

THE PLAIN FOLK OF ORANGE:
LAND, WORK, AND SOCIETY IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA

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One day in the early summer of 1860 a middle-aged man set out on a journey across Orange County, Virginia. The man was a farmer by trade, but on this day he was beginning a more uncommon job. The traveller was Mr. John F. Taliaferro, scion of a distinguished county family and the person selected by the federal government to enumerate the Orange County portion of the 1860 census. He headed to the home of Mr. Richard Richards, a man as well-versed in the details of the county's households as anyone would allow a tax collector to be. Richards, indeed, provided the State each year with much the same sort of information that the Census obtained every ten years, and so it was logical for Taliaferro to start his enumeration with such an experienced hand.

Taliaferro criss-crossed the County until the fall, starting in the small farm and scrub woods district later renowned to the world as

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the grisly "Wilderness battlefield," and circling his way gradually west through rolling farmlands and the bustling railroad village of Gordonsville, with a final sweep back east through Orange Courthouse and the area around his own farm. When finished he had records on more than ten thousand people and had visited almost nine hundred households. While Taliaferro had missed some people, counted others twice, and had not always taken down census items thoroughly, his efforts resulted in a remarkable document that mirrored the vitality and diversity of local life in Orange on the eve of the Civil War.¹

A number of Southern historians have used manuscript census and tax records of the type collected by Taliaferro and Richards to draw important conclusions about the nature of antebellum society, but the census and tax documents also have certain limitations that are unique to a largely rural and slave-oriented society. These limitations have helped make local histories of the South more abstract than comparable works in urban history based on similar sources. Since the street directories and census enumeration districts of big cities have few counterparts in rural counties, historians must generalize about Southern people from comparatively oversized units, thus losing the unique texture of each locale. Studies from such disparate states as Missouri, Texas, Virginia, and Georgia have a strange similarity, largely because they lack a concrete sense of place. Furthermore, since no occupations were listed on slave schedules, and a large majority of whites worked in agriculture, occupational studies of the South are by nature less informative than comparable studies of major cities. Finally, since the ethnic population of the rural South was so small, questions like the development of ethnic neighborhoods, the process of cultural assimilation, and the course of upward mobility that the census answers so well are not very important in Southern history.²

1. See National Archives, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (Orange County, Virginia), R.G. M-653.

2. For the classic study of Southern society based on manuscript census returns, see Frank L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*, (Baton Rouge, 1949). Studies using Virginia tax returns include Luther Porter Jackson, *Free Negro*

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Instead of exploring immigration, assimilation, and spatial distribution, then, most Southern historians have devoted their attention to class structure and social relations in the abstract. Economic democracy, the concentration of wealth, and the expansion of the market economy are the bread and butter of Southern local studies. Since land is the basis of agricultural societies such as the South, however, any study of local economic structures is incomplete without a complementary study of local geography. The global distribution of various social groups has been known for years, though local conditions are still largely unknown. Planters and large farmers made up the bulk of landowners in the rich river bottoms and deltas, while a much greater percentage of small farmers and stock-herders were to be found in the back-country and mountain highlands.

U.B. Phillips and Lewis C. Gray contended that this was the result of a gradual exclusion of smaller farms from the plantation regions as original settlers expanded their holdings or were bought out by more wealthy neighbors. The smallest farmers, they contended, were forced out to the sand hills and piney woods or to cheap government lands where competition was less brutal. Frank Owsley challenged this view by presenting a variety of tables and maps which showed that large numbers of "plain folk" owned land in even the best districts, and that these holdings were intermingled among the holdings of more wealthy planters. As Fabian Linden pointed out in a review article of some early works of the Owsley school, however.

Footnote no. 2 cont'd.

Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860, (New York, 1969), and A. Jane Townes, "The Effect of Emancipation on Large Landholdings, Nelson and Goochland Counties, Virginia," *Journal of Southern History* XLV (August 1979). For the similarity of many local studies of the South, see for example, Randall C. Manning, "Population and Agriculture in Nodaway County, Missouri, 1850 to 1860," *Missouri Historical Review* XXX (July 1978), 388-411; Randolph Campbell, "Planters and Plain Folk: Harrison County, Texas, as a Test Case," *Journal of Southern History* XL (August 1974), 369-98, and "Population Persistence and Social Change in Nineteenth Century Texas: Harrison County, 1850-1880," *Journal of Southern History* XLVIII (May 1982); Townes, "Large Landholdings;" James C. Bonner, "Profile of a Late Antebellum Community," *American Historical Review*, IL (July 1944).

mere ownership did not imply an equivalent share of landed wealth. Gavin Wright's study of the cotton South underlined Linden's point by showing that there was greater inequality in the distribution of wealth in the South than in other regions of the country.³

In Orange County, the geographic as well as the social structure reflected the complex historical forces at work in antebellum Virginia. The tobacco slump following the Panic of 1819, the rise of competition from planters in the western states and an unstable fluctuation in tobacco prices and production led to hard times in the Virginia leaf districts in the three decades before 1850. Virginia farmers were also faced with extensive soil erosion and a decline in productivity that made the idea of migration to cheap lands in the south and west very attractive. The residents of Orange County had endured the long depression by resorting to mixed agriculture, lower birthrates, and high out-migration, but important local and national changes during the decade before secession reversed the trend of these adaptations, particularly among the poorer elements of white society. John Schlotterbeck contends in his history of Orange and Greene Counties that high prices for staple crops and the improvement of transportation links with major markets caused a turnaround in the local economy, and his argument is confirmed by other evidence as well.⁴

3. Paul H. Buck, "The Poor Whites of the Ante-Bellum South," *American Historical Review* XXXI (October 1925); U.B. Phillips, "The Origin and Growth of the Southern Black Belts," *American Historical Review* XI (July 1906), 798-816; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Washington, D.C., 1933), 533-37; Owsley, *Plain Folk*, 76-89, 150-229; Fabian Linden, "Economic Democracy in the Slave South: An Appraisal of Some Recent Views," *Journal of Negro History* XXXI (January 1946), 140-189; Gavin Wright, *Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1978), 24-42; Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," in Edward Magdol and Jon Wakelyn, *The Southern Common People: Studies in Nineteenth-Century Social History*, (Westport, Conn. 1980), 119-137, esp. 125-128.

4. Joseph Clarke Robert, *The Tobacco Kingdom: Plantation, Market, and Factory in Virginia and North Carolina, 1800-1860*, (Durham, North Carolina, 1938), 139-57; Avery O. Craven, "Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the

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The course of tobacco prices, land sales, and marriages during the 1850's is shown in figure 1. Except in 1852, the congruence between land sales and tobacco prices is striking. The parallel is especially significant in 1857, when prices for wheat and corn went down, while both land sales and tobacco prices rose. Overall, the general upward trend of tobacco prices was sufficient cause for optimism among Virginia farmers. Average prices for middling leaf went below 7 cents only twice in the 1850's, whereas they had only been above that level once in the previous ten years. Orange County farmers avidly bought and sold lands according to the tobacco markets; in 1860 alone, 12 percent of all tracts and town lots exchanged hands, and the figure was much greater in 1852 and 1857. As conditions improved, farmers brought their more marginal fields into production, adding more than 19 square miles to the County's improved acreage between 1849 and 1859. At the same time, Schlotterbeck finds that there was an absolute decline in the average size of farms of about 33 acres per holding. The 1850's, then, was a time of simultaneous expansion and deconcentration in landed wealth, and the poor farm laborers clearly benefited the most from the changes.⁵

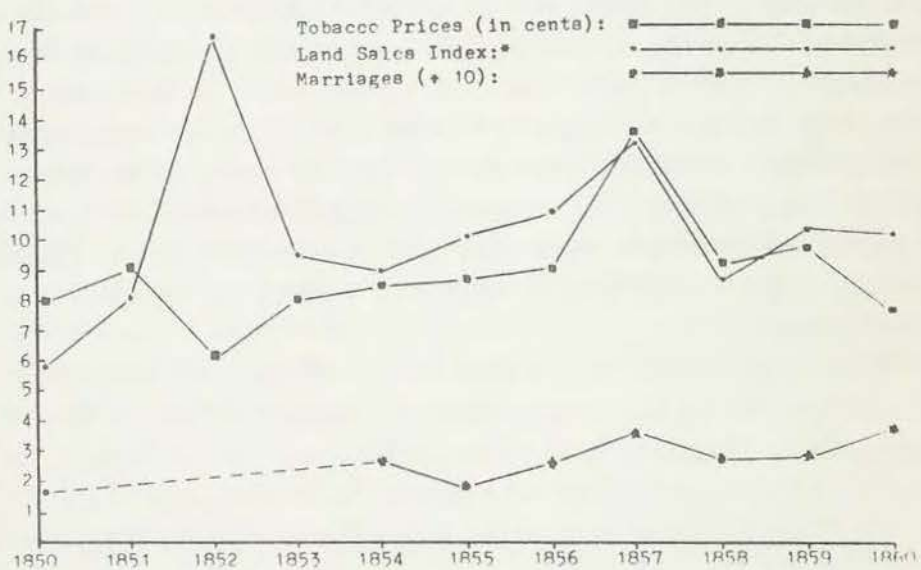
This improvement is mirrored in the changing distribution of occupations during the decade. While the absolute number of farmers increased by 2 percent in the State and 5 percent in the County, the number of laborers declined by 6 percent in the State and 73 percent in the County. The latter number is due in part to Taliaferro's usual

Footnote no. 4 cont'd.

Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860," *University of Illinois Studies in Social Science*, XIII (March 1925), 9-179, esp. 122-161; John Thomas Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm: Social and Economic Change in Orange and Greene Counties, Virginia, 1716 to 1860," (Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University, 1980), passim, esp. 301-324.

5. See Gray, *Southern Agriculture*, 1039; Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860*, (New York, 1966), 204-215; Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom*, 143-57. Land figure based on *Biennial Report of the Auditor of Public Accounts, 1860-1861*, 496; and *Land Book, Orange County, Virginia*, 1860. See also Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm," 306. For land deconcentration with less favorable results, see Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, translated by John Day, (Urbana, Ill. 1974), 88-97.

FIGURE 1:



Sources: Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom*, 133-34; General Index to Deeds, Orange County, Virginia, III (1848-1890); Biennial Report of the Auditor of Public Accounts, 1858-1859, 58-59 and 1860-1861, 177, 497; Census of 1850, 260.

* An index value of 10 = approx. 127 deed transfers. Figure derived from 1860 values, the only year for which actual figures are available.

habit of listing only the occupation of the household head, but even allowing for this, it is clear that the farming class was growing at the expense of the laboring class. The poorer element of white society seems to have avidly seized the opportunities for agricultural prosperity that arose in the 1850's. While the number of Virginians employed in non-agricultural pursuits exploded during the decade, the reverse was true in Orange County.⁶

The draw of the land was enhanced not only by the high and largely stable tobacco prices, but also by the development of railroad links to the County, which allowed residents to ship their products cheaply to the lucrative markets in Richmond and Alexandria. The Louisa Railroad reached the village of Gordonsville in 1840, connecting with the Fredericksburg-Charlottesville stage line. This railroad, redubbed the Virginia Central in 1850, was joined at Gordonsville in 1854 by the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. These railroads brought a number of products to Orange, particularly dry goods, furniture, and commercial goods, and carried away the rich agricultural harvest, while spurring village growth and adding to land values. The influence of the railroads on land sales is visible in figure 1, where the number of transfers nearly doubled in 1852 over the previous year. The Orange and Alexandria Railroad itself only purchased five tracts in 1852 for its right-of-way from Orange Courthouse to Gordonsville, but the general excitement over the new system brought about a sudden land boom. Land sales were particularly brisk in Gordonsville, where the two railroads joined, but sales were up across the County.⁷

The good times brought by the railroads and high tobacco prices greatly increased the rewards of remaining in the County, especially for young men. There are no precise statistics, but the drop in

6. See Table 1.

7. Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm," 302-305; William H.B. Thomas, *Gordonsville, Virginia: Historic Crossroads Town*, (Verona, Va., 1971), 12-17; John F. Stover, *Iron Roads to the West: American Railroads in the 1850's*, (New York, 1978), 60-66; Charles W. Turner, "Railroad Service to Virginia Farmers, 1828-1860," *Journal of Agricultural History* XXII (January 1948), 245-47. For railroad purchases, see Auditor of Public Accounts, *General Index to Deeds, Orange County, Virginia*, III (1848-1890).

TABLE I:

OCCUPATIONAL CHANGE IN STATE AND COUNTY, 1850-1860

	1850		1860	
<u>Virginia</u>				
Farmers:	106,807	(47 %)	108,958	(36 %)
Laborers:	46,989	(21 %)	44,041	(15 %)
Total occupations:	226,875	(100 %)	297,354	(100 %)
<u>Orange County</u>				
Farmers:	429	(39 %)	450	(53 %)
Other agricultural:	72	(7 %)	61	(7 %)
Unskilled Laborers:	190	(17 %)	51	(6 %)
Crafts and Services:	291	(26 %)	221	(26 %)
Civil or professional:	65	(5 %)	58	(7 %)
Others:	53	(5 %)	12	(1 %)
Total:	1099	(100 %)	853	(100 %)

Sources: Seventh Census of the United States, (Washington, D.C., 1853) 272; Population of the United States in 1860, (Washington, D.C., 1864), 524-25; Seventh Census of the United States, Original Returns of the Assistant Marshals, First Series, White and Free Colored Population, Orange County, Virginia (June 30, 1850); Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States, Orange County, Virginia, 1860. For the occupations included in each class, see

"The Plain Folk of Orange: Land, Work, and Society in the Civil War Era"
M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1983.

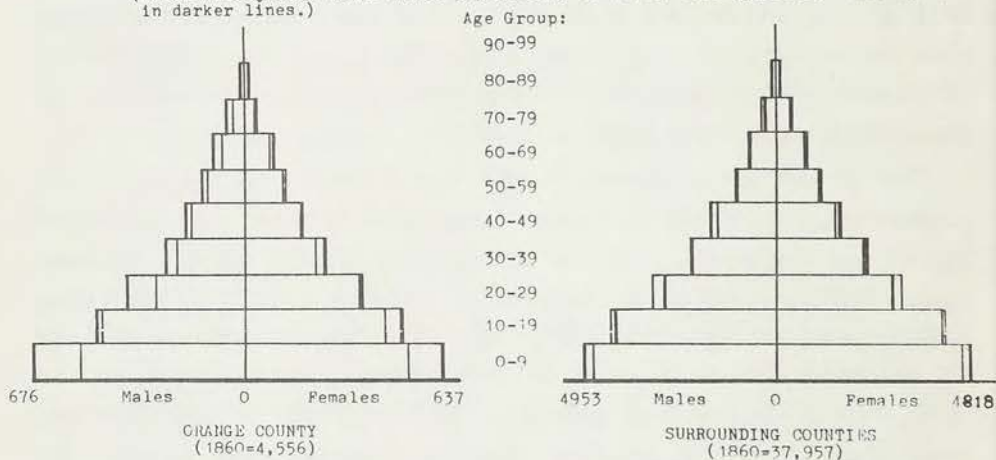
out-migration can be inferred from population profiles. The first pyramid in figure 2 shows an unusual increase in the number of men aged 20-29 and of children under 10 in Orange during the 1850's. Meanwhile there was a large increase in the number of marriages annually, (see figure 1), which partly explains the sudden boom in the number of young children and provides further proof of expanding opportunity and reduced out-migration. This reduction in migration seems especially strong when Orange is compared to the surrounding counties, but declining migration was characteristic of the State as a whole during this period. While the number of people born in Virginia and living in other states was nearly six times larger than the number of out-of-state natives living in Virginia, the growth of the out-of-state group far out-paced the growth of the out-migrant group during the 1850-1860 period.

Not all of the counties in the upper Piedmont shared in the population expansion, as figure 2 and table 2 show. The combined figures for the seven counties surrounding Orange show a decrease from 1850 to 1860 in the number of children under ten, suggesting that the boom of the 1850's depended on local circumstances. Of the six counties shown in table 2, only Orange, Spotsylvania, and to some extent Greene had important rail terminals or turnpikes and were located in the tobacco district. Culpeper was outside the tobacco planting area, as was Madison County. Louisa County lacked any major railheads, despite the fact that the Virginia Central ran through the County, and the growth of nearby Richmond may have siphoned off many Louisa residents. Similarly, Albemarle's rail network was not completed until the late 1850's. Orange, which was in the tobacco district, lay on the only direct route from Alexandria to Richmond. Two turnpikes brought produce from the Shenandoah Valley east to the railroads. Demographic patterns in the Piedmont deserve more attention, but these simple measures do show the fortunate conditions unique to Orange in this period.⁸

8. For the long term picture of migration in Orange and Greene Counties, see Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm," 121-136. For age-sex pyramids, see Roland Pressat, *Demographic Analysis: Methods, Results, Applications*, translated by Judah Matras, (Chicago, 1972), 263-82. Virginia figures from *The Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Population*, (Washington, D.C., 1864), xxxiii. For tobacco production, see Robert, *Tobacco Kingdom*, 151-157.

FIGURE 2:

NORMALIZED POPULATION PROFILES FOR ORANGE AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES, 1850-1860
 (Based on adjusted total white populations of 10,000 each pyramid. 1860 shown
 in darker lines.)



Sources: Census of 1850, 242-245; Statistics of Population, 1860, 500. The surrounding counties are Albemarle, Culpeper, Greene, Madison, Louisa, and Spotsylvania.

It is evident that the strong local economy helped to expand opportunities for average people in Orange during the last decade of the antebellum period, but expansion is only part of their story. How did the "common people" or "plain folk" of the South fit into the rest of society? What was their position on the eve of the most crucial period in Southern history? These questions are particularly intriguing for a plantation county such as Orange: slaves made up more than half of the population there, and nearly half of all white households were slave-owning, yet the other part of the white population lacked distinct cultural characteristics of the type described by Forest McDonald and Grady McWhiney. How these common people in the heart of plantation society stack up against the classical descriptions of non-planter society put forth by historians and observers such as Frederick Olmstead, Daniel Hundley, Frank Owsley and Eugene Genovese is still largely a mystery.⁹

Few people would claim that antebellum white society was devoid of distinct social groups, but attempts to divide this society

9. Literature on non-planters includes Daniel R. Hundley, *Social Relations in our Southern States* (Baton Rouge, 1979); George M. Weston, *The Poor Whites of the South*, (Washington, D.C., 1856); Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States in the Years 1853-54, with Remarks on their Economy*, (New York, 1904); Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet it*, (New York, 1857); E. A. Seabrook, "The Poor Whites of the South," *The Galaxy* IV (October 1867), 681-90; Phillips, "Black Belts;" Avery O. Craven, "Poor Whites and Negroes in the Antebellum South," *Journal of Negro History* XV (October 1920), 14-25; Buck, "Poor Whites;" A.N.J. Den Hollander, "The Tradition of Poor Whites," in W.T. Couch, ed., *Culture in the South*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1934) 402-431; Roger Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers During Slavery and After, 1840-1875*, (Baton Rouge, 1939); Bonner, "Profile;" Robert R. Russel, "The Effects of Slavery upon Non-Slaveholders in the Ante-Bellum South," *Journal of Agricultural History* XV (April 1941), 112-126; Blanche Henry Clark, *The Tennessee Yeoman, 1840-1860*, (Nashville, Tennessee, 1942); Hebert Weaver, *Mississippi Farmers, 1850-1860*, (Nashville, Tennessee, 1946); Linden, "Economic Democracy;" Owsley, *Plain Folk*; Gavin Wright, "Economic Democracy and the Concentration of Agricultural Wealth in the Cotton South, 1850-1860," *Journal of Agricultural History* XLIV (January 1970), 63-94; Eugene D. Genovese, "Yeoman Farmers in a Slaveholder's Democracy," *Journal of Agricultural History* XLIX (January 1975) 331-342; Wright, *Political Economy*; McDonald and McWhiney, "Southern Herdsman;" Richard C. McMath and Orville Burton, eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Community Studies*, (Westport, Connecticut, 1981).

TABLE 2:

GROWTH RATES FOR SELECTED MALE AGE GROUPS: ORANGE
AND SURROUNDING COUNTIES, 1850-1860

	<u>15-19</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>
Orange:	+5.6	+32.4	+18.0
Spotsylvania:	+16.3	+20.7	+10.0
Greene:	+15.3	+7.7	+0.6
Louisa:	0.0	-9.4	-9.7
Culpeper:	-6.9	-17.7	+19.3
Madison:	-17.4	-13.0	+0.8
Albemarle:	-18.8	-15.4	-4.5

Sources: Census of 1850, 242-245; Statistics of Population, 1860, 500.

into such groups have had ambiguous results. Hinton Helper, George Weston and E.A. Seabrook were leading advocates of the thesis that the chief distinction in Southern society resulted from ownership of property in slaves, and each lamented the degradation that they saw growing out of this sharp division. Their two broad categories, though, slaveholding and nonslaveholding, do not reflect the complexity and diversity of either group. Daniel Hundley, writing in the 1850's, discerned at least seven different classes, each based on behavioral characteristics rooted in heredity. His descriptions are an eloquent testimony to the rich texture of the South, and underline the difficulties of using strictly economic or sociological categories. Nevertheless, evidence about personality and behavior is scattered, and hardly adequate for classifying all the members of a community. Furthermore, models based on genetic heredity have been discredited time and time again.¹⁰

The most satisfactory means of dividing society into groups lies between these two extremes, and is based on a combination of property-ownership and occupational rankings. While lacking the elegant simplicity of the Helper, Weston, and Seabrook model or the rich flavor of the Hundley descriptions, this combination ranking should accurately reflect the broad hierarchy of white society. Skill, authority, and wealth have formed the basis of social rankings in many different cultures, and the antebellum South was little different. The fundamental division of Southern society was the caste distinction between slave and free (or between Afro-Americans and European-Americans), but work and wealth give a good notion of the social order among whites. Some qualifications about the use of occupation and wealth should be kept in mind, though, especially as the scales are applied to Orange. Since Taliaferro applied the occupation of "farmer" equally to landless sheepherders like William Amos and renowned gentry planters like Benjamin J. Barbour, ownership of land or slaves is more important in the ranking of

10. Helper, *Impending Crisis*, passim.; Weston, "Poor Whites;" Seabrook, "Poor Whites." On the diversity of these two categories, see Buck, "Poor Whites," 41-44; and James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, (New York, 1982), passim; Hundley, *Social Relations*, esp. 7-263.

"farmers" than occupation. Furthermore, since "ownership" in the largest sense also includes knowledge of crafts, trades, and skills, each wealth group has an implied sub-category. Finally, since Taliaferro's report of real and personal wealth is wildly different from Richards' report, the census figures must be taken with a grain of salt. Taliaferro's numbers are most reliable on the number of slaveholders in the County, where he finds 92 percent of Richards' count, so slaveholding is used here as the best index of wealth among County residents.¹¹

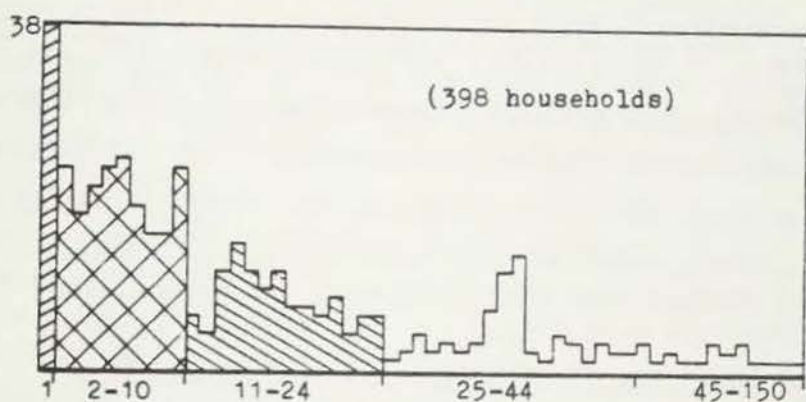
Helper, Weston, and Seabrook were correct to point out that ownership of slaves was a central characteristic of the South, even though differences among slaveholders were also very great. Figure 3 shows the distribution of households in the various slaveholding sizes. In the figure, four obvious clusters stand out: those holding one slave, those holding between 2 and 10 slaves, those holding between 11 and 24 slaves, and those holding 25 or more slaves. The first group is worthy of special attention because its members belonged to those households on the margins of slave ownership. These 38 households have been joined for analytical purposes with the 112 non-slaveholding households having direct title to land within the County, another group that was on the margins of ownership. The resulting classification of the County's households is summarized in Table 3.

These figures show that about half of all white households had at least one member who owned either land or slaves. Furthermore, craftsmen and service workers lived in about half of the propertyless

11. For social rankings in several cultures, see Donald J. Treiman, "A Standard Occupational Prestige Scale for use with Historical Data," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* VII (Autumn 1976), 283-304. For the difficulties of using occupational scales and discussion of current literature on the subject, see Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920*, (Chicago, 1982), esp. 420-43. A classic study using both wealth and occupation is Bonner, "Profile," 38-49. For the census and tax assessments, see U.S. Department of Interior, Census Office, *Statistics of the United States, (Including Mortality, Property, & c.,) in 1860, Compiled from the Original Returns and Begin the Final Exhibit of the Eighth Census*, (Washington, D.C., 1866), 506; and Auditor, *Biennial Report, 1860-61*, 496, 265.

FIGURE 3:

PROFILE OF SLAVE-OWNERSHIP, ORANGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1860



Sources: Population Schedules, 1860 (White Population);
Population Schedules, 1860 (Slave Population). (Columns
show totals for each household, and do not correspond
precisely to published totals based on individual's
ownership.)

TABLE 3:

DIVISION OF CENSUS HOUSEHOLDS IN ORANGE COUNTY, 1860

25+ Slaves:	68 (7.8 %)	Land or 1 Slave:	150 (17.2 %)
10-24 Slaves:	112 (12.9 %)	Propertyless:	318 (36.6 %)
2-10 Slaves:	175 (7.8 %)	Other:*	<u>47</u> (5.4 %)
		Total:	870 (100 %)

*Includes 28 free negro, 13 illegible, and 6 duplicate households.

Sources: Population Schedules, 1860; Land Book, 1860.

households. The remaining households were truly part of the "poor white" class, with no property or skills, a "rural proletariat" entirely dependent on income from tenancy or manual labor. Evidence on the condition of these "poor whites" is scanty, but they should not be viewed collectively as mere ne'er do-wells who lived in utter destitution and hopelessness. Given the high prices for all agricultural products in this period, especially for tobacco, tenancy was not the economic dead-end it became after the war. Recent studies have shown that wage labor was quite lucrative in staple areas such as Orange County where farmers raised crops requiring care during a large number of days during the course of a year. While this meant that slave labor had an overall competitive advantage in comparison to free labor, it also meant that wages for white manual labor during the peak periods of planting, cultivation, and harvesting were quite good. In addition, the reduction in the manual labor force during the 1850's could only have raised wages even higher. Finally, even the poorest Southerners could tap the bounty of the woods and streams. Orange County was by no means a howling wilderness on the eve of the war, but a considerable area was covered by unimproved woodlands, particularly in the northeastern corner, and the County was also criss-crossed with streams. Fish and game, then, could have been found without much trouble by those who sought it.¹²

12. For a classic description of the lazy poor white, see Olmsted, *Seaboard States*, 78, 82-83, 96-97, 143, 165. On the costs of labor and the changes in tenancy, see Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The South from Self-Sufficiency to Peonage: An Interpretation," *American Historical Review* LXXXV (December 1980), 1095-1118; Carville Earle, "A Staple Interpretation of Slavery and Free Labor," *Geographical Review* LXVIII (January 1978), 52-65; Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "The Foundation of the Modern Economy: Agriculture and the Costs of Labor in the United States and England, 1800-1860," *American Historical Review* LXXXV (December 1980). On hunting and fishing as part of the Southern diet and lifestyle, see Hundley, *Social Relations*, 261-262; Sam Bowers Hilliard, *Hogmeat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840-1860*, (Carbondale, Illinois, 1972), 70-91. For the woodlands of the country in 1864, see "Chief Engineer's Office, Map of Orange, from Surveys and Reconnaissances by Walter Izard, 1st. Lt. Egrs. P.A.C.S.," in Library of Congress Map Collection. For drainage and waterways, see United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, *Soil*

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About half of the propertyless households had artisans and service workers, but the most striking thing about the distribution of occupations in Orange is that a large portion of men from all ranks in society were so employed. Much has been made of the agricultural character of the South, but the large percentage of Orange County residents employed in non-agricultural pursuits suggests structural similarities with small-town communities throughout the United States. The wide wealth distribution of those employed in crafts and services also reflects the considerable range of success that people could attain in specific jobs. Merchants had an especially wide wealth distribution. Bernard Bear, an immigrant from Germany, had no real property, a single hog, a clock, and scattered other possessions for an inventory worth about \$1500. Another German merchant, Benjamin Rose, who was about the same age as Bear, had accumulated nine slaves, owned two valuable lots in Orange Courthouse, and was about four times as wealthy as Bear was. A third merchant, William J. Parrott, owned five slaves, three lots in Gordonsville, and personal property and inventory worth \$78,000. A similar range of wealth prevailed for artisans; 41 propertyless carpenters lived in the County, but there were also several skilled carpenters like Miles Lipscomb, who owned seven slaves to aid him in his trade. Overall, there was an expansion of the merchant class at the expense of crafts during the 1850's, but combined employment in the two classes remained stable. The advent of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad meant that ready-made goods could be brought in cheaply from outside the County, and as a result there was a decline in the number of artisans such as coopers and chairmakers from 1850 to 1860. Ready-made goods needed sales agents, however, and so there was a corresponding

Footnote No. 12 cont'd.

Survey: Orange County, Virginia, (Washington, D.C., 1971), 164, and map sheets 1-46; United States Department of Interior, Geological Survey, *7½ Minute Series Topographical Maps*, Barboursville, Belmont, Chancellorsville, Culpeper, Germanna Bridge, Gordonsville, Lahore, Madison Mills, Mineral, Mine Run, Rapidan, Richardsville, Rochelle, Rockville, and Unionville, Virginia quadrangles.

TABLE 4:

OCCUPATIONS IN ORANGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1860

	Propertyless:	Land or 1 slave:	2-10 slaves:	11-24 slaves:	25+ slaves:	Total:
Farmers:	82	80	125	98	65	450
Other agricultural:	35	5	14	1	6	61
Unskilled:	36	8	5	2	0	51
Crafts and services:	110	56	43	10	2	221
Civil or professional:	11	6	12	20	9	58
Other:	3	2	5	0	2	12
Total:	227	157	204	131	84	803

Sources: Population Schedules, 1860; Land Book, 1860. (Table includes occupations of all white residents reporting work on census schedules.)

increase in the number of merchants over the same period.¹³

The fact that a large number of Southerners were employed in non-agricultural pursuits is often overlooked, but it should not obscure the fact that most households were supported by people who worked the land. Land was the fundamental productive tool of the plantation South, and the distribution of land among the various social groups is fascinating testimony to the intricate texture of the rural South. There are, however, serious obstacles involved in the study of landholding. Gavin Wright has used census returns for real property values with telling effect in his wealth concentration studies, but census figures for individuals are consistently wide of assessment values, and are therefore best for comparative rather than exclusively local use. Furthermore, the census values for real property also include the value of buildings and improvements, so they serve as a better index of wealth than land quality. Agricultural census figures for improved and unimproved acreage are more reliable than reported real estate values, but give little indication of land value, and are reported only for farms with more than \$100 worth of production. Small farms that produced only enough for subsistence are thus completely excluded. In addition, no census returns give much useful information about geographic location. Tax records are more accurate on acreage and value than the census, and also provide some broad geographical information. The names on tax lists, though, can only be linked to those people in the census returns who held direct title, thus excluding those people (5 to 15 percent of all landowners) with an indirect interest in land tracts through estate, lease, and trust holdings. Deeds are the best sources on all counts, but the study of landholding through deed records is almost a lifetime venture, and is especially complicated in states like Virginia

13. For scholarly recognition of non-agricultural employment in the antebellum South, see Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime*, (Baton Rouge, 1966), 336, 403; Shugg, *Origins*, passim; Linden, "Economic Democracy," 142-146; Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm," 237-39. On the range of taxable inventory carried by Orange merchants, see Auditor, *Biennial Report, 1858 & 1859*, "Statistics of Orange County." County merchants paid a tax ranging from \$20 to \$96 on sales. Examples are drawn from Population schedules and tax books.

where land is surveyed using the hodge-podge system of "metes and bounds" rather than the grid system established for government lands in the West. Individually, the census returns, tax lists, and deed books have certain drawbacks, but together they can give a fairly accurate sense of the structure of landholding in a locality.¹⁴

Speculation in real property was the nineteenth century equivalent of investment in the stock market. Some farmers in Orange speculated with relish, buying and selling frequently, especially when tobacco prices were high. While the average number of tracts per household was only 1.3, a few citizens in the County held as many as ten parcels acquired at different times. Henry Hatch, for example, who lived near the hamlet of Verdiersville on the old turnpike between Fredericksburg and Orange Courthouse, held eight separate tracts in his neighborhood, only two of which were larger than a hundred acres. Hatch's holdings were worth more than \$5,600, however, and his fourteen slaves tended 3 cows, 27 sheep, 17 hogs, and a few other head of livestock while raising 150 bushels of wheat, 317 bushels of corn, 40 bushels of oats, 5,000 pounds of tobacco, 5 bushels of peas, 10 bushels of potatoes, and 4 tons of hay. By any standard Hatch was a thriving farmer, but not only rich farmers engaged in speculation. John Bledsoe, for example, brought his first tract in 1838 when he was just 22 years old. He brought two more pieces of land in the 1840's, then sold them both in 1849. Whether he sold the second two tracts for profit or simply to pay off a debt is unclear, but more importantly, the sales show the active participation of all kinds of landowners in the real estate market.¹⁵

14. Wright, *Political Economy*, passim; Wright, "Note on the Manuscript Census Samples used in these Studies," *Journal of Agricultural History* XLIV (January 1970), 95-99. For a comparison of federal census and Virginia tax figures, see Auditor, *Biennial Report, 1860-1861*, 37; For a method of locating tracts, see Walter R.T. Wiltschey, "Locating Land Described in Colonial Patents By Computer Analysis," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* LXXXVIII (1980). For a highly technical study based on reconstruction of land surveys, see Carville Earle, *The Evolution of a Tidewater Settlement System, All Hallow's Parish, Maryland, 1650-1783*, (Chicago, 1975).

15. Auditor of Public Accounts, *Land Book, Orange County, Virginia, 1860*; Orange County, Virginia, *Index to Deeds*, I and II; National Archives, *Population Schedules, 1860*; and *Agriculture and Manufacturing in the United States in*

continued on next page

The economic and geographic patterns of land distribution are shown in table 5 and figures 3-6.¹⁶ Slightly less than half of the County's households held direct ownership of land, a figure typical throughout the antebellum era in the Virginia Piedmont. Gavin Wright has shown similar long-term stability in landholding percentages throughout the cotton South, except for the most fertile delta districts. The percentage for Orange County, however, also reflects the short-term expansion of landholding in the 1850's. Despite the relative expansion and deconcentration of landholding in the 1850's, the figures show that the largest slaveholders still controlled a disproportionate share of acreage in the County. This concentration resulted more from the potentially unlimited production capabilities of slavery than from the atomization of non-slaveholder's lands. The average size of holdings for those households with less than two slaves approached the theoretical maximum of about 150 acres that a single family could cultivate without help. A few households in this group held more than 200 acres, and must have relied on hired hands or slaves to work their crops and livestock. It is also likely that many of these small landholders worked their farms with the aid of tenants and nearby relatives. Caleb Smith, for example, farmed 58 acres in the northeastern corner of the County with the aid of a single slave, but he could undoubtedly count on help from Walter Smith, a young

Footnote no. 15 cont'd.

1860; *Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census*, (Washington, D.C., 1864), Orange County, Virginia; Auditor of Public Accounts, *Personal Property Book, Orange County, Virginia, 1860*; Margaret C. Klein, *Tombstone Inscriptions of Orange County, Virginia*, (Baltimore, Maryland, 1979).

16. Sources for Figures 3-6: Population Schedules, 1860; Orange County, Virginia, *Deed Books 23-45 (1804-1860)*; "Map of Orange," and "A Map of Orange and Spotsylvania Counties, Va." (after the copy in the Military Papers of General R.E. Lee), (n.p., n.d.) in Library of Congress Map Collection; Geological Survey, *7½ Minute Series* (see note 11 for quadrangles); *The Official Atlas of the Civil War*, (New York, 1958), plates 44-3, 47-6, 55-1, 83-2, 87-1, 87-4, 87-8, 96-1; William W. Scott, *A History of Orange County, Virginia*, (Richmond Virginia, 1907), "A Map of Orange County, Virginia;" Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, map sheets 1-21, 23, 26-30, 33-46. Figures show 69 households (46 percent) with 2-10 slaves, 70 households (63 percent) with 11-24 slaves, 50 households (74 percent) with 25 or more slaves.

TABLE 5:

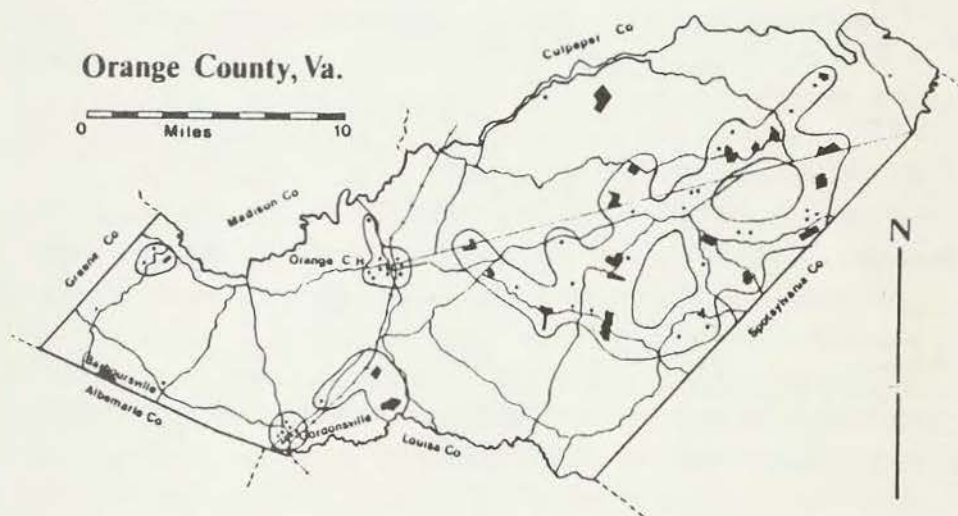
LAND DISTRIBUTION AMONG SOCIAL GROUPS, ORANGE COUNTY, VIRGINIA, 1860

	Households:	Total acreage:	Average acres:	Average assessment:
Land or 1 slave:	123 (14.9 %)	19,276 (9.0 %)	156.7	\$7.07
2-10 slaves:	104 (12.6 %)	27,901 (13.0 %)	268.3	\$9.69
11-24 slaves:	89 (10.8 %)	39,040 (18.2 %)	438.7	\$14.60
25+ slaves:	57 (6.9 %)	49,499 (23.0 %)	868.4	\$16.51
Other:*	--- ---	79,221 (36.8 %)	370.2	\$12.70
Total:	373 (45.3 %)	214,937 (100 %)	366.2	\$12.48

*Includes indirect titleholders, unidentified holdings, and out-of-county owners.

Sources: Population Schedules, 1860; Land Book, 1860.

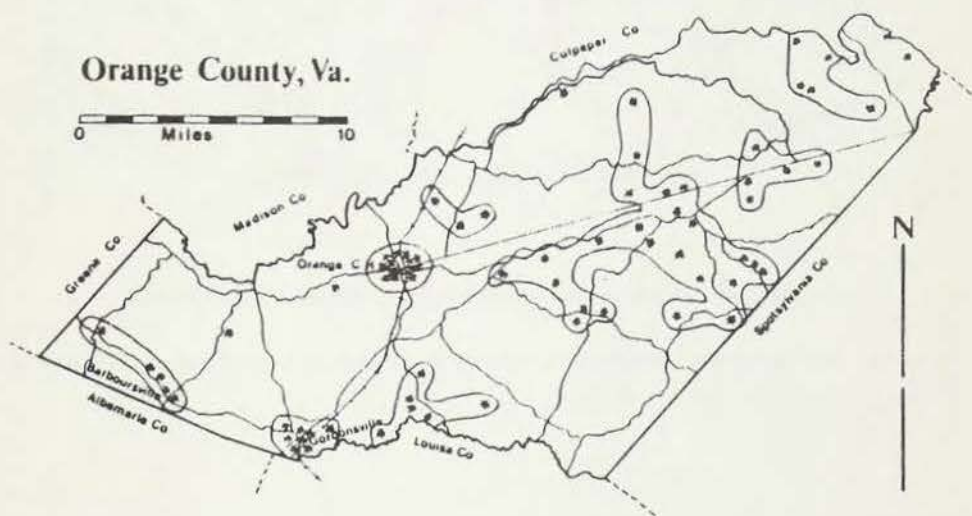
FIGURE 4:



LOCATION OF LANDHOLDINGS, OWNERS OF 1 SLAVE OR LESS, 1860

Sources: see note 17. Map drawn by author. Traceable plots shown to scale; dots represent probable locations of un-plotable holdings.

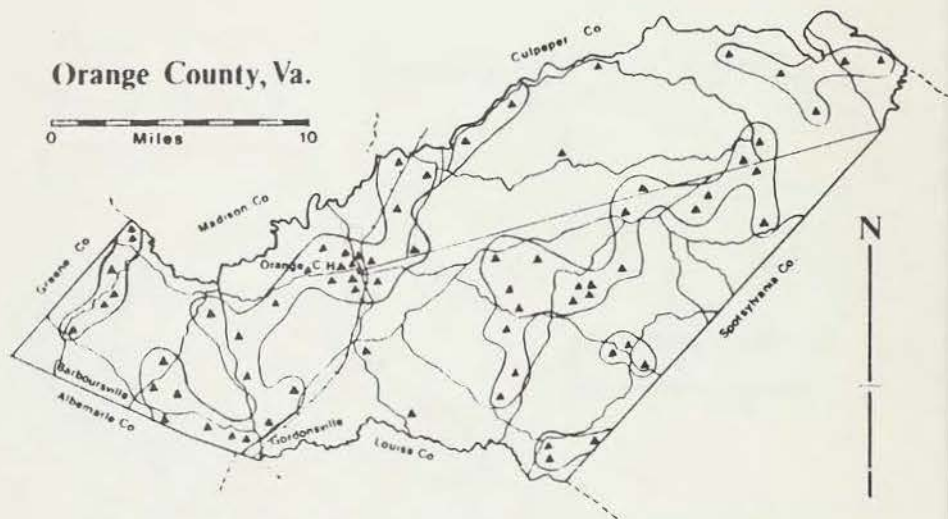
FIGURE 5:



LOCATION OF LANDHOLDINGS, OWNERS OF 2 TO 10 SLAVES, 1860

Sources: see note 17. Asterisks represent probable locations of holdings.

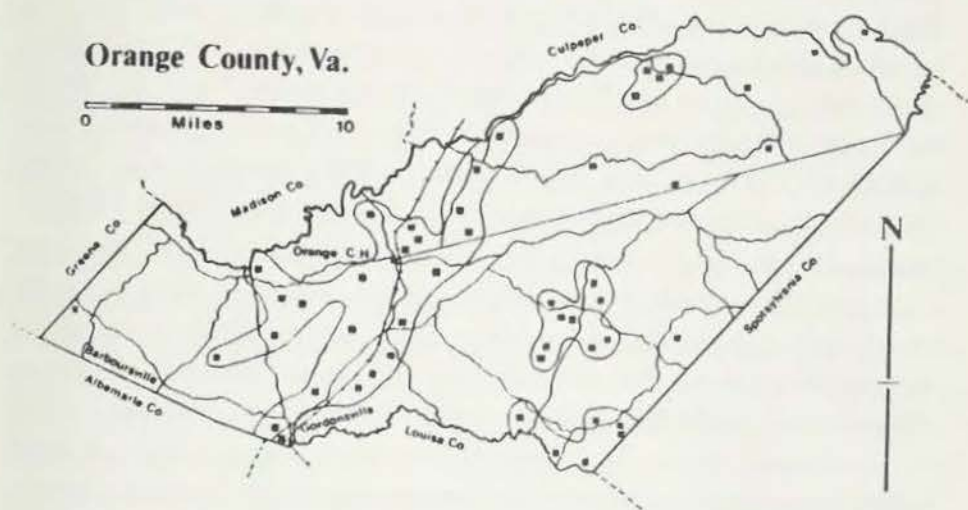
FIGURE 6:



LOCATION OF LANDHOLDINGS, OWNERS OF 10 TO 24 SLAVES, 1860

Sources: see note 17. Triangles represent probable locations of holdings.

FIGURE 7:



LOCATION OF LANDHOLDINGS, OWNERS OF 25 OR MORE SLAVES, 1860

Sources: see note 17. Blocks represent probable locations of holdings.

man who lived just a few yards away, and perhaps from William Smith and his two sons, who farmed 197 acres just down the road. Owsley depicted such labor exchanges as central to community life, and Schlotterbeck has more recently argued that such horizontal ties were crucial to the "social economy" of Orange and Greene.¹⁷

Households with 1 slave or less generally had enough acreage for production, but their farms were much less valuable than those of the largest planters. The assessment values in table 5 show that the lands of the largest slaveholders were worth more than twice what the holdings of the smallest property owners were. Three factors in particular affected the assessment values: land quality, number and quality of buildings, and the distance to mills, markets, and towns. Of these, buildings added the most to the value of a holding. Elhanon Rowe, for example, owned a large work-force of 24 slaves and held eight tracts in the Mine Run neighborhood. Seven of his tracts were worth less than \$5.00 an acre, but his substantial farmstead of six buildings was assessed at \$12.44 an acre. The solid homes of Orange planters were visible symbols of wealth, and contributed significantly to assessment values, but these homes were also symbols of dead capital that could not be used to make more money. The small cabin, in contrast, represented a relatively efficient use of capital, and by necessity. Poverty could come knocking any time at the homes of small farmers who did not have the cushion of a few extra slaves to sell, so small cabins could mean survival, and had the added benefit of not being expensive come tax time.¹⁸

Land quality—the fertility of soils, terrain, and drainage—also affected assessments, but not as directly as some have claimed. Lewis C. Gray argued in the 1930's that the soils worn out by many years

17. See Jackson Turner Main, "Distribution of Property in Post Revolutionary Virginia," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XLI (September 1954), 244; Wright, *Political Economy*, 33; Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm," 306; Owsley, *Plain Folk*, 114-115.

18. On Rowe, see Auditor, *Land Book, 1860*; National Archives, *Population Schedules, 1860*; Alfred H. Guernsey and Henry M. Alden, *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*, (New York, 1977), 522, shows the Rowe farm at the center of the Confederate lines. For a description of some distinctive Orange County homes, see Scott, *Orange County*, 202-215.

of tobacco planting were given over to subsistence farmers, while planters took up the most fertile bottomlands. His description, though, exaggerates the actual conditions of the plantation districts. Figures 3-6 illustrate the intermingled and scattered character of landholding among the four property-holding groups. Many owners of fewer than 2 slaves were clustered in the eastern half of the County, especially in an oblong district between the Fredericksburg Turnpike and the border with Spotsylvania County, but they could also be found in the two major towns. The largest slaveholders were concentrated in the areas along the railroad, near the border with Louisa County, and around a cross-roads hamlet known as "Jackson's Shop." It is evident that some of the wealthy landowners resided in parts of Orange where few of the poorest landowners lived, but figures 3-6 show that none of the propertied groups was isolated residentially from the rest. Members of all four groups could be found in Gordonsville, around the Courthouse, and near Jackson's Shop, among other places. Furthermore, all four groups were thoroughly intermingled on the vast "Nason-Tatum" soil district which lay in the eastern half of the Country.¹⁹

Within the Nason-Tatum district, owners of fewer than two slaves were found on precisely the same soils as their more wealthy neighbors. John Kube, for example, was a shoemaker and farmer who tended a large herd of sheep and hogs, as well as raising corn, wheat, rye, oats, tobacco, peas, potatoes, and hay, all without the help of slaves. Kube's farm was worth about \$4.50 an acre, and was situated roughly a mile away from Elhanon Rowe's. Hugh Simpson's 37 acre farm was located on much the same type of land as Kube's. Simpson's plot, which the Irish carpenter, his wife, and his three sons had farmed since 1846, was worth \$2.97 an acre, not much more than contemporary rates for government lands in the West. Kube and Simpson probably lived in cabins, but they did not have to scrape an existence out of barren and hardscrabble soils.²⁰

19. Gray, *Agriculture*, 452; Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, "General Soil Map;" and Figures 3-6.

20. For Kube, see Figure 7; Klein, *Inscriptions*, 42; Auditor, *Land Book*, 1860; National Archives, *Population Schedules*, 1860; Orange County, *Deed Books* 40-19, 41-195; Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, map 13; National
continued on next page

A final example from the same soil area shows the importance that the third factor—access to towns, markets, and transport facilities—had on land values. Robert Tear, a young blacksmith who hailed from Pennsylvania, bought 102 partly wooded acres that were bounded on one side by an unfinished railroad. Tear's property was located halfway between the Kube and Simpson farms, and shared the same rolling terrain and soil types as Simpson and Kube. At \$6.97 an acre, however, Tear's land was twice as valuable as theirs, mostly because of the potential benefits the railroad would bring. On a larger scale, it is no coincidence that the area where the small landholders were most concentrated was also the part of the County that was the farthest away from the railroads. In addition, this area was almost equidistant from the surrounding market towns. Simpson's farm was more than 14 miles away from Orange, 16 from Louisa, 20 from Fredericksburg, and 18 from Culpeper. Assessments were relatively low in this part of the County because transportation costs were high, not because the soils were inferior. The expense of shipping, though, did cause smaller farmers to be dependent on their richer neighbors for transportation and marketing services. At the same time, the planters relied on artisan-farmers like Kube, Simpson, and Tear for shoemaking, blacksmithing, carpentry, and a host of other services. Each group required the aid of the other, and the exchange worked to the benefit of both.²¹

In economic terms, then, there is scant evidence of a hegemonic society in the sense that one group had predominance or preponderant influence over the other, and that the invisible forces of society worked mostly for the benefit of planters. On the other

Footnote no. 20 cont'd.

Archives, *Agricultural Schedules, 1860*. On Simpson, see Orange County, *Deed Book* 40-386; Auditor, *Land Book, 1860*; National Archives, *Population Schedules, 1860*. Simpson did not produce enough to be listed in the Agricultural census. Note that both Kube and Simpson were craftsmen. For maps of their holdings see Theodore Lloyd Benson "The Plain Folk of Orange County," M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1983.

21. On Tear, see National Archives, *Population Schedules, 1860*; Orange County, *Deed Book* XLIV-43; Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey*, map 20. Schlotterbeck, "Plantation and Farm," *passim*; for a paternalist-hegemonic interpretation of this type of relationship, see Genovese, "Yeomen Farmers."

hand, planters had more protection against bad times than the small farmers did; there is little evidence of an entirely self-reliant class of autonomous common people. Rather, the economic quilt of a county like Orange was stitched tightly and made of many different fabrics. Neither "hegemony" nor "autonomy" can adequately describe the complexity of society in the plantation districts.

The most crucial test of Southern society was the Civil War. The participation of non-slaveholders in a conflict ostensibly fought to preserve slavery is an apparent paradox. While slavery was at the heart of the sectional conflict, however, two generations of fiery rhetoric had transformed a question of simple economic self-interest into a vital issue of ideology and survival. The actions of men in Orange County during the secession crisis and ensuing war illustrate the complex effects that both ideology and economic self-interest had on the common people and local society.²²

Most Southerners agreed that slavery should be preserved, but they agreed on little else. The presidential election of 1860 is a case in point. Party loyalty, if nothing else, played a major role in the outcome of the election. Table 6 illustrates the continuing party character of presidential votes in Orange and the surrounding counties between 1848 and 1860. Although a vote for Breckinridge was a vote for secession in many Southern states, in Virginia it probably represented loyalty to the Democratic party. On the other hand, a vote for Bell, the "Opposition" candidate, was more clearly a vote for continued union. A vote for Breckinridge according to one paper from Richmond, was a manly avowal of resistance to Lincoln's inevitable election. Yet, the paper also stressed that such a vote represented loyalty to the Nation: "...as you desire perpetuation of this Union, as you value your constitutional rights; as you love

22. See especially William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856*, (Baton Rouge, 1978); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, (New York, 1976); Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850's*, (New York, 1978); Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, (Oxford, 1980).

Virginia, do not fail to go to the polls next Tuesday."²³ While the majority of voters in the County went for Breckinridge on election Tuesday, Bell's camp had also made a strong showing: the election was decided in the County by only 48 votes, with a 91 percent turnout of adult white males at the polling places (Douglas received 12 votes in Orange, and Lincoln none).²⁴

Lincoln's election was a forgone conclusion by October, and immediately after his victory became official a campaign for delegates to the Virginia Secession Convention began. W.W. Scott, a young man of fifteen in the secession winter, described the atmosphere of the campaign:

After the election of Lincoln, which was followed so soon by the secession of South Carolina and the other Southern States, the Secessionists of the County grew bolder and more aggressive, and when the State convention was called to determine the course of Virginia, party feeling became very tense. Rosettes of blue ribbon, called 'cockades,' appeared everywhere, even at the churches. Men, boys, and even girls, wore them. The Unionists were less demonstrative, but no less resolute. Candidates to represent the County were numerous and eager. Col. John Willis, Major John H. Lee, Hon. Jeremiah Morton, and perhaps others, aspired to represent the Secessionists. The contest finally narrowed to Mr. Morton, on that side, and Mr. Lewis B. Williams, the elder, who had been attorney for the Commonwealth for thirty years, for the Unionists....Mr. Morton was elected by a good majority.²⁵

The Convention avoided any action until after the firing on Sumter in April. Once open hostilities began, however, the Convention acted quickly, passing a secession ordinance on April 17, 1861. Though the actual ordinance did not become law until ratified by the people in the spring elections, everybody recognized that

23. Scott, *Orange County*, 147-151; Henry T. Shanks, *The Secessionist Movement in Virginia*, (Richmond, Virginia, 1934), 112; Cooper, *Politics of Slavery*, passim.

24. *Richmond Daily Enquirer*, 26 October, 2 November, 1860. Scott, *Orange County*, 148.

25. *Ibid.*, 148-49.

Virginia's secession was fact. Large numbers of men hurried to Gordonsville, Orange Courthouse, and Culpeper Courthouse to enlist in the Virginia militia on the night of April 17, and residents of the County unanimously ratified the ordinance in the May election. The crowds and excitement generated by the preparations for war were so great that they became hazardous. In late May a crowd at the Courthouse accidentally caused a troop train to collide with a passenger train, killing two men. In the few weeks between the convention elections and the attack on Fort Sumter, the men of the County went from being divided over secession to being virtually united in defense of their homes. There was an ideology of localism, fueled by many decades of sectional confrontation. It is unlikely that many men in the County were ardent Southern Nationalists, but Lincoln's call for troops could be viewed as a clear sign of Northern tyranny, and henceforth the issue was clear. Given the absence of a pacifist community in Orange, it would have been irrational for any members of white society to ignore the threat that Lincoln and his army posed. Armed defense against oppression was the only logical alternative for them to take.²⁶

When the time came to enlist in the Confederate Army, though, individual economic circumstances tempered enthusiasm. Table 7 shows enlistments by members of the five social groups. Two things are striking about the County's enlistment figures: first, the eagerness of all social groups to join the fight, and second, the effect of employment on military service. Martial ardor ran high in the early days of the Confederacy, even among men with occupations, but soldiering fever was especially strong among those young men who were without a trade. The sons of the large slaveholders could afford to leave home for the army because they contributed relatively little

26. Shanks, *Secession Movement*, 191-213; Scott, *Orange County*, 149; National Archives, *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Virginia*, (Companies A, C, and F, Thirteenth Virginia Infantry), R.G. M-382. The referendum passed 853-0. See *Richmond Enquirer*, 4 June, 1861. For the railroad accident, see *Annual Reports of the Rail Road Companies of the State of Virginia, Made to the Board of Public Works, for the Year Ending September 30, 1861*, (Richmond, Virginia, 1861), 57.

TABLE 6:

ENLISTMENT OF ORANGE COUNTY RESIDENTS, 1861-1865

Year enlisted:	Propertyless:	Land or 1 slave:	2-10 slaves:	11-24 slaves:	25+ slaves:	Total:
<u>1861</u>						
had occupation:	24 (28 %)	16 (23 %)	14 (16 %)	13 (21 %)	8 (15 %)	75 (21 %)
no occupation:	24 (28 %)	22 (32 %)	38 (44 %)	31 (49 %)	32 (59 %)	147 (51 %)
<u>1862-1865</u>						
had occupation:	23 (26 %)	18 (26 %)	14 (16 %)	3 (5 %)	4 (7 %)	62 (17 %)
no occupation:	11 (13 %)	8 (12 %)	13 (15 %)	12 (19 %)	4 (7 %)	48 (13 %)
Under age in 1861:*	5 (6 %)	5 (7 %)	7 (8 %)	4 (6 %)	6 (11 %)	27 (8 %)
Total:	87	69	86	63	54	359

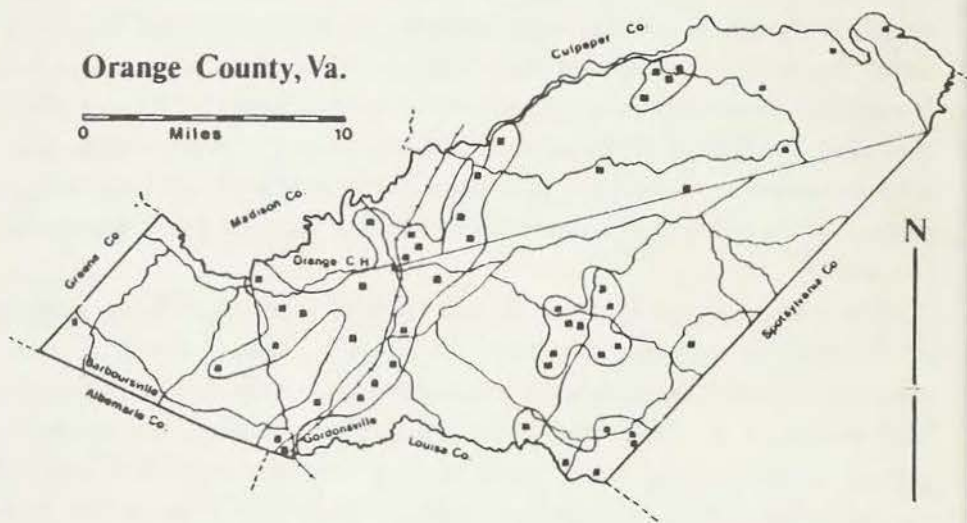
* Men aged 12-17 on 1860 Census. Sources: Compiled Service Records; Green, Orange in the Civil War; W.W. Scott, History of Orange County.

to the household economy. In contrast, men from propertyless households started making an economic contribution to their family purse at an early age, and by the time they reached their twenties were frequently heading their own households. Such men could ill-afford to race across Virginia with Confederate generals J.E.B. Stuart or A.P. Hill. They were needed at home. Only with the introduction of conscription in the winter of 1862 did the Confederate government convince some of these men that they needed to join the war effort. While only 34 percent of those who signed up in 1861 had an occupation in the 1860 census, more than 56 percent of the adult enlistees after 1861 had an occupation. It was the individual circumstances of a potential soldier, not simply his class in society, that determined whether or not he would wear the gray. The figures show that even members of propertyless households who were mere boys signed up after the martial days of 1861, and they continued to do so until the last days of the war. Class consciousness was certainly not unknown in the South at this time, but it probably played a small role in determining martial participation in the war.²⁷

The plain folk of Orange do not fit neatly into the classic models of Southern society. Rather, the people that John Taliaferro recorded in his census were a diverse lot that defy easy description. The evidence is clear that some of the propertyless and tradeless people in the County were "poor whites," but also clear that most of the other people in Orange were indeed "plain folk," much like their counterparts in small towns all over America. There is virtually no evidence to suggest that the institution of slavery created a society where ordinary whites were uniquely oppressed. On the other hand, neither were they the economic equals of the planters. Rather, it seems they faced the same structural handicaps that average citizens were subject to everywhere in the United States. Market facilities for many farmers were still distant, opportunities in the traditional crafts were shrinking, and commercial opportunities in the villages were just beginning to expand. Most of the planters and plain folk shared the same neighborhoods, the same soil types, fought for the

27. Discussion based on Table 6. See also Benson, "Plain Folk," Appendix II.

FIGURE 8:



LOCATION OF LANDHOLDINGS, OWNERS OF 25 OR MORE SLAVES, 1860

Sources: see note 17. Blocks represent probable locations of holdings.

same cause, and were linked by mutual social and economic bonds. Yet plain folk were much more vulnerable to changing conditions than planters were. They lived in cabins and worked at home until conscripted because they had little economic "breathing room." In this sense there was little "economic democracy," since the burdens of society weighed most heavily on the shoulders of the least wealthy. Yet, the economic improvement of the 1850's undoubtedly convinced many average citizens of Orange that they too could reap their society's rich harvest. The unanimity of the County on the eve of war is explained in part by this perception of the potential benefits that the plantation system could bring. Planters and ordinary men expanded their vision of the social order, the ordinary men by believing that the slave system had something to offer them, and the planters by granting at least some sense of political equality to poorer members of the community. The resulting equation gave both groups a stake in the other's concerns beyond simple economic self-interest, and firmly tied the community of Orange to the Southern cause. The legacy of this united society would extend for generations beyond the Civil War.