

The Limits of Paternalism: Driver-Master Relations on a Bryan County Plantation

BY CHARLES AND TESS HOFFMANN

IN *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (1856), the journalist Frederick Law Olmsted reported an encounter with a fine-looking, well-dressed, and well-mannered "mulatto" who tipped his hat as he passed. "There was nothing in his manner or appearance, except his color," Olmsted wrote, "to distinguish him from a gentleman of good-breeding and fortune."¹ What did distinguish the stranger, however, was his legal status; he was a slave named Amos Morel, owned by the master of White Hall plantation in Bryan County, Georgia, where Olmsted visited in January 1853.²

Morel's owner, Richard James Arnold, was a New England businessman who maintained his winter residence at White Hall, a cotton and rice plantation which his wife (Louisa Gindrat) had inherited and where Morel had been born in 1820. Although Arnold had become a planter only by virtue of his wife's inheritance, he quickly committed himself to the slave plantation system and approached it as he would any other business. He succeeded admirably at the new venture and in the thirty years

¹Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York, 1861), 428.

²Richard James Arnold (1796-1873) and Amos Morel (1820-?) have been identified by the editors of the F. L. Olmsted papers in Volume II of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, ed. by Charles E. Beveridge and Charles Capen McLaughlin (Baltimore, 1981), 163-64, 187-88. Olmsted's articles for the *New York Daily-Times* (later the *New York Times*) were first published under the name of Yeoman and later revised for inclusion in *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*.

Arnold's papers (family letters, business letters and journals, plantation accounts, etc.) are in the manuscript collections of the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill) and the Rhode Island Historical Society (Providence). Most of the extant overseer agreements, instructions, and reports, as well as part of a plantation journal for 1847-1849, are in the Arnold-Screven Papers, Southern Historical Collection (UNC). Fifteen of Amos's letters to Arnold (1841-1860) as well as a few reports from overseers and most of Arnold's business ledgers are in the Richard J. Arnold Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, with whose permission excerpts are quoted.

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from 1823, when he married his wife, until 1853, he parlayed the original thirteen-hundred-acre plantation into an eleven-thousand-acre domain.³

Like other New Englanders who owned plantations in the South, Arnold and his family returned to their northern home in Providence and later Newport, Rhode Island, during the malarial summer months. During his absences, Arnold left the plantation and its two hundred slaves in the care of an overseer, Charles Ferguson, and the head driver, Amos Morel. Georgia law required a white overseer, a manager of the plantation comparable to the English bailiff, on large plantations so that a white man was in authority even during the owner's absence. In practice, the drivers—in charge of work gangs of twenty to thirty slaves—were always black, reporting to a black head driver, who in turn was responsible to the white overseer. Head driver was the highest position a black man could achieve within the plantation slave system.⁴

Olmsted's account of his stay at White Hall, together with letters written by Morel to his master and Richard Arnold's business records, provide insight into the myth of slavery as a benevolent patriarchy and into the reality of the relationship between a slave and his master. Olmsted considered Richard Arnold to be the epitome of an enlightened slave owner whose generous paternalism represented the institution at its best. Furthermore, Olmsted considered Amos Morel an example of one who had achieved the highest position the system could offer a black, for not only was Amos

³Arnold added to the original tract on the Ogeechee River through purchase of neighboring plantations, particularly Cherry Hill. His double life as southern slave owner and northern entrepreneur is documented at length in Hoffmann and Hoffmann, "North by South: The Two Lives of Richard James Arnold," forthcoming in *Rhode Island History*, February 1984.

⁴Arnold's paternalism as reflected in his manipulation of his overseer and watchman was typical of the ways in which the southern slave owner was able to keep his work force efficiently occupied. Since 1966 when William K. Scarborough published *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South* (Baton Rouge), a number of excellent studies have appeared which add substantially to the literature of paternalism in the antebellum South, particularly the role of slave drivers and overseers. Among them are John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972); and William Van Deburg, *The Slave Drivers: Black Agricultural Supervisors in the Antebellum South* (Westport, Conn., 1979).

the head driver when Olmsted met him, he was also "the watchman." The watchman's duties, Olmsted explained,

. . . were those of a steward, or intendant. He carried, by a strap at his waist, a very large number of keys, and had charge of all the stores of provisions, tools, and materials of the plantations, as well as of all their produce, before it was shipped to market. He weighed and measured out all the rations of the slaves and the cattle; superintended the mechanics, and himself made and repaired, as was necessary, all the machinery, including the steam engine.⁵

It is no wonder that Olmsted was impressed by Amos. The position of watchman was superior to that of overseer and, if the arrangement were formalized, it could only have been held legally by a white man. In reality, however, the arrangement was much more informal and ambiguous than the title would indicate. As long as the master was in residence, any conflict between overseer and "watchman" could be resolved immediately; however, when the master was absent for any length of time, as Arnold was from five to six months out of the year, disputes were bound to occur. Although Arnold's arrangement with Amos Morel was unusual, it was not unique. Apparently, the splitting of authority between the watchman and the overseer, while not ideal, worked for Arnold; otherwise he would not have tolerated it.

Olmsted heard the details of Amos's early life from Arnold: "Being the son of a favorite house-servant, he had been, as a child, associated with the white family, and received by chance something of the early education of the white children."⁶ Amos possibly learned some of the rudiments of reading and writing while the two oldest Arnold children, Eliza Harriet (born 1825) and Louisa (born 1828) were being tutored on the plantation. But he learned by chance rather than design, because it was illegal in Georgia and the other slave states to teach reading and writing to slaves. Since normally a house servant like Amos Morel did not do field or shop work, it was probably by his own request, as Olmsted reported, that he was "allowed to learn the blacksmith's trade" on the planta-

⁵Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 426.

⁶*Ibid.*, 427. Amos had an additional advantage since his mother (Mum Phebe) was a favorite house servant whom the Arnolds took north during the summer (Beveridge and McLaughlin, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 2:187).

tion where he also learned to make and repair cotton gins with considerable skill and ingenuity.⁷ It was at this point, late in 1836, that Amos Morel's life changed drastically, albeit still within the system.

Having learned the basic skills of blacksmithing on the plantation, Amos was hired out to a Mr. Robinson, a Savannah blacksmith. Although he had no choice in the matter, Amos most likely welcomed the less supervised life. Possessing a marketable skill, he was hired out in the same manner that extra field hands or surplus house servants were often hired out by planters like Arnold who went north for the summer months and closed down the mansion house. For hiring Amos, Robinson had "the privilege of keeping him until my return in the fall by paying me \$18 per mo. & Amos \$2 [the \$2 went to Arnold to pay Amos], but he has also the privilege of discharging at any time giving my agent Mr. Habersham one Months Notice, in the event of his being discharged he pays me \$20 & Amos \$2 per Mo until discharged."⁸

For the profit-minded Arnold, Amos's services were valuable—by May 1839, he was collecting \$1.25 a day for the Plantation Account from Amos's employment in Savannah. Although illegal, the hired slave in practice could keep some of the money earned. Thus Amos wrote to Arnold on August 22, 1841, "Master I wants to beg you to get me a watch for about ten or twelve dollars if you please to get me a good one and when you return I will settle with you. . . ."⁹ Amos by this time must have built up some credit in his account with Arnold, for the watch represented six months' wages at the original rate. On October 16, just before returning to the plantation, Arnold recorded in his account book under "family expenses" that he had paid George Baker of Providence \$14.50 for a watch and key.¹⁰

At some unknown time, according to Olmsted, Arnold took Amos "to a steam-engine builder, and paid \$500 to have him in-

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Journal C (1831-1838), Vol. 7, May 5, 1837, p. 404, R. J. Arnold Papers, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. Hereafter cited as RJA.

⁹Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, August 22, 1841, RJA. In transcribing the letters, we have normalized spelling and punctuation, where necessary for meaning. Since handwriting, spelling, and punctuation vary from letter to letter, it is not clear which letters were penned by Amos himself although all are signed with his name.

¹⁰Cash Book C (1829-1842), Vol. 10, October 16, 1841, RJA.

structed as a machinist.”¹¹ This may have occurred early in 1843 when Arnold considered building a rice mill operated by a steam engine so that he could grind and polish his own rice before shipping it to market instead of paying someone else to do so. Although the context in which Olmsted reported Amos’s apprenticeship to the steam-engine builder suggests a benevolent paternalism on Arnold’s part, Olmsted’s information came entirely from Arnold himself; it was only natural for Arnold to place the arrangement in its best light. Thus, Olmsted reported, “after [Amos] had become a skillful workman, he obtained employment, and was allowed to spend his wages for himself.”¹² The context almost suggests that Amos Morel was a free man working for himself, but he lived and worked in Savannah only by his master’s consent, and his “wages” were the amount left after Arnold deducted his lion’s share. Since Arnold had to pay an engineer \$2 a day to come down from Providence to set up the engine at the rice mill in early 1844, and good engineers were getting as much as \$2.50 a day, the idea must have occurred to him then if not from the beginning that “Amos, my engineer,” would be needed back on the plantation. Whether or not Arnold recouped the \$500 he supposedly invested in Amos while the slave was still in Savannah, it was money well spent from a business point of view, regardless of any paternalistic motivation.

As Olmsted reported, Amos settled well into his life in Savannah, for in July 1843, he wrote to Arnold, “Dear Master I have made up my mind to take a wife and partner for life and I would ask your consent. I have the consent of both the girl and her Mistress Mrs Ward is the lady to whom she belongs her name is Mary. . . .” As though she would have any choice in the matter, Amos had asked Mary “if she was willing to live with you if you would buy her she is a good house made [*sic*] and a very good seamstress and she says she is willing to live with you. . . .”¹³ The master’s consent was required for a slave “marriage” to take place even though such marriages had no force under the law. Marriages between slaves belonging to different masters were discouraged be-

¹¹Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 427.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, July 18, 1843, RJA.

cause of the complication recognized by Amos in his plea to Arnold, that the partner would have to be bought or at least hired if the couple were to live together.

Consent cost little, except for providing the food for a wedding reception and paying for the preacher to perform the ceremony. Buying the slave, however, would require an outlay of capital, approximately six hundred dollars at current market prices. In keeping with Arnold's image of himself as a benevolent master, he did his favorite servant the "great favor" by giving consent. In keeping with his image as a businessman, he occasionally hired Mary from Mrs. Ward since Amos would be spending most of his time in Savannah anyway. Amos himself had suggested it as a possible alternative: "I am very certain she could be hired by you. . . ." Thus Arnold entered in his account book on August 11, 1844, payment for "Amos Wife's wages . . . \$13.60."¹⁴ Arnold bought, by this arrangement, Amos's undying loyalty.

However, there never was any question of Amos being allowed to remain in Savannah, his own man. On August 29, 1845, he wrote a plaintive letter to Arnold in Providence, asking that he be allowed to stay in Savannah: "Mr. Groce [John B. Gross, the overseer] has sent word to me this week which comes very inconvenient to me at this time I should rather not go providing you would please for to make some arrangement for me, for Dear Master if I was for to go out in the Country I would have no chance whatever Dear Master for to provide for myself and family. . . ." Amos's suggestion that he didn't want to leave Savannah because it was inconvenient bordered on insurrection. He signed the letter "Your Affectionate Servant," rather than your *obedient* servant. Even more revealing of his relative sense of independence was his disclosure to Arnold that he had visited his brother, Tom, jailed for allegedly stealing from Arnold, even though he had been unable to acquire written permission to travel the city streets alone. Arnold, however, had invested too much time and money in Amos's training to tolerate such independence and ignored his plea that "Cousin Sam is capable of running the mill as I am unless something gives way and then I know I am compelled for to go

¹⁴Ledger B (1825-1873), Vol. 11, p. 202, RJA.

out. . . ."¹⁵ Amos's skill with steam engines was needed on the plantation.

In the seven years between the time Amos Morel reluctantly returned to the plantation and the time Olmsted met him, his skills were put to advantageous use: "He had made," Olmsted wrote, "all the alterations and repairs necessary in running a steam-engine and extensive machinery . . . and his work was admirable, both in contrivance and execution."¹⁶ He had also become proficient in using the plantation system to his own advantage. On June 20, 1852, he wrote to Arnold in Providence:

I am sorry to inform you that I have had to break William of his driver ship and have gevin him his hoe, since you have left William has got into debt to the other driver 35 days and gets along very badly with his work on account of having too many favorits in the field. I have put big Peter in his place to drive and would be glad to hear from you if you approve of what I have done.

Amos had chosen well the situation in which to assert his authority. If William was in debt to the other drivers for the equivalent of thirty-five task-days for his work force, he had indeed been negligent in his duty and had probably played favorites since Arnold had left the plantation only seven weeks before, on May 1. Furthermore, Amos continued, "the Carpenters are getting along very badly with their work. . . ."¹⁷ While he does not mention the overseer, Charles Ferguson, Amos's implication is clear: the overseer is letting some of the slaves get away with being lazy, "indulging them foolishly," as Arnold complained to Olmsted a few months later about overseers in general, "in their disposition to idleness, or in other ways to curry favor with them, so they may not inform the proprietor of their own misconduct or neglect."¹⁸ Ultimately, Richard Arnold indulged Amos Morel in his privileges and responsibilities because he wanted a check on his overseer's authority. As master, he too could use the system and play favorites.

Amos Morel had thus reached the pinnacle of his power and privilege on the plantation by the time Olmsted met him seven

¹⁵Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, August 29, 1845, RJA.

¹⁶Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 426.

¹⁷Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, June 20, 1852, RJA.

¹⁸Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 438

months later. He always worked within the system. He used it to his advantage, but he also knew the system depended on the master's favor. Like his horses and guns, the keys and the watch, the trappings of power and privilege were Amos's only insofar as they were tolerated by Arnold and served Arnold's purpose of playing Amos Morel against Charles Ferguson, the overseer, so that in his absence he would have better knowledge and control of what was really happening at the plantation. The overseer could be fired at any time, and such a provision was a standard feature of overseer agreements. But the head driver could not be discharged, only broken like William and made a field hand or else sold. Amos's authority depended on his ability to please Arnold and remain in favor. He instinctively recognized this dependence, for he wrote again to Arnold two days later, June 22, 1852, concerning a conflict of authority that had developed between him and Ferguson, presumably over the "breaking of Driver William" and the replacing of him with Big Peter: "Please to write to Mr. Ferguson and tell him the man that can't please my Boy Amos can't please me. Support my law, dear master, and it will bring the People in good order. . . ." ¹⁹

Writing to Arnold four weeks later, on July 16, Ferguson did not refer to the breaking of William and replacing him with Big Peter. Rather, he asserted his own authority decisively by presenting his solution to maintaining order among the slaves—the whip. When illness on the plantation resulted in some of the slaves refusing to work, Ferguson suspected they were feigning illness. As he reported to Arnold, "I have whiped some of them to make them work but had to give way," presumably because the illnesses were real. Perhaps to reassure his employer that his favorite slave was neither ill nor whipped, Ferguson added later, "Amos and his wife is quite well and begs me to tell you all howdy for them. . . ." ²⁰ But Ferguson made it clear that it was his law of the whip that kept the slaves disciplined: "the People has behaved quite well so far they all beg to tell you all howdy for them. . . ."

Amos Morel's feud with Charles Ferguson came to a head in

¹⁹Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, June 22, 1852, RJA.

²⁰Charles W. Ferguson to R. J. Arnold, July 16, 1852, Arnold-Screven Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

early June 1853, just four months after Olmsted's visit. Amos wrote to Arnold, then back in Providence for the summer, "I think you will fall out with Mr. Ferguson before long, for he is hard to keep your orders, for he take Maria to wait on him. . . ." ²¹ Furthermore, when Amos's wife took Maria back to stay with her, "Mr. Ferguson take Prince to wait on him. . . ." This kind of "tale bearing" was common on plantations and sometimes was encouraged by the planter as a means of checking on what the overseer had done in the planter's absence. Overseers' agreements spelled out specifically what servants they were allowed, and Ferguson was to have a cook and a small boy and girl to wait on him. Obviously Amos was convinced that Ferguson had exceeded his rightful number of slaves.

However, Amos's tattling on Ferguson was only a prelude to the climax of his personal quarrel with Ferguson in their struggle for dominance. It was a symbolic confrontation, but like many such conflicts it revolved around an ordinary but very real incident: Ferguson's hog, turned out to root for itself, ate all but thirty-seven of Amos's ninety-five turkeys. These turkeys represented money as well as food to Amos because it was the long-standing custom on the plantation that he and the other slaves could sell their excess produce and fowl to Arnold for credit in the books. Amos wrote, "I take my Gun to kill it . . .," but when he found out it was Ferguson's, he "caught the hog and put [it] in pen. . . ." Ferguson, on hearing that Amos had threatened to kill his hog, "come down to give me 100 a stripes [of] bear hide" if Amos dared kill his hog. It was a confrontation as symbolic of slavery itself as the bear-hide whip Ferguson held in his hand. But it was a confrontation *within* the system between two men, one white, one black. The fact that Amos had a gun (Arnold allowed some of his slaves to keep guns for hunting) underscored the symbolic relationship of these two rivals within the slave plantation hierarchy: he might kill the hog that ate his turkeys, but he did not threaten, let alone kill, the white man who wielded the whip. Conditioned by the system and loyal to it, Amos backed down from challenging Ferguson, telling the overseer, "I did not know the hog is his. . . ." ²²

Ferguson backed down too and did not whip Amos. He knew

²¹Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, June 2, 1853, RJA.

²²*Ibid.*

that if he whipped the master's favorite slave, particularly if, as Amos complained to Arnold, he had "broke your law much," he might be fired on the spot. He may have been free and white, but his livelihood depended on pleasing his employer as much as Amos's privileges depended on pleasing his master. Sitting in judgment hundreds of miles away, Richard Arnold decided to arrange an accommodation between his overseer and head driver, dividing their duties so that they would not be in conflict. Separate they could be, but not equal, and already the following spring Amos was complaining that Ferguson was not living up to his promise and was undermining Amos's authority.

However, Arnold neither fired Ferguson nor stripped Amos of his authority, and the situation continued as before for several more years, both reporting to Arnold by letter during the summers, thus keeping a check one on the other. For example, in August 1856, Amos complained to his master that Ferguson was spending an inordinate amount of time building his own house and barn. Consequently, the drivers, unsupervised, became neglectful and allowed so much grass to grow in the rice that it was almost too late to save the crop.²³ The apparent stalemate between Amos Morel and Charles Ferguson ended on July 29, 1858. This time, instead of attacking Ferguson directly, Amos got at him through the very man he had broken to assert his authority six years earlier, ex-driver William. William, possibly hoping to regain favor, told Amos that Carpenter Peter (called so not only because of his job but also to distinguish him from Big Peter) had stolen molasses and sold it to the slaves at the neighboring plantation, saying he was selling it for Amos. Since Carpenter Peter was directly under Ferguson's control, Amos informed Ferguson and asked him to search Peter's house for the key to the supply barn. They found "not the key but found about 4 B [bushels] corn in his house. . . ."²⁴

At this point Amos was able to place the blame on Ferguson's laxity, because Ferguson had accepted Peter's story that Stephen Hines of Savannah had bought the molasses and so hadn't bothered to check up on the slave. In the meantime, ten more bushels of corn were stolen from the barn. As if this neglect of Arnold's inter-

²³Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, August 28, 1856, RJA.

²⁴Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, July 29, 1858, RJA.

ests was not enough, apparently Ferguson had allowed Peter to feign illness: "I then told Mr. Ferguson that if Peter well [enough] to sell he is well [enough] to work for you so he come but did not work. . . ." Instead, Carpenter Peter used this time to sell molasses again.²⁵ Whether due to this particular incident or the long-running feud, Arnold apparently was finally through with Ferguson. He did not renew the overseer's contract the following year, even though Ferguson had worked for Arnold for thirteen years, an unusually long tenure.

Amos Morel had won, and his arch-enemy was banished from the plantation. In March 1859, Ferguson wrote to Arnold from a plantation in Camden County, Georgia, near the Florida border, and although it was not a great distance from White Hall, it was a world apart: "I am in a strange part of the world and amongst strangers and with a new employer. . . ." It is an odd letter, alternating between hurt pride and obsequiousness, a mixture of self-justification and begging for forgiveness:

. . . [it] being Planting time it is out of my power to leave [Arnold had asked him to testify in a court case] or I would do it with all the Pleasure in the world to serve you and when you receive this if you think I will be any import advantage to you I will risk all things to serve you although I know that I am the last one in your estimation at this time but thank God I have one Consolation that I have done you justis while I was in your employment treated your negroes kindly and made them do there duty to wards you and I have always spoken very highly of you and your kind treatment to wards me also of your kind family but alas I suppose all things is at an end. . . .

He did not mention Amos directly, but he alludes unmistakably to their difficulties in terms Arnold would clearly have understood: "I would of went any length to surv you or any One of yours but they have been hard things tole on me which I hope may Come out right One of these days. . . ." He hopes Arnold is satisfied with his present overseer, but if "you Should want an Overseer for a nother year you can consider me as an applicant for it. . . ."²⁶

Amos Morel's triumph, however, was short-lived. As a slave,

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Charles W. Ferguson to R. J. Arnold, March 24, 1859, RJA.

even one favored by the master and high in the plantation hierarchy, he was always at the mercy of any white man in authority. The system required a white overseer and, from Morel's point of view, Ferguson's successor was even worse. In June 1860, Amos wrote to his master in even stronger terms about the new overseer, Edward M. Bailey: "I am constrained to write to you about my getting along, for I discouraged in doing for mr Baly do not like me to superintend as a head driver for I have not been to White Hall Sedgfield Mulberry nor San Souci [all plantations belonging to Arnold] from the time I plant the rice All I can say the people say we have a good crop of rice. . . ." ²⁷ Good crop or not, it was the last one to be harvested before the outbreak of the Civil War.

Richard Arnold sold his land and slaves in Georgia for \$75,000—eleven thousand acres and two hundred slaves—to his son Thomas on May 7, 1861, three weeks after the firing on Fort Sumter.²⁸ Arnold, his wife, and three daughters (one son, Richard, was already in the North) went to Newport where they remained for the duration of the war. Arnold had opposed secession, and while in the North he defended himself as "a Union man although a Southern planter." But two of his sons, Thomas Clay and William Eliot, remained in Georgia, running the plantations and joining the Confederate army. Since the war rendered communication between the separate members of the family virtually impossible, Amos Morel had no way of keeping in touch with his former master. He had no choice but to remain on the plantation, now Thomas Arnold's property.

Amos Morel is next heard from indirectly in a letter dated April 10, 1865. Rev. S. W. Magill wrote to his friend Arnold that he had met Amos and his second wife, Cretia, in Savannah and that they were trying to "save money for the passage" to New York.²⁹ All the money that Amos might have had on the plantation books was wiped out by the war and the confusion and chaos after the fall of Savannah in December 1864. William Eliot Arnold was taken prisoner of war in the capture of Fort McAllister

²⁷Amos Morel to R. J. Arnold, June 4, 1860, RJA.

²⁸Bryan County Record Book, I 72-75 (May 7, 1861), Bryan County Court House, Pembroke, Georgia.

²⁹S. W. Magill to R. J. Arnold, April 10, 1865, RJA.

on the edge of White Hall plantation, and Thomas Arnold fled with a number of slaves to the plantation he owned in Montgomery County, not too far from Savannah but out of the path of General Sherman's advancing army. White Hall itself was requisitioned for billeting Union troops.

Apparently Amos wasn't needed at Mount Vernon plantation, Montgomery County, by Thomas Arnold, and he stayed in Savannah where nearly thirty years before he had begun his training as a blacksmith and mechanic. Now forty-five years old, he was a free man under the law, but he had known only slavery. He had also known the best that slavery had to offer. He had had status, a position of authority and respect among his peers, even money and "possessions," although he himself was the legal possession of first Louisa Gindrat, then her husband Richard Arnold, and finally their son Thomas. Frightened by his new situation and the uncertain times, he turned to the one person who had rewarded him in the past for his loyalty and services, his former master, Richard Arnold. On May 19, 1865, another friend of Arnold wrote that Amos and his wife were determined to go North and be with Arnold: "I advised him to remain but he says he had rather starve with you than to remain here. . . ."³⁰

Arnold, a shrewd businessman, was not starving at Sunny Lawn, his eight-acre estate in Newport. His investments in real estate, mining, and railroads in the North and West more than compensated for his losses in land and slaves incurred as a result of the war. Moreover, Richard Arnold made sure, immediately after the fall of Savannah, that "said plantation be considered exempt, for the present, from the designation 'abandoned rice fields,' as used in 'Special Field Order No. 15.'" Issued on January 16, 1865, by Major General William T. Sherman, this order declared that the abandoned rice fields from Charleston south along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, to the country bordering the St. John's River, Florida, "are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the negroes now made free by the acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States."³¹ Arnold's

³⁰Aaron Champion to R. J. Arnold, May 19, 1865, RJA.

³¹Memorandum, no date or signature, RJA.

former plantation lands lay in the middle of this area, and he protected his ownership by buying them back from his son Thomas.³²

The greatest testimonial to Amos's loyalty came from Thomas Arnold who wrote his father at the end of May 1865, that "I have seen Amos he is as true as steel." It was without doubt a sincerely meant accolade. In the same letter Thomas informed his father that Big Peter "was one of the worst negroes that ever lived." Instead of being grateful and loyal for having been promoted to driver over William and kept in that "responsible" position with all its privileges, Big Peter, like Carpenter Peter before him, stole corn and sold it. Big Peter's ungratefulness and disloyalty went so far that he threatened to kill Thomas Arnold. For that treacherous act, Big Peter was turned over to the Montgomery County authorities, who hanged him.³³ The slave William, who had lost his drivership because he had been lazy and played favorites, squatted on the plantation. When Thomas and William Eliot Arnold returned to Georgia in November 1865, having spent the summer with their parents in Rhode Island, as they had done so often in the past before the war, William was ordered off the land since he refused to work for its rightful owner, Richard Arnold.

Accompanying the Arnold brothers back from Newport was Amos Morel. He had arrived in Newport that spring and joined his former master where he worked as a waiter in the Arnold household, the job he had given up nearly thirty years before as a plantation slave in order to learn blacksmithing. Richard Arnold paid "Amos Morrell my former slave" one hundred dollars in wages for four months work and bought him clothes to make him

³²Thomas Clay Arnold to R. J. Arnold, November 7, 1865, RJA.

³³Thomas Clay Arnold to R. J. Arnold, May 28, 1865, RJA. Thomas Arnold's attitude toward the Arnold slaves as the war drew to a close is underscored in a letter from Mrs. Laura E. Buttolph to Mrs. Mary Jones, June 30, 1865: "I heard yesterday that Mr. Arnold from Bryan had turned off all of his people from Mount Vernon and told them to go to the Yanks: he would feed them no longer. . . ." *Children of Pride*, ed. by Robert M. Myers (New Haven, 1972), 1278.

Richard Arnold's antebellum paternalism, in contrast to his son Thomas's attitude after the war, is typical of the Northern lessee described by Leon F. Litwack in *Been in the Storm Too Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York, 1979), 376. In 1866, freed men and women at Cherry Hill plantation refused to make a contract with Thomas on any terms, threatening violence if there were attempts to evict them. Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen's Community* (Westport, Conn., 1977), 168.

presentable.³⁴ But Amos was needed back on the plantation, not in Newport as a waiter. The rice mill had been destroyed during the war and it needed rebuilding; first, though, the rice fields had to be reclaimed and the mansion house restored. “Amos (my Engineer)” was needed by the Arnolds to help reconstruct the past.

Amos Morel found his niche as a free man by returning to White Hall plantation where he had been born a slave. He worked now as a mechanic just as he had been trained to do while a slave. He earned a daily wage, but remained loyal to his master/employer. Before he left Newport, he received a dozen photographs as a going-away gift from Richard Arnold—“taken of Amos at his request & presented him,” Arnold records in his 1865 pay book.³⁵ It was the first gift Arnold had given him that he could not legally take back. In 1869 Richard Arnold deeded to him as one of three preachers and trustees of the Colored Baptist Church “in consideration of the sum of 25¢ in hand paid to me . . . a certain piece of land on Bryan Neck on which formally stood a Presbyterian Church [white] and is surrounded on three sides by a dam or ditch which divides it from my plantation. . . .”³⁶

Richard Arnold could give Amos Morel the gift of land, about an acre out of the eleven thousand acres on which Amos and his family had formerly worked as slaves, and Amos (along with two other former slaves) could pay the nominal price of 25 cents out of the money he earned as a free man. But Amos Morel (or Morrell, as it was alternatively spelled) was nevertheless a former slave. In 1866, in one of the final ironies of this history, after all the conflict symbolized in the struggle between Amos Morel and Charles Ferguson, Richard Arnold hired a white overseer, John B. Morrell, for his rice plantation.³⁷

³⁴Day Book J (1862-1866), Vol. 9, October 27, 1865, RJA.

³⁵*Ibid.*, October 25, 1865.

³⁶Bryan County Record Book, J 151 (April 20, 1869). Bryan County Court House, Pembroke, Georgia.

³⁷Ledger B (1825-1873), Vol. 11, p. 473, RJA.