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Larry E. Rivers



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SLAVERY AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA: 1823-1861

by LARRY E. RIVERS

ON the eve of secession in January 1861, Gadsden County was one of Florida's wealthiest political subdivisions. It and its four neighboring counties contained almost 42 percent of the state's property when measured by value.¹ Gadsden's \$6,714,880 in assets constituted somewhat more than 8 percent of the state's total, even though the county contained less than 1 percent of Florida's land and 6.7 percent of its population.² The county's per capita wealth of \$1,684.19 nearly tripled the state average.³

Given the economic power of its free residents, Gadsden County also exercised a substantial influence in territorial and state business and political affairs. County leaders such as Banks Meacham and John W. Malone were among the strongest advocates of statehood in the 1830s and 1840s. Subsequently, Charles Henry DuPont and Pleasant W. White, among others, effectively urged the cause of southern secession.⁴ Interestingly, however, a prominent slaveowning planter from Gadsden County, Abraham Kyrkyndal Allison, led conservative forces in Florida's January 1861 secession convention in an unsuccessful attempt either to slow down the momentum building toward secession or to put the question to a public referendum. Ironically, Allison, as president of the state senate, became Confederate Florida's

Larry E. Rivers is professor of history, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

1. The four counties were Jackson, Leon, Jefferson, and Madison. In 1860, Florida contained thirty-seven counties. Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: 1864), IV, 297.
2. *Ibid.*, I, 51-53, IV, 297; Miles Kenan Womack, Jr., *Gadsden: A Florida County in Word and Picture* (Quincy, 1976), xi; Edward A. Fernald, ed., *Atlas of Florida* (Tallahassee, 1981), 1.
3. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, I, 51-53, IV, 297.
4. J. Randall Stanley, *History of Gadsden County* (Tallahassee, 1985), 40, 139-40; Womack, *Gadsden*, 29, 63-64.

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chief executive officer upon the suicide of Governor John Milton, April 1, 1865.⁵

The economic and political power exercised by Gadsden Countians in antebellum Florida rested squarely upon black slavery and can be understood only with respect to that institution. The nature of the county's rich, high, and fertile lands, its diversified agriculture, and the relative affluence and sophistication of its free society combined subtly to mold slavery and to be molded by it. An examination of the county's experience thus can provide a glimpse not only of the "peculiar institution," but also of the social and economic dynamics that lay behind important events in the state's history.

Even prior to the cession of Florida by Spain to the United States in 1821, whites in search of fertile, virgin land saw the Gadsden area as being highly suitable for the cultivation of staple crops, especially cotton and tobacco. As one Pensacolian noted of the vicinity in 1827: "It is an oasis which appears to have been formed by nature in one of her sportive and festive moods. . . . [T]he only regret which I feel in contemplating this beautiful region is its very limited extent."⁶ Attracted by the area's beauty and fertility, early settlers migrated from the plowed-over lands of Georgia, the Carolinas, and Virginia. Cheap acreage was available in north Florida, and settlers arrived with their families and slaves determined to become affluent planters.⁷

Florida's Territorial Council established Gadsden as a county in 1823 and named it in honor of James Gadsden, a protege of Andrew Jackson. Gadsden was one of the commissioners who negotiated the treaties for removal of Florida's natives from the territory, became active in territorial politics, and later was instrumental in effecting the Gadsden Purchase which added almost 50,000 square miles of territory to the American Southeast.⁸ The village of Quincy became the county seat.⁹

5. John E. Johns, *Florida During the Civil War* (Gainesville, 1963; reprint ed., Macclenny, 1989), 19, 205.

6. Stanley, *Gadsden County*, 16.

7. Lula Dee Keith Appleyard, "Plantation Life in Middle Florida: 1821-1845" (master's thesis, Florida State University, 1940); Julia Floyd Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth in Antebellum Florida, 1821-1860* (Gainesville, 1973), 15-18.

8. Allen Morris, *The Florida Handbook, 1977-1978* (Tallahassee, 1978), 332-33; Womack, *Gadsden*, 13.

9. Stanley, *Gadsden County*, 28.

Although Gadsden's land was fertile and well watered, the area's rivers and streams generally were inadequate for transporting products to market. The Ocklocknee River, which separated it from Leon County, was a long stream but was not navigable for sizable vessels. The seaport town of Apalachicola, the terminal for the Apalachicola River, was located 100 miles away, too far for county farmers to use it to their advantage. St. Marks, in Wakulla County, was closer, lying about forty-two miles from the county. Accordingly, planters carried their produce by wagon to Tallahassee and then shipped it to the port on Florida's first rail facility, the Tallahassee-St. Marks Railroad. Most Middle-Florida planters used the St. Marks terminal.¹⁰

The land and its products shaped and influenced Gadsden County's history during the antebellum period. "A richly fertile soil . . . and ideal climate," one historian noted, "attracted settlers and contributed to the growth of cotton culture and slavery in Florida."¹¹ The rich farm lands provided Middle-Florida planters and yeoman farmers an opportunity to prosper and to move up the social and political ladder in the community.¹² By 1829, six years after its creation, thirty Gadsden County residents had acquired tracts of land consisting of 500 acres or more. Ten years later, the number had increased to fifty, and, by 1860, 109 plantations of 500 acres or more were located in the county, with thirty properties working at least thirty slaves.¹³

Blacks had arrived in Florida with the Spanish at least as early as the seventeenth century.¹⁴ The date they first appeared in Middle Florida and, specifically, Gadsden County is difficult to document. By 1829, though, 939 blacks were listed on the first tax rolls of the county out of a total taxable population of 1,219. A decade later, 1,366 blacks and mulattoes were included

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10. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 20-21; Jerrell H. Shofner, *History of Jefferson County* (Tallahassee, 1976), 106; Womack, *Gadsden*, 33-38. See also Lynn Willoughby, "Apalachicola Aweigh: Shipping and Seamen at Florida's Premier Cotton Port," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 69 (October 1990), 178-194; Harry P. Owens, "Apalachicola: The Beginning," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47 (January 1969), 276-91; and Harry P. Owens, "Port of Apalachicola," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48 (July 1969), 1-25.
 11. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 16.
 12. Clement Eaton, *The Freedom of Thought Struggle in the Old South* (New York, 1964), 34-36.
 13. Gadsden County, Tax Books, 1829, 1839, 1860, microfilm, Florida State Archives, Tallahassee (hereafter cited as Tax Books).
 14. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 9.

in a population of 1,721 taxable inhabitants. On the eve of the Civil War, the number of slaves had increased to 4,193, and the taxable population numbered 4,681. A comparison of taxable inhabitants in 1839 shows an increase of 502 or 41 percent over the number taxed in 1829. The number of taxable persons had increased in 1860 to 2,960, or 72 percent, over the number taxed in 1839. The population of both slave and white residents had increased steadily from 1829 to 1860.¹⁵

Unlike Leon and other Middle-Florida counties, more blacks than whites were living in Gadsden County by 1830. They continued to outnumber the white population until after the Civil War. In 1830, for example, 51 percent of the total population consisted of slaves; by 1860, 58 percent were bondsmen. As illustrated in Table 1, the white population also increased continually from 1830 to 1860. This growth can be attributed, as one writer stated, to "the Golden Age of the ante-bellum tobacco industry."¹⁶ One contemporary newspaper, while noting the availability of cheap fertile land and the growth of the tobacco industry in the area, concluded that tobacco was "more profit[able] than cotton."¹⁷

Members of Gadsden County's white population did not move as frequently as other Floridians to newly formed counties in Florida or to the Old Southwest in the lower Mississippi River valley. The southern frontier, which included Gadsden County, one historian asserted, "created a democratic atmosphere," allowing whites of relatively meager means to move into the prestigious planter class through the acquisition of land and the exploitation of slave labor.¹⁸

Agricultural productivity and profits were dependent upon the availability of slaves to labor in the cotton and tobacco fields, and the economic benefits of slave families bearing children was of particular concern to their owners. Natural increases in the slave population were augmented, however, by other factors. Gadsden's increase from 1830 to 1860 stemmed principally from whites bringing their bondsmen into the county from other parts

15. In 1860, Gadsden County's total population was 9,396, including 3,981 whites, six free blacks, and 5,409 slaves. Tax Books, 1829, 1839, 1860; Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, I, 51, 53.

16. Womack, *Gadsden*, 36.

17. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, January 9, 1844.

18. *Ibid.*; Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 5.

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Table 1. Population of Gadsden County, 1830-1860

Year	Whites	%	Free Blacks	%	Slaves	%	Total
1830	2,388	48.8	5	.1	2,501	51.1	4,894
1840	2,637	44	13	.2	3,342	55.8	5,992
1850	3,897	44.4	7	.1	4,880	55.5	8,784
1860	3,981	42.4	6	.1	5,409	57.5	9,396

Sources: *Fifth Census*; or *Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830* (Washington, DC, 1832), 156-57; *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840* (Washington, DC, 1841), 454-55; *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, DC, 1853), 396-401; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC, 1864), I, 50-54.

of the South and also from illegal importation of slaves from outside the United States. Additionally, the domestic slave trade operating out of adjoining Leon County and the state capital, Tallahassee, supplemented the number of bondsmen in Gadsden.¹⁹

Except for the practice of hiring out slaves by their owners, relatively few blacks were sold or traded in the county. Most of those that were sold were advertised in the Tallahassee newspapers, and the transactions usually occurred in that community. Several large slave-trading firms operated out of Leon County during this period, and planters from the area utilized their services.²⁰

While there were many yeoman farmers who did not own slaves, a large portion of Gadsden County's white population was listed as "slave holders."²¹ In 1830, 269 or 58 percent of the county's 461 families were slaveholders; in Leon County, 321 or 56 percent of 570 families owned slaves. The number of slaveholders in Gadsden had decreased by 1860, although the overall population was increasing. Of 774 families, 355 or 46 percent

19. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 28; Julia F. Smith, "Slavetrading in Antebellum Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 50 (January 1972), 252-61; Frances J. Stafford, "Illegal Importation: Enforcement of the Slave Trade Laws Along the Florida Coast, 1810-1828," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46 (October 1967), 124-33.
20. Tallahassee *Floridian*, December 5, 12, 1838, November 12, 1836, April 7, 1838, February 2, July 8, 1839, January 2, 1841; Tallahassee *Floridian and Advocate*, February 28, 1832, April 6, 1838.
21. Larry E. Rivers, "Slavery in Microcosm: Leon County, Florida— 1824 to 1860," *Journal of Negro History* 46 (February 1981), 235-45; Larry E. Rivers, "Dignity and Importance: Slavery in Jefferson County, Florida— 1827 to 1860," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 61 (April 1983), 404-30.

owned slaves. New settlers continued to move into the county hoping to acquire land and, ultimately, slaves so as to be recognized as planters. However, as the supply of slaves decreased in proportion to the demand, slave prices increased and many whites could not afford to buy them.²²

Forty-two Gadsden County families owned one slave in 1830; eighty-two owned two to four slaves; seventy-five owned five to nine; seventy-one owned ten to nineteen; sixty-five owned twenty to forty-nine; thirteen owned fifty to ninety-nine; and seven owned 100 to 199 for a total of 355 families owning slaves.²³ Three decades later, in 1860, fifty-two owned one slave; sixty-nine owned two to four slaves; fifty-eight owned five to nine; fifty-eight owned ten to nineteen; twenty-seven owned twenty to forty-nine; and five owned fifty to ninety-nine for a total of 269 families owning slaves.²⁴

Throughout the antebellum period the majority of Gadsden County slaveowners possessed fewer than ten slaves. If the ownership of twenty slaves or more placed a person in the planter class, the county had approximately thirty-two planters in 1830. That year, Thomas Preston owned eighty-eight slaves, making him the largest owner in the county. By 1860 only seventy-five persons held twenty or more slaves. With 160, the estate of William Kilcrease led the county in numbers of bondsmen.²⁵

Slavery shaped the political structure of Gadsden County as it did throughout the South. But, unlike Leon and Jefferson counties and other parts of Florida, political control in Gadsden County did not rest completely in the hands of large slaveholders. Henry Yonge, one of the area's earliest settlers and a member of the Territorial Council, owned only fifteen slaves and no acreage in 1829. Thomas Speights, also a member of the council, listed fifteen slaves and 982 acres the same year, and John C.

22. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, February 12, 1854; Kenneth M. Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1956), 201-06.

23. U.S. Census Office, *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830, Population Schedules of Florida, No. 19, Sheets 135-38* (National Archives, Washington, DC, 1943), 275-308.

24. *Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC, 1864), 225; *Statistics of the United States (including Mortality, Property, etc.) in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns and Being the Final Exhibit of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC, 1866), 340-41.

25. U.S. Census Office, *Fifth Census*, 275-308; Tax Books, 1860.

Love, who had served on the council in 1827-1828, held but two slaves and 400 acres.²⁶

Most early members of the Territorial Council, because of their limited land possessions, cannot be designated as planters. Many were yeomen farmers owning fifteen slaves or less and between 100 and 400 acres of land. James Dunlop, a member of the council from 1829 to 1830, listed five slaves and 120 acres in 1829. Banks Meacham, lawyer and physician, reported seven slaves and no acres the same year, while Joseph McBride, judge of the probate court, held five slaves and 800 acres.²⁷ Both men had served on the council. Ten years later, Meacham had increased his holdings to fourteen slaves and owned 960 acres of land.²⁸

Control of local politics in Gadsden County— and its seat, Quincy— lay in the hands of yeomen farmers, merchants, and other individuals who owned few slaves and relatively small tracts of land. Neither Judge David L. White of the county court nor Judge Edward A. Robinson of the probate court appears to have owned land or slaves in 1829. John J. Wilson, James Wooten, and William Smith were the first county commissioners. Wilson reported four slaves and 560 acres; Wooten, seven slaves and 270 acres; and Smith, neither slaves nor land. Hezekiah Wilder, the county's first magistrate, held nine slaves and 640 acres in 1829. An exception to the general rule was Jonathan Robinson, judge of the county court from 1823 to 1824, who owned thirty-one slaves and 1,010 acres in 1829.²⁹

Despite the reality of local politics, many Gadsden citizens— as was true elsewhere in the South— believed that community prestige and higher political aspirations were based upon ownership of large numbers of slaves and quantities of land. Charles H. DuPont, a member of the Territorial Council in 1835, owned only nine slaves and 640 acres of land in 1829. Six years later he had increased his estate to twenty slaves and 1,300 acres. By 1860, when he was serving on the state supreme court, his holdings had ballooned to 108 slaves and 5,800 acres.³⁰

26. Tax Books, 1829-1832; Rivers, "Slavery in Microcosm," 235-45; Rivers, "Dignity and Importance," 404-30.

27. Tax Books, 1829.

28. *Ibid.*, 1839.

29. *Ibid.*, 1829-1832; Womack, *Gadsden*, 33.

30. Eaton, *Freedom of Thought*, 35; Tax Books, 1829, 1835, 1860.

Another example was Abraham K. Allison, one of the state's most powerful politicians. He served in the territorial legislature and, after statehood, represented Gadsden County first in the state house of representatives and then the state senate. He was speaker of the house in 1852, and later president of the senate. As mentioned earlier, he became acting governor in 1865. Apparently Allison owned little property prior to 1845; at least, he did not report any slaves or land for taxation. In 1845 he listed 320 acres and no slaves. Eight years later his assets included thirty-eight slaves and 640 acres. The pattern illustrated by Allison was not unusual. Substantial economic assets presumably were not a requirement to get started in politics, but as political careers matured, personal estates—land and slaves—often expanded accordingly.³¹

Though small farmers and planters controlled politics within the county, large planters dominated Gadsden's economic and social life. For instance, when the Union Bank was established at Tallahassee in 1833, twelve Gadsden County residents were listed as investors.³² Of this number, eleven owned both slaves and sizable acreage. The Reverend Freeman Fitzgerald listed sixty slaves and 1,920 acres of land; Thomas Preston reported forty-five slaves and 800 acres; and Henry Gee owned nineteen slaves and 3,079 acres. By 1845, Gee's holdings totalled seventy-six slaves and 4,020 acres of land.³³

As to religious affairs, three local ministers possessed enough land and bondsmen to be categorized as planters. In 1839 the Reverend Jesse Coe, of the Centenary Methodist Church, listed thirty-six slaves and 2,128 acres of land; the Reverend Freeman Fitzgerald, also a Methodist preacher, owned sixty-two slaves and 3,360 acres; and the Reverend Gospero Sweet, of the Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Church, owned nineteen slaves and 400 acres. Ten years later, Sweet held twenty-eight bondsmen and 480 acres.³⁴

Also important to the county's social life were fraternal organizations such as the several Masonic orders then active

31. Tax Books, 1833-1860.

32. Kathryn T. Abbey, "The Union Bank of Tallahassee," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 15 (April 1937), 207-31; Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 79, 90, 124, 127; Appleyard, "Plantation Life in Middle Florida," 31-34.

33. Tax Books, 1833-1845.

34. Womack, *Gadsden*, 49-55; Stanley, *Gadsden County*, 69-72; Tax Books, 1839, 1849.

throughout the South. Washington Lodge No. 1 (later redesignated No. 2) was established in Gadsden County in 1827. Among its members were planters Henry Gee, Henry Yonge, Gospero Sweet, James Gibson, and William Norwood. Additional Masonic lodges were chartered in the county in 1846 and 1852, and their membership rolls reveal, as well, the participation of many planters.³⁵

Horse racing was another popular pastime throughout the South, and several tracks were located in Florida, including one organized in Gadsden County around 1829. Of the original ten stockholders in the jockey club that sponsored the Gadsden track, four men were slaveowners: Jonathan Robinson, Henry Gee, James A. Dunlap, and Hezekiah Wilder. The club ceased operations in 1837, perhaps because of the national economic crisis that began in that year. Two more of the original stockholders acquired slaves and acreage after its closure.³⁶

While land in Gadsden County was adaptable to a variety of crops, the main production was in cotton and tobacco.³⁷ That fact was applicable to large planters and to yeomen farmers. In 1840, only sixteen people earned their living from “manufacturing products”; in 1860, that number had declined to six. In the former year Gadsden County produced 66,324 pounds of tobacco, or 85 percent of all tobacco grown in Florida. Ten years later it produced 776,177 pounds, or 78 percent of the state’s total. In 1860 a total of 828,815 pounds was grown in Florida, of which 553,701 pounds, or 67 percent, was produced in Gadsden.³⁸

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35. Tax Books, 1829-1830; “Minute Book,” vol. 1, Washington Lodge No. 2, Free and Accepted Masons, 134-35.
 36. Dorothy Dodd, “Horse Racing in Middle Florida,” *Apalachee* (1948-1950), 20-25; Gadsden County, Deed Book A, 329, Gadsden County Courthouse, Quincy.
 37. Mark Van Doren, ed., *The Travels of William Bartram* (Dover, 1928), 337; Francis de Castelnau, “Essay on Middle Florida, 1837, 1838,” translated by Arthur R. Seymour, *Florida Historical Quarterly* 26 (January 1948), 209; Rupert P. Vance, *Human Geography of the South* (Chapel Hill, 1937), 360.
 38. U.S. Census Office, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Manufacture* (Washington, DC, 1841), 337-45; U.S. Census Office, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Manufacture* (Washington, DC, 1865), 57; *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, Sixth Census, 1840, Agriculture* (Washington, DC, 1841), 337; J. D. B. DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850, Agriculture* (Washington, DC, 1854), 408; *Agriculture of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, DC, 1864), 18-21.

Cotton has been described as the “most valuable commodity produced in the United States prior to 1860.”³⁹ The crop overall made more money for Gadsden County growers than did tobacco, but its price also experienced more drastic fluctuations. The county in 1840 produced 1,833,600 pounds, or 15 percent of all cotton grown in Florida; 2,243,600 pounds, or 12 percent in 1850; and 1,734,000 pounds, or 7 percent in 1860.⁴⁰ By 1837, however, county tobacco planters had established markets as far away as Germany, and tobacco profits pound for pound were higher than those for cotton. Planters averaged in 1840 about ten cents per pound on their cotton, while they received an average of twenty-five cents a pound for their tobacco. While cotton prices increased during the 1850s and 1860s to an average of thirty cents a pound, tobacco prices rose even higher to an average of between forty to eighty cents per pound.⁴¹

In 1844 a Tallahassee newspaper noted this differential when it reported: “Culture of Florida tobacco yields more than cotton.”⁴² Five years later another area newspaper asserted: “[As] gratifying as are the rewards of [the] labor of [the] cotton planter, they sink in consequence when compared with the more lucrative gains of our [Gadsden] tobacco planters.”⁴³ Forman and Muse, a company organized by two Gadsden tobacco planters and merchants, exported the first foreign shipment of Florida leaf to Bremen, Germany, in 1842. Prior to that time, Gadsden tobacco growers had sold most of their products to factories in Tallahassee and in Bainbridge and Thomasville, Georgia. A profitable market continued to exist for the county’s growers even through the depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s.⁴⁴ After the

39. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 158.

40. *Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, Sixth Census, 1840, Agriculture*, 336; DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850, Agriculture*, 408; *Agriculture of the United States in 1860, Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census*, 18-21.

41. DeBow, *Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850, Agriculture*, 408; *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, 18-21; J. D. B. DeBow, *The Industrial Resources of the Southern and Western States*, 3 vols. (New Orleans, 1852), I, 149; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1932), II, 739, 756; Jerrell H. Shofner and William Warren Rogers, “Sea Island Cotton in Antebellum Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40 (April 1962), 373-80.

42. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, January 9, 1844.

43. Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, November 17, 1849.

44. D. D. Smith, *History of John (Virginia) Smith and His Descendants in Connection with the Tobacco Industry in Gadsden County, Florida and Decatur County, Georgia*

Civil War, tobacco remained a major Gadsden crop, and descendants of antebellum slaveholders continued to earn profits from their tobacco.

The large-scale production of cotton and tobacco in Gadsden County required the labor of black slaves. Not surprisingly, male slaves outnumbered females during most of the antebellum period (see Table 2). In 1830, 449 male slaves, or 35 percent of the county's total of 1,280, were described as being twenty-four years of age or older. In the same age category were 370 females, or 30 percent of a total of 1,221. A decade later, sixty-four males, or 4 percent of 1,683, were listed as fifty-five years or older, as compared to fifty females, or 3 percent of a total 1,658 female slaves.

During the 1850s, when slaves were selling for a higher price than at any time during the antebellum period, male slaves continued to be in greater demand than female slaves, a fact illustrated in local newspaper advertisements.⁴⁵ While in 1850 the county's female slaves outnumbered males by 134, a decade later the male slave population had increased to 2,809 and the female only to 2,600. Females, however, continued to predominate in the age categories ten to twenty, forty to sixty, and over 100.

The questions of profitability and efficiency of slave labor, as compared to free labor, have been a subject of scholarly debate. Gadsden County bondsmen, as also was the case in Leon County, exhibited considerable skills in the various tasks they were required to perform for their masters or individuals hiring their services. On the estate of William Kilcrease, in 1860 the county's largest planter family with 160 slaves, bondsmen were responsible for caring for the grist and saw mills and for the plantation's livestock. The executors of the estate, S. B. Love and Samuel B. Stephens, employed three slaves as blacksmiths and two as carpenters during the 1850s and 1860s.⁴⁶ Admiration for his slave

(Quincy, n.d.), 1-2; Stanley, *Gadsden County*, 56; Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 139.

45. During the 1850s, the *Quincy Sentinel*, *Tallahassee Sentinel*, *Tallahassee Floridian*, and *Tallahassee Floridian and Journal* advertised the sale of prime male slaves in Gadsden County and Middle Florida more frequently than female slaves.

46. William Kilcrease probate records, file 1005, books 1-6, and Cyrus Dearborn probate records, file 362, Gadsden County. (Gadsden County Courthouse (hereafter cited as probate records).

Table 2. Age Classification of Female and Male Slaves in Gadsden County, 1830-1840

Year	Under 10		10 to 24		24 to 36		36 to 55		55 to 99		100+		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1830	438	409	393	442	281	218	137	122	31	30	0	0	1,280	1,221
1840	602	584	513	537	311	319	193	168	63	45	1	5	1,683	1,658

Sources: *Fifth Census; or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830* (Washington, DC, 1832), 156-57; *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840* (Washington, DC, 1841), 96-99.

Table 3. Age Classification of Female and Male Slaves in Gadsden County, 1850-1860

Year	Under 10		10 to 20		20 to 40		40 to 60		60 to 99		100+:		Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1850	746	837	617	610	702	731	242	261	66	67	0	1	2,373	2,507
1860	878	801	683	688	829	711	340	347	79	51	0	2	2,809	2,600

Sources: *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850* (Washington, DC, 1853), 399-400; Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC, 1864), I, 52-53.

carpenter, Cato, likely caused Jesse Potts to stipulate in his will: “[I]f all my slaves, or either of them (except Cato, carpenter), should not please my wife, in that case; I have empowered her to sell or change such slave or slaves, for others as she may think proper.”⁴⁷ Forman and Muse hired nine slaves from the estate of John W. Malone from 1845 to 1851 to work for their tobacco and exporting company. Cyrus Dearborn, a local merchant, worked his six slaves in his store until his death around 1830, at which time some of the bondsmen were hired out to other county residents.⁴⁸

Jonathan Robinson’s three carpenters and two blacksmiths were among the many slaves who cared for the livestock, saw and grist mills, and other buildings on his 816-acre plantation. A skilled slave craftsman, George, who in 1841 was one of eight slaves of Judge David L. White, was charged with responsibility for building a chimney on a house. Robert S. Edmund’s confidence in the ability of his slaves led him to stipulate in his will that they “be hired [only] as mechanics and house servants.” He also required that one slave boy, after attaining the age of fourteen, should be “placed with a good master mechanic who is known to be sober and humane to learn such trade as he may desire.” Edmund appears to have been concerned about his slaves’ welfare, as well as their occupations.⁴⁹

In addition to utilizing skilled and unskilled slave labor on the plantation, many owners hired out slaves, often to utilize the profits to sustain family or to educate their children. William Graves believed that by selling or hiring out his slave boy Henry he could pay off his debts and provide some money upon which his wife could live. Elizabeth L. Winslow stipulated in her will that her executors were to dedicate proceeds from use of her slaves to support her niece, Lucy Ann Ochiltree, and Lucy’s children during their lifetime. She also provided that her niece’s son, John W. Ochiltree, upon reaching the age of twenty-one

47. Jesse Potts will, August 4, 1829, Will Book A, 93, Gadsden County, Gadsden County Courthouse (hereafter cited as Will Book A).

48. Cyrus Dearborn probate records, file 362; John W. Malone probate records, file 1184.

49. Jonathan Robinson probate records, file 1529; Robert S. Edmund will, August 13, 1850, Will Book A, 219-24; diary of David White, July 1835-June 1842, entry of October 1841, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

could receive a classical education if “sufficient profits” were available after maintaining her niece and children first.⁵⁰

Hiring out slaves thus was a common practice and an uncomplicated and secure way of making profits for many slaveholders. William S. Guinn, for example, hired out a carpenter to J. W. Malone at \$1 per day for thirty-one days in September 1840. In 1846 Thomas Monroe, executor of Malone’s estate, hired a slave, George, to P. F. Jones at \$25 per month. Forman and Muse two years later hired four slaves and rented a dwelling house in Quincy from Malone’s estate for \$575. In 1850 only the Malone slaves were hired out; the fee was \$400 per year, increased by \$50 upon renewal.⁵¹

Slaves apparently also worked in industrial capacities. As early as 1840, twenty-six businesses or industrial establishments valued at \$36,850 were located in Gadsden County. Because the owners did not list monthly wages for their employment with census officials, the majority of laborers working in the establishments likely were bondsmen.⁵² Interestingly, as demand for slave labor on plantations increased over the following two decades, the importance of industrial employment in the county declined; sixty-six such concerns existed in 1840, while only six were listed twenty years later. In 1860 industrial employment had fallen to twenty-six persons, and the businesses were valued at a mere \$6,320.⁵³

Slaveholders viewed the ownership of slaves not only as profitable for themselves, but also as a wise investment for the security of their heirs. Daniel Shaw, for instance, bequeathed \$600 to be “invested in a negro girl” by the executors of his estate to ensure the care of his daughter Mary. An ailing minister, H. McArver, similarly noted that he had “invested in slaves” to guarantee that his “wife and unborn child” could remain solvent after his death.⁵⁴

50. William Graves will, December 18, 1833, Will Book A, 55; Elizabeth L. Winslow will, January 10, 1839, Will Book A, 67; John W. Ochiltree will, April 11, 1841, Will Book A, 71.

51. John Malone probate records, file 1184.

52. U.S. Census Office, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840, Manufacture*, 337-45.

53. *Ibid.*, 337-45; U.S. Census Office, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860, Manufacture*, 57; manuscript returns of the Eighth U.S. Census, 1860, Gadsden County, schedule V (manufacture).

54. John Shaw will, July 9, 1840, Will Book A, 134; John McArver will, March 13, 1841, Will Book A, 150.

The education of their children was a high priority for many owners. Daniel McLaughlin, John Colson, and John Wooten stipulated that their estates and slaves should be used for that purpose. Malone also directed that “profits” from his estate be used for his children’s schooling. Accordingly, in 1852 his eldest son, William, received \$40; his younger son, Alfred, \$28; and his daughter, Florida, received \$32 for tuition.⁵⁵

When directing the use of slave labor for the benefit of their heirs, many owners, already accustomed to the practice in their personal business dealings, required that the bondsmen be hired out. Such a transaction could be by the day, the month, or the year.⁵⁶ In Gadsden, the period most often was a year beginning after New Year’s Day and ending before Christmas. The lessees often owned no slaves themselves, and the cost of hire— as well as the period— varied according to the needs of the lessee and to the age, sex, health, and skill of the bondsmen involved. James C. Evans’s estate in 1841 hired out two slaves to J. S. Jones for \$392, two to J. Lanier for \$477, one to A. Johnson for \$41, one to R. Rodgers for \$27, and one to D. Boslick for \$164.⁵⁷ Five years previously the executor of E. W. Sweat’s estate had leased three slaves to Forman and Muse for \$393. And, Allen Smith’s estate hired out two slaves to Malcolm Blue in 1839 for \$244.84.⁵⁸

A few Gadsden County residents allowed their bondsmen to arrange their own hires. Robert Edmunds, by will, required that lessees be “kind and hymane [sic] persons,” but afforded his slaves the liberty to select the person for whom they would work provided “such persons give satisfactory security to my executors.” Jonathan Robinson, also by testamentary provision, declared, “Boy George the carpenter shall be allowed to choose his own employer annually during his life time.” The proceeds of the hire were to be paid to Robinson’s executors.⁵⁹

Contrary to the practice of Edmunds and Robinson, most Gadsden slaveholders expressed little care as to who hired the

55. Daniel McLaughlin will, June 3, 1840, Will Book A, 129; John Colson will, July 20, 1832, Will Book A, 22; John Wooten probate records, file 1913; John W. Malone probate records, file 1184.

56. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 75.

57. James C. Evans probate records, no file number.

58. E. W. Sweat probate records, file 1575; Allen Smith probate records, file 1702.

59. Robert Edmund will, August 13, 1850, Will Book A, 219-24; Jonathan Robinson probate records, file 1529.

services of their bondsmen. James Nixon directed, for example, that his slaves “ [were to be] hired out by [his] executors until his sons reached the lawful age of twenty one, and then they [the slaves] were to be evenly divided between them.”⁶⁰ William Graves stipulated that his wife either could “ Sell my negro boy Henry” or “ hire him out.” Most owners were concerned primarily with the lessee’s ability to pay.⁶¹ Understandably, this fact led to personal tragedy and hardships for many slaves. They often were overworked, and, as one scholar has noted, “ the period of hire was temporary[,] and there was little concern for the welfare of the Negro.”⁶²

As was the case in other Middle Florida plantation counties, slaves constituted the most valuable property in Gadsden County. Probate records indicate that during the 1840s bondsmen were valued at an average of \$600 for a prime male slave and \$500 for a prime female slave. John W. Malone’s slaves, when appraised in 1846, ranged in value within those limits, while a two-year-old male was valued at \$300. In 1840, Daniel Shaw bequeathed \$600 to his daughter, Mary Strickland, for the purchase of “ a negro girl.”⁶³

The price of slaves rose during the 1850s as the demand for the labor increased with the boom in cotton and tobacco production. By 1855, John Wooten’s slaves ranged in value from a high of \$1,200 for a prime male hand and \$1,000 for a female slave to a low of \$500 for children under ten years of age. Newspaper advertisements of the period suggest that Gadsden County slave prices averaged approximately \$1,000.⁶⁴

Slave values continued to rise during the period of the Civil War as the labor of bondsmen became ever more essential to county growers. Prices soared to an average high of \$4,500 for a prime male hand and \$2,000 for a prime female. In 1863, for example, a thirty-eight-year-old male slave belonging to Jonathan Robinson was valued at \$4,550, and a twenty-four-year-

60. James A. Nixon will, April 11, 1838, Will Book A, 102-04.

61. William Graves will, December 18, 1833, Will Book A, 55.

62. Smith, *Slavery and Plantation Growth*, 77.

63. John W. Malone probate records, file 1184; Daniel Shaw will, July 9, 1840, Will Book A, 134-35.

64. John Wooten probate records, file 1913; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, February 9, 1856, September 19, 1857; Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, June 3, December 8, 1851.

old female at \$2,000.⁶⁵ Three years previously, a blacksmith on the estate of William Kilcrease was assessed at \$3,500 and a prime female, \$1,000.⁶⁶ That year, 1860, the county's bondsmen (based upon a conservatively estimated average value per slave of \$1,000) represented approximately \$5,400,000 in value. At the time the combined value of the county's improved and unimproved land came only to \$1,417,050. The year's cotton production was an estimated \$520,200, and the tobacco crop was valued at approximately \$221,480.⁶⁷ Slavery clearly was big business in the county in 1860, and at that date had not reached its natural limits.

Few free blacks lived in Gadsden County. As noted in Table 1, only five were resident in 1830. A high for the antebellum period was reached in 1840 when the total increased to thirteen. By 1860, though, only six free blacks remained in the county. Among the free persons of color, and, more numerous among county slaves, were a considerable number of mulattoes. Gadsden's mulatto population, as a percentage of total black population, constituted only half that of the state— 4 percent as opposed to 8 percent in 1860. Still, 217 individuals were reported as mulattoes to census officials, and the actual number likely was greater.⁶⁸ The experience of these mulattoes differed markedly. While all no doubt felt the opprobrium of the community and most probably toiled alongside their fellow slaves in the fields, a few enjoyed a gentle upbringing at the hands of white fathers who, at least tacitly, acknowledged their offspring. One example is that of Robert Meacham, who became a prominent politician and minister in post-Civil War Florida. Apparently the son of planter and physician Banks Meacham, Robert testified in later life that he could not answer whether he had been raised slave or free. His duties until the age of eighteen were slight. "I drove a carriage once," he related, "and superintended around my old boss-my father. Until I was eighteen years old, I never did

65. Jonathan Robinson probate records, file 1529.

66. William Kilcrease probate records, file 1005.

67. U.S. Census Office, *Eighth Census of Florida, 1860: Original Census Schedules, Schedule 4, Agriculture of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Census*, 18-24; Dorothy Dodd, "The Manufacture of Cotton in Florida Before and During the Civil War," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 13 (July 1934), 3-15; Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, I, 50-54.

68. Kennedy, *Population of the United States in 1860*, I, 54.

anything more than to stay about him and ride in the buggy with him.” Surprisingly, Robert’s father even attempted to enroll the lad in one of Quincy’s white academies, although the experiment was shortlived.⁶⁹ Meacham’s experience, however, must be considered atypical.

No evidence suggests that any large-scale slave rebellion occurred in Gadsden County. Bondsmen resisted their status, nonetheless, by “taking off,” and runaway slaves constituted a continuing problem for the county’s residents. David White’s diary, for instance, contains numerous entries related to runaway and recaptured slaves. An 1836 notation recorded a recapture. Two years later White noted that T. Smith’s slave had been caught and that Joseph Waile’s slave, Bob, had “taken off.”⁷⁰ Gadsden slaveholders advertised rewards for the return of their chattels in various Middle Florida newspapers including, during the 1830s-1850s, the Quincy *Sentinel*, the Tallahassee *Floridian and Advocate*, the Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, and the Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*.⁷¹

The institution of slavery helped to shape the political, social, and economic structures of Gadsden County, one of Florida’s wealthiest and most influential antebellum political subdivisions. As was the case in most southern communities, every individual in some way was influenced by the “peculiar institution.” Unlike many such communities, however, the number of slaves a man owned in Gadsden did not necessarily determine his social and political status. In fact, those who owned only a few slaves or none at all dominated local politics; their wealthier slaveholding contemporaries were involved instead with fostering their own economic prosperity and with territorial and state politics. Nonetheless, with a foundation rooted deeply in black chattel slavery, Gadsden County residents who could buy or hire slaves prospered from 1823 to 1860 and had immediate and personal reasons to fight to defend the institution that had bequeathed to them such gentle lives.

69. Canter Brown, Jr., “Where Are Now the Hopes I Cherished?’ The Life and Times of Robert Meacham,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 69 (July 1990), 2-3.

70. David White diary, July 1835-June 1842.

71. Quincy *Sentinel*, June 13, September 18, 1840, January 8, 1841, May 9, June 27, 1843; Tallahassee *Floridian and Advocate*, July 20, 1830, July 28, 1836; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, January 29, 1853, December 30, 1859; Tallahassee *Florida Sentinel*, October 15, 1841, January 28, March 4, June 3, 1842, March 31, 1846, July 8, 1850, November 28, 1856.