The Southern planter, 1841-1861

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THE SOUTHERN PLANTER, 1841-1861

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The Southern Planter, established in Richmond, Virginia, in 1841, was an influential agricultural journal in the years preceding the Civil War. It is now the oldest farm magazine still in continuous publication. In the years before the war there were several owners, editors, and publishers, with the attendant subscription and financial problems of a new editorial venture. The Southern Planter grew in size and in influence and mirrored the agricultural changes of its region.

The period 1815-1860 has been called "The Farmer's Age". The farmer could see much private activity and public interest in his occupation. The Federal government began its assistance with free seeds and public land acts. New methods of farming evolved from experimentation and scientific studies. Farm implements were improved. Agricultural societies were formed and encouraged self-improvement among their members. On the other hand, the changing political climate near the end of the era raised doubts that the farmer's lot would continue to improve. There were financial and marketing problems, incomplete transportation networks, and the difficulties involved in rehabilitating

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2 Ibid.
worn-out land. The darkest shadow was cast by the growing sectionalism that fed upon the existence of slavery, a predominantly agricultural institution. Virginia and the Upper South participated in these cross currents of change through the pages of The Southern Planter.

Virginia, prior to 1840 and the founding of the Planter, had suffered through an agricultural decline from colonial days and now was experiencing a slow rebirth of its rural fortunes. In the Tidewater tobacco areas, overproduction, marketing problems, low prices, declining yields and heavy debts had brought a proud region to near insolvency. Migration to the West, auction sales, or abandonment were frequent remedies for harassed planters. A renewed interest in the soil, an increasing sectionalism and frequent economic dislocations combined to spur agricultural reform.

Many prominent Virginians promoted agricultural improvement in the immediate post-Revolutionary period and afterwards. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were notable examples. Their work was mostly experimental and the results were not permanent, as their lands wasted away after their deaths. Their work developed along three lines;

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3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 5.
5 E. Merton Coulter, "Southern Agriculture and Southern Nationalism before the Civil War," Agricultural History, IV (July, 1930), 80.
6 Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (Urbanna: University of Illinois Press, 1926), 82-83; Kathleen Bruce, "Virginian Agricultural Decline to 1860: A Fallacy," Agricultural History, VI (January, 1932), 3.
first, the use of better plows and methods of soil preparation for crops or erosion prevention; second, an increased interest in the production of animal manure and the use of artificial fertilizers; and third, the introduction of grass and legume crops for feeding and plowed-under dressings as parts of crop rotations.\textsuperscript{7} It was not until 1813 that agricultural reform began to show direction. In that year, John Taylor of Caroline County, a large landowner and early states rights advocate, published the \textit{Arator}.\textsuperscript{8} This was a collection of newspaper articles on the subject of agricultural practices which he had written in previous years. They advocated crop rotations, deep plowing, use of cover crops and use of manures also. Application of his published principles increased yields in much of the Tidewater and encouraged others to develop his methods.\textsuperscript{9} Edmund Ruffin of Prince George County enthusiastically adopted Taylor's precepts but his soil did not respond.\textsuperscript{10} There were other failures with the use of Taylor's methods, primarily because of a lack of knowledge of soil types.\textsuperscript{11} Experimentation and study led to Ruffin's advocacy of chemical soil testing and marl (fossil remains) applications to the land. In 1832 he published "Essay on Calcareuos Manures," which immediately received wide acclaim. Eventually the essay

\textsuperscript{7}Craven, \textit{Soil Exhaustion}, 89.

\textsuperscript{8}Bruce, "Virginian Agricultural Decline," 4.

\textsuperscript{9}Craven, \textit{Soil Exhaustion}, 99-103.

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Ibid.}, 111.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}. 
was expanded and published in five editions. The theory that Ruffin discussed was in some cases incorrect, but the practice of marl application was the most fundamental improvement that had yet been attempted to increase the soil fertility of the region. He also believed that the cause of the economic and political decline of the South was soil exhaustion. With that corrected, he maintained that the South would again prosper. A third agricultural innovator of this period was Fielding Lewis of Charles City County. He began using lime with excellent results as his treatment to increase soil fertility. He used lime and putrescent manures on the heavily sanded, wornout lands of the lower James River area. In a ten year period he nearly quadrupled his wheat yield. The interaction of these men's research showed the value of soil chemistry for worn-out land.

The increase in agricultural activity led to the diffusion of information on farm topics. Farmers joined together in societies for the exchange of information. Seventeen societies came into existence between 1820 and 1840, eight of them in the Tidewater region of Ruffin and Lewis. As early as 1811, there had been interest in forming a
Agricultural education became a topic for active discussion; several large landowners investigated the possibilities of private, European-style training for young men in farm management. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had wanted agriculture taught at the University of Virginia; their efforts did not succeed. In writing of his projected university and also in his 1817 draft of an education bill, Jefferson included a request for a chair of agriculture. When the University of Virginia opened in 1825, however, agriculture was not a separate subject. It was called rural economy and was the last of six subjects assigned to Professor John Patton Emmett. Financial and political and perhaps also educational considerations had crowded out agriculture as a distinctive unit of the University. James Madison had been president of the United States Agricultural Society and in 1822

18 Charles W. Turner, "Virginia Agricultural Reform, 1815-1860," Agricultural History, XXVI (July, 1952), 82-83. This group existed under several names, such as the Virginia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, The United Agricultural Society of Virginia and The Virginia Central Society until it received a charter from the General Assembly in 1853 as The Virginia State Agricultural Society.

19 H. G. Good, "Early Attempts to Teach Agriculture in Old Virginia," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XLVIII (October, 1940), 347-350.

20 Ibid., 342.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.
was president of the Albemarle Agricultural Society. In this year, the University was in the process of formation and the Albemarle Society proposed several resolutions on the subject of agricultural education, specifically appropriating one thousand dollars to endow a professorship. Madison also sent a circular letter to other Virginia societies, enclosing the resolutions and requesting assistance in endowing the chair of agriculture. He asked for contributions of not more than a dollar per farmer, to gain wide support for the school. In addition, the letter called for the establishment of an experimental farm under the supervision of the Professor. The only known results of this appeal were an appropriation of one hundred dollars from the Agricultural Society of Surry County and a letter of approval from the President of the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society. In 1831, other efforts were made in the General Assembly to establish a chair and an experimental Farm. The legislature defeated the proposals, primarily because they

25 Ibid., 342-343. The preamble stated, "Whereas the Establishment of a Professorship of Agriculture in one of the principal seminaries of learning in this state is a measure eminently calculated to hasten and perpetuate the march of agricultural improvement already so happily commenced; and, whereas there are grounds to believe that such an institution may be incorporated in the University of Virginia . . . this Society could not make an appropriation of its funds more conducive to the permanent attainment of the primary objects of its institution."

26 Ibid., 343-345.

27 Ibid., 344.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 345.

30 Ibid.
were connected with the purchase of land for the farm. Agricultural fairs were held by local and state societies, the first in 1819 in Albemarle. They proved most popular, offering not only a social gathering but a medium for the exchange of agricultural information between localities. Agricultural journals sprang up and began to write of "the atmosphere of the ideal agriculturist." By the time of the Southern Planter's founding Virginia and the South had developed an agricultural consciousness and an awareness of their past problems.

Other farm journals preceded the Planter in Virginia. Theodorick McRobert's The Virginia Farmer (1827-1833), of Scottsville and Farmville was the pioneer magazine. When Edmund Ruffin began his Farmer's Register in 1833, The Virginia Farmer admitted it "must droop like a harebell before the sun" to make a place for the new publication. Ruffin began his Farmer's Register with a sparse subscription list. The interest in agriculture that his "Essay" encouraged soon increased its distribution and income. Ruffin himself wrote most of the editorial

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31 Ibid., 345-346.
32 Turner, "Virginia Agricultural Reform" 87.
33 Ibid.
34 Coulter, "Southern Agriculture and Southern Nationalism," 78.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
and scientific comment during the ten years of publication. His high standards made it an outstanding and influential periodical. In 1841 and 1842 the editorial policy of the magazine became involved in bank reform to the neglect of farm topics. Reader criticism of this and many subscription arrears led to its closing in 1842. The Southern Planter had just begun the year earlier and would continue the advocacy of agricultural improvement.

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CHAPTER I
THE EDITORS

From 1841 to 1861, The Southern Planter had five editors and four changes of ownership. All of the editors were from a rural background, and some had benefitted from training in other fields, including law and medicine. Two, Charles Tyler Botts and Frank Ruffin, remained for nearly seven years each; the other three served shorter terms. Three editors, Botts, Ruffin, and James E. Williams, owned all or part of the magazine. One editor, Richard B. Gooch, died in office before he could exert strong influence on the paper; another, John M. Daniel, went on to greater fame as editor of the Richmond Enquirer. These men gave the initial thrust to The Southern Planter and made it a magazine

1 The Southern Planter, January 1841, 1; November 1847, 356.
2 Ibid., July 1851, 193; June 1858, 387.
3 Ibid., January 1841, 1; December 1846, 282.
4 Ibid., January 1855, 17; June 1858, 387.
5 Ibid., June 1858, 387.
6 Ibid., June 1851, 163.
7 Ibid., July 1849, 193; Robert W. Hughes, Editors of the Past (Richmond: W. E. Jones, 1897), 116.
of influence in Virginia and the Upper South.  

In late 1840, Charles Tyler Botts, a farmer and lawyer, founded the Planter and Peter D. Bernard published the first issue in January 1841. Botts was born in Prince William County in 1809, the son of Benjamin and Jane Tyler Botts. His father was a prominent attorney and one of Aaron Burr's counsel during his trial for treason. His mother was the daughter of Charles Tyler of Prince William County, a descendant of the first Charles Tyler in Virginia, and a cousin of President John Tyler. His parents perished in the Richmond Theatre fire of December 26, 1811. Charles Tyler Botts and his brother, John Minor Botts, were educated by relatives and became farmers and lawyers in central Virginia. Charles Botts was interested in Edmund Ruffin's Farmer's Register and wished to publish a journal dedicated to practical agriculture. Ruffin's harsh attacks on the banking system, to the neglect

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8Frank L. Mott, A History of American Magazines 1741-1850, 5 volumes (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1930), vol. II, note 88, note 435. Mott agrees that the Planter is the oldest magazine of its type in continuous publication. He gives this more credence than the claim of the Country Gentleman or the American Agriculturist, both of which trace themselves through mergers to an earlier date.

9Planter, January 1841, 1.


11Ibid.


14Planter, January 1841, 1-2.
of agriculture, was causing him financial difficulties. The Southern Planter, being "launched by more conservative hands," would try to keep divisive topics from its pages, yet fully cover agricultural improvement. Botts designed to make his magazine "... the medium for the promulgation, in condensed form, of the observations and deductions of practical men," and to publish "... valuable communications, more peculiarly applicable to our Southern soil, climate and institutions ... at so small a price as to bring it within the reach of all." The Southern Planter developed from these ideas. Botts left the Planter in October 1847 for California and a job as keeper of stores for the U. S. Navy. In 1849 he was a delegate to the California Constitutional Convention from Monterey. He was prominent in the group trying to restrict California's boundaries and keep the fledgling state out of the slavery controversy. In the elections for state officials at the Convention, he failed to be named Attorney General by one vote. Later he practiced law in San Francisco, was named a judge in Sacramento, and became publisher of the Sacramento Standard. In 1861, he was named California State Printer. After the Civil War he travelled to the

15 Craven, Edmund Ruffin, 61ff.
16 Ibid., 71.
17 Planter, January 1841, 1.
18 Ibid.
19 Demaree, American Agricultural Press, 368.
South briefly but returned to California and the practice of law. 20

Bott's close associate in these early years was the publisher, Peter D. Bernard. He was a "book and job printer" 21 in Richmond, the son-in-law of T. W. White, the founder of The Southern Literary Messenger and the first publisher of the Farmer's Register. 22 In December 1846, Botts sold the Planter to Bernard, although he remained as editor until the fall of 1847. 23 From July 1842 to June 1843, Colonel L. M. Burfoot of Chesterfield was named "joint owner and Editor of this paper," 24 They planned a trip to the North in September to investigate farming practices and for at least four months were jointly engaged in an "Agricultural and Variety Store" 25 in Richmond. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory, as Colonel Burfoot did not perform any editorial tasks and finally left the area, the Planter, and the store operation. 26

In addition to conducting the editorial affairs of the Planter, Botts and Bernard engaged in several parallel ventures. In February 1841

21 Planter, January 1841, 16.
23 Planter, December 1846, 282; November 1847, 356.
24 Ibid., July 1842, 167.
25 Ibid., August to December 1842, back cover.
26 Ibid., January 1843, 144. Botts commented that Burfoot's leaving was no loss to the subscribers. He had "never written a word for the paper or even seen a sheet of it until it was in the hands of subscribers."
the editor offered to help the readers obtain agricultural information and to make small purchases for them in Richmond. By 1845 this service had expanded to the extent he had to charge a fee to compensate for the additional time required.  

Prior to organizing the Planter, Botts had developed a straw cutter, and an agency to market it; they both were advertised and commented upon in the magazine. They once advertised livestock, a "Holstein and Alderney" bull, in August 1842. Bernard advertised his printing operations from the first issue. In 1843 they jointly began a land agency for their subscribers, offering to communicate with interested parties. Their commission was a flat rate, $10 in advance and $50 at sale, if sold within six months.

By November 1843, one of Botts' activities had caused him trouble with a group of subscribers, the Orange (Virginia) Agricultural Club. They had purchased quantities of poudrette (the dried products of privies, used for fertilizer) from him, and found it full of broken crockery and dirt. Botts replied vaguely, relating his activities as merely a middleman. His main defense was that a Yankee must have tricked

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27 Ibid., February 1841, 32; August 1845, 188.
28 Ibid., February 1841, 32. At first, he would not reply to letters signed with a pseudonym.
29 Ibid., August 1842, 191.
30 Ibid., January 1841, 16.
31 Ibid., January 1843, 24.
32 Ibid., November 1843, 245.
him. A few months later, the New York supplier replied to the Orange Club that nothing was wrong with his product. Botts apologized to him, mentioning his duty to the subscribers in making a complaint. More letters of complaint came in shortly afterwards; causing Botts to travel to New York. The editor then concluded that poudrette may be necessary for the North, but it was a mistake for Southern crops.

Charles Tyler Botts gave the magazine its name, "The Southern Planter, Devoted to Agriculture, Horticulture, and the Household Arts." He selected two mottoes for the Planter that have remained on the masthead to this day. From Xenophon he chose "Agriculture is the nursing mother of the Arts" and from Sully, "Tillage and Pasturage are the two breasts of the state."

Upon Botts' departure for California in 1847, Bernard named John M. Daniel as editor. Born in Stafford County in 1825, Daniel had been in Richmond for several years as secretary of the Patrick Henry Society, a debating group. He attracted Bernard's attention with a series of

33 Ibid., 245-246.
34 Ibid., January 1844, 1-4.
36 Ibid., July 1844, 164.
37 Ibid., June 1841, 1.
38 Ibid., Vols. I-CXXX, passim.
39 Ibid.
newspaper articles $^{41}$ and had been employed by the Planter for a year prior to assuming the editorship. $^{42}$ He stated that he would continue the Planter as a "... journal of practical agriculture ... work for the intelligent farmer. ... ." $^{43}$ As time would permit, he promised, he would visit with farmers. $^{44}$ Within months, complaints began about a loss of editorial quality. $^{45}$ Daniel did not appear overly interested in agricultural affairs; and subscriptions and original articles both declined during his tenure. $^{46}$ He later became well known as editor of the Richmond Enquirer and as a leading Democratic party spokesman. $^{47}$

In July 1849 Bernard named Richard Barnes Gooch editor, upon the departure of Daniel. $^{48}$ Twenty-nine years old and a graduate of the University of Virginia, $^{49}$ Gooch was a farmer with a journalistic background. He had been on the Board of Editors of the Collegian, a

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$^{41}$ Ibid., 219.

$^{42}$ Planter, November 1847, 352. No previous mention of his position with the Planter during this year can be found.

$^{43}$ Ibid., January 1848, 32.

$^{44}$ Ibid.

$^{45}$ Ibid., April 1848, 121-122.

$^{46}$ Ibid., July 1849, 193.


$^{48}$ Planter, July 1849, 193.

$^{49}$ Morrison, "Richard B. Gooch," 79.
University magazine, in 1839. Letters of his from a trip abroad were published in the *Enquirer*. In 1841, he delivered, in spite of a speech impediment, the anniversary address of the Patrick Henry Society. Bernard printed this in pamphlet form shortly afterward. In 1845 he participated in the Richmond Educational Meeting, a conference on public education. When he began work with the *Planter*, he noticed the decline under Daniel and promised to do better. Gooch died in May 1851, before he was able to raise the subscription level or make a lasting impression upon the magazine and Virginia agriculture. Bernard edited the next two issues himself until he could secure a new editor.

Two months after Gooch's death, Bernard appointed Frank G. (Francis Gilham) Ruffin editor. The publisher described him as a practical farmer and Gates regarded him as one of the ablest prewar editors of the *Planter*. He owned a plantation near Shadwell in Albemarle County

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50 *Planter*, June 1851, 163.
52 *Ibid.*, 79-80. From these activities, Morrison has surmised that Gooch was the editor of the *Southern Review*, an educational journal published during 1845.
53 *Planter*, July 1849, 193.
and was without previous editorial experience. He was a distant cousin of Edmund Ruffin and a great admirer of him and the Farmer's Register. In noting the failure of the Register, he declared that the Planter's appeal would be broader and more successful. He once briefly moved the editorial offices to Shadwell upon the death of his overseer, working for the magazine "among the rocks." Ruffin's interest in the Planter and Southern agriculture led to increased subscriptions. Edmund Ruffin, in 1855 Commissioner of the Virginia Agricultural Society, thanked the Planter for "liberality and public spirit" in reprinting his reports and papers. Six months after the new editor began, he had added nearly a thousand names to the subscription list, a thirty percent gain. In April 1852, he noted a "small addition ... less than two hundred" new readers.

In September 1854, because of declining health, Bernard advertised the Planter and his printing office for sale. Before the first

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59 Planter, July 1851, 193.
60 Ibid., January 1852, 30.
61 Ibid., January 1851, 195.
62 Ibid., August 1851, 225.
63 Ibid., January 1855, 17; December 1854, 369.
64 Ibid., January 1855, 5.
65 Ibid., January 1852, 17.
66 Ibid., April 1852, 113.
67 Ibid., September 1854, 273.
of the year, Ruffin had sold his plantation and purchased the magazine. 68
Bernard had been connected with the journal since its founding; his de-
parture would be a challenge to its continuance. 69 He complimented the
new owner and wished him future success. 70 Ruffin bought the Planter be-
cause he liked the magazine and hoped to make his livelihood from it. He also said of his reasons for purchase, "... it affords a species of
occupation and of excitement which I cannot otherwise obtain; because it
keeps me busy; and, perhaps, because it enables me to do some good, at
least to make an effort in that way, and to think that I am not living
altogether in vain. ..." 72 One year after his purchase, Ruffin sold
a half interest to Nathaniel August, a businessman and real estate agent
of Richmond. 73 The two men had previously been associated in real
estate dealings. 74 August was responsible for the business department
of the office, as the administrative end of the Southern Planter had
become a burden to Ruffin. 75 He continued as editor and co-owner until

\[\text{\textsuperscript{68}Ibid.}, \text{January 1855, 17-19.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{69}Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{70}Ibid.}, \text{April 1855, 129. He remained as publisher until April,}\]
\[\text{when T. Bailie replaced him.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{71}Ibid.}, \text{January 1855, 17-18. He said of his purchase, "For the}\]
\[\text{1st time in my life I have made a speculation."}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{72}Ibid.}, 18.\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{73}Ibid.}, \text{January 1856, 19.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{74}Ibid.}, \text{April 1855, 125; October 1854, 313.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{75}Ibid.}, \text{January 1856, 19.}\]
1858. In June of that year he sold his interest in the magazine to James E. Williams of Henrico County.  

Williams, a farmer and physician, assumed the same dual duties of owner and editor that Ruffin had held. In December 1860, William Gilham joined Williams as an associate editor. He was a Major on the Virginia Military Institute chemistry faculty and had a strong interest in agricultural improvement. He held the Professorship of Agriculture at the Institute and was planning a trip to Europe in 1861, financed by the school, to study agricultural conditions. The coming of the Civil War slowed remittances for subscriptions and made publication progressively more difficult. The Planter, without fanfare, ceased operations with the July 1861 issue for the duration of the War.

The Southern Planter changed its location and its format several times in its first twenty years. Botts and Bernard moved the offices

76 Ibid., June 1858, 387.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., December 1860, 758-759.
79 Ibid., January 1861, 55-56.
81 Planter, January 1861, 55-56.
82 Ibid., 54.
83 No notation has been found regarding closing; the July issue is the last than can be located on file for 1861.
often in the first year. Its initial location was No. 3 Governor Street, Richmond, Virginia. In February 1841, a "Main Street" address was given; in April, "Opposite Merchant's Coffee House, Main Street," slightly clarified the position. In July 1841, the Planter returned to Governor Street, but by 1842 the magazine was permanently located at 148 Main Street. These moves were noted on the masthead and received no editorial comment.

The size and format of the Planter also changed during these years. The first two issued were 16 pages, 6 1/2 by 9 3/4 inches in size. The March 1841 issue increased to 24 pages and that format remained until January 1847, when Botts decreased the size to 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches and printed 32 pages. In 1855, Ruffin increased the paper size to 6 1/4 by 9 inches; in 1857 it was enlarged to 6 1/4 by 9 1/2 inches and the number of pages was doubled.

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84 Planter, January 1841, 1.
85 Ibid., February 1841, 17.
86 Ibid., April 1841, 33.
87 Ibid., July 1841, 105.
88 Ibid., May 1842, 97; March 1860, 185.
89 Ibid., January-February 1841.
90 Ibid., March 1841; January 1847.
91 Ibid., January 1855.
92 Ibid., January 1857. This was the last size change before the Planter ceased publication in 1861.
Subscription rates were low, in contrast to Edmund Ruffin's *Farmer's Register*. The rate in 1841 was $1.00 per year, in advance. The editor asked postmasters and interested farmers to solicit subscriptions to the *Planter*. These agents were allowed a twenty percent commission, and postage was at newspaper rates. This was one cent in Virginia, one and a half cents outside the state. Postmasters held franking privileges so they were prized as agents. Subscribers asked for credit as early as the second issue and Botts granted their request. The subscription was by volume (from January to January) so those farmers joining the *Planter* during the year were entitled to back issues for the previous months. When readers grew in number, the printing burden increased. Twelve hundred copies were printed for January 1841, but in December the total was three thousand.

In 1842, payment procedures changed. Subscribers had sixty days to pay their dollar subscription. If they failed to meet the deadline, the price increased to $1.50 and the account was sent to a bill collector. Later in 1842, subscription policy changed. The reader could

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94 *Planter*, January 1841, cover.
95 Ibid., 16.
96 Ibid., February 1841, 32.
97 Ibid., December 1841, 260. By March 1841, the list of subscribers had grown large enough for Botts to add eight pages.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., June 1842, 144.
begin either in January or July; if he did not express a choice, his
volume of the Planter began the preceding January.  

During these years, circulation of the Planter fluctuated between
1200 and 5000. In 1851 there were 1900 subscribers.  Frank Ruffin,
the new editor, called 1200 of them punctual in payment and the rest he
said barely paid at all. By 1854 the Planter had 4200 subscribers
and in 1855, listed 4600. By posting lists of paid-up readers on the
inside back cover of the 1857 volume and by extolling the virtues of
the Planter at every opportunity, the editors were able to hold circula-
tion near 5000 until 1861.

Financial problems developed for the Planter during its early
years. The January 1842 issue, late to the mails, was sent to all old
subscribers, whether or not they had renewed. Those who did not want to
continue were asked to return their copies. The reader did not re-
ceive a receipt for his dollar; the magazine itself served that pur-
pose.

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100 Ibid., July 1842, 167.
101 Ibid., 194.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., January 1855, 17.
104 Ibid., January-December 1857, inside back cover.
105 Ibid., January 1861, 54.
106 Ibid., January 1842, 23.
107 Ibid., February 1842, 47.
editors trouble. Thomas P. Segar was publicly assailed in the February 1842 issue for disappearing with monies taken while serving as an agent for the Planter. The editor honored his receipts, at a personal loss. 108 H. F. Hurlbert, in July 1842, absconded, taking with him some Southern Planter funds. 109 In 1843 the editor commented upon subscription losses and wondered why so many persons thought $1.00 to be excessive. 110 Difficulty in collecting continued to bother the editors; by March 1855, $11,691.50 still remained uncollected. 111 Finally, in 1857, those readers who were three years or more in arrears were dropped from the mailing lists. 112 The editor tried again to collect outstanding accounts, remarking in 1860 that "Delinquents on the Printer's books Can never enter heaven." 113 Such a program was moderately successful. When the Civil War finally closed the Planter in 1861, only $8,000 remained outstanding. 114

Subscription rates rose gradually, along with the size of the magazine. In 1855, the rate for deferred payment dropped to $1.25. 115

108 Ibid.
109 Ibid., July 1842, 167.
111 Ibid., March 1855, 83.
112 Ibid., July 1857, 390.
113 Ibid., June 1860, 375.
114 Ibid., June 1861, 373.
115 Ibid., January 1855, cover.
In 1857 the rates rose to $2.00 in advance or $2.50 deferred, accompanying the increase to 64 pages.

The operation of The Southern Planter was never a large one compared to such Northern journals as the Genesee Farmer or the American Agriculturist whose appeal was more national. During the period 1841-1861, most of the editors worked alone and travelled and corresponded widely. The Planter's format and appeal, basically similar to journals in other sections, also created similar problems. The editor's approach to the agricultural reader in the Upper South did have enough special interest to make the magazine a success where others failed.

116 Ibid., January 1857, cover.

117 Demaree, American Agricultural Press, 18. In 1839 the Genesee Farmer had a circulation of 18,000, and in 1859, 30,000.

118 Ibid., 351. In 1859 the American Agriculturist had a circulation of 45,000.

119 Ibid., 17-18. Demaree believed there had been over four hundred agricultural journals published from 1829 to 1859. At least one hundred began in the South during the period. By 1860 there were between fifty and sixty active journals with a total circulation of 350,000.

120 Gates, Farmer's Age, 341-344.
CHAPTER II

POLICIES

The aims of The Southern Planter in these formative years remained generally the same despite the numerous changes of editors. There was a constant emphasis on agricultural societies, agricultural improvement and education all through the period. Other main items of journalistic interest emerged briefly at various times. Reform movements, more popular in the North, received little lasting attention. Party politics did not become important until the years just before the war and was mostly anti-Republican rather than pro-Democrat. Southern independence and sectionalism appeared later in the pages of the Planter than in some regional publications.1 Once appearing, they soon overshadowed all other political issues and finally the war caused the temporary closing of the magazine. The Planter defended slavery, though the institution did not receive direct defense until after sectional tensions had worsened. Women's affairs had intermittent mention, with a natural concentration on rural values and the farm woman's contribution to them. The several editors advocated internal improvements and

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1 Demaree, American Agricultural Press, 78-82; The Rural American, founded in 1856 in Utica, N. Y., announced in its first issue that it would oppose the extension of slavery into new states.
governmental aid for agricultural reasons, although the emphasis was often uneven. The general aims of The Southern Planter's editors were for the improvement of agriculture as a science and as an occupation; to direct these improvements to Virginia and the Upper South, and to keep the farmer informed.

Emphasis on agricultural societies began with the initial issue. The first article in the Planter referred to the Henrico Agricultural Society's recent organization and program. Charles T. Botts would place the minutes of a society, a fair premium list, or an address by a prominent agriculturist on the value of agricultural societies, in every issue. In June 1841, Botts wrote an article on the value of agricultural societies, and said that clubs and journals were the best means of spreading agricultural information. A lengthy and flowery editorial feature on the value of agricultural association placed Botts among those believing strongly in the primacy of agriculture over industry. A typical comment was: "... amidst the busy mart, in the toil and dust of the streets, the weary merchant, the exhausted artisan, lays the flattering unction to his soul, that he will, one day, be enabled to rank with the easy, stately, and dignified farmer he has just passed on.

2The Southern Planter, January 1841, 2.
3Representative articles in the first issue are Ibid., April 1841, 38, 48; July 1841, 109-111.
5Ibid., October 1841, 188-189.
The Henrico Agricultural Society was a special beneficiary of the Planter's policy towards club news. The proceedings of the Society's 1841 Fair were printed as an appendix to the last issue of that year and all the annual fairs of that organization received special mention. This mention was not always praise. The 1844 Fair left much to be desired as "... there is no disguising the fact, that the thing was a total failure." New clubs were welcomed to the scene. The Hanover County Agricultural Society, The King William Working Agricultural Society, which prompted a call from Botts for a state fair to excite the "pocket nerve," The Albemarle Hole and Corner Club, number 1, and the Chuckatuck Agricultural Visiting Club were examples. Botts declared himself, as Southern Planter editor, an ex officio member of every agricultural club in the state. He earlier had offered twenty free

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6 Ibid., 189.
7 Ibid., December 1841, 265 following.
8 Ibid., July 1844, 162.
9 Ibid., July 1841, 114. This group was exhorted to be as good as Hanover's (Henry) Clay.
10 Ibid., June 1842, 121-122.
11 Ibid., 121.
12 Ibid., July 1842, 153-155.
13 Ibid., August 1844, 191-192.
14 Ibid., August 1843, 172.
subscriptions to the Planter to any society or ad hoc committee that would send him information for publication. The Prince George and Chuckatuck clubs elected him to membership, and Botts expressed great appreciation at the recognition.

These Hole and Corner clubs were a special benefit, in Botts' eyes. These clubs were small neighborhood groups that gathered to inspect and criticize each hole and corner of a friend's farm, on a rotating basis. Botts also saw the benefits of cooperative machinery testing and purchase in these organizations. This last recommendation may have been prompted by the editor's interest in a farm machinery warehouse.

In 1844 and 1845, agitation was begun by the Albemarle Hole and Corner Clubs to call a convention and organize a state agricultural society. This idea spread, and when the convention met in Richmond on January 20, 1845, Botts and W. W. Minor of Albemarle County were elected secretaries. The society was short-lived (Botts announced its death in September), but the convention passed two resolutions,

15 Ibid., October 1841, 183.
16 Ibid., February 1845, 47; April 1845, 84.
17 Ibid., July 1842, 153-155.
18 Ibid., May 1843, 117.
19 Ibid., February 1841, 32.
20 Ibid., January 1845, 7-8.
21 Ibid., February 1845, 41.
22 Ibid., September 1845, 201.
praising Botts and the Planter. The proceedings were published in their entirety in the magazine. In his September article complaining of the short life of the Virginia Agricultural Society, Botts declared that the South needed to reform its extravagant habits, needed to establish agricultural schools and local clubs, should disseminate agricultural information and support the local agricultural press. With the failure of the state society, Botts did not emphasize clubs as much in his last two years. Their value was restated in a short article in 1846, but the volume of coverage decreased slightly.

Agricultural society events lagged in the late 1840's. In March 1849, Botts' successor, John M. Daniel, noted editorially the projected revival of the Virginia State Agricultural Society. In this editorial, the only note on the subject during his tenure, he strongly favored the reorganization of the society. The catalyst for his editorial came from comments by a Naval officer, recently returned from the Holy Land with two Khaisi calves. The officer wanted to donate the exotic animals to

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23 Ibid., February 1845, 43. Botts was commended for "... zeal and perseverance ..." in sustaining the Planter and the magazine was considered "... eminently worthy of the patronage of the farmers of Virginia. ..."

24 Ibid., February 1845, 41-45.


26 Ibid., September 1846, 209.

27 Ibid., March 1849, 86-88.

28 Ibid., 86.
the Virginia Agricultural Society but he found no active organization to receive them. Daniel said all Virginia farmers should feel reproach for this. He called on prominent legislators to promote a society and to finance reprints of the Society's aims. Noting that the earlier organization failed for lack of funds, he asked that the Assembly give a $20,000 endowment to the Society, to underwrite its activities.

Daniel made strong statements on the lack of state support. Paraphrasing the Southern Planter's masthead, he reminded his readers that agriculture "... is the mother of all the other arts." With four-fifths of Virginia's population involved in agriculture, he thought it unseemly for the state to finance "... institutions of obsolete languages ... and ... monuments for the dead and swords for the living ..." while forgetting the farmer. He believed a strong agricultural society would recognize good farmers and encourage emulation of them. Daniel said agricultural fairs would be an outgrowth of a revitalized state society.

No state action or important private interest was recorded

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 87.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 88.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 89.
in the Planter from Daniel's plea during his editorship.

Richard B. Gooch, the next editor, participated in the reestablishment of the Virginia Agricultural Society. In February 1850, a convention was held to reorganize the society\(^{37}\) and Gooch was elected secretary.\(^{38}\) Requests for assistance in scientific advances for agriculture, in addition to resolutions organizing the new society, were passed by the convention.\(^{39}\) In March 1850, the Planter reprinted the minutes of the meetings, one of which memorialized Gooch for his services,\(^{40}\) another recommending "all honorable means for enlarging the circulation of the Southern Planter."\(^{41}\) Attendance was sparse at the convention, to Gooch's displeasure, but the organization continued.\(^{42}\) In August 1850, the editor questioned the lack of cooperation by the new Smithsonian Institution in matters of agricultural interest and wondered why it could not work with societies.\(^{43}\)

The revived Virginia Agricultural Society met in February 1851,

\(^{37}\)Ibid., January 1850, 26. Gooch called for self-appointed delegates to assemble in Richmond February 20, 1850. They would have a dual purpose; to meet in convention and to swell the crowd on hand for the dedication of George Washington's statue in Capitol Square on February 22.

\(^{38}\)Ibid., January 1850, 6; March 1850, 78-81.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., March 1850, 78-81.

\(^{40}\)Ibid.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., 80.

\(^{42}\)Ibid., 95.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., August 1850, 236-237.
and in March the Planter published the proceedings as a special supplement to the issue. Gooch commented editorially on the meeting and hoped it would be a rallying point for Virginia's agricultural interests. The Virginia Agricultural Society began to thrive and it continued to meet throughout the decade.

Frank G. Ruffin, upon becoming editor in 1851 after Gooch's death, proved an enthusiastic supporter of the Virginia Agricultural Society. The state and local societies in Virginia were the subject of comment, article, or reprint in every issue of Ruffin's editorship. Lists of experiments, minutes of meetings, Fair reports, and editorial praise appeared most often in this regard. Ruffin, as Planter editors before him had done, became secretary of a convention concerning the Virginia Agricultural Society. The Southern Planter, in the usual fashion of these conventions, received a resolution calling for more subscriptions by Virginia farmers, to make "... a fireside companion of every family." In calling for the 1852 convention, the Planter wanted to see a strong agricultural society founded. The editor believed that a good society could do more for the farmer than a governmental department

44 Ibid., March 1851, 86-87.
46 Ibid., 1850-1861, passim.
47 Ibid., July 1851-June 1858, passim.
48 Ibid., March 1852, 87-89.
49 Ibid., 88.
of agriculture, which he regarded as humbug. Reporting on the convention, the editor injected advice on bipartisan support to attain agricultural objectives. In a later issue, Ruffin reprinted the speech he made at the convention, which called for a strong agricultural society, with legislative aid given to it and support for the local agricultural press. In the next year, the Society's Fair activities furnished an opportunity to criticize the North. A slave won first prize in the state plowing contest and Ruffin assured his readers that the Negro could not have entered, much less won, such a contest in the North. Partly through his efforts, some Virginia railroads furnished free or reduced fare to the 1854 Virginia Agricultural Society Fair for members and their exhibits. During that fall, Ruffin made several editorial comments on his involvements in the State Society and Fair planning. The Society had a friend in Frank Ruffin.

James E. Williams, Ruffin's successor, continued the interest in the affairs of the Virginia Agricultural Society. During the relatively short period he supervised the magazine, every issue had a reprint of some transaction of the organization. These were mostly organizational

50 Ibid., February 1852, 49.
51 Ibid., March 1852, 81-89.
52 Ibid., April 1852, 97-102.
53 Ibid., December 1853, 368.
54 Ibid., September 1854, 274.
55 Ibid., October 1854, 306; November 1854, 337.
56 Ibid., July 1858-July 1861, passim.
notices, as the impending sectional crisis took most of the editorial attention.

In January 1860, Williams published essays written by members of the Farmer's Club of Nottoway County on the accumulation of financial capital and on tobacco culture. In June, three similar essays from the club were printed. In the next issue, the Planter published the entire program of the combined exhibitions of the Eighth Virginia State Agricultural Society and Third Central Agricultural Society of Virginia Fair. This fourteen page supplement listed 489 classes of exhibits. Included were essays on nine agricultural subjects, cattle, swine, poultry, sheep, other animals, truck crops, field crops, manures, grasses, and manufacturers of equipment. The Fair was held in October and throughout the fall, the Planter made notes on its progress and planning. In December, Williams published the "Journal of Transactions of the Virginia State Agricultural Society" and the Fair premium list. Men from Chesterfield and Henry counties tied for the best tobacco

57 Ibid., January 1860, 36-40.
58 Ibid., June 1860, 359-362.
59 Ibid., July 1860, 417.
60 Ibid., 417-431.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., August 1860, 509; September 1860, 572.
63 Ibid., December 1860, 737-755.
award; this deserved a special mention. The majority of the mechanical exhibits came from the Richmond area and took most of the prizes. Dr. Williams continued this type of coverage through the next year, but it became less important to the reader as the political atmosphere changed.

Agricultural improvement was a main reason for the establishment of the Southern Planter. Botts stated in his Prospectus that the magazine was to be "... a medium for the promulgation ... of the observations and deductions of practical men." He especially wanted the individual farmer to receive the benefit of the knowledge of other farmers by mutual correspondence in the Planter. The success of various New York farm publications were cited as examples of this sharing of information. Exchanges with other journals to obtain articles "... peculiarly applicable to our Southern soil, climate, and institutions ..." was another plan.

Specific improvements in farming techniques and attitudes were encouraged by Botts immediately. In the first issue, a letter from "A Farmer" was reprinted that extolled the value of "book farming" and how

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64 Ibid., 739.
65 Ibid., 754.
66 Ibid., January 1841, 1.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
it convinced an old-timer. 69 Other letters in the first Planter-dis-
cussed capital and management and the value of science in farming. 70
Botts advocated keeping careful farm records, 71 praised the energies of
Northern farmers, 72 published exchange and freight rates, 73 and espoused
a crop rotation plan. 74 New crops such as the filbert, or present-day
hazelnut, were recommended to the Virginia farmer. 75 In 1843 the editor
believed low prices could be an incentive to efficient farm improvement. 76
Later that year he encouraged the reading of books 77 and the "Science of
Agriculture." 78 The science he advocated was that of farmer experimenta-
tion, rather than a centralized fund of knowledge. 79

The attitude of Virginia farmers came under attack in 1845 for
their dependence on staples and for their wasteful practices. The
editor felt strongly that the South was too wasteful in spending money

69 Ibid., 13.
70 Ibid., 4-5.
71 Ibid., August 1842, 173-174.
72 Ibid., December 1841, 238-241.
73 Ibid., October 1841, 200.
74 Ibid., 180-181.
75 Ibid., August 1848, 133.
76 Ibid., March 1843, 214.
77 Ibid., September 1843, 214.
78 Ibid., October 1843, 227-228.
79 Ibid.
to import goods that could just as easily have been grown or manufactured at home. He called it also a Virginia problem, and at one time compared the Old Dominion unfavorably with North Carolina in the utilization of home manufactures. The Planter tried to prod the farmer by constant reminders of the value of improvement and rewarded those who tried by printing their experiences.

John M. Daniel, though not appearing to be as forceful an editor as Botts, printed many letters and articles on the state of Virginia agriculture and means of improving it. He commented editorially on a letter from Willoughby Newton of Westmoreland County that had stated some causes for Virginia's agricultural decline, chief among them a lack of industriousness. Newton thought that too many farmers were leaving the land in search of profits elsewhere; yet if they would only work hard on what they had at home their profits would be as great. He called it the "duty of every patriot" to repress the wandering spirit and to convince other Virginians they could do better by remaining at home than by leaving for supposedly greater opportunity.

80 Ibid., May 1845, 105-107, 108; June 1845, 121-122, 124. These articles were particularly harsh on the South's dependence upon staple crops.

81 Ibid., January 1847, 16-18.

82 Ibid., July 1847, 221.

83 Ibid., January 1848, 12. He said, "... they only have to reach out the hand of industry to reap (profits) at home."

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.
agreed with Newton's reasons and believed most Planter readers did also. He reprinted an article from the Genesee Farmer which urged better use of the agricultural press; saying it was too devoted to politics and not enough to farming. In the same issue, a reprint from the Cultivator's Almanac advocated the reading and usage of agricultural papers. Later in 1848, the Planter called for an expansion of cattle raising in the Tidewater. Daniel said the slave system had changed and was facing further modifications; that Virginia was no longer a staple producing region but a general farming state. He saw cattle as a source of manure, necessary to rebuild poor soil. The Tidewater, in his view, could raise a better feeder animal than could be raised further west. There were lessened transportation expenses involved in reaching urban markets and Tidewater land was capable of responding to new soil-building techniques based on manures. This double income production of both cattle and manure had the potential to become a significant impetus toward changing Virginia's agricultural orientation. In the same issue, he wrote of the economies of saving manures in existing operations, to include not only barns and fields, but privies and laundry

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., May 1848, 50.
88 Ibid., 152.
89 Ibid., September 1848, 283-284.
90 Ibid.
water. His suggestions had a rebuttal from a "Farmer of Lower Virginia" several months later. This gentleman said marl was better than manure; that cattle over-grazed and injured land and that almost any suggestion or solution was better than the one proposed. Daniel mildly replied that cattle manures would suffice where there was no marl.

His November editorial, "Thoughts on Agriculture," questioned why the farmer is scorned and why farmers send their sons to the cities. He argued that agriculture was not as progressive as other activities and suggested that young men be taught scientific farming. Excessive speculation in land also drew criticism as detrimental to the long term interests of agriculture. He commented on some new iron fences he had seen and thought they could be valuable to the farmer, in spite of the problems of metal maintenance. The need for a state agricultural chemist was urged by the Planter just before Daniel left. He proposed three reasons for needing the office established. The first was to test land and determine its proper usage. The second was to introduce

91 Ibid., 300-303.
92 Ibid., November 1848, 342-344.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 344.
95 Ibid., 322-323.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., December 1848, 378-379.
98 Ibid., April 1849, 124-125.
agricultural chemistry to the people of Virginia; a form of extension education. The third reason, and described as most important, was to advise on soil types prior to land sales, to protect the buyer. 99

Advocacy of agricultural improvement by Richard B. Gooch was not as varied as his predecessors. He intertwined his comments on the subject together with those on the value of the census to farmers, 100 on the value of horticulture, 101 and the virtues of chemical soil analysis. 102 As previously mentioned, his main activities were closely associated with the agricultural societies and their programs. The objective, better farms and farmers, was still served.

Frank Ruffin emphasized agricultural improvement articles and stated many personal opinions in his years as editor. 103 The topical issues of a lack of dog licensing and the presence of fence laws also came under his attack. Free-running dogs and the fence law forced the farmer into an attitude of "... eternal vigilance is the price of his harvest." 104 Contributions from college scientists received praise and

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., August 1849, 244; November 1849, 350.
101 Ibid., December 1850, 354.
102 Ibid., July 1850, 220-223; January 1851, 16.
103 Ibid., January 1852, 16-19. This first yearly summary by Ruffin is a good example of his positive attitude.
104 Ibid., 18.
publication. 105 Soil testing, 106 irrigation and diversity in crops to
supplant tobacco were other features. 107 The Richmond Tobacco Exchange,
as an economic advantage, drew favorable comment. 108 He repeated
familiar words in a reprint from Downing's Horticulturist on the reasons
for the decline of farming. 109 The Albany, New York, magazine said the
flight from the soil occurred because of poor techniques and methods and
a lack of fertilizer to keep the soil productive. It discounted manufactur-
ing's lures as a reason for people leaving Northern agriculture. 110
Ruffin, as did Gooch, devoted a great deal of editorial space to agricul-
tural societies and pressed improvement in this manner.

Dr. Williams saw agriculture as a "... profession ordained by
God ..."

and while not disavowing the profit motive, took the Plan-
ter as a means of increasing his knowledge and that of the public in
scientific agriculture. The magazine shunned non-farm affairs for a
number of months, notable when considering the inflammatory nature of
the 1858-1861 period.

105 Ibid., October 1851, 301-302; July 1852, 211. This last item
was submitted by William Gilham of the Virginia Military Institute, who
later became Williams' associate editor.

106 Ibid., June 1852, 188.

107 Ibid., April 1853, 113-115.

108 Ibid., July 1858, 387.

109 Ibid., December 1851, 363-366.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., July 1858, 497.
The editor, in his desire to maintain an agricultural magazine, strongly emphasized scientific farming, and urged more than just practical applications to improve and advance farming. Fertilizers, crop diversification, book reviews, and rural architecture received boosts. Tobacco, once before mentioned as a staple burden of the state, was the subject of a seven part article by John H. Cocke, "Tobacco, the bane of Virginia husbandry." In it he described the extensive preparations and long hours needed to grow tobacco. He attacked the tremendous drain on the soil occasioned by constant cropping with tobacco. Several times he stated that tobacco income barely sufficed to purchase food and grain for the farmer, his slaves, and his animals; if he had raised these instead of tobacco, six months' labor would have been saved. At the end of the second article, he was certain he had proven the point that tobacco was the most laborious and troublesome of all crops. Cocke said "all doubts" would certainly be removed by the

112 Ibid., August 1859, 500-501.
113 Ibid., May 1861, 320.
114 Ibid., March 1859, 176.
115 Ibid., April 1859, 248-249.
116 Ibid., April 1853, 113-115.
117 Ibid., 1859-1860, passim.
118 Ibid., May 1859, 265.
119 Ibid., March 1859, 131; May 1859, 268.
120 Ibid., March 1859, 133.
next installment. He decried the excess labor tobacco required and the credit system caused by such large overhead expenses. In his fifth article, Cocke said tobacco "stands convicted of every attribute that constitutes an idol," and like all idols, should be destroyed. His commentaries were against cultivation of tobacco and only peripherally against its usage. This article attracted comment from all parts of the state, pro and con. Agricultural improvement in general had the major emphasis during the period. In May 1861, twenty-three of twenty-eight articles dealt directly with farming.

Farm machinery and its advantages enjoyed the Planter's support. This was convenient for Botta, as he was not entirely dependent on the magazine for his livelihood. He also manufactured farm machinery and operated a machinery retail warehouse. The Planter was thus a strong supporter of mechanical innovations and Botta's Straw Cutter was prominently mentioned. The editor called for descriptions of new implements and listed the farm machinery outlets and factories in

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121 Ibid., August 1859, 482-483.
122 Ibid., January 1860, 22.
123 Ibid., 1859-1860, passim.
124 Ibid., May 1861, passim.
125 Ibid., February 1841, 32; November 1841, 22.
126 Ibid., April 1841, 52.
127 Ibid., August 1841, 152.
Richmond. Botts' firm became an agent for "M'Cormicks" reaper\(^ {129}\) and the Planter recommended it highly. In 1843, he urged farmers to be careful of advertising claims and to test new machinery well.\(^ {130}\) The Planter soon took a stand favoring the use of machinery by Negroes.\(^ {131}\) Botts noted that Northerners used machinery on their farms, and he did not think the machinery so complicated that slaves could not operate it under close supervision. He cited an example of a Southern cotton mill that used slave labor successfully.\(^ {132}\) The editor gave poor supervision as the reason for failure in earlier attempts to mechanize the slave and said this problem must be overcome if the South expected to compete.\(^ {133}\)

In spite of Botts' outside interests, or most probably because of his strong desire for improvement, farm machinery was not seen as a threat to the slave system, but as necessary to such agricultural improvement.

Daniel and Gooch did not have the personal or financial interest in machinery that Botts had demonstrated, but they both favored the use of machinery where practical.\(^ {134}\) Only occasional comment appeared

\(^{128}\) Ibid., November 1841, 222.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., August 1841, 81-82.

\(^{130}\) Ibid., June 1843, 141-142.

\(^{131}\) Ibid., September 1843, 205-206.

\(^{132}\) Ibid., 205.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 205-206.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., January 1848, 32; July 1849, 193.
during these years, primarily relating to threshing machines. Frank Ruffin differed with Botta's earlier recommendation and thought the McCormick reaper too complex to function adequately. He later complained of the price of the reaper and said such a high cost made it not a true labor saving device. Other mechanical devices were occasionally mentioned in the years before 1861, but more in the line of agricultural improvement, rather than innovation.

One agricultural improvement that the Planter did not always favor was the work of Justus Liebig, the German agricultural chemist. Botta emphasized "practical" farming, with farmers advising each other on newly discovered techniques, and Liebig was a theorist. For the reason that he was not a farmer and had not discovered his ideas concerning fertilizers in the fields but in the laboratory, Botta did not accord his proposals much merit. When Liebig was criticized in Germany, the Planter published it in translation, and reaffirmed its dependence upon "... the practical results of actual experimentation." Daniel had advocated a state agricultural chemist for reasons stated earlier, avoiding the obvious comparison with Liebig, and realized

135 Ibid., November 1847-May 1851, passim.
137 Ibid., February 1853, 55; September 1853, 374.
138 Ibid., May 1843, 134-135; January 1845, 23.
139 Ibid., January 1844, 8.
140 Ibid., April 1849, 124-125; cf. ante, 12.
Virginia farmers needed direction along scientific lines. Gooch also pressed for a state chemist. He conceded that Liebig's method had some merit, and did review a current pamphlet of his favorably. Frank Ruffin took issue with Liebig as being too theoretical, while wanting some form of soil testing available to Virginia farmers. Under Williams, Liebig came under criticism in the usual Planter inconsistency toward this scientific agriculturist. In 1860, two reviews of his latest book, *Letters on Modern Agriculture*, were reviewed and pronounced too theoretical for a practical farmer. A stronger attack on his methods came with comment on a translation of one of Liebig's letters. Using a Mr. S. Field as authority, the German's guano analysis was pronounced inaccurate and probably fake. The reason for the magazine's inconsistency was never fully revealed but may have simply been based on the previously stated distaste for theory.

The westward movement in the early 1840's caused the abandonment of some Virginia farmland, and the resettlement of these areas posed a problem in the state. Two means of correcting this were by land

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144 *Ibid.*, June 1852, 188; April 1853, 113-115; April 1856, 97-113.
improvement, to retain the farmer, or by immigration into the state onto these rejected lands. The Planter favored both, and the various means of attracting Yankees and other foreigners were given much attention.¹⁴⁷ No comment was made initially on the social attitudes any immigrants might have held; populating the countryside was of prime importance to Botts. Immigration to Virginia was also a pertinent topic during Gooch's editorship; the 49'ers had caused a decrease in the population of the East and especially in the rural areas. An agency located in the North to propagandize Virginia land had begun earlier and the proposal was expanded to include education of abolitionists.¹⁴⁸ Northern farmers had been moving into Fairfax County and Northern Virginia since 1840.¹⁴⁹ They had improved old land, increased crop yields, and made money in a nearly abandoned region. In 1846 a group of Quakers settled on part of the Mount Vernon estate.¹⁵⁰ Other groups settled in the area, establishing truck farms and dairies to supply the Washington market. At first their methods and motivations drew praise; in the early and middle 1850's the possibility of anti-slavery agitation became an issue.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, March 1843, 66-67; November 1843, 262-263; January 1845, 11-12, are representative samples of editorial encouragement of immigration.


¹⁴⁹ *Abbott*, "Yankee Farmers," 56.


Very shortly, dissatisfactions were at such a level that encouragement of settlers was dropped and Gooch saw in the issue "... questions ... which threaten the integrity of the American Union." Later, moves of these immigrants into the South reacted unfavorably with Ruffin's views on populating the region and he asked, pointedly, for more compatible settlers.

Education, both agricultural and academic, was an interest of the Southern Planter. The magazine and its first editor did, however, undergo a change of heart on the matter of education. From firm support of farmer apprentices, state aid, and then to private agricultural schools, the editor finally wrote, "Our advice, then, to farmers and farmers' sons is, stay at home, eschew agricultural schools and agricultural professors, read books only ... of practical results. ..." and declared that education was not meant for the farmer. He arrived at this conclusion after noticing several agricultural schools fail. He also attributed lack of interest in agricultural education to the wide gulf between the theoretical sciences needed for efficient crop

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152 *Southern Planter*, May 1850, 42.
156 *Ibid.*, April 1845, 92-93; May 1845, 102-104.
production and the manual arts (labor) mandatory to carry out the theories.

During 1845, the Planter printed a letter from "C. L." calling for a Professor of Agriculture at the University of Virginia and recommended Edmund Ruffin for the position. This received favorable editorial comment. In October, Botts realized the heart of the problem when he wrote, "There exists a most intimate connexion (sic) between popular education and an improved system of agriculture..." but difficulties with the legislature and public opinion caused a reversal and retreat from the cause of education.

Daniel repeated the call for a Professor of Agriculture at the University of Virginia and he recommended it for scientific reasons. Gooch, through his agricultural society statements, made the same recommendation. Frank Ruffin advocated that the farmer be educated to the level of the ruler, not the ruled, in a reprint he favored from the Agriculturist. He published other articles on the value of both

158 Ibid.
159 Ibid., June 1845, 42-45.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., October 1845, 234.
162 Ibid., June 1848, 86-88.
163 Ibid., March 1850, 78-81.
164 Ibid., September 1851, 262.
academic and vocational subjects at various intervals.\textsuperscript{165}

Education received much emphasis from James E. Williams. Agitation for a Professor of Agriculture\textsuperscript{166} finally resulted in a grant of $20,000 from Phillip St. George Cocke, former President of the Virginia Agricultural Society, to establish a chair at the Virginia Military Institute. Major William Gilham, soon to join the \textit{Planter}, was appointed to this position in the fall of 1859.\textsuperscript{167}

Female education had a discouraging comment from a Dr. A. P. Merrill. He believed, and the \textit{Southern Planter} printed, that female boarding schools were unhealthy and that women were best educated in the home.\textsuperscript{168} Encouragement of veterinary training was included in a reprint from another journal\textsuperscript{169} and the addition of Major Gilham in 1861 gave the \textit{Planter} a close contact with agricultural education.

In contrast to agricultural issues, some social features were brought to the magazine. A Miscellany section, directed towards women's affairs, began in the first issue.\textsuperscript{170} This was usually composed of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{165}\textit{Ibid.}, September 1846, 43; October 1858, 639.
  \item \textsuperscript{166}\textit{Ibid.}, June 1845, 42-45; this was the first mention of the position.
  \item \textsuperscript{167}\textit{Ibid.}, August 1859, 501-502; Brown, "Agricultural Science and Education in Virginia before 1860," 205. Gilham had been teaching agricultural chemistry and doing soil analyses for farmers since 1851.
  \item \textsuperscript{168}\textit{Planter}, December 1859, 744.
  \item \textsuperscript{169}\textit{Ibid.}, September 1859, 587-589.
  \item \textsuperscript{170}\textit{Ibid.}, January 1841, 15.
\end{itemize}
anecdotes, poetry, moral lessons, and domestic advice. Articles on flower arrangement, and reprints of household hints from other journals were also found in the main section. Botts avoided crusades; no temperance notes and certainly no anti-slavery messages graced his pages. Tobacco was "... now considered so injurious to the health ..." in a reprint, without comment. The Planter attempted to gain some balance in its presentation with these features and it managed to achieve moderate success.

Frank Ruffin declared against the temperance movement, but did not crusade against the cause, other than to give space to a reader debate on the subject in 1854. Architectural notes, never numerous, gradually faded from regularity, miscellany and ladies' news remained as isolated items. Williams introduced a poetry column, published non-farm book reviews, and architectural notes. This diversity was in keeping with his aim of maintaining the Southern Planter as an

171 Ibid.
172 Ibid., October 1841, 178.
173 Ibid., June 1841, 94; October 1847, 311, are examples.
174 Ibid., September 1841, 175.
175 Ibid., November 1853, 326-327; April 1854, 105; June 1854, 180.
176 Ibid., February 1856, 43; May 1857, 292, 308.
177 Ibid., December 1860, 758-759.
178 Ibid., March 1859, 176.
179 Ibid., April 1859, 248-249.
agricultural journal in difficult times.

Regarding government intervention in agriculture, the magazine favored state and local, rather than federal action, an attitude not at variance with the ante-bellum South. A Virginia Board of Agriculture was established by the General Assembly in 1842, and the Planter hoped it would enlighten Virginia agriculture. The 1843 report of the Board—the only one—received Botts' compliments, but the Board soon faded from the scene. The Patent Office, the federal agency then responsible for agricultural endeavor, distributed free seed to the public, and the Planter gladly cooperated with its efforts. In 1846, when the noted Northern agriculturist, John Stuart Skinner, took issue with the Patent Office Report, Botts answered him and supported the document.

The Planter's biggest boost for government aid regarded market roads. In 1845, an editorial favored turnpikes over railroads or canals, as the latter tend to urbanize the population, anathema to a farm journal. Just before leaving the Planter, Botts wrote that Virginia had nearly the worst roads in the union and her poor agriculture reflected

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180 Ibid., July 1858, 497.
181 Ibid., February 1842, 39-40.
182 Ibid., March 1843, 47.
183 Ibid., April 1841, 54; April 1844, 93.
184 Ibid., August 1846, 127-128.
185 Ibid., November 1845, 258-260.
this. The editor was not afraid of government aid, either state or federal, but he did realize that local expenditures might accomplish more. In any case, Botts thought that if the expenditure for improvements would exceed the possible return, then "nature's barriers" should prevail, and no improvements should be undertaken. 187

Botts emphasized local action and sectional interests without overt political involvement. He put forth persuasive arguments on the advantages of Southern manufacturing. 188 He said the Southern laborer required more to live and worked less than his Northern counterpart but that slave labor could compete successfully. With no wages needed for them, only minimum maintenance, the savings on labor costs would be a great competitive advantage. He derided stock companies that had failed in the South previously, saying that small partnerships allowed for much closer owner supervision. The Southern habit of unnecessary frills could be forgotten in a manufacturing operation; he related how some Northern factories looked rough and shoddy from the outside, yet produced a good product. 189 Local edge tools 190 and Mississippi cotton 191 are other items that received generous attention. The desire for

186 Ibid., September 1847, 257-258.
187 Ibid., November 1845, 260.
188 Ibid., May 1842, 99-100.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid., July 1842, 166.
191 Ibid., August 1842, 178-179.
economic separation was not quite as marked or as emphatic as in later years, but it revealed a regional attitude in the Planter.

Daniel was also interested in improving roads, Virginia being "... too poor to have bad roads," and he encouraged county action. Gooch planned to devote the Planter to "... Southern Agriculture, domestic economy, to the public works and improvements of Virginia and to the enhancement of the vital interests of the American Union." Ruffin declared that farmers should combine their political actions, for their own benefit and that they needed a journal for this purpose. His call for state financed internal improvements was based on Virginia's backward status in comparison with states formed from her old Northwest Territories, and by the Southern penchant for ignoring commerce and talking politics. A specific point of comparison was the benefit New York state received from its canal system. All factions involved in organizational controversy were urged to consolidate their interests and obtain legislative aid. His primary desire in all this involved a wish to expand the role of Virginia on the national and

192 Ibid., February 1853, 53.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid., July 1849, 193.
195 Ibid., January 1852, 16.
196 Ibid. He concentrated on state aid; never mentioning federal assistance in the editorial.
197 Ibid., 18.
agricultural scene. Williams and Gilham had little comment on state aid to farmers that was not closely related to the impending war.

In 1841, slavery was not yet a controversy that would inflame an agricultural journal and Botts had little to say on the subject. His main complaint on the labor situation concerned overseers. They were seen as injurious to the slave system and the Planter urged farmers to either train them better or undertake their own supervision. The editor could not see how anyone could entrust the operation of his plantation to anyone else. He favored overseers only in the case of proprietors of very large estates and then only if they hired men of skill and intelligence. Articles on slave management did not appear defensive, but were discussed as a normal farm problem. Botts, in replying to one letter, amplified the writer's view that firm, fair supervision and efficient work patterns made the plantation easier to manage.

Awareness of sectional troubles in the late 1840's brought Gooch

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198 Ibid., 19.
199 Ibid., April 1860, 249-253; May 1860, 314-318; March 1860, 161-163.
200 Ibid., February 1842, 36; this reprint from the Buckingham American did say that "one Negro equalled two Irish" on canal projects.
201 Ibid., December 1843, 271-272; July 1845, 166; August 1845, 172.
202 Ibid., December 1842, 272.
203 Ibid., September 1841, 157-158; August 1843, 175-176.
204 Ibid., August 1843, 174.
to a defense of slavery. Previously the matter had not needed apology, but Northern attacks caused the Planter to react. Free and slave labor were unfavorably compared and abolitionist charges refuted in strong language as gross misrepresentation by the young editor.

In a reference directed toward the North, Frank Ruffin said, "... we should be prepared to resist those who in such a government always live by assaulting property." With this, political comment on a broader scale entered the magazine. The issue of slavery took on defensive aspects during these years, following the general trend of reaction to Northern assaults on the institution. Early articles favorably compared slave to free labor, even in the production of grain, crops that were supposed to be ideally suited to machinery; but the practice of hiring out slaves brought adverse comment. Ruffin was interested in overseers and farm management and wanted to see more efficient plantation supervision. The handling of Negroes was a frequent subject in his last few years as editor, and a slave sale appeared in an 1857 advertisement. In one instance, he noted an unfriendly

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205 Ibid., September 1849, 266-267.
206 Ibid., September 1850, 286.
207 Ibid., July 1851, 194.
208 Ibid., March 1852, 71-72.
209 Ibid., December 1852, 376-379.
210 Ibid., October 1855, 313; February 1856, 48, 147; July 1858, 410; September 1858, 557.
211 Ibid., April 1856, 121; February 1858, 76; December 1857, 12 (advertisement).
article on slavery from a Northern journal, rebutted it at length and added a few words on good slave treatment. Abolitionists were denounced as being "... strong enough to threaten destruction to the South or to the Union." In 1857, the "drudgery" of frontier life (without slaves) depicted in a Northern exchange article received an introduction but no comment from the editor; the same issue included an editorial on the frequency of paupers in a free labor society.

The attempt by Dr. Williams to stay out of politics and sectional controversy enjoyed moderate success until the fall of 1859. Then "Calx," a frequent contributor, wrote a two part article, "The Two Great Evils of Virginia and Their One Common Remedy;" these evils being free Negroes in the South and abolitionists in the North. He assumed three premises regarding the Negro before proposing a solution. The first was that slavery was a great public and private benefit, one to be maintained and protected; second, that the Negro was naturally inferior; and third, that past emancipation had been injurious to him and the public at large. Calx advocated an evidence of employment test for those free Negroes who would work, with indenture or expulsion for

\[\text{212 Ibid., February 1857, 66-68.}\]
\[\text{213 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{214 Ibid., 66.}\]
\[\text{215 Ibid., July 1857, 392-395.}\]
\[\text{216 Ibid., October 1859, 643-652; November 1859, 664-672.}\]
\[\text{217 Ibid., October 1859, 644.}\]
those who would not. Indenture would be for one year, if they did not acquire good habits or leave the state voluntarily, they would be sold back into slavery. Calx supposed that with Southern free Negroes leaving in large numbers, Northern states would have to create immigration laws to prevent the influx of non-workers, thereby giving the South control over their slaves again.\(^{218}\) Edmund Ruffin wrote a serial on the benefits of slave rather than free labor,\(^{219}\) and the positive good of slavery was assumed without question by the Planter at this late date.

Southern independence and local manufactures began to receive their first notable emphasis in the Southern Planter since 1852 when a speech by Delegate D. H. London on Northern trade monopolies appeared in 1860.\(^{220}\) Using his data, the Planter complained of the lack of Southern industries and the increase in Northern economic power. Williams called much of the problem self-inflicted; Virginia did not rely enough on her own resources.\(^{221}\) Blame was also attributed to Virginia laws and taxes; such as bank discount rates and personal property taxes.\(^{222}\) Using the federal codfishing bounty as an example of national discrimination, he said the Virginia merchants license tax was just

\(^{218}\) Ibid., November 1859, 664-667.

\(^{219}\) Ibid., December 1859, 723-741; January 1860, 1-10.

\(^{220}\) Ibid., April 1860, 249-253.

\(^{221}\) Ibid., 249.

\(^{222}\) Ibid., 250-251.
as hurtful. 223 The 1860 census population statistics showed the disparity between North and South, but the editors did not consider this damaging. 224 When elderly and respected John Tayloe Lomax of Fredericksburg gave his views in favor of secession, Williams reprinted them from the Virginia Herald and added patriotic comment. 225

Northern agricultural journals, as a rule, were more pointed than the Southern Planter in promoting sectional causes. The obvious result of this sectionalism, attacks on slavery and slaveholders, were painful for the South and for the magazine. One Northern publication tried to be more objective, and lost its battle for survival as a result. 226 The Planter commented on the event, blaming the demise on Northern attitudes and remarking that only John Brown's sympathizers would be supported by the Yankee public. 227 By the Spring of 1861, the Planter had committed itself to the cause of the South and to secession; in June, it loosed a blast at its more uncompromising Northern exchanges. 228 These papers were accused of disguising themselves as agricultural journals when

223 Ibid.
224 Ibid., April 1861, 226.
225 Ibid., June 1861, 380.
226 Ibid., May 1861, 303-305; T. E. Miner's Rural American, of Utica, N. Y., denounced John Brown as a fanatic in 1859, and his subscription list so declined that he announced its closing in a circular letter, published in the Planter in May.
227 Ibid., 318-319.
228 Ibid., June 1861, 374-375.
really they just heaped abuse on the South and made "... threats of a disgusting nature. ..." 229 The editor berated the North for approving of John Brown and for not listening to moderate influences.230 Lincoln was the target of some attention and, to the Planter, Virginia's reaction to him became "To all such Despotisms as that of Abraham Lincoln, she has always been, and ever will be, a Rebel."231

The actual progress of the war received a few isolated notes in the magazine. In April 1861, after a trip on the Virginia Central and the Orange and Alexandria Railroads, the editor described Alexandria's preparations for battle and their proud spirits.232 In the June issue, "An Old Soldier" wrote in his advice for young volunteers preparing for a campaign.233

The editors of the Southern Planter had tried to keep out of the rising controversy, but agriculture, as had churches, fraternal organizations, and families, split with the Union. In July 1861, the last issue appeared, not to return until 1867.234

Founded in 1841, temporarily suspended by war, the Southern

229 Ibid., 374.
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid., 375.
232 Ibid., April 1861, 248-251.
233 Ibid., June 1861, 379-380.
234 Ibid., July 1861, passim; this is the last issue on file, no record of a later issue has yet been found.
Planter made a place for itself in the life of the farmers of Virginia. The idea of a written forum for the exchange of information acquired by practical farmers remained as the core of its editorial policy, and every editor pursued that goal. Oriented toward farm improvement, rural life, organized agricultural clubs, and beneficial laws, the Planter worked as a spokesman for a special interest group and tried to gain favors for it in the legislative halls. This was not totally partisan activity, but it emphasized the magazine's stand on behalf of the farmer. Not all of the stated aims of the Planter were achieved; some may have been too ambitious for the region or the paper, but its readers' own statements reveal that these policies did spur agricultural advancement in Virginia.
CHAPTER III

READER COMMENT

Reader comment in the Southern Planter was spirited and reflected a lively interest in agricultural improvement. The first issue was published after much correspondence and personal contact with Virginia farmers and contained many articles and letters from them.¹ The editor called on his "Friends of Agriculture"² to "Let the hundreds who have already manifested such an extraordinary interest in the success of this work, remember, that without the cooperation of the practical husbandman, no design of the kind can possibly prove successful."³ Throughout this twenty year period farmers would contribute, comment upon, and benefit from, articles in the Planter.

Replies began with the second issue. A letter from "S."⁴ on

¹ The Southern Planter, January 1841, 1-16 passim. Botts primed the readers for comment by having many letters on agricultural subjects by various authors, most of them anonymous. The first issue had letters from John Taylor of Caroline (a reprint), pp. 5-6; Arator, p. 5; A Farmer, and Martin, p. 3; M., p. 8; S., and H., p. 10; and B., p. 11. A pseudonym or anonymity was the most common signature in the Planter's columns in this period.

² Ibid., 2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., March 1841, 20-21.
stable construction and building improvement received cordial agreement. State Senator James McIlhany referred to a John Taylor reprint on seed wheat and was complimented for using his real name. In May, "D." thanked the Planter for its efforts in publishing agricultural information. In return, he gave his method for curing bacon. That same month, "A Housewife" remarked of the help she had received from new soap recipes and gave her suggestions for washing clothes. "A. B. S." in June, appreciated the Planter recommending corncob meal for feed, and mentioned that he used the product successfully. By June, the editor had noticed that the Planter had been reprinted in the Louisville Journal. The reprinted article was properly attributed, and he thanked other papers for the "... very handsome and complimentary notice they have been pleased to take of the Planter," but he chided those journals that reprinted without credit. "J. H." in July

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5Ibid., 23.
6Ibid., May 1841, 59-60.
7Ibid.
8Ibid., 74-75.
9Ibid.
10Ibid., June 1841, 89.
11Ibid.
12Ibid., 95.
13Ibid., 104.
14Ibid.
thanked the Planter for good advice, especially regarding corncob meal. 

"A Farmer" said, "I am most happy to witness your strenuous endeavors to improve the agriculture of our native state. . . . From the columns of your little work, I am satisfied that I have reaped ten times the amount of any subscription already in a single article." 

"M. E. S." wrote of the necessity for Southern agricultural papers and hoped the Planter would devote itself solely to Southern agricultural problems.

In writing on manures in September, 1841, "W. W." remarked, "I have seen much in your valuable periodical." 

In November, "A Farmer, Husband, and Father," from an unspecified Northern address, stated that he liked the Planter and considered it a good representative of the Southern region.

"B" wrote for the December issue, "I think your valuable and cheap paper better calculated to produce practical and

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 107-108.
18 Ibid. He also found subscribers for the Planter among his friends.
19 Ibid., 120-121.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., September 1841, 158.
22 Ibid. He later had criticism from "A Hanoverian" (October 1841, 191) on his manure techniques because of variances from more accepted practices.
23 Ibid., November 1841, 212.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., December 1841, 227.
lasting benefit to our farmers, than any I have ever seen." He also discussed wheat smut. Not all commentary was pleasant nor was all advice correct. William G. Maury of Caroline County wrote to complain in December's issue. He had tried a method published in November designed to rid grain storage areas of rats. The scheme involved using elder branches liberally, and it did not work. It did not prevent the rats from entering his oatbin, and it also made the oats unpalatable to livestock.

Comment in this general vein continued through Botts' tenure as editor. H. R. Robey of Fredericksburg wrote a glowing testimonial of the wonderful benefits farm papers had brought him in 1845. From them, and especially the Planter, he had learned the value of manures, crop rotations, and new varieties of crops. Scorned at first, he converted some neighbors and everyone's yield increased. John Minor Botts related the results of corn experimentation on his farm for the benefit of the subscribers; this information had been requested in previous letters to the Planter. He tried several fields with and without manure and planted the corn in various densities. He concluded that on good land, thick planting yielded more corn. Mayo Cabell of Union Hill sent in his experimental findings in 1845, prompted by earlier articles

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., November 1841, 184; December 1841, 247.
28 Ibid., February 1845, 33.
29 Ibid., March 1845, 64-65.
in the Planter. He performed similar experiments to Botts', with like results; when he tried extra thick planting of wheat, it rotted in the ground. 30 N. M. Tanner of Oak Hill, Dinwiddie, wrote, "I read the Planter with much pleasure and I think with some profit." 31 In addition to contributing information on horse diseases, Joseph B. Whitehead of Smithfield offered his "... sincere and hearty thanks for your editorials in the October and November numbers." 32 One farmer became thoroughly convinced of the necessity for exchanging information. After successful use of a Planter-published method of curing tobacco, R. H. Allen of Oral Oaks wrote in 1846, "Having derived much valuable information from your numerous correspondents, I am unwilling to withhold any facts in my possession, bearing upon any of the agricultural pursuits of Virginia." 33 Thomas Purkins, Mount Pleasant, King George County, expressed similar sentiments a few months later. He said, "Having been much edified and instructed by the perusal of your valuable paper ... I send you the following plan for breaking a surly ox." 34 Botts' encouragement of these contributions helped the editors that followed him.

30 Ibid., April 1845, 91. "As I have received both pleasure and profit from the perusal of your agricultural journal, by way of making some little return for the same, I submit a few experiments in corn and wheat, made during the last year."

31 Ibid., September 1845, 215.

32 Ibid., January 1846, 3-4.

33 Ibid., May 1846, 116-117.

34 Ibid., August 1846, 195.
to assess the effects of the magazine on the reader.

John M. Daniel received interesting comment from his subscribers. Charles Evans of Walkerton was pleased to write about the South Oregon strain of corn in the "excellent Journal."35 Zachariah Drummond of Amherst began to subscribe again after a two year lapse and said he was "right glad"36 to see the magazine. "E. J. T."37 of Albemarle called himself "... a close and attentive reader of the Southern Planter for the last few years,"38 and offered ditching hints. "N."39 of Norfolk County received "pleasure and edification"40 from the publication. An infrequent contributor, "C."41 of Gloucester Court House, sent in an essay on Eastern Virginia as his "... share towards keeping up a good agricultural paper in the South."42

Richard B. Gooch also published reader reaction that revealed the impact of the magazine. A "Gentleman in this City"43 remarked, "I wish the proprietor of the Planter could prevail upon the legislature of

36 Ibid., April 1849, 109-110.
37 Ibid., 114-115.
38 Ibid., 114.
39 Ibid., June 1849, 162-163.
40 Ibid., 162.
41 Ibid., 165-166.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., February 1850, 43.
Virginia to authorize 10 or 20 thousand copies of his paper to be issued for the benefit of the farmers who will not subscribe... A transplanted Virginian, living in Delaware, wished the Planter a one hundred times greater subscription list, to better spread the advantages of agricultural improvement. "C." of Bedford County stated the effect of the Planter on him by writing, "I am a contributor and reader of, your valuable paper, and read it with no small degree of interest, and find in it many valuable suggestions, some of which I attempt to practice." Another correspondent, "A Freind (sic) to Improvement," gladly noted the helpfulness of the Southern Planter and eagerly added his ideas on threshing machine maintenance to others he found in the magazine. Edwin G. Booth of Nottoway described as gratifying the increased attention given to agricultural journals in his county.

Frank Ruffin desired reader participation and interest in the journal and published many letters. "All Sides" read the magazine "... with the liveliest gratification," and appreciated its stand

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., March 1850, 94.
46 Ibid., July 1850, 213-214.
47 Ibid., 213.
48 Ibid., September 1850, 273.
49 Ibid., November 1850, 341-342.
50 Ibid., February 1856, 43-44.
51 Ibid., 43.
in favor of agricultural education. A correspondent from Rockbridge County stated he read the *Planter* with pleasure and for profit and would like to see it in the hands of every farmer in the state. 52 "J. M. B." 53 was inspired by "J. W. M." 54 and his recent article to write one of his own on the cattle disease, Hollowhorn. A long, involved letter of advice to Christopher Quandary from Lewis Livingston in August 1856 complimented the *Planter* often and recommended it to a young farmer. 55 General John H. Cocke of Bremo described with pleasure his good 1856 wheat crop and promised to keep the magazine informed of the yield. 56 A request to hear from an owner of a Morrison's reaper brought a prompt reply from Brunswick, Virginia, and a most favorable report. 57

James E. Williams also received much subscriber interest and printed several of the testimonials in every issue. A "Tide-Water Farmer" 58 thanked the *Planter* for its continued interest in marl and lime on poor land. I. I. Hite appreciated what the magazine had done for him and regretted that so few farmers used modern methods. 59

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54 *Ibid*.
55 *Ibid.*, August 1856, 229-234. This was a rambling, fictional discourse on proper farm methods and personal finances.
59 *Ibid.*, March 1859, 145-146. "It is at all times to me an acceptable and interesting paper."
A. G. Moody of Isle of Wight reported favorably the results of planting corn given him by the Planter's editor the previous winter. The Peabody Prolific Corn did well in spite of poor land and a dry season; he was pleased at the magazine's interest in new crops. This corn was a variety developed by a native of Georgia, Charles A. Peabody. It was a white corn, with the ears growing off the main stalk rather close to the ground. A fruit grower renewed his subscription in 1859, complimenting the horticultural articles but "... securing to myself exclusive privilege of abusing you as much as I please, if a number misses, for the next twelve months." "Subscriber" wrote as a "zealous farmer, wishing to do all the good I can," and recommended crop rotation methods to other readers. "J. L. D." reported that a method for storing sweet potatoes on open dry wooden shelves under cover as previously reported in the Planter was perfectly satisfactory and safe for potatoes. From Brunswick County, Yang Sing told of his troubles in raising the Chinese Potato and he promised the editors a sample whenever the crop

60 Ibid., 183-184.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., May 1859, 302.
63 Ibid., June 1859, 340-341.
64 Ibid., 340.
65 Ibid., October 1859, 652.
66 Ibid.
came in. "Amherst," a tobacco grower, wanted everyone to know about his new method of curing the crop, so he chose the pages of the Planter to spread the technique to his colleagues. He used a simple furnace and cured by heat alone, rather than by open flame. Inquiries as to the proper method of planting wheat, using a subsoil plow, and the success of Manny's combined reaper and mower came from "A Farmer" who wanted the advice of experienced farmers through the Planter. "Piedmont" liked the January 1861 issue, and his compliments and additions were published in February. He stated, "The improved dress of the January number of the Planter and the value of its contents suggest the propriety, if not the duty, of those acknowledging its benefits, to contribute a quid pro quo." His contribution was a call for a change in the white social order to gain more unity for the war effort. He was disturbed at the snobbish attitudes of the professional and planter classes towards mechanics and artisans. Without these neglected people, Southern industries could never begin to compete. He called for a firm and determined policy to "elevate the followers of mechanic arts,"

67 Ibid., November 1859, 719-720.
68 Ibid., January 1861, 49.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., February 1861, 128.
71 Ibid., April 1861, 222-224.
72 Ibid., 222.
73 Ibid., 223.
and to accept them socially and economically. 74

The readers of the Southern Planter were interested in the exchange of information and in agricultural advancement. They appreciated the magazine, patronized its columns, and wrote that they profited from what they read. Blanket requests for information from other farmers were quickly answered. The editors themselves gave advice where they could. The impact on the serious and constant reader, especially the ones whose efforts at improvement were published, was significant indeed. Given the general rise in agriculture in this twenty year period, the Southern Planter had a positive effect on the economy of the Upper South.

74 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

GOVERNMENTAL ACTIONS

The *Southern Planter's* direct effect upon governmental actions in agricultural matters is difficult to assess. In this era, American farming received a share of state aid. In the North, bounties were offered to diversify and sustain agriculture, marketing regulations were enacted to prevent the sale of inferior produce, state warehouses were established and state funds were spent to find remedies for potato rot and dangerous animal diseases.¹ The South was not as enterprising or as generous in its aid. For the most part, Southern legislatures enacted inspection laws and established standards for staple products.² From colonial times, the Virginia General Assembly had attempted to define standards for tobacco that was to be sold outside the state.³ Beginning in 1846, Maryland and Virginia tried to regulate by law the quality of commercial fertilizers, especially Peruvian Guano. This product had suffered from adulteration and fraud because of demand for

²Ibid., 319.
it and an attendant high price. The guano purchasers wanted some assurance of a fair deal for so vital a product. Increasingly the view was expressed that the government should aid agriculture and the agricultural press was one of the methods through which the farmer's thoughts became known.

In the early days of the Southern Planter it expressed satisfaction that the Henrico Agricultural Society had been able to get a bill introduced to establish a Board of Agriculture in Virginia. The effort succeeded and Botts printed the entire bill in the April 1841 issue. It called for an eight member board, two from each section of the state, to serve for three years. Their duties were to report annually the condition of Virginia agriculture to the General Assembly; to collect information on soil improvement; and to suggest legislation to improve Virginia agriculture. When the state published the first and only report of the board, Botts was upset at the small press run of only 1500 copies and unsuccessfully urged that more be printed. In July 1849, Gooch compared, unfavorably, Virginia's state aid to agriculture to that of New York. He was especially envious of the New York Legislature

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6 Planter, April 1841, 42-43.

7 Ibid., 43.

8 Ibid., February 1843, 47.

9 Ibid., July 1849, 194.
publishing the annual proceedings of the New York Agricultural Society at state expense; when in Virginia there was not even a society to have proceedings to publish. 10 Gooch, along with Botts and Ruffin, was at one time secretary of the Virginia State Agricultural Society, which did much lobbying for agriculture. 11 The results in 1850 were disappointing; all the projects promoted by the Society and the Planter, except guano inspection, failed of passage. 12 Defeated were proposals for an Agricultural Professorship at the University of Virginia and the Virginia Military Institute, provisions for a state chemist, and requests for financial aid to the State Agricultural Society. 13 Gooch attributed most of the lack of action to ineffective lobbying by the society, even though he had been deeply involved in the activity. 14

Though Frank Ruffin favored the use of farmers as a pressure group, at one time he distinctly disliked government intervention in agriculture. In 1856 he was convinced that the multiplication of inspection devices for tobacco, guano, and wheat violated all principles of good government. He thought the procedures cost too much and did not accomplish the stated purpose of preventing poor quality or

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., February 1845, 41; March 1850, 6; March 1852, 87-89; Charles W. Turner, "Virginia State Agricultural Societies, 1811-1860," Agricultural History, XXXVIII, 167-177.
12 Planter, April 1850, 120.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
fraudulent packaging. He further ventured that such laws were a form of at-home tariff, protecting European purchasers of American goods but not the reverse.  

Only a few months later, however, Ruffin was urging petitions on several subjects. One was a tax on female dogs, who were suspected of killing sheep. The tax was set at a high rate, hoping to reduce the number of animals and force owners to keep the remainder under restraint. He held little hope for such a bill’s passage, but he did have a model petition for subscribers to copy and send their legislators. Another petition dealt with the confining of bulls, boars, and rams, at that time allowed to roam freely, to prevent a disruption of improved breeding efforts on nearby farms. No perceptible action resulted from these efforts. No instance of editorial attack or concerted campaign by the Southern Planter directly resulted in specific legislative progress. The actions taken and advocated by the progressive agricultural editorial policy of the magazine, joined with agricultural groups and prominent individuals, did contribute to the general agricultural advances of the era.

15 Ibid., March 1856, 80-90.
16 Ibid., August 1856, 248-250.
17 Ibid., 248-249.
18 Ibid., 249-250.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Founded in 1841, temporarily suspended during the Civil War, The Southern Planter made a place for itself in the life of the farmers of Virginia. The ideal of a written forum for the exchange of information acquired by practical farmers remained the core of its editorial policy, and every editor pursued that goal. Oriented toward farm improvement, rural life, organized agricultural clubs and beneficial laws, the Planter worked as a spokesman for the agriculturists of Virginia and the Upper South.

The American agricultural press can take credit for a large part of the increase in crop productivity occurring in the decades before the Civil War. The Southern Planter participated actively in the process. Scientific practices were constantly advocated. New machinery received hearty recommendation. Agricultural education gained support from constant editorial comment; passage of the 1862 Morrill Act was aided by such efforts.¹ Edmund Ruffin, in noting the tremendous agricultural progress of this era, wrote:

This greater progress is mainly due to the diffusion of agricultural papers. In the actual absence of all other means,

these publications, almost alone, have rendered good service, in making known discoveries in the science, and spreading knowledge of improvements in the art of agriculture.2

The founder and first editor, Charles T. Botts, travelled and corresponded widely. He had diverse agricultural interests; formerly a practicing farmer, he manufactured farm machinery, operated a farm supply store, and sold cattle and real estate. He emphasized agricultural societies and cooperative experimentation by neighborhood farmers to improve methods and yields. Botts favored local action to improve roads and canals. Slavery was only another farm management problem to him; he did not defend it as a special institution. His actions in all fields firmly established the Planter and gave it a continuity many journals lacked.

John M. Daniel was not as forceful an agricultural editor as Botts. Subscriptions declined and a personal interest in agriculture seemed lacking. He did favor political action by farmers to obtain favorable legislation. He encouraged the re-establishment of the state Agricultural Society to help in the diffusion of agricultural knowledge. He demonstrated his political interests after leaving the Planter, when he became editor of the Richmond Enquirer.

Richard B. Gooch was most active in his successful efforts to help re-establish the Virginia Agricultural Society. He became one of its secretaries and his initial encouragement helped keep the organization together throughout the decade. Gooch's efforts for the Society

2Ibid., 233.
and those of the editors that followed him helped expose the magazine to a larger group of potential readers. His tenure as editor was a short one; he did not measurably improve the agricultural content over that published by Daniel.

Frank G. Ruffin's intense interest in the magazine's original goals increased the subscription list and enlarged the coverage of agricultural topics. Original articles, answers to reader questions, and reprints from similar journals combined to inform the reader of the value of the Southern Planter. He was interested in favorable legislation for farmers; he encouraged lobbying activities by the readers. As editor, he involved himself deeply in the affairs of the Virginia Agricultural Society and its annual Fairs. Frank Ruffin initially reacted to Northern attacks on slavery defensively; in his last years as editor he took the offensive and blamed the North for trying to disrupt the nation. His tenure was a successful one; for when he left, the magazine was as strong editorially as it had been under Botts.

James E. Williams endured a difficult period as editor. Attacks on his region and its culture increased rapidly and Southern agriculture's prime labor source was the featured target. He kept the pages of the magazine free of excessive political controversy until just a few months before the War and the closing of the Planter. He continued the interest of previous editors in the Virginia Agricultural Society and in agricultural improvement by individual farmers. During his period of editorship he encouraged agricultural education and crop diversification, particularly attacking tobacco as a staple crop burden.
When he did become involved editorially in the slavery question, his reaction was the typical Southern defense of the institution as a positive good. The desire of Williams to restrict non-farm news as much as possible in the 1858-1861 period and promote progressive agriculture may have contributed to the rapid revival of the magazine after the War.

The ante-bellum *Southern Planter* has not received much attention, yet it survived in a difficult period for magazines. At least five out of every six agricultural publications begun in the 1829-1859 period failed. By approaching the rural audience with an inexpensive publication offering mostly non-theoretical advice, the *Southern Planter* grew and spread. Farmers in the Upper South benefitted from the journal; their letters and the increasing circulation of the *Planter* attest to this. Virginia agriculture is better as a result of the *Southern Planter*.

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3 Ibid., 18, note.
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Curriculum Vitae

Francis Frederick Carr, Junior

Born July 25, 1936, in Danville, Virginia.
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Education:
- Graduate, Appomattox High School, Appomattox, Virginia, 1953
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