

The Network

An Enslaving Virginia Publication

August 5, 1999

The ninth issue of "The Network" contains a table of contents for the "American Diversity—Williamsburg" section of the Enslaving Virginia Resource Book, answers to questions from a recent training class, two newspapers announcements that provide details about slaves who held seats for their masters at the Second Theater in Williamsburg and slave funerals, details about slaves owned by the Prentis Family, information about an exhibit of the work of an enslaved African-American Potter named Dave, information about the *Henrietta Marie* exhibit, and a list of recently published books on race and African-American history and culture.

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Lorena S. Walsh provides answers to the following questions from a recent training class.

Question: When did the British set up a trading post on the west coast of Africa and get directly involved in the overseas slave trade?

Answer: The first English trading posts on the West African coast were established by the Guinea Company, a joint stock company granted a monopoly of trade in the area between Senegal and the Bite of Benin by King James I in 1618. This group was principally involved in the gold and dyewood trades rather than the slave trade, and they concentrated their efforts primarily in Senegambia and Sierra Leone. This company employed a renegade Dutch trader who established English trading posts ("factories") on the Gold Coast starting in 1632. Guinea Company trading posts included Komenda, Kormantin, Winneba, Anomabu, Takordai, and Cape Coast. During the English Civil War and the Commonwealth government (1642-1660) the Guinea Company's rights were challenged, and various English groups, including the East India Company, briefly established assorted trading posts in various places on the Gold Coast. With the introduction of sugar cultivation in Barbados in the early 1640s, assorted private English traders, many violating the Guinea Company's legal monopoly in the Gold Coast area, began shipping slaves to Barbados.

After Charles II was restored in 1660, the next group granted monopoly trading rights in West Africa and which established trading posts explicitly involved in the slave as well as the gold and other commodity trades was the Company of Royal Adventurers (composed mainly of courtiers), set up in 1660 and rechartered in 1663. This company set up a fort on James Island in Gambia in 1661, and in 1663 took over the previously established English factories on the Gold Coast. The Adventurers claimed to have established or re-established 18 factories (primarily on the Gold Coast) by the end of 1663. But in the next two years most of these posts were retaken by the Dutch.

The Adventurers were bought out and replaced by the Royal African Company, another joint stock company to which the King also granted monopoly trading rights, in 1672. This joint stock company was run primarily by merchants, and while continuing to pursue the commodity trades in gold, ivory, dyewood, etc., concentrated primarily on the slave trade. The company maintained trading posts in the Gambia and in Sierra Leone, primarily for the commodity trades. But its main center was on the Gold Coast and the "Slave Coast" to the east where it established posts at Allada (1674) and Whydah (1682). The Royal African Company initially also maintained a factory at Benin to purchase cloth for the Gold Coast market, that was abandoned by 1700. Royal African Company ships traded as well in Old and New Calabar and Angola for slaves, but no trading stations were maintained in these regions.

The Cape Coast (or Cabo Corso) trading post was established by the Guinea Company in 1650, seized by the Swedes in 1652, shortly thereafter taken over by the Dutch, and then retaken by an English fleet in 1663-64, at which point the English fortified the position. In the 1670s the successor Royal African Company made Cape Coast Castle its primary headquarters.

Thus English trading posts on the West African coast were first set up in the 1630s, and posts trading primarily in slaves date to the 1670s.

Sources: P.E.H. Hair and Robin Law, "The English in Western Africa to 1700," *The Origins of Empire*, vol. 1 of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Nicholas Canny, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998):241-263, a newly arrived book in the CWF Library. Local correspondence from assorted Gold and Slave Coast trading posts has been published in *The English in West Africa, 1681-1683: The Local Correspondence of the Royal African Company of England, 1681-1689*, Part 1, Robin Law, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), also in our library.

* * * *

Question: How often did people sell food and other items in the market in Williamsburg?

Answer: Here I have to claim no information. I suspect that people could not legally sell within the bounds of the official town market other than on established market days, since the idea was that such marketing take place in a regulated fashion with the buying and selling conducted during set hours under official oversight—for regulation of prices, and weights and measures—the oversight being supported by market taxes. Once an actual market house was constructed, individuals like butchers who paid rent for market stalls, as well as town officials, would presumably have had in interest in preventing irregular off day sales on the market house premises.

These regulations would not have prevented storekeepers, or individual retailers including bakers or butchers like Benjamin Hanson who had other established places of business, from selling as they pleased. Petty hucksters selling from carts or baskets on the streets or going door to door could presumably also operate on a daily basis.

However tightly or loosely the town market was regulated, unless they were making prearranged deliveries to regular customers, most people likely planned to sell primarily on regular market days where they could take advantage of food buying customers congregating in the area.

* * * *

Question: Were the chickens alive when they were sold in the market?

Answer: I would assume this to be the normal practice in a pre-refrigeration age. Aside from preserved pork, chickens and other birds were the "fast food" of the times. Anyone could keep a chicken in a cage feeding it a little grain until it was time to cook it, thus insuring freshness. And almost certainly virtually everyone knew how to kill, eviscerate, and pluck a chicken ready for cooking in a short order. If there were not enough buyers, the sellers could keep their stock in undiminished condition for sale another day, and the buyers could be assured that the bird was healthy and fresh.

* * * *

Question: Was wood the most common item sold in the public market?

Answer: To the extent that household account books reflect market purchasing patterns, wood sales were comparatively infrequent. According to the account books, the most frequently purchased item was poultry, closely followed by cuts of meat. Vegetables came next followed by fruits and nuts and seafood. More established households bought wood only weekly or bi-weekly in the winter and much less often in the summer. Tavernkeepers, professionals, merchants, and better off artisans often made annual contracts with a single dealer, assuring themselves of regular deliveries of wood at an agreed upon price, sort of like the agreements one makes with an oil dealer today. Smaller households must have bought firewood in the market as needed from smaller dealers. This however is a trade we know almost nothing about until after the Revolution.

* * * *

The following announcements from the *Virginia Gazette* and the *Virginia Gazette or American Advertiser* provide information the practice of having slaves reserve seats at the Second Theater in Williamsburg and slave funerals.

We are desired to inform the Publick, That as the Company of Comedians, lately from London, have obtain'd His Honour the Governor's Permission, and have, with great Expence, entirely altered the Play-House at Williamsburg to a regular Theatre, fit for the Reception of Ladies and Gentlemen, and the Execution of their own Performances, they intend to open on the first Friday in September next, with a Play, call'd The Merchant of Venice, (written by Shakespear) and a Farce, call'd The Anatomist, or, Sham Doctor. The Ladies are desired to give timely Notice to Mr. Hallam, and at Mr. Fisher's, for their Places in the Boxes, and on the Day of the Performance to send their Servants early to keep them, in Order to prevent Trouble and Disappointment.

Source: *Virginia Gazette*, 21 August 1752.

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Twenty Pounds Reward.

WILL be paid for apprehending and delivering to me, my negro man named MOSES, who ran away on the 29th day of October last. He is a likley [sic] black country born, sensible fellow; about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, well set, large legs, though well made, about 28 years of age; he has a small scar on his forehead, nigh the edge of his hair, and I am told a small piece of one of his ears is off; he is of a smiling countenance, and of a proud carriage, is by trade a shoe-maker, and has some of his tools with him; he formerly belonged to one Caleb Trueblood, under whose name I expect he will endeavour to pass as a free man; he has with him a black broad cloth coat, and some times officiates as a

reader at negro funerals. I strictly forbid all persons from employing him either by land or water, as I am determined to take every advantage the law shall give me of any person that shall either employ or harbour him.

WILLIAM SKINNER.

NO. CAROLINA (Perquimans county) Jan. 10, 1786.

Source: *Virginia Gazette or American Advertiser*, Hayes, ed., 22 February 1786 (Lathan A. Windley, comp., *Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790*, 4 vols., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983, I:383).

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Information About Slaves Owned by the Prentis Family

The following information about the slaves owned by the Prentis Family is taken from the talk that Julie Richter gave on Day 1 of "Enslaving Virginia" training in January and February 1999.

Judith was a young woman when her master, the merchant William Prentis, bequeathed her and her children to his daughter Elizabeth after his death in August 1765. Judith and her children Effy, Molly, and Jimmy were valued at £ 115 in the October 1765 inventory of William Prentis's estate. This slave family continued to live at the Prentis House on Lot 51 on Duke of Gloucester Street as did Elizabeth Prentis who was thirteen years old when her father died. Her mother, Mary Prentis, sent Molly to the Bray School for enslaved and free black children in Williamsburg in November 1765. Molly learned about the Anglican faith, obedience to her master, proper behavior, enunciation, and reading. Anne Wager, the teacher at the Bray School, also taught Molly and other girls how to knit and sew.

Judith's family grew in the 1760s: her children Pompey and Nancy Lewis were baptized in February 1766 and November 1768, respectively. The short intervals between the births of three children (Jimmy in 1763, Pompey in 1766, and Nancy Lewis in 1768) suggest that Judith was able to form a long-term relationship with a man who lived in or near Williamsburg. Elizabeth Prentis died on October 5, 1770 and her brother John gained possession of Judith and her children Effy, Molly, Jimmy, Pompey, and Nancy Lewis.

John Prentis kept Judith's family together during his lifetime. However, his death in late 1775 brought a number of changes to Judith and her family. John Prentis left Effy, Pompey, and Nancy Lewis to his younger brother, Joseph. He left the remainder of his slaves to be equally divided among his brothers Daniel and Joseph and his cousin, Robert Prentis. Judith was one of "several valuable SLAVES, chiefly House Servants, among wich is a very good Cook" who were sold by Prentis's executors at the January 3, 1776

sale of his estate. Her young sons Tom and Lewis were sold with her. Molly was one of the four dower slaves assigned to Prentis's widow, also named Elizabeth. It is likely that Molly served as Elizabeth Prentis's maid. Judith's daughter Effy had at least one daughter Kate who received her baptism in November 1782. Effy and Pompey lived in Williamsburg until the death of Joseph Prentis Senior in 1809. Effy, Pompey, and the other eight slaves owned by Prentis at his death became the property of his son and namesake, a lawyer who lived in Suffolk.

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William Prentis gained possession of a slave named Nanny when the will of his father-in-law, John Brooks, was probated in November 1729. Nanny and Prentis's wife Mary probably grew up together and lived out their lives on Lot 51. Nanny likely helped Mary Prentis care for her eight children in addition to her other household duties. She was called "Old Nanny" and valued at £ 5 in the October 1765 inventory of Prentis's estate. The appraisers noted that there was a place on Prentis's property known as "old Nanny's." It is possible that Nanny had a structure that was recognized as her own because she had been an important part of the household for many years. Unfortunately, the appraisers only made note of the items at "old Nanny's" that belonged to Prentis. They did not list furniture, foodstuffs, or Nanny's personal items.

Another Prentis slave used her position in the family to negotiate with her master. John Prentis bequeathed a girl named Rachel to his brother Joseph in his 1773 will. She and her daughter Lucy were among the slaves in the July 24, 1809 inventory of Joseph Prentis's estate. Rachel persuaded her new master, Joseph Prentis Junior, to allow her to stay in Williamsburg instead of moving to his house in Suffolk. Prentis hired her to Benjamin White, a free man of color, in 1826 and perhaps earlier as well. It is likely that Rachel had known Benjamin White since her childhood and convinced him to hire her so that she could stay in Williamsburg. White grew up as the slave of Mary Stith and lived on Lot 17, a short distance from the Prentis House. Rachel stayed with White and his son, also named Benjamin White, when she was older and unable to work. Prentis paid White for maintaining "Aunt Rachel" during 1836. In early February 1837 Prentis's friend and Williamsburg resident, Robert Saunders Junior, wrote to tell him that Rachel had died. Prentis lamented the death of his "much beloved & faithful nurse, Mammy Rachel."

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"I Made This Jar": The Life and Works of the Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave"

This traveling exhibition focuses on the work of a potter known as Dave. The exhibit opened at the McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina at Columbia in April 1998. It was at The High Museum of Art in Atlanta from May 16-July 31, 1999. Next, the exhibit will be at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History

in Detroit from October 9, 1999-January 2, 2000. The final venue for this exhibit is the Winterthur Museum, Garden, and Library in Winterthur, Delaware, from February 5-June 25, 2000. Jill Beute Koverman wrote the exhibit catalogue—*“I Made This Jar”*: *The Life and Works of the Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave*—published by the University of South Carolina Press in 1998.

A remarkable slave potter known only as Dave is the subject of a nationally travelling exhibition and catalogue of the alkaline-glazed stoneware tradition rooted in the South Carolina's Edgefield District.

In the mid 1980s McKissick Museum of the University of South Carolina conducted a major study of the social and economic history of this stoneware tradition. This study documented more than 50 vessels of remarkable size made in the Edgefield District during the 19th and 20th centuries. Twenty of these pots were inscribed with poetic verse, ranging from the somber and moralistic to the wry and witty, and signed Dave.

The Exhibit

The significance of Dave's work is just beginning to be acknowledged by scholars and museum curators. Major museums such as the Smithsonian Institution and the Philadelphia Museum of Art have recently acquired pieces made by the potter and poet of Edgefield.

McKissick Museum, at the University of South Carolina, examines the significance of Dave and his works for the American ceramic and literary traditions. Through these pots and poems, this exhibit promises to complicate our understanding of the social relations of slavery in the antebellum South. By celebrating the sophisticated ways one slave successfully subverted the institution of slavery, by adding to the number of known 19th century African American poets from the South, and by suggesting that not all southerners were unequivocal supporters of slavery, the story of Dave will debunk racial and ethnic stereotypes that continue to haunt the region and the nation.

Accompanying the 25 vessels made by Dave, pieces from several other potters from the Edgefield District of that era will be displayed in the exhibit. Photomurals, maps, and panels of explanatory text will accompany the objects and provide a broader cultural context for Dave and his pottery. The exhibit catalogue will provide an in-depth account as well as a catalogue raisonne of his work.

Scheduled to open at McKissick Museum during April 1998 (Poetry Month), numerous public outreach events are already being organized for presentation during the nine months the exhibit will be on view in South Carolina. The story of Dave will also be presented to a far wider audience through travelling venues across the United States.

The Research

Jill Beute Koverman (McKissick Museum Curator of Education) has conducted extensive archival investigation on the enslaved African potter known only as Dave. Her research has identified 90 existing vessels produced by Dave between 1820 and 1863. The findings have also placed Dave's work at the ideological center of southern politics and culture during this era in Edgefield, South Carolina.

The Edgefield District—home of Francis Pickens and John Hammond who were strong supporters of radical nullifier John C. Calhoun—was a virtual hotbed of secessionist sentiment. The local newspaper, *The Edgefield Hive*, served as a venue to expound the liberal views and pro-union stance of its owner, Dr. Abner Landrum. Dave worked with Dr. Landrum, and perhaps because of his liberal views, may have been the individual that taught Dave to read and write.

The most substantive clue to Dave's identity is revealed in an editorial of the April 1863 issue of the *Edgefield Advertiser*. It reads:

One day in years gone by I happened to meet DAVE POTTERY (whom many readers will remember as the grandiloquent old darkey once connected with a paper known as the Edgefield Hive in the outskirts of his beloved hamlet. Observing an intelligent twinkle in his eye, we accosted him in one of his own set speeches: "Well, Uncle Dave, how does your corporosity sagitate?" – "First rate, young master, from top to toe. I just had a magnanimous bowl-ful of dat delicious old beverage, buttermilk." Who has not often felt his buttermilk as Dave did.

From this passage it would appear that Dave was a slave well known in the larger community for his way with words. Dr. Landrum operated both the *Edgefield Hive* (from 1829 to 1831), and a stoneware factory named Pottersville (from 1817 to 1828). Contemporary scholars Dr. John Burrison and Dr. John Michael Vlach have speculated that Dave likely acquired his command of the English Language working for Landrum first as a potter, and then as a typesetter.

The institution of slavery did much to negate the lives and contributions of those enslaved. Theories about Dave's origins can be drawn from information found in sources such as census records, Slave Schedules, local newspapers, deeds, probate records and Manufacturing Census's. Two local churches in Edgefield, members of the African American community, have been asked to search their local histories as well for any information about Dave.

Sources: Homepage for the McKissick Museum of Art, University of South Carolina at Columbia (<http://www.cla.sc.edu/MCKS/html/exhib.htm>) and the Dave Website (<http://www.cla.sc.edu/MCKS/dave/index.htm>).

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Information About "A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*"

This exhibit was organized by the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society. The artifacts from the *Henrietta Marie* and the interactive exhibit are currently making a three-year, twenty-city, national tour. The last stop is in Milwaukee at America's Black Holocaust Museum from May 15 to August 22, 1999.

In the summer of 1700, the English merchant-slaver *Henrietta Marie* sank in unknown circumstances thirty-five miles west of Key West, Florida. Shortly before this mishap, she had sold a shipment of 190 captive Africans in Jamaica.

The shipwreck was first found by Mel Fisher's divers in 1972 but only partially excavated. Their brief work revealed that it was later than the Spanish galleon *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, which they were searching for, as well as being English. Known as the "English Wreck" for the next ten years, it was not until July of 1983 that divers returned to the site. Archaeologist David Moore went out to study the wreck with Henry Taylor, a salvor who had made an arrangement with Mel to work at the site. They knew that what lay below was not a treasure vessel, but suspected it would be able to make an important contribution to history.

The ship was much more important than they hoped. On most ships of the period, one or two sets of iron shackles were carried to punish sailors who might misbehave; the large number found on this site was unusual. Then came an enormous breakthrough—a diver discovered the ship's bell. The cast bronze bell was heavily encrusted with concreted sand, sediment and coral. When the crew gently chipped this covering away, something remarkable was revealed—the means to identify the long-lost ship beyond a shadow of a doubt. "THE HENRIETTA MARIE 1699" was etched in block letters on the bell. The identification brought a startling immediacy to the excavation. Once records of Jamaican shipping returns confirmed the vessel's status as a slaver, the wreck's significance was apparent—the *Henrietta Marie* was the earliest slave shipwreck identified by name.

The identification allowed researchers to use historical records to begin reconstructing a little-known passage in American history. Early in the research process, records were uncovered showing that the *Henrietta Marie* had been a London-based vessel, registered as 120 tons burden. Sturdy and fast, she traveled the infamous triangular trade route favored by the slavers—from England to the Guinea coast, to the Americas, then home again.

Accounts relating to the *Henrietta Marie*'s voyages were uncovered, as were the names of her investors, captains, and wills of some of her crew members. Artifacts found at the site proved particularly helpful in creating a picture of shipboard life and the practices of the slave trade.

Several years ago, Mel Fisher donated the artifacts from the wreck to the not-for-profit

Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society. Under the Society, research has continued both with the collection of recovered items, and in the field.

Today, the *Henrietta Marie* is believed to be the world's largest source of tangible objects from the early years of the slave trade. As such it has proved to be a "gold mine" of information about a pivotal period in African, European and American history. Artifacts from any aspect of the maritime slave trade are extremely rare. Among the objects found at the site of the *Henrietta Marie* are over eighty sets of shackles, two cast-iron cannon, Venetian glass trade beads, stock iron trade bars, ivory "elephant's teeth," and a large collection of English made pewter tankards, basins, spoons and bottles. The partial remains of the ship's hull have allowed for a reconstruction of the vessel. An equally valuable "treasure" is less tangible: the wealth of information researchers have been able to uncover about the complex maritime slave trade and the roots of racial inequality that still exist today.

In May of 1993, the National Association of Black SCUBA Divers placed a memorial plaque on the site of the *Henrietta Marie*. The simple bronze marker, which faces the African shore thousands of miles away, bears the name of the slave ship and reads,

"In memory and recognition of the
courage, pain and suffering of enslaved
African people.

Speak her name and gently touch the
souls of our ancestors."

Two years later, in May of 1995, the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society unveiled "A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie*." The first major museum exhibition in this country devoted to the transatlantic slave trade, it was prepared and mounted with the assistance of the nation's leading scholars of African-American history. The critically acclaimed exhibition uses the vessel as a focal point to examine the slave trade, the conditions that spawned it, and its still-evident effect on society. It is currently on a tour of museums across the United States, sponsored by the General Motors corporation.

Dr. Colin Palmer, author of *Human Cargoes* and a professor of history at the University of North Carolina, is just one of the scholars whose work contributed to the creation of the *Henrietta Marie* exhibition. He believes that an understanding of the slave trade—such as the exhibit might inspire—is vital if race relations are to progress beyond their current uneasy state. "The story ends in 1700 for this particular ship, but the story of what the ship represented continues today," he says. "The importance of the *Henrietta Marie* is that she is an essential part of recovering the black experience—symbolically, metaphorically and in reality."

Source: www.melfisher.org. See also *A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta*

Marie, (Key West, Florida: The Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society, 1995).

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List of Recently Published Books on Race and African-American History and Culture.
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Diouf, Sylviane A. *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.

Finkelman, Paul, ed. *Slavery and the Law*. Madison: Madison House, 1997.

Gordon-Reed, Annette. *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy*, revised edition. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999.

Rhodes, Jane. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Robinson, Eugene. *Coal to Cream: A Black Man's Journey Beyond Color to an Affirmation of Race*. New York: Free Press, 1999.

Scheckel, Susan. *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Wahl, Jenny Bourne. *The Bondsman's Burden: An Economic Analysis of the Common Law of Southern Slavery*. Cambridge Historical Studies in American Law and Society. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Zafar, Rafia. *We Wear the Mask: African-Americans Write American Literature, 1760-1870*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.