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## **Slaveholding in Antebellum Augusta and Richmond County, Georgia**

**E**XISTING STUDIES OF AUGUSTA and Richmond County, Georgia are concerned primarily with white society, with limited attention focused on slavery in the state's second oldest city and one of Georgia's original counties. Writing in his *The Story of Augusta* in 1980, however, Edward Cashin observed that "Black Augustans as well as white have a heritage which deserves to be understood and passed along."<sup>1</sup> A study of slaveholding in Augusta and Richmond County has much to add to an understanding of the black and white heritage of the city and county.

Richmond was one of Georgia's original eight counties. It was created in 1733 and organized as St. Paul's Parish in 1758. Located in east Georgia, the county was named to honor Charles Lennox who was the third Duke of Richmond. In terms of slave population, Richmond ranked third among Georgia's nine counties in 1790. By 1860, the slave population made Richmond number nine among Georgia's 132 counties.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Richmond County was one of Georgia's largest slaveholding counties throughout the slavery era.

Augusta was established in 1735 as the second settlement in the colony of Georgia. Second to Savannah, Augusta was incorporated as a town in 1789 and as a city in 1798. The town was named for Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha. In terms of slave population, Augusta ranked second among Georgia's twenty cities and towns reported in the 1850 federal census. Ten years later, Augusta was still second only to Savannah in terms of the total slave population.<sup>3</sup>

This study focuses on economic and social features of slaveholding in one of Georgia's oldest cities and counties, emphasizing the years between 1733 and 1860. Therefore, attention is devoted to the rural and urban dimensions of slaveholding in a single county in England's thirteenth colony and the state of Georgia. Richmond County's slave population grew steadily from 1800 until its demise with the close of the Civil War. On the other hand, during the 1850s Augusta showed a weakening in her slave population and a drastic decline was witnessed by 1860. Nevertheless, the city of Augusta and county of Richmond witnessed a steady increase of slave ownership throughout the slavery era.

Writing recently on the subject of slavery in colonial Georgia, Betty Wood observed that "the first fifteen years of Georgia history constituted a unique episode in the annals of colonial America because this was the only British colony in which a sustained attempt was made to prohibit black slavery."<sup>4</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Cashin, *The Story of Augusta* (Augusta, Ga.: County Board of Education, 1980), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth K. Krakow, *Georgia Place-Names* (Macon, Ga., 1975), p. 191. The other seven counties were Wilkes, Burke, Chatham, Liberty, Glynn, Camden, and Effingham; see Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789* (Athens, Ga., 1958), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Krakow, *Georgia Place-Names*, p. 10; Cashin, *Story of Augusta*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens, 1984), p. 1.

reality, it was not until almost three years after twenty-one Trustees were issued a charter for the colony by George II of England in November 1732 before slavery was legally outlawed in Georgia.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the fifteen-year period, 1735-1750, when slavery was prohibited by law in Georgia, black slaveholding existed in fact in Augusta and Richmond County.

The prohibition against slaveholding in colonial Georgia was extensively disregarded by South Carolina and Augusta Indian traders and farmers. Cashin correctly notes, "There is little doubt that the farming at Augusta [during the late 1730s and early 1740s] was done by Negro slaves hired from [South] Carolina masters or belonging to traders who had crossed" the Savannah River into Augusta. In 1741, Thomas Causton, first bailiff of the colony, wrote that Augustans "have little regard to the act against Negroes or other laws and do all their planting by slaves."<sup>6</sup> It appears, then, that the first black slaves in Augusta and Richmond County were either owned or hired by fur traders and farmers.

By 1740, the slave population of Augusta was estimated by a group of petitioners arguing for the removal of the ban on slave ownership in Georgia to be about a hundred. Contending that the use of black slaves was one of the reasons for the settlement's prosperity, Patrick Tailfar, who arrived in Augusta in 1734, and others wrote, "The settlers there [Augusta] are indulged in and connived at the use of Negroes, by whom they execute all the laborious part of culture; and the fact is undoubted and certain, that upwards of eighty Negroes are now in the settlements belonging to that place."<sup>7</sup> In November 1740, a group of ex-Georgians writing from Charleston reported to the Trustees that there were one hundred slaves in Augusta.<sup>8</sup> Thus, as Causton informed the Trustees in February 1741, Augusta had "little regard to the act against Negroes . . ."<sup>9</sup>

Among the largest slaveholders in colonial Augusta and Richmond County were fur traders who were large landowners as well. The area's earliest fur traders included Edward Barnard, George Galphin and Lachlan McGillivray. By 1768, Barnard owned 56 slaves and 1,850 acres of land, increasing his slaveholding from seven in 1759. Galphin owned 40 slaves and 300 acres of land in 1759. In 1760, McGillivray possessed 49 slaves and 1,300 acres of land.<sup>10</sup> The lives of these slaveholders provide insights into an era in the town and county's history. By the time the Trustees would legalize slavery in Georgia, the economy of Augusta and Richmond County was changing from fur trading to agriculture.

<sup>5</sup> For the June 24, 1735 law prohibiting slavery in Georgia, see Allen D. Candler, ed., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, 26 vols. (Atlanta, 1904-1916), I, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Cashin, *Story of Augusta*, 11; Thomas Causton to the Trustees, February 19, 1741, in Mills Lane, ed., *General Oglethorpe's Georgia: Colonial Letters, 1733-1743*, 2 vols. (Savannah, 1975), II, p. 557. See also Berry Fleming, comp., *Autobiography of A Colony: The First Half-Century of Augusta, Georgia* (Athens, 1957), p. 26; Kenneth Coleman, *Colonial Georgia: A History* (New York, 1976), p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> Clarence L. Ver Steeg, ed., *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia by Pat[rick] Tailfar and Others, with comments by the Earl of Egmont* (Athens, 1960), p. 153.

<sup>8</sup> Causton to the Trustees, February 19, 1741, in Lane, ed., *General Oglethorpe's Georgia*, II, p. 557.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Anderson and Others to the Trustees, November 1740, *ibid.*, p. 494.

<sup>10</sup> Cashin, "Edward Barnard," in Kenneth Coleman and Stephen Gurr, eds., *Dictionary of Georgia Biography*, 2 vols. (Athens, 1982), I, p. 57; Fleming, comp., *Autobiography of A Colony*, pp. 183, 185.

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Throughout the 1750s and 1760s, St. Paul's Parish had large slaveholders. Between 1755 and 1770, fifteen slaveholders and landowners in the Parish possessed 392 slaves and 10,811 acres of land. These wealthy property holders included Dr. Peter Welch, who owned one slave and 300 acres of land and Governor James Wright, who owned 165 slaves and 3,500 acres of land.<sup>11</sup> This number of slaveholders and landowners averaged 26 slaves and more than 720 acres of land.

Augusta and Richmond County also were endowed by nature with the Savannah River. As Harold E. Davis notes, "The most useful stream in Georgia [during the colonial period] was the Savannah River, which was navigable from the [Atlantic] ocean at Tybee up to Augusta and a little beyond." Another historian observes, "The Savannah River determined the early destiny of Augusta." Davis also found that:

Throughout Georgia's first two decades, boats with skins from the Indian trade departed regularly from Augusta and passed down the river without stopping at Savannah. They moved out along the coast and up to Charleston with their cargoes.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, the Savannah was significant for each stage of Augusta and Richmond County's economic growth. The major periods of development were those of fur trading, tobacco production, Age of Cotton, and the advent of industries. Slaves, too, were inseparably linked to all of these developments. During the antebellum era, Augusta was a commercial center for not only Richmond County, but as well for surrounding counties in Georgia and South Carolina.

"In colonial Augusta, as in Charles Town," Cashin writes, "slaves were an investment and plantations were run for profit by planters who preferred to live in town."<sup>13</sup> This is an accurate description of Augusta throughout the antebellum period as well.

TABLE 1  
GROWTH OF POPULATION OF RICHMOND COUNTY BY  
RACE AND CONDITION FROM 1790 TO 1860

Census Year	White	%	Free Black	%	Slave	%	Aggregate
1790	7,162	63	39	1	4,116	36	11,317
1800	2,728	50	54	1	2,693	49	5,475
1810	2,681	43	72	1	3,436	56	6,189
1820	3,667	42	140	2	4,831	56	8,638
1830	5,163	44	235	2	6,246	54	11,644
1840	5,650	47	186	2	6,096	51	11,932
1850	8,153	50	281	2	7,812	48	16,246
1860	12,105	58	490	2	8,389	40	20,984

SOURCE: *Ninth Census of the United States: Statistics of Population, 1870* (Washington, D.C., 1872), pp. 20-22.

<sup>11</sup> Fleming, comp., *Autobiography of A Colony*, pp. 181-88.

<sup>12</sup> Harold E. Davis, *The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1733-1776* (Chapel Hill, 1976), pp. 45, 52; Lee Ann Caldwell-Swann, "Old Towne Augusta," *Georgia Journal*, 2 (June/July 1982): 29.

<sup>13</sup> Cashin, *Story of Augusta*, p. 63.

The data in Table 1 show trends of the population of Richmond County by race and condition from the first to the eighth federal census. The data reveal that between 1790 and 1800 there was a drastic decrease of the white and slave population. During that decade all of Columbia County and parts of Jefferson and Warren Counties were carved from Richmond.<sup>14</sup> Richmond's white population witnessed a steady increase between 1810 and 1860. Excepting the federal census year 1840, the county's slave population increased steadily between 1800 and 1860. While the free black percent of the county's population had stabilized by 1820, the percent of the slave population gradually declined between 1820 and 1860.

A closer analysis of the data in Table 1 also reveals that the slave population did not grow at the rate that the white did during the three decades between 1830 and 1860. A number of factors contributed to the difference in the rate of growth of the white and slave population. During that period, Augusta and Richmond County witnessed an influx of white foreigners, especially Irish and French. Virginians and South Carolinans also continued to settle in the port area in large numbers.

Accurate demographic data for Augusta before 1800 are not available. Between 1800 and 1860, as the data in Table 2 suggest, the white and slave population peaked in 1852. For the six decades from 1800 to 1860, the slave population of the city declined from 46 percent to 29 percent of the total population. As the data in Table 2 indicate, the decade of 1850 witnessed the greatest decline in the slave population: from 46 percent to 29 percent of the total population of the city. What accounts for this decline of Richmond County's urban slave population during the last decade of the slavery era? The figures do not speak for themselves.

TABLE 2  
POPULATION GROWTH OF AUGUSTA  
FROM 1800 TO 1860

Census Year	White	%	Free Black	%	Slave	%	Aggregate
1800	1,159	.52	39	.02	1,017	.46	2,215
1810	1,109	.44	46	.02	1,321	.53	2,476
1841	3,205	.51	149	.02	2,900	.46	6,254
1845	3,948	.53	440	.05	3,114	.42	7,502
1852	5,256	.51	243	.02	4,718	.46	10,217
1860	8,444	.68	386	.03	3,663	.29	12,493

SOURCE: Cashin, *Story of Augusta*, p. 309; *The Augusta Directory and City Advertiser for 1841* (Augusta, 1841), p. 32; George White, *Statistics of the State of Georgia* (Savannah, 1849), p. 501; *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C., 1853), p. 366; *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census . . .* (Washington, D.C., 1864), p. 74. According to the 1850 federal census report, the population of Augusta cannot be defined upon the schedules. The figures reported in the 1850 federal census were taken from an 1852 population count by local authorities. The percentage calculations are those of the author.

<sup>14</sup> Krakow, *Georgia Place-Names*, pp. 51, 119, 252.

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A number of scholars have attempted to explain the source of the decline of urban slavery in the antebellum South, and their theses have been quite varied. Richard C. Wade, in *Slavery in the Cities*, advanced the thesis that "wherever it touched urban conditions [slavery] was in deep trouble . . ." According to Wade, "the cause of slavery's difficulty in the city was the nature of urban society itself." Wade argued that the nature of the urban environment caused a breakdown of the master and slave relationship.<sup>15</sup> In his study on slave hiring, Clement Eaton reached a conclusion which was supportive of Wade's observations. Eaton wrote that:

In the towns and cities, the growing practice of obtaining the service of slave labor by hire instead of an archaic system. . . . Plantation Negroes who were sent to the cities and towns to be hired lost much of their submissiveness and became more sophisticated in the milieu of the city ways.<sup>16</sup>

Claudia Dale Goldin has quite properly and successfully challenged these explanations.<sup>17</sup> In her insightful work, Goldin found that the urban slave population fluctuated in magnitude because the availability of substitute white labor made the demand for slaves in cities greater than in rural areas.

On the impact of substitute white labor, Florence Fleming Corley noted that "the influx of white craftsmen and workers from Europe just before 1850 caused keen competition between blacks and whites in Augusta and the blacks of the expanding cotton lands in the West." The demand for slaves in southwest Georgia during the late antebellum era also helps to explain the decline of slavery in Augusta during the 1840s and 1850s; in a letter to the editor of the *Chronicle* in January 1860, a contemporary writer voiced concern about the loss of so many of Augusta's slaves and asked, "What is to be done to supply the deficiency which is produced with us by the great great demand for Negroes in the Southwest?"<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, during the slavery era, slaves in Augusta made up a significant element of Richmond County's population. In 1800, for example, the 1,017 slaves in Augusta were 38 percent of the county's total slave population. Sixty years later, Augusta's 3,663 bondspersons had increased to 44 percent of Richmond County's 8,389 slaves. Thus, when statistically compared with rural slavery, it appears that urban slavery in Richmond County of 1860 was just as viable as rural slavery in the county. The information in Table 3 regarding the habitat of Augusta's slave population in 1860 is also suggestive. In 1860, 1,136 or 31 percent of Augusta's 3,663 slaves were assigned by the federal census takers to the city's fourth ward. The second ward had 953 or 26 percent, while the first ward had 946 or 26 percent. The city's third ward, the location of the oldest African Baptist Church in Richmond County and what was destined to be the heart of black

<sup>15</sup> Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), pp. 3, 246.

<sup>16</sup> Clement Eaton, "Slave-Hiring in the Upper South: A Step Toward Freedom," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46 (March 1960): 677-78.

<sup>17</sup> Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History* (Chicago, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> Florence Fleming Corley, *Confederate City: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1865* (Columbia, S.C., 1960), p. 15; *Augusta Chronicle*, January 21, 1860.

Augusta, had only 628 or 17 percent of the county's urban non-free Afro-Augustans in 1860.

TABLE 3  
POPULATION OF AUGUSTA BY  
WARD IN 1860

Ward	Slave	Free	White	Aggregate
First	946	58	2,160	3,164
Second	953	48	1,382	2,383
Third	628	45	1,545	2,218
Fourth	1,136	235	3,357	4,728
Totals	3,663	386	8,444	12,493

SOURCE: *Eighth Census of Population 1860*, p. 74.

A study of the tax digests of Richmond County reveals significant data about slaveholding in the county. Of the 1,153 taxpayers in 1818, including 179 defaulters, 586, including 22 defaulters, paid taxes on slaves. The slaveholding taxpayers, therefore, represented 50 percent of the total number of taxpayers. Judging from the tax digest of 1818, the planter class was well represented among Richmond County's slaveholders. John Course was assessed for 900 acres of land and 100 slaves, Oswell Eve for 2,115 acres of land and 116 slaves, and former governor John Milledge for 1,600 acres of land and 115 slaves. Including these three taxpayers, 70 (or 6 percent) of the county's taxpayers who were assessed for 20 or more slaves, owned 2,888 (or 52 percent) of the 5,508 slaves listed for tax purposes in 1818. The average number of slaves owned by each member of this group was 41.<sup>19</sup>

The total number of taxpayers in 1818 also included 47 free blacks. Twenty-five (or 53 percent) of these non-slave black Richmond County taxpayers were listed as slaveholders. The number of slaves for which these free blacks were assessed taxes ranged from one to eight. Caesar Kennedy and Judy Kelly were listed with eight each. A total of 49 slaves were listed for free black Richmond Countians.<sup>20</sup> As might be gathered from the population figures in Table 2, these 47 free black taxpayers were 33 percent of the 140 non-slave blacks in the county when the 1820 federal census was taken.

Although free blacks were listed as slaveholders in Richmond County in the tax digest of 1818, and some were listed among slaveholders in later digests of the county, it is questionable whether any of them were ever of an "exploitation type."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the laws of Georgia specifically prohibited

<sup>19</sup> Ruth Blair, ed., *Some Early Tax Digests of Georgia* (Atlanta, 1926).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "Exploitation type" is a term used by Edward F. Sweat. See his "The Free Negro in Ante-Bellum Georgia" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Indiana, 1957), pp. 169-70. For other blacks listed as slaveholders, see Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves in the United States in 1830* (Washington, D.C., 1924), p. 4; Richmond County Tax Digests for the Years 1835, 1839-40, 1846, 1850, and 1855 (Department of Archives and History, Atlanta).

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the ownership of slaves by blacks. In 1818, the state legislators wrote into law that

... No free person of colour within this state shall be permitted to purchase or acquire real estate or any slave or slaves, either by a conveyance to any white person or persons of such legal title, reserving to such free person of colour the beneficial interest therein. . . .<sup>22</sup>

The following year, the state lawmakers repealed the real estate clause of the 1818 act, excepting Savannah, Augusta and Darien, and enacted into law that property held by free blacks at the time of the 1818 measure should not be forfeited.<sup>23</sup> There is no evidence that the portion of the 1818 law concerning free blacks' ownership of other blacks for profit or "beneficial interest" was ever repealed. In its famous *Bryan v. Walton* decision in 1853, the Georgia Supreme Court upheld the constitutional prohibition on blacks owning slaves in the state.<sup>24</sup>

As in the South in general, free blacks in Richmond County and Augusta probably customarily purchased their relatives and close friends, and they quite often did not legally manumit them. A Georgia law of 1801 provided that:

It shall not be lawful for any person or persons to manumit or set free any Negro slave or slaves, any mulatto, mustizo, or any other person or persons of colour, who may be deemed slaves at the time of the passing of this act, in any other manner or form, than by an application to the Legislature for that purpose.<sup>25</sup>

Violators of the act were required to pay a fine of \$200. After this act slaves manumitted by any manner than by the legislature, according to the law, "shall be still to all intents and purposes, as much in a state of slavery, as before they were manumitted and set free, by the party or parties."<sup>26</sup>

A legislative act of manumission or emancipation was not easy to get in Georgia. For example, it took Solomon Humphries, a free black in Macon, three years to get the legislature to grant the freedom of his wife and father after his purchase of these relatives from their masters.<sup>27</sup> Undoubtedly a number of free blacks with black relatives and other loved ones in their possession were not moved to or felt the need to appeal to the Georgia legislature for an act of manumission. And by 1860, Peter Johnson, a blacksmith, was listed as the only free black slaveowner in Augusta.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike Richmond County in general, Augusta had three groups of slaves: those who were brought into the city and sold by slave dealers or in auctions, those who entered Georgia as cargo of the interstate traffic through Augusta for the use of Richmond County and other Georgia slaveholders, and those

<sup>22</sup> *Laws of Georgia, 1811-19* (Milledgeville, 1821), p. 815.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 820-21.

<sup>24</sup> Seaborn C. Bryan v. Hugh Walton, 14 Ga. 198 (1853).

<sup>25</sup> *A Compilation of the Laws of the State of Georgia, passed by the Legislature Since the Political Year 1800, To the Year 1810, Inclusive* (Augusta, 1812), p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Georgia, at an Annual Session of the General Assembly . . .* (Milledgeville, 1830), p. 255; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia at an Annual Session in November and December, 1834* (Milledgeville, 1835), p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Whittington B. Johnson, "Free Blacks in Antebellum Augusta, Georgia: A Demographic and Economic Profile," *Richmond County History*, 14 (Winter 1982): 17.

who were owned or employed by Augusta residents. As a slavetrading center in Georgia, Augusta was second to Savannah. The trade in slaves started early in Augusta and continued unabated throughout the era of slavery.

A study of advertisements in the Augusta *Chronicle* newspaper revealed that African-born blacks had the best market in the city during the early nineteenth century. In June 1806, Isaac Herbert advertised "a few African Negroes," and he announced them "on low terms, for cash or cotton. . . ."

In the November 23, 1805 issue of the paper, Asa Garrett advertised:

35 prime and likely Congo slaves, amongst those are Stout Fellows, men-boys; grown Wenches, Women-girls and girls — Said slaves will be disposed of on reasonable terms, for cash or produce. . . .

Garrett also put the following notice in the paper in September 1806:

The subscriber has for Sale 16 likely African Negroes. They have been one year in the country, and worked to advantage — the above Negroes are a well chosen few and will be sold low for cash or produce.<sup>28</sup>

It is apparent from these advertisements that Augustans continued to engage in the foreign slave trade after it was outlawed by the state constitution in 1798. Yet compared to Savannah, Augusta was a small center of foreign trade in Africans.<sup>30</sup>

Augusta was also one of the points of entrance into Georgia for the interstate slave traders. There were several ferries on the Savannah River, above Augusta, which connected with three roads from Hamburg, South Carolina, that were used to get slaves into Georgia. As provided by a state law of 1817, all persons bringing slaves into Georgia were required to register with the Clerk of the Superior Court. The "slave books" of Richmond County provide important information. Data in the slave books kept by the Clerk of Superior Court of Richmond County reveal that the first three months and the last two months of the year were the busiest seasons for the slave traffic from the North to and through Augusta. From "slave books" that are extant, it might be concluded that a large number of slaves were imported to Georgia through Augusta. In 1818, 2,838 were imported; 1,694 in 1819, 1,371 in 1820, and 1,273 in 1823. During the four-year period, a total of 7,176 slaves were brought in by 1,171 traders.<sup>31</sup> Such importations indicate that Augusta and the area of Georgia served by Augusta had fewer slaves than they wanted to help meet labor needs during the 1820s.

The local slave trading business in Augusta was as old as the institution of slavery in the city, and slaves were sold for a variety of reasons. William McDonough wrote in his March 8, 1790 last will and testament that upon the death of his wife, he wanted "his Negroes . . . sold and the money 'divided

<sup>28</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, June 7, 1806; November 23, 1805; September 20, 1806. Regarding another advertisement by Isaac Herbert, see *ibid.*, February 1, 1806.

<sup>29</sup> Wm. H. Dumont, "Through Richmond County, Georgia; Importers of Slaves, 1818-1824", *National Genealogical Society Quarterly*, 48 (March 1970): 31-51. The other main points of entrance were Savannah, Hartsville and Lavonia.

<sup>31</sup> For a study which focuses primarily on Savannah, see Dorold D. Wax, "New Negroes Are Always in Demand: The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 68 (Summer 1984): 193-220.



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among all my children.' ” George L. Twiggs, H. R. Walker, and Val Marshall announced an executors’ sale in January 1830. The advertisement read, “from 25 to 30 Negroes, not surpassed by any gauge in the State. Sold for division among the heirs.” During the same month, these same executors advertised the following in the *Augusta Chronicle*:

Will be sold at the Market House in the City of Augusta on Tues. the 12th of Jan. next 5 Negroes belonging to the estate of the late Edward Rowell, deceased, among whom are several Carpenters, Blacksmiths & Boatwrights, some excellent house servants & field hands. The sale to continue from day to day until all are sold — terms at sale.<sup>32</sup>

The sale of slaves to grant a slaveholder’s last will and to settle an estate was very common in Augusta.

Evidence also suggests that the local slave traders carried on a lucrative business in antebellum Augusta. The federal census of 1860 reported 28 persons in Georgia whose occupation was listed as slave trader.<sup>33</sup> A number of the traders were Augustan and they carried on the business at the city’s market house. The old market house in Augusta dated to the 1790s and the state legislature authorized in 1825 a new market house.<sup>34</sup> The market house or slave market, as it was commonly known, was a location for individual slaveholders to reduce their surplus of slaves. Sales of the sheriff took place there too.<sup>35</sup>

Although slave trading was good in Augusta throughout the antebellum period, the 1850s were doubtlessly the golden age for the slave dealers in the city. In the 1850s, Fredrika Bremer, an English traveler in America, observed the following scene at an Augusta slave market:

On our way [to the railroad] we passed through the slave market. Forty or fifty young persons of both sexes were walking up and down before the house in expectation of purchasers. The young slaves here offered for sale were from twelve to twenty years of age.<sup>36</sup>

She also saw a little boy who looked to be about six years old. Bremer added that:

Many of these children were fair mulattoes, and some of them were very pretty. One young girl of twelve was so white, that I should have supposed her to belong to the white race; her features, too were also those of the whites. The slave-keeper told us that the day before, another girl, still fairer and handsomer, had been sold for fifteen hundred dollars.<sup>37</sup>

She added that the greatest number of these slaves on the auction block in Augusta were from Virginia.

Slave trading continued to be good business in Augusta during the 1850s. William M. Thomas and R. D. Glover announced in a local newspaper that,

<sup>32</sup> Will of Wm. McDonough, March 8th, 1790, in Richmond County, Georgia Will Book No. 1, 1777-1798, p. 108; *Augusta Chronicle*, January 6, 1830.

<sup>33</sup> *Population of United States in 1860*, p. 77.

<sup>34</sup> *Act of the General Assembly of the State of Georgia, passed in November and December, 1825* (Milledgeville, 1825), p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> See *Augusta Chronicle*, January 30, 1830; January 2, 1830.

<sup>36</sup> Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, 2 vols. (New York, 1853), I, p. 373.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

“we will purchase any number of young and likely NEGROES from 10 to 25 years of age for which the highest cash prices will be paid.” W. E. Archer, L. Graves & Co. announced the following in the local newspaper: “wanted to purchase 50 Negroes, FOR which the Highest CASH PRICES will be paid. Also, have on hand, some good COOKS, HOUSE SERVANTS, and FIELD-HANDS. Can be seen at W. E. Archer and Co.’s Stable.”<sup>38</sup> Luther Roll had a cook, house servants, a painter, trimmer, and others. Roll, who was a resident of Augusta’s second ward and was listed in the federal census as a merchant, owned 20 slaves in 1860, seven less than were reported for him in the 1850 census. He was in charge of an estate with 12 slaves in 1850.<sup>39</sup>

The slave traders mentioned above were just a few of the dealers in Augusta’s slave trading business. Commission-merchants and secret speculators were also engaged in the slave selling business. And as Frederic Bancroft noted, a number of slave dealers transacted their business in public “at the Lower Market House” in Augusta.<sup>40</sup>

Slaves in Augusta also witnessed the slave auctions in the city. Eugene Wesley Smith, an ex-slave of Augusta, provided an account in the language that follows:

I saw them selling slaves myself here in Augusta at the old market. They put them up on something like a table, bid them off just like you would do horses or cows. They was two men. I can recollect. I know one was called Mr. Heckle. He used to buy slaves, speculating. The other was named Wilson. They would sell your mother from the children. That was the reason so many colored people married their sisters and brothers, not knowing until they got to talking about it. One would say “I remember my grandmother,” and another would say, “That’s my grandmother,” and then they’d find out they were sister and brother.<sup>41</sup>

Absentee ownership of slaves in Augusta and Richmond County was also pronounced in 1830. As the data in Table 4 indicate, the third ward had 390 or the largest number of absentee slave owners in the city, the first ward ranked second with 111 slaves of absentee owners, and the second ward was third with 93. Although not included in the table, the Durham District had 14 slaves of absentee owners, Rhode District 1, Wilcox District 24, and Holt District 16. Among the slaves of the second ward were 44 owned by a Steam Boat Company, the largest absentee owner of slaves in the city in 1830.

<sup>38</sup> *Augusta Chronicle*, April 14, 1859; December 3, 1859.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, January 9, 1859.

<sup>40</sup> Frederic Bancroft, *Slave-Trading in the Old South* (Baltimore, 1931).

<sup>41</sup> Ronald Killion and Charles Waller, eds., *Slavery Time When I was Chillum Down on Marster’s Plantation: Interviews with Georgia Slaves* (Savannah, 1973), p. 157.

TABLE 4  
ABSENTEE OWNERSHIP OF SLAVES IN  
AUGUSTA BY WARDS IN 1830

Wards	Slaves	Total
First	111	113
Second	93	100
Third	390	405
Totals	594	618

SOURCE: Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves [and] Absentee Ownership of Slaves in the United States in 1830*, pp. 49-50.

The total figures in Table 4 lend themselves to several interpretations. In some cases the census taker listed a slave driver as owner. For example, in the second ward, Edward Thomas and other slaves — seven slaves and a total of seven in the household — were listed. In a number of cases a man and his wife were permitted by their owner to live out and to hire their time. There were many cases of “one black slave living alone.”<sup>42</sup> Since the census records are not clear on a number of points, data on absentee ownership should be used with care.

TABLE 5  
SLAVEHOLDERS AND SLAVEHOLDING IN  
RICHMOND COUNTY IN 1860

Number of Slaves	1	2-4	5-9	10-19	20-39	40-69	70-199
Number of Slaveholders	178	249	204	166	75	20	9

SOURCE: *Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C., 1864), p. 227.

An investigation of slaveholding in Richmond County in 1860 does not offer any basis for predicting the ultimate demise of slavery in the county. When the federal census was taken in 1860, the county had a total of 2,627 families. The number of slaveholding families in the county that year represented about 34 percent of the total number of families. Thus, the typical family in Richmond County in 1860 was a non-slaveholding family, in that about two thirds of the families owned no slaves.

Judging from the data in Table 5, 178 or 20 percent of the slaveholding families owned only one slave. An examination of the manuscript census reveals that William J. Eve, who owned 132 slaves, was the largest slaveholder in Augusta and one of three slaveholders in Richmond County who owned 100 or more slaves in 1860. Although the county ranked number nine in terms of the number of slaveholders in the county that year, Richmond ranked second to Chatham, which had 1,205 owners.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>43</sup> *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, pp. 226-27.

TABLE 6  
 SLAVEHOLDERS IN AUGUSTA WITH TEN OR MORE  
 SLAVES BY WARDS IN 1860, INCLUDING  
 NUMBER OF SLAVES OWNED

Ward	Number of Owners	Number of Slaves	Average Number
First	32	584	18
Second	25	606	24
Third	17	270	16
Fourth	32	751	20
Total	111	2,211	20

SOURCE: Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States 1860, Richmond County, Georgia.

A comparison of the data in Table 6 with that in Table 3 suggests that the larger slaveholders in Augusta owned the largest percentage of slaves in three of the city's four wards. In the first ward, 32 owners of ten or more slaves held 584 or 62 percent of the 946 slaves in the ward, 25 owners of ten or more slaves in the second ward owned 606 or 64 percent of the 953 slaves, 17 holders of ten or more slaves in the third ward owned 270 or 43 percent of the 628 slaves, and 37 masters of ten or more bondpersons in the fourth ward held 751 or 66 percent of the 1,136 non-free Afro-Augustans. The data in the tables also reveal that 111 owners of ten or more blacks in Augusta in 1860, held 2,211 or 60 percent of the 3,663 slaves in Richmond County's largest urban center.

Moreover, an investigation of the occupations of Augusta's slaveholders during the last federal census year before the Civil War produced no startling observations, but the findings are quite revealing. The greatest incidences of slaveholding occurred among merchant-planters, merchants, physicians, and innkeepers. The unpublished census also includes a number of single or widowed women as slaveholders. Regarding women owners, the 1860 unpublished census included at least 20 who possessed 10 or more slaves in the city. This group of females owned a total of 441 slaves or an average of 22 each. The largest slaveholder in this class of owners was Elizabeth Gardner, a 76-year-old widow of Augusta's fourth ward who had 51 black slaves.

During the last three years before the Civil War, the value of slaves in Richmond County for tax purposes ranged from 20 to 21 percent of the total taxable property of the county. As the data in Table 7 indicate, the taxable value of slaves in the county increased from \$3,693,300 in 1858 to \$4,407,870 in 1860. Using the 1860 figure, the average slave in Richmond County that year was worth \$525. The taxable value of slaves was usually less than the actual market value. The state's average value of a slave for tax purposes in 1860 was \$672 or \$147 more than Richmond County's average.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Annual Report of the Comptroller General of the State of Georgia, Made to the Governor, October 20, 1860* (Milledgeville, 1860), p. 42.

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TABLE 7  
TAXABLE PROPERTY OF RICHMOND COUNTY  
1858-1860

Year	Slaves	%	Other Property	Total Valuation
1858	\$3,693,300	20	\$14,390,781	\$18,084,081
1859	4,302,075	21	15,575,845	19,987,920
1860	4,407,870	20	17,166,487	21,574,357

SOURCE: Charles C. Jones, *Memorial History of Augusta, Georgia; From Its Settlement in 1735 to the Close of the Eighteenth Century [and] From the Close of Eighteenth Century to the Present Time* by Salem Dutcher (Syracuse, 1890), p. 356.

Although the numerical ratio between slaveholder and nonslaveholder in Augusta and Richmond County was always very wide, whites of all classes were encouraged to believe that they would some day enhance their social status by becoming slaveowners. Augusta and Richmond County's human property was thus quite valuable socially as well as economically on the eve of the American Civil War. A slave's real worth in both the city and county was determined not only by his monetary worth, but a slave gave his master and/or mistress a social status which could not be measured in terms of dollars and cents. It could be argued, then, that the slaves of Augusta and Richmond County provided not only the labor system upon which the economy was built, but the foundation of the social order as well.