THE CULTURE OF ENSLAVEMENT AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SLAVERY IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

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By

Emily Louise Cadmus

Director: Dr. Adam Thomas, Professor of History

Committee Members: Dr. Jessie Swigger, History
Dr. Nora Doyle, History
Dr. Victoria Bradbury, New Media

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Abstract

While recent trends in scholarly research as well as popular culture have brought the reality of southern Appalachian African American history to the mainstream, there has been very little research into the culture and communities of African descended people enslaved in western North Carolina. Regional geography and the local economy in Buncombe County did not allow for the development of a commodity driven, plantation model of slavery, the absence of which has led prior generations of historians to diminish the role and severity of slavery in the area. Rather than use the hallmarks of surveillance and control found in plantation economies and public slave markets to measure the character of captive labor systems in western North Carolina, this thesis interrogates the specific culture and economic practices of slaveholding elites in Buncombe County to recognize the mechanisms of social coercion and surveillance employed in local enslavement practices. The quotidian experiences and routine social and spatial geographies constructed by people enslaved in Buncombe County are more visible and better understood through interpreting the customs and methods used to hold people in bondage. Regional enslavement practices, in particular, the necessary mobility of many enslaved people, facilitated the development of a well-connected kinship and community network.

Introduction

The Americans who settled in the Appalachian Mountains are shrouded in generations of layered stereotypes and historic misinterpretations. They exist in popular historical memory as backwoods rubes, out of step with the rest of contemporary American society on the eastern seaboard, and in pursuit of the rugged individualism and frontier life promised by the untouched wilderness of the southern mountains. "[European American settlers of Buncombe County] were descended from that remarkable people known as Scotch -Irish [*sic*], and were peculiarly fitted by their courage, self-reliance, love of adventure, and devotion to the true principles of Liberty, for the dangerous and difficult task of developing a new country and establishing sound government."[1] Outdated sources like Wilma Dykeman's *The French Broad* from 1955 and Forster Sondley's, *Asheville and Buncombe County and History of Buncombe County, North Carolina*, published in two volumes from 1922 and 1930, perpetuate romantic but inaccurate images of western North Carolina's American settlers as determined, independent, stalwart mountaineers. These stereotypes have stubbornly remained as the most persistent characterization of the European descended Americans that settled western North Carolina.[2]

This portrait of early American mountaineer culture seems disconnected from the contemporaneous "planter-politician" societies of Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans,

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[1] Hon. Theo F. Davidson, "Genesis of the County of Buncombe," afterword to *Asheville and Buncombe County,* by Forster Sondley (Asheville: The Citizen Company, 1922), 193.

[2] Taken into context, much of Sondley and Dykeman's work is still relevant today, however they are still frequently cited in popular literature as the best authorities on western North Carolina history, despite the decades of more rigorous academic scholarship that have been published since. For examples of Dykeman's and Sondley's wide contemporary use, see "Visiting our Past," a local history column written by Rob Neufeild for the Asheville Citizen Times. As recently as 2007, Nan K. Chase illustrated her second chapter, "The Livestock Years," with photographs of unidentified impoverished mountaineers, in unspecified time periods, asserting in the captions that these scenes exemplified European American settlement in western North Carolina. See "A barefoot woman," and "Housing conditions," in *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson: North Carolina: MacFarland and Company, Inc., 2007), 25-6.

Savannah, and other parts of the southern United States. Today, the stain of slavery's legacy on the antebellum south is evident in these areas, where plantation museums are preserved as a testament to the era. Palatial estates, vast mono-cropped acreages, and slave patrols are commonly associated with the history of American slavery. Western North Carolina lacked this "architecture of racial control."[3] There is no record of slave patrols, no watchtowers, no walled plantations, and no workhouse. This lack of infrastructure commonly associated with slave societies has been repeatedly misconstrued by historians to be evidence of a milder, kinder, even less coercive form of slavery. The culture of enslavement in western North Carolina is often portrayed as similar to an earlier iteration of American slavery; one that is not widely practiced, is more benevolent, less exploitative, and less capitalist.[4] However, the archival record does not definitively support this interpretation, which graces the pages of both local and academic historical literature of the region. Everywhere American slavery existed, the system was adapted to suit the economy and culture of that specific place. Differences between the wealth, material culture, and economies established in antebellum Charleston versus southern Appalachia offer some clear distinctions on the development of these different slave societies, but the comparison also highlights where the two societies overlap. What the record does show is that the foundational structure of power in both of these places would have felt familiar to all of the people, both enslaved and free, that traversed these landscapes. They each were "societ[ies]

[3] Tiya Miles, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake* (New York: Random House, 2021), Google Play digital book, 180.

[4] While much of local historic literature neglects to relay any information about Buncombe County's culture and economy of slavery, Nan K. Chase offers several accounts of the experience of slavery, all of which are relayed by the descendants of slave-owners. In contrast to her analysis of segregation and racial tensions in the twentieth-century, she offers no analysis of these accounts, all of which assert enslaved people to have been content with their enslavement. See "We didn't have any slave driving instincts. We lived very happily with our slaves," and "They considered themselves kin to the white families from which they came," 137, and Daintry Allison's account of her grandmother's experiences during emancipation, wherein her slaves mourned their obligation to leave their enslaver, 28.

where patriarchal ideology fueled oligarchy, the rule of a few wealthy men from old, aristocratic families."[5]

In 1850, forty of the sixty-one households in Asheville listed on the United States Census recorded having an estate. Half of these estates included enslaved property. Estates also included homes, land, tools, furniture, and businesses, owned by the head of household. Of those forty estates, the top five were worth more than the thirty-five others combined. These heads of household were J.W. Patton, with an estate valued at $35,000; James M. Smith, with an estate valued at $30,000; John E. Patton, with an estate valued at $20,000; Nicholas W. Woodfin, with an estate valued at $20,000; and Montraville Patton, whose estate was valued at $13,000. These five men also owned more than three times the number of enslaved people than were owned by the other thirty-five, and this did not include slaves who were part of their household but under the nominal ownership of their wives and children. In other words, of all the people who lived in the economic and population center of Buncombe County in 1850, over half of the wealth was held within just 8% of households.[6]

The southern Appalachian region of the United States was settled by Americans as a direct result of the Revolutionary War. As such, settlement of this area was one of the first efforts made towards state building in the nascent, post–Revolutionary United States. Creating American polities west of the Appalachians posed a real potential for profit through land speculation, access to resources and access to trade routes along the Mississippi River. These state building aspirations aligned well with the goals of free, white, early Americans, including

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[5] Miles, 184.

[6] The three different Pattons listed here are not related to each other. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com.

their dependence on a captive labor force.[7] After the Revolutionary War early Americans aggressively pursued this profit potential. The scholarship of Edward E. Baptist shows that the American Revolution precipitated an expansion of American slavery, and a mass forced migration of enslaved people through the domestic slave trade into the deep south:

> "In the span of a single lifetime after the 1780s, the South grew from a narrow coastal strip of worn out plantations to a subcontinental empire. Entrepreneurial enslavers moved more than 1 million enslaved people, by force, from the communities that survivors of the slave trade from Africa had built in the South and in the West to vast territories that were seized - also by force - from their Native American inhabitants."[8]

The incremental displacement of Cherokee communities and the development of an economy based on the use of captive labor were parts of the interconnected web of economic pressures and motivations that formed the social fabric of American settlers in Buncombe County. Despite the barrage of impoverished, isolationist, Appalachian frontiersman imagery, American settlement of the southern mountains and Buncombe County's founding society was both a product of and in service to the ideologies of the new republic.

The economic products of western North Carolina were not the agricultural commodities that were sold in bulk and transported out of the region by ship or train. Southern Appalachia in the antebellum period lacked the infrastructure and the geography to support this type of farming. The local agricultural market remained regional and was participated in by nearly everyone. Farmers grew for their own sustenance and also to make money by filling specific

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[7] Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 1975), Google Play digital book, 7-8. Morgan argues that in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War, American Rebels "recognized the apparent contradiction between their proclamations of equality and liberty and their continuing possession of slaves," however, "the growth of freedom experienced in the American Revolution, depended [on] enslavement." Morgan links the emergence of republican freedom ideology with the formation of white supremacy as a fundamental aspect of early American national identity.

[8] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism,* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), Google Play digital book, xxviii.

market niches. This market strategy required an intimate knowledge of the community and keen awareness of the affairs of neighbors. This thesis argues that the management and control of the enslaved labor force in western North Carolina evolved alongside this regional social context. In this landscape of watchful eyes and intimate neighborly connections, the physical "architecture of racial control" is replaced by social and psychological systems of surveillance and control. Further, walls, watchtowers, and patrols would have impeded economic activities specific to the region. African Americans enslaved in western North Carolina were compelled to labor in mines; build and maintain roads, tunnels and bridges; work in hospitality, animal husbandry, and agriculture, as well as skilled trades and the domestic labor commonly associated with elite households. These endeavors were characterized more by temporary on-site labor camps, and groups of enslaved laborers scattered across their owners' various properties and economic ventures. The ability of the enslaved to travel between work sites was essential to the functioning of the local economy.

This thesis seeks to recognize kinship and social networks among enslaved communities in Buncombe County within the context of the specific slave society that was made in this region. Communities of enslaved people evolved alongside the specific systems of enslavement they were subjected to. Through an intimate understanding of the insular social mechanisms of enslavers, the pressures and motivations that may have shaped enslaved communities come to light. In the regionally specific economy of antebellum Buncombe County, many enslaved people in likely experienced a greater amount of mobility in their daily lives than people enslaved in plantation economies. This mobility brought them into greater contact with people who were enslaved by other captors and potential to reconnect with friends or family enslaved by other families. This increased opportunities for the formation of a subversive community of

enslaved people, the maintenance of an expansive kinship network, and the creation of an active network of communication between sites of enslavement.

Another defining characteristic of this economic culture was the frequency of group investments. Buncombe County enslavers engaged in a perpetually evolving business relationship that was often enhanced by intermarriages. Thus, business and family relationships were not always distinct. The people enslaved in Buncombe County functioned as one type of currency that facilitated these connections and transactions. This network of wealth and power built upon the ownership of human property mirrors the high society of "planter-politicians" that controlled the political landscape of the deep south. However, the system differs in that enslavers in western North Carolina did not have easy access to slave markets. As a result, the slave trade remained largely private and insular, and communities of enslaved people were entangled and enmeshed in the personal relationships and family lineages of their enslavers. The collaborative business ventures, including the private slave trade, and personal relationships increased the scope and power of slaveholding families.[9] As such, Buncombe County elites require a different moniker that speaks to the class solidarity that was built and fortified by the interpersonal qualities of their business relationships. I have coined the term "capitalist fellowship" to describe this dynamic to which Buncombe County elites were beholden in order to buttress their wealth within the economic landscape of the mountain south. Just as the social development, geography, and resources of western North Carolina determined the development of a specific local material economy, so too did the systems for the surveillance and control of the labor force which fueled that economy.

[9] Two examples of powerful enslaving families mentioned in this article intermarrying are: the marriage of James McConnell Smith and Mary "Polly" Patton Smith, William Wallace McDowell and Sarah L. Smith McDowell. There are many more.

Scholarship on Appalachian history can often get stuck in the enticing rut of refuting stereotypes. Stereotypes about Appalachian history are plentiful, and with disciplined scholarship, they are easy to refute. The stereotype that Appalachia was devoid of slavery, or any type of African American history has been effectively refuted by multiple scholars, artists, and public historians.[10] In my research I hope to reach beyond refutation and portray something more relevant. My archival research is focused on uncovering the communities and kinship networks of enslaved residents of Buncombe County and their interrelationship with the elite families and capitalist fellowship that held them in captivity. With this study, I also hope to expand our understanding of how archives can be used to interpret our past. In *Reckoning with Slavery,* Jennifer Morgan expounds upon her own methodological approaches to "archival silences."[11] Some of her methods can be employed in researching the documentation, or lack of documentation, of the enslaved residents of Buncombe County. By following Morgan's lead and putting historical documents from the same time period in conversation with one another, historians can recreate some of the social context from which these documents were born. Archival silences and information gaps can be filled, and historians and the public can engage in a deeper understanding of the historical record. For too long, historic manuscripts, letters, and

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[10] The historiography of Black history in Appalachia is vast and an all inclusive account of scholarly refutation of a racially monolithic Appalachia cannot be accounted for here, but it perhaps began with William Turner and Edward J. Cabell's compilation of essays, *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985). Turner has continued his scholarship with his recent publication of *The Harlan Renaissance: Stories of Black Life in Appalachian Coal Towns,* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2021). John Inscoe has contributed his own literary canon to African american history in southern Appalachia with his books, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), *Appalachians and Race* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), and *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010). This trend has extended to more localized African American histories, such as Cicero M. Fain's *Black Huntington An Appalachian Story* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), collections of oral and community histories, like Victoria Casey McDonald's *Just Over the Hill: Black Appalachians in Jackson County, Western North Carolina* (Cullowhee, N.C.: Western Carolina University, 2012), and Frank X Walker's growing artists movement of "Affrilachian" poets.

[11] Jennifer Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery, Gender Kinship and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic,* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2021), Google Play digital book, 14.

deeds have been accepted as factual documents that record events as they happened. When these documents are contextualized with each other, the information these documents offer extends beyond the words recorded on the page. In western North Carolina, as well as many other regions across the southern United States, the history of slavery has for too long been cast aside as simply "not in the record." By engaging in this research methodology historians have the opportunity to mend some of the systemic inequities that exist in the archives, and to prohibit antiquated value systems and unsophisticated research methods from defining how we see our past and who we see in it.

Chapter 1: The Founding of Buncombe County, Coercive Labor, and Colonial Power

> "The United States are and will be in possession of an immense extent of territory, lying southward of the Lakes, eastward of the Mississippi and westward of the Alleghany [*sic*] mountains. The healthfulness of the climate[,] the goodness of the soil, and the easy terms on which it may be obtained, will all contribute to promote as rapid a settlement …as can be met with in the history of mankind."[12]

At the end of the Revolutionary War, American settlers were eager to establish new polities west of the Appalachian Mountains. The families that settled Buncombe County, both before and after the Revolutionary War, are traditionally depicted in local history sources as "raw, brawny, penniless people…roamers and adventurers…the essence of Scotch-Irishness [*sic*]."[13] The emphasis on Appalachian settlers' European ancestry likens their experience to an earlier generation of colonial pioneers, still culturally attached to their ancestral country. However, many of the founders of Buncombe County were born into families that had been in North America for generations and likely identified more as products of the American experiment rather than its initiators.

The state constitution of North Carolina was ratified in 1789, officially establishing it as one of the United States. In 1791, in response to increasing violence between Indigenous people and encroaching American settlers, the United States government negotiated the Treaty of Holston with the Cherokee people. In this treaty, the Cherokee ceded four-thousand square acres of land to the United States in exchange for annual payments and the promise to protect remaining Cherokee territory.[14] From these four-thousand acres, Buncombe County was formed "by act of the General Assembly of North Carolina … and ratified on January 9, 1792."

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[12] "Providence, Sept 13. Extract of a letter from a gentleman in New Jersey, to his friend in this town, dated August 26, 1783," *The Vermont Journal,* Windsor, VT, page 4, October, 23, 1783.
[13] Dykeman, 42-3.
[14] William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 23-4.

Originally the county encompassed most of the western portion of the state and is known as "Old Buncombe County."[15] Many of Buncombe County's first residents are documented as residents of nearby Burke and Rutherford counties prior to 1792. Several of these founders of Old Buncombe County had colonial American family lineages that can be traced back up to two-hundred years.[16] Despite the Treaty of Holston, this frontier was not uninhabited. Indigenous peoples had at least nominal legal protection from encroaching settlers for the previous two decades. Western North Carolina was settled by European descended Americans in much the same way colonial territories had been before the war, with the use of land speculation and captive labor to build infrastructure and extract natural resources. The settlers who established Buncombe County, North Carolina, were financially literate, socially connected, and born of generations of colonial development.

By the 1780s the practice of enslavement in North America had developed into a distinct wealth building mechanism that served to demarcate class stratifications and supported state-building endeavors in the fledgling nation. As such, slavery was central to the establishment of an elite class and foundational to the economy that was built in Buncombe County. The slave society that developed in southern Appalachia was born of the same colonial construct that gave rise to all other American slave societies and mirrored them in many ways. While it is true that many of Buncombe County's white founders did not own slaves, the most successful of them did, and they readily used their captive property not just for labor, but also as a specialized currency that fortified the longevity of their wealth.[17]

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[15] "Old Buncombe County," Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, accessed December 14, 2022. https://www.obcgs.com/society-2/old-buncombe-county/.

[16] "George Barius Cathey," "Col. Robert Anderson," "Wesley Banks," and "Zachariah Moorman Candler," KL4C-CDP, https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/GM4G-XFF

[17] One example of Buncombe County enslavers using enslaved people as a form of currency appears in the consecutive slave deeds, book 23, page 218 and book 23, page 266, wherein James McConnel Smith purchases three

Colonel John Patton was one wealthy Buncombe County founder who enslaved people as a wealth building practice. He was one of the largest slaveholders in the area, claiming ownership of twenty-two people on the 1810 census.[18] Patton was immediately influential in the formation of the county, presiding over the county's first court session in April of 1792.[19] His descendants would continue to exert their economic and political dominance in the region by intermarrying with other elite families, using their wealth to expand their land holdings, acting as local magistrates, and continuing to hold some of the region's largest communities of enslaved property.[20] John Inscoe describes the aristocratic class that emerged from the United States' expansion into and settlement of the southern mountains as an, "entrepreneurial elite [that] exemplifies that aspect of southern society increasingly recognized by scholars of the Old South – the strong capitalist propensities among its upper classes."[21]

As the fledgling federal and state governments made moves to assert their authority over the new republic, they sanctioned American settlement through the practice of paying Revolutionary War veterans in land grants for property within ceded Cherokee territory. However, most of those grants were for property that was located in present day Tennessee. In North Carolina, an American settler could purchase land obtained in the war against Britain at the rate of two pounds and ten shillings per one hundred acres. Every free, European descended

people, Harriet and her sons Luran and John, for $500 from his son-in-law Jacob Shuford. In the same day, Smith returns Harriet and her sons into Shuford's ownership, along with two others, Quillian and Allen as gifts. Buncombe County Register of Deeds, https://registerofdeeds.buncombecounty.org/External/LandRecords/protected/v4/SrchName.aspx.

[18] "Col.John Patton," Third Census of the United States, 1810, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedule, Washington D.C., accessed December 14, 2022, https://www.familysearch.com.

[19] "Buncombe County Court Minutes, First Session April 1792," Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, accessed December 14, 2022, https://www.obcgs.com/research-resources/buncombe-county-court-minutes/792-2/.

[20] For more about Colonel John Patton and his descendants see "Patton, Col. John," at Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, accessed December 14, 2022, https://www.obcgs.com/patton-col-john/.

[21] John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 7.

American man was entitled to six hundred and fifty acres for himself and one additional hundred acres if he was married, and for each of his children. If he wanted more land than this allotment allows, he could purchase additional acreage at a rate of five pounds per one hundred acres.[22] Most of the one hundred sixty-four people listed on the Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society's website as the "first Families of Old Buncombe" made their first Buncombe County land purchases from the state of North Carolina.[23]

Changes in federal laws during the 1790s encouraged the rapid purchase and speculation of larger stretches of land in Buncombe County. In 1794 the state legislature reduced the price of state land to encourage settlement. By 1798 millions of acres of land had been purchased by speculators under the new stimulus pricing.[24] One such speculator from North Carolina, John Gray Blount, purchased over a million acres in Buncombe County.[25] Blount advertised his land holdings and announced their public sale in newspapers as far away as Halifax, North Carolina near the Atlantic coast.[26]

There is no record of large-scale conflicts between Cherokee communities and American settlers in the southern Appalachians after the Revolutionary War; however, the few records we do have indicates that Cherokee communities in western North Carolina objected to this flurry of land speculation and American settlement in their territory. It is unclear exactly how Samuel Davidson acquired his western North Carolina property, which was in present-day Swannanoa,

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[22] "Historical Note," Speculation Lands Company Collection, D.H. Ramsey Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville 28804.

[23] These records can be searched for and viewed using the Buncombe County Register of Deeds search tool, https://registerofdeeds.buncombecounty.org/External/LandRecords/protected/v4/SrchName.aspx.

[24] "Historical Note," Speculation Lands Company Collection.

[25] "Historical Note," Speculation Lands Company Collection.

[26] "Notice," *The North-Carolina Journal* (Halifax, North Carolina), page 4, November 14, 1796, "For Sale," *The North Carolina Journal,* (Halifax, North Carolina), page 3, October 1, 1798, and "To be Sold," *The North-Carolina Journal* (Halifax, North Carolina), page 4, January 21, 1799.

but the feelings that his Cherokee neighbors had about his presence are clear. His family, who are often touted as the first white settlers of Buncombe County, brought with them an enslaved woman of African descent named Liza. She accompanied her captors over the mountain pass from Old Fort to the Swannanoa Valley in 1784, prior to the Treaty of Holston. After Samuel Davidson was killed by unnamed Cherokee men, who apparently did not consent to this new encroachment, Liza fled with Davidson's widow, Mary, and her infant daughter Ruth through the forest back to Old Fort, where they sought help.[27]

Another insight into setter-Cherokee relations exists in the form of a letter from Buncombe County founder and North Carolina State Commissioner, Captain Daniel Smith to the "Headmen and Warriors of the Cherokee Nation," promising "great presents, goods of all kinds, liquors and provisions plenty," to give to the neighboring Cherokee community when they meet so "that the disputes and quarrels between your people and ours may be settled to the satisfaction of both parties."[28] Whatever hostilities occurred in response to American settlement in Buncombe County were still going on by the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1801, *The Wilmington Gazette* published a letter that was sent to the North Carolina General Assembly along with a petition signed by "a respectable number of the inhabitants of Buncombe County, setting forth the many inconveniences and difficulties they are subject to, in consequence of being the nearest neighbours [*sic*] of the Cherokee Indians."[29] The letter goes on to request a

[27] "Davidson, Samuel," Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, accessed December 14, 2022, https://www.obcgs.com/davidson-samuel/.

[28] "A Copy of a letter to the Warriors of the Cherokees - Dated May 19th 1789 and sent by Capt. Smith and R. Hightower," Box 1, 2005.25 Frances McDowell Papers, Asheville Museum of History, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801.

[29] "The Hon. Gen. Assembly of North Carolina," *The Wilmington Gazette,* Wilmington, N.C., page 4, December 17, 1801.

clearer boundary between Buncombe County residents and the nearby Cherokee community and the assistance of the federal military in enforcing that boundary.[30]

Liza, the woman enslaved by the Davidson family is another telling aspect of the American settlement of western North Carolina. Her presence demonstrates that the practice of enslavement existed in the region from the very beginning of American settlement in Appalachia. Further, in the multiple retellings of this origin story, Liza's presence is unremarkable. Despite the decades of historic literature that assert slaveholding to be an uncommon, and somewhat benign practice in southern Appalachia, Liza is not presented as an outlier to typical practices of Buncombe County's founders. Rather, Liza's presence with the Davidson's and her condition of enslavement is an unremarkable historical reality. In some retellings of this story, Liza's presence is so unremarkable that she doesn't even get named. She is simply referred to as "a slave woman," or she is not referenced at all.[31] If the mountains of western North Carolina truly were "bulwarks against oppression," as one nineteenth century abolitionist falsely reported, Liza's enslavement by the Davidsons would be remembered as unique.[32] However, American settlers in southern Appalachia were born of and connected to other slave societies. The formation of a similar economy in Buncombe County was predictable.

Another implementation of state building in the new republic was the United States census. The first U.S census was taken in 1790 and "required that every household be visited [and] that completed census schedules be posted in 'two of the most public places within [each

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[30] "The Hon. Gen. Assembly of North Carolina."

[31] "Samuel Davidson," Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, refers to Liza as "a slave woman," and "A Brief History of Asheville, NC," accessed June 17, 2022, https://www.exploreasheville.com/iconic-asheville/about-asheville/history/.

[32] James W. Taylor, *Alleghania, A Geographical and Statistical Memoir* (St. Paul Minn.: James Davenport, 1862), 1, as quoted in Inscoe, 4. Taylor's entire quote reads: "Freedom has always loved the air of the mountains. Slavery, like malaria, desolates the low alluvials of the globe. The sky piercing peaks of the continents are bulwarks against oppression: and from mountain valleys has often swept most fearful retribution to tyrants."

jurisdiction], there to remain for the inspection of all concerned.'"[33] While Buncombe County was not yet established at the time of the first census, there were white American settlers and the African descended people they enslaved living in the region.

American settlers in western North Carolina, and the people they enslaved, were listed in the eleventh and twelfth census companies of Burke County and the thirteenth and fourteenth companies of Rutherford County.[34] These sections of the census offer a picture of enslavement practices in western North Carolina prior to the formation of Buncombe County. In *Colonial Complexions*, Sharon Block uses statistical analyses to reframe historical language to further interpret its meaning. Block methodology of shifting archival information out of its originally intended context shows how historians can more accurately and insightfully contextualize historical data. This methodology can be employed with any historical data set, including quantitative data. In the 1790 census there were a total of 15,593 people living in all of Burke and Rutherford Counties. Eighty-four of those people claimed human property, and 1,128 of those people were enslaved. In just the regions of those counties that became Buncombe, there were 1,749 people, thirty-four of whom claimed human property, and seventy-four of whom were enslaved. Using these figures, 4% of the people residing in what would become Buncombe County were enslaved by 2% of the free population. Looking at the whole region, 7% of Burke and Rutherford County residents were enslaved by one half of one percent (0.005) of the total free population. While the population of enslaved people was a smaller proportional figure, a

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[33] "History: 1790 Overview," United States Census Bureau, accessed December 14, 2022, https://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1790.html.

[34] "1790 Burke & Rutherford County Census Records With Qualifying Ancestors," Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, accessed December 14, 2022, https://www.obcgs.com/society-2/ffob/qualifying-ancestors/1790-burke-census-qualifying-ancestors/#:~:text=D%20Even%20though%20Buncombe%20County,enumerated%20in%20the%201790%20Census.

free white person living in what would become Buncombe County was four times more likely to enslave human property, compared to other free residents in western North Carolina.

After Buncombe County was established, it quickly became the economic center of western North Carolina. As the county seat, Asheville (called Morristown between 1791-1793) had the greatest population density of free and enslaved people and was a hub of political and business activity. By some accounts, over half of the residents of Asheville in 1800 were enslaved.[35] The wealth generated by captive labor in Buncombe County can be readily connected to the regional development of physical and economic infrastructure that was used to propel the region into population growth and economic prosperity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historian John Inscoe asserts that "Slavery possessed a far greater economic and political impact on that area and its people, both slaveholders and non-slaveholders, than the numerical proportion of slaves would suggest."[36]

While land was mostly acquired in Buncombe County through speculation rather than land grants from the Revolutionary War, military pensions economically buttressed Buncombe County's elite for generations. Captain Daniel Smith was a resident of Burke County during the Revolutionary War and served the rebel army "from 1776 to the close of the Revolution…principally against the Indians, as Captain of North Carolina Militia, and part of the time under Col. McDowell and General Rutherford."[37] After his death in 1829, his widow Mary

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[35] Chase,14.
[36] Inscoe, 60.
[37] "North Carolina Pension Abstracts of the Revolution; War of 1812 and Indian Wars, Volume 10," compiled by Annie Walker Burns, Box 6183 Apex Station Washington D.C., page 86, Box 1, Item 2, 2005.25 Frances McDowell Papers. In 1776, General Rutherford embarked on a violent campaign against the Cherokee in western North Carolina in an effort to inhibit their ability to fight alongside the British against the rebels in the Revolutionary War. Along with Colones Williamson, of South Carolina, Rutherford destroyed thirty-six Middle and Valley Cherokee towns in a scorched earth campaign. Their combined troops murdered, imprisoned, and enslaved Cherkee people, destroyed agricultural fields, and plundered deerskins and other valuable goods.

collected his military pension, which, in 1848, entitled her to $300 per year.[38] When Mary died in 1852, her adult son, James McConnell Smith applied for, and was approved to be the recipient of his father's military pension, seventy years after Captain Daniel Smith's service.[39]

In addition to government pensions, the heirs of Buncombe County's elite founders inherited a variety of wealth-producing assets, from land, to farm implements, businesses, livestock, enslaved human property, and stock in the toll road that comprised the only thoroughfare for livestock drovers, vacationers, or travelers of any kind through the mountains of western North Carolina. The Buncombe Turnpike connected livestock farmers in southern Kentucky and eastern Tennessee to markets in northern Georgia and South Carolina. The turnpike was narrow and impassable at times due to flooding. "The most difficult, most picturesque, and most challenging," parts of this road were the "seventy-odd miles of the French Broad River canyon," that took the road through Buncombe County, passing through Saluda Gap, Asheville, and Warm Springs, which were major economic centers of western North Carolina.[40]

The Turnpike generated economic activity through stock stands and hotels, which provided overnight accommodations to travelers and livestock drovers. Most inns were owned by Buncombe County families that also had some of the region's largest slave holdings, and used captive labor to provide food, provisions, and services to their guests.[41] Additionally, travelers

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[38] "Certificate of Revolutionary War Pension issued to Mary (Davidson) Smith," issued May 29, 1848, page 99, Box 1, 2005.25 Frances McDowell Papers.

[39] Document, January 27, 1852, page 20, Box 1, 2005.25 Frances McDowell Papers. Among the documentation for the Revolutionary War Pension are letters written by Smith's neighbors on his behalf, attesting to his upstanding citizenry and vouching for his good character. This displays that the generational wealth accumulated by Smith's family was buttressed for at least two generations by the federal government. It also reveals a network of financial camaraderie and class solidarity between elites.

[40] Dykeman, 137-8 , and Michael Hill, "Buncombe Turnpike," NCPedia, 2006, https://www.ncpedia.org/buncombe-turnpike.

[41] David Vance, Samuel Chunn, Robert Deaver, Hezekiah Barnard, James Patton, Thomas Patton, and James Smith all operated stock stands or inns on or near Buncombe Turnpike, and all claimed ownership of enslaved property.

were charged tolls to pass through the mountain counties.[42] Exactly how and who collected the tolls is as yet unclear, however, many Buncombe County elites, like Colonel John Patton, held stock in the turnpike and bequeathed it in their wills. Inheritable stock in the Buncombe turnpike indicates that the road itself was a money-making enterprise that was, in all likelihood, built and repaired by people who were enslaved by the turnpike's stockholders.[43] Wealthy founders of Buncombe County built a society that facilitated and privileged the growth of inheritable wealth. Enslavers in the region were engaged in multiple businesses, public works, and political projects. In addition to their diverse professional portfolios, the men who held the most enslaved property in Buncombe County were engaged in business partnerships with each other, and they regularly "hired out" their enslaved property to one another for bigger collective ventures.[44]As a self-generating inheritable financial asset, people held in bondage were an ideal form of property for these early American statesmen and entrepreneurs.

While there is some evidence of domestic slave traders coming from out of state to sell enslaved people in Buncombe County, western North Carolina was outside the geographic scope of the major routes of the domestic slave trade.[45] Without regular access to slave markets,

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See the Third through the Seventh United States Census', 1810-1850. For more information on the development of a service economy centered around the Buncombe Turnpike, see Katherine Cutshall, "In the Grip of Slavery: The Rise of a Slave Society Surrounding the Establishment of Stock Stands along the Buncombe Turnpike, 1790 to 1855." (thesis: University of North Carolina Asheville, 2015).

[42] Dykeman, 138.

[43] "John Patton Last Will and Testament," April 18, 1827, Vertical Files, Asheville Mu, Asheville Museum of History, North Carolina, 28801. John Patton was a founder of Buncombe County and an elite landowner and enslaver. In his Last Will and Testament he bequeathed each of his heirs stock in the Buncombe Turnpike.

[44] For more information about the practice of hiring out captive labor in Western North Carolina, see Inscoe, 76-81.

[45] In my research, I have not had the opportunity to read every Slave Deed from Buncombe County, but have noted a few where the grantor is from out of state. One example can be found in deed book B, page 130, April Sessions, 1809, Grantor Norman Morrison is in Asheville from Georgia, and sells a woman named Sally to John Merritt of Buncombe County for $340; Joshua D. Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain,* (New York: Basic Books, 2021). In his research on the domestic slave trade Rothman maps the major routes of domestic slave traders to begin in the port cities of Virginia and Maryland, following the major rivers inland, through central Appalachia, and south along the western border of Tennessee into the Lower South, and terminating in New Orleans.

western North Carolina developed a thriving intra-communal domestic slave trade. When the import and export of slaves to America was outlawed in 1808, it likely had very little impact on the commerce of human property in Buncombe County. While the slave trade in Bucombe County was impacted by larger commercial trends, however, it was more often characterized by bequeathals, gifts, and private sales that occurred in people homes, away from the public sphere of the courthouse. As such, enslaved girls and women held particular value in southern Appalachia's culture of enslavement. As in all slave societies, the commodification of enslaved women and girls in the southern mountains was bound to their potential ability to increase their owner's slave holdings. However, travel in and out of the region to acquire enslaved property would have been a time consuming and costly affair, making enslaved women's reproductive capacities even more valuable.[46]

The earliest formal record of the sale of slaves in Buncombe County is from the January court session of 1798. There were three slave transactions recorded that wintry Monday at the courthouse on the Public Square, and they were each between private citizens. This qualifies them not only as domestic trades, but intra-community transactions. In his recent research on the domestic slave trade, Joshua D. Rothman frequently cites the prices of "young, enslaved men" as the "benchmark for the slave trade."[47] This designation is likely born out of the assumption that young men presented the most valuable labor demographic for enslavers, which was true in economies based on agricultural labor. While Buncombe County elites did invest in ventures that required heavy labor, like mining, much of the labor required in Buncombe County's antebellum

[46] In Jennifer Morgan's 2021 scholarship, *Reckoning with Slavery, Gender Kinship and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* she explores the specifically gendered way enslaved women were commercially valued.
[47] Rothman, 88.

economy was domestic labor, which was typically reserved for women and children.[48] None of these first sales in Buncombe County included young men. The first sale was of twenty-two-year-old Jenny and her two young children, six-year-old Rose and eighteen-month-old David. The other two sales were single individuals: Jane, whose age was not recorded, and six-year-old Unity. The deeds for both Jane and Unity specify that they "and their future offspring" will be the property of their purchasers or "their heirs and assigns forever."[49] These early Buncombe County enslavers were adhering to a colonial statute from the seventeenth century that imposed the condition of perpetual servitude on any child born to an enslaved woman.[50] References to Jane and Unity's future offspring may not have been unique to the sale of female slaves in Buncombe County; however the type of labor utilized by enslavers combined with Buncombe County's relative isolation from slave markets, would have increased the value of female slaves in Buncombe County.

James McConnell Smith was a second-generation resident of Buncombe County. He was born in 1787 and is often referred to in local histories as the first white baby born in Buncombe County. He married Polly Patton, a daughter of another Buncombe County founder, Col. John Patton. He inherited wealth from his family, but also made money in land speculation in the 1810s. He opened the Buck Hotel in downtown Asheville, located about a block from the town square.[51] He was the son of a Revolutionary War Veteran who led a local militia against the

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[48] Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," The Black Scholar 3, no. 4 (December 1971): 2-15. In this article, Davis reflects on enslaved women's roles in the performance of domestic labor both under coercion in the service of her enslavers, as well as for the maintenance of her own community.

[49] "Slave Deeds," deed book CMD1, pages 2 and 3, Buncombe County Register of Deeds, https://www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/register-of-deeds/slave-deeds/default.aspx.

[50] Jennifer Morgan, 12.

[51] Terry Taylor, "Standing on One Corner in Asheville, Part One, *HeardTell, Stories from the North Carolina Room at Pack Memorial Library* (blog), Buncombe County Special Collections, October, 2017, https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2017/10/10/standing-on-one-corner-in-asheville-part-one/.

Cherokee, and who later facilitated diplomacy with them as a state commissioner. James M. Smith's life encapsulates the experience of the insular capitalist fellowship that fastened Buncombe County's elite aristocracy into economic and political dominance. In the second codicil to his Last Will and Testament, as he was relegating his inheritable assets to various heirs, presumably in the interest of growing the wealth of his lineage, he is clear and specific about his view of enslaved girls as especially valuable financial assets:

> To be given to each of the children of my deceased daughter Mary Emeline Shuford to be worth four hundred dollars, each must be good and likely negro girls between ten and twelve years old, I make this alteration because of the great fluctuations in the prices of negroes, it being my intention to give them such as will be immediately useful and growing property.[52]

While the growth of a slave society in western North Carolina was a logical outgrowth of American statebuilding and colonial systems, what emerged did not carry with it the hallmarks of other slave societies at the time. Western North Carolina was neither geographically nor infrastructurally suited to a plantation economy, but the choice to own, buy, and sell enslaved property remained a quotidian occurrence. Like James McConnel Smith, and the generation of his forebears, the wealthiest residents of early Buncombe County were equipped with a financial literacy that allowed them to adapt enslaving practices from the status quo, creating unique functions of a local slave society, while still adhering to the values and economic motivations that shaped all slave societies in the American South.

In 1860, Frederick Law Olmsted traveled through the landlocked regions of the American south and published a book detailing his observations of the varying slave societies he encountered. *A Journey in the Back Country,* followed Olmted's 1856 publication of travel

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[52] James McConnell Smith, "Codicil II to the Last Will and Testament of James M. Smith," January 7, 1854. Smith Family Vertical Files, Asheville Museum of History, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801.

writings, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States,* both of which contributed to a growing canon of American abolitionist literature. Olmsted observed that slaveholders in western North Carolina were "chiefly professional men, shop-keepers, and men in office, who are also land owners and give a divided attention to farming."[53] They also owned bridges, restaurants and hotels, and operated liveries. They used the people they enslaved to operate and profit off of all of these endeavors simultaneously.

Due to the nature of capitalist endeavor in Buncombe County, many enslaved people likely experienced a greater amount of movement in their daily lives than people enslaved in plantation economies. In this movement, there were opportunities to meet people who were enslaved by other captors, facilitating communications and the maintenance of kinship ties. Just as systems of enslavement culturally evolved and adapted to environmental factors, so too did the communities of enslaved people that were subjected to them. In his 2009 article, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," Vincent Brown argues:

> Scholars have commonly treated retention of African cultural forms as an index of black agency, which could in turn be cited to prove the retention of basic humanity in an inhuman system. What if instead… we treated agency not as a thing to be discovered or assigned by historians hoping to redeem the humanity of slaves, but as an aspect of existence to be assumed even under conditions of 'bare life'?... The activities of slaves could be more easily understood as having been compelled by the very conditions that slaves have been described as resisting. This would imply a politics of survival, existential struggle transcending resistance against enslavement.[54]

Scholars of slavery and the antebellum era in southern Appalachia have failed to look for and recognize kinship and social networks among enslaved communities. The existence of enslaved people in western North Carolina has been relegated to the periphery of historical social

[53] Frederick Law Olmstead, *A Journey in the Back Country,* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 226.
[54] Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5, (December 2009): 1246.

analysis. Their presence in regional historical literature, when noted at all, is only offered only in support of the authors' interpretation of their enslavers.

Fanny Patton, daughter of J.W. Patton, was a third-generation resident of Buncombe County and member of one of Asheville's most elite families. She was the granddaughter to James Patton, a member of Buncombe County's elite aristocracy in Buncombe County's formative years, and in 1865, she turned turned twenty-two. In the final two years of the Civil War, she kept a diary that chronicles her experience as a young, upper class enslaving woman during the war. As the end of the war comes, her diary entries are dominated by her perspective on the actions of enslaved people around her, who, despite the assertions of some historians, were quite aware that they were on the precipice of emancipation.[55] On April 25, 1865, she referred to John McDowell, as "a man belonging to me who ran away about two years ago…Our men talked to him and he told him [*sic*] that he had been in the [Union] army since he left."[56] This diary entry briefly lifts the curtain on the networks of communication enslaved people had within their own community in southern Appalachia. In 1864, the United States Army was organizing a "Negro Regiment" in Morristown and Knoxville, Tennessee.[57] If this was the faction of the army that John McDowell joined, that communication network went in and out of Buncombe County, and perhaps even across state lines. Whether Fanny Patton's men sought information about John McDowell's whereabouts as a form of surveillance or out of self interest remains unclear, but either way, the people with whom John was enslaved at the Patton household also likely had an interest in his welfare. These avenues of information present a

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[55] Chase, 28. In Chase's depiction of Daintry Allison's grandmother's newly emancipated slaves, they do not fully comprehend freedom, and supposedly even return to their former enslaver years later to give her money they earned working.
[56] Fanny Patton, April 25, 1865, MS 195.1.003, Fanny Patton diaries 1864-65, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801.
[57] "The News," *Asheville News,* page 1, April 21, 1864.

profound insight into enslaved community networks that formed in southern Appalachia and the ways they may have found to leverage themselves against oppression as "natal kinship communities [of enslaved people] overlapped with communities of knowledge that promoted broader empowerment."[58]

The extent and functions of kinship networks among Buncombe County's enslaved residents are likely to remain a subject of speculation. But the records, manuscripts, and deeds of their enslavers show that bequeathals, gifts, and sales of the people they enslaved often remained within their circles of capitalist fellowship. This presents the potential opportunity for the development of a kinship network of enslaved people that can persist through transactions, separations, and possibly generations.

The interconnected web of pressures and motivations that formed the social fabric of early America in Buncombe County was shaped by the incremental removal of Cherokee communities, the use of captive labor, the evolution of insular capitalist fellowship, liberal regulations on the purchase of land from the state, and even the financial stability provided by military pensions. When Buncombe County was established in 1792, it was a function of early American state building and also an extension of colonial societal functions. Behind the barrage of impoverished, isolationist, Appalachian frontiersman imagery, American settlement of the southern mountains and Buncombe County's founding society was an extension of the established, and sophisticated forms of racial and gender supremacy that characterized all early American societies.

[58] James Sweet, "Defying Social Death: The Multiple Configuration of African Slave Family in the Atlantic World," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 70, no. 2, (April 2013), 261.

Chapter 2: Reading the Record: Unpacking the Culture of Enslavement and the Experience of Slavery in Buncombe County

Most of what we know about the history of Buncombe County concerns the heritage, and economic and political endeavors of the county's elite founders. References to the people they enslaved have been used more often to justify their position as enslavers, marginalize the history of slavery in southern Appalachia, or offer evidence to support the myth of "the benevolent master."[59] Shifting the historic lens away from elites and focusing on the experiences of enslaved people can offer a richer, more meaningful perspective on Buncombe County's early development. It is a framing that is unhindered by attempts to conform to Appalachian stereotypes or misguided obligations to deify the founders. However, it is also a history that has been obscured through indirect, or total lack of documentation.

In her recent scholarship on enslaved women who endured the middle passage, Jennifer Morgan addresses the historic erasure that can result by not putting historic records in context with one another. She uses the term "archival silences" to address the meanings we can infer by the absence of information in the record.[60] The concept of archival silence can also be used regarding the historic record of Buncombe County. One method of addressing the archival silence surrounding slavery is putting multiple documents from the antebellum period in conversation with one another. Using this method can fill information gaps and offer the

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[59] Again, see Chase, 28 and 137-8; also see "A Warm Correspondence between Jane McDowell and her son William," transcribed, no date, W.W. McDowell Vertical files, Asheville Museum of History, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801.

[60] Jennifer Morgan, 14. Morgan builds on the previous scholarship of Michel Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, Saidiya Hartman in *Lose Your Mother,* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006), and Marisa Fuentes in *Dispossessed Lives:Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

potential to trace enslaved individuals or their lineage. It also allows for a thorough understanding of the values and expectations that shaped antebellum society in Buncombe County.

Plantation economies and the associated materials or artifacts that accompany them are currently, and have always been to some degree, the way outsiders recognize slave societies. However, these materials and artifacts are primarily evidence of plantation economies, in which slavery is implicit. In his 1862 publication about the state of slavery in the mountain south, James Wickes Taylor said, "Freedom has always loved the air of the mountains. Slavery, like malaria, desolates the low alluvials of the globe. The sky piercing peaks of the continents are bulwarks against oppression: and from mountain valleys has often swept most fearful retribution to tyrants."[61] In the absence of a workhouse, watch towers, or slave patrols Taylor was unable to recognize the slave society of Appalachia. In his essay, "Slavery and Antislavery in Appalachia" Richard B. Drake interrogates sweeping generalizations of Appalachians as abolitionists. He identifies increasing political tensions between pro-slavery and abolitionist factions in nineteenth century Appalachia. Drake also notes the dramatic increase in enslaved human property in western North Carolina counties through the first several decades of the nineteenth century and connects this growth in enslaved property to the increasing politicization of slave holding through the 1850s. Further, census data shows that the population of both enslaved people and enslavers in Buncombe County grew between 1850 and 1860.[62]

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[61] James W. Taylor, *Alleghania, A Geographical and Statistical Memoir* (St. Paul Minn.: James Davenport, 1862), 1, as quoted in John C. Inscoe, *Mountain Masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 4.
[62] Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States, 1850 and 1860, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com.

While there has been much scholarship on slavery in the southern Appalachians in recent years, there are still contemporary cultural vestiges of early depictions that saw American communities in Appalachia as groups of independent yeoman farmers because they equated slave societies with plantation economies. Because people like Liza, the first documented enslaved person in Buncombe County, were not working in the production of agricultural commodities, their enslavement has been deemed less significant, and their exploitation less central to the societal standards and values held by American settlers in western North Carolina.

The slave society that did develop in Buncombe County was a reflection of the first white settlers' political and economic ambitions, their connections to the rest of the south, and the political and economic pursuits that were most accessible to them. Similar to all southerners who held enslaved property, Buncombe County enslavers, "worked hard at their jobs…and they wheeled and dealed like expectant capitalists in a credit-fueled, free-enterprise, profit-oriented economy."[63] According to historian John Inscoe:

> Simply because landholding and agricultural production were not viable options for accruing wealth, almost all of the most affluent mountain residents were merchants, hotel or resort owners, land speculators, manufacturers, bankers, lawyers, doctors, or some combination thereof…they were active promoters of their region's economic development and participated in trade networks that reached well beyond their own highland region.[64]

This depicts an image of a diversified and dynamic economy that was not as culturally isolated as many portrayals of southern Appalachia contend. Much like their plantation owning contemporaries, elites in Buncombe County used enslavement as a wealth generating practice and adapted enslaving practices to suit their wealth building ventures.

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[63] Nash Boney, *Southerners All,* (Macon, GE: Mercer University Press, 1990) as quoted in Inscoe, 7.
[64] Inscoe, 8.

Edward E. Baptist's scholarship on slavery and American capitalism highlights the ability of slave societies to adapt to modernizing economies, refuting the notion that American slaveholders were stagnant in an antiquated economic system:

> The first [wrong] assumption is that, as an economic system…American slavery was fundamentally different from the rest of the modern economy…This perspective implies not only that slavery didn't change, but that slavery and enslaved African Americans had little long-term influence on the United States during the nineteenth century.[65]

There were also direct connections between enslaving families in Buncombe County and the not-too-distant active slave marketplace in Charleston. In 1839 J.W. Patton, a member of Buncombe County's enslaving elite, and owner of the Eagle Hotel, married Henrietta Kerr. Henrietta was born into a wealthy enslaving family in Charleston, and Patton regularly stayed with her family when he traveled to Charleston to conduct business.[66] While a definitive record has yet to be found, historians would be remiss not to consider the possibility of connections between Buncombe County's slave trade and the active slave economy in Charleston through the Patton-Kerr family.

While Asheville and Buncombe County may have had social and financial ties to the slave markets in Charleston, the local trade in enslaved property remained insular. This presents more layers of obscurity to the information available in the public record regarding enslaved residents of Buncombe County. However, archival inadequacies can be overcome with "an attentive archival practice."[67] For example, with an informed reading, the Slave Schedule in the United States census can offer more than meets the eye. The Slave Schedule functions as an

[65] Baptist, xxv.
[66] James W. Patton Papers #01739, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
[67] Jennifer Morgan, 32.

account of human property, not to record the individual lives of enslaved people, and thus information about each individual is limited to their age, sex, and their race as it would have been perceived by the census taker. In the context of a plantation, one can deduce with reasonable accuracy that the enslaved people enumerated resided on the plantation property. If you know about the specific plantation, inferences can be made about the work they may have performed according to the age and gender recorded. Because elites in western North Carolina used slave labor for multiple ventures at locations across the region, the Slave Schedule is not a definitive account of where enslaved people in southern Appalachia lived or worked, or the work they performed. However, this does not render the Slave Schedule useless. It remains useful for interpreting information about individuals by corroborating the age and gender of people recorded in manuscripts and other records, and Slave Schedules can be used for extracting statistical information. For example, by comparing the quantity of people documented between 1850 and 1860, we can see that the enslaved population of Buncombe County grew from 1,717 in 1850 to 2,262 in 1860.[68]

Further inferences can be made when considering the method by which the census was enumerated in this time period, which was by foot or on horseback. This implies a spatial relationship in the order of entries. In 1850 James McConnell Smith of Asheville claimed ownership of sixty-six people on the Slave Schedule. The first eighteen entries are all males between sixty-six and eight years old, and they are listed in order from oldest to youngest. Entries nineteen through sixty-six, however, are a mixture of men, women and children listed in

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[68] Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States, 1850 and 1860, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com. These numbers were derived from counting the individual entries of enslaved people on the Slave Schedules however, Buncombe County Special Collections asserts the enslaved population of Buncombe County in 1860 was 1,907, https://specialcollections.buncombecounty.org/2017/08/30/some-notes-on-slavery-in-asheville-and-buncombe-county/#:~:text=But%20first%2C%20HOW%20MANY%20SLAVES,slaves%20and%20283%20slave%20owners.

no discernable order.[69] The first half of the list appears to be a counting of enslaved people that were not present and whose information was relayed to the census taker in this organized fashion - perhaps a list. These men and boys may have been working in mines or on roads, or perhaps Smith had leased them out to a business partner.[70] The disorganization of the second half of the entry suggests that these people were listed as they were counted, likely in the housing where they lived. Smith lived in a brick mansion surrounded by farmland just south of downtown Asheville.[71] He also famously ran the Buck Hotel near the city center, a competitor with the Eagle Hotel that accommodated wealthy South Carolina planters on vacation as well as livestock drovers passing through on their way to market.[72] Fourteen of the forty-seven people listed in the second half of James McConnel Smith's slave holdings were babies and children under five who were too young to work, and were likely cared for by at least a few of the adults and older children. There are young children dispersed throughout the list, but notably there is a cluster of ten young children and babies under the age of one listed very close to one another. No babies under the age of one are listed anywhere else, which suggests that some of the enslaved adults were caregivers and wetnurses for children who could not be with their mothers because they were either too young, they were orphans, or the type of labor their mother did not allow for the presence of children.

[69] "Jas M. Smith," Eighth Census of the United States, 1850, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com.

[70] James M. Smith, "Letter from James McConnell Smith to Mr. D. [Jarret]," September 6, 1848, Smith Family Vertical Files. In this letter Smith references coordinating travel and housing for enslaved people from multiple estates to work in a local mine, including the estate of J. Hardy, Edward [Alec?], and Mr. Beamon.

[71] In 1840 James McConnel Smith had a secondary home built called the Buck House. It was in an area called Victoria, which is presently near Mission Hospital and AB Tech campus, just south of downtown Asheville. It is presently the oldest known building in Asheville, North Carolina.

[72] Rob Neufeld, "Portrait of the Past: Asheville's Buck Hotel, 1890," *Asheville Citizen Times,* February 15, 2016, https://www.citizen-times.com/story/life/2016/02/25/portrait-past-ashevilles-buck-hotel/80919128/.

Another available public record of enslaved people are deeds of sale. Buncombe County Register of Deeds has preserved and digitized 321 slave deeds that span sixty-five years between 1798 and 1863 and record the sales of 684 enslaved people between 284 grantors and 295 grantees.[73] These deeds include more qualitative information than the Slave Schedule, such as the names of the people being sold, sometimes their age, and sometimes maternal relationships in the case of women being sold with their children. There are also the names of the grantors and grantees as well as how much money was paid. But enslavers exchanged enslaved people in a variety of ways that were not recorded in the public deeds. They were inherited, sold along with household goods and livestock at estate auctions, and given away as gifts.

The prevalence of insular networks for the exchange of enslaved people can be deduced by comparing the Slave Schedule and the slave deeds of three Buncombe County elites who had some of the region's largest holdings of enslaved property. In 1850, W. W. McDowell listed eleven people on the Buncombe County Slave Schedule. In 1860 he listed forty people, twelve of whom were under the age of ten, meaning it is possible they were born into his ownership.[74] At minimum he bought or otherwise acquired seventeen enslaved people in that time period, however his name only appears once in the deed records. The deeds show that he sold two boys, Sandy and John, aged ten and twelve to J.W. Patton for $1275 on April 23rd of 1853.[75] J.W. Patton, however, appears in the deeds much more frequently. The deeds record his purchase of

[73] "Slave Deeds," Buncombe County Register of Deeds, https://www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/register-of-deeds/slave-deeds/default.aspx.
[74] "W.W. McDowell" Seventh and Eighth Census of the United States, 1850 and 1860, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com.
[75] Buncombe County Register of Deeds, book 25, page 120, https://registerofdeeds.buncombecounty.org/External/LandRecords/protected/v4/SrchName.aspx.

nineteen people before 1850.[76] On the Slave Schedule from 1850, James W. Patton lists fifty-three people, meaning he acquired thirty-four enslaved people by other means. By 1860, James W. Patton claimed ownership of seventy-eight people, eleven of whom were young enough to have been born into that community. The deeds record his purchase of only three enslaved individuals, which does not account for the minimum of eleven people who otherwise came into his possession. The deeds only show Nicholas W. Woodfin's name one time, in the purchase and immediate sale of twenty-four-year-old Caroline, from a man named Andrew McDowell, to a man named James Luske in April of 1849. These subsequent transactions are likely a record of Woodfin fronting the four hundred dollars to Luske for Caroline's purchase.[77] Woodfin listed fifty people on the 1850 Slave Schedule. By 1860 he had more than doubled his slave holdings to one hundred twenty-two. Fifty-five of those people were young enough to have been born into the community of people he enslaved, meaning he acquired at least seventeen people in this time period. All of the people Nicholas W. Woodfin enslaved were acquired through private transactions.

One influential social construct that was nearly ubiquitous in all enslaved communities in the United States was the lack of formal patrilineal recognition for enslaved people.[78] Indeed, the private and public documents that recorded the individuals enslaved in Buncombe County adhered to this convention. In her article "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," Hortense Spillers

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[76] Deed book 16, pages 138, 160, 443, 426; book 17, pages 74, 151, 214; book 21, page 473; book 22, pages 37, 109; book 23, pages 260, 337, Buncombe County Register of Deeds, https://www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/register-of-deeds/slave-deeds/default.aspx.

[77] Deed book 24, page 344, Buncombe County Register of Deeds, https://www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/register-of-deeds/slave-deeds/default.aspx.

[78] In Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacretics*, 17, no. 2 (1987), she interrogates the social implications of failing to recognize patrilineage in a patriarchal society. She accurately identifies that "'Motherhood' is not perceived in the prevailing social climate as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance." She extrapolates that this denial of patrilineage socially fortifies the chasm between the condition of enslavement and the condition of citizenship.

asserts that this construct in the culture of enslavement also establishes "A dual fatherhood…comprised of the African father's banished name and body and the captor father's mocking presence."[79] Her analysis offers perspective on the way Buncombe County's enslaving men wrote about and thought about the people they enslaved, and the expectations they may have had regarding their relationships with their bondspeople.

In 1853, Nicholas W. Woodfin sent Albert McDowell, a man he enslaved, to Jamestown, in Tuolumne County California to mine for gold. Their correspondence shows the inner-workings of an oppressive power relationship. Albert McDowell's letters to Woodfin have a decidedly humble, subservient, and even emotional tone. "The thought of retrieving home brings to my memory the sad recollection of our very kind and much beloved master Samuel in whom all had a friend… and hope that [we] may all act in such a manner, on earth as that we may be able to meet with him in that celestial clime." [80] This style of writing stands out as very different from the letters elite men wrote to each other. "Let me know if Mr. Bamon has gone up with his mule after they have got…the mill fixed and the shaft sunk… I think it is all important that we shold [*sic*] meet at the mine and come on some general understanding so that we will know how to keep the [account]...We are all in good health and your daughter is in good health."[81] Both of these letters are in their essence business related correspondence between men, and they both reference personal the affections of their recipients, however the tone of the second letter is primarily logistical. The quantity of sentimental content in Albert McDowell's letters evokes

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[79] Spillers, 80.

[80] Albert McDowell, "My Affectionate Masters," Jamestown, California July 13, 1854, in the Nicholas Washington Woodfin Papers #1689, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

[81] James McConnell Smith,"Letter from James McConnell Smith to Mr. D [Jarret]."

questions, and perhaps provides insight into the interpersonal dynamics between enslaved people and their captors.

The most obvious question is how did Albert McDowell benefit from this kind of relationship with his enslaver? The power dynamic and relationship of servitude between Woodfin and Albert is apparent. Perhaps Albert is appealing to Woodfin's authority by constantly positing himself as servile and mawkish in an effort to reassure Woodfin of his control, even at a distance. Unfortunately, the letters that were preserved do not include any letters to Albert, which elicits the question of whether or not Woodfin ever wrote to him, or if the correspondence was entirely one sided. In each of Alberts letters, he also asks Woodfin to relay his affections to other enslaved friends and family members. Albert, who had been temporarily, but non-consensually separated from his kinship network was relying on his enslaver to convey his feelings to, and perhaps garner news about his wife, children, and others. Nicholas Woodfin, who had wedged himself in the middle of Alberts kinship network, held the threads of Albert's most intimate relationships tenuously in his hands. Appealing to his captor's authority was not likely to be a genuine expression of Alberts feelings, but it was an expression necessary to the survival of his family ties.

The frequency with which insular, and sometimes familial economic partnerships were used in domestic slave trading among Buncombe County's elites sculpted the spatial, psychological, and social web of Buncombe County's enslaved population. The private manuscripts of elite families and individuals fill some of the voids in what the public record has documented regarding the communities, relationships, and psychosocial experience of enslaved people in Buncombe County. Many of these records have been well preserved over the years and have traditionally been used by public and local historians to track genealogical information

about elite families. They have also been decontextualized from even a regional scope of connections and associations. The vertical files located in the Asheville Museum of History contain a variety of documents, including multiple xeroxed copies of materials that have been previously used by the museum (formerly Western North Carolina Historical Association) as educational or otherwise prepared for public consumption. One such xerox, located in the William Wallis McDowell files, contains a transcribed excerpt from a letter sent to W. W. McDowell, supposedly from his mother in present day McDowell County. In the letter she writes, "You wright [*sic*] me that you want me to put a Price on boy Jim my Sone [*sic*] I don't know what to Say if I had the whare wit [*sic*] I would not part with him at no price…you may have him for seven hundred."[82] Whoever transcribed this excerpt goes on to suppose, "[W.W. McDowell's mother], expresses her reluctance to part with her slave servant Jim despite mounting debts…Nicholas Woodfn offered [her] $1,000 for Jim, and her offer of $700 to her son was a way to keep him in the family."[83] This interpretation shows an outdated understanding of the function of American slavery. Additionally, it aligns directly with the value systems of mid-nineteenth-century advocates for perpetuating American slavery amid a global trend towards emancipation. According to Edward E. Baptist, "By the 1850s [pro slavery writers] … agreed that enslavers were first and foremost not profit seekers. For them planters were caring masters who considered their slaves to be inferior family members."[84]

A counter interpretation might see that W.W. McDowell's mother was willing to sell Jim to her son for less than what Nicholas Woodfin had offered her because she had an interest in preserving her family's long-term wealth. If Jim remained within her family his labor would

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[82] "Letter from Jane McDowell to her son William W. McDowell," (transcribed) no date, W.W. McDowell Vertical files, Asheville Museum of History, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801.
[83] "A Warm Correspondence between Jane McDowell and her son William."
[84] Baptist, xxiii.

continue to benefit her lineage, and ultimately create profit for her grandchildren. Unfortunately, the issues with this interpretation extend beyond the ill-informed tone. The unnamed transcriber identified the letter as "A warm correspondence between Jane McDowell and her son William." However, William Wallis Mcdowell's mother was named Margaret Caroline Erwin McDowell, and she died when W.W. McDowell was just eight years old.[85] There is no record of his father remarrying after her death, and no record of anyone by the name of Jane living in his household. W.W. McDowell's father is named James Moffett McDowell. Could this be a case of the transcriber misreading the name? Without more information it is impossible to say. The transcriber did not include a date for the letter or note the repository where the letter can be read in its entirety. Instead, this transcription and interpretation fulfills all the negative stereotypes about local historians. They reproduced potentially false, and unverifiable information about the McDowell family. Their interpretations about the letters' content relies on misinterpretation about Appalachian enslavers as fundamentally unique and they used benevolent master tropes to characterize the McDowell family as "good" by present day standards.

The rest of the letter offered in the transcribed excerpt should have given the transcriber pause. After agreeing to sell Jim, the letter's author goes on to say: "I want the bank and Whitson payed [*sic*] and the Ballance [*sic*]…in Sutch [*sic*] things as I stand in need of…sugar and coffee…and perhaps a little money to pay my taxes ocationly [*sic*]…" [86] This shows an unexpected level of financial agency for a woman in the early to mid-nineteenth-century. During

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[85] Robert M. Topkins, "McDowell, William Wallis," 1991, NCPedia, https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/mcdowell-william-wallis.
[86] "A Warm Correspondence between Jane McDowell and her son William."

this time coverture laws were still commonly practiced, which forbade married women from owning property or making financial choices outside her marriage.[87]

White women in Buncombe County did, however, claim ownership of enslaved human property. On the 1850 Slave Schedule for Buncombe County, there are nineteen women who are listed as slave owners. Most of these women enslaved one person, but three of them claimed ownership of eleven people. At least six of these women were married as well, identifying themselves as "Mrs."[88] In her scholarship on how elite white women were able to subvert coverture to maintain ownership of enslaved property after marriage, Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers argues that coverture "compelled [women slave owners] to take extra steps to secure their separate ownership and management of enslaved people, processes that were not required of men."[89] Slave owning women in southern Appalachia, and elsewhere in the south typically came into their ownership of human property via a gift that was bestowed on them by their parents, or a bequeathal upon their parents' death. According to Jones-Rogers, "When human property was transferred to them, these young women came to value the crucial ties between slave ownership and autonomous, stable financial futures…White southern girls grew up alongside the slaves their parents gave them. They cultivated relationships of control and, sometimes, love."[90]

Fanny Patton's description of John McDowell as, "a man belonging to me who ran away about two years ago…Our men talked to him and he told him[*sic*] that he had been in the [Union] army since he left," in her diary suggests that she may have resigned to the fact that he

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[87]"Coverture: The Word You Probably Didn't Know but Should," Women's History Museum website, September 4, 2012, https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/coverture-word-you-probably-dont-know-should.
[88] Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com.
[89] Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), Google Play digital book, 15.
[90] Jones-Rogers, 24-5.

would never return to her, but her assertion of her ownership of him indicates that she had not fully let go of her identity as a slave owner.[91] Fanny Patton had recently turned twenty-two when Union General Stoneman led his troops through Asheville in April of 1865 and she described how many enslaved residents of Asheville responded upon seeing the Union solders: "A great many negro's [*sic*] have left town with the Yankees - crowds of men women & children just gathered up a bundle of clothes and went west with them. None of ours have gone, as we know of yet."[92] In her entry a few weeks later, she recalls how General Stoneman's Troops returned to Asheville two nights after they had marched through town and raided the residents. She goes on to describe how the enslaved people in her home reacted to the meleé, which opens a window into the minds of enslaved Buncombe County residents on the precipice of emancipation. While some enslaved people saw the raid as an opportunity for escape, Margaret and Isam appear to have deemed continued subservience to their enslavers as the less dangerous option:

> All the men and ruffian bands entered each house ransacking them from top to bottom and insulting, cursing and swearing at the helpless women and children and stealing everything of value. Isam came running in to tell us they were in town…what were five helpless women and two negroes (Margaret and Isam who were devoted to us and never left us for a moment) against a dozen armed ruffians![93]

Alternatively, Uncle Joe, Mammy, Eliza, and some others seized the moment to flee from their captors, "Uncle Joe had just brought our dear old carriage… and he and Mammy and some of the other old women and children were going off in it…and Eliza the cook had gone off."[94]

Even our most elusive histories often left their traces in historical records. Looking for and contextualizing these remnants requires diligence, persistence, and creativity that is not

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[91] Fanny Patton, April 25, 1865, MS 195.1.003, Fanny Patton diaries 1864-65, Buncombe County Special Collections, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, North Carolina, 28801.
[92] Fanny Patton, April 25, 1865.
[93] Fanny Patton, May 11, 1865.
[94] Fanny Patton, May 11, 1865.

required to convey the stories that belong to the authors of the archive. But quality historical research is difficult, and even the most apparent stories in the archive are incomplete. The archive's authors were most explicit about the parts of themselves they considered important or interesting. When historians take those stories at face value, they unwittingly agree with the author's biases. By putting archival and public records in conversation with one another, and interrogating the perspectives of their authors, more accurate and more relevant interpretations of our past can be made.

Chapter 3: Capitalist Fellowship and the Shape of Enslaved Communities in Buncombe County

The relationship between all enslaved people and the economy in which they functioned was layered. Not only did they perform the labor that drove local economies, but in the eyes of those that enslaved them, they were living, breathing financial investments. Their very bodies and minds operated as dynamic elements in the pecuniary substratum of American society. However, encapsulating the identities of enslaved people within the confines of their economic function is reductive, and fortifies the vision of slavery held by those who were invested in its continuance. If historians are compelled to understand the ways in which enslaved people's communities took form, they are also compelled to understand that their experience of life was inextricable from their involuntary captivity, the compulsory exploitation of their labor, and their specific use within local economic networks as inheritable investments. The local economy was an intrusive force that had the power to shape an enslaved person's life experience in intimate ways.

The distinctive geography and economy of nineteenth century Buncombe County meant that the reach of enslavers' estates, and their authority was geographically vast, extending far beyond their residences and farms. It also meant that people enslaved in Buncombe County were not concentrated on singular properties, isolated from the rest of society, or people enslaved by other families, rather, they were scattered in groups, performing specialized work around the region. This knowledge helps to facilitate a deep and culturally specific reading of the archival record. In James McConnell Smith's 1850 Last Will and Testament, he divided his estate among his children and their families. Each of his beneficiaries received some combination of investments, such as property, a group of enslaved people, and other assets like livestock or

furniture. The relationships between these groupings of property are often unclear, such as some of the properties he bequeathed to his wife, Polly:

> "I also give and bequeath to my said wife as her absolute property forever, the negro man George (the Shoemaker), his wife Louisa, her child William and future increase, and the girl Caroline, (Lidia's daughter), and her increase together with a good wagon and four horses and mules and harness, her choice of my stock, six cows, to be chosen by her, eight beds and furniture of her choice of all on hand, and provisions suitable for her of the value of eight hundred dollars." [95]

Other groupings of people and property are more transparent, and present some potential insights about how enslaved people were grouped together and distributed among their enslavers' far reaching estate. In the sixth section, Smith wills several of his commercial properties in the city of Asheville to his son, John P. Smith and his sons-in-law, Valentine Ripley and William Wallace McDowell. This inheritance "include[s] my storehouses [and]...the lot on which my new stable stands near the Main street…also an undivided interest in my bridge and Bridge tract on both sides of the French Broad River."[96] Along with these businesses and investments, Smith bequeaths six people, "Miles and Charles (sons of George), Alfred, Swan, Lucy Ann and Tom (the miller)."[97] Due to the shared ownership, the bequeathal of these people appears distinctly attached to the commercial properties. In separate sections of the will, James M. Smith bequeaths other groups of enslaved people to the McDowell and Ripley households via inheritances conveyed to his daughters, along with another group of enslaved people to John P. Smith as part of the Buck House inheritance.[98] Their grouping with the commercial properties suggests that

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[95] James McConnel Smith, "Last Will and Testament," section I, February 9, 1850.
[96] James McConnel Smith, "Last Will and Testament," section I, February 9, 1850.
[97] James McConnel Smith, "Last Will and Testament," section I, February 9, 1850.
[98] James McConnel Smith, "Last Will and Testament," sections V and VIII, February 9, 1850.

Miles, Charles, Alfred, Swan, Lucy Ann, and Tom likely worked in those stables or storehouses and lived nearby.

A letter from James M. Smith in 1848 offers another element of insight into how specific economic endeavors shaped the lives of people enslaved in Buncombe County. The letter is concerning a mine that he has collectively invested in with several of his colleagues. In addition to referencing the numbers of "hands" contributed by each investor to work the mines, he also describes the infrastructure required to commence mining. "And let me know if Mr. Bamon has gone up with his mule after they have got there [*sic*] cabins all up and the mill fixed and the shaft sunk which I am in hopes will be next month then I think it is all important that we shold [*sic*] meet at the mine and come on some general understanding."[99] In this letter Smith is describing the construction of a work camp, where enslaved people from different estates would live together for extended periods of time. This implies that at least some of the people enslaved in the region were in community with one another across the boundaries of estates and ownership. In addition, this letter also shows a degree of familiarity between Buncombe County elites and enslaved people from other estates, and vice versa.

Leisure tourism also proved to be a lucrative investment for Buncombe County enslavers. While the Buncombe Turnpike was mainly used by livestock drovers, it also offered South Carolina planters access to the higher elevations and milder climate of the southern mountains, which evolved into a cycle of seasonal tourism that still exists today.[100] The Eagle Hotel was built by a Scots-Irish immigrant named James Henry Patton, in 1814.[101] By 1823, James Henry Patton, was advertising his hotel accommodations to travelers and vacationers in Charleston

[99] James McConnel Smith, "Letter from James McConnell Smith to Mr. D. [Jarret]."
[100] Richard Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky,* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 1-10.
[101] "Patton Family Online Exhibit," *HeardTell, Stories from the North Carolina Room at Pack Memorial Library* (blog), November 1, 2013. https://packlibraryncroom.com/2013/11/01/patton-family-online-exhibit/.

newspapers. His advertisement is aimed at accommodating "Gentlemen and their families." Patton makes note of his capacity to host families for "a length of time," and offers housing for accompanying slaves at a "proportionable reduction."[102] This early iteration of leisure tourism accommodated wealthy vacationers as well as their enslaved attendants. This presents another potential dimension to the community of enslaved people in Buncombe County. Not only would they have had regular contact with each other, across the lines of ownership, but they also would have come into direct contact with enslaved people from the surrounding region, including metropolitan areas like Charleston, suggesting that the local social network of enslaved people in Buncombe County was connected to other urban centers.

[102] "Buncombe," *Charleston Daily Courier,* June 14, 1823.

BUNCOMBE.

JAMES PATTON, Jun. respectfully informs his friends and the public, that he continues to keep his well known Establishment at the sign of the Eagle, in Ashville, Buncombe county, who is in readiness to receive and attend to those who may call on him. His house is arranged so as to accommodate gentlemen with their families with rooms, suitable and airy for summer. Also, private rooms for those who wish, and rooms for transient travellers; with a new range of stables now putting up, seventy-two by fifty-four feet, with four range of stalls therein, and a stream of water conducted to every part of the establishment, through pipes from the mountain. And convenient to this establishment are some very Chalybeate water, some of which has been used to advantage. He has on hand a general assortment of Goods, Spirits, &c.; Tannery, Saddle, Harness, Boot, and Shoe, Tailor, and Blacksmith's shops, with their proceeds, made suitable for the traveller, all of which will be sold on the lowest possible terms.

His rates for boarding man and horse, seven dollars per week—children and servants a proportionable deduction. Also, a further deduction where a family stays a length of time. His boarding house is a large white framed house, joined by a brick building below, and is in the southern part of the village, 32 miles south of the Warm Springs, and is sufficiently large for the accommodation of one hundred persons. He is authorized to say that Wm. Murray, 13 miles south of Asheville, and Dr. Benjamin Hourth, 1 mile below the Warm Springs, (both good houses,) also hold themselves in readiness to take visiters and travellers to the mountains the ensuing season, and pledge themselves to render every possible satisfaction in their powr, on the most moderate terms the country can afford.

N. B.—The roads across the Saluda and Sevanano Gaps, of the Blue Ridge, are now put in good repair by the States of South and North Carolina.

Asheville, May 27, 1823. [J14 s3]

"Buncombe," *Charleston Daily Courier,* June 14, 1823.

The context of long-term hotel accommodations presents a host of other possibilities. The wording in the advertisement suggests that the accommodations provided for the slaves at the Eagle Hotel were separate from their enslavers. Would they have been housed with the hotel workers? At the very least, enslaved people from out of town likely shared meals with enslaved hotel workers, and almost certainly were able to interact with one another without the supervision of their enslavers. In *Surviving Southampton: African American Women and Resistance in Nat Turner's Community,* Vanessa Holden describes "geographies of evasion and resistance" as "daily movements [that] mapped a resistive geography, evasion, and survival onto

the spaces that whites meant to be sites of surveillance and control."[103] What did the daily movements of enslaved laborers at the Eagle hotel look like, and what sort of social geographies did they map? It is also important to consider who wealthy travelers would have brought with them on their extended vacations in Buncombe County. In addition to porters or drivers, they likely would have brought their closest house servants, who were also probably women. This is important, because as Holden points out, the domestic labor required of enslaved women on plantations, allowed for them to traverse otherwise segregated spaces on plantation properties - from the kitchen to their enslavers home, to the fields where their compatriots worked. "Enslaved women's labor afforded them greater mobility and an important role in building and defining geographies of evasion and resistance" and as such, "women were important conduits of information."[104] The enslaved women, as well as the male porters and drivers, who accompanied their enslaving families on vacation would have been able to pass along news, and their status as important keepers of knowledge and information would have made their presence among the enslaved community in Buncombe County especially important.

After the completion of the Turnpike in 1827, an expanded new era of recreational tourism unfolded in Asheville.[105] J.W. Patton was positioned to profit from the increased influx of travelers and well-to-do vacationers when he inherited the Eagle Hotel from his father. J. W. Patton continued to use captive labor to operate the Eagle Hotel, providing meals, care for horses, blacksmithing, a tannery, and other accommodations for his guests. In an advertisement from 1846, the Eagle Hotel is described as a "large and commodious establishment," that can provide guests with "good servants and hostlers, and well stocked with provisions of all kinds

[103] Vannessa Holden, *Surviving Southampton: African American Women and Resistance in Nat Turner;s Community,* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2021), Google Play digital book , 24-5, 44.
[104] Holden, 24.
[105] Chase, 20.

common in the country. GRAIN AND GOOD DRY LOTS FOR DROVERS, &C."[106] This presents an active and lively scene at the hotel, with laborers employed at a variety of tasks, and likely comprising a large swath of ages, genders, and skills. They were a distinct micro-community of enslaved people within a larger group of laborers enslaved by the Patton family, connected to an even larger network of people enslaved in the region.

The correspondence sent from Albert McDowell to Nicholas Washington Woodfin while he was in California indicates that people enslaved in Buncombe County were regularly compelled to acquiesce to the authority of a community of enslavers. He refers to several men as "Master," including "Master John McDowell," "Master James Woodfin," and "Master Samuel."[107] However, Albert McDowell did not refer to all white men as "Master;" several others are qualified as "Mister," such as "Mr. Fawney," "Mr. Walker," and "Mr. Bettes."[108] These letters contribute to the evidence of familiarity that transcended households between slaveholders and the enslaved. Also, Albert McDowell's choice of honorifics to distinguish the white men that he knew indicates that the class hierarchy among white men was a meaningful discernment for enslaved people. It suggests that Albert McDowell and his compatriots in Buncombe County were attuned to the dynamic complex of class solidarity and personal relationships among the enslaving elites in western North Carolina, and were expected to defer to the surveillance and authority of a community of slave holders.

The system of capitalist fellowship in which Buncombe County enslavers functioned had the capacity to cast a wide net of influence. For enslaved people, this presented the possibility of

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[106] "Notice," *Asheville Messenger,* page 4, July 20, 1846.
[107] Albert McDowell, "My Affectionate Masters."
[108] Albert McDowell to Mr. Chas McDowell, Jamestown, May 15, 1854, in the Nicholas Washington Woodfin Papers #1689, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

being subjected to an informal, yet intimate network of surveillance. In *A Journey in the Back Country,* Olmstead conveyed the sense that enslaved people in the southern mountains enjoyed a degree of latitude and self-direction in their labors. He wrote: "because the slaves being of necessity less closely superintended, and their labor being directed to a greater variety of employments, their habits more resemble those of ordinary free laborers."[109] In *Mountain Masters: Slavery and Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina,* John Inscoe supports Olmstead's analysis by recounting several instances where enslaved people were afforded the ability to travel between work sites, or sent to deliver messages, and even carry money without supervision.[110] However, neither of these men directly considered the social context wherein this purported lack of surveillance occurred. Most Buncombe County enslavers, on average, held less than ten people in bondage at a time and, as indicated by Albert McDowell's letters, maintained a level of familiarity with their friends' and associates' slaves.[111] In plantation societies enslavers used, or attempted to use, isolation of enslaved communities as a tool of control. In Buncombe County, isolation was not an option. Instead, enslavers relied upon the watchful eyes of their peers for surveillance and control. The capitalist fellowship in which these enslavers engaged meant that these men knew each other, and each other's slaves by name. Additionally, the slaves they kept in bondage were kith and kin with their associate's slaves, meaning that any misstep or insubordinate conduct on behalf of one person, could result in consequences that impacted the people they loved. In this environment, the ability of an enslaved person to abscond into

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[109] Olmstead, 227.

[110] Inscoe, 89-90.

[111] Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Buncombe County, Henderson County, and Madison County North Carolina, Population Schedules and Slave Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com. According to these records In Buncombe County 54 of 283 slaveholders owned 10 or more enslaved people. In Henderson County, 38 of 207 slaveholders owned 10 or more enslaved people. In Madison County, 5 of 46 slaveholders owned 10 or more slaves.

anonymity or conspire to revolt is unlikely. When most people you encounter know not only your name, but perhaps also your life story, to whom you belong, and to whom you are related, it presents the possibility of an intimate surveillance that remains invisible to those who are not a part of it.

As a result of the mobility implicit in enslavers' economic practices and the system of bequeathals, personal exchanges, and estate sales that came to characterize the slave trade in western North Carolina, some enslaved people had the ability to create and maintain bonds with each other despite changes in ownership or being forced to relocate. One person's story that exemplifies this possibility is that of Isaac Erwin. Like most enslaved people, Erwin's presence in the archive is inconsistent, and full of many likelihoods and few certainties. Erwin was born around 1835.[112] Mira Erwin Vance, Zebulon Vance's mother, purchased Isaac Erwin when he was nine years old, along with his siblings and his mother Leah.[113] Isaac's father, Sandy Erwin, was owned by Zebulon Vance's uncles.[114] At some unknown time, Zebulon Vance came into the ownership of Isaac Erwin, but not Leah, or Sandy Erwin.[115] During the Civil War, Zebulon's wife, Hattie, relocated from Asheville to Statesville, North Carolina, bringing Isaac, and other people enslaved by the Vance's with her. At the culmination of the war in 1865, Isaac Erwin left

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[112] Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Buncombe County,North Carolina, Population Schedules, Washington, D.C., FamilySearch.com.

[113] "Juneteenth in the Reems Creek Valley, Leah and Sandy Erwin," Constituent Affairs Liaison, NC African American Heritage Commission, audio-tour, https://www.youraudiotour.com/tours/709/stops/3011.

[114] "Juneteenth in the Reems Creek Valley, Leah and Sandy Erwin," In 1866, Sandy and Leah Erwin registered their marriage in the cohabitation records, where they stated they had been married since 1841, Buncombe County Register of Deeds, https://www.buncombecounty.org/governing/depts/register-of-deeds/slave-deeds/cohabitation-records.aspx.

[115] Hattie Vance to Zebulon Vance, March 6th, 1860, and Hattie Vance to Zebulon Vance, June 5th, 1865, "The Papers of Zebulon B. Vance," Vance Birthplace Records. Hattie Vance wrote of a slave named Isaac in two different letters she sent to her husband during the Civil War. According to the 1860 Slave Schedule, Vance owned six slaves, only one of which was an adult male, who he listed as 26 years old in 1860, which aligns with Isaac Erwins birth year of 1835. Isaac Erwin also likely changed his name from Isaac Vance, which offers more evidence that he was enslaved by the Vances.

Statesville and returned to Asheville, where he was recognized by some as Isaac Vance.[116] Once he was back in Asheville, he made sure to identify himself as Isaac Erwin whenever he could, and he was able to reconnect with his parents.[117]

Isaac Erwin's story is compelling for multiple reasons. First, it shows that his parents, Leah and Sandy Erwin, were able to maintain their relationship for over thirty years, despite the fact that they were enslaved in different locations. Sandy may have been hired out at times to Mira Erwin Vance, allowing he and Leah to have more time together, or the Erwin's marriage may have been able to continue due to their proximity, and enough chance encounters. Further, after emancipation, Isaac's choice to traverse over one hundred miles to return to Buncombe County and assert his last name as Erwin shows that he prioritized his family connections, and also believed that he could find his parents after years of separation and the uncertainties of wartime.[118] Erwin's will to reconnect to family is especially clear when considering the proximity of Statesville to Charlotte, where Isaac would likely have had more work opportunities than he had in Asheville.

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[116] Isaac Erwin, property deed book 62, page 524, 1875, Buncombe County Register of Deeds. When cross referenced with two other deeds, that of Joseph McFarland, book 36, page 363, and Isaac Logan, book 45, page 191, the fourteen acres belonging to Isaac Erwin and the fourteen acres belonging to Isaac Vance appear to be the same property.

[117]. Deed book book 62, page 524, Buncombe County Register of Deeds, Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina, Population Schedule, Washington D.C., FamilySearch.com, and Charles McNamee, "List of Members of Shiloh Church," no date, Land Records #53, Biltmore Estate Archives. Isaac Erwin consistently identifies himself under that name on his property deed, on the census, as well as in Shiloh A.M.E. church records. Evidence that Isaac Erwin was able to reconnect with his family comes from the probate records after his death in 1888. His father, Sandy Erwin, is listed as one of the recipients of proceeds after the sale of his fourteen acres, F.A. Sondley, attorney for petitioners, "Emma Erwin and others in parte: proceedings for the sale of infants land," Superior Court Buncombe County, June 15, 1888.

[118] Historian Heather Andrea Williams asserts, "The tenuous nature of enslaved people's public identities did not augur well for the possibility of finding family members…An enslaved person's name could change at the whim of an owner, or due to a sale, or to provide cover while escaping, or because a woman had married, or because people took new names once they became free," in *Help Me to Find my People:m the African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 159.

This history of slavery in Buncombe County is not dramatically different from other, more studied slave societies in the American South. It was, however, different enough from the status quo to go unrecognized and under-recognized for generations. Plenty has been written on the elite founders of Buncombe County, and the legacies of their children and grandchildren. Their lineages and successes are recorded in genealogical societies, local libraries, and weblogs aplenty. Unfortunately, very little of this research has been done in an effort to contextualize the society of western North Carolina within the broader society of the southern United States. By extension, there has been little research into the shape of communities held in bondage within that society. Without the architecture and artifacts of racial control, it can be difficult to move beyond Slave Schedule tabulations and deeds. It is a study that requires an implicit understanding of the depths and intimacies of Buncombe County's enslaving community, an understanding that this paper only begins to unravel. However, it is an understanding that can be built, through continuing to contextualize archival documents with one another, and with the larger regional and national histories. Perhaps it is time for all former slave societies, including Charleston and the deep south, to look beyond the apparent material vestiges of slavery to see what more they can discover about their own past.

Conclusion

Towards the end of the twentieth century and into the early aughts historians of Appalachia shifted their gaze onto the role of slavery and the historic presence of African Americans residing in the southern mountains. Prior to this time historical scholarship of Appalachia focused almost exclusively on the experiences of white, people and the legacies of this racially monolithic lens still distort popular memory. In 1985 William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabell set out to deconstruct this falsehood by creating a compilation of essays titled, *Blacks in Appalachia.* Their scholarship was followed and built upon by several Appalachian historians, including John Inscoe, Gordon B. McKinney, Wilma Dunaway, Richard A. Straw, and Steve Nash. Their work has solidified the presence of African Americans and the prominent role of slavery in southern Appalachia's economic and cultural fabric. Their scholarship, however, remains primarily on the presence and function of the local slave society. Their research does little to contribute to an understanding of the daily lives or the regional culture of enslaved people.

All of the regional economies and cultures that have taken form across the United States are indelibly influenced by the country's imperial origins, the distinctly American form of colonialism that evolved, and the requisite pursuit of capital that accompanies colonialism.[119] Capitalist pursuits are beholden to the landscapes and locations where they exist, and as a mechanism of capitalism, so are slave societies. The slave society that took form in western North Carolina did not leave as large of an impression on the historical record as other, commodity driven slave societies. The daily activities, societal structures, and patterns that

[119] See J. M. Blaut, "Colonialism and the Rise of Capitalism." *Science & Society* 53, no. 3 (1989): 260–96. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40404472.

comprised the social and geographic landscape that was inhabited by people enslaved in the region were only partially recorded, often in the subtext of the archival record. The personal nature of labor, surveillance, and control in Buncombe County means that much of enslaved peoples' experience will remain with them.

This intimate, or perhaps invasive power dynamic relied upon the creation of a specific relationship between the slaving class and the enslaved. This relationship was the means by which enslavers surveilled and controlled their bondspeople, and it extended beyond a single thread that tied an enslaver to the people they enslaved. Each thread was interwoven into a fabric of supremacy and subordination, wherein every kith and kinship among the enslaved was communal knowledge, and there was no possibility for anonymity. Any act of defiance or resistance by an enslaved person carried with it the greater ramifications of potential negative impacts on your parents, on your children, your spouse, and your community.

Scholarship on slave societies and enslaved communities has privileged the agricultural commodity plantation model to dominate how we understand the history of slavery in the United States. When scholars of southern Appalachia rely on the same methodologies, or historical paradigms that have been born of this study, they fail to recognize the local and culturally significant nuances of the regionally specific slave society. By relying on what have become recognized hallmarks of slavery, such as the auction block, or armed patrols, one can easily presume that their absence indicates a void of what they represent. Buncombe County had no auction block, and as Inscoe and Olmstead showed, there was little patrol, but what it did have was a network of enslavers, connected to one another by shared ventures and intermarriages, all working together to build their wealth and power, and keep Buncombe County's enslaved population in bondage. Within this context of capitalist fellowship, enslaved people carved out

the space and seized moments to nurture their connections to one another, express their love and their sorrow, their pleasures and their disappointments, to convey their triumphs and their grievances, and to exist in wholeness.

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