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Randolph B. Campbell

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FAMILY HISTORY FROM LOCAL RECORDS: A CASE STUDY FROM NINETEENTH CENTURY TEXAS

by *Randolph B. Campbell*

Family history has become a national enthusiasm during the last decade. The publication of Alex Haley's *Roots* and the subsequent television presentation by the same title were, of course, the most spectacular events attracting public attention to the subject. It should be noted, however, that the upsurge of popular interest coincides with an increase in the attention already being given to family studies by professional historians during the past ten years. Although long neglected as a subject of serious historical investigation, the search for "roots"—traditionally the province of a few "little old lady" genealogists—has now become an accepted way of studying our past. Scholars are investigating all the historical dimensions of the family. At least two texts with the theme "generations" have been published in the past few years, and assignments in family history are becoming common in United States History survey courses.¹

The field of family history has developed to the point that several different approaches to the subject may be discerned. To those who are essentially genealogical in orientation, the story of successive generations is important in itself. It identifies individual members of a family and places them in the past. The genealogy of these individuals may be of little or no general historical significance, but at least they are given the security of having "roots", of knowing where they fit in. Even this improves their appreciation of the past.² At the other extreme are those scholars who are concerned first with the family as a social institution and concentrate on its changing nature and what it reveals about a particular community or society.³ Finally, falling somewhere between those with an essentially genealogical focus and those who concentrate on the family as a social institution, there are historians who investigate individual families. Generally the families studied were especially important historically, but the intent is also to discover what the experiences of family members reveal about the historical eras through which the family lived.⁴ This difference in emphasis should not be exaggerated—these approaches to family history are not mutually exclusive—but the distinction is meaningful. As will be seen below, the research herein presented falls into the third category: histories of particular families.

The new interest in family history has meant increased attention to archival materials such as census, tax, and probate records that have generally been neglected except by genealogists, a few economic historians, and those writing local studies. Family history research of an

Randolph B. Campbell teaches at North Texas State University at Denton. He is Faculty Coordinator of the Texas County Records Inventory Project.

essentially genealogical nature often begins with the recollections of the oldest members of a family and then employs the sources of national, state, and local archives to trace the family through several generations. Historians seeking to study the past by examining the experiences of particular families during various historical periods generally seek to supplement traditional manuscript material with census, tax, and probate data. Students of the family as a social institution must rely on archival sources of social history because otherwise there are simply not enough family manuscript collections to provide an adequate data base. Thus, historians of the family, regardless of their orientation or focus, have begun to work archival records thoroughly and to depend heavily on materials located there.

To this point studies in family history have been concentrated both geographically and chronologically. Virtually all of the major published works in this field deal with the family or particular families in the northeastern United States, primarily New England. And most of these histories also deal with families in the colonial and early national periods of our history.³ It seems ironic that historians of the South, an area famed for its reverence for family, should appear negligent in the pursuit of family history and the use of all available research material to that end. Family history need not be limited to the northeast or to the years before 1800. It may be argued that this situation is due in part to the availability of manuscript materials for that time and place, but family history is not hopelessly restricted by the absence of manuscript collections.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the use of archival materials, almost entirely local and local-level records, in telling the story of an East Texas family from the late antebellum period through the years of Civil War and Reconstruction. The family is that of William J. Blocker of Harrison County. Since the Blocker family left only a few scattered manuscript materials, this study is based almost entirely on archival records such as the United States census, Texas state tax returns, and probate, deed, and marriage records. All these records were taken at the county level and may be used on a county-by-county basis for literally hundreds of similar family history studies. There is, of course, a strong element of genealogy involved in the Blocker family history, but the archival materials available make it much more than the recording of names, births, marriages, and deaths. Indeed, as it is developed, the history of the Blocker family from the 1840s to 1880 is an interesting account in itself and a contribution to understanding historical developments in mid-nineteenth century East Texas as well.

Harrison County, located on the Louisiana border in the East Texas timberlands and destined to become a stronghold of slave-holding

cotton planters in the antebellum period, was created by the Republic of Texas in 1839.⁸ William J. Blocker probably arrived there from Alabama sometime in 1841 and could thus be considered an "old settler" in the county. His place of emigration and time of arrival may be determined with reasonable certainty from two archival sources. The census of 1850 indicates that his last child born outside Texas, a fourteen year old boy named Eugene, was a native of Alabama. The first Texas-born child, a boy named Frank, was nine years old. This does not prove conclusively that Blocker moved directly from Alabama to Texas; the family could have moved several times in the interval between the births of Eugene and Frank, but it at least suggests that he came to Harrison County from Alabama. The census also indicates that Frank, the first Texas-born child, was nine. Since the census was taken after June 1, 1850, Frank had to have been born before June, 1841.⁹ The idea that Blocker arrived in 1841 is also supported by his appearance on the county's tax rolls for the first time in 1842. Therefore, he was probably not there on January 1, 1841, but arrived sometime before January 1 of the next year.¹

Undoubtedly William J. Blocker knew that East Texas was labor-rich and labor-poor and came prepared for that situation. The tax assessments for 1842, made before he acquired any land, reveal that he owned thirteen slaves. These bondsmen were almost certainly brought to Texas by Blocker in 1841.⁶ In March, 1842, the Republic of Texas issued Blocker a land grant certificate for 640 acres in Harrison County. The land was surveyed in the northeastern sector of the county, and Blocker proceeded to build a cotton farm. For the rest of the decade he gradually expanded his landholdings and labor force.¹⁰ By 1850, although he was not among the very wealthiest men in the county, William J. Blocker was clearly a substantial citizen.

Blocker appeared in the free population schedule of the 1850 United States census as a 39 year old native of South Carolina. He and his 36 year old wife, Mary D. Blocker, a native of Virginia, had six children (five boys and a girl), ranging in ages from fifteen to two. As noted above, his second son, Eugene, was born in Alabama, and the third child, Frank was born after the family arrived in Texas. Thus Blocker was born in South Carolina, moved to Alabama, lived there when he began his family, and then migrated to Texas. His pattern of migration was typical of a great many citizens of Harrison County who moved across the deep South during the 1840s and 1850s.¹¹

The slave population census schedule reveals that Blocker owned 21 slaves in 1850 (eight males and thirteen females ranging in age from fifty to one year), and the agricultural schedule indicates that he farmed 640 acres. His farm, which was valued at \$5,200, produced 22 bales

of cotton, 1,300 bushels of corn, and 850 bushels of food crops (mainly sweet potatoes) and supported livestock (nine horses and mules, four oxen, thirteen milk cows, sixty head of cattle, and fifty hogs) valued at \$1,500. Blocker called himself a "farmer" in the census, but his slaveholdings and the size of his farm and its products were well above average for the county. He might justifiably have termed himself a "planter."¹²

State tax records for 1850 indicate that William J. Blocker owned even more property than was reported in the census. His total landholdings came to 1,807 acres valued at \$4,834. County deed records explain the discrepancy between census and tax returns. In 1849, Blocker had purchased a tract of 1,167 acres near but not adjoining his 640 acre farm. The census taker recorded only the farm on which the family lived, and the additional acreage went unreported. In addition to his two tracts of land, Blocker was assessed in 1850 on his 21 slaves (\$6,721), seven horses (\$300), fifty head of cattle (\$305), and \$162 worth of miscellaneous personal property for a total tax evaluation of \$12,322.¹³

The Blocker family continued to prosper and to grow through most of the decade of the 1850s. Another son, Vinkler H., was born in 1852, and the children apparently enjoyed above average opportunities due to the family's financial position. All of the school-aged Blocker children attended school during the decade—a situation not typical of Harrison County families.¹⁴ By 1855 Blocker had increased his slaveholding to 28 (valued at \$12,000), and the number of horses and cattle on his farm had grown significantly. He still held 1,807 acres of land, but its tax evaluation had risen to \$5,534. The increase in property, coupled with a rise in values, pushed the assessed value of Blocker's property up to \$19,099, an increase of 55 percent since 1850.¹⁵ Expansion continued for several years. Harrison County deed records reveal that on the same day in November, 1856 Blocker paid \$9,600 for a new 1,280 acre tract and sold 640 acres (part of the new tract and part of the land he already owned) for \$4,500.¹⁶ The acquisition of more land may be explained in several ways. Blocker may have been simply protecting himself against the day his lands wore out. His expanding slave force may have enabled him to farm more land, or perhaps he was concerned with providing an inheritance for his six sons.

As the last antebellum decade came to a close, William J. Blocker was clearly a member of Harrison County's planter class. He owned more than 2,000 acres and held a labor force of more than thirty slaves. Apparently, and not surprisingly, he was, to use a worn cliché, a "pillar of the community." The County Commissioner's Court regularly appointed him as a supervisor of public road upkeep in the area of his

farm. The deed records show that he served as a trustee for the Methodist Church in the county from 1847 through the 1850s.¹⁷ Then, on June 13, 1859, while still in his late forties, William J. Blocker died.¹⁸

Blocker did not die suddenly. The records of his estate show that he was visited virtually every day from early April to June 13 by at least one and sometimes by two doctors. On two occasions the family even called in a doctor from Caddo Parish in Louisiana. Thus Blocker suffered a lengthy (and expensive) illness, but he died without leaving a will. And since he left a wife and seven children, a large amount of property, and many unsettled debts, his estate went into probate. In July, 1859, the County Court appointed Mary D. Blocker administratrix of the estate and ordered an inventory and appraisal of Blocker's real and personal property. This inventory, entered as part of the probate record in August, 1859, shows that Blocker left his heirs a 1,280 acre homestead valued at \$10,240, 37 slaves (seventeen men and boys, fifteen women and girls, and five infants) valued at 531,050, and livestock worth \$2,635. There was also the separate 1,167 acre tract of land and farm equipment of considerable value.¹⁹

William J. Blocker was a relatively wealthy man in his community, but the probate records reveal, perhaps appropriately for a wealthy man, that he also left his heirs a number of sizable debts. There were, for example, the doctors' bills amounting to more than \$700. Debts arising from the operation of the plantation, however, were by far the most important. Blocker handled most of his business affairs through a New Orleans factor and commission merchant firm known as Brander and Hubbard. For a 2½ percent commission plus charges for freight, handling, and insurance, Brander and Hubbard sold Blocker's cotton crop and filled his orders for plantation supplies. They also honored drafts drawn on his account. For example, the Blockers paid William N. Head, the doctor from Caddo Parish in Louisiana, with a draft for \$307 drawn on their account with Brander and Hubbard. Apparently, the draft was presented and paid nearly a year after Blocker's death. Another interesting example of the many services provided by the factorage firm is shown by the case of Blocker's second son, Eugene, who attended medical school at Tulane University in the spring of 1860. As a student living in New Orleans, he drew on the family's account with Brander and Hubbard to meet his expenses. A business arrangement of this sort naturally involved a fluctuating balance which frequently ran against the planter. Once a farmer became indebted, for whatever reason—purchase of slaves, a poor crop, etc.—a single year's cotton crop was often not large enough to pay off the debt, meet all current expenses, and throw the balance in his favor. In Blocker's case, it is apparent that the balance had been running against him for some time.²⁰

In April, 1859, a few months before his death, William J. Blocker was informed by Brander and Hubbard that he owed them \$4,954.48 in cash and \$912.12 in drafts maturing during 1860. To cover the cash debt, they asked him to sign two new notes due in early 1860 and bearing interest at 8 percent. This step brought his total indebtedness to \$6,267.52. Brander and Hubbard pointed out that this amount was large in proportion to Blocker's annual crop, but continued: "as you are an old friend and customer we are willing to accommodate you more freely than we would when guided entirely by the amount of crop." Later in 1859 the factors informed William P. Blocker, the family's eldest son who handled most of the correspondence for his mother, that, in light of their long association with his father, they would be willing to continue the business relationship on the usual terms. They felt, however, that the estate's debt was too large and advised selling the 1,167 acre tract to reduce the burden. Shortly thereafter the family shipped 91 bales of cotton, almost the entire 1859 crop, to New Orleans and bought \$486.46 worth of supplies for 1860. Brander and Hubbard sold the cotton in March, 1860 for \$4,249.46, and after deducting charges and commissions totaling \$527.87 (12.4 percent of the total) credited the Blockers with \$3,721.59. In May, 1860, however, the factors notified William P. Blocker that the estate's debt remained a little more than \$6,000 and that the interest rate for 1860-1861 would be 10 percent. The debt had not increased since early 1859, but apparently previous obligations and current expenses prevented any reduction. Brander and Hubbard again urged the Blockers to sell their extra land and reduce the debt.¹¹

Brander and Hubbard may have been concerned about the Blocker's debt, but from the family's point of view \$6,000 was a small amount compared to the value of the whole estate. The census of 1860 placed the value of their 1,280 acre farm at \$15,722 and the 37 slaves and other personal property were worth another \$33,000. Even for tax purposes, the Blockers' property was assessed at \$31,605 in 1860, more than five times the amount of their debt.¹² Thus the family apparently felt financially secure and saw little need to reduce its standard of living. Eugene attended Tulane in 1860; Brander and Hubbard reported on March 2 that they had given him \$220 in the past few months. Jessie, the family's daughter, spent three months at Mansfield Female College in nearby Mansfield, Louisiana, in late 1859-early 1860. Her tuition and fees cost only \$47.49, but her bill at the store operated by J. O. Parker, Sr. in Mansfield came to \$115.22. Five months of study by Albert, Charles, and Vinkler under the direction of Dr. A. R. Miller cost the estate \$60. The bill for plantation supplies bought from Brander and Hubbard in February, 1860 including molasses, sugar, coffee, rice, rope, bagging, and bales of cloth for slaves'

clothing came to \$486.46. The family's accounts for 1860 with T. F. Swanson and G. G. Gregg, local Harrison County merchants, came to \$137.69 and \$304.59 respectively.²³ It cannot be proven that the family had not reduced its standard of living, but this partial listing of expenditures does not suggest an austerity program.

The business relationship with Brander and Hubbard continued at least until the outbreak of the Civil War. In early 1861, the Blockers shipped 80 bales of cotton which netted \$3,181.88. They did not, in spite of constant urging, sell their extra land, and in May, 1861 when the factorage firm reorganized as Brander, Chambliss, & Co., the balance against the estate was \$5,494.35. The merchants asked that for the purpose of "closing this balance and extending it over to the next crop" Mrs. Blocker sign a note for \$6,138.93 payable in February, 1862. The effective interest rate included in the amount of this note was 12 percent—a "reasonable" rate at that time the merchants insisted. Everyone was so interested in the war, they complained, "that very little attention is given to anything else." Mrs. Blocker refused to sign the note at 12 percent and informed Brander, Chambliss, & Co. that she would sign only if the interest rate was set at 8 percent. They agreed to her demand and sent her a new note for \$5,886.80, protesting at the same time that their request for 12 percent was perfectly reasonable and honorable. They also informed her that New Orleans was blockaded and suggested that in wartime she grow "more corn and less cotton." The Blockers' cotton crop was reduced as the war went on, and apparently they did not deal any further with Brander, Chambliss, & Co. The final accounting of their estate notes that the \$5,886.80 note given in 1862 was paid, but there is no indication of any other business with the firm after this date.²⁴

After William J. Blocker died in 1859, his children continued to enjoy the benefits of his sizable estate. The five youngest Blocker children all attended school for at least a few months in 1859-1860. As noted above, Jessie entered Mansfield Female College in late 1859. Judging by the list of books she purchased, it seems that she studied Latin, algebra, and philosophy in addition to such "female" subjects as piano and French. The three youngest sons, Albert, Charles, and Vinkler, were not recorded in the 1860 census, probably because they were away from home at school.²⁵ The census of 1860 indicates that Frank attended school too, but there is no evidence of exactly where or when. William P. Blocker, the eldest son, married in late 1859 or early 1860 and brought his wife to live with the family. According to the 1860 census, his wife was a 21 year old native of Alabama. The second son, Eugene, who was 23 in 1860, apparently had completed his medical studies at Tulane early in 1860. He lived at home and listed his occupation as "doctor." In May, 1861, he married Fannie

A. Ware, the daughter of another slaveholding planter family in the county.²⁶

When the Civil War came in 1861, two of the Blockers, Frank who was nineteen and Albert who was sixteen, volunteered almost immediately. Frank became a 3rd sergeant, and Albert was the bugler for a cavalry company called the "Texas Hunters". They were sent to the Kansas-Oklahoma border in June, 1861 as Company A of the Third Texas Cavalry. Their unit fought in several relatively important battles in the Trans-Mississippi area including the Battle of Pea Ridge. Frank died of pneumonia in May, 1862, and when the Confederacy passed a conscription act later that year, Albert was discharged because he was under age for the draft. Dr. Eugene Blocker enlisted in the same company as an assistant surgeon in March, 1862 and served for at least one year in that capacity.²⁷ Thus, although the Blockers did their part to support the Confederacy, the war was not a glorious affair for them.

The end of the Civil War marked a great financial loss for the Blocker estate simply because it marked the end of slavery. They owned 43 slaves by 1864, and the value of these bondsmen (\$21,500) constituted 60 percent of their \$35,643 total assessment for tax purposes that year. Then, in 1865 after emancipation, their assessment fell dramatically to \$8,338.²⁸ The annual accounting of the estate's affairs in 1866 referred simply to "thirty-two negroes lost by emancipation," but this brief remark noted a basic change in the Blockers' world. Their 1865 cotton crop, which may have been produced in part by slave labor, amounted to 42 bales. This was less than half the size of their 1860 crop, although there was the consolation that it sold at prices as high as 42 cents per pound. By 1867, their crop had declined to 29 bales, and the price per pound was roughly 25 cents.²⁹

Finally in late 1868, the long period of administration ended for the Blocker estate and the property was divided among Mrs. Blocker and five children. She received 640 acres of land and enough livestock and farm equipment to equal half of the estate. The children received roughly equal shares of the remaining land and property. No one was given less than 320 acres of land. Jessie, William J. Blocker's only daughter, was not included in this partition of the estate, and although there is no proof in local records, it is probable that she was deceased.³⁰

By the late 1860s when the estate was divided, the William J. Blocker family was well into the process of breaking up into a number of Blocker households. William and Eugene had been married for years. In April, 1868, Albert Blocker married Eliza Jane Webster, the daughter of a prominent planter and former large slaveholder.³¹ As the Blocker children formed their own families, they became more

dispersed and more difficult to locate fully in local records. The census of 1870, which seems to have been generally deficient, showed only one Blocker household. It was headed by Mrs. Blocker and included 17 year old Vinkler H. Blocker and 25 year old Albert Blocker with his wife and a one year old son named William. Mrs. Blocker reported a 960 acre farm valued at \$3,840 that produced 1,000 bushels of corn and 22 bales of cotton. Albert Blocker owned a 1,040 acre farm worth \$3,220 and produced 1,000 bushels of corn and 54 bales of cotton. The production of 76 bales of cotton suggests that the Blockers had found at least a reasonably satisfactory substitute for slave labor in producing their cash crop. Charles M. Blocker, who was now 21, lived with two other young men in a separate household. His occupation was listed as "physician" so it may be assumed that he had joined his brother Eugene in the medical profession. The two older married brothers, William and Eugene, are not listed in the census, although William appears in the tax records for 1870.³²

At mid-decade of the 1870s all members of the family appeared in the tax records as property holders. All except Charles M. Blocker owned at least as much land (320 acres) as they had received when the estate was divided in 1868. Charles owned only a horse. In the census of 1880, three of the sons, William, Eugene, and Albert appeared. Apparently the other two sons, Charles and Vinkler H. Blocker, had died or moved from the county. They do not appear in this census or in the 1880 tax records either.³³ Of the three who remained in Harrison, a good deal may be told.

William P. Blocker and his wife were childless. He listed a dual occupation—merchant and farmer—and reported owning a farm of 245 acres valued at \$1,200. His farming operation was small, however, with only five improved acres and no cotton production. William P. Blocker may not have been as wealthy as his father had been in the 1850s, but it is clear that he was a man of some prominence in the community. In November, 1878, he was elected to the Commissioner's Court, the chief governing body of the county. And he won re-election in November, 1880. His involvement in the election of 1878 was of more than ordinary importance because that contest marked the conservative overthrow of so-called "radical" government in Harrison County as the Reconstruction era drew to a close.³⁴

Eugene Blocker, a doctor and farmer by occupation, lived on a farm of 886 acres with his wife and family of three boys and four girls. Albert Blocker and his wife had five children by this time, and they farmed 405 acres. Both Eugene and Albert continued to grow cotton, but their crops (eleven and eighteen bales respectively) were small compared to those of *antebellum* times. Eugene paid \$400 and Albert paid \$300 in wages to farm labor, although Eugene's two older sons aged

eighteen and fourteen were already contributing to their farm's labor supply. Mrs. Mary D. Blocker, now 66 years old and a grandmother many times over, lived with Albert's family.³³

This story of the Blockers of Harrison County from the 1840s to 1880 was written deliberately without the benefit of family recollections, oral traditions, or any available family archives such as a Bible containing births and deaths. These sources would have filled in holes and added important detail to the story. For example, William J. Blocker's Bible, located after most of the investigation was complete, revealed that he and Mary Blocker had fourteen children rather than the seven who could be identified from the census. Seven of the children, including a daughter born in 1859 only months before Blocker's death, died before reaching the age of seven. This heavy incidence of child mortality, which not unusual for the period, must have been an emotion-filled part of the family's experience. The family Bible also reveals that Frank's age, one of the bases for determining the date of arrival in Texas, was reported incorrectly in the census of 1850. He was eight rather than nine years old in 1850. The census of 1860, incidentally, gave Frank's age correctly.³⁴ Thus census returns, tax records, and the like are not flawless or definitive sources. Nevertheless, it should be clear that much family history can be documented from records available at the local or county level.

Finally, what does this case study suggest about the values of researching family history from local records? From the genealogical point of view, the investigation revealed a great deal—places of birth, education, marriages, occupations, economic status—about the members of the Blocker family who survived childhood. A descendant of the Blockers reading this story would be much more knowledgeable about his "roots" in East Texas than if he relied solely on family and oral traditions. From the historical viewpoint, the story provides a good example of the building of a Texas cotton plantation on the basis of slave labor. William J. Blocker arrived in Harrison County with only about a dozen slaves. By the end of the antebellum period he farmed more than 1,000 acres and produced approximately 100 bales of cotton annually with a labor force that had increased 300 percent since his arrival in Texas. Although Blocker died at a relatively young age, his slave-cotton operation continued to support his family as when he lived, at least until the war and emancipation. The Blockers' correspondence with Brander and Hubbard in New Orleans provided an outstanding example of the business relationship between an East Texas country planter and his factor in the city. The status of the Blocker sons in 1880 suggests that at least some of the well-to-do planter families had a great deal of "staying power" through the end of slavery and the supposed evils of Reconstruction.

Historians of the mid-nineteenth century South would not necessarily be surprised at any of these points demonstrated by the Blocker family's experiences. There are excellent general studies of the factorage system, for example.³⁷ But this does not mean that such family histories are without value. The examples of plantation development, business arrangements, etc., are more vivid and better remembered because they are associated with the experiences of one particular family. Thus, in much the same way that biography, the study of a single life, "humanizes" history, the study of a single family brings the past to life. Furthermore, while it cannot make the "inarticulate" speak, family history from local archives enables historians to learn something of the masses of Americans who did not leave diaries, memoirs, or manuscript collections and are therefore generally neglected in historical research. For those who teach history and direct students in their first research and writing, local records are probably the most readily available source across the United States. Any number of interesting and instructive projects may be developed on the basis of these materials. Family history from local records seems a worthwhile undertaking for the historian as both scholar and teacher. And, as this case study has demonstrated, it need not be limited to the northeastern United States or to the colonial and early national periods or to only those families for which manuscript collections are available.

NOTES

¹The popular impact of *Roots* is documented in many places. See, for example, "Why 'Roots' Hit Home," *Time*, February 14, 1977, 68-77. For a convenient, although already somewhat dated, survey of work in family history and the problems and trends involved, see David J. Russo, *Families and Communities: A New View of American History* (Nashville, 1974), 195-232. Rising interest in family history is also attested to by the appearance of the *Journal of Family History* in 1976 and the development of research facilities such as the Family and Community History Center at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The textbooks include Jim Watts and Allen F. Davis, *Generations: Your Family in Modern American History* (New York, 1974) and John G. Clark, et al., *Three Generations in Twentieth Century America: Family, Community, and Nation* (Homewood, Illinois, 1977).

²This essentially genealogical approach is emphasized by those who use family history as a teaching device. See the brief discussion in Anne M. Boylan, "Family History Questionnaires: Two Examples," *The History Teacher*, X (February, 1977), 211-219.

³Frequently cited examples of this approach to family history include John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth, Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970) and Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970). For a summary of recent historical studies of the family as a social institution, see Maris A. Vinovskis, "From Household Size to the Life Course: Some Observations on Recent Trends in Family History," *American Behavioral Scientist*, XXI (November/December, 1977), 263-288. The importance of the family in black history is well-recognized too. See Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976).

⁴Examples of this approach include John J. Waters, Jr., *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968) and Randolph Shipley Klein, *Portrait of an Early American Family: The Shippens of Pennsylvania Across Five Generations* (Philadelphia, 1975).

⁵There are a good many exceptions to these generalizations. See, for a recent example, Nicholas Perkins Hardeman, *Wilderness Calling: The Hardeman Family in the American Westward Movement, 1750-1900* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1977). Nevertheless, it seems clear that students of family history have concentrated on the northeastern United States during the colonial and early national periods.

⁶General descriptive information on Harrison County is found in J. C. Armstrong, "History of Harrison County, Texas, 1839-1880," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Colorado, 1930), *passim*.

⁷Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants. The population schedules of the United States Censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 are available on microfilm from the National Archives in Washington. The best discussion of determining migration patterns and dates from census data is found in Barnes F. Lathrop, *Migration into East Texas, 1850-1860: A Study from the United States Census* (Austin, 1949), 23-33.

⁸Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1840-1842 in Records of the Comptroller of Public Accounts, Ad Valorem Tax Division, County Real and Personal Property Tax Rolls, 1836-1880. Archives Division, Texas State Library, Austin. Herein-

after these records will be cited as Harrison County Tax Rolls with the appropriate year.

⁹Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1842.

¹⁰Survey Records, County Clerk's Office, Harrison County courthouse, Marshall, Texas. The size of Blocker's landholdings and labor force as of January 1 of any year after 1842 is available from the tax rolls. Some but not all of his land transactions may be determined from Deed Records in the County Clerk's Office. The problem with the Deed Records is that land transactions did not have to be recorded, and therefore the record is incomplete.

¹¹Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants. Lathrop, *Migration into East Texas*, 35, although he does not deal specifically with Harrison County, reveals a heavy flow of migrants from Alabama into the East Texas area during the antebellum years.

¹²Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants; Schedule 4—Productions of Agriculture. Schedule 4 of the United States Censuses of 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 is available on microfilm from the Archives Division of the Texas State Library in Austin. The statement that Blocker was an "above average" size farmer in 1850 is based on placing him in the context of a sample of 500 households that I have drawn from the manuscript census of 1850 for the purpose of a general study of Harrison County in this era. For example, among farmers who worked land of their own, the average cash value of farm was \$2,022 and the mean cotton crop was nine bales.

¹³Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1850. Harrison County Deed Records, County Clerk's Office, Harrison County courthouse, Marshall, Texas.

¹⁴Seventh Census, 1850, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants; and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants, both indicate that the Blocker children had attended school within the past twelve months. According to my sample of 500 families drawn from the census of 1850, only one-half of the families with children aged five to seventeen had any of those children in school. This situation was little changed in 1860. The Blocker children's attendance at school is borne out by receipts for tuition payments in the William J. Blocker manuscript probate papers located in the County Clerk's Office, Harrison County courthouse, Marshall, Texas. Hereinafter these probate materials will be cited as Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

¹⁵Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1855.

¹⁶Harrison County Deed Records.

¹⁷By 1859, Blocker owned 35 slaves. Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1859. Harrison County Commissioners Court Minutes, 1850-1859 in County Clerk's Office, Harrison County courthouse, Marshall, Texas. Harrison County Deed Records.

¹⁸The date of death may be fixed from the application by Blocker's widow for letters of administration. Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

¹⁹Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

²⁰*Ibid.* For the best account of the cotton factorage system, see Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925* (Lexington, Ky., 1968). Chapter three discusses the credit system and the problems of antebellum planters with debts.

¹¹Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

¹²Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Schedule 2—Slave Inhabitants and Schedule 4—Productions of Agriculture; Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1860.

¹³Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

¹⁴Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker. The cotton crop for 1862 was 92 bales. Perhaps at wartime prices, this helped pay much of the debt due in New Orleans. Brander and Hubbard reorganized as Brander, Chambliss, & Co. on March 31, 1861. New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, April 17, 1861.

¹⁵Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

¹⁶Eighth Census, 1860, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants. Harrison County Marriage Records, County Clerk's Office, Harrison County courthouse, Marshall, Texas. Apparently William P. Blocker was not married in Harrison County. His marriage was not recorded there.

¹⁷The Blockers' service to the Confederacy is explained in Max S. Lale, ed., "The Boy-Bugler of the Third Texas Cavalry: The A. B. Blocker Narrative," *Military History of Texas and the Southwest*, XIV (undated), 71-82, 147-167, 215-227; XV (undated), 21-34. Albert, who was in fact sixteen, claimed to be seventeen when he volunteered. Frank Blocker's death and Albert Blocker's discharge were reported in the Marshall *Texas Republican* on September 6, 1862. For a brief account of the Third Texas Cavalry's role in the war in 1861-1862, see Marcus J. Wright, compiler, and Harold B. Simpson, editor, *Texas in the War, 1861-1865* (Hillsboro, Texas, 1965), 79, 85-86, 112.

¹⁸Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1864 and 1865.

¹⁹Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker. There is an unexplained discrepancy between the 43 slaves reported for tax purposes in 1864 and the reference to 32 negroes lost by emancipation.

²⁰Harrison County Probate Papers, Estate of William J. Blocker.

²¹Harrison County Marriage Records.

²²Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Schedule 1—Free Inhabitants and Schedule 4—Productions of Agriculture; Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1870.

²³Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Schedule 1—Population Schedule; Harrison County Tax Rolls, 1876, 1880.

²⁴Tenth Census, 1880, Schedule 1—Population Schedule and Schedule 4—Productions of Agriculture; Harrison County Commissioner's Court Minutes, November, 1878 and November, 1880.

²⁵Tenth Census, 1880, Schedule 1 and Schedule 4.

²⁶William J. Blocker Family Bible, Property of Mrs. Robert M. Claypool, Bellaire, Texas.

²⁷Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers*.