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# A political and economic history of Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1840-1860

Christopher Robert Finley

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A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF  
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA  
1840 - 1860

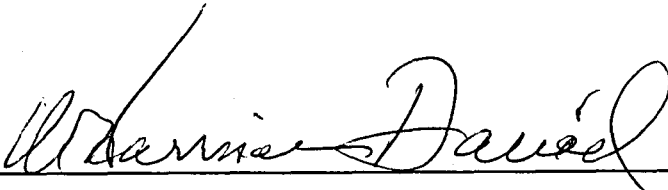
Christopher Robert Finley  
Master of Arts in History

1996

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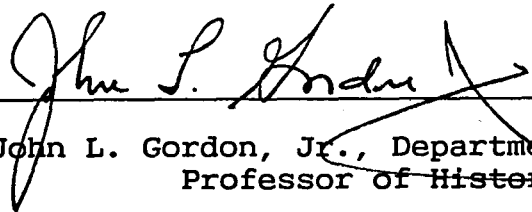
This thesis explores the political and economic factors in the growth of Fredericksburg, Virginia during the twenty years preceding the Civil War. The town's population growth is examined in relation to occupations, wealth, status, and both the political and economic patterns of living during the period. The impact of the competition with other Virginia towns and the successes and failures of the town as it slowly moved away from being a commercial center toward becoming chiefly concerned with manufacturing is explored. Information on Fredericksburg was obtained primarily from the United States census, public documents, memoirs and newspapers. The data was gathered and computed by the author offering a detailed statistical view of the town during the period.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that,  
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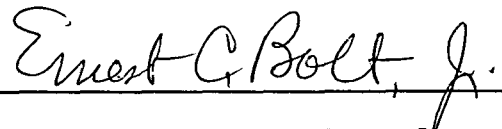
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A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF  
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA  
1840 - 1860

By

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B.S. Campbell University, 1966  
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A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the University of Richmond  
in candidacy  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
in  
HISTORY

May 1996

Richmond, Virginia

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A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF  
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This thesis was written for the purpose of exploring the people of Fredericksburg, Virginia in the antebellum period. It was not intended as a complete history of the town in that period, but a description of its people, the town and the political and economic circumstances which affected their lives in the twenty years before the Civil War.

The primary sources for this work were the town's newspapers, public documents, including the United States Census, court records, tax and deed records, records of the public auditors and overseers of the poor. Included also were the reports of the Literacy Fund and those of reports of the Board of Public Works.

Most primary and secondary sources were located at the Virginia State Library, The Virginia Historical Society, Central Rappahannock Regional Library, University of Virginia, College of William and Mary, University of Richmond, Fredericksburg Circuit Court, The Fredericksburg Museum and Cultural Center and the Fredericksburg Historical Foundation, Inc.

Along the way I was fortunate to have help and advice from several great people who made this project more enjoyable. Besides the employees of the various libraries and organizations, my thanks to Dr. W. Harrison Daniel for his advice and guidance, to my fellow teacher, Mike Raynes, for his help, and to my wife, Mary Cam, for her wisdom and advice and for going without those boat rides for the last two summers.

A POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY OF  
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA  
1840 - 1860

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## INTRODUCTION

Fredericksburg has had a long and interesting history. Chartered in 1727 by the General Assembly, it was started because of petitions sent by the "inhabitants of the County of Spotsylvania.... [requesting] that a town be laid out ... near the falls ... for cohabitation...."<sup>1</sup> Fredericksburg was to be located on the south side of the Rappahannock River at the fall line.<sup>2</sup> By 1750, the town had grown away from trading with the Indians and became a tobacco and grain port for the Tidewater and Northern Neck planters moving into the Piedmont. During the colonial period, Fredericksburg, because of its location, actually became a cosmopolitan trade center exporting crops and importing manufactured goods from Europe and the West Indies.<sup>3</sup>

The town was named in honor of Frederick, Prince of Wales, father of George III.<sup>4</sup> The small settlement which was to be fifty acres, had been created from a 1671 patent

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<sup>1</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large, 12 Volumes (Richmond: Franklin Press, 1958) 4; 234.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Virginia Its History and Antiquities (Charleston: Babcock and Company, 1845), 479.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Siener, Economic Development in Revolutionary Virginia Fredericksburg 1750-1810 (Williamsburg: William and Mary College, 1982), xi.

<sup>4</sup> Paula S. Felder and Barbara Willis, Handbook of Historic Fredericksburg (Fredericksburg: Fredericksburg Historical Foundation, 1987), 5.

that was issued to John Buckner and Thomas Royster of Gloucester County.<sup>5</sup> The town's first trustees were John Robinson, Henry Willis, John Taliaferro, Henry Beverly, Jeremiah Clowder, John Waller and Augustine Smith. They laid out town lots in half acres and sold them at public auction. They also constructed a church, churchyard and market place.<sup>6</sup>

William Byrd, who was a frequent visitor to the small town, found it in 1732 to be "pleasantly situated ...about one mile below the falls [where]...sloops may come up and lay close to the wharf thirty yards off the public warehouse". During this same visit Byrd took a walk with Colonel Willis and further observed only one merchant, one tailor, a blacksmith, and an ordinary keeper.<sup>7</sup> In that same year, the county seat for Spotsylvania was moved from Germanna, home of Alexander Spotswood, to Fredericksburg. This allowed the trustees to build a small courthouse, prison, pillory and stocks. One traveler described it as "a handsome town considerably larger than Suffolk but inferior

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<sup>5</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large, 4: 234.

<sup>6</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large, 5: 235.

<sup>7</sup> Louis B. Wright, ed., The Prose Works of William Byrd (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1966), 367-368.

to Williamsburg".<sup>8</sup> By 1759, the town had expanded its boundaries in two locations and had an estimated population of three thousand.<sup>9</sup> It was also holding agricultural fairs and fancy dress balls in June and October of each year.<sup>10</sup>

Before the Revolution, the town had become both a domestic and international trade center for the entire fall line area. Most families who lived in or near the town built large homes much like those of the affluent planters in the surrounding counties. The life styles of many of these men included the luxury of having servants and slaves along with a variety of entertainment provided by the town.<sup>11</sup> Two years before the Revolutionary War, a visitor to Fredericksburg said,

These houses generally [are] at a little distance from one another, some...of wood and some of brick...the church, the counsel house, the gallows, and the pillory are all within one hundred and thirty yards of each other.<sup>12</sup>

The following year, in February, an English traveler, Nicholas Creswell, noted, "The land is pretty good in this

<sup>8</sup> John, Ferdinand D. Smyth, A Tour of the United States of America (London, N.P. 1784), II, 152.

<sup>9</sup> Oscar Darter, Colonial Fredericksburg (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1957), 42.

<sup>10</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large, 5: 82-83.

<sup>11</sup> Edmund, Morgan, Virginians at Home, Family Life in the 18th Century (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg, 1952), 85.

<sup>12</sup> John T. Goolrich, Fredericksburg and the Cavalier Country (Richmond: Garrett & Maine, Inc., 1935), 17.

neighborhood and the river is navigable for vessels of considerable burden up to the town".<sup>13</sup>

Several leaders of the Revolutionary War called the Fredericksburg area home. General George Washington was known to have visited his mother at their plantation, Ferry Farm, and at her Charles Street home in town.<sup>14</sup> Tavern keeper, George Weedon, commanded troops at Brandywine, Germantown and Harlem Heights. Dr. Hugh Mercer, physician and apothecary shop owner, died at the battle of Princeton.<sup>15</sup> Fielding Lewis, builder of the great manor house "Kenmore" joined with Weedon, Mercer, Charles Dick, Mann Page and William Fitzhugh to produce weapons for the American Army at their public gun factory in Fredericksburg.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. J.F.D. Smyth, on his tour of America in 1784, came to the town and remarked that he stayed at Weedon's tavern and "called up a worthy and intimate friend, Dr. Hugh

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 17-18

<sup>14</sup> Charles E. Hatch, Jr., Popes Creek Plantation Birthplace of George Washington (George Washington's Birthplace: The Wakefield National Memorial Association 1979), 50-53. Ferry Farm was willed to George Washington but his mother ran the farm because young Washington was only eleven years old in 1743. She moved to Fredericksburg in 1772 when the farm was sold to Hugh Mercer.

<sup>15</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large, 9: 72.



Mercer".<sup>17</sup> The people of town and nearby counties showed their strong support for the cause of liberty by approving ordinary militia and leadership for one of the nine original Virginia Regiments. William Woodford, Hugh Mercer, Adam Stephen, and William Dangerfield all served in leadership roles.<sup>18</sup> The freedom from English taxation seems to have carried over into the town's attitude toward new state taxation. In August of 1782, Elliott Sturman, a state tax collector, informed the governor, "It is my duty to acquaint you that a spirit prevails on this river which if not averted to must be attended with dangerous and ruinous consequence to the state." Sturman had followed a ship to Fredericksburg to collect state taxes due on a cargo of salt. On hearing of his presence, a mob of incensed people from the town tore off the sails of the ship and hid the cargo in town. Sturman's final remark to the governor was that the "Mercantile interest is so great on this river, that every effort proves ineffectual."<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the Revolutionary War, the decrease in demands for foreign goods caused Fredericksburg to decline

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<sup>17</sup> Smyth, A Tour in the United States of America, 153-154.

<sup>18</sup> Darter, Historic Fredericksburg, 39.

<sup>19</sup> William P. Palmer, ed. Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts from January. 1, 1772 to December. 31, 1784. (Richmond: N.P. 1883), 3:247.

as an international trade center. Faced with ever increasing difficulties particular to an urban center, separate from the surrounding counties, the town entered the nineteenth century with its own unique problems. In the first United States Census, the town had a population of 2,748 or twenty-five percent of Spotsylvania County.<sup>20</sup> It had been incorporated in 1782, but in the same year, lost its role as county seat. The petitions from county citizens proclaiming the difficulties of holding court in the town caused the state to move the county court to the home of John Holladay in the county. The citizens of the town gave up their desire to remain the county seat and requested a separate governing body which would include a mayor, council, and recorder.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the prosperity of some citizens, the fall line area was experiencing a shift towards more grain production, particularly wheat, oats and corn, and less of tobacco. Lewis C. Gray says that this trend could be seen as early as the 1720s and 1730s. He blames this on soil exhaustion, the dissatisfaction of marketing conditions, which included the constant fluctuation of tobacco prices, and the westward settlement of the Piedmont and beyond. Thus Fredericksburg developed a limited hinterland with much smaller

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<sup>20</sup> United States Census, 1790 Population Schedule (Microfilm of Mss Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia).

<sup>21</sup> Siener, Economic Development, 162.

plantations.<sup>22</sup> A German traveler, John Scholpf, in 1783 said Fredericksburg was of

middling size... the tobacco warehouses here had a great store of hands. Here and at Alexandria the price of tobacco was only twenty-five shillings and there appeared now and then extensive fields seeded to wheat.<sup>23</sup>

From 1800 - 1860, the town remained the retail, commercial and postal center for the fall line counties of Spotsylvania, Orange, Stafford, Caroline, King George, Culpeper and Fauquier. Most of the town's trade was from within the town and these counties.<sup>24</sup> Its commercial status was constantly being eroded by competition from Richmond and Alexandria as they also had become large grain markets.

In the two decades before the Civil War the town moved into a period of great optimism as it attempted to develop into a manufacturing center.<sup>25</sup> By 1860 the skyline of Fredericksburg would change completely. Large houses of worship would be built with towering steeples and a new

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 35-37

<sup>23</sup> Johann Scholpf, Travels in the Confederation 1783-1784. Alfred J. Morrison, ed. (New York: Benjamin Publishers, 1788), 42-44.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg: The Story of an Old Town (Richmond: White and Shepperson, 1922), 29.

<sup>25</sup> Political Arena (Fredericksburg, Virginia), February 12, 1839; Fredericksburg News (Fredericksburg, Virginia), Microfilm of Mss Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, October 26, 1849; and Map and Description of the Works and Property of Fredericksburg Water Power Co. (Fredericksburg: James S. McGrath, 1856.), 6-12.

courthouse and jail were constructed in 1852.<sup>26</sup> As the town tried to maintain its commercial position its leaders and local government invested in new trends in transportation.<sup>27</sup> The first railroad arrived in 1837 and by 1849 a canal system was completed connecting the town to the northwestern counties. In addition to supporting steamboat traffic, the town helped build a plank road to Orange County and later on another railroad in the same direction.<sup>28</sup>

The focus of this study will be on the political and economic transitions of a small southern town on the eve of the Civil War. Despite the growing sectional discontent and talk of secession that permeated this period of Fredericksburg's history the town would be able to revitalize its economy before suffering the massive devastation of the Civil War.

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<sup>26</sup> Fielder and Willis, Handbook, 18, 22, 23, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 28, 32, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Silvanus J. Quinn, The History of the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia (Richmond: The Hermitage Press, 1908), 68.

## CHAPTER I

### URBAN SCENE

Fredericksburg is fifty-six miles southwest of the nation's capital, forty-one miles from Alexandria and sixty-six miles northeast of its own state capital of Richmond.<sup>1</sup> Located on the south side of the Rappahannock River, the town sits in a fertile valley and slopes gradually westward from the river. It rises from forty to one hundred feet from the river, first to a small plateau on which the majority of the town is located, and then westward to land which was open farmland and pasture during this period before the Civil War. Few trees and houses were located in this area as it gradually approached much higher ground called Marye Heights or Willis' Hill.<sup>2</sup>

Fredericksburg was laid out in the traditional English gridiron pattern and by the 1840s and 1850s consisted of five major streets running parallel to the river. They were Water Street (Sophia), Main Street (Caroline), Princess Anne Street, Charles Street and Prince Edward

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<sup>1</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 43. Webster's Geographical Dictionary (Springfield, Mass: G.C. Mealan Co., 1962), 376.

<sup>2</sup> Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Co., 13; Topographic Map Fredericksburg Quadrangle, ed. U.S. Geological Survey, 1984.

Streets, fourteen of which were named on an 1856 map of the town. These streets ran east to west from the river and like many others were named after the Hanoverian family of George II.<sup>3</sup> Looking north to south they were Pitt Street, Hawke Street, Fauquier Street, Lewis Street, Amelia Street, Commerce Street (William), George Street, Hanover Street, Charlotte Street, Wolfe Street, Prussia Street (Lafayette Boulevard), Frederick Street, Elizabeth Street and Dixon Street. Water Street, nearest the river, was seventy-two feet wide, while others in town varied from forty feet to sixty-six feet wide.<sup>4</sup>

In 1840 the town was one of eight urban areas in Virginia. It was much smaller than Norfolk, Richmond, Petersburg, Alexandria and Lynchburg, but larger than Staunton, Gordonsville and Charlottesville. The local press claimed Fredericksburg the "sixth town in the state, located in the most beautiful portion". The population in that year was 3,898.<sup>5</sup>

The town had nearly one mile of waterfront. The river,

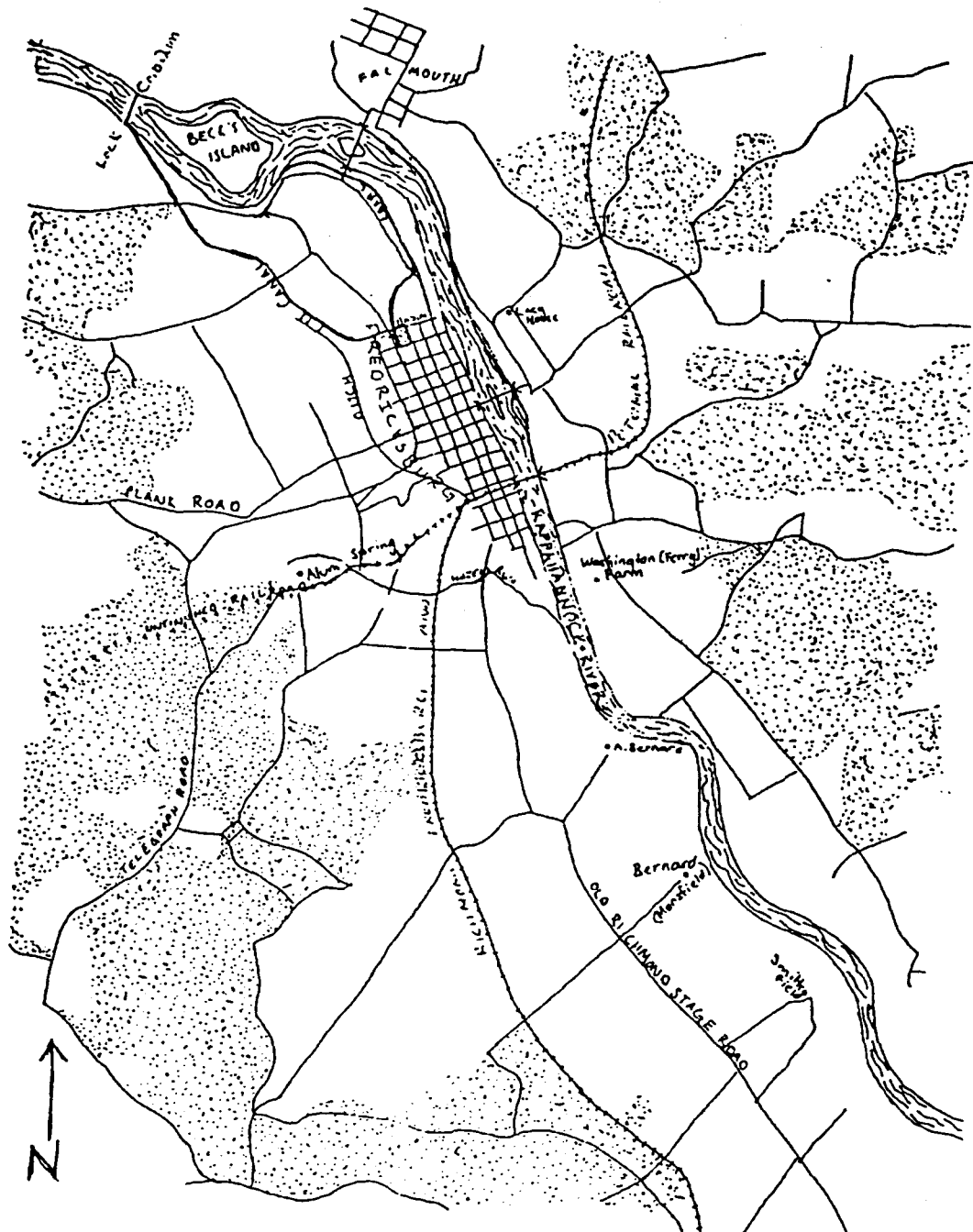
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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Names in parentheses represent current street names.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald E. Shibley, ed., Historic Fredericksburg (Norfolk: Denning Co., 1976) 9. See Figure 1 p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Co., 3; United States Census, 1840, Population Schedule (Manuscript on Microfilm, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia); and Fredericksburg News, Nov. 3, 1849.

FIGURE 1



**Source:** Drawn for the Author by M. Carnes based on the maps of Edward J. Stackpole. **The Fredericksburg Campaign** (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1991), 108. Map depicts Fredericksburg about 1861.

which was so important, gave good power for several mills and factories, both in and outside of the corporate limits. The river was also alive with fish, oysters and water fowl, and steamboats arrived semi-weekly from Baltimore and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1840 and 1860 Fredericksburg was slowly changing in physical appearance. Some of the tallest buildings were erected. Its common council annexed more land and improvements took place in transportation. The expansion of manufacturing and retail endeavors took advantage of economic growth in the state in the 1850s. Captain Basil Hall, who visited the town around 1830, said:

It was really comfortable to get into a place where the eye could rest here and there on a house at least a year old or which did not look as if it were just out of the carpenter's shop. I absolutely saw... two houses with moss upon the roof. The streets too were completed and dwellings of inhabitants within gun shot of one another, which was sociable after Washington.<sup>7</sup>

Another visitor, a farmer from Hanover county, commented that he found the town "larger than I had expected," and because he had enjoyed himself so much he only had time to

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur Boast, Fredericksburg Virginia and Vicinity (New York: University Publishing Co. 1876), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Captain Basil Hall, Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828 (London: Simpkins and Marshall, 1829), 3: 69.



walk the one mile from one end of town to the other.<sup>8</sup>

The town was mainly filled with one, two, and three story brick and wooden structures erected close or flush to sidewalks. Caroline Street, Princess Anne Street, Charles Street and Commerce Street buildings and homes echoed the Federal style and Greek Revival architecture in shape and ornamentation. The limited space on some town lots caused homeowners to simplify the porticos and columns, but homes were built with elegance in mind, both inside and out. The Robert Mackey house built in 1817, and the 1838 James Doswell home, both on Princess Anne Street, were representative of the Federal style. The new Presbyterian Church and several townhouses on lower Caroline Street were all reflective of the Greek Revival architecture. One of the best Greek Revival type buildings was "Smithsonia", the Presbyterian Female Orphan Asylum on Amelia Street built in 1834. Many of the other larger homes were built in the colonial period and reflected the popular Georgian style. Good examples of this style were the spacious homes of Matthew Fontaine Maury and George Carmichael, both built in the 1780s.<sup>9</sup> Row houses near the railroad station and

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<sup>8</sup> Diary of William Bolling, January, 1827-December, 1828 Mss in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald E. Shibley, ed., In Fredericksburg: The Past and Present of an Old Virginia Town, (Fredericksburg: Parson Weems Press, 1894), 20, 26, 69, 79, 80.

today's Visitor's Center on Caroline Street represent the efforts that were made after the 1807 fire to replace wooden structures with brick. Although many of the entrances had to be narrow because of lot size, many of the doorways were built with beautiful leaded glass transoms or tracery windows over the doors and artistic iron railings on the stoops with decorative iron fences around the yards.<sup>10</sup> One recent author said that "by 1850 the 400 and 500 blocks of Hanover Street was... [a] fine residential area and had become lined with some of the most elegant homes in Fredericksburg".<sup>11</sup>

Each building in town had many chimneys and there were numerous outbuildings on each lot. Insurance records indicate that in addition to the main dwellings there was often a kitchen building or a small business. Records indicate these other buildings were meat houses, smoke-houses, icehouses, studies, warehouses, stables, taverns, dairies, saddlers shops, blacksmiths shops, bark houses, curry houses, servant's rooms, workrooms, and medical offices.<sup>12</sup> By 1860 there were 496 outbuildings designated

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 8-10, 16.

<sup>11</sup> John James Johnson, Hanover Street Revisited (Fredericksburg: Susanne Moe Graphics, 1989), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Mutual Assurance Insurance Policies Fredericksburg, Virginia 1796-1862, Mss in Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

as slave quarters.<sup>13</sup>

Most retail merchants and larger hotels were situated in the central parts of Main Street, Commerce Street, Water Street and adjacent streets. Public buildings, both governmental, religious and financial, were located on the central part of Princess Anne Street. The mills and factories were located at various locations throughout the town. A woolen mill and flour mills could be found on the north end of Caroline Street and carriage factories and a cotton factory were located on the southern end of Princess Anne Street. In addition to lower Caroline and Hanover Streets, some families lived on upper Charles and Prince Edward Streets and in neighborhoods just outside of the western town limits. Some merchants and clerks lived above or near their stores and some lived outside of town.<sup>14</sup>

By 1860 changes in the town were abundant. The number of retail stores decreased from ninety-seven in 1835 to seventy-three in 1840. The number of manufacturers would go from twelve factories in 1850 to thirty-four in 1860. There

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<sup>13</sup> United States Census, 1860, Slave Schedule (Microfilm of Mss in Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia).

<sup>14</sup> Sanborne Insurance Map, "Fredericksburg Virginia" (New York: Sanborne Map and Publishing Co., 1886); Grays New Map of Fredericksburg, 1878 (Philadelphia: Jacob Choice, 1878).

were four taverns, two printing shops, and the town was now being supplied with water from the river, old colonial wells and the Fredericksburg Aqueduct Company. By the mid-point of the century, besides having a new railroad, the town had a newly completed canal which connected it to trade from the northwestern counties.<sup>15</sup>

The principal public buildings in 1850 were a courthouse, town hall/marketplace, clerks office, jail, orphan asylum, poorhouse, five churches (Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, and Reform Baptist), four newspapers, two banks, two private academies, one female charity school and eleven common schools. By 1860 the number of churches would increase by four. There would be two more newspapers and the schools would increase by five.<sup>16</sup>

Neighborhoods or subdivisions in Fredericksburg were developed as a result of land speculators who bought lots for resale. Suburbs such as Mortimer Town were laid out in

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<sup>15</sup> Howe, Virginia Collections, 280; Joseph Martin, ...Gazetteer of Virginia and the District of Columbia (Charlottesville: Mosby and Tompkins, 1835), 283; and United States Census, 1850, 1860, Industrial, Social Schedules (Microfilm Copy of Mss Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia).

<sup>16</sup> Martin, Gazetteer of Virginia, 479-480; Census, 1860, Social Schedule.

1811. Thornton Town and New Town were laid out in 1815. All were expansions of the town resulting in recognizable neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup>

These noticeable sections all were developed to compliment the downtown retail and commercial areas west of town. Allentown, located west of Charles Street and north of Charlotte Street, was an unusual tax exempt community. Named after John Allen, the early owner of the land, it was not listed in the town land tax books until 1852 following the annexation in 1851.<sup>18</sup>

Another section outside of town was Daniel Grinnan's and Thomas Roots' New Town. This included the extension of Prince Edward and Hanover Streets westward and was bordered by George Street on the north, Charlotte Street on the south, Winchester Street on the west and Charles Street on the east. This too became part of the 1851 annexation.<sup>19</sup>

Located northwest of Allentown, another annexed section, Liberty Town, was divided into building lots which were bought and sold regularly during the antebellum period. The area was laid out as early as 1812 by John Goolrick. It

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<sup>17</sup> Gotza, M.B., Liberty Town: the Past and Present of a Fredericksburg Suburb (Fredericksburg: Center for Historic Preservations Mary Washington College, 1994), 7, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, Hanover Street Revisited, 1-5.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, Hanover Street Revisited, 7.

was bordered on the north by Commerce Street and was created out of land owned originally by Seth Barton who began to make profit off lots as early as 1804. It included thirty-two lots, both large and small. The Swift Run Gap Turnpike bisected the area as it ran into George Street and was the chief entrance to the town from Spotsylvania Courthouse.<sup>20</sup>

M.B. Gotza, in her recent research on Liberty Town, explains it was intended as a commercial area but because of the slow commercial growth of Fredericksburg in the first part of the nineteenth century, it became a mixed area of both commercial and family dwellings. By 1850 it contained a lumber yard, hotel, storehouse and small houses.<sup>21</sup> One Falmouth resident visited Liberty Town in 1841 and called it the "Poor Quarter" where people lived "amid ugliness and dreamed of beauty". Near Pottersfield, the black cemetery, were the homes of some of the free blacks of the town.<sup>22</sup>

Within the corporate limits the common council was given the responsibility to "lay off streets and walks, alter, improve and light the same and keep them in good

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<sup>20</sup> Fredericksburg, Virginia Deed Book O. (Microfilm in Virginia State Library), November 25, 1843; March 24, 1843. Hereafter cited Deedbook.

<sup>21</sup> Gotza, Liberty Town, 6, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Moncure, Daniel, Conway, Autobiography Memories and Experiences of Moncure, Daniel, Conway (Cambridge, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), 1:44.

order".<sup>23</sup> With the large number of merchants and an active wharf area, the streets were often, as one newspaper called them, in "horrid condition...worse than even the country roads".<sup>24</sup> Edward Sache's lithograph and Lewis Miller's sketch book picture of the town in 1849 showed the streets lined with trees, with an active street life in the wharf area at the southern end of town and considerable boat and wagon traffic.<sup>25</sup> The common council had to periodically remind its police officers of the law against people camping in the streets. On any given day one could see wagons, carts, carriages, stage coaches, and hand barrows on the main streets of town. Many of the large wagons had canvas and were drawn by four and sometimes six horses or mules, each having bells on their collars.<sup>26</sup> Millie Gray, a resident

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<sup>23</sup> James M. Mathews, Laws of Virginia of a Civil Nature (Richmond: C.H. Wynne, 1857), 2:816.

<sup>24</sup> Weekly Advertiser, (Fredericksburg, Virginia) January 15, 1853. Microfilm of Mss Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>25</sup> "Birds Eye View of Fredericksburg", 1856. Drawing and lithograph by Edward Sache and Company. Baltimore, Maryland, 1856, (Richmond, Virginia Historical Society); "Fredericksburg on the Southside of Rappahannock River. Virginia. June 5, 1849". Lewis Miller Sketch Book MS Vol. 67. Abby Aldrick Rockerfeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg Picture Collection: Virginia State Library; and Common Council Minutes. Fredericksburg, Virginia. September 17, 1845.

<sup>26</sup> Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 28-29.

of the town, said of the streets, "It is a beautiful spring weather day...but the streets are too muddy to go out, so I read to my girls at home."<sup>27</sup> Jane Beale, another resident, confirms the frustration in her diary in January of 1856 stating that the streets are "almost impassible".<sup>28</sup> Bad streets were the common concern of the local press as one paper put it,

The next improvement demanded here is the paving of the streets. The principal portions of Main and Commerce Streets ought to be paved and speedily. A wagoner may now travel with perfect ease in the worst weather from Orange Courthouse to this place, and yet in his passage from the termination of the road to the place where his load is to be delivered he will find it difficult to make progress.<sup>29</sup>

Beside ordinances, the common council dealt with the street problems by trying to raise funds for paving. The state, as early as 1802, authorized the council to conduct a lottery to raise funds. This authority was given repeatedly in 1815, 1818, and 1825 but the townfolk would not buy

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<sup>27</sup> Millie Gray's Diary 1832- 1845 (New York: Flecher Publishing Co., 1967), 19.

<sup>28</sup> The Journal of Jane Howison Beale of Fredericksburg, Virginia. 1850-1867 (Fredericksburg: Fredericksburg Historic Foundation, 1979, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Weekly Advertiser, January 15, 1853.



the tickets to support these plans.<sup>30</sup> In 1839 a last attempt was made at a lottery for the purpose of paving just Main Street. The top prize was to be the \$40,000 building of the Fredericksburg Exchange Building on Main Street near the Farmers Hotel. Other prizes ranged from \$10 to \$50 in cash. The price of a ticket was \$50 and there were 1,000 tickets to be sold. But the scheme, because of limited ticket sales, was unsuccessful and the streets would remain unpaved until the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, animals and man caused more street problems for local officials. The council had ordinances which prohibited riding or driving faster than what was considered an "ordinary travel gait" and it was against the law to leave a horse standing alone in a public place or let him run away. A person was required to give testimony about anyone "willfully straining any horse" or trying to break a horse inside town limits.<sup>32</sup> Despite these efforts problems existed, and in an effort to remind drivers of proper horsemanship the editor of the Weekly Advertiser made this

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<sup>30</sup> William Lakeman, "The Block May Not Be Belgian" Fredericksburg Free Lance Star, 30 June, 1977, 26.

<sup>31</sup> Political Arena, (Fredericksburg, Virginia) November 3, 1839. Mss located in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>32</sup> Political Arena, (Fredericksburg, Virginia) October 14, 1841. Microfilm in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

statement:

It is a well known fact that persons frequently meet in the street and find some difficulty in passing. This can always be avoided by heading to the right. This has been suggested to us by seeing people meet who could not pass until one or the other came to a halt.<sup>33</sup>

Uncontrolled horses could be extremely dangerous at times. Mrs. John G. Rowe found this out in September of 1858 when she experienced a heart attack after a runaway buggy came after her.<sup>34</sup> A runaway horse also alarmed the townspeople on the Chatham Bridge one day when "a carryall...driven by a county man from Stafford" got loose and headed down towards the bridge. After hundreds of people were heard yelling "clear the way - clear the way", the only damage was to a free black man's cart and "after drawing him out from the confused mass of horse flesh, bacon and merchandise of different kinds," the only loss was the "two gallon jug of whiskey".<sup>35</sup>

In order to deal with so many street problems the Common Council had a permanent standing committee on streets. There were three policemen throughout the 1840s

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<sup>33</sup> Weekly Advertiser, October 14, 1841.

<sup>34</sup> Weekly Advertiser, September 18, 1858.

<sup>35</sup> Fredericksburg News, (Fredericksburg, Virginia) April 22, 1851. Microfilm of Mss in Central Rappahannock Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

and 1850s and by 1860 police would total five.<sup>36</sup> Council continuously dealt with serious problems concerning roaming animals. Difficulties with packs of dogs, hogs and geese were handled by local policemen. An 1837 ordinance in which hogs caught could be sold to the highest bidder was amended to allow only hogs with rings in their noses to be taken through the town. Wild dogs without collars were shot by the police who received fifty cents to one dollar bounty. In order to keep a dog in town a licensed collar had to be purchased from the mayor's office. Periodically, the council would, as it did in September of 1845, remove the ordinance on dogs when they were needed to help keep down the problem of geese running at large.<sup>37</sup>

Fire protection and the public health of the town depended on an abundant supply of water, which at times presented a problem. Fredericksburg's water supply came from the river, old colonial wells and the privately owned Fredericksburg Aqueduct Company. The company pumped water from Poplar Springs, and later, Smith Springs in the west

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<sup>36</sup> Minutes of Fredericksburg Common Council, Fredericksburg, Virginia. July 18, 1840, July 18, 1850, Microfilm of Mss at Central Rappahannock Regional Library Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>37</sup> Weekly Advertiser, July 16, 1853; Political Arena, July 11, 1837; and Common Council Minutes, September 20, 1838; September 23, 1844.

to a reservoir inside the town. A customer could get a pump placed in their yard or inside their home, store or boarding house.<sup>38</sup> In 1832 the General Assembly had granted the company a fifty year monopoly. When customers complained to the common council about inadequate water supply, they found the council to have little influence on the water company. This discouraged the council from developing a public owned water system.<sup>39</sup> Although it had problems, the Fredericksburg Aqueduct Company provided its stockholders with periodic dividends on their investments. In addition, the common council's pump committee periodically had to try and pump additional town water from older town wells when the company failed to provide enough water for the street pumps. In July 1837 the Council placed a pump in the well across from Mr. John S. Wellford's at a cost of \$63.00. But the supply of water was never enough and citizen petitions like the one presented to the mayor in May of 1845 found "sundry citizens praying for a pump at the corner of Caroline and Pitt Streets", which the Council

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<sup>38</sup> McGuire Family Records December 1847 to June 1858  
Clairborne Papers Mss at Virginia Historical Society,  
Richmond; Weekly Advertiser, July 10, 1858.

<sup>39</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 179-176; Thomas Field  
Armstrong, "Urban Vision in Virginia Composite Study of  
Antebellum Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, Staunton" (Ph.D.  
diss., University of Virginia, 1974), 285-288.

promised to look into, but never acted upon.<sup>40</sup> Further complaints about insufficient water supply caused council to negotiate with the new canal company, the Rappahannock Navigation, to run water to the streets from the canals turn basin, located north of town. The Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia offered to aid the corporation in "laying iron pipes for connecting this water from the basin" but the council never voted on this proposal.<sup>41</sup>

The major street pumps were located in five places in 1832. The most popular were the Knox Pump at the corner of Prince Edward Street and Fauquier Street; Hunters Foundry Pump on the north corner of Princess Anne Street and Hawke Street; the Commerce Street Pump in front of the Farmers Bank and the pumps on the corner of Commerce Street and Charles and Winchester Streets in the western part of town.<sup>42</sup>

In response to complaints and customer misuse, Fayette Johnson, the company's manager, reminded his customers in a local newspaper that they:

Were privileged to use the water for the following purposes only: drinking, cooking

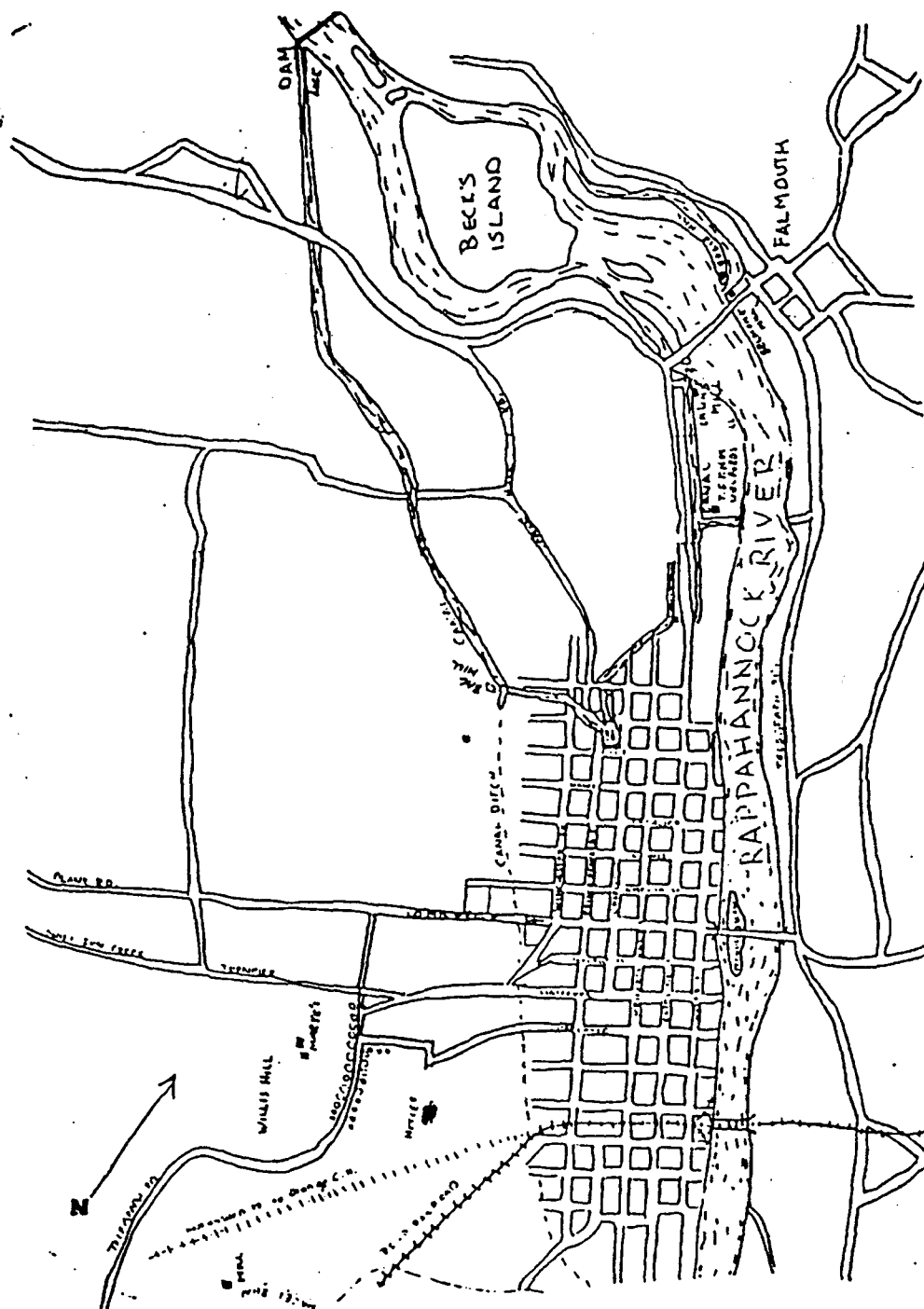
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<sup>40</sup> Common Council Minutes. July 1, 1837; May 30, 1845.

<sup>41</sup> Armstrong, Urban Vision in Virginia, 287. Common Council Minutes, August 8, 1858. See Figure 2 p 18.

<sup>42</sup> Fredericksburg News, (N.D. 1833) This newspaper found in a wood yard near Canal Street. Photo Copy in Central Rappahannock Regional Library.

FIGURE 2



Source: Drawn for the Author by M. Carnes based on the maps of Edward J. Stackpole. **The Fredericksburg Campaign** (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1991), 108. Map depicts Fredericksburg about 1861.

and ordinary washing of clothes...and the company would do everything in its power to furnish a constant supply of water, but if subscribers should not be satisfied, the Agent is hereby authorized to stop the water.<sup>43</sup>

It does not appear that the quality of the company's water was ever in question. The Fredericksburg Herald in its evaluation of the town's environment said "...the water is pure, translucent, free almost entirely from the animalcule usually found in other water [and]... Fredericksburg has never been visited by an epidemic and during the worst cholera times, escaped unscathed".<sup>44</sup> But the same paper was not as complimentary about the river water and the town could be thankful that no other populated place lay above it on the river.<sup>45</sup>

One internal improvement in Fredericksburg which seems to have met with the approval of many of its citizens of the period was the opening of the gas works in 1854. The Fredericksburg Gas and Light Company was chartered by the state on May 2, 1852. William Hargrove White was allowed to sell stock for fifty dollars per share. He was limited to sell \$100,000, the money to be used to build the plant. The

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<sup>43</sup> Armstrong, Urban Vision in Virginia, 286-287.

<sup>44</sup> Fredericksburg Herald, (Fredericksburg, Virginia) July 13, 1854. Microfilm of Mss Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

gas works was to be constructed at the end of Dixon Street by Dugan and Cart of Philadelphia. The cost of the plant was \$72,500 and was designed to burn bituminous coal and produce both public and private illumination. With White as the company's first president and Thomas Griffin as its first manager, the company had 143 customers by 1854.<sup>46</sup> To help sustain the company, the council purchased stock periodically with the consent of the town citizens.<sup>47</sup>

"Hurrah for gas! Brilliant beautiful light" was the comment from a local newspaper on the day the lamps came on.<sup>48</sup> But, the town's streets and public buildings were not to be lit. A vote of the citizens on March 7, 1854 showed the people 155 to 51 not willing to extend gas to street lamps.<sup>49</sup> Disagreement caused the council to refuse to conduct another citizen's poll because of the cost to the town.<sup>50</sup> The Weekly

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<sup>46</sup> "Something About the Inclined Retorts at the Small Gas Works in Fredericksburg, Virginia" American Gas Light Journal. January 15, 1909; Robert H. Hodge, "Story of the Fredericksburg Gas Company", Fredericksburg Times. August 1977, 53; and Weekly Advertiser, February 12, 1859.

<sup>47</sup> Fredericksburg, Virginia Deed Book R. Microfilm in Virginia State Library), November 4, 1853. Public Notice found in book.

<sup>48</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 24, 1854.

<sup>49</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 7, 1854.

<sup>50</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 4, 1857.



Advertiser, in reaction to a Fredericksburg News statement about the extreme cost, said

We can say to our friends of the "News" that lamps can be placed two to a square the length of Main and Commerce Streets and in other streets where needed, for a sum of \$500... And as to the persons at the basin and others complaining [about the cost], it is of no consequence, as their proportion of the tax for the purpose would be a mere pittance... we say vote the polls and vote for gas in the streets and public buildings.<sup>51</sup>

The vote at the council election was not enough to bring this improvement to the streets. By 1860 the company had 213 customers and two street lamps.<sup>52</sup>

In 1851 the council did try to improve the town's industry and general living conditions and provided itself with more revenue through annexing part of Spotsylvania County. Surprisingly, the boundaries of the town had not been changed since 1759. One newspaper estimated the town would gain 1,000 new residents including all of the western neighborhoods, a large part of the new canal and more river front property to the north.<sup>53</sup> In the north the boundary was one block beyond Pitt Street and would move to Madison Street and cut across Pelham Street at an angle. To the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Hodge, "Fredericksburg Gas Co.," 56.

<sup>53</sup> Fredericksburg News, April 18, 1851.

south the earlier boundary at the wharf area was moved southward bordering Hazel Run beyond what is now old Walker Grant School. To the west, the Winchester Street boundary was moved to near Sunken Road along a line where Willis Street runs northward toward the canal. The river remained the eastern boundary as it is today.<sup>54</sup> The petition to the General Assembly was introduced by Delegate Critchfield, Speaker of the House from Spotsylvania.<sup>55</sup> A committee of the Common Council made up of Joseph Sanford, John Merria and John Pritchard developed the plan for the annexation, and William Slaughter, the City Surveyor, drew up the new plat for the town. Commissioners Hugh Scott, William S. Barton, John Jones Chew, Joseph Sanford and John Pritchard were directed by the state to "lay out streets as they deemed proper, through and around the land hereby annexed". They were directed to report to the whole council the results of their work. The town paid for all the land annexed and in 1852 petitioned the state again for the power to open, extend, widen or narrow any streets in the new area.<sup>56</sup> The plan of the council was to name many of the new

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<sup>54</sup> Acts of the General Assembly, 1852 (Richmond: Public, Printer, 1852), 285.

<sup>55</sup> Journal of the House of Delegates, 1850-51 (Richmond: Williams & Richie Printers, 1850), 79.

<sup>56</sup> Sketches of Arts and Event Resolutions Passed by the General Assembly of Virginia. 1850-51, N.P. # 224. 13.

streets after our nation's first few presidents. This plan was never implemented because much of this land went undeveloped during the period.<sup>57</sup>

Fredericksburg's location and new urban problems would become hindrances to the town's expansion during the antebellum period. As all towns along Virginia rivers competed for trade and inclusion into the new transportation networks, Fredericksburg tried to maintain a respected status on the Rappahannock River and hoped to become a booming trade center.

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<sup>57</sup> Edward Alvarez, Jr., Streets of Fredericksburg, (Fredericksburg: Mary Washington College Foundation Inc., 1978), 27.

## CHAPTER II

### FREE POPULATION

Fredericksburg's annexation of an additional seven to eight hundred citizens and the doubling of the town's land area set the stage for a much anticipated expansion as a trade center.<sup>1</sup> The demographics of the population between 1840 and 1860 shows that there had been a twenty percent increase in the town's population between 1830 and 1840. There was a four percent increase in the 1840s, followed by a population increase of seventeen percent in the 1850s. By the year 1860 there were 5,035 citizens consisting of sixty-five percent whites, eight percent free blacks, and twenty-six percent slaves.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to the town's growth, Spotsylvania County declined by 250 people between 1840 - 1850. Most of this decline was the result of the movement of free blacks and slaves away from the area.<sup>3</sup> In addition to annexation and natural causes, there are both internal and external factors which explain Fredericksburg's growth. State transportation improvements and investments by the townspeople in these and other commercial and

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<sup>1</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 24, 1851.

<sup>2</sup> United States Census 1840, 1850, 1860. Population Schedule, Slave Schedule See Table 1.

<sup>3</sup> United States Census 1840, 1850. Spotsylvania, Population Schedule Slave Schedule (Microfilm Copy of Mss in Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia).

manufacturing improvements help explain part of the growth in the 1850s. Mere completion of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad to Fredericksburg in 1837 made it a major stop en route to the north. The town's effort to expand manufacturing and the financing of a nearby canal system, the Rappahannock Navigation, increased the labor population while attracting trade to the area. Lastly, the great effort made to build the Orange County Plank Road and the Fredericksburg and Gordonsville Railroad created hope for growth. The Fredericksburg News anticipated new trade when it said it was, "legitimately hers and she will have it".<sup>4</sup>

Fredericksburg's growth was not unusual in comparison to other cities and towns in the state. The county's decline was not unexpected due to land exhaustion, the downsizing of tobacco plantations, and the introduction of more and more grain production which had been contributing factors since the turn of the century. The new demand for Virginia slaves by planters in the deep south as well as area plantations,

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<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, Urban Vision in Virginia, 319; Fredericksburg News, March 24, 1851.

Table 1

Fredericksburg, Virginia Percent of Population by Gender  
1840 - 1860

	1840		1850		1860	
Total Population	3898		4063		5035	
	% of Total		% of Total		% of Total	
White	60%	47% M 53% F	64%	46% M 54% F	65%	47% M 53% F
Free Black	10%	43% M 57% F	7%	45% M 55% F	8%	42% M 58% F
Slave	30%	30% M 70% F	29%	41% M 59% F	26%	39% M 61% F

Source: U.S. Census, Fredericksburg Population, Slave

played a role in slave population declination.<sup>5</sup> According to Thomas Armstrong, Fredericksburg would have shown a reduction in population if it had not been for annexation and the new factories. Analysis of the census and tax data reveals that parts of Fredericksburg's labor force were diminishing slightly.

<sup>5</sup> Sara Gilliam, Virginia's People (Richmond: Virginia State Planning Board 1944), 34; Joseph C. Robert, The Tobacco Kingdom Plantation Market and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina (Durham: Duke University Press, 1938), 16-17; and Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis, eds.; The Edge of the South: Life in 19th Century Virginia T. Lloyd Benson "The Plain Folk of Orange County Land, Work & Society on the Eve of the Civil War." (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press 1991.), 58.

Free black population declined from ten percent of the total population in 1840 to eight percent in 1860. Slave population declined from thirty percent in 1840 to twenty-six percent in 1860. Armstrong's research is confirmed by the Personal Property Tax records which indicate that there was an increase in young men over sixteen in the town between 1845 and 1850. This, combined with the 1851 annexation, helps to explain the town's growth.<sup>6</sup>

During the antebellum period the white inhabitants of Fredericksburg made up sixty-three percent of the population. In both decades women comprised fifty-three percent of the residents. By 1860 there were 1,754 white women and 1,539 white men. The same trend could be seen in the free black community with women outnumbering men.<sup>7</sup>

Two early town historians said the nineteenth century white population was "free of want" and the merchants were men of "exalted character".<sup>8</sup> Moncure Conway, a wealthy minister, said of the twenty families that he knew

Fifty years ago ... [they] might be described as

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<sup>6</sup> Armstrong, Urban Vision in Virginia 319-320; Fredericksburg Personal Property Taxbooks, 1845-1850 Manuscript in the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>7</sup> Census 1840, 1850, 1860 Population Schedule, Slave Schedule. See Table 1; p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 32; Quinn, The History of Fredericksburg, 65.

belonging to the old gentry. Their houses though not grand were pretty, with tasteful interiors and beautiful gardens. Several families were wealthy... but the region swarmed with poor whites largely descended from the convict and and contract labor... in the Colonial times.<sup>9</sup>

In general the occupations of the white population could be categorized into learned professionals, manufacturers, artisans, merchants, service people and mariners. The largest single group of whites were poor unskilled laborers.<sup>10</sup> The number of family households in town increased from 546 in 1850 to 732 in 1860. The average white individual lived in an extended family of six with a man, his wife, perhaps one grandparent and three to five children. But it was not uncommon to find households that acted as boarding houses for young couples, students, teachers and employees of the home owner. The most common boarders in Fredericksburg were young male clerks. Thirty-nine households were headed by single women. Generally these women ranged in age from 45 - 48 years old.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Conway, Autobiography, 14.

<sup>10</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Schedule Population.

<sup>11</sup> Census 1850, Schedule Population. The author took twenty households with similar surnames to compute this data; Daniel E. Sutherland, The Expansion of Everyday Life, 1860-1876 (New York: Harper Row Publishers, 1989), 48-49.



An evaluation of the birthplaces of town residents finds that most were born in Virginia. Those who were born in foreign countries made up only 4.5 to 5.7 percent of the total population. These individuals originated from ten different countries with sixty percent having been born in Ireland, England or Germany. Most of these were men with families. Sara Gilliam points out that it was common in the colonial period for Germans and Scotch-Irish to come to Virginia from Pennsylvania, while many Germans and Swiss came from North Carolina. A few of the town's foreign born were naturalized in the town's courts. Foreign born citizens were found in all economic classes of the town.<sup>12</sup>

The free black population, having declined somewhat in the 1840's, was still rather large by 1860. It consisted of 173 males and 237 females. Twelve percent were children under the age of ten. Statewide, free blacks had grown much faster in number than slaves.<sup>13</sup> The average free black family had nine members and many lived in white households as part of the family unit. Seventy-three free black families lived

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<sup>12</sup>Census 1850, 1860 Population Schedule; Fredericksburg Order Book, N (Microfilm of Mss Virginia State Library) January 10, 1856; Gilliam, Virginia's People, 14.

<sup>13</sup>Census 1840, 1850, 1860 Population Schedule; Gilliam, Virginia's People, 37. See Appendix 1.

independently and sixty percent had no adult male present. Most free blacks were employed as artisans, servants or watermen; the largest groups were servants and washwomen. In 1860 there were twenty free blacks who claimed their occupation as house servant but only ten lived within white households.<sup>14</sup>

All of the free blacks were native Virginians and most were born free. Being born free did not mean their lives were unrestricted, and along with poor whites they were often considered by many as low class and outcasts. The state had passed laws since the colonial period that regulated all of the Negroes behavior and legal status. By 1860 each free black in a town had to register every year with the Clerk of Circuit Court. This involved giving their name, height, age and color (Black and Mulatto). They had to indicate marks and scars, how they became free and who granted them permission to remain in the state.<sup>15</sup> An 1806 Virginia law required that all slaves who were freed had to leave the state. This law was usually nullified by the town court which granted permission for them to remain.

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<sup>14</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Population Schedule.

<sup>15</sup> Luther P. Jackson, Free Negro Labor and Property Holdings in Virginia 1830-1860 (New York: D. Appleton Century Co. 1942), ix; Melvin I. Urofsky, ed. Documents of American Constitutional and Legal History "Slave Code of Virginia (1860)" (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 405.

A list of free Negroes for Fredericksburg between 1850-1860 shows that only seventy-five persons had registered. Most showed their freedom due to birth and only ten had been emancipated either by a will or the court. Only eight were denied the right to remain in Virginia.<sup>16</sup>

Because their life was organized on the basis of slavery and race, free blacks, although able to come and go at will, were dependent on themselves and the white population to make a living and provide shelter. Most of these people were very poor, owned no property and often did the jobs that Ira Berlin noted poor-whites found distasteful. They, therefore, had little problem finding work regardless of the discriminatory statutes against them. The State Slave Code prohibited any free black or slave from selling any goods in the local market or in the street without "a certificate in writing from one respectable white person". Besides regulations which prohibited them from learning to read and write, their religious activities were also limited. They were not allowed to use provoking language or make menacing gestures toward a white person or carry a firearm, sword or knife. They were prohibited to sell slaves or travel without a pass outside the town limits

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<sup>16</sup> Registry and Certificates of Free Blacks 1850-1860  
Photocopy of Mss, Central Rappahannock Regional Library;  
Jackson, Free Negro Labor and Property Holdings in Virginia  
1830-1860, 174.

and if money was owed to them by a white man they could not testify in court against him.<sup>17</sup> To make matters worse, each night all Negroes were called home by a bell that rang at 10 p.m. from the courthouse tower.<sup>18</sup>

Disfavor toward free blacks rose as their numbers increased locally and state-wide.<sup>19</sup> It also brought more support for the colonization movement which some in Fredericksburg supported. William Blackford of Fredericksburg, an active member of the movement, said of the town's free blacks that

Freedom to him is not a gift brought with every blessing. He is still a Negro and as such is under the ban of color.... The free black, too lazy to wish it, or unable to obtain work depends for his subsistence upon the nightly success of his predatory excursion or, it may be on the profit occurring to him as the medium of an illegal traffic between slaves and a portion of the white (community).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Urofsky, ed. "Slave Code of Virginia (1860)," 407, 410; Ira Berlin, Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York: Random House, 1976), 248; and Virginius Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion: A History from 1607 to Present (New York: Double Day and Co., 1956), 259.

<sup>18</sup> Common Council Minutes, August 14, 1852.

<sup>19</sup> Gilliam, Virginia's People, 37; Gray, Economic History of Southern Agriculture to 1860, 1: 323.

<sup>20</sup> L. Minor Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory: The Story of a Virginia Lady: Mary Berckley Hina Blackford. 1802-1896 (Washington, DC: Howard University, 1954), 17; P.J. Staudenrous, The African Colonization Movement 1816-1865, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 109.

Local town feelings concerning free blacks were mixed. Blackford and his wife Mary were strong supporters of the abolition of slavery and the Fredericksburg Colonization Auxiliary Society. They also became owners of the Fredericksburg Political Arena newspaper where colonization and abolitionists views were propagandized.<sup>21</sup> It was the hope of many Virginians that the Society's colony in Liberia would continue to be populated by free blacks and that someday their influence would be felt all over Africa. The Blackfords and others hoped that it would provide a safe place where these people could prosper and obtain the wealth and respect they deserved.<sup>22</sup> Mr. Blackford said of their efforts that "the germ of an American African empire has been planted" and would "flourish and expand until it overshadows a continent".<sup>23</sup>

Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford was the daughter of John Minor of Hazel Hill in the south end of town. She had freed her slaves for the purpose of having them emigrate to the colony and her auxiliary had raised money for this cause. William trained one of his apprentices at the newspaper for

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<sup>21</sup> Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory, 23.

<sup>22</sup> James Curtis Ballagh, History of Slavery in Virginia (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1902), 136.

<sup>23</sup> Staudenrous, The African Colonization Movement, 157.

the trip to Liberia where he eventually became a printer.<sup>24</sup> In May of 1837 Lancelot Minor went to the colony where he died in 1843.<sup>25</sup> By 1850 the General Assembly had agreed to continue its support for the movement and granted \$30,000 a year for five years for the transportation to Africa of free blacks.<sup>26</sup>

The Fredericksburg press continually editorialized the question of what should be done with the free Negro. This topic became more acute after the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831. The existence of slavery, which the abolitionists felt should be abolished, became a major political and economic topic during this period. The Democratic Recorder, in its interpretation of the 1840 census, implied the white population was abandoning the town because of the increase in free blacks. This paper also declared "...there is a day yet to come on which we must surrender this beloved old Commonwealth to the Negroes or exterminate them with a sword...."<sup>27</sup> The Fredericksburg News in response to these cruel comments called the idea of continuous white migration

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>25</sup> Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory, 37-38.

<sup>26</sup> Ballagh, History of Slavery in Virginia, 136.

<sup>27</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 27, 1849.

as "humbug" calling the "mania for western states" at an end, but the News also made clear a prevailing attitude of many in the town when it referred to free Negroes as the:

Unfortunate race, most ignorant and defenseless and a harmless people [who] "we admit are generally worthless, vicious and immoral" but are they contented that any group under their circumstances with the strongest prejudices against them... [and] little public sympathy on their belief... would have the same problems but the Recorder's idea was still cruel and unjust.<sup>28</sup>

The Virginia Herald, another town newspaper, later editorialized on expansion of the state's exclusion law

Free Negro liberty is evil we don't deny it but it is an evil of such magnitude as the enactment of a free forcing an exodus of the whole of this class... free Negroes have local attachments bred and born in Virginia it would be harsh and unchristian to force them ruthlessly and with violence to sunder the ties which have them to the little spot they call their homes. It would be far better to enslave them than drive them out.<sup>29</sup>

In defense of the poor treatment of these people, the Fredericksburg News also took the opportunity to try and show how well African Americans were treated in town when it proclaimed

We chanced the other day to meet in the streets a very large funeral procession... [for] a colored man of high regard by all our coloreds. At the moment we wish for the presence of some of those contrary

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Virginia Herald, February 3, 1858.

abolitionist... to notice... the probably five hundred comfortably clad... and [with] the kindness of their several masters for letting them hold such an event.<sup>30</sup>

Fredericksburg's free blacks, unlike, large southern city Negroes, did not gain as much economic independence. Although they were outside the rule of a master there were limited opportunities for skilled employment.<sup>31</sup> In Chapter Four an analysis of occupations will show that only a small percentage became craftsmen or owned property and were many times still treated like slaves.

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<sup>30</sup> Fredericksburg News, February 10, 1858.

<sup>31</sup> Berlin, Slaves Without Masters, xiii.



## CHAPTER III

### SLAVE COMMUNITY

The topic of slavery weighed heavily on the minds of Fredericksburg citizens who were accustomed to owning and selling slaves. Many local households and businesses relied on the slave community for their labor. Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831 had an unsettling effect on slave owners and employers of free blacks throughout the state and Fredericksburg was no different. This event set in motion frank discussions over the evils and profitability of the institution and became the center of economic and political discussions in the town throughout the antebellum period. The large slave community in Fredericksburg differed from that of free blacks and slaves on the surrounding plantations. They had more freedom of movement about the town and some hired themselves out. Most slaves worked as unskilled laborers, house servants, or in the warehouses, factories and shops as skilled and unskilled workers. They tended the horses in the stables, drove the wagons, ran errands and stood by to answer their master's call. Many walked the streets with free blacks and poor whites without restrictions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard C. Wade, Slavery in the Cities the South 1820-1860 (New York: Oxford Press, 1964), 30-31; Blaine A. Brownfell and David R. Goldfield, eds. The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1977), 65; and Richard H. Carrant and others, American History: A Survey (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1987), 332.

In his book Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860, Richard C. Wade claims that slave children were brought into the workforce at the age of eight or nine.<sup>2</sup> The debate over the ability of slaves to work in factories was a topic of argument throughout the south. The Richmond tobacco factories were the largest users of slave labor in the state. Fredericksburg too had its share of slave labor in its factories. Artisans also used slaves. John R. Robert used sixteen slaves in his foundry in 1850. George Allen, a brickmaker, H.D. Ginther, a saddler, John E. Beck, a shoemaker and William M. Baggott, a house builder all used from five to eleven slaves each. The Alexander and Gibbs Tobacco Co. was the largest owner, having twenty-five percent of its work-force in slave labor.<sup>3</sup>

The total slave population in 1840 was 1163 and although it grew slowly in the 1840s by 1860 it comprised twenty-six percent of the town and totaled 1291. As in the free population women outnumbered men.<sup>4</sup> Fredericksburg's slave community was characterized by one early twentieth century historian as: "....law abiding and polite and were

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<sup>2</sup> Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 31-32.

<sup>3</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Industrial Schedule, Slave Schedule.

<sup>4</sup> Census 1840, 1850, 1860 Slave Schedule. See Appendix 2.

religious in their tendencies and church going in their practices".<sup>5</sup> In 1850 there were 258 slave owners in the town and in ten years that number had grown to 403. Although most slave owners were men, ten percent were women in 1850 and thirty-three percent in 1860. Elizabeth French owned thirty slaves and was the largest owner of slaves in Fredericksburg in 1860. Eighty-one people in 1850 owned only one slave and as the wealth of the town increased by the Civil War, that number had doubled. The increase in ownership in the 1850s was a result of local demand by businesses and the increase of commercial planters living in the town but working plantations in the counties. Many wealthier townspeople often had staffs of domestic servants as large as those of rural planters.<sup>6</sup> To protect their investments and take care of the oversupply which sometimes occurred, they sold off the younger Negroes or hired them out. According to Lynda J. Morgan the slave trade had declined in Virginia in the depression but during the economic revival of the 1850s "trade remained brisk". An English traveler recorded seeing slaves near Fredericksburg being driven to the lower south. The men were chained together in pairs to prevent their escape while the women

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<sup>5</sup> Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 151.

<sup>6</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Slave Schedule; Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South (New York: Random House, 1884), 63.

walked with the children.<sup>7</sup> Many of these bondsmen were also sold to such towns as Lynchburg, Charlottesville and Danville.<sup>8</sup> By 1860 in Fredericksburg there was a reduction in the number of male slaves in the eleven to twenty-five year old group. This may indicate the existence of a strong slave trade from the town. Also significant was a large increase in young children in the same year. Mary Blackford recorded in her notes that many people, although good Christians, "passed the slave market and slave jail each day and saw gangs of chained human beings going south with indifference".<sup>9</sup> Moncure Conway, an abolitionist and minister who lived in Falmouth and was an active member in the Fredericksburg community, admitted in 1832 that<sup>10</sup>

the chief pecuniary resource in the border states is breeding of slaves and I grieve to say that there is too much ground for the charges that general licentiousness among the slaves for a purpose of a large increase, is compelled by some masters

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<sup>7</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Population Schedule, Slave Schedule; and Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization 1790 - 1860. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961), 49.

<sup>8</sup> Lynda J. Morgan, Emancipation in Virginia's Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870, (Athens: Univ. of Georgia, 1992), 36.

<sup>9</sup> L. Minor Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory; The Story of a Virginia Lady, Mary Blackford 1802-1876 (Washington, DC: Harvard University Press, 1954), 39; Census 1840, 1850 Slave Schedule, See Appendix 2.

<sup>10</sup> Conway, Autobiography, 11, 57.

and encouraged by many.<sup>11</sup>

As the economy of the town was affected by the trading of slaves, the development of a "hiring out" system became profitable. Local manufacturers, planters, the Rappahannock Navigation, individual households and the railroad all hired slaves from Fredericksburg. The Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad told Fredericksburg owners that it would keep their slaves "well fed, well clothed and well treated".<sup>12</sup> Records indicated that in 1860 there were 193 slave owners who hired out slaves.<sup>13</sup> Millie Gray confirms the fact that slaves were hired out in town: "I was very sorry yesterday to part with Aunt Lucy. She lived with us for five years and goes back home to her master not to be returned."<sup>14</sup> The profit gained by hiring out slaves was good. John C. Shelton, who ran a mill, hired out twenty-two slaves in 1859. They were between the ages of eight and forty-one and his profit for a year was from \$135 to \$155

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<sup>11</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans (New York, McGraw Hill, Inc. 1988), 106.

<sup>12</sup> Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Slave Schedule.

<sup>14</sup> Millie Gray's Diary, 95; Census 1860, Slave Schedule.

per person.<sup>15</sup> William L. Benson hired out eleven males and eleven females with an average age of twelve and made \$580 profit in 1859.<sup>16</sup>

Some owners went through a "broker," slave dealer, or slave auctioneer to secure additional slave labor. Hiring out was usually done during a slave auction. Despite what many may think, the advertisements for the sale of slaves was not frequent in the newspapers of town. Built in 1843, the U.S. Hotel on the corner of Charles and William Streets was a common place for slave auctions. A slave block still stands at this location today as a reminder of this early practice.<sup>17</sup> A sale there in the winter of 1851 saw slaves belonging to Thomas Knox, "a good seamstress and a house servant," being placed for sale by Fitzhugh and Little Attorneys at Law.<sup>18</sup> Many times, besides hiring out, slaves were sold to pay off debts long before any other property would be sold. John Pratt offered thirty to forty slaves that belonged to Elizabeth T. Taylor in front of the Farmers

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<sup>15</sup> John C. Shelton's Memo Book, December, 1858 - May 1858, Photocopy of Mss in Central Rappahannock Regional Library; Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>16</sup> William L. Bensons, Memo Book 1859-1860 Wellford Family Papers, Photocopy of Mss in Central Rappahannock Regional Library; Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>17</sup> Willis and Felder, Handbook, 30.

<sup>18</sup> Fredericksburg News, December 30, 1851.

Hotel. A slave auction in the same location brought \$26,000 in January of 1854.<sup>19</sup> Thirteen valuable slaves were sold at Ramsay's Tavern by Stafford H. Parker to pay the debts of one Walter Brown.<sup>20</sup>

Those who engaged in the sale of slaves as a living were not numerous. The census and period newspapers indicate that Thomas H. Lipscomb was a town slave dealer and Gabriel Johnson and J.B. Timberlake were auctioneers.<sup>21</sup> A slave trader, Walter H. Finnall, owned a lot used just for slaves. He listed his occupation as herring fisherman and slave trader. He used eighty male and four female slaves in his herring business.<sup>22</sup>

Mary Blackford, a neighbor of Mr. Finnall, wrote in her notes of the poor care given his slaves:

Last summer a young negro was sold to him who was strongly suspected of a crime of wishing to make escape... [he] was confined to the cellar... [and] about twilight those who were confined used to be walked about the garden for exercise<sup>23</sup>

Slave testimony from the area reveals that treatment did vary. Alice Mashall, a slave born in 1850 in

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<sup>19</sup> Fredericksburg News, January 6, 1854.

<sup>20</sup> Political Arena, January 25, 1839.

<sup>21</sup> Census, 1850, 1860, Population Schedules.

<sup>22</sup> Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 42.

Fredericksburg, said of her owner "...Mistress Sally had plenty, but we ain fared de bes by no means she ain never give us enough to eat so my mother have to get food de bess way she could." <sup>24</sup> Uncle Bacchus White, born in 1852 and owned by Frances Brooke of Spotsylvania and hired out to the Kenmore Estate, felt he was treated fairly<sup>25</sup> Joseph Brooks, born in 1845, said of the family that owned him "he wasn't a bad master and treated us very good but young master John Long, son of Jimmy Long, was just as mean as his father was good". <sup>26</sup>

One unusual situation of a slave in Fredericksburg was the case of shoemaker, Noah Davis, who, after earning his freedom, wrote the Narrative of a Colored Man in 1859. The book was used to help Davis buy his freedom from the Patton family in Fredericksburg. In describing his life in the town Davis claims that as a youth his family was treated well by both Robert Patton, a town merchant and mill owner, and John Thom, a postmaster of the town. Davis, an active member in the African Baptist Church, became a Christian, and later a minister. As a young boy he ran errands for

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<sup>24</sup> Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Thomas E. Barden and Robert K. Phillip, eds. Weevils in the Wheat Interviews With Virginia Ex Slaves (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1976), 281.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 302.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 56.



Thomas Wright, a shoemaker to whom he was bound until the age of twenty-one when he was sold again. He learned to read because Mrs. Wright taught all of her slaves despite the law against schooling negroes.<sup>27</sup>

Later owners, he concludes, were not so kind. Davis found himself owned by other town shoemakers whom he described as "the most intemperate of any class of men in the place". Among this group of men, he stated;

I soon learned to bring liquor among the men with secrecy to prevent the boss, who had forbidden it to come on the premises, from knowing it... with such examples all around I soon learned the habit of drinking... and other vile habits<sup>28</sup>

After buying his freedom he went north. He returned to Fredericksburg to open his own shoemaker shop, became a missionary to his people and after raising enough money secured from Mrs. Wright his family's freedom.<sup>29</sup>

Not all slaves in the town and fall line area were so fortunate. During the period there were numerous ads in the Fredericksburg press for runaways, most by owners from

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<sup>27</sup> Reverend Noah Davis, Narrative of a Colored Man, (Baltimore: John F. Weishample Jr. Bookseller & Publisher, 1859), 11-14. Photocopy of Mss in Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg Virginia.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 14.

outside the area. The rewards ranged from \$50 to \$300 per individual. Although most ads were for slaves who had escaped from more rural areas, the town had large numbers of fugitives.<sup>30</sup> It is hard to explain the large numbers of runaways from Fredericksburg during the 1850s. The 1850 census indicated only one fugitive in the previous ten years, but by 1860 there were three hundred and sixty-two. Perhaps Fredericksburg's location on the direct slave route to Baltimore attracted slaves from the fall line area. According to his accounts, John Washington, a slave living over the Farmers Bank and later hired out to the Alexander and Gibbs tobacco factory, stood ready to escape at a moments notice and return to his mother who had been hired by a family in Staunton, Virginia.<sup>31</sup> Records indicate that sixty-five percent of the runaways were older women with small children and twenty-five percent were those who had taken advantage of being hired out to leave the area.<sup>32</sup> Montgomery Slaughter, mayor of the town from 1860 until the war, wrote to Robert A. Grinnan of the difficult capture of

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<sup>30</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 29, 1850; October 17, 1851; and September 27, 1852; and February 21, 1851.

<sup>31</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Slave Schedule; John Washington, Memories of the Past 1838-1862: Diary of John Washington transcribed copy of Mss at Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>32</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Slave Schedule.

one of his slaves by town policeman James A. Taylor and how a ball and chain was "secured to his leg" while holding him in the town jail.<sup>33</sup>

The large number of runaways also supports the theory of Richard Wade in his book Slavery in the Cities where he contends that urban slavery was fundamentally different from rural slavery. The fact that town slaves were exposed to so much more freedom caused them to become disenchanted with bondage; consequently they ran away or misbehaved and were sold.<sup>34</sup> To control the town's slaves the local laws often supplemented the state slave code. Because the town experienced a series of serious problems with slave behavior in the 1840s, existing ordinances were supplemented by further regulations.<sup>35</sup> Many slaves were victims as well as perpetrators of crimes such as house and barn burning, burglary, fighting, and gambling. Often the failure to enforce local laws coupled with the fact that slaves took advantage of the hiring out system which let them secure

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<sup>33</sup>Montgomery Slaughter to Robert Alexander Grinnan December, 1861. Nalle Family Papers 1800-1862, Mss in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>34</sup>Wade, Slavery in the Cities, 35.

<sup>35</sup>Fredericksburg Hustings Court Orderbook K March 1841; May 1841; July 1841; December 1843; July 1843; August 1843, (Richmond: Virginia State Library, microfilm of Mss) Hereafter cited as Orderbooks; and Common Council Minutes April 15, 1845; August 20, 1852; and Diary of James R. Pullman, 25 July 1840, Microfilm of Mss in Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

their own sleeping accommodations caused these problems. The failure to enforce the ten o'clock curfew for all blacks was sometimes a problem. The common council reminded the police in 1852

It is the duty of the police officer to arrest said slave and confine him or her in the jail of the corporation... carry him before the mayor... or justice of the peace who shall order... not less than five or more than thirty lashes at the public whipping post.<sup>36</sup>

A citizen who could not keep his slave in at night was subject to a two dollar fine. Council was forced to pass legislation in 1852 that prohibited slaves from coming into town on Sunday with articles for sale.<sup>37</sup> By 1860 the town had regulations which stated that blacks must walk in the street when meeting whites on the sidewalks. Free blacks and slaves were further prohibited from smoking cigars, pipes or tobacco in public.<sup>38</sup>

As the decade of the fifties came to a close, slavery became more of an economic necessity rather than a necessary evil that was defended throughout the south.<sup>39</sup> The Fredericksburg News rejoiced to learn from a Richmond

<sup>36</sup> Common Council Minutes August 14, 1852.

<sup>37</sup> Common Council Minutes September 3, 1852.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Coder Fitzgerald, A Different Story: A Black History of Fredericksburg, Stafford and Spotsylvania Virginia (NP: Unicorn Press, 1979), 63.

<sup>39</sup> Gray, History of Agriculture, 939.

Enquirer article that the late Thomas R. Dew's famous book The Essays of Slavery would be republished. The News hoped that those who read

the Essay... [would] induce them to pause and reflect and the consequence was a decided impression favorable to the policy and continuance of slavery.<sup>40</sup>

No doubt the most important defender of slavery, Dew extended the debate and brought tremendous interest to the discussion.<sup>41</sup> Despite the considerations over the use and continuation of the institution, Fredericksburg's economy and her way of life was dependent on slave labor. The treatment for some was satisfactory, for others horrifying. Although slaves did not fill the prominent leadership roles of the town, they were part of everyday life and made the town's attempt at prosperity possible and at the same time more difficult.

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<sup>40</sup> Fredericksburg News, August 21, 1849.

<sup>41</sup> Virginus Dabney, The New Dominion: A History from 1607 to Present (New York: Double Day and Co., 1956), 228.

## CHAPTER IV

### ECONOMY: COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURING

In the nineteenth century, the development of commerce and manufacturing in the south was less consequential than in the northeastern United States. Virginia rivertowns like Fredericksburg which had lost their international trade status were forced to depend on providing a market place for the farmers of the fall line area. Dominated since the colonial period by the labor intensive plantation economy, these slow growing towns were hindered in their efforts to develop manufacturing which many Southerners felt would destroy the planter class way of life. By the antebellum period the south had become so dependent on northern markets and their manufactured goods that the prosperity of towns like Fredericksburg was effected by economic conditions beyond their control.<sup>1</sup>

The panic of 1837 and the nationwide depression that followed had its effect on the people of Fredericksburg. In 1837 the General Assembly had increased banking capital which gave the town's banks hope for further expansion. The crisis stopped the issue of specie (coinage) by banks

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<sup>1</sup> James M. McPherson, Ordeal By Fire: The Coming of War, (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1982,) Vol. 1, 27; Lewis D. Rubin, Jr. Virginia: A History (New York: W.W. Norton Co.), 121.

and cut into the flow of paper currency.<sup>2</sup> The town's first bank to stop using coins was the branch of the Bank of Virginia and next the Farmer's Bank branch, located on Princess Anne Street and organized in 1812.<sup>3</sup> Small change became so scarce that in July of 1837 the corporation's common council voted to issue its own scripnotes to help town commerce survive.<sup>4</sup> With the approval of the state they were able to issue one dollar to five dollar notes regularly until 1842.<sup>5</sup>

A group of prominent men organized a savings association called Fredericksburg Savings Institute and gave one percent interest to investors. Alexander K. Phillips was its president, and Matthew Fontaine Maury, was a member.<sup>6</sup>

In 1842 Isaac Peck, a former resident and businessman, seeking information about the economic condition of the town and in particular the status of his real estate and financial investments, received this comment from Beverly R. Wellford, a town doctor.

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<sup>2</sup> George T. Starnes, Sixty Years of Banking in Virginia (New York: MacMillian Co. 1931) 81, 87-88.

<sup>3</sup> Lemuel W. Houston, A Bank for Fredericksburg (Fredericksburg: Book Crafters, 1989), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Starnes, Sixty Years of Banking in Virginia, 88-99. Common Council Minutes July 8, 1837.

<sup>5</sup> Starnes, Sixty Years of Banking in Virginia 88-89.

<sup>6</sup> Political Arena, January 29, 1839, February 1, 1839.

We have nothing of local interest here just now. The banks are curtailing and businesses of all kinds are dull. I have not sold the stock of the Farmers Bank which I hold, nor do I feel despaired to do so... the depression may be in part owing to scarcity of money but in no part to the destruction of confidence in the bank.<sup>7</sup>

Others held confidence that the stagnated economy would recover but, in the meantime, the value of commercial property was declining. A review of local newspapers in the early 1840s indicates a noticeable increase in ads for the sale of stores, warehouses, houses, farms and plantations.<sup>8</sup> To make matters worse wheat production and the market price declined from 1839 to 1843. The number of barrels of flour being inspected in the area was 125,000 in 1830 and had declined to 60,000 barrels by 1847.<sup>9</sup> The infestation of rust, Hessian fly and other pests also brought disaster for harvest during this period.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Beverly R. Wellford to Isaac Peck, 29, January 1842, Isaac Peck Gorham Papers, 1818-1859 Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>8</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 67; Land Tax Books 1839 - 1850 Richmond: Virginia State Library; and Virginia Herald, April 16, 1842; and Deed Book O August 14, 1845 (Cotton Factory Sold, January 12, 1848. Hope Foundry also sold.)

<sup>9</sup> Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland 1606 -1860 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 145; Fredericksburg News. November 15, 1847.

Political Arena, February 12, 1839.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Banner, (Fredericksburg, Virginia) March 24, 1843.



W. F. Cheek, having visited the town for several days during the same period, responded to the continuously curious Isaac Peck who asked "whether the old town is on the surface or buried?" Cheek's reply was indeed discouraging.

I think I might say that it is not having the rites of burial. Although I might say she is dead, she has a sad and gloomy appearance just at this time. The Thorton's Hotel is closed up, Smith's Barley is sold out... C. Cole 'busted' and sold out. Thorn closed by credit problems... [and] there have been several other foreclosings and more expected, such is an outline of some of the businesses of the town... she is not flattering <sup>11</sup>

Charles C. Wellford, a town merchant and manufacturer, wrote home about a disappointing sales trip he had made to New York City.

I have not been remiss in laying before the dealers our samples but such is the desperate condition of things in this great city that I begin to despair of obtaining offers, which we can hang our hopes for future sales. <sup>12</sup>

The slow recovery of the town took until the last years of the 1850s and like most of Virginia's towns of the period it was felt that the only way to prosper as a trading center was with improvements in transportation facilities.

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<sup>11</sup> W.F. Cheek to Isaac Peck, 22 August 1939 Isaac Peck Gorham Papers 1818 - 1859. (Mss in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia).

<sup>12</sup> Charles C. Wellford to Beverly R. Wellford, 13 April 1838. Wellford Family Papers 1773 - 1963. (Mss in Virginia Historical Society: Richmond, Virginia); Census 1860 Industrial Schedule.

Railroad construction, completion of the town's canal system and the beginning of a new plank road to the west were all combined with other schemes to help Fredericksburg's recovery and growth. These improvements were all dependent on financial help from the state and a considerable capital investment from both the town's public and private funds. This at times caused serious debate among the citizens.<sup>13</sup>

Between 1831 and 1835 competition from other localities for state funding for both canal and railroad projects made towns like Fredericksburg invest its capital with mixed emotions. Citizens debated which form of transportation would best help improve the town. Between 1836 and 1848 the Board of Public Works was asked by the town authorities to petition for turnpike improvements and a canal up the Rappahannock River. Many people supported the faster form of transportation, a railroad from east to west, which would bring the town trade from far off counties. Under Virginia's system of mixed enterprise, private subscribers for stock in a company usually totaled two-fifths and the state provided the rest while stockholders managed the company.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 119

<sup>14</sup> Phillip Morrison Rice "Internal Improvement in Virginia" (Thesis, (University of North Carolina; 1948), 315, 325.

Originally requested in 1836, a charter for the Rappahannock Blue Ridge Railroad was finally approved in the General Assembly in 1848, but lacking local financial backing it never materialized. Fredericksburg was left with the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad, a north-south passenger, freight and mail train.<sup>15</sup> The construction of this railroad was completed to Fredericksburg by 1837 at a cost of \$730,000. Passenger traffic then took stage coaches north to Aquia Creek on the Potomac River where steamboats carried them to Washington, D.C. and points beyond. In 1842 the line was extended to Aquia Creek, then a seventy-five mile trip of five and one half hours from Richmond.<sup>16</sup> Freight trains always layed over in Fredericksburg.<sup>17</sup> In 1859 the R F & P completed 134,876 miles of passenger traffic and 21,737 miles of freight traffic. Although Fredericksburg citizens helped fund part of the forty percent of private money for its

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 325; Spotsylvania County Petition January 5, 1848 Mss located in Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>16</sup> Political Arena, June 28, 1986; Noal Harrison, Gazetteer of Historic Sites Related to Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park (Fredericksburg: Spotsylvania Military Park, 1986) 2: 327.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel B. Rice, "Some Recollections of the R.F.&P. When It Was Only About 31 Years Old" (Richmond: Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Co., 1987), 3.

construction, this railroad was financed primarily by men from Richmond and Philadelphia. It was strongly supported by the General Assembly as the major North South Railroad in Virginia. Because of these reasons the RF&P was never a major factor in the economy of the town.<sup>18</sup>

In the summer of 1849 the completion of the canal called the Rappahannock Navigation or Rappahannock Canal gave the town its greatest hope for the future. However, due to problems, the long awaited canal failed and was out of business by 1852. During its peak, boats arrived in the town's basin from the upper Rappahannock River through a series of locks, dams and small canals. Two man flat bottom and Bateaux type boats carried flour, wheat, corn, lumber, cords of wood, lump plaster, bushels of clove seeds, barrels of fish, sacks of salt, pounds of guano, lime, barrels of whiskey, tar and bricks.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Virginia, Annual Report of the Board of Public Works, 1859-1860, September 30, 1860, 262.

<sup>19</sup>Annual Report of the Board of Public Works, September 30, 1850, 213; Annual Report of the Board of Public Works, January 31, 1839, 402; and Fauquier County Bicentennial Commission, History of Fauquier County 1759-1959 (Warrenton, Virginia: Virginia Publishers, 1959), 113-115. From September 1849 to September 1850 descending trade on the Rappahannock Canal totaled \$1,645. Lump plaster was ground in local mills and sown by hand on farms as fertilizer. While under construction in 1838 the tolls and rents totaled \$200 and by 1848 they totaled \$5,648.

The canal system had improved eighty-five miles of the river up to Miller's Factory in Fauquier County near Waterloo. It now cost fifty percent less for a farmer to ship by canal than by wagon. Some in town called the canal a "Godsend to Fredericksburg".<sup>20</sup> Its failure marked a low point in the development of the town's hopes as a growing center of commerce. The lack of funding in the beginning showed farmers to the west had doubts about who was to gain from the canal, the town of Fredericksburg or themselves. The town's early financial rescue of the canal kept the project from failure, but after thirty years of construction, company mismanagement, flooding, low wheat prices, large repair costs, drought and the competition from western railroads, the state foreclosed on the company.<sup>21</sup> In 1850, during its short period of success, the town further invested in other improvements it felt would help the Rappahannock Canal. The Hazel River Canal and Valley Road projects northwest of town failed because of continuous flooding.<sup>22</sup> In the same year the town also gave enthusiastic support for the building of the Fredericks-

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<sup>20</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 6, 1849; Fredericksburg News, October 26, 1849.

<sup>21</sup> Donald S. Callahan, "The Rappahannock Canal" (Thesis, American University, 1967), 20, 29, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 24, 1851; April 18, 1851; June 4, 1852; Robert A. Hodge, The Rappahannock Navigation Batteau in the Ebb & Flow (Fredericksburg: By the Author, 1983), 9.

Fredericksburg Valley Plank Road to Orange County which was completed by 1851.<sup>23</sup> Because the Rappahannock Canal had failed, the people of Fredericksburg were prepared to support another new project and the Fredericksburg Water Power Company was formed in 1852. It was evident that this project would allow the town to develop a factory system to replace dwindling trade and someday reopen the Rappahannock Canal. The plan was to construct a dam north of town on the Rappahannock River that would generate enough water power through a series of canals and millraces to operate future factories. The town controlled this project with the consent of the majority of its voters and the system was completed by 1859.<sup>24</sup>

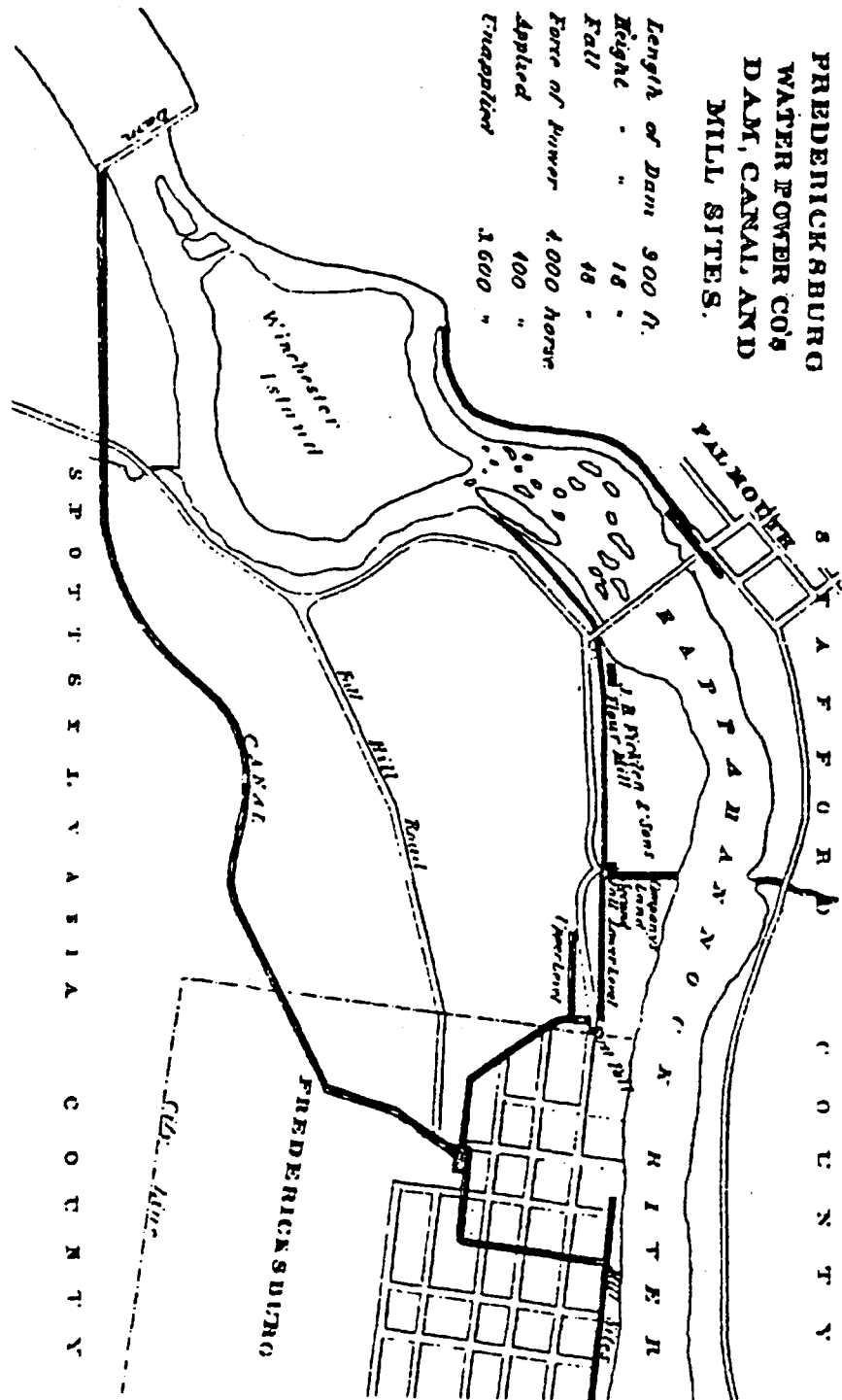
In 1852 a group of railroad men, also planning for the future, had ideas and obtained a charter for the east west Fredericksburg Gordonsville Railroad. There were several factors that caused this move. Predominate was the recent beginning of construction of the Orange to Alexandria Railroad to Gordonsville which would draw off farmers who would normally come to Fredericksburg. In addition, if the

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<sup>23</sup> Virginia, Annual Report of the Board of Public Works 1853 - 1855 Nov. 5, 1851, 310. Richmond: Virginia State Library.

<sup>24</sup> Virginia, Annual Report of the Board of Public Works 1857 - 1859 June 1, 1859, 575; Virginia Herald, March 27, 1854; and Weekly Advertiser, September 28, 1853; and Weekly Advertiser, February 19, 1859.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Fredericksburg Water Power Company Plan**



Source: Grays New Map Of Fredericksburg, 1878, Philadelphia.  
 Jacob Choice 1878.

Fredericksburg to Gordonsville Railroad could be completed it would connect the town with the Lynchburg to Gordonsville Railroad and then to the Baltimore and Ohio which was also under construction. Throughout the construction reports were always ones of progress until October of 1854, when because of a lack of funding and the successful completion of the railroad from Alexandria, construction was halted, not to restart until 1865.<sup>25</sup>

A July 10, 1854 editorial in the Virginia Herald accurately summarizes the optimistic feelings of some of the townspeople as it entered the last half of the 1850s.

There are but a few who rightly appreciate the importance of the trade of the valley of the Rappahannock,... The protection of the region alluded to the varied but... worthy exertion to see the riches of a valley whose lands are estimated at a cash value of nearly nine million dollars! The valley produces nearly two million bushels of corn and over half a million bushels of wheat. Is there not good cause for the reproach that has been charged upon us as being a sluggish... community... because we would not keep ourselves? We rejoice, however in knowing that the days of idleness are numbered. Henceforth, new armor is doomed. Clad in progress of progress and enterprise. We will forget that things that are past and press on.<sup>26</sup>

With all its insufficient attempts at improvement, the town incurred a large debt. To gain additional revenue, the

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<sup>25</sup> Robert A. Hodge Fredericksburg to Orange By Rail (Fredericksburg: By the Author 1966), 1-3; Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Virginia Herald, July 10, 1854



General Assembly passed legislation in 1858 to allow the town to sell real estate for delinquent taxes due to the town.<sup>27</sup> As the council had not provided for payment of the bonds issued by earlier town leaders, judgements against the town were placed by some citizens.<sup>28</sup>

In addition, the town's total real estate value in 1850 was \$1,128,895 with personal property estimated at \$114,570. By the end of the decade these figures would advance to \$1,305,671 for real estate and there would be a ninety-three percent increase in personal property to \$1,590,495. The town council owned real estate valued at \$15,000 and public buildings worth \$30,000. Its total debt was \$239,409 and its resources amounted to \$327,000.<sup>29</sup>

With the financial obligations one can understand why there were town disagreements over the cost of lighting and paving the streets and whether the town should be the provider of water. Despite setbacks and crises, Fredericksburg was developing into a manufacturing center. One 1842 gazetteer referred to the town as "one of the most

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<sup>27</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 69.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Social Schedule; Statement of Liberties and Resources of the Town of Fredericksburg June 30, 1855 (Copy of Mss Williamsburg: College of William and Mary, Manuscript Collection) See Table 4.

## Fredericksburg, Virginia Financial Statement 1855

Bonds Issued	Stocks Purchased
Hazel River Navigation 26,000	Hazel River Navigation 10,000
Fredericksburg Water Power Company 123,500	Fredericksburg Water Power Company 140,000
Fredericksburg Valley Plank Rd. 12,000	Fredericksburg Valley Plank Rd. 47,000
Fredericksburg Gordonsville Railroad 138,250	Fredericksburg Gordonsville Railroad 85,000
Money Owed to Banks 10,000	

Source: Williamsburg: College of William & Mary Manuscript Collection

flourishing towns in the state" but there were those with disparaging comments as well. Many blamed the council for bad judgement.<sup>30</sup> The state sanctioned a third bank for Fredericksburg in 1857, the Commerce Bank, and the number of manufacturers tripled by the end of the decade.<sup>31</sup> With all the attempts at transportation improvements to in-

<sup>30</sup> Bishop Davenport, Historical and New Gazetteer and Geographical Dictionary (New York: S.W. Benedict & Co., 1842), 312; Weekly Advertiser, July 11, 1857.

<sup>31</sup> Starnes, Sixty Years of Banking, 105. Census 1850, 1860 Industrial Schedule.

crease its commerce, its efforts at manufacturing were directly related to statewide improvements in agriculture.

As a rural town, Fredericksburg was completely dependent upon the farmer for its economic existence. Many of the large planters in Spotsylvania and Stafford counties had invested in the various plans for transportation improvements and supported petitions to the General Assembly for the same.<sup>32</sup> Farmers realized that their improvements were dependent on the nearby availability of fertilizer and that increased wheat and tobacco production depended on getting to and from a market in the most economical and speediest manner.

The nearby farm land was considered fertile, particularly near the streams and rivers. The soil of Spotsylvania was characterized as fine and the terrain as rolling hills and because of years of harvesting it required much time and deeper plowing to prepare for planting. By 1850 there were 429 farms in Spotsylvania County with a cash

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<sup>32</sup>David R. Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism in Virginia 1847 - 1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977) 184 - 185, 191.

value of \$1,233,599.<sup>33</sup> Stafford County, overlooking the town to the north and east, was a hilly county but stood at the head of the northern neck. With moderately poor soil and light loam, Stafford did not produce as much wheat, oats, corn and tobacco as Spotsylvania. Only in cotton production did Stafford overshadow all other counties in the fall line area.<sup>34</sup> Although cotton had become the major money crop of the deep south, wheat and tobacco were the cash crops of the fall line area. Corn was the largest crop but it only provided supplemental income. Most of the manufacturing was a direct result of the town's dependence on wheat and tobacco.

Virginia was the largest producer of wheat in the south, even though it produced less per capita than the national average of four bushels.<sup>35</sup> In 1850 Spotsylvania County produced 102,953 bushels of wheat, 265,753 bushels of corn and 47,347 bushels of oats. By 1860 the county had

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<sup>33</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 279; Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia & DC, 474; and Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer of Virginia, 383; and United States Census 1850 Spotsylvania Co. Agriculture Schedule; and Virginia Herald, July 10, 1854; and Diary of James R. Pullian May 1840 - March 1846 Microfilm of Mss Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>34</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 162; Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer, 385.

<sup>35</sup> Sam Bowers Hillard, Hog Meat and Hoecake Food Supply in the Old South 1840 - 1850 (London: Feffer & Summons 1972), 155-156, 167.

increased its wheat production to 118,693 bushels. Stafford county produced 58,923 bushels of wheat and 178,651 bushels of corn.<sup>36</sup> Harold Muddimon estimated that the average size farm in the area for fifty percent of the people was two hundred acres and that eighty percent of the farmers lived on farms of less than five hundred acres. He also concluded that very few planters owned over 1,000 acres.<sup>37</sup> Mr. Thomas F. Morrison's farm yielded only three bushels of wheat in 1857 but by 1859 he had increased this harvest to twenty bushels.<sup>38</sup>

The wheat and flour that was brought to Fredericksburg arrived by wagon, canal, and river. Fredericksburg, according to the local press, inspected 19,841 bushels of wheat in a single quarter in 1858. At the same time its chief competition, Alexandria and Richmond, inspected 41,265 bushels and 193,398 bushels respectfully.<sup>39</sup> Not noted for

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<sup>36</sup> United States Census 1860, Spotsylvania County. Agriculture Schedule Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer 83, 383, 385; and James M. Garnett, Address to Agricultural Society of Fredericksburg, 10. Mss at Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>37</sup> Harold Muddimon, "Agriculture in the Fredericksburg Area" (Thesis, University of Richmond, 1969), 23-24.

<sup>38</sup> Fredericksburg and Fredericksburgers (Photocopy in Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1903), 32.

<sup>39</sup> Virginia Herald, July 6, 1858.

the quality of its flour in the first part of the nineteenth century, the town had improved its reputation by the antebellum period.<sup>40</sup> By 1852 the Virginia Herald noted "the wheat crop in Spotsylvania and Orange through which we recently passed looked better for the season of year than at any previous time within our recollection".<sup>41</sup>

In general the prices paid for wheat and flour in the town went up between the 1840s and 1850s. They usually sold higher in Richmond and Alexandria and this caused some of Fredericksburg's retail merchants to try to keep their prices lower, encouraging farmers to spend their profits there.<sup>42</sup>

Most of the wheat, flour and corn that arrived was purchased by large mills located in town and in Falmouth. These large mills were Wellford, Eastham and Company, the mill of Thomas F. Knox, and the Bridgewater Mill, owned by Joseph B. Ficklen.<sup>43</sup> According to Peter S. Pockriss,

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<sup>40</sup> Muddimon, "Agriculture in the Fredericksburg Area 1800-1940", 16.

<sup>41</sup> Virginia Herald, March 30, 1854.

<sup>42</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 3, 1849; Weekly Advertiser, February 18, 1853; March 18, 1859; and Virginia Herald, January 6, 1858. Each week the press listed the names of the canal boats and there destinations in town and the prices of various crops.

<sup>43</sup> Peter S. Pockriss, Rappahannock Water Power (Fredericksburg: Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 1988), 10; Weekly Advertiser, February 18, 1853; September 24, 1853.

Bridgewater Mill, south of the Falmouth Bridge, produced 150 barrels of flour a day and 400 bushels of meal. In addition it ground feed from rye and oats and produced numerous grades of flour. Built in 1822 it was damaged by fire in 1858 and immediately rebuilt.<sup>44</sup> Hugh Scott, George B. Scott, William Slaughter and Ficklen owned other flour mills in Falmouth. In 1850 Knox's mill produced 20,000 barrels of flour at a value of \$100,000 and the Bridgewater Mill produced 10,000 barrels at \$50,000.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, smaller grist mills located near town, but not operating on the Rappahannock or the canal, often ground corn and produced meal and feed for local farmers. Two of the most popular were located on Hazel Run. Alum Springs had always contained some type of mill. In 1831 Samuel Alsop purchased a small mill there and in 1851 sold it to John L. Mayre Sr. who kept in operation until the end of the decade.<sup>46</sup> Closer to town another mill on Hazel Run was Drummond's Mill

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<sup>44</sup> "Belmont History" Fredericksburg: Belmont Press, June 1985, 2.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Census 1860, Stafford Co. Industrial Schedule. Microfilm of Manuscript Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia. Weekly Advertiser, February 18, 1853, September 24, 1853; Census 1850, Industrial Schedule; and Siener, Economic Development in Fredericksburg 1750-1810, 228.

<sup>46</sup> Robert A. Hodge, Alum Springs Park: A History (Fredericksburg: R.A. Hodge, 1991), 17-20.

owned by John L. Wellford until 1851 when it was sold to the Howison family of the Braehead Plantation.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike these small mill operations, the large town mills sent flour to places as far away as New York, Philadelphia, Boston, England, and South America. One source estimated that 75,000 barrels of flour, 150,000 bushels of wheat and 500,000 bushels of corn were exported from the town.<sup>48</sup>

Some flour was purchased by local confectioners who produced cakes, pies, candies and bread for sale in the retail and wholesale markets. In 1850 there were no confectioners whose business was valued over \$500 but by 1860 there were eight. These men were Peter P. Burr, Eliza Morgan, James Monque, Lewis Krugh, H. Mitter, William Lange, Fred Brulle and John Myers. Most employed only one other person besides themselves. In 1860 they used 1,185 barrels of flour.<sup>49</sup>

Other industries that were directly related to the

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<sup>47</sup> Drummond Mill Ledger A 1836-1840 Wellford Family Papers Photocopy of Mss Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>48</sup> Pockriss, Rappahannock Water Power, 10; Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Company, 8; and Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia & DC, 283.

<sup>49</sup> United States Census 1850, 1860 Industrial Schedule, Population Schedule. See Table 3, P 86.



production of wheat were the coopering trade and the wheat machinery and farm tool industry. W.H. Bradshaw produced 1,500 flour barrels in 1850 and 12,000 by 1860. Charles C. Wellford's Company and John Sullinger manufactured wheat fans and other machinery with a total production value of \$22,500 in 1860.<sup>50</sup> There were also two coopers in Falmouth.<sup>51</sup>

Tobacco also had its effect upon the economy of Fredericksburg. After the American Revolution, when tobacco production declined, the town no longer inspected tobacco and became only a transfer point where warehouses stored the crop for shipment to other markets. Tobacco production in the state declined 24.6 percent from 1840 to 1850 but in the fifties some in the fall line area tried to bring Fredericksburg back as a tobacco center.<sup>52</sup> Local farmers such as James Pullian of Spotsylvania, who for a long time had taken his tobacco by train to Richmond but who had always brought his wheat to Fredericksburg, was encouraged by the new market. Samuel Baggett hoped to do well in his new tobacco warehouse after being in a "horrible fix" in his

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<sup>50</sup> United States Census 1850, 1860 Industrial Schedule  
United States Census 1860 Stafford Co. Industrial Schedule.

<sup>51</sup> Weekly Advertiser, February 18, 1853.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer, 85; The Seventh Census Report of the Superintendent of the Census December 1, 1852 (Washington: Robert Armstrong Printer, 1853) 88-89.

previous business.<sup>53</sup> Seeing a future in tobacco manufacturing, Alexander L. Gibbs and John F. Alexander opened in 1858 the first tobacco factory in the town which would produce cigars and chewing tobacco.<sup>54</sup> The talk of the new factory gave great joy to the Weekly Advertiser, which in June of 1857 reproduced a News story which read:

There is a population on foot to establish tobacco manufacturing in this place... There is no reason why Fredericksburg should not be as good a tobacco market as Lynchburg and a better market than Richmond. Farmers are beginning to see that the tobacco crop can be made to pay... when they need money the most.<sup>55</sup>

By March of 1859 the Weekly Advertiser was even more optimistic when it proclaimed, "Let our farmers send us some good tobacco and we will show them what we can do for them."<sup>56</sup>

By 1860 Gibbs and Alexander were producing \$25,000 a year in tobacco products and spending \$650 in wages and had twenty slave laborers. Phillip Wright was its superintendent. The factory was located in the converted warehouse of

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<sup>53</sup> Diary of James R. Pullian June 29, 1843, August 24, 1845; Samuel Baggett to Isaac Peck; 1, May 1856 Isaac Peck Gorham Papers 1818-1859 Mss at Virginia Historical Society Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>54</sup> Fredericksburg News, May 14, 1859.

<sup>55</sup> Weekly Advertiser, January 10, 1857. Microfilm of Mss at Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>56</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 19, 1859.

**FIGURE 4**  
**Typical Fredericksburg Mill**



**Source:** Library of Congress Photo. Believed to be the Excelsior Flour Mill built about 1861, located at the end of Prussia Street next to R.F.& P. Railroad Bridge.

J.H. Owens across from the R F & P Railroad Depot,<sup>57</sup> but compared to Richmond its production, as one author put it, was "negligible".<sup>58</sup> Local farms in the area still exported not much over 350-400 hogsheads of tobacco in a year.<sup>59</sup>

Influenced by the developments in textile manufacturing in the northeast and the presence of woolen and cotton manufacturers in Richmond and Petersburg, manufacturers in Fredericksburg opened a new woolen and cotton factory.<sup>60</sup>

As early as September 15, 1837 Fredericksburg had opened a woolen factory for the making of "Negro clothing". Planters could bring their wool and for a "moderate price for the yard" could buy woolen cloth or factory made clothing. These products were sold at J.S. and C.C. Wellford's store and at Murry Forbes in Falmouth.<sup>61</sup> In 1851 this factory was owned by Phillip Jackson and Charles C. Wellford and was located on two lots purchased from

<sup>57</sup> Census 1860 Industrial, Population, and Slave Schedules; Fredericksburg News, February 18, 1860.

<sup>58</sup> Joseph Clarke Robert, Tobacco Kingdom, Plantation, Market and Factory (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1938), 16-17, 81.

<sup>59</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 162; Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia, 283.

<sup>60</sup> Gray, History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860, 935; Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism Virginia 1847 - 1861, 193.

<sup>61</sup> Political Arena September 29, 1837 Manuscript at Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Sarah Gedden on the northern end of Princess Anne Street between Pitt and Canal Streets. By 1852 it was owned by Forbes and Wellford and both building and lots were worth \$2,500. In 1860 the factory had become known as the "old factory" and the value of the property had fallen to \$1,000, a good indication that it was out of production.

In 1856 an ad for the town still claimed "wool is extensively and properly grown here".<sup>62</sup> With the encouragement of agricultural societies, local farmers improved their flocks and showed concern about breeding the best stock. Around Fredericksburg Lincolnshire sheep appear to have been the most popular breed. Newspaper ads for the renting of "old Ram getter" and other ads were common.<sup>63</sup> In 1840 Spotsylvania county farms raised 8,000 sheep and Stafford farms 5,000. By 1850 the state of Virginia's overall increase in sheep raising had increased 1.3 percent over 1840. Spotsylvania alone in 1860 produced 9,491 pounds of wool.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Map and Description of Fredericksburg Water Power Co., 8; Land Tax Books Fredericksburg 1850 - 1860 Mss at Fredericksburg, Virginia Circuit Court, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>63</sup> Weekly Advertiser, April 30, 1859. Microfilm at Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>64</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 162; Census 1860 Spotsylvania Co., Agriculture Schedule; and Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer of Virginia, 83.

A larger and more productive woolen factory was opened just before the war in 1859 and was the first to take advantage of the water power of the town's new internal canal system. Called Washington Woolen Mills Manufacturing Company it was open by May of 1860 with \$35,000 worth of orders. It was to pay \$1,000 in rent to the Water Company and be powered by a seventeen foot, nine thousand pound shaft built by local founder John F. Scott.<sup>65</sup>

The company had been founded in 1859, selling \$25,000 in stock, before it opened. Its president was Granville Kelly. The board of directors were some of the wealthiest men in the area - John E. Tackett, Franklin Slaughter, William S. Chelsey, B.F. Bowering and G.B. Scott. The plant site was located at the "upper end of town and in an admirable location" remarked the Weekly Advertiser.<sup>66</sup>

Cotton was not a large crop in many fall line counties. In 1840 Stafford produced 760,000 pounds. In 1850 Stafford County had two large cotton factories, The Falmouth Cotton Factory and the Duff Greens Cotton Factory.<sup>67</sup> Both were across the river from Fredericksburg.

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<sup>65</sup>Robert A. Hodge "The Burning of the Woolen Factory," Fredericksburg Times, May 1991, 17-20.

<sup>66</sup>Weekly Advertiser, April 30, 1859.

<sup>67</sup>United States Census 1850 Stafford County Industrial Schedule Microfilm of Mss Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia. Howe, Historical Collections, 162.

In 1845 John Coakley, William M. Fitzhugh Jr. and Franklin Slaughter purchased from John M. Herndon his cotton machinery owned by the Union Manufacturing Company which had been in business in Fredericksburg since the 1830 s. By 1852 this new company, the Fredericksburg Cotton Factory, had changed hands and was owned solely by Franklin and J. William Slaughter. With a total production of ozansburg cloth, rope and yarn worth \$65,000 it was the most valuable factory in town. It employed fifty hands who worked from sun up til 7:30 p.m. and was located near the railroad depot on Prussia Street. On December 27, 1853 a fire burned the main building to the ground.<sup>68</sup> From all indications it was not in business again until 1860.

With four large merchant tailors (Huffman and Gill Company, Walker and Lowery Company, Monder and Gouldman Company) and William Henry producing men's coats, pants and vests, both the woolen and cotton factories had customers nearby. But in addition these tailors often sold clothes made from imported English and French cloth.<sup>69</sup> Support for manufacturing was at times hard to come by from those who generally supported agricultural improvements.

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<sup>68</sup> Political Arena, February 19, 1839; Deed Book 0 August 14, 1845, 492. Microfilm of Mss Virginia State Library Richmond, Virginia. Hereafter cited Deed Book. Land Tax Books 1850 - 1854 Mss Courthouse U.S. Census 1850 Fredericksburg Industrial Fredericksburg News Dec. 22, 1853.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Census 1850, 1860 Fredericksburg, Industrial Map and Description of Fredericksburg Water Co., 8.

**FIGURE 5**  
**Fredericksburg's Merchant Tailors**

**WM. & A. MURRAY,  
 MERCHANT TAILORS.**

**W**OULD most respectfully inform their friends and the public generally, that they have just received their

**FALL AND WINTER GOODS,**

consisting of CLOTHS, CASSIMERES AND VESTINGS, of the latest styles of importations, which they will make to order in the best and most fashionable manner.

Also on hand—Gentlemen's Furnishing Goods of every description. —October 6.

**JAMES WALKER,  
 MERCHANT TAILOR,**

**W**OULD most respectfully inform his customers and the public generally that he is now in receipt of his

**FALL AND WINTER STOCK,**

consisting of Cloths, Cassimeres and Vestings, of the latest and richest styles of manufacture, all of which will be made to order in the best and most fashionable manner for cash, or on the usual time to punctual customers. ALSO—on hand a good supply of gentlemen's furnishing articles such as—Shirts, Drawers, Collars, Stocks, Cravats, Suspenders, Gloves, &c. [Sept. 20.]

**BEVERLEY T. GILL,  
 MERCHANT TAILOR,**

*At the Old Stand of Gill & Huffman;*

**W**ILL, in future, conduct the business, with such aid as may be necessary to give full satisfaction to his friends and customers, and will be happy to welcome his old friends and patrons, with as many new ones as may think proper to honor him with a visit. He has just returned from the North with an elegant stock of

**FALL AND WINTER GOODS,**

which he is prepared to make up in the best and most fashionable manner, at reasonable rates. As usual, an assortment of Shirts, Collars, Cravats, Handkerchiefs, Drawers, Gloves, and everything appertaining to a gentleman's Wardrobe will be kept for sale. Orders executed with dispatch. [Sept. 21.]



James M. Garrett, the president of the Agricultural Society of Fredericksburg championed the town's efforts in trying manufacturing.

These establishments... put in operation would not only give a great stimulus to the agriculture of all counties connected with Fredericksburg but would call into action much of the talent of the surrounding country... as a resource of individual wealth, comfort and general prosperity the improvements of these advantages... can hardly be estimated too highly.<sup>70</sup>

To meet the needs of the local farmers the town's skilled craftsmen invested in the manufacture of agricultural supplies that were needed both at home and in the field. The leather industry thrived in town during both decades. Boots, shoes, saddles, harnesses and other leather goods sold well in the retail and wholesale market. Obtaining thousands of hides and tons of sumac from local farmers and importing the rest, Peyton Hough, William Warren, and John G. Hurkamp tanned and prepared hides for the shoe, book and saddle makers of the town.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> James M. Garnett, Address to the Members of the Agriculture Society of Fredericksburg (Fredericksburg: Herald Office, 1837), 12.

<sup>71</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Industrial Schedule Weekly Advertiser September 3, 1853. Each individual invested at least \$500 in his business and the annual value of the products varied. Example: Hurkamp Produced \$10,000 in 1850 and \$20,000 in 1860. Carter \$6,000 in 1850; 8,000 in 1860.

Henry Genther and George Eve were saddle makers and Edwin Carter, J.D. Elder, John E. Beck and Robert Digman made men's boots and shoes in 1860. Other shoe makers such as Lewis Moore and Thomas Jefferies specialized in ladies' shoes exclusively that same year. On average all of these men in the boot and shoe industry employed five workers each.<sup>72</sup>

Transporting the farmer and his crops to town and the town folks around the countryside made the carriage, buggy and wagon industry very important. In 1840 there were 145 horses, twenty-five coaches, eight stagecoaches, nine carryalls and twelve gigs in town. By 1860 there were a total of 163 pleasure carriages and stages owned in Fredericksburg.<sup>73</sup>

George Gravatt's Coach Manufacturing was the largest in town. Located on the east side of Princess Anne Street, between Wolfe and Charlotte Streets, he had a six building complex, including sleeping quarters for his employees, and he produced eighty carriages a year.<sup>74</sup> O.W. Lindsley owned the

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<sup>72</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Industrial Schedule.

<sup>73</sup> Personal Property Tax Records 1840, 1860 Fredericksburg Microfilm of Mss in Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia. Elliott & Nye, Virginia Directory and Business Register for 1852, 176, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Elliott and Nye, Virginia Directory of 1852, 175. Sanborn Insurance Map "Fredericksburg" (New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co. 1886) Census 1860 Industrial Schedule.

Union Carriage Factory on Main Street next to the R F & P Railroad Station and Pitchard & Thorton Coach Manufacturers were located at Caroline and Charlotte Streets.<sup>75</sup> In 1840 a buggy was valued at between \$100 to \$150, a gig at \$40, a sulky at \$100 and a carryall at \$50.<sup>76</sup>

Although many people still made candles and soap at home there was a commercial candle and soap factory in Fredericksburg throughout this period. In 1850 George P. King produced 80,000 tallow candles with a value of \$5,000 and by 1860 the business was in the hands of Thomas Nicholson who placed the value of his products at \$5,500.

Two furniture and cabinet factories also added to the town's growing economy. Jacob Miller used white and yellow pine, walnut and poplar wood to construct his cabinets and furniture and Charles Williams, besides being the town undertaker, built \$6,000 worth of cabinets and coffins. Some of the wood for building construction and furniture came into town by canal but both Spotsylvania and Stafford supported two saw mills during this time.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Elliott and Nye, Virginia Directory of 1852, 176, 180.

<sup>76</sup> Personal Property Tax Records, Fredericksburg 1840 Microfilm of Mss Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>77</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania, Stafford Industrial Schedules; Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Co., 8; and Weekly Advertiser, February 18, 1853. Edwards, Gazeteer of Virginia. 241, 385. Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Co., 9.

**FIGURE 6**  
**Fredericksburg Business Advertisements 1852**

ADVERTISEMENT.

**WILLIAM T. BUCK,**  
**GROCER & PRODUCE DEALER,**

West Side of Caroline, between Hanover and William Sts.

Keeps always on hand an extensive Stock, of all articles in his line, which he offers to punctual customers, on accommodating terms.

BROKERAGE and COMMISSION business attended to as usual.

**GEORGE P. KING,**  
**SOAP AND CANDLE MANUFACTORY,**  
 FOOT OF COMMERCE STREET,  
 NEAR COULTERS BRIDGE.

ALSO—Keeps on hand a general variety of GROCERIES, DRY GOODS, &c., all of which he sells on the most reasonable terms.

**DR. M. A. BLANKMAN,**  
**SURGEON DENTIST,**  
**FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA.**

REFERENCES:

Dr. B. R. Wellford, Dr. H. S. Herndon, Dr. J. H. Waller, Dr. William Browne, Dr. James Cooke, Dr. Hugh Morison, Dr. Wm. S. Scott, Col. H. H. Mercer, Rev. G. W. McPhail, S. G. Daniel, Eustace Conway, Charles Herndon, —Fredericksburg.

Dr. Walter Souverville, Jeremiah Norton, —Culpeper County.

Rev. Thos. H. Black, —Fauquier County.

Joseph A. Flippo, Woodford Garnett, Prof. F. W. Coleman, Concord Academy; Dr. John Taylor, Dr. Anderson, —Caroline County.

**GEORGE GRANT,**  
**COACH MANUFACTORY,**

EAST SIDE OF PRINCESS ANN, BETWEEN WOLFE AND CHARLOTTE.

**FREDERICKSBURG, VA.,**

Has constantly on hand every kind of Vehicle in his line.

The town also exported numerous minerals from the surrounding areas. In the immediate vicinity could be found sandstone, clay, granite and freestone which were all shipped as far away as Washington, Baltimore and Norfolk.<sup>78</sup> One author estimated the total mineral and agricultural exports of the town at over \$4,000,000 annually. Within ten to thirty miles of the town could be found iron, gold and copper mines of which the gold exported from the town was estimated at \$70,000 a year.<sup>79</sup>

Although Virginia iron ore production had "shrunk to an almost inconsiderable amount" and furnaces were closing near the town, Fredericksburg maintained two large foundries and some smaller facilities in the antebellum period.<sup>80</sup> In 1850 John R. Roberts' Hope Foundry and the Cox and Peyton Company were both receiving pig iron from nearby furnaces and, with steam power, were manufacturing farm machinery such as threshing boxes, corn shellers, plows and harrows along with

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<sup>78</sup> Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia, 280.  
Howe, Historical Collections, 480.

<sup>79</sup> Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia, 283; In 1850 Spotsylvania County had two gold mines in operation the Motts Mining Co. and the White Hall Company. Motts produced \$16,000 and White Hall \$20,000 annually in gold. Orange County listed four gold mines in operation. (U.S. Census).

<sup>80</sup> Edwards, Gazeteer of Virginia, 77. Catherine Furnace west of town could not be sold during the depression and was not reopened until after the Civil War. The 4648 Acre iron plantation was worth \$35,000 in 1847. (see Wellford Family Papers translated copy of Mss Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia).

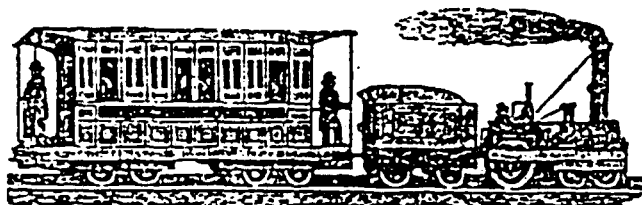
**FIGURE 7**  
**Fredericksburg Business Advertisements 1852**

ADVERTISEMENTS.

**JOHN A. ENGLISH,**

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALER IN  
**Hardware, Cutlery, Iron, Steel, Housekeeping Articles, &c,**  
 Caroline St., opposite the Post Office, Fredericksburg, Va.  
 BUILDING MATERIALS, BLACKSMITHS' TOOLS, CARPENTERS' TOOLS, COACH  
 FINDINGS AND SADDLERY.

**EAGLE FOUNDRY,**  
 FREDERICKSBURG.



**CUMBERLAND G. COX,**  
**FOUNDER AND MACHINIST,**

Keeps constantly on hand, Horse Powers, Threshing Boxes, Corn Shellers,  
 Plows, Harrows, Mill Gearing, Castings. Also Wrought Iron Work done at  
 short notice.

C. G. COX,  
 Fredericksburg, Va.

**P. P. BURR,**

CONFECTIONER AND DEALER IN FRUITS, TOYS, ETC.,  
 Caroline St., between George and William.

Keeps always on hand a large and general assortment, which he sells at  
**WHOLESALE OR RETAIL,**  
 Upon the most accommodating terms.

**GILL & HUFFMAN,**  
**MERCHANT TAILORS,**

EAST SIDE OF CAROLINE, BETWEEN HANOVER AND GEORGE STREETS.

Keep constantly on hand the best English and French  
*Cloths, Cassimeres and Vestings of the Latest Importations,*  
 With every article belonging to a gentleman's wardrobe.

machine parts and gears for mills.<sup>81</sup>

By 1843 almost all farmers in the Fredericksburg area were using threshing machines. Many claimed that the machines made by John Rallow of Fredericksburg were the best and James Garnett, president of the local Agricultural Society, would use no other machines than the ones produced in Fredericksburg.<sup>82</sup> The Eagle Foundry, which Cumberland G. Cox purchased in the 1850s, produced smaller items such as iron railings, kettles, soup pans and church bells of different sizes. They also advertised that they could make new mold boards for plows and gears for mills on "short notice".<sup>83</sup> D. Maggie with the help of two workers produced \$3,000 worth of plows and tinware in 1860. The coal used by these foundries and blacksmith shops was brought from the Richmond area.<sup>84</sup>

The town's milling and agricultural manufacturing was supported by most farms in the area. As indicated in Table Three the thirty-five percent increase in capital invested between 1850-60 was far better than the forty-seven percent decrease experienced in the 1840s. For many farmers the

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<sup>81</sup> Census 1850 Industrial Schedule.

<sup>82</sup> Kathleen Bruce, Virginia Iron Manufacturers in the Slave Era (New York: Century Co., 1931), 305.

<sup>83</sup> Political Arena, July 1, 1836; Elliott & Nye Virginia Directory of 1852; 180; Census 1860 Industrial Schedule.

<sup>84</sup> Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia, 283.

concept of using farm machinery and experimentation with methods, seeds and breeding was new. They sometimes represented the state continually supporting mining, manufacturing and commerce instead of agricultural societies, schools and experimental farms.<sup>85</sup> Robert R. Howison, Virginia historian and close neighbor to Fredericksburg, raised his concern about the state's lack of interest in manufacturing.

Virginia has fallen below her duty; that she has been indolent, while others have been laborious... she has been content to avoid a movement... while others (northern and western states) have gone rapidly forward.<sup>86</sup>

In direct contrast James M. Garnett, the future president of the Virginia Agricultural Society, although supporting the town's agriculture related manufacturing, was only concerned with promoting the town growth to the point that farmers would not have to rely on the "skill of some of our sister states". Garnett was never willing to place manufacturing above the improvements of agricultural practices.<sup>87</sup> Agricultural societies were more interested

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<sup>85</sup> Census 1850, 1860 Industrial Schedule; Howe, Historical Collections, 480; and James M. Garnett, Address to the Members of the Agricultural Society of Fredericksburg, 20, 27-28.

<sup>86</sup> Robert R. Howison, History of Virginia from its Discovery and Settlement By Europeans to The Present Time, (Richmond: Drinker and Morris 1848); 2: 510-511.

<sup>87</sup> Garnett, Address of the Agriculture Society of Fredericksburg, 11-12.



in educating the unscientific farmer about his bad plowing methods and his need to take advantage of such fertilizers as lime, potash, guano, gypsum and manure and in sponsoring agriculture fairs. All of these soil enrichments could be purchased in Fredericksburg at local stores, mills and warehouses. Most of this material was brought by canal boat or ship to town and Fredericksburg's annual Agricultural Fair was one of the high points of the year in the fall line area.<sup>88</sup> The fair, the oldest in Virginia (1823), gave the fall line area farmers who belonged to the Fredericksburg Society a place to show off their improved husbandry and farming techniques and a chance to view the latest equipment and tools.<sup>89</sup> The fairs were held at Mercer Square, a ten acre site near the western boundary of town near Sunken Road. The common council regularly supported the idea of this fair, providing sums of money for prizes and land on which the events could take place. Mayor Robert B. Semple (1844-53) was the Secretary of the Agricultural Society.

On the state level, the Fredericksburg Agricultural Society seemed to always take the largest delegation to the new state conventions and elected James M. Garnett Secretary and Treasurer of the first State Agricultural Society and

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid; Weekly Advertiser February 18, 1853.

<sup>89</sup> Charles W. Turner, Virginia's Green Revolutions: Essays on the Nineteenth Century Virginia Agricultural Reform and Fairs (Waynesboro: The Humphries Press, 1886), 24.

Table 3

Manufacturers 1850-1860  
Fredericksburg, Virginia

	No.		Capital Presented		Annual Value of Products		Average Wages Paid Monthly	
	1850	1860	1850	1860	1850	1860	1850	1860
Agriculture Implements	2	3	2,000	14,600	6,000	22,500	9	30
Book Binding	0	1		1,800		1,000	0	60
Boot & Shoes	2	5	14,000	8,500	8,000	25,100	M W 28/18	M W 23/11
Brickmaking	0	3		5,000		6,940	0	16
Carpentering	0	8		19,000		54,950	0	24
Carriages	0	1		3,000		16,000	0	28
Clothing	0	3		7,000		31,300	0	M W 58/17
Confectionery	0	7		15,400		26,340	0	24
Cooperage	1	1	1,000	4,000	1,000	4,800	10	10
Furniture/Cabinets	0	2		28,000		10,000	0	29
Leather	3	1	26,000	15,000	19,000	29,000	17	20
Millinery	0	2		3,600		5,300	0	14
Saddlery & Harness	2	2	5,500	2,500	8,000	6,700	23	14
Soap & Candle	1	1	5,000	4,000	5,000	5,620	25	40
Tobacco Manufactured	0	1		5,000		25,000	0	13
Tinners/Plumbers	0	1		1,000		8,500	0	23
Blacksmithing/ Wheelwright	0	1		750		2,000	0	18
Cotton Cloth Rope Production	1		20,000	*	65,000	*	*	
TOTALS			73,500	112,950	112,000	272,050		

Source: U.S. Census 1850, 1860 Fredericksburg, Industrial

\* No figures provided by the Census.

later its second President.<sup>90</sup>

Agriculture, commerce and manufacturing were the three major interests of this town, each claiming the right to be heard in the press. Farmers felt mistreated by the state for its generosity of giving aid to transportation and mining. Garnett even advocated statewide farm tours in the 1850s to help the farmers improve.<sup>91</sup> In the meantime, according to John Goolrick, Fredericksburg's trade "ceased to grow".<sup>92</sup> With the failure of the canal and the lack of support for the Fredericksburg and Gordonsville Railroad, together with the slow beginning of the Fredericksburg Water Power Company, the town needed more time and capital than the coming events would give it to improve its manufacturing. One newspaper editor argued

it is the duty of our people, especially at this time, to support all industrial pursuits here and let Yankeedom and her producers and manufacturers alone. Keep our money at home for our own people and not send it away to those who not only are opposed to us and to our institutions...<sup>93</sup>[and] are hostile in their actions towards us.

The Conservative Whig newspaper, the Weekly Advertiser,

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<sup>90</sup>Turner, Virginia's Green Revolutions, 10; Common Council Minutes, October 3, 1854, October 14, 1854; and Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 377.

<sup>91</sup>Turner, Virginia's Green Revolutions, 22.

<sup>92</sup>Coolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 332.

<sup>93</sup>Weekly Advertiser, December 1, 1860.

made it clear to Fredericksburg's representative in the House of Delegates, Oscar Crutchfield, that he should support legislation that, "will best promote the growth of manufacturing and industrial arts... and establish the commercial independence of the south".<sup>94</sup>

Supporters of southern manufacturing like James D.B. DeBow who published DeBows Review urged Virginians to "throw off this humiliating dependence" on northern manufactured goods and thus gave hope for a strong future for the town.<sup>95</sup> Although Fredericksburg fabricated goods primarily in the fall line area, the town's progress in the production of leather goods, carriages and buggies, men's clothing, cooperage products, tobacco products and agricultural implements were enough to show the town was progressing. Its optimism for the growth of the new Water Power Company led that group to advertise the town as a place which "... [had] developed a facility which diversified... [for] extensive manufacturing operations, had long been a subject of interest and effort on the part of the citizens of Fredericksburg".<sup>96</sup> All this was evidence that the town was moving forward in the last decade before the war.

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<sup>94</sup> Weekly Advertiser, December 24, 1859

<sup>95</sup> DeBows Review, Vol. I (New Orleans: June, 1859), 6.

<sup>96</sup> Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Co., 3.

## CHAPTER V

### ECONOMY: MERCHANTS, PROFESSIONALS AND CRAFTSMEN

Besides large and small manufacturers, the shopkeepers, learned professionals and craftsmen of the town played an integral part in the business community. Retail growth, which declined in the 1840s, moved forward by the middle 1850s.<sup>1</sup> Many of the men in these non-agricultural occupations filled prominent leadership roles in the political, religious and social life of the town. In his study of common council members of Fredericksburg, Thomas Armstrong found that forty-five percent were merchants, twenty-two percent were professionals and fifteen percent were manufacturers and craftsmen.<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the dry goods merchants, grocers, hardware stores, milliner's shops, taverns and hotels were all located in what is now downtown or old town Fredericksburg. They provided the goods and services for farmers and townsfolk. These businesses also furnished places for social gatherings, entertainment and were an excellent place for town gossip.<sup>3</sup> Store signs were described as "handsomely embellished" with "solid pieces of carving". Many signs

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<sup>1</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 480.

<sup>2</sup> Armstrong, Urban Visions in Virginia, 385.

<sup>3</sup> Diary of James R. Pullian, November 24, 1845.

were said to be framed by "ornamental castings".<sup>4</sup>

In the 1840 census, 499 town residents made their living in the area of commerce and manufacturing.<sup>5</sup> This method of grouping in limited categories hindered the view of the merchant class for that period. But the 1850 and 1860 census gave more specific occupations showing a better view of the merchant class. For this study those claiming to be merchants, grocers, butchers, coal dealers, horse dealers, innkeepers, book sellers, barbers and druggists were classified as merchants. They made up twenty-eight percent of the total working inhabitants of the town in 1850 and by 1860, only twenty-five percent.<sup>6</sup>

The competition and advertising between merchants was rather interesting. Guy and West Grocery promised "superior family groceries" and "superior liquors" at their site on Commerce Street.<sup>7</sup> Charles Miller's Grocery said he "respectfully informed his friends... that he has located himself at the upper end of Commerce Street where he will

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Herald, July 13, 1854.

<sup>5</sup> Census 1840, Population Schedule.

<sup>6</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population Schedules.

<sup>7</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 10, 1860.

always keep on hand a good assortment of groceries of every kind".<sup>8</sup> At V. Richards' new dry goods store customers were told "we ask just a little more for our goods than we gave".<sup>9</sup>

During the prosperous years the press would report "... the dry goods merchants have been doing a pleasing business... larger stocks have been laid in this fall..."<sup>10</sup> or "The ladies are perfectly run mad in the subject of spring bonnets about new styles at both Brown's and Lucy Stringfellow's milliner shops."<sup>11</sup>

Many of the dry goods merchants, grocers and hardware stores sold a myriad of goods. A hardware store might sell produce, a grocer might sell clothing. Much of the retail merchandise arrived in bulk so that merchants had numerous barrels, bins, and kegs lining the walls of the store or at intervals near their counters.<sup>12</sup> Some merchants placed their wares on the sidewalks, which caused the council to pass in 1853 an ordinance asking for the "immediate removal of all boxes in the footpaths in front of stores". This law was in

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<sup>8</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 3, 1860.

<sup>9</sup> Fredericksburg News, April 8, 1851.

<sup>10</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 23, 1849.

<sup>11</sup> Weekly Advertiser, April 23, 1853

<sup>12</sup> Daniel E. Sutherland, The Expansion of Everyday Life 1860 - 1876. (New York: Harper & Row, 1889), 188.

addition to the regulation that prohibited merchants or town residents from throwing dirty water in the streets. The editor of the Weekly Advertiser reacted to the latest law by saying "The streets and sidewalks are never so crowded as to render these boxes obstructions... as it is the streets and walks look like a dreg wasteland and present an exceedingly gloomy and mid-summer appearance."<sup>13</sup> Merchants also complained of the law which prohibited them from sweeping out their stores into the street or burning their trash. The Fredericksburg News called to the attention of the Mayor that there was also a law that prohibited people from keeping trash on their lots and as a result of the new restriction the merchants were now throwing their rubbish in the river. The News recommended council reconsider and that the police let them burn their waste in lieu of river disposal.<sup>14</sup> Other actions of the town's merchants also raised the concern of some.

The press, in the fall of 1849, seemed very much concerned about merchants behavior, pricing, and advertising practices in light of the fact that the canal was now in full operation.

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<sup>13</sup> Common Council Minutes January 1, 1855.  
Weekly Advertiser, April 23, 1853

<sup>14</sup> Fredericksburg News, May 14, 1859.



Walk up Commerce Street and Main Street and peep into the grocery and dry goods stores... and see the proprietor lounging about his door or talking with a loafer in the street, a customer rarely... if ever seen within his door... [only]... to borrow a few shillings to pay discount or a sum sufficient to curtail his note<sup>15</sup>

There appears to have been a high degree of trust between the customers and the shop keeper. Besides often not placing prices on their goods, store owners sold to local people on credit and farmers often were extended credit for a year until their crops could be sold. Some merchants advertised they sold their products for "cash only". All stores were closed by common council ordinance on Sunday.<sup>16</sup>

Additional advertising, according to some, seemed to be the solution to Fredericksburg's slow retail business in the 1840s.

Cast back upon the bankrupts for the last ten years in Fredericksburg, and our life upon it, they rarely advertised. Look upon those present, who are merely dragging along without the ability to make 'buckle and tongue' meet and you will never find their establishments named in the public papers... \$50 dollars expended in yearly advertisements is better than additional capital of \$3000.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 23, 1849.

<sup>16</sup> Sutherland, The Expansion of Everyday Life, 189-190; Elliott and Nye, Virginia Directory of Business 1852, 174; and Political Arena, October 4, 1841.

<sup>17</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 23, 1849.

Most newspapers carried one, and sometimes two full pages of advertisements for stores and manufacturers, sometimes on the front page of the paper. From 1844 to 1860 more and more ads appeared.<sup>18</sup> Many ads indicated a pride in carrying goods from Baltimore which was about as far north as a merchant dare claim his products came.<sup>19</sup> Knox, Hart and Hayes, later called Hart and Hayes, on Commerce Street sold wholesale and retail produce, hardware supplies, lumber, shingles, coal and were commission merchants. This indicated they sold for others and made commission on those sales. Hart and Hayes in the year 1859 owned real estate worth \$10,318.39, owned store furniture worth \$385, sold merchandise worth \$1,217,121 and in addition sold thirty-five barrels of flour for \$295.75 and guano from Peru worth \$4,171.12.<sup>20</sup> It is very obvious that some merchants prospered during this period, but some did not obtain their wealth at times in such an honorable fashion. One Richmond publication, the Virginia Directory and Business Register for 1852,

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<sup>18</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 3, 1860, November 10, 1860; Virginia Herald, January 20, 1858, April 16, 1842; and Democratic Recorder, October 11, 1844; and Christian Banner, June 6, 1850; and Fredericksburg News, October 30, 1849, August 19, 1850.

<sup>19</sup> Fredericksburg News, April 8, 1851.

<sup>20</sup> Hart and Hayes and Company Day Book. July 1, 1859-June 1860. Mss Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center.

showed twenty-three Fredericksburg merchants and manufacturers therein.<sup>21</sup>

The competition with Richmond and Alexandria made the high prices for retail goods a concern for the local press. The Fredericksburg News felt it had to apologize to its readers because the town had not maintained its low prices.

The parallel of prices between Richmond and Fredericksburg speaks unfavorably for Fredericksburg... [and] It behoveth the merchants of this town to explain the cause. We were told by them differently and so we published it. We hope to hear from them in our next [edition].<sup>22</sup>

Customers from the fall line area often voiced the same feelings. Isham Keith of Fauquier County, commending the town on the improvements to the river by the opening of the Rappahannock Canal, adds that

...The merchants of that place always are ready to take advantage of circumstances and could afford to simply give...because it is easier [now] to get to Fredericksburg than Alexandria. ...Fredericksburg has failed to get much trade because of the differences in [prices] of the two markets.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Elliott and Nye, Virginia Directory of Business 1852, 171-180.

<sup>22</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 30, 1849.

<sup>23</sup> Isham Keith to John Baker, 27, May 1854 Keith Family Papers 1710-1865 MSS in Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

FIGURE 8  
Merchant Advertisement

**HART & HAYES,**  
**Wholesale and Retail Grocers and**  
**COMMISSION MERCHANTS,**

**DEALERS IN WHEAT, FLOUR, CORN,**  
**&c.; offer for sale—**

200 bags Rio, Java and Laguira Coffee,  
27 hhds Brown Sugar, 120 bbls Coffee do,  
10,000 pounds Loaf, Crushed and Powdered do.  
20 hhds Puerto Rico Molasses.  
100 bbls Orleans and Cuba do  
10,000 pounds Sole Leather, 200 sides upper do,  
500 sacks fine and Ground Alum Salt,  
500 tons Lump and Ground Plaster,  
100 tons hammered and rolled Iron,  
2000 pounds "Naylor's" Cast Steel,  
50 boxes Penitentiary Axes, 2 do best broad do  
1 ton American and English Anvils,  
1 do do do Vices,  
2 cases Mill, X cut, and Pitt Saws,  
250 kegs best Nails, 4 tons Hollow Ware,  
50 packages Green and Black Tea,  
150 boxes Tallow and Adamantine Candles,  
300 barrels Potomac and Eastern Herringe,  
20,000 pounds Bacon Sides, 50 boxes Soap,  
200 kegs Blasting Powder,  
20,000 feet Safety Fuse for blasting,  
10,000 pounds Oakum, 1200 Packing Yarn,  
200 bbls Hydrantlic Cement, 50 do Calc. Plaster,  
500 bbls Wood-burnt Lime,  
20 dozen Wagon and Painted Buckets,  
10,000 pounds Manilla Rope, all sizes from half  
inch to three inches diameter,  
Files of all varieties,  
Ox, Breast, Halter and Trace Chains.

**A very large assortment of**  
**AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS:**

100 Prouty & Mear's Self-sharpening Ploughs,  
75 Watts' Cuff and Brace ditto,  
150 No. 1 1/2, Seed, Corn, Nos. 18, 19, 20 and 21  
ditto,  
50 Sub-soil and Mill-side ditto,  
100 Cutting Boxes, all approved varieties,  
75 Hand and Horse-power Corn Shellers,  
6 Corn and Cob Crushers,  
20 Cultivators for Corn and Tobacco.

**Always in Market for WHEAT at highest pri-**  
**ces, from the River, Canal, Depot or Wagons.**  
**August 20, 1853.**

One group of merchants, the owners of the town's hotels and taverns, were kept busy. It is hard to determine the exact number of such establishments that existed in the antebellum period. S.J. Quinn focuses on eight in his 1908 History of the City of Fredericksburg. They were The Rappahannock House, Farmers Hotel, Exchange Hotel, Eagle Hotel, Alexandria, Indian Queen Hotel, Western Hotel and Liberty Hotel.<sup>24</sup>

According to newspaper ads and land tax records some of them could not be documented and may have been out of business by 1840. The Farmers Hotel and Exchange Hotel were by far the most popular. The Farmers Hotel, built in 1822 was on the west corner of Caroline and Hanover Streets and was owned by C.A. Tackett in 1852. The Exchange Hotel was on the south corner of Caroline and Hanover Streets.<sup>25</sup> The Farmers Hotel promised that "every exertion will be made to please", and that the "table will have the best the markets afford".<sup>26</sup> The Exchange Hotel could claim it was the first three story building in town and when Mr. and Mrs. Bowen reopened in 1849 they promised "polite and attentive

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<sup>24</sup>Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 165-167.

<sup>25</sup>Robert R. Howison, Fredericksburg Past, Present and Future (Fredericksburg: Rufus B. Merchant, 1880), 32.

<sup>26</sup>Democratic Recorder, March 24, 1844.

**FIGURE 9**  
**Merchants Advertisements 1852**

FREDERICKSBURG

**V. RICHARDS & BRO.**

DEALERS IN

American, French, Swiss, and English,

**FANCY AND STAPLE DRY GOODS.**

MAIN STREET, FREDERICKSBURG, VA.

**CHARLES C. WELLFORD,**

SOUTH WEST CORNER OF CAROLINE AND GEORGE STREETS,

**Fredericksburg, Va.**

Dealer in French, English, India, German and Domestic

**DRY GOODS,**

OF THE NEWEST AND MOST DESIRABLE STYLES.

Particular attention paid to orders. Prices uniformly as low as at any other establishment in the State.

**FREDERICKSBURG DRY GOODS TRADE.**

**W. H. CUNNINGHAM & BRO.,**

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALERS IN

British, French and American Dry Goods,

**Main St., Fredericksburg, Va.**

Keeps constantly on hand a full assortment of

Ladies Dress Goods,  
House Furnishing Goods,  
Linen Goods,  
White Goods,

Goods for Gentlemen and  
Youths Wear,  
Goods for Farmers Wear,  
Domestic Goods,

With all the articles usually kept in the largest Dry Goods establishments; and at prices equally low with those of the larger Northern Markets.

**TERMS CASH**

AND ONE PRICE STRICTLY ADHERED TO.

Source: Elliott and Nye Virginia Directory of Business 1852  
(Richmond: Elliott & Nye Printers, 1852), 174.

servants".<sup>27</sup> The Eagle Hotel and Tavern promised its customers "the best oysters the Rappahannock will produce".<sup>28</sup> The Exchange and Farmers Hotels both offered to send servants to and from the railroad depot to carry luggage and both provided a stable in the rear.<sup>29</sup>

Because Fredericksburg was at the end of the RF&P Railroad line until 1842, it was generally necessary for northbound passengers to remain overnight in Fredericksburg.<sup>30</sup> The hotels were also one of the few places where large audiences could attend lectures, dances, auctions and see touring ministerial shows.<sup>31</sup> A fire in 1850 completely destroyed the Exchange Hotel. The Farmers Hotel was damaged by a kitchen fire in 1857 that closed it down for two months.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Political Arena, October 18, 1849.

<sup>28</sup> Democratic Recorder, March 24, 1844.

<sup>29</sup> Political Arena, October 18, 1849; Democratic Recorder, March 24, 1844.

<sup>30</sup> John B. Mordecai, A Brief History of the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad (Richmond: R F & P Railroad, 1940), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Weekly Advertiser, February 18, 1860, February 21, 1853.

<sup>32</sup> Weekly Advertiser, January 24, 1857; Fredericksburg News March 23, 1850.

Jessie White of the Weekly Advertiser let it be known that

The most important improvement which our town needs is a first class hotel on a large and complete scale...when such a building is erected and only till then will the town become of any importance.<sup>33</sup>

But many people in town were not as civic minded and could not see a profit in another. Many were interested in seeking power and wealth in the form of ownership of property and some felt that the existing establishments were too run down to attract a better clientele.

Some of Fredericksburg's merchants such as James McGuire, Peter Goolrick, James Bradley, A.K. Phillips, John Tackett, and Hugh Doggett acquired large real estate and personal property holdings and held long time seats on the common council.<sup>34</sup> But many people were small shop owners who held real estate valued from \$500 to \$1,000 and could not afford to advertise or expand as others did. Of the four wealthiest men in town in 1850, two were merchants. They were, A.K. Phillips, a coal merchant, and Hugh Scott, a dry goods and commission merchant.

Another merchant, Peter Goolrick, invested his money in

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<sup>33</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 5, 1859.

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Census 1850, 1860 Fredericksburg, Population Armstrong, Urban Vision in Virginia, 396-397. The author considers any person owning \$10,000 or more in real estate in both decades to be wealthy.



town property. In 1850 he owned sixteen lots and by 1860 he owned one of the largest holdings of real estate, having thirty-three lots valued at \$76,000.<sup>35</sup>

Along with the merchants, the learned professionals of Fredericksburg made up only 1.3 percent of the population in 1840 and 1850. In 1860 they were eight percent. This group included doctors, lawyers, dentists, ministers, teachers, managers and bank presidents.<sup>36</sup> Most of these men owned real estate and substantial personal property and a few were political leaders. Their average real estate holdings in 1850 was \$6,743 and by 1860 it had grown to \$7,825.<sup>37</sup>

Physicians and lawyers alone made up twenty-five percent of this group in 1860.<sup>38</sup> In 1843 there were seven lawyers and eight doctors. Of the latter, Dr. William Bankhead, Dr. R.B. Wellford and Dr. John Welland, as well as attorney W.B. Burton, ranked among the wealthiest men in town, each owning more than \$15,000 in real estate.<sup>39</sup> With

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<sup>35</sup> Land Tax Records Fredericksburg. 1841-1850 Microfilm of Mss Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia See Table 4.

<sup>36</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population Schedule. See Table 4.

<sup>37</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population Schedule.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid; Personal Property Taxes 1850, Fredericksburg.

the growth of the town came an increasing number of cases of consumption, pneumonia, dropsy, scarlet fever, cholera, whooping cough, and croup, all of which could be deadly.<sup>40</sup> The result was an increase to fourteen in the number of doctors by 1860.<sup>41</sup> Dr. Lawrence B. Rose's ledger book indicates he tended to both the well to do and their slaves. The cost of an office visit to Dr. Rose was two dollars.<sup>42</sup> By 1860 lawyers like William A. Little, Elliott Braxton, Thomas Burton and W.G. Barton and doctors like John S. Wellford, I.A. Wallace and William M. Smith and a dentist, H.H. Blankman, were included in the sixty wealthiest people in Fredericksburg, all possessing over \$14,000 in real estate.<sup>43</sup> Other learned professionals such as Judge John Lomax and Clerk of the Court, John James Chew, along with ministers such as George Rowe, Samuel Rodgers and A.M. Randolph were included in this prosperous group.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> United States Census 1850, 1860 Fredericksburg, Death Schedule. Mss of Microfilm at Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>41</sup> Personal Property Taxes 1860 Fredericksburg.

<sup>42</sup> Ledger Book of Lawrence Berry Rose M.D. 1800-1861. Xerox Copy; Wellford Family Papers. Photocopy of Mss at Central Rappahannock Regional Library, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>43</sup> Census 1860, Population Schedule.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

By 1860 there were twenty-one different types of skilled craftsman who made up seventeen percent of the town's workforce. Some were able to own their own businesses but many were employed by others.<sup>45</sup> The most numerous craftsmen were tailors, shoemakers, seamstresses, blacksmiths and carpenters. Newspaper advertisements attest to the retail business of some of these craftsmen. Employment in the mills and factories of the town was also common.<sup>46</sup> Robert Smith, a tailor, ran a small ad to solicit the patronage of his customers since he "had taken a room over the store of Galleher Young and Company". Thomas Juzeh, a watch and clockmaker, said he had "established himself in this place on Main Street, one door above Gray's Book Store... fully prepared to repair watches, clocks, and jewelry at low rates".<sup>47</sup> Seamstress Martha Long and her daughters advertised they were prepared to "make dresses in the most fashionable style and at the shortest notice".<sup>48</sup> James Pullian, after buying a "pretty little gun" found the gunsmith to be a fine man who "knew his craft".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. See Table 4.

<sup>46</sup> Pockriss, Rappahannock Water Power, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 3, 1860

<sup>48</sup> Democratic Recorder, October 11, 1844

<sup>49</sup> Diary of James R. Pullian November 24, 1845.

Many of these craftsmen maintained a good standard of living but would remain propertyless, leasing their shops from others. In 1850 there were no craftsmen in the wealthiest class of people. By 1860 master carpenter W.M. Baggett, Peleg Clark, a farrier and James M. Scott, a carpenter could claim this distinction. On average they owned over \$16,000 in real estate.<sup>50</sup> A comparison of artisans between the 1840s and 1850s indicates that they made up forty percent of the town's workforce in both decades.<sup>51</sup> Certain trades did not appear until the 1860 census and can be related to the town's growth in manufacturing. Men employed as tailors in the clothing industry increased by fifty-two percent over 1850 figures and the occupation of seamstress and milliner first appeared in the 1860 census.<sup>52</sup> There was a forty-four percent increase in blacksmiths and the appearance of wheelwrights associated with carriage and foundry industries.<sup>53</sup>

The occupations of saddle and harness maker remained the same during the 1840s and 1850s as did the number of manufacturers of those goods. Unusual was the fact that the

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<sup>50</sup> Census 1860, Population Schedule; Land Tax Records, Fredericksburg 1849-1860

<sup>51</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population Schedule

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

number of boot and shoemakers remained at thirty-four during the two decades, while there was a fifty percent increase in the manufacture of shoes.<sup>54</sup> This might indicate that unskilled labor was employed or that the "hands" hired were shoemakers from outside of Fredericksburg.

The growth in the economy, as related to the town's craftsmen, can also be seen in the increase in the construction industry. As Table 4 indicates, there was a twenty-two percent increase in carpenters, brickmakers, bricklayers and house painters. Noticeable new construction occurred in Fredericksburg throughout the period.<sup>55</sup> The Fredericksburg News said;

Our town in a word is looking up. New buildings are being erected and old ones brushed up. Carpenters, bricklayers, and painters have all cheerful looks on their faces<sup>56</sup>

The most noticeable addition of large buildings were the New Presbyterian and Reform Baptist Churches built in 1833. The Episcopal Church and Baptist Church were constructed in 1849. The courthouse, built in 1852, plus the rebuilding of the Exchange Hotel in 1850 and Bridgewater Mill in 1858, provided many jobs in construction. As indicated, Peleg

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<sup>54</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population and Industrial Schedules.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 23, 1849.

Clark and William M. Baggett's carpentry businesses grew into building contractors. Baggett was awarded the contract for the new courthouse.<sup>57</sup> Each of these men employed eight to twelve laborers or craftsmen by 1860 at an average cost of \$27.00 a month. In 1860 the average carpenter in town was paid \$1.25 a week.<sup>58</sup>

George Alex, J.K. Knight and George Mullen all owned brickmaking kilns and made an average 580,000 bricks a year, employing twelve hands each at an average cost of \$17.00 per month. House builder William Wooton said he built four houses a year valued at \$12,000 using just twelve laborers or craftsmen at a cost of \$41.00 a month. Fellow builder James Gongue accomplished \$5,000 worth of "house work" and A.J. Burnell \$4,000 a year. House and sign painter Robert Keyser annually worked sixty jobs "plain painting" houses.<sup>59</sup>

Tradesmen during the period did not appear to rank the honor that planters, merchants or professionals did. In the 1840s only George B. Waite, a tailor, and Peyton Hough, a tanner were craftsmen who were elected to the common council and in the 1850s only William Chesley, a saddler, was able to be elected to council.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Willis and Felder Handbook of Historic Fredericksburg, 18-26; Census 1850, 1860, Industrial Schedule.

<sup>58</sup> Census 1840, 1850, 1860, Industrial, Social Schedules.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Armstrong, Urban Vision in Virginia, 395-396.

TABLE 4  
OCCUPATIONS  
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA  
1850-1860

Category	1850	1860	% of Increase
Manufacturer	12	45	72%
Merchants	108	180	60%
Artisans (21)	66	214	69%
Unskilled	18	145	87%
Mariners	27	18	-33% (decrease)
Professionals	46	67	31%
Construction	76	98	22%
Other		67	

Source: 1850, 1860 U.S. Census, Population Schedule.

Another noticeable change among Fredericksburg craftsmen and a further indication of the town's prosperity was the development of a more extensive apprenticeship system by the year 1860. By then many craftsmen were training others to perform their skill at the apprentice level.<sup>61</sup> New apprenticeships were seen in the occupations of wheelwright, butcher, basket maker, cabinet maker, saddler, machinist, bricklayer, blacksmith, carriage maker, iron worker, milliner, candler, and book binder.<sup>62</sup>

A small group of skilled craftsmen were African-American. In 1850 they worked as carpenters, coopers,

<sup>61</sup> Census 1850 1860, Population Schedule.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

painters, blacksmiths, barbers, bricklayers, brick molders, shoe and boot makers. The most numerous were carpenters (5) and bricklayers (3). By 1860 black craftsmen made up twenty-four percent of the working free black community. While most free blacks were servants, washwomen or laborers, there was now a black apprentice shoemaker and bricklayer.<sup>63</sup>

The occupations of servant, draymen and laborer which were non-existent in 1850 in the black community were evident by 1860.<sup>64</sup> Loren Schweninger, in his 1992 study of Virginia free black businesses, found that there were thirteen towns where free black businesses increased an average of fifty-two percent during the period from 1830 to 1860. In Fredericksburg they increased by thirty-three percent.<sup>65</sup> Luther P. Jackson noted that "a number of negro skilled mechanics of all kinds... were located in Fredericksburg". He also explained that free blacks were often able to secure land on their own rather than by bequest

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Loren Schweninger, "The Roots of Enterprise Black owned Businesses in Virginia 1830-1850"; The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 100, (October, 1992.): 516.



which indicates that a certain degree of black wealth existed.<sup>66</sup>

The most prominent black men between 1840 and 1860 (based on ownership of property) were James West, a blacksmith, William Walker, a painter, Robert Even, railroad engineer, James Taliaferro, a barber, Abraham Howard, a blacksmith and James Brooks who reported no occupation. James Taliaferro was the wealthiest, paying taxes on several lots and buildings worth \$2,500. The average value of free black real estate in 1850 was \$1,262 but because of the large increase in numbers the average went down to only \$600.00 in 1860.<sup>67</sup>

The largest single group of workers in Fredericksburg were the unskilled laborers who made up eighteen percent of the work force by 1860. Jobs included laborers, servants, draymen and washwomen. In 1860 all the washwomen were black as well as sixteen percent of the laborers. Of the twenty-three servants, sixteen were free blacks. They rarely owned any property and usually had no personal property worth more than \$50 to \$100.<sup>68</sup> A laborer generally was paid seventy-five cents a week with room and board and one dollar a week

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<sup>66</sup> Jackson, Free Negro Labor. 96, 122.

<sup>67</sup> Census, 1850, 1860, Population Schedule; Land Tax Books 1840 & 1850; 1860.

<sup>68</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population and Social Schedules.

without. A servant made \$1.50 a week with room and board.<sup>69</sup> The need for unskilled labor was high in Fredericksburg and despite the availability of free black and slave workers, merchants and manufacturers kept the poor white labor employed before anyone else.<sup>70</sup> The agrarian idea that slaves were meant for field work combined with the attitude that free blacks were inferior workers kept the future for poor whites much more promising than for blacks.

Other groups of workers made noticeable changes from 1850 to 1860. The town's teachers increased fifty percent as more attention was given to education.<sup>71</sup> A significant change took place in the area of mariners. In 1850 there were twenty-seven sailors and one sea captain living in town. By 1860 there was a large increase in the number of sea captains but an overall decrease in the category of seamen. The change was related to the large number of steamboats which docked in town during the period and the decrease of sailing vessels seen in port.<sup>72</sup>

One aspect of the economy that concerned many people

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<sup>69</sup> Census 1860, Social Schedule.

<sup>70</sup> Virginia Herald February 3, 1858; Map and Discription of Fredericksburg Water Power Company, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population Schedules.

<sup>72</sup> Census 1850, 1860, Population Schedules. David C. Holley, Tidewater by Steamboat: A Saga of the Chesapeake (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 274.

was taxes. The tax on real property gave the state most of the revenue it needed. Personal property taxes were placed on personal articles and a series of license taxes became important to both the state and town.<sup>73</sup>

Real estate taxes were modified throughout the antebellum period as the state reacted to the changes in the business cycle. Land in town was designated as "lots" and was taxed based on its rental value, which in the 1840s was at a rate of \$2.40 to \$3.00 per \$100 of potential rental income. In 1840 the town residents paid a total real estate tax of \$1,477.45 and by 1850 paid \$1,570.53, both at a rate of \$2.40. In 1850 the town's lots and property were worth \$11,288.95.<sup>74</sup> By 1860, with the increases made in tax rates to \$3.00, its citizens paid \$5,222.68 and its lots and buildings were worth \$1,305,671.<sup>75</sup> Liens were placed on delinquent real estate taxes of six percent per annum and every five years the property could be sold to recover those taxes. The town exempted schools, churches and charitable

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<sup>73</sup> Edgar, Sydenstricker, Brief History of Taxation in Virginia (Richmond: Superintendent of Printing, 1915), 27. James M. Matthews, Laws of Virginia, and of a Permanent Character and General Operation, 2 (Richmond, C.H. Wynne, 1857) 817.

<sup>74</sup> Land Tax Records Fredericksburg 1840, 1850. U.S. Census 1850 Fredericksburg, Social Schedule.

<sup>75</sup> U.S. Census 1860 Fredericksburg, Social Schedule. Land Tax Records, Fredericksburg, 1860.

organizations.<sup>76</sup>

Personal property taxes before 1842 were collected only from owners of slaves over twelve years of age, horses, coaches, stage coaches, carryalls and gigs. In 1840 the town collected \$190.20 from slave owners and \$105.00 from the different modes of transportation.<sup>77</sup> In 1842 the list of property to be taxed was extended as the state searched for other sources of income during the depression.<sup>78</sup> The new items taxed were watches, pianos, clocks, silver plates, and certain animals. In that year the town's contributions went to \$675.27 and by 1850 was \$1,296.67.<sup>79</sup>

In 1851 the new state constitution went a step further and made all personal property taxable. Throughout the decade it continued to find many other items to add to the list. Besides increasing tax rates on slaves, it added taxation on free blacks over sixteen years of age up to fifty-five years of age and every white male over twenty-one. Taxes were also collected on interest income from stocks, bonds, and capital investments in manufacturing and

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<sup>76</sup> Matthews, Laws of Virginia, 819. Personal Property Tax Records 1850. List of Exemptions.

<sup>77</sup> Personal Property Records Fredericksburg, 1840.

<sup>78</sup> Robert F. Hunter, "The Turnpike Movement in Virginia" PhD Diss., Columbia University, 1957), 54.

<sup>79</sup> Personal Property Tax Records 1842, 1850.

mining. By 1860 the town's total personal property tax bill was \$7,570. Of that, the town was paying \$3,187.26 from interest and income.<sup>80</sup> As an example, in 1856 Edward C. McGuire, a Baptist minister, paid \$4.50 tax on two slaves, \$6.00 for himself, personal property tax of \$4.35 and \$13.08 on his bonds. Real estate taxes brought his total tax to \$65.45.<sup>81</sup> The town gave a five percent deduction if a tax payer paid before August 1st and two and one half percent from August to October.

By 1840 license taxes were collected on merchants, ordinary keepers, private entertainment establishments, exhibition shows, vendors of lottery tickets and from doctors and lawyers.<sup>82</sup> Before 1850 these taxes were directed at wholesale merchants, but after the 1851 constitution, a graduated form of license tax was developed and the list of taxable establishments grew to include private boarding houses, cook shops, public rooms, coal and wood yards, feed stores and more.<sup>83</sup> The town, according to law, could "in

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<sup>80</sup> Personal Property Tax Records 1850 - 1860.

<sup>81</sup> Account book of Charles Edward McGuire 1855-1858 Clairborne Family Papers 1803 - 1954 Mss, at Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Fredericksburg News, April 4, 1851.

<sup>82</sup> Sydenstricker, History of Taxation in Virginia, 2.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

addition to the state taxes on the licenses... impose a town tax for the privilege of doing the same and required a license be obtained... in any case in which it saw fit...."<sup>84</sup>

In 1840 the town's ordinary and hotel owners paid a \$20.00 fee if their yearly value of business was \$200 or less and ten percent if over that figure.<sup>85</sup> This helps explain why, throughout the period, the fees varied from one proprietor to another. Of the nine licenses issued in 1840, most paid \$20.00. This license allowed the owner to provide "wholesome and clean lodging and a diet for the travelers, stableage, fodder, ...[and] pasturage... for their horses". In addition to running an establishment which would not permit "gaming in his house nor suffer any person to tipple and drink more than is necessary". Owners were also in violation of the law if they sold alcohol to slaves or free blacks. The normal fine for the failure to acquire a license was twice the fee for the license.<sup>86</sup> By 1850 eight ordinary licenses had been issued by the Hustings Court. Some included permission to run a house of public

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<sup>84</sup> Matthews, Laws of Virginia, 817; Common Council Minutes August 27, 1852; and General Assembly of Virginia, Sketches of the Acts and Joint Resolutions 1852-53. Mss at Virginia State Library Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>85</sup> License Fee Records Fredericksburg 1840-1860 MS Fredericksburg Court House.

<sup>86</sup> License Fee Records 1840-1860.

entertainment but most went to hotel owners. In 1850 William Bowan and Robert Dillsam were issued license for a "house of private entertainment".<sup>87</sup> In 1860 there were still only eight licenses issued, and in May of 1853 the Hustings Court had the "nerve and moral courage to refuse retail liquor licenses to all but the regularly established hotels".<sup>88</sup> This was certainly brought on by the active influence of the town's churches and the Temperance Society which was extremely active in the town.<sup>89</sup>

Common council had also collected extra license fees from draymen or wagon drivers who were for hire. The rates they could charge were also set by council. As with all town licenses, it lasted one year and the number fluctuated throughout the period. Failure to acquire a license could result in a five dollar fine for a white person and twenty lashes for a free black.<sup>90</sup> Taxes were collected on all wagons and carts and in 1851 drays were taxed \$6.20, wagons \$10.00, hacks and carriages \$10.00 and buggies \$5.00.<sup>91</sup> A

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<sup>87</sup> License Fee Records Fredericksburg, 1850. Hening, Statutes at Large 10: 441.

<sup>88</sup> Weekly Advertiser, May 21, 1853.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ordinances of the Corporation of Fredericksburg, 1853 (Fredericksburg: News Printing Office, 1853), 3.

<sup>91</sup> Fredericksburg News April 8, 1851; Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1853, 4-6, 20, 52.

drayman had to number his wagon and could not sit idle in the street for more than four hours nor could he feed the horse during this time. A drayman or wagoner could receive, as of June 1849, ten lashes if black or a one dollar fine if white for violating this law. Individuals and manufacturers could also have one salesman on the streets without a license and a cartman with fresh fish could keep his catch there for only thirty minutes before removal. Cartmen were required to have licenses.<sup>92</sup>

Unlike some localities, Fredericksburg did not have a special tax to maintain the poor house or help the poor of the town. The funds used for this purpose were taken from the general fund of the town.<sup>93</sup> Based on the reports between 1840 and 1860, the town spent \$7,923.83 on this segment of the town's population.<sup>94</sup> Because reporting by the overseers of the poor was so intermittent during the twenty-year period, the best view of money spent is from 1840 to 1847. After this only two reports were submitted, in 1853 and 1860.<sup>95</sup> On average the town spent \$561.87 per year on

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<sup>92</sup> Ordinances of the Corporation of Fredericksburg 1853, 1, 11; Ordinances of the Corporation of Fredericksburg, Frdericksburg: Herald Office, 1845, 70.

<sup>93</sup> Reports of the Overseers of the Poor 1839-1860 Fredericksburg, Mss at the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Reports of the Overseers of the Poor 1840-1847



individuals who resided in the poor house. This went for fuel, food, clothing, coffins and medical care.<sup>96</sup> They also spent an average of \$336 a year in allowances given to the poor who lived at other locations in the town, some of which were given jobs. Many of these allowances were given in the winter or as a result of floods. On average, six whites and three blacks were housed in a year and an average nine white and four free blacks received allowances.<sup>97</sup>

In 1860 in the last report of commissioners of the poor, then President John Caldwell said,

There is still no special levy for the support of the poor. The authority of the overseers is to draw during the year a sum of \$1,000 by taxation on real estate and personal property for the support of the poor of the corporation.<sup>98</sup>

Caldwell also said that in 1860 seventy to eighty travelers were given temporary lodging, supplies and breakfast and in addition a significant number of twenty-nine white and four free blacks were now housed in the Poor House. This was by far the largest number in the period.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Report of the Overseers of the Poor Fredericksburg, 1860.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

A most interesting facet of the town's economy was the town market. There had been a town market in Fredericksburg since 1727 and in the antebellum period it was located on the lower level of the town hall including the "market alley" going toward Caroline Street.<sup>100</sup> The market house, as it was called, provided the townsfolk and county residents a place to buy and sell fresh bread, fruits, vegetables, fowl, fish, beef, pork, mutton, veal, lamb, butter, eggs and wild game.<sup>101</sup> It also provided a place to meet friends and talk politics. John Pullian of Spotsylvania, coming to town to buy fish from the carts, was forced to buy barrel fish from the market which was "very high"... but he "...remained sometime and left... with no news in town".<sup>102</sup>

The common council, throughout the period, made market laws to protect the quality of food sold and heard concerns about activities at the market. To keep order Council paid a "fit and proper" person \$100 a year to be clerk of the market. He was to collect daily rents, assess fines and weigh foods in addition to keeping the area clean.<sup>103</sup> A re-

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<sup>100</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large, 4: 235. Spotsylvania County Works Progress Administration Report, June 17, 1937, 280.

<sup>101</sup> "Ordinances of Market Square" Completed by Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center. February 4, 1972.

<sup>102</sup> John Pullian Diary, March. 29, 1843.

<sup>103</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1845, 22; Common Council Minutes October 5, 1854.

vised set of regulations for the market was issued in August of 1838 and again in October of 1854 with periodic ordinances in between. Market hours were from 9 a.m. from April 1 to September 1 and 10 a.m. from September 1 to April 1 each year and it was open on Wednesdays and Saturdays only.<sup>104</sup> Fines could be given for selling goods by methods other than weight or for using obscene or profane language, fighting or building a fire in the area. Fines ranged from two dollars to ten dollars and it was a two dollar fine for throwing parts of a slaughtered animal in the market lot or on a town street.<sup>105</sup> Additional ordinances became necessary as the popularity of the market grew. Effective October 15, 1854, the clerk had to keep dogs out of the market, keep his scales in good working order, provide at least three stalls for "country people", not let a butcher rent more than two stalls and make them pay twenty-five cents for each side of beef they brought into market. It was also a five dollar fine to interfere with the duties of the clerk. He could call upon the police if he needed help to maintain order.<sup>106</sup>

The merchants, learned professionals and artisans each

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<sup>104</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1853, 7, 73.

<sup>105</sup> "Ordinances of Market Square" Feb. 21, 1972.

<sup>106</sup> Ordinance of Fredericksburg 1853, 19.

had a role to play in this period of the town's slow development. Like the manufacturers and millers they were influenced so much by the agrarian ideal that when they tried to earn a living it was difficult. In an era when being anything other than a planter or farmer was sometimes considered less than honorable, citizens were made doubtful of the practicality of developing factories.<sup>107</sup>

But it was the business class that produced much of the support for the town's manufacturing future. As they prospered and improved in their small shops and stores they were helping to modify and slow the change in the all too stormy agrarian attitudes.<sup>108</sup> They also began to discard the rural ideals of the past and take on the mercantile and commercial community which as we will see made them less eager in the last decade before the war to follow the secessionists when the time came.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization 1790-1860 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 244.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid*, 247.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid*, 244.

CHAPTER VI  
TOWN GOVERNMENT

Ever since the General Assembly in 1781 incorporated the town of Fredericksburg it had either a Board of Trustees or a common council as its chief governing body.<sup>1</sup> According to town ordinances, the town's voters during the antebellum period were to pick twelve "fit and able men, freeholders and inhabitants of the town" as a common council.<sup>2</sup> Each member was elected for one year and had the major responsibility of protecting the health and safety of the citizens of the town. This involved the making of ordinances and by-laws, collecting taxes and appointing town officials to enforce the will of the state and the council.<sup>3</sup>

The state gave the council powers much like those of the county court in the numerous counties in Virginia. The town charter gave the corporation the powers to "purchase, receive and possess lands and tenements, goods and chattels". In addition, it allowed the council to erect a courthouse, warehouse, jail, and pass any law as long as it

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<sup>1</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large, 10: 440.

<sup>2</sup> Ordinances of the Corporation of Fredericksburg 1845, 5.

<sup>3</sup> James M. Mathews, Laws of Virginia of a Civil Nature and of a Permanent Character and General Operation (Richmond: C.W. Wynne, 1857.) 7: 817.

"shall not be repugnant to or inconsistent with the laws and Constitution of the Commonwealth." <sup>4</sup>

The business of council and the mayor was conducted in the Town Hall at the corner of Princess Anne and William Streets. Constructed between 1814-1816, at a cost of \$6,250, it was a two-story Federal style building with the town market on the lower level. It replaced the old town hall that stood directly below on Caroline Street. The building was ninety-seven feet long and thirty-three feet wide with twenty-three nine pane windows. It was constructed with twelve foot alleys on the side so that fire wagons could pass by. There were no stairs down to the market, due to the noise and odors of that space.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the period the building was used for citizen meetings, religious services, balls, the first public library, as well as housing the council chambers, the office of the mayor and clerk of the town.<sup>6</sup>

It was the responsibility of the town Sergeant to conduct all elections as it was the duty of the sheriff to do so in the county. He was responsible to give ten days

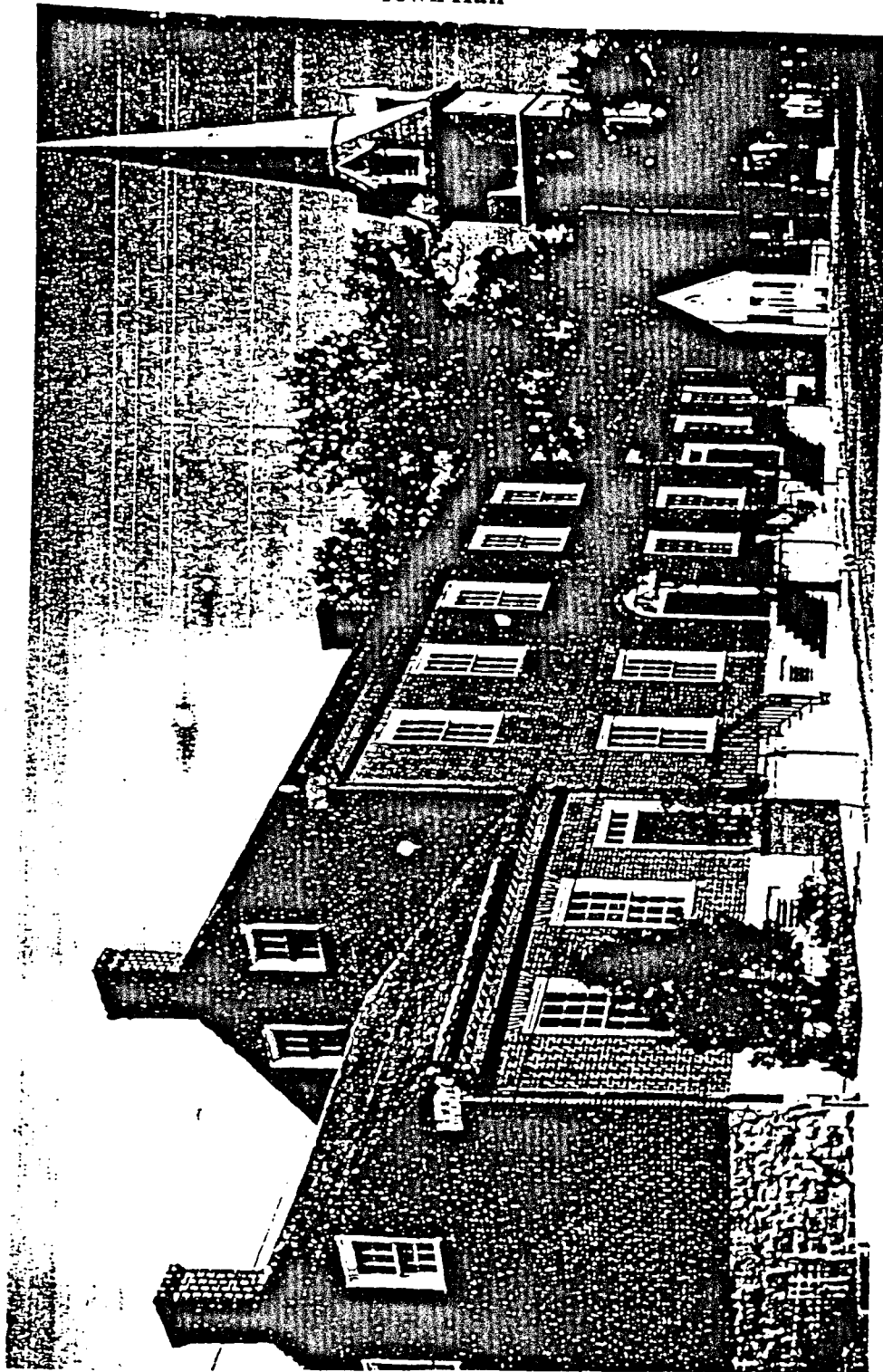
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<sup>4</sup> Hening, Statutes At Large 10; 440-441. Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1845, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Spotsylvania County Works Progress Administration Report, June 17, 1937, 280. Fredericksburg Area Museum and Cultural Center Newsletter, May 18, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Free Lance Star "Town Hall" November 7, 1988, 23.

**FIGURE 10**  
**Town Hall**



From a photo taken by F.B. Johnson in 1927.  
Historic Fredericksburg Foundation, Inc. Collection

notice to the town's voters about when and at what time the election would be held. In 1782 the town elections were set on the third Monday in March each year and were to be held by secret ballot. Many counties still used voice vote, but not Fredericksburg.<sup>7</sup> Only freeholders of town property could vote in elections and a twelve-month residency was required.<sup>8</sup> It appears that double voting in both the county and the town by dual property owners was not a problem in the Fredericksburg area. Voters cast their ballots at town hall in a locked ballot box provided by the council.<sup>9</sup>

Fredericksburg was not divided into wards as were the larger cities. In 1840 the average number of votes cast for the twelve council seats was only fifty-eight. By 1854 it was 235. This large increase was due to the new 1852 Virginia Constitution which allowed suffrage for all free white males who were twenty-one. In 1855 the number of registered voters according to Commission of the Revenue was 586.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1845, 5; Mathews, Laws of Virginia, 1857, 815.

<sup>8</sup> Hening, Statutes at Large 10; 440; Julian A.C. Chandler, History of Suffrage in Virginia (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1901), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Common Council Minutes March 19, 1838.

<sup>10</sup> Common Council Minutes March 17, 1840; Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854, March 26, 1860; and Virginia Herald, June 7, 1855.



After each election the votes were counted by the existing common council. Once elected the council had to take the oath of office within two months of the election. This usually took place the same day or night of the election.<sup>11</sup> In order to conduct the business of council it took a quorum of seven members and special meetings could only be called by the mayor, recorder and any two members of council.<sup>12</sup>

During the twenty year period under consideration council used the committee system to perform its duties. Each year three committees were formed on streets, pumps, and public property. Council members on these committees selected and studied the problems of the town. In the 1850s a finance committee was added. Several special committees were formed as needed. There is no record of council members ever receiving any salary during this period, but many county courts received compensation after 1851. The mayor and other town officials were paid.<sup>13</sup>

The town elected fifty different men between 1840 and

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<sup>11</sup> Mathews, Laws of Virginia, 1857, 815.

<sup>12</sup> Mathews, Laws of Virginia, 1857, 816; Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1845, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Common Council Minutes April 1, 1841, March 18, 1845, March 16, 1846. Fredericksburg News, April 18, 1851, March 25, 1854, March 26, 1859; Weekly Advertiser, March 21, 1857; and Martin, Gazeteer of Virginia, 283.

1860 to common council.<sup>14</sup> Throughout this period most of these men were merchants, manufacturers and professional people. Thomas Armstrong, in his study of common council, found this to be true from 1803 to 1860, but his list included craftsmen, too. A more concentrated evaluation between 1840-1860 saw few, if any, craftsmen now being elected.<sup>15</sup> In a period when the number of artisans rose sixty-nine percent, it is evident they lost political power.

In 1840 fifty percent of council were dry goods merchants and grocers. Twenty percent were manufacturers, with no professionals, and only two percent were craftsmen. By 1845 the council was forty-five percent merchants, thirty percent manufacturers and twenty-five percent professionals. By 1850 each group had thirty percent of the total makeup. Throughout this decade merchants remained at fifty percent while manufacturers and professionals vied for the remaining seats on council.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to understand that councilmen as businessmen viewed government as a catalyst for the economic

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<sup>14</sup> Armstrong, Urban Scene in Virginia, 296-397. Armstrong failed to include in his listing of Common Council members all who were elected between 1840-1860.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Common Council Minutes April 9, 1840, April 18, 1841, July 14, 1844, March 18, 1845, March 16, 1846, March 16, 1847; Fredericksburg News, March 21, 1851, March 10, 1858; and Weekly Advertiser, March 21, 1857, March 26, 1859.

growth of the town. They were the proponents of commercial and manufacturing expansion, and therefore supported area transportation improvements, encouraged manufacturing and at the same time tried to provide a retail center for the local farmers. They were somewhat laissez faire about public improvements. It was obvious that some town leaders would benefit more than others from such action.

During the 1840s no council member owned more than \$10,000 in real estate except Thomas Knox, a merchant/miller, who was the wealthiest council member.<sup>17</sup> But councilmen and soon-to-be-wealthy merchants such as James McGuire, Peter Goolrick, and George P. Waite were elected several times during the latter forties and fifties and most would fall in this upper real estate bracket by 1860. Also professional men such as Dr. B.S. Herdon, and lawyers John Minor, D.H. Gordon and W.S. Barton were elected many times and would do the same.<sup>18</sup> In the late fifties council became more diversified. The newest members were Horace Hall, druggist, Andrew Adams, livery stable operator, and John Collins, horse dealer. With the election of these men,

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<sup>17</sup> Census 1850 Population Schedule.

<sup>18</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 21, 1851, March 10, 1858; Weekly Advertiser, March 21, 1857, March 26, 1859.

council became more representative of the people.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the 1840s, during the 1850s sixteen out of thirty-two men who held office owned real estate over \$10,000 and could be considered some of the wealthiest men in town.<sup>20</sup> James McGuire, elected fifteen times and Dr. B.S. Herdon, who was elected each year for ten years were the most popular candidates.<sup>21</sup>

According to the town's charter, the council, once selected, could appoint

from among themselves or from the citizens of the state, who may have resided in the town for one year and be a freeholder therein and also from among themselves a mayor, a recorder, and senior alderman.<sup>22</sup>

Between 1840 and 1860 the election of mayor was carried out in a manner according to the charter but at the same time the council reacted to the growing wave of democracy and allowed the citizens to vote for the office of mayor. The council allowed what they called the voters to "designate a preference" with respect to the mayor's position. They in turn followed this direction in their final selection. This worked well for the town through the period despite a call

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<sup>19</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 24, 1960.

<sup>20</sup> Census 1860 Population Schedule.

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, Urban Scene in Virginia, 396.

<sup>22</sup> Mathews, Laws of Virginia 1857, 814.

for a charter change.<sup>23</sup>

The men selected mayor were, Benjamin Clarke (1838-1844), Robert B. Semple, Jr. (1844-1853), Peter Goolrick (1854-1855 and 1857-1860), John L. Marye Jr. (1853-1854), John Caldwell (1855-1857) and Dr. William F. Scott (1859-1860).<sup>24</sup> According to town law the mayor had to have an office in town hall where he could "transact the business of the corporation" and that office had to be open to the public each day from nine to ten o'clock in the morning.<sup>25</sup> The mayor was responsible for executing the laws of the town and he had direct control over the town police and the night watchmen serving as well as the head of the Hustings Court of the town. He was obligated to know and supervise the duties of all town officials. He had to issue licenses, could call a meeting of the council when he saw a need and was charged with the duty of "reviewing the streets once a day". He even had the power to determine the size of a loaf of bread to be sold in the town market. It was also his responsibility to vote in case of a tie and to keep the town seal.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Weekly Advertiser, June 18, 1859.

<sup>24</sup> Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 12, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 118.

The salary of the mayor remained at \$400 during the period.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the salary, the council paid to maintain his office. As an example, in 1847 the town incurred the following expenses to run the office of the mayor: printing forms, \$15.75, candles, \$2.37, cleaning, \$7.00, and sundries for jail, \$12.56.<sup>28</sup>

When the mayor was absent from the town or "his office vacant" the recorder would take his place.<sup>29</sup> The Recorder was selected from among the members of council. He held the position like that of his later counterpart, the vice mayor.

Unlike the county, the council for most of the period chose all of its salaried officials. The commissioner of revenue was selected by the council and approved by the corporation court for the purpose of collecting the taxes. He kept records of paid land and lot taxes and was to present a list of all improved lots each year to the clerk of the town.<sup>30</sup> He was also responsible for keeping a record of all free Negroes in Fredericksburg over the age of twelve, including their trades and occupations. This he

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<sup>27</sup> Common Council Minutes, March 18, 1845; Fredericksburg News, March 26, 1859.

<sup>28</sup> Common Council Minutes, November 12, 1847.

<sup>29</sup> Mathews, Laws of Virginia 1857, 815; Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854.

<sup>30</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 29; Order Book. L Husting Court, April 1852.

was to post on the courthouse door annually. In addition he had to list every white male citizen within the town who was eligible to vote. He was required to present the property tax books to the corporation court and make it available on Election Day.<sup>31</sup> In his process of collecting real estate and personal property taxes, the commissioner of revenue was to call upon people to determine the property taxes and make reports to the state and the common council.<sup>32</sup> John Metcalf held this office until April of 1852.<sup>33</sup> As a merchant and banker he was held in high regard. As a leader in the Episcopal church he was praised for his "high integrity and uprightness". J.J. Beazley was appointed to replace him and Robert W. Hart was next appointed to the post in 1857. The commissioner was paid \$60.00 until 1854 when the salary was increased to \$150.<sup>34</sup>

To assist the commissioner of revenue, the council chose to hire a collector of taxes and rents who saw to it that taxes were paid and the rents owed to the town were collected. The council rented the town's hay scales and the

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<sup>31</sup> Mathews, The Laws of Virginia 1857, 206, 671-672.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 4, 1857, March 21, 1852.

<sup>34</sup> Common Council Minutes, March 15, 1844; Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854.

town's wharf to citizens who maintained the property for the council. The collector of taxes and rents had to "... give a bond with good security payable to the mayor in the sum of \$10,000..." to ensure his honesty.<sup>35</sup>

In an effort to get citizens to pay their taxes, a person was given a two percent reduction in his tax if paid before April 24.<sup>36</sup> The collector was paid ten percent of tax and five percent of rents until 1854 when that was decreased to two and one half percent on what was collected before August first.<sup>37</sup> John Caldwell, town sergeant, held this position in the 1840s and later Robert W. Hart held the position until 1857 when T.A. Hart was appointed.<sup>38</sup>

The charter of the town allowed the council to appoint a town surveyor who had to be approved in the Hustings Court. He performed "in the same manner" as the county surveyor. He was to survey and "make certain and return a true plat" to the court.<sup>39</sup> John Minor was the town surveyor during this period. The town surveyor also had to

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<sup>35</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1853, 16, 25.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 25; Common Council Minutes, March 15, 1844.

<sup>37</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854.

<sup>38</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854, March 21, 1858.

<sup>39</sup> The Code of Virginia, Richmond: William F. Ritchie, 1849. Mss at the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia, 479.



be notified upon the erection of any new buildings at which time a twenty dollar fee was paid to the town. As previously mentioned the council also employed a clerk for the market and a superintendent of streets.<sup>40</sup>

As a means of assuring the fair sale of lumber, shingles, coal and barrel staves, the council appointed a measurer of wood and lumber and a coal measurer. Both men and their helpers were located at the town's wharf, at the canal basin and at the railroad depot. There they were responsible to inspect and charge a fee on all lumber, shingles, staves and coal and other materials that entered the town.<sup>41</sup>

Just as all hay, sheaf, oats and fodder that was sold in town had to be weighed on the town's hay scales, the lumber, shingles, staves, coal, salt and tanning bark was checked for size and weight in accordance with state and local regulations.<sup>42</sup> Lumber was taxed at twenty-five cents per 1,000 feet, shingles at ten cents per 1,000 shingles, staves at twelve and one half cents per 1,000 and firewood at six cents a cord. All coal, salt, oats, corn and

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<sup>40</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 34; Common Council Minutes, July 24, 1860.

<sup>41</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 40, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Mathews, State Laws of Virginia II; 821; Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 47, 40.

potatoes were taxed at twenty-five cents per one hundred bushels. There was a three dollar fine for anyone in violation of these taxes.<sup>43</sup> Robert W. Hart, who later became Commissioner of Revenue in 1852, held the post of lumber inspector, followed by I.A. Curtis for the remainder of the period. J.B. Anderson and M. Montgomery were coal measurers in the 1850s.<sup>44</sup>

The council's clerk and chamberlain (treasurer) for the town preformed a dual function throughout the period. They were elected by the council to draft all ordinances, retain all taxes, receive and disseminate all new state laws, attend all council meetings, be present at all town elections and preserve all the documents of the corporation.<sup>45</sup>

The chamberlain's salary was \$100.00 until 1854 when council, on recommendation of the new salary committee, raised it to \$250.00. The clerk's salary was set at fifty dollars until the same committee recommended he be paid two dollars per meeting. In the 1840s Arthur Goodwin was chamberlain of council. George E. Chew was elected in 1850. He held the position until 1859 when J. Marshall

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<sup>43</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 40, 48.

<sup>44</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854, March 21, 1858.

<sup>45</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 17; Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1857.

Wallace was elected.<sup>46</sup>

One group of council appointments which was very important to Fredericksburg's image and the safety of the people was the police. The major role that the sheriff played in law enforcement in most counties fell to the policemen and town sergeant in Fredericksburg.

More than just a nightwatch, the police force consisted of two men between 1840 and 1852 and was increased to five by 1860, all were appointed by the council. Merchants, very much concerned about their businesses, wanted to keep the streets free of crime.<sup>47</sup> Both Bernard Cole and J. Timberlake held these jobs and were paid quarterly based on the satisfactory completion of a written report to the mayor who had the responsibility of supervising their duties and who was not always pleased with their performance. In the late 1830s and the early 1840s constables were hired to supplement the work of the police. In 1841 the title of constable was changed to assistant policemen.<sup>48</sup>

Each year these men were appointed in March at the

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<sup>46</sup> Common Council Minutes, March 15, 1844; Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854; and Weekly Advertiser, March 21, 1857, March 26, 1857.

<sup>47</sup> David Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, 142.

<sup>48</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 12, 1852; Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1845, 73; and Common Council Minutes, March 23, 1841.

first meeting of the new council. In 1855 the town chose to increase the number of police officers to three. Bernard Cole, J. Timberlake and J.A. Taylor were now the police officers.<sup>49</sup> Because of a series of problems occurring at night, the council, for the first time, added a night watch. The night watch was not always effective and was often found drunk or sleeping on the job.<sup>50</sup> The town was divided into three police districts.<sup>51</sup> The salary of police officers and assistants was \$100.00 until 1854, when the council raised them to \$200. Officers were also paid bounties for the number of wild dogs killed in each quarter.<sup>52</sup>

Support for the police was not always the case. The council and the press made the police, like the streets, gas lighting and free schools, a constant issue in the latter 1850s. To some, the police were corrupt and ineffective. The News made this clear in 1857.

The Police Department is so arduous and complicated as to forbid detail... they are so quiet and secret in their operations

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<sup>49</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg, 1853, 24; Weekly Advertiser, March 21, 1857; and Common Council Minutes, September 24, 1853.

<sup>50</sup> Common Council Minutes, September 17, 1845.

<sup>51</sup> Common Council Minutes, September 24, 1853, March 15, 1854.

<sup>52</sup> Common Council Minutes, August 5, 1844; Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854.

that nobody is offended by their forwardness and in as much as they do not interfere with fun loving chaps who break windows and exercise their lungs during the night, it is recommended their pay be handed over as usual for good behavior. <sup>53</sup>

The council also supported volunteer fire companies. The fear of fire was always present in Fredericksburg. A major fire in 1822 destroyed blocks of buildings in the southern end of town. From 1840 to 1860 there were two fire companies in Fredericksburg, the Hope Fire Company and Union Fire Company. <sup>54</sup>

Exempt from taxation, these volunteer groups were formed in accordance with state law and were supported by the common council. Some of the most prominent members of the community were leaders of these groups. Each unit could have from a minimum of twenty to no more than sixty-four members. After forming the company, the names had to be sent to the corporation court.<sup>55</sup> Units could elect officers and, after joining, men were exempt from active duty in the town militia and were not subject to fines for failing to muster. <sup>56</sup> At the semi-annual meetings in April

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<sup>53</sup> Fredericksburg News, August 3, 1857.

<sup>54</sup> Political Arena, October 8, 1841; Land Tax Books, 1850, 1860; and Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 31.

<sup>55</sup> Mathews, Laws of Virginia, 200.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 201.

and October they had to "inspect and exercise the apparatus or engine, hose and other implements". Members who failed to attend were fined no less than fifty cents and no more than three dollars.<sup>57</sup>

From mid-point of the century to 1860 there were several serious fires in Fredericksburg. These fires may have been prevented or minimized if council had shown more support for her fire companies. Because of the close proximity of buildings a disaster awaited at the sound of the fire bell. This sound often brought out the competition between fire companies as to which could reach the water pumps first, each company pulling its hand operated pumps to the fire.<sup>58</sup>

In 1850 one of the town's largest buildings, The Exchange Hotel, burned to the ground. In September of 1853 a fire on Commerce Street between Main Street and Princess Anne burned the businesses of Waite and Sener, the tin shop, an unoccupied building owned by Mr. Dicky, the bakery of Mr. Myer, Mr. Brannan's gunsmith shop and his wife's millinery shop next door. The house of Mr. Richard Williams and the gun shop of William Bell, along with the shoe shop of J.J.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 201-202.

<sup>58</sup> Weekly Advertiser, January 24, 1851.

Phillips were all victims.<sup>59</sup> The following December the cotton factory burned with \$22,000 worth of damage. In July of 1854 a fire in the coal cellar of the new St. George Episcopal Church burned the vestry room, pulpit and organ with total damage set at \$5,000. After this disaster a local newspaper editor asked council to replace the "rotten, good-for-nothing hose" then in use with 2,000 feet of new hose for each company. In 1857 the kitchen fire at the Farmers Hotel again brought out concerns by citizens about the quality of the support given by council and the fire companies themselves.<sup>60</sup>

Because of the repeated numbers of fires and citizen concern for the lack of leadership and the lack of called meetings to maintain equipment, the Hope Company reorganized and created three engine companies in 1858. Charles C. Welford was commander of engine one, Benjamin Bowering commander of engine number two and John G. Hurkamp the leader of number three. The Hope Company was housed on the same lot as the jail and the courthouse, keeping its equipment in what is now the south wing of the courthouse. The Union Fire Company, led by Albert Lucas, was located on

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<sup>59</sup> Weekly Advertiser, September 4, 1853.

<sup>60</sup> Carol H. Quenzel, History of St. George Episcopal Church (Richmond: Saunders and Sons, 1951), 33; Weekly Advertiser, January, 17, 1857.

the same lot as the clerk's office in a building built by council in April 1845.<sup>61</sup> Robert Hodge, in an essay, described the uniform worn by the Hope Fire Company as being a red flannel shirt with white stars on the collar, an anchor on the vest, black pants and a hat with the name of the town and a figure of a funnel.<sup>62</sup>

Unfortunately, the reorganization did not solve the entire fire problem. In January of 1858 G.H.C. Rowe's house burned for four hours before a fire company could respond. In February of 1859 the carpenter shop of James Baggett burned along with the home of Montgomery Slaughter.<sup>63</sup> The fire, according to one newspaper account, would have been more destructive if it had not been for a change in the direction of the wind.<sup>64</sup> The Weekly Advertiser gave a scathing review of the new reorganization of the fire companies:

Owing to there being no efficiency in the fire companies at the present organization nothing could be done to save the property

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<sup>61</sup> Fredericksburg, Land Tax Books 1850; Robert A. Hodge, "Hope Fire Co.", Fredericksburg Times, March 1977, 17-21; and Common Council Minutes, April 17, 1845.

<sup>62</sup> Fredericksburg Times, March 1977, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Weekly Advertiser, February 5, 1859, January 13, 1858.

<sup>64</sup> Weekly Advertiser, February 5, 1859.



from flames...the engines were on the grounds but owing to the want of sufficient hose to reach the fire, some imperfection in the suction engine, no water could be obtained. It is a crying shame upon the corporation that they do not furnish each company sufficient hose to reach any fire that may occur.<sup>65</sup>

In conclusion, the council was encouraged to help the new fire company overcome its problems.

The comradeship experienced in the fire companies was even more extensive in the town's militia units. In 1855 there were 461 men registered for these units. Organized by counties, the state militia law required all white males between eighteen and forty-five to serve in the state militia. The only exceptions to the requirements were ministers, public officials, firemen, policemen and teachers. Spotsylvania County units were in the state's second division and the town's units were required to muster in the months of April and October until 1854.<sup>66</sup>

Militia units were used as guards at the agricultural fairs, to lead parades on holidays and at other ceremonial times. The units regularly held balls, dinners, excursions and picnics in which they recruited members into their

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Virginia Herald, June 7, 1855; Lee A. Wallace, A Guide to Virginia Military Organization 1861-1865. (Lynchburg: H.H. Howard, 1986), 234; and Virginia Code 1849, 123, 132; and Weekly Advertiser, April 23, 1853.

unit.<sup>67</sup> The Fredericksburg Grays, the Washington Guards, the Fredericksburg Guards, the Coleman Guards and the Uptown Militia were all competing for recruits at some point or another during this period.

The town was entitled to have four cannons according to state law, but records indicate that they maintained only one cannon in 1845 and two in 1860.<sup>68</sup> The militia units stored their arms on the second floor armory in the courthouse.

In 1859 the Washington Guards were called into service in Charles Town, Virginia by then Governor Henry Wise in the aftermath of John Brown's raid at Harpers Ferry.<sup>69</sup> In another unusual event in 1860 three units were ordered to arrest the entire Robinson Circus at Mercer Square after a murder in nearby Port Royal, Virginia. After a two-day investigation the entertainers were set free.<sup>70</sup>

The structure of town government based on the old charter and town ordinances gave substantial power to the common council and the mayor. They firmly held on to this

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<sup>67</sup> Weekly Advertiser, June 12, 1858, October 29, 1859, February 11, 1860, February 18, 1860; Virginia Code 1849, 146.

<sup>68</sup> Common Council Minutes, January 1, 1845, January 15, 1860; Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 183 - 184.

<sup>69</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 183.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 184.

power throughout the period despite protest for change. Because of the annual elections council members, most of whom were very popular merchants, manufacturers and professionals held the balance of power in the town government.

In spite of the town's changing demographics, which indicated a growing middle class, power still remained in the hands of the wealthy and council's focus was constantly toward the future of the town, neglecting at times, local crime and safety issues.

## CHAPTER VII

### TOWN COURTS AND JUSTICE

The general security and welfare of the town's people lay in the hands of the court system. In the nineteenth century the courts took care of the needs of all classes of citizens including the dependent poor and slaves. It could authorize area guardians, provide for the education of the poor, and protect the consumer in the market place.<sup>1</sup> During the antebellum period three courts were held in the town of Fredericksburg. Between 1831-1851 the Circuit Superior Courts of Law and Chancery met twice a year in the courthouse. In 1852, with the creation of the new constitution, this court was changed to the Circuit Court as the state was divided into twenty-one districts. Included with Fredericksburg in the eighth district were the counties of Spotsylvania, Caroline, King George, Stafford, Orange, Madison and Culpeper.<sup>2</sup> Circuit Courts were granted original jurisdiction which was concurrent with the town's corporation court and held appellate jurisdiction in all civil cases involving fifty dollars or more. Also included were criminal matters where the defendant could be sent to

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<sup>1</sup> Tadahisa Kuroda, "The County Court System of Virginia from the Revolution to the Civil War." (PhD. Diss. Columbia University, 1969), 105, 114, 120.

<sup>2</sup> Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer of Virginia, 101. Virginia Code 1860, 618; and Fredericksburg Circuit Court Folder "Historical Background of Record Books". Prepared by Circuit Court Clerk, 1979.

the state penitentiary and cases of "loss of life".<sup>3</sup>

Judges for these courts were elected by the voters in the circuit for eight-year terms. Judge John T. Lomax of Fredericksburg served as a Circuit Court Judge from 1840 to 1857 and was one of the most respected men in town. He also ran a well respected law school. In 1857 he was replaced by Richard H. Coleman of Caroline County who defeated J.L. Marye, Jr. of Fredericksburg in a judicial election.<sup>4</sup>

In 1852 the state was also divided into ten districts with judges serving on a district court from the circuits included in the district. This court met once a year in Fredericksburg.<sup>5</sup>

If the people of the town came in contact with the judicial system it was in the third court, the town's corporation or Hustings Court. From its incorporation the town's mayor, recorder and aldermen were considered the justices of the peace of the court. The charter in 1782 read:

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Code 1860, 618; Fredericksburg News, August 10, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer of Virginia, 101; Richmond College Historical Papers, "Biographies of John Minor Botts, Richard Henry Lee, William Cabell Rives, and John Moncure Daniel," Richmond: June 1915, 73.

<sup>5</sup> Edwards, Statistical Gazeteer of Virginia, 101.

The mayor, recorder and aldermen or any four or more of them shall have power to hold court of Hustings on the third Monday in every month and to hold pleas in all cases whatsoever, originated within the limits of the town.<sup>6</sup>

In 1806 the Hustings Court was changed enabling any eight appointed people out of the council to act as justice of the peace and any three to hold a court session.<sup>7</sup> The only exceptions were in cases of felonies, which required five justices. Unfortunately, this whole system supported the idea of men without legal training making decisions for the town's citizens.

In 1821 a town charter change by the General Assembly granted the mayor further power to act as Justice of the Peace alone when the court was not in session. In an age when justice was swift and firm, the "mayor's court", as it was called, issued sentences in minor offences brought before him, sometimes within minutes of committing the crime.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of the county court and the Hustings or corporation court was being challenged throughout Virginia until the 1820s. Many saw a need for change because of the aristocratic nature of these courts. Many people felt this handful of men had too much power and too little responsi-

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<sup>6</sup> Hening, Statutes Vol 10: 440-441.

<sup>7</sup> Ordinances of Fredericksburg 1845, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 63.

bility, often making judicial decisions based on family, business and religious interests without any legal experience. Although many delegates at the 1829-30 Constitutional Convention demanded improvements, no change occurred.<sup>9</sup> Finally, in 1852, with the adoption of the new state constitution, justices of the peace in county courts and corporation courts in cities and towns were elected for four-year terms.<sup>10</sup> Fredericksburg was included as one of these towns.<sup>11</sup> It also became unnecessary for the mayor or a recorder to be present, but it was still lawful for any three justices to hold regular courts. In a typical court session it was common to have five justices take care of felonies, then two would be excused, leaving three for the remainder of the cases.<sup>12</sup> The new constitution did not change the jurisdiction of this court. According to the new law, the town became one of the judicial districts of the state and each justice was to be paid three dollars per day "that they shall render service in the court".<sup>13</sup>

Between 1841 - 1850 seventeen men served as justices of the peace. During that time Robert Ellis died and was

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<sup>9</sup> Kurada, The County Court System of Virginia, 213.

<sup>10</sup> Porter, County Government. 231-232.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Code 1860, 276.

<sup>12</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 69.

<sup>13</sup> Code of Virginia, 1860, 277.

replaced by William Jackson. In 1842 Samuel Howison resigned and John Hart replaced him. The remaining men who served were Robert Semple Jr., Benjamin Clark, Howison Wallace, Samuel Phillips, Robert Dickey, Beverly Wellford, William Warren, William Beale, Peter Goolrick and William Slaughter.<sup>14</sup> From 1852 to 1860 most of these same men were reelected. With the first election in 1852 John Cockly and Hugh Scott were added as new justices and in 1856 William Allen, William K. Gordon and Rubin Thorn were elected.<sup>15</sup> In 1850 most justices were not wealthy men, with the exception of William Warren, who held real estate worth more than \$10,000. By 1860 five could be classified as wealthy. They were Charles C. Wellford, William Allen, Peter Goolrick, William Slaughter, and Hugh Scott, who averaged \$33,900 in real estate.<sup>16</sup>

The major exception to the jurisdiction of the Hustings Court was the handling of slaves who could be tried for all offenses in this court and who had no appeal to the circuit court. Because most minor offenses involving slaves were handled by their owners, often the court only received the

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<sup>14</sup> Order Book K, L, 1841-1850.

<sup>15</sup> Order Book L, 1846-1850; Deed Book Q, 1850-1853; and Deed Book R, 1853-1856; and Order Book N, 1855-1860.

<sup>16</sup> Census, 1850, 1860 Population Schedule.



more serious cases. Generally the most disorderly and corrupt slaves were dealt with to the full extent of the law and treated much differently than the free population. Only in a case of felony murder did a court of oyer and terminer have to be called for all Negroes, slave or free. These courts had to consist of five justices.<sup>17</sup>

Many state and local laws concerning slaves dated back to the colonial period and placed severe restrictions on their legal rights, which amounted to a total lack of rights in society. Emancipated slaves, after reaching twenty-one years of age, could remain in the state only if the corporation court gave its permission. Any free blacks sentenced for a crime could also be removed from the state.<sup>18</sup>

Serious cases dealing with slaves required no jury and, according to Henry Howe, they were probably better off. Justices, who were often slave owners, tended to be more understanding of the plight of the slave than a jury would be. Because of the "hiring out" system the number of cases of slave misconduct was more numerous than in the county court.<sup>19</sup> A hired out slave became the responsibility of his

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<sup>17</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 157; Urofsky, "Slave Code of Virginia 1860", 411.

<sup>18</sup> Urofsky, "Slave Code of Virginia 1860", 407-408.

<sup>19</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 157; Order Book K, 1841-1845, Order Book N, 1855-1860.

hirer who could be held accountable for the slaves behavior. John Tombs and Thomas Hollings were fined twenty dollars each for letting two slaves go "at large" in town without a pass.<sup>20</sup> Two slaves belonging to the estate of John L. Wellford were accused of burglary and each received thirty lashes and later were ordered released to W.M. Wellford. The 1851 trial of "Walker" a slave belonging to Virginia Lynch, who had stabbed to death William Nicholson, a white man, was handled in a different way. The court of oyer and terminer, instead of issuing the punishment of death, ordered him to be sold at public auction to any person outside of the United States for the sum of \$700.<sup>21</sup>

State laws and town ordinances also prohibited trading with slaves, but enforcement of this law was extremely difficult because some slaves were paid wages or "board money" as hired out workers. This put money in their hands and citizens could be fined for letting slaves remain on their property too long. Slaves implemented their own places to exchange goods and buy liquor.<sup>22</sup> Most of the trading by slaves was with the poor whites and free blacks

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<sup>20</sup> Order Book K, November 1841.

<sup>21</sup> Order Book L, March 1852.

<sup>22</sup> Wade, Urofsky Slavery in the City, 143; "Slave Code of Virginia 1860," 409.

of the town.<sup>23</sup>

The most serious crime against property committed by slaves was arson. Several of the fires in town were attributed to slaves. Betty, property of Inlect A. Neale, set fire to the property of cooper H.W. Bradshaw while hired out to James M. Turner. She was found guilty of "attempting to set a fire" and given ten lashes "immediately by the sergeant of the corporation".<sup>24</sup> In May of 1850, Charles Taylor, the property of Jessie Walker, was charged with setting fire to "shavings and other combustible material" in the lumber yard, stealing \$700 and in the same night setting fire to "Smithsonia", the property of W. McPhail, which did \$1,000 worth of damage. He also was accused of setting fire to the home of John Herndon, valued at \$3,000. The court found him not guilty.<sup>25</sup> In February of 1859, Sara Ann was hung at Spotsylvania Courthouse for burning the house of her owner, James S. Jones.<sup>26</sup>

Town justice for the free population, both black and white, was somewhat different. In March of 1841 Daniel Ratcliff, James Grover and Bert Glover were all found not

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<sup>23</sup> L. Minor Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen The Glory, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Order Book K, January 1844.

<sup>25</sup> Order Book M, May 1850.

<sup>26</sup> Weekly Advertiser, February 2, 1859.

guilty of stealing a turkey from a slave, Gabriel Robinson. Edward Thomas was sentenced to one month in jail and fined \$100 for stealing lumber and William Bryan received a fine of \$100 for stealing three barrels of corn and two slaves.<sup>27</sup>

A more serious robbery by James Dangerfield, who stole 240 bushels of wheat which belonged to William R. Tyler, brought a fine of \$200.<sup>28</sup> An example of typical town justice occurred in the case of Daniel Lucy, a free black, and John, a slave owned by Samuel Alsop, who were both charged with hog stealing. For Lucy the court found "that he should receive on his bare back, two lashes which the sergeant of the corporation is directed to cause to be inflicted upon him on the rising of this court". The slave received thirty-nine lashes and was sent to jail to await his owner.<sup>29</sup> The costs incurred by the jailer to house a slave and "other lawful charges, shall be chargeable upon the owner".<sup>30</sup>

In December of 1845 two free blacks broke into the warehouse owned by William Jackson, B.R. Wellford, Maury Forbes and C.C. Wellford and stole items worth \$400 and were sent to jail for two years. The following month Isaac Lucas

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<sup>27</sup> Order Book K, May 1841, March 1841.

<sup>28</sup> Order Book K, March 1845.

<sup>29</sup> Order Book K, August 1843.

<sup>30</sup> Urofsky, "Slave Code of Virginia 1860", 408.

Lucas, a free black, broke into the same warehouse and received five years in jail.<sup>31</sup> A grand larceny case involved stealing goods worth more than twenty dollars according to state statutes and usually resulted in the sentence of a free person to one and no more than five years in prison. But for James, a slave owned by William Slaughter, charged with stealing sixty dollars from his owner and who pleaded not guilty, the sentence was hanging at the "usual place of execution" and the court paid his owner \$608 for the value of the slave. Hanging was a rare occurrence in Fredericksburg, so rare that the News in June of 1859 claimed the hanging of Neda, a slave belonging to Walter Mills, was the only one in the last fifty years.<sup>32</sup>

Most crimes of violence against people were observed in the dependent classes with notable exceptions being street fights. Joseph Williams was "...unlawfully and maliciously and feloniously wounded by Elizah and Harrison Bowling, who were charged with biting off his nose with "intent to maim, disfigure and kill him". The jury in circuit court found them guilty and sentenced each to two years.<sup>33</sup> The case of

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<sup>31</sup> Order Book K, January 1845, February 1845.

<sup>32</sup> Order Book L, August, 1847; Fredericksburg News, June 14, 1859.

<sup>33</sup> Order Book N, March 1856.

George Ware, charged with the murder of William Lewis of the county, was also tried in circuit court. He was charged with second degree murder and given sixteen years in the state penitentiary.<sup>34</sup>

Many cases of minor offenses like "breaches of the peace" were heard involving fighting and stabbing and most were punishable by one to six months in jail. Many people were also charged with other minor offenses like gaming and "keeping a disorderly house". Periodically there were cases of forgery.<sup>35</sup> Offenses against morality and decency occasionally brought one or more of the town's six prostitutes before the justices.<sup>36</sup>

The crime of stealing a person's slaves or carrying them outside of town without the consent of the owner with the intent to defraud the owner could result in a person receiving a penitentiary sentence of not less than two years or more than ten years.<sup>37</sup> Taking a slave from the state, as William Mayo, a free black man did in 1844 when he took Betsy and Matilda, property of William Slaughter, out of

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<sup>34</sup> Order Book K, March 1843; Order Book B, April 1843.

<sup>35</sup> Order Book M, 1850-1855; Order Book K, August 1844.

<sup>36</sup> Order Book K, August 1841, Census 1860 Population Schedule; Order Book L, June 1845.

<sup>37</sup> Code of Virginia, 1860, 730.

state, earned Mayo ten years in prison.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to hearing criminal cases, the Hustings Court settled deeds and wills, emancipated slaves, found homes for orphans, granted licenses to practice law and medicine, approved retail and tavern licenses and called grand juries when needed.<sup>39</sup> Each year the court also was responsible for the appointment of several of the town's key officials, namely the clerk of the court, town sergeant, coroner, town lawyer, jailer, surveyor, school commissioners and overseers of the poor.

The position of clerk of the court was the keeper of the records and valuable papers of the court such as deeds, and wills. By law he was to maintain an office within the town which was located in the east wing of courthouse. Because of the nature of his position he often was the person most citizens relied upon for legal advice.<sup>40</sup> John James Chew was appointed clerk in 1826 and held this position throughout the entire antebellum period. His father before him had also held the office and the family would keep this position for ninety nine years. John Chew was paid \$150 a

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<sup>38</sup> Order Book K, August 1845.

<sup>39</sup> Order Book K, 1841-1845 Order Book N, 1855-1860.

<sup>40</sup> Virginia Code 1849, 630; Work Programs Administration, Spotsylvania County, June 1937, 295.

year.<sup>41</sup>

The town sergeant was appointed by the court until 1852, when the new constitution required he be elected.<sup>42</sup> Like the county sheriff, he regulated all elections, but unlike the sheriff he was less active in law enforcement than the policemen and constables but did conduct all hangings and whippings as prescribed by the court. His salary was restricted by the state to be no more than \$75 a year and if he served as a tax collector he had to put up a bond. He could also be fined \$100 for failure to do his duties.<sup>43</sup>

John S. Caldwell was both town sergeant and jailer from 1845 to 1855 when he was elected mayor. During that time he received an additional \$50 for being jailer.<sup>44</sup> The jail, located behind the courthouse, by law had to have separate chambers for slaves and convicts and it was required to be white washed once a year. Every prisoner had to be provided with a "wholesome, sufficient food...[and] clean bedding and proper heat...." In case of illness the jailer had to provide a doctor.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 130.

<sup>42</sup> Virginia Code, 1860, 278-180.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 178-279, 288; Mathews, Laws of Virginia, 814.

<sup>44</sup> Common Council Minutes, March 15, 1844, March 13, 1855.

<sup>45</sup> Virginia Code, 1860, 281.



The court also nominated two town doctors to act as coroners. One of these men was then selected by the governor for a term of "good behavior". During the period, Dr. Carmichael and Dr. Herndon were the two coroners for Fredericksburg. They were paid fifty dollars a year.<sup>46</sup> The court also repeatedly appointed Thomas B. Barton as the town's attorney and paid him \$200 a year to prosecute felony cases.<sup>47</sup>

The private and church schools of Fredericksburg had been a pride of its citizens. But the idea of public schools for the poor had a difficult beginning. In October of each year the Hustings Court could appoint school commissioners. In 1850, Fredericksburg had eleven common schools and three academies. The council used only \$100 of public funds for their support. The remainder of school costs were paid by tuition. By 1860 the town had seven male and female academies, and three grammar schools with a total enrollment of 318 students. There were eight common schools with 160 students which received \$400 of public money.<sup>48</sup> Because the state was just beginning to consider free public education for all, Fredericksburg, like many areas, hesi-

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<sup>46</sup> Order Book K, June 1841.

<sup>47</sup> Order Book N, November 1849; Order Book L, March 1855.

<sup>48</sup> Census, 1850, 1860 Social Schedules.

itated making this kind of investment. The court only appointed school commissioners from 1855 to 1858. Four men served as school commissioners during this period. They were William Slaughter, William H. White, John S. Wellford and George F. Chew.<sup>49</sup> While in office they determined the number of poor children, the sum of money that would be needed per student, and made sure reading, writing and arithmetic were taught. During this time the state paid \$230.63 from its literary fund for the town's poor and primary students.<sup>50</sup>

The commissioners also picked the superintendent of schools for a one year term, who also acted as the clerk and treasurer for the commissioners. George F. Chew performed this function. Commissioners were to visit the schools once a month to evaluate the condition of the building and the mode of teaching. This concept of free public schools was not to the liking of the council and in December of 1858 they voted the concept out by an eight to four vote and refused to allow a citizen vote on the issue despite protest

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<sup>49</sup> Virginia, Second Auditors Report of the State of the Literary Fund for the Year 1855, September 30, 1855, 19, 33.

<sup>50</sup> Virginia Second Auditors - Report of the State of the Literacy Fund for the Year and Proceedings of the School Commissioners in Different Counties, September 30, 1856, 127, 8.

from many of its citizens.<sup>51</sup> There was no further talk of public schools in Fredericksburg until after the Civil War. Council did take constant criticism for this action for many years.

As the population of Fredericksburg increased, so too did the number of poor inhabitants.<sup>52</sup> Not considered as important as street repairs, crime, or town investments, the council depended on the overseers of the poor and town charities for the well-being of this segment of society.<sup>53</sup> By statute the town could "prescribe the number of overseers of the poor..." their term of office and compensation and the time and manner of appointing them".<sup>54</sup> The town chose to use the justices of the peace of the Hustings Court for the selection of its overseers.<sup>55</sup> The overseers were obligated to act on behalf of "any person unable to maintain himself... or act on behalf of the family of a person, when

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<sup>51</sup> Virginia Herald, March 20, 1858.

<sup>52</sup> Fredericksburg, Annual Report of the Overseers of the Poor 1840-1848, 1859-60 (Mss at the Virginia State Library, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>53</sup> David Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism in Virginia 1847 - 1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 160.

<sup>54</sup> Laws in Relation to the Overseers of the Poor (Richmond: Auditor of Public Accounts, 1860), Mss at the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>55</sup> Order Book K, March 1842.

unable to maintain itself". Overseers were to prevent "any person from going about begging or staying in any street or other place to beg".<sup>56</sup> After selected, the overseers were to select a president and clerk for the group. Each member was paid a dollar for every day in attendance on the board."<sup>57</sup>

During the antebellum period three citizens at a time were to sit as overseers of the poor. From 1840 to 1843 Fayette Johnson served as president and clerk and John C. Caldwell, town sergeant and jailer, served in the same capacity until 1859. Other individuals who served as overseers were George Ratback, Joe Sanford, Peter Goolrick, John Buck, Montgomery Slaughter, William Little and William Chesly.<sup>58</sup> The common council maintained a poor house on lot 252 which was part of the Joseph Brgydon estate. The building, not exempt from real estate taxes, cost the council \$4.73 tax dollars in 1850 and for part of the time in the 1850s William Buche was the superintendent of the poor house.<sup>59</sup> Annual reports by the overseers to the state

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<sup>56</sup> Laws in Relation to the Overseers of the Poor, 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Order Book K, 1841-1845; Weekly Advertiser, April 2, 1859; and Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1848 and 1859-1860.

<sup>59</sup> Land Tax Books, 1850; Census, 1850 Population Schedule; and W.F. Gordon and Carter Braxton, "Fredericksburg, Virginia" map. Mss Fredericksburg Courthouse, 1867.

were haphazard during the period. From 1848 to 1859 there was no report, which brought a letter to the court from the state auditor. In reply, James J. Chew, court clerk, stated "No report of the overseers of the poor for Fredericksburg has been returned to the court. I cannot therefore render a copy."<sup>60</sup> The reports that were issued indicate that many people were not admitted to the poor house if they were able to work. Only Mrs. Chesly and Miss Lucy Johnson, who were the only two white females, and "Harry, the old black man, and Jane Stows, the colored female idiot..." were supported in the poor house in that year. But at the same time seventeen people received support at their home. On average each of these individuals received \$21.61 a year.<sup>61</sup> Between 1840 and 1848 approximately six whites and three free blacks a year lived in the poor house and nine whites and four free blacks were given home allowances.<sup>62</sup>

The Hustings Court, in an attempt to look after the needs of the indigent, ordered the overseers to perform many tasks. They repeatedly hired out orphans in order to learn a trade or to help pay a family debt. Patsy Smith, a free black girl, was hired out for eight years to Mary Smith.

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<sup>60</sup> Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, January 11, 1852

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Reports of the Overseers of the Poor, 1840-1848.

Sixteen-year-old James McCawley was sent to learn the trade of coach painter and Griffen Bucke, a fifteen-year-old was hired out for six years to Adolph Richards for \$20 a year. The money was to be given to his mother for five years.<sup>63</sup>

The center of judicial business of the town had always been the courthouse, located one block south of town hall and on the east side of Princess Anne Street. The building in the Colonial period resembled the courthouse in Hanover County before it was torn down in 1851. Containing a wealth of historical manuscripts, it housed the will of Mary Ball Washington, the papers of James Monroe, who lived and practiced law in Fredericksburg and papers of famous Americans such as Dr. Hugh Mercer, General George Weedon and French patriot Lafayette, who came to town in 1824.<sup>64</sup>

The first courthouse, built in 1740, had been under attack since 1820 as being an unsuitable place to hold court. Common council was requested by various citizens for almost thirty years to begin looking into the erection of a new one. These requests went unheeded.<sup>65</sup> The Fredericksburg News, in 1851, shared the concern when it wrote:

We doubt whether a town in the union of the

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<sup>63</sup> Order Book K, 1841.

<sup>64</sup> Goolrick, Fredericksburg and Cavalier County, 16.

<sup>65</sup> Felder and Willis, Handbook, 23.

same population and wealth has such indifferent public buildings as Fredericksburg. The courthouse has been built, we should suppose, one hundred years ago. It is a low, rough, uncouth, ill-shaped, irregular and unsightly pile of bricks and mortar... looking more like a livery stable or a brewery than a place for civilized men to dispense justice.<sup>66</sup>

The building was considered very uncomfortable, being very damp and dreary, and the jail in the rear was twice the size of the courthouse and made of massive stones. The council, in 1845, debated the problem and discussed turning the town hall into the courthouse, but this action never materialized.<sup>67</sup>

On June 14, 1849 the court could no longer wait for council to take action. Justices William Slaughter and Peter Goolrick, as well as Mayor Semple, issued an order to council "to examine and report to the court some plan for the enlargement and repairs or rebuilding of the courthouse of this corporation".<sup>68</sup> A committee was appointed to examine and report to the court on its progress. The council still would not be moved as long as Spotsylvania County claimed part ownership of the courthouse lot which had been public property since the Colonial period. The council held stead-

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<sup>66</sup> Fredericksburg News, May 2, 1851.

<sup>67</sup> Common Council Minutes, December 11, 1845.

<sup>68</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 138.

fast until the county relinquished its claim. The Hustings Court still continued to take the leadership role in the process by appointing a committee to contract for a new building and hiring an architect providing the cost was not over \$4,000.<sup>69</sup> The court proposed a two dollar tax on each citizen to pay for the project. Citizen protest and apprehension from council were strong. In September 1851, two council members appeared in court to ask that the court discontinue its efforts until its October meeting. In accordance with the request and vast number of petitions to the court they voted to stop their action.<sup>70</sup> The council, in fear the court had overstepped its power, directed its committee on public property to study the plan for the new courthouse.<sup>71</sup> The council concluded that the court had acted properly and recommended council to bid for the services of architect, James Renwick, Jr. Famous for his Smithsonian design in Washington, D.C. as well as several Gothic churches, Renwick had a good reputation. Council would not, however, move on awarding contracts for construction until after council elections of 1851, when four

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<sup>69</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 21, 1851; Goolrick, Historic Fredericksburg, 142.

<sup>70</sup> Sallie Smith, The Fredericksburg Court House: James Renwick, Jr. and Gothic Rivals in Virginia, Independent project, University of Virginia, 1981, 13-14.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.



anti-courthouse council members were removed and a referendum vote of 170 to 112 gave the green light to proceed.<sup>72</sup> In March of 1851, local contractor William Baggett was awarded the contract with a limit on the cost of \$14,000.<sup>73</sup> The citizens were delighted.

The new courthouse in this place is just beginning to rear its majestic head and impress us... The walls are nearly completed, with rafters on a portion of it... The building is 134 feet in length and 58 feet in breadth and promises to reflect credit upon the projector and the builder. We are all confident there is no finer courthouse in the state.<sup>74</sup>

Baggett was paid periodically as the gothic style building progressed, but in August of 1852 a dispute between the contractor and council developed when the final inspection committee felt that the plans had not been followed. Renwick was called in for consultation and finally in the fall of 1852 Baggett was paid the final \$4,086 and the cornice in question was not installed.<sup>75</sup> In October the council then debated the removal of the town's clock, which had hung in St. George's Episcopal Church since the eighteenth century. The decision was made to leave the

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<sup>72</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 21, 1851.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, Fredericksburg Court House, 16.

<sup>74</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 17, 1851.

<sup>75</sup> Smith, Fredericksburg Courthouse, 16; Common Council Minutes, September 3, 1852.

clock in the church tower where it remains today.<sup>76</sup>

The town's bell, taken from the older building was rehung in the new courthouse and for years was used to call public meetings, as a reminder of court days, a fire bell and as the curfew call. The twenty-eight inch bronze bell was a gift to the town by Silas Wood in 1816. According to J. William Mann, who recently researched the bell, Wood's idea was that because he had recently married a Fredericksburg resident, Miss Julia Ann Chew, the bell was a fair exchange for her hand. The council allowed a bellman to live on courthouse property in exchange for ringing the bell each night and on special occasions.<sup>77</sup>

The courthouse, still in use today, was a brick structure in the antebellum period and was covered with stucco in 1916. It housed a courtroom with walnut ceiling, nine windows, twelve feet high and six foot wide doors. The clerk's office was in the north wing and the office of the police and fire company in the south wing. The building also housed an armory on the second floor and storage for fire equipment.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Smith, Fredericksburg Courthouse, 16.

<sup>77</sup> J. William Mann, Bells & Belfries and Some of Neither, (Fredericksburg, By the Author, 1993). Common Council Minutes, April 1, 1845.

<sup>78</sup> Work Progress Administration, Spotsylvania County 1937, 296. See Figure 11.

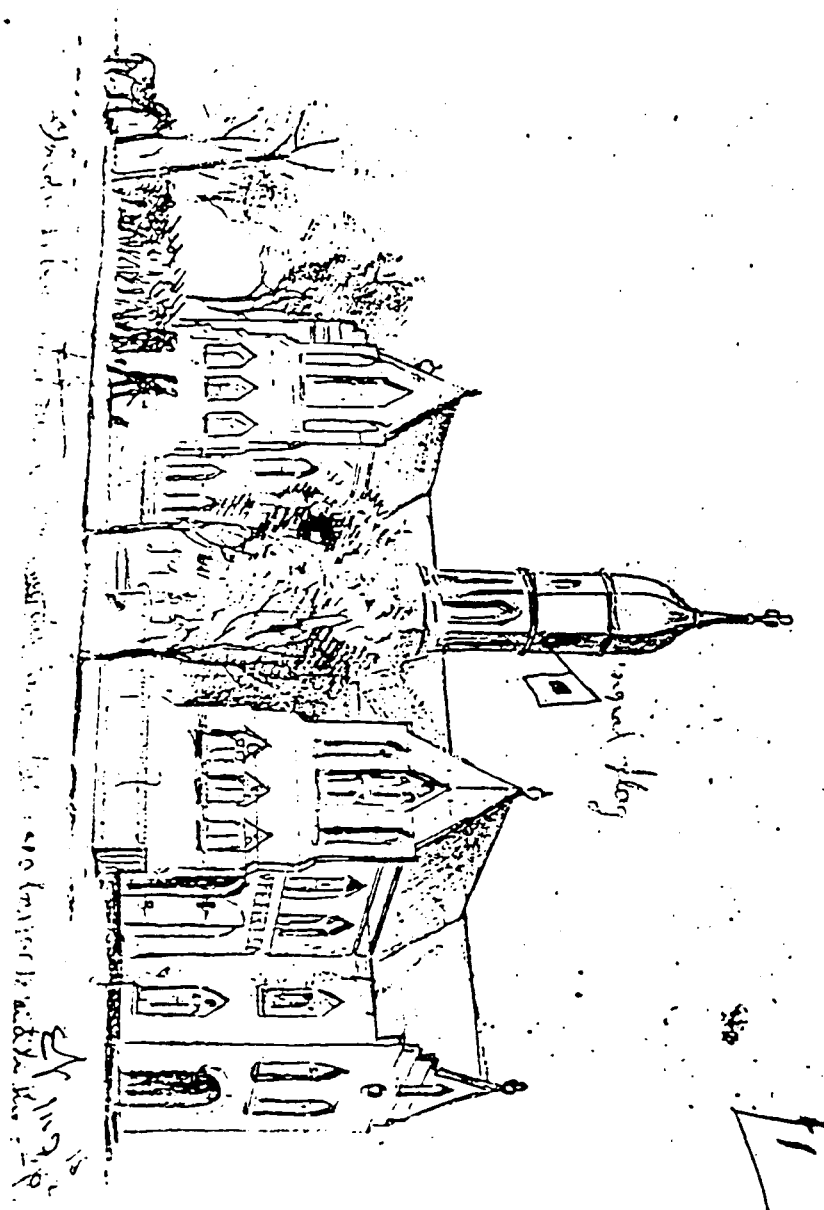
Upon completion, the new courthouse was a source of citizen pride and proved to be an invaluable asset as court-related problems showed an increase by 1860.<sup>79</sup> Fredericksburg was not apparently an abnormally rowdy town and those who broke the law were dealt with swiftly and more severely than today. The major problems came from the slave and free black community, where enforcement of the state's slave code and criminal laws were strictly followed. The visible lack of enforcement at some points appears to have been a result of the growth of the town once the quality of some of its policemen. Near the end of the period it appears that more complaints were leveled at the youth of the town for their rude behavior in the streets. This brought problems for the court and the council, which by 1860 had hired a total of five policemen.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Weekly Advertiser, July 4, 1860.

<sup>80</sup> Fredericksburg News, August 3, 1857; Weekly Advertiser, February 25, 1860.

**FIGURE 11**  
**Courthouse**



1862 Drawing: Historic Fredericksburg Foundation Collection, Inc.  
Original in Library of Congress.

NOTE: Fire Department office, note fencing.

Believed to be during the Union Army's occupation of the town.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TOWN POLITICS

After the state constitution of 1851, voting rights were extended to all white male citizens twenty-one years of age.<sup>1</sup> The influx of new voters combined with voter participation during state and national elections resulted in more interest in local politics.<sup>2</sup> In 1851 the local contest for mayor brought "as full a vote as at the Presidential Canvass" according to a local newspaper.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the period political party affiliations rarely seem relevant in town politics. Friends in the same political party ran against each other for local office. Mixed committees of friends of the candidate would publicly endorse them based on issues of concern for the town.<sup>4</sup> With no ward system until 1870, campaigning went on throughout the town. A Fredericksburg neighbor, Judge John Coalter, owner of "Chatham" from 1829-1838, spoke out against precinct voting in his county of Stafford. He felt people would "...wield the democracy of the county to their own

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Ogden Porter, County Government in Virginia: A Legislative History 1607-1904 (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 233.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Herald, March 20, 1854, June 7, 1855.

<sup>3</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 20, 1854.

<sup>4</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 12, 1853, March 21, 1857.

purposes".<sup>5</sup>

In 1851 a Fredericksburg citizen's committee made up of both Democrats and Whigs invited the Honorable James Buchanan, then candidate for the Democratic nomination for President, to a town dinner to be given in his honor. The town's Democratic newspaper, the Recorder, was not pleased, as it had chosen to support Franklin Pierce. Then Mayor Robert B. Semple, Jr., the editor of the Whig paper, the Fredericksburg News, claimed that S.G. Daniel, his opponent in the upcoming mayor's race and part of the committee of invitation, was using this to further his chances of becoming mayor.<sup>6</sup> The extensive newspaper debate over the coming of Buchanan to Fredericksburg was put to rest when Semple won the election 180 to 110, and shortly afterwards Buchanan wrote to the committee:<sup>7</sup>

...Indeed nothing could afford me greater pleasure than to exchange personal fellowship with my Democratic fellow citizens of Fredericksburg...but I shall have to be with you in spirit...<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tadahisa Kurada, "The County Court System of Virginia from the Revolution to the Civil War" (PhD. Diss., Columbia University, 1969), 188. Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 127.

<sup>6</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 21, 1851, March 28, 1851.

<sup>7</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 21, 1851.

<sup>8</sup> James Buchanan to Eustice Conway, John Pritchard, G. Daniel; and J.B. Timberlake. 9, November, 1852 Mss at the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

In 1852 another mayoral election brought more hubbub into the local press. John L. Marye, Jr., lawyer and owner of Brompton, entered the mayor's race against the aging Robert Semple, Jr. Unlike Marye, Semple was not a native of the Fredericksburg area, but since arriving in the town in 1843 and becoming editor of the Fredericksburg News he had been elected mayor each year for nine consecutive years.<sup>9</sup> Having control of one of the major newspapers, his following was large. Also he got support from his fellow Whig newspaper, the Richmond Whig, which wrote

We regret to observe that there is a strong opposition made to the re-election of the present Lord Mayor of Fredericksburg, R.B. Semple, Jr. Mr. John L. Marye, Jr. is the opposing candidate. We know nothing whatever against Mr. Marye, he may be eminently fitted for office of mayor of any other town but how the venerable city of Fredericksburg could get along from one year to another without the assistance of our contemporary of the News we cannot imagine.<sup>10</sup>

Marye, a fellow Whig, found difference with Semple on the amount of funds the town was investing in transportation improvements. Soon to be elected president of the Water Power Company, Marye felt strongly about manufacturing interests. The election was rather slanderous using statements such as "malicious reproaches of untruths" and spreading rumors that were "false as hell". The election

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<sup>10</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 19, 1852

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

resulted in J.L. Marye, Jr. losing to Semple by two votes.<sup>11</sup> Mayor Semple had not become just a figurehead for the town but an inspirational force for Fredericksburg.<sup>12</sup> Having arrived in town during the depression, and as he made clear right before his death, he worked tirelessly for the town:

...we traveled, we talked and we wrote for... the town, to build it up and gave it that destiny, which nature obviously intended for it... [and] using what influence we possess and the efforts we can command toward securing appropriations for the remainder.<sup>13</sup>

In 1853, when he died on a trip to Richmond, it was "like a blast from the desert" said the Weekly Advertiser. The large crowds at his funeral attested to the high esteem which the town held for him.<sup>14</sup>

In 1854 when the state was experiencing the decline of the Whig Party and the beginnings of the Know Nothings, or American Party, the town was participating in local reform.<sup>15</sup> The town election that year brought out the largest turnout

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> David R. Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism 1847-1861 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1977), 140.

<sup>13</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 19, 1852

<sup>14</sup> Weekly Advertiser, February 12, 1853.

<sup>15</sup> "The Campaign of 1855 in Virginia and the Fall of the Know Nothing Party" Richmond College Papers 1, (June 1916): 309.



in its history, 507 voters.<sup>16</sup> With the results came reform in the methods of paying town officials. The only incumbents returned to council in this election were John F. Scott, A.K. Phillips and George Eve. In the mayor's race John L. Marye, Jr. was defeated by Irish Catholic dry goods merchant Peter Goolrick.<sup>17</sup> But this large showing of democracy had some drawbacks.

In their excitement to change the government: "Rowdiness was rampant.... The polls were blocked up nearly the whole day, and the night was made hideous by oaths and whoopings of boys and men." Such we understand was the disturbance at the council chamber that it was difficult...to hear and record the vote as called off. .<sup>18</sup>

After the election, Goolrick, like Semple, became a colorful town leader. But in 1860, during the initial meeting of the new council, Goolrick resigned. The incident was the result of the vote on the appointment of the town's policemen. Goolrick opposed a policeman, whom he found personally "obnoxious" and when he was denied a council postponement of the vote in order to present further information he resigned.<sup>19</sup> His explanation said:

For upwards of forty-three years, I have been a resident of town...for its welfare I have expended time, energy and means, and toward its

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<sup>16</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 25, 1854.

<sup>17</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 25, 1853.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 24, 1860, April 7, 1860.

property my interests have all been directed...  
I regret the existence of the necessity to  
resign.<sup>20</sup>

The growing participation in town politics after the new constitution led to large political rallies and, in 1856, a major change in the way town officials were selected. Despite the power council was given by the charter, they allowed for the first time voter selection of town officials such as commissioner of revenue, collector of taxes and the town's police. The experiment lasted only until 1859, when council returned to the old appointment methods letting the people elect only the mayor and council.<sup>21</sup>

The News, in its attempt to explain the council's recent decision to take back its power said:

The old charter of Fredericksburg, unchanged since its first enactment, still stands the last plank in the wreck which the universal deluge of radicalism left of our laws and institutions...eight years ago the voters were allowed to designate on their tickets their choice not only for mayor but for Chamberlain, Constable, Coal Measurer etc... it was found by experiment to work badly.<sup>22</sup>

Brought on partially by the Goolrick resignation, some citizen groups wanted a charter change. The Weekly Advertiser led the charge: "We call on council to set to

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<sup>20</sup> Weekly Advertiser, April 7, 1860.

<sup>21</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 26, 1859, March 30, 1860.

<sup>22</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 21, 1857; Fredericksburg News, March 18, 1859.

work at once in getting up a new charter".<sup>23</sup> The News, again in defense of the action, said because the voters had placed the council in office, this showed the "expression of the people and their regard for the supremacy of the law and determinations to sustain those in charge". In 1860 the council still held its power to appoint town officials and would keep it until 1870.<sup>24</sup>

During council elections and other state and national campaigns, local newspapers were a major part of the political life of the town. The citizens of Fredericksburg were influenced more and more by the political opinions and party orientation of some of the town's widely read newspapers. A steady growth of new newspapers statewide was a characteristic of the period.<sup>25</sup>

In 1840 there were only two semi-weekly newspapers in town, the Virginia Herald and the Democratic Recorder. By 1850 there were four papers and by the Civil War the number had grown to six.<sup>26</sup> This large number is an indication of

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<sup>23</sup> Weekly Advertiser, June 18, 1859.

<sup>24</sup> Weekly Advertiser, March 24, 1860; Fredericksburg News, March 18, 1859.

<sup>25</sup> Lester J. Cappon, Virginia Newspapers: A Bibliography With History Introduction and Notes, 1821-1955 (New York: Dapleton Co., 1936), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Howe, Historical Collections, 480; Census 1850, 1860 Social Schedule.

the high literacy rate in the town and the political interest of its readers, both in Fredericksburg and in the fall line area. Much of the enthusiasm toward the press and the reason some papers lasted longer than others was the "personal journalism" waged by the strong willed newspaper editors like J. Harrison Kelly, Robert Semple, Jr. and others who carried on local editorial battles in the paper.<sup>27</sup> The people of Fredericksburg put faith and reliance on the information about local, state and national matters and without a doubt they affected an individual's allegiance to the political parties each paper represented.<sup>28</sup>

The Virginia Herald, started in 1787, was published bi-weekly on Wednesday and Friday. Its editor from 1851 - 1875 was J. Harrison Kelly.<sup>29</sup> This newspaper sometimes was criticized for not publishing enough local news. Another semi-weekly paper was The Democratic Recorder, published and edited by James M. and J.C. Campbell from 1842 to 1850.<sup>30</sup> In 1850 it had the largest circulation of any newspaper in town. In that same year it gave up one of its columns to the political correspondent it called the "Bachelor" who

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<sup>27</sup> Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Avery O. Craven, The Growth of Southern Nationalism, 1848-1861, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953), 402.

<sup>29</sup> Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, 90

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

gave "his view of the old bachelor...as well as the old maid". Reference here was to the Democratic party which the paper faithfully supported.<sup>31</sup>

During the forties, a common problem for newspapers was getting its subscribers to pay for the paper, for which J.M. Campbell requested

We would be particularly thankful if our friends would walk up to the office and settle their fare...a strenuous advocate of the cash system we are out...several hundred dollars hard earned dollars they were too<sup>32</sup>

Besides collecting cash from their customers, newspapers often had difficulties hiring journeymen printers to further their trade.<sup>33</sup> In 1850 the Campbells left town, selling the Recorder to Robert B. Alexander, S. Greenhow and Daniel and James B. Sener. By 1860 the circulation was at 960.<sup>34</sup>

Another popular weekly paper was The Weekly Advertiser, published from 1853 to 1861, on Saturdays only by Jessie White. It had a wide circulation and was mailed to "between 400 and 600 persons in the adjoining counties".<sup>35</sup> It carried

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<sup>31</sup> Democratic Recorder, March 24, 1843.

<sup>32</sup> Democratic Recorder, February 14, 1843.

<sup>33</sup> Clement Eaton, Growth of Southern Civilization 1790 - 1860 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 266.

<sup>34</sup> Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, 90. Census 1860, Social Schedule.

<sup>35</sup> Weekly Advertiser, January 22, 1853.

by far the most neutral approach to political issues and campaigns and seemed more concerned about local issues. It also carried many more advertisements than the other papers.<sup>36</sup> Like the other papers it reprinted articles from all over the state and nation but tried not to play the one-sided game of other political newspapers. Normally it would repeat both sides of issues of both the Whigs and the Democrats and then call on the people to use their best judgment before casting a vote. On local issues, it often had strong editorial views. Issues like crime, street conditions, the police and the council could receive their share of criticism and praise from the Advertiser. It supported all efforts by council for internal transportation improvements that affected the town.<sup>37</sup>

Our paper, said White ...takes this occasion to tender our thanks to the citizens of the old 'Burg.... Our punctual country patrons also have our thanks... but to our non-paying subscribers, wagons cannot run without wheels - boats without steam - bullfrogs jump without legs or newspapers without money.<sup>38</sup>

The strongest Whig newspaper was The Fredericksburg News, published by Lewis O. Magrath and James Raines and started in 1847. Its editor was Robert B. Semple, Jr. who

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Weekly Advertiser, October 1, 1853, April 23, 1853.

<sup>38</sup> Weekly Advertiser, December 19, 1857.

died in 1853. It was started as a weekly paper on July 1, 1847 with the motto "Welcome, the herald of a noisy world", but by the second issue had changed its name to the Semi-Weekly News and was published only on Monday and Thursday.<sup>39</sup> By February 4, 1848 the name was changed to The Fredericksburg News.

Advertisements in this paper, more than others, were far more descriptive than other papers. It often repeated the same news articles issue after issue and covered the commercial and agricultural news more extensively. It said it would always "defend the principles of a strict constitution of the Federal Constitution and work to resist the power of the federal government".<sup>40</sup> Its office was located on Hanover Street in the same building as the Eagle Hotel. If paid for in advance it cost three dollars, if not it was four dollars a year.<sup>41</sup> James Raines, its editor, reminded his readers periodically it was their responsibility to "inform the press of the news in the area". The paper was in print until 1862 with a circulation of 432.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Hodge, Index to Fredericksburg News 1847-48 (Fredericksburg: Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 1976) i.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 1, 1851.

<sup>42</sup> Fredericksburg News, October 1, 1851; Census, 1860 Social Schedule.

In 1827 The Political Arena and Literary Museum was started by a town lawyer, John Minor, and was purchased by William M. Blackford in 1829. Blackford changed the name to The Political Arena and remained it's editor until 1845 when he moved to Lynchburg. This paper was a strong anti-slavery, pro-colonization paper.<sup>43</sup>

Two other newspapers that were in operation in Fredericksburg were also anti-slavery. The Reverend James W. Hunnicutt of South Carolina was editor of The Christian Banner during the 1850s. His unusual outspoken stand against the planter class included a stand also against the Negro's ability to make progress without the white man's assistance. Hunnicutt's publication lasted until 1861, when, because of his stand against African Churches, both the black and white community turned on him resulting in his leaving town.<sup>44</sup> The other Christian newspaper was The Virginia Baptist which was published as a weekly newspaper dedicated to temperance and only lasted from 1858 to 1860. It was primarily designed to be mailed out to subscribers all over the south.<sup>45</sup>

Fredericksburg newspapers molded, as well as expressed,

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<sup>43</sup> Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, 90.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 26; Census, 1860 Social Schedule.

<sup>45</sup> Cappon, Virginia Newspapers, 90.



the public opinion of the town's people. Heavy reliance was placed on them and their editors. Some became both hero and villain to their respective readers as circulation increased in the 1850s. Newspapers like the Fredericksburg News went from 150 to 437 subscribers.<sup>46</sup> The News and Democratic Recorder contemplated the idea of establishing a daily paper, but all indications are that the town did not support this idea until after the Civil War.

Besides the excitement created by the press, the allegiance that young men in town felt to their various volunteer groups was often based on the respect and admiration for the leadership of the organizations and the political opinion of that leader. A young man having little money needed the right connections. Prominent men like Judge John Lomax, John L. Marye, Jr., Robert B. Semple, Jr., Beverly R. Wellford, Charles C. Wellford, Thomas Knox and Peter Goolrick were influential in their businesses and professions. They also set examples with their work in the church and by the volunteer spirit and financial investments they made in the internal improvements of the town. Thus, a matrix of personal ties and an interlocking network of kin, church and credit affected the political beliefs of many in

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<sup>46</sup> Census, 1850, 1860, Social Schedule.

Fredericksburg.<sup>47</sup>

In general, the town, after strongly supporting the Democratic party in the 1820s and 1830s, had become more and more Whig in its support for state and national issues. Active Whig members such as Beverly R. Wellford, Robert B. Semple, Jr., W.I. Rothrock, William H. White, Anthony Buck, John S. Marye, Jr., Thomas B. Barton and John Wallace were all middle and upper class men. Many were slave owners as well as strong supporters of manufacturing and high tariffs.<sup>48</sup>

The Democrats in the area were mostly concentrated in the surrounding counties and beyond reaching into the Piedmont. Democratic supporters in town were strong supporters of the small farmers who owned a small number of slaves and were not very well-educated.<sup>49</sup> Local delegate, Oscar Minor Crutchfield, a Democrat from Spotsylvania, was elected to the General Assembly from 1840 to 1861 and held the position of Speaker of the House of Delegates during some of that time. Major town Democrats during the period

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<sup>47</sup> Anne S. Ruben, "Political Life of John Janney." Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 102 (July, 1954); 293; Common Council Minutes, February 3, 1858.

<sup>48</sup> Political Arena, June 16, 1840; Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America Society Personality and Politics (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1978), 190-191.

<sup>49</sup> Clement Eaton, The History of the Old South The Emergence of a Reluctant Nation (New York MacMillian Publishing Co., 1975), 316.

were Peter Goolrick, J.B. Timberlake, and Stephen Eustice Conway.<sup>50</sup>

In the presidential election of 1836 the townspeople voted for a variety of Whig candidates casting a total of 125 votes. In contrast, local Democrats cast only seventy-nine votes for Martin Van Buren. In comparison, Spotsylvania County elected Van Buren with a seventy-five vote majority. No fall line locality, except King George County, voted with such a large Whig majority as did Fredericksburg.<sup>51</sup>

By 1840, when the Whigs settled for William Henry Harrison instead of Henry Clay, many in town were disappointed. Clay supporters in town had been strong and were delighted during his campaign when he made a stop near Fredericksburg at the Mulberry Racetrack. There Dr. Beverly Wellford and a crowd from Fredericksburg invited their candidate of choice, to "enjoy...the hospitality of our town...."<sup>52</sup> But Clay moved on to Richmond which had become the center for Whig support in the state. When the vote was taken in November, the town again supported the Whig party choice, voting 199 for Harrison and 126 for Van Buren. The

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<sup>50</sup> Political Arena, March 5, 1840; Fredericksburg News, March 10, 1858.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. ed. Running for President: The Candidates and Their Images (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 133; Political Arena, November 8, 1836.

<sup>52</sup> Political Arena, June 9, 1840.

town of Falmouth across the river voted 163 for Van Buren and 123 for Harrison. The total for Spotsylvania County was 368 for Van Buren and 358 for William H. Harrison.<sup>53</sup> Because of the depression many Whigs blamed the Democrats and Van Buren for their problems. This would help explain the growth of Whig support in the county.

By 1850 both Whigs and Democrats were still holding regular meetings in Fredericksburg or at the county courthouse in Spotsylvania.<sup>54</sup> A Whig club had formed in Fredericksburg with Dr. John H. Wallace, chairman and Samuel Howison, secretary.<sup>55</sup> The local newspapers were either supporting Whig or Democratic candidates for both state and national elections. This trend was to change as the issue of slavery and states rights crept into politics on all levels of government. By 1855 the Whig party was declining.<sup>56</sup> In July of 1854 a group of young men of Fredericksburg formed an order of "Know Nothings" at a meeting in the courthouse.<sup>57</sup> This group strongly denounced the Democratic party under the slogan "Americans shall rule America". By

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<sup>53</sup> Political Arena, November 6, 1840.

<sup>54</sup> Fredericksburg News, September 13, 1852, September 23, 1852.

<sup>55</sup> Fredericksburg News, September 13, 1852.

<sup>56</sup> Weekly Advertiser, April 23, 1853.

<sup>57</sup> Political Arena, July 10, 1854.

1855 the group was called the American Party and were dominated by the most conservative younger segment of the town's elite, dedicated to peace, tranquility, and the elimination of slavery as a political issue. They also appeared to not be as adamant as their northern counterparts in being opposed to Catholics and immigrants.

To prepare for the 1856 elections the local American Party had a large July 4th celebration on Brown's Island located under the Chatham (Coalter) bridge.<sup>58</sup> People came from the counties by horseback and by foot to hear the day's dignitaries. To start the festivities William A. Little read the Declaration of Independence at the Town Hall and at eleven o'clock a crowd of 1,100 sounded the cannon, rang the town's bells and marched through the streets toward the island.<sup>59</sup> The affair was cut short by a rain storm.

Know Nothingism was strong in the town, so strong that the party label was placed on the local election tickets that year. The ticket for the Know Nothings was headed by John S. Caldwell, town sergeant, who ran for mayor and along with the majority of the ticket, won. The Virginia Herald announced that this election "produced griping in all parts

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<sup>58</sup> Weekly Advertiser, July 2, 1855; Constance M. Gay, "The Campaign of 1855 in Virginia and the Fall of the Know Ncthing Party." Richmond College Papers, 1, (June 1916): 318-319

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

of the state".<sup>60</sup> As in Fredericksburg, Know Nothings had swept municipal elections in Richmond and Norfolk and, as it happened, held majorities on councils in Lynchburg and Alexandria.<sup>61</sup> The Democratic candidate for governor that May, Henry A. Wise of Accomack County, won a large victory over the Know Nothing candidate, Thomas S. Flournoy of Halifax. In Fredericksburg the Know Nothings held strong for Flournoy with 379 votes compared to 275 votes cast for Wise but the victory for the county went to the Democrats.<sup>62</sup> The Herald had little good to say about those Democrats who crossed over in this election:

They ought to be branded with an indelible mark. They will be. They quit their party for their party's good. They cast in their fortunes with this new order and are now suffering the just punishment.<sup>63</sup>

Former Whigs, J.L. Marye, Jr., William Warren, C.C. Wellford, T.B. Barton and many others supported the Know Nothings.<sup>64</sup> But, ironically, the Know Nothings and Democrats came together to support O.M. Crutchfield for the House of

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<sup>60</sup> Virginia Herald, March 26, 1855.

<sup>61</sup> David R. Goldfield, "Marketing a Candidate: Henry Wise and the Art of Mass Politics," Virginia Cavalcade, 26, (Summer 1976): 31-32.

<sup>62</sup> Virginia Herald, May 28, 1855.

<sup>63</sup> Virginia Herald, May 31, 1855.

<sup>64</sup> Virginia Herald, July 2, 1855, March 19, 1855

Delegates which the local press called "very magnanimous on their part and complimentary to Major Crutchfield...."<sup>65</sup>

The town's political composition between 1855 and 1860 was changing as the Know Nothings disappeared. Many of its members went back to the "old line" Whigs who, along with lifelong Democrats, continued to debate state and national issues. The Democratic party grew stronger as the issues of slavery and states rights became more and more a part of the political debate. The issue of slavery sent more old Whigs to the Democrats. An old line Whig, said one Fredericksburg resident, was "one who takes his liquor regularly and votes the democratic ticket occasionally".<sup>66</sup> This comment represented the crossover voting that occurred in elections in the period.<sup>67</sup>

In the 1859 gubernatorial race, the strong return to the Democratic party in town caused a tie in the votes cast. Both John Letcher, the Democrat, and W.L. Goggin, the Whig party candidate received 290 votes respectively. The Weekly Advertiser, which tended to remain neutral in most elections, said the only issue at hand was "north or south" and was critical of both parties' "tendency to ignore principles

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<sup>65</sup> Virginia Herald, May 14, 1855, May 28, 1855

<sup>66</sup> Fredericksburg News, May 3, 1859.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

in their eager and unholy crusades upon men and sections".<sup>68</sup> The Whigs could not support Letcher, who they felt was an abolitionist, because he had supported Edmund Ruffin's proposal that slavery be abolished in western Virginia.<sup>69</sup> According to the News, Democrats had "...done everything vile and infamous to destroy the value of your property and ruin the peace and safety of your firesides...." <sup>70</sup>

In 1859 Fredericksburg's William L. Goggin's supporters were led by S.S. Howison, Hugh Scott, James Hunt, and James McGuire.<sup>71</sup> Letcher received fifty-five percent of the vote for Spotsylvania county and was elected Governor.

In October John Brown made his infamous raid on the Jefferson County village of Harper's Ferry.<sup>72</sup> Governor Wise called out the entire Virginia militia as well as asked for federal assistance. The Fredericksburg's Washington Guard, under the command of Captain Joseph W. Sener, responded to the call and was placed in charge of guarding John Brown in

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<sup>68</sup> Weekly Advertiser, April 2, 1859.

<sup>69</sup> Virginius Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion - A History from 1607 to the Present (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956), 290.

<sup>70</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 13, 1859.

<sup>71</sup> Weekly Advertiser, May 14, 1859.

<sup>72</sup> Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion, 290.



Charlestown.<sup>73</sup>

The people of the town reacted with fear and anger at this event. "This is but the first faint streak of that black cloud which the abolition villains have sworn to burst upon the South. We fear that irrepressible conflict has only begun." <sup>74</sup> After the initial shock was over and calmer heads began to appear, the town began to blame the attack and other criticism on the abolitionists, as well as the entire north. In particular they felt the new Republican party, which had tried to elect John C. Fremont in 1856, was a threat to the institution of slavery. The Democratic Recorder explained

The affair at Harper's Ferry is one of the straws that shows which way the political winds...that Mr. Seward is the arch-agitator who is responsible for this insurrection no one who reads his Rochester manifesto will deny. That his elevation to the Presidency would stimulate insurrections, all over the southern country.<sup>75</sup>

Seward had remarked in 1858 that white slave holders would soon enslave the wage earners of the north.

This, along with the newest legislation about slavery in the territories made possible by the Dred Scott decision,

<sup>73</sup> Quinn, The History of Fredericksburg, 183.

<sup>74</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 12, 1859.

<sup>75</sup> Democratic Recorder, September 21, 1859

made northern claims about the spread of slavery into the free states a major concern. This idea was further interpreted in the "house divided" speech given in the same year by Abraham Lincoln as he entered the United States Senate.<sup>76</sup>

The minds of the town's citizens had been influenced by these new and growing politics. The pro slavery authors were making it clear that if Republicans continued to win seats in Congress and control the executive mansion they would lose their property. The local newspapers were more concerned with national and state party politics and they listened with hesitation to the talk of secession coming from the deep south.<sup>77</sup>

The Fredericksburg News said DeBows Review, a pro southern manufacturing and slavery publication, was

becoming more and more popular in the south. In fact, it is the heart of a new and growing school of politics which looks...to material rather than theories... certifying state's interests rather than to abstractions, to facts rights rather than trust entirely to paper guarantees, preambles, resolutions, platforms and such a school as the Democratic Party.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Henry H. Simms, A Decade of Sectional Controversy 1851-1861 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1942), 149-150.

<sup>77</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 18, 1859.

<sup>78</sup> Simms, A Decade of Sectional Controversy, 154-155; Fredericksburg News, March 18, 1859.

The town's citizens, besides reading DeBow's Review, were encouraged by the local press to review two books by George Fitzhugh of Caroline County, Sociology for the South on the Failure of Free Society written in 1854 and Cannibals All Or Slaves Without Masters written in 1857. In these two works slavery was represented as normal and culturally proper. The north was full of crime and pauperism but the people of the south were happy and prosperous in their towns and on their plantations.<sup>79</sup> The News said these works would be interesting to its readers and Fredericksburgers could look forward that Mr. Fitzhugh would soon be writing a series of articles on the Northern Neck and the Fredericksburg area.

On the other side the town's anti-slavery newspaper the Christian Banner encouraged its readers to study the work of North Carolinian Hinton R. Helper, Impending Crisis of the South: How To Meet It, published in 1857. Helper developed the theme that the north's economic superiority and the south's backwardness was blamed on the south's slave holding. He encouraged non-slave holding whites to oust the slave owners if they ever hoped to prosper. He encouraged all non-slave holders to disassociate themselves from slave-

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<sup>79</sup> Simms, A Decade of Sectional Controversy, 155.

holders and vote them out of office.<sup>80</sup> W. Hunnicutt, the outspoken proprietor of the Banner said, "We faithfully warn our fellow citizens of the fearful results of any talk of secession... the day Virginia secedes, slavery,... is dead." <sup>81</sup>

After John Brown's raid Fredericksburg's citizens made an effort to show their growing displeasure with the way the nation was moving. In December of 1859 Charles A. Wellford and John A. English called a town meeting where state Delegate Crutchfield and state Senator Fredrick W. Coleman were given instructions on how to represent the town and surrounding county. They were asked to support any bills in the General Assembly that would promote manufacturing and that would give state tax incentives to attract industry. Lastly, they were to "promote the political security of the south and largely advance her future prosperity".<sup>82</sup>

The events of the presidential campaign of 1860 would see the former Whigs of the town, who could not support the Republicans, follow the newly formed Constitutional Union Party which nominated Tennessee Congressman, John Bell. The

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<sup>80</sup> Fredericksburg News, March 18, 1859; Simons, A Decade of Sectional Controversy, 155; and Christian Banner, May 7, 1860.

<sup>81</sup> Christian Banner, May 21, 1860.

<sup>82</sup> Weekly Advertiser, December 24, 1859.

election would be only a three man race in Virginia because the Republicans did not have electors or support in most counties and towns like Fredericksburg.<sup>83</sup> The Fredericksburg News, The Virginia Herald, and The Christian Banner all supported the Constitutional Union Party of Bell. The Democratic Recorder supported Stephen A. Douglas until the split in the party in June. The Weekly Advertiser which claimed neutrality, occasionally favored John Breckenridge of Kentucky, the eventual candidate of the southern Democrats.<sup>84</sup>

The town witnessed countless speeches by party orators to bring the messages to the voters. Party pamphlets were printed by the local press and mass meetings were held at Town Hall and at Spotsylvania Courthouse. In Fredericksburg the Constitutional Union Party campaigned under the slogan, "The Union, Now and Forever". The chief advocate for Bell was John L. Marye, Jr., who lived in Spotsylvania county, just over the boundary line. At a grand rally, held on September 8th, Marye spoke to the Bell and Everett Club of Fredericksburg for two and one half hours arguing the facts

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<sup>83</sup> A. Wilson Green, "Rebellion on the Rappahannock: Secession in Spotsylvania County, Virginia" (M.A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1977), 8.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

"worthy of the thoughtful consideration of every voter".<sup>85</sup> Said the News, he spoke of "good sense and patriotism of men of both parties" and he claimed that Bell, who had voted for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, was the man for the White House because the Democrats had endorsed "Squatters Sovereignty" in Kansas and Nebraska and had broken up their own party and were about to break up the government.<sup>86</sup> Their campaign propaganda said that a vote for the southern Democrat Breckenridge was a vote for the "dissidents" and a "secessionist".<sup>87</sup> The northern Democrat, Stephen A. Douglas, found a small support group in town led by Hugh S. Doggett and George H.C. Rowe, who gave speeches at local rallies, picnics and pole-raisings.<sup>88</sup> The Weekly Advertiser saw the election as between the "black" Republican party and any undivided party in the south and felt "politics and political prejudices should be entirely excluded from the question, and that safety, happiness, peace and property of the Union should absorb all minor attachments".<sup>89</sup> This would not be the case and factualism between sections and

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<sup>85</sup> Fredericksburg News, September 7, 1860.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 2, 1860.

<sup>88</sup> Green, "Rebellion on the Rappahannock" 9.

<sup>89</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 3, 1860.

parties would result in the election of Lincoln as the first Republican President.<sup>90</sup> The Advertiser blamed the problem on the great tide of abolition corruption and, although neutral, had hoped for Lincoln's defeat. The final vote in town was Bell 352, Breckenridge 334 and Douglas 179.<sup>91</sup>

After the election the town reacted to the developments in the deep south and in Washington, D.C. "The action of some of the southern states"...said the Weekly Advertiser... "has brought about this crisis, threatening as they do secession from the Union, and organizing a separate district and independent confederacy".<sup>92</sup> The town's people were of mixed feelings about these ideas. Talk of secession in Fredericksburg in November of 1860 was not as apparent as in the surrounding counties. The Fredericksburg News wrote

We are hoping to announce that the secession fury in this old county (Stafford) has in a grand manner subsided...and she will continue her beneficent career in supplying Fredericksburg with those necessities and luxuries for which she has been for long famous.... Let South Carolina become reasonable and follow the example of Stafford and the dangers of disunion will disappear forever ...Hurrah for Stafford.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 9, 1860.

<sup>92</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 7, 1860.

<sup>93</sup> Fredericksburg News, November 20, 1860.

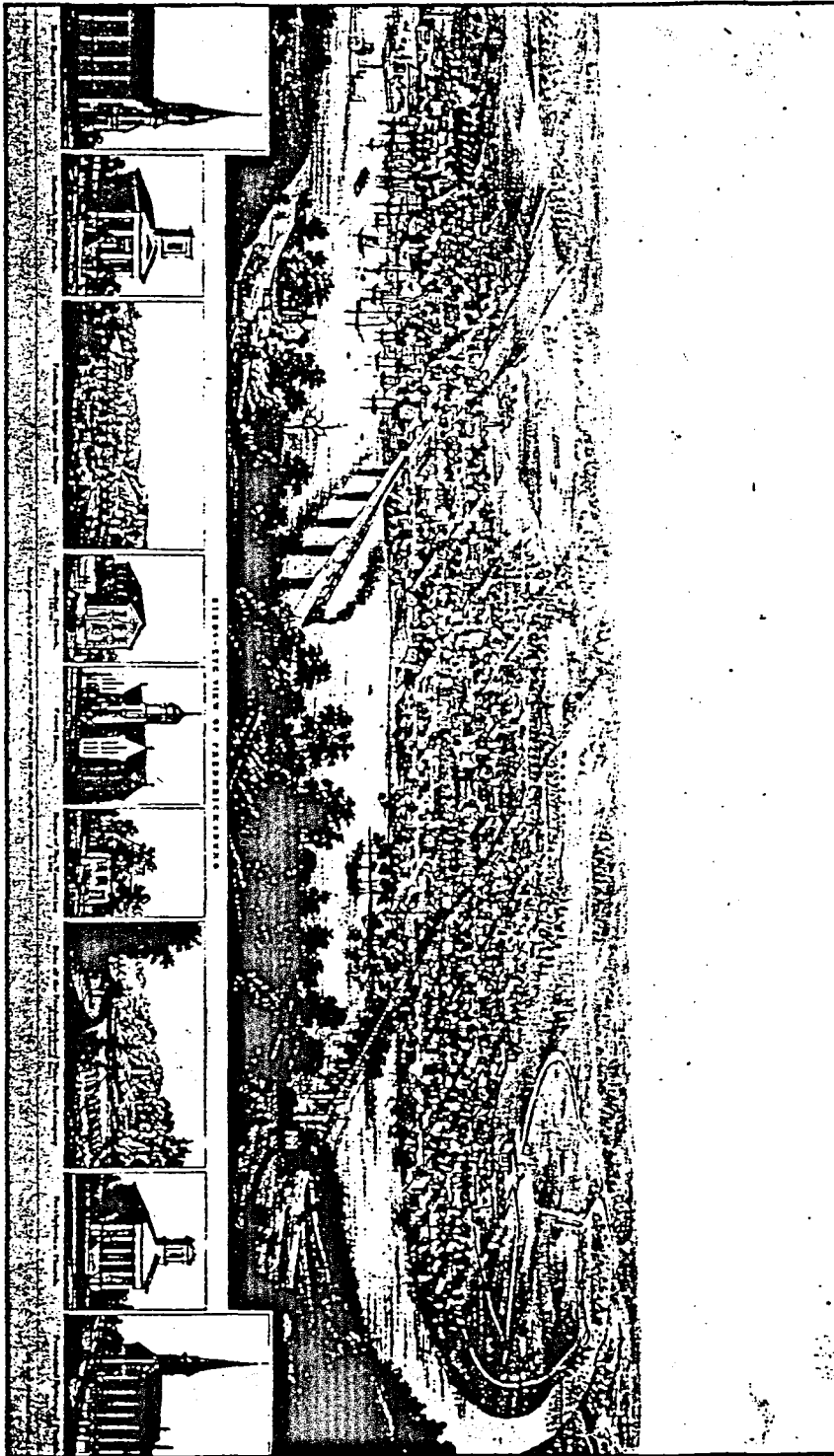
Although many of the Breckenridge Democrats were notably sympathetic towards South Carolina's idea of secession and despaired because Lincoln was president, Fredericksburg was willing to give Lincoln a chance as "Chief Magistrate".<sup>94</sup> The town, thus, remained in a conservative wait and see frame of mind as the decade neared its end.

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<sup>94</sup> Weekly Advertiser, November 24, 1860.



**FIGURE 12**  
**Fredericksburg Virginia 1856**



"Birds Eye View of Fredericksburg" 1856

Drawing and lithograph by Edward Sache and Co., Baltimore, Maryland, 1856.  
 Virginia Historical Society.

## CONCLUSION

As a small southern town before the Civil War, Fredericksburg experienced growth as well as hardships on a similar but smaller scale than the larger urban centers in Virginia. As she dealt with her changing role as a commercial center to a diverse manufacturing town she also began to change her philosophy. Predominantly agrarian in nature, Fredericksburg moved slowly toward a more industrial viewpoint much like the northern towns had experienced a few decades earlier.<sup>1</sup>

As Fredericksburg grew she encountered the problems that came with urban development. An ambitious community, Fredericksburg became the center for change in the fall line area. Thus, like many southern towns she experienced financial problems. Contemporary observers of this period even went as far as to call her a "finished town". Hindered by trade that dwindled after the Revolution and the failure of the Rappahannock Canal, Fredericksburg saw little economic growth until the end of the 1850s.<sup>2</sup> As one critic explained, the town "stood still for about twenty years."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eaton, Growth of Southern Civilization, 2.70.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Herald, February 10, 1858.

<sup>3</sup> Harpers Weekly, April 1862 (Photocopy of Mss Central Rappahannock Regional Library. Fredericksburg, Virginia.)

Frederick Olmsted painted a somewhat different but discouraging picture at the height of the canal era when he said "... at Fredericksburg we passed through the streets of a rather busy but poorly built town...."<sup>4</sup> The Weekly Advertiser, the conscience of the town, explained a local viewpoint of equal concern when it explained that what the town needed was to clean, pave, and light the streets, stop the rowdy behavior at night and on Sunday and a "... bright day would dawn upon the old Burg".<sup>5</sup> But this newspaper also proclaimed right before the War that "our streets are now daily thronged with wagons and carts... from the country which remind us of gone by years...."<sup>6</sup> The resurgence of the town in the 1850s was a much welcomed change from the earlier periods of economic decline.

The later 1830s and 1840s saw the town hindered by commercial rivalry with other fall line towns which made Fredericksburg so competitive for state funding for transportation improvements that she placed many of her civic improvements on hold. The focus on trade gave her an increased urban identity but she often found this uncomfort-

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<sup>4</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American States Arthur M. Schlisinger ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 32-33.

<sup>5</sup> Weekly Advertiser. July 18, 1857.

<sup>6</sup> Weekly Advertiser, September 8, 1860.

able because of the society she served. Having to always play catch up in the race for westward trade affected the economy of the town negatively with the final blow coming when she failed to complete the Fredericksburg and Gordonsville Railroad in 1853.<sup>7</sup> Much of the criticism of the town came because she always depicted herself in this period as a needy, forgotten place, looking for sympathy from the state legislature and asking the surrounding planters for financial support.<sup>8</sup>

The town's political leaders, faced with annual elections and pressured by the press and their constituents, were forced to spend large sums of tax money to try and achieve more commercial status for the town. This did little more than place the town in debt.

Although the entire economy of Fredericksburg did not revolve around slavery, as it did on the plantation, the 1830s and 1840s saw the town actively involved in the profitable slave trade. By the 1850s it was apparent that Fredericksburg was experiencing a unique decline in the institution of slavery. The "hiring out" of surplus slaves gave these African Americans such a distinct experience of freedom it resulted in massive runaways. This phenomenon

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<sup>7</sup> Goldfield, Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism, 203-204, 212.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

gave further support for those who felt strongly that only an all white labor force should be employed in the town's factories and that slave labor would be counter-productive.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the critics, the town was manufacturing forty-four products in 1860 and anticipated the building of a new broom factory, paper mill and increased production in her small textile mills and the addition of some new flour mills in both Falmouth and Fredericksburg.<sup>10</sup> The town's new Water Power Company that was slowly making sites available to new industry was strongly supported by town merchants, newspapers editors and in most cases the town politicians. The real estate investors, manufacturers, professionals and some of the town's craftsmen also increased their wealth during the 1850s and the newly established apprenticeship systems helped raise the status of many others.

The success of manufacturing near the end of the period brought about a change in the political identity of the majority of the town. Fueled by national issues and political warfare of the town's newspapers, Fredericksburg moved toward the Whig-Know Nothing side. This helped

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<sup>9</sup> Eaton, Growth of Southern Civilization, 250; Map and Description of the Fredericksburg Water Power Company, 6; and Avery O. Craven, The Growth of Southern Nationalism 1848 - 1861 (Louisiana State University, 1953), 263.

<sup>10</sup> Fredericksburg News, July 3, 1858, June 18, 1859; Weekly Advertiser, March 5, 1859; and Census 1860 Industrial Schedule.

perpetuate the manufacturer's gospel and kept the town's evolving merchant class more and more in suspect by the local farmers.<sup>11</sup>

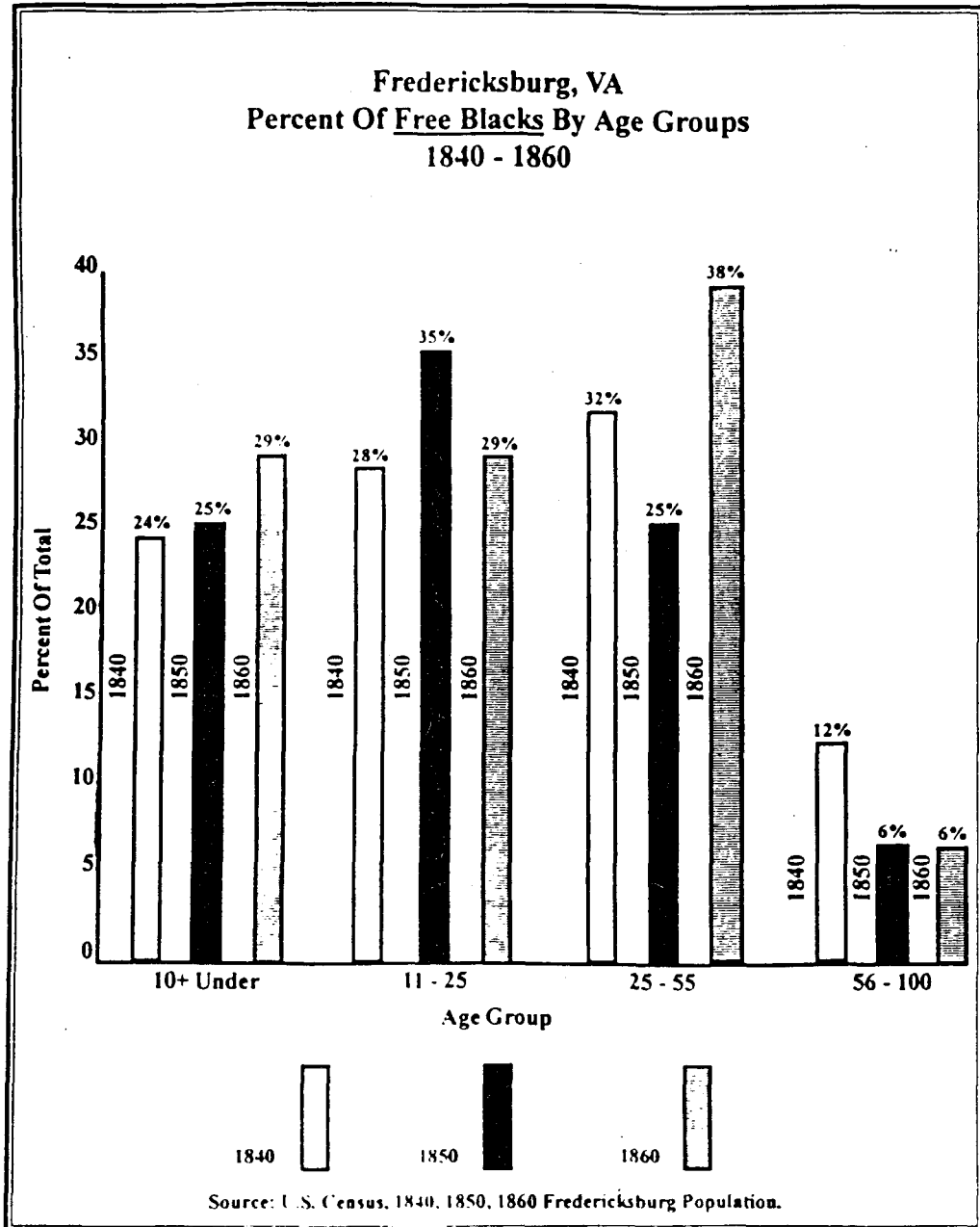
By 1860 termination as a town was not envisioned at all. Beneath a rough exterior was a high degree of determination and optimism. Unfortunately the town was forced to change its focus by 1860 toward national issues as sectional interests took center stage. Although a strongly conservative people, Fredericksburg sent moderate delegates to the secession convention in 1861 who voted for withdrawal from the union when the time came. As with its handling of canals, roads, and businesses, the citizens of Fredericksburg would meet the challenges created by the Civil War to remain a small, proud southern town steeped in tradition, with one eye on the future but a heart planted firmly in the past.<sup>12</sup>

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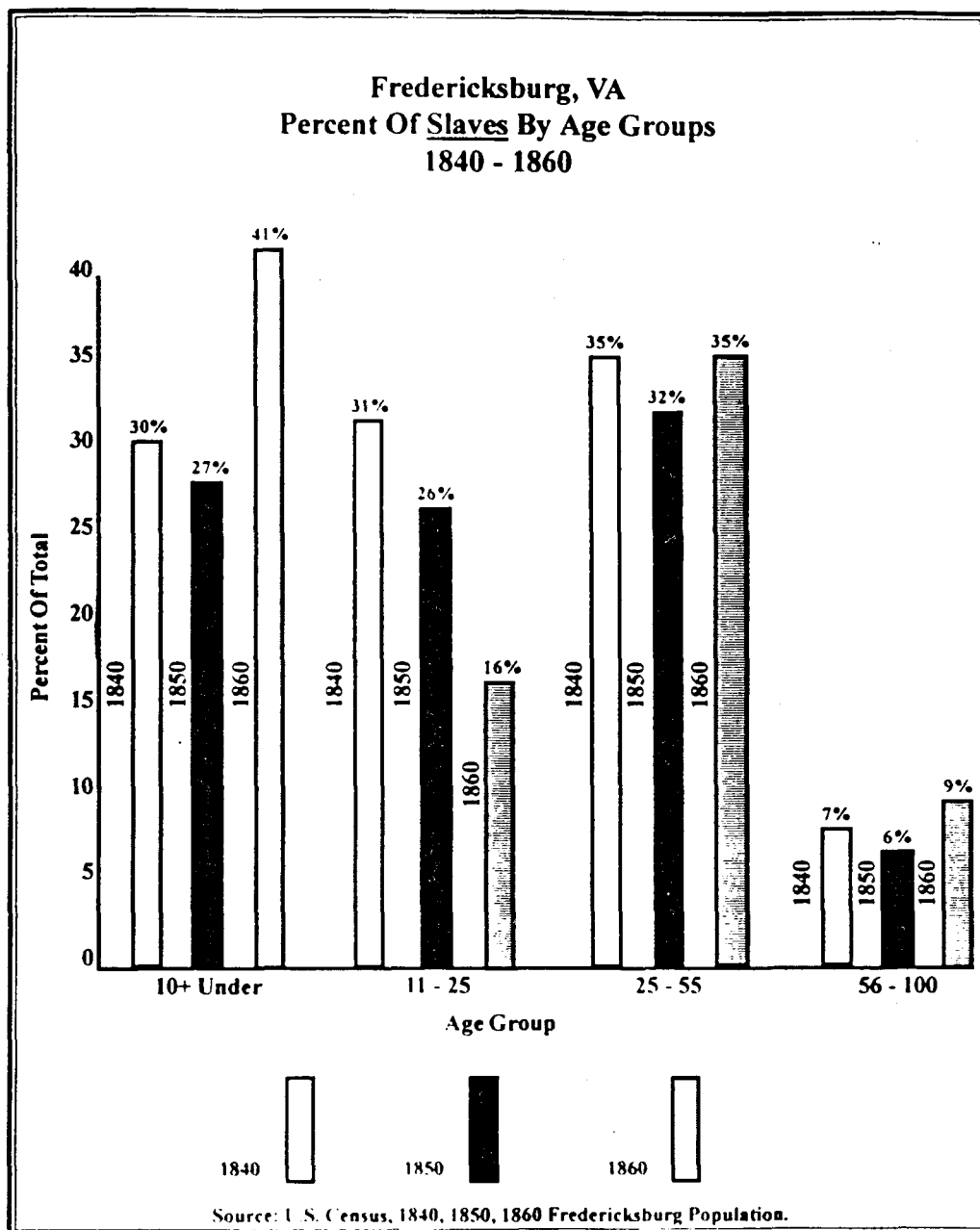
<sup>11</sup> Leonard P. Curry, "Urban Life in the Old South" The Forum Series (St. Louis: Forum Press, 1926), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Quinn, History of Fredericksburg, 119.

# APPENDIX 1



# APPENDIX 2





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Central Rappahannock Regional Library Manuscript Collection

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