INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
Master and slaves at work in the North Carolina Piedmont: The Nicholas Bryor Massenburg plantation, 1834–1861

Kukis, Margaret, M.A.

Rice University, 1993
RICE UNIVERSITY

MASTER AND SLAVES AT WORK IN THE NORTH CAROLINA PIEDMONT: THE NICHOLAS BRYOR MASSENBURG PLANTATION, 1834-1861

by

MARGARET KUKIS

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

John B. Boles
John B. Boles, Professor
History

Edward L. Cox
Associate Professor
History

Angela Valenzuela
Assistant Professor
Sociology

Houston, Texas
August, 1992
ABSTRACT

Master and Slaves at Work in the North Carolina Piedmont:
the Nicholas Bryor Massenburg Plantation, 1834-1861

by
Margaret Kukis

Nicholas Bryor Massenburg, a cotton and tobacco planter in Piedmont North Carolina, operated his plantation within a network of fellow farmers, neighbors, friends, and relatives. He turned to merchants in town and to scattered individuals for goods, services, and hired labor. He also sold surplus food crops locally, meaning that a portion of his income was derived not just from the sale of cotton and tobacco. For Massenburg, managing his plantation also meant implementing agricultural reform techniques. The twenty-some slaves were organized into a system that was a hybrid of task and gang labor, with work routines varying throughout the year. Task variation peaked in spring and late fall, while during much of summer and early fall the slaves performed a limited variety of tasks. Rigid gender segregation did not characterize the working environment at the Massenburg plantation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION.</td>
<td>1-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE, MANAGEMENT AND REFORM.</td>
<td>8-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO, SLAVE WORK ROUTINES.</td>
<td>61-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION.</td>
<td>92-96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

In 1834 Nicholas Bryor Massenburg, a North Carolina tobacco and cotton planter, began a record of the daily affairs on his Piedmont plantation by simply noting that all hands were clearing land on that cold and wet winter day.¹ For twenty-eight years Massenburg faithfully entered an accounting of the day's work, faltering only when the Civil War began to disrupt his routines. His diary frames a period of change and transition in North Carolina: in 1835 the state revised its constitution and in 1861 it seceded from the Union. Constitutional reform encouraged more proportionate representation in the state legislature, the growth of political parties, the founding of a free common school system, and state funding for internal improvements. Even as modernization sounded a positive note, North Carolinians were faced with massive outmigration to the newer areas of the South, eroding and infertile soil, increasing competition from the West, and rising labor costs, with the Civil War forcing an even greater adjustment upon the state's inhabitants.² Although Massenburg's entries are brief and focus almost exclusively on his agricultural affairs, his diary is useful for illuminating
the everyday working life of one planter and his slaves during this crucial period in North Carolina history.

Massenburg's journal affords a glimpse of how the introduction of the railroad through his county affected the marketing of crops. It also shows how one farmer responded to the call of agricultural reformers in a state beset by difficulties. Examining the work routines of one slaveholder and one community of slaves also can help elucidate some of the broader issues in southern history as they related to a particular group of individuals on one plantation. How self-sufficient were individual plantations and neighborhoods? Some historians have also argued that production of commercial crops for export out of the region stifled local markets in foodstuffs and artisan services. Another issue has been the amount of work performed by slaveowners and their attitudes toward work and leisure. The pattern of slave work routines throughout the seasons is an area of interest: how did crop diversification effect labor organization? Did male and female slaves have different work experiences? Although examining the agricultural diary of one southern planter cannot fully answer these questions, such an inquiry can illuminate the working world found on one small, diversified plantation in North Carolina's Piedmont.

Nicholas Massenburg's plantation diary, while omitting references to his family life or to political events,
provides material to examine his and his twenty-odd slaves' work routines over a span of three decades. From 1834 to 1861 Massenburg kept a daily account of the distribution of labor on his Woodleaf plantation, along with scattered accounts of yields and monthly comments about the state of his crops. At the end of each year he totaled up the yields on all his crops, recording the amounts sold to various individuals. The journal also includes a register listing the approximate birthdates of his adult slaves, the names of couples on and off the plantation, and the names and birthdates of their children.

Massenburg bought his main plantation and his home Woodleaf in 1831. A year later he married Lucy Davis, daughter of Archibald Davis, a prominent Franklin County cotton planter. In 1835 the Massenburgs purchased a neighboring plantation, Flatrock, which they renamed Egypt. Woodleaf lay two miles northeast of Louisburg, the county seat, with Egypt being within easy riding distance of the main plantation. Both properties were located in Franklin County, in the easternmost end of the Piedmont region of central North Carolina. Massenburg's neighborhood was just south of the line of tobacco counties bordering Virginia and just west of the big Coastal cotton counties. Situated along the Fall Line where the rocky, rapid streams of the Piedmont drop into the calmer waterways of the coastal Plain, Franklin County is an area of broadly rolling hills
cut by rivers and creeks and dotted with stretches of piney woods. Massenburg's own property included wet lowgrounds and dry highgrounds for cultivating crops, along with patches of woods, some creeks, and a pond. Massenburg and his slave labor force of fourteen to twenty-two slaves cultivated cotton until 1839, when Massenburg began to plant mainly tobacco. They also grew corn, wheat, and a variety of garden vegetables.

This thesis, which uses Massenburg's plantation diary as its main source, examines the daily lives of master and slaves as they completed their agricultural duties at Massenburg's main plantation Woodleaf. For the master, his working life was embedded in a wider community comprised of fellow farmers and business acquaintances since Woodleaf, although it produced a wide variety of foodstuffs along with cotton, wool, and cattle hides, could not entirely provide for the needs of the white family and the slave population. Massenburg turned to merchants in town and to scattered individuals to supplement his plantations' output. He also sold his crops not only in distant, national markets, but locally as well. The array of transactions recorded in his journal illustrates how even a largely self-sufficient plantation acted not as an isolated unit but as part of a larger community where friendships, business relationships, and kinship intersected. The presence of this thriving local trade further demonstrates that cash crop production
did not fully stifle the development of local markets for goods and services in all areas of the South. Some historians have viewed the antebellum South as a region of dispersed plantations dependent upon the local merchant only for some staples, luxury goods, and agricultural implements imported from the North or from overseas. Massenburg's experience, at least, did not fit this pattern: instead, he engaged in a variety of business transactions within his immediate community.

Although much of Massenburg's work responsibilities involved selling crops, hiring labor, and purchasing goods, he also had to run the plantation itself. In the period during which he farmed, this meant adjusting agricultural techniques to compensate for the loss of virgin land, the increasing prices of slaves and hired labor, and the competition from tobacco planters in the border states and cotton planters in the Deep South. Massenburg, like many other farmers in the Upper South, responded to these exigencies in a sketchy fashion, altering his methods where the need was the greatest while maintaining other outdated practices. Particularly in the 1850s, Massenburg and other farmers responded to the call of the agricultural reformers to rotate crops and use heavy amounts of fertilizer in order to maintain crop production levels.

The Massenburg journal is also useful for studying the work routines of the slave community during this period.
The pattern of the slaves' labor shifted the most after Massenburg began to plant tobacco. Once tobacco became the main crop, Massenburg no longer recorded individual slave output during cotton harvest time. The hands also lost the cotton patches that they had been allowed to cultivate for extra money since tobacco took so much extra labor, especially in the finishing process. Gender proved to be an important variable influencing work patterns, with women's work experiences fluctuating throughout the seasons and during the course of their lifetimes.

Slave work routines, and slavery in general, has not received much attention in North Carolina historiography. Several general histories of the antebellum period touch on the subject of slavery, and Guion Griffis Johnson's social history of the antebellum era provides much information about life on the plantation. Rosser Taylor's is a useful source for basic background information, but his work neglects to address the experience of the slaves themselves. Slavery in the western area of the state has been studied, along with the Bennehan-Cameron plantations in the Piedmont, but there is more room for work in a state marked by a diversity of crops, plantations and farms sizes, and slave experiences.
1. Nicholas Bryor Massenburg Journal, January 1, 1834. Volumes One, Two, and Three of the journal (1834-1851) are in the Nicholas B. Massenburg Papers in the Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Volume Four (1852-1861) is at the Woodson Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas.


MANAGEMENT AND REFORM

In 1834 when Nicholas Massenburg began his record of the daily affairs at his Woodleaf plantation he was already a moderately successful small planter. For four years he had been steadily increasing all the yields on his crops, especially after he bought his second plantation in 1835. His work force of fourteen adult field hands and their twenty children had been acquired through marriage to Lucy Davis, the daughter of Archibald Davis, a prominent Franklin County planter.1 As master of the plantation, the overall success or failure of his operation ultimately rested with Massenburg, even if a particular crop failing might be attributed to the mismanagement of the overseer or to uncooperative weather that might produce all in one day "a little snow, a little hail, a little rain, a little cloudy, and a little cold."2

Although Massenburg himself had to make the daily decisions regarding when to plant or how to distribute labor, his efforts to till the soil were conducted within a wider community to which he was linked by kinship, friendship, physical proximity, and religion. Massenburg sold crops, bought services, and borrowed and lent slaves to
numerous people in his area. Besides maintaining many ties to the local economy, Massenburg shared with his fellow farmers the common experience of cultivating crops, which fostered a sense of community among these dispersed rural dwellers. Operating as an individual planter within this setting, Massenburg attained financial success: by the Civil War his plantation roster listed twenty-two full hands, and he owned 1,863 acres of unimproved and 490 acres of improved land.\textsuperscript{3} The ownership of more than twenty slaves put Massenburg comfortably within the top 12 percent of southern slaveholders, and he occupied an even higher place in North Carolina where slaveholding tended to exist on a smaller scale than in the Deep South. His substantial landownership also securely placed him within the elite of a state where the average family owned 316 acres in 1860.\textsuperscript{4} As such an affluent person, Massenburg was hardly representative of the majority of southerners or North Carolinians, most of whom never owned slaves, much less twenty slaves. Although an elite, Massenburg's experience cultivating a mixture of cash and food crops had its counterpart in much of North Carolina, particularly in the Piedmont region, where many farmers strived to combine commercial crop production and subsistence farming to their best advantage.

Even though slaveholding may have been less widespread among Tarheels than among their neighbors in Virginia and
South Carolina, slavery had a long history in North Carolina and in Franklin County. Since the late colonial period, settlers had brought black laborers into North Carolina to work tobacco farms and plantations in the Coastal Plain area and in the tier of Piedmont counties bordering Virginia. Even among slaveholders, though, landholdings in North Carolina typically remained small due to the difficulties of getting cash crops to market. Poor natural harbors, shifting sandbars, and raging storms along the coast, combined with treacherous rivers in the interior, hampered commercial agriculture in North Carolina, confining the production of cash crops mainly to the coastal region and areas close to Virginia. Faced with these hindrances, early settlers of Franklin County remained subsistence farmers, supplementing their corn harvests with hunting and trapping. After the introduction of the cotton gin in 1793, farmers in Massenburg's area turned to cotton, not tobacco, as their first cash crop. Bales of cotton were difficult enough to market in North Carolina's interior, but they were considerably easier to store and transport than bulky 1500-pound hogsheads of tobacco.

The presence of an expanding commercial crop economy in Franklin County and elsewhere in North Carolina did not mean that farmers grew only cotton and tobacco. Due to distant markets and poor transportation, diversification and a rather significant degree of self-sufficiency had always
marked the farms, plantations, and neighborhoods of the state. Throughout the antebellum period North Carolina along with other states in the upper South developed a mixed farming economy. Franklin County farmers and other growers outside the coastal area continued to raise corn, wheat, and other food crops, even after tobacco and cotton became popular cash crops in much of the eastern half of the state. In Maryland and Virginia some of the old tobacco areas turned to wheat production after the Revolution. Farmers in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri also participated in a mixed agricultural economy, growing not only tobacco and some cotton, but also corn, flax, hemp, grasses, and various food crops. Massenburg planted three or four fields of corn and smaller amounts of wheat, rye, and oats. The slaves also worked on a large central garden each year, cultivating peas, beets, radishes, lettuce, onions, Irish potatoes, Spanish yams, cabbages, and coleworts. Pork from hogs, beef and hides from cattle, and mutton and wool from sheep helped make Woodleaf and Egypt almost completely self-sufficient in foodstuffs.

Franklin County's mixture of commercial and subsistence farming supported a thriving local economy in which Massenburg fully participated. In 1810 Louisburg, located a couple of miles from Woodleaf, possessed "twenty houses, several stores and mills and had stagecoaches passing through three times a week." Over the next decade the
town continued to thrive even as the population of the county declined.¹⁴ By the 1850s Louisburg boasted numerous grocery and general stores, not to mention Skinner and Baker's apothecary and druggist shop, W.H. Ferguson's carriage shop, Aycock's liquor store, and Powell's watch and jewelry establishment, which carried a "wide assortment of fancy goods."¹⁵ The county experienced more growth after state aid to railroads increased with the passage of the new state constitution in 1836. Another town was founded when the Raleigh-Gaston Railroad was laid through the county in 1839. Franklin Depot began spontaneously as a scattering of stores and buildings on a farmer's private property, with the settlement being incorporated and renamed Franklinton in 1842. For many local planters, the Franklin Depot facilitated the marketing of crops; previously bales of cotton had to be hauled by cart or wagon to Gaston, where they were then shipped down the Roanoake River to the coast.¹⁶ Massenburg made much use of the Franklin Depot, and he also did much of his business in Franklinton and Louisburg.

Massenburg sold his cash crop of cotton both locally and in distant markets. After he began to grow tobacco in 1839 Massenburg marketed that crop in Virginia. Massenburg also took part in the local economy: he sold small amounts of his other crops, hired free and slave labor, bought various goods, and exchanged services with neighbors. His
local business dealings often involved relatives and friends, and these relationships frequently intersected with his religious life.\textsuperscript{17}

Massenburg's participation in the local economy involved four basic types of transactions: selling small amounts of his secondary crops, hiring free and slave labor, buying various goods, and purchasing services. His dealings with distant markets were usually limited to the sale of his cash crops of cotton and later tobacco. The two types of transactions—local and national—were hardly unrelated, though. Cash crops provided Massenburg with the income to buy goods and services locally, and the array of crops grown to feed the white and the slave families provided a surplus, which he then placed in the local market. Massenburg's commitment to growing cash crops for a national or an international market did not preclude significant involvement in the local economy.

Two of Massenburg's most frequent transactions within his immediate community were with local grain and lumber mills. About a dozen times a year he sent a few barrels of wheat to nearby mills, receiving back one or two barrels of flour on each trip, with the miller keeping the remaining wheat for payment. In one particularly large exchange Massenburg sent his wagon driver Lewis to town with 40 bushels of wheat, and Lewis returned with "6 Barrels of flour, 2 of which were superfine and 4 for the family with
66 lbs. in bags, and two barrels of seconds and 5 sacks."
Although Massenburg was satisfied with this transaction, he
was not always pleased with certain mills. He expressed
much discontent when a particularly lopsided transaction
with the "town mill" netted only "one full barrel and two
small pieces" from fourteen bushels of wheat. Massenburg
decided that it was "a very poor turn out--enough to induce
us not to send wheat to that mill." Fortunately, the
town had some choice--most of Woodleaf's wheat was being
ground at Turner's mill anyway.

Besides the grain mills, lumber mills drew much
business from Woodleaf; logs cut from the plantations'
forests were sent to town to be sawed into plank for the
family home and for slave cabins. Massenburg also had mules
shod, wagon axles fixed, and hides tanned in Louisburg. These transactions illustrate how mixed farming, while
promoting a certain amount of self-sufficiency for
individual planters, did not entirely eliminate the need for
local services. Instead, diversification could generate
some demand for certain skills. By raising cattle
Massenburg provided Louisburg's tanner with business, while
the local blacksmith was needed to make shoes for the draft
animals and fix farm equipment. Frequent transactions such
as these augmented the network of ties that bound the
Massenburg plantation to the local economy and to life in
town.
Purchasing goods not made or grown on the plantation was another economic activity linking Massenburg to merchants in town and to neighbors. On a typical trip to Louisburg in 1841 the wagon brought back "Rope, Bagging, and Nails." Fifteen years later the cart driver was fetching similar supplies, including "Oil, Shoes, Iron, and Sugar." Neighbors also proved to be useful sources of goods such as molasses and brandy. Although the neighborhood provided most of Massenburg's needs, he did leave the county to buy salt in Henderson, a town about twenty-five miles away, and lime in Warrenton, about equally far away. Massenburg even traveled over thirty miles to Halifax to buy mulberry trees.20 Even a largely self-sufficient plantation, whose cash crop was marketed out of state, still had to turn to the local economy to satisfy all of its needs.21

Like goods and services, labor needs could not be filled solely within the plantation. Every year white, free black, and slave labor, both skilled and unskilled, were hired to work at Woodleaf. Massenburg hired most of the extra workers during his first decade of farming. When Massenburg first began to plant, he needed his full labor force to cultivate cotton and a variety of other crops, as well as to do overhead chores such as clearing land, breaking a path between Woodleaf and Egypt, planting trees, and building fences. With his own slaves fully occupied during the first years after he acquired his two
plantations, Massenburg needed extra hired hands to cut oats, thrash wheat, plow, and make ditches. Beginning in the late 1840s and through the 1850s, however, Massenburg only occasionally hired men to clean and make ditches, not to do any actual harvesting or cultivating of crops as they had done previously. By then his own labor force had increased in number as the children grew up and began to work in the fields, and the number of overhead tasks had slightly diminished. With more permanent hands and less land to clear, the work force at Egypt and Woodleaf could complete most of the tasks with a minimum of hired help. Massenburg does not list the race or status of these laborers hired throughout the years to do unskilled overhead work such as digging ditches, but probably they were a combination of free black, slave, and white workers. Small planters and farmers in North Carolina and in other parts of the South typically hired slaves and white farm laborers to supplement their own work force.²²

Although little is known about the unskilled hired labor, some of the skilled workers are easier to identify. The biggest project involving skilled craftsmen was the expansion of the Massenburg home during March through December of 1838. William Jones, a white carpenter from Louisburg, directed Massenburg's slaves along with his own workers, who included white, free black, and slave craftsmen. Massenburg's own slave Lewis helped Willis, one
of the hired slaves, to lay the foundation for the new t-shaped extension. Willis also built the stone chimney that ran from the original first floor up to the new second story. Charles, a Woodleaf hand, gathered the stones for the new chimney with Hardy Floyd, a free black stonemason from Louisburg. This combination of slave, free black, and white workers laboring together on building sites was common throughout the state, according to Catherine Bishir, a historian of black builders in antebellum North Carolina. Being able to hire skilled workers like carpenters and blacksmiths, along with various unskilled workers, was crucial for farmers and planters who could not afford a fully staffed labor force. Successful mixed farming depended upon having a flexible work force that could be supplemented when necessary. For Massenburg this required that he carefully calculate his labor needs, hiring slaves where needed for extra work, while leaving most of his own hands in the fields to cultivate the crops that provided his main income.

Massenburg took his cotton crop to either Gaston or Henderson, and presumably these loads were then shipped to Virginia. In 1839 Massenburg began to grow tobacco at Egypt, and beginning the next year he grew tobacco at both of his plantations, planting only small amounts of cotton, mainly for household use. After he began to cultivate tobacco in large quantities, Massenburg hauled hogshead
after hogshead of tobacco, one at a time or in pairs, to
Franklinton where they were shipped to Richmond. By 1844
Massenburg had begun to send his crops to Petersburg,
probably because it was nearer and marketing costs were
lower there. Cotton and tobacco netted the most cash income
for Massenburg. His sales of cotton ranged from a high of
$1,256 in 1837 to a low of $166 in 1844 after he had cut
back on his cotton planting to concentrate upon tobacco
production. Massenburg's tobacco sales started out small.
In 1839, the first year he cultivated tobacco, Massenburg
sold two hogsheads for $195 total. Throughout the 1840s
when prices remained low for Ornico tobacco, the crop from
Woodleaf and Egypt typically netted only four or five
hundred dollars. Massenburg's decision to try tobacco was
probably prompted by two factors: the difficulty of growing
cotton with the northern Piedmont's late frosts and the high
price of tobacco from 1836 to 1838. After having
experienced decades of dismal prices due to a glut on the
European market, tobacco prices experienced a temporary
surge beginning in 1833 due to small crops in Virginia and
Maryland. But the upswing in prices merely encouraged
production, driving the price down again after 1842.25
Massenburg, though, began to grow tobacco when the returns
were high, and he continued to grow it after prices dropped,
apparently believing that the low prices were less
disadvantageous than the difficulties of cultivating cotton
in a relatively cool climate. Massenburg was the first Franklin County planter to grow tobacco in any sizable quantity. Many other planters and farmers followed suit, although a substantial number continued to plant cotton as their main cash crop. By 1850 Massenburg and other North Carolina farmers who chose to cultivate tobacco found the trade to be increasinly lucrative after the development of a new variety of yellow tobacco called "bright" tobacco. Bright tobacco had been grown for years, but before the 1850s no one had determined how to produce consistently the light-colored leaf until two brothers, Elie and Elisha Slade of Caswell County, North Carolina, determined the precise curing process and type of soil necessary to grow the special variety on a regular basis. The leaf grew especially well in the light, sandy soils of the central and southern Piedmont of Virginia and North Carolina. Besides the particular type of soil, a special curing process also helped give bright tobacco its distinct qualities. When drying the leaf, the use of charcoal instead of wood and flues instead of open fires allowed for careful monitoring of the drying process. In the case of bright tobacco, this meant that its growers were consistently able to produce a light yellow-colored leaf with a mild flavor.

The cured yellow tobacco leaf was popular in both domestic and foreign markets, commanding high prices due to its superior taste and color. Average export prices for
bright tobacco from 1851 to 1861 were, in fact, about 40 percent higher than for the total average prices for Ornico tobacco from 1842 to 1850. These high prices rejuvenated agriculture in Virginia and North Carolina, with North Carolina nearly tripling its tobacco production during the last decade before the Civil War. Such rapid growth doubled the value of land and buildings in North Carolina. Massenburg's own property values doubled to $12,000 between 1850 to 1860.

Towards the close of the antebellum period, much of Massenburg's prosperity rested upon his slave labor producing cash crops, particularly bright tobacco. In 1852, the last time Massenburg noted his crop sales in his plantation journal, his twenty-three hogshead of tobacco brought $2143.43 in cash. Although Massenburg derived most of his income from tobacco and cotton, he also conducted quite a busy trade selling surplus foodstuffs to numerous local people. These many transactions illustrate how diversification, while meant to promote individual self-sufficiency, could spawn a series of economic exchanges within a particular neighborhood. Interactions were informal and decentralized, operating among friends, neighbors, and business acquaintances. Participation in a mixed economy allowed Massenburg to increase his cash earnings while he improved the quality of his plantations' soil and increased his family's
self-sufficiency.

Massenburg sold mainly wheat, corn, and pork, along with smaller quantities of rye, flour, peas, wool, and potatoes. Both merchants and individuals bought surplus goods from Woodleaf and Egypt. B.J. Ballard, Massenburg's friend and a Louisburg merchant, purchased bacon, corn, and potatoes on three separate occasions. A.H. Ray, another merchant, stocked his shelves with flour and bacon from Woodleaf. The other sales were made to a dozen individuals, with Woodleaf's overseers being some of Massenburg's best customers. Every year overseers bought extra rations of bacon, corn, potatoes, and other food items. For two years Massenburg provided an extended monthly account of what the overseers bought and the money that they borrowed. Hamblin Jordan, for example, indebted himself to Massenburg for $69 in 1835 for the purchase of numerous food items. His salary for that year was $100. Massenburg made most of his other sales to friends whom he mentions visiting, discussing crops, and hunting and fishing with. Dr. Archibald Davis, his father-in-law and one of his most frequent visitors, bought wheat, rye and potatoes. Other people bought a few bushels of corn one year, a bit of bacon a couple of years later, and then some wheat the next year. Besides selling surpluses to friends, merchants, and overseers, Massenburg also sold wheat to William Arendell, his minister, and to Mr. Ham, who made shoes for the
Woodleaf's slaves. The scattered and infrequent nature of these purchases suggest that Massenburg's customers were merely supplementing their own main food supplies gotten elsewhere, from their own farms and plantations or from merchants in town.\textsuperscript{35}

The existence of this local market in foodstuffs—conducted largely by word-of-mouth, it seems—enabled Massenburg to grow a diverse array of crops to feed his own family, while making extra income from surplus foodstuffs. Massenburg's total yearly intake from these sales ranged from a low of $51 in 1835 to a high of $230 in 1837. Most years his sales tended to remain under $100. For years where it is possible to calculate, these earnings typically represented less than 10 percent of Massenburg's overall earnings.\textsuperscript{36} While small, the sales did provide him with some extra income, and they did represent a contribution to the local economy, at least during Massenburg's first two decades of farming. By 1853, however, Massenburg no longer recorded selling secondary crops to local merchants and friends, although he does list the number of hogshead of tobacco sent to Virginia every year. If his 1852 figures are any indication, by 1853 Massenburg was probably earning quite a large income from his bright tobacco; in 1852 his twenty-three hogshead brought $2,143 in Virginia markets.\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps with such a substantial income from his tobacco, Massenburg no longer needed to sell his secondary crops and
instead used them to feed his own growing family and the increasing slave population on his two plantations. Even though he was growing more tobacco on his plantations, the yields on his other crops were at an all-time high in 1853, so it does not follow that he may have cut back on his secondary crop production in order to maximize the amount of labor and acreage devoted to his main cash crop. Instead, both the size and the maturity of his labor force and his acreage under cultivation were expanding, allowing him to increase the yields on all of his crops. Perhaps by 1853 Massenburg was simply failing to record extra crop sales, or he was recording them in other places. Alternatively, his dealings in the local economy may have been reduced to the purchasing of staples and goods from merchants.

Massenburg's activities within his community did not always involve cash transactions. Besides hiring slave, free black, and white labor, Massenburg also borrowed and lent slave labor on an informal basis. Typically he sent his slaves to neighbors either alone or in pairs. Most of the time his slaves helped roll logs, a heavy chore related to clearing land that required a few strong hands.\textsuperscript{38} Another time all the men from both Woodleaf and Egypt spent two days at Dr. Perry Johnson's helping his slaves build a tobacco barn and cut tobacco. Massenburg also cleaned and threshed wheat for a Mr. Hight, although he does not mention whether he did this as a favor or whether he received a
portion of the wheat in payment. J.G. Stone, who borrowed
slaves to roll logs, also brought his cotton to Woodleaf to
be processed through Massenburg's own cotton gin. Stone may
have been a small farmer who needed to turn to a larger
planter to process his crop. Massenburg noted that the
transaction with Stone involved only three bales of
cotton.39

Massenburg also borrowed labor from his more prosperous
neighbors. During the summer of 1844 Massenburg's cotton
and corn crops were being choked by excessive amounts of
grass, and Massenburg's own labor force could not hoe and
plow quickly enough to save the crops. Massenburg observed
that other cotton planters in the area were doing well "as
there were plenty of blooms in the county," but his own crop
was doing poorly "from being planted in clover and weeds,
and stubble land, and grass."40 To help stave off
disaster, Archibald Davis sent ten hands in May and eight in
July. B.J. Ballard lent five hoe hands for two days "to
hill corn and work the cotton."41 In September Dr. Johnson
took his turn, sending six hands to cut tobacco.42
Massenburg never records repaying these people in any way,
although two years later he did send his slave Cary to help
B.J. Ballard kill hogs.43

Such exchange of labor could generate a series of ties
among various members of the community. In Massenburg's
neighborhood and throughout much of the South, farmers and
planters were linked by complementary interests: a planter might gin a neighbor's cotton, while the farmer sold surplus foodstuffs to another neighbor. Prosperous slaveowners also might send hands to a nearby yeoman's farm to help him shuck corn. The proud yeoman probably found some way to reciprocate—with a bushel of potatoes or perhaps some help at harvest time. These kinds of interactions could potentially mitigate class tensions since they helped forge a sense of community and common purpose among various groups—large and small planters, farmers, artisans, merchants, and farm laborers.44

The borrowing and lending of labor and services among neighbors was typical in farming communities. For Massenburg it dropped off a bit before the Civil War, although he still exchanged ginning cotton for the use of two hands for a day and cleared a neighbor's fields in exchange for timber.45 The easy give-and-take among friends and neighbors, however, did not preclude a more entrepreneurial tone to some of their other transactions. When Massenburg sold bacon to B.J. Ballard one spring, he charged him interest since Ballard would not be settling the account until fall. Another time he recorded (with satisfaction, no doubt) that he was getting a dollar per bushel for his wheat when the going rate around town was 75 cents per bushel.46

Besides being bound by similar or complementary
economic concerns and interests, many members of the community were also linked by the very act of cultivating crops. Cultivating tobacco or cotton involved a shared experience that promoted a certain amount of social unity. Throughout the area people engaged in similar tasks at the same time, utilizing comparable techniques and implements. Cultivators all faced uncooperative weather and vexing pests, reminders of the precarious nature of agricultural life. A sense of stability and predictability, however, was derived from the cycle of the seasons: planting, weeding, and harvesting came at regular intervals throughout the year. This sense of common purpose and identity derived from all being farmers is most vividly revealed by Massenburg's entries describing how the planters in the area visited each others' properties, comparing their crops amongst themselves. These fellow farmers functioned as judges of Woodleaf's crop, with the state of their own crops and their timetables for planting and harvesting serving as yardsticks for Massenburg's own efforts. Massenburg frequently reported that another planter had dropped by, and together they had surveyed his fields, with the visitor rendering his opinion of Massenburg's crops compared with his own and others in the neighborhood. Massenburg also frequently made such observations and evaluations on his own.

T.H. Breen has argued that the judging of tobacco crops
in colonial Virginia provided its cultivators "with a means to establish a public identity, a way to locate themselves within a web of human relations. The crop served as an index of worth and standing in a community. . . quite literally, the quality of a man's tobacco often served as the measure of a man." Massenburg's journal indicates that Franklin County farmers showed concern about the state of all their crops, not just tobacco. Massenburg, for instance, never seemed quite so proud of his efforts as when he discussed his 1839 crop of corn, cotton, and tobacco. "I never saw a finer crop than my own in this section of the world," he wrote. "My corn crop at this plantation is guessed by good judges to make 400 barrels. . . and some of the highland is thought by Mr. R. MacNair to make 8 barrels to the acre, and he offers to bet that it will reach that quantity. Tobacco is generally, uncommonly fine. Cotton is quite green yet, and the largest I ever made." Even gardens were worthy of concern and comparison. During one cold spring Massenburg observed: "Gardens are very backward. We did not have English peas until the 29th." He explained, though, that the "other gardens in the neighborhood seem to be as backward as ours."

Even though the planters in the area compared all of their crops, Massenburg's entries on tobacco judging were sometimes a bit lengthier than the others, and comparisons tended to revolve around exactly how big the leaves were:
tended to revolve around exactly how big the leaves were: did any grow to "as large as a half dollar" or were most of them "not larger than a 5 cent piece"? The need to grow the plants in beds before transplanting them to the fields added an extra dimension to tobacco cultivation. Sowing the tiny seeds, carefully nurturing them, and then replanting them required of the planter knowledge, attention, and a kind of intuition, not to mention skill and care on the part of the slaves. Historian Frederick Siegel describes tobacco cultivation as having an "artisanal" quality about it: differences in soil quality, the timing of planting and harvesting, the amount and type of fertilizer, and the curing process all came to bear on the final quality of the leaf, with minute variations in any step of the process potentially having disproportionate results. Although Massenburg's record of tobacco judging may have differed slightly in frequency, length, and tone, it is clear that the cultivation of all crops, not simply tobacco, provided the planters in his area with a shared experience that brought them together in a world marked by elements of both cooperation and competition.

Massenburg's relationship with Dr. Johnson, another planter, best exemplifies this combination of competitive and cooperative impulses operating among Massenburg and his fellow farmers. Dr. Johnson, the same planter who had lent Massenburg several hands when his grass was overtaking his
fields, frequently visited Woodleaf and offered his opinion about the state of the crops there. Once he advised Massenburg on when to manure his fields, and one winter Massenburg noted that he had not cut any wood yet since "Dr. Johnson very kindly gave me wood for the winter from his newground on Millbrook."\(^{52}\)

Dr. Johnson's opinion, advice, and aid were no doubt well-appreciated, but the journal entries also reveal that even though the relationship was distinguished by well-meaning friendship, it was also marked by an element of competition. Throughout the journal Massenburg frequently points out Dr. Johnson's success when he and others have failed. When the peas in Woodleaf's garden did not sprout until May 29th, "Johnson had peas about a week ago."\(^{53}\) When Massenburg was scrambling to clear new ground for tobacco beds one winter, "Dr. Johnson burnt his [bed] south of the road today."\(^{54}\) During one spring transplanting, Massenburg lamented that his tobacco plant beds "were the most perfect failure I have ever seen." One bed, "which good judges (Dr. Johnson among them) said would not yield a plant to the square yard," was plowed under and replanted. Massenburg complained that his other beds at Egypt "were overrun by a freshet and eaten by flies," but he explained that "there is a general scarcity [of tobacco plants]--owing to freshets and flies." Yet, despite widespread distress caused by an excess of water and insects, Massenburg related
that "Dr. Johnson had great success with plants this year."\textsuperscript{55}

Dr. Johnson's frequent record of success was not without its little blemishes, Massenburg was careful to note. One year he recorded that his tobacco was doing well: "Dr. Johnson and myself, also May Hill have a tolerable stand, except that Dr. Johnson failed to have set his manure and plant his lot land first. . . ."\textsuperscript{56} During the summer of 1850 Johnson's crop was again doing well, but it was not quite the best. Massenburg observed that both his crop and Johnson's were "fine and large." But he immediately added that another visitor had already declared his own plants to be the finest in the neighborhood: "Mr. Alston was here last week and said mine was the best tobacco crop--throughout, he ever saw."\textsuperscript{57}

The competitive element present among these planters did not obliterate the sense of a shared experience--a sense that they were all cultivators of the soil facing destructive pests, declining soil fertility, and treacherous weather. In particular, difficult or sometimes even disastrous weather highlighted the fact that the burdens shouldered by one farmer were experienced by all. In 1850 the tobacco plants at Woodleaf "were very backward from cold spring." Massenburg, though, could perhaps derive some comfort from the fact that the bad weather had disrupted the planting schedules of planters throughout his neighborhood
and as far away as the neighboring county. Another year frost damaged his wheat and corn crops, along with those of his immediate neighbors. Massenburg knew that even farmers in Virginia were facing the same difficulties since he includes in his journal entry for the day a clipping from a Virginia newspaper discussing the devastation experienced in various counties in that state. During one particularly bad episode, a cold winter had forced the late planting of tobacco all over the upper South. Massenburg wrote that "Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri planters having had to resort to a third sowing of seed to get plants."59

Drought could be especially devastating. Massenburg's comments about the lack of rainfall illustrate with particular clarity the intersection of the community's evangelical and agrarian cultures. Massenburg was fully immersed in evangelical culture. A Methodist, he attended services at that church or whatever church happened to have a preacher that week; only severe weather or personal or family illness kept him home on Sundays. Revivals generated much excitement in the community, and Massenburg duly noted them in big black letters in his journal. A particularly fervent meeting sparked these enthusiastic remarks: "A most powerful revival of religion in the country. We go to Prospect 3 miles south of Louisburg where upwards of 1000 have been converted and between 60 and 70 have joined the Methodist Church, and the meeting still continues."60
Weekly church services and yearly camp meetings allowed Massenburg to participate fully in the community's thriving religious life.

Informed by their evangelical beliefs, Massenburg and many others in his neighborhood believed that God influenced the general conditions under which they cultivated crops. During one drought year Massenburg was relieved that "Providence so favored us [since] all over our wheat and rye was saved, without one drop of rain on it." During a more severe drought two decades later, Providence did not offer help without being asked. "We are in the midst of the most intense drought I ever witnessed," Massenburg wrote. "Corn has been suffering intensely and of course looks very badly so much so as to require a fast day to be set apart and observed to supplicate the Divine Providence for rain." The drought experienced by Massenburg and farmers all over the locale was disastrous, but it was experienced by everyone, and it was not seen as being totally arbitrary or inexplicable. Somehow they had displeased God, and, although they were, in one sense, completely helpless to end the drought, they could look to heaven and ask for forgiveness—hopefully their humbleness and piety could help restore their livelihood. The episode reveals a certain seamless quality to the lives of Massenburg and others in his area as evangelical and agrarian culture intermingled,
each lending meaning to the other.

Religion, the common experience of cultivating crops, and participation in the thriving local market in hired labor and surplus foodstuffs linked Massenburg to various members of his community, providing a context for his working environment. Maintaining his position in the community, though, was largely dependent upon successfully managing his plantation. Certainly Massenburg and other farmers had help in this—friends lent labor and offered advice, and numerous articles appeared in newspapers and journals telling farmers the proper way to manage slaves or the best way to prevent erosion. But, as one article in a Raleigh newspaper observed: "Agricultural principles are broad and easily understood: their application must, necessarily, be left to the judgement of each individual engaged in agricultural pursuits."63

The actual daily management of the farm or plantation, with its numerous details to attend to and decisions to make, was ultimately the responsibility of the owner or manager. In Massenburg's case, making and executing these decisions demanded his involvement in the everyday operations of his plantations, even with overseers present at both Egypt and Woodleaf. Although Massenburg sometimes took a day or two to visit friends, hunt with neighbors, or attend a camp meeting, he spent most of his time at Woodleaf directing and sometimes participating in the daily farm
work. Each day, Massenburg rode out to the fields to supervise the overseers and slaves and to inspect the crops. Even when taken with a long and severe attack of pneumonia during the winter of 1855, Massenburg struggled on "two sticks" down to the tobacco barn to inspect the crop, and then later went out to the fields a few times to survey the work. Like many southern planters and farmers, Massenburg did not explicitly discuss his ambitions or his attitudes towards work and leisure, but his journal does make clear that most of his time was devoted to minding his plantation, not indulging in frivolity. Massenburg, along with many other southern planters, hardly lived the life of leisure described by some historians. Family money may have enabled Massenburg to buy Woodleaf, and marriage may have given him the slaves to work his fields, but he simply could not afford to leave supervision completely to the overseer in an area marked by capricious weather, exhausted and eroded soil, increasing competition from the west, massive outmigration, and high slave prices.

Successfully running a plantation under these circumstances required making numerous decisions regarding agricultural methods, labor organization, and slave management. Traditional, wasteful agricultural practices needed to be reevaluated in order to remain competitive with farmers in the more recently settled areas of the South. Massenburg began to farm in a period when progressive
planters and agricultural reformers began to urge farmers to abandon one-crop agriculture and to pay more attention to the quality of their soil. John Taylor, author of *Arator*, a book of essays on agricultural reform, and Edmund Ruffin, a particularly zealous crusader for scientific farming, were two of the most prominent and influential agricultural leaders. Much of Taylor's, Ruffin's, and other reformers' advice was disseminated by agricultural journals published throughout the South.65 Massenburg subscribed to both the *Southern Planter* and the *Southern Cultivator*, as well as to local newspapers, many of which carried information about agricultural affairs.66 While not the most progressive planter, Massenburg nevertheless engaged in a limited amount of agricultural reform in order to maintain and improve his plantations' productivity.

In seeking to promote change on southern farms, reform leaders advocated a number of basic innovations in farming practices. A typical issue of an agricultural journal might include articles about deep plowing, horizontal plowing, record keeping, and proper care of farm equipment. Another important feature of the reform program was maintaining soil fertility. To accomplish this end farmers were supposed to rotate crops and use generous amounts of fertilizer—barnyard manure, lime, compost pilings, and marl were all recommended. Reformers also encouraged farmers to experiment with these and other materials in order to
determine what worked best for their plantations' particular soil type. Journals advocated internal improvements, agricultural fairs and societies, agricultural colleges, and government aid for all of these ventures.

One of Massenburg's major responsibilities was caring for the plantation soil. Declining soil fertility was a serious problem in the older seaboard states prior to the Civil War. Since the colonial period many planters had condemned the soil-exhausting properties of nutrient-greedy tobacco and the destructive farming practices of its growers. To combat exhausted soil, reformers throughout the antebellum period called for diversified crop selection, crop rotation, intensive fertilization, and certain plowing techniques to prevent erosion. Massenburg's journal indicates that he took many steps to preserve and replenish the soil on his two plantations. High winds and heavy water were two enemies of healthy soil. He began to observe problems with erosion during his early years of farming when frequent heavy rains threatened to sweep away the topsoil. To prevent erosion Massenburg practiced horizontal plowing, a technique advocated by agricultural reformers, which involved plowing perpendicular to the natural slope of a field in order to prevent soil erosion by channeling water into ditches. Every year the slaves at Woodleaf and Egypt dug and cleaned an extensive system of ditches used to drain the rain-washed fields. Massenburg also tried another
technique, one he apparently had come up with on his own: to keep the topsoil on his cornfields he left the old stalks in the field. "I do not haul up the stalks," he explained, "believing that they prevent hilly land from washing." Horizontal plowing, extensive ditching, and plowing under crop stubble no doubt did help preserve the soil during Franklin County's rainy springs and summers.

Soil fertility proved to be an even more vexing problem for Massenburg than soil erosion. Agricultural reformers encouraged crop rotation as one way of replacing valuable nutrients. They recommended many different schemes over the years, one of the most popular and successful being John Taylor's four-course rotation, with two years of rest being the key. Like many other planters, Massenburg simply cleared new land every year during the first years after he began to farm. Later he continued to clear some new land each winter, but this still left many old fields, some of which had been planted for a number of years. Massenburg rotated his main crops of tobacco, corn, and wheat, although he never explicitly discussed in the plantation diary his scheme of crop rotation.

Although Massenburg did not remark extensively upon crop rotation, he frequently wrote about the reformers' other recommendation for soil rejuvenation--fertilization. During the first ten years of farming, Massenburg relied mostly on sporadic applications of manure to maintain crop
yields. He also used cotton seed to replenish the corn fields, which was accomplished "by running off the ground with Dagons [a kind of plow] both ways and putting the seed on both sides of the corn." Diversification, rotation, the clearing of new lands, and some doses of manure or cotton seed sufficiently rejuvenated the land during his early years of farming, but Massenburg was eventually forced to spend much more money and labor on maintaining fertile fields. By the 1840s "manuring" became a common chore at Woodleaf, particularly for female hands. During the 1850s Massenburg's increasing concern about fertilizing was evident by his habit of recording each and every load of manure brought out to the fields. One year the hands spent days hauling out load after load of manure until Massenburg proclaimed with emphasis, satisfaction, and most assuredly relief that the 349th cartload had finally been deposited in the fields.  

Although Massenburg had to decide for himself on a daily basis how much time and labor to spend on putting manure on the fields, concern about soil fertility was shared by other farmers in his area. One episode recorded in Massenburg's journal illustrates how many reforms may have been tested out and implemented throughout the South. One afternoon a group of planters gathered together to view a new fertilizing technique. "I go to Dr. J. Hill's to witness Mr. Totten put up a pile of Bommer manure,"
Massenburg wrote. "Dr. W.J. Joshua Perry, Dr. Tom Perry, and Elisha Young there also." Mr. Totten was probably "Colonel Totten," a man who traveled around the countryside lecturing farmers on the new method. A Raleigh newspaper described Totten's procedure as gathering together "leaves, straw, the rakings of the woods, boggs, swamp mud, ditch bank and the like," then allowing this mixture to ferment in a compost pile before dumping the resulting liquid on the field. Although the newspaper earnestly endorsed the procedure, Massenburg was apparently not impressed by what he saw at Dr. Hill's since he never utilized the new method. The way in which he was exposed to the new method, though—a small group of farmers observing the procedure together—shows how information about reform could be informally passed among a network of friends.

Massenburg may have rejected the Bommer method of fertilization, but he—and probably other farmers in his neighborhood as well—discovered that another fertilizer, guano, worked very well on the area's fields. Guano, an expensive fertilizer composed of seafowl excrement, became quite popular during the 1840s when increasing quantities were imported from Peru and other South American countries. A veritable "guano mania" was ignited as farmers wrote to the agricultural journals, attesting to guano's regenerative powers. After 1850, however, the craze subsided when some farmers began to question its value due to high prices and
the potential for harming crops by overuse.\textsuperscript{74} Apparently, though, neither controversy nor his own occasional "overdose of guano" could dim Massenburg's enthusiasm for its use since he continued to purchase the South American fertilizer in large quantities until the Civil War.\textsuperscript{75}

Besides striving to maintain his soil through rotation, fertilization, and horizontal plowing, Massenburg also attempted to improve his yields by trying other new techniques. One time he divided a field in half, experimentally applying manure to one side only in order "to make it a kind of hot bed."\textsuperscript{76} Another of his experiments was more elaborate, involving fourteen rows of potatoes, each planted with different mixtures of fertilizer, including "rotted wheat chaff," "cow dung," "cow dung covered with wheat straw," "wheat straw covered with cotton seed," "cotton seed covered with hog hair," and "hog hair only." These exotic combinations apparently worked (or at least did not hurt): five months later during potato digging time Massenburg turned back to this entry to record that this was "by far the best crop of potatoes we have ever made," although the entire experiment was undermined because he was unable to tell which rows were the most successful since he was not present when the potatoes were first dug.\textsuperscript{77}

Massenburg's willingness to try new methods of plowing or different combinations of fertilizer reflects an interest
in improving upon old techniques in the interest of increasing his long-term prosperity, even at the expense of extra time and labor. Massenburg, however, did not conduct carefully controlled, "scientific" experiments such as those undertaken by James Henry Hammond or Edmund Ruffin. These more wealthy and prominent figures closely observed and recorded the results of large-scale experiments. Ruffin, for instance, successfully experimented for a decade with marl, a naturally occurring soil deposit that was particularly useful for land that was deficient in lime. Massenburg was never so careful—as the potato harvesting fiasco suggests—yet his own small changes and trials do indicate a willingness to experiment in order to increase yields.

Innovation generally involved making small changes in procedures, but it also included purchasing some machinery. Massenburg owned an oat thresher, a wheat thresher, and a cotton gin, a minimal degree of mechanization, but an amount typical for the times and suited to his needs. Other smaller implements such as double plows, shovel-like coulter plows, and dagon plows were either purchased or fashioned in the plantation's blacksmith shop. Farm machinery was not an unmixed blessing. During the fall of 1835 Massenburg bought a wheat thresher, but he remarked that it did not perform very well. Several months later his new oat thresher lasted only one afternoon before breaking down. Difficulties with
equipment was typical in many rural areas where many implements were fashioned by local blacksmiths. Standardization was difficult to achieve and the sturdiness of the equipment depended upon the blacksmith's skill. Even the indispensable cotton gin did not come without problems—Massenburg reported that dust from the gin sometimes made his slaves sick, forcing them to shut down the machine for the rest of the day. Unreliable or unproven equipment may have prevented many farmers, especially those less affluent than Massenburg, from investing in equipment which, if functioning properly, could have freed up labor and increased crop production. The piecemeal progress of agricultural reform was often due to lack of capital and lack of certain success rather than ignorance or reluctance to innovate.

Massenburg may very well have represented how many small planters in his area responded to the call of the agricultural reformers. His plantation was diversified and largely self-sufficient in foodstuffs. Massenburg conducted experiments to help improve his yields, but he sometimes failed to observe closely and record the results, eliminating any benefits from some of his efforts. Progressive planters also urged careful record-keeping. The fact that Massenburg kept a journal at all indicates that he was concerned with noting the timing of each year's planting, the amount of crops produced, and the distribution
of labor—the three main subjects of his daily entries. Information of this sort allowed him to retain successful practices and reevaluate fruitless ones. Massenburg was also attentive to the need to prevent erosion, and his efforts to utilize horizontal plowing techniques and extensive ditching no doubt helped to preserve his plantation's topsoil. Massenburg's concern with maintaining soil fertility escalated as he experienced the need (less virgin soil), had the incentive (high prices for bright tobacco), and possessed the means (increasing revenues from cash crops).

Massenburg exemplified neither the best nor the worst of progressive farmers. John Schlotterbeck's study of Orange and Greene counties revealed that reform there proceeded with mixed results. Many farmers abandoned traditional wasteful practices, but others were hampered by unproven or unreliable equipment, lack of knowledge, and lack of ready capital.81 Reform in North Carolina also took hold in a patchwork fashion. Many agricultural societies were established in North Carolina after the 1820s, but they did not flourish before 1850. The pace of agricultural reform in North Carolina often depended upon the amount of cheap, virgin land available in a specific locale. In areas where fresh land abounded, farmers' found it more profitable simply to clear new land than to employ innovative farming techniques. In other areas, farmers such
as Massenburg found that fertilization and investment in machinery were worthwhile investments. Cornelius Cathey, who is quite critical of North Carolina's agricultural progress, cites poor transportation as a root cause of the state's difficulties in fully developing its commercial farming potential. He admits, though, that progressive farmers could be found throughout the state, with their numbers constantly increasing, especially after the 1850s when high land values forced farmers to tend more carefully the land that they already owned. Iron and steel plows, thresher, corn shellers, and other implements became widely used, as did guano, lime, and barnyard fertilizers. Cathey concludes that the state made "remarkable progress in increasing agricultural production between 1840 and 1860, yet, the rate of advance was not as fast as that being made in the nation at large." 82 Lewis Gray, in his work on antebellum southern agriculture, takes a more positive view of agricultural progress in the region as a whole, attributing what wasteful practices that continued to the abundance of fresh land. 83

In order to run his plantation successfully Massenburg needed not only to adjust his agricultural techniques, but he also had to allocate his labor resources efficiently. This required that he evaluate on a daily basis the best way to divide up the slaves to complete the day's tasks. Assigning tasks could be especially difficult on a
diversified plantation where more than one crop was being grown. Spring and late fall were particularly busy times; in the spring different groups of slaves spread out over the plantation, hauling wood, putting manure on the fields, making ditches and fences, planting, and plowing. Fall brought harvest time and more overhead work. An economist studying the Massenburg plantation, along with several other plantations in North and South Carolina, discovered that Massenburg managed to distribute his labor quite well. After analyzing six years of Massenburg's plantation diary, Ralph Anderson found that "labor bottlenecks were minimized on the Massenburg plantation, due to effective scheduling on a wide range of activities." Anderson also determined that the efficient use of labor contributed to Massenburg's high productivity rate. In Anderson's study the productivity rates of Piedmont planters—including Massenburg's—stood between 179.8 percent and 204.0 percent higher than those on the Coastal plantations. Closer supervision by owner and overseer and careful distribution of tasks were two factors contributing to the higher rate.\textsuperscript{84}

Managing slaves involved more than efficiently dividing up the tasks for the day. Encouraging slaves to work was a delicate business requiring careful balancing of punishment and threat of punishment with rewards and incentives.\textsuperscript{85} Although a subtle picture of the master-slave relationship at Woodleaf is difficult to glean from the daybook, some
observations can be made. Massenburg was apparently able to maintain work routines at Woodleaf and Egypt without resorting to violence, for he recorded only a couple of problems in the twenty-eight years of the journal. Only one of Massenburg' own slaves ran away, with the incident receiving the briefest mention: "Burster ran away today and came in at night." The only other runaways were two hired slaves. Simon left for only two days before being brought back to Woodleaf; no punishment was recorded for the incident. In 1853 another hired slave, Sherrod, ran away but returned the next day. Massenburg noted his departure and return without any other comment. Five days later, he again mentioned matter-of-factly, "Sherrod didn't make his appearance today." Within a week, Sherrod returned, apparently on his own. As punishment, Massenburg put the runaway "to rest in the Dairy for as long as he's been gone." Within seven days Sherrod was back plowing corn fields, having spent a week in solitary confinement. No other record of punishment exists for this incident or for any others. Throughout North Carolina and the rest of the South slaves, particularly hired slaves, frequently ran away from their plantations for a couple of nights or a week in response to bad treatment or to visit family members on other plantations. Usually they returned without the help of a posse or tracking dogs, and masters often only lightly punished these "runaways."
The absence of other entries concerning punishment at Woodleaf is open to a variety of interpretations. Massenburg may not have noted punishments, preferring not to have a permanent record of them. He may have withdrawn food or visiting privileges; Massenburg never recorded food allotments and passes, so he may have neglected to note the withdrawal of such privileges as well. Massenburg, perhaps wishing to distance himself from violence, could have delegated such unpleasant tasks to the overseers. Slaves also may have engaged in subtle resistance such as malingering, stealing, or sabotaging equipment, which went undetected.89 Also, even if Massenburg did not use the whip to command obedience from his slaves, the threat of such punishment or even of sale further south may have been enough to quell intransigence.90 Fear of sale further south may have acted as a particularly effective deterrent since the Massenburg slaves may have witnessed slave sales in nearby Louisburg or Franklinton. During Works Progress Administration interviews during the 1930s one former slave from Franklinton recalled "seeing heaps of slave sales, with the niggers in chains, and the speculators selling and buying them off. I also remember seeing a drove of slaves with nothing on but a rag betwixt their legs being galloped around before the buyers."91 Being so close to town, the slaves at Woodleaf very well may have witnessed similar sights or at least heard about them.
Incentives also existed within the system. Perhaps the hands took pride in their work or identified their interests with the masters: the more crops grown and harvested, the more food for their larders. A prosperous master was also less likely to have to sell off slaves to pay debts. Even more importantly, Massenburg allowed the slaves to grow their own cotton, which he apparently marketed for them. The journal never lists how much acreage Massenburg gave over to the slaves for their cotton patches, but one year after he listed his cotton production for the year he did add, "Negroes for themselves 824 pounds."92 The slaves usually worked "the negroes' cotton ground" during regular working hours. A typical day's entry might end with "Finish breaking up negroes' cotton" or "5 ploughs finish mine and negroes' cotton."93 Usually the work on the slaves' patches was left until the end of the day, surely as an incentive to keep the slaves working hard on Massenburg's crop. Although the entries usually generically refer to "the negroes' cotton," one entry suggests that each slave may have had his or her own patch, or two may have shared one: "Ploughs finish New House cotton early in the morning and plant 2 small patches of cotton, 1 for Lewis and the other for Mary Blick and Lila."94 From Massenburg's perspective, such privileges were a minor concession if they did anything at all to improve slave productivity.

The journal entries also revealed the occasional hint
of benevolence, mixed with concern for profit, in Massenburg's dealing with his slaves who were ill. Often Massenburg blandly noted the sickness of a slave; usually the hand appears working again the next day. During one particularly bad bout of pneumonia, however, Massenburg and his wife Lucy spent over a week at Egypt nursing several sick adults and children whom they took into either their home or the overseer's home there. Even though a doctor was called in, Massenburg could not resist bleeding one of the slaves, a commonly prescribed procedure. "I bled him [Abraham] with good effect--taking a large quantity," he recorded. Two days later Massenburg wrote, "I bled him copiously." Surprisingly, Abraham survived the pneumonia and the treatment, while others, who it seems may not have received Massenburg's ministrations, died from the illness. Episodes such as this very well may have lessened the distance between master and slave. Smaller plantations and farms, such as those dotted across much of Franklin County and North Carolina, often operated more informally than the large, highly structured plantations more likely to be found in the Deep South.95

Clearly, Massenburg, although a prosperous planter, was involved in the daily operations of his plantation and in the daily lives of his slaves. What the master's presence may have meant is a crucial question, although the answer from either the master's or the slaves' point of view
is not explicit in the journal. From Massenburg's perspective, the entries do occasionally convey a sense that even though the slaves did most of the physical labor and the master, of course, reaped most of the benefit, the effort to plant, nurture, and harvest crops was in many ways a cooperative one. Emergency situations, for instance, sometimes required the master to pitch in, as when Massenburg and the hands struggled to re-set the tobacco during a downpour; neither the master nor the slaves, however, proved to be "seaman" enough to finish the job on such a wet day. On another occasion, after spending an afternoon hauling poles with two slaves, Cary and William, Massenburg commented, "We think we have nearly enough." Such language suggests mutual discussion and a commitment to complete projects on the plantation.

Massenburg apparently did not find much fault with the labor of his slaves; he never recorded any complaints about slow, incompetent, or intransigent slaves. The absence of criticism may have been done to present himself as a good, kind master, or Massenburg, like other southern planters, may have directed some of his anger and frustration towards the overseers. Overseers, unlike valuable slave property, could be disposed of relatively easily. Massenburg hired over twenty overseers during the twenty-eight years covered by the journal, and only a few remained for more than a couple of years. The reasons for the overseer's departure
are not discussed in the journal. Rapid turnover like that at Woodleaf and Egypt was common, especially in the Deep South. Many overseers found themselves in the difficult situation of cultivating the cooperation of the slaves while maintaining discipline and high productivity for the master. The many overseers at Woodleaf and Egypt probably did have difficulties negotiating between master and slave, although such problems are not mentioned in the journal, a document written entirely from the master's perspective. Perhaps the overseers tired of participating in field work. Although the overseers' activities are not always recorded, the journal contains frequent references such as: "Burster, Joe, Tom, and Falkner [the overseer] cut wood on the plant beds." Overseers spent many afternoons doing the same work as the slaves: plowing, hoeing, and harvesting all of the crops. The overseers also may have been uncomfortable with Massenburg's criticism. Massenburg criticized them for not correctly arranging tobacco leaves before firing and for putting too much seed on plant beds. The overseers, then, may have lacked experience and knowledge of farming, and they also may have served as convenient scapegoats in a working world where the master found two important factors—the weather and the labor force—beyond his absolute control.

For Massenburg, maintaining order on his plantations meant engaging in a process of accommodation with his slave
workers. Adequate provision of food, clothing, and housing would have been the minimum expected of him. Incentives in the form of patches may have helped increase productivity, at least during the first several years after he purchased his plantation. Some of the slaves at Woodleaf found an outlet by occasionally running away, while others may have expressed dissatisfaction about overwork by feigning or exaggerating sickness. Mingo, a hired slave, was frequently listed as being sick. Sometimes he would not work for an entire day, or he might show up at the fields on his own in the afternoon. Other slaves would not "show up" some mornings because of illness, usually returning the next morning. In situations such as these, even if the master suspected shamming, they often could do little but allow the slaves their self-proclaimed day off. Slavery at Woodleaf and other plantations involved this constant interplay of resistance and accommodation between master and slave.

2. Ibid., January 14, 1844.

3. Massenburg purchased only two slaves, and one of these was sold after a year. The increase in hands resulted from children growing up and joining the workforce.


   Slaveholding, though, continued to expand in North Carolina during the decade of the 1850s, even if there were never as many slaves there as in the Lower South. Slavery was well-entrenched in Franklin County; by 1860 it was one of several counties in North Carolina that had a high density of slaves (ten or more slaves per square mile). Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 46, and for a map showing slave populations in North Carolina counties, see page 50.


8. Willard, *Franklin County Sketchbook*, 42. For the spread of cotton in other areas of the state, see Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 30, 33. Even with the spread of cotton and the persistence of tobacco in certain areas, many western and southern counties in North Carolina grew mostly corn, wheat, and oats. Others in the eastern counties raised hogs and produced naval stores. Taylor, 30-35; Johnson, *Ante-Bellum*
North Carolina, 53.


11. In 1846, a typical year, Massenburg harvested 445 barrels of corn, 118 bushels of wheat, and 27 stacks of oats. Massenburg only records his rye harvest for 1836; that year 32 bushels of rye were produced. *Massenburg Journal*, December 31, 1846 and December 31, 1836.

12. Each winter Massenburg and the slaves prepared several thousand pounds of pork. In 1845, for example, 75 hogs yielded 9,484 pounds of bacon and ham. *Massenburg Journal*, December 31, 1845. Every year about two cattle and two sheep were slaughtered to supplement the diet of both the white and the black families. In 1838 Massenburg had 52 cattle, most of which were cows along with a couple of bulls and a few oxen. December 31, 1838.


14. Ibid., 38. She lists the county's population as 10,166 in 1810 and 9,741 in 1820.

For outmigration in the state of North Carolina, see Taylor, *Slaveholding in North Carolina*, 52-68.

15. Louisburg *American Eagle*, various advertisements, July 3, 1858.

17. Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm: Social and Economic Change in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1716 to 1860." Schlotterbeck argues that in Orange and Greene counties, Virginia, there existed a "social economy, a dense network of trade and exchange of farm products, labor, services, and manufactured goods within the local community." Such an economy generated "a network of ties among farmers, planters, laborers, artisans, and merchants." My thesis owes much to Schlotterbeck's basic concept of a decentralized, "social" economy. I am not, however, offering an examination of all of Franklin County; rather I am showing how one small planter in that area did participate extensively in the local economy.

18. Massenburg journal, September 21, 1837; April 28, 1847.

19. Ibid., lumber, August 8, 1836; mules, February 6 and 7, 1838; axle, February 15, 1838; hides, March 3, 1836.

20. Ibid., first depot trip, October 12, 1841; second depot trip, November 28, 1856; brandy, March 14, 1836; molasses June 13, 1835; salt, October 8, 1838; lime, November 13, 1838; mulberry trees, January 17, 1839.

21. Ibid., brandy, March 14, 1836; molasses, June 13, 1835.


27. Nannie May Tilley, The Bright Tobacco Industry, 1860–1929 (Chapel Hill, 1948), 3–36, curing process, 4, 23–26. Although Tilley's work focuses on the industry after the Civil War, she provides useful background for the development of the new variety of tobacco; Paul W. Gates, The Farmer's Age:


31. Massenburg journal, bacon, April 20, 1839; corn, December 31, 1842; potatoes, March 25, 1841.

32. Ibid., flour, December 31, 1847 and December 31, 1848; potatoes, December 31, 1840.

33. Ibid., potatoes, March 25, 1841; bacon, corn, December 31, 1842; list of debts, undated pages at the end of 1839.

34. Ibid., wheat, December 31, 1837 and December 31, 1848; rye, December 31, 1837; potatoes, March 25, 1841.

35. Ibid., Arendell, December 31, 1835; ham, March 25, 1841;

36. In 1835 Massenburg sold $1167.17 of cotton and other goods, with cotton bringing $1116.14, and secondary crops $51.00 (4.4 percent). In 1837, his year tally read: cotton, $1256.45, other crops, $230.00, total $1486.51. His sales of extra wheat, rye, and pork, represented 15.5 percent of his income for that year.

37. Ibid., December 31, 1852.

38. Ibid., March 27, 1834; February 27, 1836; February 20, 1841; March 3, 1845.

39. Ibid., January 28, 1843.

40. Massenburg journal, June 3, 1844.

41. Ibid., July 15, 1844.

42. Ibid., September 30, 1844.
44. Boles, Black Southerners, 77.

45. Massenburg journal, January 24, 1854 and February 27, 1852.

46. Ibid., April 20, 1839.

47. Breen, Tobacco Culture, 23.

48. Massenburg journal, August 31, 1839.

49. Ibid., May 31, 1849.

50. Ibid., April 31, 1855.

51. Siegel, Roots of Southern Distinctiveness, 94-96; Joseph Robert Clark, The Tobacco Kingdom: Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800-1860 (Gloucester, Mass., 1965), 38. Massenburg only discusses comparisons made while the crop was growing, not after it was cured.

52. Massenburg journal, April 31, 1856. Although Dr. Johnson frequently stopped by the plantation, this is the only instance where Massenburg explicitly records that Johnson offered him specific advice. Presumably, though, the give and take advice was commonplace during these visits from Dr. Johnson and other planters. January 31, 1850.

53. Ibid., May 31, 1849.

54. Ibid., February 8, 1850.

55. Ibid., May 31, 1853.

56. Ibid., August 3, 1851.

57. Ibid., August 31, 1856.

58. Ibid., April 31, 1849.

59. Ibid., January 31, 1845.

60. Ibid., September 9, 1843. It is difficult to say which of Massenburg's friends or fellow farmers were fellow churchgoers. Methodism was fairly widespread in North Carolina. In 1827 there were 19, 208 members, and by 1857 they had increased to 44, 693. Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, 348, 343-47.

61. Massenburg journal, August 1, 1835.

62. Ibid., August 31, 1851.

64. Historians have debated the nature of southern attitudes concerning work. More recently, Eugene Genovese has emphasized the precapitalist nature of the South, arguing that although southern planters "did not spend their lives in leisure," they still "could hardly be accused of Puritanical steadiness, of bourgeois respect for time and attention to duty, of single-minded devotion to the calling of business." Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, 1976), 297. James Oakes, The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders (New York, 1983), 126 maintains that southerners were an ambitious, upwardly mobile people who valued individual struggle and achievement.


Reform was also promoted through agricultural fairs and societies, which blossomed after the War of 1812. Throughout the South, farmers gathered together to discuss and evaluate the latest trends in agriculture. In certain states, including North Carolina, the state legislatures provided funds to support agricultural societies. Gray, Agriculture, II, 782-88; Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, 106-109; Taylor, Slaveholding in North Carolina, 44-45. Massenburg does not discuss being a member of a society, nor does he mention attending fairs.

66. See Oakes, Ruling Race, 165-66, for a description of these journals. James O. Breeden, ed., Advice Among Masters: The Ideal in Slave Management in the Old South (Westport, Conn., 1980), provides documents written by planters and reformers regarding slave and plantation management.

67. Massenburg journal, concern about erosion, May 30 and July 1, 1837; horizontal plowing, January 12, 1837. See Gray, Agriculture, II, 800-01, for a description of horizontal plowing.

68. Massenburg journal, October 21, 1836.

69. Gray, Agriculture, 774, 807-10, 915-17; Robert, Tobacco Kingdom, 23-31.

70. Massenburg journal, January 31, 1834.

71. Ibid., May 11, 1853.

72. Ibid., January 17, 1849.


75.Massenburg journal, June 2, 1858.

76.Ibid., April 1, 1857.

77.Ibid., March 3, 1836.


79.Massenburg journal, September 4, 1835 and March 10 and 11, 1836; Gray, Agriculture, II, 792-800.

80.Massenburg journal, December 10, 1840.

81.Schlotterbeck, "Social Economy."

82.Cathey, Agricultural Developments in North Carolina, 196-203; 203 (quotation).


85.Boles, Black Southerners, 80-82, 175-76; Faust, James Henry Hammond, 74-75, 92; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 146-47; Oakes, Ruling Race, 179-80.

86.Massenburg journal, October 10, 1851.

87.Ibid., June 30, 1834 and July 3, 1834.


Historians have argued that slavery in North Carolina was
a relatively mild because of the preponderance of farms and small plantations. Schneider, "Institution of Slavery in North Carolina," 26; Taylor, Slaveholding in North Carolina, 81. Works Progress Administration interviews of former slaves gives the impression that rather than being characterized by mildness, slavery in North Carolina instead evidenced much diversity. In terms of punishment, for example, the slaves' experiences ran from "I never saw a slave whopped" to "Marster was good ter his slaves. . . . [but] Missus had slaves whapped fur most any little thing" to "[Master] beat 'em unmercifully." Slaves reported a similar range for material conditions and the amount of work required. George P. Rawick, ed, The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, vol. 15 (41 vols., Westport, Conn., 1972, 1978, 1979), 206, 193, 194 (quotations).

89.Blassingame, Slave Community, 277-80; Boles, Black Southerners, 176.

90.Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina, 494-95; Taylor, Slaveholding in North Carolina, 81; Boles, Black Southerners, 81, discusses how the threat of the whip or the occasional public whipping could serve as deterrents to slave disobedience. For another discussion of the ritual aspect of punishment, see Charles Joyner, Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community (Urbana and Chicago, 1984), 50-57.


92.Massenburg journal, December 31, 1837.

93.Ibid., March 24, 1838 and July 10, 1841.

94.Ibid., May 7, 1840.

95.Ibid., months of January and February, 1859; February 11 and 13, 1859 (quotations).

96.Ibid., March 5, 1856.

97.Ibid., February 4, 1854.

98.Ibid., February 10, 1854 and October 16, 1858.

99.For one bout of sickness, see Ibid., April 16, 19, and 20, 1852.
SLAVE WORK ROUTINES

For the slaves at Woodleaf, as for their master, the rhythms of agricultural life molded their working environment. Weather, season, the type of crop, and the organization of labor in the fields influenced the slaves' daily existence. Recently some historians have deemphasized the importance of the slaves' working hours in order to explore the more autonomous experience in the quarters.¹ Undoubtedly, the time spent in the quarters among family and friends shaped slaves' lives. Yet, family and friends were also co-workers, and the bulk of a bondperson's life was spent toiling in the field or in the house. Massenburg's slaves worked approximately 300 days each year, six days a week, often until sundown, with three or four days off at Christmas and perhaps an extra "holiday" or two during the year. Given the amount of time slaves spent working, their experience laboring in the fields deserves further examination. Recently, historians of both slavery and working-class life have begun to explore the connection between the world of work and working-class, or slave, culture. Scholars studying female slaves, for instance, have analyzed the extent of gender segregation in field work, debating the possible influence of any such
segregation on male-female interactions in the slave quarters. While not containing extensive information about life in the quarters, the Massenburg journal does provide adequate material to examine slave work routines over a three-decade period in the context of some of these issues.

During the period covered by the journal, fourteen to twenty-two of Massenburg's own adult hands toiled in the fields, along with one or two hired slaves most years, and several children at any given time. The work force was divided between the two plantations with an extra one or two more slaves placed at Woodleaf. The number of full hands increased from fourteen to twenty-two as children grew up and began to work in the fields. Only three adult slaves were bought during the twenty-eight years; one was sold after a year, and another was returned to the original owner when she ran away. A nearly equal number of men and women labored in the fields at both plantations. During 1844, a typical year, four men and five women worked as full hands at Woodleaf, with four men and four women at Egypt.

Massenburg rarely mentioned house servants, since his journal is devoted to recording mainly agricultural work. A comparison of the list of "taxable hands" for 1839 with the plantation roster listing field workers reveals that three women probably worked in the house. Presumably these hands did a full range of domestic work, including cleaning,
cooking, washing, and child care. Massenburg only once recorded that these house servants came out to the fields, noting that it was the "first time" that they had worked for him.\(^3\) During another afternoon, the female field workers helped "Mrs. Massenburg's hands" with making sausage and lard. Most days, it seems, the house workers remained indoors under the mistress's direction.

Not just at Woodleaf, but on many other farms and small plantations in the South, a sharp division between field hands and house servants did not exist: cooks and maids came out to the fields during harvest time or in emergency situations, and domestic and field slaves often married each other. Except on the very largest of plantations, where a liveried corps of domestic servants might form an elite of sorts, such easy interaction among house and field hands typified the experience of slaves in the agricultural South.\(^4\) At Woodleaf two of the female house servants married field hands, with only one of these males being in a privileged position in the fields. Although those who labored in the house did not work in the outdoors, the field hands, particularly the women, had much contact with the white family and the house servants. Sometimes when they or their children were very sick, the women were nursed in the Massenburg home. During one particularly bad bout of illness, Mary Blick, Lila, and Lucy were brought into the house for eight days, presumably to be cared for by Mrs.
Massenburg or one of the domestic slaves. Before and after they had children some of the women also worked at lighter tasks in the house. Lila spent a month in the house spinning prior to giving birth to her second child Oscar, and Mary Blick left the field for the house a month before her third child was born, staying indoors for two more months afterwards. During cold weather the women also spent numerous days in the house spinning cotton into thread. Such frequent contact with life in the house meant that the white family and the house servants did not remain strangers to the field hands, particularly the female ones.

Slave children regularly labored in the fields at Woodleaf, as they did on other plantations and farms in the South. Masters typically put children to light tasks at age nine or ten, classifying them as one-quarter or one-half hands. The "small hands" at Woodleaf did a variety of chores, including raking up manure, chopping cotton, carrying cotton seed out to the fields, and picking peas. Other chores involved heavier labor--cleaning ditches--or even potentially hazardous work such as "burning log heaps." Sometimes the children worked with a particular adult, usually a female, but more often they appeared to be under the general supervision of the overseer or perhaps whatever adult slaves happened to be laboring nearby. At the age of eleven or twelve, individual children left the
gang of "small hands" and became "water carriers" or "waterers." Children younger than these twelve-year-olds easily could have brought water to the fields, but presumably the older water carriers were learning--on a daily basis over the course of a year or two--how to plant, plow, and harvest the crops. By 1861 seven children had reached the age of twelve or older, becoming full hands at Woodleaf and Egypt.

The work force on the Massenburg plantation was organized into gangs, although such organization did not always carry with it the high degree of routinization the term "gang" might imply. The very nature of field work, especially on a small, diversified plantation such as Massenburg's, precluded the machine-like repetition of a single task week after week. Numerous crops demanded attention, and miscellaneous overhead chores such as clearing land needed to be completed. Task assignments tended to be particularly varied on a plantation like Woodleaf, which had a work force of only about twenty men and women. Without a large number of hands, specialization was necessarily rare; therefore, each slave was responsible for a broader range of tasks. On a large plantation, slaves may have worked with only corn and cotton, but on a smaller place, more crop diversity meant a greater diversity of tasks for each slave.

Given the lengthy list of chores that needed to be
completed during the year and the large variety of crops needing attention, the slaves at Woodleaf were usually organized into a system that represented a mix of gang and task labor. Except during harvest time, the hands worked in as few as two but perhaps as many as four or five small groups. Such an arrangement limited supervision, especially since there were no formally designated black slave drivers. Work paces may have been more easily manipulated by slaves in this setting, since constant supervision or "driving" of all hands at all times would have been difficult even with the presence of the master and an overseer at each plantation. Also, some slaves at Woodleaf were set to work individually or in pairs, often completing more than one task during the day. These slaves were not given their tasks and then allowed to take the rest of the day off after having completed their chores—a common practice on some plantations, particularly those in the South Carolina lowcountry. But, even though all slaves had to work from sunup to sundown, for at least some of the slaves, working alone or in pairs nevertheless provided a bit of relief from the rigors of gang labor.\textsuperscript{12} During much of the year, then, the slaves at Woodleaf worked in a system that might best be described as something in between large-scale, regimented gang labor and individual tasking.\textsuperscript{13}

Although the organization of labor on the Massenburg plantation was generally a hybrid of task and gang labor,
the pattern of slave work routines is best revealed by examining how the organization of labor fluctuated over the course of the entire year. Each stage in the cultivation process--preparing fields, planting, weeding, and harvesting--saw the hands put to all sorts of different tasks in assorted sized groups. For the slaves this meant that the amount of routinization and supervision that they endured, or the degree of autonomy that they enjoyed, varied significantly throughout the year.

During early spring--before planting--and during late fall--after harvesting--the hands at Woodleaf completed a diverse array of tasks. Chilly and wet March and April days were spent clearing land, burning debris on the plant beds, building fences, digging ditches, spreading manure, and plowing fields in preparation for sowing rye, cotton, clover, and tobacco. Slaves were divided into two or more groups on most days in order to ready the fields for planting. The work was hard and fast-paced--in a single day a slave might complete three or four tasks, working until sundown. But, routines changed every few days, mitigating some of the monotony, and with so many small groups scattered about the plantation, supervision was at a minimum. Like spring, late fall brought many different chores and lighter supervision, although the work pace was a bit less harried and the days shorter than in the spring.
During winter the slaves performed a multiplicity of tasks, with the weather influencing the mix of chores from day to day. Unless the weather was particularly bad, slaves might spend the day outdoors, clearing land, cutting wood, plowing, and making ditches. Often indoor tasks were done in the mornings, with the warmer afternoons being devoted to working outside. A bitter winter with snow or ice could reduce the number of tasks to spinning indoors for the women and cutting wood outside for the men. Or, all might remain in the barns to strip the tobacco that had been cured the previous fall. Sometimes the master let the slaves have the day off because of the weather: "Hail and rain all day moderately," Massenburg reported one winter morning, "We have a good woodpile and all hands do nothing 'but enjoy it.'"

Routinization and supervision increased during summer and into fall harvest time. In June the work force split into hoe and plow gangs, with generally only these two jobs being done day after day. Cotton gathering in particular may have encouraged a quick work pace enforced by either Massenburg or the overseer, since Massenburg recorded how many pounds of cotton were picked by each slave and then calculated the average for all hands, including children. His chart revealed that each slave picked between sixty and one hundred pounds a day, a modest amount compared to other plantations. The daily weighing of each individuals'
output would have made it easier for Massenburg and the overseer to monitor each slave's performance and to speed up the pace of work where needed. Although slaves could always collectively slow down the work pace during cotton picking time, they may have found it easier to establish their own speed during harvesting after Massenburg began to plant tobacco in 1839. Once he switched to cultivating mainly tobacco, Massenburg stopped recording individual slave output. Harried slaves could do great damage to delicate tobacco plants, which required especially careful attention during harvesting and throughout the year. At least during the harvesting phase of tobacco production, slaves may have found it slightly easier to set their own work paces than when they cultivated only cotton.

Seasonal patterns varied throughout the year--during some months work tended to be a monotonous diet of the same duties while during other times routinization decreased as slaves began to work in smaller groups or at individual tasks. Inclement weather complicated the work patterns, sometimes providing relief from a particular task or an early end to the work day. On a "gloomy" day in March 1858, complete with hail, snow, and ice, Massenburg grumbled, "nothing done by the men except feed stock." Treacherous weather also could force all hands to drop their regular work and dash to another field to save a crop from destruction. During one summer afternoon with winds so
fierce that they "blew Falkner [the overseer] into a ditch," all the slaves scrambled to re-set tobacco plants.\textsuperscript{17} Sometimes human disasters interrupted work; hands stopped all tasks for two days to rebuild a fence when the unlucky Falkner, "shooting a Gobler thro the fence," set its wooden rails ablaze.\textsuperscript{18} Such times of unexpected cooperative work surely reduced monotony and probably helped to foster a sense of common burden, and perhaps commitment, among the slaves and between them and the master.

While no hands escaped days of monotony in the fields, some slaves were more fortunate than others. Lewis and Gary, two older male slaves, were relieved of much field work through their positions as wagon and cart drivers. These two drivers spent numerous days hauling logs or other items around the Massenburg plantations, to other plantations, and to town. During the months of February and March of 1856, for example, Lewis spent thirty-six days on his own, working only twelve days with the others in the field. Cary, the cart driver, spent thirty-nine days on his own during the same two months. During this period other slaves worked in groups of at least two, but usually three or more.\textsuperscript{19} Such a position afforded Cary and Lewis a degree of autonomy not shared by most of the other slaves. Although some of the other hands might spend a day or two tracking down stray sheep or cutting logs off in a remote area, their movement during the work day was usually
confined to the Massenburg plantations. Cary and Lewis, though, often would be gone all day, or even overnight, staying at Egypt, or in Franklinton, Louisburg, or Warren, a town in a neighboring county.

Besides the positions of cart and wagon driver, no other year-around, privileged positions existed for field hands at Woodleaf. Both contemporaries and historians have classified plowers as specialists, but at Woodleaf most of the slaves plowed at some time during their lives, making it a common task. Opportunities to hold skilled jobs remained scarce at Woodleaf since Massenburg chose to hire white and other slave laborers, perhaps because he considered it more profitable to keep his regular hands in the field. Some slaves, though, did help these hired artisans with carpentry or blacksmith work. Every year, Massenburg hired George, a blacksmith owned by a neighbor. Charles, a slave at Woodleaf, helped George in the shop, often for two or three weeks at a time. After George left, during slow periods Charles's work might involve nothing more than "tinkering in the shop all day." He was probably completing various small projects for the plantation. Charles, then, was able to acquire at least some rudimentary blacksmithing skills, even though he apparently never became completely skilled since Massenburg hired George every year.

Massenburg did buy a slave artisan in November 1856. Bob, a carpenter, was purchased for $1400, and he
immediately began "to joint shingles for the Overseer's House." Bob did not remain long at Woodleaf; in 1859 Massenburg sold him, perhaps to buy Amy, Cary's wife (the privileged cart driver), and her three children. The hiring of trained artisans such as George meant that the chances for acquiring a skill at Woodleaf were limited. Only the wagon and cart drivers held special jobs on a permanent basis, except for Bob during his three-year stay. Young Tom, though, was allowed on occasion to drive the cart. Tom, Cary's son, probably received this privilege because of his father's position, indicating that perhaps transmission of skill was in part determined by kinship rather than ability. But this has often been the case in preindustrial or agricultural settings throughout the world since skill is frequently derived from observation; thus Tom would naturally--and most efficiently--grow into Cary's position.

Issues of specialization, autonomy, and routinization can be further illuminated by considering how the slaves' gender interacted with daily work routines. The Massenburg journal suggests that in some ways the female field hands at Woodleaf experienced the working world differently from the way men did. The ranks of specialized or skilled labor, for instance, were closed to women. On the Massenburg plantation, female slaves did not work in the blacksmith shop, build houses, drive wagons, or help with any of these
tasks. Although a couple of women apparently held gender-specific, specialized jobs in the house—as cook or maid—women's work in the field was limited to hoeing, plowing, ditching, and other such tasks. Excluding female field hands from skilled jobs was typical—masters did not want to train women for special positions since childbirth and nursing disrupted their work lives. But, as it has already been observed, on many plantations and farms, particularly small ones such as Woodleaf, avenues for advancement were often closed for many men as well as for women.

Although specialized or skilled jobs may have been limited for both men and women at Woodleaf, men in general certainly had greater opportunity to perform diverse tasks either on their own or in small groups away from direct supervision. Not surprisingly, Cary and Lewis, the cart and wagon drivers, spent the most time on their own. Other men often worked in pairs chopping wood or prizing tobacco, particularly in spring, late fall, and winter. Mingo also might help hired carpenters mix plaster, or Charles might get rocks from the quarry or spend the afternoon trimming trees. Men were sometimes sent out for a day or two to hunt down a stray hog or a head of cattle. Women occasionally worked alone or in pairs—usually building fences or cleaning ditches—but this occurred much less often than with men. Women as a group and individually experienced the
most autonomy and mobility during the first year after Massenburg purchased Egypt in 1835. When that plantation was being settled, both male and female hands were often sent from Woodleaf to help the smaller work force at Egypt. The men and women might spend a day or two thrashing wheat, butchering hogs, or sowing corn. Lone women also traveled to Egypt to cook for the hands there, and two or three female field hands at a time sometimes went over to complete chores such as packing cotton. After the early 1840s, however, with rare exceptions the female slaves always remained at one plantation, working in a group, be it with all females or with men. Never did Lila, Lucy, Clarica, or any of the other women spend the day alone searching for a hog or traveling to town with a hogshead of tobacco. For instance, during the first four months of 1852, a typical year, various male slaves worked alone eleven times (not including driving the cart or the wagon), while only twice did females complete a task without help or supervision.

At Woodleaf--and on other plantations--the increasing amount of task variation that accompanied crop diversification did not always benefit women--female field hands were infrequently chosen to be trained for skilled work, and women were more likely than men to spend the bulk of their time in supervised groups doing menial labor. This meant that the women spent longer periods of time performing the same tasks day after day, without any
respite. But, although the female slaves did not do some of the work that men did at Woodleaf, the men and the women did not remain completely isolated from each other during their hours in the field. At Woodleaf—and on many other plantations—women and men worked side by side throughout much of the year, doing much of the same heavy, dirty work. Although some concessions were made to pregnant and nursing women, most of the female slaves' working lives at Woodleaf were not spent apart from men. The organization of labor at Woodleaf confirms that gender did influence the pattern of work routines, but the result was not simply a neat division of the labor force into male and female groups. Instead, the experience of the slaves at Woodleaf underscores the need to examine closely the cycle of the agricultural seasons when determining the relationship between gender and work routines—that is, at Woodleaf, the pattern of gender segregation showed great variation throughout the year, with women and men never remaining entirely segregated for long.26

During winter, the women frequently did work such as spinning apart from the men, who would usually be cutting wood outside. Often, though, the men and the women worked together in the barns stripping the cured tobacco so it could be prized (packed) into hogsheads for shipping. Beginning in February or March, the work routines became more complicated. Men and women worked both together and
separately, with new tasks coming up every couple of days. On a Wednesday in February of 1861, for example, the women cleaned ditches while some men cut wood and five plow hands, both men and women, worked in the cornfield. The next day all of the women and two of the men plowed. The day after that all the hands together burned plant beds. Much of the work in the spring followed this general pattern—women and men segregated one day, in mixed groups on another, and then all together a day or two later.

After the crops were planted, much of the summer months were devoted to plowing and hoeing. On many plantations, women and some older men hoed while the plow gang was made up of only young, strong men. After Massenburg first started farming, the labor division at Woodleaf was almost reversed: mostly women plowed while men hoed. For three years—1840, 1841, and 1842—Massenburg listed the male and female slaves under the headings of "Hoe Hands" and "Ploughers." (Thereafter he merely listed them by gender, not recording whether they were in the hoe or plow gangs.) For 1840 the plantation roster shows three men and one woman as making up the hoe gang, while four women plowed. For the next two years Lucy, originally the one woman in the hoe gang, joined the plow hands, along with another male slave. The designated hoe gang remained made up solely of men. Massenburg may have preferred this somewhat unusual arrangement because the men were often needed to do other
work: two hoe hands, Cary and Lewis, drove the cart and wagon, while the third, Charles, often did other extra chores. It was essential, then, that Massenburg fully utilize his female slaves in order to get the plowing done. He could afford to be a bit more flexible with the hoe gang: ailing slaves or pregnant women could more easily be transferred to the hoe gang on a temporary basis. Plowing required more training than hoeing, as well as a bit more strength and skill, therefore all slaves needed to be trained to plow. The women apparently performed the task satisfactorily; after 1840 Massenburg ceased to designate hoe or plow hands, but his entries make clear that women continued to plow. After 1842, though, it becomes difficult to determine the exact composition of the two gangs for each day since Massenburg might simply record "8 plows sowing oats." His numbers, though, suggest that both men and women plowed together after the mid-1840s. Men occasionally hoed, although this task was increasingly given over to whatever women happened to be pregnant or nursing at a particular time.

After summer—when men and women spent a great deal of their time hoeing and plowing in a mixture of single-gender groups or in mixed groups—male and female slaves began to complete essentially the same tasks together. During fall, one single gang of slaves wormed, suckered, cut, and hauled tobacco; they pulled fodder; stacked wheat; and gathered
corn and peas. Often the day would be divided in half, with the morning devoted to cutting tobacco or picking cotton, while the afternoon was spent gathering fodder. On most farms and plantations in the South, the harvesting season was a time of cooperative work, when male and female slaves, along with overseers and even masters, all labored together to get the crops in before cold weather came.

Not just during harvest time, but throughout the year men and women did much of the same labor at Woodleaf, although pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing complicated the female slaves' work routines. In the South, female slaves of childbearing age experienced a range of treatment: some masters, motivated by basic humanitarian impulses and an eagerness to protect potential laborers, gave women lighter tasks and several weeks off before and after childbirth, as well as substantial breaks during the working day to nurse infants. Other masters were unable or unwilling to take women out of the fields for very long, giving them perhaps only a couple of weeks to prepare and recover from childbirth. In short, slave women faced what many yeoman or poor white women experienced in the rural South: brief lying-in periods and a quick return to labor. The crucial and unforgettable difference, of course, lay in the slave woman's lack of choice—the master, not the woman in conjunction with her husband or family, made the decision when to return to work.
It is difficult to determine precisely how Massenburg treated pregnant and nursing women since he infrequently mentions women by name and rarely, if ever, lists the gender breakdown in hoe and plow gangs. These omissions make it difficult to tell exactly at what time during her pregnancy a specific woman may have dropped out of the hoe gang and stopped working in the fields, either to do domestic work in the house or to rest before giving birth. In 1853, for example, five field hands were pregnant, four at Woodleaf and one at Egypt. Massenburg only records three instances when two of these women received special jobs—Venus cleaned ditches alone one day, and on two other days she and Mary cleaned up before the plows, a comparatively light task.\(^{30}\)

No other references were made to Venus and Mary before they gave birth in July and August, nor any at all to the other three pregnant women. These women may have stopped working, been assigned to domestic work, or remained in the fields with a smaller amount of work expected of them. Given how much had to be done in planting corn and replanting the tobacco during that particularly rainy July, it seems likely that all hands were expected to participate as best they could. It is clear, though, that in at least two other cases field hands worked at lighter tasks in the house during their later stages of pregnancies. Lila spent a month in the house spinning prior to giving birth, and Mary Blick also left the field for the house a month before the
birth to her third child, staying indoors for eight more weeks afterwards. In determining when to pull pregnant women out of the fields, Massenburg probably assessed the age, strength, and health of each particular woman, along with the tasks at hand that needed to be done. The result was probably some variation in the treatment of pregnant women, but it seems that generally women were given lighter tasks in the field, and then assigned to house work for a few weeks before and after the children were born.

Nursing women also needed lighter tasks and breaks during the day since rigorous labor, particularly if done in hot, humid weather, could affect the quantity and quality of breast milk. Again, it is difficult to tell how nursing women were treated at Woodleaf; they are mentioned specifically only a few times during the entire twenty-eight year span of the daybook, and the care of infants and children is never discussed. On the few occasions that they are mentioned, the nursing mothers were not excused from field work but were left behind in the fields to finish up hoe work at a slower pace. On one summer day, for instance, Massenburg recorded that "6 hoes leave the piece east of 3 barn lot for the women who have children to finish."\textsuperscript{31}

Presumably nursing mothers were frequently allowed to work at a slower pace than full hands and were given some breaks during the day to care for their children.

Women at Woodleaf had different work patterns
throughout the year, completing their tasks in gender-segregated groups most often during winter, and with men in spring and fall. During summer some women plowed with men while others (especially those who were pregnant) spent their time with mostly women in the hoe gang. Although the working world of the slaves at Woodleaf was not characterized by rigid gender segregation, the work experience of men and women certainly was not identical. Year-around, skilled jobs were limited for all slaves on the Massenburg plantation, but the women could easily have seen that opportunity for upward mobility or travel from the plantation was more circumscribed for them than for men. Women also had to cope with the extra burdens of childbirth and child care.

How might such an arrangement where women performed much of the same work as men, yet labored under some burdens unique to their gender, have affected notions of equality between female and male slaves? Even if slaves often worked together in the fields, doing much of the same onerous, backbreaking labor, the men and women still could have retreated into more traditional roles in the slave quarters, thereby diminishing any leveling effect produced by comparable labor in the field. The Massenburg journal does not provide much information about life in the quarters, but it seems likely that on a small plantation such as Woodleaf, the nature of work routines probably did not encourage the
formation of a completely separate female world in which women developed their identities and their rankings apart from their fellow male slaves. Men and women worked together throughout much of the year. Women's skill and strength as hoe and plow hands, their speed and dexterity at stripping tobacco and shucking corn, were perhaps compared not only among female slaves but among male and female hands as well. Such accomplishments could have served as indices of worth among the slave community. That is not to say that what parity did exist in the fields at Woodleaf neatly translated into equality in the quarters. More likely, a certain amount of egalitarianism may have been produced by the similar work routines, even as the men and women continued to order their domestic tasks around traditional concepts of what constituted male and female work: women cooking, washing, and taking care of children, while the men may have made furnishings for the cabin, and hunted and fished for extra food.

Although Massenburg's journal focuses on the slaves' working life, it does indirectly provide some clues about life in the quarters. The slaves at Woodleaf and Egypt lived in one-family cabins and in single cabins placed back to back to form "double houses." The cabins were covered with plank bought by Massenburg at the town mill, with male slaves constructing and repairing the buildings during regular working hours. Women were occasionally given the
day off to "scald their houses and clean up." Massenburg does not discuss food allocations, but the slave diet probably would have been similar to the one consumed by the white family--corn, pork, sweet potatoes, the occasional cut of beef or mutton, plus some vegetables and fruits. Slaves surely supplemented their diet by fishing, hunting, or growing additional vegetables. The hands also had cash from their cotton patches to spend on additional food and clothing. Having their own bit of income gave the slaves some independence and autonomy and allowed both men and women to provide extra provisions for themselves and for their families.

The slaves created a viable family life on the Massenburg plantations. Six couples resided at Woodleaf and Egypt, and at least one couple, Fanny and Rivers, was married at Woodleaf, with the hands receiving two days holiday for the celebration. At least seven other women had long-standing relationships with men from neighboring plantations. Fanny, for instance, had four children with Robert Branch, and Venus had at least four with Ellick Johnson, and probably two more. Couples from different plantations having more than one child together suggests the stability of these "abroad" marriages. At least one of these abroad couples, Fanny and Robert Branch, officially married after emancipation, along with two other couples from the Massenburg plantation. Although most of the
slaves were in monogamous, long-term relationships, it appears that some women may have had their first child with one man before settling down to have the rest of their children with another man. This was a typical pattern among slaves on many plantations in the South, since having a first child out of wedlock was widely accepted in the slave community, as long as subsequent relationships were monogamous.\textsuperscript{38} Massenburg occasionally recorded a woman and a "stray" or a "wild" producing a child, suggesting that some slaves engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage or before marriage.\textsuperscript{39} His choice of words suggests condemnation of these liaisons, indicating that his interest in slave relationships may have involved him attempting to impose his values on an unwilling slave population. Or, the slaves themselves may have accepted the dominant group's values, with any knowledge about supposedly casual liaisons reaching Massenburg from disapproving fellow slaves.

Eighty-four children were born on the Massenburg plantation between 1834 and 1861, with fifty-two of these children surviving to adulthood. Of the thirty-two children who died, most did not survive past three years old, with the time of their deaths being spread fairly evenly from birth to three years old. The infant death rate at the Massenbur plantation was about the same as for the slave population as a whole in the South in 1850.\textsuperscript{40} As on other plantations, some children at Woodleaf and Egypt succumbed
to typical childhood diseases such as whooping cough, pneumonia, and dysentery. The cause of many of the other deaths is not explained, but respiratory and bowel problems seem to have been the two main sources of infant death on the Massenburg plantations.  

The Massenburg journal, while not providing information from the slaves' point of view, is nonetheless a valuable document for analyzing work routines on a small plantation. The Massenburg hands' working lives on a small, diversified tobacco plantation represents one variety of slave experience in the antebellum South. The picture that emerges from the Woodleaf daybook is one in which work routines varied throughout the year, peaking in variety in spring and becoming increasingly monotonous through summer. Weather could disrupt the pattern of work, either slowing down labor or creating crises requiring communal efforts. Diversification meant less large, driven gangs and more smaller groups working under lighter supervision. Such labor organization increased slave autonomy and control over their working environment, particularly among the male slaves, who often completed tasks alone or in pairs. Gender proved to be an important variable—women bore heavy work loads, and they shouldered the extra burdens of childbirth and child care. The work routines of the female slaves at Woodleaf illustrate that in some cases diversification along with the use of the plow did not result in the segregation
of the work force into a male plow gang and a female hoe gang. Instead, each individual woman's life went through stages: childhood in the trash gang, young adulthood plowing, and childbearing years and later adult years fluctuating between the hoe and plow gangs. Lack of rigid segregation in the fields may have fostered a certain amount of equality among men and women in the slave quarters, or at least made it more difficult to duplicate fully white middle-class norms of male authority and female subordination. Even so, traditional work arrangements prevailed during the slaves' own time, a conscious choice which greatly contrasted with the organization of labor in the master's field where women did much of the same work as men, and where neither the women nor the men involved exercised any choice in this arrangement.
1. Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 105-106, divides the slaves' world into a primary environment (the slave quarters) and a secondary environment (the work place). The first environment, he argues, provided ethical rules and promoted solidarity and cooperation among the bondspeople. The work environment, contrarily, involved considerable contact with whites and had less of an impact on slave personality and culture.


5. Massenburg journal, February 1, 3, 8, 1845.

6. Ibid., April 11, 1846; March 31, 1840, May 31, 1840.

7. On at least one occasion the men worked in the house making baskets. Ibid., October 11, 1836.


9. Massenburg journal, April 1, 1834; June 13, 1835; April 11, 1840; and July 21, 1836.

10. Ibid., March 3, 1834 and May 14, 1835.
11. For example, see Ibid., January 1, 1841.

12. For descriptions of how the task system operated in South Carolina low country, see Joyner, *Down By the Riverside*, 43-45, and Faust, *James Henry Hammond*, 74-75.


15. Massenburg journal, undated pages, end of 1834. The average weight of cotton picked per slave per day was one hundred and fifty pounds. Jones, *Labor of Love*, 17.

16. Ibid., March 8, 1858. The women were spinning indoors.

17. Ibid., June 12, 1858.

18. Ibid., July 4, 1857.

19. Ibid., February and March, 1856.

20. Ibid., November 3, 1853.

21. Ibid., bought, November 28, 1856; sold, August 8, 1859.

22. Johnson, "Work, Culture, and the Slave Community," 331-47. Johnson maintains that the average slave did not have great chances for upward mobility. What opportunities did exist were usually related to kinship rather than being based on merit.


24. Massenburg journal, cotton, January 10, 1838; cook, November 1, 1838, January 14, 1840.

26. Historians such as Deborah White have recognized that slave women did a variety of heavy and dirty labor, including chopping wood, plowing fields, and clearing land. She argues, though, that gender segregation typified the female slave's working experience, the most common form being the female hoe gang made up of pregnant, nursing, and elderly women. White maintains that men and women did work together, but usually during harvest season, and that most women who were plowing or doing other heavy field work were past their childbearing years. White, Ar'n't I a Woman?, 91-118, and "Female Slaves: Sex Roles and Status in the Antebellum Plantation South," Journal of Family History 8 (1983), 248-61.

Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, 16-22, argues that although some tasks were reserved for men--clearing land, chopping wood, and rolling logs--female slaves typically did much of the same work as male slaves since the drive for profits "induced slaveowners to squeeze every bit of strength from black women as a group."(18)

27. Massenburg journal, February 27 and 28, and March 1, 1861.

28. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 495, observes that men alone usually plowed on the larger plantations, but that "a substantial minority" of all plow hands were women if smaller plantations and farms are taken into consideration. Jones, Labor of Love, 16, also argues that many slave women plowed.

Ex-slaves from North Carolina reported women plowing on plantations in that state. Henry James Trentham, one of four hundred slaves on a large plantation near Camden, North Carolina, recalled that "Some of de women plowed barefooted most all de time, an' had to carry dat row an' keep up wid de men. . . ." Rawick, ed., North Carolina Narratives, vol. 15, 364; For other former slaves' descriptions of women plowing in North Carolina, see vol. 15, pp. 74, 98, 130, 149, 219, and 429.

29. Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, 18-19, argues that pursuit of profit and a misguided belief that labor helped women stay healthy led most planters to keep pregnant women in the fields as long as possible. Deborah White sees a bit more consideration for pregnant and nursing women, although she still regards the lot of the female slave to be an exacting one. White, Ar'n't I a Woman?, 112-15.

30. Massenburg journal, Venus, six months pregnant, ditches on March 12, 1853, and works with Mary, also six months pregnant, on February 9 and March 26, 1853.

31. Ibid., July 7, 1858 (quotation); see also July 19 and 20, 1853.
32. White, Ar'n't I a Woman?, argues that gender segregation in the fields resulted in a female slave world that existed quite independently of the male slave world. Carr and Walsh, "Economic Diversification and Labor Organization," 182-83, maintain that the introduction of the plow into agricultural work did separate male and female working worlds, but that instead of engendering equality, technological advancements relegated the hoe hands— that is, mostly women—to an inferior position.

At Woodleaf, women were not relegated to the hoe gang. Instead, due to a small labor force, all female field hands plowed except when they were pregnant or nursing. Although I would certainly not want to argue that the existence of some parity in the fields at Woodleaf directly resulted in complete equality in the quarters, similar work routines probably would have made it difficult to sustain either a largely separate female slave world or a male-dominated one.

33. Massenburg journal, January 23, 1840.

34. Boles, Black Southerners, 88-95; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll, 540-49; Stampp, Peculiar Institution, 282-89; Hillard, Hog Meat and Hoecake, is devoted to discussing primarily the white South's food supply.

Although the granting of slave patches is most commonly associated with the South Carolina lowcountry, some former slaves from North Carolina did mention them during WPA interviews. See Rawick, ed., North Carolina Narratives, vol. 14, 93; vol. 15, 139, 222, 302, 344.

35. Massenburg journal, August 9, 10, 1846. Massenburg's entries for the two days contain nothing more than: "Fanny and Rivers married," and "Holiday here." Fanny and Rivers were both field hands.

36. It is impossible to tell who was the father of four other women's children, and whether or not four of the men had mates off the plantation.

Maintaining these relationships may have been made more difficult by the Franklin County slave patrol. One ex-slave recalled during a WPA interview the difficulties her father had visiting her mother in Franklin County: "I 'member when my father would come ter see mother. De patterollers tole him if he didn't stop coming home so much dey was goin' ter whip him. He had a certain knock on de door, den mother would let him in." Rawick, ed., North Carolina Narratives, vol. 15, 218. Another former slave remembered the Franklin County patrol whipping many male slaves during the early years of the war.(228)
37. Robert Branch and Fanny Massenburg, Daniel Johnson and Harriet Massenburg, and Garret Massenburg and Cloa Massenburg all married after the Civil War. "Record of Marriages of the Freedmen of Franklin County, Registered April 2, 1866–April 6, 1867," North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, reported in Willard, *Franklin County Sketchbook*, 94.


40. The births and deaths of infants and children on the Massenburg plantation were as follows: 84 children born; 80 immediately survived (95 percent); four stillborn (5 percent); 14 overall (16 percent) died by age one; nine more died by age three (10 percent); three died older than age three (4 percent) and seven died at an unknown age (8 percent); overall 32 die before reaching adulthood (38 percent).


CONCLUSION

In January 1854 Massenburg noted in his journal that the holiday seasons had ended, so "We go to work now, and all hands strip tobacco."¹ For both master and slaves, Christmas had been but a brief, five-day respite from the daily work of cultivating crops. Massenburg's remark highlights the centrality of labor in the master's and the slaves' lives and illuminates something of the nature of the working environment at Woodleaf. Massenburg's use of "we" suggests the frequent contact between master and slave on this small plantation, even while his entry makes clear that the hands will be stripping the tobacco and he will be preoccupied with more managerial concerns.

At Woodleaf, and to a lesser extent at Egypt, Massenburg and the hands interacted on an almost daily basis. Each morning Massenburg assigned tasks and then divided his day among directing the labor, examining the crops, making the plantation rounds, and sometimes participating in the work. The fields proved to be a crucial place for working out the master-slave relationship. By feigning or exaggerating illness, slowing down work paces, or even occasionally running away slaves expressed their view that their needs and wishes could not be entirely overlooked. Slaves' observations about crops were also an important source of information on a farm with so much
acreage under cultivation and with so many crops planted every year. Masters could not ignore the field hands' expertise, thereby acknowledging some of their slaves' humanity, intelligence, and ability. It was also necessary to trust at least some of the slaves to go into town or to towns in neighboring counties to pick up and transport goods. The master, in turn, established set working hours, granted various official and unofficial holidays throughout the year, allowed the slaves to cultivate their own patches of cotton, and provided food, clothing, and shelter. That the master could resort to physical force to obtain a cooperative work force, however, was hardly lost on anyone, particularly the slaves.

Slave management occupied much of Massenburg's time and energy, but other duties and responsibilities required his attention. Running his plantation included hiring and borrowing labor, marketing crops, and purchasing goods and services. Many of these transactions illustrate how traditional, rural practices and values could coexist with a more modern, capitalistic ethos in the life of an individual farmer. Many of his local dealings were conducted by word of mouth amongst friends and neighbors, while his cash crop sales involved national and international markets for cotton and tobacco. His efforts at altering his agricultural practices was certainly progressive, although he did not rank as a truly scientific planter, even for his time.
The Massenburg journal, while not providing information from the slaves' point of view, is nonetheless a valuable document for analyzing work routines on a small plantation. The Massenburg hands' working lives on a small, diversified tobacco plantation represents one variety of slave experience in the antebellum South. The picture that emerges from the Woodleaf daybook is one in which work routines varied throughout the year, peaking in variety in spring and becoming increasingly monotonous through summer. Weather could disrupt the pattern of work, either slowing down labor or creating crises requiring communal efforts. Diversification meant less large, driven gangs and more smaller groups working under lighter supervision. Such labor organization increased slave autonomy and control over their working environment, particularly among the male slaves, who often completed tasks alone or in pairs. Gender proved to be an important variable—women bore heavy work loads, and they shouldered the extra burdens of childbirth and child care. The work routines of the female slaves at Woodleaf illustrate that in some cases diversification along with the use of the plow did not result in the segregation of the work force into a male plow gang and a female hoe gang. Instead, each individual woman's life went through stages: childhood in the trash gang, young adulthood plowing, and childbearing years and later adult years fluctuating between the hoe and plow gangs. Lack of rigid
segregation in the fields may have fostered a certain amount of equality among men and women in the slave quarters, or at least made it more difficult to duplicate fully white middle-class norms of male authority and female subordination. Even so, traditional work arrangements prevailed during the slaves' own time, a conscious choice which greatly contrasted with the organization of labor in the master's field where women did much of the same work as men, and where neither the women nor the men involved exercised any choice in this arrangement.
1. Massenburg journal, January 2, 1854.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Johnson, Michael P. "Work, Culture, and the Slave Community: Slave Occupations in the Cotton Belt in 1860." *Labor History*
27 (Summer 1986): 325-55.


Siegel, Frederick F. The Roots of Southern Distinctiveness: Tobacco and Society in Danville, Virginia, 1780-1865.


United States Bureau of the Census, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850, and Eighth Census of the United States, 1860.


