
The Plantation Underground of Prince George's County

Community Formation
& the Flight from Slavery,
1770 – 1864

Excerpts from a presentation given at Belair Mansion, City of Bowie Museums, Bowie, Maryland, February 19, 2004 by David Taft Terry, Project Director for Beneath the Underground: the Flight to Freedom and Antebellum Communities in Maryland, a research effort of the Maryland State Archives

The Atlantic Slave Trade



Tobacco growth encouraged the importation of Africans as slaves from the mid-1600s to the Eve of the Revolution. In fact, from 1700 thru the end of the trade, the black population of Maryland nearly tripled.

June 4, 1771.

*Just arrived, In the Mary, Captain Samuel Haycroft,
from Africa,*

A Small Parcel of about One Hundred choice Slaves, confisting of Men, Women, Boys, and Girls, which will be sold, on Monday next, the Tenth Instant, at *Selby's Landing, on Patuxent River,* for Bills of Exchange or Current Money, by the Subscribers,

JAMES DICK & STEWART,
JUDSON COOLIDGE.

An Act to encourage the Inhabitants of this Province to Adventure their Shipp and Vessells more freely abroad to import Rum Sugar Negroes and other Comoditys.

Be it Enacted by the Queens most excellent Maj^{ty} by and with the Advice and Consent of her Majestys Governour Councill & Assembly of this Province and the Authority of the same that no Shipp or Vessell built in this Province whereof all the Owners shall be Actual Residents of this province And that no Shipp or Vessell English or Plantation built purchas'd enjoy'd and held by Owners which are all Residents of this Province nor the Owners thereof shall be lyable to pay the duty of three pence per Gallon for rum imported in such Shipp or Vessell mencond in one Act of Assembly Intituled An Act Imposing three pence per Gallon on Rum and Wine and twenty Shillings per pole for Negroes for raising a Supply to defray the publick Charge of this province and twenty shillings per poll on Irish Servants to prevent the Importing too great a Number of Irish papists into this Province nor to pay the Duty of twenty shillings for every Negro imported mencond in the aforesaid Act but from those Dutys aforesaid And from the Duty of three pence per Tonn payable to the Governour of this Province for the time being shall be fully and Clearly Exempted Any former Act or Acts of Assembly to the Contrary notwithstanding.

And be it Enacted by the Authority aforesaid that such Owner or Owners of such Shipp or Vessells as aforesaid shall for entring and Clearing pay no more but half so much fees to the Navall Officers and Collectors with whom they Enter and Clear as other Owners of other Shipp not belonging to the Inhabitants of this Province are lyable to pay Any former Act or Statute to the Contrary notwithstanding.

Sept^r 23^d 1704.
Read and Assented to by
the house of Delegates.
W Taylard Clk hD

Sept^r 26th 1704
Read and assented by her
Ma^{ty} hon^{ble} Councill.
W Bladen Cl Concll.

Maryland October 3^d 1704.
On the behalf of her Maj^{ty} &c^t I will this be a Law.
Jo: Seymour.

Above: *Laws of Maryland*, 1704, pp 349 - 50; Left: "Mary," June 6, 1771, *Maryland Gazette*.

Community of Plantations

August 8, 1770.
RAN away, on Tuesday the 6th Instant, from the Subscriber, living near *Selby's Landing*, on *Patuxent River*, in *Prince-George's County*, Two Negro Fellows, the one named *Charles*, Country-born, about 33 Years of Age, thick and well set, about 5 Feet 8 Inches high, he walks lame, is a sly artful Fellow, and well acquainted all over *Prince-George's* and *Charles* Counties: Had on, when he went away, an *Osnabrig Shirt*, and *Crocus Trousers*, but may change his Dress. The other is a *Salt Water Negro*, named *Scotland*, a likely slim Fellow, about 5 Feet 9 Inches high, speaks good *English*, but thick: Had on, when he went away, a ragged *Osnabrig Shirt* and *Trousers*. Whoever secures said Negroes, so that their Master may have them again, shall receive, for *Charles*, Three Pounds Currency, and Forty Shilling for *Scotland*, paid by
(tf) JUDSON COOLIDGE.
* * It is supposed they may harbour about Mr. *Joseph Spriggs's*, near *Queen-Anne*, as *Charles* is well acquainted there.

This ad seeks two men who fled together, possibly to another plantation. Advertisement for "Charles," and "Scotland," August 23, 1770, *Maryland Gazette*; photo of early twentieth century tobacco workers, MSA

By the time of the Revolution, cross-plantation social networks among Maryland's black communities had emerged. One of the most useful applications of these networks came in the form as assistance to those attempting to runaway.



The Domestic Slave Trade Crisis

Threat of sale created a crisis situation for Maryland blacks by 1800. Slave dealers and speculators, hoping to supply the growing cotton markets of the Deep South, set up shop throughout Maryland and Virginia. As a result, most blacks faced the "social death" of family members and friends.

CASH FOR NEGROES.

WE will at all times pay higher prices in cash for likely young Negroes, of both sexes, either in families or otherwise, than any other purchasers who are now or may hereafter come into this market.

All communications will meet attention. We can at all times be found at W. Robey's Tavern, near the corner of 7th street and Maryland Avenue, Washington city, D. C.

Oct 9—cott

SIMPSON & NEAL.

CASH IN MARKET.

WE will pay cash for any number of LIKELY NEGROES (of both sexes) from 12 to 5 years of age, Field Hands. Also, Mechanics of every description. Apply to

R. C. Ballard & Co. Richmond, Va.

J. M. Saunders & Co. Warrenton, Va.

George Kephart & Co. Fredericktown, Md.

James F. Purveis & Co. Baltimore.

William Hooper, Annapolis, Md.

A. Grimm, Fredericksburg, Va.

Thomas M. Jones, Easton, Eastern Shore of Maryland, or to the subscribers at their residence in Alexandria.

Persons having likely servants to dispose of, will do well to give us a call, as we, at all times, will pay higher prices in cash than any other purchaser who is now or may hereafter come into market.

All communications promptly attended to.

Nov 1--1f

FRANKLIN & ARMPFIELD

Above: the *Washington Globe*, November 25, 1833;

above left: the *Washington Globe*, November 13, 1834

The Plantation Underground in the 19th Century

150 DOLLARS REWARD.

RUNAWAY from my farm, in Prince George's County, on the 11th instant, a negro man, belonging to me, named TOM; he is between thirty-five and forty years of age, five feet eight or ten inches high, and with quite a dark complexion, and well made; has a soft manner when spoken to, and apparently a little deaf. There is nothing very remarkable about him, except that his head is rather tapering towards the top; his clothing such as is common among laboring servants. I purchased him about two years since of a Mr. Joseph Pope, of this County. He has a wife and family at Mr. Summers', just below the Long Old Fields.

Also, a handsome mulatto man, who calls himself JOE COOK, a first rate carpenter by trade. I purchased him some years since of a Mr. George Wells, (carpenter) of this county. Joe is about six feet high and well proportioned, and has a large dark mole or wart on one of his eye lids; he was formerly in the habit (before I purchased him) of hiring himself in Montgomery County, where it is likely he will aim to get, and probably from thence to Pennsylvania. I will give twenty-five dollars for Tom and fifty for Joe, if apprehended in Prince George's County, and brought home to me; or fifty dollars for Tom and one hundred for Joe, if taken up out of the county and secured in any jail, so that I may get them again.

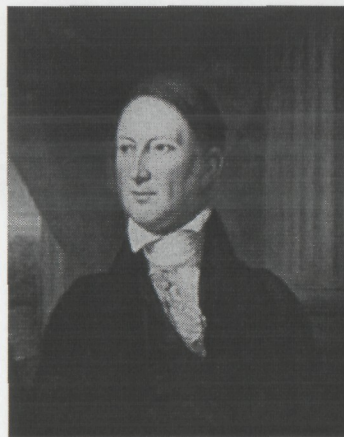
SAML. SPRIGG.

Northampton Farm, July 18, 1820.

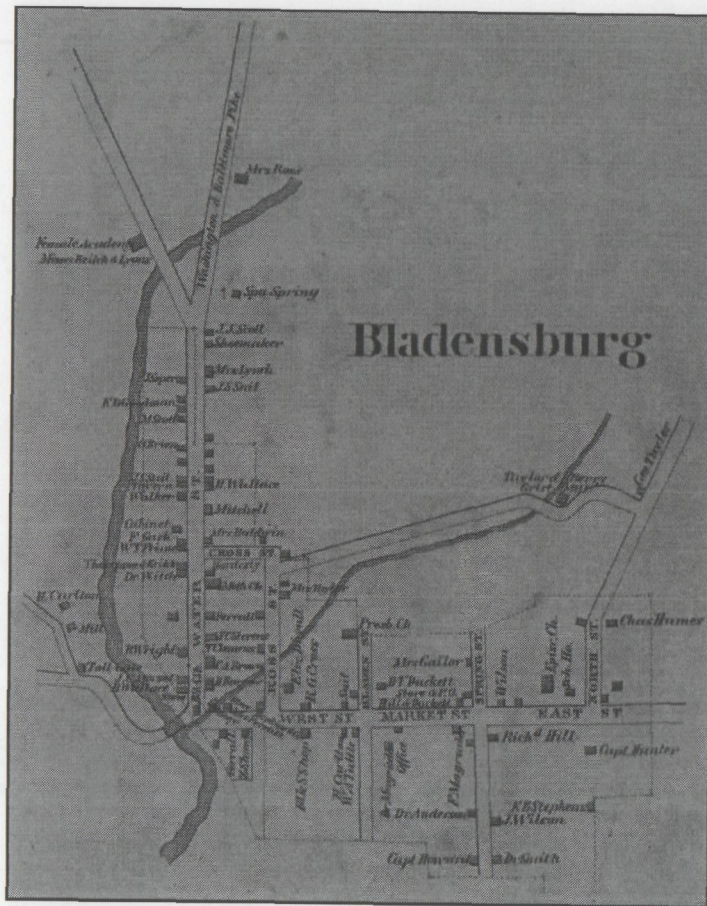
N. B. All persons are hereby cautioned against employing or concealing the above slaves, or in anywise aiding or assisting them in their escape. S. S.
July 20—

When Tom and Joe fled Governor Samuel Sprigg's Northampton in 1820 their history elsewhere offered certain resources. *Sprigg* by Peale, MSA; Ad for Tom and Joe, *Intelligencer*, Aug 1, 1820, Northampton, from Bowie, *Across the Years* (1948).

Cross-plantation networks among blacks acted as a "plantation underground," for runaways, providing shelter, subterfuge, and resources. Such activity likely increased after 1800 given the crisis that emerged. By 1830, when the Underground Railroad of free states began, its passengers had crossed the Mason-Dixon Line thanks to the Plantation Underground.



The Plantation Underground & Cities



Often, plantation networks extended to urban areas, like Bladensburg, Washington, Annapolis, Frederick, and Baltimore. Not only could free blacks and greater autonomy be found in cities, but transportation to elsewhere as well.



TAKE NOTICE.—Ranaway on the 24th October last, a dark copper colored girl, named **SUSAN**, about 21 years of age, thin visaged, and a little below the ordinary size, and has considerable lumps or knots on each of her big toes, her back considerably scored previous to my purchasing her. I purchased said woman of Jacob N. Shrick, of Old Town, Baltimore, some time in July last. I am inclined to believe she is far gone in pregnancy at this time. I will give Fifty Dollars if taken in Baltimore, or State of Maryland, or One Hundred Dollars if taken in Pennsylvania. I forewarn all persons from harboring said negro, under the penalty of the law, as I will enforce the law against all such persons.

GEO. W. SUYLER,

fe3-2aw2m Bladensburg, Prince Georges co., Md.

Considerations of departure and destination were critical in flight attempts. Susan, for example, who fled Bladensburg in 1841 had several options. This was important given that she was pregnant when she set out Map of Bladensburg; advertisement for "Susan," October 27, 1841, *Baltimore Sun*.

The Plantation Underground & the UGRR

There is evidence of kin people running together, sometimes unfolding amazing dramas to preserve kinship. Some even returned to the "scene of the crime" to extract family left behind. Several documented connections to the Northern Underground Railroad occurred.



FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.—
Ran away or decoyed from the subscriber, living near Beltsville, Prince George's county, Md., on Saturday, September 5th, 1857, mulatto woman **MARIA**, from 30 to 35 years of age, and very stout; negro boy **DALL**, dark mulatto, 13 years of age, stout and well grown; negro boy **LEM**, 11 years of age, black, has a scar on the side of his breast, caused by a burn; negro boy **BILL**, generally called "SHUG," 8 years of age; negro boy **BEN**, 2 years of age. Also, negro man **ADAM SMITH**, about 30 years of age, 5 feet 4 or 5 inches high, stoutly built and full suit of hair. He ran away on Saturday, the 22d of August, and I think has returned and induced his wife and children off. I will give \$500 reward for them, no matter where taken, if lodged in jail, or secured so that I may get them again; or I will give \$300 reward for Adam, if taken separate, and a proportional reward for either of the others, if taken separate; in any case, they must be secured, so I may get them again.

I have reason to believe they are making for a free State.
ISAAC SCAGGS. 88-115

Left: Some concept of the source of slaves laying in the Southern states is demonstrated by traditional UGRR maps. However the ways in which blacks moved out of the South, are yet to be fully recovered. Source: Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad From Slavery to Freedom* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1898), insert following page 112; Ad for the Smiths, September 8, 1857, *Baltimore Sun*.

The Underground Railroad & Slaveowners

\$50 Reward.

RANAWAY from the subscriber, living near the Brick Church, in the Forest of Prince George's County, Maryland, on Tuesday, the 16th of September, 1856, negro man BEN, commonly called



BENJAMIN DUCKETT.

I purchased him from Mr. Edmund B. Duvall, who owns his father. His mother belongs to Mr. Marcus Du Val, near Buena Vista Post Office, in this county; and he, no doubt, may be found in that neighborhood.

BEN is of a dark ginger color, about twenty-five years of age, five feet ten or eleven inches high; has an impediment in his speech, and when spoken to has a down look and pats his left foot. His clothing not recollected, as he has various kinds.

I will give the above reward for his apprehension—no matter where taken—provided he is brought home or secured in jail, so that I get him again.

ZACHARIAH BERRY of Washington.
October 1, 1856—tf

Ben Duckett and Jim Belle fled from the same owner, Zach Berry, though at different times. Duckett came to Berry by way of local sale, Belle from elsewhere in the state. Ad for Ben, *Planters' Advocate*, Oct. 1, 1856; for Jim, *Baltimore Sun*, July 28, 1857

By the late-1850s, thousands of enslaved Marylanders had reached the free states. The growing proliferation of attempts and successes worried slaveowners. Reflecting their concern, the state's slaveholders met in conference at least four times since 1842.

\$100 REWARD.—Ran away from the subscriber on Saturday night, Negro Man JIM BELLE. Jim is about five feet ten inches high, black color, about 26 years of age; has a down look; speaks slow when spoken to; he has large thick lips, and a mustache. He was formerly owned by Edward Stansbury, late of Baltimore county, and purchased by Edward Worthington, near Reisterstown, in Baltimore county, at the late Stansbury's sale, who sold him to B. M. and W. L. Campbell, of Baltimore city, of whom I purchased Jim on the 13th of June last. His wife lives with her mother, Ann Robertson, in Cornalley, between Lee and Hill streets, Baltimore city, where he has other relations, and where he is making his way. I will give the above reward, no matter where taken, so he is brought home or secured in jail so I get him again.

ZACHARIAH BERRY, of W.,
near Upper Marlboro',
Prince George's county, Md.

j28-6t*!

The War & Freedom

Dear Gov. Bradford
Annapolis, Maryland
May 22, 1862

Since the passage of the emancipation bill by Congress, many thousands of slaves from the State of Maryland, I should say, have been attracted to the District of Columbia — And unless Maryland can obtain some protection she will soon be depopulated & desolated — The Centage of fugitives, which is now being sent to the District of Columbia, is in close proximity to the District — Many farmers have received a large crop of slaves, which are now being sold at a high price, and are being cultivated for the present year — With the impending winter, I fear there will be a large number of slaves, who will have suffered from the effects of fugitives, into the District, within the limits of the State — And we have endeavored to recover them under the provisions of the fugitive slave law, but all our efforts have been unavailing, and we have been obliged to resort to military intervention — The law has been suspended & will probably be abrogated by the action of Congress — If the law becomes inoperative in the District of Columbia — Will it not be a palpable violation of the Constitution & a violation of the compact between the States in the State of Maryland? — And inasmuch

MSA SSF 1274-6636-70p 18.5

State Senator John H. Bayne, whose plantation existed in present-day Oxon Hill, made a number of requests to the government for aid in retrieving runaways, but the end was near, and the sun set on slavery. Bayne to Gov. Bradford, 1862, MSA SSF 1274. Photo of Montpelier, by D. T. Terry, 2002

The outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861 encouraged greater numbers of runaway attempts. With the emancipation of slaves in Washington, D.C. (1862), and of slaves in the Confederacy (1863), Maryland owners made countless pleas to federal authorities for assistance in recovering runaways. It was not to be. Sensing the institution's demise, Maryland abolished slavery in 1864.

