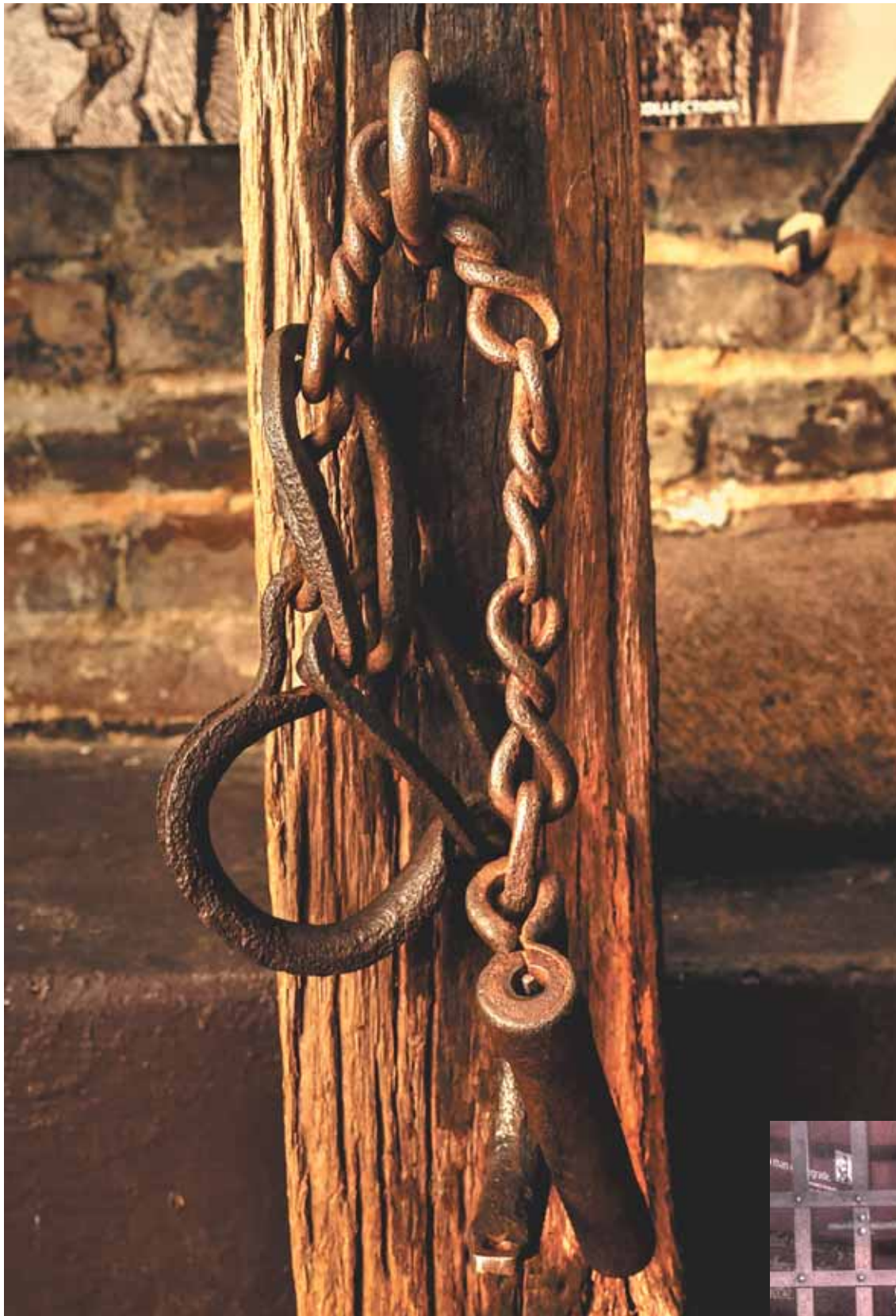


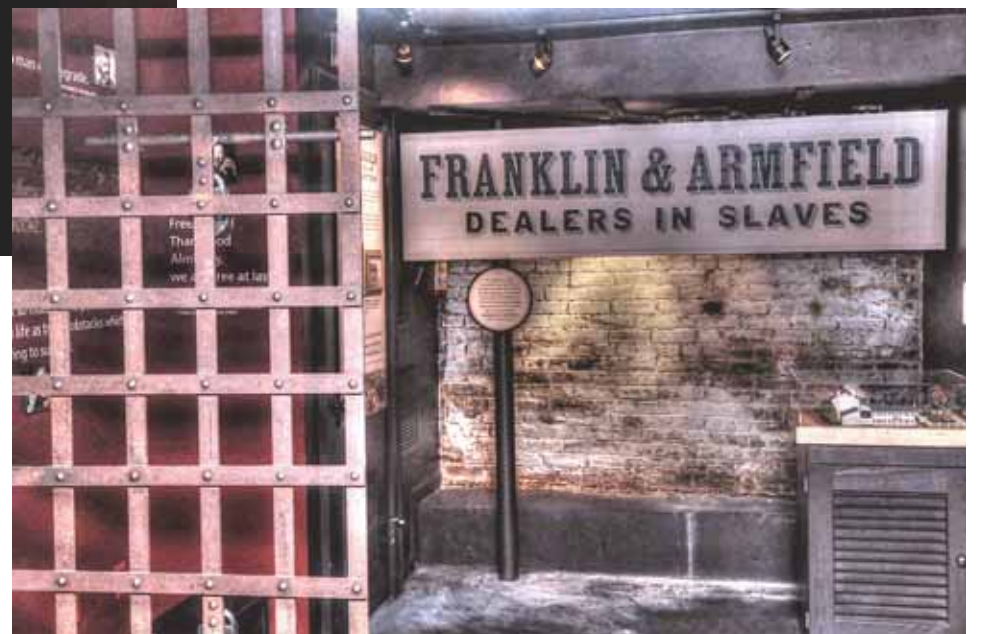
HISTORY

# Alexandria to New Orleans: The Human Tragedy of the Interstate Slave Trade



Alexandria  
**Gazette Packet**

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## Four-Part Series

Published October, 2014 in the Alexandria Gazette Packet. Donald Sweig, who retired in 2002 after more than 27 years as the county historian for Fairfax County, holds a Ph.D. in American history from the College of William and Mary. This article is drawn from his earlier scholarly, statistical analysis of the Alexandria-to-New Orleans slave trade, which was awarded the Charles Thomson Prize by the National Archives of the United States, and The Organization of American Historians, and from his doctoral dissertation "Northern Virginia Slavery." He is an occasional contributor to The Connection Newspapers.



Sweig

# HISTORY

# Alexandria to New Orleans: The Human

BY DONALD M. SWEIG, PH.D.

This is the first article in a four-part series.

On May 17, 1828, the following advertisement appeared in the *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*:

### Cash in Market~

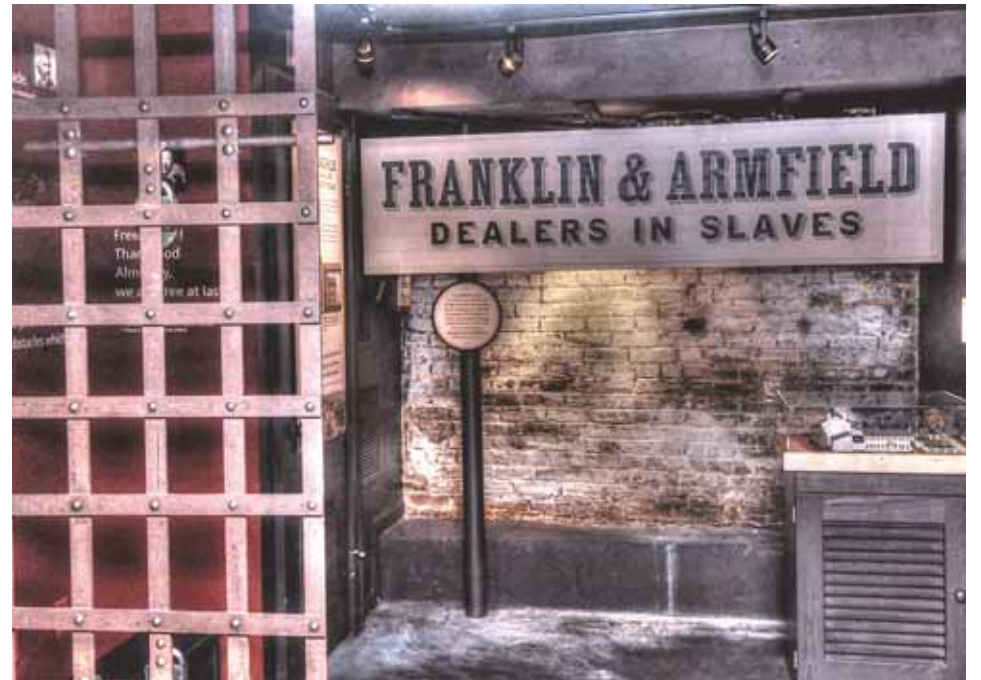
The subscribers having leased for a term of years the large three story brick house on Duke Street, in the town of Alexandria, D.C. formerly occupied by Gen. Young, we wish to purchase one hundred and fifty likely young negroes of both sexes, between the ages of 8 and 25 years. Persons who wish to sell will do well to give us a call, as we are determined to give more than any other purchasers that are in market, or that may hereafter come into market.

Any letters addressed to the subscribers through the Post Office at Alexandria, will be promptly attended to. For information, enquire at the above described house, as we can at all times be found there.



The historical marker outside 1315 Duke St., now the home of the Northern Virginia Urban League Inc.

PHOTOS BY LOUISE KRAFFT/GAZETTE PACKET



A view inside 1315 Duke St. of the Freedom House Museum that was formerly part of the slave pens.

This was neither the first nor the last such notice to appear in Alexandria or Washington newspapers, but it commenced the business operations of the most successful interstate slave-trading operation in the history of the United States. Over the next eight years, John Armfield in Alexandria purchased from local planters and farmers, and shipped to his partner Isaac Franklin at New Orleans at least 5,000 Virginia and Maryland slaves. Franklin and Armfield, as the firm came to be known, were engaged in the transportation and sale of slaves within the United States; in compliance with the law, they did not bring into the country any African or West Indian blacks.

The international slave trade involving all the major nations of Europe as transporters, much of Africa to supply the slaves, and both North and South America and the West Indies as markets for the enslaved blacks had begun in the middle 15th century and continued in Cuba and Brazil until nearly the middle of the 19th century. In all, between 10 and 15 million blacks were forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean. Of this number, fewer than 400,000, barely 4 percent, were imported to all of British North America. Nevertheless, this 400,000 was sufficient to establish racially based slavery in every British North American colony, a situation which persisted in all of the new American states at the time the federal Constitution was adopted. The Constitution, reflecting the needs and desires of Carolina and Georgia, prohibited interference with the importation of slaves by the federal congress until 1808, a period of 20 years. The need for such a prohibition is ample testimony of the inclination of many of the founding fathers to restrict the slave trade at the earliest possible date.

Indeed, George Mason, of Fairfax County, opposed the ratification of the Constitution by Virginia because (among other issues) it allowed this "infamous traffic" to continue for another 20 years. The importation of blacks into the United States barely survived

the 20-year protection provided by the Constitution. On March 2, 1807, Congress prohibited further importation of slaves after Jan. 1, 1808. This same legislation expressly allowed the interstate transportation of slaves providing that duplicate copies of manifests listing slaves transported should be kept and certified by U.S. Customs officials. Thus, Franklin and Armfield operated within the law of the United States.

In fact, this statute, by prohibiting importation of slaves, yet allowing the interstate transportation of slaves, combined with a surplus of slaves on the worn-out tobacco farms of Virginia and Maryland and a need for more slaves to operate the newly developing cotton and sugar plantations of the deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, east Texas), a need which could be supplied in no other way, acted to create the interstate trade which was so profitable for Franklin and Armfield.

Location on the Potomac River, in the heart of a region with many surplus slaves, made the City of Washington and the town of Alexandria an early transfer point for buyers and sellers of enslaved African-Americans. As early as 1802, an Alexandria grand jury had complained of the "Grievance ... of persons coming from distant parts of the United States into this District for the purpose of purchasing slaves." It referred to the "wretchedness and human degradation" of marching black slaves "in our streets ... loaded with chains as though they had committed some heinous offence against our laws." It lamented that "interposition of civil authority cannot be had to prevent parents being wrested from their offspring, and children from their parents, without respect to ties of nature."

IN 1816, vituperative Virginia congressman John Randolph declaimed against this "nefarious traffic" in the House of Representatives and insisted it was not necessary that "this city should be made a depot for

Report and Manifest of the cargo of slaves on board the schooner *La Fayette* of the town of Benjamin, Virginia, at special Master's Auction, 12th of 2nd month from the Port of Alexandria in the District of Columbia for New Orleans in the State of Louisiana

No.	Name of Slave	Height	Age	Complexion	By Whom Shipped	Residence of Shippers	To Whom Consigned	Residence of Consignee
1	Marion Lewis	5' 2"	15	Black	Franklin & Armfield	Alexandria	Isaac Franklin	New Orleans
2	Tom Lewis	5' 4"	20	"	"	"	"	"
3	John Black	5' 10"	20	"	"	"	"	"
4	Stephen Davis	5' 6"	19	"	"	"	"	"
5	John Jackson	5' 4"	18	"	"	"	"	"
6	George Hill	5' 7"	22	"	"	"	"	"
7	Charles Brown	5' 5"	20	"	"	"	"	"
8	Edward Marshall	5' 2"	20	"	"	"	"	"
9	Henry Saunders	5' 6"	22	"	"	"	"	"
10	Edward Price	5' 7"	20	"	"	"	"	"
11	Washington Davis	5' 4"	20	"	"	"	"	"
12	Will Brown	5' 4"	20	"	"	"	"	"
13	Sam Ellis	5' 8"	20	"	"	"	"	"
14	James Phipps	5' 6"	18	"	"	"	"	"
15	Ben Ramsey	5' 4"	20	Black	"	"	"	"
16	William Smith	5' 4"	20	Black	"	"	"	"
17	Thomas England	5' 6"	20	Black	"	"	"	"
18	Henry Thomas	5' 8"	21	Black	"	"	"	"
19	Samuel Long	5' 6"	20	"	"	"	"	"
20	Thomas Brown	5' 4"	18	"	"	"	"	"
21	Richard Adams	5' 4"	17	"	"	"	"	"
22	John Brown	5' 4"	21	Black	"	"	"	"
23	John Brown	5' 4"	16	"	"	"	"	"
24	James Brown	5' 4"	15	"	"	"	"	"
25	John Brown	5' 4"	11	"	"	"	"	"
26	John Brown	5' 4"	11	"	"	"	"	"
27	John Brown	5' 4"	11	"	"	"	"	"
28	John Brown	5' 4"	16	"	"	"	"	"
29	John Brown	5' 4"	19	"	"	"	"	"
30	John Brown	5' 4"	12	"	"	"	"	"
31	John Brown	5' 4"	11	"	"	"	"	"
32	John Brown	5' 4"	16	"	"	"	"	"
33	John Brown	5' 4"	20	Black	"	"	"	"
34	John Brown	5' 4"	20	"	"	"	"	"
35	John Brown	5' 4"	11	"	"	"	"	"
36	John Brown	5' 4"	11	"	"	"	"	"

COLLECTOR'S OFFICE, Alexandria, Va. 1832

from Alexandria, Va. - having received the right belonging to law, Shippers to hereby give to said the cargo and manifest of said schooner, and to certify that it is correct and true.

Isaac Franklin & John Armfield

Shippers

Section of a ship's manifest for a shipment of slaves from John Armfield, in Alexandria, to Isaac Franklin in New Orleans in March, 1832. Each slave was entered on the manifest as to name, height, age, and complexion, as required by federal law.

SOURCE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES

WWW.CONNECTIONNEWSPAPERS.COM

# Tragedy of the Interstate Slave Trade

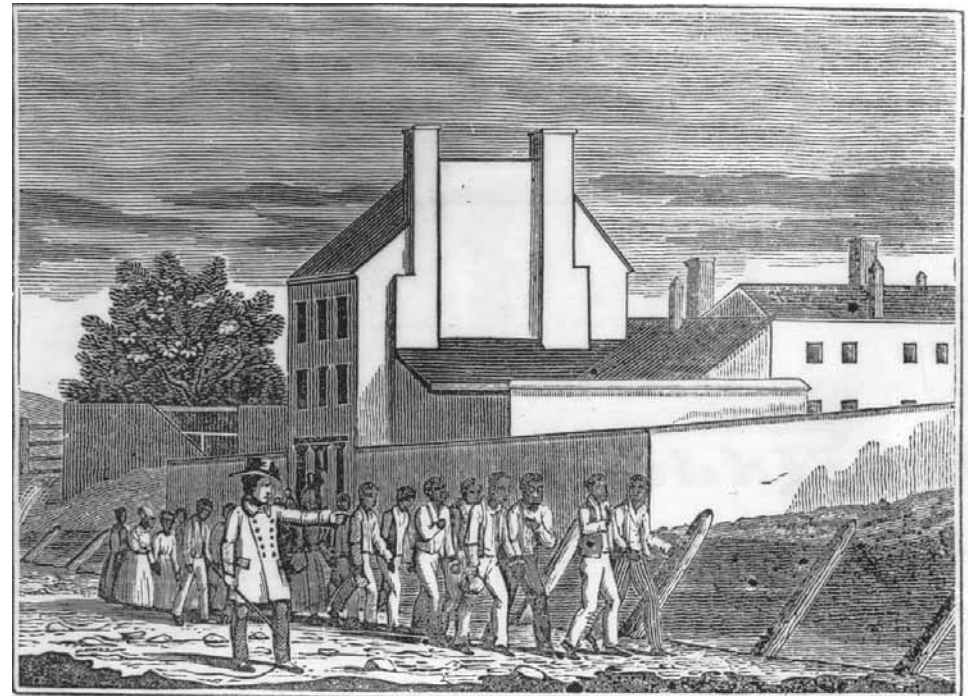
slaves.” Yet the newspapers continued to carry advertisements for the local traders. Samuel J. Dawson, Jesse Bernhard, and Samuel Meek advertised to buy in Georgetown; John W. Smith and E.P. Legg were among those who operated at Alexandria. By the 1830s, James H. Birch, William H. “Yellow House” (from the color of the building where he conducted his business) Williams, and Joseph W. Neal and Company bought slaves in Washington City, as did numerous planters who came to buy for themselves. Alexandria was soon recognized as “the best point from which to start both coastwise shipments and overland coffles.” It became “the place most favored” for beginning such journeys.

Isaac Franklin was operating as a slave trader in Mississippi as early as 1819. In 1824, he met John Armfield driving a stage in

Virginia. Armfield later married Franklin’s niece and, in 1828, the two men formed a partnership to engage in the slave trade. John Armfield, who operated the Alexandria end of the business, was a careful and successful businessman. He, like his partner Franklin, is reputed to have made over half a million dollars (in 19<sup>th</sup>-century value) in the slave trade. How then did this business operate in the City of Alexandria?

John Armfield purchased slaves at the firm’s “establishment” on Duke Street from 1828 until 1836. He not only purchased slaves brought to him by farmers and planters, but had agents or buyers at Richmond and Warrenton in Virginia, and at Baltimore, Frederick, and Easton in Maryland. The majority of the slaves were transported to New Orleans by ship from October through April of each year.

**THE FIRM** initially used whatever ships were available such as



FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD'S SLAVE PRISON.

Detail from a 19th-century broadside protesting the slave trade in Alexandria. Library of Congress.

the Shenandoah of Georgetown and the Ariel and James Monroe of Norfolk, often sharing these ships with other traders. By 1834, they owned four ships of their own; the United States, the Tribune, the Uncas, and the Isaac Franklin, which was built at Baltimore especially for their trade. The ships sailed from Alexandria once a month at first and later once every two weeks. A typical cargo was from fewer than 100 slaves to more than 250, the average being a little less than 200. Once a year, during the summer, they transported slaves by “coffle,” or chain gang, overland to Mississippi.

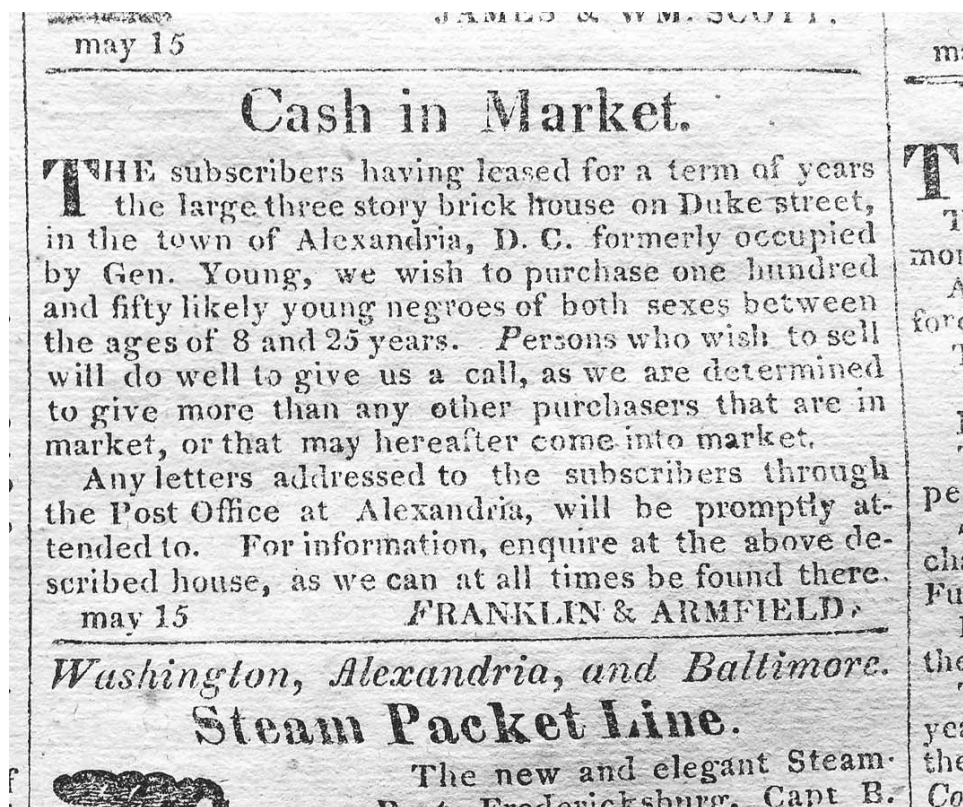
The best descriptions of Franklin and Armfield’s Alexandria “establishment” come from abolitionist writings of the early 1830s. Many abolitionists came to Washington to protest slavery and the slave trade before the Congress, and several of these men came across the river to Alexandria, inspected the slave “prison or jail” on Duke Street, and recorded what they saw. By this time, Franklin and Armfield were at the height of their business.

The Rev. Joshua Leavitt of New York visited the “establishment” in late January 1834. Leavitt had been told that Armfield

“bore the character of a gentleman, of fair character for integrity and openness in his dealings, and one who was ever ready to afford any facilities for redressing whatever abuses might grow out of the nature of his business.” George Drinker, an Alexandria Quaker and abolitionist, confirmed this essentially positive picture of Armfield and added that Armfield was very careful to avoid purchasing or transporting free blacks, and often went “to much trouble and expense ... to keep his business free from every thing that would contravene the laws.”

The following year, 1835, a Boston abolitionist, Professor E. A. Andrews, recorded that Armfield had by his efforts to prevent kidnapping and his honorable mode of dealing “acquired the confidence of all the neighboring country.” In fact, Andrews had been assured that this reputation extended even to the Alexandria slave community, and that when faced with being sold, many Alexandria slaves requested that they “be sold to Mr. Armfield.” Even so, trading in the buying and selling of other human beings was at all times a nasty and disreputable business.

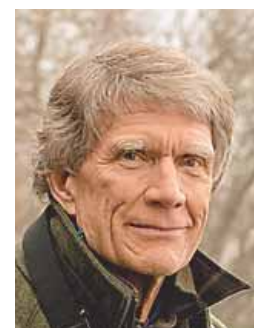
*To be continued in next week's Gazette Packet.*



May 17, 1828, this advertisement appeared in the *Alexandria Phenix Gazette*

## Author

Donald Sweig, who retired in 2002 after more than 27 years as the county historian for Fairfax County, holds a Ph.D. in American history from the College of William and Mary. This article is drawn from his earlier scholarly, statistical analysis of the Alexandria-to-New Orleans slave trade, which was awarded the Charles Thomson Prize by the National Archives of the United States, and The Organization of American Historians, and from his doctoral dissertation “Northern Virginia Slavery.” He is an occasional contributor to *The Connection Newspapers*.



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## HISTORY

# Alexandria to New Orleans The human tragedy of the interstate slave trade.

BY DONALD M. SWEIG, PH.D.

*Continued from last week's Gazette Packet*

**F**ranklin and Armfield's slave-trading "establishment" was located near the outskirts of what was then, in the 1830s, the town of Alexandria. The main building was three stories, handsomely painted, with green blinds. Appended to the main building was a large yard, perhaps 300-foot square, enclosed by a high "close board fence" neatly whitewashed and filled with numerous small buildings. Over the door hung a simple sign: "Franklin and Armfield." Inside the fence was a high brick wall, also whitewashed, with the enclosed courtyard about half covered by a roof.

**PART II** The pavement inside the wall was reported to be clean, with a pump in the center to provide an "ample supply of water." In the roofed area was a large table where the slaves ate from tin plates. The fare was bread and boiled meat which the abolitionist visitors found wholesome in quality and sufficient in quantity. The courtyard was apparently used only for exercise and meals. Otherwise, the men and women were sequestered separately in cellars, the children staying with the women.

The abolitionist visitors also found that the slave men were well clothed with shoes and stockings, which was apparently the Virginia standard. The only raggedly clothed boy was from Maryland. "That's the way they come from Maryland," Armfield said, "you see the difference." The women and girls were also clothed in "coarse but apparently comfortable garments."

In the cellar, both the rooms, which separated the slaves by sex, were provided with fireplaces or stoves for warmth. Next to the yard was a kitchen where the slaves' food was prepared, and a tailor's shop where the slaves' clothing was made. Before embarking for New Orleans, each slave was provided with two entire sets of clothing from the shop. The visiting Boston abolitionist Andrews found the clothing well made of good materials, with the women's wardrobe showing "considerable taste."

In the corner of the yard was a hospital, which in January 1834 contained a sick, old woman, whom Armfield had refused to buy, and a young woman with an infant beside her on a pillow, indicating a recent childbirth. In July 1835 the hospital was empty. Each of the slaves was provided with a blanket which was hung in the sun during the day. Both men also commented on the many iron bars, door grates, and security bolts to be seen everywhere. This was a clear reminder that the blacks were not there by choice, and that the facility was, in fact, a prison.

Most of the slaves appeared to these visitors to be contented. The Rev. Joshua Leavitt could not discover "any indication of dependency or unhappiness;" Andrews reported the slaves "were standing about in groups, some amusing themselves with rude

sports, and others engaged in conversation, which was often interrupted by loud laughter." Several of the women were clutching young children tightly to themselves, as if to prevent any separation.

Leavitt was able to visit the *Tribune*, which was loading at that time in the Alexandria harbor. He was told by Armfield that the firm had purchased its own ships to prevent overcrowding, which resulted in the slaves becoming sick and arriving at the market "in bad order." But Armfield was no humanitarian. It was to his financial interest to have the slaves appear fresh and healthy, and John Armfield was a man who protected his interest carefully.

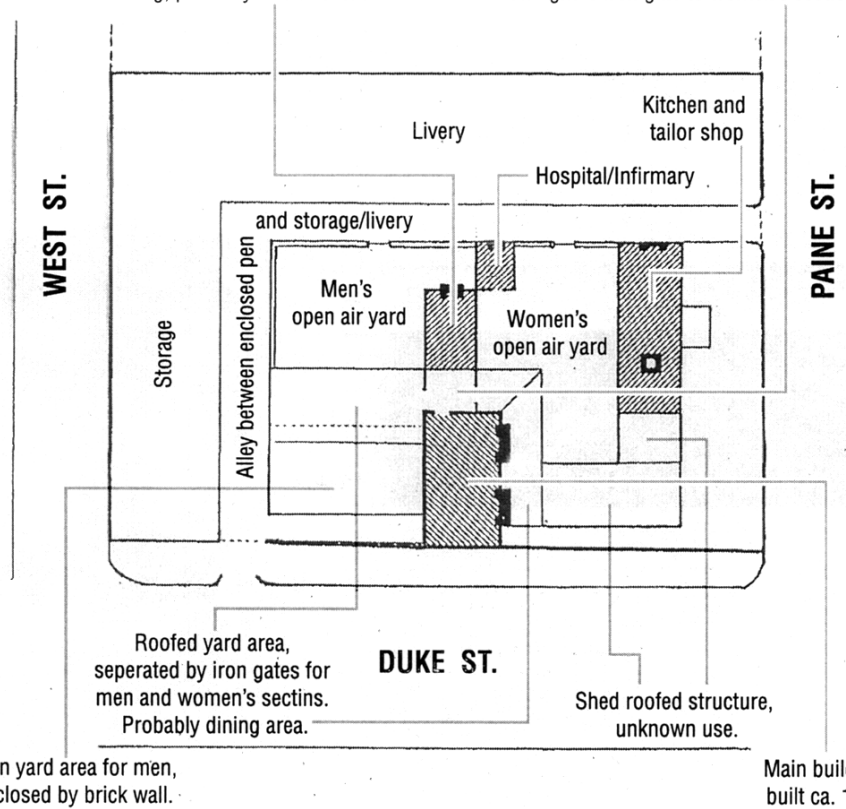
The hold of the *Tribune* was divided into two compartments, one to transport about 80 women and the other about 100 men. "On either side were two platforms, running the whole length, one raised a few inches, and the other about half way up to the deck." On the platforms, which were about 5 1/2 to 6 feet deep, the slaves would lie as closely together as possible.

The captain of the *Tribune* observed that the slaves were not forcibly confined, that he did not even lock his hatchway, but allowed the slaves to come on deck as they pleased, and that he never had the least difficulty with them. Leavitt, a minister, commented that the enslavers should also not "lock down the hatchways upon the mind of the slave, and keep him from a free enjoyment of the light of heavenly truth."

The visit to Alexandria altered Leavitt's view of the trade. While adamantly opposed to slavery in all forms, he refused to condemn Armfield. "The very men who sell him

Outbuilding now part of "ell" to main building; built in 1812 by Gen. Young, probably as a kitchen.

Passageway from main office building. On left is iron gate to men's section. On right is iron gate to women's section.



**Conjectural plan of the Franklin and Armfield "establishment," on Duke Street in Alexandria, ca. 1834. Adapted from original 1980s archaeologist's conjectural plan.**



**Civil War-era photo of Franklin and Armfield Slave Pen. Showing the original 1812 main building (on left, three-stories with the two chimneys), the probable kitchen and tailor shop (low building on right with two chimneys), and some sort of roofed area of unknown use behind the white-washed wall.**

slaves in Alexandria, and those who buy them in New Orleans are respectable," he wrote. "Judge (Bushrod) Washington sold his slaves from Mount Vernon; ... I have met here a minister of the gospel who told me without remorse that he had bought a slave and afterwards sold her. A member of one of our Presbyterian churches," he continued, "sold another member of the same church, to go to New Orleans." Thus, Armfield as a facilitator of the trade should not, in Leavitt's view, be singled out for social censorship. However, whatever Leavitt's opinion was of this respectable trader of human beings, closer analysis of John Armfield's business indicates he was shrewd rather than kind, and that he had his personal profit, not the slaves' well being, uppermost in his mind.

When Franklin and Armfield's ships arrived in New Orleans, they were required to turn in to the Collector of Customs a

manifest, which had been certified by the Customs Collector at Alexandria, listing each slave by name, age, sex, height, and color. The purpose of this manifest, with a detailed description of each slave onboard, was to assure that none of the slaves on the ship were from outside the United States, such as being exchanged for African slaves at sea. A close analysis of more than 3,500 slaves listed on the manifests for 28 shipments from 1828 to 1836 provides a unique insight into just what the trade meant to the African-American slave community from which Armfield drew his supply.

Most of the slaves were young men and women apparently without families. Over 80 percent of the women with children were without apparent husbands, and most of the women appeared to be without husbands or children. Apparently Armfield was willing to purchase women with children, but had few qualms about separating male slaves from wives and family.

Three-quarters of the males and 90 percent of the females were under the age of 25. Nearly half the women were under age 16. This is not surprising, as young single slaves, the so-called "prime field hands," would be easiest to sell and would bring the best prices at New Orleans. How then did Armfield assemble such a large proportion of young, single slaves, especially women?

Andrews had been told that women with children were harder to sell than those without. Analysis of the slaves that Armfield shipped from Alexandria strongly suggests that he regularly separated young women from their children and husbands. The high percentage of single males supports this view that Armfield did separate both men and women from their families in order to procure the young, single individuals who would bring the best price on the New Orleans market. Indeed, an unnamed slave trader whom Andrews met on a Potomac River steamer attested that he often separated African-American slave families. The trader added: "I have often known them to take away the infant from its mother's breast and keep it, while they sold her." Although the trader was speaking of his, not Armfield's, experience, Armfield purchased from the same market, and clearly operated in a similar manner.

*To be continued in next week's Gazette Packet.*

## HISTORY

# Alexandria to New Orleans

The human tragedy of the interstate slave trade.

BY DONALD M. SWEIG, PH.D.

*Continued from last week's Gazette Packet.*

**T**he extent of the forced separation and sale of young slave children away from their mothers has long been a vexing question, and historians have often been especially concerned with this issue. In 1931, the historian Frederick Bancroft asserted that “the selling singly of young [black slave] children privately and publicly was frequent and notorious.” He added that such children were “hardly less than a staple in the [interstate slave] trade.”

### PART III

In 1975, two American scholars (Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman), utilizing computer analysis, declared that this was not so, that the percentage of black slave children under age 13 sold at New Orleans was only 9.3 percent, and amounted to no more than 234 per year. The historian Herbert Gutman attacked these results in the *New York Times*, claiming that the computer had “trivialized the number of children sold.” A careful analysis of the shipments by John Armfield in Alexandria to Isaac Franklin in New Orleans, however, provides a different and more useful understanding of the number of young slave children sold separately in the Alexandria to New Orleans trade.

Statistical analysis of the 3,570 slaves on the Alexandria manifests shows that 145, or 4.5 percent, were under age 10, and 308, or 8.62 percent, were under age 13. Thus, it would appear that the percentage of children in the Alexandria shipments supports the computer analysis. On closer examination, it is not so simple.

In January 1829, the Governor of Louisiana signed into law new legislation prohibiting the separate sale of children under 10 years of age, or of mothers from children of similar age, except orphans. This meant, of course, that single children under age 10 purchased in Virginia or Maryland by John Armfield could not be sold in New Orleans by Isaac Franklin. Indeed, the apparent necessity for such statutory prohibition of the separation and sale of young slave children in Louisiana, clearly indicates that such sales were frequent and common. Further, this new statute greatly affected the way in which Armfield bought slaves.

Among the slaves in the shipments from Alexandria to New Orleans before the new law took effect, single children under age 10 comprised about 13 percent, and under age 13 over 20 percent. This is over twice the 9 percent predicted by the computer analysis of Fogel and Engerman. For the first three shipments after the new law went into effect, the percentage of single children under age 10 shipped by Armfield dropped from 13 percent to zero, and of children under 13 from 20 percent to 3 percent.

Clearly, the new Louisiana legislation had a significant effect on which slaves were purchased by John Armfield.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**Photograph of the former Franklin and Armfield “Slave Pen,” during the Civil War. The building had been sold to Price, Birch & Co. in 1850.**

That this was not mere coincidence is apparent by two other factors. Prior to February 1829, Armfield advertised in the local papers for slaves from 8 to 25 years old. The next advertisement in April 1829, when the sale of children under 10 was prohibited in New Orleans, offered to buy “likely Negroes from 12 to 25 years of age, prime field hands.” The offer to buy young children, who he could not sell, had been withdrawn. Additionally, there was an enormous increase in the number of children listed on the manifests ages 11 and 12 over the number ages 9 and 10 in Armfield’s shipments after April 1829. He was again buying in accordance with the law, in order to maximize his profit. Armfield exhibited little concern about keeping slave children with their mothers, when he purchased so many single children ages 11 and 12. And, the true cost of such transactions was paid by the African-American children he bought and by the mothers from whom the children were separated.

Finally, the trader that Andrews spoke with on the Potomac steamer admitted that he sold many young children separately in Carolina (where there was no law prohibiting their sale), but added: “they won’t go in Mississippi; Armfield never takes them if he can help it.” This was in 1835; back in 1828 when he could still sell young, slave children, Armfield obviously “took them,” as 20-percent of his slave shipments were such children. When he changed his advertisements to buy slaves and when he bought

no children under age 10 after the new Louisiana law, John Armfield was simply responding to market reality, and was not acting out of any concern for African-American slave children. Armfield, a businessman, simply bought what he could sell.

It was also no coincidence that in 1833, 1834, and 1835, the very time Armfield was visited by abolitionists who had come to Washington to press antislavery with the Congress, that Armfield increased his purchases of slaves in family groups. Abolitionism was very strong in the early 1830s, and the breaking of slave families by the slave

trade received special condemnation by the abolitionists.

It was thus for good reason that Armfield’s assistant assured the visiting abolitionist Andrews, in 1835, that “they were at great pains to prevent” the separation of families and “to obtain, if possible, whole families. . . In one instance,” the clerk continued “they had purchased, from one estate, more than 50, in order to prevent the separation of family connections; and in selling them, they had been equally scrupulous to have them continue together.” This had cost the firm “not less than one or two thousand dollars, which they might have obtained by separating them,” as they sold better in small lots. It was, the Reverend Leavitt thought, ultimately profitable for the firm to lose on an isolated sale” in order to gain the good will of farmers and planters in Maryland and Virginia.”

Armfield told Leavitt that “he would never sell his slaves so as to separate husband and wife, or mother and child.” The trader said he had been offered a troublesome slave “for twelve and one half cents, if he would carry him to New Orleans.” Armfield asserted that he had refused to purchase this slave, even at such an attractive price, as “the fellow had a wife in the neighborhood and they did not like to be separated.” It is unlikely that Armfield actually bought with such care. And, a cursory analysis of the slave sale records in New Orleans indicates that Franklin regularly divided slave families for easier sale. But, it was shrewd business for Armfield to have good public relations with the local Maryland and Virginia slave owners.

Whatever Armfield said or Leavitt heard, it is obvious from the high percentage of young, single, African-American slave men and women that Armfield shipped from Alexandria to New Orleans, that the sale and transportation of local Virginia and Maryland slaves resulted in many broken families and many separations from family and kin.

For the African-American slaves involved, the price of Armfield’s profit was very high indeed. This was especially so before it became good business to buy slaves in families. Even so, at all times, the ready market for prime-age, single men and women in the Deep South and the high percentage of such individuals among the Alexandria shipments testify to the disastrous effect of the marketplace on African-American slave families.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**Civil War-era photograph of an interior area of the former Franklin and Armfield “slave pen.” The iron gate and barred window was commented on by northern abolitionists who visited in the 1830s. This was probably a staged photograph. Notice the two Union soldiers peering through the gate.**

*To be continued in next week's Gazette Packet.*

# Alexandria to New Orleans: The Human

BY DONALD M. SWEIG, PH.D.

Continued from last week's Gazette Packet.

What is also clear from the slave names on the manifests of the slave trade ships is that the enslaved African-Americans of Virginia and Maryland did have a rich and extended family structure. Numerous families appear on the manifests, from young slave men and women with one infant, through apparently husbandless mothers, often with several children, occasionally an apparently wifeless father with children, and finally complete, even three-generational families. For example, a manifest for February 1832 includes Ben Thomas and his wife Milly, both age 40; their three daughters, Ann, Serina, and Matilda, ages 20, 18 and 13; three sons age 18, 11, and 9; and a 20-month old infant who was clearly the child of 20-year-old Ann Thomas.

In another case, on the manifest for the *Tribune* in October 1835, appears the name Dick Johnson, Senior, age 75, and directly below that Dick Johnson, Jr., age 19. The junior and senior seem to tie the two men together. Was the older man the younger's father or grandfather? If, as seems likely, the manifest was filled in by asking each slave his or her name as they boarded the ship, the family pride reflected in the answer of Dick Johnson, Senior and Junior is apparent.

Family groups accounted for only a small percentage of Armfield's early shipments, a mere seven percent for the first three years. This percentage later doubled to 14 percent of all slaves shipped, and after 1834, when market pressure not to separate families increased, the number of slaves shipped in family groups increased to more than 37 percent for the final three years of Armfield's operation.

In one shipment in 1834, for example, we find an impressive array of African-American slave families and family names: King — mother and six children, ages 5 to 20; Lucket — mother and four children, 7 to 13; Dorsey — mother and four children, 9 to 18; John and Hannah Gage and children 4, 2, and two months; Speake — seven children only, ages three to 17, including twin girls aged 10; Lucy David — age 22, her infant son and three other children; Gaige — mother and three children; Paine — mother, father and two children; Charles and Permillia Greene with five children ages two months to nine years; Butler — mother and two children, 13 and 7; and Amelia Blackwell with four children, ages 8, 5, 3 and 1.

Such a large number of families in one shipment of slaves most likely came about by Armfield buying an entire plantation laborforce, probably at an estate auction. Even though this 1834 shipment of families was not an isolated incident, Armfield was a careful and shrewd businessman. If



COURTESY, ELIZABETH COPPINGER, BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TENN. (1981)

Photograph of the grave marker of John Armfield in Beersheba Springs, Tenn.

he bought more families it was surely because he needed to do so, most likely for solid business reasons.

The local planters from whom Armfield bought his slaves were the prime targets of the abolitionist pressure not to sell slaves or divide slave families, and many planters may have had misgivings about the moral rectitude of human bondage. If a planter saw slave families owned by a neighbor torn asunder by a trader, he might decide to manumit his slaves in his will, rather than consign them to a similar fate. But, if he had confidence that the trader would at least respect the family ties, the planter could, perhaps, allow his executors to sell the slaves and, at the same time, still keep peace with his conscience. Therefore, the significant increase in the percentage of slaves apparently purchased in family groups after 1834, combined with Armfield's excessive assurance to the abolitionists regarding his respect for slave fam-

ily integrity, suggest that Armfield was responding to social pressure and protecting the source of his slaves by buying rather than separating more slave families.

But, despite the assurances given to both Leavitt and Andrews that groups of slaves who were acquainted and family groups sold easier and for a better price, and that the firm would never sell so as to separate husbands and wives or mothers and children, and despite the increase of slave families in Armfield's shipments, the high percentage of apparently husbandless mothers and of young single adults suggests that such separations were quite common, especially before it became better business to buy families after 1834.

It also seems unlikely that John Armfield and his partner made a fortune trading slaves in only eight years, and became the largest dealer in Virginia and Maryland by asking every slave they bought whether or not he wanted to leave home. Armfield may

or may not have purchased the problem slave, that he was offered for "twelve and a half cents," but it seems most improbable that so shrewd a businessman as he, would refuse what was essentially a free slave, whom he could sell in New Orleans for \$500 to \$1,000, simply because the slave had a wife on a nearby plantation. The large number of single women among Armfield's slaves, the 80 percent of women with children but without an apparent husband, the 84 percent of males without any identifiable family, all suggest that African-American family disruption of all kinds was common. Armfield and his agents simply bought what would sell.

In the case of the young children after 1829, and of families after 1834, what would sell worked to the benefit of the slaves. But the ready market for prime-age, single men and women in the Deep South and the higher percentage of such individuals among the Alexandria shipments testify to the disastrous effect of the slave trade on African-American slave marriages and families. And, the number of slaves involved was not insignificant.

Leavitt reported in 1834 that 1,000 slaves had been shipped the previous year and that Franklin and Armfield alone would dispatch 1,200 slaves in the coming year. For 1835, the available manifests (others are still missing) indicate that over 1,400 slaves were exported that year. A veritable surfeit of slaves flowed from Alexandria to New Orleans: 318 in three weeks in February; 201 in March; 352 in five days in October; 344 in 10 days in November; 281 in December; 140 in January 1836. A total of 977 slaves were shipped in the last three months of 1835 alone (1,117 with the January shipment).

In November 1836, Armfield's last shipment, an astounding 254 slaves were dispatched on one ship, the *Isaac Franklin*. The majority of these slaves probably came from northern Virginia and southern Maryland, but it seems significant that even the Baltimore trading houses complained of difficulty obtaining slaves, and only 208 slaves were shipped from Baltimore in 1836. All of this testifies to the business success of John Armfield as a trader, and to the importance of his "establishment" on Duke Street in the history of Alexandria.

Franklin and Armfield retired from the slave-trading business late in 1836. Two of the firm's ships, the *Tribune* and the *Uncas*, were sold to William H. (Yellow-House) Williams, a well known trader in the federal city. The "slave pen" on Duke Street and the ship *Isaac Franklin* were sold to George Kephart, Franklin and Armfield's former agent in Frederick, Md. Kephart may have been less careful about his reputation and more anxious for a fast profit than Armfield. He is reputed to have shipped as many as 400 slaves at one time in the *Isaac Franklin*.

In the early 1850s, the Duke Street es-

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# Tragedy of the Interstate Slave Trade

FROM PAGE 34

establishment was conveyed to "Price, Birch and Co.," slave traders who had operated in Washington City, and had been driven from the District of Columbia by the slave-trading prohibition of the Compromise of 1850. This firm's name was on the building when it was captured by Union troops in 1861.

The available evidence indicates that John Armfield was neither an iniquitous barbarian nor an enlightened humanitarian, but rather a shrewd businessman. When it was good business to divide families and sell young children, he did so. When it became better business to maintain the slaves in family units, he did that. Because Armfield was on good terms with the selling farmers and planters of Virginia and Maryland, and because he was able to monopolize the local trade, he was clearly operating by, or establishing himself, the local standards for moral and ethical propriety in the buying, selling, and treatment of slaves. Other traders operating in this same market would have been subject to these standards in order to stay in business. To do less for the slaves might have jeopardized the willingness of owners to sell their slaves; to do

more would have increased costs, decreased profits, and given the edge to Armfield's competition.

Standards for slave traders became more restrictive as time passed. The number of young children sold singly declined in response to legal, and presumably, public pressure. At the same time, the proportion of slaves sold in family units increased — also because of social pressure. Yet, the large number of young, single men and women sent south from Alexandria indicates that African-American slave marriages and families were frequently disrupted to obtain those slaves most marketable at New Orleans — the prime field hands.

Finally, and most importantly, analysis of the business orientation of the slave traders must not be allowed to obscure the personal, human experience of the African-American slaves, who were the essence of the trade. It was the African-American men, women, and children who were bought, separated from their families, sold, and transported to New Orleans (not John Armfield, Isaac Franklin, nor the northern abolitionists), who testify, even in their silence, to a new and painful understanding of the human tragedy that was the real and actual cost of the Alexandria – New Orleans

slave trade.

*Epilogue:* John Armfield eventually retired to his plantation in Beersheba Springs, Tenn. He died there on Sept. 20, 1871 (apparently at age 74). His slave-trading partner, Isaac Franklin, died on his Tennessee plantation on April 27, 1846, at age 57. Franklin's estate has been estimated to have been valued at perhaps \$750,000 (in 19<sup>th</sup>-century value), most acquired from his slave-trading operations. All of the Franklin and Armfield "establishment" on Duke Street in Alexandria, except the original house built by General Young, was torn down after the Civil War. That original building at 1315 Duke Street, and



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John Armfield as an old man.

some of the adjacent land to the west, was an archaeologically investigated in the 1980s and is still standing today, and is a National Historic Landmark.

Detailed information regarding the lives and fate of the thousands of African-American slaves bought by John Armfield in Alexandria and later sold by Isaac Franklin in New Orleans may be lost to history. Doubtless, many of their descendents are still living in Louisiana, Mississippi, east Texas (and elsewhere), a

testimony to the hardiness of their forebears who endured the painful experience of being the essence of the Alexandria-New Orleans slave trade.

May 17, 1828, this advertisement appeared in the Alexandria Phenix Gazette

**Alexandria Phenix Gazette**  
 "Fait ce qu'il faut, arrive ce qu'il pourra."  
 VOL. IV. SATURDAY MORNING, MAY 17, 1828. NO. 900.

**Cash in Market.**  
 THE subscribers having leased for a term of years the large three story brick house on Duke street, in the town of Alexandria, D. C. formerly occupied by Gen. Young, we wish to purchase one hundred and fifty likely young negroes of both sexes between the ages of 8 and 25 years. Persons who wish to sell will do well to give us a call, as we are determined to give more than any other purchasers that are in market, or that may hereafter come into market. Any letters addressed to the subscribers through the Post Office at Alexandria, will be promptly attended to. For information, enquire at the above described house, as we can at all times be found there.  
 FRANKLIN & ARMFIELD.  
 may 15  
 Washington, Alexandria, and Baltimore.  
 Steam Packet Line.

**Received and for Sale.**  
 130 kegs white lead  
 37 do spanish brown and black paint  
 20 barrels of chalk  
 200 do tar  
 25 do rosin  
 10 do pitch  
 With a general assortment of Ship Chandlery and Lumber.  
 JOSIAH H. DAVIS.

**Molasses, Sugar, etc.**  
 11 Hhls bright retailing molasses  
 13 do N. Orleans sugar  
 6 do N. E. rum  
 5 hhls Whiskey  
 15 do 3d and 4th proof do  
 10 casks wine  
 30 boxes mould candles  
 40 kegs white lead  
 40 caisters verdigris  
 40 reams wrapping paper  
 15 bags coffee  
 50 nests boxes, received and for sale by  
 L. & L. CHAMBERLAIN.  
 april 29

**New Spring Goods.**  
 JOHN M. JOHNSON & Co. have received by the last arrivals from New-York and Philadelphia, their full supply of Dry Goods, which they bought on the best terms; and pledge themselves to sell as cheap as can be bought by the yard or piece.  
 Jm

**Whiskey.**  
 10 Hhls Baltimore whiskey, landing this morning from schr Express, and for sale by L. & L. CHAMBERLAIN.  
 may 12

**Linseed Oil, etc.**  
 JUST received and for sale by the subscribers,  
 5 hhls linseed oil  
 18 boxes and 3 boxes window glass, 8 x 10 and 10 x 12  
 1200 lbs bacon  
 20 kegs butter  
 40 do lard.  
 M. MILLER & SON.

**Salt.**  
 649 bushels coarse salt, on board the schr. Nancy, at Vowell's wharf, for sale by S. MESSERSMITH.  
 april 22

**Car and 5-4 North Carolina Plank.**  
 RECEIVED per schooner John Doyle, 300 barrels tar; 3000 feet 5-4 flooring.  
 JOSIAH H. DAVIS.  
 april 18

**Pork.**  
 10 barrels mess pork } N. York City inspection.  
 10 do prime do }  
 For sale by LINDSAY, HILL & Co.  
 march 29

**Sweet Oil.**  
 50 baskets sweet oil of superior quality, landing and for sale by LINDSAY, HILL & Co.  
 march 29

**Candles.**  
 SPERM, mould and dip candles, for sale by LINDSAY, HILL & Co.  
 march 29

**STRIPED JEANS.**  
 8 Cases "Hamilton" superfine striped jeans  
 4 do Warren do very stout do  
 8 do do printed calicoes  
 20 bales brown sheetings and shirtings  
 Just received and for sale by  
 march 29 J. C. CAZENOVE & Co.

**To Carriage Makers.**  
 4000 Feet of seasoned Ash Plank, 2, 2 1/2, 3 & 4 inches thick; just received and for sale by—  
 march 25 JOSIAH H. DAVIS.

**Citron.**  
 Case containing 10 boxes citron, superior quality, landing and for sale by LINDSAY, HILL & Co.  
 march 26

**Cabinet, Chair, and Sofa Manufactory.**  
 JAMES GREEN Cabinet maker,—has on hand, a will constantly keep at his old stand on Roy st., Alexandria, & at the corner of 10th st., Pennsylvania, Avenue—Washington—a general assortment of the most fashionable and durable Furniture, which will warrant equal, if not superior in quality, to ever offered in the District.—Consisting in part, of Grecian, winged and plain wardrobes  
 Goshier, pedestal end and plain side boards  
 Dittie, with cellarets and marble slabs  
 French and plain bureaus  
 Dressing do with mirrors  
 Ladies' and Gentlemen's secretaries and book-cases  
 Pier tables with marble and mahogany tops  
 Piller and claw dining, breakfast and card tables  
 Plain do do do  
 Ladies work stands  
 Shaving and randle do  
 Wash stands with marble and mahogany tops  
 Grecian Sofa's  
 Mahogany chairs  
 Music stools, bideets, crabs, cradles  
 Portable writing desks &c  
 With a general assortment of bedsteads, carved mahogany, maple and stained wood which will be sold as low for cash as they can be had of the same quality at any other manufactory in the Union.  
 ALSO,  
 An assortment of St Domingo and Day of 1 Mahogany, a part of which is suitable for steam sawed curl and slatted veneers, &c. of a superior quality, packing bottles, &c.  
 TURNING AND CARVING  
 Handsomely executed

**Another Fresh Supply of SPRING GOODS**  
 THE subscribers have the pleasure to announce to the inhabitants of Alexandria public generally, that the arrival of the schooner from New-York, has put them in possession of a shipment of Dry Goods,  
 among which are  
 75 pieces calicoes, some entirely new patterns  
 4-4 and 6-4 Grecian ginghams, new style  
 1 case cut & cote-paley plain, different and beautiful article for ladies' dresses  
 1 do satin stripe and plaid cote-paley  
 1 do plaid batiste, new style  
 Madras ginghams, elegant goods  
 A large and general assortment of new fancy gauze and barge hdkfs. superior quality  
 White bobbinet lace veils, extra rich  
 Bobbinet lace capes and peleries &c. as could be found



Report and Manifest of the cargo of slaves on board the schooner La Fayette of  
 the name of Benjamin Russell is at present Master; last 120 of 700 bound from the Port of  
 Alexandria in the District of Columbia for New Orleans in the State of Louisiana

No.	Name of Slave	Height Feet inches	Age	Complexion	By Whom Shipped	Residence of Shippers	To Whom Consigned	Residence of Consignee
1	Horace Luman	5' 2"	15	White	Franklin & Co.	Alexandria	Price & Biron	New Orleans
2	Tom Luman	4' 2"	20	do	do	do	do	do
3	Jack Black	4' 6"	20	do	do	do	do	do
4	Stephen Davis	4' 2"	19	do	do	do	do	do
5	John Jackson	4' 2"	18	do	do	do	do	do
6	George Hall	5' 7"	22	do	do	do	do	do
7	Charles Brown	5' 5"	25	do	do	do	do	do
8	Edmund Marshall	5' 5"	20	do	do	do	do	do
9	Henry Saunders	5' 10"	22	do	do	do	do	do
10	Edmund Price	4' 7"	24	do	do	do	do	do
11	Washington Davis	5' 5"	20	do	do	do	do	do
12	Bill Brown	4' 7"	20	do	do	do	do	do
13	Sam Ellis	5' 8"	20	do	do	do	do	do
14	Edmund Duggan	5' 6"	18	do	do	do	do	do
15	Ben Brown	5' 4"	20	do	do	do	do	do
16	William Smith	5' 4"	20	White	do	do	do	do
17	David Graham	5' 5"	20	Brown	do	do	do	do
18	Henry Thomas	5' 8"	21	White	do	do	do	do
19	Samuel Jones	5' 6"	20	do	do	do	do	do
20	Horace Davis	5' 3"	18	do	do	do	do	do
21	Isidore Dade	5' 5"	17	Yellow	do	do	do	do
22	John Smith	5' 2"	21	White	do	do	do	do
23	John Smith	5' 16"	do	do	do	do	do	do
24	Sam Smith	5' 10"	15	do	do	do	do	do
25	John Smith	5' 7"	14	do	do	do	do	do
26	John Smith	5' 11"	16	do	do	do	do	do
27	John Smith	5' 2"	17	do	do	do	do	do
28	John Smith	5' 5"	16	do	do	do	do	do
29	George Hall	5' 6"	19	do	do	do	do	do
30	William Dancy	5' 5"	12	do	do	do	do	do
31	John Brooks	5' 1"	11	do	do	do	do	do
32	Horace Jackson	5' 5"	10	Yellow	do	do	do	do
33	George Smith	5' 6"	20	White	do	do	do	do
34	William Coffey	5' 4"	20	do	do	do	do	do
35	John Ely	5' 7"	do	do	do	do	do	do
36	William Brown	5' 2"	11	do	do	do	do	do

COLLECTOR'S OFFICE,  
 BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TENN. 1832  
 The Master of the Schooner La Fayette  
 from Alexandria - having ordered the cargo according to law,  
 I have signed to land the cargo, and on this day  
 have taken the receipt of the cargo and manifest  
 of the cargo of slaves from the  
 Collector.



COURTESY, ELIZABETH COPPINGER, BEERSHEBA SPRINGS, TENN. (1981)

Photograph of the grave marker of John Armfield in Beersheba Springs, Tenn.

#2: For Part-I  
 Section of a ship's manifest for a shipment of slaves from John Armfield, in Alexandria, to Isaac Franklin in New Orleans in March, 1832. Each slave was entered on the manifest as to name, height, age, and complexion, as required by federal law. National Archives