

**THE DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF AMERICAN SLAVERY:
JAMAICA VERSUS VIRGINIA**

by

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The Africans who were shipped as slaves to the Caribbean sugar islands from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century encountered enormously different conditions from the African slaves who were landed in North America. The most obvious difference was demographic. The Caribbean slaves experienced continuous decrease, while the North American slaves experienced continuous increase. In order to sustain their labor gangs the Caribbean planters imported more than 4 million Africans, whereas only about 400,000 Africans came to North America.¹ Jamaica and Virginia—two of the most important slave societies founded by the British—epitomize this dramatic demographic contrast. Over 800,000 slaves were imported from Africa to Jamaica between 1655 and 1808, and fewer than 100,000 to Virginia between 1619 and 1778.² Yet by the close of the slave trade in 1808, Virginia had a larger black population than Jamaica.³

To get a first-hand sense of the impact of continuous natural decrease upon the Jamaica slaves and the impact of continuous natural increase upon the Virginia slaves, we need to examine particular communities with comprehensive demographic data. In this essay I focus upon two such communities: Mesopotamia Estate in western Jamaica and Mount Airy Plantation in tidewater Virginia. Mesopotamia was owned and operated by the Barham family and Mount Airy by the Tayloe family. The Barham Papers in the Bodleian Library at Oxford contain eighty-seven Mesopotamia slave inventories from

¹ In 1969 Philip Curtin estimated that 9,391,000 African slaves were landed in America, of whom 4,683,000 came to the Caribbean, 3,647,000 to Brazil, and 399,000 to North America. In 2001 David Eltis, analyzing the records of 27,000 slave voyages, arrived at similar totals: 9,468,000 slaves landed in America, 4,371,100 to the Caribbean, 3,902,000 to Brazil, and 361,100 to North America. See Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI: 1969), p. 268; and David Eltis, “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment,” *WMQ*, 3d ser., LVIII (2001): 35-37, 45. Having tracked another 7,000 slave voyages, Eltis now estimates that close to 11 million Africans were landed in America, but since almost all the newly discovered voyages went to Brazil or Spanish America, the number of Africans shipped to the Caribbean and North America is not greatly changed from his 2001 estimate. Many thanks to David Eltis for posting his latest findings on the web: “The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment Based on the Second Edition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database” (AHA session, Jan. 6, 2006).

² David Eltis estimates in “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade,” pp. 36, 45, that 1,070,000 Africans were imported to Jamaica, of whom 210,000 were re-exported to the Spanish colonies. For Virginia, Lorena S. Walsh in “The Chesapeake Slave Trade: Regional Patterns, African Origins, and Some Implications,” in *WMQ*, 3d ser., LVIII (2001), 166-69, estimates that about 78,000 Africans were imported to Virginia, 1698-1774, from Africa and the West Indies. The pre-1698 slave import total is harder to calculate, but was well under 20,000.

³ In 1808 the Jamaica census recorded 350,000 slaves and 30,000 free colored, whereas Virginia at this date could claim 380,000 slaves and 30,000 free blacks.

1727 to 1833, with a nearly unbroken run from 1751 to 1833.⁴ These inventories identify each slave by name, age, occupation, state of health, often by family connection, and sometimes by monetary value and religious status. Correlating these lists I have reconstructed the individual life histories of the 1,103 people (excepting unrecorded newborns who died within a few days) who lived at Mesopotamia between 1762 and 1833, when the Barham records are most fully informative. For Mount Airy the Tayloe Papers at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond contain a parallel series of inventories, in which the slaves are always identified by name and age, and usually by occupation, family connection, and monetary value. Fifty-two lists of Mount Airy slaves enable me to recreate the biographies of 977 people who lived on this plantation between 1808 and 1865,⁵ and another twenty-one lists reveal the process by which 246 of these Mount Airy slaves were uprooted from Virginia and moved 800 miles to new cotton plantations in Alabama between 1833 and 1862.⁶

The slave communities at Mesopotamia and Mount Airy make natural units for comparison. They were the same size, with populations averaging approximately 300 during the final sixty or seventy years before slavery ended in 1834 at Mesopotamia and in 1865 at Mount Airy. The two communities are certainly not completely representative. Mesopotamia was a standard-sized sugar estate, but even by Jamaican standards the Barhams were extreme-case absentee owners, who paid only two brief visits to the island in 100 years and left their slaves almost entirely to the mercy of hireling attorneys and overseers. At Mount Airy the Tayloes were fully in charge of management, but they conducted one of the relatively few really large slave operations in Virginia, whereas most other slave owners in this state were small planters. For

⁴ I thank the seventh Earl of Clarendon for permission to cite the Mesopotamia records in the Barham Papers, Clarendon Manuscript Deposit at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. 85 of the Mesopotamia slave inventories are in Barham b 34-38, dated 1736, 1743-44, 1751-52, 1754-1820, 1822-1832. Another 2 slave inventories—the first and last of the Mesopotamia series—dated 1727 and 1833, are in Jamaica Inventories, IB/11/3, vol. 14, p. 93ff, and vol. 150, p. 25ff, Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, Jamaica.

⁵ I thank Mrs. H. Gwynne Tayloe and her sons Gwynne and William Tayloe for their many kindnesses to me as I have been studying an uncomfortable subject, the slaves held by their ancestors. The 28,000 documents in the Tayloe Papers in the Virginia Historical Society have been microfilmed in the *Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations from the Revolution through the Civil War, Series M*, reels 1-37. The Mount Airy slave inventories are dated 1808-1847, 1849-1855 and 1861-1865, and are found (chronologically) in Tayloe d 538, a 13, d 13410, d 13424, and d 23707.

⁶ The Alabama lists, dated 1833-1838, 1840-1843, 1845, 1847, 1853-1856, 1859-1863, and 1865, are in Tayloe a 13, d 13410, d 13424, d 13425, d 13450, and d 13453.

demographic purposes, however, the two communities *are* representative. At Mesopotamia there were nearly two recorded slave deaths for every recorded slave birth. To keep this plantation operable, the Barhams were constantly bringing in new workers. At Mount Airy there were nearly two recorded slave births for every recorded slave death. Here the Tayloes were constantly moving their surplus laborers to new work sites, or were selling them to new owners. Thus demographic developments had great impact upon both of these slave communities, but in opposite ways.

Mesopotamia

Two members of the Barham family kept outstanding slave records: Joseph Foster Barham I, who owned Mesopotamia Estate from 1746 to 1789, and his eldest son Joseph Foster Barham II, who operated the estate from 1789 to 1832. Table 1 summarizes the changes in the slave population during the years 1762-1833, when 1,103 people were recorded as living on the estate. The birth and death figures at Mesopotamia drove all of the other numbers. During this seventy-two year span there were 416 recorded births (5.77 per annum) as against 751 deaths (10.43 per annum). These totals are not complete. Though the Barhams' bookkeepers kept slave birth and death registers, they never reported abortions or miscarriages and only occasionally reported stillbirths, and they probably didn't even know about many of the infants who died within a few days of birth. On twenty-eight occasions the bookkeepers *did* note that a woman was pregnant at the time of annual inventory, but only thirteen of these pregnancies were reported as births the following year. This suggests that about half of the close-to-term pregnancies at Mesopotamia terminated in miscarriages, stillbirths, or quick unrecorded infant deaths. Thus the true birth total was probably much higher than 416, which would make the true death total much higher than 751. The net result was the same—335 more deaths than births.

To sustain their Mesopotamia workforce, the Barhams bought 419 new slaves between 1762 and 1833—122 directly from the African slave ships and 297 from other estates in Jamaica. By this means they were able to expand the population from 268 in 1762 to 300 in 1789 and to 415 in 1820—after which the total declined to 329 in 1833.

Table 1: Slave Population Changes at Mesopotamia, 1762-1833*A. During the Ownership of Joseph Foster Barham I, 1762-1789*

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Population in July 1762	152	116	268
Increase:			
Born at Mesopotamia	53	56	109
Tranferred from other Barham estates	0	0	0
Bought from Africa	72	20	92
Bought locally in Jamaica	45	22	67
	<u>170</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>268</u>
Decrease:			
Died at Mesopotamia	145	84	229
Transferred to other Barham estates	0	0	0
Sold for Transportation	2	0	2
Escaped	1	0	1
Manumitted	2	2	4
	<u>150</u>	<u>86</u>	<u>236</u>
Population in December 1789	172	128	300

B. During the Ownership of Joseph Foster Barham II, 1789-1833

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Population in December 1789	172	128	300
Increase:			
Born at Mesopotamia	153	154	307
Transferred from other Barham estates	0	0	0
Bought from Africa	11	19	30
Bought locally in Jamaica	116	114	230
	<u>280</u>	<u>287</u>	<u>567</u>
Decrease:			
Died at Mesopotamia	287	235	522
Transferred to other Barham estates	0	0	0
Sold for Transportation	2	0	2
Escaped	4	2	6
Manumitted	2	6	8
	<u>295</u>	<u>243</u>	<u>538</u>
Population in August 1833	157	172	329

Though a great many slaves ran away temporarily, there was very little permanent movement out of the estate. Only seven slaves escaped for good, another four runaways were sold for transportation off the island, and twelve mulattoes (all fathered by the white men who managed the estate) were manumitted. A particularly interesting feature of the Mesopotamia population is the gender balance, which kept shifting. A slight female majority in 1727 changed into strong male dominance by 1762, continued with the males

firmly in the majority until 1792, then moved to parity in 1809 and closed with a female majority in the final years of slavery.

To put the population figures of 1762-1833 in perspective, we need to look back to the early days of this estate. In the 1670s Edmund Stephenson laid out a sugar plantation in the 1670s on the Cabarita River in the Westmoreland plain, a few miles inland from the seaport at Savannah la Mar. He named it Mesopotamia, in evocation of the fabled fruitfulness of the ancient Tigris and Euphrates river valleys. Edmund's son Ephraim expanded operations at Mesopotamia in the 1690s, and by the time he died in 1726 he had a cadre of ninety slaves.⁷ Ephraim Stephenson's probate inventory, taken in 1727, lists these slaves by name and value: forty-one 'Negroe' men and boys, forty-eight 'Negroe' women and girls, and one nameless 'Indian Girl'. The list is crude, but circumstantial evidence indicates that these slaves were young, healthy, and durable. Only two men were identified as 'old'. Sixty-seven of these people reappear on the 1736 inventory, and twenty-two on the 1762 inventory—the first Mesopotamia listing to assign ages to the slaves. Several of these Stephenson slaves lived well beyond 1762. Parry, who was a driver of the field gang in 1727 and about twenty-five years old, was still a driver at age sixty in 1762 and died in 1783 at age eighty-one. Love, who was a girl of about fifteen in 1727, worked in the field gang for some forty years, was invalided for another thirty years, and died at age eighty-two in 1794.⁸ Ralph, a child of about five in 1727, became successively a field worker, a driver, and a watchman, and died at age eighty in 1802.

Ephraim Stephenson's widow Mary Stephenson married a Jamaica physician named Dr. Henry Barham, who took over the management of Mesopotamia in 1727 or 1728 and greatly enlarged the labor force in a very short time. Mary died in 1735, and Henry decided to get away from the unhealthy Westmoreland climate before the same thing happened to him. So in 1736 he departed for England, never to return. Before

⁷ Almost no records survive to document Edmund Stephenson's operations. The Barham Papers at Oxford contain a few of Ephraim Stephenson's business records. Ephraim's probate inventory for Mesopotamia estate, dated 16 Aug. 1727, is in 1B/11/3, vol.14, p. 93ff, Jamaica Archives.

⁸ Interestingly, the Mesopotamia attorney John Graham thought that Love was much older than her stated age. In 1795 Graham reported to Joseph Foster Barham II that he had recently lost "Old Love, who from the best account, could not have been less than from 100 to 105 years, of age" (Barham c 357).

leaving, he took an inventory of his 248 slaves—nearly triple the number in 1727.⁹ There were 124 males and 124 females. Ages are not stated, but we know that most of the adults had been imported since 1727 from Africa, and that a quarter of the slaves were children described as “not yet fitt to work”—that is, under age ten—most of whom must have been born at Mesopotamia. There were no non-working invalids. Thus the population in 1736 continued to be youthful and healthy.

During the next century the Mesopotamia slaves very rarely saw their masters. Henry Barham settled in England as an absentee proprietor, remarried, and at his death in 1746 bequeathed Mesopotamia to his favorite stepson Joseph Foster Barham I (1729-1789). Educated at Eton and Oxford, Joseph visited Jamaica for a year in 1750-1751. He was a pious young man, and was distressed to find that the Mesopotamia slaves received no religious instruction, and indeed that no Christian mission work was carried out among the slaves *anywhere* in Jamaica. After returning to England, Barham joined the Moravian Church, a small sect in England but extremely active in overseas evangelism. In 1753 Barham persuaded the Moravians to send missionaries to Jamaica, and he soon got them to establish a mission at Mesopotamia that continued for over seventy-five years, from 1759 to 1835. The Moravians built a chapel at Mesopotamia, quickly gathered a sizable black congregation, and produced a long series of richly informative diaries detailing their day-to-day struggles to reach and help the Mesopotamia slaves.¹⁰

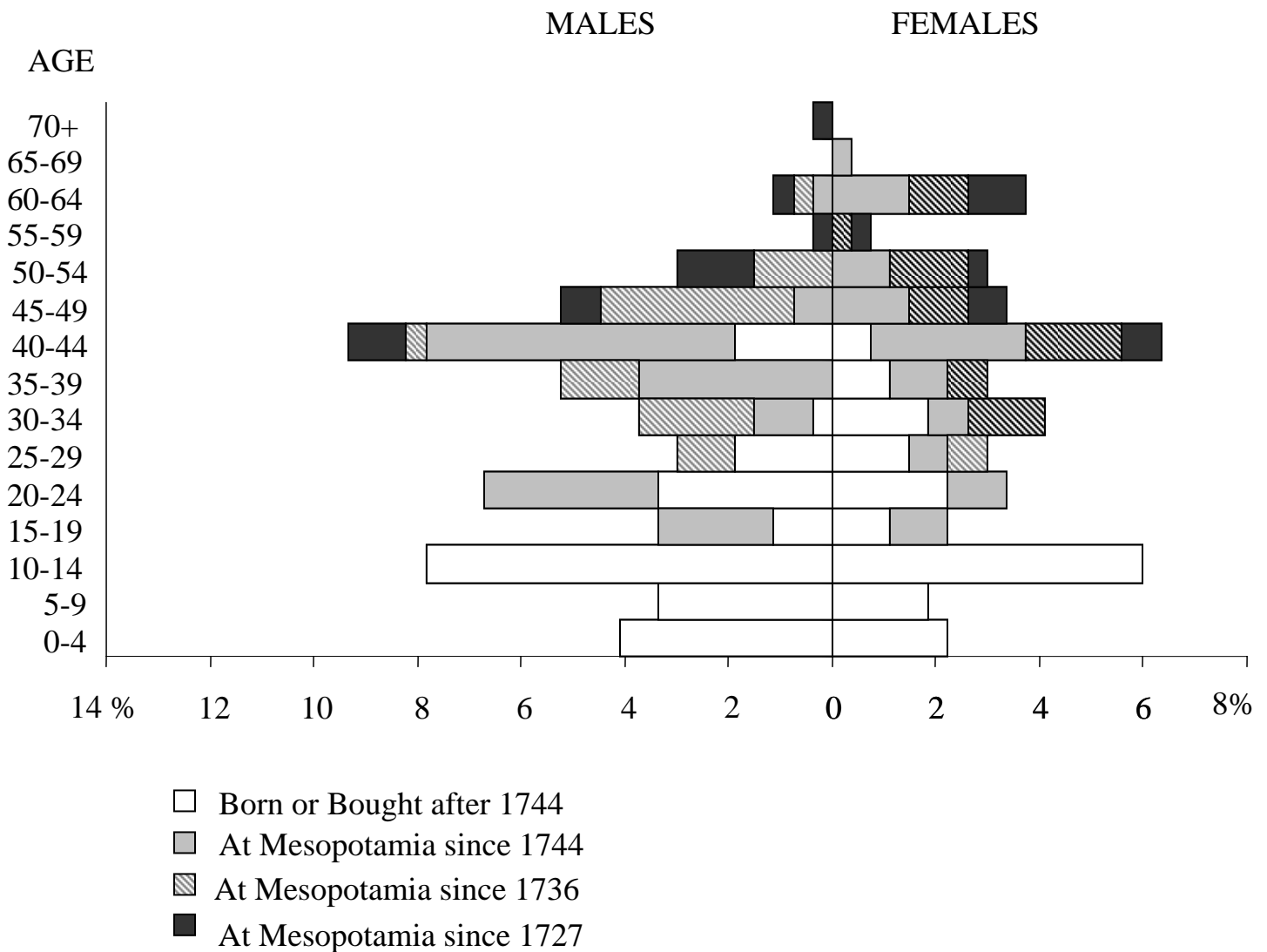
Joseph Foster Barham was also concerned about the rapid turnover in his Mesopotamia slave force. By the time of his visit in 1750 over half of the people who had been inventoried in 1736 were dead or gone, and they had been replaced by 168 new people—principally from the African slave ships. Barham himself bought twenty-one new African slaves for £1,023 in 1751. But he wanted to track the population changes after he returned to England, so he ordered his overseer to compile annual inventories starting in 1751. The ten inventories dated 1751 to 1760 showed that on average ten slaves were dying each year. Barham expressed alarm and called for a birth register. His overseer, Daniel Barnjum, became worried that he might lose his job, and in 1762 sent

⁹ Barham’s Mesopotamia inventory, dated 18 April 1736, is in Barham b 37.

¹⁰ 30 Mesopotamia diaries, written between 1759 and 1832, were sent to the Moravian headquarters in Germany, and are today stored in the Archiv der Brüder-Unität in Herrnhut. There are further Moravian diaries and conference minutes relevant to Mesopotamia in the Fairfield section of the Moravian Archives of Jamaica, JA.

his master an expanded inventory that listed the annual births and also reported the age and occupation and state of health of each slave.¹¹ This 1762 inventory identifies 268 men, women and children, and is our first fully articulated description of the Mesopotamia slave community.

Figure 1
Mesopotamia Population Pyramid, 1762



¹¹ Daniel Barnjum (who seems to have been a poor relation of Joseph Foster Barham) had compiled his first expanded inventory in Dec, 1761, but it was lost at sea, so he sent a new one dated 10 July 1762 (Barham b 37). He told Barham on 19 July 1762 that “I have been as exact as I possibly can in the calculations of their ages, and in regard to their conditions rather on the favourable side” (Barham c 360).

Using this inventory, I have diagrammed the age structure of the Mesopotamia population in 1762, as shown in Figure 1. An age diagram of a standard population is pyramidal, with numerous young people at the base gradually tapering to the few oldest people at the top—males shown to the left and females to the right. But Figure 1 is not pyramidal. The diagram shows more adults in their 40s than young children under age 10. Is this because Daniel Barnjum’s age estimates are wildly erroneous? I believe not. Having correlated the 1762 inventory with 15 previous Mesopotamia inventories, I have found that his age statements whenever they can be checked are generally very accurate up to about age 40, and somewhat exaggerated for the older people—though the diagram demonstrates that almost all of the slaves said to be past age 30 had been living at Mesopotamia for a great many years. The diagram thus demonstrates that the Mesopotamia population, which had been youthful and vigorous in 1736, had become strikingly elderly by 1762. There were not enough workers in their 20s and 30s for effective sugar production, which requires strenuous manual labor. The gender balance of 1736 had also been lost; by 1762 there were only 116 females as against 152 males, producing a skewed sex ratio of 131/100. Furthermore, a quarter of the adult slaves were listed as non-working invalids. In sum, from every point of view the Mesopotamia population was in terrible shape.

Why were there so few young people at Mesopotamia in 1762? This question cannot be fully resolved because the slave records from the 1730s, 1740s, and 1750s are incomplete.¹² But the basic answer is: too few live births and too many early deaths. In the twenty-six years between 1736 and 1762 the thirteen surviving inventories identify 132 births as against 287 deaths, creating a surplus of 155 deaths. And a very high proportion of the slaves who died during these years were children, teenagers, or young adults. Thirty-five of the fifty-six young children described in 1736 as “not yet fitt to work”—boys and girls who would have been prime workers in their late twenties or early thirties had they survived to 1762—were dead or gone. The managers of the estate had acquired 175 new slaves between 1736 and 1762, mostly from the African slave ships, and these new people were generally of prime working age when they came to

¹² I have found no Mesopotamia inventories for the years 1737-1742, 1745-1750, and 1753, no death registers until 1751, and no birth registers until 1762.

Mesopotamia—on average about twenty years old.¹³ But by 1762 nearly half of these 175 new slaves were also dead. Nevertheless sugar production at Mesopotamia would have collapsed without the new Africans, who constituted a majority of the prime-aged workers in 1762.¹⁴

The extraordinarily high number of deaths among both the estate-born slaves and the newly imported slaves strongly suggests that the managers of Mesopotamia had been overtaxing their workers. Mesopotamia crop accounts, which survive for most of the years between 1736 and 1761, show that the estate was shipping unusually large crops considering the size of the working population. The slaves produced an average of 199 hogsheads of sugar per annum for export during the 1740s and 1750s, as against 152 hogsheads per annum during the 1760s and 1770s when the slave gang was about the same size.¹⁵ Overwork in the cane pieces had so decimated the field gangs that by 1762 Overseer Barnjum said he could only muster fifty effective workers, and had to hire extra slaves in order to keep the place going. He complained frequently that there were far too many elderly slaves who could do little or no work on the plantation. If only these people would die, he told Barham, “a Happy Release it will be, for they are so Enfeebled by age, as to be scarce able to help themselves.”¹⁶

By 1762 the Mesopotamia population was not only poorly designed for sugar labor, but poorly positioned for future natural increase, thanks to the paucity of young females. Generally in Jamaica slave women survived much better than slave men,¹⁷ but at Mesopotamia between 1736 and 1762 considerably more females died than males. In particular, many fewer girl babies than boy babies survived the first few days after

¹³ I have established the approximate ages of 71 of the new slaves (those not born on the estate) who entered the Mesopotamia slave force between 1736 and 1762.

¹⁴ In 1762, 25 of the 43 Mesopotamia slave workers in their 20s had been imported. Among these were 19 new Africans who had arrived in 1756 and 1759.

¹⁵ I have compiled annual Mesopotamia sugar production figures for the years 1741 and 1747-1833 from the Mesopotamia crop accounts in *Accounts Produce*, 1B/11/4, vols. 1-75, Jamaica Archives, supplemented by several lists in Barham b 34, Barham b 37, and Barham c 360.

¹⁶ D. Barnjum to JFB I, 22 April 1765, Barham c 357. See also same to same, 23 Dec. 1760, 19 July 1762, Barham c 360; same to same, 20 July 1764, 20 May 1768, Barham c 357.

¹⁷ For a summary of the evidence on male versus female mortality in Jamaica, see my essay, “Sugar Production and Slave Women in Jamaica,” in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 49-52, 55.

childbirth.¹⁸ And when the estate managers bought new slaves from the African slave ships, they always selected more males than females. The sexual imbalance in 1762 was extremely damaging to the social fabric of the slave community. Nearly a third of the Mesopotamia men in their twenties, thirties, and forties could have no wives unless they mated with women on neighboring estates. And since there were few women of child-bearing age, and even fewer young girls who could become mothers in the future, the prospects for healthy family structure and natural population increase were bleak indeed.

During the final years of his ownership from 1762 to 1789 Joseph Foster Barham I endeavored to bolster his Mesopotamia slave force.¹⁹ Although he resented having to buy workers, he purchased 159 new slaves for the estate during this period, or 6 new people per year. He knew that he had to take action in 1768 when twenty slaves died, ten of them in a smallpox epidemic. All but one of the eighty-three new laborers acquired between 1762 and 1774 came from Africa, and they were filtered into Mesopotamia in small groups of ten or a dozen every few years. The great majority of these African newcomers were males, which did nothing to redress the gender balance on the estate, but most of them were strikingly young, aged ten to fifteen, which suggests that the Mesopotamia managers were trying to lower the age level of the population.²⁰ Then came the American Revolutionary War, when sugar receipts from Mesopotamia barely exceeded expenses, and the African slave trade was disrupted. Food shortages were endemic in Jamaica during the war, and the Mesopotamia slaves suffered severely. The worst year at Mesopotamia was 1777, when twenty slaves died.²¹ After overseer Daniel

¹⁸ The disparity between recorded girl and boy births, 1736-1762, is quite startling: 55 girls as against 77 boys. Girl infants seem to have been far more neglected than boy infants, and it may be that some slave mothers were selecting their baby daughters for infanticide.

¹⁹ I have sketched the biography of a Mesopotamia slave born in 1767, and her mulatto son born in 1793, in "The Story of Two Jamaican Slaves: Sarah Affir and Richard McAlpine of Mesopotamia Estate," in *West Indies Accounts: Essays on the History of the British Caribbean and the Atlantic Economy in Honour of Richard Sheridan*, ed. Roderick A. McDonald (The Press University of the West Indies, 1996), pp. 188-210.

²⁰ The age estimates in the inventories for these new African slaves are of course open to question, but I reckon that even a Mesopotamia bookkeeper could observe the adolescent growth changes of boys and girls aged 10 to 15 with some accuracy. A very significant age marker for young Africans would be the presence or absence of scars or body marks from tribal pubertal initiation rites at around age 12.

²¹ Were they starving? The death register for 1777 (Barham b 37) offers ambiguous evidence: it reports that 3 newborn babies died of convulsions, 7 adults died of old age, 5 more had the flux (or diarrhea, which may well indicate severe malnutrition), 2 had the yaws, 2 died from an inflammatory fever, and 1 had ulcers.

Barnjum's death in 1780, Barham acquired twelve slaves from his estate, but otherwise there were no purchases between 1774 and 1784 and the population shrank from 278 to 240.

With the close of the war, sugar prices rose significantly and economic prospects brightened for Jamaican planters. Joseph Foster Barham I went on a spending spree and bought sixty-four new slaves for Mesopotamia between 1784 and 1786—twenty-four from the incoming African ships and forty seasoned slaves from Three Mile River estate in Westmoreland.²² Sugar production expanded at Mesopotamia, gross income from the estate rose to nearly £9,000 per annum, and the slave population climbed to a new high of 303. This was the situation when Barham abruptly died on 21 July 1789 of a paralytic stroke at the age of sixty.

Figure 2 shows the Mesopotamia population pyramid as of December 1789, five months following Barham's decease. The changes since 1762 are dramatic. There were many more young adults in their 20s and 30s, and many fewer over-aged workers in their 40s. Most of the prime-aged workers either came directly from Africa or had been purchased from Three Mile River estate. Relatively few had been born on the estate. Most of the Mesopotamia-born slaves were either too young or too old for heavy work, as the diagram demonstrates, and sugar production would have been almost impossible without these imported workers. All in all, from a labor perspective Mesopotamia in 1789 had a far more functional work force than in 1762. But otherwise the old problems persisted. The proportion of youngsters under age 20 was even smaller than in 1762, and the proportion of females was also smaller. The sex ratio had risen from 131/100 to 134/100. And there were still two deaths for every birth.

In contrast to the 1740s and 1750s, the men and boys were now surviving less well than the women and girls. Sixty-one more males than females had died since 1762,²³ and the women were now in about the same physical shape as the men. Overall, the inventory of December 1789 indicates a dismal health status for nearly all of the older Mesopotamia slaves. Only 14 percent of the 102 men and women over age thirty-five in

²² The Three Mile River slaves were priced at £3,150 or £79 per person, and are listed in family groups in Barham b 33.

²³ 45 % of the 322 men and boys who lived on the estate during the twenty-seven years since July 1762 had died by December 1789, as against 39 % of the 214 women and girls.

Figure 2

Mesopotamia Population Pyramid, 1789



1789 were described as “able”; 86 percent were described as sick, weak, or infirm; and 13 percent were so incapacitated that they were listed as invalids unable to work. This may not have bothered Barham’s attorneys greatly. Having bought 117 new male slaves and only 42 new female slaves since 1762, they had successfully fashioned a male-dominated force of young laborers. As the diagram shows, the concentration of young

men in the 25-34 age bracket—seventy-one of them altogether—was especially notable. Most of these young men had been imported very recently, between 1784 and 1786.

With the death of Joseph I, his eldest son Joseph Foster Barham II (1759-1832) took over the estate. Joseph II was brought up as a Moravian, and attended a Moravian school at Barby in Germany, and though he settled into a patrician life in England and conformed to the Church of England, he continued to support the Moravian mission at Mesopotamia. Like his father, Joseph II visited Mesopotamia as a young man in 1778-1781 but never returned to Jamaica once he became the owner of the place. During his stay on the island he had been disgusted by the sight of planters rushing to the slave ships to haggle over the purchase of captive Africans, and years later when he sat as an MP for Stockbridge, Hampshire, he joined William Wilberforce in 1807 and voted to terminate the African slave trade. Declaring that he wanted three people to do the work of two and thereby alleviate the living and working conditions of his slaves, Joseph II brought 260 newcomers into Mesopotamia between 1791 and 1819 and built his gang to a peak total of 415 in December 1820. Against his own principles, he purchased thirty slaves from the African ships in 1791-1792, but he acquired the other 230 new people in three large blocs from local Jamaican plantations—sixty-two from Southfield estate in 1791, fifty-six from Cairncurran estate in 1814, and 112 from Springfield estate in 1819.²⁴

The seasoned slaves who came to Mesopotamia from these local estates were quite different in character from the people who came directly from the slave ships. To be sure, about 45 percent of the slaves from Three Mile River, Southfield, Cairncurran and Springfield had been born in Africa.²⁵ But the Africans purchased directly from the slave traders were 68 percent male and almost entirely in their teens or twenties, whereas

²⁴ JFB II paid about £21,000—or £91 per person—for the 230 people he acquired from Southfield, Cairncurran and Springfield. In an undated letter of around 1800 JFB II wrote to his Mesopotamia attorneys, “I cannot approve the purchase of any negroes from the ships on any account whatsoever.” But he added, “I should desire you to inform me when any eligible purchase should offer of negroes in the vicinity of my estate” (JFB II to H.W. Plummer and William Rodgers, n.d., Barham c 428).

²⁵ In 1817 Parliament mandated a comprehensive registration of all the slaves in Jamaica, listing each person by name, sex, age, color and origin; this census thus identifies all Jamaican slaves in 1817 as either African-born or Creole. The Mesopotamia return for 1817 (which identifies the origins of all Three Mile River, Southfield, and Cairncurran slaves still living on the estate) is in T71/178, PRO. The Springfield return for 1817 (compiled two years before JFB II bought the estate) is in T71/190. About 85 percent of the Mesopotamia slaves who did *not* come from these 4 estates were identified in 1817 as Creoles. For background discussion of the 1817 slave registration, see B.W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834*, pp. 45-46, 256.

the local people acquired for Mesopotamia between 1786 and 1819 were only 52 percent male, arrived in family groups, and ranged in age from infancy to seventy plus. In age profile on entry they closely resembled the Mesopotamia population as of 1789 (see Figure 2) except that they included more young children and teenagers and fewer prime-aged adults in their twenties and early thirties. Thus from a labor perspective Barham's decision to stop trading with the slave ships was a bad mistake. But from a social perspective his policy helped to stabilize the Mesopotamia population. Though deaths continued to outnumber births and the population dropped from 415 in 1820 to 329 in 1833, the proportion of young women was increasing a little, and these young women were producing a few more children.

Joseph II bought no more slaves after 1819, and by the 1820s he came to believe that his Mesopotamia people must be responsible for their demographic failure. Accepting the arguments of his Jamaican attorneys, Barham judged his laborers to be naturally "dissolute" and "dreadful idlers". In 1823 he published a pamphlet entitled *Considerations on the Abolition of Negro Slavery* in which he claimed that the slaves in the British Caribbean, if given freedom, would be incapable of productive individual enterprise. He did not live long enough to see what happened when his slaves acquired their freedom, for he died on 28 September 1832, two years before Parliament instituted an emancipation process for the British Caribbean slaves that began on 1 August 1834 and ended on 1 August 1838.²⁶

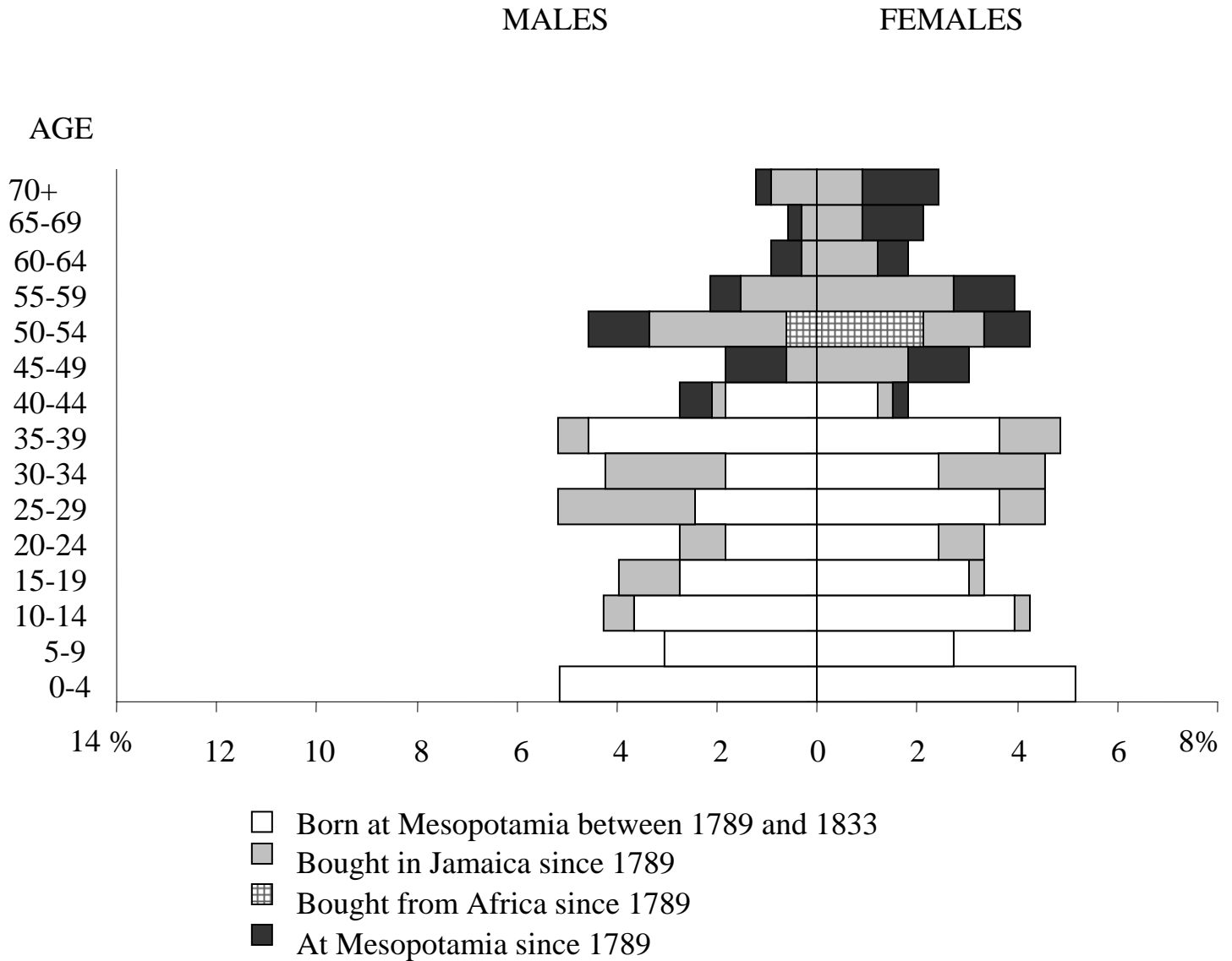
Joseph Foster Barham II's probate inventory taken in August 1833 gives us our final look at the Mesopotamia slave population.²⁷ Figure 3 shows that the age structure was now considerably more pyramidal than it had been in 1762, and far less distorted by the importation of new slaves than in 1789. The proportion of young children on the estate was larger in 1833 than in 1762 or 1789, although still strikingly small. The proportion of older men and women, on the other hand, was far greater than in 1762 or

²⁶ In 1834 only slave children under the age of 6 were fully freed, while all the other slaves were redefined as "apprenticed labourers" and were ordered to work 45 hours a week for their former owners without pay. After 4 years of this semi-slavery, the apprentices were manumitted in 1838.

²⁷ The 2 final Mesopotamia slave inventories, dated 1 January 1832 and 23 August 1833, list the slaves by their "original" or "former" names and their "Christian" names in parallel columns. Those with Christian names—about 20 percent of the total—adopted surnames as well as first names.

Figure 3

Mesopotamia Population Pyramid, 1833



1789.²⁸ Thirty of the Mesopotamia people—nine men and twenty-one women—were now over the age of sixty, suggesting that health conditions on the estate had improved markedly. From management’s perspective, the Mesopotamia slave gang by 1833 was

²⁸ In 1833 there were 79 slaves aged 50 or older, compared with 36 in 1789 and 34 in 1762.

encumbered with far too many nonworking senior people and was a lot less effective than in 1789 when 39 percent of the slaves had been prime-aged workers in their twenties or early thirties—as against 25 percent in 1833. Furthermore, by 1833 there were only 157 males as against 172 females for a sex ratio of 91/100, and the women in the prime field gang now considerably outnumbered the men. In sum, though Mesopotamia's population structure in 1833 was quite different from the structure in 1762, we once again see a work force not very well designed for effective sugar production.

In 1832 Joseph II's eldest son John Barham (1799-1838) inherited Mesopotamia, but John took no interest in his slaves since they were on the brink of emancipation. He stopped his grandfather's and father's elaborate record keeping, and closed the Moravian mission. John's brother, the Reverend Charles Barham, succeeded him in 1838 but also left no surviving paper trail. Consequently I am in the dark about what happened at Mesopotamia on or after 1 August 1838 when the Barham slaves were fully manumitted, and I cannot tell how many (if any) of these freedmen continued to work for wages on the estate. I don't even know when the Barhams sold the place; it was sometime in the 1850s or 1860s. But this slave-holding family is still memorialized today. The local village on the Cabarita River is called Barham, and a signboard on the clapboard church announces the order of service at the *Barham Go Between Ministry*. The agricultural estate that we have been investigating no longer carries the name Mesopotamia but is now known as Barham Farm. Sugar is still being cultivated here, as it has been for well over 300 years.

Reviewing the demographic pattern at Mesopotamia between 1762 and 1833, we face troublesome questions. Why was the death rate so high throughout these years? Why were the women in such poor health in 1762? Why did the men survive less well than the women between 1789 and 1833? Why did the women consistently produce so few children? There is not space here to discuss all of these issues, but I will briefly consider the most striking feature of life at Mesopotamia, which is the exceedingly low birth rate. Nearly half of the women of child-bearing age during the period 1762-1833 had no recorded children, and most of those who gave birth had very small families. The African-born women produced even fewer babies than the Mesopotamia-born women, perhaps because they had more difficulty finding sexual partners. Ironically, the Mesopotamia birth rate was boosted by the sexual predations of the white managerial

staff. These men constituted less than 5 percent of the adult males on the estate yet sired more than 10 percent of the children born between 1762 and 1833. And the Mesopotamia birth registers, which identify the mothers of the mulatto and quadroon babies,²⁹ indicate that the whites pursued young slave girls who were Jamaica-born rather than African, and that they particularly sought out light-skinned women.

There are clearly several reasons for the low birth rate at Mesopotamia—and on all other Jamaican sugar estates—which can be categorized as disease, diet, depression, and labor. First, the slaves inhabited a toxic environment in which African newcomers had no immunity against Caribbean diseases and Caribbean natives had no immunity against African diseases. But, as we have seen, many of the Mesopotamia people survived to old age in this environment, and some of the women described in the inventories as “dreadfully diseased” bore children, while others in better health were childless. Second, the slave diet was very deficient in protein and fat content, and some of the semi-starved women on the estate may not have been able to ovulate, let alone produce healthy offspring. Third, we know from the slave records that several Mesopotamia mothers were accused of infanticide because they “overlaid” their newborn babies, and it is certainly possible that some of the pregnant women deliberately aborted their fetuses. But the most important factor in my opinion was the brutal labor regimen, which particularly affected almost all of the women of child-bearing age.

At Mesopotamia, as on all Jamaican sugar estates, the most attractive jobs—for craft workers and stock keepers—went exclusively to the men. Only a few women could be employed as domestics to serve their white masters, and all of the other women were forced into field labor. Typically at about age twenty a healthy girl was placed in the first field gang—which performed the most strenuous physical labor on the estate in regimented lockstep—and there she stayed for a decade or more until her constitution began to break down and she was moved to the second gang, where the work load was much lighter. From 1762 to about 1790 the Mesopotamia first gang was male-dominated, but after 1790 there were always more women than men in this work unit.

²⁹ The Mesopotamia records carefully identified all mixed-race babies because they were considered to be of a higher order than the all-black slaves. Once they were old enough to work, the mulatto and quadroon males were given skilled craft jobs and the females became domestics; they were never put into the field gangs. 12 of the 52 mixed-race slaves who lived at Mesopotamia between 1761 and 1833 were manumitted by their fathers.

Toiling twelve hours a day, six days a week, the first gang workers did everything in unison and by hand, digging cane holes, planting and weeding the cane, and harvesting it at crop time. This was punishing work, very hazardous for a newly pregnant woman, and it undoubtedly facilitated large numbers of miscarriages and stillbirths.³⁰ Interestingly, the Mesopotamia woman who bore the largest recorded number of children—thirteen—was Minny (1770-1826), who spent all of her career as the overseer’s housekeeper and never worked at field labor.³¹ Minny was the closest thing possible in the slave era to a homemaker, which is what all of the other slave women wanted to be. And as soon as emancipation occurred in Jamaica, most of the freed women stopped working in the cane fields and embraced domestic duties, and the birth rate immediately zoomed upward.

Mount Airy

Turning to Virginia, two members of the Tayloe family kept outstanding slave records at Mount Airy: John Tayloe III, the master from 1792 to 1828, and his son William Henry Tayloe, who operated this plantation through the Civil War. Father and son pursued very different agendas, as we shall see. John III was one of the grandest Chesapeake planters in the Early Republic, and continually shuttled his slaves in and out of Mount Airy to achieve the mix of workers that he wanted. William Henry, who inherited about a quarter of John III’s slaves at a time when agricultural prospects were increasingly discouraging in the Virginia tidewater, gradually moved 222 of his people 800 miles to new cotton plantations in Alabama, and built up a labor force almost as impressive as his father’s before the Union army freed his slaves. Table 2 summarizes the population changes under both men by tracking all 972 slaves who are recorded as

³⁰ For further discussion of female labor at Mesopotamia, see two of my essays: (1) “‘Dreadful Idlers’ in the Cane Fields: The Slave Labor Pattern on a Jamaican Sugar Estate, 1762-1831,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XVII (Spring, 1987): 795-822; and (2) “Sugar Production and Slave Women in Jamaica,” in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 49-72.

³¹ After a stillbirth at age 13, Minny produced her first (mulatto) child Susannah at age 15. She had 5 more mulatto children and 7 black children. Her last child, born in 1814 when she was 44, was a black baby named Joseph Foster Barham.

Table 2: Slave Population Changes at Mount Airy, 1809-1863*A. During the Ownership of John Tayloe III, 1809-1828*

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Population in January 1809	216	165	381
Increase:			
Born at Mount Airy	136	116	252
Purchased	4	0	4
Transferred in from other Tayloe Chesapeake properties	<u>20</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>36</u>
	160	132	292
Decrease:			
Died at Mount Airy	80	62	142
Transferred out to other Tayloe Chesapeake properties	72	37	109
Sold	<u>12</u>	<u>32</u>	<u>44</u>
	164	131	295
Population in January 1828	212	166	378

B. During the Ownership of William Henry Tayloe, 1828-1863

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Population in January 1828	212	166	378
Increase in Virginia:			
Born at Mount Airy	121	127	248
Transferred in from other Tayloe Chesapeake properties	14	17	31
Purchased in Virginia	<u>9</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>20</u>
	144	155	299
Decrease in Virginia:			
Died at Mount Airy	91	66	157
Transferred out to other Tayloe Chesapeake properties	109	84	193
Sold in Virginia	8	17	25
Escaped in Virginia	<u>11</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>14</u>
	219	170	389
In Alabama:			
Moved from Mount Airy to Alabama	110	112	222
Born in Alabama (est.)	113	86	199
Former Mount Airy slaves reacquired in Alabama	13	11	24
Purchased in Alabama	30	21	51
Died in Alabama (est.)	41	34	75
Sold in Alabama	14	16	30
Population in Alabama in 1863	211	179	390
Population of Mount Airy in 1863	<u>27</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>67</u>
Total Population in 1863	238	219	457

living at Mount Airy between 1809 and 1863 as well as the 274 slaves acquired by William Henry in Alabama between 1833 and 1863.³²

³² Table 2 stops at 1863 because the last comprehensive census of William Henry Tayloe's Alabama slaves was taken in this year. In 1864-1865 an additional 5 babies were born at Mount Airy, bringing the Mount

Both John III and William Henry enjoyed a continuous surplus of slave births over slave deaths: the opposite of the situation at Mesopotamia. During these fifty-four years there were 500 recorded births at Mount Airy (9.26 per annum) as against 299 deaths (5.53 per annum). And both Tayloes manipulated their bondsmen to a high degree. Between 1809 and 1863 they bought, sold, or moved 789 of the 1,222 slaves who appear in Table 2—and in addition they transferred several hundred slaves from one quarter to another within the Mount Airy complex or from one Alabama plantation to another. Only fourteen slaves managed to escape from their control—all but one of them during the Civil War when the Union lines were very close to Mount Airy.

John Tayloe III was a fourth-generation Tayloe slaveholder, but unfortunately the surviving slave records kept by his great grandfather, grandfather and father are very spotty.³³ William Tayloe (1645-1710), the founder of this dynasty, began planting tobacco along the Rappahannock River around 1680—just about when Edmund Stephenson was starting Mesopotamia estate in Jamaica—and built up a workforce of twenty-one slaves.³⁴ His son John Tayloe I (1687-1747)—a contemporary of Dr. Henry Barham at Mesopotamia—became a large-scale entrepreneur. He acquired extensive property through marriage, opened up two ironworks on the Rappahannock and the Potomac, and managed the sale of a number of slave cargoes from Africa.³⁵ By 1747 Tayloe possessed over 20,000 acres in Virginia and Maryland, and he left his heirs 328 slaves: 167 at Mount Airy, and 161 on other Chesapeake work sites.³⁶

John I's 1747 probate inventory gives us an early view of the Mount Airy slave force. It is an imperfect view, since the slaves are only identified by name and value, not by age, occupation, or family. They all have English names, though some of them must

Airy total for this study to 977. 5 babies are also recorded as born in Alabama in 1864-1865, but this is almost certainly an undercount.

³³ For a full discussion of the rise of the Tayloes as major Virginia entrepreneurs, see Laura Croghan Kamoie, "Three Generations of Planter-Businessmen: The Tayloes, Slave Labor, and Entrepreneurialism in Virginia, 1710-1830" (PhD dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1999).

³⁴ William Tayloe's probate inventory, dated 7 March 1710, is in the Richmond County Wills and Inventories, 1709-1717, Library of Virginia.

³⁵ Tayloe's account of his sales from a Bristol slave ship with 230 Africans in 1717 is in the Loyde-Tayloe account book, 1708-1778, Tayloe b 1, VHS. An account of Tayloe's management of sales from two other Bristol ships with 404 slaves in 1723 is in Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, DC, 1931-1935), IV, 100-102, 185, 187.

³⁶ John Tayloe I's will, dated 31 Jan. 1744, is in Tayloe d 149; the probate inventory of his estate, dated 2 Nov. 1747, is in Richmond County Wills and Inventories, 1725-1753, LVA.

have been born in Africa.³⁷ The sex ratio (145/100) is heavily male, and the population seems to be youthful. While only fourteen slaves are specifically identified as children, nearly half are valued at £5 to £25, and most of these low-priced slaves were probably young boys or girls.³⁸ Tayloe's inventory was taken sixty-two years before the first fully detailed Mount Airy inventory of 1809, yet several of the oldest men and women in 1809 seem traceable back to 1747. A field hand named Tom, who was said to be seventy-one years old in 1809 and lived into the 1820s, could well be the Tom who was valued in 1747 at £20, the right price for a nine-year-old boy. Likewise Old Sucky, who was sixty-seven and an invalid in 1809 (though she lived for another twenty-two years) could well be the Sucky who was valued in 1747 at £15, an appropriate price for a five-year-old girl.³⁹

In the third generation, John Tayloe II (1721-1779)—a contemporary of Joseph Foster Barham I at Mesopotamia—enjoyed his wealth and played the role of leisured gentleman. In the 1750s he built a splendid Palladian mansion, which is one of the finest architectural showplaces of colonial Virginia and has been occupied by the Tayloe family ever since.⁴⁰ Newspaper notices in the *Virginia Gazette* reported the triumphs of his horses at races in Williamsburg, Yorktown, and Fredericksburg, and Tayloe advertised annually in the 1770s that his most celebrated steed, Yorick, was available for stud. Meanwhile he did not neglect his business affairs. Between 1747 and 1779 he doubled his father's acreage, sent his ship *Tayloe* to transport convict servants from the London jails to Virginia, and employed some of these convicts at his two ironworks and as sailors on his schooner *Occaquan*.⁴¹ Though no probate inventory was taken at his death, John Tayloe II seems to have increased his slave force at Mount Airy from 167 to about 250,

³⁷ Philip Morgan estimates that 21% of the Virginia slaves in 1750 were African born (*Slave Counterpoint*, p. 61).

³⁸ The 9 slaves specifically identified as 'child', 'boy' or 'girl' are priced at £22 on average. 5 babies are lumped with their mothers and given no value. Only 3 slaves are identified as 'old'; they are valued at £17 on average.

³⁹ Tom and Sucky both appear in the Mount Airy tax lists taken in the 1780s (see below), which increases the likelihood that they lived their entire lives at Mount Airy. Several other elderly slaves in 1809—Robin (married to Sucky), Dick, John, and Moses among the men; Judy and Patty among the women—could also have been at Mount Airy in 1747.

⁴⁰ For a perceptive discussion of Mount Airy's layout and design, see Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: 1988), pp. 362-68.

⁴¹ Advertisements placed by Tayloe for runaway convicts appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* on 2 Sept. 1757, 24 Dec. 1772, 8 July 1773, 7 Oct. 1773, 22 Sept. 1774, and 10 Nov. 1774.

with another 250 slaves on his outlying properties in Virginia and Maryland. He willed £2,000 to each of his eight daughters and bequeathed the rest of his property to his one son, John Tayloe III, who was only eight years old in 1779.⁴²

In 1783-1787, while John III was a minor and his relatives were managing Mount Airy for him, county tax lists give us another partial view of the Mount Airy slave force. The people are identified by name only, and are grouped in three broad categories: “working” (i.e., taxable), “under sixteen” and “old and infirm” (both non-taxable).⁴³ The lists show that the slave population in 1785 stood at 265, and that it was youthful in composition, with about 110 children under the age of sixteen, and only a dozen people too old or too sick to be taxed. The proportion of children at Mount Airy in 1785 was double the proportion of children at Mesopotamia in 1789, reflecting the most fundamental difference between the two populations. The Mount Airy sex ratio in 1785 was quite even at 108/100, but there were significantly fewer women than men among the working slaves—which was also the case from 1809 onward.

John Tayloe III (1771-1828) was a contemporary of Joseph Foster Barham II at Mesopotamia. Two years after the Revolutionary War ended he was sent to England at age fourteen and entered Eton College; in 1789 he moved on to St. John’s College at Cambridge University. During his time in England the Mount Airy slave force grew rapidly, and when he returned home and took possession of his estate he found that he had about 380 slaves at Mount Airy, which was more than he needed or could afford. So John III placed the following concisely worded advertisement in the local newspapers: “For sale. 200 Virginia born men, women, and children, all ages and descriptions.” Prospective buyers were directed to Tayloe’s agents in the town of Fredericksburg for further particulars.⁴⁴ The phrase “Virginia born” is telling: none of the slaves for sale

⁴² John Tayloe II’s will, dated 22 May 1773, is in Tayloe d 166 as well as in the Richmond County Will Book, 1767-1787, LVA. The will was proved on 5 July 1779.

⁴³ The Mount Airy tax lists for 1783-1787 are incomplete, and have to be tracked in 3 counties. Most of the slaves on this estate lived in Richmond, but some were on farm quarters in neighboring King George and Essex. The returns for 1785 and 1787 state the total Mount Airy slave population, while the Richmond return for 1783 and the Essex return for 1786 are the most informative because they list all the slaves by name and distinguish the taxable workers from the non-taxable children and old people.

⁴⁴ Tayloe advertised his sale in the *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* (Richmond), the *Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser* (Fredericksburg), the *Virginia Chronicle and Norfolk and Portsmouth General Advertiser* (Norfolk), the *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser* (Alexandria),

were Africans, because the Tayloes had stopped buying from the slave ships at least fifty years before. Probably John III was selling slaves to pay his father's debts, and he may also have been pruning his agricultural work force because he was switching from tobacco to grain production, which was much less labor intensive. How many slaves did Tayloe sell in 1792? I have found no sale records, but the county tax lists show that the population at Mount Airy fell from about 380 in 1792 to about 270 in 1794. During the next 15 years the population rapidly built up again through natural increase. By 1809 when the first complete surviving inventory was taken, there were 381 slaves at Mount Airy—the same total as in 1792.

The Mount Airy slave inventory taken on 1 January 1809 lists every man, woman, and child by name, age, occupation, and value, and identifies the mothers of all children under the age of ten.⁴⁵ Unlike the Mesopotamia inventories there is no effort made in this listing (or in any later Tayloe inventory) to describe the slaves' state of health. Also unlike the Mesopotamia inventories where the slaves are always grouped together, the Mount Airy inventory of 1809 consists of nine separate lists: an inventory for the home plantation where 105 domestics and craft workers lived with their families, and inventories for the eight widely scattered farm quarters—named Forkland, Old House, Doctors Hall, Marske, Menokin, Gwinfield, Hopyard, and Oaken Brow—where 276 field hands lived with their families.⁴⁶ The inventory for 1809 cannot be tested for accuracy because we have no previous inventories to check it against. But the age statements on the lists are clearly not wildly exaggerated. There is no indication that the ages of older people are inflated, since only 8.7 percent of the slaves are stated to be forty-five or above—which is less than half the proportion of senior slaves at Mesopotamia at any time between 1762 and 1833. And the ages of the younger slaves are distributed very evenly: for example, there are four men listed as age twenty, five as age twenty-one, four as age twenty-two, five as age twenty-three, four as age twenty-four, and five as age

and the *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis) from Sept. to Nov. 1792. I owe these newspaper references to Michael L. Nicholls and Michael Mullin.

⁴⁵ The 1809 inventory is entitled "A General Inventory taken at John Tayloes Esq Mount Airy Department the beginning of January 1809"; see Tayloe d 538.

⁴⁶ I discuss the slave work routine at Mount Airy during John III's ownership in "After tobacco: the slave labour pattern on a large Chesapeake grain-and-livestock plantation in the early nineteenth century," in *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, ed. John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 344-363.

twenty-five. This persuades me that the 1809 Mount Airy inventory is based upon previous listings, and that John Tayloe III had begun to register his slaves annually perhaps as early as 1792 in inventory books that have not survived.

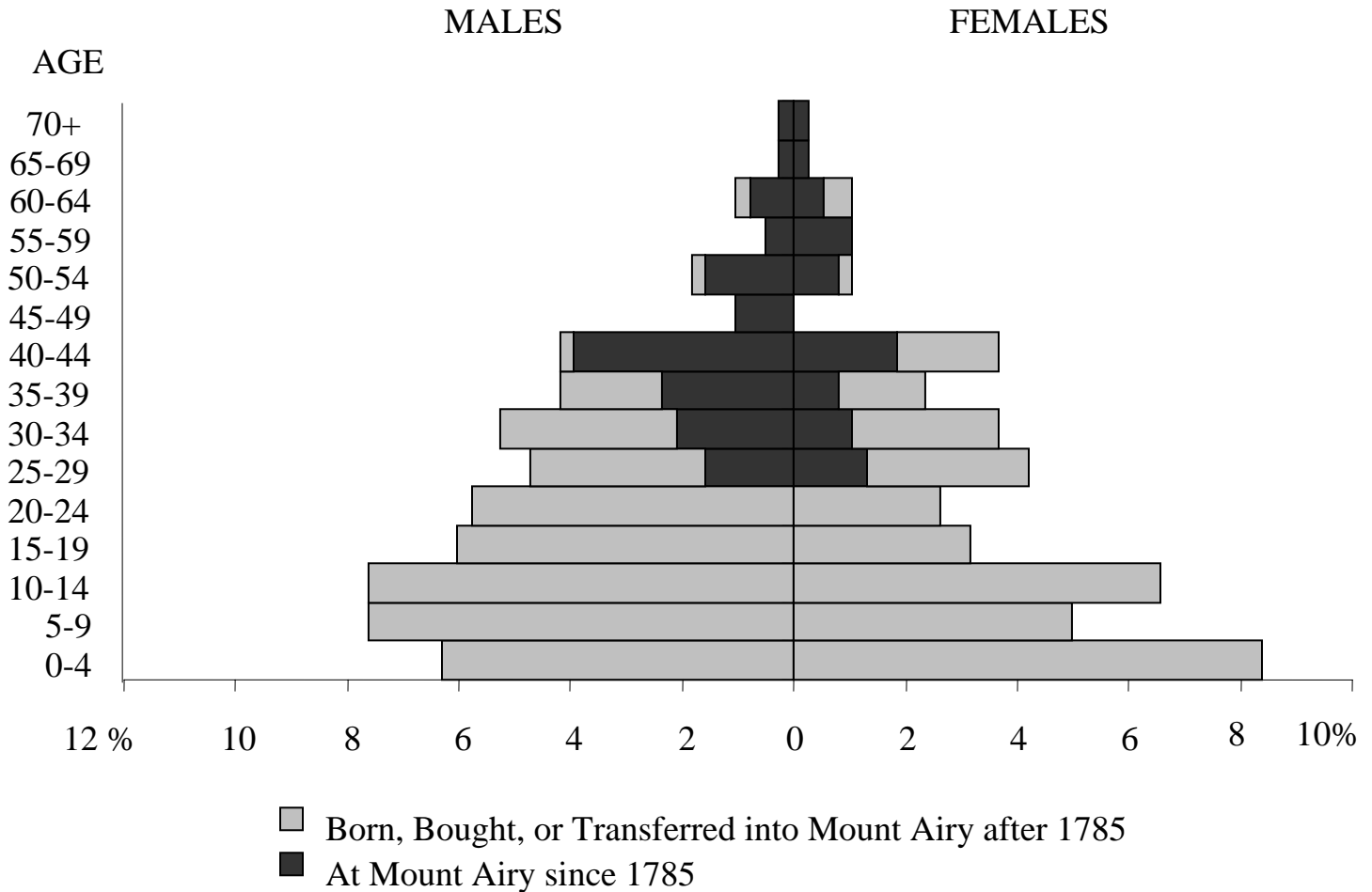
Figure 4 presents Mount Airy's age structure as of 1809. Unlike any of the three Mesopotamia diagrams, we have here a genuine step pyramid. Mount Airy in 1809 had twice as many young children and half as many old people as Mesopotamia at the same date. The Mount Airy pyramid is not perfect, of course. The shortfall of boys aged 0-4 and of girls aged 5-9 may reflect aberrations in recent infant births and early childhood deaths. But most of the other distortions result from John Tayloe III's policy of favoring male slaves over female slaves. The sex ratio in 1809 was 131/100, and hence much more male dominated than it had been in 1785. The deficit among young women aged 15-24 is especially evident, and indicates that Tayloe had recently been selling or transferring some of his teenaged girls. Even so, there were more women of prime child-bearing age at Mount Airy in 1809 than at Mesopotamia in 1762 or 1789. And the shortage of young women did not seriously impede population growth, since the Mount Airy women bore many more children than their counterparts in Jamaica.

Figure 4 highlights the cohort of eighty-five traceable slaves who had lived at Mount Airy since 1785. These people were survivors of the big slave sale back in 1792-1794. Almost two-thirds of them were males. And the gender difference is particularly striking if we trace the 110 children who were under age sixteen in 1785. Half of the males in this group were still living at Mount Airy in 1809, but less than one quarter of the females. This suggests that when John Tayloe III staged his sale in 1792 he was much more willing to dispose of young women than young men. The diagram shows numerous males from the 1785 cohort in the 40-44 age bracket in 1809; these men had been twenty-three to twenty-seven years old in 1792 and at the peak of their strength for slave work, so Tayloe didn't give them up. All in all, despite the slave sale, the Mount Airy gang in 1809 was in a lot better working shape than the Mesopotamia gang ever was between 1762 and 1833.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The only time when the Mesopotamia gang had a larger proportion of young workers than the Mount Airy gang was in 1784-1792 when the Barhams acquired nearly 100 new young slaves to bolster their work force (see Figure 2). But even in these years the Mesopotamia population was far more crippled by disease and nutritional deficiency than the Mount Airy population.

Figure 4

Mount Airy Population Pyramid, 1809



By January 1809 Tayloe was the head of a large family: six sons and three daughters, with another son and two daughters to come. He and his wife Anne lived during the summer months at Mount Airy, and during the winter social season in Washington D.C. at their elegant town house—the Octagon, which Tayloe had constructed in 1798-1800 two blocks from the White House.⁴⁸ Since he had numerous sons to provide for, he opened up several new farm quarters in Virginia and Maryland

⁴⁸ The Octagon is now maintained as a house museum by the American Institute of Architects, and is open to the public.

and acquired two ironworks in the Blue Ridge. And after 1800, instead of selling off his surplus slaves as he had done in the 1790s, he moved most of the slaves that he didn't need at Mount Airy to other Chesapeake work sites that he was developing for his sons. Between 1809 and 1828—the final nineteen years of John Tayloe III's ownership—there were 110 more recorded births than deaths at Mount Airy, and Tayloe imported thirty-six people from his other Chesapeake properties and purchased four new slaves, which gave him an even greater surplus of extra people. He utilized this surplus to transfer 109 slaves out of Mount Airy, and to sell forty-four slaves that he didn't want. He moved eighty-five slaves from one work quarter to another work quarter within the Mount Airy complex, and he also moved a dozen house servants every year from winter duty at the Octagon in Washington to summer duty at Mount Airy.

It may seem as though Tayloe was shuffling hundreds of people for no purpose, but in fact all of his moves were calculated to maximize the effectiveness of his labor force. The slaves who were shunted around by John Tayloe III had differing group characteristics. The dozen house servants who traveled between Mount Airy and the Octagon twice a year were especially wanted and needed because they were the Tayloes' personal attendants. The thirty-six people imported from outlying properties were mostly young craft workers or domestics who had skills that Tayloe wished to make use of at Mount Airy. By contrast the eighty-five slaves who were switched from one Mount Airy work quarter to another were fledgling farm hands, mostly girls in their teens, who were separated from their parents as soon as they were old enough to work on their own. And the 109 slaves who were transferred to outlying Chesapeake work sites between 1809 and 1828 were mostly males of prime working age. During the 1810s forty-four of these people were sent to Cloverdale, an iron furnace in the Blue Ridge 150 miles to the west, to work there as founders, woodcutters and colliers. None of them ever returned to Mount Airy.

All of this movement played havoc with family life. For example, a carpenter named Harry and his wife Agga (a spinner at the textile workshop) had eight children—John, Michael, Kitty, Caroline, Georgina, Ibbey, Tom, and George. The parents lived out their lives at the home plantation, Harry dying in 1829 and Agga in 1856. But their children were widely dispersed. John was sent to Doctors Hall quarter at age ten to

become a farm hand, and was sold in 1819 at age twenty-one. Michael joined his father as a carpenter at Mount Airy until he was transferred to Cloverdale in remote western Virginia in 1827 at age twenty-seven. Kitty was sent to the Tayloes' Octagon House in Washington as a housemaid in 1816 at age eleven. Caroline was sold the year before John in 1818 at age eleven. Georgina became a farm hand at Doctors Hall quarter in 1819 at age ten. Ibbby was sent forty miles away to Windsor in King George County in 1822 at age eleven. Only the two youngest boys, Tom and George, who both became carpenters, remained permanently with their parents on the home plantation.

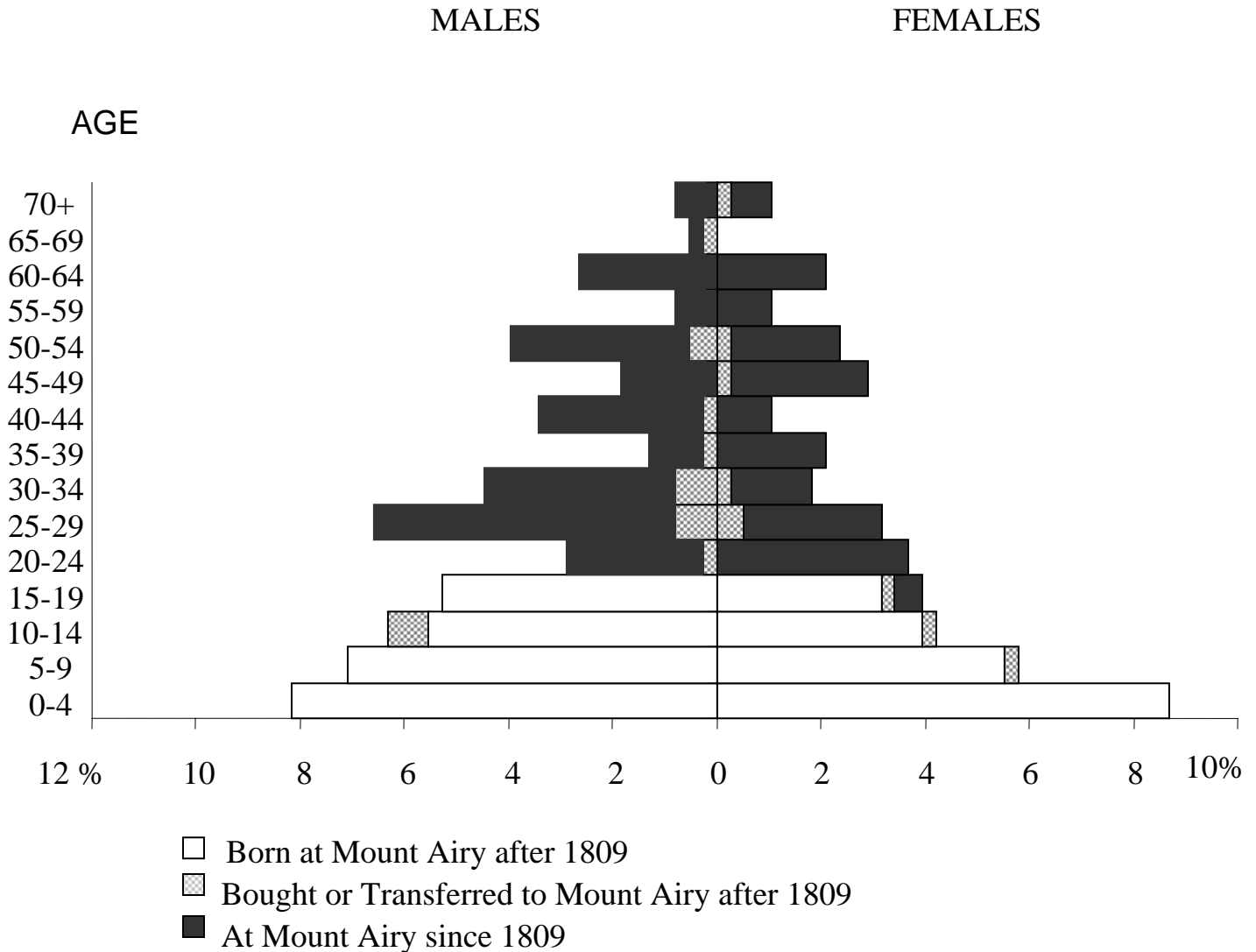
Despite his need to build labor gangs for his seven sons, John Tayloe III sold forty-four slaves between 1809 and 1828. Thirty-two of them were females, and the older women selected for discard seem to have been in poor health, with a lower monetary value than other women of their age. In 1816 Tayloe dispatched twenty-five slaves for \$7,210—or \$288 apiece.⁴⁹ This group included five mothers who were sold together with their young children. But Cate was sent off without her four-year-old son Alfred (who was trained up as a houseboy at Mount Airy), and Rachel was sold with three of her children but not six-year-old Bailor (who became a field hand). The most surprising reject in 1816 was Peter, a house servant whose wife Elsy, a spinner, had died in 1815 leaving five young children in his care. But Tayloe sold Peter for \$500 and kept the five orphaned children, training them all as domestics or craft workers—which suggests that he got rid of Peter in punishment for misconduct. Tayloe seems to have used the threat of sale to keep his slaves in line. When a valuable miller named Reubin defied him by running away in 1817, he was caught the next year and put in the Fredericksburg jail, and sold in 1819.

Figure 5 presents Mount Airy's population pyramid as of 1 January 1828, the year of John Tayloe III's death. Less than half of the people who had been inventoried nineteen years before were still living on the estate. Yet the population (378) was virtually the same size as in 1809, the sex ratio was unchanged, and the age structure was very similar. To be sure, there were a few less teenagers than in 1809, significantly fewer adults in their thirties and early forties, and more than twice as many senior slaves over

⁴⁹ Two professional slave traders, L. Bevan and J. Snide, auctioned these slaves for Tayloe in Washington DC. A number of the adults in this group were described as sickly or diseased. See Tayloe d 414-40.

Figure 5

Mount Airy Population Pyramid, 1828



the age of forty-five. So the continuous out-migration had depleted the strength of the Mount Airy labor force. But Tayloe was probably not bothered by this, because he had engineered (as in 1809) a Mount Airy cohort of prime-aged slaves with many more male than female workers.

When John Tayloe III died in March 1828 he liberated one slave—his faithful body servant Archy—and bequeathed more than 700 other African-Americans to

members of his family.⁵⁰ His third son, William Henry Tayloe, inherited Mount Airy with a reduced—but still very sizable—work force of 212 slaves and four farm quarters.⁵¹ Nearly half of the Mount Airy people went to William’s younger brothers, and abruptly disappeared from the annual inventories. Of the forty-one adult male craftsmen—carpenters, joiners, blacksmiths, masons, shoemakers, jobbers, and sailors—living at Mount Airy at the time of John Tayloe’s death, only sixteen remained with William Tayloe. In the division of 1828 the Tayloe brothers took some trouble to keep slave families together, but the fragmentation of the larger slave community at Mount Airy was total and permanent, and the social disruption must have been very great.

William Henry Tayloe (1799-1871) had taken over the management of Mount Airy in 1824 when his brother John IV died. When he became outright owner of the place in 1828 his domain was a lot smaller than his father’s had been, but he was still a very large scale slaveholder. Though he lost most of the Mount Airy craft workers to his brothers, William acquired five new artisans from a family ironworks that was going out of production, and he kept thirteen of the sixteen household domestics attached to Mount Airy. Overall, William’s slave force was extremely youthful: a full third of his people were under the age of ten, and over half were less than twenty years old. Only forty-three men and women were of prime working age in their twenties or thirties. So Tayloe was short-handed in 1828, but the structure of his slave population boded well for continuing rapid growth and an ample future labor supply.

William Henry Tayloe was labor rich, but land poor. His wheat and corn fields at Mount Airy were less productive than they had been, and much less profitable. Compared with his father, William had to cope with smaller acreage, declining crop

⁵⁰ Beside his slaves, John III left a most imposing estate: the Mount Airy family seat; twenty-two farms in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia; four ironworks; schooners on the Rappahannock and on the Potomac; the Octagon, the Mansion House Hotel (said to be worth \$100,000 with slave attendants and furnishings included), and much other real estate in Washington D.C.; and three small hotels and a tavern in the Virginia countryside.

⁵¹ John Tayloe III’s will, dated Dec. 1827, which shows how he distributed his estate, is in Tayloe d 539. His eldest son John had died in 1824, and his second son Benjamin Ogle wanted to live in Washington. So he gave Mount Airy to William Henry, together with the 4 closest farm quarters: Forkland, Old House, Doctors Hall, and Marske.

yields, and falling grain prices.⁵² To escape from this predicament William joined with his brothers Henry Augustine Tayloe and Benjamin Ogle Tayloe in the 1830s in a pilot project to try growing cotton in the deep South. Henry was the leader in what he called “our Alabama speculation.”⁵³ Henry purchased a virgin tract of rich black soil in Marengo County, Alabama, and assembled a group of forty-three Tayloe slaves to clear and plant this tract which he fittingly named Adventure Plantation. William took a quarter share in this venture by contributing twelve slaves, including seven from Mount Airy.⁵⁴ Henry gathered the Tayloe slaves at Cloverdale in December 1833 and set out with them for Alabama in January 1834, traveling in mule-drawn wagons and camping each night in tents. The 800-mile journey took forty-five days.⁵⁵

Henry reported enthusiastically on the progress he was making at Adventure, and William gradually increased his investment in Henry’s scheme. He sent fourteen more people down from Mount Airy in October 1835, another twelve in October 1836, and one boy in November 1837. Some of these slaves were sold by Henry soon after arrival in Alabama to help cover the costs of setting up cotton production. By 1840 the three Tayloe brothers, still working in partnership, had installed some 140 slaves on three Alabama plantations: Adventure, Walnut Grove, and Oakland. There was a family crisis in the mid-1840s when Henry, having spent far more on production costs than he could cover from his initial cotton sales, went bankrupt. But William was by now too deeply involved to turn back, and began to act independently from his brothers. He bought Henry’s and Benjamin’s shares in Oakland plantation, also bought some of Henry’s slaves and purchased others in Alabama, and made periodic visits to Oakland to supervise his expanding operation there. In October 1845 he sent forty-one more Mount Airy people to Alabama and installed them at Oakland. By 1850, according to the U.S. slave census taken that year, William had seventy-one slaves at Oakland and sixty-two at

⁵² Between 1800 and 1820 John Tayloe III generally sold about 7,000 bushels of Mount Airy wheat and 2,500 barrels of Mount Airy corn for \$16,000-\$18,000 per annum. But William Henry Tayloe in the 1830s was selling about 2,500 bushels of wheat and 1,100 barrels of corn for only \$3,000 per annum.

⁵³ Henry A. Tayloe to Benjamin O. Tayloe, 26 Dec. 1833, Tayloe Papers, Alderman Library, UVA.

⁵⁴ The 7 Mount Airy pioneers included 3 brothers: Davy (age 36), Tom (34), and Jim (33); plus Billy (22), Emanuel (16), James (27) and Ralph (33). Emanuel was a houseboy who soon returned to Mount Airy, while the other 6 were farm hands who stayed in Alabama. 5 died in slavery, but James and Ralph became freedmen in 1865.

⁵⁵ Henry A. Tayloe to Benjamin O. Tayloe, 29 July 1839, Tayloe Papers, Alderman Library, UVA.

Adventure for a total of 133 in Alabama, which was close to his total of 166 at Mount Airy.⁵⁶

During the next decade William continued to shift his slaves, especially his prime field hands, from Virginia to Alabama. In September 1854 he sent down the largest party yet, a contingent of forty-eight people from Mount Airy whom he installed on a new plantation he had bought called Woodlawn. By this point William had moved 123 slaves—sixty-nine males and fifty-four females—from Mount Airy to Alabama. Viewed collectively, these forced migrants were well chosen for their new jobs. Two-thirds of them were over age ten and under age twenty-five on arrival. They were almost all field hands by training, and young enough to learn how to cultivate and pick cotton.⁵⁷ By 1855, according to William Tayloe's memorandum book,⁵⁸ he had 209 slaves on Oakland, Woodlawn, and Adventure plantations, a combination of migrants from Virginia and people born or purchased in Alabama. During the late 1850s William Tayloe removed his slaves from Woodlawn and Adventure, and consolidated all of his Alabama workers on two properties quite close to each other, Oakland plantation in Marengo County and Larkin plantation in Perry County. And his Alabama slave force kept growing. In 1860 the U.S. slave census credited him with 125 slaves at Oakland and 152 at Larkin, for a total of 277 in Alabama compared with 169 at Mount Airy.⁵⁹ In a little over thirty years William had more than doubled his work force and had shifted his chief business activities from Virginia to the deep South.

Mount Airy remained a very sizable operation. Between 1828 and 1844 William held the population steady at just over 200, with removals to Alabama and local slave sales counterbalanced by natural increase and slave purchases. The exodus of eighty-nine slaves in 1845 and 1854 shrank the Mount Airy population to below 170, and

⁵⁶ The manuscript slave schedules for Oakland and Adventure in 1850, which are very carelessly compiled, are in NA U.S. Census, 1850, Schedule 2, Marengo Co., Alabama. The slave schedule for Mount Airy in 1850, which is equally defective, is in NA U.S. Census, 1850, Schedule 2, Richmond Co., Virginia.

⁵⁷ On 22 Oct 1834 Henry A. Tayloe reported to WHT from Alabama: "Our hands pick very badly not having been accustomed to it, they improve somewhat however and another year will make good pickers" (Tayloe d 5849-5959).

⁵⁸ Tayloe d 13425.

⁵⁹ The manuscript slave schedules for Oakland and Larkin in 1860, which have the same defects as the 1850 schedules, are in NA U.S. Census, 1860, Schedule 2, Marengo & Perry Co., Alabama. By 1860 5 of the Tayloe brothers collectively held 651 slaves in these two counties. The slave schedule for Mount Airy is in NA U.S. Census, 1860, Schedule 2, Richmond Co., Virginia.

William closed down two of his four Virginia farms. By the late 1850s he was spending most of his time at Oakland and Larkin, and he turned over the management of Mount Airy to his only son Henry Augustine Tayloe.⁶⁰ But he still kept more domestics and craft workers in Virginia than at his two Alabama plantations.

Then came the Civil War. William Henry Tayloe was a long-time southern Whig who opposed secession, but he was also a practical man. He wrote to his son from Alabama in December 1860 urging that “in case of Disunion of the U.S.” Henry should “send all your active Negroes South before long.”⁶¹ Once the war started, Mount Airy was dangerously close to the Union lines and in December 1861 Henry planned to move fifty-nine of his most valuable people down to Alabama. When the slaves discovered what he was up to, eight men and three women deserted to the Yankees, so in the end he brought only forty-eight slaves to Oakland plantation. Four months later, in April 1862, Henry Tayloe brought most of the remaining “active” Mount Airy slaves—fifty-one in all—to Larkin plantation, while two more men escaped to the Union army. Thus by the middle of the Civil War the Tayloes had moved a total of 222 slaves from Mount Airy to Alabama. In 1863 father and son took their last complete slave inventory, which was especially informative, grouping parents with their children and identifying each family by surname.⁶² The combined population of Oakland and Larkin now stood at 390, and only 67 slaves were left at Mount Airy.

Figure 6 presents the population pyramid for William Henry Tayloe’s total slave force in Virginia and Alabama in 1863. The diagram is much more complex than Figures 4 and 5 since it combines four groups of people: 67 Mount Airy slaves who stayed in Virginia, 186 Mount Airy slaves who had moved to Alabama between 1833 and 1862, 111 children born to Mount Airy slaves in Alabama after 1833, and the 93 non-Mount Airy slaves acquired by Tayloe in Alabama or born on his Alabama plantations. The diagram shows how decisively Tayloe had shifted his labor force from Virginia to

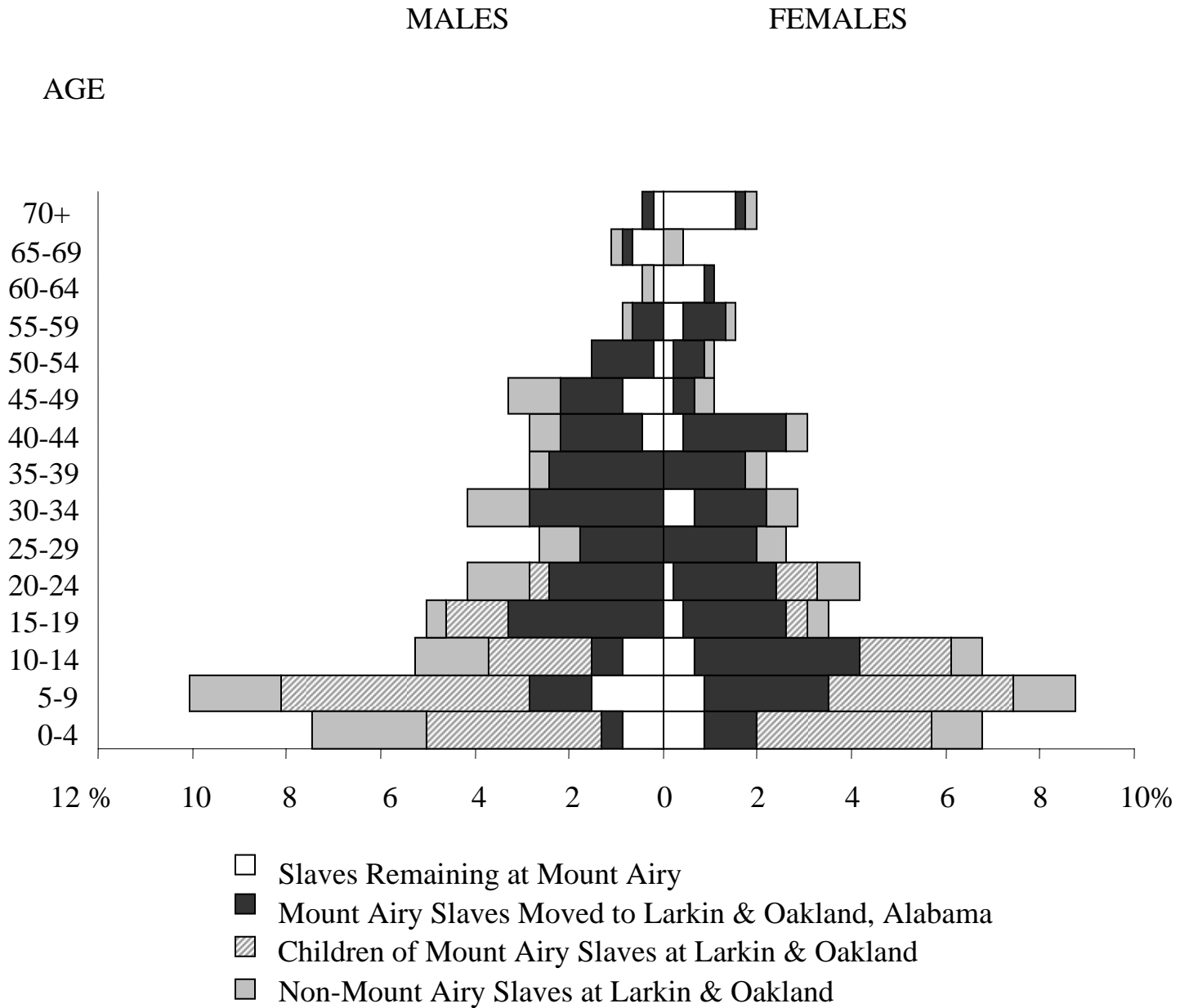
⁶⁰ William and his wife Henrietta had 3 sons and 6 daughters between 1825 and 1842, but 2 sons and 4 daughters died young, and Henrietta also died in 1844, leaving William a widower. Henry, named for his Alabama uncle, was born in 1836 and was 20 years old when William first entrusted partial management of Mount Airy to him. See WHT to son HAT, n.d. [c. 1856], Tayloe d 5960-6045.

⁶¹ Same to same, 11 Dec. 1860, Tayloe d 5960-6045.

⁶² WHT’s Alabama census for 1863 is in Tayloe d 13453; HAT’s Mount Airy census for 1863 is in Tayloe d 8539-8590.

Figure 6

Mount Airy & Alabama Population Pyramid, 1863



Alabama. Mount Airy was now a nursery for young children and a retirement home for old people. Figure 6 also demonstrates that—despite the repeated shocks of sale and transfer and long distance migration, plus the war crisis—the African-American population under Tayloe’s control remained vigorously expansive.

There were surprisingly few old people in the Tayloes' combined Mount Airy-Alabama slave population in 1863: only seven men and thirteen women over the age of sixty. The total had been higher back in 1828: fifteen men and twelve women were then sixty or older. In fact, despite the huge demographic contrast between Mount Airy and Mesopotamia, William Tayloe in 1863 held considerably fewer old people than could be found at Mesopotamia in 1833, where thirty men and women were over the age of sixty in a smaller population. But if Tayloe's slaves in 1863 were not long-lived, they certainly had plenty of offspring. The sex ratio at 109/100 was much more balanced than in 1809 or in 1828, and the mothers in 1863 were producing more young children than in 1809 or 1828. A full third of the slaves in 1863 were under the age of ten, and 53 per cent were under the age of twenty. Thus the population retained the strong pyramidal structure and potential for further growth that it had exhibited ever since 1809.

William Henry Tayloe always combined paternalism with a residual sense of guilt about his role as slaveholder, and he worried that his son Henry was inadequate to the task of slave management. In 1858 he asked Henry, "what will become of the Human Beings under us? Owned by us. Humanity demands their care. I have done my duty as Man sees, but not in the eyes of God."⁶³ And writing from Alabama in 1864, he told Henry that "my best acts are my examples in managing Negroes. The effort to promote cleanliness, domestic comforts and religious tendencies on my plantations influenced my neighbors and within few years the position of the Negroes in this County is much ameliorated."⁶⁴ When he wrote this letter in July 1864 Tayloe was still optimistic about the outcome of the war, but by January 1865, when the Confederates in desperation were impressing some of the slaves from Oakland and Mount Airy into military labor, his mood had changed completely. "Slavery is doomed any how," he told his son. "Shermans success and Hoods misfortune make me think secesh is whipped and I am ruined."⁶⁵

His worst fears were soon realized. In June 1865 he reported to his daughter-in-law Courtenay Tayloe that his neighborhood in Alabama was now controlled by Union troops. "The blue coats are in Selma, Demopolis, Uniontown and other towns. Negroes

⁶³ WHT to son HAT, n.d. [c 1858], Tayloe d 6046-6170.

⁶⁴ Same to same, 24 July 1864, Tayloe d 6046-6170.

⁶⁵ Same to same, 3 Jan. 1865, Tayloe d 6046-6170.

have crowded to them...[and] are told they are free.”⁶⁶ All of a sudden, nearly 400 people in Oakland and Larkin were no longer slaves, and William Henry Tayloe had lost property worth over \$250,000 by his valuation.⁶⁷

What happened to the freedmen at Oakland, Larkin, and Mount Airy after 1865? Because Tayloe had listed family groups with surnames in 1863, I have been able to trace 231 of the 457 people in his 1863 inventory via the U.S. census of 1870.⁶⁸ The overwhelming majority—82 percent—were still in Alabama, living either in Perry County (the seat of Larkin Plantation) or in Hale County (formerly Marengo, the seat of Oakland Plantation). Another 17 percent were in Richmond County, Virginia (the seat of Mount Airy), including four families who had returned from Alabama. Three ex-Tayloe freedmen had moved to Washington, D.C. It appears that most of the identifiable ex-Tayloe freedmen in 1870 were working as sharecroppers on their former master’s plantations. Of the 112 males with listed occupations in 1870, 106 were farm laborers—including boys only ten years old and men who had held higher level jobs such as coachman or carpenter during slavery. Among the eighty-four females with occupations, most were also farm laborers, but thirty-four had escaped field labor to become homemakers in 1870. The most discouraging finding is that only five children—all girls—were listed as attending school in 1870, and in this cohort of 231 freedmen only one adult and seven children were able to read and write.

Obviously the Mount Airy people did not experience the disastrous demographic problems found at Mesopotamia. But they had been manipulated to a high degree, and were just as ill-prepared as the Mesopotamia slaves to capitalize upon their freedom when it finally came. Denied education and blocked from exercising any entrepreneurial initiative, they were victimized by one of the most degrading and dehumanizing systems ever devised. The institution of racial enslavement was pernicious to the core at all times and in all places. This is no news. But it should never be forgotten.

⁶⁶ WHT to Courtenay Tayloe, 8 June 1865, Tayloe d 5292-5327.

⁶⁷ WHT’s valuation of all his slaves at Larkin and Oakland, c. 1863, is in Tayloe d 8597-8605, and d 8632-8667. His valuations are on the high side, ranging from \$100 for a newborn infant to \$2,500 for his most prized craft workers.

⁶⁸ I found 92 ex-Tayloe freedmen in Townships 17-18, Perry Co., Ala., U.S. Census, 1870 (M 593, roll 33, NA); 98 in Beat 7-8, Hale Co., Ala. (M 593, roll 18); and 38 in Marshall Township, Richmond Co., Va. (M 593, roll 1674). Some of the people in the 1863 inventory were dead by 1870, but most of those I cannot trace in the 1870 census had probably changed their surnames after emancipation.