

THE RICE DRIVER: HIS ROLE IN SLAVE MANAGEMENT

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Antebellum rice plantations with their massive slave congregations necessitated very sophisticated slave management practices. Rice planting was profitable only through quantity production; consequently, the rice industry became more and more concentrated in the hands of a few planters, less than six hundred by 1850. Slaveholdings on rice plantations grew in proportion. By 1850 these, ideally at least one hundred and very often several hundred, averaged four times those on sugar estates, ten times those for cotton and tobacco, and forty times those on hemp plantations. Too, the sickly malarial season from May to November forced the rice planter to reside off the plantation for these months. Thus, the presence of an overseer on the rice plantation was a virtual necessity. Slave codes dictated that overseers be white. Some planters, though, chose to defy the law and appointed a plantation slave as black overseer. Thus, a few slaves were brought into the highest level of management. However, the position of greatest authority and responsibility open to most slaves was that of driver. Drivers acted as both foremen of the labor gangs and supervisors of the decorum of the slave quarters. Capable drivers readily became the most important slaves on the plantation and very often knew more about management than did the whites placed over them.¹

As to the number of drivers on rice plantations, there seems to have been no established rule. The most common practice was to have one driver for each fifty slaves. The ideal plantation with one hundred slaves therefore would normally have had two drivers with one designated as head driver and the other as assistant

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¹ J. D. B. DeBow, comp., *Statistical View of the United States . . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census, 1850* (Washington, 1854), pp. 94, 178; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1972), pp. 365-66; Dale E. Swan, "The Structure and Profitability of the Antebellum Rice Industry, 1859" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of N. C., 1972), *passim*.

driver, deputy driver or sub-driver. However, available figures from different plantations for random years covering the entire antebellum period indicate that this practice often did not apply. These show rice plantations with as many as 176 and 181 slaves having only one driver. Too, Hopeton Plantation on the Altamaha River in 1806 had only four drivers for 637 slaves, an average of 159 per driver.²

Considering then the driver's direct responsibility for such vast numbers of slaves, it is little wonder that planters sought out qualified drivers with diligence and considered themselves indeed fortunate when they found such persons. Qualities looked for in prospective rice drivers were maturity, physical size and strength, intelligence, and knowledge of rice culture. Also, some planters sought out mulattoes or blacks of African noble descent as drivers. Rice drivers were all males but not always slaves. There is at least one recorded instance in which a free black operated as driver, that of Nat Weaver who was driver-miller on Elias Ball's Limerick Plantation on the Cooper River in the first decade of the nineteenth century. It is not clear whether Weaver was freed by Ball for his services and remained as driver after being freed or whether he simply was hired as driver as a free Negro.³

Age was a factor of great importance in selecting drivers. Drivers, with few exceptions, were simply elevated from the planter's own work force; consequently, it was to his advantage to select persons possessing the talents he desired early in their work lives so he could be assured of a long duration of the driver's tenure. Available evidence suggests that most drivers were selected in their twenties or certainly by age thirty-five. Charles Izard Manigault preferred to choose drivers on his Savannah River plantations in their early to mid-twenties, appointing one in 1833 at age twenty-one, one in 1855 at twenty-three, and one in 1849 at twenty-six. James Reid Pringle selected a new driver for his Santee River plantation in 1843, age twenty-seven; and John Berkeley Grimbail, one for his Edisto River plantation in 1832, age twenty-

²Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 366; List of Negroes the property of Madame La Viscomtessa de Dampierre, March, 1859, Francis Porteus Corbin Papers, Duke University, Durham, N. C.; Keating Simons Ball Record Book of Comingtee Plantation, 1850-1866, Duke University; List of Negroes Belonging to James Hamilton and John Couper, January, 1806, Corbin Papers.

³Anne Simons Deas, *Recollections of the Ball Family of South Carolina and the Comingtee Plantation* (1909, reprinted Charleston, 1978), pp. 122-25.

nine. In 1806, the four drivers at Hopeton Plantation ranged in age from twenty-five to thirty-five. While the twenties would appear to be young for drivers to assume such vast responsibility, they would already have had ten to twelve years of field work with these same people and certainly by then their qualities for leadership should have matured.⁴

Planters seemed to prefer those of mixed blood as driver, under the assumption that the intelligence of the white would elevate the leadership qualities of the black. However, there were very few mulattoes on the Rice Coast because of the presence of so few whites there. At Hopeton, for example, out of 637 slaves only 3 were mulattoes. A few planters nevertheless were fortunate enough to secure mulatto drivers. Bran, the driver at Pierce Butler's famed Hampton Point Plantation when Fanny Kemble visited there in 1839, was a mulatto driver of distinction. Frederick Law Olmsted discovered a mulatto driver on a Savannah River plantation in 1853 who ran the plantation with such complete authority and received such handsome gratuities from the owner that he may well have been either the owner's brother or son—he was the son of a "favorite houseservant" during the owner's youth.⁵

A number of planters preferred for their drivers to be either African born or first generation Afro-Americans, especially if they were descended from the African nobility or were of mixed ancestry. Tom, also designated as Old Tom or African Tom, served with distinction as first driver and then head driver at Hopeton for over thirty years. He was a native African and the son of a prince of the Foulah tribe, who was captured at age fourteen near Timbuctu, carried to the West Indies and then later removed to Georgia. Wil-

⁴ James M. Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor on Argyle Island: Letters and Documents of a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833-1867* (Savannah, 1978), pp. 4, 66, 194; Mason Crum, *Gullah: Negro Life in the Carolina Sea Islands* (Durham, 1940), p. 242; John Berkeley Grimball Diary, October 17-November 3, 1832, Southern Historical Collection, University of N. C.; List of Negroes Belonging to James Hamilton and John Couper, Corbin Papers; James Reid Pringle Papers, Jan. 1843, Duke University.

⁵ Fanny Kemble, *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-39* (New York, 1863), pp. 255-56; List of Negroes Belonging to James Hamilton and John Couper, Corbin Papers; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York, 1856), pp. 426-29.

liam or Cudjoe, driver at Jacob Motte Alston's Woodbourne Plantation on the Pee Dee, was also the son of an African prince.⁶

Rice drivers almost invariably were impressive in their physical appearance, size and strength, needed qualities if they were to hold the slaves under suasion (and occasionally under intimidation). Antebellum travelers such as Frederick Law Olmsted and William Howard Russell mentioned time and again the elements of size and strength among the drivers they met. Writers after the Civil War such as Daniel Elliott Huger Smith and Duncan Clinch Heyward affectionately remembered drivers on family estates as being quite tall and of powerful build, with a commanding manner and looking as if they were indeed born to command. Very little information has survived to indicate the actual size or dimensions of rice drivers, but what there is indicates men of considerable proportions. Plantation records of Charles Manigault for his Savannah River plantations and of Dr. James Ritchie Sparkman for Dirleton Plantation on the Pee Dee show the drivers on those plantations to have been always among the largest men on the plantation and ones noted for their great strength.⁷

Rice planters looked for slaves with superior intelligence as drivers. Contemporary descriptions of rice drivers by such writers as Basil Hall, Charles Lyell and Fanny Kemble offer almost invariable testimony to their intelligence. A few rice drivers (but very few) were able to read and write, an obvious advantage in being able to communicate with their owners. Isaac Step, in the only extant letter by a rice driver, was able in 1849 to give his master of Beaufort, South Carolina, a good account of the harvesting of rice and provision crops at "pon pon." The kind of intelligence that would enable one to master the elements of rice planting and

⁶ Charles Lyell, *A Second Visit to the United States of North America* (2 vols., New York, 1849), I, 266-67; Arney R. Childs, ed., *Rice Planter and Sportsman: The Recollections of J. Motte Alston, 1821-1909* (Columbia, 1953), pp. 108-9.

⁷ Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 436, 470; William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South* (2 vols., London, 1863), I, 192; Alice R. Huger Smith and Herbert Ravenel Sass, *A Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties* (New York, 1936), p. 65; Duncan C. Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar* (Chapel Hill, 1937), pp. 113-14; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 66, 151, 317; William Capers to Charles Manigault, Oct. 15, 1860, Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents, 1649-1863* (2 vols., Cleveland, 1909), I, 338; James R. Sparkman Record Book of Dirleton Plantation, Sparkman Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

direct a labor force would not completely qualify him to be a driver. The distinguished Pee Dee planter, Robert Francis Withers Allston (state senator and in the late 1850s governor of South Carolina and the most significant contemporary essayist on rice culture) placed a greater value on what he characterized as "ready intelligence," the ability to make quick and correct decisions upon any occasion, reflected by his driver Tommy. Another form of intelligence, "understanding," was needed by the driver to perform such functions as measuring and staking off daily tasks in irregularly shaped rice fields and a multiplicity of other job duties absolutely essential to handling large gangs of slaves.⁸

Finally, a most essential quality for the rice driver was a complete mastery of the complex rice planting operations. Rice planters in general were not that knowledgeable as to the minute details of rice culture; consequently, they had to rely heavily on their overseers and especially their drivers for the crop's success. Jordan Myrick, universally acclaimed as the best overseer on the Rice Coast until his death in 1834, attributed his great success in plantation management to the careful training given him by Old Joe, the head driver in his initial management at Dean Hall Plantation near Charleston. John Ashe Alston, owner of Strawberry Hill Plantation in the Georgetown District, preferred to consult with driver Cuffee, whose opinions on agricultural matters he accepted as "conclusive," rather than the overseer on his trips to the plantation from his summer home in Charleston. Antebellum travelers such as Olmsted commented on the vast knowledge of rice drivers, observing that planters and overseers almost invariably deferred to their advice in agricultural affairs.⁹

⁸ Katherine M. Jones, ed., *The Plantation South* (Indianapolis, 1957), pp. 95, 99; Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 266; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 44, 48, 210; Isaac Step to his master, Oct. 22, 1849, Elliott-Gonzales Papers, Southern Historical Collection; J. Harold Easterby, ed., *The South Carolina Rice Plantation as Revealed in the Papers of Robert F. W. Allston* (Chicago, 1945), pp. 164-65 (first quotation); Frances Butler Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation Since the War* (London, 1883), p. 182 (second quotation).

⁹ Joseph W. Barnwell, ed., "Diary of Timothy Ford, 1785-1786", this *Magazine* 13 (July 1912): 143; John B. Irving, *A Day on Cooper River* (Charleston, 1842), pp. 59-61; "Mr. Jordon [sic] Myrick; by a Friend," *Southern Agriculturist* VIII (December 1834): 636-38; Childs, ed., *Rice Planter and Sportsman*, p. 106 (quotation); Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 211; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 437-38.

Such expert knowledge of the intricacies of rice planting was generally acquired by the driver during a period of apprenticeship. Ideally, the prospective young driver would serve as deputy or assistant driver for months or even years in the late stages of the regular driver's tenure. This would provide both an excellent training program for him and an opportunity to demonstrate to his owner that he had the talents essential to the position. Successful performance during the apprenticeship would bring to the deputy the appointment as driver when his mentor died or retired. Falling short of pleasing his master, he was demoted to field hand, often on another plantation. Rice drivers came generally from the field hands but not always so. Carpenters (commonly men of high intelligence), trunk minders (whose work necessitated engineering skills), plantation preachers (moral persuasion as well as physical power was helpful in the driver's job), and overseer's servants sometimes became drivers. Olmsted encountered in the 1850s one highly successful head driver who had never served as a field hand. Rather, he had functioned as a waiter in his master's house as a boy, a blacksmith, a maker and repairer of cotton gins, a machinist, and finally as an engineer prior to his becoming a driver.¹⁰

The duties of the rice driver were legion. Most common among these was the daily direction of the work force. Rice plantations, unlike most others, operated on the task system. Under this format, each laborer (be he or she a full, three quarter, half, or quarter hand, such designations being based on what portion of a full task each could do) was assigned a certain portion of land to get over during the day according to what was then being done—planting, hoeing, harvesting, etc. By the 1840s all the tasks in rice planting had become standardized: for breaking the soil with the hoe, 1,500 square feet; for trenching, sowing, hoeing, or harvesting, a half-acre; for digging canals and ditches, 600 cubic feet; and for threshing by the flail, 600 sheaves or 12 bushels of rice. The flooding and drainage system of the rice plantation with ditches crisscrossing the fields in a checkerboard fashion cutting them generally into plats of a quarter-acre each made the designation of most tasks

¹⁰ R. J. Arnold to J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold and Screven Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection; Ball Record Book; Brookgreen and Springfield Plantation Book, Hassell-Flagg Plantation Books, South Carolina Historical Society; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 4; Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (2 vols., Boston, 1974), I, 149-50; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 369; Olmstead, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 427, 450-51.

quite simple—the worker just did the number of plats required under the task.¹¹

However, some rice fields were irregular in size, and here the driver would actually have to measure with a five foot rod and stake off the area for the task, something in which a quick eye for distance and considerable powers of calculation could be a real help. Moreover, the work in some tasks was more difficult than in others—the removal of 800 cubic feet in ditching in soft marsh soil would be much more easily accomplished than even 400 feet in river-side land full of roots. In hoeing, for example, a half-acre, if the grass and weeds were dense, might be too much of a task. Thus, it was to the planter's advantage to have a driver who could judge as to what actually constituted a fair day's work. Here the driver was in a very delicate position. The owner expected the driver to extract from the slaves the optimum amount of labor; the workers, on the other hand, wanted to do as little as possible. Thus, the driver had to strike a happy medium of getting enough work from the slaves to satisfy the planter and yet at the same time not push them to the point of turning against him. If the assigned task proved to be more than the worker could do, the driver had the authority to excuse him from completing it. However, once the task was assigned, the driver could not increase it regardless of how soon the worker completed the task. Only under the most urgent necessity would the driver be allowed to require work beyond the assigned task, and then he was to report to the planter the amount of excess labor for which the slave was to be compensated. Planters considered it "subversive of discipline" for drivers not to punish slaves who did not complete their tasks; at the same time, "contrary to justice" to hold them accountable for not finishing what was really too much for them to do.¹² A South Carolina planter summed it up perhaps best: "*In nothing does a good manager [driver] so much excel a bad, as in being able to discern what*

¹¹ Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, pp. 31, 59; Albert V. House, Jr., ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism in Ante-Bellum Georgia: The Journal of Hugh Fraser Grant, Rice Grower* (New York, 1954), p. 54; Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (New York, 1918), pp. 247-48.

¹² Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 213; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 373, 379; "Management of a Southern Plantation: Rules Enforced on the Rice Estate of P. C. Weston, Esq., of South Carolina," *DeBow's Review*, XXII (Jan. 1857): 40 (quotation); Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard*

*a hand is capable of doing, and in never attempting to make him do more."*¹³

Virtually everything involved in the day-to-day operations on the rice plantation came under the immediate and direct supervision of the driver. On most plantations he determined the most suitable time to plant the crop, how long to keep the fields flooded, when to drain them for the various hoeings, and especially the correct time to drain them for the harvest. During the cultivation season the driver was responsible for scaring away the rice birds, or bobolinks, which infested the fields in both the spring and late summer. Also, the drivers were to be very careful to move against animal and plant pests during the crop season—Charles Manigault commented time and again on the rat problem in the Savannah River rice fields. The driver supervised the slaves' work on provision crops and in the common vegetable gardens. During the harvest season, the busiest time of the entire year on the plantation, he determined which fields were to be harvested first and how long the rice was to remain in the field to dry before being bundled for transfer to the barnyard for storage in stacks to await threshing. The driver had to be careful that the rice in the stacks did not become overheated or "mow-burned," which would turn the rice an amber color and reduce its market value.¹⁴

Slave States, pp. 435-37; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, pp. 247-48, 267; Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, I, 117-18; William K. Scarborough, *The Overseer: Plantation Management in the Old South* (Baton Rouge, 1966), pp. 81-82.

¹³ "Management of a Southern Plantation," p. 40. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ R. J. Arnold to J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold and Screven Family Papers: Grimball Diary, Nov. 28, 1852; Coffee Bluff Plantation Book, 1838, Kollock Plantation Books, Southern Historical Collection; Louis Manigault Notebook, 1852, Louis Manigault Manuscripts, Duke University; Ben Sparkman Plantation Record, 1853-1859, Southern Historical Collection; William E. Sparkman Plantation Record, 1844-1866, Southern Historical Collection; Clinton T. Baldwin, "The Rice Industry of South Carolina, Primarily Colonial," Master's thesis, Duke University, 1935, pp. 77, 80; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 9, 25, 155; David Doar, *Rice and Rice Planting in the South Carolina Low Country* (Charleston, 1936), pp. 14-15; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 376-77; Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, p. 35; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 431-34, 436-38; "On Planting and Managing a Rice Crop by the late James C. Darby," *Southern Agriculturist* II (June 1829): 249; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, pp. 26-27; "Valuable Information for Rice Planters," *Southern Cultivator* XII (Oct. 1854): 301 (quotation).

In the milling processes—first threshing and then polishing—the driver was the central figure. Most rice produced in Georgia and North Carolina and much of that of South Carolina was threshed by the hand flail, with the rice spread out on large wooden floors (Charles Manigault's at Gowrie on the Savannah was 60 feet by 110 feet). Here the task system would apply, and the driver with his ever-present whip was there to make certain the tasks were accomplished. Even on the large plantations with steam-powered threshers the driver closely supervised the work. However, the rice was threshed (by hand or machine), the driver was required to inspect constantly the rice stalks to make certain the grain was removed before their disposal in refuse heaps or in the river. If the rice was polished on the plantation, the driver was to supervise the laborers all during the milling. Charles Manigault, in his contract with overseer Stephen Clark in 1853, carefully required Clark to refrain from interfering with the millers during the pounding of the rice because of their great skill at milling; however, there was no mention that this restraint was to apply to the driver. On plantations without pounding mills, the driver was responsible for loading the threshed rice on flats or in schooners for removal to a nearby mill for later shipment to the rice markets in Charleston, Savannah, or Wilmington, or more commonly in the late 1850's, direct shipment to the rice factors who would have the rice milled in the city commercial mills.¹⁵

Beyond the daily direction of the labor force, the driver's main function was to maintain discipline among the slaves. Here he was expected to enforce plantation regulations fairly and equitably but never to the point of making life unbearable for the slaves, thus encouraging them "to take to the swamps." The driver was especially instructed to prevent shirking and theft, two matters of great concern to the planter. He was quickly to quash any situation that might lead to a fight or other disturbance of the peace of the

¹⁵ Francis Marion Weston Laurel Hill Rice Mill Account Book, South Carolina Historical Society; James M. Clifton, ed., "Charles Manigault's Essay on the Economics of Milling Rice," *Agricultural History* LII (Jan. 1978): 104-10; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 2, 9, 136; "Agricultural Notes," James Hamilton Couper Plantation Records, 1818-1854, Southern Historical Collection; Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, pp. 46-48; House, ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism*, 62-64. While Manigault's driver, Robert, apparently had the right to interfere in the milling, there is no evidence that he actually did.

plantation. The driver too was to mediate both intrafamily and interfamily disputes before serious trouble developed. And he was to set a good moral example for the entire work force and to force in line those who did not follow suit.¹⁶

The driver was to be very careful to keep crime and violence to an absolute minimum on the plantation. In any attack by a slave on a white person, he was quickly to subdue and summarily punish the slave. Very often drivers had to come to the aid of an overseer who was being attacked by slaves wielding axes or hoes, and even more often they were required to end fights among the slaves and to punish those involved. The driver was instructed to neutralize as quickly as possible any challenge on the part of the slaves to the authority of any white member of the plantation hierarchy. He would quash even sooner any threat to his own power or position.¹⁷

The driver had frequently to capture runaways and apprehend slave criminals, a task which could be very hazardous. A particularly awesome and frightening slave, Jack Savage, on Charles Manigault's Gowrie Plantation on the Savannah, ran away in the fall of 1861. Fortunately, Manigault's driver, John, was an expert slave catcher, and Savage was soon apprehended but not without a fight which might have been too much for a less determined driver. Big George and three other runaways from Gowrie (two of these had been gone several months) were captured by driver John only through the use of dogs. Robin, driver at John Berkeley Grimball's Slann's Island Plantation in South Carolina, and not the overseer, was given the task in 1859 of capturing Poyas John, a field hand who had killed a runaway, Hercules, for having lain with his wife. He was instructed to take John into custody and put a guard over him until the matter was investigated. He also was expected to testify against Poyas John in the informal plantation hearing which followed.¹⁸

Whipping was the general punishment for infractions of plantation rules, and the driver commonly did the flogging. A most con-

¹⁶ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 202; Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation*, p. 234; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 253; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, p. 77 (quotation).

¹⁷ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 213; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 378; Grimball Diary, Feb. 5, 1841; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 436-37.

¹⁸ Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 296, 325; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 634; Grimball Diary, Nov. 28, 1858—Jan. 12, 1859.

spicuous part of the driver's dress was his whip. Planters gave considerable thought to the extent of whipping to be allowed—too little would not keep up proper discipline and too much might set off a sizable stampede to the swamps. Overseers almost invariably were empowered to whip; however, most offenses were of such minor nature that they would easily come within the driver's number of permissible lashes. Very often overseers determined when and under what circumstances the whipping was to take place, simply leaving it to the driver to do it. Often the planter dictated the punishment; and in at least one recorded instance, the wife of the planter. Drivers were not normally allowed to whip slaves at their own discretion. Generally there had to be a time lapse, usually twenty-four hours, between the discovery of the misdeed and the punishment. Some planters went so far as to require a conviction at a plantation hearing with whites present before the driver could whip the slaves. Quite often drivers were forbidden to punish slaves except in the presence of the owner or overseer.¹⁹

When whipping would not suffice to bring the slave in line, other more stringent methods were applied. Some planters used very effectively chains and stocks for slave confinement either in place of or sometimes in conjunction with whipping. And for the really recalcitrant slaves, such recourses as solitary confinement in workhouses or jails for days or even weeks and eventual sale were not uncommon. Charles Manigault was one planter much given to

¹⁹ Nightingale Hall Plantation Book, Allston-Pringle-Hill Papers, South Carolina Historical Society; R. J. Arnold and John B. Cross, Agreement, Dec. 1, 1843, Arnold and Screven Family Papers; B. Cannon to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Aug. 21, 1820, Pinckney Family Papers, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 300; Betsy Fancher, *The Lost Legacy of Georgia's Golden Isles* (Garden City, N. J., 1971), p. 109; Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 238-39; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 42-43, 175, 228; "Management of a Southern Plantation," p. 40; William Allister Noble, "Sequent Occupance of Hopeton-Altama, 1815-1956," Master's thesis, University of Georgia, 1956, pp. 39-40; "On the Management of the Butler Estate, and the Cultivation of the Sugar Cane; by R. King Jr., addressed to William Washington, Esq.," *Southern Agriculturist*, I (Dec. 1828): 524; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 438-39; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 70; U. B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1929), pp. 260-61; Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, I, 118; William D. Postell, *The Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations* (Baton Rouge, 1951), p. 26; Scarborough, *Overseer*, pp. 93-94; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, p. 65.

using these extreme measures on his Savannah River plantations. Less extreme punishments were to restrict the slave's freedom to visit nearby plantations, require extra work, or reduce his weekly rations and especially such "luxury" items as tobacco and molasses for a certain period of time. Punishment for the most severe misdeeds of the slave, such as murder, was commonly meted out by the regular trial courts.²⁰

Drivers commonly were responsible for safeguarding all the valuables on a rice plantation. As a symbol of this duty, the head driver on the plantation carried a ring of keys attached to a strap at his waist—keys to the locks of all the utility buildings on the plantation such as the rice barns, machinery sheds, toolrooms, animal barns, provision rooms, and smokehouses, and even keys to the houses of the planter and the overseer. Some planters such as Plowden Charles Jennet Weston of the Georgetown District (as expressed in his famous "Overseer's Contract") preferred for the keys to so many important buildings on the plantation to remain in the hands of the overseer. Having the keys to the provision rooms, drivers usually issued the weekly (on some plantations, daily) food rations on the rice plantation. At Butler's Island, much to the surprise of Fanny Kemble in 1839, Frank, the head driver, issued the rations not only to the slaves but to the overseer and even to the proprietor. Slaves charged with looking after the plantation livestock also got their grain and fodder through the driver.²¹

²⁰ William Gibbons, Jr., Papers, Nov. 21, 1769, and June 26, 1771, Duke University; Grimball Diary, Nov. 28, 1858-Jan. 18, 1859 (quotation); James Reid Pringle Papers, Jan. 1863; James M. Clifton, ed., "The Ante-bellum Rice Planter as Revealed in the Letterbook of Charles Manigault, 1846-1848," this *Magazine* 74 (1973), pp. 301-3; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 49-50, 300, 339; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 376-77; Phillips, *Life and Labor*, pp. 260-61.

²¹R. J. Arnold to J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold and Screven Family Papers; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 177; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, p. 44; "Management of a Southern Plantation," p. 42; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 426-27; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, pp. 253-54; Postell, *Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations*, p. 36; Elizabeth Waties Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood* (New York, 1922), p. 272; Robert S. Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South* (New York, 1970), p. 171. Perhaps the most famous of rice overseer's contracts was that of Weston, which was several pages long and in much detail on rules and regulations for his plantations. Weston's contract was published in *DeBow's Review* and as a pamphlet in Charleston and was the model for rice overseer's contracts in general.

A very important duty of the driver was to keep all the tools and machinery in good working condition. Such tools and machines ranged from the common hand hoe to complicated seed drills. Each planter maintained a blacksmith or two to keep the tools and equipment in order under the driver's supervision. Steam-powered threshing and pounding mills of the late antebellum period were generally outside the driver's immediate control. These were so sophisticated as to require specially trained Negro artisans as millers, machinists, and engineers to operate and maintain them. However, the driver still maintained direct responsibility for the field hands who worked in the mills during the milling season. Some few drivers who had received training in the mechanical arts prior to their becoming drivers might be able both to administer the mill and supervise the workers.²²

Drivers commonly accompanied groups of Negroes whenever they traveled away from the plantation to ensure their safe passage, particularly across canals and rivers. They also accompanied slaves when they worked off the plantation on local roads, railroads, canals, military fortifications, or on another plantation, to provide familiar leadership and especially to see that they were not mistreated. Drivers were to be very careful to protect the slaves during periods of foul weather. The driver usually decided whether the weather was suitable for the slaves to work outside; if not, he then assigned them chores to do in their homes or in the barn. Should a storm arise while the workers were in the field, they were to be brought in immediately. During the hurricane season the driver was to keep a very close eye on any sudden storm, hustling the slaves quickly to places of shelter such as the planter's house or specially-built "hurricane houses" or storm shelters. Failure to do so could be devastating as in the instance of one planter who lost over one hundred slaves in a fall hurricane.²³

²² Baldwin, "Rice Industry of South Carolina," p. 77; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 250, 290; Deas, *Recollections of the Ball Family*, p. 124; Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 214; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 81, 133; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 425-26; 431; Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, pp. 170-71.

²³ Elias B. Bull, "Storm Shelters at the Santee Delta," this *Magazine* 81 (1980): 95-101; Margaret Davis Cate, "Mistakes in Fanny Kemble's Georgia Journal," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XLIV (March 1960): 5-6; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 136; Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, pp. 136-37, 170, 249, 383, 386; Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, p. 132; House, ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism*, p. 292; Leigh, *Ten Years on a Geor-*

Finally, a most important duty of the rice driver (never stated in the planter's written rules) was to maintain a liaison between the whites (overseer and owner) and the black workers. He received from the white hierarchy rules and regulations to be carried out; he had, at the same time, an obligation to represent the interests of his fellow blacks. The driver alone of all persons on the rice plantation had a foot in both worlds—"the man between" in the words of Eugene Genovese. He supplied daily information to the overseer about the state of the crop and the health and welfare of the slaves. A very few drivers could provide direct information to the planter through written correspondence. And it was not unknown for the planter to use a trusted driver to secure information on the overseer, to keep down excesses on the part of the whites. Drivers logically would do what they could to prevent undue or cruel treatment of the workers by whites, especially the overseer. They also did what they could to protect those under their supervision from white outsiders, such as the slave patrols.²⁴

The driver received many benefits, both material and otherwise. Almost invariably he acquired better housing. The driver would now have his own single family unit, generally located at the head of the slave "street" next to the quarters of the overseer. Frederick Law Olmsted described the accommodations of the head driver on a model Savannah River plantation in the 1850s as those of "considerable luxury," and when compared to those of the common slave, they doubtless were. The driver got more and better rations than most other slaves. Charles Manigault gave his two drivers,

gia Plantation, pp. 182-85 (quotation, 183); Robert Manson Myers, ed., *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War* (New Haven, 1972), pp. 85-91.

²⁴ Childs, ed., *Rice Planter and Sportsman*, p. 106; Clifton, ed., "Antebellum Rice Planter," pp. 305-6; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 53-54; Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, p. 63; Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 40; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 374, 378-79; Ebenezer Jackson to John Lyons, June 3, 1801, Ebenezer Jackson Letterbooks, Duke University; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, p. 42; Postell, *Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations*, p. 51; George C. Rogers, Jr., *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina* (Columbia, 1970), p. 346; Scarborough, *Overseer*, p. 83; Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, pp. 91-92; Clyde E. Woodall and William H. Faver, Jr., "Famous South Carolina Farmers," *Agricultural History*, XXXIII (July 1959): 139. "The Men Between" is the heading of Genovese, pp. 365-388.

George and Ralph, at Gowrie on the Savannah double rations of corn—two pecks as compared to one for other adults. However, on most plantations the drivers got only from a third to a half more than the others. Rice was too expensive (generally twice the price of corn) to be distributed as rations. Small rice (that broken in the polishing process) and dirty rice, though, were given to the slaves (Charles Manigault especially did this during the harvest season when they did not have time to grind corn), with the driver always getting a somewhat enlarged share. Also, drivers were allowed to have their own small rice patches in their private garden plots. Sometimes they were rewarded with rice for superior performance of their duties. Robert F. W. Allston gave his driver, Daniel, a bushel of rice in 1859 for not having missed a day's work because of illness during the year. Roswell King, Jr., made it a common practice to give the drivers at Butler's Island a ton of rice each year, believing that this made them more responsible and consequently increased the plantation's production by many tons of rice.²⁵

Drivers generally had milk cows for their exclusive use. Also, the owner commonly assigned other slaves to work the driver's private garden plot, thus saving him time for more important duties and especially freeing him from the indignity of having to do this kind of menial labor. And if the usual sources of rations were not ample for the driver's table, he could help himself to whatever he pleased from the planter's barns and provision rooms (since he had the keys to these) without any serious risk of punishment. Rice drivers usually had better household hardware than

²⁵ Cherry Hill Force 1825, White Hall Force and Allowance List for 1825, C[herry] Hill Allowance List for 841, White Hall Allowance List for 1841, Arnold and Screven Family Papers; R. J. Arnod to J. Swanston, May 22, 1837, Arnold and Screven Family Papers; Allowance List for Gowrie and East Hermitage Plantations, 1858, Manigault Manuscripts; Sparkman Record Book; William E. Sparkman Plantation Record; Francis Withers Account Book, 1833-1840, Southern Historical Collection; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 247, 265; Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, p. 455; Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 149; Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, p. 102; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 42, 44-45; Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation*, p. 234; Olmsted, *Journey in Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 428-29 (quotation); Phillips, *Life and Labor*, p. 267; Scarborough, *Overseer*, pp. 165, 168; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, p. 65; Bennett H. Wall, "The Founding of the Pettigrew Plantations," *North Carolina Historical Review*, XXVII (Oct. 1950): 410, 414.

other slaves. At Dirleton Plantation on the Pee Dee, James Sparkman in 1855 gave driver John a six-quart cooking pot and an oven while all the other slaves (with one exception who got the six-quart pot but not the oven) got only two-quart cooking pots.²⁶

Invariably, drivers got better clothes than most slaves and generally of a different color to make them readily recognizable in the fields. Commonly the driver dressed in blue (sometimes referred to as "the drivers' color"), with the other slaves in white. Charles Manigault had to put in a special order with his factor in Charleston in the fall of 1847 for a mere six yards of cloth, that of blue Hazard's cloth (a mixture of wool and cotton), since none of his one hundred slaves except the driver at Silk Hope Plantation on the Cooper could wear the blue. Usually the driver received more cloth to make into clothing than the others, the most common practice being from a third to a half more. In ready-made clothing, he normally received the best. Most planters, though, preferred to make the slaves' clothes on the plantation; Charles Manigault was a notable exception in securing ready-made coats, work shirts and trousers for all his male slaves for the winter season. The greatcoat became a virtual symbol of the position, and planters were very careful to ensure that their drivers received these periodically. Some planters, such as Charles Manigault at Gowrie, however, chose to alternate between the greatcoat and a pea jacket for the driver. While the extant records of clothing, such as work shirts, trousers, shoes and hats or caps, do not show the driver as always receiving a better variety, they do ordinarily indicate that the driver got his first, and where there was any shortage (such as during the Civil War) the driver was to be fully clothed whether any other member of the force was or not. Sometimes the driver was allowed to wear certain items apparently denied to other slaves. Only at Smithfield Plantation on the Combahee, for example, is there any documented evidence that rice slaves wore stockings and there only the driver received these—two pairs of woolen stockings each year.²⁷

²⁶ Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, 112, 274; Sparkman Record Book.

²⁷ Pimlico Negroes Clothed 13th November 1810, John Ball, Sr., and John Ball, Jr., Papers, Duke University; Ball Record Book; Read-Lance Plantation Journal, Read-Lance Family Papers, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Sparkman Record Book; Joseph Glover Mt. Pleasant Plantation Book, Glover Family Papers, University of South Carolina; Wrightfield Plantation Book, Glover Family Papers; John Beaufain Irving Record Book of Windsor and Kensington Plantations, Charleston Library Society, Charleston; John

Drivers, in addition to their blue uniform and greatcoat, had other visible symbols of their position. They alone had the whip, which they pridefully displayed across shoulder and hip and which most were able to wear even after retirement. Too, the driver would normally have the only slave watch (an essential item in his work) on the plantation. Also, he sometimes had a horse assigned for his work—Olmsted found a driver on the Savannah with not one horse but three. Most planters, however, were slow to give the driver a horse, which obviously could provide a ready means of escape. The driver alone of the slaves was allowed to have liquor on occasion, and some few drivers had enough access to liquor to become problem drinkers. Drivers were generally given monetary rewards by the planters for their services. Olmsted found a driver on a Savannah River plantation who received such rewards (sometimes as much as \$200 at a time) to the point that he was really paid more than the overseer.²⁸

In the way of intangible benefits, the driver's most obvious advantage was to be freed from the tedious and unhealthy physical labor of the rice swamp. Also, he would enjoy a much higher standard of living as part of the administrative hierarchy of the plantation. But most important in the drivers' eyes was the authority and prestige associated with the job, for in the words of one driver: "Nothing makes us happier dan to strut in front of other niggers."²⁹

Ball and Keating Simons Ball Books, Southern Historical Collection; Keating Simons Ball Blanket Book of Comingtee Plantation, Charleston Museum, Charleston; William E. Sparkman Plantation Record; Undated Notes, Robert F. W. Allston Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society; Grimbball Diary, Nov. 8, 1834; Winter Clothes Delivered My Negroes . . . Dec. 1814, Jackson Letterbooks; Withers Account Book; Clifton, ed., "Ante-bellum Rice Planter," pp. 306-7 (quotation); Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 21, 57-58, 62; Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, pp. 100-2, 294-95, 319-20, 340, 347, 453; Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, p. 104; House, ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism*, pp. 285-86; Olmsted, *Journey in Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 428-29; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, pp. 64-65, 73.

²⁸ Baldwin, "Rice Industry of South Carolina," p. 77; Olmsted, *Journey in Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 428-29, 431; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 254; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, pp. 64-65.

²⁹ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 370; Olmsted, *Journey in Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 435-36; Postell, *Health of Slaves on Southern Plantations*, p. 26; Sparkman Record Book (quotation).

Because good drivers were hard to replace, planters took great care to look after their health. James Sparkman of the Georgetown District noted in 1858 that it was common practice for the driver in his neighborhood to receive extra medical consideration and attention without regard to cost. Charlotte Ann Allston (mother of Robert F. W. Allston) of Matanza Plantation in the Georgetown District in the spring of 1823 nursed driver Chance personally, administering blisters and rubs. A safe guess seems to be that most other owners would have been willing to go to the length of Mrs. Allston to provide medical services for their drivers.³⁰

Rice drivers could often take their pick of the slave women as wives. Too, the driver, by virtue of his position, could partake of illicit sex with the slave women pretty much at will, either through force or persuasion. Fanny Kemble admonished Sophy, an unmarried slave, at Hampton Point for submitting to Morris, the driver, whose son she had just borne. Sophy's quick and defensive response was: "Oh yes, missus we know—we know all about dat well enough; but we do any thing to get our poor flesh some rest from de whip; when he made me follow him into de bush, what use me tell him no? he have strength to make me.'" Miss Kemble thought that Bran, the other driver at Hampton Point, too, had partaken of the slave women and apparently rather often, for a number of children there looked rather suspiciously like him.³¹

Along with the perquisites, there were many disadvantages in being a driver. The job required the driver to put in longer hours than any other slave on the plantation. He arose first in the quarters to blow the horn to awaken the other slaves for the day's work. On Plowden C. J. Weston's Hagley Plantation on the Waccamaw this would be two hours before sunrise to allow time for the slaves to get ready and be flatted across the river to the fields for beginning work at the crack of dawn. Once in the fields the driver had to remain until the last task was finished, which might be several hours later than other workers who had finished their tasks early. Then in the evening he was to report to the overseer on the day's activities and to receive the instructions for the following day. In some instances this involved traveling to another plantation such as was true at Charles Manigault's Gowrie Plantation on the Sa-

³⁰Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, pp. 58-59, 348.

³¹Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 45, 140, 140n, 162, 210, 228 (quotation), 229, 239.

vannah where there was no resident overseer before 1847. The driver was then to return to the quarters to maintain quiet and to enforce the evening curfew. Carrying out these latter duties did not add to the driver's popularity in the quarters. If he was too lax in enforcing them, he risked his job. Obviously, any recreation for the driver was virtually impossible. In the words of Eugene Genovese, "undoubtedly the willingness of the drivers to wink at the violations of curfew . . . sometimes meant no more than they wanted a good night's sleep and did not want to be bothered."³²

The greatest thorn in the driver's flesh was a sense of frustration in that there was no further chance for advancement. A sub-driver might move up to full driver and a full driver to head driver, but that was as far as he could go. Whites still regarded the driver as a slave regardless of how many slaves he may have supervised. And those he supervised generally distrusted him. Thus, the driver was buffeted by conflicting demands from above and below. The owner and overseer could reprimand and even whip the driver before his charges—Olmsted witnessed such a reprimand on a Savannah plantation in the 1850s. Georgia planter William Walter Hazard made a habit of rebuking his driver first in private and then in public but he did not degrade him to the point of allowing another slave to whip him, which he felt would humble the driver and sizably reduce his authority. Some planters such as John Berkeley Grimball, however, would not even allow the overseer to whip the driver. The overseer notwithstanding could make life difficult for the driver in a number of other ways. Roswell King, Jr., overseer at Butler's Island, took Betty, the wife of the head driver, as his mistress for a period of time and even produced a son by her, as vividly told by Fanny Kemble. Leonard Venters, Charles Manigault's overseer at Gowrie in 1856, chose to make life difficult for the driver there by establishing close familiarity with the slaves,

³² Clifton, ed., "Ante-bellum Rice Planter," pp. 305-6; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 53-54, Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 61, 383 (quotation); Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, pp. 107, 135; House, ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism*, pp. 151-52; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, p. 42; "Management of a Southern Plantation," pp. 40, 42; Olmsted, *Journey in Seaboard Slave States*, pp. 432-36; Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, p. 248; Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier Documents*, I, 117-18, 120; Scarborough, *Overseer*, p. 83; Smith and Sass, *Carolina Rice Plantation of the Fifties*, p. 70; Starobin, *Industrial Slavery in the Old South*, pp. 91-92.

even to the length of attending their prayer meetings, and invariably taking their side against him.³³

On the other hand, the driver could never expect to live a normal life in the slave quarters. Uniformly planters forbade any familiarity with the other slaves on the part of their drivers, an act which would quickly lose for them control over the slaves. The slaves took their not doing so as an affront. They regarded the driver then as the white man's man, not to be trusted and one who would quickly betray them to owner or overseer. Even if the driver were able to gain personal acceptance in the quarters, the very performance of his duties—chastising the slaves, requiring them to perform adequately their tasks, testifying against them in plantation hearings, etc.—further alienated him from them. The worst punishment a driver could receive from his white owner or overseer was dismissal; he could be killed by those he supervised and sometimes was. The driver Cudjoe was killed on Christmas Eve night, 1837, on Robert F. W. Allston's Waverly Plantation on the Waccamaw by a group of slaves. Jacob Schirmer of Charleston entered in his diary a comment concerning the death of another driver on June 7, 1844: "Trial in St. Thomas Parish of 2 negroes Mother & Son belonging to Mr. Ball for the murder of the Driver found Guilty and sentenced to be hung 1' Friday in August." As trying as all these difficulties may have been, it is interesting to note that there is no recorded instance of a slave having turned down the opportunity of becoming driver.³⁴

Once installed, the driver could expect normally to retain his position until poor health, old age, or death would bring about his removal. However, such was not always to be. Four examples from the drivers associated with Charles Manigault's Gowrie Plantation will suffice to show how one's tenure could be rather sharply

³³ Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 250; Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, I, 149; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 374-78, Grimbail Diary, July 8, 1834; Julia E. Harn, "Old Canoochee-Ogeechee Chronicles: Life Among the Negroes," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XVI (June 1952): 146; W. W. Hazard, "On the General Management of a Plantation," *Southern Agriculturist*, IV (July 1831): 350-54; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, pp. 45, 141n, 209-10, 315; Olmsted, *Journey in Seaboard Slave States*, p. 431; "On Planting and Managing a Rice Crop," pp. 248-49; Phillips, *Life and Labor*, p. 262.

³⁴ Easterby, ed., *South Carolina Rice Plantation*, p. 76; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, pp. 377-79, 634; "On the Management of the Butler Estate," p. 524; "The Schirmer Diary," this *Magazine* 74 (July 1973): 171.

curtailed. In 1848, Charles, who had been driver since 1833, when he was appointed at age twenty-one, a period of fifteen years, was demoted by overseer Jesse Cooper for an unspecified offense and replaced by another slave on the plantation, Renty. Normally the overseer would have great difficulty making such a demotion stick, for overseers were much easier to come by than good drivers, with the typical driver during his tenure seeing many overseers come and go. However, Manigault concurred in Cooper's decision, writing to him that he had for some time felt that Renty was really better suited to be driver than Charles but had had no occasion to justify Charles's dismissal. Either Charles was entirely unaware of his owner's having reservations about his choice as driver, or he was very stupid in not making more effort to cultivate his support. Too, Ishmael, driver at Gowrie from 1849 to 1852, was rather summarily demoted to the position of cooper. When Charles Manigault appointed Ishmael at age twenty-six, he doubtless showed considerable promise for the position. However, when Louis Manigault (Charles's son) assumed the position as manager of Gowrie in 1852, he quickly concluded that Ishmael was ill-suited as driver but excellent at coopering; consequently, he was relegated to that position. He, like Charles, apparently had made little effort to ingratiate himself with his master.³⁵

³⁵ Clifton, ed., "Ante-bellum Rice Planter," pp. 309-10; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 63-64, 133. Generally, in a clash between the overseer and driver, the owner supported the driver, unless he had little faith in him as in the examples here or the driver had committed an egregious error, as discussed below. John Berkeley Grimball in 1832 refused to support his overseer's demotion of his driver, Richard, at his Slann's Island Plantation and returned him to his post. However, later in the year, Grimball changed his mind and demoted Richard himself, replacing him with Robin who continued as driver there through the Civil War. Grimball Diary, Oct. 17-Nov. 3, 1832, Nov. 14, 1864.

The tenure of antebellum rice overseers was at best brief. According to William Scarborough, *Overseer*, p. 39, the average duration for these was 3.6 years; at Gowrie, for example, it was even less, the average there being only 2.5 years. At the same time most drivers served for lengthy terms. Old Tom at Hopeton, Robin at Slann's Island, and Bran at Hampton Point, for example, served over thirty years each. Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, I, 266-67; Grimball Diary, Oct. 17-Nov. 3, 1832, Nov. 14, 1864; Kemble, *Journal of a Residence*, p. 175; Leigh, *Ten Years on a Georgia Plantation*, p. 56. Prince, a driver at Hugh Fraser Grant's Elizafield Plantation on the Altamaha, served for about 20 years. House, ed., *Planter Management and Capitalism*, pp. 252-60. Two drivers, Bob and Dick, served continuously at Wrightfield Plantation

William Capers as overseer demoted both drivers at Gowrie, Ralph, the head driver, and George, his assistant, in the summer of 1860 over a slave suicide. George, on the morning of June 9, 1860, brought Nat and London to Ralph to be whipped. While Ralph was obtaining from his cabin the key to the rice barn (where Manigault always had the slaves whipped), London escaped from George, who made no effort to stop him. Ralph pursued London to the river, promising not to whip him until the overseer returned. However, London refused to return, saying that he would drown himself before he would return and proceeded to do just that. When Capers, who was absent from the plantation that day, returned later, he immediately demoted both drivers—George for doing nothing to stop London and Ralph for allowing the situation to develop. Manigault chose not to take Capers' advice to sell George; instead, he retained both former drivers as field hands on the plantation.³⁶

The driver, John, who replaced Ralph as head driver, too, had just been demoted by James R. Pringle on his Santee River estate for excessive drinking. Capers had earlier served as overseer for Pringle and knew well the good qualities of John as driver. Capers reasoned that bad management was the reason for John's downfall; with the proper supervision, he could once again perform capably the driver's duties. Accordingly, Capers (feeling that none of the one hundred slaves at Gowrie was suitable as driver) requested that Manigault purchase John who was up for sale, which

in the Charleston area from 1845 to 1859 (these are the only years for which there are available records for this plantation). Drivers Sam and John served at nearby Mt. Pleasant Plantation from the time of their purchase in 1851 until 1865. Wrightfield Plantation Book and Joseph Glover Mt. Pleasant Plantation Book, Glover Family Papers. Driver John (discussed below), when he was dismissed by James R. Pringle in 1860 for alcoholism, had served seventeen years there, having been appointed by Pringle in 1843 at age twenty-seven. Crum, *Gullah*, p. 242; Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 304-5. And apparently drivers often (if they cared to) served far beyond their real physical usefulness. Bob, the driver at John Ball's Pimlico Plantation on the Cooper River in 1810, was listed as only a half-hand at age 60. Slave List, Ball Papers. Charles Manigault described the driver, Isaac, of his neighbor Legaré in 1844 as "most old & feeble & crabbed." Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, p. 11. Charles Heyward's driver, Ishmael, at his Amsterdam Plantation on the Combahee was 77 (the oldest driver on record) when the Civil War ended his tenure. Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, pp. 132-35.

³⁶ Clifton, ed., *Life and Labor*, pp. 296, 300.

he did. Manigault's purchase of John proved to be a wise one, for within two months Capers had rescued him from his drinking problem.³⁷

The post-Civil War performance of rice drivers provides an interesting commentary on the disposition of the drivers themselves. Those of Charles Manigault demonstrate the different roads taken under freedom. When Louis Manigault returned to Gowrie on the Savannah for the first time after the war, in March, 1867, he found four of the former drivers—John, George, Charles and Ishmael—serving as foremen for General George Harrison, who was then renting the plantation. Doubtless these four were continuing to provide leadership for the blacks and advice and assistance for the whites. Quite different indeed was the position taken by Frederick, the driver at Manigault's Marshlands estate on the Cooper. He immediately assumed control of the plantation at the war's end, telling the emancipated slaves there that he now owned the estate and everything on it. He even leased portions of the plantation for them to plant. And he invited blacks from neighboring plantations to come over and rent land from him.³⁸

Everything considered, the rice drivers acquitted themselves very well under slavery. They of all slave managers had had the greatest opportunity to experience large-scale economic management and to play the role of compromiser between conflicting demands from the few above and the many below. Thus, they should have been well prepared for some role of leadership in the emancipated black community, perhaps in company with the preachers. However, the post-war reaction under white domination ensured that no such opportunity would materialize. It is the irony of American history that the rice drivers under emancipation could only go back to their old accommodationist role.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 296, 304-5. It is interesting that the purchase price for John was only \$500—an index of how little value was attached to acknowledged alcoholics as drivers, for good drivers (and very few were ever sold except along with the slave force) would easily bring \$1,000 or more.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 363-64; "Souvenirs of Our Ancestors and My Immediate Family" [by Charles Manigault], Manigault Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection.

³⁹ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, p. 388.