

University of Richmond

UR Scholarship Repository

Honors Theses

Student Research

1940

Slave life in Virginia between 1736-1776 as shown in the advertisements of the Virginia Gazettes

Florence Lafoon
University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lafoon, Florence, "Slave life in Virginia between 1736-1776 as shown in the advertisements of the Virginia Gazettes" (1940). *Honors Theses*. 313.

<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses/313>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshipprepository@richmond.edu.

SLAVE LIFE IN VIRGINIA
BETWEEN 1736 - 1776
AS SHOWN IN THE ADVERTISEMENTS OF
THE VIRGINIA GAZETTES

by

FLORENCE LAFOON

PREFACE

Newspapers are an invaluable index to a period and the personalized Virginia Gazettes are particularly revealing of the attitudes of the Colonial period. Although the advertisements for runaway slaves give more of the master's feeling for the slave than the life of the slave himself, it is hoped that the writer has sufficiently drawn forth the inferences toward this latter point to make all that is available clear.

There are no copies of the Virginia Gazette between the years 1739/40 - 1744/45, and 1746 - 1766. This would make a great difference to a chronology of any kind, but the absolute similarity between the advertisements for slaves in the earliest and latest years of the period here under discussion, minimizes that loss to a certain extent.

The last available issue of the Parks Gazette appears in 1746 and the first issue of the Purdie and Dixon which is available is #739 in 1766. The Rind Gazette begins publication in that same year.

Florence Lafoon

Throughout the years between 1736 and 1776, there may be found in the Virginia Gazettes numerous announcements of the arrival of slave ships and the sale of their cargoes, of which the two following are typical:

The ship Johnston of Liverpool, Captain James Gildart, is lately arrived at York from Angola with 490 choice young slaves. The sale of them began on Tuesday the twelfth instant at Yorktown by Thomas Nelson.¹

Just arrived in James River from Africa The Ship Black Prince, Captain Charles Thomas, with a cargo of fine Windward and Gold Coast Slaves. Sale - Bermuda Hundred on Monday the (F) 15th of September next and continuous until all are sold. Thomas Newton and Son.²

Each one of these ships dumped into the colony of Virginia a group of black savages, unacquainted with either the language, custom, or activity of this new land. They had to be taught in some manner to wear the white man's clothes, to speak his language and to do his work. The clothes he probably adapted by observation and association, and he was turned over to the overseer to learn his work.³ It is doubtful that there was any separate effort to teach the slave the language. What he did not pick up he learned by query from other slaves, longer in the land.

To a certain extent an idea of the time it took for a new negro to begin to understand and speak the English language can be gathered from various advertisements for runaway slaves.

-
1. The Virginia Gazette, ed. Parks. Apr. 22, 1737.
 2. The Virginia Gazette, eds. Purdie & Dixon. Sept. 5 - 19, 1766.
 3. Wertenbaker, Thomas Jefferson, Planters of Colonial Virginia., p. 147.

It can not be in any sense definite because of the necessary differences in intelligence of the separate slaves and those in character between the runaway slave and the new negro who was content or frightened in his new position. Some slaves ran away almost as soon as they had arrived. For an instance is this advertisement of 1745:

Ran away from the Subscriber, living in Hanover, two new Negro Men, imported from Gambia, in the Brig Ranger, and sold at Newcastle the 5th of September last; they understand no English, and are near 6 Feet high, each; one of them is nam'd Jack, a right Black, with a Scar over his Right Eye-brow; the other a yellow Fellow, with 3 small Strokes on each Side of his Face, like this Mark (). They had on, each, a knap'd new Cotton Jacket and Breeches, without either buttons or button-holes, a new Oznabrig Shirt, a new Felt Hat. They stole a fine Damask Table-cloth, 10 qrs. square, 5 Yards and a Half of fine Scotch Linen, 3 Yards and a Half of Scotch 3 qr. Check, a white Holland shirt, and a Silk Handkerchief. Whoever takes up the said Negroes, and Goods, and brings them to me, or to Mr. Robert Brown, Merchant, in Newcastle, shall be rewarded, as the law allows. Margaret Arbuthnott.⁴

These two negroes, but a month in the colony and not speaking a word of English, not only wandered forth but took with them stolen goods which could be of no value to them and which they probably could not sell without benefits of speech. In 1745, there ran away from William Hunter three negroes, Sambo, Aaron and Berwick, of whom only Sambo spoke English to be understood.⁵

There are many announcements of new negroes being committed to the jails of Virginia who could tell their own name but either could or would not tell their master's name or the name of the county from whence they came. Such is the case of

4. Op. Cit., Parks. Apr. 10 - 24, 1745.

5. Ibid., May 16 - 23, 1745.

George, 25 and "lusty", who was taken up in Middlesex and committed to the Public Prison at Williamsburg.⁶ Most revealing of these announcements is that about Sandy, which gives some indication of the phraseology of the slave:

Middlesex, Sept. 12, 1768.

Committed to the Gaol of this County, on the 9th Instant, a Negro Man who calls himself Sandy, says he belongs to Thomas Wilsom or Wilson, in the neighborhood of Ferrin Turner and Thomas Waters, but in what part of the country can give no account; that he has made two crops for his master, has been absent from his service about two moons; seems to be about 25 years of age, has lost 2 of his under fore teeth, and those above are sharp, and a considerable distance from each other. He is cloathed in rolls breeches, a Virginia cotton shirt, and Negro cotton jacket. The owner may have him, on proper application.

John Daniel, Gaoler.⁷

The slave who had been in the country two years could generally speak some English, which is described as anything from "broken" to "pretty good". Jumper had been in the country two years and spoke pretty good English,⁸ while another negro who had been in the country the same length of time could tell his master's name but not the county.⁹ It is probable that at this time the average slave had the usage of the simpler and more necessary words but was still for the most part confused by proper names. Phil, an outlandish fellow, who ran away with an Irish servant man, had been in the country four years and spoke but broken English,¹⁰ and Warrah, stolen away from the Isle of

6. Ibid., Sept. 2, 1737.

7. The Virginia Gazette, ed. Rind. Sept. 22 - Oct. 6, 1768.

8. Op. Cit., Parks. Apr. 21, 1738.

9. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Dec. 4 - 18, 1766.

10. Op. Cit., Parks. Feb. 9 - 23, 1738.

Wight Courthouse, spoke the same after an equal length of time.¹¹

From the following phrase, "speaks plain for an African born", which appears in description of Jack, who ran away from Thomas Poindexter in 1766,¹² it would seem evident that the African born slave was not expected to learn much of the English language. He learned enough of it to get along and to learn his trade, usually that of raising tobacco.¹³ It was his offspring, brought up in the colony, who spoke the language of his master and learned the industrial trades.

The Virginia born slave was the most valuable, and this state carried on a profitable business in their sale. They were typically advertised as follows:

To be Sold - On the Twenty-fifth of July at Gloucester Court-House, Twenty Virginia Born Negroes, for Ready Money or Tobacco. Henry Whiting.¹⁴

A Choice Parcel of Virginia born Negro Slaves to be Sold, by publick Outcry, on the Subscribers' Plantation, in James City County, on the 22nd Day of January next, for Ready Money, or such Credit as may be agreed upon by Purchaser and Thomas Couffons.¹⁵

For the most part the Virginia born slave spoke good English, as for example Bob, committed to the Gaol of Charles City County in 1746,¹⁶ or Cuffey and Bacchus who ran away together in 1745.¹⁷ Some, such as Will who was committed to the Gaol of Prince George on the 10th of April of 1766,¹⁸ were even described as smooth spoken. Sometimes the country bred negro

11. Ibid., Oct. 12, 1739.

12. Op. Cit., Rind. Aug. 8, 1766.

13. Wertenbaker, Op. Cit., p. 147.

14. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. July 18, 1766.

15. Op. Cit., Parks. Dec. 12, 1745.

16. Ibid., Aug. 28 - Sept. 4, 1746.

17. Ibid., Mar. 21 - 28, 1745

18. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Apr. 25 - May 9, 1766.

could read or write or had accomplished both. Since there is no evidence of any general teaching of the slave in the eighteenth century, verified by the lack of education among the new negroes, it can be assumed that reading and writing, like speaking, were acquired. There are several possibilities of sources; first the slave might be quick-witted and observant enough to learn by watching his overseer or master; he might in some cases be fortunate enough to be singled out and taught by some evangelistic person, or taught by a fellow slave who had learned in one of these ways. The most natural way however, would have been to acquire the arts from the master's children - a childlike mind grasping childish teaching most easily.

Ben, who ran away from Joshua Jones in 1770, read "tolerably well",¹⁹ and Joe, kept as a waiting man and who knew house business and was a good shoemaker, could both read and write.²⁰ William Macon, in advertising for the runaway Peter, did not know how his slave had learned to write. He said, "He learned to write by some means and frequently wrote papers for himself and others."²¹ Charles, who ran away from William Alston in 1766, spoke very good English and pretended that he could read,²² showing a race characteristic that is not lost in any sense to-day and throwing a little light toward the intellectual curiosity which would lead a race to learn though unaided.

The most learned slave naturally could become a leader and his greatest field of leadership was in preaching. Typical is the case of Charles who ran away from Charles Floyd in 1768.

19. Ibid., Mar. 22 - 29, 1770.

20. Ibid., Aug. 17 - 24, 1769.

21. Ibid., Feb. 9 - 23, 1769.

22. Ibid., Aug. 15 - 22, 1766.

He could read "tolerably well" and was a "great preacher" from which he was expected to try to pass for a freeman.²³ Primus, advertized for by Seth Ward in 1772, had been a preacher since he was sixteen.²⁴

The artistic expression of the slave in the Colonial period is bound to have been slight. By the legend of the nineteenth century and the observation of to-day, one is sure that he danced and sang and made music. There could have been no literature with the scarcity of education at this early date and of either a graphic or plastic art there is no evidence. The violin was evidently the most popularly and quickly acquired musical instrument for the slave. Tom, who ran away from the Whitfield plantation in 1745 played very well on the violin,²⁵ Billie, fleeing from the Occoquan Furnace in Prince William County took his violin with him,²⁶ and Joe must have been a most colorful fiddler, described by John Harwood, sen. as going off in a pair of large checkered trousers.²⁷ Damon, who ran away from Sarah Gist in 1766, had two loves, liquor and drum beating,²⁸ but probably the most accomplished of them all was the slave advertised for sale as follows:

To be Sold. A Young, healthy Negro fellow, who has been used to wait on gentleman, and plays extremely well on the French horn. For further particulars apply to the Printer. ²⁹

23. Op. Cit., Rind. Oct. 27, 1768.

24. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Feb. 27 - Mar. 12, 1772.

25. Op. Cit., Parks. Dec. 5 - 12, 1745.

26. Op. Cit., Rind. Aug. 4, 1768.

27. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. July 19, 1770.

28. Ibid., Apr. 4 - 18, 1766.

29. Ibid., Mar. 28 - Apr. 4, 1766.

From 1736 to 1776, there were, in the advertisements in the Virginia Gazettes, many specified trades mentioned. The following lottery, the notice of which first appeared on Thursday, April 14, 1768, will show a number of these trades. (Material prizes are not reprinted here)

"A scheme of a lottery for disposing of certain Lands, Slaves and Stocks belonging to the Subscriber (Bernard Moore).

CONTENTS OF PRIZES

- | | | |
|------|-----|---|
| 1 of | 280 | A negro man named Billy, about 22 years old, an exceeding trusty good Forgerman, as well at the Finery as under the Hammer, and understands putting up his Fire. Also his wife named Lucy, a young wench, who works exceeding well both in the House and Field. |
| 1 of | 200 | A negro man named Joe, about 27 years old, a very trusty good Forgerman, as well at the Finery as under the Hammer, and understands putting up his Fire. |
| 1 of | 200 | A negro man named Mingo, about 24 years old, a very trusty good Finer, and Hammerman, and understands putting up his Fire. |
| 1 of | 180 | A negro man named Ralph, about 22 years old, an exceeding good Finer. |
| 1 of | 220 | A negro man named Isaac, about 20 years old, an exceeding good Hammerman and Finer. |
| 1 of | 250 | A negro man named Sam, about 26 years old, a fine Chafery man; also his Wife, Daphne, a very good Hand at the Hoe, or in the House. |
| 1 of | 200 | A negro man named Abraham, about 26 years old, an exceeding good Forge Carpenter, Cooper, and Clapboard Carpenter. |
| 1 of | 150 | A negro man named Bob, about 27 years old, a very fine Master Collier. |
| 1 of | 90 | A negro man named Dublin, about 30 years old, a very good Collier. |
| 1 of | 90 | A negro man named London, about 25 years old, (ditto). |
| 1 of | 90 | A negro man named Cambridge, about 24 years old, (ditto). |
| 1 of | 90 | A negro man named Harry, (ditto). |

- 1 of 100 A negro man named Toby, a very fine Master Collier.
- 1 of 120 A negro man named Peter, about 18 years old, an exceeding trusty good Waggoner.
- 1 of 190 A negro man named Dick, about 24 years old, a very fine Blacksmith, also his Smith's Tools.
- 1 of 80 A negro man named Sampson, about 32 years old, the Skipper of the Flat.
- 1 of 70 A negro man named Dundee, about 38 years old, a good Planter.
- 1 of 85 A negro man named Caroline Joe, about 35 years old, a very fine Planter.
- 1 of 110 A negro woman named Rachel, about 32 years old and her Children Daniel and Thomson, both very fine.
- 1 of 10 A negro woman named Hannah, about 16 years old.
- 1 of 75 A negro man named Jack, a good Planter.
- 1 of 75 A negro man named Ben, about 25 years old, a good House Servant and a good Carter.
- 1 of 120 A negro man, Robin, a good Sawyer, and Bella, his Wife.
- 1 of 70 A negro girl named Sukey, about 12 years old and another named Betty, about 7 years old, Children of Robin and Bella.
- 1 of 75 A negro man named York, a good Sawyer.
- 1 of 80 A negro woman named Kate, and a young child, Judy.
- 1 of 60 A negro girl, Aggy and Boy, Nat; Children of Kate.
- 1 of 75 A negro named Pompey, a young Fellow.
- 1 of 110 A fine breeding woman named Pat, lame of one side, with child, and her three children, Lot, Milley and Charlotte.
- 1 of 60 A fine Boy, Phill, son of Patty, about 14 years old.
- 1 of 50 A negro man named Tom, an outlandish Fellow.
- 1 of 280 A negro man named Cafar, about 30 years old, a very good Blacksmith, and his Wife named Nanny, with two Children, Tab and Jane.

- 1 of 110 A negro man named Edom, about 23 years old, a Blacksmith who has served four years to the Trade.
- 1 of 160 A negro man named Moses about 23 years old, a very good Planter and his Wife, Phoebe, a fine young Wench with her Child, Nell.
- 1 of 50 A negro woman, Dorah, Wife of Carpenter Jemmy.
- 1 of 35 A negro named Venus, Daughter of Tab.
- 1 of 25 A negro named Judy, Wife of Sambo.
- 1 of 20 A negro named Lucy, outlandish.
- 1 of 25 A negro man named Toby, a good Miller.

124 Prizes £ 18,400
1716 Blanks
 1840 Tickets at £ 10 each, are

£ 18,403

Managers are - John Randolph, John Baylor, George Washington, Fielding Lewis, Archibald Cary, Carter Braxton, Benj. Harrison, Ralph Wormley, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Walker, Thomas Tabb, Edmund Pendleton, Peter Lyons, Patrick Coutts, Neil Jamieson, Alexander Donald, David Jamieson and John Madison, Gentlemen.

The Time and Place of Drawing will be inserted hereafter. Twelve Months Credit will be given for the Tickets from the Time the Lottery is drawn.

Bernard Moore.³⁰"

The most intelligent slaves were seldom limited to only one trade. Peter Deadfoot, a Mulatto slave belonging to Samuel Selden, junior, was -

...a tall, slim, clean limbed, active, genteel, handsome fellow, with broad shoulders; about 22 years of age, a dark Mulatto with a nose rather flat than otherwise, very sensible, and smooth tongued, but is apt to speak quick, swear, and with dreadful curses upon himself, in defense of his innocence, if taxed with a fault, even when guilty, which may be easily discovered, by any persons taxing him with being run away. He is and indifferent shoemaker, a good butcher, ploughman and carter; an excellent sawyer and waterman, understands breaking oxen well, and is one of the best scythemen, either with or without a cradle, in America; in short he is so ingenious a fellow that he can turn his hand to anything; he has a great share of pride, though he is very obliging, is extremely fond of dress...³¹

David, belonging to David Gaskins and who was his waiting man when he went from home, was a good waiter, driver, hostler, understood something of gardening and of combing and dressing wigs and hair, could plough, work at the hoe and axe very well, and was on the whole, a very clever, active, brisk Fellow.³²

In the advertisements of the public sales, the trades worked by the average slave are more evident. In 1771 there was announced a sale of "A Parcel of very valueable Negroes, consisting chiefly of good waterman, house servants, a man cook and gardener."³³ In December of 1767 it was announced that there were for hire "some house servants and good spinners on the flax and cotton wheel."³⁴ There were to be sold at the June Fair

31. Ibid., Sept. 29 - Oct. 27, 1768.

32. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Nov. 5, 1772.

33. Op. Cit., Rind. Feb. 7, 1771.

34. Ibid., Dec. 24, 1767.

of 1766 in Fredericksburg "About twenty very valueable SLAVES, consisting of house servants, watermen, some tradesmen and labourers, and among them three children....³⁵ Those slaves not specified, are, it is assumed, those fit only for service as field hands.

In some cases special mention is made in an advertisement of an outstanding slave in a certain trade. In 1773 there was announced by Baldwin Matthews Buckner "A Small Cargo of Choice GOLD COAST SLAVES well assorted and healthy, also a fine Fellow who understands the Sailmaking Business,"³⁶ Also there were sales or rentings of one slave, especially fitted for a certain business.

January 27, 1776.

To be hired. A valuable negro blacksmith.
Inquire of Mr. Starkey Robinson at the Half
Way House or the subscriber at York.
Augustine Moore.³⁷

To be Sold to the highest bidder, at Petersburg
on the 8th instant; A very likely negro man
Slave, regularly bred to the ship carpenter's
business. Six months credit will be allowed,
on giving bond and security to
Yuille, Hylton & Co.³⁸

Since to give an advertisement as an example of each trade would be lengthy and irrelevant, there follows an alphabetical list of the various tradesmen described throughout these 40 years.

Bakers	Ditchers	Hammermen	Sawyers
Blacksmiths	Drivers	Hostlers	Shoemakers
Breeding women	Farmers	House servants	Sailors
Butchers	Ferryboatmen	Jockeys	Skippers (flat boats)
Carpenters	Finers	Millers	Spinners
Carters	Firemen	Mill-wrights	Scythemen
Chafery men	Forgemen	Overseers	Tailors
Colliers	Gardners	Planters	Valets
Cooks	Hair and	Ploughmen	Waggoners
Coopers	Wig Dressers	Sailmakers	Waiters
			Watermen

35. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. May 2 - 30, 1766.

36. Ibid., May 27, 1773.

37. Ibid., Purdie & Dixon. Jan. 27, 1776.

38. Ibid., May 2, 1766.

The runaway slave is probably representative of the rest of the body of slaves in the colony in respect to education, and since the same trades and talents which appear in the runaway advertisements are reiterated in the advertisements of sales, there can be no doubt that these are proportionately universal. But there is shown a difference from the other slave in either the character or life of the runaway in the very fact that he ran away. He had any of a number of causes to take flight. Families were split up and slaves ran away to join their wives.

One example is that of Valentine who ran away from his master, James Hawkins, and was seen the same night at Dr. George Alexander's plantation at which his wife, the property of Mr. George Noble, was staying.³⁹ Also there was Bob, property of John Woodliff, Sr., who had a wife at Mr. John Nelson's in Louisa, where it was supposed he had gone,⁴⁰ and Frank, running away for the third time in 1770 whose wife was an Indian of the Pamunkey river town.⁴¹ The following advertisement shows what was most probably a preconceived plot of escape by man and wife:

Amherst, June 6, 1776

Ran away from the Subscriber, the 15th of last month, a remarkable strong made Negro fellow named Ben, formerly the Property of Mr. John Nicholas of Buckingham, 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, 30 years old with thick Legs, a surly countenance, house man and works at the Carpenter and Shoemakers' trades. He passed last fall at Fredericksburg, for a freeman by the name of John Savage, and has an Indian woman for his wife. It is probable they are together, as she sold off and moved from her late Dwelling place in Albemarle, a few days before the fellow ran away. Any person that will deliver the above slave to Mr. John Nicholas in Buckingham or the Subscriber in Amherst, shall have three pounds Reward, and what the law allows. Patrick Rose.⁴²

39. Ibid., Apr. 8-15, 1775.

40. Ibid., May 27-Jun. 3, 1773.

41. Ibid., Nov. 29, 1770.

42. Ibid., Aug. 3 - 10, 1776.

In this advertisement:

Ran away from the Subscriber, living near Jamestown, last Sunday was Fortnight, A Negroe Man named Harry, who formerly belonged to Col. Charles Grymes, of Richmond County: He is about 5 Feet 6 Inches high, thin visag'd, has small Eyes, and a very large Beard; is about 35 Years old; and plays uppn the Fiddle. He has a dark colour'd Cloth Coat, double breasted, 2 Cotton Jackets, dy'd of a dark Colour, a Pair of Buckskin Breeches, flourish'd at the Knees, and a blue Great Coat. It is suppos'd he is gone to Richmond County, where he has a Wife. Whoever apprehends him, so that he may be brought to me near Jamestown, shall have a Pistole Reward, besides what the law allows. William Newgent.

N.B. As he went away without any Cause, I desire ⁴³ he may be punish'd by Whipping, as the Law directs.

it is evident that the master did not feel that the separation from his family was sufficient cause for the slave's running away. Slave men and slave women often eloped together, and in 1739 Col. Richard Randolph had need to advertise for two such couples, Sancho, Warwick, Bella and Phebe.⁴⁴

Along with the desire to return to his family, the slave often ran away to his former home, as is proved by the notes of owners of such an expectation. Richard Ambler in 1739, for instance, expected Kingsdale to go over the James River toward North Carolina, "having been lately from thence".⁴⁵ Negroes did, in some cases, run away without any discernible destination. Francis Peters advertised in 1772 that two outlandish old negroes named Cuffie and Grace were lurking about his place and he wished that the owner would come and take them away.⁴⁶

Another cause for a slave's running away was seduction by some person either interested in having him or selling him.

43. Op. Cit., Parks. Mar. 27, 1746.

44. Ibid., May 5 - 26, 1739.

45. Ibid., Apr. 6 - 13, 1739.

46. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Mar. 12, 1772.

The two advertisements below are examples of this:

Ran away from the Subscriber the 20th of July last, a Negroe Man named Joe, (who formerly belonged and was Coachman to Mr. Belfield, of Richmond County), he was for some time after he first ran away lurking about the Widow Belfield's Plantation, and was Outlaw'd in Richmond County, but is supposed to be lately removed up to Orange: He is a short, well-set Fellow, about 26 Years of Age, and took with him several Cloaths, among the rest a Suit of Blue, lined and faced with Red, with white Metal Buttons. Whoever takes up the said slave and brings him Home, shall receive Two Pistoles Reward, beside what the law allows. And as I have great Reason to believe, that he is privately encouraged to run away, and there harboured and concealed, that I may be induced to sell him, having had several Offers made me for him since he went off: I hereby promise, that if any One will discover where he has been harboured and concealed, so that the Person or Persons so harbouring him may be thereof convicted, I will pay to such Discoverer Ten Pistoles upon Conviction. This being the third trip he has made since I bought him in January last, I desire he may receive such correction on his Way home as the Law directs, when apprehended. And I take this Oppurtunity to give public Notice, That I shall always be willing to reward any Person, according to his Trouble, that shall take up and bring home any Negroe belonging to me, that shall be found abroad without a Note or other sufficient Pass.⁴⁷
John Mercer.

Whereas, I the Subscriber, living in Isle of Wight County, did last January hire to Nathaniel Magrouder, alias Redurgam, Two Negro Boys belonging to the Orphans of Mr. James Benn, one named Sam and is about 14 Years of Age, the other Mingo and is about 12 Years old, both Country born; and the said Magrouder absconded from his house in Isle of Wight County on the fifteenth of March last and took with him the two above-said Boys. He is a middle-sized man of a dark complexion, has a large mole on the side of his face, and a large dent on his nose. Whoever shall apprehend the said Magrouder, so that he may be brought to Justice, and bring the two Boys, or either of them, to me in the Isle of Wight County, shall be handsomely rewarded, by
Joseph Wright.⁴⁸

47. Op. Cit., Parks. Sep. 12 - Nov. 21, 1745.

48. Ibid., Apr. 15, 1737.

Most unusual of the runaways were those who thought to provide themselves with any necessities or means of transportation, of which the following is a rare example:

Ran away from Coggan's Point on James River, opposite to Col. Byrd's, 3 Negro Men, viz. Basil, a lusty, well made, black Negro, Virginia born, about 25 Years of Age. Gloucester, a tall, slim, black Negro, about 30 Years of Age. Sam, a Tawney, well made, Madagascar Negro, about 30 Years of Age. They went away in a Canoe on Sunday the 25th of June last; they were seen to go down the River: They had each of them on old Cotton Wastecoats and Breeches, and old Ozna-briggs Shirts; and 'tis supposed carried with them several sorts of old Cloaths they got of their neighbors, either bought or stole, besides a Small Cask of Salt Fish, and some Corn. Whoever secures them so that their Master may get them shall have Twenty Shillings for each, besides what the law allows, and all reasonable Charges, paid by me
Nathaniel Harrison. 49

No one, acquainted with the habits of children, would fail to imagine that punishment was a primary cause for a slave's attempt for freedom. It might be assumed from the wording of the advertisement on p. 13, (Note 43), that this was the reason expected by the master. Yet, there is rarely any mention given of the cause in any of the advertisements, although it is sometimes denied as in the case mentioned above. Numerous slaves are cited, however, as having been recently whipped. Stephen, a negro boy, who ran away from Aaron Trueheart in 1746 had been "much whipt, as his back will shew",⁵⁰ and it was advertised in 1737 that the runaway, Anne Relee, "being whipt last Court held for the County of King George", might "possibly have the Marks on her Back".⁵¹

49. Ibid., Jul. 21 - 28, 1738.

50. Ibid., May 15, 1746.

51. Ibid., Feb. 3 - 17, 1737.

In the case of Phebe, a Mulatto runaway of 1772, it is stated that she was, "for a Propensity of Pleasure in the Night", punished by her overseer, which is supposed to have made her run off.⁵² Another runaway of the same year, the negro woman, Betty, was said to have had a scar on her breast "occassioned by a stroke from her overseer"⁵³, and in 1772 a negro wench was said to have a scar of the same kind which may have come about in the same way.⁵⁴

A large per cent of the slave women, advertised as runaways, were "with child". For an instance was the Mulatto woman, Tabb, who ran away in 1769,⁵⁵ and Judith, who carried her child, "a little girl at the Breast", with her in 1773 while bearing another.⁵⁶ Whether this tendency has an relation to the fact brought forth by Ulrich Bonnell Phillips in his "Slave Crime in Virginia"- that of the twelve murders of slave children recorded in vouchers in a mass of seventeenth century archives in the Virginia State Library, all of these murders were of their own children by slave mothers- it can probably not be proven.⁵⁷ It is possible that the slave woman rebelled against the status of mere breeding animal and preferred either to runaway or destroy the child.

The punishment of the slave's petty offenses was left to the master by Colonial Law, and only for serious offenses or to terrify the culprit, was he taken before the regular officers of the law. Inhumane treatment was forbidden, but the slave

52. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon, Aug. 6 - 20, 1772.

53. Ibid., Dec. 10 - 17, 1772.

54. Ibid., Apr. 8 - 22, 1775.

55. Ibid., Nov. 2 - 9, 1769.

56. Ibid., May 6 - 13, 1773.

57. American Historical Review (Reprinted from) Vol. XX, No. 2, Jan. 1915.

had the difficulty of proving his case and brunting the desire of the people to preserve plantation discipline.⁵⁸

The outlawed slave, evidently one convicted of a capital crime or guilty of enough previous crimes to be undesirable, was usually advertized for with an inducement similar to that offered by William Gregory for Peter, an outlawed runaway. To any person who would kill him and bring the subscriber his head separated from his body, he offered ten pounds; if delivered alive, he offered forty shillings.⁵⁹ This was because the colony paid for a dead outlawed slave to further the suppression of crime, and if he were left alive, he would be merely a source of trouble until he ran away again.⁶⁰ The only case in the runaway advertisements in which the cause of outlawing is stated is in 1768. John Smith states that Maun was outlawed for threatening to burn his house.⁶¹

The status of the slave as either a property or a personality fell with the master. In the announcements of property sales he was usually listed as household goods, as for example in the following advertisement:

To be Sold at Publick Sale, at Mr. Vobe's Door, in Williamsburg, on the 23d Day of April next, a Parcel of Household Furniture of Several Sorts; a young Negro Wench perfectly well qualified for all Sorts of Housework; a young Negro Fellow who understands driving a Chariot, and is most careful in managing Horses: Also a Couple of excellent Coach-horses, not above 7 Years old, a fine Match with regard to Colour and Size. Six Months Credit will be allow'd the Purchasers, giving good Security.⁶²

Often he went with the land or the property as in the case

58. Scott, Arthur P., Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia. p.293.

59. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. May 4 - 18, 1769.

60. Scott, Op. Cit., p. 302.

61. Op. Cit., Rind. Feb. 4, 1768.

62. Op. Cit., Parks. Mar. 28, 1745.

of the saw mill advertized for rent or sale in 1766, with or without negroes.⁶³ That many masters knew their slaves well and understood them is obvious by the phrasing of a good many of the advertisements. An excellent example of this familiarity is shown in Samuel Meredith's description of his slave Abel, which follows:

20 LBS. REWARD

Ran away from the Subscriber, a Mulatto Man, named Abel, about 40 years old, near 6 Feet 7 Inches high, has lost Several of his Teeth, large Eyebrows, a Scar or two on Some Part of his Face, occassioned by a Brick thrown at him by a Negro, is very apt to stroke his Hand over his Chin, and plays on the Violin. He is well known as a Pilot on the York River and the Bay. As I have whippedhim twice for his bad Behaviour, I believe Scars may be seen upon his Body. He can write so as to be understood, and once wrote a Pass for a Negro belonging to the Hon. Col. Corbin, wherein he said the Fellow had served his Time honestly and truly. He has been to England, but the Captain he went with took care to bring him back, and since his Return from that Country is very fond of Liquor. He is gone off in a Boat with two Masts, Schooner rigged, once a Pilot Boat, but now the property of the Magdalen Schooner of War, and was seen, I am told, fifty or sixty leagues to the Southward of Cape Henry, from which it is expected he intends for one of the Carolinas. He is a very great Rogue, and is so instructed by several Persons not far from Wormley's Creek, York River, one of whom, he told me, said I was not worthy to be his Master. He had some Cash of my Son's, and an Order drawn by Captain Punderson on Richard Corbin, Esq., payable to Ralph G. Meredith or myself. A white Lad went off with him, whom I cannot describe, never having seen him to my knowledge. Whoever secures said Servant, so that I may have him again, shall have the above Reward.

Samuel Meredith, Sr.

King & Queen, Nov. 16, 1773.⁶⁴

63. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. July 4 - 18, 1766.

64. Ibid., Jan. 6 - 27, 1774.

The master's consideration for a slave is evident in the following notice:

About the 2nd or the 3rd of this Instant (March) some person out of Suffolk gave a Negroe Man in my Service, instead of a two dollar bill, one of more Value. The person who made this mistake, by applying to me, and giving a Satisfactory Account of the affair, will have the money restored after paying charges. If no application is made in four months, I shall return the money to the Negroe.
John Hawkins.⁶⁵

Slaves were branded and usually on the cheeks. The Randolph slaves were branded IR, with one character on each cheek,⁶⁶ and the slaves of Hardin Perkins had an HVP on both cheeks.⁶⁷ In 1771 there was taken up a negro fellow who was branded on the cheek I+C who said he belonged to Indians.⁶⁸

A most interesting light is thrown on the attitude toward the negro in this period in the following quotation from an announcement of 1739:

I find that it has been industriously reported for many Years, that Ships which come from the Guinea Sea with Slaves, are never in a Condition after to take in tobacco; which is very absurd and ungenerous, and a great Discouragement to bring Negros here; But I can not think any man, who has any Notion of a Ship, can ever imagine any one will venture his Life and Fortune to Sea in a Vessel that is not Seaworthy.⁶⁹

If a slave ship were not regarded safe enough to haul tobacco, strange must have been the attitude toward the creatures being brought in such a ship.

The disease most mentioned among the slaves was smallpox and many such as Josee⁷⁰ and Sam⁷¹, both run away in 1766 are described as "pitted with smallpox". In September of 1770 it was advertised in the Virginia Gazette that there were to be

65. Ibid., Mar. 16 - 23, 1776.

66. Op. Cit., Rind. Apr. 28, 1768.

67. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Aug. 1 - 15, 1766.

68. Ibid., Jan. 10, 1771.

69. Op. Cit., Parks. June 29, 1739.

70. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Mar. 7 - 14, 1766.

71. Ibid., Oct. 17 - 24, 1766.

sold on the 14th instant, a hundred and fifty-one healthy choice slaves who had had the smallpox but who had been well for several weeks and were removed two miles from the ship. They had been washed, shaved and newly clothed and the owners and their families had not had the disease, of which fact they wished to assure the public.⁷² The following amusing announcement reveals the fact that slaves were inoculated:

Maryland, August 15, 1770.

The Subscriber, who has been regularly bred to the practice of PHYSIC and SURGERY, gives this public information that he begins to inoculate on the 5th of September, and continues until the last of June, 1771, at his house which stands about a half a mile from Baltimore Town, on a healthy situation with an agreeable prospect. The price (as before) Two Pistoles, and twenty-five shillings per week for board. The sickness is really trifling, and the confinement none. They may safely return to their homes in 21 days. Those that chose to come, are requested not to alter their diet, and to give timely notice, that necessary care may be taken to prevent their being disappointed. Negroes will be insured at five per cent. The subscriber declares he has inoculated upwards of eight thousand, and has lost but seventeen, and they died more from obstinacy and a too great indulgence, than from the smallpox.

Henry Stevenson.⁷³

John Mercer describes his runaway slave, Christmas, as having been inoculated for smallpox.⁷⁴ This excerpt from a description of the runaway Natt, "He has lately had the foul disease and the Ulcers on his Scrotum and Penis are not perfectly healed," would indicate that the venereal diseases were not unknown among the slaves.⁷⁵

72. Ibid., Sept. 6, 1770.

73. Op. Cit., Rind. Feb. 7 - July 18, 1771.

74. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Mar. 19, 1772.

75. Op. Cit., Parks. June 22, 1739.

It has been seen in the fully quoted advertisements of the previous pages that rather minutely detailed descriptions of the clothing worn by runaway slaves are often given. From a reading of all the descriptions in the Colonial period of the Gazettes, there become evident certain materials and pieces of clothing that by the weight of numbers seem to be most common. Most usual of the materials are plains, kersey, oznabrug, "negro cotton" and "Virginia cotton." Plains cloth was well named, being a material not twilled, corded or figured,⁷⁶ and kersey was a coarse but smooth-faced cloth. Oznabrug, or oznabrig as it is sometimes spelled in the Gazettes, was a coarse linen originally made in Osnabrück, Germany. (The word and its numerous variants are all spelled with the "s" of the town, in the Murray Dictionary.) "Virginia" cotton was evidently that stuff made in the colony and "negro cotton" probably came into this usage because of custom. That the two are the same can not here be proven but it seems probable. Henry Lee in 1769 stated that the runaway Tom Slater had a variety of clothes but worked in dyed brown cotton.⁷⁷ Since cheaper clothes would naturally serve as work clothes for the slave it seems logical that the home made goods would be the most practical. Other materials that were often mentioned are drill, a heavy fabric of linen or cotton having a diagonal weave,⁷⁸ fustian, a coarse cloth made of cotton and flax and usually of a dark leaden or olive color; and russet, a coarse

^{76.} This and subsequent definitions, except for note ⁷⁸, are taken from A New Dictionary on Historical Principles, ed. James A. H. Murray. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1893.)

^{77.} Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Mar. 16 - Dec. 7, 1769.

^{78.} Webster's New International, 2nd ed. unabridged.

homespun woolen cloth of a reddish-brown, grey or neutral color. Other materials, rarer than these, were duffle and duroy, both coarse woolens, the latter made in the west of England; fogarthy, a cloth of which the writer was unable to find any definition; and manx or manks cloth, which, according to the definition of the adjective, was made in the Isle of Man. Calico was worn by the slave women.

The most quoted piece of clothing was the "fearnought" or "fearnothing" jacket, which was a coat of a stout woolen of the kind used on shipboard. Next to this were the "thickset" coat made of a short twilled cotton with a close nap, and the "greatcoat". There were coats and jackets mentioned of all the above-cited materials and also some of camblet, a weave of camels' hair and silk. Waistcoats were many and various, often well-decorated with metal buttons and lacing behind. Canvas, linen, buckskin, crocus and broadcloth were commonly used along with an enticing sounding stuff called "everlasting" which was practically applied in the making of breeches.

Slaves were to be seen in worsted and silk caps, and cocked, felt, beaver or costor hats, the latter being either a beaver or an imitation of such. The shoes are described as Virginia shoes, country shoes or "negro-made", and the slave such as Jack who had a stout pair of imported shoes was fortunate.⁷⁹ James Walker gave an unusual description of the shoes of Sambo, Edom, Ben and Tom who ran away in 1771. They are described as having "cotton wrappers to their legs", and "shoes of stiff leather, hind quaters entirely without seams, and the bottoms very broad and nailed." Stockings were

79. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Jan. 14, 1773.

80. Op. Cit., Rind. Jan. 17, 1771

usually country-knit of negro cotton, yarn or thread, and sometimes were ribbed or plaid.

In 1771, Richard Randolph described Jack Sunday and Peter as having "cloaths of the best kind given to negroes that work in the ground",⁸¹ indicating a certain amount of regimentation in dress, at least among the field hands, for things "of the best given" are usually very much alike. There is also a tendency in the latter part of the Colonial period to reduce the amount of description in an advertisement. Whether this is because of increasing uniformity, a raise in advertising prices, or the subscriber's awareness that a runaway slave was liable to change his apparel, it is not known. At any rate, certain slaves would appear far from uniform. The same Jack who wore the imported shoes wore a new suit of green beaver coating trimmed with mohair basket buttons, with white metal buttons on the jackets and breeches,⁸² and Agnes, who ran away from Paul Heriter in 1766 and who snivelled through her nose, wore a red, white and yellow calico gown, a short white linen sack, a petticoat of the same, a pair of stays with a fringed blue riband, a large pair of silver buckles and a pair of silver bobs.⁸³

The character of the slave can only be determined by interpretation of general facts and stray phrases. He spoke English for the most part brokenly and he could only occasionally read and write. He learned trades, but the greater number of his people worked in the tobacco fields. He had no art but music, and usually he lived and died a stranger

81. Ibid., Feb. 7 - 14, 1771.

82. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Jan. 14, 1773.

83. Ibid., Apr. 25, 1766.

to Christianity, with religious and moral ideals little better than those he had known in his native land.⁸⁴ He was simple and childlike, guided and guarded according to the wish of his master and running away when that wish became too unpleasant.

The common words used in description of the slave were "remarkable", "outlandish" and "sensible". If his activity were unusual, it was pointed out that he was brisk or active, and many were "cunning" and "subtile". Stammering was a common difficulty and many adopted the habits of liquor and tobacco. A common characteristic that was pointed out in any number of advertisements was a "down look", meaning a downcast expression. For an instance was Shadrack, who ran away from Williamson Ball in 1766, who was described as having "remarkable thick lips, down look, a large scar on the left corner of his mouth, and the lugs of his ears have been a little cracked from his head."⁸⁵ Often the new negro was still marked by his native land, as was the slave of Michael Sherman, who was between 30 and 40 years old, but looked younger, having no beard and scars on his temples, being the marks of his country.⁸⁶ Similar phrases to "having no beard" throughout many of the advertisements would indicate that a number of the slaves wore beards, and many were described as having long bushy hair. They were well scarred from accidents, especially by the clumsy handling of tools. Certainly they were not a very

84. Jernegan, Marcus W., *Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America*, 1607 - 1793. p. 24.

85. Op. Cit., Purdie & Dixon. Apr. 18 - May 2, 1766.

86. Op. Cit., Parks. Nov. 21 - 28, 1745.

attractive looking race at this period. Deformities were prevalent and tribal differences must have made the slaves an incongruous group.

The real character of the slave can not be obtained from such a material description as an advertisement for a runaway slave. What he learned, his trades, his talents, why he ran away, how he was punished, his status and his diseases, at least those that marked him, can be to a certain extent realized; but his real character, other than the identifying traits of certain personalities, - what he thought and how he felt, his reactions and struggles for acclimation, his wishes and dreams, morals and traditions - will only be understood with a complete study of his whole period of slavery and of all the material available. The sources of this paper will be but a part of such a study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. A New Dictionary on Historical Principles, ed. James A. H. Murray. Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1893. (The Library of the University of Richmond)
2. Jernegan, Marcus W., Laboring and Dependent Classes in Colonial America, 1607 - 1793. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1931. (The Virginia State Library)
3. Phillips, Ulrich Bonnell, "Slave Crime in Virginia" Reprinted from The American Historical Review, Vol. XX., No.2, Jan., 1915. (The Virginia State Library)
4. Scott, Arthur P., Criminal Law in Colonial Virginia. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1930. (Library of the City of Richmond)
5. The Virginia Gazette, ed. Parks. (Photostatic copies, 1736-39, 1744-46) (The Virginia State Library)
6. The Virginia Gazette, eds. Purdie & Dixon. (Photostatic copies, 1766-76) (The Virginia State Library)
7. The Virginia Gazette, ed. Rind. (Photostatic copies, 1766-76) (The Virginia State Library)
8. Webster's New International Dictionary, 2nd ed. (unabridged) G. and C. Merriam Company, Pub. Springfield, Mass., 1934.
9. Wertebaker, Thomas Jefferson, The Planters of Colonial Virginia. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1922.