



# Interns Add to Knowledge of Plantation Community

Over the summer, University of Virginia students Robert Parkinson and Elizabeth Arnebeck helped advance our understanding of the Monticello plantation and the lives and working conditions of its African-American residents.

Parkinson, a graduate student in UVA's Corcoran Department of History, gathered information on the overseers – young and old, harsh and humane – who supervised the plantation laborers. Information about their ages, social status and property holdings, as well as their subsequent careers, illuminates the ways these men reflected Thomas Jefferson's changing ideas of management and affected the welfare and productivity of the people under their control.

Arnebeck, an undergraduate history major, compiled references to individual slaves in Jefferson's records, organized them by families, and created family trees, making a valuable addition to the biographical information in the forthcoming book, *Free Some Day: The African-American Families of Monticello*.

In addition, Arnebeck, aided by Ella Hoffman, an intern from Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., read through surviving copies of Charlottesville newspapers from the first issue in 1820 to the end of 1830. Their mission was to note every reference to slaves, not just items involving Jefferson and Monticello. Casting this wider net yielded some very interesting insights into family formation and disruption.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

© Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., 2000

## *This Issue's Other Stories*

-  DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGY ARCHIVE
-  FESTIVE FOOD
-  JEFFERSON LIBRARY
-  "JEFFERSON LIVES" CAMPAIGN
-  JEFFERSON & WEST CHRONOLOGY
-  JULY 4 EVENT
-  "MANUAL OF PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE"
-  MILLENNIUM TRAIL DESIGNATION
-  MONTICELLO'S PRIVIES
-  PRESIDENT'S LETTER
-  "RETIREMENT SERIES" BEGUN
-  SAUNDERS BRIDGE
-  SECRETARY OF STATE
-  SHADWELL AGREEMENT
-  WINTER TOUR

# MONTICELLO



## Interns Add to Knowledge

CONTINUED, PAGE TWO,

It is interesting that it is the pursuit of freedom that brings individuals from this period into sharpest focus. When, as the law required, free people of color registered at the county courthouse, the clerk recorded their height, complexion and distinguishing marks. Four slaves freed by Jefferson in his will – John Hemings, Burwell Colbert, Madison Hemings and Eston Hemings – were described in this way. But advertisements for runaways provided even more detailed descriptions, often including personality traits and biographical information. Because they sought freedom by running away, eight people from the Monticello community have come back to life on reels of microfilm.

Other than the well-known advertisement Jefferson placed in the Virginia Gazette in 1769 for the runaway carpenter Sandy, all of the newspaper ads mentioned slaves who ran away from owners to whom they had been sold by Jefferson or the executors of his estate. All but one of the runaways were men.

Patsy Fossett, the 17-year-old daughter of blacksmith Joseph Fossett and his wife, Edith, Monticello's head cook, was the female exception. She ran away in 1827, just a few months after being sold in the Monticello dispersal sale.

A prominent theme of the advertisements found in the newspapers is the effort to rejoin members of families fragmented by sale. James Gillette, brother of Israel Gillette Jefferson, who left his recollections of Monticello in 1873, ran away from the Richmond area in 1829. He, his parents and nine of his brothers and sisters had been sold to at least 10 different bidders at the Monticello auction sales in 1827 and 1829. James Gillette's new owner surmised that "Jimmy" had run back to Albemarle County and was "lurking about some of the late Mr. Jefferson's farms."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.

© Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Inc., 2000

## Fifty Dollars REWARD.

Runaway on the 30th day of last March, from the subscriber living in Albemarle county, Virginia, near Charlottesville, a Negro man by the name of

## PHIL,

twenty years of age, five feet five or six inches high, has a young and smooth countenance, quite likely, proportionably made, white and good front teeth, his eye lashes more inclined to close the ball of his eye than usual when alarmed;—he has a scar over one of his eyes occasioned by a fall against some bricks whilst a child, and is somewhat inclined to limp when spoken to. He took with him a snuff coloured Broad Cloth coat, a pair of pantaloons of the same, a pair of dark silk do, a cambric & linen shirt, a ruffle sham, one striped marsdies waistcoat, 1 white do with yellow stripes one white ditto, a pair of woollen socks, a good wool hat and perhaps other clothes.—His mother, by name Beck, who formerly belonged to Kemp Catlett of this county together with the rest of the family—now—belongs to Wm. Galt; and lives on a place of his near New-Canton, about five miles below General Coker's, of Fluvanna County. He has been anxious to get with them, and David Bulluck, Galt's agent, some years ago made me an offer for him with a view of getting the whole of the family together—he has relations also, in the estate of colonel Thomas Jefferson, one of which is a brother, I think, by the name of Israel, and his father by the name of Phil, lived and died the property of col. Jefferson. It having been suggested to me he would make an attempt to get with his mother, I am solicitous that the overseers of Galts and their neighbors, keep a look out, as its more than probable Galt's people may convey him from place to place by way of secreting him. I will give \$20 reward if taken in this county, \$30 if out of the same, and \$50 if out of the state provided he is so secured that I get him—if he is taken, a letter addressed to me and sent to the post office, Charlottesville, will meet with prompt attention.

JOHN WATSON, L.M.

April 19, '22—3t

## House and Lot for sale.

The subscriber wishes to sell the House and Lot where he at present resides, on the Main street, and nearly opposite Mr. J. B. Benson's store. For terms



## Interns Add to Knowledge

CONTINUED, PAGE [THREE](#),

Another advertisement illustrates the harsh features of the institution of slavery and uncovers the fact that a man who was listed by himself in Jefferson's Farm Book actually had a family – a wife and children living on an adjoining plantation. Placed in the Charlottesville newspaper by merchant John Watson, the ad reveals that the father of a runaway named Phil was Monticello's principal shoemaker, also named Phil (his surname is not known). Because of this advertisement, we now know that after the death of his first wife, Aggy, the elder Phil married a woman named Beck, who belonged to Jefferson's neighbor Kemp Catlett. As with many "abroad" marriages, Phil, Beck and their children – the property of two different men – were doubly vulnerable to family separation.

Phil's family did, in fact, experience separation, possibly after Phil's death in his 60s in 1809. Sometime before 1822, Beck and her younger children were sold to William Galt, whose Fluvanna County property was more than 30 miles from Monticello, while her son Phil was sold to Watson, who lived in Milton, a now-vanished town surrounded by Jefferson's landholdings. Watson provided a hitherto unknown family genealogy in his advertising effort to reclaim Phil, because he suspected the runaway would attempt to rejoin his mother and siblings and wanted to provide sufficient information to alert Fluvanna County residents.

The strategies used by enslaved people to protect their companions, whether kin or not, is apparent in Watson's concluding assumption about the probable actions of Beck's fellows in bondage: "I am solicitous that the overseers of Galts and their neighbors, keep a lookout, as its more than probable Galts' people may convey him [Phil] from place to place by way of secreting him."

—LUCIA STANTON

*Lucia Stanton is Shannon Senior Research Historian at the International Center for Jefferson Studies.*

[COMMENTS? newsletter@monticello.org](mailto:newsletter@monticello.org)