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THE JOHN W. ANDERSON SLAVE PEN

Carl B. Westmoreland[†]

At the end of 18th century America, a series of events occurred that forever changed the economic and political status of white Americans. These changes were heavily influenced by the transportation of blacks to this country, the circumstances surrounding their enslavement, and the increasing demand for cotton. America's founders prohibited the importation of enslaved Africans into the United States at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. This prohibition, however, occurred at a time when America was expanding and additional labor was necessary. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 increased the amount of market ready cotton. The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States, which meant more fertile soil for cotton production via slave labor. These major changes in the American economy meant that white Americans had to continue slave operations in a way that complied with the prohibition against importing slaves.

Slaves were needed to fulfill the labor needs of the new land and King Cotton.¹ Due to the aforementioned prohibition, a lucrative business of moving slaves from the Old South to Louisiana Territory began.² Slave dealers from New York City, New York, Perth Amboy, New Jersey, Baltimore, Maryland, Alexandria, Virginia, Richmond, Virginia, and Charleston, South Carolina initiated the process of relocating more than 1 million slaves, a process now known as the Internal Slave Trade. Lines of enslaved men, women, and children were marched down Pennsylvania

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¹ King Cotton is a term people used to describe the economic and political power cotton production had on the national and international economy prior to the Civil War. Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates is one of many scholars who remind us that by 1830, cotton was America's leading export (*See* Gates Jr., Henry Louis, "Why was Cotton 'King'?", *The Root*, <http://www.theroot.com/articles/history/2013/02/why-was-cotton-king.html>); "King Cotton," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, *available at*, <http://www.britannica.com/event/King-Cotton>; *See also*, "History of Lehman Brothers: Laying the Foundation," Harvard Business School, Baker Library Historical Collections, <http://www.library.hbs.edu/hc/lehman/history.html>.

² *Whitney Plantation*, <http://www.whitneyplantation.com/the-domestic-slave-trade.html>.

Avenue in Washington, D.C. to the boats that moved them to the Port of New Orleans and sometimes to Texas via the Atlantic Ocean. Many slaves were also relocated by the Mississippi River from New Orleans, north to the Red River to Texas to plow, plant, and harvest. Virginia was the largest contributor to the trafficking of Black people for the purposes of slave labor and property interests.³ A continuous chained ribbon of Black people were marched west to Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia), where they joined the slaves being transported by river fleet from Maryland. From there, they were taken down the Ohio River to Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri.

One man particularly involved in the Internal Slave Trade was John W. Anderson. He was a Virginian who had moved from Amelia County, Virginia to Maysville, Kentucky. In the 1800 Kentucky Census he and seven of his siblings appear on tax records in Mason County, Kentucky.⁴ In 1812, Anderson was listed as a member of the Mason County Militia.⁵ Listed along him was his neighbor, Thomas Marshall, who would become Anderson's business associate and who was also first cousin to U. S. Supreme Court Justice, John Marshall.

In 1825, the court records of Adams County, Mississippi (November term) list Anderson as a witness in a slave trial that involved physical conflict with Edward Stone, a publicly known slave dealer, and a male slave while in route to Natchez, Mississippi. Anderson had moved from transporting tobacco from Mississippi to serving as an understudy to the area's most successful slave dealer, Edward Stone.⁶ Stone was from nearby Paris, Kentucky.

John W. Anderson, following in the steps of Edward Stone, seemed to prosper in similar substance and style. In 1825 he purchased a

³ *Id.*

⁴ A significant amount of the material that I used in this essay was secured from an 800-page document that the Museum developed with the assistance of the Natural & Ethical Environmental Solutions. We worked specifically with Jeanne Kreinbrink, M.A., R.P.A.; in her capacity as their principal investigator. This document was developed in order to comply with the requirements of the U.S. Department of the Interior's research standards. Among Your Friends And Acquaintances "The Anderson Slave Pen And The Business of Slavery Cultural Resources Mitigation, at 15MS112/MS549 Mason County, Kentucky (page 31 and 48).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=31840546>; See also J. WINSTON COLEMAN, JR., *SLAVERY TIMES IN KENTUCKY* (1940).

100-acre tract of land at the intersection of the Dover Road (now known as Walton Pike) and Highway 9.⁷ In an 1829 newspaper ad, Anderson was listed as owner of several imported thoroughbred horses, including one named Paragon. The 100-acre property Anderson purchased in 1825 was the site of the John W. Anderson Slave Pen, now on permanent display at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center. The Slave Pen was a human warehouse, a holding place for enslaved people. The pen held slaves, chained to the floors and ceiling, until enough human bodies were purchased to make the journey to Natchez, Mississippi worth it. Anderson purchased people at auctions, county courthouse sales, and from private owners within a 50-mile radius of his home.

According to Adams County, Mississippi court records and Mason County, Kentucky probate records, Anderson would obtain 30 or more enslaved people over a period of weeks, sometimes months, and then take them to Mississippi by flatboat or by foot. In a November 15, 1830 court case regarding “a slave deal gone bad,” James Kempe, a Mason County farmer described seeing Anderson taking many enslaved people to Dover, Kentucky. Dover is a small Ohio River port. The next day, *The Maysville Eagle* posted an advertisement on behalf of John Anderson in an effort to recover 2 slaves John, 20, and Jim, 24, who had escaped during the journey. This advertisement is one source that clearly indicates Anderson’s profession as a slave dealer.

Anderson was able to secure financing for his endeavors from some of the leading citizens of Maysville and the surrounding community. On July 20, 1831 he borrowed \$10,000 from John Marshall. The probate records of Mason County note the amount was in fact repaid. On July 30, 1832, Anderson borrowed \$12,000; and again the debt was paid.⁸ Marshall’s involvement indicates that much of white America approved of the Internal Slave Trade and profited greatly from investing in it.

John Anderson’s Slave Pen was a place of fear that reinforced hopelessness and ripped apart families. In a letter sent to Thomas Marshall on November 24, 1832, Anderson bragged, “A girl I bought in Cynthiana of Weathers cost \$350. I sold her to a young cotton planter for \$1,100.”⁹

⁷ Mason Co., KY Deed Book pg. 30 & 65-66 (on site with the author).

⁸ Among Your Friends And Acquaintances “The Anderson Slave Pen And The Business of Slavery Cultural Resources Mitigation, at 15MS112/MS549 Mason County, Kentucky (pages 56-57).

⁹ Letter to Thomas Marshall, Nov. 24, 1832 Pg. 56, a Xerox copy of the original letter is mounted behind glass on a kiosk outside the Slave Pen; the letter

This letter was included as evidence in a court case filed against Anderson by Thomas Marshall who did not receive the profit he expected on his investment. Mississippi tax records from 1832 and 1833 indicate that Anderson grossed \$38,000 from selling slaves.¹⁰ This was equivalent to \$800,000 in 2000 and over \$1 million in 2016.¹¹

On October 14, 1826, *The Louisville Gazette* reported that slaves had killed Edward Stone, midstream on the Ohio River.¹² Anderson again succeeded in Edward Stone's footsteps. On July 22, 1834 John W. Anderson died from trauma incurred while he was chasing two men who had managed to escape from the Slave Pen. It is said that the slaves present at the Slave Pen at that time could hear the chase and the consequences thereof. Anderson himself did not leave behind many written documents. However he did leave a public trail in *The Maysville Eagle* newspaper and the probate and civil court records. These documents have aided in understanding how whites moved a million blacks from enslavement east of the Appalachians to the snake-infested cotton fields of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. This forced migration enabled America to become the world's leading economic power by the 20th century through slave labor.

The slaves that remained chained in the Pen after Anderson died waited in fear for their fate. John Anderson's daughter, Susan, made the decision that the 32 people should not be sent to Mississippi. Instead, she sold them to residents of Mason County who agreed to keep them in Kentucky. This choice is reflected in the Mason County courthouse

is on file at the State Archives in Frankfort Ky. In the probate records that originated in Mason Co., Maysville KY, after the death of John W. Anderson the owner of the Slave Pen; Among Your Friends And Acquaintances "The Anderson Slave Pen And The Business of Slavery Cultural Resources Mitigation, at 15MS112/MS549 Mason County, Kentucky (page 56).

¹⁰ Among Your Friends And Acquaintances "The Anderson Slave Pen And The Business of Slavery Cultural Resources Mitigation, at 15MS112/MS549 Mason County, Kentucky (pages 58).

¹¹ Among Your Friends And Acquaintances "The Anderson Slave Pen And The Business of Slavery Cultural Resources Mitigation, at 15MS112/MS549 Mason County, Kentucky (page 59).

¹² COLEMAN, *supra* note 6 at 173-176.

records, which chronicled the 1857 auction, where 32 Black people were sold.¹³

¹³ Among Your Friends And Acquaintances “The Anderson Slave Pen And The Business of Slavery Cultural Resources Mitigation, at 15MS112/MS549 Mason County, Kentucky (page 67).

