

## Sentimental Attachments: Race Relations in Brownsburg before and after the Civil War

This exhibit explores the sentimental connections among white landowning families and their slaves, and later hired African-American laborers and domestics, in the Brownsburg area. Drawing on four years of ethnographic fieldwork and archival research, this display conceptualizes race relations as anchored in personal attachments. Excerpts from diaries, letters, church records, and chancery cases provide illustrative examples of why we should “imagine those attachments, their delight and their terror, their intense and even obsessive focusing on their object, if we are ever able to talk well about love, fear, or anger.”

It is my hope that this exploration of race within the intimate spaces of farm, home, and church will give visitors to the Museum an understanding of how emotional attachments among whites and blacks reinforced, as well as resisted, economic, political, and social dynamics of the time, revealing the pleasures and dangers of interracial intimacy.

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# Slavery in Rockbridge County

Unlike plantations in the Deep South, slavery in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia developed “within the context of small 100- to 200-acre family farms that typically dotted the landscape.” Similar to neighboring Augusta County in the north, Rockbridge County’s slaveholdings were generally small. In 1850, the average number of slaves per household was 5.97, while in the overall South it was 10.9. On the eve of the Civil War, the average slaveholding size climbed to seven. According to New Providence Presbyterian Church records, there were 200 white families and 300 slaves in the Brownsburg region.

The majority of slaveholders “owned slaves intermittently depending on their immediate needs or economic circumstances,” thus moving into and out of the slaveholding class with considerable frequency. The local agrarian economy demanded intense labor during the wheat harvest, and “in hiring out their bondsmen, owners found a profitable way to deploy the excess labor of slaves.”

Nevertheless, the sale of slaves frequently occurred as a means to divide property equally among descendents or to pay off debts. Slaves were essential to a white landowner’s success because they were key sources of labor and financial worth.

**SERVANTS FOR HIRE.**  
ON the 28th of December the undersigned will offer for hire privately, at her residence near Brownsburg, a number of Servants, consisting of Men, Women and Boys.  
MARY JOHNSTON.  
December 17, 1857.—3t.

**PUBLIC SALE.**  
ON Thursday, the 12th day of June, 1862, I will offer, at public sale at the late residence of Mrs. Sally Fulton, dec'd, on Walker's Creek, all the  
**Personal Property**  
belonging to said Sally Fulton's estate, consisting of Household and Kitchen Furniture, two Milch Cows, some Corn, &c.  
Also at the same time and place I will offer for sale privately, a negro WOMAN and three CHILDREN one MAN and one GIRL. These negroes are all young and likely, and I believe honest and trusty.  
**Terms of Sale.**—For Negroes a credit of 12 months will be given, with interest from date, purchaser giving bond with approved security. The other property will be sold on a credit of six months, purchaser giving bond with approved security.  
S. A. EAST, Ex'or of  
Mrs. Sally Fulton, dec'd.  
June 5, 1862. tds

**NEGROES WANTED.**  
THE subscriber wishes to purchase some Sixty Negroes of both sexes—for which the highest Market price will be paid. Persons having likely negroes to sell will find it to their interest to give him a call, by mail or otherwise. Communications will be promptly attended to.  
JAMES WITHROW.  
Brownsburg, Va., June 30, 1843.

# Slaves as Family and Property

Masters and slaves had many opportunities to develop strong attachments to one another. Research indicates that “short-distance sale and estate division” spread kin groups over the village of Brownsburg and neighboring Augusta County several miles to the north. Slave holders, many of whom were interrelated themselves, owned members of the same black families. Former slaves and masters thus kept informed about each other.

In addition, working together in the fields with their slaves and sharing domestic duties in the home, whites sometimes developed warm feelings for, and trust of, their slaves. They often viewed their “servants” as part of their “family white and black.” Landowner memoirs reveal the worries and pleasures of managing slaves as both family members and household property.

## A Negro Girl and Boy for Sale.


I WILL sell privately a GIRL about 16 years of age, and a BOY about 12, they are (both of them) healthy, likely and good servants, and are not offered for sale for any fault, but because it is not convenient for me to keep them. As it is an important object with me to procure for them good homes in this county and to make it convenient for persons wanting them for their own use. An unusually long credit will be given by making the debt secure.

They will not be sold to negro traders, or any one lending themselves as agent for such.

JAMES M. BEARD,

Aug. 13, 1857.—3t. Brownsburg, Va.

**\$30 Reward.**



Ranaway from the Subscriber, living near Brownsburg, in Rockbridge on the 20th instant, a Mulatto Slave, named JOHN, aged about 30. He is a very bright mulatto—freckled face—Red whiskers and red bushy hair—about 5 feet 6 inches in height. He speaks low—voice feminine—has a down look and is tolerably stout built.

The above reward will be paid if the said slave is taken up out of the county and put in jail so that I can get him: and I will pay \$20 reward, if taken up in the county and delivered to me. **ROBT. McCHESNEY.**

Nov 24—4\*

As the above advertisement from the Lexington Gazette shows, not all enslaved men and women agreed with the “my family, white and black” ideology.

On January 1, 1854, Captain Henry Boswell Jones, prominent member of the Brownsburg community, wrote the following in his diary:

*“We enter upon the duties of the new year under favorable circumstances... My stock consists of 10 horses, 30 cattle, 30 hogs, 10 sheep and plenty to feed them. I will hire out Jerry to the Canal for \$150 this year, Ann to G. Whiteman for \$40 and Catharine and child to James Culton for \$40. Mary with some victuals and clothes and Mariah to my niece Mary F. Gilkerson. I have at home Madison, Joseph, James, Russ, Sarah, Abbey, Hetty, Drucella, Martha, and Charles. There are six persons in my white family. I pray God to enable me to watch over and so to direct my household as to merit his blessing. May I have strength giving me properly to discharge all of my relative duties.”*

By the end of the year on December 31, he updated his diary to note that “My family consists of five whites and twelve servants, three of these are hired out.”

# The Nanny as “Home”

From 1857 to 1858, Maggie, who was studying at the Oakland Female Seminary in Ohio to become a teacher, frequently wrote letters home to her friend and cousin Mary Eliza Withrow, living in Brownsburg, about her experiences and worries about the future. On December 20, 1857, she shared some exciting news.

Why did the sight of this black nanny arouse such feelings of extreme delight in Maggie, and the rest of the “Virginia girls,” that it sent them into a fit of homesickness? Why did Maggie portray Mrs. Brown’s suggestion to “to kiss the darkie” as a taunt? The next paragraph of the letter provides some clues about the pleasures and dangers of interracial intimacy in Virginia.

*“Mammy Oliver,” photographed by Michael Miley in 1908. After emancipation, Willie Ann Oliver, born to one of Preston Trotter’s slaves in Brownsburg in 1848, lived in a house on Sterrett Road which is now occupied by her descendant, Mrs. Isabelle Sites.*



*“Mr. Balston’s sister is here now. She has a baby and a black girl for a nurse, such things are such a treat for us Virginia girls to see that we thought we would go into ecstasies the first night I saw the darkie. It looked so much like home.*

*Mrs. Brown, the housekeeper, laughed at us so much about making such a fuss over her. She wanted us to kiss the darkie.”*

*“We always stand at the door when we go up from prayers & kiss the girls – our particular friends – good night as they pass by our rooms. We were kissing the girls at a great rate as they ran by, they would have to be walking along and stick out their mouth for a kiss at the same time. A group of girls came along & one of the servants was right behind them. I did not notice but she was one of the girls and [I] was sticking up my mouth for a kiss, when I found my mistake. You may depend I jumped back in my room pretty quick, I was so near kissing her.”*

# Aunt Peggy: “Queen of the Kitchen”

Reverend James Morrison, the pastor at New Providence Presbyterian Church from 1819 to 1857, owned 25 slaves on his 300 acre farm. Dr. Morrison’s wife Frances, like many slaveholding women, relied on slaves to do the household chores like cleaning, childcare, and cooking.

At the Morrison homeplace, “Old Aunt Peggy” was definitely in charge, bringing much pride and happiness to the Morrison family. Writing in 1916, Dr. Morrison’s daughter, Emily Morrison Bondurant, waxed dreamily in her unpublished memoir about how “that old Aunt Peggy was a famous cook.”

*“His [Dr. Morrison’s] table was noted for its lavish supply of all that was best. My mother with ‘her Peggy’ knew well how to prepare it all. It was this same old Dr. Speece that would often tell her he would come many miles to enjoy the Corn pone. A bread I have never known made to perfection except by that one old cook. It was brought to the table very hot, a steaming loaf of four or five inches in thickness, looking like a rich yellow pound-cake; it has been in the process of baking for over twelve hours in the open fire place.”*



And yet, the sumptuous delights that Peggy brought to the family also created a real sense of trepidation in the Morrises – since controlling her was never easy. It was not uncommon for her to exempt herself from attending family worship together in the family sitting room. As Emily explained:

*“My father often noticed this and excused, at last he ordered that she must come. ‘Go tell Master it is too cold way back there in the setten room. I ‘longs to the big Church anyhow.’ The first part, not the latter delivered at that time; so out again the order went; ‘tell Peggy I have a warm place for her, come in.’ A chair was placed in front of us all, and with her toes reaching the hearthstone. I see her now short and very fat, a real African, jet black, shining white teeth and great turban on her head come stalking in and taking her seat at the fire in front of the whole circle. My father quietly proceeded, Aunt Peggy sitting stone still through it all, but it was too much for me. I had to giggle out loud, for which my father leaned over and gave me a good tap, the first and only one I ever had from his hands. As soon as old Aunt Peggy saw me afterwards, ‘Oh! I so glad Massa slapped you; you had no business laughing at me anyhow.’”*

# After the Civil War

Frederick's Bureau marriage records indicate that most of the blacks living in Rockbridge County in 1868 were born there or in the neighboring Augusta County. As a result, they knew the local white families very well, and some had even been their slaves or had relatives who were. Many of these white landowners still expected domestic bliss from their black workers, but some came to experience anger and a sense of deep betrayal.

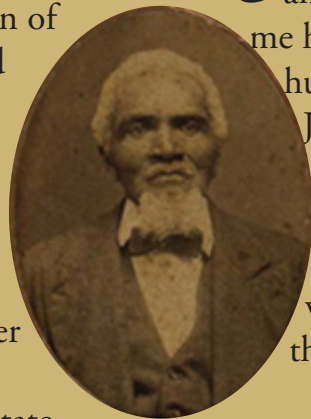


*Bessie White, 3 months old, ca. 1873-1875, held by her nanny, taken by Michael Miley.*

Sometimes, a struggle ensued between former slave owners who expected their slaves to remain with them after the Civil War and those former slaves who resisted this assumption of loyalty and left to reconnect with kin and find better lives elsewhere. In his will, Preston Trotter of Brownsburg said he would liberate after his death his “slaves and their increase.” Trotter died in 1866, one year after the end of the Civil War, leaving his widow in serious debt. In order to assess whether the former slaves were entitled to any compensation from the estate, lawyers took depositions from several white male members of New Providence Church to find out whether Trotter’s slaves left during the Civil War “against his consent.” In other words, did they remain loyal to their former master?

Writing about the first Christmas after the Civil War, Ella Lackey Wade noted to her mother Mary Stuart (Lackey) Patterson, the third wife of Andrew Patterson of Brownsburg:

*“I got a fur cape. Jennie a dress and neck scarf. Rose [the black nanny] got a doll the height of her ambition. I cannot get rid of her and can’t get anybody in her place... Jim can’t do anything in the world with her. Mr. Wade has given her several severe whippings and she cares as little for it as she does for talking, she is such a specimen. I wish every Yankee radical had one just like her tied to him and could not move or turn without seeing her... I know that Mrs. Youell thinks the time she predicted is fast approaching when we would be down under the niggers and have to work for them. Things look as if we are on the eve of another revolution.”*



Daniel Brown testified that “Mr. Trotter told me himself that he thought his negroes were hurting him very badly on leaving him.” James W. Gilkeson said that in the summer after the Civil War, Trotter had told him that he “had informed his servants of the provisions made for them in his will, and he would carry [them] out if they remained with him.”

*The above picture is of Jacob Haliburton, Jr. from the Haliburton family album. During the trial, his father, Jacob Haliburton, Sr., was deemed a loyal slave of Trotter and awarded \$7.75 in 1868 from the estate.*

# Black Labor

For some whites, their inability to control black labor sometimes led to internalized anxiety and sadness. This was the case with Mary Eliza Withrow McClung and her husband John Tate McClung who lived at Castle Carberry, north of Brownsburg on Route 252, with their two children Herbert J. (Dickie) (born in 1869) and Eleanor (Nellie) (1871). John, Mary Eliza, and Nellie frequently wrote to Dickie while he attended Dunsmore's Business College in Staunton in 1890.

In discussing his efforts to plow the land still wet from rain, John mentioned that "I did not hire Ben, intended doing it as soon as the weather got good, but Mr. Brown got him before I knew. I expect he would suit us very well and then he lived so close."

Ben, born in 1864, was the son of Fleming Walker, a long time black servant of the Withrows and McClungs, and he lived near the McClung's farm. The loss of Ben seemed to be a topic of intense focus for John and his family, since this incident shows up several times in correspondence to Dickie. John's wife and daughter, more than he himself, commented on how it affected the family's morale.



*Mary Eliza Withrow McClung from the family album*



*John Tate McClung from the family album*

Mary Eliza wrote: "Papa was so slow about seeing Ben that Mr. Brown has hired him. I felt disappointed for I wanted him to hire him. Don't know who he will get now, the Browns seemed so anxious for him, that I think he must be a good boy."

Dickie's younger sister Nellie, in her letter, commented: "I don't know whether any of them told you or not that Ben Walker has gone to Mr. Brown's. I think Papa is sorry now that he didn't get him."

# At New Providence Presbyterian Church until 1865



*Pastor G. A. Wilson of New Providence and his family, photographed by Kate Stuart, circa 1900*

All church members had to follow the Rules of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church which were “the exercise of that authority and the application of that system of laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed to his Church.” If found guilty of violating God’s Word by a court of Elders and the Reverend, persons accused could find themselves censured by admonition (a warning to be careful), suspension, excommunication, and/or deposition (a de-ranking of a church officer). Out of a total of eighteen disciplinary actions against slaves and free blacks that were recorded in the church books, eight were for “fornication,” four for “intoxication,” one for “stealing,” and five others for various other sinful conducts. Sixteen of the cases resulted in suspension, one in acquittal, and one in excommunication. Slave marriages were not recognized under Virginia law, but slave-owners sometimes arranged marriages between their slaves, so as to keep them under better supervision. Therefore, charging slaves with “adultery” was most likely in the slave owners’ best interest.

On July 9, 1859, the session heard that Lavinia, a servant belonging to James E. Willson and “married” to Bolen Watson (enslaved by William Withrow), was guilty of the sin of fornication. The church sent out a committee to “have a private conversation with her on the subject of her past conduct and report to the session at a proper time.” On September 11, Lavinia appeared before the session and expressed “sorrow for her sinful conduct.” She was suspended from Communion until seven months later when she was “restored to the privileges of the church” after “showing satisfactory evidence of sincere repentance.”

In 1819, slaves constituted 34 out of 353 members (9%) at New Providence Church. Between 1823 and 1848, there were 30 slaves out of 468 total members (6%). In 1849, slave membership was 58 out of 241 members (22%). And from 1861 until 1864, blacks were 22% of the congregation (51 [3 of them free] out of a total of 236 members). To put slave attendance into perspective during that final time period, blacks attending New Providence would have accounted for 17% of the total slave population in the Brownsburg area.



*This portrait, found in the Craney/Porterfield homeplace, could be a descendant of Lavinia, since her relationship with the free blacksmith Preston Gilmore produced two children who became prominent members of the black community and were ancestors of this family.*



# Leaving New Providence Church

Members of Asbury United Methodist Church, established by emancipated men and women in Brownsburg in 1869, claim that blacks from New Providence joined their church immediately after the Civil War. However, New Providence records indicate otherwise. Exiting white supervision in the realm of religion was a slow and painful process.

New Providence, aware of the pull of the new “colored church,” elected four of their most loyal black male members to the new position of “colored superintendent” in 1867, in order to administer to black members, find their whereabouts, and convince them to return to New Providence.

Some emancipated congregants left the area to reunite with family elsewhere. The church struck such members off the rolls since they were “out of the bounds of the church.” Seven departed in this manner. Others asked for a certificate to join another church outside of Rockbridge County. Eleven left in this manner. There were at least eight black members whose attendance waxed and waned over the course of several years. Finally, upon a visit by a Church elder, most of these men and women decided to either join Asbury or another church outside the area.



*A photo of Annie Craney, the youngest daughter of William and Estaline Craney.*



*Photo taken in Brownsburg by Kate Stuart, circa 1900*

Some openly defied the authority of Church elders. William Craney, a slave born to parents in Rockbridge County, joined the New Providence congregation in 1854. In 1880, the Session was concerned about his lack of attendance. Elder E. Bosworth reported that, in a meeting with Craney in August 1881, Craney “showed a rebellious spirit - expressing a desire to have his name erased from the Church Register and declaring that he would not attend Church, nor answer any citation to appear before sessions.” After three repeated attempts to call Craney in front of the Session, the elders excommunicated him and struck his name from the roll because of his “contumacious spirit in refusing to recognize the authority of the church court.” However, a review of church records by the Presbytery in March noted that “Excommunication is not the censure which the constitution provides for contumacy.”

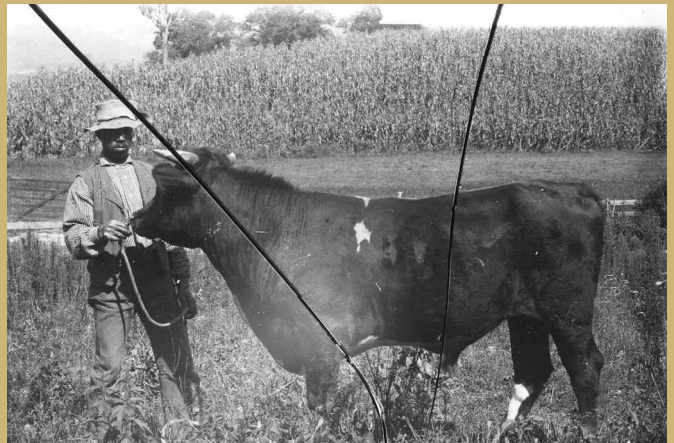
# The Pleasures and Dangers of Intimacy

On November 25, 1893, the Session of New Providence summoned a white woman named Mrs. Vina E. East (age 41) to “explain the fact that in the recent trial of Baxter Holtz (a negro man) before the Rockbridge County Court (for an alleged outrage upon her person) the impression seemed to be made upon the jury that she was a willing party to the offense.” Mrs. East denied to the Session “any complicity on her part stating that owing to fears she was prevented from making an outcry.” Those gathered decided to ask the judge and attorneys for more information about the case.

The committee found out that John A. Parker, Justice of the Peace, had arrested Holtz (age 39) on May 21, 1893, with the charge of “assaulting Mrs. V E East by cursing and abusing her and by calling her names and did then and there defame her character and threatened to disgrace her.” When he brought Holtz to the County Jail, he fined him “for carrying a razor concealed upon his person.”

Once in prison, Holtz penned the following note about Mrs. East and one of the witnesses to be admitted as evidence during his trial:

*“Notice to the Public. Mrs. V E East and James Houzer are now acting as man and wife he goes there on Saturday Night after dark and comes way monday morning before day.”*



*Photo by Kate Stuart, circa 1900*

On October 5, 1893, the jury found Baxter Holtz not guilty of the indictment, and he was freed from jail.

During Session four months later on February 2, 1894, elders at New Providence Church presented Reverend Wilson with the following report as to the cause of Holtz’s acquittal. Testimonies proved that Holtz had done Mrs. East no violence. In addition, several Elders interviewed Mrs. East at home where she admitted yielding to Holtz without resistance in the dining room of her house during the daytime. “Her aunt was in the house” and could have come to her rescue at any moment. “She kept the man on the place working for her after this act was committed.” Afterwards, she had “difficulty with him about his failing to drive some cattle as she directed him to, in which she struck him and drove him off the place.” Mrs. East was suspended indefinitely from Communion at New Providence.

Although there were 78 lynchings of black men by white mobs in Virginia from 1889-1918, Holtz was never accosted, and interestingly, he joined New Providence in 1910 as one of six blacks in the congregation at the time. The last two African American members, Holtz’s in-laws, left in 1943 to join Asbury.

# Longing for the Homeplace

Highlighting the role of emotional attachments in making race relations before and after the Civil War allows us to delve into the messy processes by which daily household activities became the basis for, as well as challenges to, racism in southern Virginia. A focus on sentimental relationships can move us beyond essentialized views of white and black attitudes to see the nuances, personal struggles, and powerful feelings shared among white employers and black workers.

How else can we begin to comprehend the intense longing that an emancipated slave, living in New Jersey, had for her former mistress' daughter in Virginia? On September 20th 1910, Easter McKamey wrote to Nellie McClung Wade inquiring about the health of Nellie's mother Mary Eliza McClung. Born in 1833, Easter was a former slave of Mary Eliza's mother Eleanor Withrow, and she continued to work for the family until Eleanor's death in the late 1880s.

*"I have wrote to you but do not get a answer. I would like very much to here from you all wither you are dead or alive. Pa and I still living but not do very much for we are getting older...If you are living write back and let me know and will write you a long letter... Write soon if Mrs. Mary Elzie is still living. Please answer my letter."*

On the back of this circa 1885 picture of Castle Carberry, someone labeled the names of family members, and, noting the black woman hanging out the wash to the left behind the house, wrote, "Aunt Easter?"

The sentimental attachment Easter said she felt for Mary Eliza, and perhaps that Mary Eliza felt for her, opens up the possibility that whites and blacks experienced positive visceral connections that might have reinforced, as well as resisted, racial ideologies. Greater attention to the ambivalent outcomes of such emotions can help us to appreciate the lingering pleasures and dangers of interracial intimacy in the rural South.



*A photograph of Nellie McClung Wade and her children in 1915, from the family album*

