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## Landless

Amy J. Hirshman  
*West Virginia University*

Madison McCormick  
*West Virginia University*

Riley Bowers  
*West Virginia University*

Bonnie M. Brown  
*West Virginia University*

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# Landless

## AS INVOLUNTARY PARTICIPANTS IN WHITE SETTLER COLONIALISM, ENSLAVED PEOPLE DISPROPORTIONATELY FACED DAILY HARDSHIPS

One of the earliest Monongalia County histories indicates John Evans and his family arrived here with a “family of Negroes” whose names remain unknown to us. As involuntary participants in White settler colonialism, this enslaved family and others like them in western Virginia disproportionately faced daily hardships such as food insecurity, substandard housing, and the intensive toil demanded of them to create large farms from forestland. Labor included removing trees and stumps, planting, tending, and harvesting crops, and general farm tasks, as well as domestic work such as food preparation and preservation, laundry, childcare, and housekeeping. Moreover, like the landowners, they may have found themselves in physical conflict with Indigenous people who were fighting to regain and keep their homeland.

Though John was among the earliest settlers, he was not the first settler, nor was he the only enslaver. In 1782, the Commonwealth of Virginia found that 23 White families in Monongalia County enslaved 81 people. The first U.S. Census from 1790 indicates there were 154 enslaved individuals and 12 free Black persons in Monongalia County, within an overall population of 4,768. Prior to the end of the Civil War, Virginia law required any freed slaves to relocate or risk re-enslavement. In fact, very few free Black farmers lived in the County before or after the Civil War.

From surviving census records, we know that John, his son John Jr. (“Captain Jack”), and his grandson James enslaved people at the Walnut Hill farm. As is typical of the time, these records do not include the individual names of the enslaved. However, over time, wills listed some by name; Porter, Perry, Harriet, Esther, and Nancy were listed in John’s will. John Jr.’s will listed Jerry, Alexander, Willis, and Elizabeth. At least two individuals (unnamed in the records) were enslaved by James, including one individual as late as 1860. The Evans family remained a prominent and prosperous family throughout this time.

The 1820 Census of Monongalia County indicates there were 375 enslaved persons out of an overall population of 11,060 (both counts had more than doubled since 1790). However, by the 1850 County Census totals, that ratio had declined to 176 out of 12,387. In 1850, James D. Watson, enslaving 17 people, was the largest slaveholder in Monongalia County. Ten years later, in 1860, 101 people still remained enslaved in the County.

Surviving Census records indicate that few people of color stayed in Monongalia County after the end of the Civil War. Those who lived in the County worked predominantly as laborers or domestics, though a number of Black individuals owned their own businesses, including shops, restaurants, and a hotel. One such businessman, John Edwards, delivered water to the citizens of Morgantown until the City installed water pipes in 1899. His son, James A. G. Edwards, had a garbage collection business in Morgantown until 1926, when the City took over garbage collection to generate funds for its budget. The Black population in Monongalia County grew after several new mines opened in 1918, around the end of WWI, though the size of the Black citizenry remained disproportionately small. In contrast, descendants of John Evans controlled the farmland until 1942.

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SCHEDULE 2.—Slave Inhabitants in \_\_\_\_\_ in the County of Monongalia State of Virginia, enumerated by me, on the 10 day of July, 1860. A. Wade Ass't Marshal.

NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS	Number of Slaves	DESCRIPTION			NAMES OF SLAVE OWNERS	Number of Slaves	DESCRIPTION		
		Sex	Age	Color			Sex	Age	Color
Elizabeth Bennett	1	F	52	B	James D. Watson	1	F	58	B
Alfred Barker	1	M	48	"	"	1	M	40	"
"	1	M	26	"	"	1	M	35	"
"	1	M	15	"	"	1	M	17	"
"	1	M	8	"	"	1	M	15	"
John Dawson	1	M	30	"	"	1	M	12	"
"	1	M	3	"	"	1	M	10	"
Wallace Morgan	1	M	16	"	"	1	M	9	"
"	1	F	18	"	"	1	F	7	"
William Bear	1	M	13	"	"	1	M	7	"
William T. Bright	1	M	50	"	"	1	M	7	"
"	1	M	30	"	John Black	1	M	23	"
"	1	M	12	"	Charles M. Rice	1	M	41	"
"	1	M	4	"	Henry Hamilton	1	M	50	"
Wm. Pennell	1	M	65	"	Ellen R. Dorsey	1	F	65	"
"	1	M	12	"	Benjamin M. Dorsey	1	M	15	"
William Walcott	1	M	36	"	George M. Dorsey	1	M	40	"
"	1	M	33	"	"	1	M	35	"
"	1	M	20	"	"	1	M	26	"
"	1	F	18	"	"	1	F	18	"
"	1	M	11	"	"	1	M	15	"
"	1	F	8	"	"	1	F	15	"
William Anderson	1	M	50	"	"	1	M	12	"
"	1	M	10	"	"	1	M	8	"
"	1	F	3	"	"	1	F	4	"
James Evans	1	M	30	"	"	1	M	4	"
Crack Evans	1	M	50	"	Charles W. Pennell	1	M	12	"
F. S. Hank	1	M	20	"	"	1	M	10	"
"	1	M	15	"	Abner Hanaway	1	M	23	"
"	1	M	11	"	"	1	M	20	"
"	1	M	9	"	"	1	M	15	"
Henry Watson	1	M	25	"	"	1	M	10	"
"	1	M	22	"	"	1	M	10	"
"	1	M	20	"	George D. Evans	1	M	28	"
William Watson	1	M	23	"	"	1	M	12	"
"	1	M	20	"	"	1	M	12	"
"	1	M	16	"	Ernest P. Pettit	1	M	17	"
"	1	M	2	"	"	1	M	17	"
James D. Watson	1	M	57	"	"	1	M	6	"

No. of males slaves, 33  
No. of female slaves, 47  
Total slaves, 80

No. fugitives, \_\_\_\_\_  
No. male and female, \_\_\_\_\_  
No. male, \_\_\_\_\_  
No. female, \_\_\_\_\_

1860 Slave Schedule listing James Evans as a slave holder. Credit: U.S. Census

Background Image: View of the Evans-Dille farm. Credit: West Virginia and Regional History Center, WVU Libraries



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