

Slavery in Chatham County, NC

A First Draft

By Jim Wiggins, March 2022

The history of slavery and information about enslaved people in Chatham County are difficult topics to research due to a scarcity of data sources. In this brief paper I will describe in a loosely organized fashion the information available in the few sources I have identified. My hope is that this will serve as a catalyst for others to conduct and share future research.

Even at this point, a couple of conclusions can be drawn. There is no single history of slavery in Chatham County. There was no single enslaved persons' experience. Pulling together snippets of the experiences of enslaved persons drawn from many sources indicates the diversity of those experiences. The one commonality was that these people's lives were under the control of their enslavers.

Federal Censuses

My search for the history of slavery in Chatham County begins with the first Federal Census, which took place in 1790. Enslaved persons were undoubtedly in Chatham County before that time. Slaves were brought to and sold in Wilmington in the early 1700s. The Cape Fear River provided a convenient conduit to areas to the northwest. Farmers bringing persons they enslaved came from southeast Virginia in search of cheap land. Scotch-Irish, Germans, and Dutch farmers came into the Piedmont following the mountains from Pennsylvania, including the anti-slavery Quakers. Apart from the opposition to slavery by the Quakers and Wesleyan Methodists, historians have had little to say about settlers bringing slaves with them or acquiring slaves once they were here. But the 1790 Federal Census shows that slavery was already part of the economic and social fabric of Chatham County by the late 1700s.

The 1790 Census was organized by "heads of families," whose names are given. The number of other members of the household are listed by the following categories without giving names:

- Free White males of 16 years and upward (to assess the country's industrial and military potential)
- Free White males under 16 years
- Free White females
- All other free persons
- Slaves

Subsequent censuses give information on the number of enslaved persons owned by each head of household, and in 1850 and 1860, includes the enslaved person's age and gender. But no names of the enslaved are provided.

According to the 1790 Census, 17% of the Chatham County's total population were enslaved. One out of four of Chatham households included enslaved persons. Of those households including enslaved persons, nearly half (44%) enslaved one or two persons. Only seven of Chatham's 1,270 households enslaved 20 or more persons: Burwell Williams (20), John Malane (22), Richard Kennon (25), Thos. Stokes (27), Phillip Taylor (36), Matthew Jones (42), and George Lucas (68). Nine female heads-of-families included enslaved persons: Elizabeth Ginn, Jessie June, and Elizabeth Linn (1); Elizabeth Stewart (3); Phebee [Phoebe?] Clark and Agnes Harrington (5); Mary Brantley (10); and Sarah Raglin (17).¹

A comparison to the 1860 Census information is provided to give the reader an idea of how things had changed in Chatham County going into the Civil War.²

	1790	1860
Total Population	9,221	19,101
# of Enslaved Persons	1,547	6,177
# of Households	1,270	2,521
# of Households with Enslaved Persons	312	733

The enslaved portion of Chatham's population almost doubled, from 17% in 1790 to 33% in 1860. The sexes of the enslaved were about equal in number. The proportion of households including enslaved persons had increased from 25% to 31%. Many slaveholders owned few enslaved persons; a few owned a large number. Heading the latter list was Adeline Alston—to be discussed in a moment. Others included Lawrence J. Haughton, Martha K. Alston, Everline Alston, Elias Bryan, J. Q. A. Leach, Woodson Lee, W. P. Taylor, and Robert Alston.³

Accounts by Historians

In the 1976 Second Edition of *Chatham County 1771-1971*, Bishop Leach, assistant principal of Northwood High School, wrote a chapter entitled simply "The Negro," which covers the history of the African American experience in Chatham County. In one section, Leach discusses slavery in the County. There was not much to draw on and much of the section relates generalities, some undocumented. "In many instances," Leach says, the relationship between slave and "master" was "very close" and that masters looked upon slaves as "members of the family." He cites as evidence that slaves "attended church with their masters" and that some slave children were baptized in the St. Bartholomew's Church.

Leach quotes Henry Armand London's Centennial Address in 1876, which notes that slaves remained "true and faithful to their masters" during the Civil War. On the other hand, Leach notes that some slaves did try to escape their enslavers and some escaped to the Union Army. When caught, he says, they were often punished by crude and abusive measures. None of these assertions are supported with Chatham references.

Leach quotes Clarence Poe's account of an instance of slave breeding in Chatham, noting that this was a common practice in North Carolina and that Chatham was no exception. Leach attributes the large increase in the number of enslaved people in Chatham by 1830 to this practice.

As one Chatham example of slave labor being responsible for economic growth of Chatham County industries, Leach cites the grist mill owned (at the time he wrote the chapter) by the Lee family in Gorgus (Moncure), which formerly used the labor of enslaved people for operation. The canal that enabled boats to get as near the mill as possible with their cargo was built by enslaved people.⁴

Another Chatham County account of the well-treated slave is provided by Dr. Clarence Poe's (1881-1965) account of slavery on his great-grandfather's farm in Chatham in the mid-1800s. In his book *My First 80 Years*, Poe relates that "the twenty-six Negroes" owned by [Jesse Poe, Sr.] "...seem to have regarded their master more as their friend and provider than as any selfish exploiter of their labors...As definitely as soldiers in an army they felt themselves bound together in an exclusive, family-like comradeship of service. If they labored to keep their master in moderate comfort, they also worked to support themselves and their families, their very young and their very old—a fact all too often overlooked by historians."⁵ Leach reports, quoting Clarence Poe, that Jesse's will disinherited one son-in-law whom he believed mistreated his enslaved people and also specified that even after Jesse's death, his slaves could not be hired out as turpentine hands and put under control of "hard driving strangers."⁶



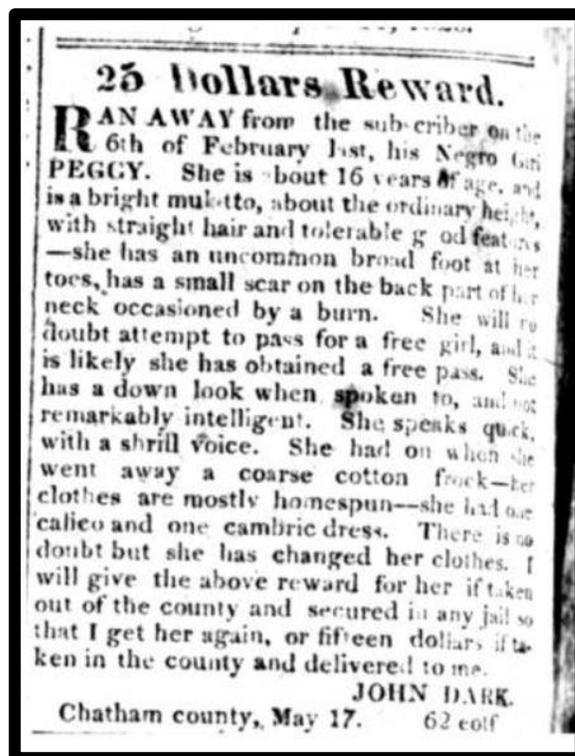
As further evidence of Jesse Poe Sr.'s regard for the people he enslaved, Clarence Poe also wrote that "Jesse Poe buried his slaves in the family burying ground along with his wife Charity Patterson who had died in 1848."⁷ The Chatham County Cemetery Survey record for the Jesse Poe cemetery indicates that the marker for Jesse Poe, Sr. and his wife has the inscription "He with his wife Charity Patterson Poe, 1768-1848, and some of

their slaves are buried nearby." The marker was certainly created some time after Jesse Sr. and Charity Poe died, perhaps by Clarence Poe, and suggests that the exact burial places within the cemetery of Jesse, Sr., and his wife are not known. Nor is there any indication of where enslaved persons might be buried.⁸

In some other Chatham County cemeteries, enslaved persons were buried on the periphery of the family cemetery. One example is the Able Green cemetery in Hickory Mountain Township.⁹ Much more common, however, is that the graves of enslaved persons have not been identified and have likely been destroyed. We know, for example, that the Alstons enslaved many people, some of whom would have died during their enslavement. Yet, no burial places for these people have been found on former Alston properties.

Newspapers

Enslaved people didn't often make the news, but some events involving them did and helped tell one aspect of the lives of some of them. Notably, reports of runaway slaves suggest that enslavement was not the agreeable situation suggested by some white authors. A database of runaway slave notices is found on the web at The Digital Library of American Slavery and a search turns up numerous references to Chatham County slaves over the period 1751 to 1840.¹⁰ The notices usually describe the physical features of the runaway and often give a name, along with the name of the owner and sometimes a reward for return.



Family Papers and Legal Documents

Information about the economic value of enslaved Chathamites, and sometimes their names, can be found in some legal documents involving the sale of such persons or the division of estates. One such document is the settlement of a suit filed in 1844 by the guardian of Adeline Alston's youngest daughter, asking for a share of the enslaved persons that Adeline had inherited from her husband at his death.

In 1845, Adeline Williams Alston, age 37 and the mother of nine children, inherited from her deceased husband a 1,140-acre plantation and more than 100 enslaved persons. Enslaved people constituted value to their "owners" not only because of the labor they provided or products they produced. They could also be sold, rented out, or used as collateral for a loan. To allocate the appropriate share of enslaved persons to Adeline's youngest daughter, a monetary value had to be assigned to each of Adeline's slaves. Here are just a few examples: Dillard \$500, Peggy \$275, Sam \$125, Sophia \$10 and Silvy (invalid) \$0.¹¹ The

value of the 114 enslaved persons inherited by Adeline from her husband was \$28,524 in 1844, which in 2022 dollars would be \$1,060,339.

What were the lives of slaves like on Adeline's plantation? Miscellaneous papers from the Alston Family collection give some hints. They worked growing corn, tobacco, and cotton, much of it carried to markets, as well as a variety of garden produce for plantation consumption. This required structures in addition to the main house, such as stables, storehouses, granaries, smokehouse, and barns.

Many of the enslaved persons on the plantation would have engaged in agriculture, but others may have been crafts persons. Receipts in the Alston archive suggest that crafts persons enslaved by Chatham Jack Alston likely produced clothing and shoes and other leather goods. An 1830 receipt suggests that gun manufacture or repairs may have been among the skills practiced on John and Adeline Alston's plantation. Receipts for cotton and wool cards suggest that some cotton and wool may have been spun and woven into cloth on the plantation. Purchased fabrics, including "linen, negro cottons, flannel, silk, calico, and muslin, edging, ribbons, and needles," indicate that clothing was being made on the plantation. Receipts and correspondence also indicate that enslaved people were rented out. Correspondence from one renter notes that she had contacted him previously questioning whether the work involved affected the enslaved person's health. But it was not clear that her concern was for the wellbeing of the enslaved person rather than for the preservation of the value of her property.¹²

Some Alston Family papers have been preserved and provide information about the lives of enslaved people on the Alston's very large plantation. More details are provided in a [paper about Adeline Alston on the CCHA website](#).¹³ The lives of enslaved people working on smaller farms or in households are less well documented. I hope that if any documents shedding light on the lives of enslaved people in Chatham are identified, those documents will be shared with the Chatham County Historical Association to build on the database available to researchers.

The [NCGenweb page for Chatham](#), created by Sue Ashby, includes lists from family Bibles, such as that of Alexander and Phoebe Jefferson Clark. The Clark Bible includes names as well as birth and death dates of people they enslaved.¹⁴ Also extracted by Ashby are the names of slaves mentioned in legal transactions—wills, probate, inventories and divisions of estates, Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions, deeds of gift, guardian records, and some deeds.¹⁵ All of these sources are worthy of additional research.

Laws Intended to Regulate the Lives of Enslaved People

The lives of enslaved people were governed to some degree by state statutes that restricted, among other things, their right to carry weapons (including for hunting), leave their plantations, raise stock, teach others to read, meet for the purpose of drinking or dancing,

and preaching in public. Severe penalties were prescribed for apprehended runaway slaves. These laws were likely enforced to varying degrees in various parts of the state. We don't know how closely they were followed in Chatham County. A complete list of these statutes is contained in *Slaves and Free Persons of Color, An Act Concerning Slaves and Free Persons of Color*, which chronicles legislation passed in North Carolina surrounding enslaved peoples and people of color from the years 1741 to 1831.¹⁶

In 1830, the laws regulating emancipation were made much more restrictive. Those wishing to emancipate an enslaved person were required to provide a bond payable to the State in the sum of two thousand dollars for each slave named in the petition and to ensure that the slave would behave appropriately while in the State and that the slave would leave the State within 90 days of emancipation being granted, never to return. Freeing slaves by will became even more restrictive and cumbersome. If an emancipated slave violated the "leave and never return" conditions, they could be sold back into slavery.

Western Chatham widow, Marium Alston's efforts to free her slaves bear witness to the difficulty of such efforts in Chatham County. In her deathbed will, she charged her attorney, Jesse Marley, with the task of taking her enslaved people to a free state and freeing them there. [The story of this endeavor has been documented on the CCHA website.](#)¹⁷

Accounts of Formerly Enslaved People

The question of how enslaved people were treated by their owners is certainly best answered by the formerly enslaved themselves. Such accounts are uncommon, but we are fortunate that, in 1936-38, former slaves then living in seventeen states were interviewed by the Federal Writer's Project regarding their recollections about their lives as slaves. This resulted in 176 narratives of former slaves living in North Carolina, of which twelve mentioned having lived some or all of their lives in Chatham County. [All twelve of the complete narratives are available via the CCHA website.](#)¹⁸

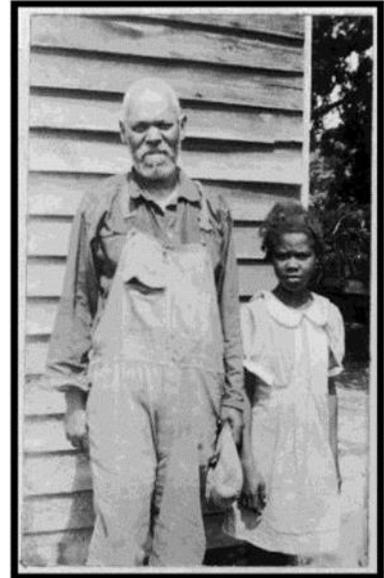
Here, I will provide excerpts from the nine narratives that provide some specific answers to the question of how enslaved people were treated in Chatham County. I have organized the excerpts according to topic. The "dialects" expressed in the written translations of their oral accounts undoubtedly reflect the ears of white interviewers. These recollections are almost certainly imperfect, having been collected so many years after the recalled events and from persons whose exposure to slavery may have been limited to when they were very young. Nevertheless, these narratives provide rare first-person accounts of what slavery was like in Chatham County. Reading these can be cumbersome due to the dialect, but please take the time to get to know these people.

Lineage and Ownership

Charley Crump: “I was borned at Evan’s Ferry in Lee or Chatham County, and I belonged ter Mr. Davis Abernathy an’ his wife Mis’ Vick.

Dorcas Griffeth: “I belonged to Dr. Clark in Chatham County near Pittsboro. My father wus named Billy Dismith and my mother wus named Peggy Council. She belonged to the Councils. Father belonged to the Dismiths and I belonged to the Clarks. Missus wus named Winnie.

Elias Thomas: “I was born here when the civil war wus goin’ on an’ I am 84 years old. I was born in Chatham County on a plantation near Moncure, February 1853. My master wus named Baxster Thomas and missus wus named Katie. I don’t know my father’s name, but my mother wus named Phillis Thomas. It took a smart nigger to know who his father wus in slavery time. I can just remember my mother. I was about four or five when she died.



Charley Crump with granddaughter

Emma Stone: “My mammy wus a Free Issue an’ my pappy belonged ter de Bells in Chatham County. Pappy wus named Edmund Bell, mammy wus named Polly Michel. My sisters wus Fannie, Jane, Ann, Josephine, Narcisus, and Crissie. My brothers wus Lizah, Hilliard, an’ another one, but I doan ‘member his name. Yo’ knows dat I doan ‘member much, but I does know dat days on de plantation wus happy. When my mammy married pappy she moved ter de Bell’s plantation so we chilluns, long wid her, wuz lak de udder slaves.

Jane Lassiter: “My mother an’ me belonged to the Councils. Dr. Kit Council who lived on a plantation on de lower edge of Chatham County, ‘bout three miles from New Hill. My father belonged to de Lamberts. Their plantation wus near Pittsboro in Chatham County. My father wus named Macon Lambert an’ his master wus named At Lambert. Our missus wus named Caroline an’ father’s missus wus named Beckie. My grandfather wus Phil Bell. He belonged to the Bells. They lived in Chatham County. My grandmother wus named Peggy an’ she belonged to the same family.

Sara Anne Green: My mammy an’ pappy wus Anderson and Hannah Watson. We belonged to Marse Billy an’ Mis Ruby Watson, but when Billy’s daughter Mis Suzie ma’ied young Marse Billy Headen, Ole Marse gave her me, an’ my mammie an’ my pappy for er weddin’ gif’. So I growed up Sarah Anne Headen. My pappy had blue eyes. They wus jus’ like Marse Billy’s eyes, kaze Ole Marse wus pappy’s marster an’ pappy too. Ole Marse an’ Mis Ruby lived on er big plantation near Goldston an’ dey had ‘bout three hundred slaves.

Sara Ann Smith: I wus born January 28, 1858 ter Martha and Green Womble in Chatham County, near Lockville. My father ‘longer ter Mr John Womble an’ mammie ‘longed to Captain Elias Bryant. Dey had six chilluns I bein’ nex’ der de oldes’.

Tempie Hearndon Durham: I was thirty-one years ol' when de surrender come. Dat make me sho nuff ole. Near 'bout one hundred an' three years done passed over dis here white head of mine. My white fo'ks lived in Chatham County. Dey was Marse George an' Mis Betsy Hearndon. Mis Betsy was a Snipes befor' she married Marse George.



Adeline Crump

Welfare

Adeline Crump: "Mother and father said they were treated all right and that they loved their white folks. They gave them patches, clothed them tolerably well, and seed to it they got plenty to eat. The hours of work wus long. Nearbout everyone worked long hours then, but they said they wus not mistreated 'bout nothing. When they got sick marster got a doctor, if they wus bad bad off sick. They wus allowed holidays Christmas and at lay-by time, and they wus 'lowed to hunt possums an' coons at night an' ketch rabbits in gums. They also caught birds in traps made of splinters split from pine wood.

Charley Crump: sometimes we jists gits one meal a day. De marster says dat empty niggers am good niggers an' dat full niggers has got de debil in dem.

Dorcus Griffeth: Dey had tolerable fine food for de whites folks, but I did not get any of it. De food dey gave us wus mighty nigh nuthin'. Our clothes wus bad and our sleepin' places wus nothin' at all. We had a hard time.

Elias Thomas: We called the slave houses "quarters." They were arranged like streets about two hundred yards on the northside of the great house. Our food was purdy good. Our white folks used slaves, especially the children, as they did themselves about eatin'. We all had the same kind of food. We all had plenty of clothes, but only one pair of shoes a year. People went barefoot a lot more than they do now. We had good places to sleep, straw mattresses and chickenfeather bed, and feather bolsters. Everybody eat out of the big garden both white and black alike. Ole missus won't allow us to eat rabbit but she would allow us to catch and eat possum...Sometimes we would catch fish with hooks in the Haw River, Deep River, and the Cape Fear River, and when it was dry time and the water got low we caught fish with seines...When we got sick Dr. Hews, Dr. Wych, and Dr. Tom Buckhannan looked after us. A lot of the slaves wore rabbit feet, the front feet, for luck. They also carried buckeyes...

Emma Stone: De missus gib us her old hoop skirts ter play in an' we played neigh 'bout all de time.

Jane Lassiter: We lived in little ole log houses. We called em cabins. They had stick an' first chimneys wid one door to the house an' one window...We didn't have any gardens an' we never had any money of our own... We had plenty sumptun to eat an' it was cooked good. My mother wus de cook an' she done it right. Our clothes wus homemade but we had plenty

shiftn' clothes. Course our shoes wus given out at Christmas. We got one pair a year an' when dey wore out we got no more an' had to go barefooted de rest of de time... The slaves caught game sometime an' et it in de cabins, but dere wus not much time huntin' dere wus so much work to do.

Sara Anne Green: Marse Billy wus er doctor too. He doctored dey slaves when dey got sick, an' if dey got bad off he sen' fer sho nuff doctor an' paid de bills. Every Chris'mas Marse Billy gave de niggers er big time. He called dem up to de big house and gave dem er bag of candy, niggertoes, an' sugar plums, den he say: 'Who wants der egg nog, boys?' All dem dat wants er dram hol' up dey han'...I would hol' up [my hands] too, an' Ole Marse would look at me an' say 'Go away from hear, Sarah Anne, yo' too little to be callin' fer nog.' But he fill up de glass jus' de same an' put in er extra spoon of sugar an' give it to me...Marse Billy wus er good man.

Punishment and Run-aways

Charley Crump: De Abernathy's wusn't good ter us, we got very little ter eat, nothin ter wear an' a whole lot o' whippins.

Dorcas Griffeth: I saw slaves whupped till de blood ran down der backs. Once dey whupped some on de plantation and den put salt on de places and pepper on 'am.

Elias Thomas: I never saw a jail for slaves but I have seen slaves whipped. I saw Crayton Abernathy, an overseer, whip a woman in a cotton patch on Doc Smith's farm, a mile from our plantation. I also saw ole man William Crump, a owner, whip a man and some children. He waited till Sunday morning to whip his slaves. He would git ready to go to church, have his horse hitched up to the buggy and call his slaves out and whip them before he went to church. He generally whipped about five children every Sunday morning. Willis Crump, a slave, was tied up by his thumbs and whipped. His thumbs was in such a bad fix after that they rose up and had to be cut open. Willis was whipped after the war closed for asking for his wages and having words with ole man Crump because he would not pay him. They fell out and he called his friends in and tied him and whipped him...

Jane Lassiter: No slaves ever ran away from our plantation cause master wus good to us. I never heard of him bein' 'bout to whup any of his niggers.

Work

Adeline Crump: Marster didn't have no overseers to look after his slaves. He done that hissself with the help o' some o' his men slaves. Sometimes he made 'em foreman and my mother and father said they all got along mighty fine.

Charley Crump: Dey ain't had no slaves 'cept seben or eight, in fact, dey wus pore white trash tryin ter get rich; so dey made us wuck. Dey wicks us from daylight till dark.

Elias Thomas: When I was eight years old he bought the Boylan place about two miles from his first home and he moved there. It was about one thousand acres of land...with about

three hundred acres cleared for farming...We worked from sun to sun with one and a half to rest at noon or dinner time. I was so small I did not do much heavy work. I chopped corn and cotton mostly. The old slaves had patches they tended, and sold what they made and had the money it brought...my Marster never had any overseers, he made bossmen out of his oldest slaves... He hired both men and women of the poor white class to work on the plantation. We all worked together. We had a good time. We worked and sang together and everyone seemed happy. In harvest time a lot of help was hired and such laughing, working, and singing. Just a good time in general. We sang the songs 'Crossin' Over Jordan' and 'Bound for the Promised Land'.

Jane Lassiter: Dere wus 'bout fifty slaves on the plantation, an' dey wurked from dawn to dark. I 'member dey wurkin' till dark.

Sarah Anne Green: Hannah my mammy wus de head seamstress. She had to 'ten' to de makin' of all de slaves clothes. De niggers had good clothes. De cloth wus home woven in de weavin' room. Ten niggers didn' do nothin' but weave. But every slave had one Sunday dress a year made out of store bought cloth. Ole marse seen to dat.

Sara Ann Smith: Father was a carpenter an' by his havin' a trade he got along better before an' atter de war dan de other niggers. Mammie wus housekeeper an' cook an' she wus always neat as a pin an' quick as lightin'. Both families wus good ter dere slaves, givin' em plenty ter eat an' enough ter wear. I stayed wid mammie on Captain Bryant's plantation an' I doan 'member doin' any wurk at all 'cept lookin' after de babies onct in a long while.

Tempie Hearndon Durham: Dey had a big plantation an' raised cawn, wheat, cotton, an' 'bacca. I don't know how many fied niggers Marse George had, but he had a mess of dem, an' he had hosses too, an' cows, hogs, an' sheep. Dey raised sheeps an' sold de wool, an' dey used de wool at de big house too. Dey was a big weavin' room whare de blankets wus wove, an' dey wove for winter clothes too. Linda Hearndon an' Milla Edwards was de head weavers, dey looked after de weaving of de fancy blankets. Mis Betsy was a goods weaver too. She weaved de same as de niggers. De cardin an' spinnin' room was full of niggers. I can hear dem spinnin' wheels now turnin' 'round an' sayin' hum-m-m-m, hum-m-m-m, an' hear de slaves singin' while dey spin. Mammy Rachel stayed in de dyeing room. Dey wuzn't nothin' she didn't know 'bout dyein'.

Religion

Adeline Crump: The colored folks went to the white folks church and had prayer meetings in their homes.

Elias Thomas: We had prayer meetings on the plantation about once or twice a week. We went to the white folk's church on Sunday. We went to both the Methodist and Presbysterian. The preacher told us to obey our marsters.

Jane Lassiter: Dere wus no churches on de plantation an' we wus not 'lowed to have prayer meetings in de cabins, but we went to preachin' at de white folks church. I 'member dat. We sat in the back seat.

Sarah Anne Green: Ole marse made de niggers go to chu'ch too. He had er meeting house on plantation an' every Sunday we wus ma'ched to meetin'. Dey was preachin' every other Sunday and' Sunday School every Sunday. Marse Bill and Mis Ruby teachd dey Sunday School.

Literacy and Mobility

Adeline Crump: Mother and father go no learnin. They would not allow them to read and write. Master wus fearful 'bout that. My mother and father told me many stories 'bout patterollers and Ku Klux. A nigger bettrer have a pass when he went visitin' or if they caught him they tore up his back.

Charley Crump: An' we ain't 'lowed ter go nowhar at night, dat is if dey knowed it. I'se de time dat niggers from all ober de neighborhood gang up an' have fu anyhow, but if dey hyard dey patterollers comin' gallopin' on a hose dey'd fly. Crap shootin' wus the style den, but a heap of times dey can't find nothin ter bet...I'd ruther be a nigger any day dan ro be lak my ole whites folks wus."

Dorcas Griffeth: Dey wouldn't let me have books when I wus a slave. I wus afraid toer be caught wid a book.

Elias Thomas: No books were allowed slaves in slavery time. I never went to school a minute in my life. I can't read and write.

Jane Lassiter: Der wus no books, or larnin' uv any kind. You better not be katched wid a book in yore han's. Dat wus sumptin dey would git you fer. I kin reads an' write a little but I learned since de surrender. My mother told me 'bout dat bein' 'gainst de rules of de white folks.

Sarah Anne Green: they didn' teach us to read an' write, no suh, they sho didn'. If dey'd see us wid er book dey'd wip us. Dey said niggers don' need no knowledge; dat dey mus' do what dey wus tol to do.

Marriage and Children

Tempie Hearndon Durham: When I growed up I married Exter Durham. He belonged to Marse Snipes Durham who had de Plantation 'cross de county line in Orange County. We had a big weddin'. We was married on de front po'ch of de big house. Marse George killed a shoat an' Mis Betsy had Georgeanna, de cook, to bake a big weddin' cake all iced up as white as snow wid a bride an' grown standin' in de middle holdin' han's...All de niggers came to de feas' an Marse George had a dram for everyone...Mis Betsy done made me a weddin' veil out of a white net window curtain...she played de weddin ma'ch on de piano...Uncle Edmund Kirby married us. He was de nigger preacher who dat preched at de plantation church...Exter couldn't stay no longer den dat night cuze he belonged to Marse Snipes Duncan an' he had to back home. He lef' de nex day for his plantation, but he come back every Saturday night an' stay 'twell Sunday night. We had eleven chillun. Nine was bawn

befo' surrender...I was worth a heap to Marse George cuze I had so many chillun. De more chillen a slave had de more dey was worth.

Union Soldiers

Elias Thomas: I remember the Yankees. I'll remember seein' them till the day I die. I'll never forgit it. I thought I was the last of me. The white folks had told me the Yankees would kill me or carry me off, so I thought when I saw them coming it was the end of me. I hid in the woods while they were there.

Sarah Anne Green: De day Ole Marse heard dat the Yankees wus comin' he took all de meat 'cept two or three pieces out of de smoke house, den he got de silver an' thing an' toted dem to de wood pile. He dug er hole an' buried dem, den he covered de place wid chips...When the Yankees come up into de yard Marse Billy took Mis Ruby an' locked her up in dey room...I wuzn' skeered of de Yankees; I thought dey wuz pretty mens in dey blue coats an' brass buttons. I follow dem 'roun' beggin' for dey coat buttons...When dey lef' I followed dem way down de road still beggin', 'twel one of de Yankees pulled off er button an' gave it to me. I's given' it to you kaze yo's got blue eyes. I ain't never seed blue eyes in er black face befo'. I had blue eyes like pappy an' Marse Billy, an' I kept dat Yankee button 'twell I wus ma'ied, den I los' it.

Post-War and Looking Back

Adeline Crump: When the surrender came after the war they stayed on the plantation right on and lived on the marster's land...Slavery wus a bad thing' cus from what mother and father tole me all slaves didn't fare alike. Some fared good 'n some fared bad.

Elias Thomas: When the war was closed I stayed on eight years with marster.

Emma Stone: Yo' knows dat I doan 'member much, but I does know dat days on de plantation wus happy.

Jane Lassiter: Mother loved her white folks as long as she lived an' I loved them too. No mister, we wus not mistreated. We stayed on at marster's when de surrender come cause when we wus freed we had nothin' an' nowhere to go. Data de truth...We wus free but we had nothin' 'cept what de marsters gave us...I don't know all 'bout slavery but I 'members dere wus a lot of big greasy niggers goin' around, an' I reckon' dey fared good or dey wouldn't a been so fat. Dey got plenty to eat even if dey did wurk hard. I believe slavery wus all rite whur slaves were treated right."

Tempie Hearndon Durham: After we was free, we lived right on at Marse George's plantation a long time. We rented de lan' for a fo'th of what we made, den after a while we bought a farm. Freedom is all right, but de niggers was better off befo' surrender, kaze den dey was looked afteran dey didn' get into no trouble figh' an' killin' like dey do dese days. If a nigger cut up an' got saazy in slavery times, his olke marse gave him a good whippin' an' he went way back an' set down an' 'haved hese'f.

End note

This paper is offered as a first draft of the history of slavery in Chatham County. My hope is that others will revise and add to this story as more resources are discovered. If you have information to offer, please contact me, Jim Wiggins, via history@chathamhistory.org.

¹ Ancestry.com: Year: 1790; Census Place: Chatham, North Carolina; Series: M637; Roll: 7; Family History Library Film: 0568147.

² Reference: chatham1860.blogspot.com/p/v-behaviorurldefaultvmlo.html

³ For a more complete list, see chatham1860.blogspot.com/p/v-behaviorurldefaultvmlo.html

⁴ Leach, Bishop, "The Negro," in *Chatham County 1771-1971*, second edition, Chatham County Historical Association, 1976, pages 319-322.

⁵ Poe, Clarence, *My First 80 Years*, University of North Carolina Press, 1963, p. 13.

⁶ Leach, Bishop, "The Negro," *Chatham County, 1771-1971*, 2nd edition, Chatham County Historical Association, 1976, p. 327.

⁷ Poe, Clarence, *My First 80 Years*, University of North Carolina Press, 1963, p. 13.

⁸ Jesse Poe, Sr. cemetery on CemeteryCensus.com, accessed 29Jan2022, <http://cemeterycensus.com/nc/chat/cem460.htm>.

⁹ See, for example, <http://cemeterycensus.com/nc/chat/cem260.htm>.

¹⁰ North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements on the Digital Library of American Slavery [libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/search/collection/RAS]. <http://dlas.uncg.edu/>

¹¹ For a complete list, see <https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/AAIAlston/AdelineAlstonAppendixD.pdf>. Similar lists appear in the estate papers of Oroom and Marium Alston. See: <https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/MariumAlstonandAlstonFreedSlaves.pdf> and Bishop Leach (reference above) reproduces a list from Clarence Poe's writings (source not provided) of the valuation of Jesse Poe, Sr.'s enslaved people at his death in 1958.

¹² North Carolina State Archives, Alston-DeGraffenriedt Papers, Chatham County, 1773-1970. PC 1575.1-1575.8

¹³ Article about Adeline Alston Chatham Plantation Owner, Chatham County Historical Association website: <https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/AAIAlston/AdelineAlstonChathamPlantationOwner.pdf>

¹⁴ Alexander and Phoebe Jefferson Clark Bible records: <http://www.ncgenweb.us/chatham/afam/slaves.htm>

¹⁵ Slave names extracted by Sue Ashby in NCGenweb: <http://www.ncgenweb.us/chatham/afam/slaves.htm>

¹⁶ For an elaboration see <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/black-codes>, which provides a transcription of *Slaves and Free Persons of Color, An Act Concerning Slaves and Free Persons of Color*, which chronicles legislation passed in North Carolina surrounding enslaved peoples and people of color from the years 1741 to 1831.

¹⁷ Article about Marium Alston and the Alston Freed Slaves, Chatham County Historical Association website:
<https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/MariumAlstonandAlstonFreedSlaves.pdf>

¹⁸ Links to Chatham County Slave Narratives:
<https://chathamhistory.org/resources/Documents/PDFs/ResearchArticles/ChathamCountySlaveNarratives.pdf>

My thanks to Beverly Wiggins for editing and helpful suggestions on this paper.

6Mar2022