History Vault: Southern Life, Slavery, and the Civil War

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Slavery in Antebellum Southern Industries

Slavery and the Law

Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Law and Order in 19th Century America

Southern Life and African American History, 1775-1915, Plantation Records, Part 1

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Confederate Military Manuscripts and Records of Union Generals and the Union Army

Reconstruction and Military Government after the Civil War

History Vault's collections on Slavery and Southern plantations candidly document the realities of slavery at the most immediate grassroots level in Southern society and provide some of the most revealing documentation in existence on the functioning of the slave system. Digitized ledgers, letters, papers, petitions, photographs, scrapbooks, diaries, judicial documents and other materials illuminate a unique view into this large and momentous chapter in history by documenting the far-reaching impact of slavery on plantations, the American South, and the nation.

Slavery in Antebellum Southern Industries

Slavery in Antebellum Southern Industries presents some of the richest, most valuable, and most complete collections in the entire documentary record of American slavery, focusing on the industrial uses of enslaved labor. Industry never rivaled agriculture as an employer of slave labor in the Old South, but because of the kinds of records industrial enterprises kept a window is opened on the slave's world that no other type of primary documentary evidence affords. The materials selected include company records; business and personal correspondence of industrialists, their managers, financiers, and customers; documents pertaining to the purchase, hire, medical care, and provisioning of enslaved laborers; descriptions of actual production processes; and journals recounting costs and income. Beyond the traditional image of enslaved people as forced laborers for plantations, these manuscript collections document the breadth and diversity of the extensive practice of slave hiring by which enslaved people, particularly those with specialized occupational skills, were contracted to other enslavers or to business owners to work in mines, manufacturing, and other southern industries. These record in these series document economic diversification and speculation among some members of the slave-owning class and depict aspects of the lives of enslaved persons that are comparatively overlooked.

Series A: Selections from the Duke University Library

Series B: Selections from the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Series C: Selections from the Virginia Historical Society

Series D: Selections from the University of Virginia Library

Slavery and the Law

Slavery and the Law features petitions that vividly portray the contrasts, contradictions, ironies and ambiguities of Southern history. Testimonies by a wide range of Southerners — black and white, enslaved and free, male and female — reveal not just what people were saying, but what they were doing. Evidence of complex political, economic, legal and social conditions provide a research framework for exploring the topical, geographical and chronological breadth and penetrating depth of this subject matter.

Drawing on the remarkable candor of the petitioners' statements, testimonies in this collection offer valuable biographical and genealogical details — how enslaved people, as chattel, found themselves sold, conveyed, or distributed as part of their master's estates; and the impact of market forces on the slave family. The guardianship and emancipation petitions present an unusually clear view of the association between whites and free Blacks; and the divorce petitions provide a unique picture of slaveholding white women.

Series I: Petitions to State Legislatures presents important but virtually unused primary source materials that were scattered in state archives of Alabama, Delaware, Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. The collection includes virtually all extant legislative petitions on the subject of race and slavery.

Series II: Petitions to Southern County Courts were collected from local courthouses and candidly document the realities of slavery at the grassroots level. It was at county courthouses where the vast majority of disputes over the institution of slavery were referred. The petitions provide revealing documentation on the functioning of the slave system.


Slavery and the Law

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Petition Analysis Record (PAR)


Slavery, the Slave Trade, and the Law and Order in 19th Century America

This module focuses on two topics: the slave trade in the 18th and 19th centuries and the development of the federal law enforcement apparatus in the 19th Century.

The Slave Trade materials come from two premier repositories for documentation on the slave trade and American slavery: Rhode Island Historical Society and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Rhode Island ports were key junctures of the “notorious triangle,” in which Rhode Island rum was sold for enslaved Africans, who then were sold in the Caribbean for molasses and sugar that were, in turn, sold to the state’s rum distillers. The Rhode Island collections include papers of prominent slave traders as well as records of opposition to the slave trade.

The other major subject in this module is the development of the federal law enforcement apparatus in the 19th century, including issues pertaining to race and slavery. Legal issues documented in this module are the slave trade, runaways, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, rights of free persons of color before 1865, and rights of freedmen and freedwomen during Reconstruction. On the topic of the slave trade, there is documentation on including the Amistad case, the coastwise slave trade and steamboat travel, and the Creole case.

Southern Life and African American History, 1775-1915, Plantation Records, Part 1

Inspiring both romantic imagery and moral outrage, the Southern plantation was at once a farm, business, home, prison, cornerstone of Southern culture, political power base and crucible of African American tradition. The Southern Plantation Records in History Vault document the impact of plantations on the American South and on the nation as a whole. Many planters kept journals, crop books, overseers’ journals and account books in remarkable detail. Family members kept personal diaries and exchanged correspondence with relatives and friends.

Southern Plantation Records illuminate business operations and labor routines, family affairs, roles of women, racial attitudes, relations between enslavers and enslaved people, social and cultural life, shared values, and tensions and anxieties that were inseparable from a slave society. All are revealed with a fullness and candor unmatched by any of the other available sources.

The extensive papers of James Henry Hammond and his family members are a highlight of Part 1. Sourced from the holdings of the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, the Hammond Papers document the life of the firebrand proslavery senator from South Carolina. Hammond’s meticulous business records and sizable correspondence constitute one of the most comprehensive plantation collections in existence.

- The Hollyday Family Papers offers material from the Revolutionary War era. Other collections from the Maryland Historical Society include the Susanna Warfield Diaries and the Martha Forman Diaries.
- Substantial collections from the holdings of the Louisiana State University Libraries document cotton and sugar plantations in Louisiana and the lower Mississippi Valley. One highlight is the David Weeks and Family Collection, which documents the daily rhythms of a sugar plantation.
- The Virginia Historical Society provides important collections. The Tayloe Family collection documents vast land and slave holdings. Many prominent Virginia families are documented in the Northern Neck collections. The Tidewater collections come from families in circumstances ranging from vast wealth and influence to a more hardscrabble existence.
- Rounding out Part 1 are collections from the Louisiana State Museum and Tulane University, such as the Valcour Aime Slave Records, the John McDonogh Papers, and records of the Jones and Colcock families.
The records presented in Part 2 come from the holdings of the University of Virginia and Duke University. Researchers will find many major collections presented in this module from the holdings of the University of Virginia.

- The papers of General John Hartwell Cocke, a protégé of Thomas Jefferson, illuminates the paradox of Enlightenment intellectual energies and slaveholding economic interests. Cocke, who owned three large plantations along the James River, was involved in educational reform for women and tried to extend the benefits of education to the people he enslaved resulting in remarkable correspondence.

- The papers of the Berkeley family are exceptional on land and crop sales, medical accounts of the enslaved, and family and overseers’ correspondence. The diary and letterbooks of Robert “King” Carter, one of the richest Virginians of the early 18th century, enable the study of plantation practices prior to the closing of the transatlantic slave trade.

- The John Ambler Papers include correspondence from overseers as well as documents on sales of the enslaved, runaway enslaved, diet, health, and the workloads of adults and children. The papers of John Jacquelin Ambler and his father-in-law, Philip Pendleton Barbour, reveal details on the discipline on enslaved and the punishment of runaways.

Major collections from the Duke University holdings document plantation life in Alabama, as well as South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

- The Watson collection provides insight into the responsiveness of planters to the cotton market following the Civil War. The Clay papers reveal the experience of women on postbellum plantations. Following the Civil War, Clement Claiborne Clay was imprisoned for his alleged involvement in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The collection contains letters from Virginia Clay to Andrew Johnson attempting to secure her husband’s release.

- Another of the major collections from the Duke holdings is the William Patterson Smith Collection, which documents the grain trade in the Chesapeake region and includes data on prices of slaves, staple crops, farm implements, and consumer products.

- Rounding out the Duke holdings are records from plantations in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia. The South Carolina and Georgia plantation records document the low-country plantations of absentee “rice barons” and upland cotton estates. Topics in the collections on North Carolina and Virginia include the culture and marketing of tobacco over the course of many decades, the lives and labor of enslaved people in the Upper South, and the social life and travel of the planter class.
Southern Life and African American History, 1775-1915, Plantation Records, Part 3

NEW! This module consists of collections selected from the holdings of the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. These collections represent rice, cotton, and sugar plantations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Arkansas.

Standout Collections in this module include:

- The Cameron Family Papers which chart the rise of a plantation family from 1770 to one of the antebellum North Carolina’s wealthiest families and in the process documents women's success in managing large plantations during the men's absences; complicated legal agreements in upper-class marriages; western migration; genealogies of enslaved people; and the material culture of the times.

- The Pettigrew Family Papers which begin in the 18th century and recounts the history of an influential coastal North Carolina family of planters, ministers, intellectuals, military officers, and politicians. The family’s correspondence, spanning four generations, as well as financial and legal documents related to the running of the family’s three plantations throughout the first half of the 19th century.


Southern Life and African American History, 1775-1915, Plantation Records, Part 4

NEW! The fourth installment of Plantation Records in History Vault, focuses on plantations in North Carolina and Virginia while also covering Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama. Major series of records in this module document tobacco and cotton plantations in the Tidewater, Coastal Plains, and Piedmont regions of North Carolina. Throughout these collections, the lives of enslaved people and the work performed by them is documented in extensive lists of enslaved people, purchase of and sale agreements for enslaved people, plantation diaries, account books, correspondence, and financial and legal papers. Many of the series include records of plantation overseers and some include occasional letters from enslaved.

Noteworthy content in this module include:

- The Eliza Penn Hairston family correspondence from 1840-1847 includes a lengthy letter from William Martin to Lyman C. Draper describing General Joseph Martin’s service during the American Revolution.

- Another major series contains records from 32 plantations in the Piedmont area of North Carolina, documenting tobacco and cotton culture. This series includes occasional letters from enslaved people. One of the notable collections in this series is the William Hargrove Papers. In December 1814, William Hargrove received a letter from Camp Peach Orchard with comments on the horrors of the War of 1812, including the high mortality of soldiers due to disease and the poor conditions in camp. The Octavia Wyche Otey diary which spans from 1849-1874 and offers a detailed description of the life of a woman planter in Madison County, Alabama.


This module's handwritten text recognition feature makes these extraordinary records accessible to a wider range of users by allowing students with less practice in reading handwritten documents an opportunity to engage with the Plantation Records.

Ten Dollars Reward.

RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the 29th August, a negro man named SY, about twenty-six years of age, five feet, nine or ten inches high, has a down and silky look when spoken to, very dark complexion, stout made, large and furious eyes, the whites in a remarkable degree inclined to a reddish

Newspaper clipping from 1819 offering a monetary reward for an enslaved person’s return. From Calvin Jones Papers in Plantation Records, Part 4.
Confederate Military Manuscripts and Records of Union Generals and the Union Army

CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title, 2017

More than 150 years after the end of the Civil War, research interest continues to thrive. The collections in this module are being published digitally for the first time in ProQuest History Vault to deliver one-of-a-kind coverage.

- The Confederate Army records consist of Confederate Military Manuscripts sourced by ProQuest from the holdings of Virginia Historical Society; the Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University; the Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; and the University of Virginia.

- The collections provide insights into virtually every facet of life in the Confederacy, from records and papers of high command to evidence of Johnny Reb and his family—the fuel for "new" military history, which studies the social and cultural aspects of the military.

The Confederate Military Manuscripts are highlighted by significant collections of Robert E. Lee Papers from the Virginia Historical Society. Researchers will also find papers of other Confederate officers: Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, Ambrose Powell Hill, J.E.B. Stuart, Jubal A. Early, and John Walter Fairfax, P. G. T. Beauregard, Launcelot Minor Blackford and several more.

This module has other standout collections:

- The William Pitt Ballinger Papers from the University of Texas chronicle the life of a man who initially opposed secession, but once it came, embraced it with passion.

- Materials from Louisiana State University document wartime Louisiana and Mississippi in the army, at home and under Union occupation.

- The collections from University of Virginia in this module document virtually every aspect of the war in Eastern Theater.

Unique and several previously unpublished collections of records of the Union Army are also integral to this module. Highlights include papers of spies, scouts, guides and detectives, including a series on Allan Pinkerton; records on military discipline from courts-martial, courts of inquiry and investigations by military commissions; and records of the U.S. Colored Troops.

- The records on spies and scouts cover troop movements, Indian activity in the West and Midwest, bushwhacking in Missouri; military concerns, such as pay, rations, appointments and commission trials; smuggling of contraband goods; and daily activities of the government officer doing the reporting.

- The records on military discipline cover desertion, discipline, robbery and theft, absence without leave, and violation of Articles of War. Excellent documentation spotlights the daily experiences of soldiers in the Civil War army, the relationship between officers and enlisted men, and interactions between civilians and military personnel.

- The records on Union Generals consist of the papers of Ambrose Burnside, Henry W. Halleck, Don Carlos Buell, and Benjamin F. Butler.

Reconstruction and Military Government after the Civil War

This module offers remarkable insight into the early Reconstruction period with the correspondence of the U.S. Army's Office of Civil Affairs — which reveals efforts to foster democracy and rebuild communities in the divided and war-torn former Confederate states. The files include letters, petitions, court proceedings and internal documents related to elections and the fair administration of the election process. Many letters in the collection call for military intervention to secure the voting rights of African Americans.

Also included in this module are Letters Received by the Attorney General pertaining to law and order in southern states from 1871-1884 and records of the Freedmen's Hospital and the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company.

Collection page for the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company: Letters Received by the Commissioners, 1870-1914, Part 1: Correspondence, Loans and Bank Books, part of the module Reconstruction and Military Government after the Civil War.

Reward notice for the capture of the killer of U.S. Army Captain George Haller, who was killed in June 1869. From Reconstruction and Military Government after the Civil War.
Explore Related History Vault Collections

Since its debut in 2011, ProQuest® History Vault is an unparalleled collection that continues to build over time, covering the full sweep of U.S. History from the American Revolution to the last years of the 20th century. Major content areas covered include not only Southern Life and Slavery, but also Civil Rights and the Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century, Women's Studies, Native American History, American Politics and Society, Military and Diplomatic History, and Workers and Labor Unions.

Civil Rights and the Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century
- NAACP Papers: Board of Directors, Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and National Staff Files
- NAACP Papers: The NAACP’s Major Campaigns—Scottsboro, Anti-Lynching, Criminal Justice, Peonage, Labor, and Segregation and Discrimination Complaints and Responses
- NAACP Papers: Special Subjects
- NAACP Papers: The NAACP’s Major Campaigns: Education, Voting, Housing, Employment, Armed Forces
- NAACP Papers: Branch Department, Branch Files and Youth Department Files
- NAACP Papers: The NAACP’s Major Campaigns—Legal Department Files

Women's Studies
- Women's Studies Manuscript Collections from the Schlesinger Library: Voting Rights, National Politics, Reproductive Rights
- Margaret Sanger Papers
- Struggle for Women's Rights, 1880-1990: Organizational Records
- Women at Work during World War II: Rosie the Riveter and the Women's Army Corps
- Southern Women and their Families in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Cover Images
- John Foster, Confederate soldier from MS. Folder 002536_006_0055.
- Reward notice for the capture of the killer of U.S. Army Captain George Haller, was killed in June 1869 in Milam County, Texas. From Reconstruction and Military Government in the South, 1867-1870, Office of Civil Affairs, Part 4: Fifth Military District (Texas and Louisiana), Folder 104221-008-0243.
- Photograph from Weeks Family Papers. Folder 009351_011_0532.
- Newspaper clipping from 1819 offering a monetary reward for an enslaved person's return. Folder 002439_005_0493.
- Women from the Natchez Garden Club being driven in horse drawn carriage. Folder 009209_013_0750.
- Bill of sale listing enslaved persons' names, ages, complexion, and prices. From the Quitman Family Papers, Folder 002443-005-0506.
- Photograph of child laborers from Butler Family Papers. Folder 002423_024_0711.
- Entry from the 1868 diary of John Houston Bills of Hardeman County, Tennessee. In the entry shown here for November 3, 1868, Bills writes about the turnout for the 1868 election. Folder 002439-016-0262.
- Photograph of women with child from Weeks Family Papers. Folder 009351_011_0532.

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