

1971

## Tallahassee Through the Storebooks, 1843-1863: Antebellum Cotton Prosperity

Clifton Paisley



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Paisley, Clifton (1971) "Tallahassee Through the Storebooks, 1843-1863: Antebellum Cotton Prosperity," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 50 : No. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol50/iss2/3>

## TALLAHASSEE THROUGH THE STORE- BOOMS, 1843-1863: ANTEBELLUM COTTON PROSPERITY

by CLIFTON PAISLEY\*

**F**EW THINGS STIRRED more interest than the planting, harvesting and marketing of cotton in mid-nineteenth-century Tallahassee. In April 1849, cotton was in the ground and prospects looked bright despite a severe freeze on April 15. There was some apprehension that the unexpected cold had badly damaged and perhaps had destroyed the young plants, but these fears were quickly allayed. The freeze was even more severe in the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, and the damage in those areas indicated a likely increase in cotton prices from the seven or eight cents a pound of recent years.<sup>1</sup> In addition to cotton, politics was important in Tallahassee. Here also there was cause for satisfaction. Like other counties in Florida's small plantation belt, Leon was Whig, and in the October 1848 elections, for the first time in Florida, a Whig governor had been elected. Not only were Leon County planters and merchants happy about this result, but they were pleased that the victor was their neighbor and friend, Thomas Brown, the popular innkeeper. Brown first had planned to take office in January 1849, but the Democratic incumbent, William Moseley, took advantage of a convenient vagueness in the law of gubernatorial succession, and he continued to stay in office until October 1849. Brown was not overly irritated by Moseley's tardiness; more important to him and his friends was the glorious period of Whig prosperity that seemed to lie ahead.<sup>2</sup>

In this ebullient frame of mind, Tallahassee turned now to a third interest, party-going, and preparations began for what

\*. Mr. Paisley is research editor, office of the Graduate Dean, and director of research, Florida State University,

1. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, April 21, 28, 1849.
2. Herbert J. Doherty, Jr., *The Whigs of Florida, 1845-1854* (Gainesville, 1959), 28, 33, 64.

already was the capital's most gala event, the May Party.<sup>3</sup> Unlike later May Parties, the 1849 event featured a banquet served in the senate chamber of the capitol followed by dancing in the house of representatives. There were reportedly enough alcoholic beverages on hand to add to the enjoyment of the occasion.<sup>4</sup>

Evidently in preparation for the May Party, William Stafford on April 11 purchased more than \$100 worth of supplies in the Tallahassee store owned and operated by James Martin Williams. These included the makings of party cakes: twenty-five pounds of crushed sugar and three loaves of sugar, \$8.50; two boxes of raisins, \$2.00; two pounds of pecans, fifty cents; two pounds of currants; eight pounds of almonds; a pound of citron; twelve pounds of butter; and a barrel of Magnolia flour. Stafford also ordered thirty-four and one-half gallons of Old Cumberland whiskey at \$1.25 a gallon, \$43.12; one gallon of Old Hard Times whiskey, \$3.00; two gallons of sweet wine, \$2.00; a gallon of brandy, \$4.00; a bottle of rose cordial, \$1.00; twenty pounds of twenty-five cent tobacco; and forty-three pounds of twelve and one-half cent tobacco. He also secured a dozen glass tumblers, two decanters, three candlesticks with candles, four bowls, two pitchers, and knives and forks.

Williams's customers had already begun buying dress materials, suits, hats, gloves, parasols, and other accessories to wear to the grand event, and these purchases continued through April 1849. For his daughter, Harry T. Wyatt purchased a fan, \$1.00; parasol, \$2.50; a pair of black twisted silk mitts, \$1.00; one leather belt, twenty-five cents; five yards of thread edging, \$1.25; two and one-half yards of Swiss muslin, \$2.31; and ten yards of pink muslin, \$5.62. Muslin of various colors and designs, usually in quantities of eight or ten yards, were ordered

3. According to local tradition, Tallahassee's first May Party was held in 1833, but the earliest official May Party was recorded in 1838. See Evelyn Whitfield Henry, "The May Party," *Apalachee*, II, (1946), 35-45.

4. Preparations for the party are described in the James Martin Williams store daybook, January 1-August 4, 1849, Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee. Hereinafter referred to as Williams daybook. Little is known about Williams except that he came to Florida from Virginia. The 1850 census lists him as being twenty-eight years old (*Seventh U.S. Census, Original Schedules*, Leon County, Florida). He operated a store in the late 1840s and early 1850s on the west side of Monroe Street, Tallahassee. The property had a thirty-foot frontage which began sixty-three feet north of Jefferson Street. See Leon County Deed Records, Book K, Leon County courthouse, Tallahassee, 56.

frequently during the month. Leslie A. Thompson bought (for Louisa) eight yards of polka muslin at seventy-one cents a yard. In William M. Campbell's order, totaling \$39.91, he had included polka muslin at seventy-one cents a yard. Buff and purple muslin were also sold. Dr. Taylor ordered ten yards of black muslin and a parasol costing \$3.25; J. P. Maxwell secured ten yards of muslin of unspecified design and color, and Colonel Houghton purchased ten yards of dotted muslin costing \$6.25. Miss Ann Newsom ordered sixteen yards of pink dotted muslin for \$14.00 and two pairs of gloves for \$2.00. Bonnet ribbon, lace, silk mitts, linen braid, belt ribbon, kid gloves, white kid shoes, and pomatum were much in demand. Alexander Croom bought a lace-worked cape costing \$5.50, and Laban Rawls purchased thirteen yards of Swiss muslin, \$7.80; a fine parasol for \$2.50; and ten yards of printed lawn, \$6.25.

The clothing needs of the Tallahassee men were hardly less demanding. R. H. Bradford ordered a drap d'été dress coat<sup>5</sup> for \$11.00 on April 11. His kinsman, H. B. Bradford not only bought himself a coat of the same material and price, but he also ordered a linen coat for \$3.50 and a "fancy" vest for \$3.50. I. Choice Hall purchased a \$3.50 vest, a pair of drap d'été pants for \$6.00, and a drap d'été coat for \$12.00. A drap d'été coat cost G. J. Sharpless \$13.00, while Alexander Williams spent \$4.75 for a satin vest, \$11.00 for a drap d'été coat, and \$5.00 for a Panama hat. Dr. W. F. Robertson purchased a drap d'été coat, \$9.00; a black satin vest, \$5.00; and drap d'été pants, \$6.25.

Tickets for the Tuesday evening party sold for \$1.00 each,<sup>6</sup> and several hundred people gathered at the capitol for the festivities. The local paper reported that "not a few deemed it superior to anything of the kind ever witnessed before in Tallahassee." Magnolia, bay, and "running vines of various descriptions" decorated the house chamber where the darkhaired Queen of May, identified as "the charming Miss B," delivered

5. Drap d'été, a popular material for summer dress suits, was an expensive thin staple woolen or mixture fabric with a fine twill weave. It was "used for evening wear and very popular with the clergy," according to George E. Linton, *The Modern Textile Dictionary* (New York, 1954), 235.
6. The \$1.00 charge for the May Party apparently was one of long standing. Daybooks for 1843-1844, 1849 and 1850 mention \$1.00 cash disbursements debited to customers "for May Party."

her May Day speech "with much grace and self-possession." Dressed "in purest white," she sat on a throne during the ceremonies, "her dark hair forming a striking contrast with the deep hue of the crown of evergreens that encircled her brow, and her lovely eyes beaming with the pleasure and excitement of the occasion." The newswriter who described the activities noted: "When these ceremonies were over, Old Fred was seen entering the room, with his violin in his hand, and after perching himself upon a high seat prepared for the purpose and completing all necessary preliminary arrangements, he at last gave the desired word of command 'gentlemen take your partners.' This was immediately done and in a few seconds many of the company were indulging in that amusement to which the southern people are so much attached." The guests adjourned to the senate chamber for the banquet and then returned to de dance, which went on until one in the morning.<sup>7</sup>

Tallahassee had never been a frontier community in the traditional sense. As the seat of government for the territory and with a settled, affluent planter population, Tallahassee in its earliest years envisioned itself as the Charleston, Richmond, Nashville, or Savannah for the area's small upland cotton region.<sup>8</sup> Schooners, barks, and brigs called regularly at the old Spanish port of St. Marks to load aboard the \$1,200,000 annual cotton crop and to deliver the latest products from northern mills and shops. These goods were then hauled along the rickety twenty-mile rail line into the city. Tallahassee served as trading center not only for Leon County, Florida's largest cotton county, but also for Gadsden, Jefferson, and surrounding counties, and even for a small section of Georgia.. The merchants' annual business amounted to \$2,500,000.<sup>9</sup>

Late on the afternoon of May 25, 1843, a fire broke out in Tallahassee just east of the capitol, and by nightfall it had devastated almost the entire business area. Within three hours

7. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, May 5, 1849.

8. Williams storebook, September 16, 1843-November 29, 1844.

9. The estimates of the value of cotton shipped from St. Marks and Tallahassee are from an account, "Dreadful Conflagration in Tallahassee," in the Tallahassee *Star of Florida*, May 27, 1843, that also described the fire of May 25, 1843, reprinted in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, III (July 1924), 44-48. By 1856 cotton shipments out of St. Marks had increased considerably, totaling 53,277 bales worth \$2,500,000. See also Tallahassee *Weekly Floridian and Journal*, January 31, 1857.

seven blocks of frame structures between Adams and Calhoun streets, St. Augustine Street, and present-day Park Avenue had been destroyed. This latter street, then called "the 200-foot street," blocked its further advance northward. It would have spread west were it not for a double row of oaks along Adams Street. After the conflagration, merchants moved what merchandise they had salvaged into temporary shacks erected on the "200-foot street" and on the several Tallahassee squares. The city council promptly adopted an ordinance requiring that structures rebuilt in the downtown area had to be of brick or stone with zinc, tile, or slate roofs. By the fall of 1843, several stores had reopened.<sup>10</sup> It is likely that the daybook for 1843-1844 records some sales from the temporary location, and others from the rebuilt location. Sales of building materials, including nails at ten cents a pound (often selling by the keg) were frequent. Among the customers was George Proctor, the well-known free Negro carpenter and one of the early architects of Tallahassee.<sup>11</sup>

The daybook shows that the store carried a large and varied supply of merchandise. One could buy a bar of soap for twenty-five cents; shaving soap for eighteen cents; a bottle of cologne for seventy-five cents; a tooth brush for thirty-eight cents; a shaving brush for about the same amount; a hair brush for fifty cents; a broom for twenty-five cents; and a quire of letter paper for thirty-eight cents. Starch, vinegar, and pepper were regularly stocked. Tallahassee was largely candle-lit, and candles of various kinds and the materials from which to mold them were sold. On October 2, 1844, T. A. Bradford bought a pound of lard candles for twenty-five cents; a pound of sperm candles for forty cents; and a half-pound of wax candles for thirty-three cents. Sperm candles appear to have been most frequently used, and they were sold by the box of thirty and one-half pounds for \$12.20. There was also some demand for lamps. Lard lamps sometimes sold for from eighty cents to \$1.00 apiece; train oil could be bought for \$1.00 a gallon and lamp oil for \$1.25, \$1.50,

10. *Ibid.* "The Tallahassee Fire of 1843," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VII (October 1928), 164-67; Fred P. Ley, Jr., "The Tallahassee Fire of 1843," *Apalachee* (1948-1950), 11-19.

11. Some of George Proctor's homes are still standing in Tallahassee. Henry E. Palmer, "The Proctors—A True Story of Ante-Bellum Days and Since," *Tallahassee Historical Society Annual*, I (1934), 14-16.

or \$1.75 a gallon. The latter price was for the "best lamp oil."<sup>12</sup>

Large quantities of whiskey were sold, frequently by the barrel, although smaller amounts could be obtained. A gallon cost from twenty-five to fifty cents and in September 1843, a barrel sold for \$9.25. However, the price went up as the season progressed, as more money became available, and as the quantity of purchases increased. December was a busy month for whiskey sales, and business grew even more in January. On one day, January 17, 1844, four barrels were sold. One forty-one gallon barrel went for \$12.71; two barrels totaling seventy-nine and one-half gallons sold for \$24.43; and one barrel of fifty and three-quarter gallons sold for \$12.22. Wine, costing \$1.00 a gallon, was only rarely sold, and rum, \$1.75 a gallon, was in little demand.

Tobacco was sold for chewing in large seventy-five cent plugs. Pipe tobacco sold for twenty-five cents a pound and snuff for twenty-five or thirty cents a small bottle. Cigars, usually spelled "segars" by the clerk, were not yet sold in quantity, but rare users, such as James B. Gamble, ordered them at \$2.50 a box. H. W. Braden's purchases on November 13, 1844, reveal an attempt to start a local cigar industry using Florida tobacco. He bought 100 nine-inch cigar boxes for \$15.00; 200 ten-inch cigar boxes for \$16.00; and some labels and paper for \$3.50.

Some luxury items in the food line were available. Raisins sold for \$2.00 a pound and a keg of buckwheat for \$2.25. Tea cost \$1.50 a pound, and it was used sparingly, although it was bought occasionally by such prosperous planters as Edward Bradford. On April 4, 1844, he ordered two pounds of tea, and twenty pounds of coffee at \$2.00 a pound. Coffee, selling in the bean, was largely Java coffee at this time and sold in 1843-1844 for from ten to seventeen cents a pound. By 1846 Rio coffee was being sold in Tallahassee at ten and one-half cents a pound, and it became more popular than Java.<sup>13</sup> Coffee frequently was

12. Train oil or whale oil was taken from the right whale. The other lamp oils presumably were sperm oil taken from the sperm whale. Possibly the "best lamp oil" was winter-strained sperm oil, considered to be of superior quality. Loris S. Russell, *A Heritage of Light: Lamps and Lighting in the Early Canadian House* (Toronto, 1968), 62.
13. J. Martin Williams store ledger, 1846, and store inventory, goods on hand on July 1, 1848; July 1, 1849; July 1, 1850; July 1, 1851; July 1, 1852; and July 1, 1853.

sold in quantities of 100 pounds, and J. J. Perkins secured this amount on October 21, 1844, for \$15.00.

Flour, shipped in from the middle west by way of New Orleans, or arriving from the north in vessels out of New York, sold at \$8.00 a barrel. Brown sugar cost ten cents a pound, and loaf or crushed white sugar, sold in lots of as much as 100 pounds, was priced at seventeen cents a pound. A typical order for food staples is that of William Lester, a local planter, who on November 2, 1843, ordered 112 pounds of coffee for \$19.04, and a barrel of flour for \$7.50. Rice sold at six and one-fourth cents a pound, and a fifty-two pound keg of lard cost \$5.20. Even though Leon County was an agricultural county, with a large number of swine, cattle, and sheep, the store sold imported salt pork. "Sides" and "hams" were the only cuts available at the time. A typical purchase is that of William M. Maxwell in November 1843: fifty pounds of bacon sides for \$3.50 and thirty-two pounds of ham for \$3.20. Edward Houstoun, although himself a plantation owner, also bought hams from Williams's store. On September 19, 1843, he ordered ninety-nine pounds at eight cents a pound.

The most obvious example of "conspicuous consumption" by the planter community at this time was the purchase of fine clothing. The price of a palmetto hat was only sixteen cents, but customers more frequently purchased hats costing \$1.50, \$2.00, \$3.00, and even more. Dr. G. W. Call on October 6, 1843, bought "one fine pair of shoes for son" for \$3.00; a few days later Richard Hayward secured a vest for \$4.50; and the same day, William M. Footman's purchases included a pair of pants, \$5.25; coat, \$11.00; vest, \$2.50; and a cravat, \$1.25. Mr. Hayward returned later the same month for a dress coat, \$18.00; a pair of pants, \$7.50; a fine vest, \$5.00; two shirts, \$4.00; and two pairs of stockings, \$1.00. Dress coats particularly were in demand, and a frock coat sold for \$25.00 on October 16, 1843. An astrakhan cap cost \$3.00, and T. A. Bradford and his brother H. B. Bradford in October 1843 ordered hats which cost \$6.00. On September 20, 1843, William M. Bloxham, father of the future governor of Florida, bought three net shawls for \$7.50. Occasionally, there were other purchases of women's finery.

There was a large demand for cheap garments for the slaves.



William M. Maxwell in December 1843 bought 216 1/2 yards of linsey at twenty cents a yard and 211 yards of kersey at twenty-three cents a yard. Cheap heavy-duty shoes, sometimes called "Negro shoes" and also described as "russet Brogans," sold at ninety cents a pair when ordered in quantity. M. Young bought sixty pairs and John C. Hall forty pairs in October 1844. "Negro" blankets sold in quantity for \$1.00 or less, and some planters ordered quantities of wool hats at about this price. Kentucky jeans sold for fifty cents a yard, and it was the most durable of all material utilized for work clothes.

There were active sales of material used in the cultivating, picking, baling, and shipping of cotton. Baling materials included bagging and rope. Choice Hall ordered a bolt of bagging (a total of ninety-one yards selling for seventeen and one-half cents), \$15.92, and a coil of rope (131 yards at eight cents a yard), \$10.48. There were some orders for sea island cotton bagging at twenty-one cents a yard, although that type of cotton was not grown extensively around Tallahassee. Bar iron, needed for the large number of blacksmithing and similar farm jobs, was purchased by the pound. William Lester secured 140 pounds in February 1844, for seven cents a pound, a total of \$9.80. A pair of mill rocks used in water-driven corn mills cost \$10.50.

Cotton continued up to the time and the Civil War to be almost the only cash crop, but occasionally planters devoted their attention to other products. There was considerable interest in 1844 in sugar cane, and in the fall of that year, the daybook shows sales of sugar boilers and kettles. On November 21 James Kirksey bought a boiler (378 pounds at six and one-fourth cents a pound) for \$23.63. The same month G. Galphin, H. Doggett, H. Vickers, and Edward Footman also bought kettles or boilers.

That personal finery continued in great demand by affluent Tallahasseeans at mid-century was reflected in the Williams daybooks.<sup>14</sup> In the 1849-1851 period there were many entries such as one for Joseph Austin: "one black mantilla, \$16.00." Mrs. Susan Blake paid \$10.00 for a black mantilla, and Jephtha Dykes secured bonnet and trimmings for \$6.75. Frock coats

14. Material in the following paragraphs is from the Williams daybook, 1849; daybook, January 1-June 30, 1851; or account book, January 1, 1850-January 1853, except as indicated.

sold frequently for as much as \$20.00, although F. E. Carn only paid \$18.00 for one. He also bought some pants for \$7.50. C. B. Allen's frock coat cost \$17.00, while Willis Hudnall secured a "fine overcoat for son, \$13." A. B. Clarke purchased "for lady" seven and one-half yards of white satin costing \$9.06, and nine yards of silk serge sold for \$11.25. The 1850 inventory records several "fancy Spanish fans" on hand, priced wholesale at \$3.00, \$5.00, and \$6.00. N. N. Branch purchased a fine dress coat, \$20.00; cassimere tweed coat, \$10.00; fancy vest, \$4.00; and pair of pants, \$6.00. The order by Governor Thomas Brown "for Miss Mag" included half a yard of velvet trimming, thirty-eight cents; one belt ribbon, fifty cents; and one nightingale sash, \$2.50. Included in the purchase of John P. Scott were a cloak, \$19.00; sack coat, \$14.00; silk dress, \$20.00; a pair of boots, \$6.75; and silk cravat, \$1.75, for a total of \$61.50. Leghorn hats cost \$1.50 and \$2.00; a "fine beaver hat" cost Madison Lott \$5.00. James Locker paid \$5.00 for a moleskin hat, and R. B. Houghton spent \$5.50 for a Panama hat.<sup>15</sup> A black satin vest cost Dr. William F. Robertson \$6.50. Novelty items and goods for children were also carried by the store; grass skirts for instance sold for seventy-five cents to \$1.00.

Gentlemen were not only well-clothed, but they also had to have fine boots and a handsome saddle. William H. Gibson paid \$7.00 for a pair of calf water-proof sewed boots, and William Edward Fisher bought a pair for \$7.00 and a "black quilted saddle" for \$17.00. Gilbert N. Williams paid \$17.00 for a Spanish saddle; Zacheus Ryalls purchased one for \$15.00; and N. N. Branch paid \$12.00 for a Spanish saddle and \$12.00 for a "superior side saddle." In a store purchase totaling \$70.13, William Stafford secured a \$15.00 saddle; and for \$90.68 Dr. J. H. Hill secured a \$14.50 saddle and martingale. Expensive firearms were in demand. A standard single-barrel only cost \$12.00, but William H. Gibson and John D. Branch each paid \$27.00 for a "fine double barreled gun." The ultimate in fowling pieces was the "superior twist double barrel gun" bought by John Thompson for \$50.00.

15. An inventory on July 1, 1848, showed these hats and caps on hand: fur, \$3.50, wholesale; boys' cloth, \$1.00; infants (fancy), \$1.00; otter skin cap, \$3.00; black silk, \$2.50; plush, \$2.25; imitation, \$1.00. Following the California gold rush the store also occasionally sold a "California hat" for \$1.38.

With cotton prices high and goods coming into St. Marks in increasing quantity, the 1840s and 1850s saw large expenditures going into houses and furnishings. F. E. Carn purchased twenty-five yards of carpeting for \$19.50; Miles Johnson bought thirty-four yards for \$42.50; and George Alexander Croom, thirty-six yards for \$49.50. Croom had purchased the fine two-story house *Casa de Lago* located on a hill overlooking Lake Jackson. William Campbell ordered a bookcase which cost \$20.00. Harry T. Wyatt had an extension table which cost \$22.00 shipped in from New York. It cost \$5.00 to move the table to Tallahassee. It was not uncommon to see purchases evidently made to outfit a new household such as those totaling \$134.07 by Mrs. Sarah O. Williams. Thomas A. Bradford spent \$28.69 on a 123-piece dinner set. Cane-bottom chairs apparently were new to Tallahassee and were in demand, especially maple ones. Miss Penelope Tyson paid \$4.00 for a cane seat rocking chair for the Reverend Mr. Blake and \$1.75 for a cane seat straight chair. B. F. Whitner ordered a set of knives and forks for \$20.00, and William Stafford purchased a white Granite tureen for \$5.00; a pair of white Granite steak dishes, \$3.00; a large white Granite dish, \$2.25; and three moderate size white Granite dishes, \$4.50.

A "swinging lamp for store," obtained by Williams from Towle and Myers, local jewelers, for \$3.00; might have been utilized as a mobile advertisement for home improvements. Williams also had in his display room at this time a shower bath valued at \$10.00 and a foot tub worth twenty-five cents, symbols of a future Tallahassee that was still very much a part of the wash basin and pitcher era. News that fresh goods had arrived in the store spread rapidly by word of mouth in Tallahassee and its environs. As a result Williams's entire bill for advertising in the local paper, the *Florida Sentinel*, came only to \$43.39 in merchandise and cash for Joseph Clisby, the publisher. This was only a little more than the \$32.00 that Williams paid in city taxes.

In addition to having fine homes, affluent Tallahasseeans liked to travel in style, and in the period around 1850 they began to do so in increasing luxury. One had to arrange for Williams to make the purchase in New York, but several local residents ordered four-seat Rockaway carriages. Joseph Chandler bought one for \$283.62, and the total price delivered in Talla-

hassee came to \$314.83. William Stafford bought a Rockaway with set of harness for \$270.00, and the cost delivered was \$300.70. Willis Hudnall's carriage sold for \$500.00, and the total cost was \$534.73.

Food expenditures also increased as planter income rose, or at least as it appeared it would with increasing cotton prices. Flour was bought now not only as "northern" and "western" flour but as "New York," "Genesee" (favored by George A. Croom), "St. Louis," "St. Louis Mills," "Peoria Mills," "Albion Mills," and "Magnolia flour." The price, however, was the same as in the 1840s, still \$7.00 to \$9.00 a barrel. Tallahassee citizens continued to import much of their pork, and like the flour, much of it came by boat from New Orleans. It arrived as barreled mess pork or as shoulders or sides packed in giant casks.<sup>15</sup> Occasionally corn was shipped in from New Orleans even though Leon County usually had more acreage in corn than in cotton. How much was added to the cost is indicated in the purchase of 135 sacks by R. B. Houghton in March 1851: 316 bushels of corn totalled \$180.16; handling in New Orleans, \$11.68; freight by boat, \$39.50; storage at St. Marks, \$13.80; rail freight to Tallahassee, \$15.80; exchange, \$7.80; total, \$267.74.

Oysters sold for fifty cents a bushel, and the Williams store also carried crackers to eat with them. Mackerel sold not only by the pound but occasionally by the barrel, the latter costing \$14.50. The price of sardines was seventy-five cents a box. Dried and fresh apples and peaches were available part of the year, and oranges sold for fifty cents a dozen in February 1851. A jar of prunes cost \$1.75 in September 1850. Williams's customers developed a taste for shipped-in butter, and twenty-seven pounds of "northern butter" were sold to M. M. Johnston for \$8.44 on January 23, 1851. Although pork appeared to be the usual meat for white and black alike, J. J. Bond purchased "family beef" which had been shipped in a barrel and which cost \$13.00. For those who could not afford better cuts, pigs feet sold at \$3.50 a keg.

Probably for a state dinner Governor Thomas Brown, "per order of Miss Mag," his daughter, on February 19, 1851, ordered

16. The typical size of these casks can be seen from the record of this shipment of bacon sides: one cask, 678 pounds at six and three-fourth cents, \$47.12.

a barrel of flour, \$9.00; twelve pounds of brown sugar, \$1.50; eight pounds of loaf sugar, \$1.50; one quart of vinegar, nineteen cents; two vials of New Orleans pepper, fifty cents; ten pounds of lard, \$1.25; nine and one-half pounds of cheese, \$1.56; seventeen pounds of shoulders, \$1.70; six pounds of macaroni, \$1.50; and eight pounds of butter, \$2.50.

When Williams could not supply a customer from his own establishment, he bought the needed item at a neighboring store. Lewis and Ames handled drugs and William Wilson sold books and stationery. Other merchants were D. C. Wilson,<sup>17</sup> Hopkins and Meginniss, J. W. Argyle, Hein and Rust, Betton and Higgs, James Kirksey, and Richard Hayward. The latter's store joined that of Williams.<sup>18</sup> These merchants, and others as far away as Quincy and Monticello, sometimes traded with Mr. Williams. Some large orders by James A. MacMillan of Quincy apparently were for resale. He ordered bacon, coffee, whiskey, and once some cognac brandy worth \$143.32. He also secured five boxes of cheese worth \$12.60 on consignment.<sup>19</sup>

Liquor cabinets were also taking on new splendor according to the data in the Williams daybooks. Rectified whiskey was still the most popular item, and the 1849 inventory showed 357 gallons, at a wholesale price of sixteen and two-thirds cents a gallon. Only rarely did liquor sell by the barrel. Cheaper whiskey sold at fifty cents a gallon; the more expensive brands cost \$1.00 or more. Liquor purchases included Holland gin, \$2.00 or \$2.50 a gallon; brandy, \$4.00; and Madeira or port wine, \$3.50. Besides rectified whiskey, the inventory on July 1, 1849, listed seventy gallons of brandy, sixty-two and one-half cents wholesale; forty-one gallons of rose gin, thirty-one cents; 121 gallons of common New England rum, twenty-nine cents; nineteen and one-half gallons of Jamaica rum, \$1.50; thirty gallons of apple brandy, thirty-seven and one-half cents; fifty-three gallons of Cumberland whiskey, ninety cents; fifteen gallons of Holland gin, \$1.25; thirty-five and one-half gallons of Spanish Madeira, sixty-two and one-half cents; thirty-seven and one-half gallons of Spanish Madeira, \$1.25; thirty-three gallons of port

17. P. W. Wilson Co., a department store north of the Williams store, was in business until May 1971. It traced its beginnings to D. C. Wilson, which opened in 1837.

18. Hayward paid \$169 to join his store wall to that of Williams.

19. J. Martin Williams store ledger, 1846.

wine, \$1.50; thirty-three gallons of peach brandy, ninety cents; seven dozen bottles of porter, \$2.50 a dozen; two and one-half dozen bottles of porter, \$1.62 1/2 a dozen; thirty gallons of brandy, \$2.00; two dozen bottles of champagne, \$7.00 a dozen; two dozen bottles of champagne, \$10.00; and one-quarter dozen bottles of champagne, \$11.50.<sup>20</sup>

Wine and liquor cabinets, glasses, decanters, and other accessories were sold. William N. Taylor bought "a fine decanter" for \$16.00, and others purchased cut glass bowls and decanters. Liquor, and jugs or decanters to hold it, often were secured at the same time. Dr. Jacob Elliott purchased a \$7.50 cut glass decanter, a half gallon of Madeira wine for \$1.75, and a gallon jug.

Tobacco in plugs, pipe tobacco, and snuff sales continued heavy, and cigars, even more popular in the wake of the Mexican War,<sup>21</sup> were plentiful in Tallahassee. Cigars sold in varying lots, but the price for a box of 250 was \$9.00. The most popular smoking tobacco in 1850 was Richardson's, priced at eighteen cents a pound wholesale. The inventory on July 1 showed 1,547 pounds on hand. There were also 1,287 pounds of Hills, thirteen cents; 941 of Simms, thirteen cents; 100 pounds of Berger, twenty cents; and 309 pounds of Boston House, thirty-five cents.

Books became increasingly available in Tallahassee, principally through the bookstore of William Wilson. Many were school books, and one order showed that an arithmetic, Davis arithmetic, and a dictionary each cost fifty cents. Pailey's reader and an "English reader" sold for twenty-five cents, and an atlas and geography and an American history text cost \$1.00. Williams himself bought a set of books for \$31.38. A Euclid sold for \$1.50, a Virgil for \$1.95, and a Latin dictionary for \$3.00. Williams purchased at Wilson's, the large leather-backed ledgers and account books that he used, paying \$3.50 each.

Pocket knives were popular in the period, selling from seventy-five cents to \$1.25. Oil and lamps were increasingly used, and Governor Brown was a regular oil customer. Train or sperm oil sold for \$1.00 to \$1.50 a gallon. Medicines were

20. Inventory book, 1848-1852.

21. G. Melvin Herndon, *William Tatham and the Culture of Tobacco* (Coral Gables, 1969), 415.

other popular store items. Castor oil sometimes sold in gallon quantities, and Epsom salts was a large seller. A vial of calomel or laudanum was priced at twenty-five cents; a vial of opium, fifty cents; but an ounce of quinine cost \$4.50 to \$5.50. Magnesia and carbonate of soda were available, and Balsam wild cherry cost \$1.00 a bottle. Hair tonic was sold occasionally. Townsend's sassaparilla was popular at \$1.00 a bottle, and in 1851 a bottle of Panacea sold for \$2.00.

It was possible for Tallahassee and the surrounding planter community to secure all of its clothing, most of its shelter and household necessities, and a considerable part of its food and luxury wants from the North and Midwest and still remain prosperous, provided there was a locally produced surplus it could exchange for equal value. The cash crop was cotton, but it was subject not only to many production uncertainties but also to periodic price fluctuations. The average annual price ranged between 7.2 cents and 13.2 cents in the period from 1846 to 1856.<sup>22</sup>

There were some efforts among planters at this time to diversify production, produce more food at home, and in other ways improve an agricultural economy dependent on the price of cotton. Williams's daybook record of sales of plows and agricultural equipment, however, does not indicate more than a casual interest in anything but the continued production of cotton by traditional methods. Agricultural machinery was unknown, and at a time when midwestern farmers were beginning to use mechanical harvesters, purchases of \$5.00 scythes and cradles at Williams's store indicated how grain was gathered around Tallahassee. Plows, costing \$3.00 or \$3.50 for an occasional turning plow, were increasingly replacing the kind that could be manufactured in the plantation blacksmith shed. The daybook for January-June 1851, records one purchase of the kind of subsoil plows advocated at this time by progressive agriculturists. A. H. Lanier ordered two such plows on January 2, 1851. There was also some interest shown in the cultivation of Irish potatoes as indicated by the purchase of seed potatoes at \$4.50 a bushel in the winter and the purchase of gunny sacking at twenty-five cents a yard to sack potatoes and other products.

22. Harry Bates Brown and Jacob Osborn Ware, *Cotton* (New York, 1958),

There were frequent purchases of onions for planting; papers of garden seed were in demand throughout the winter, and oats occasionally were sold for planting. Heavy purchases of salt, which in mid-century came either from Liverpool or the Turk Islands in the Bahamas, suggest that it was being utilized to salt down locally-produced meat. If the sale of spinning wheels was an indication of the amount of home industry, there appeared to be little around Tallahassee in the mid-nineteenth century. Only an occasional wheel at \$4.50 apiece and an occasional "bunch of cotton" at \$1.00 were sold in the Williams store.

In addition to cotton, Williams handled and shipped other produce from the region. Some tobacco was shipped to New Orleans from the Middle Florida region and even more to New York. Williams's records reflect sales of \$7,852.09 in leaf tobacco through Coe, Anderson and Company, New York merchants, during the first half of 1851. The largest of twenty-five growers supplying the tobacco was William H. Gibson, whose twenty-eight cases brought \$1,770.45. During this same period, however, Coe, Anderson and Company also sold \$38,818.23 of Williams's cotton, and during the course of a cotton season handled much more cotton than this. Only occasionally was anything besides cotton and tobacco handled by Williams. There were occasional shipments of hides, and the records note sales of thirty-six and one-half bushels of peas for William A. Carr on one occasion, and a bale of wool for John G. Rawls on another. These products brought \$54.25 and \$57.57, respectively.

Cotton, the big item in agriculture and in trade during the 1850-1851 season, was purchased between September 10 and May 3, and 2,666 bales were bought by Williams and shipped to New York in lots ranging from twenty-five bales aboard the schooner *Elizabeth* on one voyage to 156 bales aboard the brig *Charles A. Coe*. Williams bought the cotton for \$143,914.23, or just under \$54.00 a bale. The price ranged between eleven and thirteen and one-half cents a pound during most of the season.

The freight on cotton shipped from St. Marks to New York was one-half cent a pound during the fall but it increased to five-eighths cent in December. The September 30, 1850 shipment aboard the *Elizabeth*, totalling 11,816 pounds, therefore cost \$59.08 in freight. Added to this was "primage" amounting to



five per cent of the freight cost, of \$2.95; the railroad freight charge to St. Marks, \$15.63; storage charges, \$3.12; and "B. & L," fifty cents. *The Charles A. Coe* cargo, weighing 71,516 pounds, paid a \$357.58 freight charge on a trip beginning November 6, 1850. There was a \$17.88 primage charge and \$117.50 in other costs, resulting in a total bill of \$492.96 for 156 bales.

How well both moderate and large scale cotton growers fared under this arrangement is indicated by the following data showing number of bales sold to Williams and amounts received: Willis Hudnall, thirty-two bales, \$1,840.13; William Stafford, twenty-five bales, \$1,577.92; John B. Doggett, thirty-eight bales, \$2,000.49; William G. Ponder, twenty-seven bales, \$1,702.57; William Alderman, sixty-two bales, \$3,189.30; Est. Oscar Fillyaw, 102 bales, \$65,383.92; T. E. Blackshear, sixty-two bales, \$2,918.23.

Considering that planters probably disposed of additional cotton to other buyers, and some probably shipped on consignment, thus taking the risk of long storage and a price decline, the 1850-1851 season may be considered quite successful. It was the second season of unusually higher prices; evidently, 1849-1850 also had been a highly productive season. A notation in Williams's cotton book shows that 2,428 bales had been purchased. His store sales began immediately to reflect rising cotton prices and shipments; however, these sales, almost entirely on credit, meant only that customers increased their debts to him. Williams showed at the end of the calendar year 1850 \$43,903.58 in unpaid accounts.

Anticipating continued cotton prosperity and a lively sale of luxury goods, Williams stocked up heavily on a New York buying trip in the fall of 1850, ordering \$28,491.23 in goods. There was little to justify this optimism in spring trading, however; between January 1 and June 30, 1851, sales totaled only \$9,112.82. This period was utilized, meanwhile, to liquidate some of the approximately 300 accounts with unpaid balances which dated back to the previous December 31. Planters, used to trading on credit, apparently took a casual attitude about paying their bills. Former Territorial Governor Richard Keith Call, more prompt than many, did not settle his \$109.58 bill until March 11, 1851. The largest accounts still owed at the end of 1850 were A. H. Lanier, \$1,476.73; J. B. Doggett, \$1,017.-

68; William Edward Hall, \$1,407.23; and Governor Thomas Brown, \$1,292.12. Williams ended the fiscal year on June 30, 1851, with \$22,896.94 in accounts receivable and an inventory of \$23,955.23. The situation was no better on December 31, 1851; his customers still owed him \$22,208.72. A year later there were still more than \$12,000 in unpaid accounts.

Cotton meanwhile, after two good years, started a price decline. Williams's purchases also declined; whether from a decline in the crop or in his sources of credit, or for some other reason, is not apparent from the records. During the 1851-1852 season Williams bought \$42,385.96 in cotton and in 1852-1853 he purchased 580 bales for \$23,077.36. In two years the price had dropped so that growers were receiving \$39.80 a bale instead of the \$54.00 which they had received earlier.

Williams's store business appeared headed toward failure. Besides his financial problems Williams was also in bad health. On December 26, 1853, he made out his will, directing that after payment of his debts his estate be divided into three parts to be distributed equally among two sisters and the children of a deceased sister. In May 1854 New York creditors foreclosed on his store building, valued at \$4,000, and a house on two lots in Quincy, valued at \$1,200. The following month, Williams died at the age of thirty-two, and the body, in a \$20.00 coffin, was taken to Quincy for burial. Executors found that \$17,933.54 was owed to the store. One planter, A. K. Lanier, had a debt of \$3,792.55. The store inventory had dwindled to \$5,894.86, while Williams owed considerably more than this. Claims totaled \$41,488.13; Smallwood Anderson & Co., the New York successor of his agent, claimed \$33,383.42. There were enough assets only to pay thirty-five cents on the dollar, while the heirs named in Williams's will received nothing.<sup>23</sup>

23. Leon County Probate File 201, Smallwood Earle and Co. v. Robert H. Gamble, *Exr.*, Leon County Circuit Court, Chancery File 1218.