

TESTATORS, BENEFICIARIES, AND BONDSERVANTS:  
WHAT EARLY GEORGIA WILLS REVEAL

by

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(Under the Direction of Peter Charles Hoffer)

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines over 400 wills written by testators who lived in Georgia from 1733 to 1790. These rich sources reveal much about their authors, including their occupations, family composition, and property holdings. Because they span Georgia's entire colonial history and issue from colonists from all walks of life, what the wills reveal is representative of colonial Georgia generally. In particular, examining the wills informs analysis of the history of slavery in the colony. Georgia was unusual in that its founders initially forbade slavery. However, officials later reversed this policy. The extent to which colonists subsequently came to hold slaves is unsettled. This thesis argues that slave ownership concentrated in the hands of a few colonial Georgians instead of becoming widespread; that few slaves worked in cities or at non-agricultural jobs in the colony; that the sex ratio of slaves in the colony was roughly even; and that slaves in the colony of Georgia powerfully resisted their enslaved condition.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia history, colonial Georgia, slavery, wills, slave ownership in colonial Georgia, demographics of slavery, slave resistance.

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2005

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December 2005

## DEDICATION

To Ana and Celia, with love.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work owes its completion to a great many people. I am indebted to several students and all of my colleagues at Gainesville College, and particularly to my supervisor, Dr. Charles Karcher, for much support and encouragement. No one ever had better coworkers and friends. I am also grateful for the assistance of many fine people at the Georgia State Archives and at the libraries of Gainesville College and the University of Georgia. Several people in the University of Georgia Department of History have given me much. Fellow graduate student Duncan Maysilles, Esq., was always willing to lend an ear and moral support. My committee members, too, were outstanding. I am grateful to Dr. Thomas Dyer for supporting my interest in Georgia history. Though I have lived in this state for decades, I never came to truly appreciate its history until I came under his tutelage. I am also grateful to Dr. Michael Kwass, who first encouraged me to examine wills in writing history. His suggestions helped me see these documents as the rich sources they are. And to Dr. Peter Charles Hoffer I owe a great deal indeed. I have been the beneficiary of his patience, his wisdom, his intellect, and his unfailing support more times than can be counted. No student ever had a better advisor. Finally, I owe the most of all to my wife, Ana, who has simply done more for me than I could ever say.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In 1773 in the colony of Georgia, Joseph Butler, Esq., died a wealthy man. In his will, he bequeathed to his several surviving family members 6,710 acres of land in multiple tracts and plantations, 750 pounds Sterling (no small sum), a plethora of livestock, and a menagerie of household goods. He also left behind over 100 slaves.<sup>1</sup> When Clement Martin, Sr. passed away in the colony in 1775, he left behind 2,750 acres of land, several feather beds and household items, and roughly a dozen slaves to each of his five children.<sup>2</sup> And when Christ Church Parish planter Joseph Wright died in 1773, he left behind 1,500 acres and over forty “Negroes” to his wife and children.<sup>3</sup>

What is remarkable about these three estates is the number of slaves they included. However, equally remarkable is the number of slaves *not* included in many contemporary wills. A great many other wills drawn up by even well-off colonial Georgians in the 1760s and 1770s mention only a handful of slaves, often just one or two. Many testators had no slaves to leave behind. Was there, as this data suggest, a great disparity in slave ownership in the colony as Georgia’s slaves “became concentrated in relatively few hands?”<sup>4</sup> Or, upon closer inspection, will slave distribution prove to have been, in fact, more uniform in colonial Georgia?

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<sup>1</sup> Will of Joseph Butler, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>2</sup> Will of Clement Martin, Sr., Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 212-214, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>3</sup> Will of Joseph Wright, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 48-53, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>4</sup> Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 108.

These questions and others concerning slavery in the colony merit investigation and could be answered by examining wills left by colonial Georgians. Virtually no scholarship exists on colonial Georgia's legal history, let alone on wills in colonial Georgia. This makes this topic ripe for attention.<sup>5</sup> This lack of scholarship is especially unfortunate because any examination of testamentary instruments can provide a wealth of information about the society in which testators lived. Given that we know relatively little about the Georgia colony as compared to other colonies, a study of Georgia wills could reveal an especially great deal of information. This thesis will examine approximately 400 wills from Georgia's colonial era to expand our knowledge of slavery in the colony and to determine: Whether or not slave ownership in the Georgia colony concentrated in the hands of a few elites with the introduction of slavery; where slaves lived and worked in colonial Georgia; the ratio of male to female slaves in the colony; and how slaves resisted enslavement.

The history of the Georgia colony is closely tied to slavery.<sup>6</sup> Georgia was the only North American colony that the British government directly subsidized. Parliament saw fit to foot Georgia's bills because the colony's founders, a group of English aristocrats and members of Parliament called the Georgia Trustees, designed Georgia to earn her keep. The Trustees planned for Georgia to serve as a place of refuge for England's "worthy poor," a place where down-and-out Britons might resettle and live productive lives. In leading such lives, the colonists would produce luxury goods like wine and silk that would fetch high prices for Britain

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<sup>5</sup> See Terri L. Snyder, "Legal History of the Colonial South: Assessment and Suggestions," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 50 (January, 1993): 18-27.

<sup>6</sup> The brief history of the colony of Georgia presented in the next few paragraphs is distilled from several sources. Kenneth Coleman's and Milton Ready's (eds.), multi-volume *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1976) is an excellent collection of primary sources that tell much about the colony. See also Kenneth Coleman, *Colonial Georgia: A History* (Millwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1989); Harold E. Davis, *The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1733-1776* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1976); and Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* for interpretations of early Georgia history.

in world markets. Besides finding Georgia appealing for these prospects, Parliament hoped that the colony would become a military outpost against the expansion of Spanish Florida to the south.

The Trustees believed that permitting slaves in the colony would undermine these purposes. The worthy poor could not uplift themselves through virtuous labor if they made slaves to work in their stead. Also, the Trustees believed slaves unsuited for the meticulous work that viniculture (wine making) and sericulture (silk making) entailed. Finally, the Trustees viewed slaves as potential belligerents who had no place living so close to a rival power's colony. Besides, since compact settlement (which promoted defensibility and the production of wine and silk) would be the rule of thumb in Georgia, there would be no plantations upon which slaves might work. All of these considerations (and, really, none that had the welfare of slaves in mind) led the Trustees to ban slavery in the colony. Soon after, the Trustees sought to add the weight of government to their ban. They pressured Parliament for and received legislation officially prohibiting slavery in Georgia in 1735. This was the only instance in British colonial American history where officials made such a decision deliberately.

But the decision would later be unmade as many colonists bristled under the ban. Labeled "Malcontents" by the Trustees, these men (most of them lowland Scots and Englishmen) began a publicity campaign aimed at winning slavery for the colony. The arguments the Malcontents laid out in their letters and pamphlets pointed out how profitable slavery was in South Carolina and how ill-suited Europeans were to toil in Georgia's heat. They furthermore asserted that the land and climate in Georgia proved unsuitable for producing luxury goods. Realizing this, many impoverished settlers sought to emulate the lucrative rice and indigo plantations in Carolina to make their living. Doing so would require slaves since it was widely

known that whites simply lacked the skills and constitution for plantation work. So, these colonists clamored for the repeal of laws banning slavery in Georgia. Georgia's "Founding Father," Trustee James Oglethorpe, inadvertently aided their cause in 1742 by defeating a Spanish invasion force at the Battle of Bloody Marsh on St. Simon's Island. This effectively ended the threat Spain posed to England's North American colonies and so obviated the need to ban slaves from the southern frontier on military grounds.

These factors and the sad reality that Georgia was simply not supporting itself, let alone turning a profit, forced the Trustees to relent and permit slavery starting in 1749. Still, they hoped to make slavery take on a different character in Georgia than it had elsewhere, particularly in the colony of South Carolina where poor treatment of slaves was often evident. Even as slaves came to Georgia, the Trust hoped to make Georgia slavery a more humane institution than that practiced in the neighboring colony. Partly at the practical urgings of Highland Scots and the German Salzburgers (skilled builders who had settled in Georgia and feared losing work to skilled slaves), the Trustees supported a slave code that would have limited slave ownership to four slaves per family and would have forbidden the excessive physical punishment of slaves. However, such measures would not endure when the Trustees finally asked Parliament to permit slavery in the colony in 1751. The legislation authorizing slavery in colonial Georgia passed the House of Commons in 1752 and included few vestiges of the Trustee's good intentions. This was due largely to the fact that South Carolina plantation owners seeking to replicate their lucrative rice operations on Georgia land made newly available in very large tracts induced officials to ignore restrictions on slave ownership and treatment. Consequently, slavery in Georgia would come to resemble the brutal institution of slavery practiced in South Carolina.

With the legalization of slavery in the colony, South Carolinians flooded into Georgia, bringing with them money and slaves. They duplicated both their business operations and their social organization in the younger colony and came to dominate local government. Historian Betty Wood indicates that the white population in the colony of Georgia grew from less than 3,000 to roughly 18,000 in but a few decades. Georgia's black population likewise expanded.<sup>7</sup> Wood wrote that, "The Georgia settlers, as one of the Trustees' supporters had put it back in 1746, were 'stark Mad after Negroes.'"<sup>8</sup>

Whether this madness was real or merely perceived is something the wills of colonial Georgians can speak to effectively. Many colonial American historians make use of selected wills in their scholarship, however only a few systematic studies of will collections from one place exist. Scholars such as Alice Hanson Jones, Gloria Main, David Scott Smith, and others gleaned a great deal about particular colonies and their slavery practices from their studies of wills, but much of this work is decades old and confined to New England and the Middle Colonies.<sup>9</sup> The best recent studies of wills from one place are by Toby Ditz, David E. Narrett, and Allan Kulikoff, who do a fine job of examining inheritance patterns in colonial Connecticut,

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<sup>7</sup> Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>9</sup> See Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation To Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1980) and *American Colonial Wealth: Documents and Methods* (New York, NY: Arno Press, 1977); Gloria Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982) and "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 32 (January, 1975): 89-99; and David Scott Smith, "American Family and Demographic Patterns and the Northwest European Model," *Continuity and Change* 8 (December, 1993): 389-415. See also Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658-1777," *Historical Methods*, 13 (Spring, 1980): 81-104 and Peter Benes, *Early American Probate Inventories* (Boston, MA: Boston University Press, 1989). Fine studies employing wills exist outside of American history as well. In particular, see Suzanne Desan's *The Family on Trial in Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2004).

New York City, and the Chesapeake, respectively, by mining rich troves of testamentary sources.<sup>10</sup>

Toby Ditz's *Property and Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut* makes impressive use of colonial testamentary documents. Ditz examines wills and probate records in two parts of Connecticut, Windham County (a newly-settled area with lackluster land where subsistence agriculture predominated) and Wethersfield (an established, affluent area with rich farmland). Comparing the wills from these two places let Ditz erode a theory that says America was "born modern" in that it had private nuclear families, early independence, and egalitarian inheritance strategies from the start. Ditz finds instead that inheritance strategies in Connecticut continued traditional practices found in Europe: "preferential partibility, subordination of spouses' interests, the creation of overlapping rights, and the use of family property at marriage and retirement were variants of ... patterns of inheritance widely adopted by family-farm holders in Western Europe."<sup>11</sup>

Ditz reveals that testators in colonial Connecticut favored certain sons over others, that daughters often received personal property rather than land in a will, that the interest of wives was sharply limited by testator husbands, and that recipients of bequests often inherited obligations to provide for siblings or parents. This means that in colonial Connecticut, inheritance was not of an egalitarian type but rather "extended cognate" or "favored heir plus burdens," as some children (sons especially) simply got more than others. This testamentary practice reflected a tension between a family's desire to keep its holdings together to maximize profitability and to provide something for all of its children. And because children often

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<sup>10</sup> See Toby L. Ditz, *Property & Kinship: Inheritance in Early Connecticut, 1750-1820* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680 – 1800* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); and David E. Narrett, *Inheritance and Family Life in Colonial New York City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Ditz, *Property & Kinship*, 158.

inherited obligations with their bequests to provide for other family members, families were neither typically private nor nuclear. Instead, families kept in close touch and tended to live in close proximity to one another so these obligations could be conveniently met.

Ditz also reveals that inheritance patterns in colonial Connecticut changed as communities grew commercially. Where Connecticut became more commercialized, fathers began treating sons and daughters more equally. In these areas, widows also began obtaining more real property than widows elsewhere. In the other parts of the colony, women continued to receive relatively fewer and less valuable bequests than men.

Examining testamentary sources in Connecticut let Ditz draw these very lucrative conclusions in the same way that examining wills in colonial Georgia could bear fruit. For example, the Georgia wills clearly reveal what women inherited. Ditz demonstrates that women generally lacked control over property as “only eight of the one hundred widows of landed men got ownership of any real property” in fee simple in colonial Connecticut.<sup>12</sup> Examining the wills of colonial Georgia would reveal whether or not the same dynamic existed in the Deep South. Also, Ditz reveals that there was little separate ownership of property in Connecticut. There may have been more in Georgia judging by the fact that wills from that colony actually mention “dower” (i.e., part of a deceased husband’s estate allotted by law to his widow) with some frequency. In Connecticut, daughters inherited *things* much more often than they inherited land. Ditz asserts that such “direct inheritance of tangible goods” was “a central mechanism in the reproduction of class.”<sup>13</sup> Examining the wills from the Georgia colony would reveal whether or not this was the case there as well. And in the colony of Connecticut, Ditz reveals that fathers

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 37.



seldom tried to provide for grandchildren in their wills. Did colonial Georgia testators similarly avoid such “lineal strategies” as they devised their estates?

The wills from colonial Georgia may answer even more questions than those of Connecticut could. This is because unlike Connecticut, Georgia would afford the opportunity to compare the colonial testamentary practices of two very distinct ethnic groups: Anglicans and Germanic Salzburger. Such a cross-cultural comparison would inform an analysis of inheritance practices generally in the colonies.

Georgia’s Salzburger were Germanic Lutherans fleeing religious persecution in Europe who came to North America beginning around 1734 at the urging of, and under the patronage of, the Georgia Trustees.<sup>14</sup> They settled in frontier market towns like Ebenezer that would remain viable until Savannah would become large enough to furnish all market services in the region and vibrant enough to lure later generations of Salzburger to assimilate into mainstream Anglican colonial culture. The Salzburger brought with them to Georgia from Europe their strong beliefs in the teachings of Martin Luther and their native Germanic language and customs involving things like marriage, naming—and devising property.

The Salzburger endured many hardships in colonial Georgia, such as disease and starvation, but remained devoutly Protestant. While their faith remained constant over time, the settlers adapted some Germanic practices to fit their New World existence while retaining others intact. For example, in Europe, the Germanic custom was to keep cattle in herds. In America, the Salzburger instead took to branding their cows and turning them loose to graze freely in the forest like other American herdsmen. Some Salzburger also came to own slaves even against

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<sup>14</sup> See George Fenwick Jones, *The Salzburger Saga: Religious Exiles and other Germans along the Savannah* (Athens, GA: UGA Press, 1984) and A.G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) for good treatments of Georgia’s German settlers.

the strong urgings of their religious leaders, a kind of rebelliousness largely unknown in European congregations. Germanic testamentary practices, however, often persisted unaltered in the New World and differed from many of the testamentary practices of settlers from Anglican descent.

In his book entitled *Inheritance and Family Life in Colonial New York City*, David E. Narrett examines a number of wills in colonial New York issuing from families of both Anglican and non-Anglican (in this case, Dutch) descent. From this analysis, he determines that, regarding testamentary law, “the Dutch retained certain distinctive customs” while relinquishing some “practices that were at variance with English law.”<sup>15</sup> During this period, citizens of Dutch ancestry continued to draw up mutual wills as married couples, devised estates to sons and daughters equally, and retained traditions of community property. While these practices were common to Dutch law, they were unused by English law. These traditions led most husbands to bequeath the use of very nearly their entire estates to their widows, which postponed outright inheritance for younger generations until the death or remarriage of their mother. This also meant that daughters in Dutch families were more likely than other girls to inherit real property as opposed to personal property such as furniture and silver plate ware. Narrett indicates that these traditions would change over time as all of New York society became more Anglicanized, but they did so at different rates and in different ways depending upon the social class of the testator.

The wills of Georgia’s Germanic Salzburgers evidence that, like the Dutch of colonial New York, they also had legal traditions that differed from those of England. Like the Dutch, Georgia’s Salzburgers embraced notions of common property seldom seen in the English system. This explains why Johannes Altherr would bequeath to his wife “fifty pounds Sterling according

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<sup>15</sup> Narrett, *Inheritance and Family Life in Colonial New York City*, 14.

to our marriage contract, two cows, return to her, her property that she brought to me.”<sup>16</sup> A more complete examination of other wills written by colonial Georgians of Germanic extraction would likely reveal other discrepancies from English testamentary practices.

Testamentary documents in other southern colonies also proved to be worth scrutiny. In *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680 – 1800*, Allan Kulikoff uses such documents (among others) to explain the origins of southern slave society. This society emerged after slavery took hold and after both black and white populations began to grow without the need for continued immigration. These two developments, Kulikoff writes, caused significant economic changes in the Chesapeake as land and labor became scarcer and too expensive for most whites to afford. This fostered the emergence of two primary social classes, the often-struggling yeomanry and the more well-to-do gentry. The latter developed patriarchal family structures and came to exercise political and economic control in the region. The gentry maintained this hegemony by enlisting the support of the yeomanry through piecemeal grants of power and by increasing the importance of inheritance.<sup>17</sup> Kulikoff’s examination of tidewater testamentary documents demonstrates that, over time, patriarchs endeavored to devise estates in more intact forms to preserve their profitability. An examination of wills from the Georgia colony could reveal a similar dynamic at work.

As they would illuminate these topics, wills from the Georgia colony will shed light on slavery and such is the focus of this thesis. Chapter Two reveals the wills in detail and validates their storytelling properties. We see that the testaments Butler, Martin, and their fellow colonists left behind are powerfully able to inform our knowledge of slavery in England’s thirteenth North American colony. What the wills actually reveal follows. Chapter Three shows through

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<sup>16</sup> Will of Johannes Altherr, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 380-381, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>17</sup> Kulikoff also examines black family structure, which became more extended as plantation workforces grew and sex ratios equalized.

statistical analysis how the will data both support and confound current thinking about slavery in the colony. Chapter Four complements this quantitative exploration with a qualitative one in which anecdotal accounts of testators augment what numbers tell us about slaveholding in colonial Georgia.

## CHAPTER 2

### “SIX DUNGHILL FOWLS” AND OTHER BEQUESTS: REVEALING THE WILLS OF COLONIAL GEORGIA

James Goldwire sighed as he resettled himself atop his mount to glimpse another aspect of the land that was newly made his in the colony of Georgia. He missed his late father, but the legacy of John Goldwire, Sr., tempered his sadness. James inherited well for a younger son. According to John Goldwire’s 1774 will, now his were a “tract of land, containing 200 acres, in St. Matthew’s Parish,” and “another tract of 600 acres,” which he now beheld; “three tracts at Mount Pleasant...containing 400 acres” whereon his late father lived; “a tract of 500 acres in South Carolina on the Savannah River, opposite Mount Pleasant;” fourteen slaves; and one half of his father’s hogs and horses.<sup>18</sup> He also received by bequest his father’s wearing apparel, clock, watch, mahogany tables, books, and firearms. It was certainly enough to give a man a leg up.

James might have esteemed even more his good fortune had he known about another father-son bequest in the colony. While John Goldwire left his second son over a thousand acres and over a dozen slaves, Clement Martin, Sr., left his first born son something very different. According to Clement Martin, Sr.’s, 1771 will, his namesake, Clement Martin, Jr., received all of “six dunghill fowls for having cheated me out of six thousand pounds, by my keeping no account against him.”<sup>19</sup> Martin, Sr., went on to declare that “Son: Clement, nor any of his heirs shall

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<sup>18</sup> Will of John Goldwire, Sr., Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 135-138, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>19</sup> Will of Clement Martin, Sr., Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 212-214, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

claim any right or property” of his.<sup>20</sup> Clement, Sr.’s, land and slaves instead went to his other children and grandchildren.

In instances like these and in almost ecclesiastical fashion, the wills of colonial Georgia describe the colony and its colonists. As with James Goldwire and Clement Martin, Jr., wills speak of times to get and of times to lose. In wills, stones are cast as with the Clement family. Likewise, parts of family legacies (like those of John Goldwire) and even families themselves are gathered up as one might gather stones. Of course, any will contemplates a time to die, which is the same time that a testator would have it speak.<sup>21</sup> With what wills say (and with what wills do not say), one can write history.

*Black’s Law Dictionary* tells us that a will is simply “an instrument . . . by which a person makes a disposition of his real and personal property, to take effect after his death.”<sup>22</sup> However, Black’s dictionary misses the mark when sizing up wills. Wills relate much more than simply who gets what. Wills tell us about people, about who they were, their relationships, what roles they played in society, what they valued and believed, even who they loved and hated. Wills also tell us about places, about the social, economic, and political life of both bustling cities and bucolic countryside. Wills also tell us about things, about what people owned and why, what societies valued and why, and, in some cases, even the value society placed upon people. Wills are more than just estate inventories (i.e., lists of a testator’s belongings and accompanying valuations of those belongings compiled by appraisers of the estate). Wills convey more than just numbers; wills tell stories and this was never more true than in the case of the wills of colonial Georgia.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Ecclesiastes, Book 21, 3, 1-8.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Campbell Black [Abridged Sixth edition by the Publisher's Editorial Staff], *Black's Law Dictionary* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1991), 1102.

Wills from the Georgia colony are similarly rich and varied as the wills used by Ditz, Narrett, and Kulikoff. Owing to the destruction of a very great amount of colonial records by time and also by British soldiers during the American War for Independence, only a few hundred wills dating from Georgia's colonial epoch still exist. These now reside mostly in the State of Georgia Department of Archives and History in Morrow, Georgia. They were written at various times throughout the entirety of Georgia's colonial period by colonists from all parts of the colony and from all walks of life. As such, as much as any primary sources could, the wills provide a ready-made random sample of life in colonial Georgia.<sup>23</sup> Because of this, one can take whatever the wills in the colonial Georgia will sample reveal to be representative of the colony of Georgia generally.

The remaining colonial Georgia wills are as diverse as they are telling. The sample reveals that people from virtually every walk of life left wills. Rich plantation owners wrote wills, but so, too, did relatively poor laborers and small-plot farmers. Authors were both men and women who came from different ethnic backgrounds with many being of British descent while others were not. Also, the wills indicate that some testators were sophisticated, literate people while others were not.

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<sup>23</sup> Like all sources, wills have their drawbacks. The chief complaint about wills and all other probate documents is typicality. As one scholar put it, "probate records represent the experience of an atypically prosperous segment of the population." Daniel Scott Smith, "Underregistration and Bias in Probate Records: An Analysis of Data from Eighteenth-Century Hingham, Massachusetts," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 32, no. 1. (January, 1975): 100-110. Gloria Main qualified this point even further when she wrote, "Even among decedents whose estates were inventoried, only one-third to one-half left wills. Those who did so were not representative of all decedents but were likely to be male heads-of-households of middle- or upper-class status who were wealthier and older than those who did not make wills." Gloria L. Main, "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 32, no. 1 (January, 1975): 89-99. However, that the colonial Georgia wills may be much more "typical" than colonial probate records elsewhere is supported by the presence of a number of very poor estates in the sample group. This seems to suggest that more than merely prosperous people left wills in colonial Georgia. This may also mollify another critique of wills, which is that they do not reflect the lives of very poor people because such individuals who had little or no property would not bother to write wills. Again, the very modest condition of many of the estates in the will sample suggests that, at least in colonial Georgia, poor people wrote wills with some regularity. These considerations could suggest that the colonial Georgia will sample may indeed be quite representative of colonial Georgia society at large.

The wills vary in length with some being uncommonly terse while others border on loquacious. Michael Tattersell required only fifteen words to settle a lifetime's worth of affairs: "Wife: Elizabeth, entire estate, real and personal. Witnesses: William Kirk, Jr.; John Floyd, Sarah Kirk."<sup>24</sup> In contrast, minister Christopher Orton took a lifetime to bequeath what was a very modest estate in a several-paragraph will that read like a sermon.<sup>25</sup> The majority of the colonial Georgia wills fell in between these two extremes. Most were about a paragraph long and contained around 100 words. Planter Audley Maxwell's 1769 will provides a representative example of one of these rich documents in full:

Audley Maxwell, St. John's Parish, planter. Wife: Hannah, Negro woman named Patty, horse and chair, bed and furniture, kitchen furniture. Son: James, tract of land whereon he now lives, Negro girl named Betty, one-third of my black cattle, an equal part of my movable estate. Son: Andrew Elton Wells, one-half a 350-acre tract of land in Newport, adjoining land of John Mitchell, Matthew Smallwood and John Davine; Negro girl named Siby; one-third of my black cattle. Son: John Sandiford, other one-half of tract mentioned above, Negro girl named Beck, eleven cows and calves. Grandson: Audley Maxwell, tract of land on Midway, containing 150 acres, adjoining lands of Kenneth Baillie and Audley Maxwell, Jr., deceased. Granddaughter: Elizabeth Maxwell, one-third of my black cattle, as was mentioned in my deed of gift to her father, Audley Maxwell, Jr., deceased. Son: Josiah Powell, 10 shillings Sterling. All remaining real and personal estate equally divided among three sons: James Maxwell, Andrew Elton Wells, John Sandiford. Executors: Sons, James Maxwell, Andrew Elton Wells, John Sandiford. Witnesses: Jonathan Evans, James Alexander, Richard Wyly. [Dated 22 May 1769. Probated 22 Nov 1776. Recorded 22 Nov 1776.]<sup>26</sup>

There is some correlation between the length of a will and the size of an estate, but just so. Certainly, colonial luminaries like James Habersham would require fairly lengthy wills to devise their vast holdings. But as this excerpt from Reverend Orton's will demonstrates, even small estates can be devised with lengthy particularity:

Item, I give and bequeath to my dear brother Rowland Orton of Sheeby nigh Richmond in Yorkshire, whatsoever is within one large chest of Mr.

<sup>24</sup> Will of Michael Tattersell, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 187, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>25</sup> Will of Christopher Orton, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>26</sup> Will of Audley Maxwell, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 246-248, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.



Bosomworth's now in the custody of Capt. Patrick Mackay, provided that the silver plate belonging to the church of Savannah, one surplice, one folio book belonging to the library, and one silver pint belonging to his Excellency, Genl. Oglethorp, which Mr. Peter Jouboy is under condition to engrave according to the directions given him, for which he has already rec'd of me to the value of forty shillins by Genl. Oglethorp's order and which I hope his Excellency will repay to Mr. Thomas Bosomworth--<sup>27</sup>

The modest size of most wills is a likely indicator that colonial Georgians generally had only modest amounts of property, both real and otherwise.

While it may not be entirely evident from Reverend Orton's passage, all of the wills in the sample except for thirteen were handwritten by testators in English. Six each of those in this baker's dozen were authored in French and German and one will was written in Dutch. This relatively small number of non-English wills suggests that colonial Georgia society was quite homogenous. Outside of a group of Germanic settlers and a small contingent of Sephardic Jews, early colonial records reveal that most white Georgians were Britons of English, Scotch, or Irish descent.

The language of the wills was, for the most part, straightforward and business-like.<sup>28</sup>

Most read like that of carpenter Barak Norman, who instructed his executors: "to sell entire

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<sup>27</sup> Will of Christopher Orton, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>28</sup> It is very interesting to note how little the language of wills seems to change over time. The following is a will from one William Hawkins of Plymouth, England, written in 1589, almost 150 years before Georgia even came into existence. It bears a close resemblance to many colonial wills:

I WILLIAM HAWKINS of Plimouth Esq. 6th Oct. 1589

My body to be buried in place & sort as my brother Sr John Hawkins Knt. & my wife Marie Hawkins shall think most convenient. Concerning my said wife & the children I have now living as well by her as by my former wife, & all my lands I dispose of them as follows -an annuity of £40 to William Hawkins my eldest son for life out of my lands in Plimouth I give all my lands so charged & all my other lands whatsoever to my wife Marie for life, with remainder to Richard Hawkins my eldest son by the said Marie, & to his heirs male, with remainder respectively in tail mail to Francis my 2<sup>d</sup>, Nicholas, my 3<sup>d</sup>, William my 4<sup>th</sup> son &~my own right heirs for ever.

To Judith Whitakers one of my daughters "all that my bargayne of Hindwell." To William Whitakers her eldest son, my grandchild £10 & to every of her other children £5. To Clare Michael daughter £40

[Several legacies to servants.]

All the rest of my goods to be divided into 3 equal parts, one 3<sup>rd</sup> part to be divided among all my Children by my wife Marie, another 3<sup>rd</sup> part to my wife Marie, & the remaining one to my brother Sir John Hawkins. I constitute my wife my sole Executrix, and my brother Sir John Hawkins & Anthony Halse gent. my brother in law my Supervisors

estate at public sale to pay debts. Remaining profits to be put at interest for maintenance of my daughter: Elizabeth Norman, until she is eighteen, when she is to have the remaining principle.”<sup>29</sup>

Some earlier wills do contain more flowery language. In his February, 1734 will, Joseph DeFeron leaves his wife “all household furnishings, all estate, real and personal, ‘without which [my] young child is left nothing in the world except anxiety.’”<sup>30</sup> John Mackay’s will blossomed even more:

I John Mackay being at this time sick and weak, but by God’s great blessing of perfect sense & memory, but yet uncertain how soon my change may come, do therefore make this my last will & Testament in manner & form following (Viz) Imprimis.

Mackay goes on to “bequeath my body to ye. Ground decently to be interd in ye usual burying Ground of Savanna in ye [province of] Georgia” and “my Soul unto God that gave it.”<sup>31</sup> Both the serious and the spiritual tones of the wills reflect that these documents were themselves taken very seriously in the colony.

However they were written, all the colonial Georgia wills contained certain elements and shared several characteristics. The testator’s name and (typically) the testator’s occupation and place of residence would come first. Bequests would then follow. Generally, close family (i.e., wife, children, brothers, sisters, etc.) would precede more distant relatives or friends and acquaintances. An executor or executors would then typically be named, as would several witnesses. Executors were the people that testators selected to carry out the instructions in their

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Read, signed & sealed in the presence of Edward Combes, Robert Peterson, W. Hales, Thos. Nun, James Finche, Ric. Wood, Ric. Hawkins, Ric. Collyns, Charles Fenton.  
Proved in London 20th Oct. 1589 by Marie the relict.

Mark Freeman, “Will of William Hawkins,” Available from <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~markfreeman/hawkins.html>. Internet; accessed 29 June 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Will of Barak Norman, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 127-129, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>30</sup> Will of Joseph DeFeron Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>31</sup> Will of John Mackay, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

wills while witnesses attested to the validity of a will. The vast majority of the wills named only a single executor and were witnessed by three people. Finally, the will would be signed and dated by the testator and the witnesses.

The chief reason why all of the wills resemble one another so closely in format would be because of the security this afforded testators. In writing a will, one wanted to be sure that the document would be honored to the letter. This meant respecting legal traditions and practices about language and structure. Deviation from accepted norms invited scrutiny, which might in turn lead to the invalidation of a will. To avoid this, testators did what testators before them had done since earlier wills that were honored fully set precedents for how later wills should be treated.

The wills suggest that many testators may have been illiterate. Several contain not signatures but a mark of the testator used in lieu of a signature. One other will indicates, “Martin Fenton was too feeble to sign his name to the will and it was signed for him by John Glenn before the other witnesses.”<sup>32</sup> Presumably, in cases of both illiteracy and infirmity, testators dictated their desires to someone capable of transcribing them, probably usually a witness or even the future executor of the will him- or herself. The fact that many testators were illiterate reflects the Spartan times in the colony. Settlers could simply not afford to spend a great deal of time receiving education when they were forced to spend a great deal of time on merely subsisting.

Interestingly, only one will, that of mariner Telamon Cuyler of Savannah, which was dated 2 September 1772, suggests that some testators had professionals handle their estate matters. In his very short will, Cuyler bequeaths to his “Wife: Jane, all estate real and personal” and names her as one of two executors. The other executor was “John Glen of Savannah,

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<sup>32</sup> Will of Martin Fenton, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 286-288, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

Attorney at law.”<sup>33</sup> Why did so few testators enlist professional assistance in drafting such important documents? Prior to the 1750s, the reason may have been because finding an attorney in the colony was difficult. The Trustees actually banned lawyers from Georgia thinking that their absence would make for a more harmonious society. The ban would be lifted, however, and lawyers would establish practices in the colony.

That more testators did not enlist help to handle their affairs from the attorneys who did eventually come to the colony suggests that testamentary matters in colonial Georgia may have often resolved themselves neatly. One item may suggest otherwise, though. A document dated 27 March 1762 is a deposition in the court case of *Mackay vs. Morrison* regarding the estate of William Mackay. In it, John McLeod “St. Andrew’s Parish, Darien, planter, aged about 55 years” declares “that he knew the deceased William Mackay, late of Darien, for 27 years; and his wife, Margaret, also deceased, for 20 years; and that he understood that their intentions concerning William Mackay’s estate were that Barbara, daughter of Capt. James Mackay, should be the sole heir.” “This intention,” McLeod further indicates, “was declared openly by both William Mackay and his wife, Margaret, on many occasions, together and apart.” McLeod’s deposition was “sworn in Open Court before His Excellency the Governour, and Ordinary,” which indicates that contested testamentary matters did exist and were taken quite seriously.<sup>34</sup>

Virtually all of the colonial Georgia wills name one or more executors. Serving as an executor for a will could be a bittersweet experience. On the one hand, being tapped as an executor showed that a testator held one in very high esteem. This is because testators placed an immense amount of responsibility and trust in their executors. Testators charged executors with putting a will into effect; in essence, making sure that everyone received the bequests specified

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<sup>33</sup> Will of Telamon Cuyler, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 16-18, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>34</sup> Deposition of William Mackay, Cuyler Collection, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

in the will. This work required first proving the will and then drafting correspondence and coordinating the receipt of bequests. On many occasions, recipients of bequests lived overseas, which meant more and more prolonged work and effort.

What an executor or executrix received for his or her trouble varied. Frequently, testators would name the primary beneficiary of a will (typically a surviving spouse) as an executrix. This person would then receive the boons of the bequests in compensation for carrying out the duties shouldered upon the executor. Some executors made out handsomely in this way. This was the case for John Patton, friend to planter Richard Thompson of St. Matthew's Parish who died in 1767. In his very short will, Thompson bequeathed to "Friend: John Patton, my lands and slaves" and named Patton the "sole Executor."<sup>35</sup> Other executors received far more modest gifts from testators or received nothing at all. Francis Harris, Esq., of Savannah named "The Honorable James Habersham, Esq.," as one of the executors in his will of 1771 yet bequeathed nothing to his Honor.<sup>36</sup> This was despite the fact that Habersham and Harris's other executors would have to sort through the bequests of a "plantation at Little Ogechee...containing about 1300 acres," a tract "containing 3400 acres on Little Ogechee," a tract "containing 1150 acres at Great Ogechee called Bushy Park," and "all my Negroes, horses, cattle, hogs, sheep, goats and all other personal estate."<sup>37</sup> The executors would also have to attend to bequests to "Thomas Harris of London" and "William Harris and his wife, John Field and his wife," and one Mr. "Brown and his wife, all of London in England," who were to each receive "10 pounds Sterling for a mourning ring."<sup>38</sup> Between arranging for or actually supervising the tallying of livestock

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<sup>35</sup> Will of Richard Thompson, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 325-326, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>36</sup> Will of Francis Harris, Esq., Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 422-424, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

and slaves for division, preparing the transfer of title of the various tracts of land, and preparing international correspondence, Francis's executors were doubtlessly kept busy.

Given the demands placed on executors, it is no wonder that the people some colonial testators named as executors occasionally declined the job. This was the case for gentleman John Barnard of Wilmington Island, Savannah. When Barnard wrote his will in January 1747, he desired that "Noble Jones, Esq. of near Savannah" and Samuel Mercer of Savannah serve as his executors. However, in a document attached to the will that bears the signatures of both Samuel Mercer and Noble Jones, the men "refuse to take upon ourselves the Burthn and Execution" of the will.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the men would have assented to do the job had Barnard left them something for their troubles. As it was, however, he devised his entire estate to his wife and two sons.

Besides containing such elements pertaining to executors and language identifying testators and articulating bequests, many of the colonial wills in the sample also contained several other common elements or did similar things. As was the case in the will of John Barnard, several wills included codicils or attached documents that made additional bequests or that further qualified what was contained in the will. Some wills also included attached documents that empowered certain individuals to administer the oath of executor to whomever a testator named as an executor in the will. Included with these attachments was, generally speaking, an oath of executor signed by the executor him- or herself. Very often, wills specifically mentioned that a testator's debts were to be paid by the executors. Commonly, these wills empowered the executors to sell land or slaves to raise money for this purpose.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Will of John Barnard, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 26-29, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>40</sup> This occurred with enough frequency to suggest that debt may have been rather common in the colony.

The presence of these addenda in the wills proves that affairs in the colony were fluid. Testators added additional bequests as they acquired more property or as property changed hands before their death. Debt and credit were often key components of such dynamics. Also, testators adjusted their wills to reflect changes in personal dynamics. Some heirs would fall out of favor while others would come into favor. Society accepted this.

Many wills also made specific, smaller bequests for “mourning” articles as did that of Francis Harris. Typically, these were made to more distant relatives or to members outside of the testator’s immediate family. Mourning bequests usually left a small sum of money that the recipient was instructed by the will to use to purchase some specific article of jewelry or clothing. For example, testator Brian Kelley left Ann Fitch “19 pounds sterling to purchase a suit of mourning and one mourning ring” and Catherine Cashell, “three pounds Sterling for a mourning ring.”<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, the mourning article itself might be bequeathed. For example, in 1763, Cutler Isaac Brabant of Savannah bequeathed to “Nieces: Sophia and Christiana Chiffelle, a suit of mourning each.”<sup>42</sup> Indian trader William Sludders from Augusta left several mourning rings to his partners and various business associates.<sup>43</sup> The tenor of the wills is that testators left these articles to communicate affection to those that they left behind. Testators did not bequeath more to recipients of mourning articles because they sought to leave the bulk of their estates behind to provide for closer friends and family members.

Upon occasion, testators used parts of their wills to mention specific individuals although they did not bequeath anything to them. This could be done to acknowledge affection. James Habersham, Sr., bequeathed a great deal of land, money, and what-not to several people, yet he left nothing of earthly value for the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield. Instead, he included

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<sup>41</sup> Will of Brian Kelley, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 176-177, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>42</sup> Will of Isaac Brabant, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 109-111, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>43</sup> Will of William Sludders, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 66-68, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

something that a man of the cloth might esteem much more: Habersham made particular mention of Whitefield in his will as being “a friend for 33 years.”<sup>44</sup> Whitefield reciprocated after a fashion in his own will. The Reverend named Habersham as his executor and bequeathed to him “my late wife’s gold watch” and “ten pounds for mourning.”<sup>45</sup> A man like Habersham had no need of either another watch or a mere ten pounds. But he would have been pleased at receiving such an intimate gift from his close friend.

Mentioning someone in a will might also convey disaffection as well. We have already seen this in the case of Clement Martin, Sr., but it occurs elsewhere in the wills as well. In her three-sentence long will written in 1762, widow Ann Monford of Savannah wrote, “I cut off and disinherit my sons, Simon and John Rouvier with one shilling each.”<sup>46</sup> Daniel Derizous of St. Paul’s Parish wrote, “As my wife Olive Derizous has eloped from me for about six years past I bequeath to her one shilling Sterling for poisoning me.”<sup>47</sup> And in his 1775 will, John Pettigrew of the town of Sunbury in St. John’s parish devoted several lines to giving away such commonplace personal articles as books, shoe buckles, and a watch. At the same time, he reserved some space in his will to express his feelings about other matters as well. Pettigrew wrote, “I have no exception to any person in town being at my Funeral, but John Hardy, carpenter who I despise on account of his bad character, & as I hate all villains as I do snakes, I desire that my Executors shall turn that Scoundrell from my funeral should he have the impudence to attend it.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Will of James Habersham, Sr., Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 232-246, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>45</sup> Will of George Whitefield, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 363-368, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>46</sup> Will of Ann Monford, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 82-83, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>47</sup> Will of Daniel Derizous, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>48</sup> Will of John Pettigrew, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 208-212, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.



Testators also occasionally used wills to settle matters of parentage. For example, in his 1775 will, Clement Martin, Jr., used the phrase “whom I acknowledge to be my [son/daughter]” five times to describe five different children he had by one Elizabeth Jackson, a woman he never names as his wife.<sup>49</sup> Raymond Demere of St. Simon’s Island had a big enough heart to pen the following about Betsy Demere: “but the porre little girl is not my daughter but as she was born under my Roffe I was always willing for to do something for her so that I would not hav her to be called a Bastard.”<sup>50</sup>

That some testators used wills to clarify parentage suggests that at least some children were born out of wedlock in the Georgia colony. However, this number appears to have been very small given that a very few of wills go to the trouble of discussing parentage. The very vast majority of the time, sons and daughters are identified easily in wills by parent-testators.

Some of the wills contain language attesting to the health and mental fitness of the testator. This language typically places the writer in a state like that of John Mackay, who in 1733 was, “at this time sick and weak, but by God’s great blessing of perfect sense & memory.”<sup>51</sup> Christopher Orton used a similar turn of phrase in his 1742 will: “being infirm in health, but of perfect mind and memory.”<sup>52</sup> It is interesting to note that only earlier wills seem to employ this language, which apparently fell out of usage. This is language that today is actually somewhat commonly used in wills. That later wills in the colony lacked attestations of fitness does not, of course, imply that testators then were incapacitated somehow at the time of writing their wills. Rather, it suggests that the presence of mind to prepare a will in the first place served as evidence of one’s mental fitness to the courts at the time.

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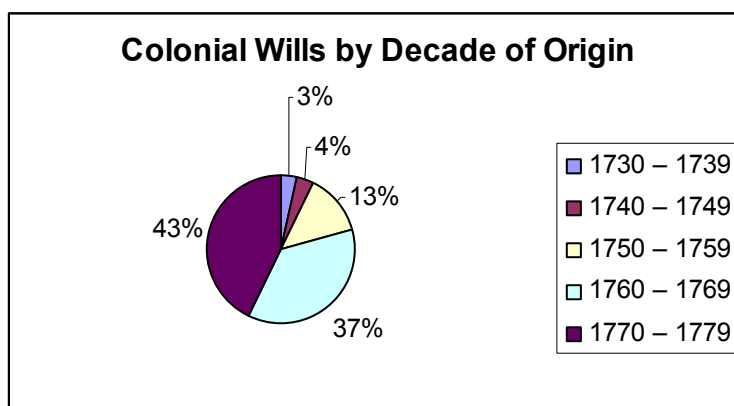
<sup>49</sup> Will of Clement Martin, Jr., Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 190-194, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>50</sup> Will of Raymond Demere, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 151-152, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>51</sup> Will of John Mackay, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>52</sup> Will of Christopher Orton, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

The 408 colonial Georgia wills in the sample span several decades and multiple generations of colonists. John Mackay's is, in fact, the oldest in the sample, having been written in July of 1733, scarcely five months after General James Edward Oglethorpe and the first settlers in the colony arrived to settle the site that would become Savannah. The youngest wills in the group date from the very late 1770s when Georgia was technically no longer a colony, at least in the eyes of the upstart United States of America. Thomas Lee, Robert McDonald, and Malcolm Nelson wrote their wills in 1778. Jane Sommerville's will is the newest in the sample, being authored in 1779, the same year that British forces captured the newly formed state of Georgia during the American War for Independence. In all, 401 wills include a date that indicates when each was written. Figure One describes the wills by decade of origin.



**Figure One: Colonial Georgia Wills by Decade of Origin**

Within the sample, 3.24% of the wills date from the period 1730 – 1739; 3.99% date from 1740 – 1749; 13.47% date from 1750 – 1759; 36.66% date from 1760 – 1769; and 42.64% date from 1770 – 1779. That wills were written so early in the colony's history is significant because it suggests the importance colonial Georgians generally placed on testamentary matters. It also

suggests that, even from Georgia's somewhat shaky beginnings, even during times of turmoil such as the period of war with Spanish Florida, there was sufficient stability in the colony's society and government to accommodate will writing and the probate process.

The majority of the wills indicate the date upon which each was "proved" and "recorded." Proving a will, in essence, meant putting it into effect. This would typically happen as close to the time after a decedent's demise as possible so as to avoid problems that could arise from unattended property. Recording a will made it a matter of public record. One-hundred nine wills include no date of recording. Only nine wills fail to indicate when executors proved them. For 265 of the 408 wills (64.95%), less than one year elapsed between the time executors proved the wills and the time that they were recorded. Most wills were, in fact, proved and recorded within the same month, often within a couple of weeks. For example, planter George Heyd of St. Matthew's parish dated his will 29 October 1770. His executors proved the will on 7 November 1770 and recorded it on 9 November 1770, an enviably quick turn-around by today's standards.<sup>53</sup> Testators proved eighty-four percent of the wills that took longer than a month to prove within two years. What this evidences is simply that colonial Georgians as a whole were quick to try to resolve testamentary affairs.

Forty-seven of the wills lack proving dates, which makes it impossible to determine how long it was after testators wrote them before they went into effect. For 160 wills, less than one year elapsed between the date the will was written and the date upon which it was proved. For another ninety-two wills, only a year or so elapsed between the time the will was written and the time it went into effect. That at least 61.76% of the wills went into effect a year or less after testators wrote them indicates that colonial Georgians in the eighteenth century (like most people today, in fact) did not really plan ahead for death. Testators wrote only about one-fourth of the

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<sup>53</sup> Will of George Heyd, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 359-360, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

wills well in advance of death (here, defined as two years or more) and, of these, only about 40% were written more than five years out. Very many of the wills were like that of George Heyd—clearly last-minute jobs.

The gendered authorship of the wills is quite fascinating. The sample collection suggests that men wrote wills much more often than did women in the colony of Georgia. Only thirty-eight of the 408 wills (a mere 9%) belong to women. Testators wrote fully 60% of these thirty-eight in the 1770s while another 21% came into being in the 1760s, which means that the vast majority of female testators wrote their wills in the late colonial period. No will written by a woman appears before 1748 when Anna Yyels Christian Steinbibs wrote hers in May of that year.<sup>54</sup> Despite this scant female authorship, that women a-plenty lived in the colony is evident from the wills themselves. Many male testators were married or seemed to have cohabitated for long periods of time with women mentioned in their wills and many had large families that included several daughters as well as sons.

Many things might account for why women wrote few wills and why the ones they did author appear only later in the colonial period. However, the main reason likely involves notions about gendered ownership of property in the colony. The wills suggest that at least up until the very late colonial period, most Georgians recognized only slightly a woman's right to own real property. Time and again, male testators did not bequeath their land and goods to their widows outright but rather did as Captain George Palmer of Savannah did in 1771. In his will, Palmer bequeathed to "Wife Mary Ann: entire estate, real and personal for her lifetime." "After her

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<sup>54</sup> Will of Anna Yyels Christian Steinbibs, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

death,” Palmer wrote, “the estate to my son, William, and my daughter, Elizabeth, equally divided.”<sup>55</sup>

In the minds of male testators, bequeathing a “life estate” (as opposed to an estate in “fee simple,” which conveyed unfettered ownership) was apparently a means by which a spouse could be provided for from beyond the grave while a family estate was kept intact. A recipient could use the estate or proceeds from the estate to maintain herself in the fashion in which her husband had provided for her. However, a widow was not at liberty to dispose of any significant part of the estate. She would instead serve as a sort of trustee for the estate, which would go at some later time in fee simple into the hands of the couple’s child or children, who would then be at liberty to do with the estate whatever they wished to do. By bequeathing estates in this way, fathers provided for sons and daughters as well as spouses. Typically, children with a father as a testator would realize possession of the estate upon their mother’s death. However, many wills also stipulated that if a widowed spouse were to remarry, her use of the life estate would cease and the children would possess the estate outright. One testator even went so far as to contemplate how his companion might behave outside of marriage after his passing. In his 1778 will, vintner Robert McDonald of Savannah wrote that Margarett Goodall was “to have the use” of the estate “for her and the children as long as she doesn’t keep company with any man.”<sup>56</sup>

When women in the Georgia colony did leave wills, as was the case in Ditz’s examination of colonial Connecticut, their estates were typically of a much more moveable character than those of male testators. For example, Margaret Papot left no land in her will. She instead bequeathed such things as, “50 pounds Sterling...Negro wench named Lucy, bed and furniture, two pair of sheets, one quilt, two large tablespoons, chest of drawers, dressing table,

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<sup>55</sup> Will of George Palmer, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>56</sup> Will of Robert McDonald, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

[and a] tea table” to her friends and relations.<sup>57</sup> Women also commonly devised wearing apparel, jewelry, “silver plate” (fine dinnerware), and livestock of several descriptions to people in their wills.<sup>58</sup>

That few women devised land in Georgia was because few women had land to devise, at least in the early colonial period. The Trustees initially prohibited women from inheriting property in the colony on military grounds. They sought to ensure that every tract of land in the colony would be owned by a man capable of bearing arms who could be drafted into a militia to safeguard Georgia (and the economically more valuable South Carolina colony) from Spanish invasion if the need arose. To this end, the Trust required that land in the Georgia colony be bequeathed in “tail male.” This essentially meant that a male landowner could only gift his real property to a male relative, usually a son or sons. If a landowner died with no male heirs, his land would escheat back to the Trustees. This would be the case even if the landowner had a spouse or several able-bodied daughters and had made many improvements upon the land. Georgia colonists hated this provision since it could operate to remove hard-worked land from a family’s possession. The practice did not long endure in the colony owing to its great unpopularity and to the decline of the Spanish military threat after the 1740s. In the later colonial period, some wives and even more daughters are bequeathed land outright in fee simple in many colonial wills.

The disparity in the presence of real property in the wills of men and women speaks to the expectations colonial Georgians had for women in their society. Given the colony’s

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<sup>57</sup> Will of Margaret Papot, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 302-306, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>58</sup> This was not unique to Georgia and Connecticut. Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena S. Walsh point out in *Robert Cole’s World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* that, “In leaving his daughters only personal property, Cole also followed traditional practice” of male testators in his region. Lois Green Carr, Russell R. Menard, and Lorena S. Walsh, *Robert Cole’s World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland* (Chapel Hill, NC: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 149.

agricultural character, land supported families. Denying women real property denied them the ability to support families themselves. Colonial Georgians expected women to work in support of husbands and not to be primary breadwinners. This is especially evident in the will of Amie Pruniere, who worked in support of not one but three husbands. Her will reads, “Amie Pruniere, wife of Joseph Pruniere of Savannah, Gent. (and widow of David Jones, planter, deceased; and before that widow of Peter Mallet of Savannah, shopkeeper, deceased).”<sup>59</sup> That colonial Georgians expected women to play a support role for men is also illustrated by bequests relating to education in the colonial Georgia wills. These were relatively rare and when they did occur, testators bestowed them upon male relatives, as was the case in the will of Matthew Mauve, who wrote that “Profits arising from estate to be used toward liberal education for William Moore, the younger.”<sup>60</sup> Colonial Georgians deemed education largely unnecessary for women since “it was assumed that a girl would need much less education in order to be a wife and mother.”<sup>61</sup>

Besides speaking of gender, the wills reflect that the testators earned their livings in a variety of ways in the colony of Georgia. Two-hundred and ninety-four of the 408 wills in the sample (72.06%) mention an occupation. Agriculture was clearly the dominant vocation in the colony. Fully 116 of these 294 testators (or 39.46%) described themselves as “Planters.” There are also four “Vintners,” two self-described “Freeholders,” and one “Yeoman,” accounting for another 2.38% of the testator population. Thirty-three testators (11.22%) described themselves as either “Esquires” or “Gentlemen” and most of these elites devised plantations in their wills as well. All total, at least 156 testators (or 38.24% of all of the testators in the sample) made a living off of agriculture in the colony.

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<sup>59</sup> Will of Amie Pruniere, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 12-13, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

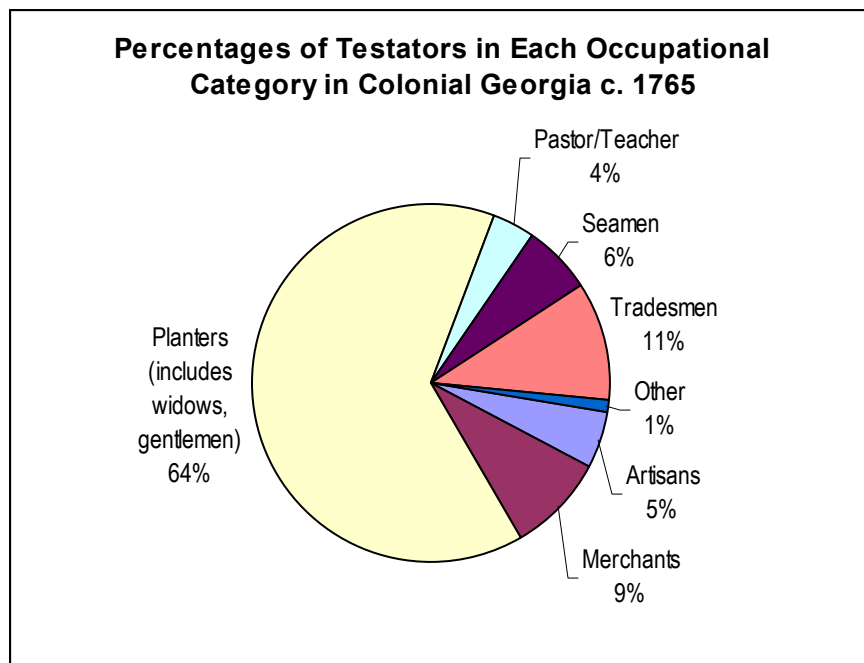
<sup>60</sup> Will of Matthew Mauve, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 171-173, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>61</sup> Carr, Menard, and Walsh, *Robert Cole's World: Agriculture and Society in Early Maryland*, 149.

Other occupations prevailed in the colony as well. Of the testators who listed an occupation, several men (6.46%) made their living at sea. There were three ships captains, one fisherman, and fifteen self-described “Mariners.” There were also thirty-one tradesmen (four “Bricklayers,” one “Blockmaker,” three “Butchers” or “Victualers,” thirteen “Carpenters,” two “Carters,” one “Cooper,” one “Cordwainer,” two “Joiners,” and four “Laborers”) and fourteen artisans (three “Blacksmiths,” one “Cabinet Maker,” one “Gunsmith,” three “Sadlers,” two “Shoemakers,” one “Silversmith,” and three “Tailors”), which accounted for the occupations of 10.54% and 4.76% of the testators, respectively.

A few of the Georgia colonists (4.42% of the testators who listed an occupation) were educated professionals or men of letters. The colonial Georgia will sample reveals that during its colonial life, Georgia boasted at least six doctors or “Practitioners of Physick,” as they were more commonly called during the age, two “Schoolmasters,” two “Ministers,” and one each rector, “Chief Justice,” and “King’s College Fellow.” Many other testators (9.18%) in the will sample dealt with trade. There were fifteen “Merchants,” seven “Indian Traders,” three “Inn-” or “Tavernkeepers,” and two “Shopkeepers.” Finally, one testator indicated that he made a living as an “Overseer” while two more were soldiers. While not technically “occupations” *per se*, among the female testators who described themselves, twenty-six declared themselves as “Widows,” while two more were wives and three more were “Spinsters” (reflecting 10.54% of the testators who declared an occupation). Figure Two summarizes the occupational information revealed by the wills in the sample by illustrating the percentage of colonial testators leaving wills who labored in several occupational categories at one time or another during the life of the colony.





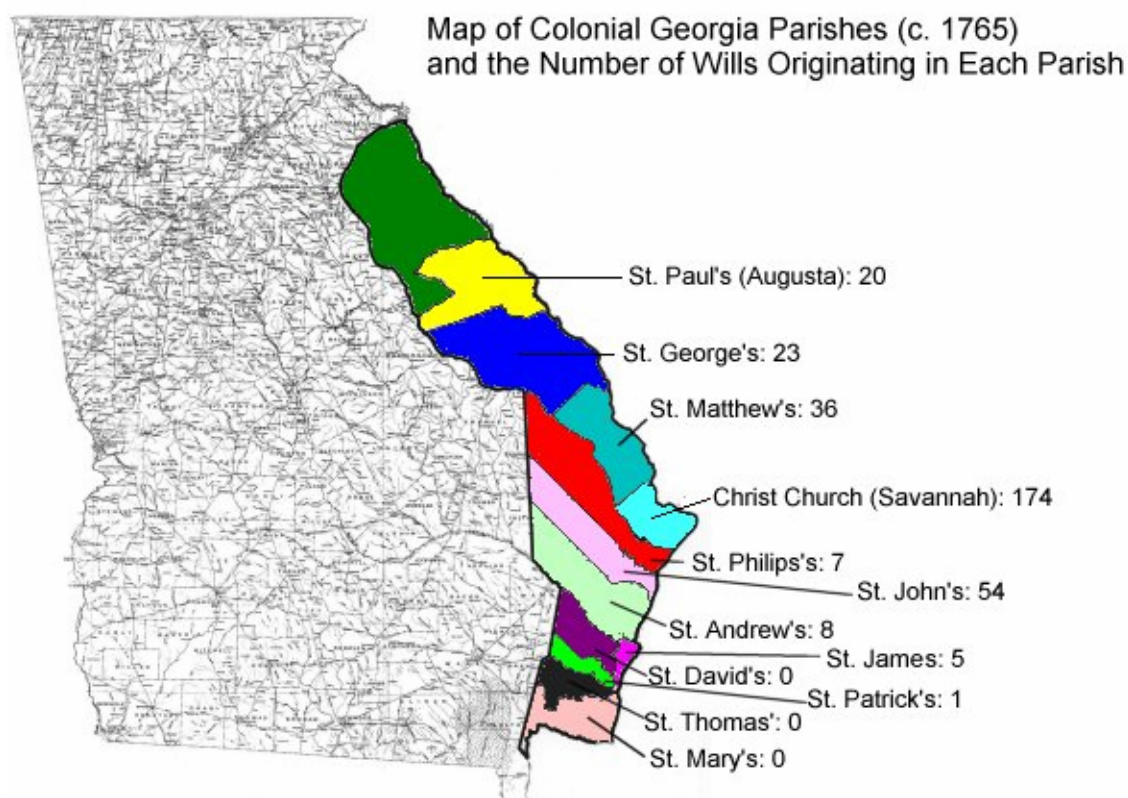
**Figure Two: Occupational Information Revealed by the Will Sample**

What the wills in the sample reveal about occupations tells a great deal about colonial Georgia. That so many different trades flourished in the colony may affirm the colony's relative economic stability. Had colonial Georgia been unstable, it is doubtful that many artisans and merchants, in particular, could have justified remaining in the colony since these occupations required stable flows of raw materials and retail goods to function. If circumstances had prohibited the regular influx of such materials and goods, it is logical that merchants and artisans would have had to turn to other trades to make their livings.<sup>62</sup> The presence of so many occupations also suggests that the economic life of the colony was dynamic and robust as many goods and services were available. Also, early Georgia was very likely connected to

<sup>62</sup> There may be another side to this argument. Dr. Michael Kwass has observed that economic stability might promote (and so be demonstrated by) *fewer* practitioners of some occupations in a colony with a more or less free market economy. This would occur as time and stability would permit a few merchants and artisans to drive competitors out of business by offering better goods and services and/or more competitive pricing. Michael Kwass, conference with author, 14 October 2005, Athens, Georgia.

international markets as evidenced by the presence of merchants, Indian traders, and ship captains in colonial society.

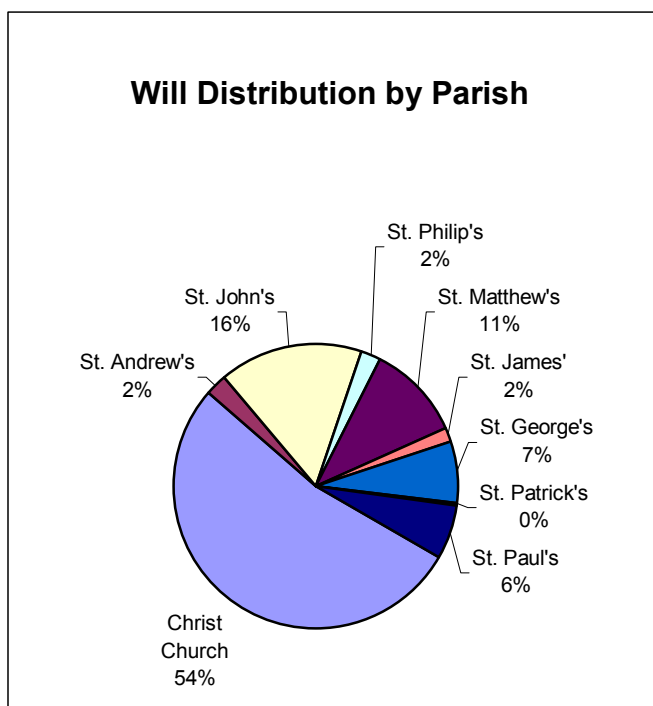
Besides speaking of occupations, the wills address the place of origin of their testators. Based upon the wills, a definitive parish of origin could be determined for 320 testators, which is indicated in Figure Three. The majority of the testators who reported a parish of origin lived along the Savannah River in the parishes of Christ Church, St. Matthew's, St. George's, and St. Paul's. The remainder of the testators either claimed no point of origin, lived in one of Georgia's other sparsely populated parishes, or hailed from other states, other countries, or towns with indeterminate locations.



*Figure Three: Will Origin by Parish*<sup>63</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Map adapted from Marion Hemperley, "Map of Georgia Parishes." Available from <http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/parishmap.htm>. Internet; accessed 30 July 2005.

Figure Four indicates the percentage distribution of wills in the sample by parish and indicates that the wills in the sample had diverse origins.



**Figure Four: Colonial Will Distribution by Parish (Note: No wills appeared from St. Thomas', St. Mary's, or St. David's Parishes.)**

For all they tell, the wills in the sample do not illuminate every detail about the testators. For example, no will specifies the age or race of its author. Given what is known about Georgia's colonial demographics, it is probable that all testators, witnesses, and executors would have been white and that the vast majority of testators wrote their wills between the ages of twenty-five and fifty. The wills also do not indicate the date of death of any testators, though it may logically be presumed to be close to the time that the will was proved in most cases.

Though they do not reveal everything about the colonial Georgians who wrote them, the wills still reveal much. Over a fifty year period, we see through them where and how several

different colonists lived; how colonists organized their families; what testators did; what they thought, felt, and valued; and what they owned. We see this not for any particular group of colonists at any particular time, but rather for a wide and diverse array of colonial Georgians who lived throughout the entire colonial period. The testators, then, were typical colonists. As such, they were representative of colonial Georgians in general, which makes their history likewise representative of that of the colony. Their wills inform colonial Georgia history, especially as regards slavery in the colony.

## CHAPTER 3

### SLAVERY BY THE NUMBERS IN THE COLONY OF GEORGIA

Thomas Frazer and Richard Williamson had much in common. Both men were planters. Both men called Christ Church Parish in the Georgia colony home. Both men wrote wills in late 1772. Both men had small families: Thomas had his wife, Catherina, while Richard had his wife, Susannah, and a single child, William. Both men held land and owned homes. And both men owned slaves. Here, however, the similarity ends. Richard Williamson owned many slaves. In his will, he left to Susannah, “7 Negroes now in the possession of Ann Parker, her mother” and “43 Negroes to executors with remaining estate to administer my plantation during my son, William’s, minority.”<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Thomas Frazer owned but one slave: a “Negro fellow named David” whom he left to his wife along with the rest of his entire estate.<sup>65</sup>

Taken alone, these wills suggest that slave ownership could vary widely even between similarly situated colonists. They also suggest that some colonists came to own many slaves while others owned very few—in this case one. Was this polarized slave ownership the norm in the Georgia colony? Or do the wills of Thomas Frazer and Richard Williamson present an anomalous case in a colony where slave ownership was, in fact, uniform?

Betty Wood is the only scholar who has really engaged this question in any depth.<sup>66</sup> In several articles and in her book entitled *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, Wood tells the story of

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<sup>64</sup> Will of Richard Williamson, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>65</sup> Will of Thomas Frazer, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 174-176, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>66</sup> Few scholars besides Betty Wood have investigated colonial Georgia slavery at all. See Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Rice Culture in Low Country Georgia, 1750-1860* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1985).

slavery in the colony and touches upon patterns of slave ownership.<sup>67</sup> She asserts that, “Between 1752 and 1765, upwards of 3,000 blacks, most of whom appear to have been African-born, were brought by their owners, or shipped, to a labour-hungry Georgia from elsewhere in British America.”<sup>68</sup> Karen Bell concurs with Wood and indicates that, “During the early period of Savannah’s involvement in the [slave] trade, from 1755 to 1767, 63 percent of slaves imported into Savannah originated from the Caribbean, and 24 percent came directly from Africa’s rice and grain coast.”<sup>69</sup> Bell likewise indicates that, “During the intermediate period from 1768 to 1771, 86 percent of slaves imported into Savannah originated from Africa.”<sup>70</sup> Wood acknowledges this shift as well, noting that “In 1766 blacks began to be imported directly from West Africa” (mainly from Angola, Sierra Leone, and Gambia) and that importation from elsewhere in the Americas declined.<sup>71</sup> Owing in part to this importation, Wood posits that between 1750 and 1775, Georgia’s slave population grew in size from less than 350 to approximately 16,000 people.<sup>72</sup>

This influx changed colonial Georgia society. Wood claims that, “Within a decade or so of the introduction of slavery into Georgia the Low Country already contained ‘a pyramid shaped distribution of landholders with a handful of large slave-owning rice planters at the apex and small family farms with one or no slaves at the bottom’, a social structure which endured down

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<sup>67</sup> See Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984). See also Betty Wood, *Women’s Work, Men’s Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

<sup>68</sup> Betty Wood, “Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815,” *The Historical Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1987): 605.

<sup>69</sup> Karen Bell, “Atlantic Slave Trade to Savannah,” *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Available from <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-686>. Internet; accessed 31 July 2005.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Betty Wood, “Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815,” *The Historical Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1987): 605.

<sup>72</sup> Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 89-98.

to the Civil War.”<sup>73</sup> “At the top of this ‘pyramid’,” Wood claims, “5 per cent of masters owned more than fifty slaves.”<sup>74</sup> According to Wood, this meant that within two decades, around 60 nabobs came to own roughly half of Georgia’s slave population. Outside of this upper echelon, ownership was more modest, though still robust. Wood indicates that, “43 percent of masters owned between two and nine slaves and 13 percent held just one slave.”<sup>75</sup> Wood concludes that, “the average size of slave holdings was 15 between 1755 and 1777” and that “Throughout this period, ‘as many as 70 per cent of Low Country slaves lived on estates containing more than twenty (but seldom more than fifty) slaves.’”<sup>76</sup> In terms of where these estates were, Wood agrees with scholar Sylvia Frey, who asserted that in 1775, “two-thirds of Georgia’s slaves lived within twenty miles of the coast.”<sup>77</sup>

Regarding the character of the slave population overall, Wood asserts that, “the Low Country’s black population throughout [the colonial] period was predominately African-born, male, young, and unskilled.”<sup>78</sup> Discerning more than this, she claims, is lamentably difficult. Wood points out that, “Unfortunately, there is no detailed record of the sex ratios and age structure of the slave cargoes landed in Georgia.”<sup>79</sup> Regarding the age of slaves, Woods indicates that, “Only 2 percent of the 3,042 adult slaves listed on 235 colonial inventories of estates (records which, it must be said, seldom indicated the exact or even approximate ages of slaves) were said to be ‘old’. The same was true of just under 5 per cent of the 1,563 men and

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<sup>73</sup> Ralph Gray and Betty Wood, “The Transition from Indentured to Involuntary Servitude in Colonial Georgia,” *Explorations in Economic History*, 13 (1976): 363.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia*, 108.

<sup>76</sup> Betty Wood, “Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815,” *The Historical Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1987): 603.

<sup>77</sup> Sylvia Frey, “Bitter fruit from the sweet stem of liberty”: Georgia slavery and the American revolution’ (paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association held in New York City, Dec., 1985), p. 13 as cited in Betty Wood, “Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815,” *The Historical Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1987): 604.

<sup>78</sup> Betty Wood, “Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georgia, 1763-1815,” *The Historical Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1987): 603.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

women listed on ninety-eight inventories from Chatham County covering the years between 1776 and 1796.”<sup>80</sup> The inference, then, is that slaves were generally young people. Regarding slave gender, Wood asserts that, “In the black population as a whole, men outnumbered women.”<sup>81</sup> Wood’s research reveals that before the Revolutionary War, the sex ratio on the 235 slave owner estates that she surveyed “was in the order of 148 men to every 100 women.”<sup>82</sup> Wood also holds that, “Men outnumbered women in the countryside, but the reverse appears to have been true in Savannah, as indeed it was in Charleston also.”<sup>83</sup>

Betty Wood’s work is exceptional and communicates much about slavery in the colony of Georgia. Still, hers is but one treatment of this topic drawn mainly from one cache of sources (mostly estate records). Other sources (like the wills from the Georgia colony) could augment Wood’s conclusions or tell a different story altogether.

Taken as a whole, the wills from the colony reveal much about slavery. On the one hand, they provide facts and figures to substantiate the big picture of Georgia’s early slaveholding experience. After gleaning the big picture, details can be brought to life by examining through wills the slaveholding experiences of select individuals in the colony that typify larger segments of the population. Throughout their review, what the wills contain permits us to answer some questions about slavery in the colony that could not be answered by looking at estate records alone.

Estate records were just that—records. They were meant to be impersonal and were written by third parties whose only interest in the estate was reducing it to numbers. They

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. Peter Wood places the ratio between the sexes among adult slaves in South Carolina around 1726 at 129 men to 100 women on average-sized plantations and at 155 men to 100 women on very large plantations. Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 159-160.

<sup>83</sup> Betty Wood, “Some Aspects of Female Resistance to Chattel Slavery in Low Country Georges, 1763-1815,” *The Historical Journal*, 30, no. 3 (1987): 606.



generally took the form of an inventory—a list—of a decedent’s property. Accompanying each entry would be a valuation of the item or items described. On the other hand, wills were written by estate owners themselves to do nothing less than make one last attempt to set events in particular directions in life. These documents specify who is to receive what property owned by a testator and the conditions (if any) under which the receipt will occur. They were the most important documents most testators would ever draft. The information they contain should be examined and imbued with equal importance. Doing so will confirm several scholarly contentions, call others into question, and speak to several points that have been inadequately addressed by previous research.

Different testators spoke about slaves in different ways in their wills. Some referred to slaves by name. For example, planter John Davis from St. Philips’s Parish bequeathed, “five Negroes named Mingo, Adam, Natt, Bob, and Rose” to his son John; “eight Negroes named March, Peter, Dick, Cudjo, Lucy, Big Chloe, Jemina, and Paul” to son William; “four Negroes named Limas, Will, Flora, and Rachel” to daughter Sarah Jones; “four Negroes name Joe, Leah, Melinda, and Bob” to daughter Catherine Morecock; “four Negroes named Saul, Nan, London, and Bella,” to daughter Rebecca Patterson; “five Negroes named Harry, Sauney, Willie, Eve, and Sue” to daughter Theodora Davis; and “Negroes named Pompey and Flora” and to grandson James Davis.<sup>84</sup> Other wills treated Negroes much more impersonally, more like chattel, as did Thomas Carter of St. John’s Parish, who bequeathed his “Personal estate, consisting of Negroes, cattle, horses, hogs, sheep, etc. to be divided equally among wife, Mary; sons, Hepworth, James, and Charles Thomas Carter; and daughters, Anne Oswald and Catherine Mutteair.”<sup>85</sup> This

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<sup>84</sup> Will of John Davis, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 274-278, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia. See John C. Inscoe, “Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 49, no. 4 (November, 1983): 527-554 for an interesting discussion on slave names.

<sup>85</sup> Will of Thomas Carter, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 84-85, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

difference in nomenclature is telling. It suggests that some slave owners thought of their slaves as simply being more human than did other slave owners. This is because they bestowed names upon their slaves that were essentially unremarkable by standards of the day. On the other hand, slave owners that bestowed unusual names upon their slaves (e.g., names of powerful Greek gods) often did so to lampoon them and to reiterate their bound condition.

The wills from the Georgia colony reveal that 158 of the 408 testators (38.73%) owned one or more slaves during the colonial period. More may have owned slaves, but this is doubtful simply because no other testators made mention of slaves in their estates and it is very unlikely that anyone would omit something so valuable from a will. That slaves were indeed valuable is a foregone conclusion.<sup>86</sup> Jackson Turner Main asserted that possession of twenty slaves in the pre-Revolutionary South denoted “a man of means.”<sup>87</sup> This conclusion stemmed from his calculations that the average price for a healthy adult male slave before 1776 was around £36, a figure which other scholars match.<sup>88</sup> (Healthy slave women might sell for around £30.) Main went on to assert that to live comfortably before the War for Independence, a man needed to make around £100 annually, and that to live very well would require an income of around £450 per annum.<sup>89</sup> Given these figures, omitting a slave from a colonial will would be an equivalent deed to omitting several thousand dollars from a will today. This is simply something that few, if any, testators—colonial or modern—would do.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Alice Hanson Jones asserts that “in the South slaves were second only to the land in value” that comprised colonial wealth. Alice Hanson Jones, “Wealth and the Growth of the Thirteen Colonies: Some Implications,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 44, no. 2 (June, 1984): 251.

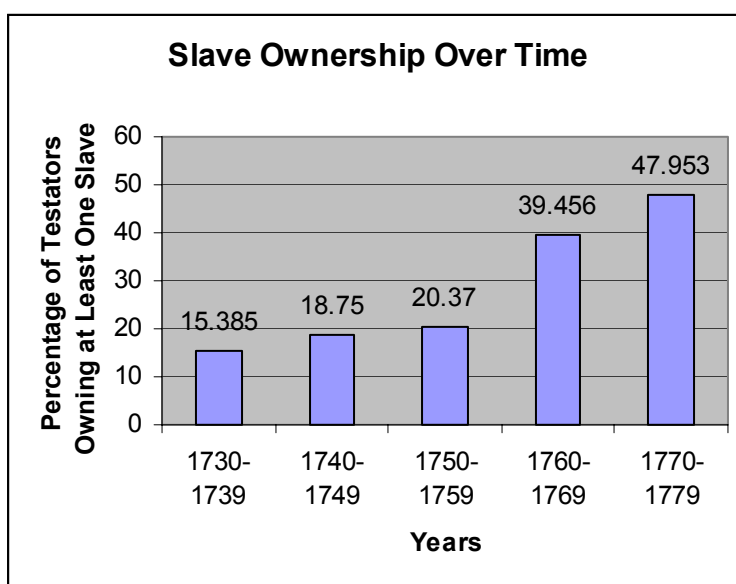
<sup>87</sup> Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 55.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>90</sup> Surely, a testator with only one or two slaves is not going to forget about them in a will any more than a testator with one or two children might forget to leave a bequest to a child. It stands to reason that the only testators that *might* not mention their slaves in their wills would be those who own very rich estates who tended to think of their slaves more like livestock than human beings. Few men of such wealth existed in the colony and not all of them

The will data suggest that slave ownership in colonial Georgia increased over time as reflected in Figure Five. Apparently, the increase in slave ownership occurred gradually during the colony's first three decades of life. However, slave ownership went on to double in the 1760s what it had been in the 1750s. The reason for this rapid increase is likely two-fold. It reflects the official legalization of slavery in the colony, which occurred in the 1750s, and the fact that most colonial Georgians simply lacked the means to purchase slaves very early in the colony's life.



*Figure Five: Slave Ownership Over Time in the Georgia Colony*

Some colonial Georgians appear to have owned slaves prior to 1752 when the British government actually legalized slavery in the colony. Thirty-four wills were written prior to 1752 and, in these, a total of five testators bequeathed a total of twelve slaves. One-quarter of these were actually Indian slaves. Indian slaves were relatively rare in the colony; only one other

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would make such an error of omission—if, indeed, any of them would make such an error. Consequently, very few wills (if indeed any) would omit mentioning any slaves if, in fact, the testator owned slaves.

estate even mentions an Indian slave and testator William Francis only mentions that slave to declare him (or her) emancipated.<sup>91</sup> That testators owned slaves prior to the actual legalization of slavery in the colony is telling. It suggests both that the British government lacked the ability to intimidate some colonial Georgians and that colonial Georgians thought slaves to be so valuable that they would break the law to have them.

The number of slaves owned by each slave owning testator, of course, varied. For thirty of the 158 estates that included slaves, the language of the wills was ambiguous as to the exact number of slaves owned. These wills contained language such as that of George Gray's ("Negroes and chattels to be sold to pay debts.") or George Fraser ("Wife...one third of my Negroes...Children...two thirds of my Negroes, equally divided.")<sup>92</sup> Clearly, these testators owned slaves, but it is not possible to ascertain exactly how many. (Presumably, they in fact owned at least more than but a few slaves as suggested by the context of their bequests. Who would bother fractioning other than a fairly large number?) The remaining 128 testators either specifically quantified the number of slaves they owned or gave them away by name, which facilitated making a count of 977 slaves total. The wills of sixteen of the thirty estates that did not provide an exact count of the number of slaves owned by testators did mention at least some slaves by name or mentioned at least some number of slaves. These mentioned in total at least twenty-nine slaves, which when coupled with the 977 slaves mentioned in the other wills reveals that the colonial Georgia testators in the will sample who owned slaves owned at a minimum 1007 slaves between them. Given this estimate, the mean number of slaves owned by each of these testators was seven (6.98), but this figure may be somewhat high as it factors in 126 slaves

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<sup>91</sup> Will of William Francis, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 94-102, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>92</sup> Will of George Gray, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 310-311, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia; Will of George Fraser, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 215-218, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

owned by a single exceptional testator, Joseph Butler.<sup>93</sup> This is more than double the next highest number of slaves owned by any one testator, which was fifty-two owned by Bartholomew Zouberbuhler. If Butler's estate is left out, then on average, each testator in the will sample that contributed at least some slaves to the count of 1007 owned six slaves. The will data reveal that 112 of the 128 slave owning testators whose holdings could be decidedly quantified (87.5%) owned ten slaves or less (indeed, 71.88% owned only five slaves or less) in the following distribution:

| Percentage of Testators Owning... |         |
|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 1 slave                           | 22.656% |
| 2 slaves                          | 15.625% |
| 3 slaves                          | 18.75%  |
| 4 slaves                          | 8.594%  |
| 5 slaves                          | 6.25%   |
| 6 slaves                          | 3.906%  |
| 7 slaves                          | 2.343%  |
| 8 slaves                          | 3.125%  |
| 9 slaves                          | 1.563%  |
| 10 slaves                         | 4.688%  |

**Table One: Percentage of Testators Owning Between One and Ten Slaves**

Sixteen of these estates (including Butler's) registered more than ten slaves and half of these kept between eleven and twenty slaves. The remaining eight estates had at least 126, 52, 51, 47, 37, 34, 29, and 21 slaves, respectively. All but two of these large estates existed in the 1770s, very late in Georgia's colonial era, and the two that did not issued from the 1760s.

The wills also reveal a great deal about the gender of slave holdings on both large and small estates. Betty Wood placed the sex ratio of slaves during Georgia's colonial period at

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<sup>93</sup> The mode for the 1007 slaves (at minimum) that colonial Georgia testators in the colonial will sampled owned was 3.

about 1.5 males for every 1 female. She also indicated that female slaves outnumbered male slaves in Savannah, while males outnumbered females on slaveholding estates in the countryside. Eighty-nine of the 158 testators who owned slaves in the colonial will sample reported owning at least one male slave while ninety-six estates reported owning at least one female slave. The remaining testators did not provide names or the genders of the slaves they bequeathed, but simply gave away “Negroes” in varying amounts, which made assigning gender values impossible. Testators who did this tended to have large estates that accounted for many slaves. Consequently, it is possible to ascertain the gender of around only 42% of the 1007 slaves that (at a minimum) colonial Georgia testators bequeathed in the wills. This is still, however, a relatively large percentage, which will reveal much about the sex ratio of slaves in the colony.

Remarkably, the wills place this overall ratio at exactly 1:1 as testators in the sample definitely bequeathed 211 male slaves and 211 female slaves. The wills of sixty estates indicate that testators owned both male and female slaves at the same time, which means that at least 38% of the colonial Georgia slaveholders in the sample owned slaves of both genders. The wills indicate that these estate holders owned a total of 170 male slaves and 156 female slaves, which produces a sex ratio of 1.09:1. The wills indicate that nineteen testators owned the same number of male and female slaves while twenty-three estates held more males than females and eighteen estates held more females than males. One-hundred and twelve testators in the sample related their place of residence as colonial Georgia’s only true city, Savannah. Between them, these testators owned fifty-seven male slaves and forty-five female slaves.

This data suggests that neither male nor female slaves outnumbered each other in the city to any significant extent. In addition, 116 of the testators in the colonial will sample described themselves as “planters,” the only occupation in the sample that required living in the

countryside. Between them, these testators reported owning ninety-four male slaves and ninety female slaves. As was the case in Savannah, this suggests that neither male nor female slaves outnumbered one another in the countryside to any meaningful extent.

What all of this data regarding slavery suggests is multi-fold and tells a great deal about colonial Georgia. First, it is evident that the overall character of slave ownership during most of Georgia's colonial period was very small-scale and that it grew only gradually over time. The wills suggest that during the entire colonial period, about 40% of colonial Georgians were slave owners. About three-quarters of these slaveholders owned five or fewer slaves with many holding just one or two. Individual testators holding large estates with many slaves were relatively rare, though they did exist and did account for much slave ownership in the colony as the case of Joseph Butler demonstrates.<sup>94</sup> This generally affirms Betty Wood's pyramidal description of slave ownership in the colony. However, the will data go on to suggest that the average size of slave holdings in colonial Georgia was actually about half of what Betty Wood would have it to be. Also, the will data seem to indicate that the percentage of male and female slaves living in the colony was roughly equal throughout colonial Georgia, which differs from Betty Wood's conclusion that the sex ratio of slaves in the colony was about 1.5 slave men for every slave woman.

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<sup>94</sup> Based upon conclusions drawn by Jeffrey Robert Young, this pattern appears to have persisted for about a century in Georgia:

Although slavery played a dominant economic and political role in Georgia, most white Georgians did not own slaves. In 1860 less than one-third of Georgia's adult white male population of 132,317 were slaveholders. The percentage of free families holding slaves was somewhat higher (37 percent) but still well short of a majority. Moreover, only 6,363 of Georgia's 41,084 slaveholders owned twenty or more slaves. The planter elite, who made up just 15 percent of the state's slaveholder population, were far outnumbered by the 20,077 slaveholders who owned fewer than six slaves. In other words, only half of Georgia's slaveholders owned more than a handful of slaves, and Georgia's planters constituted less than 5 percent of the state's adult white male population.

Jeffrey Robert Young, "Slavery in Antebellum Georgia." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Available from <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1019>. Accessed 31 July 2005.

The will data reveal that the pattern of slave ownership in colonial Georgia, where a handful of slave owners held the majority of slaves, is similar to that which existed in South Carolina, though on a smaller scale. Peter Wood describes slavery in that colony in his well-respected work, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*. By cleverly interpreting census records from colonial South Carolina, Wood concludes that by about 1708, the population of blacks in the colony began to exceed the population of whites. This was owing to the large-scale importation of slaves into the colony to work on the lucrative rice plantations that existed throughout the swampy Low Country. From this point on, Peter Wood demonstrates that the black population would maintain a majority in the colony. By 1720, in a remarkably short amount of time, this majority approached 65 percent.<sup>95</sup>

While a “black majority” would never emerge in colonial Georgia, Georgia would come to own slaves in the South Carolina manner.<sup>96</sup> Peter Wood demonstrates convincingly that slave ownership in colonial South Carolina concentrated in a relatively small number of families. He discerns from a 1726 census record of St. George’s Parish that eighteen out of 108 families (roughly 17%) held 65% of the slaves in the parish. He further demonstrates that a mere three families owned fully one-fifth of that percentage.<sup>97</sup>

The numbers for colonial Georgia are virtually identical to the numbers Peter Wood generated for colonial South Carolina. The 158 slave holding estates in the colonial Georgia will

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<sup>95</sup> Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 158.

<sup>96</sup> Regarding Georgia, Jeffrey Robert Young asserts that, “on the eve of the Civil War, some 462,198 slaves constituted 44 percent of the state’s total population.” Not a majority, but a significant number all the same. Jeffrey Robert Young, “Slavery in Antebellum Georgia.” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Available from <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1019>. Accessed 31 July 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 159. Peter Wood also shows that a very large number of these slaves came from a single African region, Angola. Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, 302.



sample possessed at minimum 1007 slaves.<sup>98</sup> The largest twenty-five out of these 158 estates (roughly 16%) held 643 slaves—63.85% of the slaves in the sample. The top two estates (the families of Joseph Butler and Bartholomew Zouberbuhler) held a total of 178 slaves, a little over one-fourth of that percentage.

That Joseph Butler, “Esquire,” should own so many slaves may strike few as being surprising. He was, after all, a gentleman who owned much land. But Bartholomew Zouberbuhler was a man of the cloth, the “rector of Christ Church Parish at Savannah.”<sup>99</sup> It may strike some as odd that a preacher should own any slaves at all, let alone fifty-two of them. Zouberbuhler would not be the only colonial Georgian with a conspicuous occupation to own slaves.

Slave ownership varied according to the occupation of a testator. Of the 408 wills in the sample, 292 testators listed an occupation. Unsurprisingly given Georgia’s agrarian character, 120 of the 292 testators who listed an occupation (40.96%) were planters (including vintners). Thirty-three more testators were “Gentlemen,” who did not till the fields themselves but generally did make their money from the agricultural labors of others. Another thirty testators were widows, wives, or sister-spinsters of these gentlemen who, again, generally subsisted off the fruits of someone else’s labors at planting. All told, at least 183 colonial Georgians who wrote wills in the sample made a living through agriculture—just under two-thirds of the testators who declared an occupation in their wills. Ninety-two of these colonists (just under half) owned a total of 666 slaves, or 66.13% of the 1007 slaves (at minimum) mentioned in the

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<sup>98</sup> There were surely a few more slaves since this count can not include values from the 30 estates that held slaves but did not specify how many slaves were owned. However, given that the slave populations of other estates were generally modest, it is probable that the slave populations of these estates were generally modest as well. Since this would mean that these estates held relatively small numbers of slaves, the overall number of slaves they would contribute toward ascertaining the dynamics of slave ownership in the colony would be small.

<sup>99</sup> Will of Bartholomew Zouberbuhler, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 184-188, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

will sample. Forty-eight of these ninety-two agriculturalists (52.17%) owned five or fewer slaves each. The largest five enumerated estates (eighteen listed an unspecified number of slaves) each held 126, 52, 51, 47, and 34 slaves, respectively. This data implies that planters owned the majority of the slaves in the colony just as they owned the majority of the slaves in the colonial Georgia will sample. It also indicates that a few planters in the colony were quite wealthy and owned very many slaves while the majority of planters owned five or fewer slaves each.

Other testators who made their livings in different ways owned slaves as well and their slave owning patterns differed from those of planters. Included in the ranks of slaveholders for the colony of Georgia were at least one each mariner, merchant, carpenter, Indian trader, physician, bricklayer, innkeeper, tailor, cutler, overseer, cordwainer, cabinet maker, and one “Chief Justice.” Conversely, none of the testators who reported the following occupations bequeathed any slaves in their wills at all: shoemaker, saddler, schoolmaster, soldier, blacksmith, ship captain, yeoman/freeholder, laborer, joiner, gunsmith, wagoneer/carter, silversmith, shopkeeper, cooper, block maker, and one “King’s College Fellow.” Table Two indicates slave ownership by occupation.

What this data reveal that may be surprising is the relative scarcity of slave ownership by non-agrarians. Granted, no one would expect people working at non-agricultural occupations to own the same number of slaves as planters, especially in a colony as bucolic as Georgia. This is because merchants, craftsmen, and the like simply had less need of slaves given the kind of work they did and, in all probability, less means to afford to purchase slaves. Yet, even so, one might expect to see at least a few slaves owned by people in these types of careers in the form of house

servants or assistants. The wills relate that in the colony of Georgia, this presence was actually paltry.

| Occupation                       | Number of Testators Reporting Occupation | Number of Reporting Testators who Owned Slaves | Percentage of Slave Ownership by Occupation | Size of Slave Population in Each Estate                        |
|----------------------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Planter                          | 116                                      | 55   | 47.413%                                     | Var.   |
| Gentleman/Esquire                | 33                                       | 19   | 57.576%                                     | 126, 10, 4, 4, 4, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, and 7 of undetermined size |
| Wife/Widow/Spinster              | 31                                       | 13   | 41.935                                      | 47, 13, 10, 7, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 1                                |
| Mariner/Fisherman                | 16                                       | 3  | 18.75                                       | 8, 5, 2  |
| Merchant                         | 15                                       | 5  | 33.33                                       | 3, 3, 2, 2, 2  |
| Carpenter                        | 13                                       | 5  | 38.46                                       | 8, 4, 2, 1, 1  |
| Indian Trader                    | 7  | 1  | 14.286                                      | 2  |
| Doctors/Practitioners of Physick | 5  | 3  | 60  | 3, 2, and 1 of undetermined size                               |
| Vintner                          | 4  | 3  | 75  | 3, 2, 2  |
| Bricklayers                      | 4  | 2  | 50  | 1 and 1 of undetermined size                                   |
| Tavern/Inn-keeper                | 3  | 1  | 33.33                                       | 1 undetermined size  |
| Tailors                          | 3  | 1  | 33.33                                       | 4  |
| Victualer/cutler/butcher         | 3  | 1  | 33.33                                       | 6  |
| Minister/rector/preacher         | 3  | 2  | 66.66                                       | 52, 11   |
| Overseer                         | 1  | 1  | 100   | 3  |
| Cordwainer                       | 1  | 1  | 100   | 2  |
| Cabinet maker                    | 1  | 1  | 100   | 3  |
| “Chief Justice”                  | 1  | 1  | 100   | 1  |

*Table Two: Slave Ownership by Occupation in Colonial Georgia*

Only twenty-six testators both declared an occupation that did not involve agriculture and also owned slaves. The wills of these twenty-six testators mention a total of just seventy slaves. This means that out of 408 estates spanning Georgia’s entire four-decade colonial period, which contained at minimum 1007 slaves (not to mention those additional slaves from the thirty estates that included slaves but did not specify how many slaves were owned), only seventy slaves

(6.95%) were definitively owned by colonists who were not tied by their vocation directly to agriculture.<sup>100</sup>

That most slaves in the Georgia colony worked on plantations while a few worked at other jobs is further born out by what the wills reveal about where slave owners lived. The wills of twenty slaveholding testators do not specify any point of origin; the remaining 138 do. According to these 138 wills, seventy-five slaveholding testators (54.35%) hailed from Christ Church Parish. The wills of eighteen of these seventy-five testators do not specify the number of slaves attached to the estates. The remaining fifty-seven testators owned 445 slaves between them, or 45.55% of all of the slaves accounted for in the will sample. Ownership was polarized, however. Seventy-seven percent of these fifty-seven testators (some forty-four slave owning testators) owned only five slaves or less, while three very wealthy testators owned 229 slaves between them in estates with slave populations of at least 126, 52, and 51.

Slave ownership in the other parishes was much lighter as compared with slave ownership in Christ Church Parish. Thirteen testators from St. Matthew's Parish owned slaves. Two of these testators bequeathed an indeterminate number of slaves. The remaining eleven testators from St. Matthew's Parish bequeathed a total of eighty-four slaves, though seven of these estates (63.64%) held three slaves or less each. The remaining four estates held 37, 17, 10, and 7 slaves each. Twenty-seven testators from St. John's Parish held slaves. Three estates did not specify how many slaves each testator possessed. The remaining twenty-four estates in this parish held a total of 123 slaves, but as was the case in St. Matthew's, most holdings were quite small. Sixteen of the twenty-four estates (66.67%) contained five or fewer slaves and the largest of the estates contained only twenty-one slaves. Table Three summarizes slave ownership in the

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<sup>100</sup> The remaining 25% of the slaves mentioned in the wills of the colony that did not belong to agriculturalists or craftsmen, merchants, etc., belonged to testators who did not indicate an occupation in their wills.

remaining parishes, which was generally much less pronounced than slave ownership in Christ Church, St. Matthew's, or St. John's Parish.

| Parish         | Estates with Slaves | Slave populations on each estate        |
|----------------|---------------------|---|
| St. Philip's   | 4                   | 34, 3, 2, and 1 of undetermined size    |
| St. Paul's     | 4                   | 6, 4, 1, 2                              |
| St. James'     | 2                   | 10, 3                                   |
| St. George's   | 5                   | 12, 2, 1, 1, and 1 of undetermined size |
| St. Andrew's   | 6                   | 20, 5, 4, 4, and 2 of undetermined size |
| South Carolina | 2                   | 5 and 1 of undetermined size            |

*Table Three: Slave Ownership by Parish*

As was the case for the most part in the other parishes mentioned in the colonial Georgia will sample, slave ownership in the parishes of St. Philip's, St. Paul's, St. James', St. George's, St. Andrew's, and elsewhere was generally modest. Thirteen of the twenty-three slaveholding estates apparent in these parishes (55.52%) held only five slaves or less and only two estates definitively had over twenty slaves.

The patterns of slave ownership revealed by the wills tell us much about the wider world of colonial Georgia. In the main, it affirms that colonial Georgia's population concentrated along waterways. Colonists used rivers such as the Savannah River both to flood rice fields and to transport their harvests to the markets and port of Savannah. Colonists in close proximity to such waterways benefited economically from their location. They were able to make more money, which could in turn be used to expand their operations. That expansion would, in turn, often lead to still greater profits, which begot still more expansion. At each turn, the more capital a planter had, the more slaves he could purchase to further his operations. This would

leave him with larger slave holdings than many other colonists, holdings that needed bequeathing at death.

The information provided by many of the wills in the sample facilitates an analysis of urban slavery in the colony as well. This is because many wills indicate that the testator was from Savannah, Georgia's only true city.<sup>101</sup> One-hundred and eleven testators in the sample specifically indicated in their will that they were from Savannah. Eighty-seven of these testators listed an occupation that likewise suggests they were from Savannah, such as "merchant" (ten testators) or "mariner" (ten testators). Many were also tradesmen as there were wills left by eight carpenters, two joiners, and two bricklayers. There were also ten widows, nine gentlemen/esquires, four vintners, and a smattering of artisans who called Savannah home.<sup>102</sup> Forty-four testators who lived in Savannah indicated in their wills that they owned slaves, which means that 39.64% of these city-dwellers were also slave owners. Twelve of these owned an indeterminate number of slaves. The remaining thirty-two testators in the colonial Georgia will sample owned between one and thirteen slaves each for a total of 116 slaves in the distribution presented in Table Four.

As in the case of plantation slavery, the will data indicate that small-scale slave ownership was the norm in colonial Georgia off of the plantation. The minimum 116 slaves kept by testators in Savannah during Georgia's colonial period represent just 11.52% of the 1007 slaves (at minimum) that appear in the 408 colonial will sample. This percentage roughly comports with the percentage of slaves living in urban Charleston during South Carolina's

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<sup>101</sup> Granted, Savannah was not a "city" on a par with New York, Philadelphia, or even Charleston, but it was arguably a city by colonial Georgia standards.

<sup>102</sup> Two testators that claimed Savannah as their home listed their occupation as "planter." These were dropped from present consideration simply because there were no plantations within the city limits. Also, while it is likely that many, if not all, of the elites who claimed Savannah as home in fact kept many of the slaves they mention in their wills on plantations, these slaves are included in the urban slavery count. This is done because it permits erring on the side of caution since it is not possible to discern exactly how many slaves were house servants and how many slaves were field hands.

colonial period. Michael P. Johnson found that, “More than nine out of ten slaves in South Carolina lived on the rice and sea-island cotton plantations along the coast or on the short-staple cotton plantations throughout the upcountry.”<sup>103</sup> By extension, then, the remaining 10% or so of the colony’s slaves must have lived off-plantation in city environs.

| Percentage of Savannah Testators Owning... |         |
|--|---------|
| 1 slave                                    | 15.625% |
| 2 slaves                                   | 25%     |
| 3 slaves                                   | 28.125% |
| 4 slaves                                   | 12.5%   |
| 5 slaves                                   | 0%      |
| 6 slaves                                   | 3.125%  |
| 7 slaves                                   | 3.125%  |
| 8 slaves                                   | 6.25%   |
| 9 slaves                                   | 0%      |
| 10 or more slaves                          | 6.25%   |

**Table Four: Percentage of Urban Testators Owning Between One and Ten Slaves**

Since urban living went hand-in-hand with certain occupations, it is worth considering whether the 114 testators in the 408 will sample that declared no occupation could have contributed significantly to an urban slave presence assuming (for sake of argument) the improbable, that all were city-dwellers. Of these 114 testators, only thirty-nine (34.21%) owned slaves. Thirty of these thirty-nine testators owned a total of just 155 slaves (Joseph Butler owned almost as many on his single plantation) while the remaining nine testators owned an indeterminate number of slaves. Twenty-one of the thirty testators (70%) owned but between one and three slaves each of the 155. Seven of the remaining nine testators owned between five

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<sup>103</sup> Michael P. Johnson, “Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 38, no. 3 (July, 1981): 428.

and twelve slaves each while the remaining two testators that specified no occupation in their wills owned seventeen and thirty-seven slaves.

What this data tells us is that just over half of the testators who specified no occupation but did own slaves owned only three slaves or fewer. Several more of these testators owned but fewer than a dozen slaves. In short, the vast majority of the testators that specified no occupation owned very few slaves. Even if we were to assume that all of these testators worked off of plantations and in urban environs, the number of slaves they owned would still not much increase the presence of slaves in colonial Savannah. The will data again suggest that colonial Georgians kept the vast majority of slaves on plantations in relatively small numbers, though some planters did own large numbers of slaves.

Few colonial Georgians held many slaves simply because few could afford to. “Access to capital was the key factor in obtaining slave labor” and only those men who “possessed the very best land and the largest amounts of capital” could own many slaves.<sup>104</sup> These men frequently brought wealth with them to Georgia from other colonies to duplicate successful plantation enterprises there. Some, however, arrived to Georgia “nearly penniless” and went on to become men of great rank.<sup>105</sup> Alan Galloway points out that wealth and power tended to beget wealth and power. One prominent planter, Jonathan Bryan, built a plantation empire “largely because of his position on the Executive Council, which regulated Georgia’s land system through legislation and control of the distribution of land in the public domain.”<sup>106</sup> At its height, Bryan’s plantation empire “contained some 10,000 acres and 300 slaves.”<sup>107</sup> Bryan earned his seat on the council by virtue of becoming a leader in colonial Georgia society. In this, Bryan was “typical

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<sup>104</sup> Alan Galloway, “Jonathan Bryan’s Plantation Empire: Land, Politics, and the Formation of a Ruling Class in Colonial Georgia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ser., 45, no. 2 (April, 1988): 275, 257.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.



of Georgia's slaveholding elite," a man of talent, "who understood the importance of patronage, political preferment, and public works projects, as well as the marketing of crops and the intricacies of English law."<sup>108</sup>

Whether they were men of talent or merely men, virtually all colonial Georgia slaveholders shared similar roots. Slaveholders in the colony were overwhelmingly British. None of the testators in the twelve translated wills in the sample (Dutch, French, or German) bequeathed any slaves in their wills. Also, few Germanic colonists (colonial Georgia's largest non-British ethnic group) appear to have owned any slaves; only two out of eleven residents of Ebenezer (a town settled by Germanic Salzburgers) held slaves. The reason why non-Britons and Germanic Salzburgers in colonial Georgia did not own slaves would have varied from person to person, but may have been tied to living conditions. Two scholars have noted that, "Because the Salzburgers maintained a degree of stability and economic prosperity, they became ardent defenders of the Trustees' ban on slavery."<sup>109</sup>

Clearly, the wills provide a great deal of quantitative information about slavery in the colony. Since nothing suggests that these several hundred wills are not representative of colonial Georgia generally, we might make some inferences about slaveholding in the colony from what the wills tell us. For starters, it would seem that only around two-fifths of colonial Georgians owned slaves throughout the entire life of the colony. This percentage represents something of an average since only around 20% of colonial Georgians owned slaves during the 1730s, 1740s, and 1750s and around 40% and 50% owned slaves in the 1760s and 1770s, respectively. Of the 38% of colonial Georgians who owned slaves, close to three-quarters of them owned a small number of slaves (five or fewer) and over half of these slave owners owned but one or two

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>109</sup> Shane A. Runyon and Robert Scott Davis Jr., "Ebenezer." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. Available from <http://www.newgeorgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2878>. Internet; accessed 28 August 2005.

slaves. Slave ownership in colonial Georgia was pyramidal in nature as it was in colonial South Carolina with a very small number of elites (about 16% of the colony's slaveholders) owning a large number of slaves (about 65% of the total slave population in the colony) while the remaining 84% of slaveholding colonial Georgians owned the remaining 35% of the colony's slaves in much smaller holdings. Some colonial Georgians did hold a great many slaves (some even a hundred or more), but these vast estates were very few in number. Planters, gentlemen planters, and the wives and widows of planters owned the vast majority of colonial Georgia's slaves. Tradesmen, artisans, merchants, and the like owned less than 10% of the slaves in the colony as suggested by the colonial Georgia will sample. When practitioners of these occupations did own slaves, they owned very few of them, typically only three or less. Taken as a group, colonial slave owners tended to own the same proportion of male and female slaves both on and off of plantations. Slave ownership was greatest in Christ Church Parish and in the other parishes that lined the Savannah River, although colonial Georgians in other parishes did keep slaves as well.

The will data provide a look at slavery by the numbers in the Georgia colony, but the wills do more than just quantify colonial Georgia's slaveholding experience—they *qualify* it. Through anecdotes and passages from these testamentary documents, we learn about individual slaves and slave owners, who they were, what they were like, how they thought and felt. In doing so, we learn about slavery in the colony itself. Examining narrative excerpts from the colonial Georgia wills will tell us more about the colony than numbers ever could alone.

## CHAPTER 4

### SLAVERY BEYOND THE NUMBERS IN THE COLONY OF GEORGIA

Besides providing information useful in developing a statistical picture of slavery in the colony, what testators wrote in their wills lets us piece together other information about the peculiar institution in early Georgia. Examining accounts of various testators gives us a sense of much more than merely who owned how many slaves. What testators wrote and did not write tells us about who slaves and slave holders were, how colonial Georgians thought about and treated their slaves, and even how slaves resisted slavery, among other things. This makes the many testator anecdotes evident in the will collection just as valuable as the quantitative data gleaned about slavery from the wills.

Some slave owners were men like Hugh Clark, a planter in St. Andrew's Parish. He was certainly not rich, if his will is any indication, but he apparently lived comfortably. Of all the things he might have said first in his will, he requested only "to be buried in the town of Sunbury with my deceased wife and children."<sup>110</sup> To be sure, this would be in a churchyard, a place reserved for parishioners and friends to the community. Clark's will is dated 15 October 1771, yet it would not be proved and recorded until 17 June 1773. This means Clark planned ahead. He could have named his four Negroes (not slaves, mind you, but Negroes) anything he wished. He called them Argyll, Rinnah, Jack, and Nancy, which would have been names that existed even in white society during the colonial period. In other words, Clark did not demean his slaves by assigning them whimsical names. Clark also might have ended up with two male slaves and

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<sup>110</sup> Will of Hugh Clark, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 93-94, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

two female slaves by accident. Or he might have purchased two couples by design either in the hopes of gaining slave children or to perhaps facilitate his slaves making families.

In one of only four bequests in this short, straightforward will, Clark bequeaths these slaves to his brother, William, along with half of his “stock of cattle, horses, and hogs.”<sup>111</sup> This is a sizeable bequest, one that could turn a profit over time, and one with a purpose: William was “to act as guardian of Barbara [Clark’s daughter] until she is of age.”<sup>112</sup> Thanks to Clark’s foresight, when she came of age and sought to marry, Barbara would carry into the match the other half of her father’s livestock and the “remainder of his estate, real and personal.” This real estate would include property Clark held thanks to the following grants: “11th Feb. 1757, Hugh Clark, 500 acres in the District of Sappola, reg. 26th Feb. 1757” and “7th July 1761, Hugh Clark, 200 acres in the Parish of St. Andrew, reg. 14th Aug. 1761.”<sup>113</sup> The personal estate would include one chest of drawers that was no doubt a special piece. It was the only item that furnished his home that Clark held back for his daughter from his other brother, Angus, to whom he bequeathed all of his “furniture and bed furniture.”<sup>114</sup> As close as Clark was to his brothers to entrust them with these precious gifts that included even his only remaining little girl, he was also close to his late wife’s family. What else could motivate him to devise to “Sister-in-law: Sarah Stephens” a “tract of land on the river St. Mary’s” that, by virtue of its location, would be worth much?

Clark’s will is that of a dutiful father and kinsman that would make his Scottish ancestors proud. His sense of duty is further evidenced by whom he selected as his executors: besides his

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ann R. Davis, “Some Early Grants from Georgia Colonial Records of land located in what became McIntosh County (St. Andrew’s Parish, formerly Liberty County).” Available from <http://www.rootsweb.com/~gaglynn/mcintosh/history/earlygrants.htm>. Internet; accessed 1 August 2005.

<sup>114</sup> Will of Hugh Clark, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 93-94, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

two brothers, he chose Captain James Mackay and William Mackintosh. Both were respected men in the colony, especially Mackay. Clark knew Mackay because he served as a sergeant under him in the Independent Company at Darien when he came to Georgia at the age of twenty-one from Dorris, Scotland.<sup>115</sup> Mackay, a gentleman, went on to serve in Georgia's General Assembly. These men of stature obviously accorded Hugh Clark no little esteem since they agreed to serve as his executors without remuneration. This speaks well for Clark, who could only have earned their respect by being respectable himself.

Clark may very well represent a typical slaveholder in the colony. The relatively neutral language he employed in his will suggests he was neither especially unkind nor overly benevolent toward his slaves. A slave owner with little human interest in the condition of his slaves would likely have used much more impersonal language in referring to his slaves in a will. His slaves might have been referred to as "slaves" or have been doled out in the same breath as livestock was distributed. Conversely, a slave owner with much affection and concern for his slaves might have gone so far as to free them or provide for them in his or her will as several colonial Georgia slave owners did. Clark did neither.

Like that of Hugh Clark, the wills of other testators, such as cabinetmaker James Love of Savannah, suggest an other-than-anonymous existence for some slaves in the colony. Love's estate was quite modest and much of it consisted of land. To his wife, Elizabeth, he bequeathed a "house in Savannah," a "town lot" in Savannah, a "five-acre garden lot," and a "forty-five acre farm lot."<sup>116</sup> Son James received "a town lot, garden lot and farm lot in Savannah."<sup>117</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>115</sup> Emmet Bondurant, "Darien, Georgia: The Scottish Plymouth Rock." Available from <http://home.sprintmail.com/~ejb/Darien.htm>. Internet; accessed 1 August 2005. The Highland Independent Company of Foot was a colonial Georgia militia unit modeled after independent companies in Scotland.

<sup>116</sup> Will of James Love, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 269-271, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

son John received a “town lot in Savannah” and “a farm lot.”<sup>118</sup> To son Walter, Love left “two tracts of land in St. Matthew[’s Parish] containing 250 acres each” and “half of a town lot in Savannah held by my wife and Mrs. Jane Blyth (wife of Peter Blyth) as co-heirs of their late father, John Evans, deceased.”<sup>119</sup> Besides land, Love also bequeathed slaves to his family and the language he employed in his will to do this is telling.

To his son James, Love left a “Negro man named Jacob.”<sup>120</sup> This simple phrase holds much significance. Ira Berlin writes in *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* that slave names often “reflected the contempt in which their owners held them.”<sup>121</sup> This occurred as most slaves “answered to some European diminutive” of formal names, such as “Jack” for “James.”<sup>122</sup> The names of a great many slaves mentioned in the colonial Georgia wills are in the diminutive forms, suggesting that these slaves were slighted by their owners. Love referred to Jacob as “Jacob,” not as “Jake” or “Jay.” That he did not employ the diminutive suggests that Love did not hold his slave in contempt as other owners did theirs. Indeed, that Love referred to Jacob by name in his will at all is significant.

Many wills simply refer to slaves as “Negroes” in the same way testators might refer to “hogs” or “cattle.” Love is acknowledging a measure of Jacob’s identity by acknowledging that he had a name, and a respectable one at that. Moreover, that Love would name his slave after a biblical hero is meaningful. It conveys a sense of personhood that other names simply did not. Berlin indicates that some slave names seemed designed to denigrate. He writes, “As if to emphasize their inferiority, some [slaves] were tagged with names such as Bossey, Jumper, and

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 95.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

Postilion—more akin to barnyard animals than men and women.”<sup>123</sup> Alternatively, some slaves “were designated with the name of some ancient deity or great personage like Hercules or Cato as a kind of cosmic jest: the more insignificant the person in the eyes of the planters, the greater the name.”<sup>124</sup> It is doubtful, for example, that Thomas Ross of Augusta, who bequeathed to Katron Douglass a “Negro fellow called Rainbow” and to John Douglass a “Negro fellow called Cork,” held his slaves in the same esteem as Love did Jacob.<sup>125</sup> Also, Love referred to Jacob as a Negro *man*. Many other colonial wills do anything but acknowledge a slave’s manhood. These wills instead refer to slaves only as “Negroes,” or place them in contexts with livestock. In short, these wills reduce slaves to chattel. Love’s will acknowledges that Jacob was human, albeit a human in bondage.

This tone continues as Love makes further bequests. Son John received “my man slave (a Spaniard) called Henry.”<sup>126</sup> Like Jacob, Henry was “Henry,” not “Hank.” Furthermore, assigning a slave a nationality as Love did conveyed an added sense of identity upon the slave. Conferring a Western European nationality upon a slave could only do this more so. Also, Love again referred to his slave as a “man,” this time obviating even calling him a “Negro.” That Henry was, in fact, black is a foregone conclusion in 1768 as Indian slavery had died out. It is likely that Henry hailed from a Spanish estate in the Caribbean. Finally, Love bequeathed to his son Walter a “Negro girl called Pegg.”<sup>127</sup> Many contemporary wills referred to female slaves as “Negro wenches.” Love could have, but chose not to. The language Love used in his will evidences that he held his slaves in higher regard than many other colonial testators. In all likelihood, he did so simply because he knew them better. Other wills suggest that Jacob and

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Will of Thomas Ross, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 175, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>126</sup> Will of James Love, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 269-271, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Henry would have assisted Love in his trade, cabinet making. Preacher John Osgood of St. John's Parish left to his nephew, "Thomas Baker, Negro named Jack, who now works with him at the carpenter's trade."<sup>128</sup> Love simply could not have supported his slaves had they not assisted him in earning his livelihood as Jack assisted Thomas Baker. Pegg would have assisted Love by housekeeping. In each instance, Love and his family would have worked alongside their slaves. It would be difficult to continually ignore another being's humanity in such close proximity.<sup>129</sup>

The wills reveal many attitudes about slave owners toward their slaves, some much more distant than that of James Love or Hugh Clark. A man like Samuel Burnley of St. John's Parish probably knew more about his stock of horses than he did his stock of slaves. In his will, Burnley identified both several slaves and several horses that he bequeathed by name, yet he described more his horses. "Willaby" is merely a Negro wench; "Fly," however, is not just a horse but a "riding mare."<sup>130</sup> "Diamond" is not just a horse but "a riding horse." "George" is merely a "Negro slave."<sup>131</sup> Burnley might have described Willaby as a house servant or George as a field hand in the same way he qualified the purpose of his animals. That he did not may be telling.

The wills of other testators suggest that relationships between masters and slaves could be close. Surely John Matthias Reinstetler, who toiled alongside his "Negro man named Prince" on his meager one-hundred-acre plantation at Vernonburgh came to know the quirks and

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<sup>128</sup> Will of John Osgood, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 53-57, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>129</sup> While it does not relate to the colonial period, this view that close proximity to slaves begot good treatment of slaves is adeptly discussed by Drew Gilpin Faust in *Mother of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). At the same time, other scholars have demonstrated that white owners treated slaves poorly despite working in close proximity with them. See Douglas Mann, "Becoming Creole: Material Life and Society in Eighteenth-Century Kingston, Jamaica," Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 2004.

<sup>130</sup> Will of Samuel Burnley, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 238-243, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.



dispositions of his lone bondman.<sup>132</sup> Yet, the wills suggest that some slave owners became even more intimate with their slaves. Merchant Joseph Prunieres of Savannah was one such man. When he wrote his will on 23 April 1768, Prunieres left his “Entire estate, real and personal to James Mossman and Joseph Clay of Savannah, merchants to act as executors.”<sup>133</sup> To these fellow merchants, trusted friends it is likely, he left an important task. They were to see to the maintenance of “Thomas, son of my slave, Maria, whom I have lately manumitted . . . until he is twenty-one.”<sup>134</sup> When Thomas turned 21, he was to receive the remainder of the estate. Prunieres further states that, “If he [Thomas] dies before twenty-one, estate for the benefit of the poor of Christ Church Parish.”<sup>135</sup> In the same will, Prunieres gave to his slave, Mary, her freedom. In the will, no friends or family received bequests—yet the son of a freed slave did. One wonders if Maria had been more than merely a slave to Joseph. The will suggests so in very specific language. “Thomas” is not just “Thomas;” Joseph gave the “remainder of the estate to him, Thomas, commonly called Thomas Prunieres.”<sup>136</sup> That Joseph bestowed upon Thomas his own last name is very telling. This is because in the colonial Georgia wills, slaves (like those of planter John Davis from St. Philips’s Parish) simply do not have more than one name, let alone last names. Thomas was not just the son of a manumitted slave. Thomas was the son of Joseph Prunieres, either by birth or adoption. While other slave holders considered their slaves as chattel and mentioned them in their wills in the same breath as cattle, hogs, and horses, Joseph Prunieres literally considered his slaves not as mere servants but as family.

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<sup>132</sup> Will of John Matthias Reinstetler, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>133</sup> Will of Joseph Prunieres, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 268-269, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

The wills also indicate that Indian slavery existed for a time in the colony. William Francis bequeathed to his brother, “John Francis of London, leather dresser and glover” his “stock of slaves,” except for an “Indian slave whom I hereby emancipate.”<sup>137</sup> John Musgrove of Savannah left to son James an “Indian man called Justice,” to son Edward an “Indian girl called Nanny,” and to his wife, Mary, an “Indian boy called Won.”<sup>138</sup> Only one other testator mentions an Indian slave in his will. John Barnard bequeathed to “Indian slave: Harry, his freedom, after two years of service to Jane Barnard, or upon her death if it is sooner.”<sup>139</sup>

No additional mention of Indian slaves appears in the colonial Georgia will sample because Indian slavery existed on a very small scale in the colony and only existed in Georgia’s infancy. In *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670 – 1717*, Alan Galloway writes that “There is no telling how many Piedmont and low country Indians as well as Creek, Westo, Savannah, Chickasaw, and Cherokee were enslaved” during the colonial period.<sup>140</sup> (These were the Native Americans closest to colonial Georgians and so they would have stood the greatest chance of being enslaved in the colony.) Galloway estimates that only between 4,000 and 10,000 such Indians were sold in the British slave trade from 1670 to 1715.<sup>141</sup> Historians acknowledge that colonists enslaved relatively few Indians as compared to Africans because they believed “that African slaves were much more highly valued than Amerindians because they were better field-workers, they were less likely to die in captivity from diseases, and on the mainland they were less able to run away.”<sup>142</sup> To these considerations must be added the simple fact that by the time slavery truly came to the fore in Georgia

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<sup>137</sup> Will of William Francis, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 94-102, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>138</sup> Will of John Musgrove, Cuyler Collection, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

<sup>139</sup> Will of John Barnard, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 26-29, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>140</sup> Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670 – 1717* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 298.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

(beginning around 1750), there were far fewer Indians living in and near the colony than there had been in the preceding decades. This would have made for few Indians to enslave in the first place.

The wills reveal that slavery was not only black and red in colonial Georgia. Several slaves were mulatto. Paynter Dickenson bequeathed several Negroes to various family members. Yet, to his wife, Dickenson left, “one mulatto boy named Michael.”<sup>143</sup> Joseph Gibbons gave a “mulatto girl named Leah” to his daughter Mary.<sup>144</sup> John Forbes wrote, “To a mulatto girl of Babet’s daughter in Charles Town named Dyna, her freedom, also a trust fund of 100 pounds Sterling to her to be administered by the executors.”<sup>145</sup> One-hundred pounds was a very large sum to leave to anyone. It was an especially large sum when left to the daughter of a slave. This bequest suggests that mulatto slaves may have stood a better chance at becoming close to slave owners.

Whether slaves were African, mulatto, or Indian, the wills indicate that some testator-owners managed to act somewhat magnanimously toward at least a few of them as John Forbes did for Dyna. Widow Jane Somerville left behind a rich estate when she wrote her will in 1779. In between giving away several silver personal items and several tracts of land, she devised “40 of my Negroes” to her niece, Ann Somerville.<sup>146</sup> She also left to “Negroes: Nancy, Tom, Bob, their freedom.”<sup>147</sup> Jane’s husband, John Somerville, also made grants of freedom to two of his slaves, Tamar and Statire.<sup>148</sup> Gentleman William Jones of St. Andrew’s Parish bequeathed “freedom to a Negro named Primus” in his February, 1768 will.<sup>149</sup> Gentleman John Parkinson,

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<sup>143</sup> Will of Paynter Dickenson, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 73-75, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>144</sup> Will of Joseph Gibbons, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 313-320, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>145</sup> Will of John Forbes, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 148-150, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>146</sup> Will of Jane Somerville, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 327-329, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Will of John Somerville, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 62-64, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>149</sup> Will of William Jones, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 180-182, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

“late of the island of Jamaica but now of Christ Church Parish” bequeathed to “Negro woman: Maria, now in Jamaica, her freedom & manumission.”<sup>150</sup> Bryan Kelley literally began his will with his slaves in mind. His first line reads, “Following slaves are granted their freedom: Negro man named Dick, his wife, Juno, their three children (Paris, Venus, and Tulip).”<sup>151</sup> Charles Maran of St. John’s Parish bequeathed to “John Couper, all my lands, Negroes (except Dinor, who I give her freedom), my cattle, horses, hogs and all other estate.”<sup>152</sup>

Freedom sometimes came at a price—literally. Planter Charles Odingsell of Christ Church Parish left “Freedom and new suit of clothes annually to Old Mimah and Amoses in exchange for 5 shillings annually.”<sup>153</sup> One wonders what would have happened had Mimah or Amoses fell into arrears. At other times, freedom came with a stipend. In her will of 1768, widow Margaret Pages of Savannah instructed her “Executors. To clothe, maintain, and educate in such beneficial trade, my mulatto slave named Peter, until he is twenty-one when he shall be manumitted.”<sup>154</sup> Not only wealthy testators, widows, and gentlemen freed their slaves. Daniel Ross, an overseer from Christ Church Parish, wrote in his will “Mullato girl named Sally, daughter. To my Negro woman Phillis, her freedom, but she shall live with my friend Mr. Thomas Ross of Christ Church Parish, vendue master, until she is fifteen, to be educated.”<sup>155</sup> Ross went on to leave Sally’s mother to his friend, Thomas Ross, along with some additional bequests: “Negro man named Sandy, Negro woman named Phillis, remainder of my estate, real and personal, sole executor.”<sup>156</sup> John Roviére was a “cordwainer” from Savannah who left behind a very small estate in a short will written in February of 1767. To his brother, Simon

<sup>150</sup> Will of John Parkinson, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 417-418, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>151</sup> Will of Bryan Kelley, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 176-177, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>152</sup> Will of Charles Maran, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 438-439, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>153</sup> Will of Charles Odingsell, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 375-378, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>154</sup> Will of Margaret Pages, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 280-282, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>155</sup> Will of Daniel Ross, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 338-340, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

Roviere, he left a “lot, containing 50 acres” and to his sister, Anne Guindre, he left a “lot at Yamacraw.”<sup>157</sup> He then relinquished two very valuable possessions when he decreed, “Negroes: Tom and Judith, their manumission.”<sup>158</sup> Arguably, the slaves he freed were worth almost as much as (if not more than) the meager parcels of land that he devised.

In one instance, freedom came with a very interesting condition. Reverend Bartholomew Zouerbuhler wrote in his 1766 will: “43 Negroes, in trust to executors. Executors to hire a person to instruct Negroes on my plantation in Christianity according to the Church of England. Negroes who are converted as a result of this and express a desire to convert other Negroes, they shall be manumitted and employed by the Executors for the purpose.”<sup>159</sup> While there is no evidence to suggest that Zouerbuhler’s plan ever produced any converts, it apparently merited support among some of colonial Georgia’s elites: several gentlemen (including James Habersham, Francis Harris, and Noble Wimberly Jones) were among Zouerbuhler’s executors. It is doubtful they would have lent their signatures, and thus their reputations, to a document requiring them to affect Zouerbuhler’s scheme if they thought it improper.

In all, seventeen of the 408 colonial Georgia wills in the sample (about 4%) mention emancipated slaves. These wills mention a total of twenty-six slaves that were definitely emancipated, which represents just 2.6% of the 1007 slaves (at minimum) accounted for in the colonial Georgia will sample. In most instances, testators apparently emancipated slaves to reward long and faithful service. Indeed, language to this effect appears in more than one emancipating will. Other instances of emancipation may be tied to slave owner paternity. While Allan Kulikoff demonstrated that interracial sexual relations between whites and blacks in

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<sup>157</sup> Will of John Roviere, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 223-224, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Will of Bartholomew Zouerbuhler, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 363-368, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia. Zouerbuhler further ordered that his executors were “empowered to sell and make title for tract of 1000 acres on Turtle River; profits toward the support of a college.”

southern colonies began to decline at the beginning of the eighteenth century, such relations still occasionally occurred and produced offspring.<sup>160</sup> For example, such a relationship probably existed between John Forbes and Dyna's mother and between Joseph Prunieres and Thomas' mother. Offspring of such miscegenational unions may have been freed by slave owners out of a sense of paternal obligation.<sup>161</sup>

While the wills reveal that several slaves were lucky enough to receive their freedom, they indicate that many, many more remained in bondage. These individuals had to endure. One scholar noted that, "By adopting a posture of outward subservience and defensive racial exclusiveness, bondsmen minimized the inner damage of slavery, but they could not escape its pain."<sup>162</sup> The wills reveal ways that these individuals sought to further mitigate against the damage of slavery by resisting their captivity. Unlike other colonies, Georgia never experienced any large-scale slave revolt during its colonial period. Instead, slave resistance existed in less overt forms and to varying degrees as exemplified by the colonial wills. While it could never tenably be said that slaves in colonial Georgia exercised anything like true "power" over their owners, slave actions revealed by the wills affirm that slaves were not merely passive victims of barbaric oppression; slaves played some roles (albeit small ones) in shaping slavery in the colony.

One form of slave resistance related to slave naming. As mentioned previously, several wills mention slaves by name in making bequests. The majority of these names were rather commonly used in the English language at the time. For example, John Flerl owned two slaves

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<sup>160</sup> Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 395.

<sup>161</sup> See Catherine Clinton and Michele Gillespie, eds., *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Scott L. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (New York, NY: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2000) for interesting discussions of miscegenation.

<sup>162</sup> Clarence L. Mohr, *On the Threshold of Freedom: Masters and Slaves in Civil War Georgia* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), xvii.

named Peter and Catherina.<sup>163</sup> William Gilbert kept slaves named Will, Maryann, Lewis, and “a Negro boy named Nimrod.”<sup>164</sup> And Wentworth Webb owned another Peter and “a Negro wench named Sarah.”<sup>165</sup>

These and many other “good Christian names” are attached to slaves throughout the wills. However, not all slaves were so named. Some possessed names that were very clearly African in origin, and this is significant.<sup>166</sup> John Inscoc wrote, “names of African origin are particularly revealing in regard to acculturation because they serve as the clearest index of the original input of blacks into their own cultural development. They also reflect the degree to which slaves were able to resist complete assimilation into the society in which they found themselves.”<sup>167</sup> This does not at all imply that slaves with Anglicanized names were all servile supplicants; however, it might suggest that some slaves resisted assimilation to a greater degree than others. These could either be slaves imported directly from Africa who simply refused to answer to any other name that an owner may have tried to give them or slave mothers who refused to give up African naming traditions when assigning a name to a child.<sup>168</sup> (Fathers, Inscoc demonstrates, had little to do with naming children.) In either instance, the acknowledgment and use of the African

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<sup>163</sup> Will of John Flerl, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 285-287, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>164</sup> Will of William Gilbert, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 182-184, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>165</sup> Will of Wentworth Webb, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 437-438, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>166</sup> For interesting discussion about slave naming practices, see: Cheryl Ann Cody, “There Was No ‘Absalom’ on the Ball Plantations: Slave-Naming Practices in the South Carolina Low Country, 1720-1865,” *The American Historical Review*, 92, no. 3 (June, 1987): 563-596; John C. Inscoc, “Generation and Gender as Reflected in Carolina Slave Naming Practices: A Challenge to the Gutman Thesis,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 94 (1993): 252-263 and “Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation” *The Journal of Southern History*, 49, no. 4 (November, 1983): 527-554.

<sup>167</sup> John C. Inscoc, “Carolina Slave Names: An Index to Acculturation,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 49, no. 4 (November, 1983): 531.

<sup>168</sup> Regarding African slave names on Low Country plantations, Philip D. Morgan wrote that, “although some African immigrants were able to retain their names, more often they bequeathed homeland names to their children in an effort to honor tradition and family ties.” Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint* (Chapel Hill, NC: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 454.

name would demonstrate at least some acquiescence on the part of a slave master to a significant aspect of slave desire.

John Inscoe mentions several African names as being in somewhat common usage in colonial South Carolina: Quash, Cudjo, Cuffee (or Cuff), Quaco, Juba, Quasheba, Cubena, Abba, Sambo, Mingo, Mustapha, Sukey, Tillah, and Rinah. We have already met Cudjo and Mingo, who lived on John Davis's estate in St. Philip's Parish in 1773. Table Five reveals other slaves in colonial Georgia who likewise possessed names of African origin (or very close variants).

| Slave Name of African Origin | Testator/Owner       |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Tirah                        | Joseph Bacon         |
| Cuffy                        | Martin Fenton        |
| Cuff                         | Kenneth Baillie      |
| Abbe                         | Richard Baker        |
| Sambo                        | Isaac Barksdale      |
| Rinnah                       | Hugh Clark           |
| Sambo                        | George Cubbadge      |
| Rina                         | John DeVeaux         |
| Sukey                        | John Francis Reinier |

**Table Five: Slave Names of African Origin Mentioned in Colonial Georgia Wills**

The wills indicate that slaves in the colony of Georgia resisted their condition in other ways as well. In several of the wills, testators bequeathed to a single recipient a mother-child slave pair. For example, Heriot Crooke of Savannah gave to her son, Robert Charles Crooke, "500 pounds Sterling, Negro woman named Chloe and her son Joe."<sup>169</sup> In 1767, George Cuthbert, Esq., of Christ Church Parish bequeathed to his wife, Mary, "Negro woman named Rose and her child."<sup>170</sup> Carpenter Gasper Garbut of Christ Church left his wife, Christiana, a

<sup>169</sup> Will of Heriot Crooke, Colonial Georgia Loose Will Collection, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>170</sup> Will of George Cuthbert, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 263-266, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.



“Negro wench named Sarah and her two children, Joe and Jem.”<sup>171</sup> And John Luptan of Midway left “My well-beloved Susannah Baker (daughter of Benjamin Baker), Negro wench named Jean, with her sons, Bob and Jack.”<sup>172</sup>

These bequests are all significant. It is no coincidence that the colonial testators bequeathed these slaves as they did; the mother and her offspring were kept together intentionally. But why was this the case? The possibility exists that the bequests might have been made out of kindness, that slave owners realized that separating a mother from her child or children would have been cruel. However, a more selfish motive was probably at work.

Slave owning testators knew that separating a mother from her child or children encouraged running away as family members sought to reunite. So, to remove at least one reason for running away, testators would have endeavored to keep slave families together as much as they felt they could. Only rarely do the wills suggest that separation of a slave mother and a young child or young children occurred. For example, William Russell did give by themselves “Three Negro children at Savannah” to his wife.”<sup>173</sup> Such was also the case with John Flerl, whose will mentions only a single slave, a “Negro child named Salome” that he bequeathed to Matthias Brandner.<sup>174</sup> These few exceptions aside, testators often devised slave mothers and children together.

This pattern of inheritance suggests that slaves in fact exercised some small measure of influence over their masters in at least this respect. Masters did not feel at complete liberty to devise slaves in any way they wished because they understood that, despite their best efforts, separating families would very likely lead to losing slaves as runaways. Consequently, to avoid

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<sup>171</sup> Will of Gasper Garbut, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 253-257, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>172</sup> Will of John Luptan, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 215-217, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>173</sup> Will of William Russell, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 308-313, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>174</sup> Will of John Flerl, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 285-287, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

this, masters frequently bequeathed slave mothers and children together in their wills in some degree of acquiesce to slave desires that families remain intact.

Mother-child bequests are also significant because there were relatively few of them in the colonial Georgia will sample as compared to bequests of single slave women. Many wills bequeath something like “a Negro girl,” or (more impolitely) “a Negro wench” to someone. For example, Margaret Papot of Christ Church Parish gave “Daughter: Sarah Papot, wife of my son Peter, Negro wench named Phobe, during her life.”<sup>175</sup> And in his 1768 will, carpenter Richard Milledge of Savannah left his “Wife: Mary, Negro wench named Hate.”<sup>176</sup> In fact, there are many more bequests of single female slaves in the wills than there are bequests of female slaves with children. This might suggest that female slaves were practicing another form of resistance, which was refusing to increase a slave owners slave holdings by having children.<sup>177</sup>

The wills suggest that slave owners would have wanted their slaves to procreate. On several occasions, testators bequeathed slaves in male-female couples in their wills as did Theobald Kieffer of Ebenezer around 1767 when he gave to “Dorothe . . . Negroes named Jonas and Mary” and to “Emmanuel . . . Negroes named Adam and Judy.”<sup>178</sup> Also, a very large

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<sup>175</sup> Will of Margaret Papot, Colonial Georgia Will Book AA: 302-306, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>176</sup> Will of Richard Milledge, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 294-295, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

<sup>177</sup> For good treatments of this and other forms of slave resistance, see the following: Stephanie M.H. Camp, “‘I Could Not Stay There’: Enslaved Women, Truancy and the Geography of Everyday Forms of Resistance in the Antebellum Plantation South.” *Slavery and Abolition* 23, no. 3 (December, 2002); George M. Fredrickson and Christopher Lasch, “Resistance to Slavery,” in Allen Weinstein and Frank Otto Gatell, eds., *American Negro Slavery: A Modern Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1973); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Darlene C. Hine and Kate Wittenstein, “Female Slave Resistance: The Economics of Slavery.” In *Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, ed. F.C. Steady, pp. 289-99 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Sharon A. Holt, “Symbol, Memory and Service: Resistance and Family Formation in Nineteenth-Century African America.” In *Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South*, ed. Larry E. Hudson, pp. 192-210 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1994); Norrece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanisms of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1990); Peter Wood, “Slave Resistance in Colonial South Carolina.” In *Atlantic American Societies from Columbus through Abolition, 1492-1888*, ed. Alan L. Karras and J.R. McNeill, pp. 144-73 (London, UK: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>178</sup> Will of Theobald Kieffer, Colonial Georgia Will Book A: 201-203, The Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia.

number of slave holding estates held slaves of both genders. This would seem to suggest that slave owners at least desired the means by which they might increase their slave holdings from within. What this also makes clear is that slave women in colonial Georgia had available access to sexual partners. Given this access and the relatively few number of female slaves that appeared with children in the colonial will sample, it may very well have been the case that many female slaves elected to frustrate their masters' desires for more slaves by remaining childless.

Other curious factors revealed by the wills, while not demonstrative of slave resistance *per se*, suggest that slaves had some influence in colonial Georgia society. For example, in at least a dozen wills, testators are careful to bequeath only male slaves to male heirs and only female slaves to female heirs. In all likelihood, this was done because of gendered differences in work. Male heirs received male slaves because testators anticipated that these heirs would supervise those slaves in doing physical labor in the fields or at a trade. Women received female slaves to assist them with work around the home or in caring for children. However, one wonders whether or not at least some of these same-sex bequests may have been made because of fears of black sexuality. Perhaps white women seldom received male slaves because testators feared for their virtue at the hands of rapacious blacks. Perhaps white men seldom received female slaves because testators feared miscegenation and the complications it visited upon society. If this was ever the case, then it demonstrates another manner in which some whites may have made some life choices in partial deference to perceptions about blacks.

The presence of certain occupations in the colony and the relative absence of others as revealed by the wills also provide information about the influence some slaves exercised in colonial Georgia. There are relatively few tradesmen represented in the will sample as compared to planters, gentlemen, and the like. This may be because skilled slaves put many tradesmen out

of work by hiring themselves out at cheap rates. This would demonstrate that these slaves had some presence in colonial society. Slaves also wielded influence of a sort in the colony as evidenced by the very existence of other occupations, particularly that of overseer. By being the objects of surveillance, slaves in colonial Georgia made vigilance demands on whites and in so doing held some small measure of influence over them. Indeed, this dynamic is palpably evident by the wills themselves as many testators spent much time and effort, and created a great deal of work for others, in devising their slaves.

Clearly, the colonial Georgia wills reveal more than just statistics about slavery. The wills give a sense of how colonial Georgians regarded and interacted with slaves. A close reading of the wills also demonstrates how slaves in the colony resisted slavery. Coupled with what the wills reveal statistically, these qualitative accounts paint a very full picture of slavery in the colony.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

As he stood upon the hangman's scaffold at Ellis Island in 1831, set to swing for confessing to nearly 400 murders at sea, United States Navy sailor-turned-pirate Charles Gibbs spoke his final words: "No mercy did we ever show, for dead men tell no tales." While this mindset made Gibbs proficient by piratical standards, it would have made him a very poor historian. As the wills of these several hundred colonial Georgians demonstrate, dead men (and women) in fact speak volumes in the writings they leave behind.

Chapter Two identified in detail the colonial testators who left wills in the sample to substantiate that these testators were, as a whole, typical colonial Georgians. As such, anything gleaned from their wills would speak to colonial Georgia more broadly. Their documents reveal both quantitative and qualitative information about slavery in the colony of Georgia. In Chapter Three, treating the wills as a random sample of colonial life and analyzing the data they contain let us address several issues. The wills made it possible to approximate how many colonial Georgians owned slaves (about 40%, most of whom owned five or fewer slaves); to ascertain who slave owners were and were not (mostly planters, with few merchants or tradesmen holding slaves); to arrive at the average size and gendered character of slave holdings (seven slaves per holding, on average, with a male to female ratio of 1:1); to posit where slaves lived and what they did (generally working in fields on plantations, with few slaves living in cities working at trades); and to gauge how slave ownership patterns changed over time in the colony as slave

ownership essentially doubled after 1760. What the wills revealed upheld many scholarly conclusions about slavery in the colony and at the same time called at least some into question.

Chapter Four examined the wills anecdotally to further qualify the slavery experience in the colony and revealed attitudes about slave owners toward their slaves and aspects of slave resistance in the colony. While some colonial Georgians viewed slaves as so much human livestock, others seemed to respect slaves to a degree and even granted several their freedom. Some colonists even became intimate with their slaves and considered them family. However colonial Georgians regarded their slaves, the wills indicate that slaves resisted slavery in many ways. Slaves often shunned the names owners gave them, using instead names that conveyed their heritage. To some degree, slaves also induced their owners to follow particular behaviors by being willing to run away and frequently remained childless to deprive owners of another bondservant.

While this is a wealth of information, perhaps what the wills reveal overall is the failure of a noble experiment. The advent of slavery in the colony destroyed any chance of Georgia's fulfilling the utopian vision of its aristocratic founders. Though less than half of the colonists in Georgia ever came to own slaves, the peculiar institution's entrenchment in the colony changed virtually every aspect of Georgia society and made being a yeoman farmer much more difficult than it otherwise might have been. Slavery did not become the panacea that would lift up all whites as the Malcontents hoped it would. Rather, the coming of slavery to the colony of Georgia either itself created more division within white society or accentuated preexisting societal divisions as the pyramidal hierarchy of slave ownership emerged.

The wills demonstrate that slavery fixed itself in the colony of Georgia in such a way that led to the eventual formation in the state of Georgia of a robust plantation society. Why such a

society emerged may actually be related to the wills themselves. Alan Gallay wrote that an “important motivation” for Jonathan Bryan to amass so much land and so many slaves “may well have been a desire to leave each of his many children an estate large enough to secure a place among the ruling elite.”<sup>179</sup> Judging by what men and women bequeathed in their wills, many colonial testators seemed to share Bryan’s desire. This reaffirms the importance of the wills in colonial Georgia society. Testators knew these documents would be honored and that their heirs would receive what they bequeathed to them. This security promoted the acquisition of things to be left behind, including slaves. If there had been widespread doubt that testator bequests would be honored, it begs the question of whether so much wealth in the form of slaves (or anything else) would have been amassed—and fewer slaves in the colony would have made for a very different Georgia.

It has been said that “The history of slavery is central to the history of the United States.”<sup>180</sup> The same is true for Georgia. Wills from the colony illuminate the early history of slavery there and do nothing less than make it more possible to appreciate Georgia’s subsequent years. Consequently, while what Butler, Martin, Wright, and other colonial Georgians wrote in their wills may not be famous last words, they are important ones.

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<sup>179</sup> Gallay, 266

<sup>180</sup> James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11.

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