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# Antebellum Southampton County, Virginia, 1840-1860

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**Antebellum Southampton County,  
Virginia, 1840-1860**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
at the University of Richmond in candidacy  
for the degree of Master of Arts in History

by Richard Tyler Kanak  
B.A. University of Virginia

May 1991  
Richmond, Virginia

## ABSTRACT

*Antebellum Southampton County, Virginia, 1840-1860*  
by Richard Tyler Kanak, M.A. University of Richmond

Dr. W. Harrison Daniel, Thesis Director

This thesis is a descriptive account of life in antebellum Southampton. Established by the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1749, Southampton County gained notoriety as the site of Nat Turner's slave rebellion. (In August 1831, Turner's nefarious followers murdered fifty-five of Southampton's white residents in an attempt to free the slaves.) Fears of another armed slave revolt prompted the Virginia General Assembly to enact a series of stringent slave codes, which remained in effect until the Civil War. Primary sources consulted in the preparation of this thesis include corporate records, church manuscripts, court order books, reports of county and state officers, tax journals, and personal papers of the county's contemporary citizens. Few such studies of Virginia counties currently exist. Future historians will be able to use this study for comparison and analysis.

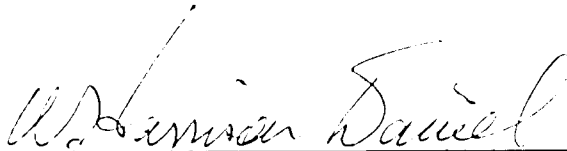
By the latter half of the eighteenth century, the African-American and European populations assimilated or removed the aborigines. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the number of whites and blacks gradually increased, then stabilized. By 1840, African-Americans comprised over one-half of the total population. Three-fourths of antebellum Southampton's Negro residents were slaves. The vast majority of the population belonged to a handful of religious

denominations: Baptist, Methodist, Disciples of Christ, and Quakers. Free Negroes and slaves attended religious services in Southampton. Baptist and Methodist churches listed blacks as full members.

Located on the Virginia-North Carolina border, Southampton is about sixty miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. Antebellum farmers enjoyed a comparative advantage in agriculture and produced a variety of crops. Larger farmers successfully applied the traditions of the plantation system to general farming techniques. Truck farming became increasingly important after 1835. By 1860, Southampton's farmers produced one-fifth of Virginia's cotton, rice, peas, and beans. Small manufacturing enterprises complemented the dominant agricultural sector. Roads, navigation projects, and railroads provided a relatively efficient means of communication.

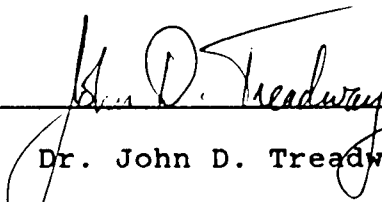
Southampton's county officials worked to make local government an effective institution. Schoolmasters, clergymen, and professional tutors educated children in private schools. County and state governments taxed the citizens to provide elementary education for children who could not afford tuition, but no comprehensive system of public education developed in Southampton before the Civil War. The county maintained a poor house, and the overseers of the poor administered monetary assistance to both blacks and whites.

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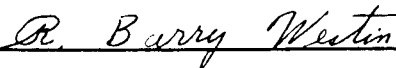
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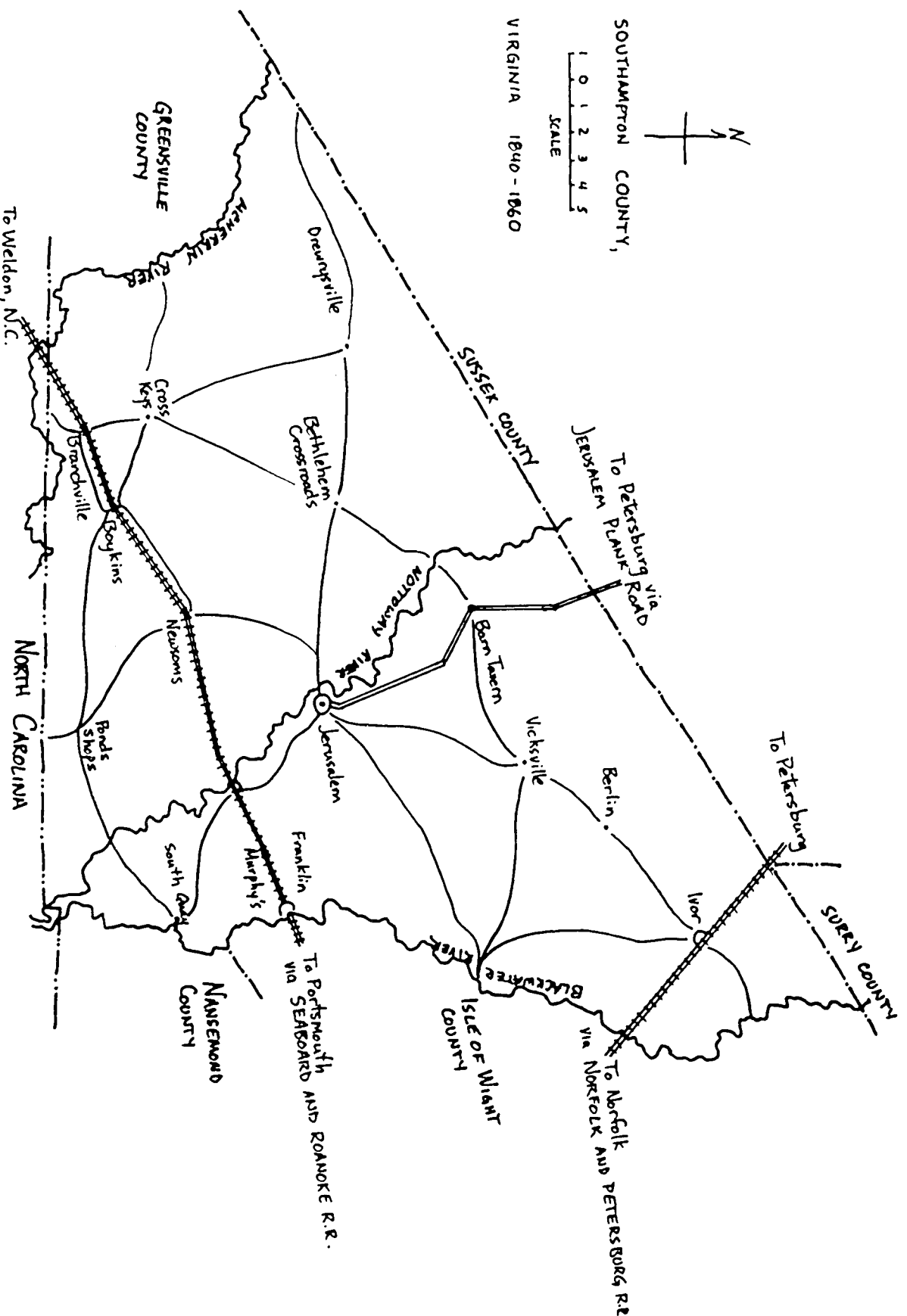
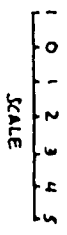
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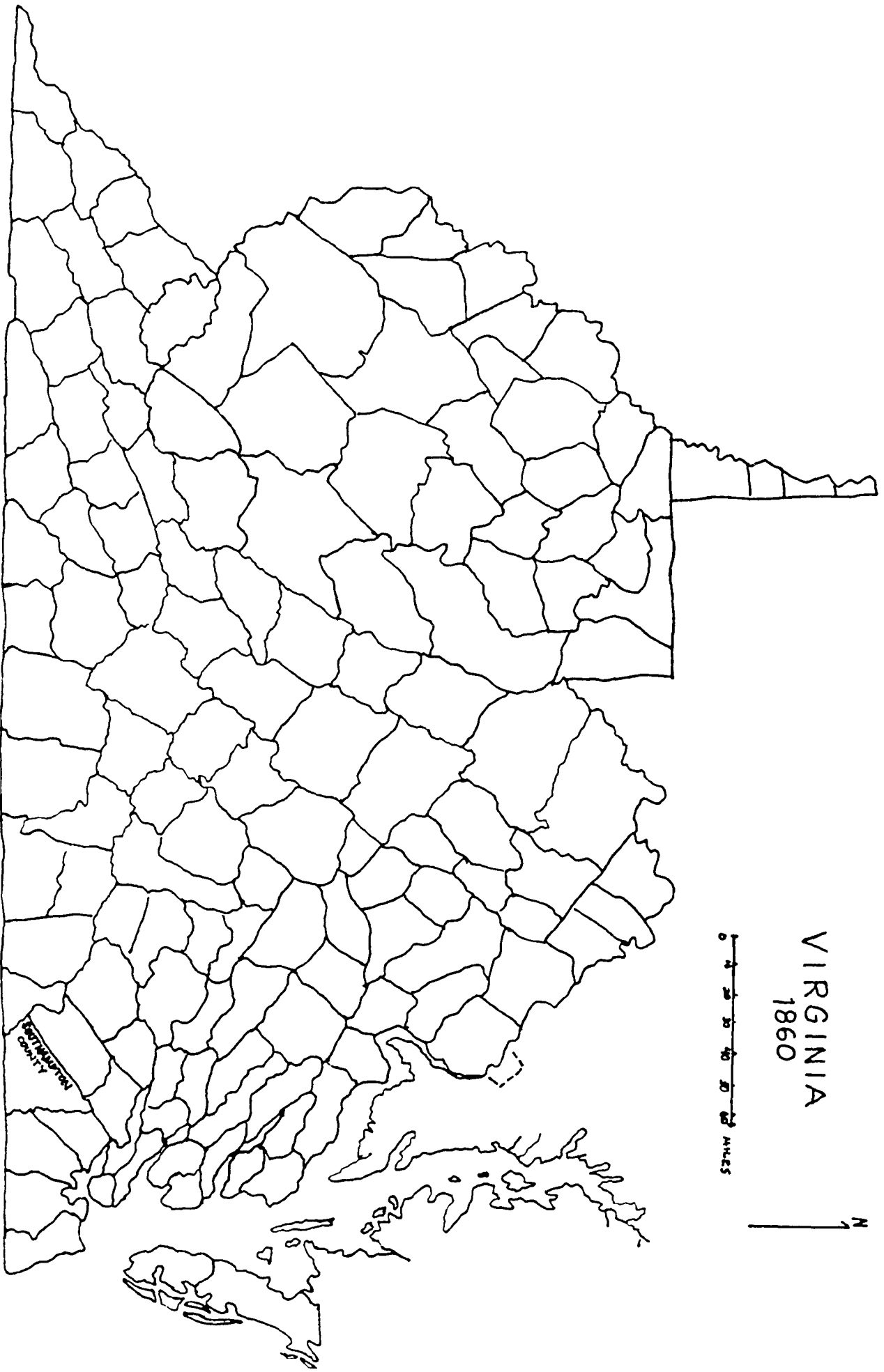
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SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY,

VIRGINIA 1840-1860







## Introduction

### The People of Southampton

On 18 April 1749, the Virginia House of Burgesses passed "An Act for dividing the County of Isle of Wight into two distinct counties."<sup>1</sup> This Act organized territory south and west of the Blackwater River into a new entity, Southampton County. Most scholars agree that the burgesses named Southampton County in honor of Sir Henry Wriothseley, third Earl of Southampton.<sup>2</sup> In October 1785, the General Assembly enacted legislation which revised the county boundary to include the area in Nansemond County lying south and west of the Blackwater and Nottoway Rivers.<sup>3</sup> A sixty degree diagonal

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<sup>1</sup> The Governor and Council agreed to the Act on 20 April 1749. H.R. McIlwaine, ed. *Journal of the House of Burgesses, 1748-1749* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1915), pp. 367-371.

<sup>2</sup> B.W. Green, *Word Book of Virginia Speech* (1912), p. 59. Charles M. Long, *Virginia County Names* (1908), p. 64. United States Geological Survey, *Bulletin*, no. 258 (1905), p. 287. Morgan Poitiaux Robinson, "Virginia Counties: Those resulting from Virginia Legislation," *Bulletin of the Virginia State Library* (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1915), 9: 191. Cf. Emily J. Salmon, ed., *A Hornbook of Virginia History*, third edition (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1983), p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> The act became effective on 1 March 1786. William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: being a collection of all the laws of Virginia from the first session of the Legislature in the year 1619*, 13 vols. (Richmond: W. W. Gray, 1819), 12: 69. (Hereafter cited as Hening, *Statutes at Large*.)

separated Southampton from its Northwestern neighbors, Surry and Sussex Counties. The Meherrin River separated Southampton from its western neighbor, Greensville County. The Virginia-North Carolina State Line defined Southampton's southern border.

Southampton's African-American and European populations steadily increased until the 1830s. By the antebellum period, the African-Americans and Europeans either assimilated or removed the aborigines.<sup>4</sup> The Meherrin Indians moved south into North Carolina. The few remaining Nottoway Indians sold or leased their lands to settlers.<sup>5</sup>

Europeans introduced Negro slavery into the Blackwater area in the late seventeenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century, almost half the settlers owned slaves.<sup>6</sup> The proportion of blacks to whites remained relatively stable throughout the antebellum years. In 1840, 6,171 whites and 8,354 blacks lived in Southampton County; in 1850, 5,940 whites and 7,581 blacks; in 1860, 5,713 whites and 7,202

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<sup>4</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, Census Office, Population Schedule, 1840, Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia. (Hereafter cited as Population Schedule, 1840, VSL.) Population Schedule, 1850, 1860, VSL.

<sup>5</sup> Helen Rountree, "The Termination and Dispersal of the Nottoway Indians of Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 95, no. 2 (April 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Walter E. Minchinton, *Virginia Slave Trade Statistics, 1698-1773* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1984).

blacks.<sup>7</sup> Negroes consistently accounted for about 55 percent of Southampton's total population from 1840 to 1860.

The proportion of slaves to free blacks also remained stable. In 1840, 6,555 of the 8354 blacks were slaves.<sup>8</sup> In 1850, 5,755 of the 7,581 blacks were slaves.<sup>9</sup> In 1860, 5,408 of the 7,202 blacks were slaves.<sup>10</sup> Free blacks consistently accounted for about 25 percent of the Negro population and 12-to-14 percent of the total population.

About 85 percent of the population made a living by farming. Among the non-slave population, family size averaged from four to five members. In 1860, 1,203 white families and 363 free black families lived in as many dwellings.<sup>11</sup> Most of the non-slave agricultural population lived on small farms of 200 acres or less. About 10 percent of the white population lived on estates comprised of 500 acres or more. Tenant farmers lived on the periphery of the larger estates,

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<sup>7</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Ninth Census...* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 100-101.

<sup>8</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium... of the Sixth Census* (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *The Seventh Census of the United States in 1850...* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), pp. 253-255.

<sup>10</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States in 1860...* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. 502-513.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 349-350.

farming small plots of land and sharing their harvests.<sup>12</sup> Just over one-half of the slaves lived on large estates.<sup>13</sup> Rural slaves inhabited separate Negro quarters. Masters often gave attention to family status. On larger farms, Negro quarters consisted of several small single-family dwellings and one or two larger barracks for single males and females.<sup>14</sup>

About 15 percent of the population lived in small towns and villages. Slaves residing in these small communities generally lived in a separate part of their master's house.<sup>15</sup> Jerusalem was the county seat and served as the main hub for county roads. In 1836 the town had about twenty-five dwelling houses, four mercantile stores, one saddlery, one carriage maker, two hotels, one masonic hall, and two houses of private entertainment (in addition to the usual county buildings). Jerusalem's resident population was 175, four of whom practiced law and four of whom were practicing physicians.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1840-1860, VSL. Id., Personal Property Tax Register, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>14</sup> Slave Schedule, 1840, 1850, 1860, VSL. George Rawick, editor, *The American Slave*, vol.16, *Virginia Narratives* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972). [George E. Harrison], "Hints in Relation to the Dwellings and Clothing of Slaves," *Farmers' Register* (Petersburg: Edmund Ruffin, 1832-1842), vol. 2., no. 11 (April 1835).

<sup>15</sup> Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Martin, *A New and Comprehensive Gazetteer of Virginia* (Charlottesville: Mosely and Tompkins, 1836), pp. 278-279. (Hereafter cited as Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia*.)

Franklin, Murphy's, Newsom's, Boykin's, and Branchville were depots on the Seaboard and Roanoke railway.<sup>17</sup> Ivor was a depot on the Norfolk and Petersburg railway.<sup>18</sup> Other principal settlements included Barn Tavern, Berlin, Bethlehem Crossroads, Cross Keys, Drewrysville, South Quay, and Vicksville. By 1860 the postal service also delivered mail to settlements at Assamoosick, Bower's, Farmer's Grove, and Pond's Shops.<sup>19</sup>

Vital records for the late antebellum years indicate that health care was less than ideal for both whites and blacks in Southampton. Infant mortality was high for both races. Respiratory diseases were most severe in the winter months, and diseases of the digestive system affected the population in the summer months. Tubercular diseases and a variety of fevers affected the population during all seasons. Infrequent

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<sup>17</sup> The Seaboard and Roanoke railroad was originally incorporated as the Portsmouth and Roanoke railroad in 1832. Service was available between Portsmouth and Weldon, N. C. by the end of 1837. Corporate Papers of the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad Company, 1832-1846, VSL. (Hereafter cited as P&R Papers.) Corporate Papers of the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company, 1846-1861, VSL. (Hereafter cited as S&R Papers.)

<sup>18</sup> The Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad Company was incorporated in 1851. Service began between Norfolk and Petersburg in 1858. Corporate Papers of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad Company, 1851-1861, VSL. (Hereafter cited as N&P Papers.)

<sup>19</sup> Virginius Cornick Hall, Jr., "Virginia Post Offices, 1798-1859," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 81, no. 1 (January 1973). "A List of Virginia Post Offices Arranged by Counties as Revised and Collected by the Post Office Department to October 20, 1867 as Published by the American News Company."

outbreaks of communicable diseases, such as smallpox and measles, did not develop into measurable epidemics. Local doctors and physicians tended to whites, slaves, and free blacks. Masters, mistresses, and overseers often took responsibility for their ailing slaves, but not for the health of free blacks. A maritime hospital operated in Norfolk.<sup>20</sup> The county court ordered idiots to be placed in the Eastern Lunatic Asylum in Williamsburg.<sup>21</sup>

After 1851, the county clerk recorded all reported deaths in the Death Register. A family member, neighbor, or close friend of the deceased usually reported the deaths of whites and free persons of color. The slaveowner (or agent thereof) usually reported the death of his slaves. If a physician visited the patient during his illness (or soon after his death), he either ascertained the cause of death or instructed the family to report the cause of death as "unknown." The clerk would leave the corresponding space in the register blank if the reporter did not provide a physician's diagnosis or at least a plausible explanation of the death in question.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia*, p. 248.

<sup>21</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, Southampton County Courthouse, Courtland, Virginia (SCC).

<sup>22</sup> The coroner investigated all mysterious deaths. The chapter on local government addresses the duties of the coroner in more detail.

The clerk listed "unknown" causes for 22 percent of the recorded deaths. Another 20 percent of the time he listed no cause. Physicians had no knowledge of diseases made possible by advances in microbiology, but experienced medical professionals were able to identify and treat the symptoms of a surprising variety of diseases.<sup>23</sup> The general population had more limited knowledge of diseases and their treatment.

TABLE 1

## TEN LEADING CAUSES OF DEATH, 1855-1860

Disease	White	Free Black	Slave	Total
Unknown	92	32	129	253
No cause	105	11	113	229
Diarrhea	61	8	53	122
Respiratory system	28	6	43	77
Typhoid	43	1	27	71
Tubercular	28	6	24	58
Nervous system	17	2	23	42
Other fevers	24	4	13	41
Whooping cough	2	2	23	27
Scarlet fever	20	0	6	26
Total deaths	483	91	575	1,149

SOURCE: Southampton County, Death Register, 1855-1860, VSL.

Thirty-nine percent of all reported deaths occurred before the age of five. At least 452 infant deaths occurred in Southampton from 1855 to 1860. The county clerk recorded the

<sup>23</sup> Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978), pp. 143-145.



deaths of 152 whites, 33 free blacks, and 267 slaves.<sup>24</sup> Diarrhea (also dysentery, "flux") claimed the lives of more infants than any other recorded disease. This miserable affliction caused the deaths of thirty-seven whites, five free blacks, and thirty-nine slaves. Unsanitary conditions and poor food quality were to blame. Whooping cough and dropsy were serious problems among slave infants. Twenty-two slave infants died from whooping cough and ten died from dropsy.<sup>25</sup> Seventeen slaves and one free black reportedly died of "smothering" during the five years preceding 1860. All the infants who perished from "crib death" were black. The preponderance of Negro infants who died of crib death were two to six months old.<sup>26</sup> No white infants died of crib death over the same period.<sup>27</sup> From 1855 to 1860, 588 whites, 119 free blacks, and 854 slaves were born in Southampton.<sup>28</sup> Roughly one-third of all children died before they reached the age of five.

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<sup>24</sup> Southampton County, Death Register, 1855-1860, VSL.

<sup>25</sup> Dropsy affected the entire slave population. Symptoms included edema and swelling of body tissues. Southampton County, Death Register, 1855-1860, VSL. Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery*, p. 131.

<sup>26</sup> Southampton County, Death Register, 1855-1860, VSL.

<sup>27</sup> Current scholarship on SIDS is discussed by Michael P. Johnson in "Smothered Slave Infants: Were Slave Mothers at Fault?" *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 47 (November 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Southampton County, Register of Births, 1855-1860, VSL.

Once a child reached the age of five, his/her chance of reaching maturity was good. Fourteen percent of all reported deaths occurred between the ages of five and twenty. Typhoid was a problem in the summer months. Scarlet fever took more lives in the winter. Twelve percent of total deaths occurred among those aged twenty to thirty-five. Typhoid fever was more prevalent among whites between twenty and thirty-five than among Negroes of the same ages. Respiratory system diseases, especially pneumonia, were responsible for most deaths among the young adult Negro population. Adults aged from thirty-five to fifty made up 8 percent of total deaths. Pulmonary tuberculosis, or "consumption," was the most frequently cited cause of death among middle aged whites.<sup>29</sup> Pneumonia and other respiratory diseases topped the list for middle aged Negroes. Adults aged from fifty to seventy made up about 10 percent of the total number of reported deaths. Consumption, respiratory illness, and typhoid were responsible for most deaths among the white population in this age category. Respiratory ailments and dropsy were the most frequently cited causes of death among the Negro population (although nervous system disorders such as paralysis, fits,

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<sup>29</sup> Consumption affected whites and blacks, but at different ages. Consumption was more frequently listed as the cause of death among Negroes under the age of thirty and among whites over fifty. Consumption was listed as the cause of death in a greater proportion of whites aged from thirty to fifty. Southampton County, Death Register, 1855-1860, VSL.

and "brain fever" claimed a significant proportion of older Negroes). Those over seventy made up 7 percent of the total number of deaths. The most frequently cited cause of death among seniors was simply "old age." Seven whites, three free blacks, and twelve slaves died of either old age or debility. There were one hundred fourteen deaths for which the clerk listed no age.

To recapitulate, the clerk recorded 1,149 deaths from 1855 to 1860: those of 483 whites, 91 free blacks, and 575 slaves.<sup>30</sup> Whites made up from 42-to-44 percent of the population and accounted for 42 percent of total deaths. Free blacks made up from twelve-to-fourteen percent of the population and accounted for but 8 percent of total deaths. Slaves made up from 42-to-44 percent of the population and accounted for 50 percent of reported deaths.

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<sup>30</sup> Southampton County, Death Register, 1855-1860, VSL.

## Chapter One

### Land and Slaves

Southampton is one of eastern Virginia's largest counties in terms of land area. Roughly forty miles long and twenty miles wide, Southampton's official area is 604 square miles (386,560 acres).<sup>1</sup> Three principal rivers drain the county: Blackwater, Nottoway, and Meherrin. Each flows into Albemarle Sound, via the Chowan and Roanoke Rivers.

Ancient terracing of the inland sea defines Southampton's topography. Four of these terraces run through the county: Sunderland, Wicomico, Chowan, and Dismal Swamp. Extreme western and northeastern parts of the county lie on the Sunderland terrace. Rolling hills, 90 to 130 feet above sea level, dominate the relief here. North central Southampton lies on the Wicomico terrace. Relief is flat or gently undulating. Elevation on the Wicomico terrace ranges from fifty to ninety feet. Areas in the southwestern part of the county and scattered spots along the Meherrin River lie on the

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<sup>1</sup> U.S., Department of Agriculture, *Soil Survey of Southampton County, Virginia*, series 1933, no.6 (July 1937), p. 3. (Hereafter cited as Devereux and Shulkum, *Soil Survey*.)

Chowan terrace. Land on the Chowan terrace is gently undulating. Elevations range from thirty to fifty feet. The Dismal Swamp terrace runs through the southern and southeastern parts of the county. This area is predominantly flat. Elevations range from eighteen to thirty feet. To recapitulate, elevations in Southampton range from nearly sea level to 130 feet. Most of Southampton is flat or gently undulating, but rolling hills and shallow valleys characterize about 35 percent of the county.<sup>2</sup> The gently rolling relief posed no hinderance to antebellum farmers.

Southampton is about sixty miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. No natural barriers prevent the ocean breezes from tempering the seasons. The average high temperature in January is thirty-nine degrees. The average high in July is seventy-eight degrees. Rainfall averages forty-seven inches annually. The growing season is 191 days.<sup>3</sup> The first killing frost usually occurs near the end of October.

Native flora and fauna typify those found in the coastal regions of the Chesapeake. Coastal flatwoods grow in most areas of the county. In the upland regions of Southampton, thick stands of pine forests dominate unimproved lands. Dense

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., map insert.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6. Virginia, Division of State Planning and Community Affairs, *Data Summary: Southampton County, Franklin City*, edition 75-10 (1975), pp. 5-6. (Hereafter cited as Nicholson, *Data Summary*.)

deciduous forests with abundant undergrowth cling to unimproved bottom lands. Cypress trees abound in low lying and poorly drained areas. The swamps have an eerie, bayou-like appearance; mosses hang gracefully from cypress boughs. Wild game and fowl are prolific in the woodlands and wetlands. Fishing is good in the rivers and streams; shad and herring migrate up the principal rivers and streams each spring.

Most soils found in Southampton have excellent agricultural qualities. There are at least twenty-five different soil classifications in Southampton, but for the purposes of this study they may be grouped into three main categories: light colored well drained soils, light colored poorly drained soils, and dark colored poorly drained soils.<sup>4</sup>

The Norfolk, Ruston, Craven, Moyock, Onslow, Wickham, Altavista, and Kalmia soils comprise the light colored well drained category. Together, these soils make up 74.4 percent of Southampton.<sup>5</sup> The light colored well drained soils warm up early in the spring and are the most easily cultivated. The fact that most of the light colored well drained soils occur in flat or gently undulating areas further increases the

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<sup>4</sup> Actually, Devereux and Shulkum list twenty-two soil types and one soil phase in addition to the earth classified as either swamp or meadow. Devereux and Shulkum, *Soil Survey*, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

potential for profitable cultivation.<sup>6</sup> The Norfolk soils, which comprise most of the category, prevail in the western part of the county and other well drained areas (i.e. alongside streams). Although well drained soils are naturally low in nutrients, antebellum farmers rotated their crops and applied soil supplements to increase productivity. Cotton, sweet potatoes, tobacco, and early fruits and vegetables grew well in all of the soils listed in this category.

Soils of the Lenoir, Bladen, Roanoke, and Conagree varieties comprise the light colored poorly drained category. These soils make up 11.7 percent of Southampton.<sup>7</sup> The light colored poorly drained soils are higher in nutrients than the light colored well drained soils, but they are not inherently as productive (initially). Poorly drained soils are heavier and warm up later in the spring. The light colored poorly drained soils occur most frequently on flat terrain. Antebellum farmers who established proper drainage noticed that these soils took on characteristics which are not dissimilar to the soils of the light colored well drained category.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., map insert.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> R. G. Johnson, "On Reclaiming Marsh Land," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 4, no. 11 (March 1837).

The Portsmouth soils and the areas classified as meadow or swamp make up the dark colored poorly drained category. Portsmouth soils account for 2.1 percent of the county, meadow for 1.3 percent, and swamp for 10.5 percent.<sup>9</sup> Dark soils are high in acid content and (for the most part) are unsuitable for agricultural purposes.<sup>10</sup> Proper drainage is often impractical, because these soils occur in areas subject to frequent overflow. The Portsmouth soils are scattered throughout the county. Meadow most frequently occurs alongside small streams. Swamp most frequently occurs by larger streams and rivers. Most of Southampton's swampland is in the Nottoway River Basin.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Some farmers spread lime pellets and grew rice, but most left these areas undeveloped. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>11</sup> Devereux and Shulkum, *Soil Survey*, map insert.



TABLE 2

## AVERAGE AND PROPORTIONATE EXTENT OF SOILS

Soil Type	Number of Acres	Percent of Total area
<i>Light Color, Well Drained</i>		
Norfolk fine sandy loam	130,560	33.8
Norfolk fine sandy loam, deep phase	37,632	9.7
Norfolk very fine sandy loam	16,384	4.3
Norfolk sandy loam	7,616	2.0
Norfolk fine sand	26,816	6.9
Ruston fine sandy loam	2,688	0.7
Craven fine sandy loam	9,600	2.5
Moyock fine sandy loam	33,152	8.6
Moyock sandy loam	4,672	1.2
Onslow fine sandy loam	5,504	1.4
Wickham fine sandy loam	4,160	1.1
Altavista fine sandy loam	1,600	0.4
Kalmia fine sandy loam	1,280	0.3
Kalmia fine sand	5,824	1.5
<i>Light Color, Poorly Drained</i>		
Lenoir fine sandy loam	19,776	5.1
Lenoir very fine sandy loam	11,008	2.9
Lenoir silty clay loam	2,816	0.7
Lenoir clay	448	0.1
Bladen very fine sandy loam	3,520	0.9
Bladen silty clay loam	1,216	0.3
Roanoke very fine sandy loam	448	0.1
Conagree silty clay loam	6,272	1.6
<i>Dark Color, Poorly Drained</i>		
Portsmouth fine sandy loam	8,064	2.1
Meadow	4,928	1.3
Swamp	40,576	10.5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>356,560</b>	<b>100.0</b>

SOURCE: Devereux and Shulkum, *Soil Survey*, p. 10

Aggregate property values in Southampton remained relatively stable throughout the antebellum period. Assessors valued rural property in Southampton at \$1,507,190 in 1840 and \$1,615,065 in 1860.<sup>12</sup> The assessed value of most rural property ranged from one to ten dollars per acre, depending upon the quality, location, and the intended use of the property.<sup>13</sup> Assessors valued unimproved lands in remote areas at one dollar or less per acre. The value of farmland in more settled areas ranged from three to seven dollars per acre. Improved farmland near rails or water was usually valued at more than seven dollars per acre. Easements and other special property rights increased property values up to ten times their original values. Some mill tracts sold for more than \$100 per acre.<sup>14</sup> Assessors consistently valued individual town lots from \$50 to \$300 per acre from 1840 to 1860. The aggregate value of town lots increased over the same period, reflecting the growth of settled areas.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840, VSL. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860...*, p. 162.

<sup>13</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>15</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL. It is difficult to compare aggregate values because settled areas grew and the methods of taxation varied from 1840 to 1860. See Edgar Sydenstricker, *A Brief History of Taxation in Virginia* (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1915).

Relatively little changed with respect to real property ownership in Southampton from 1840 to 1860.<sup>16</sup> The trend away from cash crop farming to general farming, including techniques of crop rotation and soil fertilization, resulted in more intensive

TABLE 3

## LAND OWNERSHIP, 1860

Number of Acres	Number of Owners
50 or less	212
50-200	386
200-300	139
300-400	76
400-500	66
500-700	64
700-1,000	60
1,000-1,250	51
1,250-5,000	11
5,000 or more	2
Total owners	1,060

SOURCE: Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

(rather than extensive) land use strategies. Cotton and rice planters continued to expand production, but their numbers decreased as the period progressed.<sup>17</sup> Some who did not diversify wound up selling most of their property and moving south and west in hopes of a better future.<sup>18</sup> Some proprietors parceled out their estates among all of their survivors, and some bequeathed their entire estate to a single survivor.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>17</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1840, 1850, 1860, VSL.

<sup>18</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>19</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

The Land Tax Book assessed 1,060 landowners in 1860. One hundred eighty-one individuals held title to 500 acres or more in 1860.<sup>20</sup> One hundred six inhabitants owned between 300 and 500 acres. Five hundred sixty-one inhabitants owned between 50 and 300 acres. Two hundred twelve inhabitants owned less than fifty acres. The majority of the non-slave agricultural population were small farmers.

Slaves comprised from 42-to-44 percent of the total population and made up about 55 percent of the agricultural work force.<sup>21</sup> Just over one-half of the slaves worked on estates larger than 500 acres. About 45 percent of the slaves worked on smaller farms. Most of the larger farmers practiced general farming, but a few produced cotton, rice, and tobacco.<sup>22</sup> Gang labor prevailed on the cotton plantations. Overseers and farm managers organized Negro labor by task on estates and larger farms where rice, tobacco, and other crops were grown.<sup>23</sup> On small farms slave labor was less

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<sup>20</sup> Most major landholders owned a number of farms scattered throughout the county. Eighty-five of the 181 individuals who owned over 500 acres did not own a large estate. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>21</sup> A conservative estimate, based upon the fact that 85 percent of the non-slave population listed agriculture or related fields as their chief occupations. Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>22</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1840, 1850, 1860, VSL.

<sup>23</sup> William Kauffman Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation management in the old South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1966).

specialized, and slaves engaged in almost every facet of production.

The specialization of labor was greatest on the largest estates. Tasks were divided into three basic categories: field labor, domestic labor, and semi-skilled work. Adult men and women cleared land, plowed, spread fertilizer, maintained fields, and harvested the bounty. Women and children usually took care of domestic tasks, including cooking, washing, cleaning, taking care of livestock, cleaning barns and stables, ginning cotton, curing tobacco, shucking corn, shelling peas, snapping beans, and preparing other crops for cultivation. Some women became skilled at sewing, weaving, and furniture making. Men worked in the forges and acquired carpentry skills. Semi-skilled workers produced domestic manufactures and performed general maintenance on the property. Masters retained the most cultivated slaves as house servants, drivers, and messengers.<sup>24</sup>

Slaves attached more prestige to positions which required special skill or the trust of the master. Slaves could thereby take pride in their work and receive respect within the "slave community." By the antebellum period, Southampton's slave population developed a certain degree of

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<sup>24</sup> Miscellaneous accounts, 1840-1860, Maget Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia (VHS).

social cohesiveness.<sup>25</sup> By being physically separated from whites and free blacks, slaves were able to perpetuate a culture which was parallel to that of the free population. Their shared African-American heritage and status as bondsmen reinforced this cultural bond between the slaves. Although they were not educated in the modern sense, slaves developed their own dialect and a lively oral tradition. Stories and folk songs related their interpretations of their social condition.<sup>26</sup>

Masters viewed their slaves as much more than simply personal property. Many masters felt a moral responsibility to care for the physical as well as spiritual well-being of the slaves under their charge. Housing and clothing were simple, but practical.<sup>27</sup> Some of the larger slaveowners required their slaves to attend religious services, and others allowed local preachers to minister to their slaves right on the estate.<sup>28</sup> As a reward for good service, masters granted

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<sup>25</sup> "Interview with Mrs. Hines [formerly a slave in Southampton]," Rawick, ed. *The American Slave*, vol. 16, *Virginia Narratives*, pp. 27-30.

<sup>26</sup> John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation life in the antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972). J. K. Paulding, "Slavery in Virginia [a letter from a lower Virginia farmer]," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 4, no. 3 (July 1836). [Hill Carter], "On the Management of Negroes," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 1, no. 8 (January 1834).

<sup>27</sup> "Management of Slaves," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 5, no. 1 (May 1837). [Harrison] "Hints in Relation to the Dwellings and Clothing of Slaves."

<sup>28</sup> "Interview with Mrs. Hines," Rawick, ed., *The American Slave*, vol. 16, *Virginia Narratives*, pp. 27-30.

trustworthy slaves liberty to visit relations or close friends on neighboring farms.<sup>29</sup> As a factor of agricultural production, every slaveowner had to consider their slaves' physical and mental well-being. Mistreated slaves were much less likely to cooperate, lowering levels of productivity and increasing the need for supervision. Slaveowners used various disciplinary means to maximize productivity. Punishments for misbehavior varied from verbal reprimands to the whip. Masters usually delegated unpleasant chores or field work to domestic servants and semi-skilled workers who committed minor offenses. The whip was used to punish more serious offenses. (Overseers were given broad powers in this area, although severe punishments often required the consultation with and the approval of the master.) Ultimately, the welfare of the slave depended upon the benevolence of his master, but a standard of decency prevailed which few slaveholders chose to cross.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Before 1830, relatively few accounts of fugitive slaves appear in the minutes of the county court. Security on most estates was quite lax. In the wake of the Nat Turner slave rebellion in 1831, the Virginia General Assembly passed a series of stringent slave codes. Upon demand (of any white person), slaves were required to present written permission and a reasonable explanation of their business. The county court appointed slave patrols each quarter to surveil suspicious Negroes and maintain order. Southampton County Minute Book, SCC.

<sup>30</sup> Franklin, "Rules for Overseers," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 8, no. 4 (April 1840). [An Overseer], "On the Conduct and Management of Overseers, Drivers, and Slaves," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 4, no. 2 (June 1836).

Slaves were much too valuable to abuse or work to death. A fair price for an adult male was about \$350 dollars in 1818, about \$600 in 1835, and about \$1,000 in 1857.<sup>31</sup> The values of individual slaves varied considerably, but in aggregate terms the values increased proportionately to the value of an average field hand. Highly cultivated slaves could bring twice the price of a field laborer, as could slaves considered suitable for concubinage. Older slaves and slaves with histories of disciplinary problems sold for considerably less than the average field hand. The aggregate value of slaves in Southampton was about \$2,500,000 in 1840, \$3,000,000 in 1850, and \$3,500,000 in 1860.<sup>32</sup>

While the aggregate value of slaves increased by nearly two-thirds, the rate of (state) taxation on slaves increased 400 percent. From 1838 to 1851 the tax on slaves increased from thirty cents to forty-six cents per slave. From 1851 to 1860 the tax increased from fifty-six cents to one dollar twenty cents per slave. Masters paid state tax for each slave

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<sup>31</sup> Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro*, vol. 1, *Virginia cases* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1926).

<sup>32</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1840-1860, VSL.



aged twelve and above, and a special "capitation tax" for each slave aged sixteen and above.<sup>33</sup>

Slaves were the single most important component of personal property for the vast majority of those directly involved. About 40 percent of the white families owned slaves in 1860. Although it was difficult for free blacks to get permission to own a slave, some

TABLE 4

## SLAVEHOLDING, 1860

Number of Slaves Owned	Number of Slaveowners
1-5	246
5-10	89
10-15	60
15-20	28
20-30	39
30-40	9
40-50	9
50-70	6
70-100	4
100-200	4
200 or more	0
Total	494

SOURCE: U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, pp. 244-245.

free Negroes had managed to buy the freedom of their families by 1860.<sup>34</sup> Four hundred ninety-four residents of Southampton County owned slaves in 1860. Three hundred fifty-five owned

<sup>33</sup> Until 1851, the county court exempted slaves who were too old or infirm to work. Provisions in the Constitution of 1851 required a majority vote of the General Assembly to exempt personal property from taxation. The capitation tax on slaves reverted to the state literary fund. More on this in chapter seven. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>34</sup> The court usually granted permission if the prospective owner could prove that the slave was a close family member. Members of a Negro's extended family and even close friends were a different matter. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

fewer than ten slaves, eighty-eight held between ten and twenty, fifty-six held between twenty and fifty, and fourteen held between fifty and two hundred slaves. No one owned more than 200 slaves.<sup>35</sup> One immediately notices that the vast majority of all slaveowners owned less than ten slaves, but it is not as readily obvious that under one percent of the free population owned the majority of the slaves. Negro slavery was deeply ingrained into the economic and social fiber of the county.

In addition to slaves, Southampton's inhabitants possessed other taxable personal property valued at \$1,347,193. Examples of taxable articles in 1860 include: livestock, farm equipment, household furnishings, and luxury articles. Table three demonstrates that the wealthiest one percent owned one-third of the personal property in Southampton. Although relatively few families were wealthy, most non-slave adults owned taxable articles of personal property.<sup>36</sup>

The long growing season, the mild maritime climate, the gentle relief, and the makeup of the soils provided the inhabitants of Southampton with a comparative advantage in agriculture. Most of the inhabitants were small farmers, and about 40 percent of the white families owned at least one

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<sup>35</sup> Slave Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>36</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

slave. Slaves made up about 55 percent of the agricultural work force. Some specialization of labor existed on the largest estates, but this was not necessarily the case on small farms. Relatively few families were wealthy, yet two-thirds of the non-slave population owned their own real estate and almost every family owned taxable personal property.

TABLE 5

## PERSONAL PROPERTY OWNERSHIP, 1860

Assessed Value of Personal Property (Dollars)	Number of Taxpayers
under 500	1,494
500-750	94
750-1,000	60
1,000-1,500	72
1,500-2,000	36
2,000-3,000	48
3,000-4,000	14
4,000-5,000	12
5,000-7,500	9
7,500-10,000	10
10,000-20,000	12
20,000-30,000	4
30,000-40,000	3
40,000-50,000	1
50,000 or more	3
<b>Total taxpayers</b>	<b>1,882</b>

SOURCE: Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

## Chapter Two

### Agriculture

Continued reliance upon tobacco in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries virtually exhausted the soils of the Chesapeake by the latter half of the eighteenth century. Tobacco continued to play a major role in the American economy, but Piedmont farmers grew most of it.<sup>1</sup> In the early nineteenth century, leading agricultural reformers like Thomas Jefferson, John Taylor, Edmund Ruffin, and John Hartwell Cocke realized that Virginia could not rely upon tobacco forever and began to advocate general farming techniques.<sup>2</sup> Diversified crops, careful cultivation, rotation of crops, the use of marl and manures became common features of the new agriculture. By

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<sup>1</sup> Avery Odelle Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland 1606-1860* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965, reprint of the 1929 original). For more on tobacco farming, see Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1938).

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Morris Betts, editor, *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). M. E. Bradford, editor, *Arator: Being a series of agricultural essays, practical and political: by John Taylor* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1977). Edmund Ruffin, ed., *Farmers' Register*, ten vols (Petersburg: 1833-1842). John Hartwell Cocke Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

1840, most Tidewater farmers diversified and rotated their crops scientifically.<sup>3</sup>

By 1840, farmers made considerable progress with respect to fertilizers. Edmund Ruffin's 1835 *Essay on Calcareous Manures* did much to promote the widespread use of lime and marl throughout Tidewater Virginia. Ruffin claimed that calcareous manures actually neutralized the toxic condition of the soils exhausted by tobacco, and he strongly recommended applying lime and marl with vegetable manures in concert with his techniques of crop rotation.<sup>4</sup> We know now that calcium carbonate counteracts acid in soils and encourages more rapid decomposition of plant offal. Lime sold at ports on the James River for eight to ten cents per bushel in 1842.<sup>5</sup> Marl was commercially excavated from the banks of the Nottoway River in Southampton as early as 1833.<sup>6</sup> Farmers also used (bat) guano as a fertilizer. In light sandy soils, guano alone

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<sup>3</sup> There were several methods of rotating crops. Edmund Ruffin, "Report to the State Board of Agriculture, on the most important improvements of agriculture in lower Virginia...", *Farmers' Register*, vol. 10 (June 1842). (Hereafter cited as Ruffin, "Report to the State Board of Agriculture," 1842.

<sup>4</sup> Antebellum farmers regarded earthy deposits containing a substantial amount of calcium carbonate as "marl." Edmund Ruffin, *An Essay on Calcareous Manures*, second edition, supplement to the *Farmers' Register* (Shellbanks, Virginia: 1835).

<sup>5</sup> Ruffin, "Report to the State Board of Agriculture," 1842.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Campbell, "Marl on the Nottoway River," *Farmers' Register*, vol.1, no. 11 (April 1834).

sufficiently increased crop yields. In loamy soils, a mixture of calcareous manures and guano worked best.<sup>7</sup> By 1840, lime, marl, and guano were in general use throughout lower Tidewater.<sup>8</sup> The application of soil supplements transformed lands formerly regarded as marginally productive into valuable farmland.

Of the 2,228 non-slave inhabitants in Southampton who listed an occupation in the eighth census, 1,835 engaged in agriculture.<sup>9</sup> Most of the white inhabitants were farmers, although there were a significant number of white agricultural laborers. Of the 1,464 whites involved in agriculture, 856 were listed as farmers, 10 were listed as agricultural agents, 78 were listed as overseers, and 520 were listed as agricultural laborers.<sup>10</sup> Most of the free black inhabitants were agricultural laborers. Of the 371 free blacks involved in farming, 35 were listed as farmers, 12 were listed as farm laborers, and 324 were listed as laborers. Most of the slaves

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<sup>7</sup> "On Guano," *Farmers' Register*, vol.10, no.8 (February 1842). Most guano was imported from South America (Peru), but some was harvested from caves in the western part of Virginia.

<sup>8</sup> Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, two vol.s (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1933), 2: 918-922.

<sup>9</sup> Agricultural occupations include farmers, overseers, agricultural agents, farm laborers, farm hands, and laborers. Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>10</sup> Agricultural laborers include those listed as farm hand, farm laborer, and laborer. Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

in Southampton were also engaged in agricultural pursuits. There were 3,169 slaves over the age of eleven in 1860.<sup>11</sup>

The traditions of the plantation system proved to be well suited to general farming. Farmers organized almost all labor by task. On large estates, greater efficiencies resulted from the specialization of labor.<sup>12</sup> Farmers of more than 500 acres characteristically owned more than twenty slaves. (Census takers designated these men as "planters.") In peak years, planters hired additional agricultural laborers to help with planting and harvesting. Planters employed overseers to help supervise labor on the plantations. Planters' agricultural agents marketed farm produce in local and regional markets. Unlike planters in the coastal regions of the lower South, those in Southampton characteristically resided at their estates during the entire year.<sup>13</sup> By 1860, about eighty planters lived in Southampton.<sup>14</sup>

Anslam B. Urquhart provides a good example of a wealthy planter in Southampton. He owned a total of 5,558 acres in

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<sup>11</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>12</sup> Some large estates established grist mills and metalworking facilities. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL. Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>13</sup> Before the advent of general farming, most planters in Tidewater Virginia did not personally attend to the daily affairs of their plantations. Ruffin, "Report to the State Board of Agriculture," 1842.

<sup>14</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1840-1860, VSL. Id., Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

1860: four large estates and a fifth with 460 acres.<sup>15</sup> He owned seventy-eight slaves over the age of eleven and approximately \$1,500 worth of farming implements and machinery.<sup>16</sup> His farming enterprise was well diversified: Urquhart's estates produced a wide variety of agricultural goods, ranging from Indian corn to cotton. In 1860, he produced 7,500 bushels of Indian corn, 2,500 bushels of peas and beans, 2,500 bushels of sweet potatoes, 200 bushels of Irish potatoes, 1,500 bushels of oats, 80 tons of hay, 200 pounds of butter, 300 pounds of wool, and 25 400-pound bales of ginned cotton.<sup>17</sup> He also owned one of the largest orchards in the county (1,000 acres were planted in fruit trees).<sup>18</sup> Urquhart's orchard produced \$5,000 worth of apples, peaches, and pears in 1860. Urquhart bred horses for farm use and equestrian events, some of which were valued at over \$100 in 1860.<sup>19</sup> Urquhart bred oxen for field labor. He raised cattle and swine for food. He raised sheep for wool (but inevitably they too were slaughtered). In all, he slaughtered \$3,700

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<sup>15</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL. Seventeen hundred acres appeared in the agricultural schedule as "improved farmland." Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>16</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>17</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.



worth of livestock in fiscal 1860.<sup>20</sup> Urquhart owned thirty horses, twenty-five working oxen, five milch cows, thirty-five cattle, seventy sheep, and three hundred thirty swine.<sup>21</sup> His farm workers produced \$300 worth of homemade manufactures.<sup>22</sup> Urquhart was rather affluent by antebellum standards. He furnished his estate with \$2,000 worth of household articles and invested \$5,800 in bonds and securities.<sup>23</sup> Urquhart was interested in community affairs. From 1840 to 1860, he served as a guardian to juvenile children, a commissioner and surveyor of roads in his district, and the state proxy on behalf of the Board of Public Works for the Petersburg and Jerusalem Plank Road Company.<sup>24</sup>

Large landowners in Southampton with under twenty slaves rarely farmed more than 500 acres. As a whole, they handled their agricultural pursuits as a well balanced enterprises.

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<sup>20</sup> The average value of a hog was two dollars, a sheep was three dollars, and a clean beef was five to ten dollars. Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> He reported the total value of the above livestock as \$3,000 to the census taker. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL. According to the local tax register A. B. Urquhart owned 26 horses, mules, asses, and jennets; 328 sheep and hogs; and 57 other cattle. The total assessed value of A. B. Urquhart's livestock was \$3,825 in the local tax register. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>22</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>23</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>24</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, VSL. Corporate Papers of the Petersburg and Jerusalem Plank Road Company, 1853-1861, VSL. (Hereafter cited as P&J Papers, VSL.)

Thomas H. Applewhite owned 1,700 acres, but farmed only 300 of them in 1860.<sup>25</sup> He owned nine slaves and fifty dollars worth of farming implements.<sup>26</sup> In 1860, he produced one hundred bushels of Indian corn, fifty bushels of sweet potatoes, ten bushels of Irish potatoes, twenty bushels of peas and beans, three bushels of rice, and two tons of hay. He slaughtered sixty dollars worth of livestock.<sup>27</sup> Applewhite owned two horses, thirty swine, six cattle, and \$12,000 worth of bonds and securities.<sup>28</sup>

About one hundred farmers planted between 300 and 500 acres.<sup>29</sup> Most of these farmers owned between ten and twenty slaves.<sup>30</sup> Joseph E. Gillette owned one large estate with 618 acres and one smaller farm with about 263 acres.<sup>31</sup> In 1860, he planted 350 acres.<sup>32</sup> He owned seventeen slaves over the age of eleven, and two hundred dollars worth of farming

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<sup>25</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>26</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>27</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>28</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>29</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>30</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>31</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>32</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

implements and machinery.<sup>33</sup> He practiced general farming, but on a smaller scale than did any of the planters. In 1860, Gillette produced 2,250 bushels of Indian corn, 500 bushels of peas and beans, 400 bushels of sweet potatoes, 200 bushels of Irish potatoes, 370 bushels of wheat, 300 bushels of oats, 100 bushels of rye, 22 tons of hay, and 200 pounds of butter.<sup>34</sup> His fruit trees yielded thirty dollars worth of produce.<sup>35</sup> He practiced husbandry on a scale which was compatible with his agricultural production: he slaughtered \$700 worth of livestock in 1860.<sup>36</sup> Gillette owned nine horses, two mules, four working oxen, two milch cows, twenty other cattle, and one hundred twenty swine.<sup>37</sup> His workers produced \$300 worth of homemade manufactures.<sup>38</sup> He reinvested most of his profits in land and slaves from 1840 to 1860, but by 1860 his estate

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<sup>33</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>34</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> The total value of his livestock was \$1,750. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL. According to the local tax register, he owned 9 horses, mules, asses, and jennets; 125 sheep and hogs; and 20 other cattle in 1860. The estimated value of his livestock was \$1,440 in the local tax register. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>38</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

contained \$500 worth of household articles.<sup>39</sup> Gillette served on the county court from 1856 to the Civil War.<sup>40</sup>

John Cobb owned 500 acres, 340 of which he planted in 1860.<sup>41</sup> He owned fifteen slaves over the age of eleven and \$500 worth of farming implements and machinery.<sup>42</sup> Cobb produced 1,500 bushels of Indian corn, 800 bushels of sweet potatoes, 40 bushels of Irish potatoes, 300 bushels of peas and beans, 250 bushels of oats, 120 bushels of wheat, 15 tons of hay, 10 pounds of tobacco, 15 pounds of wool, and 75 pounds of butter in 1860.<sup>43</sup> His orchard yielded fruit valued at \$200.<sup>44</sup> He slaughtered \$560 worth of livestock in 1860.<sup>45</sup> He owned five horses, one mule, one hundred swine, fifteen sheep, ten oxen, and fifteen other cattle.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1840-1860, VSL. Id., Land Tax Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>40</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1850-1860, SCC.

<sup>41</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>42</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>43</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The total value of the above livestock was \$962. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL. According to the local tax register, he owned 6 horses, mules, asses and jennets; 125 cattle, sheep, and hogs; and 15 other cattle. The assessed value of livestock was \$835 in the local tax register. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

Yeomen farmers were the backbone of the social and economic fiber of the county. Yeomen farmers planted less than 200 acres and owned fewer than ten slaves. On small farms, whites and blacks worked together and learned (culturally) from one another. Living arrangements were separate. Standards of living among the yeomanry varied greatly according to the degree of economic success. About 300 of the 550 yeomen farmers owned slaves.<sup>47</sup> Some yeomen served on the county court after 1851.<sup>48</sup>

George James planted 120 of his 200 acres in 1860.<sup>49</sup> He owned three slaves and \$100 worth of farming implements.<sup>50</sup> James produced 875 bushels of Indian corn, 300 bushels of peas and beans, 100 bushels of sweet potatoes, 20 bushels of Irish potatoes, 5 1/2 tons of hay, and 3 bales of cotton.<sup>51</sup> He did not report any orchard produce, but he slaughtered \$320 worth of livestock.<sup>52</sup> James owned two horses, a mule, three milch

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<sup>47</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the functions of the county court, please refer to chapter six: County Government.

<sup>49</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>50</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>51</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

cows, two oxen, four other cattle, and forty-one swine.<sup>53</sup> His home was modestly furnished with only fifty dollars worth of household articles in 1860.<sup>54</sup>

E.L. Story owned 480 acres, one hundred of which were "improved farmland."<sup>55</sup> He owned no slaves, but possessed seventy-five dollars worth of farming implements.<sup>56</sup> Story produced 350 bushels of Indian corn, 150 bushels of Irish potatoes, 100 bushels of sweet potatoes, 50 bushels of peas and beans, 3 tons of hay, and 50 pounds of butter in 1860.<sup>57</sup> His fruit trees yielded thirty dollars worth of produce. He earned extra income from slaughtering hogs. He slaughtered \$184 worth of livestock in 1860.<sup>58</sup> Story also owned two horses, two working oxen, two milch cows, one other cow, and twenty-one swine in 1860.<sup>59</sup> He became relatively affluent by

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<sup>53</sup> The total value of livestock was \$450. Ibid. The local tax register lists the total value as \$469. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>54</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>55</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>56</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>57</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> The value of the above livestock was estimated at \$320. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL. The total value of his livestock was estimated at \$288 in the local tax register. According to the local tax register, E. L. Story owned two horses, mules, asses, and jennets; fourteen sheep

1860. He furnished his farmhouse with \$250 worth of household articles.<sup>60</sup> Story was also interested in community affairs. He served as a justice of the peace from 1856 to the Civil War.<sup>61</sup>

Wiley Dick exemplifies what historian Frank Owsley referred to as the "one-horse farmer."<sup>62</sup> One-horse farmers characteristically planted fifty acres or less and owned few, if any, slaves. About one hundred fifty one-horse farmers cultivated land in Southampton. Dick owned thirty-three acres, but only twenty were suitable for farming.<sup>63</sup> In 1860, Dick's only assets were a horse, a dozen or so swine, and a few simple hand tools.<sup>64</sup> The total value of his farm was only \$150. His main source of income appears to have come from raising swine. He slaughtered about three dozen hogs over the course of the year, retaining fourteen to perpetuate the

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and hogs; and six other cattle in 1860. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>60</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>61</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1850-1860, SCC.

<sup>62</sup> Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1949), p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>64</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

cycle.<sup>65</sup> He grew one hundred fifty bushels of Indian corn and one-half ton of hay in 1860. What grains Dick and his animals did not consume, he milled and sent to market. His horse doubled as a beast of burden and his only means of transportation. Dick was by no means affluent, but he owned real property and received no assistance from the overseers of the poor.<sup>66</sup>

One-third of the free families in Southampton did not own real property. Two thirds of these landless families were free blacks. Some were sharecroppers, but most were agricultural laborers. Sharecroppers characteristically produced only one or two small crops and raised a few animals for domestic use, but some in Southampton practiced general farming.<sup>67</sup> Sharecroppers sold or traded their excess production for essential domestic needs which could not be made by hand. Farmers paid their agricultural laborers a subsistence wage, seldom over one dollar per day.<sup>68</sup> No sharecroppers or agricultural laborers were elected to positions of authority in Southampton, but many served the

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<sup>65</sup> He slaughtered seventy dollars worth of livestock on his property in 1860. Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>66</sup> Southampton County, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>67</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>68</sup> Food and shelter were often included as part of their wages. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 1: 500-501.



community as good citizens. The county court appointed a few to ride with community patrol units, and others worked hard to maintain the roads and rivers in the county.<sup>69</sup>

In aggregate terms, commercial activity centered on the production of crops and livestock. The most important crops produced in Southampton from 1840 to 1860 were Indian corn, potatoes, and early fruits and vegetables. Southampton's farmers raised more swine than any other domestic animal. Farmers raised cattle and sheep on a much smaller scale. Horse breeding was most popular among wealthy farmers. General farming provided a relatively stable standard of living.

Farmers grew Indian corn on all but the dark colored poorly drained soils.<sup>70</sup> Corn planted in late spring matured in late October. Some farmers harvested corn as an early vegetable, but most allowed their corn to dry on the stalk before harvesting. The offal was plowed under for fertilizer and used for livestock feed. The shucks were used for barnyard cover. The cobs were used for crude pipes and firewood. Nothing was wasted. Production of Indian corn gradually increased from 1840 to 1860: farmers in Southampton produced 553,895 bushels in 1840, 564,183 bushels in 1850,

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<sup>69</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>70</sup> Dark colored poorly drained soils warmed late, were hard to plow, and subject to frequent overflow.

and 572,995 bushels in 1860.<sup>71</sup> More Indian corn was produced in Southampton than all other crops combined.

Sweet potatoes were an important component of the farmers' diet in antebellum Virginia. The produce kept longer than did Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes contained many essential nutrients otherwise unavailable to the average rural inhabitant.<sup>72</sup> Southampton's farmers harvested most of their Irish potatoes as an early vegetable. As the antebellum period progressed, farmers harvested more sweet potatoes as an early vegetable. The "culls" were boiled and fed to mature hogs.<sup>73</sup> Aggregate potato production increased significantly from 1840 to 1850 and then declined from 1850 to 1860: farmers in Southampton harvested 88,036 bushels of "potatoes" in 1840, 250,398 bushels of "sweet and Irish potatoes" in 1850, and

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<sup>71</sup> U.S. Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp.155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. *Id.*, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>72</sup> No science of vitamins and minerals existed in the modern sense, but antebellum Virginians recognized that the sweet potato had different dietetic properties than the Irish potato. For more on the diet of Antebellum Virginians, see Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: food supply in the old South, 1840-1860* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).

<sup>73</sup> Culls were potatoes which were unsuitable for market. "On the Breeding and Rearing of Pigs," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 5, no. 11 (February, 1838).

138,284 bushels of sweet potatoes and 20,295 bushels of Irish potatoes in 1860.<sup>74</sup>

Producing early fruits and vegetables developed into a very profitable enterprise in Tidewater. Some farmers used the money from early produce to offset capital outlays for spring planting, while others relied on a good spring to get them through the summer months. Farmers shipped watermelons and sweet potatoes north from neighboring Nansemond County as early as 1835.<sup>75</sup> By 1848, shipping companies based in New York and Baltimore were sending agents to Portsmouth and Norfolk to purchase future crops of early vegetables.<sup>76</sup> According to William S. Forrest's *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*, the shipment of early fruits and vegetables provided lucrative returns to farmers in Tidewater Virginia:

For the purpose of conveying some idea of the business done here, in fruit and vegetables, at this season, we present the following statement:  
-- On the 17th of this month [May 1850], six hundred bushels of green peas, and five hundred quarts of

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<sup>74</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. Id., *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>75</sup> Edmund Ruffin, "Hasty Observations on the Agriculture of the County of Nansemond," *Farmers' Register*, vol.4, no. 9 (January 1837). Dr. R. Archer, "Report to the State Board of Agriculture, on Elizabeth City County," *Farmers' Register*, vol.10, no. 7 (July 1842).

<sup>76</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *Report of the Commissioner of Patents, 1848*, pp. 493-497.

strawberries, were shipped to Baltimore. Four hundred bushels of peas were also shipped to Washington. This may be considered a tolerably fair business, for so early a day in a very backward season. An intelligent writer thinks that, 'Since the line of steamers between New York and this place have been in operation, the farms, in this vicinity, are more profitable than the mines of the modern El Dorado.[']

In 1852, the shipments of early fruit, vegetables, &c., had wonderfully increased; a very heavy and profitable business was done.<sup>77</sup>

This volume of trade was maintained throughout the antebellum years. For example, a field report issued by the U.S. Bureau of Soils indicates that 600 bushels of peas embarked from Norfolk to Baltimore, and 400 bushels were sent to Boston on 17 May 1859.<sup>78</sup> About 21 percent Virginia's peas and beans came from Southampton County.<sup>79</sup>

Farmers in Southampton grew peas and beans on the light colored soils in rotation with grains. Almost all of the peas and beans were harvested by late spring. The stalks were plowed under, used for hay, or boiled and fed to young hogs.<sup>80</sup> Cowpeas were followed by Indian corn. No separate listing of peas and beans production appears in the 1840 census, but by

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<sup>77</sup> William S. Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity* (Philadelphia: Lindsay and Blackston, 1853), pp. 253-254.

<sup>78</sup> U.S., Department of Agriculture, *Field Operations of the U.S. Bureau of Soils* (1903), p. 324.

<sup>79</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, pp. 185-191.

<sup>80</sup> "On the Breeding and Rearing of Pigs," *Farmers' Register*, 1838.

1850 farmers in Southampton were producing 125,218 bushels of peas and beans.<sup>81</sup> In 1860, they grew 107,305 bushels.<sup>82</sup> By the end of the antebellum period, farmers were using the rails to transport peas and beans to market.<sup>83</sup> It cost twelve cents per mile to transport one hundred pounds of peas and beans from Ivor to Norfolk on the Norfolk and Petersburg railroad in 1860.<sup>84</sup> A freight schedule for the Seaboard and Roanoke railroad indicates that 15,390 bushels of peas and beans embarked for Portsmouth from points within Southampton County in the spring of 1860.<sup>85</sup>

Farmers traditionally sowed peas and beans with oats. But as truck farming became more established, the returns from producing peas and beans outweighed the benefits of mixing the

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<sup>81</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331.

<sup>82</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>83</sup> The Norfolk and Petersburg railroad ran from Norfolk to Petersburg, Virginia, via the northeast corner of Southampton County. The N&P offered service to Ivor depot in the fall of 1858. N&P Papers, VSL. The Portsmouth and Roanoke railroad offered service to Southampton as early as 1836. P&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>84</sup> Freight Schedule, 1860, N&P Papers, VSL.

<sup>85</sup> Virginia, Board of Public Works, *Report to the General Assembly, 1860-1861* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, printer for the commonwealth, 1861), p. 191. (Hereafter cited as BPW, *Report, 1860-61.*)

crops.<sup>86</sup> As a result, oat production fell from 1840 to 1860: farmers grew 71,312 bushels of oats in 1840, 15,035 bushels of oats and rye in 1850, and 28,935 bushels of oats in 1860.<sup>87</sup> Some farmers mixed oats and rye as a winter crop, but they did not harvest the grains for market. In the spring, they turned their horses out into the fields to graze. That which was left over was either plowed under or dried and used for hay.<sup>88</sup> Rye production remained relatively stable throughout the period: farmers harvested 3,032 bushels in 1840 and 4,532 bushels in 1860.<sup>89</sup>

The importance of wheat had declined in the Tidewater Region by the antebellum period. By 1840, a variety of diseases had attacked the wheat crop, and the particular variety available in the mid-nineteenth century did not mature until early summer.<sup>90</sup> (Late maturity made the crop more

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<sup>86</sup> Peas and beans provided the necessary nitrogen for healthy oats. "On Raising Mixed Crops," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 5, no. 7 (November 1837).

<sup>87</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. *Id.*, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>88</sup> "Winter Rye for Early Spring Feed," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 10, no. 8 (August 1842). "Rye for Winter and Spring Feed," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 10, no. 9 (September 1842).

<sup>89</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>90</sup> "Prospects of the Wheat Crop in Virginia," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 10, no. 9 (September 1842).

susceptible to rusting and prevented the land from being planted with a crop of early vegetables). Farmers in Southampton produced 9,730 bushels of wheat in 1840 and 12,287 bushels in 1860.<sup>91</sup>

Enterprising farmers realized lucrative returns from producing rice in the Nottoway River Basin. The export prices for rice fluctuated from 2.7 to 4.3 cents per pound from 1840 to 1860.<sup>92</sup> Southampton's farmers harvested 1,080 pounds of rice in 1840, 14,584 pounds in 1850, and 1,852 bushels in 1860.<sup>93</sup> Relative to the other coastal regions of the lower South, Virginia produced very little rice. On the other hand, 22 percent of Virginia's total rice production came from Southampton.

Piedmont farmers were growing vast quantities of tobacco in 1860, but Tidewater farmers were not. Tobacco production in Southampton declined from 25,346 pounds in 1840 to 971

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<sup>91</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. *Id.*, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>92</sup> Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 2: 1030.

<sup>93</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. *Id.*, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163. Note that the census changed the method of reporting rice from weight to volume in 1860.

pounds in 1850 to just 100 pounds in 1860,<sup>94</sup> when the commonwealth as a whole produced 123,968,312 pounds of tobacco in 1860, far more than any other state.<sup>95</sup> Again, this is evidence of the increasing importance of truck farming in lower Tidewater.

Virginia produced more wool than any other Southern State,<sup>96</sup> but relatively little came from Tidewater. Land in Southampton was better suited to planting. Most sheep grazed in lowland meadows. Wool production fluctuated from 9,839 pounds in 1840 to 11,739 pounds in 1850 to 8,596 pounds in 1860.<sup>97</sup>

Relatively little cotton grew in the Old Dominion vis-a-vis the other Southern States, but in any one year, Southampton's farmers grew about 20 percent of Virginia's cotton crop. Although cotton exhausted the soil quickly, most

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<sup>94</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S. Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. *Id.*, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>95</sup> Virginia produced far more tobacco than any other state in 1860. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. xcvi.

<sup>96</sup> It should be mentioned that Texas increased production tenfold from 1850 to 1860. U.S. Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 189.

<sup>97</sup> In 1860, the census changed the method of reporting rice from pounds to bushels. U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. *Id.*, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.



planters tried a crop or two every year. Aggregate production fluctuated in Southampton during the antebellum period. Farmers harvested 851,315 pounds in 1840, 869 400-pound bales in 1850, and 2,563 400-pound bales in 1860.<sup>98</sup> No evidence suggests that any cotton manufacturing enterprises operated in Southampton from 1840 to 1860,<sup>99</sup> but shippers stored cotton awaiting transfer to Portsmouth at rail depots and warehouses in Southampton.<sup>100</sup>

Virtually every farm had a few fruit trees, and some large estates included an orchard. Apples, pears, and peaches grew well in Southampton. The value of orchard production varied anywhere from zero to five thousand dollars in 1860.<sup>101</sup> There seems to be a loose correlation between the size of the property and the value of orchard produce. The value of orchard production among the yeomen farmers varied from zero to one hundred dollars, the value among middle class farmers averaged from one hundred to five hundred dollars, and the

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<sup>98</sup> U.S., Department of State, *Compendium of the Sixth Census*, pp. 155-165. U.S., Department of the Interior, *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, pp. 322-331. Id., *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 163.

<sup>99</sup> Some of the larger planters from Southampton invested in cotton mills in nearby Greenville County and the city of Norfolk, but no mills of this kind operated in antebellum Southampton. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>100</sup> The records of the Seaboard and Roanoke railroad show that 8,385 bales embarked from points within Southampton to Portsmouth in 1860. BPW, *Report, 1860-1861*, p. 191.

<sup>101</sup> Agricultural Schedule, 1860, VSL.

value among planters ranged from one thousand to five thousand dollars. Thomas Pretlow's orchard produced \$1,000 worth of fruits, John Stith's orchard produced \$2,300, and Abslam Urquhart's orchard produced \$5,000.<sup>102</sup> The profits from commercially produced fruits generated an important source of capital for farmers at every economic level.

Table 6

## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, 1860

Crop	Southampton (Bushels)	Virginia (Bushels)	Virginia: Southampton
Indian corn	572,995	38,319,999	1.5
Sweet potatoes	138,284	1,960,817	0.7
Irish potatoes	20,295	2,292,398	0.9
Peas and beans	107,355	515,168	21.0
Oats	28,525	10,186,720	0.3
Rye	4,532	944,330	0.5
Rice	1,852	8,225	22.5
Wheat	12,287	13,130,977	0.1
Tobacco	100	123,968,312	$8 \times 10^{-7}$
Wool	8,596	2,860,765	0.3
Ginned cotton	2,563	12,727	20.0

SOURCE: U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*.

NOTE: Tobacco and wool production is listed in *pounds*. Cotton production is listed in *400-pound bales*.

Raising livestock was another component of the agricultural economy. The official compilation of the census data lists the aggregate number and value of horses, asses and

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

mules, milch cows, working oxen, other cattle, sheep, and swine in Southampton<sup>103</sup> The census data offers a very useful breakdown of livestock by type and value, however, the data is somewhat inconsistent with the information found in the Personal Property Tax Register.<sup>104</sup> Since the data in the tax book is probably more reliable, it will be used to describe the aggregate patterns of ownership and values of livestock in 1860.

The horse was the principal means of local overland transportation. Virtually everyone owned a horse, and many owned several. Horse breeding was a favorite enterprise of the more wealthy landowners. The value of horses ranged from about \$40 to \$150, depending on the quality, breed, sex, and other factors. Riding ability was revered as a skill by many inhabitants of the county. The less affluent used asses and mules for both field labor and transportation. There were a total of 2,335 "horses, asses, mules, and jennets" in Southampton. The total value of these animals was \$181,063 in 1860.<sup>105</sup>

Pork was an important component of the agrarians' diet. Farmers raised hogs privately and commercially in Southampton.

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<sup>103</sup> U.S., Department of the Interior, *Agriculture in the United States in 1860*, p. 162.

<sup>104</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Most processed their own pork, but some "drove" their hogs to neighboring Isle of Wight county for processing. Young pigs fed upon "pea soup," a mixture of boiled grains and milk.<sup>106</sup> Half-grown pigs ate grasses and fattened on ground peas and boiled or steamed potatoes.<sup>107</sup> After slaughtering, most pork was simply salted and put into barrels for transport. Parts such as the feet, jowls, and ears, were "pickled." Bacon or "sow belly" was salted and exposed to the smoke from hardwood logs for a few weeks to preserve the meat and to add flavor. Hams were more carefully prepared with salt and pepper before they were exposed to the smoke from a special combination of hardwoods. Hams cured in the Smithfield tradition did not reach their optimal flavor for six to ten months. Some exported cured hams and bacon by rail. The Seaboard and Roanoke railroad reported that 109,500 pounds of bacon embarked for Portsmouth from points within Southampton in 1860.<sup>108</sup> According to the Personal Property Tax Register,

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<sup>106</sup> Pea soup refers to a broth made from the offal of pea plants. "On the Breeding and Rearing of Pigs," *Farmers' Register*, 1838.

<sup>107</sup> For more on the care and breeding of hogs, see A.J. Lovejoy, *Forty Years' Experience of a Practical Hog Man* (Springfield, Ill.: Frost Publishing Co., 1914).

<sup>108</sup> BPW, *Report, 1860-61*, p. 192.

there were 28,049 "sheep and hogs" in Southampton in 1860, the value of which was \$52,557.<sup>109</sup>

As mentioned previously, Southampton was not as well suited to raising either sheep or cattle. Sheep destroyed their pasture by close grazing and were susceptible to frequent attacks by foxes and wild dogs.<sup>110</sup> Most of the land suitable for cow pasture was better used for planting. Nevertheless, some farmers herded a few sheep for wool and a few cattle for food. They raised milch cows (and goats) to provide milk, butter, and cheese. Farmers used oxen for field labor. Some barbecued beefs on special occasions. Oxen, milch cows, and beef cattle comprise the category headed "cattle" in the local tax register. There were 7,848 cattle in Southampton in 1860, valued at \$49,440.<sup>111</sup>

In conclusion, the vast majority of Southampton's inhabitants were farmers, most of whom rotated their crops and used fertilizers. Truck farming became more important as the antebellum period progressed. Indian corn, sweet potatoes, peas, and beans were the most prolific crops. Animal husbandry was practiced on almost every farm. Cured pork

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<sup>109</sup> The local tax register lumps the two together in one category. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>110</sup> Ruffin, "Report to the State Board of Agriculture," 1842.

<sup>111</sup> The average value for one head ranged from five to ten dollars, depending on its type and quality. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

Table 7

## PRINCIPAL LIVESTOCK, 1860

Livestock	Number	Value (Dollars)
Horses, mules, asses, jennets	2,335	181,063
Sheep and hogs	28,049	52,557
Cattle	7,848	49,440
Totals	38,232	283,060

SOURCE: Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

products were the most important animal staples. Farmers raised cattle for dairy products and meat. Many horses, asses, mules, and oxen provided transportation and field labor. Agriculture and related pursuits dominated the economy in 1860.

## Chapter Three

### Manufacturing and Services

Although Southampton's economy was predominantly agricultural, by 1860, residents of the county had invested over \$10,000 in manufacturing and related pursuits.<sup>1</sup> Manufacturing was limited to coach making, metalworking, leatherworking, and milling. Coach shops made and repaired carriages, sullys, wagons, and simple carts. Some supported complementary blacksmithing and wheelwright establishments. Other blacksmithing firms ran in concert with large agricultural operations. Skilled smiths applied their metalworking ingenuity to the manufacture and repair of farming implements and simple machinery. Coopers made metal hoops for barrels and casks. Cobblers made boots, shoes, and other leather products. One leatherworking establishment specialized in saddlery and harness. A few small tanneries complemented the leatherworking firms. Grist mills ground grains for domestic use and barrelled flour and meal for

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<sup>1</sup> Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

market. Manufacturing pursuits complemented the agricultural sector.

Artisans, skilled and semiskilled workers, businessmen, and licensed professionals engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. Manufacturing firms employed artisans, skilled and semiskilled workers. Merchants employed clerks and offered domestically-produced goods for sale in their stores. Taverns, ordinaries, and houses of public entertainment employed cooks, barkeepers, and domestic helpers. Those who were skilled in carpentry, painting, tailoring, sewing, and weaving were self-employed. Professional medical and legal services were available by appointment and private contract. By 1860, about 20 percent of the working population engaged in non-agricultural pursuits.<sup>2</sup>

Coach making, in particular, required a significant capital investment. The larger, independent coach shops included a forge or two where skilled metalworkers fashioned all of the necessary hardware. Wheel rims, axles, springs, brakes, door latches, and the like were made of iron and steel. The wheels and the major body components were wooden. Carpenters and painters customized the product. All of the necessary raw materials were available in the regional market.

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<sup>2</sup> Four hundred forty-three of the 2,278 occupations listed were non-agricultural occupations. Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.



Specialty items could be obtained by rail. There were four coach shops in Southampton in 1860.<sup>3</sup>

Jacob Lenow's shop provides a good example of an artisan owned firm. Lenow invested \$1,000 to set up two forges and purchase the tools he needed to manufacture and repair wheeled vehicles.<sup>4</sup> In 1860, he bought 10,000 board-feet of timber, 6,000 pounds of iron, 500 pounds of charcoal, 50 gallons of paint, 200 feet of patent leather, and \$300 worth of other articles. Total raw materials expenditures came to \$1,005. Lenow paid blacksmiths and skilled woodworkers twenty-five to thirty-five dollars per month. Workers who tended the forges and performed other manual tasks earned from ten to fifteen dollars per month. Lenow employed seven men in his coach shop in 1860. Labor outlays totalled \$2,520. J. Lenow's shop produced twenty wagons valued at \$2,250, fifteen wagons valued at \$450, two sullys valued at \$120, one buggy valued at \$100, and \$1,200 worth of repairs and other specialty work. The total value of goods and services came to \$4,070.<sup>5</sup> Lenow's gross profit for the year was \$545, withstanding any allowance for depreciation and the opportunity cost of his initial investment.

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<sup>3</sup> Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Seven blacksmithing firms produced goods valued at \$400 or more in 1860. Two of these complemented the coach making industry, three were coupled with a wheelwright shop, and the other two were components of large agricultural enterprises.<sup>6</sup> The two firms which complemented the coach making industry were small and had the capacity to produce little more than was required by local coach shops. The firms coupled with a wheelwright shop specialized in the manufacture and repair of wooden-spoked wheels. Wheelwrights made the wooden components and blacksmiths forged the necessary hardwares. Workers made simple tools and repaired carriages in their spare time. The two blacksmithing firms which were independent of the coach making industry operated on large farms. These operations supplied most of the agricultural tools used on the parent estate and neighboring farms. Some skilled metalworkers fashioned custom hardwares.<sup>7</sup> Blacksmithing establishments were important to the agricultural as well as the non-agricultural sectors of Southampton's economy.

George Cland owned a wheelwright and blacksmithing shop in Southampton. In 1860, he invested fifty dollars in his blacksmithing shop and fifty dollars in his wheelwright shop.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> A proper forge was unnecessary to produce wheels on this scale. Ibid.

He spent an additional \$150 dollars for raw materials: fifty dollars for one ton of iron, and \$100 for timber and other miscellaneous articles. He employed one blacksmith at thirty dollars per month and one wheelwright at twenty dollars per month. The blacksmith fashioned iron bushings and rims. The wheelwright made the spokes and body of the wheels. Cland handled the business arrangements himself. The firm produced thirty wheels valued at \$600 and did other work valued at \$500 in fiscal 1860.<sup>9</sup> Cland's gross profit for the year was \$300, withstanding depreciation expense and the opportunity cost of his principal.

The two largest forges in Southampton operated as a component of a large agricultural enterprise. Benjamin C. Waller owned one of these.<sup>10</sup> By 1860, he had invested \$500 in his smithing operation. He employed two blacksmiths at thirty dollars per month. His shop used five tons of iron and coal in 1860. His employees made shovels, rakes, hoes, plows, horseshoes, and other specialty items for his farms: the estimated value of production totalled \$700 in 1860.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Waller owned 985 acres: one farm with 481, one with 417, and another with 87. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>11</sup> Note that the cost of operating the forge outweighed the value of production. Either Waller was more interested in producing farming implements than making a profit, or he employed two blacksmiths for only part of the year. Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

Jonathan Darden owned the other large forge.<sup>12</sup> He invested \$631 in his blacksmithing operation in 1860. He spent an additional \$277 for 5,800 pounds of iron and steel. Darden employed two smiths at thirty-five dollars per month. His operation produced a variety of hardwares valued at \$1,100 in 1860.<sup>13</sup> The largest forges complemented the agricultural sector.

Demand for barrels and casks depended upon the need to transport agricultural products. Barrels were used to transport large quantities of flour and meal, salted pork, and pickled vegetables. Casks were used for cider, ale, wine, liquor, and other spirits. Barrel staves were readily available throughout the county, and the skill required to produce barrels was easily learned.<sup>14</sup> Planters had the greatest need for barrels and casks, and the largest cooperages operated on their estates.

James Drewry owned the largest cooperage in Southampton. His cooperage produced enough barrels and casks for all four

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<sup>12</sup> Darden's forge operated on his 683 acre estate. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>13</sup> Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>14</sup> According to the annual report of the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad Company for the year ended June 1861, 561,000 barrel staves embarked for Portsmouth at depots within Southampton County. BPW, *Report, 1860-1861*, p. 191. George Elkington, *The Coopers: Company and craft* (London: S. Low, Marston, 1933). Richmond Cedar Works Manufacturing Corporation, *Richmond Cedar Works, November 1, 1888* (Richmond: 1888).

of his large estates.<sup>15</sup> He invested \$150 in his cooperage and employed four coopers at an average monthly wage of ten dollars each.<sup>16</sup> James Drewry's cooperage produced \$500 worth of barrels and casks in 1860.<sup>17</sup> Samuel Drewry owned a smaller enterprise. He invested \$100 in his cooperage and employed two coopers at an average wage of fifteen dollars per month.<sup>18</sup> Samuel Drewry's cooperage produced \$250 worth of barrels in 1860, enough for all four of his agricultural enterprises.<sup>19</sup> A number of smaller shops also engaged in cooperage, but the majority of these do not appear in the industrial schedule, as the value of aggregate production was less than \$400.<sup>20</sup> The cooperage industry was inexorably linked to agricultural production.

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<sup>15</sup> He owned eight other parcels of land, one of which was a grist mill. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>16</sup> Although he owned in excess of forty slaves, no evidence suggests that any worked in the cooperage. Slave Schedule, 1860, VSL. Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>17</sup> Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Drewry also owned in excess of forty slaves, but again, no evidence suggests that any were coopers. Slave Schedule, 1860, VSL. Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL. Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Drewry owned four medium-sized farms and two additional parcels of land in Southampton. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>20</sup> The census listed Samuel Drewry's cooperage with his other enterprises. Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

Southampton's most profitable non-agricultural enterprise was leatherworking. Demand for leather products was reasonably high, and only two firms produced leather goods on a large scale. Skilled leatherworkers made a variety of products, ranging from personal apparel to buggy whips. Cobblers specialized in boots and shoes, but they also made purses, belts, gloves, hats, jackets, and "chaps." Some personal items were made to order, while others were prefabricated for sale in local stores. Only one firm produced more than \$400 worth of boots and shoes in 1860. This shop, owned and operated by Isaiah Bracy, reported a capital investment of \$800 to the census takers. Three skilled workers earned an average monthly wage of twenty-five dollars.<sup>21</sup> Bracy spent \$458 for raw materials in 1860. With it he bought seventy-five calf skins, forty-eight sheep skins, twenty-four sides of leather, twenty-four units of sole leather, and twelve skins of "morocco" leather. Bracy's shop made fifty pairs of boots valued at \$300, three hundred shoes valued at \$600, and \$900 worth of repairs and other leather

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<sup>21</sup> This implies that there was little, if any, specialization within the shop itself. Craftsmen did their own fitting, cutting, and sewing. For more on early American leatherworking, see Thomas K. Ford, *The Leatherworker in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1988).

articles.<sup>22</sup> Bracy's shop made a gross profit of \$742 in 1860. One leatherworking shop specialized in saddlery and harness. Semiskilled workers tanned hides, cut them according to pre-made patterns, and then sewed them together under the direction of a master craftsman. Once assembled, the artisan embellished the saddle with his personal touch.<sup>23</sup> Richard Blythe invested \$2,000 in his saddlery shop. He spent an additional \$1,000 for 5,500 sides of leather. Five semi-skilled workers earned on the average of twelve dollars per month. Blythe's shop produced one hundred saddlery and harness outfits valued at \$5,000 in 1860. Blythe made a gross profit of \$3,280. Saddlery and harness manufacture was the most lucrative non-agricultural pursuit in Southampton.<sup>24</sup>

Planters established grist mills as a component of agricultural production, and smaller farmers used milling as a secondary source of income. Considerable effort was required to establish a mill. Before constructing the *ad quod dannum* for water power, one had to obtain special permission

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<sup>22</sup> Repairing footwear was more commonly practiced in 1860 than it is today. Contracting for a single boot or shoe was not uncommon. Thomas Wright, *The Romance of the Shoe* (C. J. Farncombe and Sons, Ltd., 1922).

<sup>23</sup> For more on saddlery in the antebellum period, see G. Craig Caba, *Historic Southern Saddles, 1840-1865* (Enola, Pa.: Civil War Antiquities, 1982).

<sup>24</sup> Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

from the county court.<sup>25</sup> If permission was granted, the court ordered the grantee to make compensation to all parties who were affected by the construction of the mill (i.e. mill-pond overflow and/or digging a canal for a sluice).<sup>26</sup> After construction was completed, the miller was limited to one-eighth of the total value of the milled grain for his services.<sup>27</sup>

As mentioned previously, Southampton farmers grew relatively little wheat, but what they produced they milled before use. Millers separated chaff from seed at the mill site. They then rinsed and weighed the grains. After milling, workers again weighed the flour before putting it into barrels or sacks. Flour was sold locally and transported via rail to warehouses, awaiting inspection and sale. Corn meal was produced in much the same way.<sup>28</sup> Most of the grist mills in Southampton produced corn meal. Large farmers owned seven of the eleven grist mills, but small farmers owned the

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<sup>25</sup> Virginia, General Assembly, *Code of Virginia, 1860* (Richmond: Ritchie and Dunnavant, 1860), Title 19, Chapter 43, § 1-6. (Hereafter cited as *Virginia Code, 1860*.)

<sup>26</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 19, Chapter 43, § 7. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>27</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 19, Chapter 43, § 12.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Minor, "Value of Cob-meal. Mill for Grinding Corn, Cob and All." *American Farmer*, vol. 1, no. 40 (December 1819). W. F. F., "On Horse Mills," *American Farmer*, vol 6, no. 51 (March 1825). F. H. Smith, "As to Horse Mills," *American Farmer*, vol. 7, no. 40 (December 1825). "As to Steam Mills," *American Farmer*, vol. 7, no. 46 (February 1826).



two mills which produced over \$400 worth of flour and meal.<sup>29</sup> Some mills were totally owner operated, while others employed semiskilled mill hands.

Charles Beale owned one of the larger mills. It cost Beale \$150 to build the mill alongside the stream which ran through his 289 acre farm. Beale employed one mill hand to help him during the busiest months. His helper earned an average wage of fifteen dollars per month. In 1860, Beale bought 400 bushels of corn (valued at \$300) and ground the kernels into 125 barrels of corn meal (valued at \$500).<sup>30</sup>

Table 8

## MANUFACTURING, 1860

Type of Business	Number of Firms	Total Capital Invested	Number Employed	Value of Wages Paid	Cost of Materials	Value of Output
Coach Making	4	3,600	15	4,560	2,010	7,590
Blacksmithing	7	2,031	13	2,554	982	4,800
Cooperage	1	150	4	240	100	500
Boots/shoes	1	800	3	900	458	1,800
Saddlery	1	2,000	3	720	1,000	3,000
Milling	2	350	2	360	600	1,050
<b>Totals</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8,931</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>9,334</b>	<b>4,880</b>	<b>18,740</b>

SOURCE: Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL.

NOTE: Total Capital Invested, Value of Wages Paid, Cost of Materials, and Value of Output are given in dollars.

<sup>29</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>30</sup> Industrial Schedule, 1860, VSL. Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

Most merchants operated "general stores," marketing everything from imported cloth to locally tanned hides. These establishments were located in small settlements, at crossroads, and at rail depots.<sup>31</sup> Some of the larger businesses became landmarks; many served as depositories for local postal officials.<sup>32</sup> The county court approved sixteen general merchant licenses in 1860. Twelve of the sixteen merchants reported the amount of commerce their establishments did in 1860.<sup>33</sup>

Since the state based license fees on a proportion of estimated commerce, one can get a rough idea of aggregate domestic consumption by examining the license returns.<sup>34</sup> A license fee of \$96 allowed firms to do between \$10,000 and \$15,000 in commerce. Of the five firms granted \$96 licenses, three indicated the amount of commerce they did in 1860: Pope and Woodward, \$14,500; Beaton and Harrison, \$12,800; Darden and Vick, \$12,000 (estimated). A \$76 license allowed firms to

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<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Francis Gilmer, Chief Engineer, Department of Northern Virginia, Confederate States Army, Map of Surry, Sussex, and Southampton Counties..., 1863, VHS. (Hereafter cited as Gilmer Map, 1863, VHS.)

<sup>32</sup> Hall, "Virginia Post Offices, 1798-1859," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1973.

<sup>33</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>34</sup> The values of goods which were directly imported from a foreign nation and domestically produced agricultural products do not appear in the license returns. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 38, § 31. *Virginia, Acts of Assembly, 1859-1860*, p. 49. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1860, SCC.

do between \$5,000 and \$10,000 in commerce. Five of the six firms in this category reported aggregate commerce for 1860: Samuel Drewry, \$9,330.80; James J. Darden, \$9,228; James E.P. Turner, \$9,075, James M. Casbill & Co., \$6,500 (estimated); Murfee and Darden, \$6,000 (estimated). A \$48 license allowed firms to do between \$2,500 and \$5,000 in commerce. Three of the four firms in this category reported aggregate commerce in 1860: Joseph R. Cassell, \$4,984.50; Jesse B. Vick, \$4,000 (estimated); Sebrell and Holmes, \$3,500 (estimated). The county court granted John W. Murfee & Co. a \$35 license. Although Murfee did not report aggregate commerce in 1860, had he done less than \$2,500, he would have been charged (a maximum of) \$32.<sup>35</sup> Accounting in the same manner for the four firms which did not report commerce, a conservative estimate of aggregate consumption is on the order of \$120,000.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to paying the state license fee, a merchant had to obtain special permission of the county court before selling ardent spirits.<sup>37</sup> The state charged an initial fee of \$100 to wholesale spirits and an initial fee of \$40 to retail the same. The state charged ongoing concerns a yearly

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<sup>35</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1859-1860*, p. 49.

<sup>36</sup> This figure does not take into account the sale of liquors. Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>37</sup> Ardent spirits included wine, porter, ale or beer, or any mixture containing fermented juices. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 19, Chapter 38, § 32.

fee of one percent of gross sales.<sup>38</sup> The county court approved four requests to sell ardent spirits in 1860.<sup>39</sup> Pope and Woodward estimated liquor sales at \$450; Murfee and Darden, \$600; James E.P. Turner, \$1,000; John W. Murfee & Co. sold \$2,333 worth of ardent spirits.<sup>40</sup>

County residents could distill their own whiskey or spirits (and make sale thereof) as long as they (1) sold the spirits at the "place of manufacture," (2) produced all of the ingredients on their own property, and (3) did not operate the still for more than four months out of the year.<sup>41</sup> Landowners could hire someone else to do the distilling, as long as the production and sale occurred on the estate. Small amounts of locally-produced spirits were consumed in local taverns and ordinaries.

Statutes required keepers of taverns, ordinaries, and houses of private entertainment to (1) offer lodging and diet to travellers and their servants and (2) provide adequate stableage and provender for guests' horses.<sup>42</sup> Taverns and ordinaries served spirits, houses of private entertainment

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<sup>38</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1859-1860*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>39</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1860, SCC.

<sup>40</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>41</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 38, § 4 and 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 28, Chapter 96, § 2.

generally did not. The state taxed establishments which were located within 800 yards of a public road or housed more than five persons at once. License fees for taverns and ordinaries started at forty dollars.<sup>43</sup> Jesse B. Vick operated a small ordinary in the southern part of the county.<sup>44</sup> Vick's "meeting house" was also used for community events and an occasional Quaker meeting.<sup>45</sup> License fees for houses of private entertainment started at five dollars.<sup>46</sup> Six houses of private entertainment operated in Southampton. One of the establishments was valued at \$550, two at \$400, another at \$300, and yet another two at less than \$50.<sup>47</sup> State law prohibited free Negroes from obtaining a license to operate an ordinary or to sell ardent spirits, but one free black female

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<sup>43</sup> If the yearly value of the establishment was less than \$100, the license fee was forty dollars. If the yearly value was between \$100 and \$200, the license fee was fifty dollars. If the yearly value exceed \$200, the license fee was fifty dollars plus 15 percent of the surplus value. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 40, § 10.

<sup>44</sup> He paid \$40 for his license. Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL. *Id.*, Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>45</sup> Douglas S. Brown and Helen L. Smith, "A Map of Virginia, 1656-1941, showing all Quaker meetings that are or ever were established in this ancient COMMONWEALTH," VSL.

<sup>46</sup> The state charged establishments with a yearly value less than \$50 a five dollar fee; establishments with a yearly value between \$50 and \$100, a ten dollar fee; and establishments valued at more than \$100, a ten dollar fee plus 10 percent of the surplus value. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 40, § 11.

<sup>47</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

operated her own "eating saloon."<sup>48</sup> She paid fifteen dollars for her license, so her saloon was probably worth less than \$100 in 1860.<sup>49</sup>

Enterprising farmers offered specialty livestock services throughout the county. The state charged keepers of livery stables one dollar per stall.<sup>50</sup> Two public stables operated in Jerusalem, each with ten stalls.<sup>51</sup> A license to buy and sell horses for others on commission or for profit cost ten dollars.<sup>52</sup> Only one horse trader bought a license in 1860.<sup>53</sup> The license fee for stallion or jack services was twice the amount the owner usually charged for one service.<sup>54</sup> Stallion fees in Southampton ranged from six to ten dollars. Four breeders bought stallion licenses in 1860: one for twenty dollars, two for sixteen dollars, and one for twelve dollars.

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<sup>48</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 38, § 1. Id., Title 12, Chapter 40, § 12.

<sup>49</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>50</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title, 12, Chapter 40, § 16.

<sup>51</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL. Id., Land Tax Book, 1860, VSL.

<sup>52</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 40, § 48 and 49.

<sup>53</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>54</sup> The minimum fee was ten dollars. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 40, § 28.

The county court granted two jack licenses for ten dollars each.<sup>55</sup>

Some tradesmen, skilled and semiskilled workers were self-employed. Twenty-one carpenters, two painters, one cabinet maker, and three tailors conducted business in Southampton.<sup>56</sup> Most carpenters and painters worked by private contract, moving from job to job in the general proximity of the county. Some craftsmen had their own shop where they fashioned cabinets and simple furniture. Tailors made fine clothing to order and prefabricated simple apparel for sale in local stores. Apprentices usually worked with simple apparel until they acquired the skills necessary to assist the master with his orders for fine clothing. Women worked as seamstresses, weavers, and domestic helpers. There were ninety-five seamstresses, eleven weavers, and forty three domestic helpers in Southampton.<sup>57</sup> Sewing and weaving were "cottage industries". Seamstresses took private orders for clothing, quilts, upholstery, curtains, linens, embroidery, and decorative articles (like doilies, napkins, and tablecloths). Weavers contracted for rugs, blankets, and other woven

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<sup>55</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>56</sup> All of these craftsmen were white males, except one free black female furniture maker. Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

<sup>57</sup> All of the seamstresses were white females except one. No free blacks worked professionally as weavers. Eighteen of the forty-three domestic helpers were free blacks. Ibid.

fabrics. Individual families and businesses employed housekeepers, domestic servants, and cooks. Twenty-five housekeepers, fourteen domestics, five house servants, one wash woman, and nine cooks were self-employed.<sup>58</sup> Taverns, ordinaries, and houses of public entertainment hired domestic helpers to assist with everyday operations. Four female entrepreneurs owned and operated their own confectioneries.<sup>59</sup>

Doctors and lawyers needed a license to practice medicine and law. License fees for professional physicians and attorneys were five dollars plus an additional one percent for receipts over \$400.<sup>60</sup> Doctors renewed their licenses annually. Lawyers in Southampton did not.<sup>61</sup> Once a lawyer obtained a license, he could legally practice anywhere within the Commonwealth (but most county courts required prior examination and qualification before allowing new lawyers before the bar).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> All of these domestic employees were females. All of the house servants were free blacks. Most of the cooks were free blacks. Most of the professional housekeepers and domestics were whites. Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Although the county court granted the fourth owner a license to sell her confectionery, the new owner did not apply for a license to operate the confectionery in 1861. Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>60</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 40, § 37.

<sup>61</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1840-1860, VSL. (Some of the license returns are in the back of the Personal Property Tax Register.)

<sup>62</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 12, Chapter 38, § 4.



The county court appointed examiners to qualify all new attorneys. If the candidate was of majority, had resided in the county for at least one year, and satisfied the examiners, he was usually qualified as an attorney.<sup>63</sup> From 1848 to 1860, the county court qualified twenty-two new lawyers: John J. Kindred, John Myrick, Richard H. Baker, Jr., John Andrews, William S. Goodwyn, R. H. Whitfield, William B. Shands, E. W. Massenburg, Joseph H. Prince, William W. Cobb, Robert Prentiss, John R. Kilby, D. J. Godwin, James T. Crocker, Peter Sharp, William H. Pretlow, Joseph W. Urquhart, Peter F. Weaver, James L. Wilson, R. H. Mann, James T. Parker, and James E. Watson.<sup>64</sup> License returns for the period are incomplete, but the attorneys listed in the 1855 return each paid the minimum fee of five dollars.<sup>65</sup>

Fifteen professional physicians practiced medicine in Southampton.<sup>66</sup> Six of these were prominent doctors, and the other nine practiced medicine as a sideline. William A. Massenburg, C. D. Barham, and Erastus C. Barrett each paid

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<sup>63</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC. For a specific example, see Southampton County, Minute Book, November 15, 1852, SCC.

<sup>64</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1848-1860, SCC. The court certified Richard H. Brown on 15 August 1853, but there was no subsequent mention of Brown in the court minutes. Southampton County, Minute Book, 15 August 1853, SCC.

<sup>65</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1855, VSL.

<sup>66</sup> All of the practicing physicians were white males. Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL. Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

fourteen dollars for their licenses, George S. Musgrave paid twelve, William H. Summerell and Samuel B. Kello each paid six. Together, these six doctors provided \$6,300 in medical services to the inhabitants of Southampton in 1860. James E. Creighton, H. K. Darden, Madison J. Davis, Jonathan C. Griffin, B. B. Hunter, John R. Jones, William R. Parker, Fabius S. Ricks, and John R. Rochelle all paid the minimum fee of five dollars.<sup>67</sup> Since the latter were charged the minimum license fee, one must assume that the value of their annual practices amounted to less than \$3,600 in 1860. The total value of professional medical services rendered in 1860 amounted to less than \$10,000.

Women worked as midwives and nurses. Experienced midwives delivered children in the absence of a physician. Experienced nurses diagnosed common ailments and administered cures. Eight midwives and two nurses served the inhabitants of the county in 1860.<sup>68</sup>

The variety of opportunities with respect to self-employment and entrepreneurial activities increased as transportation improved. The county kept local roads, rivers, and bridges in good repair. Steamboats frequented Franklin after 1850. The Portsmouth and Roanoke (later reorganized as

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<sup>67</sup> Southampton County, License Returns, 1861, VSL.

<sup>68</sup> Population Schedule, 1860, VSL.

the Seaboard and Roanoke) and the Norfolk and Petersburg railroads linked depots in Southampton with Norfolk, Petersburg, and the principal north-south rail line of the time.

Manufacturing, merchandising, and entrepreneurial activities made a significant contribution to Southampton's economy. By 1860, the manufacturing sector demonstrated some degree of economic integration. Some of the labor force exhibited specialized skills. Merchandising firms employed semiskilled workers and provided a marketplace for domestically-produced manufactures. Professional attorneys and physicians offered their services throughout the period.

## Chapter Four

### Roads and Navigation Projects

County roads provided access to the county seat, linked together towns and principal settlements, and effected a more efficient means by which farmers and businessmen transported goods and offered services. The county court laid out county roads into precincts and managed them according to the corvée system, by which the court appointed commissioners and surveyors to plan and supervise construction and maintenance of county roads and bridges. Male residents of the county provided the labor. Statutes required every male between the ages of sixteen and sixty to offer his services to the surveyor in his precinct.<sup>1</sup> If a new road was being constructed or major repairs were being undertaken on an existing road, the surveyor could require up to ten days labor from each eligible male. The county court administered penalties to those who failed to fulfill their

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<sup>1</sup> Exempted from road duties were (1) residents of towns who made an attempt to provide for its poor, (2) officers of the penitentiary or a lunatic asylum (as well as servants or slaves employed therein), (3) persons employed at any ferry, (4) persons employed on any state-funded internal improvement, (5) officers of any literary institution, and (6) ministers of the gospel. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 16, Chapter 52, § 26.

responsibilities.<sup>2</sup> Direct taxation (the county levy) generated the necessary funds for construction and repairs. By 1860, the system of county roads provided access to virtually every corner of Southampton.<sup>3</sup>

Each May, justices of the peace appointed several commissioners of the roads, who planned, supervised, and evaluated county road projects. Any citizen could petition the county court to have a public road built. If the county court agreed to look into the matter, it directed at least one commissioner (or a committee of three "viewers") to examine the situation and report upon the expediency of undertaking the improvement. If the commissioner(s) persuaded the court to accept the proposal, it condemned the land for public use, whereupon construction ensued. In the meantime, justices summoned the proprietors and tenants of the lands through which the improvement was to pass so that they could set a just compensation for the condemned property. If the proprietors did not accept the rate of compensation set by the justices, the sheriff summoned a jury of twelve freeholders (of the vicinage) to determine a fair rate. At the end of their terms, the commissioners made an annual report to the county court, which included the total number of days the

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<sup>2</sup> If a slave or an employee substituted, his owner or employer accepted personal responsibility. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 16, Chapter 52, § 28.

<sup>3</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC. Gilmer Map, 1863, VHS.

surveyor and other residents worked on the roads in their respective precincts, total expenditures, and advice concerning future projects. Commissioners of the roads acted as liaisons between the county court and those who desired public improvements, supervisors of improvements when large public outlays were involved, and a control group with regard to the information surveyors reported to the county court.<sup>4</sup>

The county court appointed surveyors to implement approved road projects and to keep track of specific expenses incurred from construction and maintenance of county roads in their respective precincts. The surveyor made sure that the roads in his precinct were kept relatively smooth, free of obstructions, and well drained to facilitate unfettered travel. Road signs and foot bridges were also constructed and maintained under the direction of the surveyor. A predetermined sum was apportioned for each precinct out of the county levy and managed under the trusteeship of the surveyor. Each May or June, the surveyor furnished a complete report to the county court which justified his expenditures out of the public trust.<sup>5</sup> After a period of two years, the surveyor

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<sup>4</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

could ask the court to relieve him of his responsibilities, provided that the roads in his precinct were in good order.<sup>6</sup>

The county court also used the *corvée* system to construct and maintain county bridges, rafts, and ferries.<sup>7</sup> Cooperation between county precincts was necessary where the improvement linked two separate precincts; cooperation between county governments was necessary where the improvement linked two separate counties. Southampton, Isle of Wight, and Nansemond Counties shared responsibilities for improvements over the Blackwater River. Improvements over the Nottoway River and its tributaries were exclusively under the management of Southampton County. Southampton and Greensville Counties jointly managed improvements over the Meherrin River. Rafts, located at major bridges, transported heavy or bulky items. Raft service was available at Jerusalem, Cary's, Cypress, Joyner's, and Hayley's bridges in 1860. Raft keepers were paid out of the county levy; salaries ranged from five to twenty-five dollars per year.<sup>8</sup> Ferry service was established at important river crossings when it was more efficient than constructing a bridge. Ferries operated at Monroe, Jones Ferry, Cherry Grove, and South Quay in 1860. Ferry keepers

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<sup>6</sup> *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 16, Chapter 52, § 24.

<sup>7</sup> The county managed over thirty bridges by 1860. Southampton County, *Minute Book, 1840-1860*, SCC.

<sup>8</sup> Bridge keepers usually doubled as raft keepers in Southampton. *Ibid.*

were also paid out of the county levy; salaries ranged from \$137.50 to \$200 per year.<sup>9</sup> No tolls were charged on these improvements; money for construction and maintenance came out of the county levy(ies).

The General Assembly granted the privilege of incorporation to prospective bridge companies. The company assumed responsible for constructing and maintaining the improvement in return for the privilege of charging tolls. A company's success often depended upon the special rights and privileges granted to frequent users of the improvement, such as neighboring land owners and county officials.

Only one such bridge company operated in Southampton form 1840 to 1860.<sup>10</sup> The South Quay Bridge Company, incorporated in February 1852, built and operated a bridge over the Blackwater River at the settlement of New South Quay.<sup>11</sup> The bridge at New South Quay connected the roads leading from Suffolk, in Nansemond County, to Murfreesboro, North Carolina.<sup>12</sup> Southampton County paid the president of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> The company opened its books in South Quay. Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1852*, p. 152.

<sup>12</sup> The Dismal Swamp canal and the Seaboard and Roanoke railroad connected the deep water port at Suffolk to the Albemarle Region. Suffolk, the county seat of Nansemond, was an important depot on the Norfolk and Petersburg railway. Several water and overland routes linked Murfreesboro to other commercial centers in the Carolinas. Gilmer Map, 1863, VHS.



South Quay Bridge Company \$100 per year so that its citizens could pass freely.<sup>13</sup> Expenditures for maintaining the bridge at South Quay exceeded revenues generated by private contracts and tolls; by the winter of 1856/57, the bridge had fallen into disrepair.

In March 1857, the justices ordered county commissioners to meet with representatives from neighboring Nansemond County to discuss the situation. By May of the same year, both counties agreed that it was appropriate to provide service over the Blackwater River at South Quay, but balked at the thought of constructing another bridge. The commissioners proposed that ferry service be established, and in July 1857 the county courts agreed. The South Quay ferry provided free service to the citizens of both counties throughout the remainder of the decade. James Vaughan, of Southampton, operated the ferry in return for his annual stipend of \$137.50.<sup>14</sup>

When an improvement was too expensive to be undertaken without state funding, or when its continuation and coordination depended upon unpredictable supralocal interests, an internal improvement company was considered. Local

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph J. Lawrence served as President of the South Quay Bridge Company from 1852 to 1857. Payments were made to J. J. Lawrence out of the county levy. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1857, SCC.

<sup>14</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1857-1861, SCC.

interests petitioned the assembly for state funding either directly or through their representative. If the assembly agreed to the proposed route and the plan for financing the effort, the legislators chartered an internal improvement company and granted it the privilege of soliciting private subscriptions. The state normally provided 60 percent of the needed capital by subscribing to the company's outstanding shares.<sup>15</sup> The Board of Public Works supervised all disbursements of public monies in the Internal Improvement Fund. The assembly appointed a proxy on behalf of the Board of Public Works to sit on the board of the internal improvement company. The state's interest in the company was held in non-voting shares to prevent excessive government intervention into the realm of private investment.<sup>16</sup> Internal improvement companies surveyed, constructed, and operated plank roads, canals, and railroads in Southampton.

Engineers designed plank roads to provide a reliable overland route in inclement weather. Raised planking reduced

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<sup>15</sup> Some companies received less state funding as a proportion of total capital. Virginia, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate, 1840-1860*. (Hereafter cited as *Senate Journal*.) Id., House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates, 1840-1860*. (Hereafter cited as *House Journal*.)

<sup>16</sup> One notable exception was the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad Company. The proportion of public to private investment became so great that the assembly found it expedient to suspend the principle of non-intervention in 1860. Virginia, *Senate Journal, 1859-1860*. Id., *House Journal, 1859-1860*.

the problems of erosion and rutting caused by excessive travel on wet roadbeds, but increased the difficulty and expense associated with performing all but the most simple maintenance. Plank roads were much more expensive to build than standard thoroughfares. Workers graded the roadbed to provide a solid, level foundation for the timber planking. Hardwood sills of substantial girth (five to eight inches in diameter) were placed about five feet apart, upon which a series of wooden planks were laid side-by-side and secured.<sup>17</sup> Even so, plank roads were established at one tenth the cost of building railroads. Public and private sources provided the capital. Dividends (on their shares of stock in the company) enticed prospective investors. Tolls charged to use the road generated revenues to maintain the project.<sup>18</sup>

The Petersburg and Jerusalem Plank Road Company, chartered 8 March 1853, constructed and operated a plank road from

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<sup>17</sup> For more on plank roads, see George R. Taylor, *Economic History of the United States*, vol. 4, *Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Rinehart, 1951).

<sup>18</sup> The assembly set toll rates for turnpikes. From 1850 to 1860 rates were as follows: "six and a quarter cents for twenty sheep or hogs, twelve and a half cents for twenty cattle, and so on in proportion for a less or greater number; three cents for a horse, mare, mule, or gelding, ten cents for a two-wheeled riding carriage; twenty cents for a four-wheeled riding carriage; and for a cart or wagon, if the wheels are not more than four inches wide, six and a quarter cents for each animal drawing it, and if the wheels are more than four and less than seven inches wide, three cents for every such animal, and if the wheels are seven inches wide or more, one cent for every such animal." *Virginia Code, 1849*, Title 18, Chapter 61, § 14.

Petersburg to Crockettville, a depot on the Seaboard and Roanoke railway.<sup>19</sup> Officers of the company immediately opened the company's books in Petersburg, where they offered 600 shares of common stock at fifty dollars per share. By 18 April 1853, private subscriptions totalled \$8,050.<sup>20</sup> Due to the immediate outpouring of public support, P&J officers opened subscription books in towns along the proposed route of the road: Templeton, Sturdivant's, Belscher's Mill, Littleton, and Jerusalem. By 10 May 1853, local investors bought all but thirty-eight shares.<sup>21</sup> Considering the state's commitment, the Jerusalem Plank Road Company was capitalized at nearly \$75,000.<sup>22</sup>

In June 1853, Southampton's county court granted the J&P the privilege of using the public road, provided that (1) they awarded free passenger travel to the citizens of Southampton, and (2) they properly maintained all improvements to the

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<sup>19</sup> The Seaboard and Roanoke railway ran from Portsmouth to Weldon, N. C., where it connected with north-south routes linking the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay with major Eastern cities. Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1853*, pp. 175-176.

<sup>20</sup> List of Stockholders, 18 April 1853, P&J Papers, VSL.

<sup>21</sup> List of Subscriptions, Letter from the Commissioners of the Petersburg and Jerusalem Plank Road Company to the Board of Public Works, 10 May 1853, P&J Papers, VSL.

<sup>22</sup> Under the articles of incorporation, the state promised to subscribe to three-fifths of the company's stock. After private subscriptions reached \$10,000, the company began to receive its proportional share from the Internal Improvement Fund. Articles of Incorporation, 1853, P&J Papers, VSL.

public road and the bridge over Assamoosick Swamp.<sup>23</sup> The Prince George County court transferred actual ownership of the public road through their county to the J&P, on the condition that the improvements made thereto were properly maintained.<sup>24</sup> P&J employees surveyed and graded the public roadway before they laid the timber. Workers had to widen some stretches of road and improve most of the bridges to accommodate sills and planking. The P&J completed construction in the summer of 1855.<sup>25</sup>

The Norfolk and Petersburg railroad viewed the plank road as a potential economic rival and applied considerable political opposition to it.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the P&J remained solvent through fiscal 1859. Subscribers' previous commitments to the company's stock covered the cost of constructing the road. The company called for \$61,353 by the end of April 1855 to pay the debts incurred in fiscal 1854 and

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<sup>23</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1853, SCC.

<sup>24</sup> The order books of the Prince George county court burned. This agreement is implicit in the proceedings of Prince George vs. Petersburg and Jerusalem Plank Road Company, 1860. Letter from Peter Batte (legal council for Prince George County) to the President and Directors of the Petersburg and Jerusalem Plank Road Company, 21 February 1861, P&J Papers, VSL.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of directors meeting, 30 April 1855, P&J Papers, VSL.

<sup>26</sup> BPW, *Report*, 1840-1860.

1855.<sup>27</sup> This left just over \$13,000 in reserve to meet future contingencies. The company counted on revenues from freight transfer to cover the ensuing costs of operating and maintaining the road. Unfortunately, expenses exceeded revenues through fiscal 1857. The directors managed to keep the plank road solvent by using the remaining capital the subscribers provided. By 30 September 1857, the P&J used up all but \$950.<sup>28</sup> From 1857 to 1859 financial pressure forced the company to reduce maintenance expense just to break even.<sup>29</sup> After a few vain attempts to solicit additional loans, the plank road reverted to county management.<sup>30</sup>

Local navigation projects were undertaken in a manner similar to road projects. Locals cleared waterways of obstructions and manipulated river depths by dams and short canals. Freight barges and canal boats transported goods and passengers. Transporting lime, lumber, and gypsum cost one

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<sup>27</sup> Certificate of Debt, 29 September 1854. P&J Papers, VSL. Statement of Account (signed by J.C. Schoolfield, Treasurer), 30 April 1855, P&J Papers, VSL.

<sup>28</sup> The P&J sold all but twelve shares of stock and received a total of \$73,450 (\$28,450 from private sources and \$45,000 from the Internal Improvement Fund). List of Stockholders, 30 September 1857, P&J Papers, VSL.

<sup>29</sup> The P&J received only \$3,353.73 from tolls. They spent a total of \$2,891.90 to maintain the road, leaving but 461.83 in escrow for all other exigencies (salaries, dividends to investors, etc.). *BPW, Report, 1859*, p. 369.

<sup>30</sup> *BPW, Report, 1858-1859*, p. 368.

and one-half cent per ton-mile; other minerals and fossils, two cents per ton-mile; agricultural production, two and one-half cents per ton-mile; other articles, three cents per ton-mile.<sup>31</sup> River improvements provided access to rail depots and settlements which were located on or near the three principal rivers.

The preamble to "An Act for building a Bridge over Pagan Creek; and for appointing several new Ferries" indicates that Southampton's residents used the Blackwater River as a conduit to Smithfield as early as 1752.<sup>32</sup> Locals initiated actual improvements on the Blackwater as early as 1790. "An act for opening the navigation of Blackwater river, from Little Town on the said river, to Broadwater bridge" required Southampton's county court to appoint surveyors to supervise the removal of obstructions from the Blackwater from its mouth to the Broadwater bridge.<sup>33</sup> The Blackwater River, kept clear of obstructions throughout the antebellum years, provided a cheap conduit for goods transfer to and from Southampton. The Blackwater River was navigable to the largest vessels to South

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<sup>31</sup> These rates were half that of railroad rates. *Virginia, Acts of Assembly, 1840-1841*, pp. 102-103. *Virginia Code, 1849, 1860*, Title 18, Chapter 61, § 19.

<sup>32</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 6: 288.

<sup>33</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 13: 203-204.

Quay and for smaller vessels some miles higher.<sup>34</sup> Unfinished timber was lashed together to form rafts, upon which more timber was secured. Finished staves and other freight were transported on shallow draft barges to prevent swelling and warping caused by excessive exposure to moisture. Passengers used barges and canal boats for transport.

Several plans integrated the Blackwater River into a system of canals linking the Chesapeake Bay with the Roanoke and Dan Rivers. The assembly ordered three river surveys, but it never appropriated any money for large scale improvements. The first official survey of the river, undertaken in 1820 in connection with the proposed Nansemond and Blackwater River canal, appears to have been a modification of the 1802 proposal to link the Nansemond and Roanoke Rivers via Somerton Creek and the 1804 plan to effect the same via Bennet's Creek in North Carolina.<sup>35</sup> The Blackwater proposal would have provided a more direct route from Hampton Roads to the Roanoke River than was available via the Dismal Swamp canal.<sup>36</sup> Robert

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<sup>34</sup> Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>35</sup> "An Act authorizing the survey of the Nansemond and Blackwater river canal," Samuel Shepherd, *The Statutes at Large of Virginia, from October session 1792, to December session 1806, inclusive, in three volumes, (new series,) being a continuation of Hening*, 2: 365. Shepherd, *Statutes*, 3:135.

<sup>36</sup> The Dismal Swamp canal connected the Albemarle Region with Hampton Roads via the southern branch of the Elizabeth River and the Pasquotank River. Suffolk was connected via a feeder canal, Lake Drummond, the Jericho canal, and Ironmine Creek (a tributary of the Nansemond River). Thomas H.



H. B. Brazier made a more complete survey of the Blackwater River in 1831 (in connection with the proposed Portsmouth and Roanoke railroad).<sup>37</sup> The engineers who planned the route of the P&R used Brazier's survey to determine the most appropriate point to build a bridge over the Blackwater River.<sup>38</sup> But more importantly, the survey drew attention to the navigability of the Blackwater River through Southampton County. E. H. Gill completed a third survey of the Blackwater River in 1851 (in connection with the proposed Blackwater River-Pagan Creek canal).<sup>39</sup> This canal would have connected the James and the Roanoke Rivers via Smithfield, Pagan Creek, the Blackwater River, and the Chowan River.<sup>40</sup> State legislators were slow to appropriate money for these projects in light of their plans to improve rail service to the area.

Improvements on the Nottoway River provided the inhabitants of Southampton with a navigable route to depots on the

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Williamson, "Plan of the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad and Trace of the PETERSBURG RAIL ROAD," 1838, VSL.

<sup>37</sup> Robert H. B. Brazier, "Blackwater River Survey for the Board of Public Works," 1831, VSL.

<sup>38</sup> Locals knew the covered bridge over the Blackwater River near Franklin as McClonny's bridge. Engineer's Report, 1833, P&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>39</sup> E. H. Gill, "Map of the proposed Blackwater River-Pagan Creek Canal", 1851, VSL.

<sup>40</sup> Apparently, this plan was part of a scheme to develop a major deep water port facility at Smithfield.

Petersburg railroad and the Portsmouth and Roanoke railroad.<sup>41</sup> The General Assembly authorized the first official survey of the Nottoway River in February 1833.<sup>42</sup> By August of that year, William B. Thompson completed his survey of the south fork of the river and reported his findings to the Board of Public Works.<sup>43</sup> His report included specific suggestions for improving the river and estimates of the expenditures required to do so. The planters above the Forks of Nottoway sent a letter to the Board of Public Works indicating that they would be able to transport 2,000 hogsheads of tobacco and 60,000 bushels of wheat down the Nottoway if the project were undertaken.<sup>44</sup> William Thompson estimated that the reduced cost of transporting agricultural products from the fertile lands near the Nottoway between the Forks and the railroad

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<sup>41</sup> The Petersburg railroad ran from Petersburg to Weldon, N. C. Corporate Papers of the Petersburg Railroad Company, 1840-1860, VSL. (Hereafter cited as Petersburg RR Papers.) The P&R was reorganized as the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company in 1846. Corporate Papers of the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company, VSL. (Hereafter cited as S&R Papers.)

<sup>42</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1833-1834*, pp. 213-221.

<sup>43</sup> Thompson recorded his findings in two small journals. The original manuscripts are preserved in the archives of the Virginia State Library. Thompson describes the condition of the south fork of the river in meticulous detail. Thompson's illustrations reinforce his chain-by-chain description of the river. A separate survey map was also made, and is on file at the Virginia State Library. The main part of the text is reprinted in *BPW, Report, 1834*, p. 203.

<sup>44</sup> *BPW, Report, 1834*, "Letter from Lew. Jones," p. 221.

bridge would increase planters' efficiency by 50 percent.<sup>45</sup> In February 1834, the assembly chartered the Nottoway Navigation Company and granted it the privilege of soliciting \$30,000 for the project.<sup>46</sup> The Nottoway Navigation Company improved the river from the Petersburg railroad bridge to the fall line.<sup>47</sup> River traffic began as soon as ten miles of the river was cleared upstream of the railroad bridge.

The initial success on the Upper Nottoway promoted interest in improving the lower stretches of the river. The Nottoway was navigable to vessels of sixty or seventy tons as far upstream as Monroe, "from which place considerable quantities of lumber and other produce are shipped to Norfolk."<sup>48</sup> In March 1836, the assembly ordered an official survey of the Nottoway River from the Petersburg railroad bridge to its mouth.<sup>49</sup> John Williston surveyed the lower Nottoway in 1836/37 and recommended a number of major improvements.<sup>50</sup> But clearing the river of the large

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<sup>45</sup> William B. Thompson, "Navigation of Nottoway River," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 1, no. 4 (September 1833).

<sup>46</sup> The state promised to subscribe to two-fifths of the company's stock as soon as private subscriptions reached \$15,000. *BPW Report, 1834*, pp. 111-113.

<sup>47</sup> John Williston, "Nottoway River Survey," VSL.

<sup>48</sup> Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia*, p. 278.

<sup>49</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1836*, p. 399.

<sup>50</sup> *BPW, Report, 1837*, pp. 454-461.

obstructions deposited by the 1834 flood required a significant financial commitment, and state legislators were slow to act on the proposal in the wake of the Panic of 1837.<sup>51</sup> With momentum lost, statewide interest in improving the river declined until well after the reorganization of the Portsmouth and Roanoke railroad in 1846. In the meantime, the county maintained the portion of the river flowing through Southampton.<sup>52</sup>

In March 1853, the assembly gave the Nottoway Steam Navigation Company the exclusive right to navigate the Nottoway River (by steam vessels) above Monroe for a period of twenty-five years in return for maintaining the navigability of the Nottoway River.<sup>53</sup> The introduction of steam vessels on the Nottoway provided quicker and more efficient transport of perishables and more reliable passenger service. The Nottoway River improvement projects eventually provided the inhabitants of Southampton with a water route as far upstream as the Forks of Nottoway, and downstream to the Atlantic Ocean

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<sup>51</sup> "The Recent Hurricanes in Virginia," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 2, no. 2 (July 1834).

<sup>52</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1838-1852, SCC.

<sup>53</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1850*, p. 118. Monroe was just south of the Seaboard and Roanoke railway bridge. The P&R/S&R railroad bridge prevented most sailboats and steamers from passing, but had little effect on the bateaux and timber rafts which frequented the river. Edmund Ruffin, "The Portsmouth and Roanoke Railway. Navigation of the Meherrin, Nottoway, and Blackwater Rivers." *Farmers' Register*, vol.4, no. 9 (January 1837).

(via the Chowan River and Albemarle Sound). The Nottoway River remained an important link in the transportation system joining Southampton to Petersburg and Portsmouth throughout the antebellum years. In 1860, S&R freights loaded 88,000 feet of lumber, 68,000 staves, and 1,726 pounds of bacon at the Nottoway bridge.<sup>54</sup>

Improvements on the Meherrin River also provided the inhabitants of Southampton with a reliable water route to depots on the Petersburg and the Portsmouth and Roanoke railroads. The Meherrin River was first surveyed in connection with the 1804 plan to connect the Nansemond and Roanoke Rivers. The survey, undertaken as a private venture, was plagued by financial difficulties from its inception. Only after eight years and the pressure of the War of 1812 did the Meherrin company raise enough money to complete the initial survey.<sup>55</sup> The Nansemond-Roanoke improvement project was never undertaken, but it did raise interest in the efficacy of improving the Meherrin River. Legislators ordered an official survey in February 1837.<sup>56</sup> Appointed Chief

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<sup>54</sup> BPW, *Report, 1860-1861*, p. 191.

<sup>55</sup> Proponents of the project were granted an extension to secure enough money for the necessary surveys. Shepherd, *Statutes*, 3: 135-137, 433. "Meherrin River Survey," 1812, VSL. No part of the planned canal would have run through Southampton, although the inhabitants of the county would have had ready access to the improvement.

<sup>56</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1837*, p. 301.

Engineer, John Williston completed his survey of the upper Meherrin River by the end of the year.<sup>57</sup> In March 1842, the assembly granted a private charter to the Meherrin Navigation Company to improve the river from Hicksford to the Forks of Meherrin and beyond.<sup>58</sup> The act of incorporation authorized the company to sell up to \$40,000 in stock and granted the company rights to charge tolls on the improved stretches of the river.<sup>59</sup> The Meherrin Navigation Company failed to maintain the river, and the legislature revoked the company's charter.

A separate entity under the same name, incorporated in the spring of 1848, became successful under the direction of E. B. Hicks.<sup>60</sup> The success of the new company rekindled local interest in the Meherrin project. The Lower Meherrin Navigation Company, incorporated in the spring of 1852, extended improvements on the Meherrin River (downstream of the Petersburg railroad bridge at Hicksford) to its confluence

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<sup>57</sup> John Williston, "Meherrin River Survey," 1837, VSL. *BPW, Report, 1838*, pp. 36-50.

<sup>58</sup> Hicksford, in Greensville County, was an important depot on the Petersburg railroad. Petersburg RR Papers, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>59</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1842*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>60</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1848*, pp. 226-230. Letter from E. B. Hicks to J. Brown, March 16, 1848, Corporate Papers of the Meherrin Navigation Company, VSL.

with the Nottoway and Blackwater Rivers.<sup>61</sup> The Lower Meherrin Navigation Company began construction in the summer of 1852, and charged tolls by the time they reached Southampton. The Meherrin River served as an important conduit to Petersburg and Portsmouth from 1850 until the Civil War. In 1860, the P&R railroad embarked 145,788 feet of lumber, 24,000 staves, 5,955 pounds of bacon, 316 bales of cotton, 35 kegs of lard, 72 bushels of grain, and 1,942 bushels of peas for Portsmouth at Branchville.<sup>62</sup>

The improvement companies tried to coordinate water and rail services wherever they intersected. For example, the P&R/S&R crossed the Blackwater River at the town of Franklin, the Nottoway River near Monroe, and the Meherrin River near Branchville. The P&R established wharfs, warehouses, and transfer services to accommodate farmers and merchants.<sup>63</sup> By 1860, commercial activity at Franklin surpassed that at the county seat, Jerusalem. Over 4,500 tons of freight embarked for transport to Portsmouth at Franklin depot alone in 1860. Freight items consisted of 1,215,100 feet of lumber, 91,000

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<sup>61</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1852*, p. 161.

<sup>62</sup> Branchville was accessible via Flat Swamp Creek, a tributary of the Meherrin River. Margarettsville, on the border of Virginia and North Carolina, was also accessible via the Meherrin River: there 224,000 staves embarked for Portsmouth in 1860. BPW, *Report, 1860-1861*, p. 191.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Walter Gwynn to Arthur Emmerson, August 1834, P&R Papers, VSL. BPW, *Report, 1833-1837*.

staves (for barrels), 40,637 pounds of bacon, 6,006 bales of cotton, 174 kegs of lard, 150 vessels of naval stores (tar etc.), 2,504 bushels of grain, and 9,012 bushels of peas.<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, county roads provided access to virtually every corner of Southampton by 1860. The Jerusalem plank road was independently operated from 1853 to 1860, when the responsibility for the road reverted to the county. Navigation projects greatly improved river travel. Improved waterways became important routes for freight and passenger transfer. Improvement companies coordinated services wherever possible, offering residents a relatively efficient system of transportation.

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<sup>64</sup> In 1860, 340 tons of freight embarked for Portsmouth at the Nottoway railroad bridge, 448 tons at Branchville, and 4,514 tons at Franklin. BPW, *Report, 1860-1861*, p. 191.



## Chapter Five

### Railroads

Establishing and maintaining rail service through Southampton was integral to the development of the county. Rail access promoted truck farming and made large scale production more profitable. Increases in the velocity of agricultural trade fostered the establishment of a number of related industries. Continued success of these enterprises encouraged yet further development of non-agricultural pursuits. The Portsmouth and Roanoke railroad (reorganized as the Seaboard and Roanoke in 1846) provided the residents of Southampton with the only direct rail link with the rest of the country before the completion of the Norfolk and Petersburg line in 1858.

The Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad Company, incorporated 8 March 1832, provided rail service between Portsmouth and Weldon, N. C.<sup>1</sup> Connecting the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay and the principal north-south rail line of the time, the P&R venture promoted the idea of the "Great Southern Terminus"

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1832*, pp. 137-143.

while rescuing the failing Roanoke and Dan River improvements.<sup>2</sup> The actual path of the railroad passed through Nansemond and Southampton Counties before continuing into North Carolina. The legislatures of Virginia and North Carolina granted the railroad the right of way; citizens recovered against the company in a manner consistent with that for condemned lands in the public domain.<sup>3</sup> The P&R assumed control of about 170 acres in Southampton County.<sup>4</sup>

The P&R venture was initially capitalized at \$600,000. Books opened in the town of Portsmouth, and the officers of the company solicited subscriptions from both private and public sources. By November 1834, the P&R sold 9,500 fifty-dollar shares: the Commonwealth invested \$190,000; the borough of Norfolk, \$100,000; the trustees of Portsmouth, \$50,000; and private investors, \$135,000.<sup>5</sup> By November 1837, local investors purchased the remaining 2,500 outstanding shares.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The principal route between Weldon and Baltimore included the Petersburg; the Richmond and Petersburg; and the Richmond, Fredricksburg, and Potomac railroads. By 1832, Virginians and North Carolinians invested over \$400,000 in the Roanoke Navigation Company. These investors believed they would lose their investment if a rail link was not established. BPW, *Report*, 1830-1833.

<sup>3</sup> Southampton County, *Minute Book*, 1833-1836, SCC.

<sup>4</sup> The company owned exactly 169 191/240 acres, all of which were immediately adjacent to the roadway. Southampton County, *Land Tax Book*, 1840, 1860, VSL.

<sup>5</sup> BPW, *Report*, 1833, pp. 467-475.

<sup>6</sup> BPW, *Report*, 1837, p. 249.

Due to the rapidity with which subscriptions were solicited, construction began soon after the company's books opened. Work began in Southampton in the spring of 1833.<sup>7</sup> By November 1834, the P&R graded the entire road through Southampton, and workers placed much of the timber from the Blackwater River to the Nottoway River.<sup>8</sup> By December 1835, all of the rails were laid to the Meherrin River.<sup>9</sup> The P&R established depots at Franklin, Murphy's, the Nottoway railroad bridge, Newsoms, Boykins, and Branchville.

Construction through Southampton cost over \$130,000.<sup>10</sup> Construction of the roadway provided steady employment for "about five hundred hands and thirty carts and horses."<sup>11</sup> Engineers designed trestles for low-lying and swampy areas, because the cost of procuring enough earth for permanent

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<sup>7</sup> Contracts for surveying and grading the P&R line from Suffolk to the Nottoway River, P&R Papers, 1832-1836, VSL. Contract for grading the road to the Meherrin River, P&R Papers, 1833, VSL.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Arthur Emmerson to James Brown, 1 November 1834, P&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Arthur Emmerson to James Brown, 31 October 1835, P&R Papers, VSL. *BPW Report, 1836*, pp. 105-118.

<sup>10</sup> *BPW, Report, 1833-1837*. Report of the Chief Engineer, 1835, P&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>11</sup> *BPW, Report, 1836*, p. 111.

embankments far exceeded the cost of the timber for piles and trestles.<sup>12</sup>

All of the superstructures for trestles and major bridges through Southampton were wooden. Heart pine rails (5X7 and 5X9 inches) were keyed into oak, pine, cypress, chinquepin, and sassafras sills (10 to 14 inches in diameter). The superstructures of the bridges over the Blackwater and Meherrin Rivers took on the traditional lattice shape.<sup>13</sup> Bridge construction delayed service through Southampton until the spring of 1838.<sup>14</sup> The P&R established stage service to forward the mails until daily rail service was established to Weldon.<sup>15</sup>

Rail service from Portsmouth to Suffolk opened 27 July 1834.<sup>16</sup> The P&R offered daily service between Portsmouth and the Nottoway River in June 1836, and between Portsmouth and

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<sup>12</sup> BPW, *Report, 1837*, pp. 451-453. The P&R spent \$141,656.72 on excavation and embankments and \$50,990.26 on superstructures from its commencement to 31 October 1835. Extract of Expenditures, 1835, P&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>13</sup> Engineers met challenges met by swampy terrain by innovative bridge design. For example, Long designed an adjustable superstructure for the Nottoway railroad bridge. BPW, *Report, 1837*, p. 452.

<sup>14</sup> BPW, *Report, 1836*, pp. 105-118.

<sup>15</sup> The P&R won contracts for transferring the mails in December 1835. BPW, *Report, 1837*, p. 248.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Arthur Emmerson to James Brown, 1 November 1834, P&R Papers, VSL.

the Meherrin River by October of that year.<sup>17</sup> Reliable rail service to the intersection with the Petersburg railroad was available by August 1837.<sup>18</sup> By December 1837, the P&R completed construction to the Roanoke River.<sup>19</sup> The company offered daily service between Portsmouth and Wilmington, N.C., in the spring of 1838 and expanded service to Charleston, S.C., in the spring of 1839.<sup>20</sup> The effect of the railroad was immediate. In 1837, Franklin became a regular stop for steamboats, on which "much cotton [was] brought from North Carolina to be sent by the railway to Norfolk."<sup>21</sup>

The P&R demonstrated its potential as a profitable enterprise through fiscal 1840. Revenues steadily increased, facilities were improved, and rolling stock was added. Gross revenues provide a good barometer of a company's success. P&R receipts from passengers and freight steadily increased from 1835 to 1840. Continued increases in receipts after the completion of the road indicated a growing demand for rail

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<sup>17</sup> BPW, *Report, 1837*, p. 105, pp. 451-453.

<sup>18</sup> The P&R intersected with the Petersburg line near Margarettsville, N.C. BPW, *Report, 1838*, p. 252.

<sup>19</sup> BPW, *Report, 1838*, pp. 250-253.

<sup>20</sup> The Weldon Bridge Company, created as a joint venture between the P&R and the State of North Carolina, linked the Wilmington & Raleigh railroad with the P&R. BPW, *Report, 1839*, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Ruffin, "The Portsmouth and Roanoke Railway," *Farmers' Register*, 1837.

Table 9

## P&amp;R REVENUES, 1835-1840

Date (Fiscal Year)	Revenue (Dollars)
1835	13,060.45
1836	35,830.23
1837	49,791.47
1838	51,216.16
1839	59,140.45
1840	72,987.05
Total Revenue	311,745.71

SOURCE: BPW, *Report, 1840*, p. 375.  
NOTE: Fiscal year ends 31 October.

services between Portsmouth and Weldon. The initial success of the P&R prompted expansion of wharf and warehouse services to meet anticipated needs. The P&R built wharves for sea-going vessels at Portsmouth, smaller docks at inter-sections with principal

rivers and canals, and warehouses at virtually every depot.<sup>22</sup> They built facilities to manufacture and repair their own equipment.<sup>23</sup> The company's rolling stock rapidly increased to meet growing demand. In 1836 the P&R had one engine, five passenger coaches, and fourteen freight cars; by September 1840, the P&R had on hand eight locomotives, six passenger coaches, and ninety-seven freight and utility cars.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the apparent success of the company, problems plagued the P&R. In August 1837, a passenger train collided with a lumber-laden freight near Suffolk. Replacing the two

<sup>22</sup> BPW, *Report, 1837*, p. 453. *Id.*, *Report, 1836*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> The P&R built the main manufacturing and repair facilities at Portsmouth. Most simple repairs were made *en route*. BPW, *Report, 1839*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>24</sup> BPW, *Report, 1837*, p. 453. *Id.*, *Report, 1841*, p. 368.

locomotives, the passenger coaches, and the freight cars destroyed in the crash drained the P&R's current account, and for a brief period "revenues were insufficient to meet current expenses."<sup>25</sup> Recovery suits, filed by the survivors of the crash and the families of the deceased, compounded financial pressure on the company. Another fatal accident occurred just after the company completed construction over the Roanoke River. All of the passengers in the coach juxtaposed to the engine (and power plant) were killed as the train derailed in the Dismal Swamp. An investigation into the cause of the crash revealed the dilapidated state of the P&R tracks between Portsmouth and Suffolk. Public outcry over the incident threatened the suspension of all operations. To placate public fears, the company pledged that it would give greater attention to repairs, and that passenger coaches would henceforth be placed behind the burthen cars. The second fatal accident in as many years raised serious questions as to the safety of passenger travel.<sup>26</sup>

Public scrutiny of the P&R forced the company to see itself in a more objective light. Upon further investigation, the company determined that the entire roadway was

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<sup>25</sup> BPW, *Report, 1839*, p. 96.

<sup>26</sup> This was especially alarming to investors, because passenger receipts were the backbone of the P&R. In no year (1835-1846) did freight receipts surpass passenger receipts. Water routes dominated the market for freight transfer in Tidewater Virginia until the 1850s. BPW, *Report, 1833-1847*.

deteriorating at a rate almost double that which was previously anticipated.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the two locomotives purchased to replace those destroyed in the August 1837 crash were really too heavy to be used on the road compounded the problem.<sup>28</sup> Inefficient management procedures interrupted rail service and undermined the reliability of the line.<sup>29</sup> In May 1838, the board employed Charles Dimmock to streamline management procedures, supervise improvements on the road, and restore the confidence of prospective investors.<sup>30</sup> By the end of 1838, the P&R repaired the line between Portsmouth and Suffolk, refurbished most of the cars and engines, and implemented a plan to sell the two heavy locomotives. Railroad agents supplied wood and water on a more reliable

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<sup>27</sup> The company planned to replace superstructures after ten years of service. In practice, the structures were good but for six years. BPW, *Report, 1837*, p. 453. *Id.*, *Report, 1839*, p. 101.

<sup>28</sup> BPW, *Report, 1839*, p. 96.

<sup>29</sup> BPW, *Report, 1837-1840*.

<sup>30</sup> BPW, *Report, 1840*, pp. 103-104. The army stationed Dimmock, a native New Englander and graduate of West Point, in Virginia from 1825 to 1836. After a summer in Florida fighting the Seminoles, he resigned his commission and returned to Virginia to pursue a career in civil engineering. Dimmock worked on several canal surveys in lower Tidewater, assisted Claudius Crozet in the Blue Ridge, and helped plan the routes of the Danville & Wytheville railroad and the Wilmington & Raleigh line. For more on Dimmock, see Michail Sanchez-Saveedra, *Charles Dimmock: beau ideal of a soldier* (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Richmond, Virginia, 1971).



basis.<sup>31</sup> Managers reorganized service so that motive power was more efficiently employed.<sup>32</sup> These efforts appeared to restore confidence in the P&R. Gross revenues continued to increase through fiscal 1840.

Despite the apparent turnaround, financial trouble loomed on the horizon. In 1838, the Board of Public Works loaned the P&R \$150,000, redeemable in 5 percent state scrip. But according to the president of the P&R, the state scrip was "unsalable, except at a depreciation so low as to forbid its sale."<sup>33</sup> Having faith that the State would eventually redeem the bonds at their face value, the P&R continued its program of improving the road and expanding services. Legislators ignored the appeals of the P&R for nearly two years. By the time the Board of Public Works authorized the P&R to offer an additional \$50,000 in subscriptions, the capital market was saturated and investors took very few of the P&R securities.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Irregular availability of wood and water caused major disruptions in service until 1839. P&R Papers, 1833-1840, VSL.

<sup>32</sup> BPW, *Report, 1840*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>33</sup> BPW, *Report, 1839*, pp. 92-93. In March 1839, legislators approved a 6 percent issue for the Staunton and Parkersburg road project. On 8 April 1839, they authorized the Board of Public Works to issue future subscriptions at 6 percent. Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1839*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> BPW, *Report, 1841*, p. 370.

Sensing the vulnerability of the line, the Petersburg railroad began a price war with the P&R.<sup>35</sup> The Petersburg line pegged their rates at one-half those existing on the Portsmouth and Roanoke line.<sup>36</sup> Three railroad companies (together) offered contiguous overland service between Baltimore and Weldon: 1) the Petersburg, 2) the Richmond and Petersburg, and 3) the Richmond, Fredricksburg, and Potomac. Lower passenger fares on the Petersburg line lured away those who would have otherwise chosen the alternate route through Norfolk.<sup>37</sup> This development was especially bad for the P&R, whose primary source of revenue stemmed from passenger receipts.<sup>38</sup> Lower freight rates induced farmers to send their agricultural production to Petersburg, rather than to Norfolk, for processing and shipping.<sup>39</sup> By keeping rates artificially low, the Petersburg line established itself as the preferred

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<sup>35</sup> The president of the P&R habitually complained about the program of predatory pricing practiced by the Petersburg line. BPW, *Report*, 1841-1846. P&R Papers, 1840-1846, VSL.

<sup>36</sup> The P&R maintained their rates: six cents per mile for passengers, four cents per mile for gypsum and lime, and eight cents per mile for other freight. P&R Papers, 1840-1846, VSL. *Virginia Code, 1849, 1860*, Title 18, Chapter 61, § 19.

<sup>37</sup> One could take the P&R from Weldon to Norfolk and board a steamer to Baltimore. Steamer service took about sixteen hours in 1838. Edmund Ruffin, "Remarks on the Scheme of the Eastern Shore Railway," *Farmers' Register*, vol. 5, no. 12 (March 1838).

<sup>38</sup> In no year preceding its reorganization in 1846 did freight receipts surpass passenger receipts. BPW, *Report*, 1833-1847.

<sup>39</sup> BPW, *Report*, 1840-1846.

route for "through service" between Baltimore and Weldon. This forced the P&R to borrow over \$80,000 to meet its financial obligations in fiscal 1841.<sup>40</sup>

The P&R found it increasingly difficult to emerge from its financial sinkhole. Service was briefly interrupted in the fall of 1841, after the bridge over the Meherrin River caught fire.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, this incident coincided with very competitive negotiations for a multi-year contract for transferring the mails between Baltimore and Weldon. The P&R lost the contract to the overland interests, and with it any hopes of government intervention to save the failing company.<sup>42</sup>

In hopes of raising enough capital on their own, the P&R began to sell its assets to friendly interests (with the understanding that the assets would be repurchased by the company as soon as it was able to do so).<sup>43</sup> But the railroad's economic troubles continued, and in the summer of 1844 the P&R sent a committee to memorialize the General

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<sup>40</sup> BPW, *Report, 1841*, p. 370.

<sup>41</sup> BPW, *Report, 1842*, p. 442.

<sup>42</sup> The P&R offered to transfer the mails for \$20,000 less than the overland interests (the Petersburg; Richmond and Petersburg; and the Richmond, Fredricksburg, and Potomac railroads), but the postal authorities granted the latter three companies the contract. BPW, *Report, 1843*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>43</sup> The practical effect of this plan resembled a no-interest loan.

Assembly on the condition of the road.<sup>44</sup> Three of the seven committee members came from Southampton: A. Joyner, John S. Millson, and Carr Bowers. The P&R representatives tried to convince the legislators that the entire road was not ruined and pointed out that the company retained many valuable assets. Meanwhile, leading stockholders worked on a plan to absolve the company of its debts and begin anew. During the winter of 1845/1846, the major investors discussed reorganizing the road under the public trust.<sup>45</sup> On 26 February 1846, the General Assembly authorized the sale of the P&R. On 10 April 1846, the stockholders formally agreed to the proposed sale and reorganization plan.<sup>46</sup>

On 4 September 1846, the Board of Public Works secured full ownership of the P&R for \$60,000.<sup>47</sup> John S. Millson, future representative to the U.S. Congress, supervised the sale of the P&R and its reorganization into the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company.<sup>48</sup> The town of Portsmouth immediately leased the company and restored rail service

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<sup>44</sup> BPW, *Report, 1845*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>45</sup> While the reorganization would not legally nullify the agreement between Francis Rives and the Petersburg line, it would, in practice, circumvent the difficulties arising from Rives' belligerence as the owner of the Weldon bridge. See Appendix I.

<sup>46</sup> BPW, *Report, 1846*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>47</sup> BPW, *Report, 1846*, p. 243.

<sup>48</sup> BPW, *Report, 1846*, pp. 403-405.

between Portsmouth and Boykins Depot, in Southampton County. The new managers developed freight service as the primary concern of the line. In April 1847 (the next session of the legislature) the Commonwealth offered a five-year lease with the exclusive option to purchase the S&R.<sup>49</sup> On 28 June 1847, an offer to sell the line superseded the lease (but the sale was not actually completed until 17 January 1848).<sup>50</sup>

On 17 March 1849, the state offered to relinquish all claims against the S&R if the company completed the line to the Raleigh & Gaston railroad (by March 1851).<sup>51</sup> By April 1853, the S&R completely refurbished the railroad and opened service between Boykins and Weldon.<sup>52</sup> The S&R grossed \$75,944.80 in the first fiscal year after it opened the Raleigh & Gaston connector (1853).<sup>53</sup> In February 1858, the S&R added a line of steamers, which operated from Norfolk and

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<sup>49</sup> The state offered the five-year lease with the understanding that the city of Norfolk and the town of Portsmouth would accept it as a joint venture. But Norfolk declined the opportunity on 22 May 1847, and a week later the S&R was under exclusive control of Portsmouth. Letter from the trustees of Norfolk to the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company, 22 May 1847, S&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>50</sup> BPW, *Report, 1847*, p. 16. Portsmouth bought the S&R for \$50,000. Mortgage for the sale of the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company, 17 January 1848, S&R Papers, VSL.

<sup>51</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1848-1849*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>52</sup> In January 1851, the assembly extended the time allotted to complete the new line (along with the deadline for the first installment of the mortgage). Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1850-1851*, p. 41.

<sup>53</sup> BPW, *Report, 1853-1854*, p. 487.

Portsmouth.<sup>54</sup> By 1860, the original strategy of the new management group succeeded. The S&R grossed \$280,822.10, \$255,455.58 of which were revenues generated from freight receipts.<sup>55</sup> The line from Portsmouth to Weldon provided the only direct rail link to Southampton county until the completion of the Norfolk and Petersburg line in 1858.

The Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad Company, incorporated in March 1851, connected the city of Norfolk with the Southside railroad at Petersburg.<sup>56</sup> The initial survey, conducted in the summer and fall of 1851 by Henry B. Smyth, was little more than a copy of the land survey made by the Virginia Telegraph Company the year before.<sup>57</sup> The officers of the N&P realized that it was impractical to build the railroad along the same path as the Virginia telegraph, and hired William Mahone, of Southampton, to conduct a more complete survey in the summer of 1853.<sup>58</sup> Mahone's report persuaded the directors to plan a direct route from Norfolk to Petersburg, reducing the total distance from ninety-four miles to eighty miles and circumventing the costly problem of

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<sup>54</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1858-1859*, pp. 124-125.

<sup>55</sup> BPW, *Report, 1859-1860*, pp. 188-194.

<sup>56</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1850-1851*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>57</sup> Apparently, Smyth assumed that the N&P would simply follow the path of the Virginia telegraph. BPW, *Report, 1850-1851*, pp. 451-455.

<sup>58</sup> BPW, *Report, 1853-1854*, pp. 369-376.

building railroad bridges over deep estuaries near the James River.

Construction began immediately. By 1855, the N&P graded the entire road from Suffolk to Petersburg.<sup>59</sup> Workers laid most of the iron by December 1857.<sup>60</sup> By the end of 1858, the entire line was completed. The total distance of the N&P was eighty miles, seventy-four miles of which were straight track. Only eight and one-half miles of track ran through Southampton, but the importance of the N&P for (the economic life of) the county should not be underestimated. Southampton's residents had practical access to the road at Ivor and Zuni.<sup>61</sup> Operations at Ivor depot, in Southampton, began in the fall of 1858.<sup>62</sup> The N&P provided a vital link between Norfolk and Petersburg from 1858 until the Civil War.

The P&R/S&R and the N&P improved the quality of postal service in Southampton. Each railroad outfitted special postal cars to carry and protect the mails. The postal department established a post office at every rail depot in

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<sup>59</sup> BPW, *Report, 1855*, pp. 958-976.

<sup>60</sup> BPW, *Report, 1858-1859*, p. vii.

<sup>61</sup> There is little doubt that Southampton's inhabitants used the depot at Zuni, technically in Isle of Wight County.

<sup>62</sup> Freight Schedule, 1858, N&P Papers, VSL.

Southampton.<sup>63</sup> Postmasters received and distributed the mails. The volume of posts one processed determined the postmaster's salary. At larger offices, clerks helped sort and distribute packages and letters. Mail which was transferred on rail coaches arrived more frequently. Trains were generally more reliable than stages in periods of inclement weather. Packages and letters were less susceptible to damage when transferred by rail. Less crime occurred on rail coaches as compared with overland stages. Before the P&R won the contract for carrying the mails in 1835, overland stages and private couriers carried all mail through the county.<sup>64</sup> In 1860, regular stages and canal boats still carried mail to more rural post offices in Southampton, but railroads carried the bulk of the mail.<sup>65</sup>

Telegraph service was not available in Southampton County before the Civil War, but residents did not have to travel far

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<sup>63</sup> *Post Office Directory*, p. 189. Hall, "Virginia Post Offices, 1798-1859." "A List of Virginia Post Offices Arranged by Counties as Revised and Corrected by the Post Office Department to October 20, 1867."

<sup>64</sup> The general practice was to pick up one's letters and packages at the nearest post office. If there was a personal delivery, the mail carrier expected a one or two cent tip. For more on early mail service, see Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Post Bags* (New York: D. Appleton and Co. 1929) and Oliver W. Holmes, *Stagecoach East: stagecoach days in the East from the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983).

<sup>65</sup> Mail was delivered to the following post offices in Southampton in 1860: Assamoosick, Berlin, Bowers, Boykins, Branchville, Drewryville, Farmers Grove, Franklin, Green Level, Green Plain, Jerusalem, Newsom's, Pond's Shops, Vicksville. Hall, "Virginia Post Offices, 1798-1859."



to send messages. By 1860, telegraph offices operated in almost every neighboring county. The Washington and New Orleans Telegraph Company followed the route of the Richmond, Fredricksburg, and Potomac; the Richmond and Petersburg; and the Petersburg railroads. The Virginia Telegraph Company served points between Norfolk and Petersburg.

As the popularity of the telegraph spread, so did interest in constructing a line from Washington to New Orleans. Virginians debated the exact route in the spring of 1847. Amos Kendall, then an agent for Samuel F.B. Morse, lobbied the legislature to approve planned construction along the Richmond, Fredricksburg, and Potomac; the Richmond and Petersburg; and the Petersburg railroads.<sup>66</sup> Proponents of the telegraph explained that its implementation improved managerial efficiency in the public as well as the private sector. Furthermore, they argued, improved information flows helped stem speculative ventures which depended upon delays in information processing. But many felt that Norfolk and the surrounding areas would be left at a tremendous disadvantage unless plans were made to include lower Tidewater.<sup>67</sup> On 30

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<sup>66</sup> The railroad companies granted the right of way in return for the rights to use the telegraph for the purposes of management and operations. Letters from Amos Kendall to the Board of Public Works, 31 March 1847 and 27 April 1847, Corporate Papers of the Washington and New Orleans Telegraph Company, VSL. (Hereafter cited as W&NOT Papers, VSL.)

<sup>67</sup> Letter from J. Brown to Amos Kendall, W&NOT Papers, VSL.

September 1848, the stock of the Virginia Telegraph Company was consolidated with that of the Washington and New Orleans Telegraph Company, and legislators approved the proposed route from Washington to the North Carolina border.<sup>68</sup>

The Virginia Telegraph Company, formally incorporated 17 March 1849, constructed a line of communications linking Norfolk to Petersburg.<sup>69</sup> The line ran through Nansemond, Isle of Wight, and Prince George Counties before reaching Petersburg.<sup>70</sup> The Virginia telegraph established its two main offices at Norfolk and Petersburg; interim offices were established at Suffolk, Smithfield, and Cabin Point.<sup>71</sup> The company set rates between Norfolk and Petersburg at fifty cents for the first ten words and four cents for each additional word (in 1850). Service between Norfolk and Suffolk, Suffolk and Smithfield, and Smithfield and Cabin Point cost twenty-five cents for the first ten words and two cents for each additional word. Service between Norfolk and Smithfield, Suffolk and Cabin Point cost thirty-seven and one-

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from Amos Kendall to J. Brown, 28 October 1848, Corporate Papers of the Virginia Telegraph Company, VSL. (Hereafter cited as VTel Papers, VSL.)

<sup>69</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1848-1849*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>70</sup> The telegraph ran a total distance of ninety-four miles. The actual route of the telegraph had some bearing on the original plans to construct the N&P railroad. N&P Papers, VSL.

<sup>71</sup> Letter from W. J. Hardy (President) to J. Brown, 21 October 1850, VTel Papers, VSL.

half cents for the first ten words and three cents for each additional word.<sup>72</sup> On 1 November 1857, the Virginia Telegraph Company sold all its property, rights, and privileges to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad Company, which managed telegraph service along the line until the Civil War.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, the railroads had a positive effect on the economic development of Southampton County. Rail service promoted truck farming, which proved to be an essential part of the agricultural economy. Rail service allowed farmers to practice general farming away from primary estuaries. Farmers used rails to transport agricultural products to market. Those engaged in non-agricultural pursuits used rail service to acquire raw materials and transport finished products. Merchants and wholesalers took advantage of rail services to provide the inhabitants of the county with goods and services.

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<sup>72</sup> Letter from W. J. Hardy to J. Brown, 21 October 1850, VTel Papers, VSL.

<sup>73</sup> Letter from William Mahone (Chief Engineer) to J. R. Tucker (Attorney General of Virginia), 29 December 1859, VTel Papers, VSL. The N&P made a special report to the Board of Public Works in 1858 regarding the acquisition of the telegraph company.

## Chapter Six

### Local Government

In general, citizens of Southampton had minimal contact with personnel and agents of the federal and state governments. Most residents had intermittent contact with local postal agents, but few encountered those who actually transferred the mails or managed the postal system. Census takers tried to make contact with the heads of each family but the census was taken only once each decade, and returns were not always complete. Prior to 1851, the sheriff supervised elections; but the revised constitution provided for election commissioners to operate the polls and certify elections.<sup>1</sup> Eligible voters elected a Congressman every two years, and selected Presidential electors every four years. Women did not vote, and less than one-half of the eligible males cast ballots in the 1852, 1856, and 1860 elections.<sup>2</sup> Prospective

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<sup>1</sup> The governor appointed three election commissioners to supervise presidential elections. Statutes allowed each of the election commissioners to appoint three more commissioners to assist them in their duties. Virginia, General Assembly, *Constitution of Virginia*, 1851, VSL.

<sup>2</sup> White males of majority who had resided in Virginia for at least two years and had lived in the locality for at least one year were allowed to cast ballots. Southampton County, Poll Records, 1852-1860, VSL.

candidates for state and local offices held social events to encourage support, but the candidates undoubtedly spent most of their time campaigning with the most influential voters. State agricultural agents were on hand at major termini to inspect and regulate the quality of agricultural produce, but many farmers did not accompany their produce all the way to market.<sup>3</sup>

County government had the most pronounced effect upon the residents of antebellum Southampton. County officers made executive decisions which had a direct and often personal effect upon the inhabitants. The county court administered the public business of the county; judged all civil, and most criminal cases, and before 1852 appointed all of the county officers except the attorney for the commonwealth.<sup>4</sup> The most important institution in terms of local government was the county court.

The county court was a self-perpetuating body until the assembly passed the Constitution of 1851. The governor appointed local justices for life; but the court nominated its own replacements, and Virginia's governors did not disapprove

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<sup>3</sup> Private agricultural agents handled transfers. Population Schedule, 1850, VSL.

<sup>4</sup> Voters popularly elected the attorney for the commonwealth for a four year term. Albert Ogden Porter, *County Government in Virginia*, (New York: AMS Press, 1966).

a single nomination before 1852.<sup>5</sup> Officially, twelve justices comprised the county court. In practice, many more were appointed and commissioned. Fifty justices commissioned in Southampton from 1805 to 1852, twenty-nine of whom between 1840 and 1852.<sup>6</sup> Statutes required at least four justices to hold a monthly court, and a majority of the justices to lay the county levy. All of the justices took turns sitting on the court, but the newest appointees carried the bulk of the workload. Only six of the fifty justices were replaced before 1852: three moved from the county, one died, one resigned, and one was disqualified.<sup>7</sup>

The General Assembly effectively interrupted the self-perpetuating nature of the court by passing the 1851 Constitution, but the new document did nothing to diminish the justices' power or responsibilities. In April 1852, the court

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<sup>5</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1852, SCC.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL.

<sup>7</sup> William A. Spark disqualified himself when he accepted his appointment to the Virginia Senate in 1844. Cynthia Miller Leonard, compiler, *The General Assembly of Virginia, 1619-1978*, (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1978), pp. 392-488. The goal of many justices appears to have been achieving seniority, for it was a long-standing tradition in Southampton to nominate the senior justice (who had not yet already served) as sheriff. This tradition was not broken until the assembly passed the 1851 Constitution. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1830-1852, SCC. It is worthwhile to note, however, that each justice who had served as sheriff continued to sit on the court after he completed his term of office. Before 1852 the justices were not paid for their services. The reward for a long tenure as justice was the lucrative office of sheriff. Porter, *County Government in Virginia*, p. 201.

partitioned Southampton into seven electoral districts.<sup>8</sup> District number one was known as Drewrysville District; number two, Cross Keys; number three, Joyner's Store; number four, Murfee's Depot; number five, Black Creek Church (included Jerusalem); number six, Berlin; and number seven, Faison's Store.<sup>9</sup> Beginning in 1852, voters popularly elected four justices in each district to four year terms. Election returns for 1852 revealed that fourteen of the twenty-eight new justices had not served on the court before. In 1856, eighteen of the elected justices had no previous experience on the county court. In 1860, ten of the twenty-eight justices were new.<sup>10</sup> Only four justices served contiguous terms from their appointments until the Civil War: James W. Murfee, Peter J. Holmes, Samuel B. Kello, and James E. Peters.<sup>11</sup>

The county court had unlimited jurisdiction in civil cases. A single justice could judge civil cases involving

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<sup>8</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 19-26 April 1852, SCC.

<sup>9</sup> Voting in Black Creek Church precinct actually took place at the school-house nearest the church. Black Creek District included the county seat, Jerusalem, in which voting commissioners manned a separate voting precinct (at the courthouse). Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852, SCC. Id., Poll Records, 1851-1860, VSL.

<sup>10</sup> Southampton County, Poll Records, 1852-1860, VSL. See Appendix II.

<sup>11</sup> The governor appointed Murfee 29 November 1842; Holmes, Kello, and Peters, 1 May 1847. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1860, VSL. Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL.

less than twenty dollars.<sup>12</sup> The county court had original jurisdiction in all criminal cases except those against free Negroes charged with any felony for which the punishment may have been death. The county court had concurrent jurisdiction with the Superior Court in cases against white persons for which the penalty may have been death or imprisonment in the penitentiary.<sup>13</sup>

Until 1852, the Superior Court in Richmond heard appeals and cases out of the jurisdiction of the county court.<sup>14</sup> The General Assembly appointed judges to the Superior Court for life. The Constitution of 1851 organized the state court system into a Supreme Court of Appeals, five sections, ten districts, and twenty-one circuits. After 1851, judges, attorneys for the commonwealth, and clerks of the circuit court became popularly elected officers of the state.<sup>15</sup> Circuit court judges travelled from courthouse to courthouse administering justice. Southampton was included in the first

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<sup>12</sup> The constable, not the sheriff was the officer of the one-justice court. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>13</sup> The county court maintained concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit court after the assembly adopted the 1851 Constitution. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 49, Chapter 53, § 16.

<sup>14</sup> Civil cases involving less than ten dollars, and criminal cases resulting in fines less than five dollars were not subject to appeal. *Virginia Code, 1849*, Title 49, Chapter 175.

<sup>15</sup> The local attorney for the commonwealth, clerk of court, and sheriff doubled as officers of the circuit court in Southampton from 1852 to 1860. Southampton County, Poll Records, 1852-1860, VSL.



circuit with the counties of Nansemond and Greensville.<sup>16</sup> Circuit court convened in Southampton twice each year, usually in May and October.<sup>17</sup>

Many local merchants and residents came to the county seat to take care of their important business while the county officials assembled for "court day." The county court met every third Monday until June 1854, after which time it convened every second Thursday.<sup>18</sup> Justices normally took care of the most important matters at quarterly terms of the county court, convened in March, June, August, and November. After July 1853, justices handled most trials and jury cases at quarterly terms held in March and August.<sup>19</sup>

The first order of business before the court was usually the administration of wills, deeds, and trusts. Justices decided questions of equity according to existing precedents in Southampton and other county and corporation courts. The court appointed commissioners in chancery to examine cases of equity for which no specific statutes or principles of common law applied. Although the court heard each case, justices

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<sup>16</sup> Two districts made up a section, and two circuits made up a district. Virginia, General Assembly, *Constitution of Virginia*, 1851, VSL.

<sup>17</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1850-1860, SCC.

<sup>18</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, May 1854, SCC.

<sup>19</sup> The county court convened as a court of *oyer and terminer* for felony cases. Southampton County, Minute Book, 18 July 1853, SCC.

usually followed the advice of the commissioners.<sup>20</sup> The court appointed the sheriff as executor of intestate estates. The clerk recorded important property transfers in the court minutes to prevent possible discrepancies with regard to ownership and taxation.<sup>21</sup> This practice also served as a control function for commissioners of the revenue, who were responsible for keeping land and personal property registers. The county court usually approved petitions for guardianship. The court assigned guardians for orphans and bastards. If a suitable guardian was not available, the court sent the child to the overseers of the poor, who bound out some indigents as apprentices until they reached majority.<sup>22</sup>

Each June, a majority of the justices convened to lay the county levy. After hearing the reports from the county officers, the justices generated a budget for the ensuing year. The most important components of the county budget were: (1) salaries of the county officers, (2) money for

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<sup>20</sup> The court usually appointed local lawyers as commissioners in chancery. For example, William B. Shands, William S. Goodwyn, William W. Cobb, Henry Howard, Edward Massenburg, and William Pretlow were appointed as commissioners in chancery for the August 1850 term of the county court. Southampton County, Minute Book, 19 August 1850, SCC.

<sup>21</sup> The clerk also recorded slave and (indentured) servant transfers. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>22</sup> The overseers applied apprentices' wages to the maintenance of the poor. After 1848, the county court held indigents' wages in trust until they reached majority. In certain cases, the court compensated children's parents with a nominal fee from the poor levy. Southampton County, Minute Book, 10 August 1854, SCC.

improving roads, bridges, waterways, and railroad service, (3) money for the upkeep of public buildings and lands in the public trust, (4) money for county patrols and the militia, and (5) money for the care and education of indigents. The court assessed each tithable with a per capita tax to fund expected contingencies.<sup>23</sup> The court taxed 4,895 tithables in 1840, 4,602 in 1850, and 4,499 in 1860. The county levy increased from forty-seven cents in 1840 to one dollar in 1850 to one dollar and seventy-five cents in 1860.<sup>24</sup> As the period progressed, fewer citizens were taxed more to support the county budget, a large share of which the justices earmarked for the poor.<sup>25</sup>

State law required free Negroes to register with the county court. The commissioner of revenue kept a running ledger, called the Register of Free Negroes, in which the age, sex, registration date, manner in which the individual gained his freedom, and a brief description of the party entered was

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<sup>23</sup> All adult males and female slaves who had attained the age of sixteen counted as tithables. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 16, Chapter 53, § 2. The county court exempted a few residents due to old age and infirmity. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>24</sup> The levy remained above \$1.50 for most of the decade preceding the Civil War, and was as high as \$2.80 in 1858. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>25</sup> Outlays for the poor ranged from 10 to 30 percent of the county budget from 1840 to 1860. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

carefully recorded.<sup>26</sup> Nine hundred fifty-nine free Negroes registered with the county court from 1840 to 1860: 902 were born free in Southampton, and 57 were emancipated.<sup>27</sup> It was important for a free Negro to register with the court so as to preclude any discrepancy with regard to his free status or his privilege to remain in the county. Statutes required all Negroes manumitted after 1805 to petition the Virginia locality in which they desired to live for permission to remain there for any length of time exceeding one year past the date of manumission. After the clerk posted a petition to remain in the county on the courthouse door for at least two months, he summoned all of the justices to consider the case. The county court allowed each of the fifty-seven locally-manumitted slaves to remain in the county.

The court received just two petitions from free Negroes who were not local residents. One they accepted, and one they denied. The court accepted the petition offered by John and Martha Harrison in October 1852. The Harrisons, both emancipated on 1 May 1806, had resided in Virginia their entire lives. Upon examination by the justices and thorough analysis of the testimony regarding their characters, sobriety, industriousness, and cooperative spirit, the court

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<sup>26</sup> Southampton County, Register of Free Negroes, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

unanimously granted both permission to live in Southampton.<sup>28</sup> The justices considered the petition offered by Tom, Susan, Lucy, and Julia Harrison in September 1853. After the justices thoroughly examined the applicants and heard testimony from the sheriff and jailor, they found it expedient to deny the petition.<sup>29</sup>

The county court naturalized two foreigners between 1840 and 1860. James Fagan, a thirty-one year old male from Ireland, became an American citizen on 21 April 1845.<sup>30</sup> John Yates, a twenty-seven year old male from Great Britain, was naturalized on 20 April 1846.<sup>31</sup> The county clerk instructed them in the duties of citizenship and qualified the candidates under the direction of the county court.

The county court judged over one thousand civil cases during the antebellum period. It was not uncommon for the justices to hear as many as twenty in a single monthly court. The court heard and judged most civil cases within a month after the plaintiffs brought suit, but justices continued a few cases until pertinent witnesses could appear. Most of the

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<sup>28</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 18 October 1852, SCC.

<sup>29</sup> The clerk recorded no further information in regard to this petition. It is not clear whether or not they were related to John and Martha Harrison. Southampton County, Minute Book, 19 September 1853, SCC.

<sup>30</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 April 1845, SCC.

<sup>31</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 April 1846, SCC.

civil cases before the court involved small claims against neighbors or business customers whose debts to the plaintiffs were overdue.<sup>32</sup>

Cases involving minor misdemeanors were usually initiated by a complaint, followed by a summons to appear before the next session of the county court for examination. Disturbing the peace was the most common complaint before the court from 1840 to 1860. Justices ordered guilty parties to agree to a note of indebtedness to the state, which was only executed if the signatory again violated the law within the year. The sheriff, his deputies, and constables arrested those suspected of more serious misdemeanors.<sup>33</sup> Although the suspects were promptly arraigned, they usually remained in jail until their trials. Justices punished most serious misdemeanors with fines or short terms in the county jail. In September 1848, a local constable apprehended a male slave belonging to Jane Joyner in the act of fornication and public display. Taking into consideration the fact that the slave remained in jail for two weeks, the attorney for the commonwealth decided against further prosecution.<sup>34</sup> In September 1841, the sheriff

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<sup>32</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>33</sup> Law enforcers needed a warrant to arrest a suspect unless they caught him "red-handed." Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>34</sup> The slave was released into the custody of his master, contingent upon her remittance of the jailor's fee. Southampton County, Minute Book, 18 September 1848, SCC.

arrested Isham, a male slave, for "using seditious language." Isham remained in jail for three weeks awaiting his trial. At his arraignment, the justices felt that three weeks had been sufficient punishment, and ordered Isham to be released into the custody of his master.<sup>35</sup>

The county court convened as a court of *oyer and terminer* for felony cases. Justices appointed grand jurors to investigate felonies and to offer indictments of suspected criminals. Forty-seven felony cases came before the county court, sixteen of which resulted in convictions. Nine cases were passed on to the Superior Court (after 1850 the circuit court). In twenty-two instances, the commonwealth did not pursue the case, and/or the court acquitted the defendant(s).<sup>36</sup> All sixteen cases which resulted in convictions involved Negro defendants. The primary reason for this was that the county court had more jurisdiction over Negroes than whites indicted for felonies.<sup>37</sup> All six whites indicted on felony charges went before the circuit court. Twelve of the twenty-two acquittals involved Negro suspects.

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<sup>35</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 September 1841, SCC.

<sup>36</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the term "circuit court" will be used interchangeably with the term Superior Court.

<sup>37</sup> The county court was the court of final decision for slaves. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 49, Chapter 53, § 16. For more on slave crime, see Philip J. Schwartz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1988).

The court reserved capital punishment for murder and insurrection.<sup>38</sup>

The most common felony was larceny. Of the fifteen larceny cases which came before the county court from 1840 to 1860, three resulted in convictions, five in acquittals, and the justices sent seven cases on to the circuit court. In September 1840, the court convicted Jane Artis, a free Negro woman, of grand larceny and sentenced her to five years in the state penitentiary.<sup>39</sup> In November 1848, the court convicted William Jones, free Negro, of larceny and sentenced him to thirty-nine stripes on his bare back (at the public whipping post in Jerusalem) both immediately before and after he served his term of thirty days in the county jail.<sup>40</sup> William Jones again committed larceny in March 1850. This time the county court sentenced him to thirty-nine "well-laid" lashes.<sup>41</sup> Of the five acquitted, three were white. All seven cases the justices passed on to the circuit court involved white defendants. Four of these involved Willis Rawls, a local

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<sup>38</sup> The county court ordered the execution of seven slaves for murder and insurrection. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>39</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 17 September 1840, SCC. Id., Minute Book, 22 September 1840, SCC.

<sup>40</sup> Public whipping was reserved for Negroes. Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 November 1848, SCC.

<sup>41</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 15 July 1850, SCC.



thief who was believed to have stolen from a number of Southampton's inhabitants during 1843.<sup>42</sup>

When the commonwealth lacked enough evidence to convict the suspect of larceny, but enough evidence placed the defendant at the scene of the crime, the court usually tried the suspect for breaking and entering. All four cases of breaking and entering involved Negro defendants. Breaking and entering was a felony for Negroes. In June 1852, the court found Jesse and Henry Crocker guilty of breaking and entering and sentenced each to five years in the state penitentiary.<sup>43</sup> On 1 January 1853, the court found Daniel Jackson guilty of breaking and entering and sentenced him to five years in the penitentiary.<sup>44</sup> Isham, a slave, was acquitted of larceny in April 1857.<sup>45</sup>

Nine cases of felonious assault came before the county court: three resulted in convictions, five resulted in acquittals, while the justices passed one case to the circuit court. All three convictions involved Negro defendants. In September 1849, the court found Artimissa Artis, free Negro,

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<sup>42</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 August 1843, SCC.

<sup>43</sup> The sheriff suspected Jesse and Henry Crocker of stealing some coins and banknotes. The court did not convict them of larceny, because the money was never found. Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 June 1852, SCC.

<sup>44</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1 January 1853, SCC.

<sup>45</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 April 1857, SCC.

guilty of "maliciously inflicting a blow with the eye of an axe on a Negro man slave named Amos," and ordered her to be incarcerated in the state penitentiary for one year.<sup>46</sup> In the summer of 1855, the court sentenced Juba, a slave, to be sold and transported beyond the boundaries of the United States for assaulting a white man.<sup>47</sup> In November 1853, the court sentenced Nicholas Artis, free Negro, to three years in the state penitentiary for assaulting and robbing Susan Glover, a local white woman.<sup>48</sup> Three of the five acquitted were white defendants. The justices passed the case against Samuel Revell to the circuit court in December 1840.<sup>49</sup>

Seven cases of insurrection came before the county court from 1840 to 1860, all of which stemmed from an incident at Barrett's meeting house. On the evening of 23 August 1840, a Negro agitator from Petersburg and four slaves from Sussex County met at Barrett's and began to solicit followers in their alleged plot to "rise up and kill the white people."<sup>50</sup> The sheriff apprehended Nelson, Abram, and James, three slaves

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<sup>46</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 17 September 1849, SCC.

<sup>47</sup> The state compensated the owner with \$800. Southampton County, Minute Book, 16 July 1855, SCC. Id., 20 August 1855, SCC.

<sup>48</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 November 1853, SCC.

<sup>49</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 16 November 1840, SCC. Id., 21 December 1840, SCC.

<sup>50</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 September 1840.

from Southampton, and brought them to trial for conspiring in the plot. This was a very serious matter, for in August 1831, the notorious Nat Turner had led an armed Negro rebellion against the white inhabitants of the area (to free the slaves) which resulted in the deaths of some fifty-five white men, women, and children.<sup>51</sup> The county court heard testimony from slaves, free Negroes, and whites who witnessed the incident at Barrett's.<sup>52</sup> Nelson was convicted of treason and hanged in the public square in Jerusalem with the other four slaves from Sussex on 20 October 1840.<sup>53</sup> The court acquitted Abram and James.

Seven murder cases came before the county court. The most notorious involved Matthew Drake, accused of murdering five residents of the county. The justices passed his case on to the circuit court in December 1840.<sup>54</sup> The two cases which resulted in conviction involved slaves. In February 1840, the

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<sup>51</sup> In the wake of the Nat Turner slave rebellion, the Southern States passed more stringent slave codes and moved to censor abolitionist materials. For more on Nat Turner, see T.R. Gray, editor, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, (Baltimore: T. R. Gray, 1831) and Frank Roy Johnson, *The Nat Turner Story*, (Murfreesboro, N. C.: Johnson Publishing Company, 1970).

<sup>52</sup> Slaves could not testify against whites in court, but the court allowed their testimony in these cases against the slaves from Sussex and Southampton. Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 & 22 September 1840, SCC.

<sup>53</sup> The state compensated Peter Booth with \$420. The Negro agitator from Petersburg was never caught. Southampton County, Minute Book, 22 September 1840, SCC.

<sup>54</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 22 December 1840, SCC.

court sentenced a slave named Melinda to hang for the murder of her husband.<sup>55</sup> In January 1850, a slave named Henry was sent to hang for the murder of his black neighbor.<sup>56</sup> Two of the four acquitted of murder were whites.<sup>57</sup>

Two cases of arson came before the county court during the antebellum years. The county jail burned in December 1852, but the suspect, Daniel Jackson, was not convicted due to a lack of evidence.<sup>58</sup> Lucy Wilkinson accused Esther, her slave, of arson when her house burned in January 1855. The county court found Esther innocent of any wrongdoing at her trial in February, and ordered her to be released to the custody of her master.<sup>59</sup> The court also heard three forgery cases. The justices passed the case involving Joshua Myrick to the

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<sup>55</sup> The state compensated her owner with \$450. Southampton County, Minute Book, 17 February 1840, SCC.

<sup>56</sup> The state compensated Drewry Walker with \$700. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1 January 1850, SCC.

<sup>57</sup> There were three duels in Southampton from 1840 to 1860. Two resulted in death, and one resulted in a wounded party. Neither case was pursued by the commonwealth after the justices examined the combatants. Southampton County, Minute Book, 4 November 1841, SCC. Id., 21 April 1845, SCC. Id., 19 July 1847, SCC.

<sup>58</sup> He was in jail awaiting his trial for grand larceny. Southampton County, Minute Book, 11 January 1853.

<sup>59</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 19 February 1855, SCC.

Superior Court in March 1843.<sup>60</sup> The commonwealth did not prosecute the other two cases.<sup>61</sup>

The decision whether to prosecute is very important from the standpoint of general common law. Statutory law expressly warrants prosecution, whereas prosecution based upon principles of general common law serves to either establish or uphold precedents. Although the justices were ultimately responsible for rulings in these cases, they were bound by the evidence and the manner in which it was presented to the court. Voters elected the commonwealth attorney for four years. The county paid him an annual salary of \$300.<sup>62</sup> He served both the county court and the circuit court after 1851. Three men served antebellum Southampton as commonwealth attorney: William C. Parker from 1840 to 1848, William S. Goodwyn from 1848 to 1852, and John J. Kindred from 1852 to 1860.<sup>63</sup>

The county clerk recorded the minutes of the county and circuit courts; kept the official registers of births, deaths, and marriages up to date; naturalized foreigners; and handled all official correspondence with state authorities. In short,

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<sup>60</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 March 1843, SCC.

<sup>61</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 15 August 1842. Id., 16 January 1843, SCC. Id., 20 February 1843, SCC.

<sup>62</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>63</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1861, SCC.

he was the liaison between the people and the courts and the liaison between the court and state authorities. State law allowed the clerk to appoint a deputy to assist him when his workload became excessive, but Southampton's clerk usually managed the responsibilities alone.<sup>64</sup> The county court appointed the clerk for seven-year terms until 1852. Beginning in 1852, voters elected the clerk of court every six years.<sup>65</sup> Littleton R. Edwards served as the county clerk from 13 October 1835 until the Civil War.<sup>66</sup>

The sheriff was the chief law enforcement officer for the county and circuit courts; collector of state and local taxes; and, before 1852, chief election official. As chief law enforcement officer he was responsible for serving summons and warrants, keeping the county jail, and maintaining order throughout the county.<sup>67</sup> He collected state taxes on land and personal property, the state capitation tax (for purposes of

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<sup>64</sup> The workload became excessive in years when the county processed lands. The clerk received an additional \$100 for his services during these years. Southampton County, Minute Book, 17 June 17 1850, SCC. Id., 20 June 1853, SCC. Id., 19 June 19, 1854, SCC.

<sup>65</sup> *Constitution of Virginia*, 1851, VSL.

<sup>66</sup> Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1848-1861, SCC.

<sup>67</sup> The county jail doubled as the circuit court jail after 1852. A professional jailor was in charge. Southampton County, Minute Book, 11 January 1853, SCC.

the literary fund), and the county levy.<sup>68</sup> All proceeds he remitted to the state treasury.<sup>69</sup> The state made local funds available to the county court upon application by the justices. As the chief election officer, the sheriff collected the poll tax and handed out ballots to eligible voters.<sup>70</sup> The sheriff received an annual salary of seventy-five dollars plus fees.<sup>71</sup> The county court appointed citizens patrols to help maintain order and surveil suspicious Negroes.<sup>72</sup>

Statutes limited the sheriff to two consecutive terms. Until 1852, no sheriff repeated his term in Southampton. Thomas Pretlow, Samuel Hines, Jacob Barnes, Jephtha Darden, Alexander Myrick, and Jesse Parker served as sheriff from 1840

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<sup>68</sup> He also served as the county treasurer until 1853. Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1853*, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> The sheriff was empowered to distrain delinquents' personal property (excluding slaves) after a period of thirty days. After 1850 he was empowered to hire out free Negroes who failed to fulfill their obligations to the county in the event that they had no property from which the court could recover. Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 January 1851, SCC.

<sup>70</sup> After 1851, the county court appointed clerks and conductors to carry out local elections. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1850-1860, SCC.

<sup>71</sup> Beginning in 1852, the county court taxed his fees of office. Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 September 1852, SCC. Id., 18 July 1853, SCC.

<sup>72</sup> Patrollers were white males, appointed for three month terms. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

to 1852.<sup>73</sup> Beginning in 1852, voters popularly elected the sheriff for two-year terms. Samuel Kello served as Southampton's sheriff from 1852 to 1856, and William W. Briggs from 1856 to 1860.<sup>74</sup> Popular election of the sheriff effectively interrupted the tradition of rewarding the senior justice with the office.

Constables represented local authority in the absence of the sheriff, serving summons and warrants, apprehending suspicious characters, and otherwise maintaining the peace. The one exclusive duty of the constable was serving as the officer of the one-justice court.<sup>75</sup> The court divided the county into four constabulary districts: Upper St. Luke's Parish, Lower St. Luke's Parish, Upper Nottoway Parish, and Lower Nottoway Parish. Before 1852, the county court annually appointed two constables to serve in each district. For example, in 1849 John Barham and Benjamin C. Everett served in Upper St. Luke's Parish; Everett T. Hill and Parker D. Story, Lower St. Luke's Parish; Arthur A. Drewry and Richard Branch, Upper Nottoway Parish; William Munford and Colin D. Bishop,

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<sup>73</sup> Thomas Pretlow took over from William Everett in 1840. Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL.

<sup>74</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1860, SCC.

<sup>75</sup> Statutes required but one justice to judge small claims, but prohibited the sheriff from acting as the officer of the one-justice court.



Lower Nottoway Parish.<sup>76</sup> Constables' fees of office were minimal. No continuity of office developed before 1852.<sup>77</sup> Remarkable continuity emerged as a result of offering the constables a yearly salary. Beginning in 1852, voters popularly elected one constable to serve a two-year term in each of seven electoral districts. In 1852, voters elected Robert J. Fitch, Parker D. Story, William Murfee, Sr., Giles S. Whitney, William R. Stephenson, and William Whitney.<sup>78</sup> All but Parker Story continued to serve as constables through 1860.<sup>79</sup>

Commissioners of the revenue made sure all licenses were up to date and kept the Personal Property Register, the Land Book, and the Register of Free Negroes. Commissioners notified the county clerk as licenses came due. The clerk then posted notice on the courthouse door. This notice provided legal charge for the sheriff to collect the fee(s) and forward the proceeds to the state treasury. The sheriff reported payments and delinquencies to the commissioners. The commissioners showed receipts of paid accounts the county clerk. Licenses were not valid until the clerk forwarded the

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<sup>76</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 18 June 1849, SCC.

<sup>77</sup> The sheriff served most of the warrants (and collected the fees). Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1852, SCC.

<sup>78</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 21 June 1852, SCC.

<sup>79</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1861, SCC.

official license returns to the state auditor of public accounts for processing.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes the commissioners included an annual accounting of license fees in the Personal Property Register. The Personal Property Register included a listing of all taxable personal articles owned by the inhabitants of the county. The Land Book included information as to ownership, location, size, quality, value, of lands in Southampton as well as the amount of taxes assessed for each tract. In 1850, the county court appointed assessors to determine the value of land and buildings.<sup>81</sup> Commissioners of the revenue worked closely with the sheriff, the clerk, and the attorney for the commonwealth to ensure that all taxes and levies were properly paid.

The court partitioned Southampton into two main areas of responsibility: the area to the east of the Nottoway River, St. Luke's Parish; to the west, Nottoway Parish. Before 1852, the county court appointed one commissioner to serve each parish. There was no limit as to the number of terms the commissioners could serve. After 1851, voters elected commis-

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<sup>80</sup> Porter, *County Government in Virginia*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>81</sup> Before 1850, Virginia was divided into four districts, each under the supervision of four principal assessors. The board of principal assessors met intermittently in each county of their district to present assessments made by their assistants and to hear appeals from local assessors. Porter, *County Government in Virginia*, p. 197. In 1850, the county court appointed two assessors to complete a total revision of real property values in Southampton. Southampton County, Minute Book, 17 June 1850, SCC.

sioners for a two-year term. John M. Gurley served as commissioner in St. Luke's Parish from 1840 to 1860. William W. Briggs was the commissioner in Nottoway Parish from 1840 to 1856, Samuel Kello served from 1856 to 1860.<sup>82</sup>

The county surveyor administered the processioning of county lands and settled local boundary disputes. Every couple of years, the county court ordered the surveyor to supervise the processioning of lands.<sup>83</sup> The surveyor laid off the county into thirty-nine districts. The county court appointed two processioners to serve in each. The surveyor made sure that processioners followed proper surveying procedures. The county clerk and his deputy carefully recorded the results to preclude potential disputes over property lines. Boundary disputes most often occurred during or immediately after the owners transferred propriety. The county court appointed the county surveyor until 1852, after which the voters popularly elected him for a two-year term. William D. Hood served as county surveyor from 1838 to 1848; Joshua Pretlow from 1848 to 1854, and William E. Beale from 1854 to 1860.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>83</sup> Processioning of lands continued in Southampton until the Civil War. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1861, SCC.

<sup>84</sup> Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1860, SCC.

The coroner investigated all cases in which doubt surrounded the cause of death. In cases involving suspicions of wrongdoing, he was empowered to have the county court summon a grand jury of inquest to investigate the matter. If the grand jurors voted in favor of indictment, the coroner issued a warrant for the arrest of the suspect. After the coroner examined John T. Burgess, found dead in Southampton on 5 June 1853, he launched an investigation which led to the arrest and conviction of William Barden.<sup>85</sup> The office of coroner remained an appointive one throughout the antebellum period. Nicholas M. Sebrell served as Southampton's coroner from 1835 to 1844.<sup>86</sup> His son, James Sebrell, succeeded him from 1844 until the Civil War.<sup>87</sup>

State law required all county officers to post a surety bond (before the court) before taking office. The amount of the surety bond ranged from as little as \$1,000 for the commissioners of the revenue to as much as \$90,000 for the

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<sup>85</sup> The county court passed Barden's case to the circuit court in July 1853. The circuit court convicted Barden of murder in the second degree. Southampton County, Minute Book, 18 July 1853, SCC.

<sup>86</sup> Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL. Nicholas Sebrell left his office to serve as Southampton's representative to the General Assembly. Leonard, *The General Assembly*, pp. 392-488.

<sup>87</sup> Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1848-1861, SCC.

sheriff.<sup>88</sup> The latter was indeed a large sum, but the sheriff was the collector of taxes (including the poll tax), and the trusted executor of intestate estates (some of which exceeded \$30,000). Almost all county officers received fees of office as payment for their services to the community, and some received a salary in addition to these fees.<sup>89</sup> The court approved disbursements for salaries and fees of office out of the county levy.

County officers were competent and worked together to carry out the responsibilities of self-government. Those charged with crimes were brought to a speedy, but fair trial. Guilty felons were punished according to statute. During the (Virginia) constitutional debates in 1851, state representatives frequently raised the question of whether popularly elected local officials could maintain enough continuity of office to develop the necessary level of expertise to run the county government effectively.<sup>90</sup> Voters initially reordered county personnel, but by 1856 a new continuity developed among the county officers. Local government remained an effective institution in Southampton throughout the antebellum years.

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<sup>88</sup> The bond for the commissioners of the revenue increased to \$5,000 in 1859. Southampton County, Minute Book, 20 June 1859, SCC.

<sup>89</sup> For a complete list, see *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 51, Chapter 184.

<sup>90</sup> *Virginia, House Journal, 1850-1851*. Id., *Senate Journal, 1850-1851*. Most property holders in Southampton voted against the 1851 Constitution. Southampton County, Poll Records, 1851, VSL.

## Chapter Seven

### Education, Religion, and Welfare

A comprehensive system of public education did not develop in antebellum Southampton. The basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic were often taught at home in preparation for primary school. Private teachers and members of the clergy offered primary lessons.<sup>1</sup> Citizens of the county erected few actual schoolhouses for this purpose. Educators used public meetinghouses, churches, and their individual homes to instruct primary students. Some examples of the texts used include: *Pike's and Parker's Arithmetic*; *Ray's Arithmetic*; *Jones' and Walker's Dictionary*; *Webster's Dictionary*; *Comley's and Webster's Spelling*; *McGuffey's Spelling*; *McGuffey's Reader*; *The Bible*; *Murray's English Grammar*; *Smith's Grammar*; *Woodbridge's Olney's and Paley's Geographies*; *Mitchell's Geography*; *United States Reader and Perceptor*; and *Key and Grimshaw's History of the United States, Rome, and Greece*.<sup>2</sup> Classes met once or twice per week during most of the year.

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<sup>1</sup> William Daniel Cobb, *Diary, 1838*, VHS.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia, House of Delegates, *House Document 7L, 1860*, VSL.

Educators charged students from three to six cents per day to attend.<sup>3</sup> By 1860, thirty-eight common schools offered elementary education in Southampton.<sup>4</sup>

Teachers educated poor or indigent children along with other children in primary schools. The state maintained a special literary fund, part of which was annually allotted to each county for the education of poor children. Voters in each county elected school commissioners to manage their allotments.<sup>5</sup> School commissioners paid the tuition and fees of as many indigent children as the annual allotment allowed. Southampton's annual allotment from the literary fund ranged from \$500.19 (in 1854) to \$600.95 (in 1849).<sup>6</sup> Statutes required school commissioners to make a report to the General Assembly on the effectiveness of primary schools in their counties. The number of poor children educated increased from 162 in 1847 to 384 in 1860.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia, House of Delegates, House Document 4L, 1840-1846, VSL. Id., House Document 4o, 1846-1860, VSL.

<sup>4</sup> Southampton County, Reports of School Commissioners, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>5</sup> School commissioners served a three-year term. Porter, *County Government in Virginia*.

<sup>6</sup> Virginia, House of Delegates, House Document 4o, 1846-1860, VSL.

<sup>7</sup> School commissioners reported 360 poor children in 1847 and 580 poor children in 1860. One should notice that the allotment decreased at the same time the number of children educated increased. Southampton County, Reports of School Commissioners, 1846-1860, VSL.

TABLE 10

## SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS, 1848 AND 1860

Class of 1848	Class of 1860
Howell Harris	John E. Briggs
James D. Bryant	Joshua W. Cland
William D. Hood	William M. Parker
Thomas B. Worrell	Stith H. Bishop
William Stephenson	Elijah Joyner
Joshua Presson	William E. Gay
Alexander Myrick	William Atkinson
Theodore Trezvant	Eldridge C. Maget
James Drewry	Sugars Lain
James Holmes	Alfred T. Stephenson
John J.P. Pennington	John J. Branch

SOURCE: Virginia, House of Delegates, House Document 5M, 1848, VSL. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852-1860, SCC.

Between 1838 and 1842, school commissioners established two "district free schools," both of which were soon abandoned due to the lack of community support. Under the provisions of the 1829 statute, the county assumed three-fifths of the costs associated with building the school and one-half of the teacher's salary.<sup>8</sup> District free schools were open to children of both sexes, and no tuition was charged. Teachers earned \$250 per year, out of which they were expected to provide books and supplies for students.<sup>9</sup> At the height of the program in 1843, fifty-nine students regularly attended the two district free schools; only twenty-two were "poor

<sup>8</sup> Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1829*, pp. 13-16. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1838-1842, SCC.

<sup>9</sup> Virginia, House of Delegates, House Document 4K, 1843.



children." The school commissioners reported that year that they were "disposed to do away with the district system," because "the greatest part of the money [from the literary fund] will be spent in three neighborhoods and the balance of the poor children will thus go uneducated."<sup>10</sup> Commissioners gradually phased out district free schools after the assembly revised the statutes governing the system of primary schools in 1846.<sup>11</sup> One district free school remained operational until 1852, but the county court appropriated no more county funds for its maintenance after 1847.<sup>12</sup>

Educators realized some progress toward educating the poor children from 1846 to 1860, but the fact remained that at least one-third of the indigent children were left uneducated. No laws required parents to send their children to school. Some families refused to take advantage of the provisions for free tuition, fearing their peers would say that they accepted

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<sup>10</sup> Virginia, House of Delegates, House Document 4M, 1843.

<sup>11</sup> The provisions for establishing district free schools were continued under the plan to revise elementary education in Virginia. Virginia, *Acts of Assembly, 1846*, pp. 22-26.

<sup>12</sup> The teacher managed to educate an average of thirty students each year, only about ten of which were indigents. Virginia, House of Delegates, House Document 4K, 1846-1853. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1846-1860, SCC.

"charity" or brand their children with a social stigma for receiving a "public" education.<sup>13</sup>

Those who desired a secondary education either hired a private tutor or attended a private academy.<sup>14</sup> Only one academy existed in Southampton before the Civil War: Millfield Academy, established in 1790 near the settlement of Berlin. The act of incorporation gave the academy's trustees permission to raise £300 (sterling) by lottery for the benefit of the institution.<sup>15</sup> Edward Smith, locally known for his classical knowledge, expanded the curriculum in the 1830s. By 1835, enrollment averaged about fifty pupils, some of whom were from adjacent counties.<sup>16</sup> Many sons from wealthy Southampton families attended the academy during the antebellum period.<sup>17</sup> General George Thomas, Union hero of the

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<sup>13</sup> Cornelius J. Heatwole, *A History of Education in Virginia*, (New York: Macmillan, 1916). A. J. Morrison, *The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860*, (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1917).

<sup>14</sup> For more on academies in Virginia, see Dale G. Robinson, *The Academies of Virginia, 1776-1861*, (copyrighted by the author, Dale G. Robinson, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> Hening, *Statutes at Large*, 13: 173.

<sup>16</sup> Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia*, p. 279.

<sup>17</sup> Maget Family Papers, 1829-1861, VHS.

battle of Chicamauga, graduated from Millfield Academy in 1842.<sup>18</sup>

Religion played an important role in the lives of most county residents. The Baptist Church enjoyed the largest following in Southampton. Membership was principally white, but some Negro members regularly attended.<sup>19</sup> Officially, the church received members by letter or baptism, but many Negroes attended services without fulfilling either requirement.<sup>20</sup> At some churches, preachers held separate prayer meetings for slaves.<sup>21</sup> Baptist churches in Southampton listed 652 white members and 232 black members in 1860.<sup>22</sup>

From time to time, the Baptist churches in Southampton sponsored "protracted meetings" (religious revivals). Revivals were designed to save the unfaithful and boost church membership. Local and visiting preachers would proclaim the

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Budd Van Horne, *Life of Major General George H. Thomas*, (New York: Scribner, 1982), p. 2. Later admitted to the United States Military Academy, Thomas served with Major General Zachary Taylor in Florida, Texas, and Mexico. Thomas Papers, 1847-1848, VHS.

<sup>19</sup> Baptist Church, Portsmouth Association, *Minutes*, 1860, Virginia Baptist Historical Society, University of Richmond, Virginia. (Hereafter cited as Portsmouth Association, *Minutes*, VBHS.)

<sup>20</sup> Slaves and free Negroes attended Baptist churches in Southampton. Tucker's Swamp Baptist Church, Church Book, 1840-1860, VBHS.

<sup>21</sup> Some slaves went on their own accord, and others were prompted by their masters. "Interview with Mrs. Hines," Rawick, ed., *The American Slave*, vol. 16, *Virginia Narratives*, pp. 27-30.

<sup>22</sup> Portsmouth Association, *Minutes*, 1860, VBHS.

word of God, stressing the dire consequences of leading an un-Christian life. Colporters, employed by Virginia Baptists, sold the Holy Bible and Sunday School books. The revivals sponsored by Millfield Baptist church lasted anywhere from four to nine days, during which local preachers baptized many new converts. At one of these revivals, George Griffin (Pastor of Millfield Church) and Brothers Cofer and Wallace (of Richmond College) received forty-two new white converts and thirty-six new black converts.<sup>23</sup>

Table 11

## BAPTIST CHURCHES, 1860

Name	Date Founded	Membership	
		white	black
South Quay	1785	173	46
Black Creek	1786	132	22
Meherrin (Hebron)	1788 (1846)	80	33
Tucker's Swamp	1807	160	131
Millfield	1836	160	30
Jerusalem	1846	27	3
Total Members		652	232

SOURCE: Portsmouth Association, *Minutes*, 1860, VBHS.

<sup>23</sup> Millfield church was located near the settlement of Berlin. Nineteen of the new converts were baptized in the millpond. "Revival," *Religious Herald*, (Petersburg, Va.), 12 October 1854.

All six Baptist churches in Southampton held regular Sabbath Schools.<sup>24</sup> Tucker's Swamp Baptist Church maintained a library of religious works and held weekly Bible classes, spelling, and general religious instruction.<sup>25</sup> Preachers and Sunday school teachers orally instructed blacks, using Robert Ryland's *Scripture Catechism for Coloured People*.<sup>26</sup>

Each church held monthly or quarterly congregational meetings to take care of its public business, formulate policies, and decide matters of discipline. If a member of the church suspected another of unchristian behavior, he notified the deacons, who summoned the suspect to the next conference for trial. Meanwhile, a committee was appointed to examine the charge and report its findings to the next conference. If the accused failed to appear, or the report of the committee upheld the charge, the former faced excommunication or expulsion from the fellowship of the Church.<sup>27</sup> Serious offenses included theft, adultery, fornication, illegitimate pregnancy, intemperance, failing to attend services, failing to reconcile personal differences

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<sup>24</sup> "Sunday School Convention", *Religious Herald*, 17 September 1840.

<sup>25</sup> Tucker's Swamp Baptist Church, *Church Book*, 1860, VBHS.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Ryland, *The Scripture Catechism for Coloured People*, (Richmond: Harrold Murray, 1848).

<sup>27</sup> Black Creek Baptist Church, *Church Book*, 1840-1860, VBHS. Tucker's Swamp Baptist Church, *Church Book*, 1840-1860, VBHS.

with another member of the Church, and in some cases public dancing.<sup>28</sup> The code was the same for whites and blacks.

During the antebellum period, Southampton's six Baptist churches belonged to the Portsmouth Baptist Association. The church incorporated district associations into the State Association until 1845, after which Southampton's Baptist churches also affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Methodist churches in Southampton operated under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, from 1845 to 1860. Bishops appointed preachers to stations and circuits. Regional Districts, normally headed by supernumerary preachers, administered stations and circuits. The Annual Conference, headed by one to four Methodist bishops, supervised districts and special missions. A council of three Methodist bishops presided over the Virginia Conference.<sup>29</sup>

The Methodist Church designated edifices or rural meetinghouses where local preachers held regular services as stations. Local Methodists congregated at ten stations in Southampton County: Nottoway, Indian Spring, Joyner's, Applewhite's, Barnes', Peet's, Brookneal, Mount Horeb,

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<sup>28</sup> Black Creek Baptist Church, Church Book, 1840-1860, VBHS. Tucker's Swamp Baptist Church, Church Book, 1840-1860, VBHS.

<sup>29</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1840-1860, McGraw-Page Library, Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, Virginia. (Hereafter cited as Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, MPL.)

Clarksbury, and Old Church.<sup>30</sup> Three local preachers proclaimed the Word in Southampton: Benjamin Devany, Isaac M. Arnold, and Benjamin Cleviers Spiller. The church designated Isaac Arnold and Benjamin C. Spiller local preachers, and Benjamin Devany, supernumerary.<sup>31</sup> It was not uncommon for the local preachers to hold more than one service on a Sunday, and Reverend Devany preached four or five sermons on one occasion.<sup>32</sup> During the week, local preachers ministered to the sick and infirm and planned the sermon for the upcoming Sabbath. Reverend Devany, supernumerary, was in charge of the regional district.<sup>33</sup>

Local preachers were also active in secular affairs. Benjamin Devany served as a school commissioner and an overseer of the poor.<sup>34</sup> Benjamin C. Spiller taught school

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<sup>30</sup> Department of the Interior, *Statistics of the United States*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. 485-488. Gilmer Map, 1863, VHS. William Daniel Cobb, *Diary*, VHS.

<sup>31</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1846-1860, MPL.

<sup>32</sup> John H. Lafferty, *Sketches of the Virginia Conference*, (Richmond: Christian Advocate Office, 1880).

<sup>33</sup> District boundaries were not rigid. For example the Methodist Church included Southampton in the Randolph-Macon district in 1858, the Nottoway district in 1859, and the Petersburg district in 1860. Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1858-1861.

<sup>34</sup> Devany allowed a number of indigent inhabitants to live on his farm. Southampton County, *Minute Book*, 1840-1860, VSL. *Id.*, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL. *Id.*, Reports of School Commissioners, 1840-1860, VSL.

until the church licensed him as a local preacher in 1848.<sup>35</sup> Isaac Arnold became a successful farmer: by 1860 he owned eight slaves over the age of twelve, four horses valued at \$100 each, eighty-eight sheep and hogs, and thirty-six cows.<sup>36</sup>

Travelling preachers, or circuit riders, evangelized new members and ministered to those who were unable to attend services of the established Methodist Church. Boundaries of the circuits were loosely drawn, and often overlapped. The church included all or part of Southampton in the Smithfield circuit until 1861. After 1859, however, the Franklin circuit included the southern half of Southampton.<sup>37</sup> Ezekiel Potts rode the Smithfield circuit from 1845 to 1861.<sup>38</sup> Benjamin Franklin Woodward rode the Franklin circuit from 1859 to 1867.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The church first licensed Spiller as an exhorter in 1847. Lafferty, *Sketches of the Virginia Conference*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>36</sup> Southampton County, Personal Property Tax Register, 1860, VSL.

<sup>37</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1850-1860.

<sup>38</sup> Rev. Potts settled in Southampton as a local preacher after the church revised the boundaries of the Smithfield circuit in 1861. Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1861.

<sup>39</sup> The church officially included Southampton within the Franklin circuit in 1861, but Woodward was preaching in the county before the Civil War. Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1861. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1859, SCC. Id., Register of Marriages, 1858-1860, VSL.



Annual Conference minutes do not mention any special missions to Negroes, but blacks attended Methodist services in Southampton and churches counted them as full members.<sup>40</sup> The process for acceptance was the same for blacks as for whites. After professing faith in the Church, local preachers baptized prospective candidates. The church considered baptized candidates as "probationers" until they learned the doctrines of the Methodist Church and accepted responsibilities of regular membership. Methodist churches listed 485 white members, 24 white probationers, 62 colored members, and 7 colored probationers in 1860.<sup>41</sup>

Two churches in Southampton affiliated with the Disciples of Christ movement.<sup>42</sup> Followers of James O'Kelly established Union Christian church in the late eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> As the nineteenth century progressed, the democratic form of church government and the emphasis on Christian brotherhood

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<sup>40</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Annual Conference, *Minutes*, 1845-1860. Id., Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1845-1860.

<sup>41</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Virginia Conference, *Minutes*, 1860.

<sup>42</sup> The Disciples of Christ movement embodied former Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Henry Jackson Darst, *Antebellum Virginia Disciples*, (Richmond: Virginia Christian Missionary Society, 1959).

<sup>43</sup> James O'Kelly, of Southampton, led a group of Methodists interested in reforming the government of the Methodist Church so that one preacher did not have direct authority over another. *The Principles and Government of the Christian Church...*, (Suffolk, Va.: Christian Board of Publication, 1867). R. B. Wellons, *The Christians, South*, (Suffolk, Va.: Office of the Christian Sun, 1860).

appealed to other reformers. Followers of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell merged with the Christian Church in the 1830s.<sup>44</sup> Burwell Barrett, a Christian minister from Norfolk, established a church in Southampton for Alexander Campbell's followers in May 1832.<sup>45</sup>

The Society of Friends (Quakers) continued to meet at Vick's from 1840 to 1860.<sup>46</sup> No Presbyterian churches existed in Southampton during the antebellum period.<sup>47</sup>

State law required ministers of the Gospel to register with the county court and post bond before performing marriage ceremonies. Local preachers performed most marriages, but visiting clergy and justices of the peace also married local

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<sup>44</sup> Barton Stone and his followers seceded from the Presbyterian Synod of Kentucky to form their own religious group in 1804. Alexander Campbell, another Presbyterian reformer, acquired a loose connection with Baptist reformers in the east after 1811. Campbell's followers became known as the Christian Connection after they merged with the Christian Church founded by O'Kelly. Barton Warren Stone, *Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone*, (Cincinnati: J. A. and U. P. James, 1847). Robert Frederick West, *Alexander Campbell and natural religion*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

<sup>45</sup> Christian Church, Barrett's church, Minutes, May 1832, VSL.

<sup>46</sup> The Virginia Meeting, suspended after the schism in 1843, divided into regional meetings until larger Quaker meetings in the North assimilated them. The Baltimore Meeting supervised Quakers in Southampton from 1843 to the Civil War. Douglas Summers Brown and Helen M. Smith, *Map of Quaker Meetings in Virginia*, VSL.

<sup>47</sup> The 1850 census indicates two, but no evidence in the minutes of the Presbyterian Church in the United States supports this claim. Presbyterian Church in the United States, Synod of Virginia, Minutes, 1815-1860, Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia.

couples. The clerk recorded 980 marriages from 1840 to 1860.<sup>48</sup>

Although local churches established benevolent funds to help indigents, local government assumed primary responsibility for the poor. Overseers of the poor, elected for three-year terms, administered the poor levy.<sup>49</sup> Each spring, the overseers of the poor notified the sheriff how much money they would need for the ensuing year. The sheriff collected the "poor tax" from each tithable and deposited it in the county treasury.<sup>50</sup> From 1840 to 1860, the poor levy ranged from 10 to 30 percent of the total county budget.<sup>51</sup>

Each month, the overseers reported the condition of the indigent population to the county court, and once a year to Virginia's second auditor.<sup>52</sup> From time to time, mothers of illegitimate children brought suit against wayward fathers and

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<sup>48</sup> Southampton County, Register of Marriages, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>49</sup> In 1839, the General Assembly required the county court to appoint overseers of the poor in their respective counties; but this system proved to be cumbersome, and it was abandoned in 1842. Porter, *County Government in Virginia*, p. 211, p. 241.

<sup>50</sup> Each tithable paid an equal sum. The county court exempted certain individuals from the poor levy for being either too poor themselves, too old, or infirm. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>51</sup> Southampton County, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL. Id., Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>52</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC. Id., Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL.

won varying degrees of support.<sup>53</sup> Through 1848, overseers of the poor bound out indigent children as apprentices, and applied their wages to the benefit of the poor. After 1848, the county court kept their wages in trust and returned the sums to the children upon as they reached majority.<sup>54</sup>

Paupers had to register with the county before they received aid at the "poor house." Early statutes required anyone on relief to prove at least three years' residence in the commonwealth. After 1848, state law required recipients of public aid to prove one year's residency in the particular district he desired to receive the aid.<sup>55</sup> Overseers hired out vagrants to pay for their own care, and ordered the sheriff to remove vagrants who did not earn their keep.<sup>56</sup>

Men received at the poor house labored in the fields. Women living at the poor house either cooked, cleaned, spun, sewed, or weaved. Overseers of the poor made exceptions for the very young, the aged and the sick.<sup>57</sup> The county employed a full-time doctor, a nurse, and several servants to care for

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<sup>53</sup> About fifty suits appeared in the county court minutes. Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

<sup>54</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1848-1860, SCC.

<sup>55</sup> This barred vagrants from receiving relief. *Virginia Code, 1849*, Title 16, Chapter 51.

<sup>56</sup> State law allowed the overseers to hire out vagrants for up to three months. *Virginia Code, 1860*, Title 16, Chapter 51.

<sup>57</sup> Southampton County, Minute Book, 1840-1860, SCC.

the poor; their salaries ranged from \$75 to \$150 annually.<sup>58</sup> Between forty-one (1851) and seventy-two (1859) needy citizens received aid at the poor house from 1840 to 1860.<sup>59</sup> Overseers of the poor admitted whites and free blacks at the poor house. In any given year, from 10 to 20 percent of those received at the poor house were Negroes.

The poor house in Southampton was a medium sized farm of 421 acres.<sup>60</sup> The edifice was a converted estate house, valued at \$800 in 1850.<sup>61</sup> After 1848, the county court organized the overseers of the poor as a corporation, empowered to purchase additional lands for the benefit of indigent residents.<sup>62</sup> In 1851, they added 250 acres to the existing property. In 1859, local taxpayers financed another poor house on a 98 acre tract in the western part of Southampton.<sup>63</sup>

The overseers of the poor aided other needy families at home, creating an escrow fund, out of which they made small disbursements to those who needed it the most. Between 1840

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<sup>58</sup> Southampton County, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>59</sup> Southampton County, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL.

<sup>60</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1840-1851, VSL.

<sup>61</sup> Southampton County, Land Tax Book, 1850, VSL.

<sup>62</sup> *Virginia Code, 1849*, Title, 16, Chapter 51.

<sup>63</sup> Southampton County, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1850-1860, VSL. *Id.*, Land Tax Book, 1850-1860, VSL.

and 1860, payments ranged from five to fifty dollars.<sup>64</sup> Both white and free black families received monetary aid. In any given year, about 5 percent of the recipients were black.

In conclusion, most of the children educated in Southampton attended private schools. Local government taxed the citizens to provide about two-thirds of the indigent children with a primary education. Millfield Academy was the only secondary institution in the county. Baptists, Methodists, Disciples of Christ, and Quakers were present in antebellum Southampton, and many of the larger congregations received Negro members. Most religious groups established benevolent funds to aid the poor, but local government shouldered chief responsibility for indigent families. From 1840 to 1860, outlays for the poor ranged from 10 to 30 percent of the total county budget. Overseers of the poor established two poor houses and aided individual families of both races during the antebellum period.

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<sup>64</sup> Southampton County, Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1860, VSL.

## Epilogue

On the eve of civil war, Southampton's leading citizens undoubtedly pondered questions of national importance, but they carried on quotidian activities much as they did in the early part of the nineteenth century. The diversified agricultural economy promoted social and economic stability. The ongoing national debate over slavery extension kindled many bitter political battles in the U.S. Congress, and some state legislators fought hard for their positions. No residents of the county or its governmental representatives, however, gained notoriety from publicly advocating their opinions, and no local newspaper was established to promote political action. Local government had the most pronounced effect upon Southampton's inhabitants.

Agricultural expansion south and west fueled an increasing demand for slaves, but few Negroes were exported from the county during the antebellum period. Southampton's residents accepted and maintained the peculiar institution. The agricultural economy diversified with the advent of truck farming, and the traditions of the plantation system proved to be well-suited to techniques of general farming. In 1860,

about 40 percent of the white families in Southampton owned slaves. A local market for Negroes existed in Southampton until the Civil War.

Some residents, caught up in the fervor of manifest destiny, migrated south and west in hopes of a better future. Only a token number of these retained ownership of their property in Southampton. Absentees, most of whom resided in neighboring counties, owned less than 10 percent of the county's farmland. Few migrating farmers carried their slaves with them. Most emancipated slaves remained in the county and earned a living farming.

National economic crises, such as the Panic of 1857, had little effect on Southampton's economy. Truck farming did suffer that year, but farmers had diversified enough to hedge against brief economic downturns, and in the summer of 1858 local farmers realized record successes. Most locally-manufactured goods were sold in regional markets, avoiding the effects of the Tariff. The Walker Tariff (1857) did not curtail agricultural production destined for export (corn, rice, cotton).

Organized religious groups, especially Baptists and Methodists, continued to influence the lives of Southampton's inhabitants. No comprehensive system of public education developed until after the Civil War, but a primary education



was provided for all who would attend. Citizens of the county provided relief for both black and white families.

By the end of the antebellum period, lifestyles began to change. Rail and telegraph services improved information flows, and residents became less and less isolated from the rest of the country. Better transportation facilities promoted economic diversification and offered residents a reliable link with major commercial centers. The masonic movement became active in the 1850s. One masonic hall was established in Jerusalem, and a few leading citizens, such as Anslam Urquhart, were members. The destruction brought by invading Union armies forever shattered the lives of Southampton's citizens. This study stands as a descriptive account of life as it was in antebellum Southampton County, Virginia.

Given the number of scholars who have written about the antebellum period, relatively few focused on specific localities. Local history is an arduous, but rewarding, endeavor. Authors who concentrate on state or national issues miss the opportunity to see life as the ordinary man lived it. Everyday life in antebellum Southampton was not necessarily a reflection of national trends. Whether this is the exception or the rule can only be determined after more localities are thoroughly researched.

## Appendix I

### The P&R Scandal

The officers of the P&R assumed that common law precedents regarding private investment in State chartered joint stock companies would protect the company from unforeseen incursions from hostile railroad interests.<sup>1</sup> But the Petersburg; the Richmond and Petersburg; and the Richmond, Fredricksburg, and Potomac railroads conspired to ruin the P&R to demand higher freight and passenger rates between Baltimore and Weldon. An open incursion into the affairs of the P&R would have threatened the state's interest in the line. In order to preempt a negative response from the legislature and retain the good will of patrons, the overland interests formulated a plan which would distance themselves from the demise of the P&R: they would gain control over the Weldon bridge through a "ghost bidder" and blackmail the P&R until the company failed under increased financial pressure.

Francis E. Rives, of Sussex, was offered a portion of the profits resulting from the demise of the P&R to successfully

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<sup>1</sup> BPW, *Report*, 1844, p. 377.

implement the plan. To divert attention away from his connection with the overland railroad companies, Rives conspired with the former superintendent of repairs, Clement Rochelle (of Southampton), to act as the ghost bidder. On 29 September 1843, Rochelle secretly agreed to transfer any future claims that he acquired against the P&R to Rives for the sum of \$16,500.<sup>2</sup> On 7 October 1843, Rochelle secured private rights to the property for only \$10,000.<sup>3</sup> Soon after the sale, Rochelle became aware that his financial security was in jeopardy. Apparently, Rives failed to mention to Rochelle that no money was forthcoming from the railroad companies unless the P&R was (permanently) prevented from using the bridge. To cover his debt, Rochelle demanded what amounted to a ransom for the privilege of using "his" portion of the road.<sup>4</sup> To add credence to his demand, Rochelle threatened to sell his claim to hostile interests, adding that Rives had already offered him a "large amount of money" for the property. The mention of Rives' involvement aroused suspicion among the officers of the P&R. Rives attended the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 342, p. 346.

<sup>4</sup> The fare for passengers travelling between Margarettsville and Weldon was fifty cents in October of 1843. Rochelle demanded that the P&R forward one dollar per passenger in a letter to the Board dated 17 October 1843. P&R Papers, VSL. BPW, *Report, 1844*, pp. 350-352.

7 October auction but did not so much as offer a bid.<sup>5</sup> Littleton, the Rives' estate in Sussex, was not worth enough to compensate Rochelle for his existing claims against the P&R.<sup>6</sup> Walter Gwynn and others suspected that the rival Petersburg line was somehow responsible, but as yet lacked any evidence connecting Rochelle, Rives, and Bird.<sup>7</sup>

The P&R planned to stall its opponents long enough to amass the evidence necessary to prove the suspected collusion. By 25 October 1843, the company was asserting that Rochelle's offer was intended to release the P&R from any future claims against it.<sup>8</sup> Rives, now handling Rochelle's business with the P&R, responded by threatening to retract the offer altogether and disallowing any traffic from Margarettsville south. The P&R realized the seriousness of the matter and tried to circumvent Rives by directly approaching Rochelle. On 28 October 1843, legal council from the P&R met with Rochelle and drew up a formal agreement to repurchase his claims against

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<sup>5</sup> BPW, *Report, 1844*, pp. 347-349.

<sup>6</sup> The Rives estate at Jones Hole, in Sussex, was worth \$4,003.50. George Rives parceled out the 667 2/3 acre tract among his survivors in 1840. Francis E. Rives is not listed as a landowner in the tax records for 1837-1847. Sussex County, Land Tax Book, 1837-1847, VSL.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Gwynn was the president of the P&R. Mr. Bird was the President of the Petersburg railroad. P&R Papers, VSL. Petersburg RR Papers, VSL.

<sup>8</sup> BPW, *Report, 1844*, pp. 355-357.

the company.<sup>9</sup> Rochelle balked when asked to sign the agreement. Apparently he was sympathetic to the P&R but feared legal recourse from Rives and the Petersburg railroad.

In an effort to preempt any future arrangements between the P&R and Rochelle, Rives had the superior court of Northampton (N. C.) validate the (29 September 1843) agreement.<sup>10</sup> But at the reading of the contract, Rochelle took advantage of a clause which stipulated that he could retain control over the warehouse at Margarettsville and the superstructure of the road between Margarettsville and Garysburg if he abated \$500 of the original compensation for the property in question (\$16,500).<sup>11</sup> The practical effect of this was that Rives acquired the bridge at Weldon for \$16,000, and Rochelle acquired the rest of the property for a mere \$500. Throughout November and December 1843, Rochelle refused to allow rail traffic on his portion of the road, and Rives challenged the P&R to recover the bridge. For the time being, the stalemate suited the interests of the P&R.

Rives realized that he would not be able to extort more money from the P&R than the Petersburg railroad already

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 358-359.

<sup>10</sup> The Superior Court in Richmond validated the contract on 31 October 1843. The court read and executed the contract during the following week. Ibid., p. 360.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 360-361.

offered him, and he proceeded to destroy the portion of the P&R from Margarettsville south.<sup>12</sup> On 5 January 1844, Timothy Rives and Mr. Foley (or Follet) led a party of about forty Negroes to begin the destruction of the railroad near Turner's Cross Roads (about one-half mile from Margarettsville). Rochelle assumed command until the late afternoon arrival of Rives, who thence supervised the destruction of the superstructure between Margarettsville and the Roanoke River. By 7 January 1844, the raiding party had reached a point just upfreight of Garysburg. As soon as Gwynn learned of the disastrous circumstances, he issued an appeal to the citizens of Garysburg, beseeching them to turn out in force and oppose the rapacious band led by Francis Rives. In the meantime, Gwynn embarked for Margarettsville with about forty citizens from Portsmouth interested in vindicating the P&R. Gwynn's force arrived at Concord Depot (about six or seven miles shy of Garysburg) by four or five o'clock on the afternoon of the seventh. Threats of armed conflict were exchanged as the two forces squared off against one another. Although Gwynn was not able to wrest control of the line from Rives, the stalemate ceased further destruction of the line.

During the stalemate, Gwynn sent to Weldon for "helpers" to effect repairs on the destroyed section of the road. Rives

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<sup>12</sup> The following account is based heavily upon: BPW, *Report, 1844*; P&R Papers, 1843-1846, VSL; S&R Papers, 1846-1848, VSL.

countered by sending an engine to Petersburg (on the Petersburg railroad) to pick up more raiders. Before any P&R supporters from Weldon could arrive, the engine sent by Rives returned with "thirteen friends", some of whom were Negro slaves with passes from their masters ordering them to "tear the iron off the railroad." Reinforced, Rives began to tear up the road with "increased rancour." Before the sheriff could arrive, Rives destroyed the railroad bridge at the connection with the Petersburg line and the Troublefield bridge (about one mile to the southwest).

The sheriff, supported by Gwynn and followers from Garysburg and Weldon, arrested Rives and the thirteen at Oconeechee Creek.<sup>13</sup> Rives was able to post bail, and he immediately won an injunction against the P&R. This decision enjoined the P&R from traversing the sections of the line made unsafe by the recently demolished superstructures. From 25 May to 26 June 1844, the P&R re-initiated stage service between Margarettsville to Weldon.<sup>14</sup> Stages faithfully forwarded the mails to maintain the government contract and avoid being branded as an unreliable carrier. According to the reports to the Board of Public Works, no accidents or interruptions in service occurred during this period.

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<sup>13</sup> BPW, *Report, 1844*, p. 364.

<sup>14</sup> BPW, *Report, 1845*, pp. 90-92.

To avoid a lawsuit which would expose the true financial condition of the line, the P&R made several attempts to appease Rives and recover the Weldon bridge.<sup>15</sup> When he was first approached, Rives demanded \$200,000 for his claims against the P&R. The company refused on the grounds that it could not justify (to the investors) paying Rives more than the sum of all judgements, claims, and interest thereon. Rives lowered his price to \$50,000, but the P&R stood firm on their previous offer. The resulting case, *State of North Carolina vs. Rives*, established an important precedent: private interests in a joint stock company (in this case a State funded internal improvement company) is incidental (secondary) to the primary consideration. In other words, the public right regarding the creation of and maintenance of an internal improvement company supersedes an individual's rights in it. Francis Rives was sued for \$50,000; Timothy Rives, for \$5,000; the others, for \$500 each.<sup>16</sup>

In June of 1844, the Petersburg railroad agreed to bail out Rives with \$60,000, provided no rail traffic resumed on the portion of the road south of Margarettsville.<sup>17</sup> To discourage any further attempts by the P&R to acquire the

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<sup>15</sup> The P&R was \$317,529 in debt in the Spring of 1844. *BPW, Report, 1844*, p. 379, p. 384. *Id., Report, 1845*, pp. 97-104.

<sup>16</sup> *BPW, Report, 1844*, p. 364.

<sup>17</sup> *BPW, Report, 1845*, pp. 103-104, pp. 108-110.



property, the agreement stipulated that any proceeds from the sale of the property would be evenly divided between the Petersburg company and Rives. To insure the terms of the agreement, Rives initiated a lawsuit against the P&R to have the company sold under its mortgage to the state. The Board of Public Works purchased the P&R in 1846 as part of the company's reorganization as the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad Company.

**Appendix II**  
**Lists of Justices**

**JUSTICES APPOINTED BEFORE 1852**

Jeremiah Cobb	Thomas B. Worrell
James Clayton	William D. Hood
Carr Bowers	John Vick
William L. Everett	Robert G. Griffin
Samuel B Hines	James D. Bryant
Jacob Barnes	George A.W. Newsom
Jeptha Darden	James W. Murfee
Richard Urquhart	Howell Harris
Alexander Myrick	William A. Jones
Jesse Parker	Thomas S. Turner
Samuel Drewry	James O. Peters
James Maget	Nathaniel Francis
William A Sparks	John J.P. Pennington
Nicholas M. Sebrell	Peter J. Holmes
Edwin B. Cland	Samuel P. Kello
Thomas Ridley	William H. Summerell
Nathaniel T. Williams	Goodwyn G. Griffin
Willlliam H. Nicholson	John Cobb
Henning T. Smith	William J. Sebrell
Samuel P. Nicholson	Johnathan Darden
Francis T. Ridley	Henry Kindred
Benjamin T. Pope	Nathan B. Bryant
Mark T. Peete	Richard Barrett
Jacob Barrett	William A. Massenburg
Henry Blow	

Source: Virginia, General Assembly, Register of Justices and County Officers, 1805-1852, VSL.

## JUSTICES ELECTED IN 1852

*Samuel Drewry *James E. Peters *Howell Harris Joseph W. Cland *Benjamin T. Pope Benjamin B. Kindred Edward Beaton Robert S. Jones *James Maget Elijah Joyner *Henry Blow Stith H. Bishop *Henning T. Smith *James W. Murfee	Robert G. Edwards Joseph E. Gillette James Holmes Benjamin Devany William Bowers *William H. Nicholson *Samuel B. Kello *John Cobb Milton T. Butler Irvin Griffin *William H. Summerell *Peter J. Holmes Patrick Doles Alfred J. Brittle
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SOURCE: Southampton County, Minute Book, 1852, SCC.

NOTE: The "\*" indicates that the justice was appointed from 1805 to 1852.

## JUSTICES ELECTED IN 1856

William W. Westbrook *#Peter J. Holmes William H. Drewry Joshua Pretlow * Alexander Myrick #Elijah Joyner E.L. Story #Benjamin J. Kindred William S. Frances *#James W. Murfee Thomas Vaughan Sugars Lain Robert M. Doles John James	Davis Barrett Edwin Daugherty Thomas Pretlow #James Holmes #Joseph E. Gillette John P. Boykin Nathan N. Thomas Robert S. Barnes *#Samuel B. Kello Arthur A. Drewry John Pretlow Thomas Griffin John Barham *#James Peters
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SOURCE: Southampton County, Minute Book, 1856, SCC.

NOTE: The "#" indicates that the justice served on the county court from 1852 to 1856.

## JUSTICES ELECTED IN 1860

\$William H. Drewry	#\$Joseph E. Gillette
\$John Pretlow	#\$James Holmes
\$Thomas J. Pretlow	*#\$James Peters
William E. Beale	\$Robert M. Doles
A. Stephenson	\$E.L. Story
\$Nathan N. Thomas	B.E. Worrell
\$Joshua Pretlow	John S. Briggs
*#\$Peter J. Holmes	H.M. Smith
\$Robert S. Barnes	Thomas J. Bristow
William Urquhart	*#\$James W. Murfee
\$John P. Boykin	* Nathaniel P. Francis
Thomas Newsom	John W. Harrison
*#\$Samuel B. Kello	A.W. Norfleet
\$Thomas Vaughan	\$\$ugars Lain

SOURCE: Southampton County, Minute Book, 1860, SCC.

NOTE: The "\$" indicates that the justice served on the county court from 1856 to 1860.

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