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COTTON AND THE FACTORAGE SYSTEM IN ANTEBELLUM FLORIDA

by JULIA F. SMITH *

FLORIDA planters cultivated both short staple and Sea Island cotton. The most common varieties of short staple cotton grown throughout the lower South were Green Seed, Mexican, Petit Gulf, and Mastadon.¹ Florida growers preferred the Mexican to other "short" cotton seed. Under favorable conditions, it yielded about 1,500 pounds of cotton to the acre. In other cotton culture areas the yield was not so great; for instance, in the fertile black belt of Alabama yields of 800 to 1,000 pounds of short staple per acre were obtained. The yield from less fertile regions was not so great. In the South Carolina Piedmont, from 100 to 300 pounds was considered average. In 1852, J. D. B. De Bow estimated the average for the whole South to be 530 pounds of short staple, or seed cotton, per acre.²

Cotton growers in Florida soon discovered that the soil was especially suited for the growth of Sea Island cotton. It was superior to the short staple, and because of the length of its fiber it was used for the finest fabrics and sewing thread. French manufacturers used it to adulterate their silk fabrics. Though the Sea Island variety required more space for cultivation and took about four weeks longer to mature, its market price per pound was about twice that of short staple. Hardy Bryan Croom, the noted Florida botanist and owner of Goodwood Plantation in Leon County, Florida, wrote in *The Farmer's Register* in 1834 that an average of 600 pounds of Sea Island cotton was produced per acre and that it was not uncommon for 800 pounds to be realized. In South Carolina, the average yield of Sea Island cotton was 300 pounds per acre.³

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1. John Hebron Moore, *Agriculture in Ante-Bellum Mississippi* (New York, 1958), 145, 233; *The Farmer's Register*, II (June 1835), 2.
2. Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933), II, 708.
3. *The Farmer's Register*, II (June 1835), 3.

Croom stated that it was necessary to prepare the Sea Island cotton with roller-gins in order to avoid breaking the staple and "destroying that *length of fiber*" which was its real superiority over the other varieties. The short staple was prepared for market with saw-gins, more commonly used than the roller type.⁴ Cotton gins, presses, and other heavy plantation equipment necessary to prepare cotton for shipping were expensive, and many small planters could not afford them; they usually paid a more fortunate neighbor for the use of such equipment. Alfred Gatlin of Leon County had "doubtful notes and accounts amounting to \$111 and good notes amounting to \$81" for the use of his equipment during the year 1841.⁵

Occasionally, planters allowed their cotton to be fraudulently packed. When the factor or broker discovered this condition, the planter was notified and penalized by being offered a lower price. Oscar Fillyaw of Gadsden County received such a notice in 1850 from Robert Mason, a Liverpool broker, who had discovered that two of Fillyaw's seven bales were "falsely packed and unmerchantable, the whole of said two bales throughout consisting of alternate layers of Saw Gin and Sea Island cotton, and short staple Upland Cotton." Mason declared that "the value of said cotton in its present mixed condition" was worth only seven cents per pound.⁶

In the antebellum years in Florida, cotton instead of cash was sometimes used as a medium of exchange. An account book, dated 1829, kept by the firm of Laudaman and Sheffield in Tallahassee, lists entries showing cotton, corn, and tobacco as the medium of exchange for merchandise.⁷ Plantation accounts found among county courthouse records, dated 1845 to 1860, show that corn and hides were frequently used by planters as payments for merchandise.

When cotton was ready for shipment, "six-mule team" wagons hauled it to the warehouse in Tallahassee or on to St. Marks. Wagons from several plantations often traveled in

4. *Ibid.*

5. Sarah A. Gatlin Dower Assignment Letters, 1842-1845, Florida State Library, Tallahassee.

6. Miscellaneous papers, Oscar Fillyaw's Estate File, 1848-1855, probate records, Gadsden County Courthouse, Quincy, Florida.

7. Laudaman and Sheffield Store Account Book, 1829, Florida State Library.

groups.⁸ Prices covering the cost of marketing cotton varied according to localities, depending on the distance to port and methods used to move the cotton. During the early 1820s, total costs for handling and shipping cotton from a Georgia plantation averaged six dollars per bale. Improved conditions in handling and shipping reduced costs slightly during the next decade and the average appears to have been nearer four dollars. Charges for marketing cotton increased after 1840, again averaging six dollars per bale.⁹ As an example, total charges for shipping and selling forty-eight bales of cotton from William Bellamy's plantation in Jefferson County through St. Marks to New York in 1850 were \$287.¹⁰

Whether cotton was destined for Europe or New England manufacturers, it was usually bought by New York speculators, factors, and commission merchants who represented Liverpool or New York houses.¹¹ Some Florida planters shipped their cotton directly to Liverpool, but the vast majority shipped either directly to a factor in New York or through a commission merchant in Middle Florida to a factor in New York.¹² Planters were dependent upon New York since almost everything connected with their operations was bought on credit. The factorage system constituted the main source of that credit. The foundation of the system depended on the potential value of the unharvested crop, the bank, the factor, or the commission merchant gambling on the fickleness of cotton futures. No matter what the price of cotton might be, the planter had to have his supplies. As a consequence, mortgages increased as debts mounted against him. It was not uncommon for the planter to go for months without any cash even though he owned large amounts of acreage and had valuable crops in the field.¹³ Often his factor or commission merchant advanced cash payments to overseers, advanced cash for the hiring out of slaves to another plantation, paid debts due other persons, and made many other advances to and for

8. Susan Bradford Eppes, *The Negro of the Old South* (Tallahassee, 1925), 89.

9. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, II, 716.

10. Cotton sale, July 16, 1844, William Bellamy Estate File 33-43, probate records, Jefferson County courthouse, Monticello, Florida.

11. Robert R. Russell, *Economic Aspects of Southern Sectionalism, 1840-1860* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1922), 101.

12. Probate records, located in county courthouses of Gadsden, Hamilton, Jefferson, Leon, and Madison counties.

13. Gray, *History of Agriculture*, I, 460.

the planter.¹⁴ Sometimes loans as small as twenty-five or fifty cents were tendered.¹⁵

Even though bagging, rope, sugar, coffee, and molasses apparently were the most frequent plantation purchases, sundries of various kinds were nearly always included. The firm of Laudaman and Sheffield offered a variety of services in addition to general merchandise. Some of their accounts read: "to digging grave, furnishing plank, \$10, to making coffin \$30; to keeping mare 5 weeks for Jesse Hines, deceased, no charge."¹⁶ Jesse Willis, Turbot Betton, Robert Butler, and other well-known Florida persons had accounts with Laudaman and Sheffield. Some accounts were not paid and had to be taken to court for collection. A complaint made in 1831 states that the "small coffin and rough box that Laudaman charged \$15 for was not worth 75 cents."¹⁷

The method of paying an account with a factor was quite simple. The planter ordered the necessary supplies, and they were charged against his account with the yearly interest added. If the merchant was also a factor and handled his cotton, the commission charged for this service was entered against the planter's account. If the planter dealt with a cotton factor who was not his commission merchant, the merchant usually forwarded the bill to the factor for payment, charging a commission for this service. The whole system was most inequitable since the planter paid a high interest charge in addition to a marked-up price for supplies.¹⁸ The commission merchant always kept

14. Probate records, dated 1845-1860, Gadsden, Hamilton, Jefferson, Leon, and Madison counties. Plantation accounts with merchants and factors found among estate inventories have proved to be the best sources for information showing the workings of the factorage system.

15. Weymouth T. Jordan, *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation* (Montgomery, 1948), 120.

16. Laudaman and Sheffield Store Account Book, 1829.

17. A letter written to W. I. Laudaman, 1831, probate records Leon County courthouse, Tallahassee.

18. Jordan, *Hugh Davis and His Alabama Plantation*, 123; Lewis E. Atherton, "The Problems of Credit Bating in the Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Southern History*, XII (November 1946), 534-66. Atherton studied records of a country storekeeper in the old South and found that two-thirds to three-fourths of the goods were sold to the planter on credit. Just before the Civil War \$131,000,000 represented credit extended planters by factors. Philip S. Foner, *Business and Slavery: The New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict* (Chapel Hill, 1941). Foner shows how the South depended upon the North for credit. The New York business house would contact the local lawyer or storekeeper to check the credit rating of the planter before extending credit

his ledger sheets itemized and up to date, indicating the standing of a particular planter at a given time. When the planter's cotton was sold, the merchant sent him a bill of sale indicating the number of pounds (in cotton) involved in the transaction. Also included was an itemized list of charges made, which when deducted, showed the net profit to the owner. Cash payments to the merchant for amounts owed by the planter seem to have been rare, and accounts were extended yearly or longer depending on the success of the planter's crops.¹⁹

Supplies for plantations in Florida were furnished by general merchandise stores located at Quincy, Tallahassee, Monticello, Madison, and White Springs. Such articles as shoes, blankets, hats, bagging, rope, muslin, drugs, and other items were shipped in from Apalachicola, Cedar Key, and St. Marks to the general stores. The stores played an important role in the financial life of the planter, for they took his cotton or established credit on his crop before it matured, supplying him with commodities necessary for the plantation.

One such store was Smallwood, Gibson, and Harris at Quincy. This firm served as cotton factor and commission merchant for Oscar Fillyaw, whose account showed lists of purchases necessary for his plantation and cash advances made against his crops. Since the firm acted as merchant and factor for Fillyaw, a rate of two and one-half per cent interest was charged for purchases made and cash paid out for plantation expense; six per cent was charged for handling Fillyaw's cotton. Entries in the firm's ledger for 1851 show: "cash to pay Dr. Jarrett, \$15; cash paid C. M. Harris bill of bacon from New Orleans, 6 mos., \$180; cash paid Harris and Lines bill for storage and frt., \$16; amount paid boy, \$1.00." Other entries indicate purchases of a variety of items including osnaberg, kersey, whiskey, gunny

for merchandise from New York. The local lawyer acted as a collecting agency for New York and charged a commission. It was necessary for the Southerner to have a letter of recommendation from the lawyer when shopping in New York to receive credit. After the panic of 1837, this informal system of credit changed, and credit agencies were established in the South, though they were not effective until after the Civil War.

19. Francis J. Ross's estate account with John B. Spencer, commission merchant at White Springs, extended from April 15, 1858 to February 11, 1862. Usually accounts did not run this long and were settled at the end of a year and a half. See probate records in Gadsden, Hamilton, Jefferson, Leon, and Madison counties.

bagging, blankets, shoes, "colonial" coffee, and castor oil.²⁰ For the period January 1 to December 23, 1851, Fillyaw's (now deceased) account with Smallwood, Gibson, and Harris for plantation supplies, cash paid out for plantation operation, and commissions (or interest) charged for handling cotton and the plantation account totaled \$1,486. The firm sold Fillyaw's cotton and credited his estate with the proceeds amounting to \$4,007. The amount due the firm was then deducted from the cotton proceeds, leaving a balance due the estate of \$2,521.²¹

When the firm of Smallwood, Gibson, and Harris dissolved, Smallwood went to Tallahassee and opened his own business. Harris continued to operate at Quincy as cotton factor and commission merchant under the name of J. R. Harris and Company. William E. Kilcrease's account with Harris was considerably larger than Fillyaw's. Harris supplied Kilcrease's two plantations, including one in South Georgia, and sold his cotton and tobacco.²² It was not unusual for planter and factor to have a close friendship with each other, and there was such a relationship between Kilcrease and Harris. In his will Kilcrease directed that his crops be turned over to Harris "that he may from the proceeds reimburse himself for all advances received by me through his kindness."²³

Kilcrease's account with Harris exemplifies the manner in which the merchant financed the planter. Harris acted as Kilcrease's banker. All money transactions were made through Harris; he paid notes and interest due for Kilcrease and advanced cash on his crops. From July 1859 to April 1860, Kilcrease's account amounted to \$22,434. The value of cotton and tobacco sold is not shown on the ledger sheets. A notation, dated May 1860, listed \$2,313 as being the balance due Harris, the

20. Inventory and appraisement of the Oscar Fillyaw estate, 1850-1854 probate records, Gadsden County courthouse.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Inventory and appraisement of the William E. Kilcrease estate, 1856-1864 (no file number), probate records, Gadsden County courthouse; see Alfred H. Stone, "The Cotton Factorage System of the Southern States," *American Historical Review*, XX (April 1915), 557-65. Stone writes that the factorage system existed before 1800; only after cotton became important did the factor appear at Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and other southern ports. The factor sold only cotton; the commission merchant bought or sold anything for the planter. They were often one and the same.

23. *Record of Wills*, Book 6, 1005, probate records, Gadsden County courthouse.

remainder of Kilcrease's account having been paid. Typical entries made by Harris read as follows: "To commissions on advances, \$250; to D. G. Raney, charges on 119 bales of cotton, \$488.82; cash handed you, \$5.00; cash handed you, \$150.00; cash paid bal. of int. to Telegraph, \$50.00; To A. K. Allison for your draft on us, \$5,238.57."²⁴

Other Quincy stores catering to planters in the general area and offering "yankee notions" of every description were A. L. Smith and Company and Munroe Muse and Company. Kilcrease traded with both these firms, and he was charged the usual commission of two and one-half per cent. Entries on Kilcrease's account with Munroe Muse read: "To A. L. Smith for Mr. Boykin's note against Fenley, \$117.32; one colt pistol, \$10.00; one pair black silk gloves, \$1.00; one umbrella, \$2.25." A credit of thirty-two dollars was deducted from Kilcrease's bill of ninety-nine dollars for "hides auctioned" by Munroe Muse and Company.²⁵

Leon County planters shipped their cotton from St. Marks to New York through a commission merchant at Tallahassee. John W. Cotton and James Whitehead were among the planters who did this. A bill of sale for thirty-one bales of cotton sold from the late John W. Cotton's plantation in 1856, shows the net amount received by his estate after charges for handling the sale were deducted:

Account Sales for 31 Bales Cotton Rec'd, per Bark
Culloma from St. Marks and sold per Acc't. and risk of
the Estate of J. W. Cotton
Dec. 11, Cash, Utica Mills *Est JWC Blwg, 16449 lbs.*
at 12 1/8 \$1,994.44

Charges

Marine Insurance	\$ 29.85
\$109, Exp. \$4.38, Weighing \$2.48	115.86
Cartage, \$3.87, Labor, \$3.88	
Storage, \$3.87, Barkage, \$3.88	15.50
Fire Insurance, \$4.98, Weighing,	
\$2.48, Mending, \$2.17	9.63
Commissions 2 1/2 per cent	49.86
Net pct. due Dec. 26th	\$1,773.74

24. Kilcrease estate; D. J. Raney was a factor at Apalachicola. Among the manuscripts in Kilcrease's file is a bill of sale showing fifty-six bales of cotton shipped directly to Liverpool by D. J. Raney in the bark *I. A. Bishop*.

25. *Ibid.*

E. E.

New York December 26, 1856

Smallwood Anderson & Co. ²⁶

The system practiced by Florida planters of lending money and securing notes for other planters, small farmers, and industrial interests was a lucrative business. A rate of interest from six to ten per cent was charged, and the net return on large amounts loaned out was profitable. In some instances, the planter sold his cotton to a local buyer, securing the buyer's note at a rate of interest. Abram Bellamy made such a transaction in 1839 when he sold seventy-six bales of cotton to Darius Williams in Monticello for \$5,560 (32,708 pounds at seventeen cents). Williams did not pay for the cotton, but gave Bellamy a note secured by Martin Palmer. The rate of interest was eight per cent per annum for the first year and ten per cent thereafter. When Williams paid the note in 1846, the amount due was \$9,137. Bellamy's estate made a profit of \$3,627 on the transaction. ²⁷ Another similar transaction was made in 1839 when Williams and Martin Palmer bought fifty-five bales of "upland cotton" from John Bellamy (Abram's father). This lot of cotton (21,882 pounds at seventeen cents) sold for \$3,720. Bellamy secured Williams' and Palmer's notes due twelve months later with interest added at a rate of eight per cent. ²⁸

The Bellamy family dealt directly with their factor in New York, the firm of Taylor and Ritch, which acted also as commission merchant. Abram Bellamy's twin daughters, Theodosia and Victoria, attended boarding school in New York, and they even received their allowances from the firm. This covered all of their expenses, including travel to and from New York; and such items as "Godey and Leslie Magazines, \$6.00; For Tiffany

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26. *Book of Sales of Personal Estates, 1846-1860*, 244, Leon County courthouse. The above figures do not include transportation charges to St. Marks. Many planters hauled their cotton to the port, avoiding freight charges from Tallahassee. Others hauled their cotton as far as the railroad warehouse at Tallahassee to have it transported. In either instance, the cotton moved through a merchant who charged his commission, entering the amount in his ledger book along with other services and supplies rendered the planter.
 27. A bill of sale and due note found among the Abram Bellamy estate papers, File 59, probate records, Jefferson County courthouse, Monticello.
 28. A bill of sale and due note found among the John Bellamy estate papers, File 33-43, probate records, Jefferson County courthouse.

and Co., \$134.50; For amount paid to herself, \$50.00; For expense covering trunk insurance, cartage, \$26.81; Bill for washing, \$9.99; Arnold Constable & Co., \$389.89; For Madam Aubrey, \$13.75; For I. A. Paul, \$2,500." Theodosia's expenses from April 1856 to June 1857 amounted to \$3,389, which included the interest and commission \$165, charged by the firm for handling Theodosia's account. Victoria's expenses from August 1858 to September 1859 were \$4,839, of which \$213 was interest and commissions.²⁹ Taylor and Ritch kept a separate account for all cotton sold from Abram and John Bellamy's estates for the Bellamy children who were beneficiaries.

In some instances, cotton growers acted as commission merchants and planters. Reddin W. Parramore of Madison County acted as both. In addition to his two plantations from which he received profitable returns, he owned half partnership in a mercantile business with L. B. Thomas at Madison. Parramore, though a commission merchant, had a New York factorage house -Madison and Company-to sell his cotton. The inventory listing of his assets at the time of his death in 1851 showed \$4,656 due him for the sale of his cotton.³⁰

The John B. Spencer firm at White Springs was typical of the general merchandise store which catered to the planters of the area. Francis J. Ross's account with Spencer is typical. Ross's purchases in 1860 included shoes for his slaves, eighteen straw hats, which cost thirty cents each, one dozen bottles of wine at twelve cents a bottle, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, bacon, flour, lard, salt, cutlery, nails, hoes, harnesses, raisins, cheese and butter."³¹ Spencer also made cash advances for Ross and charged these to his bill. These entries read: "Cash paid repairs on buggy, \$30.83; cash to Smiley and Moore, \$21.00; cash sent to Mr. Reice, \$115." When Ross died in 1861, Spencer supplied the lumber and black velvet for his coffin, and cash was advanced to Cribbs and Mobley for making the coffin. The cost, \$25.20, was charged to Ross. His son, General William B. Ross, paid a portion of it in cash and the remainder by ginning 387 pounds of cotton for

29. John Bellamy's estate papers, File 33-43.

30. *Record Book of Annual Returns*, 36, 92, 95, probate records, Madison County courthouse, Madison.

31. Francis J. Ross's estate papers (no file number), probate records, Hamilton County courthouse, Jasper.

Spencer.³² Spencer continued to supply the plantation and made cash advances for various services until March 1862. These advances included: "Amount paid D. L. Duke, Overseer, \$284.65; Hire a boy Peter, 6 mos. @ \$35.00, \$210.00; Cato for 7 mos. @ \$20.00, \$140.00 cash for 12 beef cattle @ \$12.00, \$144.00." Spencer was the typical merchant who supplied the plantation. He advanced cash to the planter and charged a commission of two and one half per cent for his services. The Ross plantation account from April 1858 through March 1862 came to \$3,823, including a credit of \$959 for payments made in hides, cotton, corn, mules, and a small amount of cash. The balance due at the end of the four year period was \$2,864.³³

Ross also had an account with the D. J. and J. W. Sheffield firm at White Springs. Although Ross was widowed, most of the items purchased from January through December 1860 were women's and children's clothing, accessories, toys, and medicine, including "11 yds. velvet ribbon, \$1.82; 2 pr. wo's Booties, \$2.76; 8 yds. print, \$1.20; 3 pr. Misses Botties, \$3.00; 3 1/2 Yds. blk. Doe Skin Cassimere, \$3.50; 1 pr. ladies blk. Guitors, 1 wax doll .50; 1 pr. child's kid shoes, .88; 1 bottle worm S. drops, .38."³⁴

Factors and merchants advertised in Florida newspapers offering their services to planters. The following notice appeared in a Tallahassee newspaper in 1838:

The subscriber informs his friends and public that he has commenced business as cotton broker and commission merchant in the city of New York and is now prepared to receive cotton and other produce which he will dispose of on commission.

J. F. Davis

60 Waters St., New York

References: R. W. Williams and Sam Reid at Tallahassee

James Lanier & Co. at Quincy

John B. Collins at Monticello

William J. Bailey at Magnolia

William G. Porter at Apalachicola

Craig and Daffin at St. Joseph³⁵

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Tallahassee *Florida Watchman*, February 17, 1838.

Another advertisement in the same paper offered cash advances on cotton if it were stored for shipment at Magnolia:

The subscribers still continue the storage and commission business at this place and will advance CASH ON COTTON stored with them for shipment to New York, New Orleans, or Charleston, and attend with promptness . . . all business entrusted to their care. Their charges:

Storage for cotton for season, .25 per bale

Marking and weighing each, $6\frac{1}{4}$ per bale

Filling up Bills of Lading per set, .50

First months storage on goods, $.12\frac{1}{2}$ per bush.

Each succeeding month, $.6\frac{1}{4}$

Benjamin Bird & Co. ³⁶

The panic of 1837 had caused some factors and merchants to become insolvent. But with the improvement of economic conditions throughout the South, these firms became more numerous than ever. Florida papers after 1845 carried many advertisements offering to sell cotton. F. R. Ely's Marianna company promised "cash advances on all cotton shipped on the barge *General Taylor* and placed in my charge with orders for insurance, consigned to my friends in Apalachicola, at usual rates." ³⁷ At Tallahassee, D. C. Wilson advertised for 3,000 bales of cotton in 1851, offering "liberal cash advances" if it was "shipped to [his] friends in New York." ³⁸

Factors and merchants at New Orleans, Charleston, and Savannah sometimes had agreements with planters in Florida who acted as agents for them. Post and Mel of New Orleans advertised in Tallahassee newspapers suggesting that planters "refer to Thomas J. Perkins and Company at Tallahassee, J. R. Harris and Company at Quincy, Denham and Palmer at Monticello, and Beard and Denham at St. Marks" when selling their cotton. Another New Orleans factor, Nathaniel Hamlen, had as his agent in 1859 at Tallahassee former Governor James E. Broome. Other persons who acted as agents for Hamlen were A. B. Noyes and R. M. Spencer at Newport, John J. Snelling at Quincy, General William Bailey at Monticello, J. G. Putnam

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Marianna Florida Whig*, January 6, 1849; Tallahassee, January 30, 1855; January 30, 1855; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, April 5, 1856.

38. Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, December 2, 1851.

at Madison, and Daniel Bell at Jasper.³⁹ James Gadsden and Company at Charleston acted as factors and commission merchants for many Middle Florida planters. Another Charleston firm, Walters and Walker, were factors, commission merchants, and agents for "The Pioneer Line of Packets" which ran between Charleston and Newport. The William M. Tunno firm, with offices in Charleston and Savannah, acted as factors and commission merchants for planters in South Georgia and Middle Florida.⁴⁰

The cotton weigher's position was also very important. In 1845, the Florida legislature provided for the governor to appoint certain persons from time to time to serve as public cotton weighers. Usually the appointment was made upon recommendation of interested persons in the area. Apalachicola was such a thriving port that six cotton weighers were appointed to serve that area in 1846.⁴¹ In some instances, cotton weighers were merchants. This dual role enhanced their position, and they seldom wanted to relinquish their appointment as weigher. William H. Hughes, a weigher at Apalachicola, petitioned Governor Thomas Brown in 1853 to have his appointment as weigher renewed, and he supplied recommendations from "buyers and sellers" at Apalachicola and friends in Tallahassee who would vouch for his "honesty and capabilities." John F. Broome, Governor Broome's brother, was a cotton weigher in Tallahassee.⁴² At the height of the season when cotton was moving, a shortage of weighers could cause delay and inconvenience. A letter written by T. J. Eppes to Governor Madison S. Perry in 1859 from Apalachicola recommended that Reuben L. Harrison be appointed cotton weigher to relieve the situation caused by the shortage of weighers. Eppes assured Perry that "one of our first and largest commission houses joined in the request for the appointment. At times, some one or two of the cotton weighers have been taken sick during the press of the

39. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, August 6, 1859, February 25, 1854.

40. *Ibid.*, February 25, 1854; Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, June 19, 1855.

41. Petitions from the citizens of Apalachicola for the appointment of Cotton weighers, January 9, 10, 1846, Division of Archives, History and Records Management, Tallahassee.

42. A letter to Governor Thomas Brown from William H. Hughes, January 20, 1853, Office of Secretary of State.

business season, leaving too few to attend to the weighing.”⁴³

Apalachicola was the largest cotton outlet along the Gulf of Mexico east of Mobile. Merchants and factors here handled and sold cotton for planters in Alabama, Georgia, and the western section of Middle Florida. In 1849, between \$2,000,000 and \$3,000,000 worth of cotton passed through the port.⁴⁴ This figure rose considerably after 1850. Apalachicola merchants vied with the merchants of other Gulf ports for the cotton trade of Alabama and western Georgia.

Like Apalachicola, Tallahassee was a bustling center for Middle Florida cotton planters. During the summer months, merchants went to northern markets to purchase supplies for the coming season, and by September they were ready for active trading. A typical fall scene in downtown Tallahassee was described by a contemporary: “The streets of our city are becoming more and more lively as the business season progresses. The mule team and wagon so long regarded as a peculiar institution of Tallahassee, still maintains its ground and is now evincing a disposition, as heretofore, of taking possession of the streets this fall. Our merchants . . . have returned and their familiar faces appear in the business haunts, giving welcome assurance that the dull season is passing away.”⁴⁵

Supplying planters and marketing their cotton was a profitable business. The factorage system was the financial arrangement upon which it was based. That the system enriched the factor and merchant is evidenced by the various charges made for handling cotton, financing the planter, and supplying his needs. The system by no means deprived the planter of his share of the profits from his crops, though a contrary concept has often been suggested.

43. A letter to Governor Madison S. Perry from T. J. Eppes, November 24, 1857, office of Archives, History and Records Management.

44. A petition to the General Assembly of Florida from the citizens of Apalachicola, December 9, 1848, office of Archives, History and Records Management.

45. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, October 3, 1857.