of ways by which slaves sought to avoid their subordination. Many tried to run away, particularly those who had been separated from their families and friends. When Thomas Randall's slaves arrived in Jefferson County from Maryland in early 1828, he acknowledged that two who ran away were dissatisfied with their new homes.<sup>87</sup> John Gamble experienced a runaway problem after he purchased some of John Carnochan's slaves from Gadsden County. Although Gamble attempted to please his slaves with gifts, rewards, and money, he lamented throughout his diary the chronic problem of slaves fleeing his plantation.<sup>88</sup>

Slave resistance usually was generally more evident during the months of May through September when working hours

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83. Louis Goldsborough to Elizabeth W. Goldsborough, August 31, 1835 (ms no. 439); Louis Goldsborough to William Wirt, February, 1834 (me no. 336); Goldsborough Papers. For other interesting accounts of the day to-day resistance of slaves to their lot in Jefferson County, see Shofner, *History of Jefferson County*, 143-44.

84. See, for example, Records of the Superior Court of Jefferson County, Minute Book, 1831, 37, 1834, 33, 1847, 110, and Order Book A, 449; Records of the Circuit Court of Jefferson County, Order Book A, 115, 170, 187, and Order Book B, 93, 275-76, 402. Jefferson County Courthouse, Monticello, Florida.

85. Laura Randall to William Wirt, June 30, 1832, roll 15, Wirt Papers.

86. Records of the Circuit Court of Jefferson County, Order Book A, 323, 486 *Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate*, December 8, 1829; *Tallahassee Floridian*, July 21, 1828.

87. Laura Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, December 15, 1827, roll 10, Wirt Papers.

88. See Gamble Family Papers, April 1835 to November 1836; *Tallahassee Floridian and Advocate*, November 25, 1828, November 1, 1834; *Tallahassee Florida Watchman* November 3, 1838.

were unusually long. From June to September of 1839, Ellen Vass noted in a letter to her mother that "almost every man, woman, and child with two exceptions have been sick."<sup>89</sup> She also commented on Lucy, a slave belonging to the Wirts, who did not want to work in the field because she "keeps complaining sometime about the swelling of her legs— but is not much afflicted I think."<sup>90</sup> In another letter to her mother, written in July, she noted that had "been occupied nursing for some time as our little household has been visited by sickness several times since the warm weather set in."<sup>91</sup> Henry wrote to his sister Catharine Randall in 1842, noting that Charlotte, one of the Wirtland slaves, told him there was "more sickness during the months of May, June, and July among the Negroes" than she had known.<sup>92</sup> During subsequent years, he continued to mention "slave sicknesses" during these months. When Mary, a slave belonging to the Wirts, complained of constant illness, she was assigned work in the main house because, as Thomas Randall stated, she was "always able to do housework."<sup>93</sup>

While house servants were usually regarded as the most trusted, loyal, and submissive of the bondsmen, this was not always true in Jefferson County. When Elizabeth Wirt suggested that her daughter and husband take their house servant, Eliza, along with them from Maryland to Florida, Laura insisted that her mother hire the services of a "white girl" since "I am very sure I shall not be able to manage her."<sup>94</sup> Some fourteen years later, Ellen McCormick left Florida for Fort Gibson, Arkansas, taking Eliza with her. In a letter to her sister Catherine, in 1843, she wrote, "Eliza is a good cook, if she gives me little satisfaction in other respects." Eliza felt that nothing was expected of her

89. Ellen Vass to Catharine Wirt, September 4, 1839, roll 18; Elizabeth Wirt to Laura H. Randall, October 12, 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, April 13, 1828, roll 10; Alexander Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, September 11, 1841, roll 19; Wirt Papers.

90. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, April 15, 1852, roll 22, Wirt Papers.

91. Louisa A. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, July 14, 1844, roll 20, Wirt Papers.

92. Henry C. Wirt to Catharine Randall, September 29, 1842, roll 19, Wirt Papers.

93. Thomas Randall to William Wirt, October, 1828, roll 11; Laura Randall to Elizabeth Wirt, February 9, 1828, roll 10, Wirt Papers.

94. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community* (New York, 1972), 304; Laura H. Wirt to William Wirt, June 19, 1827, roll 9; Thomas Randall to William Wirt, July 11, 1828, roll 11; Laura H. Randall to Mother, September 4, 1827, roll 9, February 9, 26, May 18, 1828, roll 10, June 14, 17, July 18, August 31, November 24, 1828, roll 11; Wirt Papers.

“except her duties as a cook, since she would not milk cows, churn the butter, or do the washing.”<sup>95</sup> Ellen had to pay another woman to do the family’s washing. There was an apparent breakdown in communication between Thomas Ross’s overseer and the Wirtland slaves. Soon after his arrival, Henry Wirt and his wife were dismayed at how dissatisfied and ungovernable the house servants were. In 1842, John, one of Wirtland’s most efficient blacks, became “mighty lazy and inefficient,” according to Henry Wirt.<sup>96</sup> Several months later, another slave asked to be sold from Wirtland because he regarded himself, as Ellen said, “in the light of one greatly oppressed, and of course is a very uncomfortable somebody to have about.”<sup>97</sup> Two years later, Henry wrote his mother in disgust, “the negroes have been behaving so badly about the hogs.” However, Mr. Anderson and Ross, he suggested, would know what to do “without any suggestions how to punish them for their rascality.”<sup>98</sup> The problems were not solved, and conditions at Wirtland continued chaotic so long as Anderson and Ross remained.

In antebellum Jefferson County, there were two distinct worlds— that of slaveholders and that of slaves. The bright prospect of making profits, and becoming “citizens of dignity and importance” through the ownership of chattel and land, would become a reality for many Jefferson residents. The only reality for slaves was the unhappy awareness that they were a necessary commodity for the achievement of this “dignity and importance.”

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95. Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, June 14, September 10, 1843, roll 19, October 1, 20, 1843, roll 20; see also Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, January 15, 1843, roll 19; Wirt Papers.
96. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, October 12, 1842, roll 19, Wirt Papers.
97. Ellen McCormick to Elizabeth Wirt, September 8, 1842, roll 19; Ellen McCormick to Catharine W. Randall, January 15, 1843, roll 19; Wirt Papers.
98. Henry C. Wirt to Elizabeth Wirt, January 6, 1844, roll 20; Laura H. Randall to Elizabeth W. Wirt, December 7, 1828, roll 11; Wirt Papers.