

The Organization of Work on a Yeoman Slaveholder's Farm

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Below the middle-class planters was the rabble of small planters who owned less than ten slaves. They were generally densely ignorant, pursuing a careless and thriftless agriculture under relatively unfavorable conditions. Generally, in their efforts to raise cotton and tobacco, they failed to secure the comforts of the farming class. Almost invariably they lived in small log cabins and pursued a squalid, yet generally cheerful and care-free existence.¹

With these words, the usually level-headed Lewis C. Gray casually dismissed the great majority of slaveowners in the antebellum South. His dismissal was typical of the attention paid to small slaveholders for many years; when they were mentioned by historians at all, it was often with scarcely disguised contempt. Despite the labors of Frank Owsley and his students, the South's plain folk rarely took a place on the center stage of the South's economic or political history.²

A burst of recent publications has begun to decrease this deficit, and we are now able to form a clearer picture of the place of small farmers, including small slaveholders, in the antebellum South's political economy.³ Especially significant have been a number of books and articles on the yeoman

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1. Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States To 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution, 1932), vol. I, 500.

2. Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949). See also Herbert Weaver, *Mississippi Farmers, 1850-1860* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1945); Blanche Henry Clark, *The Tennessee Yeoman* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1942).

3. A study of the South's slaveholders that places special emphasis on the proportion of small holders is James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982).

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farmers of the “upcountry,” outside the heart of the staple economy. The picture that emerges from these studies is of a class of householders, cherishing their independence and relatively isolated from markets, who tended for both ideological and practical reasons toward “safety-first” principles of farming. That is, they sought to assure a relative self-sufficiency in foodstuffs and held back from an all-out commitment to staple crop production.⁴ Yeoman farmers in the plantation districts have also received some attention in recent scholarship. The evidence for this group suggests considerably more commitment to staple crop production and involvement in markets.⁵

Despite this recent work, significant gaps remain in our knowledge of the households and farms of southern yeoman. In part this is because of the lack of manuscript sources comparable to the rich materials available on planters. Students of plantation economics have, for example, been able to complement statistical studies based on census material with in-depth analyses of production and work organization on individual plantations.⁶ This essay offers such an analysis of work on a yeoman slaveholder’s farm. The analysis relies primarily on a single year’s record for a single farm. The paucity of such records justifies close attention to this one—the journal of Benton H. Miller of Georgia.

Benton Miller was a young Georgian who took up farming in 1858 in the lower Piedmont area of the black belt. Details of his early life are sketchy, but he had probably at some point served as an overseer on a Mississippi plantation. Indeed, the journal opens in January of 1858 in Mississippi,

4. Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1–2; Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chap. 2; David F. Wieman, “The Economic Emancipation of the Non-Slaveholding Class: Upcountry Farmers in the Georgia Cotton Economy,” *Journal of Economic History* 45 (1985): 71–93. Interestingly, Lewis Gray himself distinguished sharply between “small planters” growing staples and “yeoman commercial farmers,” who might own slaves but concentrated on food crops and livestock. These later lived in “comfortable frame or brick structures,” were “characterized by sturdy independence and self-respect,” were “intelligent, but without extensive education,” and, indeed, “maintained a more comfortable type of existence” than even “middle-class planters” who owned from 10 to 50 slaves: *Agriculture in the Southern United States*, vol 1, 488–90.

5. Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*, 74–77; J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), chap. 1. See also Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978).

6. See, for example, R. Keith Aufhauser, “Slavery and Scientific Management,” *Journal of Economic History* 23 (1973): 811–24; Jacob Metzger, “Rational Management, Modern Business Practices, and Economies of Scale in the Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations,” *Explorations in Economic History* 12 (1975): 123–50; Ralph V. Anderson, “Labor Utilization and Productivity, Diversification and Self-Sufficiency, Southern Plantations, 1800–1840” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1974).

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where Miller is trying to collect his slaves and some old debts. He soon heads back to Georgia with his slaves—two men named Harry and Clark and a woman named Mary—and takes up farming on a tract loaned to him rent-free by his father-in-law, William F. Womble of Washington County.⁷ Womble, like several other neighbors and relatives mentioned in Miller's journal, was a planter of middling means; in 1860 he owned 900 acres and fourteen slaves.⁸

Benton Miller's journal contains an almost-daily entry from January 1, 1858, until July 22, 1859, where it breaks off for unexplained reasons. While entries mention a great variety of daily events, by far the most frequent entry consists of a brief mention of the weather, followed by a short summary of the activities of Miller, his wife Martilla, and his three slaves. The volume also includes, on a page near the back, a daily record of cotton picking, by picker, for each of Miller's fields. Thus the journal allows us to trace with considerable precision the organization and management of work on a small farm in the Piedmont cotton belt.⁹

Because Miller did not actually arrive in Georgia with his slaves until almost the end of February, and perhaps because the tract he farmed had not been recently planted, the early weeks of Miller's journal are filled primarily with details of clearing and preparing land for planting. The analysis below is based on a "crop year" that starts in March of 1858 and ends in February of 1859; this definition of the year eliminates some of the distortion that might otherwise arise because of Miller's late start in 1858. In April of 1859 Miller hired a white farm laborer who worked with him and his slaves, so the Spring months of 1859 are also not exactly comparable to the corresponding months of 1858. The year analyzed here is, therefore, one year of labor by a small owner and his slaves on a small cotton farm. One anomaly should be noted at the outset—Miller's slave Mary did virtually no field work during the year. Except for a few days planting vegetables or picking cotton, Mary worked, if at all, only in the house. This may

7. Washington County is in the lower Piedmont of Eastern Georgia; the southern parts include areas of "pine barrens." In 1860 slightly more than half the county's population of 12,698 consisted of slaves. About 40 percent of its 560 slaveholders owned fewer than 5 slaves. See United States Census Office, *Tenth Census, Population*, p. 72; *Agriculture*, p. 226.

8. The Journal of Benton H. Miller is on microfilm at the Georgia Department of Archives and History. Information on the land and slaveholdings of William Womble and others mentioned in the journal was gathered from microfilms of the 1860 Census of Free Population, Census of Slave Population, and Census of Agriculture, collected by the U. S. Census Office, in the National Archives and Records Service. For other details concerning the life of Benton Miller, see J. William Harris, "Portrait of a Small Slaveholder: The Journal of Benton Miller," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, forthcoming.

9. The journal also includes a section on Miller's farming activities in 1875–1877. Unfortunately, the material on the later years is too sketchy for a detailed analysis. The later years are discussed in Harris, "Portrait."

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Table 1. Total Days of Labor, Miller Farm, 1858–59 Crop Year

| | <i>Crops</i> | <i>Overhead</i> | <i>Work on Other Farms</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Miller | 121 | 55.5 | | 176.5 |
| Slaves: | | | | |
| Harry | 208.5 | 50.5 | 26.5 | 285.5 |
| Clark | 222 | 43.5 | 20.5 | 286 |

Source: Journal of Benton Miller, mf. in Georgia Department of Archives and History.

have been because of illness—many of Miller’s entries note of Mary that she was sick, and Miller’s wife, Martilla, was also frequently ill. It was quite probably unusual for an adult slave woman to do so little field work on a farm with only three slaves. In any case, the analysis below is based primarily on the work of three people—Miller himself, Clark, and Harry.

“[S]lavery requires all hands to be occupied at all times.” This observation by Eugene Genovese, dubbed “Genovese’s rule” in a notable article by Ralph Anderson and Robert Gallman, was the touchstone of the latter’s analysis of the effects of the capitalization of labor in slavery. Anderson and Gallman, like Anderson in his earlier dissertation, argued that “Genovese’s rule” was a main reason that slave plantations diversified their crops. Proper diversification meant that slaves could be kept busy at all times of the year.¹⁰

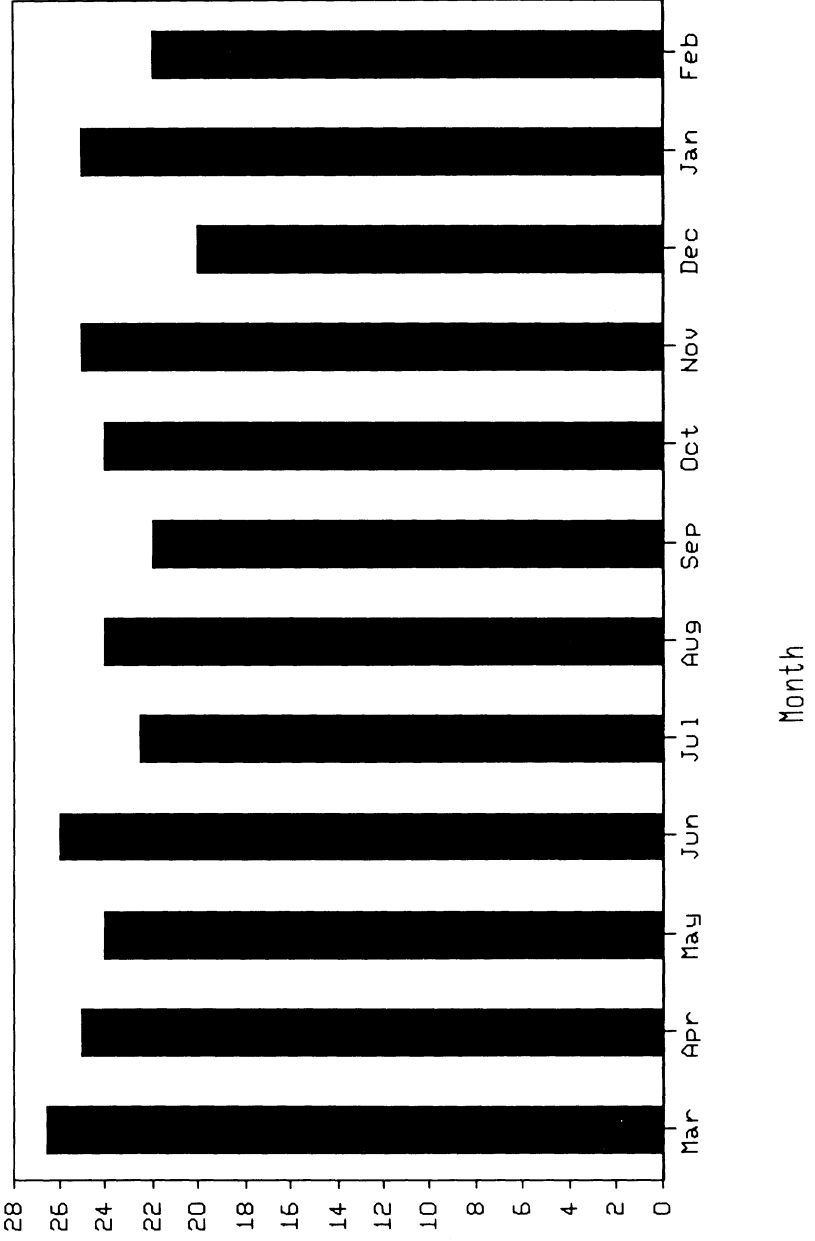
Benton Miller managed his slaves the same way, and with similar success. His two male slaves, Harry and Clark, normally worked a full six days a week, with occasional half-days off on Saturday; they did not work on Sundays. In total, Harry worked 285 days and Clark worked 286 days during 1858–59—almost precisely the 290 days given by Anderson as an average for pre-1840 Piedmont and Deep South plantations. Further, the breakdown between work directly on crops and work on “overhead” is also very similar to that found by Anderson—a little over 200 days on crops and rest on clearing, fence repair, and the like (see Table 1).¹¹

Like the planters studied by Anderson and others, Miller kept his slaves working at a steady monthly pace throughout the year. Thus Clark averaged 24 days of labor a month, never falling below 21 days nor rising above 26 days (Chart 1. Harry’s work pattern is almost identical). On their own time, Harry and Clark were allowed to raise a small amount of cotton, which, according to the 1859 summary, amounted to 1550 lbs. of seed

10. Robert E. Gallman and Ralph V. Anderson, “Slaves as Fixed Capital: Slaves Labor and Southern Economic Development,” *Journal of American History* 643 (1977): 24–46.

11. For comparative data see Anderson, “Labor Utilization,” chap. III. The work “on other farms” was primarily used to pay back labor borrowed for overhead tasks.

Chart I: Man-Days per month, Clark, 1858-9



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cotton, or "one good bale." To judge by the journal, Miller did not have to resort to any punishment of his slaves to ensure their steady work pattern. The only item in the journal relating to discipline occurred in February of 1858 in Mississippi, when Harry ran away, apparently because he did not want to go to Georgia. After a week, Harry returned, and Miller "let him off this time on a promise that he would do better."¹²

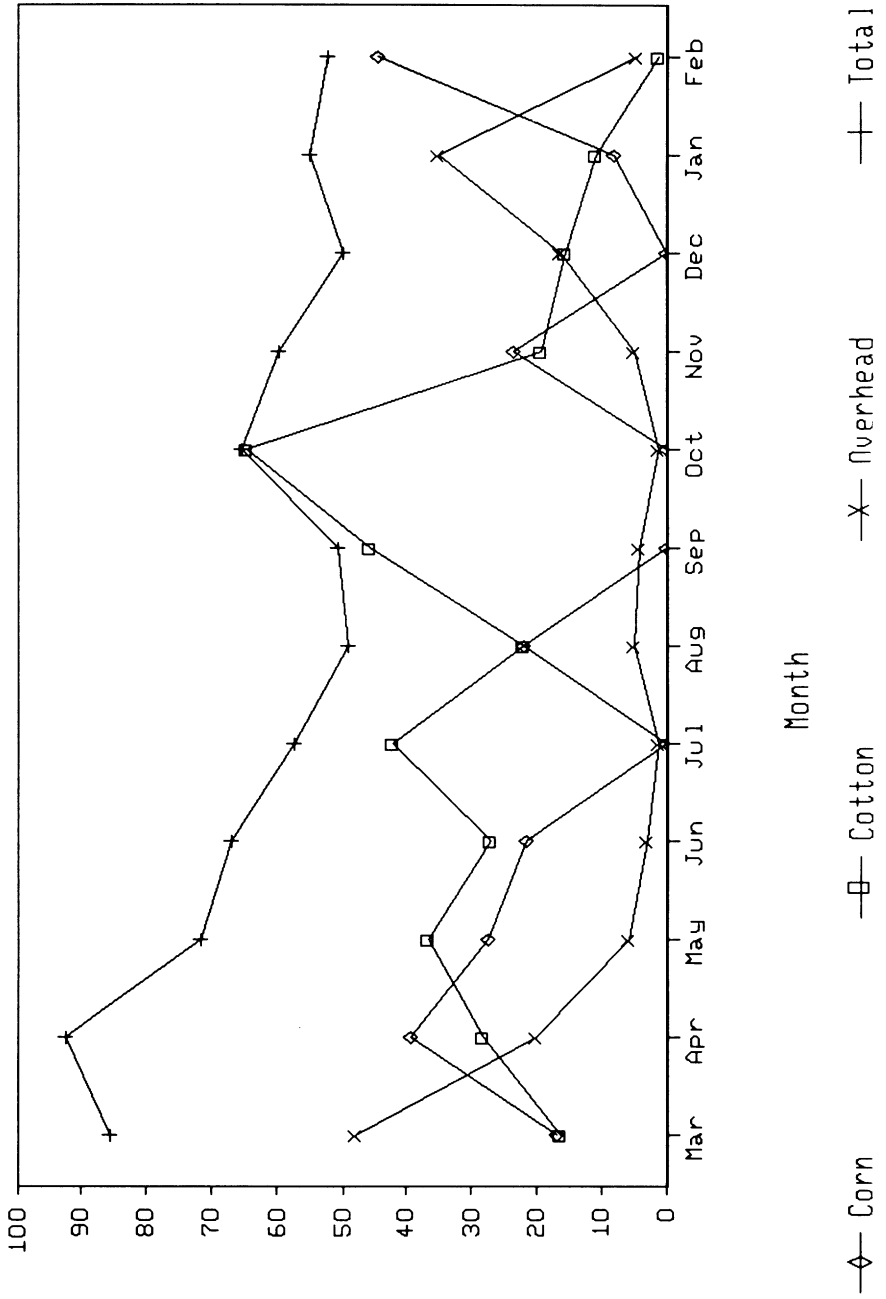
Miller managed this regular work pattern by judiciously mixing a variety of crops. The primary crop on Miller's farm other than cotton was the usual one of corn. In addition, Miller raised wheat, sweet potatoes, and garden crops. Corn was planted earlier than cotton and harvested later, and it required relatively little cultivation during the summer. Thus labor on corn showed peaks in early Spring and again in November. Cotton was planted later and harvested earlier, and required heavy cultivation ("chopping" with heavy hoes) in July and August to keep down weeds. In early Fall work concentrated single-mindedly on picking cotton. For these reasons cotton dominated labor requirements from mid-April until October. Winter months were largely devoted to overhead labor. In addition, Miller planted a small crop of wheat in late 1858; this could be planted in late Fall and harvested in a few intensive days of labor in June, after cotton had been planted. As a result of these seasonal variations in labor requirements, Miller, like big planters, was able to keep Harry and Clark working at their steady 24-days-per-month pace. (See Chart 2.)¹³

Miller could not, of course, divide his slaves up into specialized groups, nor could he afford to train one of them to specialize in artisan or other nonagricultural tasks. Yet despite these constraints imposed by a small slave force, Miller was able to take advantage of specialization and economies of scale for some important tasks. He did this by borrowing slaves from other owners and lending the labor of Harry and Clark, or occasionally himself, to repay the borrowings. For example, on March 16, 1858, nine slaves owned by as many nearby masters helped Miller clear out brush and trees and "roll" logs. Miller also borrowed labor when he needed to replant corn quickly in Spring, borrowed several men to plow in wheat in December, and borrowed a wagon, with driver, to carry corn to the mill in November. Similarly, when Miller needed some special artisan services, he borrowed slaves from his father-in-law; on several occasions,

12. JBM, February 1 to 77, 1858.

13. The early peak of total labor was most likely due to Miller's late start in preparing the farm in 1858. Thus in March 1859, before he hired a new laborer, Miller, his slaves, and borrowed labor worked only 62.5 man-days, compared with 88 man-days in March of 1858. Miller was able to achieve the latter by borrowing substantial amounts of labor. Without the distorting effects of the late start in 1858, the yearly patterns of work would resemble the pattern described in Anderson, "Labor Utilization," p. 77, which shows peaks in late Spring and again in Fall.

Chart II: Man-Days of Labor, 1858-9



Womble's slave, Mance, spent the day repairing and assembling plows for Miller.¹⁴

This kind of reciprocity in performing farm work has often been associated with production based on household and community needs, rather than market-oriented behavior.¹⁵ For Benton Miller, such reciprocity seems rather to have been a way to help rationalize commercial production on his farm. While there was surely a strong element of simple neighborliness in Miller's exchanges, which Miller referred to on one occasion as "work don by my friends," he also kept a careful accounting of the loaned labor and paid back his friends with loans of his own. Thus Harry and Clark each spent several days in June helping Miller's father-in-law William Womble bring in a crop of wheat. Altogether, Miller borrowed 52.5 days worth of labor in 1858–59 and paid back 49.5 days. (See Chart 3). The small imbalance was perhaps a measure of "pure" neighborliness spent to help a beginning farmer set up his farm.¹⁶

This borrowing and lending, therefore, enabled Miller to share to a considerable extent in the advantages of specialization and in those areas in which economies of scale are unquestioned, such as heavy logging and clearing work, or quick reaping and threshing of a field of wheat. At the same time it was another way of assuring that his slave force, however small, would be kept at work all year round. Genovese's rule, then, seems to have been as important for this yeoman as for a big planter.

Not all the work on the Miller farm was done by slaves. Benton Miller worked, though much more unevenly than his slaves (Chart 4). At times, especially in the Spring during the heavy work of plowing, he worked as much as his slaves, normally alongside them in the fields. But in the hot days of July and August, Miller's journal entries often note, "I don nothing all day." This was in part a measure of the privileges of slaveholding and in part a measure of the requirement of the crops. When picking season came in the Fall, Miller was back in the fields, and even his wife Tillie sometimes picked alongside the slaves. Altogether Miller worked a little over 180 days on the farm, about 63 percent of the labor contributed by

14. Miller also borrowed buggies and wagons when he needed them. For example, in January, 1859 he used his Uncle Kinion Malpass's wagon to take his cotton to nearby Sanderville to sell it. He paid his uncle \$1 per bale for this use. See the journal entry for 26 January 1859.

15. See, for example, Hahn, *Roots of Southern Populism*, 52–58; James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: *Mentalite* in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 35 (1979): 3–32; John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 130–42.

16. Or, as suggested by an anonymous reader, may have been simply a result of the inconvenience of settling up all such accounts within a given year. About half the total exchanges involved Miller's father-in-law, William Womble; the remainder involved some ten other local farmers and planters.

Chart III: Man-Days Exchanged, 1858-9

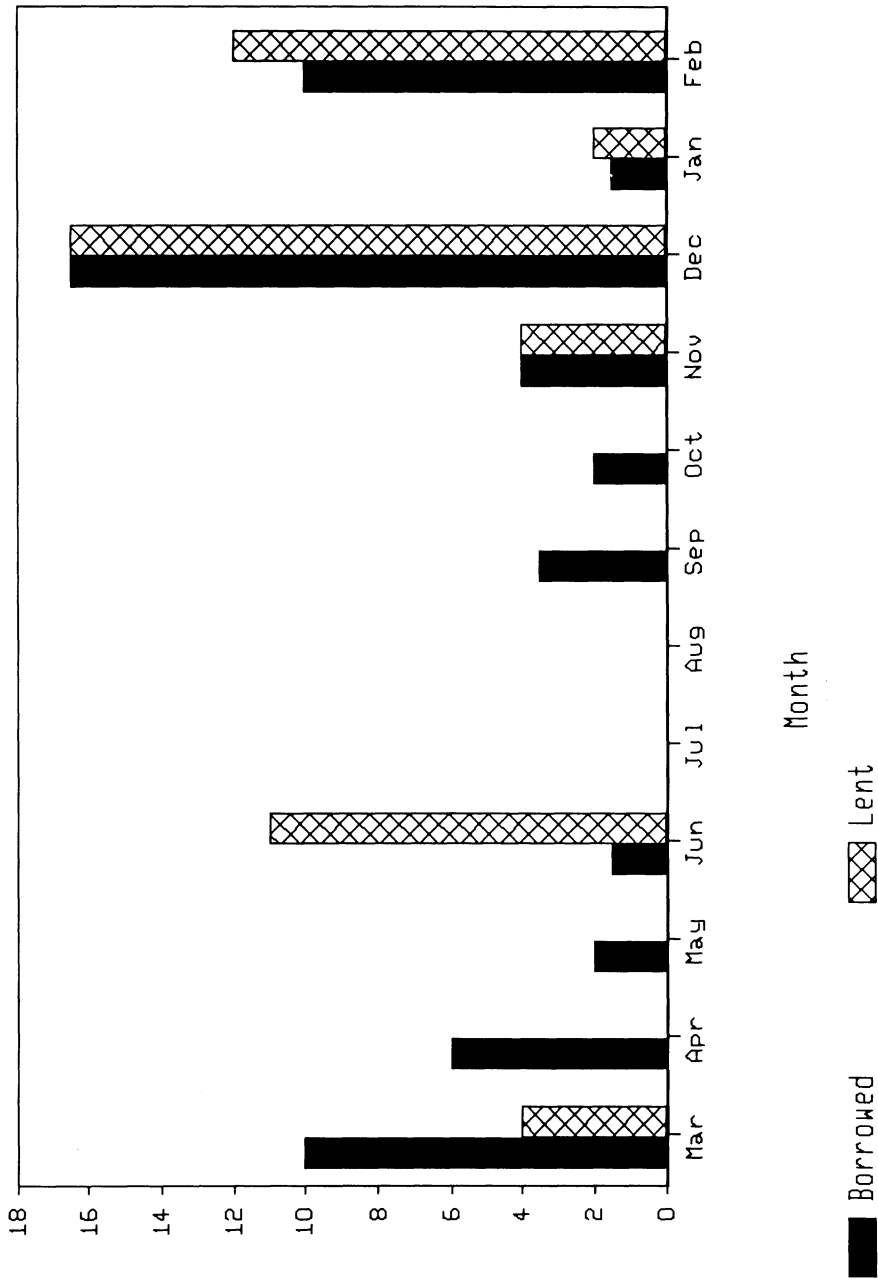
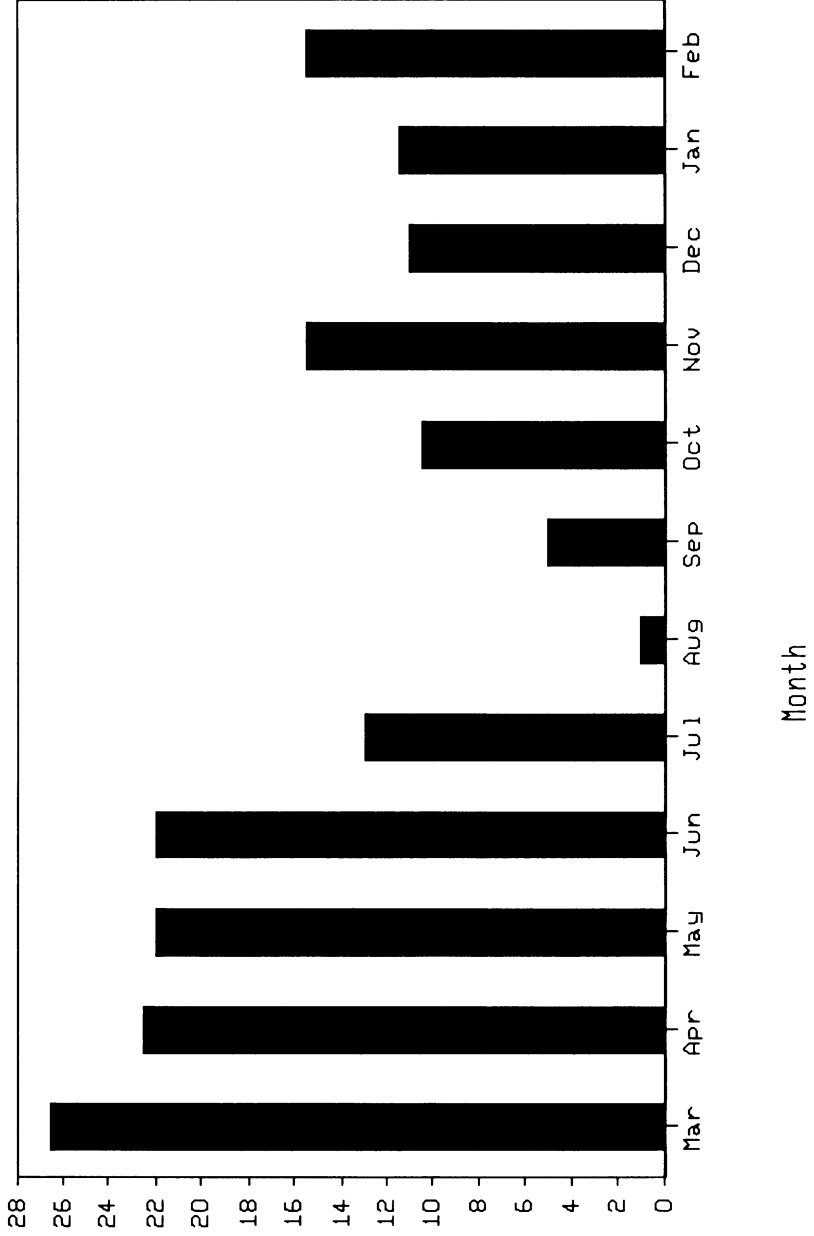


Chart IV: Man-Days for Miller, 1858-9



each male slave. A visitor to the farm in August, then, might well conclude that slavery "degraded" white labor, while a visitor in April would be hard put to distinguish the labor of Miller from that of Harry or Clark.

In addition to his own labor, Miller could draw on other sources. At least on some occasions, he paid for the daily labor of a slave with cash. More significantly, Miller hired a local white laborer in April of 1859, perhaps because he had expanded his acreage somewhat for the new year. This new worker, Joseph Renfrow, may have been the son of a local blacksmith.¹⁷ The journal does not mention his rate or form of payment. Renfrow worked with Harry and Clark, performing the same kinds of labor. From April through June, the last month for which Miller kept a daily account, Renfrow worked a total of 70 man-days, a little less than Clark, but a little more than Harry (Miller worked 59 days during the same period).

Nothing in Miller's brief daily descriptions indicate that Renfrow's work differed from that of the slaves, except on the day that Miller complained, "Jo pretended to split out middles [with the plow] in No 5 all day. Jo is doing badly now." For some reason, Renfrow did not finish the year. According to the accounts of cotton picking kept in the back of the journal, he picked through September, but was no longer picking in October. There is no mention of the reason for his departure, but the daily picking records indicate that he averaged only 80 lbs. of lint cotton per day, compared with 112 lbs. for Harry and 104 lbs. for Clark. Perhaps Renfrow's work was unsatisfactory to Miller on too many occasions. After Renfrow left, Miller himself went into the cotton fields, which he had largely avoided in September. On 23 days in October and November, Miller picked, on average, 84 lbs. per day, while Harry's and Clark's picking rates had both increased to over 125 lbs. In mid-November Miller began borrowing or hiring labor to help with the picking. From then until the end of December he used a total of 49 days of labor from both women and men. The records do not indicate whether the labor was paid for with return labor, cash, or other means. The use of last names for some of these pickers may indicate white workers, but this, too, is uncertain. In any case, Miller had been able to get access to large amounts of labor on the specific occasions when the nature of the job or the pressure of time had made that necessary. Whether this use of outside labor involved significant transactions costs is impossible to determine. In all probability such costs were lowest in exchanges with William Womble, who was nearby, a relative, and presumably highly interested in Miller's success. Still, Miller clearly had access to other sources for labor and services as well.

If Benton Miller's organization of work suggests that his model was the

17. Census records do not afford an unambiguous identification.

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plantation, his results indicate success comparable to many plantations. Altogether Miller planted 32.5 acres in cotton and 44 acres in corn. From these acres he harvested 14,990 lbs. of seed cotton and 300 bushels of corn. The seed cotton yielded in turn 4657 lbs. of ginned cotton—10 bales as he sold them; 11.6 bales if we standardize them at 400 lbs. each.

This result was, on the whole, quite good. Miller was, in the first place, fully self-sufficient in basic foodstuffs. After allowances for seed, Miller could have fed his two horses, mule, small number of cows and hogs, and his family and slaves, with some 104 bushels to spare.¹⁸ He does not indicate what he did with this surplus, which would have been worth about \$80.¹⁹ This does not take into account any other foods raised by Miller or his slaves.²⁰

The record of output, particularly cotton, can be measured in a number of ways. The yield of 461 lbs. of seed cotton per acre was probably above average for the lower Piedmont at this time. Anderson estimated a range of 250–400 lbs. per acre on Piedmont and Deep South plantations before 1840. (Plantations in Mississippi and Texas could do much better in the 1850s.)²¹

Altogether Miller and his slaves, and occasional borrowed or hired workers, put 324.5 man-days of labor into the cotton crop from March of 1858 through January of 1859, when harvesting was completed. If we take 285 days as a full year of work by a “prime” field hand, this is the equivalent of 1.14 man-years of labor. The yield of cotton was therefore about 10.2 bales per man-year (11.6 bales/1.14 man-years). By comparison, Anderson estimated yields on pre-1840 plantations of between 2.2 and 5.3 bales per man-year. The cotton yield could also be calculated as about 4.4 bales per prime hand (11.6 bales/2.63 prime hands, counting Miller himself as .63 of a prime hand). James Foust and Dale Swan estimated produc-

18. I allowed 2 percent, or 6 bu., for seed, 15 bu. each for Miller, his wife, and his three slaves, 35 bu. for each horse, 30 for a mule, and 15 each for three cows. No allowances were made for hogs; the procedure assumes that the 15 bu. allowed for human consumption can take the form of meat. Miller dressed almost 500 lbs. of pork in December, 1858. The values for seed and feed requirements are adopted from Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), Appendix E.

19. The wholesale price of corn in Augusta, the nearest city, was 95 cents to \$1.00 in January, 1859, according to the *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel*, 4 January 1859. I have used 80 cents as the approximate farm gate price. Ransom and Sutch estimated the farm gate price of corn in 1859 as 84 cents per bushel: Ransom and Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom*, Appendix A.

20. The 1860 manuscript Census of Agriculture does not include Miller's farm. This is probably because in that year he had become a merchant in neighboring Hancock County. While the Census takers were expected to collect information on 1859 farm production, his was probably included with the report on William Womble. In any case, although the journal indicates that Miller planted peas and other food crops, it does not record the size of the harvest.

21. Anderson, “Labor Utilization,” chap. IV.

tivity at about 4.4 bales per hand in 1859 in the South; for a sample of Piedmont Georgia farms they estimated 3.3 bales.²²

Miller's 104 net bushels of corn (valued at 80 cents) were equivalent to 832 lbs. of cotton (valued at 10 cents) in output. Miller, Clark, and Harry thus produced the price equivalent of 5.2 bales of cotton per hand, even if we ignore all other outputs. Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman have estimated an overall average of 6.9 bale-equivalents per prime hand for the cotton South for 1859. On the whole, it seems that Miller's farm produced cotton quite efficiently for its Piedmont location.²³

Finally, we can estimate Miller's return on his investment. Based on sales of slaves registered in nearby probate records in 1860, Miller's slaves were probably valued, at the highest, at \$1500 each for the men and \$1000 for Mary. He paid \$270 for a horse and mule, and his second horse was worth perhaps \$150, for a total of \$420. He received use of the land for free, but its market value (again based on nearby probate valuations) was approximately \$12 per acre, or, roughly, \$1000. If we allow \$180 for the value of his plantation tools, the farm's investment value was, therefore, about \$5600. His gross receipts for cotton were about \$512, and his excess corn was worth about \$83. This total, for cotton and corn, represented a gross rate of return of about 10.6 percent or about the average for cotton farms and plantations in 1860.²⁴ None of these measures is more than approximate. The rate of return measure, for example, does not subtract an implicit wage for Miller's own work, nor does it estimate the income value of his considerable summer leisure. It neglects minor outputs as well as the costs of slave maintenance other than corn. Still, the overall measures of productivity and profitability are consistent in placing Miller's operation somewhere near the average for all cotton operations in the South.

Even if we assume that Miller benefited from unusually good weather or good luck, this is an impressive result. Miller himself recognized that he had a good year. In the final entry for 1858, he noted that "It has been on of the

22. *Ibid.*, chap. IV, esp. p. 117; James D. Foust and Dale E. Swan, "Productivity and Profitability of Antebellum Slave Labor: A Micro Approach," *Agricultural History* 44 (1970): 39-62.

23. Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), vol. 2, p. 79. Miller actually received an average of about 11 cents for his cotton. I have used 10 cents here to be consistent with the computations in Fogel and Engerman.

24. Fogel and Engerman, *Time and the Cross*, vol. 2, p. 79. Fogel and Engerman's figure is considerably higher than that of Foust and Swan, "Productivity and Profitability," who estimated a 6 percent rate of return for the "old south," based on the value of cotton and food residuals. The values for slaves and land are estimated from maximum values noted in 40 probate inventories from 1858 to 1861 in nearby Taliaferro and Glascock Counties. Inventories are on microfilm in the Georgia Department of Archives and History. Prices Miller paid for a horse and mule and receipts for cotton are recorded in scattered journal entries.

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best years for farming that I ever saw in my life. Farmers every where don well this year.”²⁵ Miller succeeded as fully as most Piedmont planters in producing both for a commercial market and for household consumption.

At the top of each page of Miller’s journal he entered, with some pride we might imagine, a heading: “Journal of Daily Events on the Plantation of Benton Miller.” By the standard measures, of course, Miller’s land was far from a plantation either in acreage or in the size of its labor force. Still, Miller seems to have tried to operate it much like a plantation. He concentrated his energies on producing a cotton crop, while still planting enough corn for his own purposes. Thus, for example, the crop mix on Miller’s farm, defined as value of cotton/value of corn + cotton, was about .66. Gavin Wright and Howard Kunreuther reported similar ratios for plantations in the cotton South with between 500 and 999 improved acres; average ratios for smaller farms were considerably lower.²⁶ Indeed, by taking advantage of the possibilities to lend and borrow slaves, Miller was even able to reap the benefits of specialization and other economies of scale normally associated with true plantations. As a result, he produced with the efficiency of true plantations. Perhaps this was due to his good fortune in having productive slaves, or perhaps he benefited from the personal supervision he was able to give his slaves, as he worked next to them in the fields. No doubt luck played its part as well—the weather was good, the soil productive, and neither he nor his “prime” hands got sick. More importantly, if Miller is at all typical, the record of management on his small farm suggests that small farmers in the lower Piedmont were fully committed to commercially oriented agriculture. As an economic entity, Benton Miller’s farm was after all, in most characteristics *except* size, a little plantation.

25. Journal, 31 December 1858.

26. “Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History* 35 (1975): 529. Prices used to calculate the ratio for Miller were 10 cents for cotton and 80 cents for corn, the same as those used by Wright and Kunreuther.