

## How did the slavery business operate in Shenandoah County?

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One did not have to enter the Shenandoah County slavery business. It was a choice made by Shenandoah County people. Slavery was forced only upon the slaves. Often for religious reasons some people chose neither to buy nor to depend upon slaves. Other people did not have the money to buy African American slaves, who to the Commonwealth and Shenandoah County represented wealth, and to the slaveholder, power. In repetition of the slavery business in counties surrounding Shenandoah and eastern Virginia, many county leaders held slaves, including the sheriffs and lawyers.<sup>1</sup> Yet, by choice, many individual men chose to inject the slave labor force into the operation of their business or situation for increased production.

Shenandoah County men who bought African American slaves used their labor primarily in diversified agriculture or the iron industry. Plowing permanent fields, manuring the soil, rotating the crops for soil fertility, working draft animals, blacksmithing, fencing pastures, caring for animals and stables, working on the threshing floor, using fodder crops, logging, brick making, brick laying, driving a wagon to cart grain, fodder, and manure were tasks performed regularly on Shenandoah County farmland by whites and African Americans. Tanneries, distilleries, mills, pottery deliveries, gun making, the textile industry and the iron industry used African American slaves and free African Americans for specialized work in manufacturing.

Involvement in the slavery business meant buying, working and selling African Americans. Importing African American slaves ended near the beginning of the nineteenth century, so the increasing African American population came from reproduction. Because the sale price was lower, it appears that early on Shenandoah County buyers opted for young African American children. Philip Troutman has prepared graphs that show the involvement of the Valley in the slavery business, which peaked in the 1830s:

The Valley stops importing slaves ca. 1805-1808.

The Valley begins to export slaves ca. 1810-1830, 10% of Virginia's total out migration.

The Valley drops exporting slaves ca. 1840-1850.

The Valley begins sharply to export slaves 1850-1860, 16-17% of Virginia's total out migration.<sup>2</sup>

When exporting African Americans, the seller realized a profit because the sale price continued to increase throughout the nineteenth century.

In antebellum years, some slaveholders allowed their African American slaves to live on their own property and/ or to hire their own time by giving the slaveholder one payment and keeping the rest for themselves. Other slaveholders allowed the African American slave to moonlight for himself, as did James H. Foster. In filing a claim with the Southern Claims Commission after the Civil War, James H. Foster, testified:

I was the owner of the property when taken. I raised the hogs and purchased the cow, the carriage and harness from Charles J. Hite, a farmer who lived near Strasburg and who owned about 20 slaves. I was a shoemaker and used to work at my trade of nights for my own benefit; my master gave me the privilege. I had made shoes and repaired work for Mr. Hite and his slaves several years and took the cow, the carriage and harness from him in part payment of what he owed me and he was still owing me \$125. I could not get . I purchased a horse from a man named Mason from Mt. Jackson and traded him for another which was taken from me by the Union forces. He was very poor when I got him and I recruited him up ... I was a slave of Isaac S. Bowman, a farmer who lived 2 miles eastward.<sup>3</sup>

Advertisements were placed in *The Woodstock Herald* for assistants or apprentices for cabinet makers and carpenters with no mention of race being a factor in employment, an opportunity for free African American men. Free African American women, who responded to ads for cooks, washer women and ironers, attained some measure of time management for themselves and their lives in domestic services.<sup>4</sup>

One way of looking at how the business of slavery operated in 1810 is to look at the output of manufacturers in Shenandoah County. This information appears by Tench Coxe in “A Statement of the Arts and Manufacturers of the United States of America for the year 1810.”

Linen goods	145,960 yards
Hats	8, 405
Guns	70
Gunpowder	490 lbs.
Iron	1,754 tons
Copperware	\$2,043.
Clocks, watches	\$560.
Saddles	\$8,385.
Beer, liquor	91,600 gal.
Snuff, tobacco	25,000 lbs.
Cabinetware	\$3,081. <sup>5</sup>

Industrial Facilities in Shenandoah County:

Looms	606
Carding machines	6
Fulling machines	5
Furnaces	2 (1,254 tons)
Forges	3 (500 tons)
Distilleries	92,000 gal.
Tanneries	15 (15,761 hides)
Linseed Oil Mills	5 14,812 gal.
Gunpowder mills	1 (490 lbs.) <sup>6</sup>

These trades and facilities allowed easy supervision of a small number of African American slaves at one location. Diversified farming, however, required someone with each group of slaves in larger areas. On 3 April 1862 Siram P. Henkel, owner of Plains Mill near New Market, records in his journal some of the work done by the free African Americans that he hired: “Son Samuel and the two black boys hauled a load of oak wood with the two oxen and the Fan mare, it is of Zirkle’s chopping; they then took 579 lbs. bacon to town, I went along and sold it to the Army at \$20 per 100.”<sup>7</sup> On April 17, 1862: “Son John and the two black boys hauled half a cord of pine wood (from Wetzel’s chopping) to our wood

pile, they done other small jobs, in the morning they brought the plantation wagon with the hay ladders, from the mud hole below Kook's.<sup>8</sup> The journal reports that a supervisor always attended the free African American men working for Siram P. Henkel.

The Plains Mill Store Day Book, 20 October, 1843 records the employment, pay, and purchases, in credit or debit, for other free African American employees:

Mima (a black woman) commenced work this morning at the Plains to house work at 50 per week

8 November 1843: Mima (a black woman) D (debit) to 2 yds. Linen for aprons at 25 - .50" (Wittig 144).

2 December 1848: "Prince the black man C (credit) by 6 days work at attending to the coal pit at 62 1/2 - #3.75 <sup>9</sup>

Other farm work recorded by Siram Henkel included hauling manure to the fields from the hog pen, working in the truck patch and garden, chopping wood, cutting wheat and rye with two cradles, digging potatoes, husking corn, hauling corn and fodder, cutting sugar cane, shearing sheep, repairing fence, attending the coal pit and doing housework. Because these farm activities were time consuming for farmers and slaves, mechanization threatened the operation of slavery in Shenandoah County. In 1826 farmers had opportunities to purchase labor saving devices advertised in *The Woodstock Herald*.<sup>10</sup> Among these were the threshing machine, the wheat rubber, the corn sheller, and the self sharpening plough. Even Israel Painter, born in Shenandoah County in 1826, invented a smut machine for cleaning wheat.<sup>11</sup> Although these implements gradually changed farming methods in the Valley, the major invention was the reaper. When Cyrus McCormick's reaper appeared in 1831, an improved model in 1857, it replaced the reaping hook or sickle, the cradle, the scythe, and it and changed the methods of harvesting grain in the Valley. It has been said: "Two men on the first reaper could cut as much grain in one day as 4-5 men with cradles or 12-16 men with reaping hooks."<sup>12</sup> As more farmers acquired the reaper, less slave labor was needed, and the slaves were sold for a cash crop.

To what extent African Americans used these implements is unknown, but by 1850

the sharp export of slaves had begun. To increase income more efficiently, Shenandoah County farmers sought information on better methods of farming. Over 100 agricultural societies in Virginia pursued information on improved animal husbandry, rotation of crops, and markets. Orators delivered lectures, that according to Drew Faust “identified the people with the southern soil, the soil, in turn, with a particular sort of agriculture, and the agriculture, finally, with the peculiar institution of slavery.”<sup>13</sup> When one examines the trustees of the enacted but never built Shenandale College, 1849, one sees major slaveholders in Shenandoah County and nearby areas.<sup>14</sup> Trustees named were: John Strayer, Gabriel Jordan, Jacob D. Williamson, Sr., Joseph R. Sibert, Green B. Samuels, Samuel Coots, Reuben Moore, Sr., William Anderson, W.G. Thompson, Anderson Moffett, Derick Pennybacker, Jacob Sommers, Samuel G. Henkel, Hiram Martz, William Wickes, Jr., E. Coffman, A.R. Meem, Zachariah Shirley, J.S. Calvert, J.D. Zirkle, and Naason Bare. Twelve of these men held slaves. This association of influential community leaders and slaveholders suggests how the intricate business of slavery operated in Shenandoah County by 1850. It is not surprising that those who opposed the holding of African Americans as slaves hesitated to speak out. Only George Rye, Edinburg and Woodstock, confronted openly and vigorously, the business of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

The participants in the slavery business used the “Buy low, Sell high” adage as supply and demand fluctuated. One study of slave prices in the Lower South shows a triple in price from \$125. (1740-49) to \$381.(1800-1809).<sup>16</sup> In Shenandoah County, the 5 October 1792 probate inventory of Gasper Branner, Forestville shows: “one Negro wench named Milla 50 pounds.” Based on the 1792 one pound sterling value of \$4.44, Milla was valued at \$222.<sup>17</sup> In comparison, a letter fifty years later from John Coiner, Waynesboro, to Siram and Margaret Henkel, New Market ,1 July 1842, states: “I bought 100 acres of land of father ... . I paid it of, and now I will make some inquiry about a black girl .... I think I can buy one at 350 to 600 dollars.”<sup>18</sup> Five years later the price for slaves again increased in Waynesboro, according to a letter from Delila Overholt to Siram Henkel, her brother-in-law, on 24 January 1857:

... Brother Jacob Nicholas were here the evening before New Year he said they are all well they do not like their black woman very well The blacks were sold at Grandfathers the 26th of December and the land of G father his property sole low the land Uncle Michel Koiner bought Uncle Martin Koiner boght Maria and Mary he gave \$7.00 hundred for Maria and \$6.00 hundred for Mary Uncle Samuel gave \$5.00.25 [\$525.00] dollars for Easter Uncle Ben gave \$5.00.25 [\$525.00] dollars for Easter Uncle Ben bought Antony \$7.00 [\$700.] dollars Uncle David bought Silas for \$8.00.25 [\$825.] dolars I think as far as I can reccollect that is what the blacks sole for if the traidors could of got a bid they would of hoisted them higher, so Grandfather wanted his children to buy them....<sup>19</sup>

As was usual, female African American slaves generally sold for less than males.

The buying and selling of slaves depended upon the needs of the individual slaveholders, who often came into debt and has to sell farm and slaves. The 1790 Census furnishes the name of slave trader William Williams. The 1800 Census names Hezekiah Turner for the "Arts cottel," Jas. T. Blakney, Agent for H.H. Slatter, Baltimore,<sup>20</sup> or H. J. Crow, Agent for William Crow,<sup>21</sup> men who were always ready to trade African Americans for a profit.

A few slaveholders willed that their slaves be sold.<sup>22</sup> Local auctions, advertised in *The Woodstock Herald*, often described the slaves as "likely," a term meaning capable of doing well or being promising. By will, sons and daughters often inherited particular slaves and their increase. One sees the surname of some slaveholders continuing decade after decade in the census records.<sup>23</sup> If the slaveholder had kept the same slaves and had not sold them to buy others, the age of the slaves would be ten years older at the next census. The retention of the same slaves, however, seldom appears in the census.<sup>24</sup> Because in other parts of Virginia most slaveholders kept careful business records, including names of slaves and their ages, it is unlikely that Shenandoah County slaveholders forgot from one year to the next the age of his African American slaves. No records, however, have been yet located. There are also many names of slaveholders who appear for one decade and

never again. Of course, many African American slaves died and are buried in Shenandoah County soil, one cemetery being near Liberty furnace and another near Forestville, but many one time slaveholders did not continue in the slave business. The export numbers show that slave holding became less after 1830.

The operation of slavery became the umbrella under which free African Americans lived and worked. This study of Virginia tax lists and federal censuses reveals the numbers of slaveholders and the number of people who hired free African Americans only:

1775	Dunmore County Census	13 slaveholders
1783	Virginia Tax List	111 slaveholders
1790	U. S. Federal Census	71 slaveholders
	Virginia Tax List	108 slaveholders <sup>25</sup>

The 1790 discrepancy between the Virginia and Federal Census indicates that the local census counted more households than did the Federal Census, a suggestion that the Federal Census numbers are low throughout this research. Numbers furnished by the Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, have been used in calculations of percentages in this study.

1800	Virginia Tax List	82 slaveholders
1810	Federal Census	273 slaveholders 37 households named free blacks only 12 households named both free and slave
1820	Federal Census	476 slaveholders 62 households named free blacks only 41 households named both free and slave

1830	Federal Census	583 slaveholders 97 households named free blacks only
1840	Federal Census	241 slaveholders 48 households named free blacks only
1850	Federal Slave Census	203 slaveholders
1860	Federal Slave Census	197 slaveholders 22 renters of slaves <sup>26</sup>

The numbers above show a decrease in the number of people holding slaves after 1830, and they indicate that the slaves had to have been sold from the county. Although African Americans headed the households with free blacks only, a few African American heads of household named both free and slave. That some African Americans bought one or two of their family members out of slavery explains why some free African Americans listed slaves in the census.

Newspapers informed Shenandoah County citizens of auctions where African American slaves could be bought or sold, whether at taverns, farms, or Hotel Strasburg. Newspaper publicity kept the slavery business operating. The following newspaper advertisements show examples of upcoming sales:

Negroes for Sale: Will be sold at Public Sale, to the highest bidder, before the front door of the Court House in Woodstock on Monday the 10th of July (being Court Day), a family of Negroes, consisting of one woman and five children -- one boy, 17 -- one do, 15 -- one girl, 13 years old, and the other two younger. The above Negroes are included in a Trust Deed from Frederick Dellinger to Jacob Ott, jun., and the proceeds of the sale of the above Negroes to be appropriated thereto. Terms: Cash

Jacob Dinges, Agent for Frederick Dellinger, June 29, 1843<sup>27</sup>

The July 10 sale followed a private sale one month earlier when Samuel C. Williams bought “a certain female Negro slave Hannah and her child Adam” from Frederick Dellinger for \$180., as described in a Bill of Sale on 10 June, 1843.<sup>28</sup> The splintering of this family is painfully apparent as one compares the advertisements.

Another sale of Negroes admitted to record on 29 March 1858 at the Shenandoah County Court House reads:

Sale of Negroes belonging to Philip Pitman, sold 29th day of March 1858, by Mark Bird, trusted in a deed from said Pitman bearing the date 10th day of February 1854 and recorded in the Clerk’s office of the Shenandoah County Court in Deed Book No 2, pages 55 and 56, to secure certain debts to the Bank in Staunton and to indemnify said Pitman’s endorsers:

Ellen, about 5 years old, bought by Robert Snapp for \$159.50  
Lucy, about 8 years old, bought by Robert Snapp for \$411.00  
Jim, about 45 years old, bought by Robert Snapp for \$174.50  
Polly, about 58 years old, bought by Robert Snapp for \$58.00  
Charles, about 72 years old, bought by Robert Snapp for \$2.00

Mark Bird, Trustee

—————  
\$805.00<sup>29</sup>

Robert Snapp bought the five people, who may or may not have been family, and kept the group of young and old African Americans together, a possible relief to those who had faced separation. The retention of ties between African Americans family members seldom occurred in a sale. The legal sale of chattel in the Commonwealth of Virginia paid off debts, deeds of trust and bonds, and the purchase of chattel provided taxes for the state and county. Such was the business of slavery.

Within each sale resided the human horror, for each African American, of being wrenched away from family and home, of knowing nothing of the kind of treatment that would be forthcoming nor what work would be required, of the humiliation of being inspected by the prospective buyers, of being devalued by advancing age, of possibly

being sold to the cotton fields of the South, of having no freedom to protest or prevent the sale, of not being able to read. Slave narratives, recorded after the Civil War by Northerners and Public Work projects, tell how those who escaped to the North before the Civil War felt and were treated. These have been collected by The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.<sup>30</sup>

Bethany Veney published one of the most famous narratives in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1889, at age seventy-four. This woman was born in Shenandoah County in 1815, but she remembered only that her life was lived in Luray, which became Page County in 1831. “Of my father I know nothing,” she acknowledged.<sup>31</sup> Her touching narrative, in which she relates her memories of life as a slave in this area, can be found online.

Through auctions and traders the slave business operation in Shenandoah County made slaves available to anyone who chose to buy or sell African Americans. A 1748 Black Law provided that widows should have one-third of all slaves and their increase for life,<sup>32</sup> so the widow could choose to emancipate the slaves, which few did, even in their wills. An 1806 and 1848 law demanded that “if any slave hereafter emancipated remain in this Commonwealth more than twelve months after his freedom, he shall forfeit such right and may be sold by the overseers for the benefit of the poor.”<sup>33</sup> That the slaveholder who emancipated a slave was also responsible for the cost of transportation from the Commonwealth may have prevented some slaveholders and widows from releasing their African Americans from bondage. Sale was the usual option if one no longer wanted a slave and many chose that option, as well as the money from the sale of African Americans. The other way to avoid emancipation or sale was to give time, a practice at Monticello and most probably in Shenandoah County. Giving a slave his or her time allowed the enslaved person to continue to live in Virginia, and the slaveholder avoided a request to the state legislature and the cost of transportation for the African American out of the state. This practice surely added to the African American population in the county and may account also

for some slaves that lived in free African American households.

The slaveholder, able to “buy low,” could use the slave and sell at a profit as the value of slaves increased. A female slave doubled the profit with her first increase and tripled the profit, at least, with her second child, although many children did not live to maturity due to lack of nutrition and conditions. Absolutely no proof of breeding has been found, but a report of a stud named Sampson in the Moore’s Store area has circulated in the white community for years. In slave narratives in other states, reports of breeding have come from the black community. Given the emphasis upon improvement of stock by local gentlemen farmers, one can only wonder until breeding records are found.

At the beginning, the slavery business operated by importing African Americans to perform work in agriculture, industrial facilities and production of products for sale within the county and to outside markets. Many young African American children were sold within the county, but older siblings who were not sold locally were acquired by traders to be sold to Southern cotton fields as the prices continued to rise. The sales brought wealth, power and social recognition to many in the slavery business, but the number of slaveholders decreased after 1830. The local newspapers kept Shenandoah County informed of auctions, runaways, and incidents of uprisings in Virginia and elsewhere. The slavery business operated to make a quick profit; it cared not for emotions, fears, or concerns of the African Americans. In the antebellum period, some African American slaves began to have some small control over their lives by being allowed to hire themselves out at night, for a season or for a year, and to be rewarded in small measure or goods for their work.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Books #I, #II, #III for names.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/slavetrade/graphs/graphs.html> 1998.
- <sup>3</sup> James H. Foster, RG217 National Archives Microfilm M-2094 Roll 40 Nara 428 Item 66.
- <sup>4</sup> Book #III for names.
- <sup>5</sup> Robert D. Mitchell, Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977) 203.
- <sup>6</sup> Mitchell 207.
- <sup>7</sup> Wittig 129.
- <sup>8</sup> Wittig 131.
- <sup>9</sup> Wittig 146.
- <sup>10</sup> Book #I.
- <sup>11</sup> Wayland 26.
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.vaes.vt.edu/steeles/mccormick/harvest.html>
- <sup>13</sup> Faust, "The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture," Southern Stories 44-45.
- <sup>14</sup> Nancy B. Stewart, "Shenandale College," Schools in New Market II (Broadway: New Market History) 83-109.
- <sup>15</sup> Nancy B. Stewart, "George Rye and the Abolitionist Movement in Shenandoah County" Book #III.
- <sup>16</sup> Peter C. Mancall, Joshua L. Rosenbloom, and Thomas Weiss, "Slave Prices and The Economy of the Lower South, 1772-1809."  
[http://eh.net/Clio/Conferences/ASSA/Jan\\_00/rosenbloom.shtml](http://eh.net/Clio/Conferences/ASSA/Jan_00/rosenbloom.shtml)

<sup>17</sup> Carroll Davidson Wright, Comparative Wages, Prices, and Costs of Living from the Sixteenth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor 1885.)  
[http://books.google.com/books?id=xA0XAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA41&lpg=PA41&dq=pound+value+1792&source=bl&ots=d8O97BG1DC&sig=gEZnf042Typ2juitz72FWpeYrBU&hl=en&ei=oR24SvOKBZPplAeYrNnWDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=6#v=onepage&q=pound%20value%201792&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=xA0XAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA41&lpg=PA41&dq=pound+value+1792&source=bl&ots=d8O97BG1DC&sig=gEZnf042Typ2juitz72FWpeYrBU&hl=en&ei=oR24SvOKBZPplAeYrNnWDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=6#v=onepage&q=pound%20value%201792&f=false).

<sup>18</sup> Wittig 166.

<sup>19</sup> Wittig 189-90.

<sup>20</sup> *Sentinel of the Valley* , 6 August 1846.

<sup>21</sup> *The Tenth Legion* , 20 December 1849.

<sup>22</sup> Gilreath, Book #I.

<sup>23</sup> Books #I, #II, #III.

<sup>24</sup> Books # I, #II, #III.

<sup>25</sup> Books #I, #II, #III.

<sup>26</sup> Books #I, #II, #III.

<sup>27</sup> *The Sentinel of the Valley*, June 29, 1843.

<sup>28</sup> Shenandoah County Archives Collection #2 Reel 1 411, Shenandoah County Library.

<sup>29</sup> Court Minutes, 29 March 1858.

<sup>30</sup> <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/veney/veney.html>

<sup>31</sup> [http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blveney\\_chapter1-2.htm](http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blveney_chapter1-2.htm)

<sup>32</sup> Guild 55.

<sup>33</sup> Guild 72, 117.

